



FROM FOLLY
TO FETTERS
TO FREEDOM

THE STORY OF THE MENTALLY ILL





**BEFORE MEDICINE
THERE WAS MAGIC**

Ancient man had an easy explanation for everything, including mental illness and mental deficiency—if the gods hadn't done it, the demons had. If a man became mad, a demon had seized him unless, perchance, his madness was of such a nature that he could be termed one of "God's true minstrels." In either case, treatment was to drive out the demon or worship the god. Ancient Egypt and Babylon cared for their mental cases just this way.

In the Grecian temples of the Asklepiads, the major treatment was still ritualistic, but suggestion, beauty, peaceful surroundings and healthful living contributed to the possibility of cure.

A medical view of mental illness was first expressed by Hippocrates about 400 B.C., and he used diet control, massage, baths and exercise for treatment along with blood-letting and purging. Soranus of Ephesus wrote some directions for care of the mentally ill in the second century that could be used without change in a modern attendants' manual. Medicine began to replace magic—but only for a time.



**MAN IS BORN FREE,
BUT EVERYWHERE HE IS IN CHAINS**

The Middle ages saw a retreat to the old demon-view of mental illness. At first the mentally ill and deficient were treated with tolerance and sympathy, even though shrines, magic rites, fetishes and exorcism were the only treatments offered.

Soon after the first European asylum was established in Spain in 1408, treatment became more and more fanatical and barbaric. Monks who did not stop at scourging themselves in order to reduce the influence of the "evil one" certainly could not be expected to give sympathetic care to creatures who had allowed the devil to take complete control. The "success" of this mistreatment is indicated by one famous exorcist who reported that he not only forced five demons to relinquish possession of a victim but actually made them sign an agreement not to molest him again.

This attitude culminated in the famous witchcraft mania of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Over 100,000 persons at that time—many of them mentally ill—were executed as witches. Through the whole period up to the late 1700's, the mentally ill were hanged, imprisoned, tortured and persecuted as agents of Satan; they were chained in kennels and cages like wild beasts; they were jailed and flogged like criminals; at best, they were left to wander about naked and starved, the butt of taunts and teasing. Such treatment prevailed for many centuries, but it could not last.

'DESE BONES 'GONNA RISE AGAIN!

Just before the end of the eighteenth century men in all walks of life were beginning to break the chains that bound them—humanity was ready to rise again. Philippe Pinel in France (1792), William Tuke in England (1796) and Chiarugi in Italy even earlier performed this task for the mentally ill. They not only struck off the chains but began to treat the mentally ill as sick human beings.

Special institutions for mental cases had been established before this time; but ignorance of better methods had allowed mechanical restraint and blood-letting to remain the major treatments. In 1752, Pennsylvania Hospital was founded in Philadelphia, and Quaker influence saw to it that occupational therapy was provided for the mental patients admitted. The first hospital exclusively for the mentally ill in America was opened as a state hospital at Williamsburg, Va., in 1773. There were mental hospitals in nine states before 1825. The outlook was up—but it soon turned down.

OVER THE HILL TO THE POORHOUSE

Busy America could not be bothered with any poor wretch who couldn't make a success of life in the early 1800's. Yet it needed to get such people out of the way so that fortunes could be made without any interfering conscience. For a time the helpless—including the mentally ill and mentally deficient—were kept at home at public expense or auctioned off to the man who would keep them at the least expense. Then a cure-all and catch-all was offered: Why not build institutions and send to them all of the poor and incompetent?

Often built at the least possible expense, operated on a miserly budget, and regarded as places for sub-human beings anyway, the poorhouses of the nineteenth century exhibited remarkable conditions. One institution reported:

- a garret room, unheated and unsealed, accommodated twelve women and children in five beds,
- five men, three women and eleven children occupied another chamber with ten beds,
- ten women and children were crammed into a 17 x 9 foot room with three beds.

It was a sorry road that led over the hill to the poorhouse. And the least regarded of those who journeyed it were the mentally ill.



LET MY PEOPLE GO!

Dorothea Lynde Dix, conducting a Sunday School class in a Massachusetts jail in 1841, saw that mental cases were confined there, beaten and neglected. Her experience launched her on an international crusade which caused the founding or enlarging of thirty-two mental hospitals before her death in 1887.

A new era of reform was under way. The organization which is now the American Psychiatric Association was founded in 1844. The first school for the feeble-minded was established in Massachusetts in 1848; the first training school for nurses in a mental hospital was opened in Massachusetts in 1882; an outpatient clinic for mental cases was added to Pennsylvania Hospital in 1885; and a full-blown program of state care became law in New York in 1890.

Meanwhile, John Conolly had precipitated a violent debate among hospital superintendents when he presented his philosophy of non-restraint in 1856; James Braid had used hypnotism as a therapy in the 1850's; medical discoveries in neurology, endocrinology and related fields had shed new light on the nature of mental disorders; and Emil Kraepelin presented the first organized system of psychiatry in 1896.

A MIND THAT FOUND ITSELF— THROUGH ABUSE AND NEGLECT

Yet in 1900, when Clifford Beers was forced to spend three years in mental hospitals, he found such deplorable conditions and was mistreated so thoroughly that he wrote on the walls of his room, "God bless our Home, which is Hell."

He told the country about his experiences in a book, *A Mind that Found Itself*, and went on to give the rest of his life to the National Committee for Mental Hygiene which he founded.

Humanity could no longer plead ignorance; this time its only excuse was neglect and indifference. At last we knew better—but our actions mocked our knowledge.

PROGRESS IS THE REDUCTION OF IDEALS TO FACTS

Ideals are not enough; we must not only know where we want to go, but we must know how to get there. The last thirty years have seen many ideals about the mentally ill and mentally deficient become facts.

- Adolf Meyer became the dean of American psychiatry by uniting many streams of thought into a comprehensive mental hygiene movement.
- Wagner-Jauregg developed fever therapy as a cure for the mental illness of syphilis in 1917.
- Manfred Sakel announced insulin shock therapy in 1933.
- Von Meduna used metrazol therapy successfully in the same year.
- Moniz introduced psychosurgery in 1935.
- Three doctors in Italy introduced electric shock treatment in 1937.

It thus became a known fact that some mental illnesses, previously thought incurable, could be cured by medical means. We now have the ideals in mind for great improvements in hospital architecture, nursing care, treatment and therapy. We have seen successful demonstrations of programs to prevent mental illness, to rehabilitate mental cases, and to provide proper legal controls. But rarely have these ideals been reduced to facts.

Three thousand young men who, as conscientious objectors, gave emergency service to mental hospitals in this country during 1942-46, found conditions not at all unlike those Clifford Beers experienced forty years earlier.

The program started by these men inspired and gave impetus to the development of the National Mental Health Foundation, a nationwide organization of citizens working for the improvement of conditions in mental hospitals and the development of progressive community programs for the preservation of mental health.





**NOW IS THE TIME—
THE FUTURE MUST REPLACE THE PAST**

The history of the care and treatment of the mentally ill and mentally deficient is a spotted history, showing many advances, many regressions. Again and again, waves of reform have assaulted the passive shore only to recede: their work begun but yet undone.

A new and greater wave of reform is gathering now and is rolling shoreward. This time the substance, power and vision are all at hand to keep the wave rolling—united direction is all that is needed. The wave must not recede this time, but roll on to attain the new vistas opening before us.

FROM FOLLY . . TO FETTERS . . TO FREEDOM . .

That is the story of the mentally ill. It leads back to folly again, unless we do our part. Freedom is never a gift—it is earned and maintained only by effort. If the care of the mentally ill fails to improve in our generation, remember—

WE ARE ACCOUNTABLE!

(References: Albert Deutsch, *The Mentally Ill in America*, and Marie B. Ray, *Doctors of the Mind*.)

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