

OUT OF MIND, OUT OF SIGHT

IF you were told of a large parish where Catholics never heard Mass, never assisted at Benediction, never knelt before the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, never held a rosary in their hands, never saw a crucifix on their walls, never crossed themselves with holy water—and this through no fault of their own but only because they had been overlooked and forgotten—you would not believe it. And yet such a parish exists: scattered among all the mental hospitals in England whose tragic sufferers—the most tragic sufferers of all—have forfeited with health, sanity and freedom almost the whole practice of their religion.

In the nature of things—if nature were to be allowed the last word—no one thinks more than can be helped about insanity. Your daughter at Cambridge has a breakdown from overwork: you minimize the episode to her, to yourself, to your acquaintances. Everyone is encouraged to forget all about it as soon as possible. Your old father becomes senile: you make him as comfortable as you can in appropriate surroundings, but you do not broadcast the calamity. Someone goes under altogether: husband, wife, parent or child becomes incurably insane. It is not, for the most part, the lazy, the half-hearted, the unintelligent. It is often, in these intimidating days, the young, the ardent, the generous. It is they who, thanks to our crazy educational system over-tax their minds while they are still growing. They whose careers depend on the reiterated strain of examinations—those statutory mile-stones of imaginary progress which have so little bearing on present interests or future needs. It is they who suffer from their elders' restless manner and reckless standards of living, from their elders' vicarious enthusiasm for war. And it is they who have the most to lose—the longest to suffer from mishandling. Yet it is not only the young who become insane. It may have been, in the past, he or she whom you most loved. It may be, in the future, yourself. You needed—you may need—all the resources of your religion—to bear the great-

BLACKFRIARS

est calamity, short of sin, that can befall a human being. *Has it ever occurred to you that there is no Catholic Mental Hospital in England?*¹

If you lose your reason you forfeit not only your freedom but almost the whole exercise of your faith at the time when, of all others, you most need it. And the hospital that receives you, however friendly to your Faith, can in this respect do little or nothing for you. A Protestant institution may, and usually does, welcome the intervention of a priest. If the patient is well enough, he may go to Confession, may receive Holy Communion and, of course, when he is dying there are the Last Sacraments, if the visiting chaplain is apprised in time. That is all. Everything else is gone. The long, vacant, hopeless days are made longer, more vacant, more hopeless by the lack of what should have been, what probably was, the most dependable strand in the skein of life.

But before the ultimate verdict is passed—a sentence to which the sentence of an innocent death is a light and a joyful one—there are stages when the lack of Catholic co-operation in diagnosis and remedial treatment must bear its heavy and unforgivable blame for the final catastrophe. Immense strides have been made of late in the early handling of mental disease; and, as Archbishop Downey pointed out in a recent letter to *The Catholic Herald*, we cannot leave so great a power as psycho-analysis entirely in the hands of doctors whose view of the soul and its destiny is not our own. The modern alienist is far too sagacious to under-rate religion. He may, and often does, count it as a factor on his side. Yet he cannot exploit its possibilities as if he were a Catholic. On the other hand, he may look upon it as an evil—a burden from which he must liberate his patient. In this case it is only too possible to envisage a physical and mental alleviation wrought with the shipwreck of a soul as its price. Between the doctors who might reinforce Faith, and cannot, and the doctors who may destroy Faith, and

¹ There exist, of course, institutions for the care of the mentally deficient; home of rest for the aged; and one or two private mental hospitals which are not—they could not be without endowments—within reach of ordinary professional people, let alone the poor.

can, the Catholic patient left to non-Catholic handling stands, body, mind and soul, the worst chance of all.

The importance of a happy and congenial atmosphere for mental patients is at last being stressed. Gone are the days when any sunless rooms, any dreary clothing, was good enough for those who—it was crudely imagined—were indifferent to their surroundings. “The essence of successful treatment,” says the last Board of Control pamphlet published, “is to normalise the patients. We want them to feel that they are not patients but ordinary people. A woman, particularly a young woman, cannot and ought not to feel normal in shapeless clothes and with limp and dragged hair.” One might, perhaps, put in a plea for the customary exercise of religion as at least as essential as this sound and sympathetic advocacy of the need for personal daintiness. Yet the latter policy, carried out in at least one hospital, “transformed the women’s side.” The stress on normal habits as the means of a return to normality is reasonable enough. But the present writer has heard of a Catholic boy gently bereft of his rosary as a possible source of danger to other patients; and of a Catholic religious stript by her own community of her habit before being sent to a Protestant hospital. It does not seem to have occurred to those outside—though it did, most poignantly, to the hospital authorities—that this “unfrocking” weighed on an unbalanced mind as a punishment for some imaginary sin and cruelly retarded the patient’s possible cure.

Such instances and others coming to the knowledge of the writer—obviously no expert, but an ordinary member of the public—inspired the following letter published in *The Catholic Herald* of January 7th, 1936, under the heading: *Needed: A Catholic Home for the Insane.*

SIR,—The Archbishop of Liverpool’s timely letter on the modern treatment of mental disease should bring home to Catholics the terrible truth that in England there is practically no Catholic provision for the insane. Some forms of mental deficiency are admirably cared for; but a hospital where ordinary Catholics can afford to keep the most tragic of invalids is to seek. Such a hospital would need endowment. Insanity is an expensive disease to nurse. You require a considerable and very competent staff and large grounds. Yet it is true that we find money for

more grandiose and far less urgent schemes, and nothing for the souls and bodies so linked—as the Archbishop says—in affliction.

The present writer has visited a large Protestant asylum for the last seven or eight years, with feelings of unimpaired admiration for the work done by the staff—many of them Catholic—and of unmitigated misery and bewilderment that Catholics can leave the most pitiful and helpless of invalids with the minimum of Catholic rites and nothing of Catholic atmosphere. The hospital in question gives a sympathetic *entrée* to the priest at all hours; but the lack of everything else, from the Blessed Sacrament on the altar to a crucifix on the walls, is heartrending. If your readers had heard a young Catholic girl crying, "I want my religion" to a puzzled and kindly matron who promptly enquired, "Does she mean her prayer-book?" they would not leave the matter where it is. We have the nurses—the best in the world—and some, at any rate, of the doctors. Surely we do not grudge the money?

ONLOOKER.

This letter followed a sympathetic inquisition by Archbishop Downey into modern neuropathy and the need for Catholic co-operation with all that was good in it. It in turn evoked a pathetic plea from a Catholic who had actually endured the terrible conditions which "Onlooker" had only beheld. His letter appeared on January 21st and ran as follows:

SIR,—Had I not been a mental patient myself I should perhaps have never felt prompted to write to the *Catholic Herald*. As it is, the appearance of "Onlooker's" letter has given a spur to my own secret hopes that something may be done with regard to the provision of a Mental Hospital for all classes of Catholics.

"Onlooker" has in fact echoed the very feelings and desires I myself experienced as a male patient in a mental hospital. I used to look at the walls and long for the sight of a crucifix or a picture of Our Lady and this as much for others as for myself.

None but a mental patient can realise the sense of futility and hopelessness that such an illness produces and surely anything that can give some meaning to his sufferings and supernaturalise them, if only a small way, should be provided if possible. Now think what a Catholic Hospital would mean to many of these unfortunates. I cannot conceive of a more exquisite charity than to provide a Catholic home of this kind for the insane and I did myself wonder as a patient how it was possible that in a great country like this Catholics had left the most tragic members of Christ's Mystical Body so sadly neglected. I can even remember building up a grandiose phantasy in my mind and saying to myself, "Yes, as soon as I am out, I shall start a campaign through the country and I shall get a Catholic Mental Hospital built."

RELIGIOUS.

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The Editor of *The Catholic Herald* added that 'Onlooker's' letter "has already led to a concrete offer and proposal of which something may come."

This concrete offer was put forward by Miss Marguerite Selby, who suggested that a Catholic committee might consider a country mansion with eleven acres of ground which she herself had hitherto used as a rest house for priests. The details of her generous proposal were sent by the Editor of *The Catholic Herald* to "Onlooker," who has Miss Selby's leave to mention them to anyone interested in "a most urgent work of charity."

Obviously what is needed is a clinic in London—and later on in every big centre; and a hospital in the country as distinguished for every excellence, human and divine, as the Hospital of St. John and St. Elizabeth. What this last-named already does, not only for its patients, but, by much-appreciated example, for the conversion of England, needs no stressing here.

The Stationery Office, which publishes the findings of the Board of Control, is unable to provide statistics of the religious beliefs of the over a hundred and fifty-five thousand patients notified as "under care" in England and Wales for 1936. These are the latest figures available and the Report containing them is essential reading both for its facts and its recommendations.² The numbers of Catholic patients in public and private hospitals could be ascertained by a census of chaplains accredited to these institutions, men who for the most part carry out a notable work of mercy as a hampered side-line to other exacting duties. Their experience and advice would be invaluable. They, and perhaps they only, will not hear it said: "The weak you have not strengthened, and that which was sick you have not healed, that which was broken you have not bound up, and that which was driven away you have not brought back again, neither have you sought that which was lost . . . and my flocks were scattered on the face of the earth and there was none that sought them, there was none, I say, that sought them." "ONLOOKER."

² *The Twenty-Third Annual Report of the Board of Control for the Year 1936. Part I.* H.M. Stationery Office, Adastral House, Kingsway, London, W.C.2—*or through booksellers—price 1s. 6d. net.*