

LUNACY: ITS PAST AND ITS PRESENT

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649528271

Lunacy: Its Past and Its Present by Robert Gardiner Hill

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Cover @ 2017

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ROBERT GARDINER HILL

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AND ITS PRESENT**

With H. G. Kelly's Compl.



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ITS PAST AND ITS PRESENT.

BY

ROBERT GARDINER HILL, F.S.A., 1811-1878

*Licentiate of the Royal College of Physicians, Edinburgh; Member of the Royal
College of Surgeons, England; Fellow of the London Medical Society;
Author of the Non-restraint System of Treatment in Lunacy; late Medical
Superintendent of the Lincoln Lunatic Asylum; and late
one of the Visiting Justices of the Lincolnshire
County Lunatic Asylum, &c.*

WITH

APPENDIX.

"The evil that men do lives after them;
The good is oft interred with their bones."

LONDON:
LONGMANS, GREEN, READER, AND DYER.
1870.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY C. W. REYNELL, LITTLE FULTENEY STREET,
HAYMARKET, W.

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P R E F A C E .

THE writer of the following pages addresses himself to those who think, but emphatically to those whom the accidents of life have familiarized with the painful phenomena of mental alienation. If he does not profess to furnish a scientific treatise on the subject, his hesitation must be attributed to its right cause—to the fact, in other words—that the so-called science of psychology is still in its earliest infancy, and that however great have been our advances in all that is material in the world around us, we are far removed from even penetrating the crust of that which is mental. Whilst to man is given the faculty of plumbing the depths of the ocean, and of bringing continents in proximity through the subtle agencies of electricity, he is prostrated in any attempt to analyse the recesses of thought. They are

amenable to no delicacy of instrument, and however much we may generalise, we ultimately arrive at nothing beyond obscure and uncertain guesses—their spirituality rebuking us at every step we take. The writer, therefore, eschews such debatable ground, and contents himself in the humbler sphere of propounding the results of a large and extensive practice that has given a zest to the labours of the greater part of a lifetime. The experience so acquired he thinks should be utilised for the benefit of those who are treading in his footsteps, and it is in this spirit he ventures again to come before the public. What insanity is would furnish speculation for the materials of a lexicon. What the writer aims at elucidating are some of those particular forms of the disease falling under the head of legal insanity, wherein the application of the Lunacy Laws is brought into operation. Beyond such an arena he does not desire to travel; his starting point is a legal document framed in accordance with the Act of Parliament, which limits the freedom of one for the benefit of many.

If we cannot be said to live in the maturity

of time, we can at any rate bring home to our senses that we do not live in a non-progressive era, the magnificent strides in every department of research meeting us at every turn in the journey of life. In none has our progress been more conspicuous than in the recognition of our moral obligations, when we substituted a law of kindness for the practice of cruelty in the treatment of the insane. The conception of abolishing all mechanical restraint ushered in the dawn of a new day—its practical success is the crowning of the edifice.

To have been an instrument in this great achievement ought to satisfy the ambition of any ordinary mortal, and so undoubtedly it would in the present case had not some unjust and ungenerous criticisms lately appeared, the effect of which was not only to deprive the author of his laurels in the long-sustained fight, not only to discredit the institution of which he was the representative, but actually to pervert the current facts of history. Under such circumstances silence would have been culpable. He is necessarily obliged, therefore, to assume the part of the historian by placing before the public the grava-