

## Medical Matters.

### THE TREATMENT OF THE INSANE.

Dr. G. M. Robertson, Physician-Superintendent of the Edinburgh Royal Asylum for the Insane, presented a most interesting report at the Annual Meeting.

#### THE DANGERS OF INFLUENZA.

With regard to the character of the cases admitted, Dr. Robertson stated that there were 16 men and 10 women admitted who were diagnosed by the medical officers to be suffering from alcoholic insanity, being 10.8 per cent. of the total admissions, a proportion which compared favourably with previous years. A more remarkable feature was the fact that eleven persons were admitted suffering from post-influenzic insanity, being nearly 5 per cent. of the total admissions, and 42 per cent. of the admissions directly due to alcohol. The poison produced by the influenza microbe was recognised by mental physicians to have most injurious effects on the functions and tissues of the brain and nervous system. As a rule these effects were not immediate, as the poison acted slowly by impairing the health and nutrition of the nerve cells, and after the patient had been out of sorts for a fortnight, a month, or even much longer, the mechanism of some nervous function or other broke down. These nervous after effects were legion, and, fortunately, in only a few cases did they result in complete mental derangement. The extent of the mental, physical, and material damage, indirect as well as direct, sustained by the nation as the result of influenza could only be realised by comparing it with that produced by the excessive indulgence in alcohol. For one case that was sent to the asylum there were scores who were incapacitated. The ill-health of these was a source of misery to themselves, and if they were bread-winners, the loss or diminution of their earnings was followed by as serious consequences for their families as would have been the case had the head of the household been a drunkard. It would have been better for the country had an epidemic of cholera passed as a scourge through the land and then left it, than to be afflicted as we were by recurring outbreaks of influenza. The percentage of recoveries was 31.3 of the total number of admissions, which was the average for the asylum since the year 1900. This was considerably below the average of the asylum since its opening, and its lowness was due to the operation of many factors, some of which were given in last year's report. Dr. Robertson pointed out that the increasing numbers of senile cases needing to be nursed in hospital or infirm wards reduced the recovery rate and

added to the death-rate. It was also a well-known fact that a large number of admissions of alcoholic insanity tended to raise the recovery rate, as such cases recovered quickly. Conversely, with a low alcoholic admission rate, such as existed there last year, the recovery rate tended to fall. The total number of deaths was 64, and this was actually and proportionately less than it has been for 20 years. The percentage on the average number resident was 8.7, and on the total number under treatment it was 6.5.

#### THE OPEN AIR TREATMENT OF MENTAL DISEASE.

The Report stated that the Ladies' Hospital at Craig House had also been enlarged, and, what was of more importance, it had had an extensive glass verandah added to it, to facilitate the use of the open air treatment. The employment of this form of treatment in consumption was familiar to all, but it was not so well known that in every condition in which the bodily health was run down, treatment in the open air acted as a tonic of the most wonderful power. As anæmic, neurasthenic, and low states of health generally formed the basis of so many cases of insanity, it had been found to be a remedy of great value in the treatment of mental disease.

Dr. Robertson also reported that in the place of a Matron on the ladies' side and a head attendant on the gentlemen's side, a Lady Superintendent had been appointed in sole charge of the nursing and domestic arrangements. The arrangement adopted was, of course, that which was universally employed in all hospitals, and it was another proof of the fact that the asylum of the present day had really become an hospital for the treatment of a special disease—a mental hospital.

#### THE SUCCESSFUL TREATMENT OF LEPROSY.

An announcement which may be of far-reaching importance was made at the Congress on Tropical Diseases at Bombay, by Captain Williams, Residency Surgeon at Bushire, who delivered an address on leprosy. Referring to the reported cure of a Maori leper in New Zealand by the treatment introduced by Dr. Deycke, of Constantinople, and consisting of the injection of a culture of the bacillus of leprosy, Captain Williams announced that as the result of eight months' treatment by the Deycke-Nastin method he had cured two lepers. Two others were practically cured, and a fifth showed remarkable improvement.

Only those who have lived in countries where leprosy is prevalent can realise the misery which would be abolished if a cure were found.

*previous page*

*next page*