

One hundred years ago

An Address on the Hospital Treatment of Curable Cases of Mental Disorder

Delivered before the South-West Wales Division of the British Medical Association by Edwin Goodall, MDLond, BS, FRCP, Medical Superintendent, Cardiff City Asylum, Chairman of the Division [excerpt].

Next would come the inquiry as to how, by virtue of what precautions or conditions, they remain sane. As regards racial prophylaxis, if one may first of all digress for a moment, we are told by our mentors, the newspapers and politicians, that public opinion in this country is not ripe for considering the question of compulsory military service. There is, I venture to think, a proposition for the consideration of which it is still less ripe – I mean that for the sterilization of the insane and defective

classes. On such a subject he would be a bold man who should venture to hustle public opinion, or shock the conscience of His Majesty's good lieges. Far be it from me to assume such responsibilities.

But I have come to the conclusion that it is time an attempt were made to arouse public opinion to the importance of putting into force the less radical procedure of forbidding, under severe penalties, of marriage to persons released from asylums, and of infliction of like penalties in all cases in which the responsibility for illegitimate procreation amongst such can be fixed. I observe that quite recently, at a meeting of public men in Lancashire, at which the growing burden of the support of the insane of that county, together with the evils attendant upon the discharge of patients recovered from asylums, was considered, it was resolved to request the Government

to institute an inquiry into the whole question of the growth and prevention of insanity. What Lancashire thinks today England thinks to-morrow is the gist of an old saying and I trust it may come true in the present instance.

Note: Draconian methods of 'prophylaxis' including compulsory castration are to be found in the literature at this time. However, as far as I know, that particular suggestion was never carried out, at least in the UK. (H.R.)

REFERENCE

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