

ARTICLE IV.

INSANITY IN CANADA.*

In Canada, as in other countries, very little was known on the subject of insanity, and the extent of its prevalence, before the institution of asylums for the reception of its victims. The presence of one insane or idiotic person in each thousand of the thin population of a new country, in the wilds of America, was not likely to create any very strong conviction in the minds of the people generally, or to awaken much inquiry, on the subject of insanity, as an important national fact. Now, however, that the gleanings of the tangled field have begun to be gathered in and garnered, and our people have the opportunity of seeing, under one roof, several hundred lunatics, a great change in their estimate of the prevalence of insanity has taken place.

The almost universal declaration is, that the malady is rapidly increasing in Canada; and the settlers from Europe, whose experience, before their emigration, was quite as meagre as that of our most beclouded foresters, with almost one accord—English, Irish and Scotch—exclaim that this is a sad country for producing madness! It is questionable whether in any country there is a lower ratio of insanity than in Canada. This assertion, however, is to be understood as mainly applicable to Western Canada. The census of 1851 shows, in this division of the united provinces, 1069 lunatics and idiots, in a population of 952,004; or one in every 890. The general average for all Ireland, in the last census, was one in every 657; and it is more than probable that an equally exact enumeration would show the averages in England and Scotland to be fully as high, if not higher. In Eastern Canada there appears, by the census, to be a much larger proportion of insane persons than in Western Canada; and it is the opinion of those acquainted with the former province that there is a very large preponderance of idiocy in the aggregate returns. The total number of lunatics, so termed, (including both lunatics and idiots,) in Eastern Canada, in 1851, was 1733; total population, 890,261; showing one lunatic or idiot in every 513 of the population.

When it is considered that the French inhabitants of Eastern Canada, confined to a very limited region on the banks of the St. Lawrence,

* Canadian census, 1855.

and descended from a limited number of unmixed settlers, chiefly from one or two departments of the mother country, have intermarried with each other for a period of two centuries, and have, by their language, religion, and other isolating influences, preserved their national unity almost untouched, little surprise will be felt that *idiocy* has become largely prevalent in the race.

In Western Canada, on the other hand, the settlers from the British islands, constituting a thoroughly variegated mixture, have been, by conjugal alliances, even in the short period of half a century, almost transformed into a new people, and by no means a degenerate one. It is the belief of the writer that, should a healthy stream of emigration into Western Canada continue for another half century, the ratio of insanity would be found to be lower than in any other country. The natural resources of the province are unsurpassed; the climate is, in reality, superior to that of England; the necessaries and comforts of life are procurable by a light expenditure of bodily or mental toil; and the people are generally temperate, intelligent, and moderately religious. The increase of population in Western Canada has been very rapid. In 1811 it amounted to 77,000, and in 1851 has been found to be 952,004; being more than a twelvefold increase in forty years. In the last ten years of the above period it rose from 465,357 to 952,004. It cannot, therefore, be any matter of surprise, that with the rapid and large increase of population the number of the insane should increase also; yet it is questionable whether this has kept pace with the increase of population.

It has been found in Western Canada, as in the United States, but, of course, to a still greater extent, that the lunatics sent into the asylum have been chiefly of foreign birth; and the natives of Ireland have constituted the majority. In the first two years from the opening of the temporary asylum in Toronto, in 1841, the register of admissions shows the following proportions, as to national origin:

Natives of Ireland.....	54 per cent.
“ England.....	24 “
“ Scotland	11 “
“ Canada	7 “
“ Other countries	4 “

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In the last two years, however, a striking change has been evinced in the national proportions; the admissions have been thus:

Natives of Ireland	36½	per cent.
“ England.....	16	“
“ Scotland	18½	“
“ Canada	17½	“
“ United States.....	6½	“
“ Other countries	4½	“
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The population of Western Canada is constituted, as to nativity, as follows :

Born in Ireland	18.5	per cent.
“ Scotland	8.0	“
“ England	8.7	“
“ Canada	58.0	“
“ United States.....	4.6	“
“ Other countries	2.2	“
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It will be observed that, notwithstanding the large preponderance in the population of persons born in Canada, these constitute but a trivial portion of the inmates of the asylum. Nothing, however, could be more erroneous than the conclusion that because of this disparity Canadians must be comparatively exempt from insanity. That portion of the population designated Canadian comprises all who have been born in Canada; and it is quite usual to find in the same family the parents and several of the elder children of foreign origin, and the younger styled Canadian. The Canadian portion of the census is, to a considerable extent, the youthful progeny of the settlers who have entered the province in the last twenty years. As these native Canadians attain to riper years, and encounter the various disturbing agencies which tend to the development of insanity, the inherent predisposition to the malady, derived from their parents, will manifest itself; though it is to be hoped, from their more comfortable physical condition, and a better moral and social discipline, the incidence of the disease will be materially curtailed.

It is deserving of notice, that for the last fourteen months a very great apparent increase of insanity amongst females in Western Canada has been observed. Of two hundred and forty-six cases, for admission of which application has been made in the above period, one hundred and forty-three have been females, and only one hundred and three

males. There is, however, good reason for believing that this disparity in the applications does not prove any actual increase of insanity amongst females in Western Canada; for it is found that not less than one-half of those sent have been insane for a considerable time; in some instances the disease has been of many years' duration, and in a majority it has been over one year.

On the other hand, it is found that in the males admitted the duration of the disease has been much shorter, and that the type is generally more favorable. It is to be regretted that, from the ignorance of the friends of the insane on the subject of insanity, and the true character and purpose of lunatic asylums, they have deferred transmitting patients in the early period of the disease. Women being more easily controlled and much less offensive to the public than men, in a state of insanity, have been kept at home, until, from their destitute condition, the death of friends, or the final exhaustion of their overtaxed sympathies, further delay has been impracticable. What may be the extent of the arrearage in this sex, now outstanding, it is difficult to conjecture. Over forty applications for admission of females into the asylum now await advice of vacancies. The house is much overcrowded, in both the male and female divisions, having at present one hundred and eighty-two of the former sex, and one hundred and eighty-eight of the latter, as its insane inmates. The Legislature has made an appropriation for the commencement of an extension of the building, by the erection of its wings; on the completion of which, its capacity of accommodation will be somewhat greater than that of the State Asylum at Utica. The structure of the building, being on the plan of associated dormitories, varying in capacity from sixteen to five beds each, a much larger number of patients have been introduced than could possibly be lodged under the arrangement of separate single-bed apartments. It is expected that the provincial government will soon be in a position to convert the military barracks, in London, into a provisional asylum, for the accommodation of the insane of that rapidly growing portion of the western province. It is very gratifying to know that our provincial authorities have begun to manifest a very deep interest in the cause of insanity, much of which, there is good reason to believe, is ascribable to the humane influence of the present Governor, Sir Edmund Head. Perhaps one of the greatest blessings which could have been conferred on the insane of Western Canada has been the opening, under his Excellency's auspices, of a separate asylum for criminal lunatics, at Kingston, to which the patients of that class, formerly confined in the asylums at Quebec and Toronto, have been transferred.

The funds available for the erection and maintenance of lunatic asylums in Western Canada are derived from a general tax on property, levied by the various municipalities, and paid over to the Receiver General of the province. This tax does not, probably, fall much short of one hundred and eighty thousand dollars per annum ; but, unfortunately, though levied under the name of "Lunatic Asylum Tax," and believed by the payers to be wholly applied to the benefit of the insane, it has been largely drawn upon for other, and very different, though very commendable purposes. It would be well, however, to call things by their right names, and not to make the burthen of the support of the victims of so dire a calamity, as insanity appear greater than it really is.

J.

ARTICLE V.

INSANITY AND IDIOCY IN MASSACHUSETTS.*

This Report, of the value of which our readers were somewhat apprised in the last number of this Journal, was directed by the Legislature of Massachusetts in 1854.

The Commission consisted of Hon. Levi Lincoln, Hon. Increase Sumner, and Edward Jarvis, M. D.; but the two former do the latter the justice to say, "that the very extensive correspondence with professional gentlemen, in this country and Europe, which elicited many of the facts, and much of the important and instructive information contained in this Report, was exclusively conducted by him. He directed and superintended, also, the preparation of the numerous tabular statements and illustrations which are herewith presented, and the draft of the Report is from his pen."

The committee was directed :

1. To ascertain the number and condition of the insane in the state, distinguishing, as accurately as may be, between the insane, properly so considered, and the idiotic or *non compos*, between the furious and the harmless, curable and incurable, and between the native and the foreigner, and the number of each who are state paupers.

* Report on Insanity and Idiocy in Massachusetts, by the Commission on Lunacy, under resolve of the Legislature of 1854. 8vo, pp. 202. Boston, 1855.