

[Spear, Chauncey Price]

CHAUNCEY PRICE SPEAR

On Friday evening, June 10, the release for which he waited cheerfully and with unclouded faith, came to Mr. Chauncey Price Spear, at the residence of the Hon. William Parkhurst in Canandaigua, where he had for some years made his home. Mr. Spear had attained the great age of 91 years and three months. Until within a few weeks of the end he had been in excellent health, moving about almost with the light step of youth. During a large part of his life he lived in Clifton Springs, where he was one of the original members of the Universalist church of that village. He was well known in denominational circles in Western N.Y., where his presence was expected at all church gatherings. He had attended all the meetings of the Ontario Associations, save one, for 71 years. Mr. Spear—"Uncle Chauncey," as nearly everybody called him, was an intelligent and well-grounded Universalist, a man of faith, of great frankness, of a fine strain of sentiment, kind-hearted, and a favorite with old and young. He was gathered like a shock of corn, fully ripe, and the religion to which he had borne witness in times that tried his soul, supported him serenely and sweetly at sunset. His funeral was attended from Mr. Parkhurst's on June 11, by his pastor, the Rev. E. P. Wood, assisted by his former pastor and attached personal friend, Dr. I. M. [Isaac Morgan] Atwood.

The Convention at Work, Herkimer NY, July 1910
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CHARITY AND TYRANNY.

THE STATE ALMS.

Horrors of the Dark Cell at Hopewell.

THE ONTARIO COUNTY POOR—THE DARK CELL CAREFULLY DESCRIBED—
THE INSANE AMONG THE MUD—GOOD AND BAD FEATURES.

CANANDAIGUA, N.Y., Oct. 11, 1879

It would have been impossible to have selected a more unpleasant day than that in which I reached this city. The wind was biting cold and filled with moisture; the roads were in a terrible condition. The drive to Hopewell, where the Almshouse is situated, seemed almost hopeless. The horse floundered along through the mud and water for nearly five miles. It was a glad sight, even for a curious and inquisitive traveller, to see the County Poorhouse near at hand. Inquiry established the fact that *Chauncey Spear*, the keeper, was absent at Canandaigua. In his place, however, was Mrs. Spear, perfectly competent, apparently, to protect the county's interest. The main structure is of brick, about eighty feet in length, two stories high above the basement. To the left and partly in the rear extends a frame addition in which the insane are lodged and where the cooking is done. The farm is quite large, embracing in all 212 acres, estimated to be worth \$32,000.

A vigorous ring at the front door admitted your correspondent into the reception room, where Mrs. Spear received him kindly and, after a few minutes' delay, proceeded to conduct him through the building. After leaving the keeper's dwelling the work of renovation was apparent on every hand. The floors of the first story had all been painted yellow, and boards were laid over them while the new color was drying. Room after room was opened and found empty with a painted floor. We then ascended to the second story and traversed the several rooms devoted to the women.

"We have one of the finest babies in the State," said Mrs. Spear, cheerfully, as she led the way toward a bed in which a pretty child was lying. There were more than twelve women in the apartment, and several began to express opinions regarding the child that were not in accord with that announced by the landlady. One woman, in particular, became very voluble, and was finally threatened by her mistress with punishment if she did not keep silent. It was remarkable to see what a quieting effect that intimidation had on the woman. I did not exactly understand it then, but I did afterward when I stood in the dark cell and learned from the attendant, to whom I had been transferred, that this woman had recently passed several days in it.

THE DARK CELL

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As I have had occasion to refer to this cell earlier than I intended it may be best to describe it at this point. A narrow corridor leading off the entrance to the kitchen contains one heavy door, which the casual visitor would certainly mistake for the entrance to a large refrigerator, such as is seen in the metropolitan meat markets. On it, at about the height of a man's shoulders, is a small wicket, just large enough to pass a tin cup or a half loaf of bread through. This is closed by a door of equal thickness, and has a separate clasp and padlock of its own. I discovered the door, although my guide was hurrying me past it, and seeing it unlocked, pulled it open without hesitation. It is one of the most dreadful prison pens imaginable. How the Commissioners of the State Board of Charities, who travel on their philanthropy and at the State's expense, can repeatedly approve such a place is beyond comprehension. The existence and, more terrible still, the constant use of this "black hole" damns all the good features of the Ontario county almshouse. What are the painted floors, what are the whitewashed walls, what the good bread (for the bread was paraded in here as elsewhere) to those who stand in terror of this dark cell? I had formed a very favorable opinion of the matron, but when I saw this place I was sure that even a smiling woman could be as cruel as a tyrant.

I stepped inside and almost closed the door after me. The atmosphere was stifling. In size it is about four and a half feet deep by three feet wide and eight feet high—a mere box. It is too short to lie down in, and too confined to even stretch the arms or legs in. Of course there cannot be any bed in it—there is not even a bench or chair in it. Containing as it does only 108 cubic feet of putrid air to begin with, a very few minutes suffice to render the atmosphere deadly to breathe. Not a particle of oxygenated air can find its way into the infamous place, and as a consequence the victim who passes a day in this noxious darkness is almost always taken out in an insensible condition. Their state closely approaches asphyxia. After being revived by the fresh air they are returned again, and even yet again, if they have given such offence as asking for a second bowl of coffee or another ladle full of beans. For the sake of my respect for woman I am sorry that I saw that dark cell at Hopewell. To the disgrace of the country, as well as of those selfish Christian humanitarians whom, only a few hours after my return, I saw thronging to prayers in a great and gaudy church on Main street, this torture cell is permitted to exist, and is frequently used. When, on my return to town [Canandaigua], I inquired for Mr. *Chauncey Spear*, I was sent to a foul-smelling liquor saloon on the west side of the main street, with the remark that he was generally to be found there. Bad as the place was it was not so nauseous as the room into which, by a word of command and without a shadow of legal authority, he thrusts the poor and demented

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of Ontario county. Inquiry at this place established the fact that it was his headquarters when in town, but that he had "just gone out." So we did not meet.

AMONG THE INSANE

Proceeding to the old men's ward (to resume after the allowable diversion) I was confided to the care of an attendant. He was a rather intelligent man, and, I believe, a pauper in the establishment. The quarters for the old men were in decided contrast to the women's rooms. Everything was helter-skelter. We then descended to the insane ward. Cold as was the day, and wet, I found two poor fellows in the muddy yard. One had only a single garment, a torn shirt, on his body, and was walking about in the water in his bare feet. The rain was running down his face—the drops were not tears, for the insane rarely weep. Theirs is a grief far beyond any ordinary exhibition. They waste no words in appealing to human pity. They suffer, but are silent. In the same yard sat a large man, with a smile upon his face, but it was not an expression of pleasure. There is more incredulity in such a leer than in all the atheistical writings that man has yet indited. The accommodations for the insane were inadequate in every respect.

To sum up the whole matter, the dark cell in which the paupers are punished for infractions of the rules is an outrage upon our present civilization and should be abolished at once. Bathing facilities are said to have been introduced, but I failed to see the bathroom. The grounds are spacious, neatly laid out and planted with trees. The children were removed in 1875 to the orphan asylums at Canadaigua. With the two exceptions that I have described the chronic insane have been sent to the Willard Asylum. The retention of these two cases, with such inadequate accommodations, should not continue any longer than possible. Overshadowing all the good features of this place (for there are many) and all the kind acts of the keeper and matron is the horror which an inspection of the torture chamber, called the dark cell, inspires.

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