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## 'I recall the advent of a new attendant...': extract from *A Mind That Found Itself*, by Clifford Whittingham Beers

Selected by Femi Oyebode

I recall the advent of a new attendant – a young man studying to become a physician. At first he seemed inclined to treat patients kindly, but he soon fell into brutal ways. His change of heart was due partly to the brutalizing environment, but more directly to the attitude of the three hardened attendants who mistook his consideration for cowardice and taunted him for it. Just to prove his mettle he began to assault patients, and one day knocked me down simply for refusing to stop my prattle at his command. That the environment in some situations is brutalizing, was strikingly shown in the testimony of an attendant at a public investigation in Kentucky, who said, "When I came here, if anyone had told me I would be guilty of striking patients I would have called him crazy

himself, but now I take delight in punching hell out of them."

I found that an unnecessary and continued lack of outdoor exercise tended to multiply deeds of violence. Patients were supposed to be taken for a walk at least once a day, and twice, when the weather permitted. Yet those in the violent ward (and it was they who most needed exercise) usually got out of doors only when the attendants saw fit to take them. For weeks a ward-mate – a man sane enough to enjoy freedom, had he had a home to go to – kept a record of the number of our walks. It showed that we averaged not more than one or two a week for a period of two months. This, too, in the face of many pleasant days, which made close confinement doubly irksome.

IN OTHER WORDS

**Clifford Whittingham Beers** (1876–1943) published *A Mind That Found Itself* in 1908. It is an autobiographical account of his psychiatric hospital admission and the abuses that he suffered during his treatment in hospital. In 1909 he founded the National Committee for Mental Hygiene (a reforming organisation), now renamed Mental Health America, and in 1913 he started the Clifford Beers Clinic, the first out-patient clinic for the mentally ill in the USA. This extract is from *A Mind That Found Itself: An Autobiography*, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1908: p. 136.

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