

THE GATE TO A MADHOUSE

KEPT BY TWO PHYSICIANS AT BELLEVUE HOSPITAL.

EIGHTEEN HUNDRED PERSONS PASS THROUGH THE HANDS OF DR. FITCH AND DR. FIELD EVERY YEAR— GREAT CARE EXERCISED IN DEALING WITH THEM.

There are two men in New-York who send more than 1,800 of their fellow-citizens to the madhouse every year. These men are Dr. Allen Fitch and Dr. Matthew D. Field, public examiners in lunacy for the City Government.

No other person or body of persons in the world approach their record, and to the ordinary layman it would seem that the terrible responsibility imposed by their duty would be sufficient in time to deprive them of their own reason. But apparently this responsibility does not weigh very heavily on the two doctors. They are among the most cheerful men in the metropolis, with a joke and a smile for good company wherever they find it, and this, too, despite the fact that they are thoroughly in sympathy with the horde of unfortunates who pass annually through their hands to the insane asylum.

At first glance it would appear that the appalling large number of persons committed by these examiners is out of all proportion with the exercise of ordinary care. It would seem to imply a criminal haste in condemning human beings to what most persons consider a living death. But such is by no means the case, and an afternoon spent with the two doctors at their work, besides doing away with the suspicion of perfunctory machine methods, is full of instruction for the outsider.

Every non-professional person, whether man, woman, or child, has an uncanny idea of insanity. He looks upon it as something entirely different from any other ailment. As a matter of fact, it is nothing of the kind. It is a physical disease pure and simple, of which madness is merely a symptom, just as delirium is one of the symptoms of fever. A lunatic is therefore no different in the eyes of the doctors than a consumptive or a paralytic, and a lunatic asylum, that terrible institution to the layman's mind, resolves itself with the doctor simply into a hospital for the cure of diseases of the brain tissue, where treatment consists of drugs, nourishing foods, cheerful surroundings, healthful exercise, and other restoratives, just as in ordinary hospitals, where lungs and backs and joints and fever-racked bodies are under treatment, instead of brains. Hence the equanimity with which the New-York doctors pursue what to others seems such a terrible task.

The examiners do their work in what is known as the insane pavilion in the Bellevue Hospital grounds at the foot of East Twenty-sixth Street. It is a narrow one-story building, about 150 feet long, and by means of a partition wall is divided into male and female wards. Here all the unusually eccentric persons picked up by the police are sent by the police magistrates for examination. Hospitals and other public institutions where the charges begin to act "queer" also forward them to this pavilion, and persons whose friends develop dangerous mental symptoms, doctors who become suspicious of their patients' soundness of mind, and all who want official opinions passed on the sanity of persons in their control take them there.

At times, too, some poor man will go of his own accord to be examined. But this is very rare indeed. The tendency of a lunatic is to consider himself as sound as a nut mentally. Others may be crazy. But he, never!

By special permission from President Porter of the Board of Charities and Corrections, a representative of THE TIMES was recently allowed to attend the county examiners during their visit at the insane pavilion. This is ordinarily not permitted, and no newspaper man had ever been present before at these examinations, which for apparent reasons are conducted with all possible privacy.

On the afternoon in question there were nine patients awaiting attention. This was the crop for the preceding twenty-four hours in the big city, for the doctors call at the pavilion every day except on Sundays and holidays. The star of the company was John J. Lingemann, the "Vanderbilt crank." On the night before, he had scared everybody in the millionaire's mansion almost into fits by ringing the door bell as if the house was on fire and demanding of the perturbed butler, who answered, an interview with "Cornelius Vanderbilt."

A patrolman arrested the fellow, and after passing through the police station and court he was on hand to greet Dr. Fitch.

The doctor took a comfortable seat in the little examination room in the front end of the pavilion overlooking the East River. In front of him under a big window was a small table covered with writing materials and a record book. Through the door leading into the ward the different subjects for examination could be seen sitting or standing listlessly about. As soon as he was seated the doctor gave the word and an attendant half led and half followed the "Vanderbilt crank" into the room.

He was evidently not over nineteen or twenty years old, and was neatly dressed. His forehead was low and retreating, but on the whole he appeared rather pleasant and intelligent. On the street he would have been passed without suspicion, as he was anything but a picture of the typical lunatic. His linen was clean, his hair neatly brushed, and his clothing was of a quiet, decent cut.

He sank languidly into a chair in front of Dr. Fitch, where the light was full upon him. The doctor greeted him cordially, almost effusively, a fact that seemed to gratify Lingemann very much, for he raised his eyes for the first time and a flickering smile came over his countenance. After friendly relations had been established by means of this cheerful salutation, Dr. Fitch moved his chair up several inches closer and, laying his hand familiarly on the younger fellow's knee, fastened his eyes on his face with a careless yet firm glance, and then asked in an ordinary conversational tone:

"Now tell me, Lingemann, what did you want at Vanderbilt's house anyway?"

The smile which had again died out came over the fellow's face again, but he didn't venture any reply.

"Come now, tell me what you went there for," urged the doctor pleasantly, moving still closer. For a second or two Lingemann shifted uneasily in his chair, his eyes completely hidden by the pallid lids, and his loose-jointed body twitching nervously. Then he raised his eyes again, and the smile, which had grown vapid and silly, still on his face, he answered in a rather halting voice:

"Well, I heard he wanted a fine mind, and I thought I'd offer him mine."

"You did, eh? Where did you hear that he wanted a fine mind?" queried the doctor with a good show of interest.

"Oh, I heard it on the street and on the Broadway road."

"Who told you? Did you see the people?"

"No, I didn't see anybody, but I heard 'em. They said: 'There goes a young fellow with a fine mind. Vanderbilt would give a good deal for his brain.'"

"Just heard the voices?"

"Yes, heard 'em everywhere," assented Lingemann, eagerly.

And so it went on for over half an hour. By cleverly contrived questions, put in a friendly and interested manner, the doctor drew out all sorts of hallucinations from the unfortunate, many of which showed a dangerous tendency. His "fine mind" and the eagerness of everybody to possess it was the main burden of his confidences. President Harrison, Jay Gould, Mayor Grant, Crane the actor, and many others had made all sorts of efforts to get it. They were aided by his stepmother, who let mysterious agents into the house, "who breathed antipyrine into him," so that he could not defend the possession of his much-coveted mind.

Lillian Russell was after his mind, too, but he was perfectly willing she should have it. She had sent for him, and he had been up to see her a number of times. He admitted that he had been in an asylum before—Bloomington. Miss Russell used to come to see him there, but the doctors put padlocks on all the doors so she couldn't get in. Afterward, when he was released, Miss Russell and Mayor Grant fought a duel with swords "for the possession of his mind." Thanks to her superior knowledge acquired through the frequent use of the sword in her plays, the actress beat the Mayor and "won him for forever."

"Do you think you are insane?" asked the doctor finally.

"No," responded Lingemann without the slightest hesitation.

"What are you doing here then?"

"Oh," replied the lunatic with a cunning leer, "I guess you doctors want my mind."

There was nothing in this case that required an expert to determine his insanity, and the physical examination that followed the mental was merely a matter of form.

With the next patient, however, it was the physical symptoms rather more than anything else that pointed to an unbalanced mind. The pulse was irregular, running from sixty to ninety, the hands cold and clammy, especially at the finger tips, the eyes were unsteady, and the pupils dilated, refusing to act even under the strongest light. The man was an engraver, probably fifty years old, and managed to conceal his ailment so well that nobody but an experienced person would have suspected that his brain was affected.

He admitted that he had been in an asylum before, but hastened to add that it was merely because he had been run down by trouble and overwork. Evidently he had no intention of returning if he could help it, and his coolness and caution in answering the doctor's questions were admirable. He had been arrested on the complaint of his wife and committed for examination by the Police Justice before whom he was arraigned. His ill will against his wife was evidently strong, but he managed to hold even this in check, merely saying that she spent all his money.

"It's the dry goods stores, doctor," he remarked sagely. "A dry goods store is to the women what a saloon is to the men."

Nothing could be made out of his case that

would warrant a commitment to the asylum, and he was retained at the pavilion for "further observation." This meant that the trained nurses would make notes on his case, and after the lapse of twenty-four hours he would be examined again.

It was learned afterward that it took three days before his hallucination was developed. He imagined that he had engraved some perfect bank-note plates, from which \$10,000,000 in counterfeit notes had been printed so that no one could tell them from genuine. He was only prevented from circulating them by his wife, who was in a conspiracy with others to keep him poor. The development of this hallucination completed his case, and he was sent to Ward's Island for treatment.

After the engraver came four very ordinary cases, one man and two women, that required only a cursory examination, even by a layman, to show their insanity. Then followed a patient who would have passed mental muster anywhere outside of an insane asylum. She was a young German domestic of about twenty-five, with a good healthy color, bright eyes, and generally neat and tidy appearance. Only her hands, tell-tale evidences in nearly every case of lunacy, showed a disordered system. They were cold and clammy and abnormally puffed, leaving a most disagreeable feeling to the touch.

She appreciated thoroughly where she was, having been brought in by a doctor to whom she had applied for treatment. She described her symptoms intelligently. Chief among her troubles was sleeplessness. For three nights she had been unable to close her eyes.

Dr. Field, who had arrived at the pavilion in the meantime, examined her first, and for fifteen minutes she withstood his most searching inquiries until the physician concluded to have her remain over for observation. Then Dr. Fitch took her in hand—the doctors always make their examinations separately—and the strain having evidently told on her by this time under his adroit questioning, she finally revealed her insanity.

She had all along insisted that it was simply her nerves that kept her awake, but now she confessed that the reason her nerves "worked so" was that the house was filled with "strange noises at night."

"What kind of noises?" asked the doctor pleasantly.

"Well," glancing around cautiously, "somebody throws pails and chairs around as soon as I go to bed."

"Anything else?"

"Yes. They begin sawing wood in the cellar, and keep it up until daylight."

"Have you any idea who does this?"

"It is my lady. She hates me."

"Is she trying to kill you?"

"I think so. Yes, I know she is. Only the other night I heard her paying some money to a strange woman who was to put me out of the way. Oh! she is a bad woman."

"Do you ever see any strange things at night?"

"Sometimes," was the hesitating answer.

"What are they?"

"As soon as it gets dark there is a bright light in my bedroom. It is electricity, because I can hear the wires."

"And does your lady make this light?"

"Oh, no," with a sly laugh. "You know who makes it. It comes from here." All this in an easy, natural manner, so sincere that it seemed anything but the vaporing of a lunatic.

She was put down as a dangerous case, as the idea of persecution might easily develop a homicidal mania. Several causes had combined to break her down, but under treatment it was promised she would recover in a comparatively short time.

By the time the last patient had been examined it was dark. The certificates were filled out, signed, and sworn to by the two doctors, and next morning the department steamer carried the unfortunates to the asylums on Ward's and Blackwell's Islands. Last year the examiners passed on more than 2,000 cases, and the average number for the last five years has been over 1,800. Such an occurrence as the attack on Russell Sage by the dynamiter Norcross brings out an unusually large number of "cranks," and for several months the authorities have felt the effect in an increased list of commitments for examination.