

contemporaries in the recognition of widespread importance of psychological issues in clinical practice. Rush went further in stressing the importance of the study of psychology in training for general medicine, in focusing concretely on the patient as an individual, and in combining his psychological and physiological behaviour into a holistic pattern of functioning constituting a unitary view which in recent years is again experiencing more imperatively additional emphasis in medical education.

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JOHN THOMAS PERCEVAL (1803-1876) PATIENT AND REFORMER

THE autobiographies of the insane furnish unique opportunities for the student of the human mind to study its aberrations in pure culture as it were, untrammelled and uncoloured by those subtle but uncharted influences which result from the interaction of observer and observed in the doctor-patient relation of the formal psychiatric interview. They present mental illness portrayed in all its unvarnished detail without fear or favour, let or hindrance, save for the limitation of language to express that borderland between body and mind, thought and feeling, against the background of which so much of it is played out. Their usefulness varies only with their author's

power of self observation and awareness and the richness of his experience. 'Who e'er is *Mad*, he first had *Wit* to lose' wrote the poet John Carkesse while a patient in Bedlam in 1679, and the more wit to lose the more informative the result. Nothing shows better how much psychiatric theory owes to such self-accounts than D. P. Schreber's *Memoirs of my nervous illness*, 1903, Leipzig (translated and edited by Ida Macalpine and Richard Hunter, London, Dawson, 1955), Freud's analysis of which marks the beginning of the present-day insights into the paranoid psychoses. The late Professor Carney Landis of New York made a comparative and analytical survey of this important field of psychiatric literature which is due to be published this year as *Varieties of abnormal experience*.

The first half of the nineteenth century saw the publication of a number of tracts by former inmates of private madhouses which are unfortunately partially vitiated for the purposes of psychological study by their avowed intent to publicize the misdemeanours if not actual atrocities perpetrated in them. Not so John Thomas Perceval's *A narrative of the treatment experienced by a gentleman, during a state of mental derangement; designed to explain the causes and nature of insanity, and to expose the injudicious conduct pursued towards many unfortunate sufferers under that calamity*, which as its title implies had a much wider aim: 'to stir up an intelligent and active sympathy . . . by proving with how much needless tyranny they [the insane] are treated' and 'By showing how inadequate and deficient are the means provided by law for the protection of insane persons under confinement, and for the rescue of persons who may be unjustly confined—he hopes to procure a reform of the law'. It appeared in two versions in 1838 (pp. 278) and 1840 (pp. xxviii+430). Together they form a not less than classic addition to the canon of the records of insanity seen from the inside.

Dr. Bateson has done well to reproduce a modern printing of this insighted man's experience of his own unconscious.* He has reprinted the 1838 book complete, but alas only about two-thirds of the 1840 version. Since the value of such records lies to a large extent in their being complete and unadulterated as no observer study can ever be, editorial licence of this kind is hard to condone whatever the reason—even if as here the cutting down was done to produce a more readable volume by removing overlapping, repetitious and contentious matter. (It may be remarked that repetitiveness whether in thought or mood or deed is in itself a little studied yet ubiquitous sign of psychiatric disorder, a symptom in its own right which may well yield vital clues to the understanding of mental illness in the future.) This is in any case not a book which can be made palatable for the layman: it is for the serious student for whom all is grist to the mill. He will want as much detail as possible about Perceval's life (not only that he was the son of Prime Minister Spencer Perceval assassinated in 1812 and was married with four daughters), so that he can fill in the background to his psychosis both before and after, and he will want to know about the contemporary psychiatric scene against which it was written so that he can evaluate fact from fancy in the *Narrative*. Such editorial labours would have produced a first-rate historico-clinical contribution to psychiatry. Unfortunately Dr. Bateson has not availed himself of the opportunity: his treatment of Perceval's life is sketchy not to say cavalier, his commentary devoted to modern and perhaps ephemeral psychopathological theories he sees reflected in the *Narrative*, his notes on the text almost non-existent. The reader will look in vain for annotations on the famous Fox family of Brislington House near Bristol where Perceval was confined in 1831 (recorded in the centenary number

* *Perceval's Narrative: a patient's account of his psychosis, 1830–2* edited with an introduction by Gregory Bateson, London, The Hogarth Press, 1962, pp. xxii + 331, 42s.

of *Bristolington House Quarterly News*, 1904) or of the Newingtons of Ticehurst, Sussex where he was moved in 1832 and which is still in use (an account of which is to be found in the contemporary brochure *Views of Messrs. Newington's Private Asylum* [1830]). Naturally the owners and conduct of these establishments played a vital role in Perceval's *Narrative* and psychosis.

Nor was Perceval's contribution to psychiatry limited to his *Narrative* as casual reading of Dr. Bateson's introduction might suggest. In fact on his recovery he became one of the devoted band of lay agitators for reform of asylums and lunacy legislation who forced a by no means willing Government and medical profession into that progress which placed England in the lead in these fields in the mid-nineteenth century. Soon after his release and presumably in 1835 he sought out the ageing Esquirol in Paris to discuss with him how best to improve public services and supervision of the insane (*Letters to the Right Honourable Sir James Graham . . . upon the reform of the law affecting . . . persons alleged to be of unsound mind*, 1846, p. 91). By 1839 he had embarked on his reforming career in two main directions: private philanthropy to individual patients and by public agitation for the lot of the insane. In 1838 he had intervened for Richard Paternoster who believed himself wrongfully confined in Kensington House Asylum (R. Paternoster, *The madhouse system*, 1841, p. 51) and in the following year tried unsuccessfully in consort with a group of friends (Messrs. Saumarez, Parkin, Paternoster and Bailey who like himself all had a personal interest either through their own experience or that of near relatives) to introduce amendments to the laws of lunacy in the House of Commons through the agency of Thomas Wakley (*Letters . . .*, *q.v.*). At this time also he started that long series of memorials to members of Government by private correspondence and letters to the Press which he continued for more than twenty years. For this he may be fitly called the gad-fly of the Home Department and Commissioners in Lunacy in matters affecting the insane. 'Mr. Perceval . . . has his hobby' wrote Forbes Winslow in a sympathetic note on Perceval's endeavours, 'and like many of us, may at times be disposed to ride it a little too hard; nevertheless, we greatly commend him for his undeviating and zealous assiduity in pursuit of what he conceives to be an object worthy of the devotion of his life' (*J. Psychol. Med.*, 1851, 4, 231).

From 1841 he devoted himself to the welfare of the surgeon Arthur Legent Pearce confined in that year in the criminal lunatic wing at Bethlem Hospital for the attempted murder of his wife; and ten years later 'undertook the extremely hazardous speculation of printing at his own cost and risk' Pearce's collected verse published as *Poems. By a prisoner in Bethlehem*, 1851, hoping 'by the sale of the volume, to create a fund for the comfort and support of Mr. Pearce during his melancholy incarceration' (F. Winslow, *loc. cit.*)—an act of benevolence perhaps insignificant in the light of greater events but unparalleled in the history of the insane. In two other publications Perceval similarly exerted himself on behalf of patients unjustly treated: *A letter to the Secretary of State for the Home Department, upon the unjust and pettifogging conduct of the Metropolitan Commissioners on [sic] Lunacy, in the case of a gentleman, lately under their surveillance*, 1844, a patient certified insane by John Haslam and J. F. Reeve (*cf. Med. Hist.*, 1962, 6, 22–46); and *Case of Dr. Peithman*, 1855, a patient at the Middlesex County Asylum at Hanwell, and at Bethlem in which Sir William Charles Hood played a prominent part.

In 1845 Perceval was active in 'assisting at the formation of a society for the protection of persons from false arrest, as of unsound mind, and for the redress of those who are ill-treated in asylums', the *Alleged Lunatics' Friend Society* whose honorary

secretary he became in 1846 on the retirement through ill-health of Luke Graves Hansard. The *Society* published two reports, in 1851 and 1858, giving an account of the cases and complaints investigated, and their practical recommendations for lunacy law reform. However, despite the fact that its ten vice-presidents were all members of Parliament (the most active of whom was T. S. Dunscombe) and that a representative was available to give advice every day between ten and four at the Society's premises at 44 Craven Street, Strand, it never received the support it needed to be properly and powerfully effective, and in consequence remained obscure. In 1859 Perceval told the Parliamentary Committee that it had been 'carried on under every disadvantage, for it is scarcely supported; and I may say it is passing rich with £30 a year'. Even Sir John Charles Bucknill, the usually well-informed editor of *The Asylum Journal* (1855, 1, 159) confused it with Sir Alexander Morison's brain-child, the *Society for Improving the Condition of the Insane*, founded three years earlier than Perceval's and with the different aim of advancing the practice of psychological medicine and mental nursing by the award of prizes for clinical essays, meritorious conduct, etc.

The *Alleged Lunatics' Friend Society* played an important part in bringing to public notice the abuses of Bethlem which gave the Lunacy Commissioners their long overdue *entré* and led to the inquiry in 1852 which in turn resulted in the Hospital being brought within the cognisance of the Commissioners in the Consolidated Lunacy Acts of 1853. But its greatest success and finest hour as well as that of its honorary secretary came in 1859, when at long last and after years of representations and petitions to the House of Commons (referred to in the Society's *Report* of 1858) they obtained the appointment of a Select Committee 'to inquire into the Operation of the Acts of Parliament and Regulations for the Care and Treatment of Lunatics and their Property'. It was set up in February 1859 in consequence of 'one of those waves of suspicion and excitement which occasionally pass over the public mind in regard to the custody of the insane' according to Daniel Hack Tuke (*Chapters in the history of the insane in the British Isles*, 1882, p. 190) who was inclined to belittle its importance perhaps because like the *Association of Medical Officers of Asylums and Hospitals for the Insane* (now the *Royal Medico-Psychological Association*) he was jealous of reforms and reformers from outside the ranks of the profession. The Parliamentary Committee published reports and minutes of evidence in April and August 1859, and a third in July 1860 with detailed recommendations for new legislation some of which were adopted from those put forward by the *Alleged Lunatics' Friend Society* whose representatives were interrogated at length. Besides those stalwarts the Earl of Shaftesbury, Drs. Bright, Bucknill, Conolly, Coxe, Gaskell, Hood, Southey, Sutherland and Webster there were called for the *Society* Admiral Richard Saumarez its chairman (whose brother had been a patient of Dr. E. T. Monro at Brooke House, Hackney, in the 1830s), its honorary solicitor Gilbert Bolden, and Perceval its honorary secretary whose evidence occupies pp. 15-30 and 33-47 of the *Report* of August 1859, and pp. 14-21 of the July 1860 *Report*. 'I consider myself the attorney-general of all Her Majesty's madmen', he bluntly and without exaggeration told the Committee,

I believe I am the only person, and, as far as I can see, my pamphlet is the only work that is published on the subject of maintaining the rights of lunatics. I consider that society or the Legislature, who shut up patients not only for their own benefit . . . but for the benefit of society as well . . . in a manner are compelled, in doing so, to violate the liberty of the subject, and to deprive him of the power of seeing his friends, and I think that they should most jealously respect all his other rights; he ought to enjoy them, and they ought not to interfere with them.

News, Notes and Queries

In a letter to Sir James Graham of 1845 (reprinted in *Letters*, 1846, pp. 47–8) Perceval gave expression to the same fundamental freedom for which he fought all his life on behalf of the insane:

I am of opinion that one secret in the cure of lunatic patients will be discovered to be the art of allowing patients the faculty of expression, by gesture, utterance and exclamation . . . and to encourage with discretion the development of individual character . . . the spirit of independence and self-respect . . . the cure of many maniacs is impeded by repression, and cannot be effected but by giving liberty.

This declaration which strikes the modern psychiatrist as almost prophetic in the accuracy of its prevision of present-day developments in mental health policy, must to Perceval's generation have appeared as the uncritical expression of an enthusiastic visionary—to put it at its mildest. For this reason also his activities were undervalued in his time and can be appreciated only now.

It is a pity that Dr. Bateson has not attempted to redress the balance or provide the necessary background to enable the modern reader to exploit the psychiatric treasures of the *Narrative* to the full. This is, however, not to belittle this adventurous reissue which will bring to notice a man who played a significant role at a crucial period in psychiatric history a century ago by his fearless and honest exposure of himself as well as of what he considered the shortcomings of his time. Nothing portrays better the image of this practical reformer whose strength and singleness of purpose grew out of an intense awareness of his own sufferings than Perceval's entry in the Visitors' Book of Bethlem Hospital dated 27 November 1846 previously unpublished and reproduced here by permission of the Governors of King Edward School, Witley, Surrey (keepers of the old Bethlem Hospital records) which makes a fitting epitaph until such time as he will find a friend to rescue him from that oblivion from which he himself attempted to rescue his fellow sufferers:

I visited the Hospital this day for the purpose of seeing my Friend Mr. Pearce, and being ushered into the waiting room, & finding this upon the table, I beg leave to call the attention of the Governors to the following observation. Having myself been confined some years back from a temporary derangement of the understanding, I knew the irksomness of long confinement without hope (except that which inwardly maintained me from a confidence in the reasonableness of the views I entertained, when I was of opinion that my liberty ought to have been restored to me, and my trust in the Power and Wisdom of a Divine Providence) and the depressing influence of such a confinement & of every circumstance that rudely called it to my recollection. Amongst the most painful of these circumstances was the constant sight of heavy bars to my window, which in my extremely nervous state even produced a sensation of physical pain to the visual organs. I observed the bars to the windows in this Asylum are peculiarly massive—and they remind me so much of the horrors of my former situation, that it is with a considerable effort, that I am not persuaded by my feelings from fulfilling my intentions, when I come to the gate of the Asylum. I think the Committee might safely remove these bars, and substitute windows with small sashes in iron frames—or adopt in some cases, the plan pursued in many private asylums, of having Venetian blinds to the windows. This would give a more cheerful appearance to the Hospital outside, and relieve in a greater degree than can be conceived by those who have never secluded under such circumstances, its heartsick inhabitants.

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