DAILY HOSPITAL LIFE IN ONE OF THE EARLY PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITALS
(EBERBACH, RHEINGAU 1815)

(Condensed)

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This study is based on the almost complete collection of 550 medical case histories on patients of the former asylum in the Eberbach monastery in Rheingau, that existed from 1815 to 1846 and that was considered one of the most advanced asylums of the twenties and thirties of the 19th century, because it was opened to practice moral treatment, treatment by means of a hospital and did so for 30 years. So it was not only one of the first but also one of the best. The archives also contain numerous administration files, letters, administration regulations, reports, and other materials. But other fortunate circumstances became more evident. The written reports were remarkably extensive. Since the asylum had been a completely new institution, every minute detail was recorded, even if it was quite irrelevant. Every day entries were made in the patients' files. Since there were no telephones and since travelling by horse and by coach even over short distances was quite hard, all communications with the authorities were written down. The administration, the state-ministry in Wiesbaden, did not only want to be informed about every little incident but also insisted in being especially asked for permission whenever a new patient was admitted or discharged. The files thus accumulated have apparently been preserved in their totality. We finally discovered an annual chronicle amongst the files of the asylum, that had been compiled by "the insane Guth" and deals with all social events that took place there. The monastery itself which served as the asylum is still maintained and by now under state preservation. Behind the monastery there is a little graveyard that is overgrown by trees now. On some of the overturned gravestones one can still find the names of the same patients whose files are now in the archives. After we had together with our
coworkers transcribed the files into modern writing, we were now in
the fortunate position to do research on the social and psychiatric
life of one of the earliest psychiatric institutions where moral
treatment was being done for a closed period of 30 years without
there being vital gaps regarding the sources.

POLITICAL AND INTELLECTUAL BACKGROUND

From the political and cultural-historical point of view the era
of the Eberbach asylum coincides with the period of the German
Biedermeier which began with the final defeat of Napoleon in 1815.
The asylum was opened in the same year. This economically under­
developed and pre-democratic period, which was still pre-technologi­
cal for the area which is being referred to, was a very peaceful
time. There were no wars in central Europe at that time. The 1848
revolution already showed precursory signs of eruption but did not
take place yet. Eberbach ceased two years before the outbreak of the
revolution and hence two years before the end of the Biedermeier
period. These in my opinion are other lucky circumstances: that the
Eberbach period coincides with the Biedermeier Epoch.

From the intellectual point of view Eberbach clearly fulfilled
the ideas of PINEL and ESQUIROL. In 1800 PINEL had presented the
successes of moral treatment in the first edition of his textbook
"Traite médico-philosophique sur l'aliénation mentale". In his
thesis "Des Passions" ESQUIROL had not only provided the necessary
theory but he had also introduced the first asylum as an instrument
of treatment which was recently elaborated on by MARCEL GAUCHET and
GLADYS SWAIN. The books of ESQUIROL and PINEL were found in the
library of Eberbach. In one case ESQUIROL had been personally asked
for advice. In one of the patients' files I discovered a lengthy
comment by ESQUIROL. It was a case of what is now called mania.
ESQUIROL wrote that the prognosis was extremely poor, but the patient
recovered some months later.

THE LAY OUT

For the accomodation of the insane two floors of the largest
and the best maintained part of the so called abbey building of the
monastery was set aside. The building was improved at a cost of
11,494 Gulden, 22 kr. As a result 32 rooms were furnished. Conside­
ring the construction of today's hospital buildings, one could con­
clude that there were single cabins for patients who needed to be
isolated. However the idea was more that of a big family, a commu­
nity of staff and insane. For that reason the insane - male and
female were separated - slept in dormitories. The attendants also
slept in these dormitories although they had a corner of the room
which was protected by strong bars. I have always found it note­
worthy for the basic attitude that the attendants and not the
patients slept behind bars. Moreover the attendants were obliged