

differences in the rate per million in the decade 1881-90 with that of 1861-70 we find :—

Ages :	45	55	65	75 and upwards.
Women ..	+1	+5	+3	-17
Men ...	+46	+62	+120	+123

The contrast is striking, especially in those aged 75 years and upwards, in whom the difference is no less than 140 per million.

A large proportion of the increase is therefore in men, and in men upwards of 45 years of age.

Since 1861 there has not been any increase in the proportional number of persons living at an age over 55 years, such as was shown by the census returns of the preceding decades, so that the increase cannot be accounted for in this way. The sex comparison makes it obvious that women especially at the advanced periods of life are sheltered from the causes which affect men. The annual fluctuations, moreover, prove that these causes vary in intensity from year to year.

The homicidal side of the return shows that these were 26, 23, 20, and 26 in the four years under consideration ; but as there are no previous returns of the number of homicides committed previous to suicide, no definite conclusion can be drawn.

Homicides in England have fallen progressively and rapidly from 18 per million in 1858-60 to 11 in 1886-90, and it would be interesting to learn from future returns whether these homicidal suicides were also diminishing. They are often the outcome of definite insanity, and their frequency would be to some extent a measure of the want of promptitude in treatment in the early stages of mental disorder, such as may arise from the legal difficulties of certification, etc.

The return emphasises the need for greater care in recording in verdicts the actual evidence of mental state in all cases of suicide, in place of the inaccurate and misleading findings that are at present recorded.

Insanity in Prisons.

Our prisons during the last year or two have been accused by various lay writers of producing an undue amount of insanity in the prisoners.

Undefined inhumane treatment and low diet have formed

one general basis of this alleged increase, the result having been assumed from a comparison with the statistics of the occurrence of insanity in the general population.

We have published papers by Drs. Baker and Pitcairn relative to this subject, and have also reprinted a *resumé* of the Report of the Departmental Committee on Prisons, in which last Dr. Bridges* has proved the exaggerated statistical fallacy of those writers, while admitting that the actual rate of recurring insanity is much in excess of the general population ; that this is so cannot be regarded as surprising.

Prisoners, by the fact of their imprisonment, prove their want of power to adapt themselves to their environment, and general observation demonstrates that this commonly extends beyond loss of control in relation to their fellow men to all their appetites and habits. In minds so ill-developed and ill-balanced, and often already depressed by anxiety arising from fear of detection in wrong-doing, depression must constantly follow imprisonment, from the sudden withdrawal of habitual excitation (mental or physical). This depression is often exaggerated by their low physical powers and by onanism.

Many of these socially defective persons oscillate between prisons and asylums, and the Commissioners in Lunacy in their 43rd Report draw attention to the fact that owing to the dangers of certification many lunatics are allowed to remain at large until, on the commission of some criminal act, they are sent to prison.

That imprisonment of such persons does not develop insanity in a much larger proportion than Dr. Bridges' statistics show is an astonishing fact, and suggests that the beneficial results of the healthful *régime* and withdrawal from excesses outweigh the opposing influences.

The allegations of inhumane treatment do not appear to have been advanced during the inquiry. The Departmental Committee only advocated in their Report one slight change in the dietary, and even this on mature consideration by the authorities has not been considered necessary.

Medical Officers of Prisons have been thoroughly vindicated from the attacks made upon them, and will, we trust, benefit largely by the changes which the Departmental Committee has recommended, to which attention was drawn in our July issue.

* Report of Departmental Committee on Prisons.