

THE MIDDLETOWN STATE HOMOEOPATHIC HOSPITAL.

AN OPEN LETTER FROM
DR. SELDEN H. TALCOTT

IN REPLY TO
PROF. CHAS. F. CHANDLER.

MIDDLETOWN, N. Y., March 21, 1891.
*Prof. Charles F. Chandler, 21 University
Place, New York City, N. Y.*

MY DEAR SIR:—From the exalted position which you occupy as a teacher in a college, and as president of a State Association, I have been led to infer that you are a man of honesty and honor; and I now believe that you would not, knowingly or intentionally, misrepresent any body or class of your fellow citizens, even though you might for some unknown reason be opposed to measures advocated by them.

I have read your *pronunciamento* against the Middletown State Homeopathic Hospital, at least I infer it is against the homeopathic hospital, although not so stated in the head lines which appear over your letter to Hon. William P. Richardson, the Senator from this district. For the purpose of reviewing and correcting some of the statements which you make in your letter to Senator Richardson, I send this open communication to you.

In the second paragraph of your letter, relative to a bill in behalf of the institution in question, you state: "The proposed measure seeks, by special legislation, to secure for the Middletown State Hospital certain immunities and privileges not accorded to the other State hospitals for the insane."

We seek immunity from constrictions recently put upon us, and which are not in concordance with that freedom of thought and action upon which the superstructure of the State homeopathic hospital was founded. We seek a privilege which is our inborn and inalienable right—that of providing at this hospital suitable care for all who may prefer the homeopathic mode of treatment; and likewise, we seek to establish for the citizens throughout the State the right of sending those who may prefer homeopathic treatment to this institution when afflicted with insanity. The right of liberty in medical matters is as sacred and unimpeachable as the right of liberty in religious or political matters;

and any measure which seeks to restrict such a right of the people is doomed to speedy disaster. Such is the handwriting on the wall of this western temple which is dedicated, eternally, we trust, to the cause of human freedom.

In your fourth paragraph you state that "the proposed legislation seeks to free the Middletown Asylum from this condition (namely, that of receiving private patients when the pauper and indigent insane have been cared for), leaving it optional with this State hospital to fill its wards entirely with paying patients should it so desire, without restrictions of any kind." We confront this assertion with a positive denial. The amendment introduced by Senator Richardson provides that "county judges and superintendents of the poor in any of the counties of this State, and all county or State officers having authority to commit insane persons to any of the State hospitals for the insane, may, at the request of relatives, friends or guardians of any such insane persons, either *public* or private, for whom homeopathic treatment may be desired, commit, without further legal requirements, such recently insane persons to the Middletown State Homeopathic Hospital." Here we have, as a restriction against filling the institution with private patients, the authority vested in both county and State officers for sending all pauper or indigent patients, whose friends may desire for them homeopathic treatment, to the Middletown State Homeopathic Hospital. Do you think that if this amendment becomes a law we can defy the orders of the county judges and Superintendents of the Poor, and all county or State officers having authority to commit insane persons? If you do, I do not. We recognize, above all things else, the duty of, and necessity for, receiving, first of all, the poor insane; and next, those who can pay but moderate prices; and finally, those who can pay goodly sums, and who, if there is room for them, may be admitted to a State hospital.

In paragraph five you express the opin-

ion that "the association is satisfied that this is not the moment to alter it (the law of 1890), when the condition of the pauper patients in the poor houses calls for their immediate transfer to the care of the State." We have had a transfer of twenty-nine patients from the Sullivan County poor house to this institution, and every one who was capable of expressing any opinion whatever declared, after arriving at this institution, that he or she was well fed, well clad, comfortably housed, kindly treated, and contented with the surroundings furnished by the County of Sullivan. Such being the actual fact, and the fact also appearing that we are not likely to be able to cure the patients thus transferred, it seems to me that legislation which shall make provision for the care, treatment and cure of the acute insane of all classes is even more important and imperative than is legislation which takes cognizance of nothing except a transfer of the chronic insane from county institutions to State institutions.

If you will kindly consult Section three, chapter 126, laws of 1890, you will find that "the State Commission in Lunacy is directed to ascertain, from time to time, what vacancies, if any, exist in any one or more of the State insane asylums, and said commission is hereby authorized and required to forthwith cause the removal to such asylum or asylums, from some one or more of the counties of the district to which said asylum has been assigned, under the provisions of this act, as many of the pauper and indigent insane patients as can be accommodated." If this provision of law was absolutely obeyed, then no victim of acute insanity, either public or private, could be admitted to any one of our State hospitals during the next year, and possibly during the next three or four years; for, as we understand the case, every State hospital, with possibly one exception, is to-day filled to the extent of overcrowding. Such being the case, what is to become of the acute pauper insane, let alone the acute private insane? Not only is there no room in our State hospitals for these to-day, but, so far as I can learn, no suitable appropriations have been made for enlarging our State hospitals, in order to provide accommodations for such cases. We are trying to look out for the interests of all classes of the insane, and to provide State care for all. How can this be accomplished when we meet with open and avowed opposition from those who are the asserted advocates of State care?

In paragraph nine of your letter you state: "One important feature of the law divides the State into asylum districts,

and obliges the pauper and indigent insane to be sent to the State asylum in their respective districts." Such being the fact, those paupers who have a taste for homeopathic pellets are obliged to swallow allopathic doses, *volens volens*, and those who want large doses of so-called powerful medicines must content themselves with homeopathic pills.

But you say to meet the demands of personal preference a section was inserted which allows a lunatic to go from one district to another for treatment "in the discretion of the Chairman of the State Commission in Lunacy, and the superintendent of such asylum. Any expense of removal in such cases must be borne by said insane person's guardians, relatives or friends, as the case may be." Here the gratification of personal preference for homeopathic treatment may be interdicted in the "discretion of the Chairman of the State Commission in Lunacy;" and again, a man endowed with the brilliant intellect of an Edgar A. Poe, and residing in Albany, or Syracuse, or Rochester may prefer homeopathic treatment and want to be sent here when suffering with mental disease, but he may also be absolutely penniless, and his friends may be unable to buy a ticket or furnish a pass, and in that case (the superintendent of the poor being unauthorized to pay for such a patient's transportation) he must be necessarily forced into an institution where allopathic drugs must be crammed down his throat. These "few restrictions" may seem of very slight importance to the victim of inherited wealth, or pampered child of fortune, or the fortunate son of opulence and fame; but to the victim of poverty, misfortune, and disease these "few restrictions" may seem like the crushing weight of the "old man of the sea."

Freedom of choice in medical matters — one of the most inalienable of all human rights — is almost absolutely stultified by the provisions of the State care act of 1890. Such being the case, the amendment which we ask is natural, reasonable and just. It simply restores to the homeopaths of New York a right which is as necessary to them as the air which they breathe, and which is as dear in their estimation as the right to control one's conscience, or to seek in one's own way salvation for the soul.

Concerning uniformity of charges to be made for the maintenance of patients in our State hospitals, we have yielded that point, although I think nothing could be more fair than to charge counties and individuals such sums as may actually be needed for the proper care of patients. The

distinction between acute and chronic insanity having been abolished by law, it strikes me that it would be no more than just to abolish that distinction of care which is implied by a charge of \$4.25 per week during the first three years of insanity, and a reduction to \$2.50 per week after the victim has been insane for more than three years. Certainly you cannot furnish as good care, nor as many comforts for \$2.50 as you can for \$4.25; consequently, while the distinction between acute and chronic insanity has been abolished by law, the distinction continues, in point of fact, by reason of the charges made.

Again, you assert that the bill introduced by Senator Richardson "authorizes the Middletown State Hospital to receive as many paying patients as its managers may choose to receive, whether or not there is room in the hospital for the pauper and indigent insane of the Middletown Hospital district." If the county authorities send a sufficient number of public patients to fill our wards, then we can only receive private patients as we may be able to make room for them. Also you state: "It authorizes this asylum to disregard entirely the districting feature of the State care act." The fact is the amendment says nothing about the State care act; nor do I understand the amendment as relieving the hospital from the care of patients from such a district as the proper board may assign to it.

In your postscript you speak about the revival of the "old mileage abuse, which the State Care Act has just abolished." During the past ten or more years we have had patients from about thirty or thirty-five counties of this State. During last year we had representatives from thirty-eight counties—nearly two-thirds of all the counties of the Commonwealth. During all our experience with the superintendents of the poor, we have found none of them disposed to cart patients long distances, and away from the asylums nearest the homes of their patients, except to accommodate those who wanted special treatment. On the contrary, as a rule, the friends of patients prefer to have their sick ones taken to the nearest hospital, in order that they may frequently be visited, and the superintendents so act. Public sentiment would not allow the superintendent of the poor in Oneida county to take all his patients to the Buffalo asylum for the sake of securing a large amount of mileage fees. You know that just as well as I do. As I said before, we have had dealings with the superintendents of between thirty and forty of the counties of this State. These men have brought

patients to this institution, sometimes from long distances, because the friends of these patients, foregoing a desire to have them near home, preferred for them homeopathic treatment. The law of 1874, chapter 414, granted to the superintendents of the poor that privilege, and the people have never complained of its abuse, so far as I have been able to learn. The superintendents of the poor in some of the counties have brought many patients here for the reason that the people of their counties demanded the privilege, and because it was thought that satisfactory results were attained by so doing. If our amendment becomes a law, there will be no revival of any mileage or any other abuse. The result will be simply the granting of a just right to those of the homeopathic faith.

You state, likewise, in your postscript: "We do not believe that the homeopathic medical profession at large, which has repeatedly endorsed the State Care Act in its present form, desires to nullify its provisions before it has had time to go into full effect." Let me state to you that the homeopathic medical profession at large, through the medium of the State Homeopathic Medical Society, at its annual meeting in February, 1890, cordially endorsed the principle of State Care; but since the passage of the State Care Act in its present form—most objectionable in some of its features, I can assure you—the State Homeopathic Medical Society, at its semi-annual meeting, held in Brooklyn, last September, and at its annual meeting, held in the city of Albany in February, 1891, passed resolutions unanimously condemning most earnestly and strenuously certain provisions of the State care act in its present form. It is probable that I am in communication with a larger number of the members of the homeopathic medical profession than you are; and I am prepared to assert that this profession is most strongly opposed to that provision of the State care act which requires every member of this profession residing in fifty-three counties of the State, to apply, in case he wants to send a patient here, to an old school physician for his permission to send a believer in homeopathy, who is mentally diseased, to this hospital. The homeopathic physicians of the State know that the insane patients of fifty-three counties, whose friends may desire for them homeopathic treatment at this hospital, may all be excluded "in the discretion of the chairman of the State Commission in Lunacy."

"Can such things be and not overcome us like a summer's cloud?"

You state that the most important and

dangerous feature of the proposed legislation is that "it seems to reverse the principle of giving the preference to those who are most helpless." Such is not a feature of the proposed legislation as we recognize it. The principal and important feature of this legislation is that it insures freedom of thought and action in medical matters, and that is all. We believe that universal freedom of thought is of vastly more importance to the inhabitants of this Commonwealth than any provision which can be made for any one class of the unfortunate insane. We believe that true State care of the insane must provide for all, in accordance with the individual preference of each. We believe that the State should take care of her insane as follows:

First, the acute and curable insane of all classes; and secondly, the chronic, or incurable, or protracted cases of all classes.

We should be glad to know that the assumption of State care for all the insane has become an established and triumphant fact; but we do not believe that this will be accomplished so long as opposition is made to that loftiest of human principles—namely, liberty of thought and action in everything that pertains to the welfare of the body and the saving of the soul.

I am amazed at the opposition which has arisen against this great principle. The cloak of alleged philanthropy sometimes covers strange and incongruous influences and tendencies.

You may think that our advocacy of the principle of freedom in medical matters is chimerical and untenable, but time will disclose the magnificent powers of this mighty principle. When William H. Seward announced the doctrine that "there is a higher law than the constitution," he was assailed by the most malignant and bitter forces of slavery; yet the

annunciation of that sublime fact, by Seward, was followed by the rattling electricity of war as let loose by the God of battles and of nations, and the existence of a "higher law" was proved by the evolution of events, to the dismay and defeat of the myriad hordes of those who advocated the Bible truth of the damnable doctrine of human slavery. We may be defeated, temporarily, in our efforts to establish true State care and universal freedom of thought and action in medical matters, but we shall succeed by and by. With Disraeli, we will assert: "I can wait;" and, with St. Paul, we will believe that "all things work together for good to them that love God."

With sentiments of esteem,

I am, very truly yours,

SELDEN HAINES TALCOTT,

Medical Superintendent,

Middletown State Homeopathic Hospital.

P. S.—You state, with regard to the admission of pauper and indigent insane to asylums beyond the district where these patients reside, that "in no instance has permission been refused." We are not yet in full possession of all the facts relating to this matter, but we may state positively that in several instances dangerous and unnecessary delays in the granting of such permissions have occurred. These delays have ranged from eight to twenty-eight days.

With regard to a conference to fix rates, I sent my steward—who understands the problem of rates as well as any one can, but his opinion received, apparently, but very little attention—to Albany on one occasion, when the matter of rates was incidentally referred to, and I do not now recall any other conference for the purpose aforesaid.