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years ago

Thomas Drapes, Medical Superintendent of the Enniscorthy

Dermot Walsh

In these days of some perturbation concerning the overinclusiveness of proposed psychiatric classificatory systems such as DSM-5, it is salutary to reflect that this concern is nothing new. Dr Thomas Drapes, Medical Superintendent of the Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford Asylum, voiced his worry in 1911, when Eugen Bleuler was introducing the word 'schizophrenia' to the psychiatric dictionary. In an article 'The personal equation in alienism' in the *Journal of Mental Science* he wrote (May 1911): 'In classification we have another example of the effects of the personal equation. That there is need for some kind of classification is agreed on by all; what should be the basis of classification is agreed by none. And so we have scheme after scheme ushered into existence by one writer after another, framed according to the mental proclivities of each individual authority, all different, and each constructed, not on a single basis, but on sundry and diverse bases, pathological, aetiological, symptomatological, and so on, forming a veritable medley or hotch-potch, most embarrassing to the student of psychiatry. . . A new variety of insanity is announced. It is ushered into existence by some illustrious psychiatrist. It is accepted with acclaim by one class of mind, regarded as a new discovery by which diagnosis and prognosis will be in future rendered comparatively easy, the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain. (607)'

His obituarist, fellow countryman, psychiatrist and Inspector of Lunacy Sir W. R. Dawson, on the first page of the *Journal* in April 1920, reflected that Drapes 'could never bring himself to adopt the doctrines of Kraepelin' and thought that 'Freudism is, in much of its theory, scientifically unsound'. Drapes was probably the most enquiring psychiatrist in Ireland of his generation and contributed frequently to the *Journal* on topics as diverse as 'On the alleged increase of insanity in Ireland' and 'Acute hallucinatory insanity of traumatic origin'. Literate in French and German, he reviewed many publications in these languages for the *Journal*. In 1912, he became co-editor of the *Journal* and in 1915 editor-in-chief. In 1911/1912, he was elected president of the Royal Medico-Psychological Association, but declined the honour on health grounds.

Earlier in 2011, the Enniscorthy Asylum, over which Drapes had presided from 1883 to 1919, closed. One wonders what he would have thought of the 'community psychiatry' which led to its demise.

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