

P 8129

The Weston State Hospital



An Article Written by R. Ad Hall
And Published in the Weston
Democrat



AT THE WESTON STATE HOSPITAL

Through the kindness of Superintendent White and in company with him and Dr. J. G. Pettit, one of his capable assistants, it was the privilege of a representative of this paper to spend part of a recent afternoon walking through the buildings and grounds of the Weston State Hospital. The truth of the aphorism, "A stitch in time saves nine." is very forcibly impressed by many evidences that confront the casual observer on every hand as he walks about the place. Repairs are being made under direction of Superintendent White which are costing the people of the State large sums of money now, where smaller sums would have sufficed and valuable state property would have been in better condition but for the practice of a system of false economy.

For instance, a few years ago, listening to somebody's demand for rigid economy, a system of retrenchment was inaugurated and carried out so faithfully to the demands of those who directed it, that there came leaks in the roofs, and pipes rusted and became perforated so badly that water and sewage sometimes escaped, so that plastering softened and crumbled, floors were damaged, and other losses to the taxpayers ensued, evidencing the practice of rigid economies in the figures that were, but necessitating the opposite arithmetical showing in the figures that are and are now for a time to be.

Since Doctor C. E. White came to the institution a few brief months ago, he has sought to stop leaks of various sorts. He has had his men go over the roofs of the buildings all over the grounds, even the large cattle barn, and repair roofs to preserve the buildings beneath those roofs. On the slate-covered structures more than eight hundred pieces of the slate have been used to replace broken or absent ones, and prevent the water from coming through in many places. Those in charge were surprised to find more repairs necessary on roofs of buildings recently constructed than of those built years ago, indicating either that the slate more recently used is poorer in quality, or that it has not been so carefully put on.

It is not the purpose of this article to reflect on any predecessor of the present superintendent, for the writer understands that these in carrying out policies of more rigid closeness were only obeying directions which came from men "higher up," and

that they did not at all times agree with the policies which they felt obliged to carry out. A former policy of keeping a tinner on the job, and one or more carpenters, a plumber and other specialists in their various lines, each supposed to keep watch on the work in his department, and keep everything in repair, was abandoned for a time, and only such repairs as the direct necessities of the case made imperative were ventured upon.

There is no estimating the real losses occurring from water-pipes rusting out, and permitting water to escape so that floors were rotted away, plastering dislodged, or other damage done. Since many years ago, when the center building was erected, superintendents have come and superintendents have gone, and yet, others have succeeded them only to be succeeded by still others, and, like Tennyson's river, a moist, sour, unsanitary condition in the basement threatened to go on forever; and none will ever know how many were sickened by it, nor how many deaths were hastened through its instrumentality.

Known apertures and avenues through which water and sewage have escaped into this basement have now been closed, all such drainage turned into the sewers, and the ground under the buildings so ditched and tiled that dampness may escape and future dangers be largely averted. A thousand feet of ditching has been done beneath these buildings. This, in some portions of the institution, has necessitated the abandoning or transferring of closets and sinks. The turning of ward dining rooms into dormitories, made possible because of the recent construction of congregate dining halls for the patients rendered these improvements easier of accomplishment.

In all these former dining-rooms in the male wards the old floors have been re-enforced with a veneer which adds both to appearances and to service. Four carpenters have been constantly on the job since Doctor White came. Much repainting has also been done, and much work of a similar character has been undertaken in the female wards as well, and workmen are yet engaged there. Hundreds of feet of heavy moulding has crumbled and fallen, as has much other plastering, and this has necessitated a great deal of work in the way of repairs. This is true, not alone as to halls and wards, but in the chapel as well. In the repairing of floors the sleepers and joice were frequently found rotted so nearly away as to be totally unfit for use, and new timbers had to be installed. Some sections of flooring were gone over without the expense of needed repairs, because new ones entirely will soon be required.

Ditching and tiling are being put in to drain low portions of the ground used for gardening purposes. Here and beneath the buildings about 3500 feet of tiling is being used, some of it being eighteen inches, so that drainage may be ample to carry away the water and reclaim some of the most fertile portions of the State's land, which for 65 years of ownership by the people have lain idle and useless.

The report of John Allman, the new farmer, touching the year's planting and purposed cultivation provides for 23 acres of ensilage corn, to be raised for the purpose of filling a 217-ton silo. Thirty-three acres are to be cultivated for this purpose. Sixteen and one-half acres are to be planted to potatoes, six acres to sweet corn, sixteen to beans, and three to tomatoes. Fifteen acres near the buildings are to be given to such small crops as onions, lettuce, beans, peas, beets and the like. For all purposes, it is planned to cultivate about ninety, possibly 100, acres this season, the acreage being somewhat dependent on the outlook for help.

In all departments a carefully devised cost system is being tried out; perhaps it would be more accurate to say it is being introduced, or inaugurated, for it is believed that it has been so well planned that it cannot fail to bring the desired answer. Some responsible person in each department or ward, or other branch or division, is made the custodian and distributor of every sort of instrument or material used, and this is charged to that particular person, and every part of it must be accounted for. It is intended that this system of handling supplies shall be so rigidly adhered to that the cost of every garment, or every meal, or other required outlay or expense, may be ascertained with certainty. The sewing room, the painter, the farmer, the upholsterer, everybody, in short, will be required to bring himself and his department within this system. This will fix responsibility for possible leaks, as it will point unerringly to efficiency where it is most marked and worthy of reward.

Climbing some distance up the hillside we came upon a most cheering place, where at some period of time some modern Moses had smitten the rock and provoked an abundant stream of living waters to spring forth. This limpid flow pours out of the fissure into a recently constructed concrete receptacle, from which it is carried through pipe some distance down the hill to a concrete reservoir, where it flows on through a pipe which conducts it into the great kitchen of the big institution in sufficient quantity to supply the entire culinary needs with water as pure and wholesome as Nature yields.

On the way back to the central building we passed a spot where there was pointed out a site on which it is hoped some time to have a pavilion for the proper treatment of tuberculosis. The project contemplates provision for fifty patients, which would make isolation of such patients, and their proper treatment, possible. A number of tuberculosis patients have been successfully treated here in recent years by sleeping them on porches and assuring pure air, together with other needs of such cases.

A settling tank is also talked of as a part of a filtration plant which has already been provided for, and will soon be under construction. The filtration, which will be 50 by 15 feet in dimensions, will be up near the reservoir on "Asylum Hill." Cleanliness and health cry aloud for these improvements; and economy—wise economy—itself echoes back the cry. This West Fork water cannot be free from disease germs, either above or below Weston. No difference how stagnant the stream by reason of a lack of rain, or how turgid its running waters when there is overmuch of the torrent, still it is forced into the reservoir and turned uncleaned into the pipes for use at the Hospital. Sometimes the water-pipes fill up with mud and roots and other filth, and the flow stops until a plumber hunts up the cause and removes it. Is it any wonder that these pipes perforate, leak, pollute floors, damage walls, increase illnesses, and hasten and multiply deaths?

Some machinery for the new laundry was but recently installed. One of the first demonstrations of its usefulness came soon after the recent flood. Many business men of Weston got goods damaged by water while in transit. So did the Hospital. At Burnsville, where the flood was even worse than it was in this region, a car-load of goods was flooded, and in the car were 250 yards of prints intended for the sewing-room at the Hospital. When it came Superintendent White very naturally declined to receive it. The house sent a man to look it over, and the result was that he and his house didn't want it either. He proposed to sell it at a price which the Superintendent thought the State could stand, and still use it to advantage, and a deal was made. The goods went into the laundry just before noon, and before night arrived the industrious woman who has charge of the laundry, together with her dutiful assistants, had all that stuff washed, dried, in the store and on the shelves, ready to go to the sewing-room as needed.

A tremendous amount of work can be done over there by patients; much of it is so done. It is better so. As late as in the day of the Man of Galilee an insane person was regarded as possessed of a

devil; sometimes with a multitude of them. A later authority is responsible for the statement that an idle brain is the devil's workshop. However, much or little of exact truth or of fiction there may be in these notions, it is unquestionably a bad thing for men and women to be idle. It is the belief of Superintendent White that large opportunities should be afforded at the Hospital for diversional occupations. It might be necessary to build for this purpose. Many of the patients have nought to engage their diseased minds, save the monotonous and ever-present mop, to turn their thoughts away from themselves and the ills that brought them and keep them there. That which habitually turns the troubled mind away from the things which perpetually annoyed cannot help proving a diverter of sadness.

The problem of wages is a serious one at this institution. It is a most difficult thing, particularly when the weather is fine and all out of doors is vocal with invitations to hang up one's keys and come out and accept more inviting tasks at better wages than the \$20 or \$36 dollars a month, plus "eats," paid at the Hospital, to keep that institution properly manned. The loss of from six to eight good men is now in sight, and this is a most unfavorable time to try to fill the places to the advantage of the institution. For more reasons than that of economy six women are now at work in some of the better classes of male wards. It is easier to get them at the wages offered, and they better know how to keep a hall. The average man is not by very nature a tidy housekeeper. The average woman is such by Nature's free gift. Then a womanly presence has its good effect on men, whether sane or otherwise, provided the over-violent be excluded from the account. For instance, a man rarely swears in the presence of ladies; even a man with reason dethroned avoids that by some subconscious inhibition. Womanly presence brings the better morale.

On the subject of labor and wages, Doctor White informs the writer that as many as five of the states of the Union, and also the District of Columbia, forbid the working of female employees more than eight hours per day. Here we are obliged to work them fourteen hours daily, and we pay them nominal sums ranging from \$20 to \$27 a month. The highest price paid a male attendant is \$37.50, which is inadequate to the proper support of his family. In 1906 the cost of maintaining this institution, with one hundred fewer patients than are now there, was \$147,000. Now we are asked to squeeze through with \$150,000. In 1906 the contract price of beef was five and six cents a pound. Now the price paid is 17 cents a pound. Then flour was bought at four dollars a barrel, while it

costs eleven dollars today. Practically any other commodity is costing twice as much now as then. How, then, is it possible, with a two per cent increase in funds, to provide for a population increased 10 per cent, when the cost of commodities has increased approximately 100 per cent? With these facts known to the tax-payers, they will not complain, but they will rise up and demand that their unfortunate friends and neighbors, their afflicted kith and kin, shall be generously provided for by the State; and gladly will they foot the bill.

The heating needs a very thorough going over before another winter arrives. Last winter there were whisperings of an insufficiency of heat. The same thing existed all over town, and wherever humankind was trusting to natural gas for warmth. There was widespread suffering. This sort of thing is bad enough anywhere, but it is worse in an institution like this, where helpless men and women, many of them aged, and all of them infirm of mind and body, must through compulsion be herded together behind locked doors and iron-barred windows, to shiver and suffer through the long weary days and the wakeful nights, as sweep the wintry winds without.

One cannot conceive of a more sacred duty than is the care of those who cannot care for themselves; who cannot even intelligently make their needs known, in many cases. The people themselves, acting through the Board of Control, and these latter acting through the officials and employees of these charitable institutions, are responsible for the proper maintenance of the unfortunates confined therein. We are wont to point with pride to our treatment of these in our great eleemosynary institutions as one of the things that distinguish the Christian present from heathen countries, past and present. If we forget that humanity dictates for these unfortunates warmth, food both wholesome and ample, cleanliness and every kindness that is consistent with proper discipline, we forget the boasted distinction; we lapse into the forbidden past.

It is a mistaken notion of economy to subject public property to waste and decay, and it is all but criminal for a great wealthy State to be slack in any proper care of its unfortunates, merely to make a show of economy. There will be mistakes in the future, but the mistakes of the past ought to warn the powers that be against their repetition. The Board of Control is in part composed of the same men who have been in office for years. From sources outside of the Hospital it is learned that more generous appropriations of money are now available for use at this institution. In that case

it will be better cared for. Superintendent White is on his job. He is a farmer's son, inured from early boyhood's days to early rising and a full day's activity. These hills have no terrors for him, and he frequently carries the common clay of the various pathways about the premises on his shoes. As he is on the job to work, he believes that all others about the place are there to serve. Efficiency is the watchword, and everybody appears to be busy.—The Weston Democrat, April 5, 1918.

The Democrat's representative called at the institution the other day just in time to find Superintendent White and others engaged in the "herculean" task of cleaning stables on the filthiness of which the mythical Augeus had little, if anything, on the State of West Virginia. The home of the Hospital horses, of which there are seven head, is directly above the institution's sick ward, and not more than seventy-five feet away, by guess. The situation last week looked as if the locations were made to make sure that the ward should not fail to have its sick at all times. The stables is above the ward, horses standing over a basement, and this basement having some old trucks, discarded parts of wagons, and a condition of feculence and foulness beneath, which beggars description. It can not well be permanently improved save by finding quarters elsewhere for the horses, a thing which the superintendent purposes trying to do.—The Weston Democrat, April 26, 1918.

