

Zoe, and had further beneath its fascinating attractiveness a profound interest for us, as showing, among other things, the vast power of personal influence in the borderland realm of mental instability. Dr. Easterbrook's carefully elaborated paper on tent life indicated that the broad, physical lines of treatment in insanity, first, perhaps, sketched by the school of Cos, have not lost their interest or their value to the most advanced observers of to-day. Last, though not least, we must commend to the special notice of our readers the epoch-making observations of Drs. Ford Robertson and McRae. Such work as this the scientific world will not willingly let die. It can never lose its worth in the history of progress, for it can only be superseded when it has brought forth observations more keen, careful, and laborious than those which lend to it eminent distinction. Such work as this is the best answer to the shallow and ungenerous sneers of those who strive to aggravate in modern minds the secular prejudice that exists against our specialty by insinuating that we are unscientific and indifferent to the advance of knowledge, because most of us are doomed under the Egyptian bondage in which we live to make bricks without straw. Give us a public who deems that out of the superfluity of the richest people in the world it can afford to endow clinical and pathological research, give us, in other words, opportunity, and the men will not be lacking who will be ready to give their lives to the service of science, as so many of our young men now burn to do, as so many of our older men have done under difficulties hitherto all but insuperable.

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*The Alleged Decrease of Insanity.*

The alleged increase of insanity has been a perennial source of interest in the lay and medical press for so many years, that it is almost with regret that its demise has to be recorded, and the introduction of a new head-line brought to notice. The decrease of insanity is certainly a more agreeable subject, although it cannot hope for the popular support that has been so cheerfully accorded to its predecessor by the melancholy pessimists, who love by pictures of decadence to make the national flesh to creep.

The possibility of a decrease in the occurrence of insanity has been foreshadowed in the blue books of the three kingdoms during the last few years, but the statistics of insanity have been so liable to fluctuation that temporary decreases have been regarded with distrust, as they must continue to be; nevertheless, the continuance of a depression of production of insanity, culminating in an actual diminution in the numbers of the insane as recorded in this year's report of the Commissioners in Lunacy for Scotland, justifies the consideration of lunacy statistics from the aspect of possible decrease.

The report states that since 1858 the number of lunatics under the cognisance of the Board had steadily increased until 1904, in which year there has been a decrease in the proportion of lunatics in every 100,000 of the population from 363 to 362.

This decrease, following on two previous years in which the proportion has remained stationary, is significant, but by no means conclusive.

Beyond the numbers of the insane officially recognised there is a considerable number of persons of unsound mind not on the register, and the temporary arrest of increase might be due to causes limiting the previous increment from this source, or to temporary increase in the death or recovery rate.

The decrease, however, as the Commissioners point out, can be satisfactorily proved to be due to the diminution in numbers who have been placed on the register during the past four years, the maximum of 3,660 placed on the register in 1902, having diminished to 3,449 in 1905, and 3,370 in 1906, this diminution in a considerably increased population being really very striking.

Still more striking, however, is the diminution in the number of insane persons who have never been registered previously; these had reached the proportion in 100,000 of the population of 62·8 in 1902, falling in the last four years to 60·7, 60·6, 57·6, and to 54·3 in 1906.

This would appear to indicate a very considerable falling off in the occurrence of insanity, but must not be relied on too confidently. In recent years in Glasgow a considerable number of cases of mental disorder of brief duration are treated to recovery without admission to asylums, and it is a question whether the number so treated may not have affected asylum statistics.

A possible statistical fallacy is thus introduced. The two classes of cases being treated under two independent official bodies there is a difficulty in satisfactorily combining their information. This is an additional argument in favour of the establishment of a ministry of health which should have general supervision in all health matters and furnish definite information in such cases.

Whether these statistics indicate an apparent or real diminution in the production of insanity, they are at least satisfactory as an evidence that we may expect that there should certainly be a decrease in the rate of the erection of asylums.

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*Questions on the Alcohol Question : the Use of Alcohol.*

The question of the use of alcohol was raised in connection with the annual meeting, and drew the attention of one of the most active of the daily papers to the views and habits of the members of the Medico-Psychological Association. Publicity has thus been given to the fact that, although as a body we advocate temperance, and to some extent enforce total abstinence in our asylums, as individuals the large majority use alcohol as an habitual article of diet. It behoves us to consider whether we are setting a bad example by habitually using a noxious poison, or whether we are availing ourselves of one of the means of enhancing the pleasure of life in using that which in moderation can "gladden the heart of man," and thus tends to aid his evolutionary progress.

The question, indeed, is ever the same : Is alcohol an absolute poison, in all quantities, or has it any use whatever as a food, stimulant, or for any other effect ?

On the one hand, the striking fact presents itself that some of the most progressive nations have habitually used alcoholic beverages for long periods. If alcohol is a poison why have these not deteriorated or become exterminated ? Is there progress in spite of, or by reason of, their alcoholic habits ? On the other hand, the Hindoos and Mahommedans who have been non-alcoholic for centuries, have not appeared to develop as rapidly as the alcoholic races, and, indeed, seem—in the case of the Mahommedans—to have undergone serious deterioration.