

the insane depends ultimately upon the skill and conscientiousness of the nurses and attendants.

ALCOHOL AS A CAUSE OF INSANITY.

Another interesting section of Dr. Robertson's Report is that which deals with alcohol as a cause of insanity:—

The interest that has been aroused in the public mind in excessive indulgence in alcohol as a cause of insanity, and in the prevalence of alcoholic insanity as a sign of excessive drinking has given great satisfaction to all engaged in the care and treatment of the insane. With regard to the first point, there is scarcely any difference of opinion in the minds of those who are in a position to judge, that there is no single factor which sends more men insane in this country than over-indulgence in alcohol. As it is a cause over the action of which there can be exercised an absolute control, it appears little short of criminal to those in whose minds a "health conscience" has developed, to allow this evil to exist unchecked by the State, to the moral and material damage of its citizens. With regard to the second point, interest has been mainly taken in the alleged increase of alcoholic insanity, and in the inference from this observation that the drinking habits of the people are rapidly becoming very much worse.

It is a curious fact that during the last five years the percentage of alcoholic insanity rose from 13.3 in 1899 to 18.4 in 1900, and 25.8 in the year ending May, 1901, after which it subsided again to 13.2 in 1903.

Commenting on this, Dr. Robertson says:—

The association of periods of good wages for the working classes, with an increase of drunkenness and of alcoholic insanity, and of cycles of bad trade with a decrease, has frequently been noted. An additional explanation of the apparent paroxysm of intemperance now happily passing off, which tallies most satisfactorily with my own observations, was that suggested by Lord Balfour of Burleigh, then Secretary for Scotland. During the acme of this period the South African War was in progress, and owing to large numbers of able-bodied young men having enlisted and left the country, the lowest class of labourer, for the first time for many years, got constant employment and steady wages. His sudden good fortune was too much for his powers of self-control, and the extreme excesses of his class, to my knowledge, made a substantial increase to the amount of alcoholic insanity admitted to this asylum.

Another interesting point which he brings out is The difficulty of estimating the exact effect of alcohol as a cause of insanity is due to the unknown hereditary element in every case. In the causation of every case of insanity there are two factors involved—the internal factor, or heredity; and the external factor, or the exciting cause or combination of causes in the environment, such as worry, influenza, or alcohol. If, for example, with a good heredity, the nervous system of A. possesses 10 degs. of resistance to the effects of injurious agencies, it will take nearly five times as much drinking on his part to overcome this resistance and produce insanity as it would in another case, B., in whom, owing to defective hereditary tendencies, there exists only 2 degs. of resistive power.

CONSUMPTION.

Dealing with the question of the prevention of phthisis in asylums, Dr. Robertson writes as follows:—

It has been conclusively demonstrated that this disease, once an institution has been contaminated with the tubercle bacillus, tends to increase in prevalence among the inmates the older the institution gets, unless vigorous measures be adopted to purify it and to prevent fresh sources of contamination. It is definitely known, too, that the insane, owing to their impaired vitality, their hereditary predisposition, and other reasons, are prone to be attacked. It has likewise been shown that in institutions in which the tubercle organism has not obtained a footing, the insane, in spite of their predisposition, are not attacked by consumption. It is therefore the clear duty of those who are responsible for the welfare of the insane in Asylums where consumption is prevalent to take those steps which are called for to check the spread of this infectious but preventable disease, the chief of these being the provision of a detached sanatorium, where consumptive patients may be isolated. Nor is it a reason to delay the adoption of this measure that such special treatment is not yet available for sane people of humble means. Among such people the spread of consumption is due to the neglect, whether culpable or otherwise, of hygienic laws, for which they themselves, as free agents, are ultimately responsible. The patients in an Asylum are compulsarily detained there, and if they be subjected to sources of infection, which are removable, the responsibility for this rests not upon themselves, but upon those who detain and care for them. This subject, in so far as it affects this institution, is, I am grateful to say, receiving very sympathetic consideration.

A TRAINED MATRON.

An important step taken during the past year has been the appointment of Miss Satchwell, who was trained at the London Hospital, as Matron over the whole nursing staff of the Asylum, thus adopting an organisation similar to that of General Hospitals, which must certainly conduce to smooth and efficient administration.

THE BENEFIT OF SUPERVISION BY TRAINED NURSES.

It is not surprising that in an institution managed on the lines described, the nursing system should be markedly satisfactory and on this point the following entry in the books at the Asylum has been made by Mr. John Fraser, Commissioner in Lunacy:—

"There are many features in the methods of nursing and care in this Asylum which always attract most favourable attention. The employment of Assistant Matrons, who are hospital-trained nurses, to supervise and control each section, is attended by many benefits and advantages. These officials are constantly in the wards, and their influence is productive of the best results both as to the welfare of the patients and the work done in each division. The standard of nursing is a high one, the lay supervision is more reliable, and gentler and kinder methods of dealing with the patients are secured. One of the Assistant Matrons is at present in charge of the male division and of the male section of the hospital,

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