

MD REMEMBERS: A Great Pioneer in Psychiatry

Philippe Pinel, who insisted that physicians must live among the insane to understand their problems and study their diseases, died October 26, 1826, at his post in the Salpêtrière where he had lived for 31 of his 81 years. During the French Revolution, he liberated many patients from their chains and dark dungeons and introduced humane, rational methods of management, including "moral treatment" or psychotherapy and occupational therapy in workshops and farms.

At a time when mental patients were subjected to extreme deprivations, cruelty, and ridicule, the compassionate physician wrote that these were sick people who deserved "all the consideration that is due to suffering humanity. One should try with the most simple methods to restore their reason." He opposed the common practice of bleeding, purging, "ducking," and shackling psychotics and pointed out that ruling with an iron rod "is a system of superintendence, more distinguished for its convenience than for its humanity or its success." He also objected to the excessive use of drugs and said knowing when to suspend or omit medicines was a greater art than administering them.

Contemporaries of Pinel considered him a master of internal medicine because of the analytic classification of diseases published in 1798 in his *Nosographie philosophique*. Today he is celebrated as a founder of modern psychiatry and his *Treatise on Insanity*, which first appeared in 1801, has been called one of the most valuable texts in the history of psychiatry.

Early Years. The son of a master surgeon and a mother whose ancestors included a number of physicians, surgeons, and apothecaries, Philippe Pinel was born April 20, 1745, at St André d'Alayrac. He planned a career in theology when he completed his studies in the humanities at the College des Doctrinaires in Lavaur and entered the University of Toulouse but his interests turned to mathematics, the sciences, and finally medicine. Af-

ter receiving his M.D. in 1773, he spent four years in Montpellier where he frequented the medical school and supported himself by teaching mathematics and an anatomy course.

In 1778 he moved to the Latin



Dr. Philippe Pinel

Quarter in Paris, took a job tutoring mathematics, and continued to study patients in hospitals. As a member of the Society of Encyclopedists, he often visited Madame Helvetius' salon where he met Benjamin Franklin and was almost persuaded to settle in the United States.

When a friend became a manic in 1783, Pinel visited him daily, took extensive notes on the illness, and became intensely interested in mental disease. From 1784 to 1789 Pinel served as editor of the *Gazette de Santé* and contributed a number of his own medical articles.

Reformer. On being appointed physician-in-chief of the Bicêtre in 1793, Pinel found the asylum "a vast pandemonium" and soon decided to unshackle some of the inmates, but he was told that he must first obtain permission from the Commune. He made a fervent personal plea to that body but the members suspected that he wanted to hide enemies of the revolution in the asylum and refused his request. The following day the Commune president, Georges Couthon, although he was paralyzed, had

himself carried to the Bicêtre to question the patients. When they responded to his queries with curses and obscenities, Couthon asked the physician: "Are you mad yourself that you want to unchain these animals?" Pinel replied: "Citizen, it is my conviction that these mentally ill are intractable only because they are deprived of fresh air and their liberty."

Couthon departed without prohibiting the experiment and Pinel proceeded to unshackle a few patients. An English officer, considered violent during 40 years of incarceration, once released merely marveled at the beauty of the sun; after two years of exemplary behavior he was discharged. A French soldier, locked up for ten years because of a drunken brawl, promptly became docile and later saved Pinel from an angry mob that charged the physician with harboring enemies of the people.

Named chief of the Salpêtrière in 1795, Pinel unchained many of the 600 patients, initiated the practice of taking psychiatric case histories, spent hours talking with patients, and forbade attendants to use force. In some situations he recommended strict measures, such as an unexpected cold shower.

At the newly established École de Médecine, Pinel became adjunct professor of medical physics in 1794. Nine years later he was appointed professor of pathology, a post that he held for 20 years except for a brief period in 1822 when he and ten other faculty members were dismissed on suspicions of "political liberalism." He served as consultant physician to Napoleon, was elected a fellow of the Academy of Sciences and made a Chevalier of the Legion of Honor.

Pinel and his first wife, Jeanne Vincent,^o had three sons, one of whom, Scipion, became a prominent psychiatrist. Philippe's nephew, Casimir Pinel, was also a leading psychiatrist and Casimir's son-in-law Armand Semalaigne and grandson René Semalaigne were psychiatric historians.

^o She died in 1811 and four years later Pinel married Marie-Madeleine Jacquelin Lavalee.