



***JOHN  
HASLAM***

***OBSERVATIONS  
ON INSANITY***

**John Haslam**

# **Observations on Insanity**

**With Practical Remarks on the Disease and an  
Account of the Morbid Appearances on Dissection**

EAN 8596547366706

DigiCat, 2022

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# **PREFACE.**

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As the office I hold affords me abundant means of acquiring information on the subject of mental disorders, I should feel myself unworthy of that situation, were I to neglect any opportunity of accumulating such knowledge, or of communicating to the public any thing which might promise to be of advantage to mankind. The candid reader is therefore requested to accept this sentiment, as the best apology I can offer for the present production.

It has been somewhere observed, that in our own country more books on Insanity have been published than in any other; and, if the remark be just, it is certainly discouraging to him who proposes to add to their number. It must, however, be acknowledged, that we are but little indebted to those who have been most capable of affording us instruction; for, if we except the late Dr. JOHN MONRO'S Reply to Dr. BATTIE'S Treatise on Madness, there is no work on the subject of mental alienation which has been delivered on the authority of extensive observation and practice.

It is not intended to present the following sheets as a treatise, or compleat disquisition on the subject, but merely as remarks, which have occurred during the treatment of several hundred patients. As a knowledge of the structure, and functions of the body, have been held indispensably necessary in order to become acquainted with its diseases, and to a scientific mode of treating them; so it would appear, that he who proposes to write on Madness should be well informed concerning the powers and operations of

the human mind: but the various and discordant opinions, which have prevailed in this department of knowledge, have led me to disentangle myself as quickly as possible from the perplexity of metaphysical mazes.

As some very erroneous notions have been entertained concerning the state of the brain, and more especially respecting its consistence in maniacal disorders, I have been induced to examine that viscus in those who have died insane, and have endeavoured with accuracy to report the appearances. It seemed proper to give some general history of these cases; perhaps the account which has been related of their erroneous opinions might have been spared, yet some friends whom I consulted expressed a wish that they had been more copiously detailed.

Of the difficulty of enumerating the remote causes of the disease I have been fully aware, and have mentioned but few, that I might be accused of the fewer mistakes. The prognosis contains some facts which, as far as I am informed, have not hitherto been made known, and appear to me of sufficient importance to be communicated to the public.

As it is my intention at some future period to attempt a more finished performance on the subject of Insanity, I shall feel grateful for any hints or observations, with which the kindness of professional gentlemen may supply me.

BETHLEM-HOSPITAL,  
MARCH 14, 1798.

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OBSERVATIONS

ON  
INSANITY.

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CHAP. I.

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Readers in general require a definition of the subject, which an author proposes to treat of; it is the duty therefore of every writer, to define, as clearly as he is able, that which he professes to elucidate.

A definition of a disease, should be a concentrated history, a selection of its prominent features and discriminative symptoms.

Of the definitions which have been given of this disease, some appear too contracted; and others not sufficiently precise.

Dr. Mead, after having treated largely upon the subject, concludes, "That this disease consists entirely in the strength of imagination." If the disease consisted entirely in the strength of imagination, the imagination ought to be equally strong upon all subjects, which upon accurate observation is not found to be the case. Had Dr. Mead stated, that, together with this increased strength of imagination, there existed an enfeebled state of the judgment, his definition would have been more correct. The strength, or increase of any power of the mind, cannot constitute a disease of it; strength of memory, has never been suspected to produce derangement of intellect; neither is it conceived, that great vigour of judgment can operate in any such manner; on the contrary it will readily

be granted, that imbecility of memory must create confusion, by obstructing the action of the other powers of the mind; and that if the judgment be impaired, a man must necessarily speak, and generally act, in a very incorrect and ridiculous manner.

Dr. Ferriar, whom, to mention otherwise than as a man of genius, of learning, and of taste, would be unjust; has adopted the generally accepted division of Insanity, into Mania and Melancholy. In Mania, he conceives "false perception, and consequently confusion of ideas, to be a leading circumstance." The latter, he supposes to consist "in intensity of idea, which is a contrary state to false perception." From the observations I have been able to make respecting Mania, I have by no means been led to conclude, that false perception, is a leading circumstance in this disorder, and still less, that confusion of ideas must be the necessary consequence of false perception.

By perception, I understand, with Mr. Locke, the apprehension of sensations; and after a very diligent enquiry of patients who have recovered from the disease, and from an attentive observation of those labouring under it, I have not frequently found, that insane people perceive falsely, the objects which have been presented to them. It is true, that they all have false ideas, but this by no means infers, a defect of the power by which sensations are apprehended in the mind.

We find madmen equally deranged upon those ideas, which they have been long in the possession of, and on which the perception has not been recently exercised, as respecting those, which they have lately received: and we

frequently find those who become suddenly mad, talk incoherently upon every subject, and consequently, upon many, on which the perception has not been exercised for a considerable time.

It is well known, that maniacs often suppose they have seen, and heard those things, which really did not exist at the time; but even this I should not explain by any disability, or error of the perception, since it is by no means the province of the perception to represent unreal existences to the mind. It must therefore be sought elsewhere, probably in the senses, or in the imagination.

I have known eight cases of patients, who insisted that they had seen the devil. It might be urged, that in these instances, the perception was vitiated; but it must be observed, that there could be no perception of that, which was not present and existing at the time. Upon desiring these patients to describe what they had seen, they all represented him as a big, black man, with a long tail, cloven feet, and sharp talons, such as is seen pictured in books. A proof that the idea was revived in the mind from some former impressions. One of these patients however carried the matter a little further, as she solemnly declared, she heard him break the iron chain with which God had confined him, and saw him pass fleetly by her window, with a truss of straw upon his shoulder.

It must be acknowledged, that in the soundest state of our faculties we sometimes perceive things which do not exist. If the middle finger be crossed over the forefinger, and a single pea be rolled under their extremities, we have the perception of *two*. By immersing one hand into warm,