

**A LETTER TO LORD ROBERT
SEYMOUR: WITH A REPORT OF
THE NUMBER OF LUNATICS AND
IDIOTS IN ENGLAND AND WALES**

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A Letter to Lord Robert Seymour: With a Report of the Number of Lunatics and Idiots in England and Wales by Sir Andrew Halliday

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SIR ANDREW HALLIDAY

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LORD ROBERT SEYMOUR:
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A REPORT
OF
THE NUMBER OF LUNATICS AND IDIOTS
IN
ENGLAND AND WALES.

By SIR ANDREW HALLIDAY, K.H. & M.D.

LONDON:
THOMAS AND GEORGE UNDERWOOD,
32, FLEET STREET.
1829.

TO
THE RIGHT HONOURABLE
THE LORD ROBERT SEYMOUR,

&c. &c. &c.

MY LORD,

THERE IS NO man now living to whom the following Report can be addressed with half so much propriety as to your Lordship. I shall, therefore, offer no apology for thus bringing your respected name once more before the public. The interesting subject to which it relates is one that has long engaged your almost undivided attention; and the important information it contains has been constantly sought for by you with unwearied zeal and unceasing anxiety. That this information is still in some measure imperfect, is certainly to be lamented; but

how can it be otherwise, since, in collecting it, I have had to struggle against (worse than the cold indifference) the opposition of some official men, and all the common difficulties that assail a private individual? My energies have been cramped, and my sphere of usefulness restricted, yet my zeal has in no measure been lessened; and, in as far as it goes, your Lordship will find that this Report presents a very fair view of the statistics of insanity in Great Britain. It is calculated to set at rest a question that involves much of our character and conduct as a Christian nation, and that affects more or less, in all their relations, the happiness and comfort of every member of the community.

The prevalence of insanity in England is no new doctrine. Foreigners of all countries have universally asserted it, and many amongst ourselves have implicitly believed the assertion; but, up to the present moment,

the soundness of that doctrine has been firmly disputed and combated, though, as one of its ablest opponents candidly confesses, "little else than conjecture has ever been brought forward on the subject." Now, however, I am enabled to lay before your Lordship and the public a series of returns, authentic and tolerably accurate, which not only shew that insanity, in all its forms, prevails to a most alarming extent in England, but that the numbers of the afflicted have become more than tripled during the last twenty years!

If such, then, are the melancholy facts which it will no longer be possible to dispute, it would argue, in my opinion, a consciousness of criminal negligence were we to attempt longer to conceal them. Our inattention, I verily believe, has arisen more from our ignorance of the extent of the evil and of its rapid increase, than from either inhumanity or indifference to the sufferings

of our fellow-creatures. And so convinced have I been of this, that, from the first moment that my attention became directed to the subject, I have endeavoured to obtain and to promulgate as true a statement as possible of the numbers and condition of the insane poor in the several divisions of the British empire. I felt that, until we had ascertained with some degree of certainty the extent of the existing evil, it was almost impossible to recommend or to carry into effect any measures that were calculated to correct, far less entirely to remove it. My early representations and communications to the public, though anonymous, were so appalling, and found to be so true, that they led to the Select Committee of 1806-7, where we have, in the report of that committee, the first attempt that was made to obtain an official return of the number of the insane poor in England. How unsatisfactory that return proved, I need not mention to your Lord-

ship. The committee could not discover more than *two thousand two hundred and forty-eight* lunatics and idiots in the whole of England and Wales; while I proved to them that *two hundred and thirty* existed in two counties (Suffolk and Norfolk), from which not a single lunatic or idiot had previously been returned.

Again, my Lord, I can appeal to your own recollections for the unsatisfactory nature of the returns called for by the committee of 1815, though the numbers they gave more than doubled the returns of 1807. Hence the urgency with which I recommended the insertion of that clause in the late act, which requires "that the justices of the peace, acting in and for every county in England and Wales, shall, at their several petty sessions, held next after the 15th of August in every year, issue their warrants to the overseers of the poor, to return lists of all insane persons in, and that are supported by, their respective

parishes;" and hence the eagerness with which I have availed myself of the information to be obtained by means of such returns, to prepare the Report which I have now the honour most respectfully to submit to your Lordship and the public.

I have the honour to be,

With the greatest respect,

MY LORD,

Your Lordship's very faithful and obedient

Humble Servant,

ANDREW HALLIDAY.

HAMPTON COURT,
Sept. 24, 1829.