

IS THE WORLD GOING CRAZY, AND IS LIQUOR DOING IT?

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IS the world becoming insane? One of the most noted insanity experts living declares that insanity is increasing throughout the globe. This, he asserts, is due to various causes, but chiefly to the use of alcohol, while the high strain under which people of the present day exist, he asserts, is another. In order to escape the danger which threatens the world he insists that the remedy, in brief, lies in striking at the root of the evil by a return to the simple life.

In earlier ages Horace, the famous Roman poet and writer, contemporary of Julius Caesar, wrote: "He appears mad indeed but to a few, because the majority is infected with the same disease." In the nineteenth century Taine, the great French critic, asserted, "Insanity is not a distinct and separate empire; our ordinary life borders upon it, and we cross the frontier in some part of our nature," while only a few years ago Mark Twain expressed his firm conviction that people are all, more or less, insane.

Dr. Albert Warren Ferris, President of the New York State Commission in Lunacy and one of the most noted authorities on mental diseases in the United States, whose professional fame extends also to Europe, differs with Mark Twain, declaring that, while there are few persons who are absolutely and entirely free from mental disorder, yet mental disorder is not actually insanity. He makes it clear that he speaks from a medical standpoint only, and from the same point of view of the medical profession which holds that there is not a person who is in perfect health, physically or mentally.

Calm and deliberate of manner, possessing pulse to a degree and with the air of one who deprecates exaggeration and shows he has no patience with alarmists, Dr. Ferris nevertheless made it quite clear when I called on him that the increase of insanity in the United States and the contributing causes thereto must be regarded with the utmost seriousness, and immediate steps taken to combat the danger which threatens not alone the people of this but of other countries. In all he said to me there was an evident inclination to minimize the actual threatening conditions rather than to overstate them, and thus cause undue alarm on the part of the public.

"Is lunacy increasing throughout the world?" I asked.

"It is, but not to the extent people imagine," he replied. "In most States in this country a change has been made from the old asylums with keepers to modern hospitals and nurses, so that many cases of insanity formerly cared for by friends and relatives are now brought to large hospitals in various States. This does not apply to the world in general, but to the United States. Insanity is increasing largely in great Britain, but not so fast as in this country. In Germany it is increasing more rapidly than here."

"To what is the increase of insanity in the United States chiefly attributable?"

"Alcohol, first," replied Dr. Ferris, decisively. "Next in importance comes a certain loathsome disease, which has existed for many ages, and which causes from 15 to 20 per cent. of the insanity cases. It is almost the only cause of general paresis, which is so frequent."

"Is this increase also due, in part, to the high tension under which the people of the present day are living?"

"Decidedly. I should call that one of the great causes: Stress and strain, to use a medical expression, in the case of people with a nervous inheritance or acquired nervous condition. Stress and strain are actually more frequent in city and suburban localities where rivalry and competition are fiercer and where there are conditions which do not exist in the country, such as excessive noise, poor ventilation, constant use of artificial light, and temptation to dissipation. These are generally found operating together with alcohol, as contributing causes. Of course there are many cases of insanity in which alcohol does not appear."

"The probability is that cases of insanity to be attributed to stress and strain will increase in number as the difficulty of transportation, overcrowding, exhaustion, considerable nervous anxiety as regards personal safety owing to the din and swift pace and crowded conditions in streets of cities; increase of competition, increase, also, of ambition among those struggling for supremacy; the choice of a wrong career among a great many, and temptation to gamble, with consequent thirst, anxiety, and disappointment. These may seem trivial, but taken all together they corroborate one another until the sum total is tremendous.

Dr. Albert W. Ferris, Head of This State's Commission in Lunacy, Says Insanity Is Increasing and Gives the Reasons--The High Tension of Modern Living Partly Responsible.

Worry is one of the chief contributing factors in stress and strain.

"Are these causes to continue, and if so, to what final condition will they bring the people of this country?" I asked.

The doctor threw up his hands with a despairing gesture.

"If nothing is done to teach people the avoidable causes of insanity, the prospect is that the number of insane will increase in rapid ratio, until the money necessary to care for insane people cannot possibly be provided by the various States," he answered.

"The only remedy is to prevent the production of insanity by teaching a hygienic life, and the avoidance of the special causes which we know operate to induce mental impairment. This education must begin very early in life: the proper rearing of children is of first importance.

"A campaign for the prevention of insanity has been commenced in New York State, dating from my article on the subject read in May of last year before the American Medico-Psychological Association in Washington. The methods advocated are field work in the study of insane-productive families by members of hospital staffs; co-operation of physicians in general practice, co-operation of lay societies in churches and elsewhere, instruction of families in foods, clothing, occupation, diversion, and child rearing; leaflets setting forth avoidable causes of insanity and illustrated lectures teaching ordinary forms of insanity and their causes. Since December last I have delivered five such lectures."

"If the ratio of increase of insanity reaches such a degree that the State cannot take care of its insane will it not devolve on the Government to do so?"

"No, they would remain a State care," replied Dr. Ferris. "If the States ever become unable to appropriate sufficient funds for the curative care of the insane, economy will demand that simply custodial care be provided, and that the insane be herded together in large numbers and cared for as cheaply as possible, with retrenchment in medical treatment and nursing, which retrogressive measures would probably defeat all attempts to cure recoverable cases."

"But might not that bring about a condition where the percentage of insanity among people would increase to an even greater extent, if the insane cannot be cared for by the State, as you suggest?" said I.

"Yes, undoubtedly. It, therefore, is of prime importance that all the States take up the matter of teaching the prevention of insanity immediately, so that they may save lives that are now, or will be, jeopardized, and also be in a condition to meet the situation when it arises."

"How do the present methods of treating the insane compare with those of earlier days?"

"In ancient times the insane were considered as possessed of the devil, locked up as if criminals, chained to the floor and often whipped. In more modern times they were treated as sick people, but not as needing individual care. They simply received food, clothing, and shelter, and their emergence from insanity was considered to be under the hand of God. No medical treatment was given them at all, for the additional reason that there was no psychiatry (special medical study of the insane) in those days."

"In the present time the insane are cared for in well-equipped, modern hospitals, with reception buildings in which the new cases are carefully studied and classified, and where they are provided with water treatment, rest cure, special diet, special therapeutic occupations, special recreations such as gymnastics, callisthenics, folk dances, &c. Infirmary wards where feeble or physically ill people are cared for are provided, just as in modern general hospitals. Special wards exist for disturbed and semi-disturbed patients, with a large amount of indoor and outdoor freedom and exercise; also open wards, wherein no doors or windows are fastened or barred, for convalescent cases; and vacation camps, to which patients are taken in groups of twelve to fifteen at a time for entire freedom in the country. In all respects the

insane patient is treated as a sane sick person would be, a complete examination being made of his chest, abdomen, nervous system, circulatory system, digestive tract and all vital organs, as in the case of an ordinary patient by any practicing physician.

"Within two weeks after his reception each patient is brought before a staff meeting, which consists of a consultation on himself and other patients by the entire medical staff of the hospital. About two weeks later another consultation of this kind is had, and still once again, before he is discharged on parole or permanently.

"The first point to which attention is given is the mental or physical condition of the patient. Every ounce of strength is saved by putting him to bed, on reception, for one or two weeks or longer, if necessary. His dread, fear, and anxiety are allayed as much as possible, and he is made to feel that he is among friends who desire his recovery and his early return to his family.

"From time to time patients who improve are paroled for a period of from

one to six months in the care of their relatives, as a test to decide whether they are fitted for discharge. During the parole period they may be returned to the hospital without re-examination or re-commitment, if necessary.

"This is the general treatment of the insane in this and various other progressive countries. It shows the wide difference between the present methods of treatment and the strictly custodial care of the insane fifty years ago.

"For instance, in those days the disturbed or violent patient was controlled with cold showering, or was strapped firmly to a chair. The assaultive patient was shut in a dark cell, while frequently the confused and bewildered patient was allowed to live, almost entirely unaided, in an uncarpeted room with straw on the floor. His food was thrust into his cell on a tin plate. No effort was made to provide recreation or occupation. Even recoverable patients were allowed to rust away until all possible chance of recovery was gone. Under such conditions it is not surprising that the recovery rate was extremely small."



Dr. Albert Warren Ferris, President of the New York State Commission in Lunacy.

sanity. In Berlin and Munich, Germany, the figures are about the same as in this country—over 80 per cent. in men being due to alcohol. In three English asylums the percentage in men was 26.3. In five asylums in Austria 24.9 per cent. of the male cases owe their insanity to alcohol.

"Is insanity preventable, and if so, how?"

"Not entirely. In Germany they have restricted the use of alcohol among soldiers and young men of army age to prevent physical deterioration and increase of insanity. That is the first great cause. The Kaiser recently made an edict that his health should be drunk only in water, to prevent physical and mental deterioration among the troops. He appreciates the fact that alcohol drinking has increased to such an extent that the male public is stunted and not as fit for army service as heretofore. It is to save the army, mainly, that he has joined forces with those who oppose the use of alcoholic beverages.

"If these two causes, alcohol and the disease mentioned, were avoided, as they can be; if individuals will listen to the truth and exercise self-control the total number of insane in New York State would be reduced by 40 per cent. The same ratio would be noted elsewhere.

"In New York State statistics of the insane are probably more accurate and complete than in others, because of the exact separation of the different classes of mental impairment, the insane being cared for in entirely separate hospitals, while in certain other States idiots, imbeciles, epileptics, &c., are grouped in the same institutions, so that the proportion of the different classes of mental impairment does not appear in the totals stated."

"Are not many persons insane only to the extent that their condition is not serious enough to justify placing them in asylums?" I asked.

"Yes. There are a great many who would not be kept in confinement in State institutions for the insane were it not for the danger of their marrying and propagating defective offspring. (So quite a number who, while really insane, would be termed merely defective by some people, and who would be entirely or partially self-supporting, must be kept in custody until past the child-bearing period. While our first duty is to the individual, our second, and as important a duty, is to society and the State."

"The heredity of insanity is very strong. In many families insanity appears in each succeeding generation. People with insane inheritance should not be allowed to marry. Until the States are willing to take advanced ground and prevent the propagation of the unfit it will be necessary to hold in custody patients who are morally insane who otherwise might be at large.

"Indiana, Connecticut, California, and New Jersey have laws providing for the sterilization of idiots, imbeciles, and certain irrecoverable insane of both sexes. New York ought to have taken the lead in this matter, and should now lose no time in following suit. In the New York Legislature next year a bill will probably be introduced to provide for the sterilization of mental defectives of certain classes, and also of repeating criminals."

"Is not nervousness a mild degree of insanity?"

"It is not. Medical men make a fairly straight line between nervous and mental disorders. Insanity is very easily grafted on people of nervous temperament, but it is not the same condition. There is a disease called neurasthenia. This term is used to cover too large a field, for many so-called cases of neurasthenia, or nervous exhaustion, are really cases of psychasthenia, (mental exhaustion,) and not at all a nervous disorder. Nerve fag or nerve waste will result in the lowering of the vitality and the reduction of general resistance to such an extent as to permit the incidence of insanity in many cases."

"Is religious fanaticism a form of insanity?"

The famous insanity expert smiled to himself quietly for a few moments, and answered:

"I so regard it. Religious ideas and fancies of the most absurd character are

very common among certain insane people. With very impressionable and receptive individuals, religious ceremonials and principles frequently become the controlling features in life, and occupy almost the entire content of thought. In such cases insanity may follow constant devotion to religious service, and the result may be a religious fanatic."

"Is there no less insanity among uncivilized peoples than in those who represent the highest type of civilization?"

"Without question. In New York State it is not the worthless, idle, or undesirable part of the public that furnishes the largest number of insane. Of the New York total of insane patients, 77 per cent. are above the grade of day laborers, or are the wives and children of people above that grade, who were formerly producers and taxpayers.

"Among the North American Indians, Eskimos, and the savage races in the interior of Africa insanity is said to be almost unknown. On the other hand, history records that insanity existed to a considerable extent among the early Egyptians even during their highest period of development. From these facts we deduce that civilization offers great danger to the susceptible, and that excessive intellectual effort, genius, and insanity become closely related. In other words, the higher the civilization, with its artificial life, the greater the amount of insanity."

"That being the case, what has the world to look forward to, in order to escape the danger which threatens?" I inquired.

"The remedy is the return to the simple life; an avoidance of undue ambition and of the attempt to enter a field for which one is not fitted; the avoidance of all undermining agencies, such as stimulants and narcotics, and the securing of proper recreation and diversity of occupation."

"Is it probable that people of the present day can be brought to see the necessity of complying with these requirements?"

"I think they can. In my professional experience I find the tendency is to leave the city and go into the country to make homes. Even those who must, perforce, work in the cities are seeking the country and the advantages of out-of-door environment more and more. If the congestion of population in cities and the stress of strenuous life and work continue, the outlook for the increase of insanity will become greater and more serious," was the answer.

"What is the percentage of insane among the foreign population in the United States and what among native Americans?"

"In New York City 45.2 per cent. of the insane are foreign born, whereas a trifle less than 35 per cent. of the State at large is of foreign birth. This condition is probably due largely to laxity of the law's provision or enforcement in former years."

"Then you believe immigrants are landed without sufficient inquiry as to their mental condition?" I suggested.

"Unfortunately, the amount of money at the disposal of the Commissioner of Immigration at the Port of New York is too small to provide for a proper detention and study of the stream of immigrants constantly arriving, hence many mentally impaired unavoidably slip through the hands of the officials at Ellis Island and secure at least temporary admission to the country. About 600 cases are picked up annually in New York State hospitals for the insane and deported to other States or foreign countries. New York State maintains a special board of three examining physicians, whose entire time is given to this work of deportation. No other State takes this precaution.

"New York State hopes to join the United States Government in a strong policy of exclusion of the mentally defective, which may result in amendment of the present immigration law. It is very advisable that other States, especially those on the border line of Canada and Mexico, should follow the example of New York in this regard. Personally I believe that the insane criminal should always be deported whenever found, even after having served a sentence in prison or hospital, for insane criminals. The period within which we may resort to deportation of the insane alien who entered the country with mental defect should be extended to five years.

"As a matter of fact, the truth was well expressed in the recent words of ex-President Elliot of Harvard University: 'To invite the insane alien to our shores is to water the blood of our people. The danger that threatens should be heeded in time.'"