

The Middletown
State Homoeopathic Hospital.

Dr. Selden H. Talcott, Medical Superintendent

Middletown, Orange Co., N. Y., March 5, 1891. 189

Hon. Albion W. Tourgee,

Mayville,

Chautauqua Co., N. Y.

My Dear Sir:

It is some years since we had the pleasure of meeting you, and your memory of Middletown may have been pretty thoroughly dimmed by many other intervening experiences.

I told Dr. Talcott yesterday that I was going to write to you and ask if you could and would be willing to assist us among your legislative friends, in having this hospital set apart for those who may desire Homoeopathic treatment. As this hospital has become successful it has steadily gained in public confidence, until it is safe to say that to-day it is probably equal to any institution of similar character in this country. This, as a matter of course, has engendered envy, hatred, and malice, to such an extent that an organized effort has been made and is now working to cripple its usefulness for performing the work originally intended for it by its founders.

In all this there is probably a political move, but this is enveloped by a cloak that the people have been taught is pure philanthropy for the "wards of the State" and which is wholly "beneficent", even in the working out of the details of the plan.

I send you our last report, together with "The Hospital Idea",

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and a clipping from the New York Times of Feb. 24th that explains itself. I will send you in a day or two a circular letter that will be sent to physicians in the State.

If you can write to any of the members of the Senate or Assembly and ask their support of measures calculated to afford the Homoeopaths of the State their rights, you will place us under obligations.

Dr. Talcott is now absent in Albany, or he would join me in sending regards.

Very sincerely yours,

C. Spruce Kinney

CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY NY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

FREEDOM IN MEDICAL MATTERS.

THE HOMEOPATHIC ASYLUM AND THE PAUPER INSANE.

To the Editor of the New-York Times:

In your issue of Feb. 19 we have read the following: "Senator Richardson has introduced a bill to exempt the Middletown Insane Asylum from the operations of the Pauper Insane bill. This institution is now on a liberal paying basis, and the fear that the pauper insane may encroach upon the confines of wealthy patients who occupy two or three rooms has led to the introduction of this bill, which, on humanitarian grounds, ought to be beaten."

The statement that exemption from the laws of 1890, or any amendment in behalf of this hospital, is sought for because of a "fear" on the part of the friends of this institution that the pauper insane may encroach upon the "confines of wealthy patients" is untrue. No such fear exists in the minds of the friends of this hospital. The real object of the proposed amendment to exempt this institution, to a very limited extent, from the provisions of the law of 1890 is to secure freedom in medical matters—such freedom as every honest man desires either in the government of his own conscience or in the care of his body or mind when either may become diseased.

The proposed amendment does not relieve this institution from State supervision, nor does it interfere in any way with State care for the insane. It simply provides for the unhindered admission of cases from all parts of the State for whom homeopathic treatment may be desired, and it provides also that the rates for board and maintenance of patients shall be fixed by the Trustees of this hospital. These Trustees were appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate, and they are pledged by the provisions of Chapter 121 of the Laws of 1876 "to maintain the homeopathic mode of medical treatment in such asylum." They know the purposes of this hospital, and are competent to fulfill them.

The State of New-York established the Middletown State Homeopathic Hospital for a specific and designated purpose, and for seventeen years this institution has afforded homeopathic treatment to those insane persons residing anywhere in the Commonwealth whose friends desire in their behalf the application of those methods of treatment discovered and exemplified by Dr. Samuel Hahnemann.

Under the provisions of a law passed in 1890, the State was divided into as many districts as there are State hospitals, (with three exceptions,) and to each hospital was assigned a given district composed of certain designated counties. The State asylums at Auburn, Matteawan, and Ward's Island were exempted, in the original law, because they were set apart for the treatment of certain specified classes of the insane. Under the provisions of the law of 1890, insane persons residing in one hospital district might be sent for treatment to a hospital in another district "in the discretion of the Chairman of the State Commission in Lunacy and the Superintendent of such asylum." This provision of the law has caused serious delays, in some instances, in the commitment of the acute insane to the hospital of their choice; and in order to obviate such delays in the future, and to place the selection of a hospital entirely with the friends or guardians of an insane patient, and in order to secure the just and equitable right of freedom of medical opinion and action to every citizen in this State, the friends of this hospital asked for an amendment to the law of 1890. This amendment provides for the commitment to this hospital of those for whom homeopathic treatment is desired; and it places the regulation of rates for board and care of patients in the hands of the Trustees. Nothing could be more fair and equitable than such a procedure. The reasons for the amendment are obvious to every thoughtful and unbiased citizen who has studied the subject.

In asking for this amendment we do not ask to be relieved from State supervision, nor do we interfere in any way with the broad and benevolent principle of State care for the insane. On the contrary, we ask positively, emphatically, and solely for the right and privilege of affording State care to all the insane—poor, medium, and rich—whose friends may prefer for them the homeopathic method of treatment. Homeopaths do not seek to compel those who prefer "old school" treatment to be placed in this hospital for care; nor do homeopaths wish to be compelled to seek permission to enter here from "old school" authorities.

No private patient occupies "two or three rooms" in any of the wards of this hospital. On the contrary, no patient is allowed more than one room in a ward, and such room is often shared by one of the regular attendants or by another patient. At the present time there are 698 patients upon the census list of this hospital. Of this number but 23 pay more than \$10 per week. The remaining 675 are either pauper or indigent patients or patients paying low rates of board. We have nearly 200 patients who pay from \$3 per week to \$10 per week each, and between 400 and 500 who are maintained by the counties from which they come. Last year thirty-six out of the sixty counties of this State were represented in our wards by patients residing therein. The vast majority of paying patients would be pauperized in a short time if compelled to purchase care in an expensive private institution. While we do not object to private asylums for the insane for those who wish to patronize them, we do object most earnestly and strenuously to compulsory patronage of private institutions established and designed by their proprietors for the purpose of making money while caring for the most helpless beings on earth, to wit, persons who have been bereft of the use of their reason.

It is a strange condition of affairs when the State, having erected hospitals for her insane wards, may direct that the profligate lunatic, whose insanity is self-induced, and who has brought upon himself and his family both poverty and disease by the recklessness of his mode of living, should be placed in a public hospital and surrounded by every comfort and luxury, while the thrifty and economical citizen who has accumulated a moderate competence by patient and persistent toil is, when stricken with mental disease and rendered absolutely helpless, compelled to patronize a private institution, established for personal gain, until his money is gone and himself and his family beggared. Then, when thus despoiled, his industrious and useful citizen is to be placed in a State hospital as a pauper patient. How much better would it be for all concerned if the State would assist the private citizen in maintaining independence and self-respect and self-support when he is brought to bay by the most disastrous of all known diseases.

In the three main buildings at this hospital, now used for patients, there are 1,147,831 cubic feet of air space. This includes halls, day rooms, sitting rooms, and sleeping rooms. Of all this space only 31,561 cubic feet are occupied by the twenty-three patients who pay more than \$10 per week for board and care. The balance of space, namely, 1,116,270 cubic feet, is used indiscriminately by pauper and indigent patients, and by those paying low rates of board. This is a plain, practical showing of the actual condition of affairs, and by it you will see that wealthy patients are not spreading themselves over spaces that should be occupied by the poor insane. It seems to me that only a very moderate percentage of space is now being used by those who have contributed largely to the erection of these State hospitals for the insane.

We believe in state care for the insane; in State care for all the insane; in State care for the acute insane; in State care for the poor; in State care for those in moderate circumstances, and in State care for those who have been blessed with opulence, if the friends of such patients desire for their treatment in our State hospitals. At the same time, we do not believe that it would be wise to transfer from county institutions to State hospitals those who are most unlikely to recover to the exclusion or overcrowding of patients suffering with acute insanity, and who would be likely to recover if afforded the benefits of State hospital treatment. We are willing to take all who need to come, acute and chronic, as soon as sufficient room is provided by additional buildings. We seek now by means of wise and equitable laws to establish the principle of state care in the Middletown Hospital for all who may desire homeopathic treatment.

There are, in this State, over 1,000,000 adherents of homeopathy. As far as we have been able to learn, these patrons of our cause stand as a unit in favor of freedom of medical opinion and action. All are strenuous in behalf of the medical liberties and unhindered right of choice of those who may need treatment in this hospital. The homeopaths of this State pay a very considerable portion of the taxes. In some parts of the Commonwealth more than 50 per cent. of the taxes are paid by the adherents of homeopathy, consequently it would seem to the unprejudiced mind that we are justly entitled to at least one hospital of the eight which have been erected for the insane by the generosity of this Commonwealth. The legislators of the State thought that the appeal of homeopaths for a State asylum, where homeopathic treatment might prevail, was a just one twenty years ago, and their belief in the justice of our cause has been reiterated and emphasized by liberal appropriations made annually ever since. We know of no reason for any change of attitude at the present time. All we ask is fair play and a continuance of the privileges which have been accorded to us, to which we are justly entitled, and which we hope to continue to deserve.

We do not wish to interfere with the rights of others, nor with the plan of State care for the insane, but we do wish to secure to every resident in this State the unhindered and unhindered right of admission, direct and without delay, to this hospital whenever the necessity of sickness impels commitment to an institution for the insane.

SELDEN H. TALCOTT,

Medical Superintendent.

THE MIDDLETOWN STATE HOMEOPATHIC HOSPITAL,
MIDDLETOWN, ORANGE COUNTY, N. Y., Friday,
Feb. 20, 1891.