

their branch establishments, would seem to put undue restraint upon the development of the cottage system.

The jurisdiction of the County Court Judge, in cases of small property, conferred by Section 9, is a great improvement, but the limit of annual income, instead of being fifty pounds, might well have been drawn at one hundred, as in the similar provision in the Scottish law.

Urgency orders by the first Section of the Act are to be limited in their action to four days, instead of seven, as in the existing Act. This will probably lead to a great deal of inconvenience, and will possibly lead to the occasional setting at liberty of persons acutely insane, an evil much greater than any which this change of procedure can possibly counteract.

The scheme of penalties to be inflicted for erroneous reports under Clause 29 savours rather of legislation against habitual criminals than for the direction of the members of an honourable profession.

We append a summary of the Bill in '*Notes and News*,' to which we refer our readers for the less important changes.

The Alleged Increase of Lunacy in England and Wales.

The special report of the Commissioners in Lunacy to the Lord Chancellor has lately been issued. They state that whereas in 1859 the number of lunatics, idiots, and persons of unsound mind in England and Wales, reported to the department as resident in asylums and other establishments for the insane, and in workhouses, or with their relatives or others, was 36,762, the number had increased in 1896 to 96,446, showing a ratio to every 10,000 of the population of 31.38, as compared with 18.67 at the previous period. The replies received from the Medical Superintendents of Asylums indicated that 10 were of opinion that occurring insanity has increased, while 30 were of a contrary opinion, and 22 were unable to arrive at a definite conclusion. The Commissioners point out that it is a noticeable and important fact that while the increase in the number of pauper patients has been from 31,401 to 87,417, that in the private class has only been from 4,679 to 8,265, the ratios having risen from 15.95 to 28.44 for paupers, and from 2.38 to 2.69 only for private patients, per 10,000 of the population. It is obvious, therefore, that the increase in numbers and ratios has been almost entirely confined to pauper patients, and that the class upon whom

some of the insanity-producing causes often referred to would have been most likely to operate severely have scarcely suffered in any degree. Indeed, the ratio for private patients is actually lower than in 1879, and is still undergoing an annual diminution. The increase in the numbers and ratios of paupers is, however, strikingly large, and out of all proportion to that of the population. It would be of extreme interest to ascertain if the apparent decrease in private cases was not really due to the avoidance of certification, resulting from the magisterial intervention.

After giving elaborate tables of statistics, the Commissioners say:—These tables prove that while in the general population there has been a considerable increase in those ages in which the greatest liability to attacks of insanity is known to prevail—namely, from 20 to 45—there has been a marked diminution in the ratios among the insane in those ages, and a large increase in the numbers and ratios at the more advanced ages; the obvious inference being that accumulation, and not fresh production, has been the most influential factor. We have thus, we think, by means of the figures within our reach, demonstrated at least the probability that much of the apparent increase of insanity has been due, not to an increase in the incidence of that disease, but of the aggregate of persons affected by it, and to their redistribution; in other words, that insanity has not greatly increased, out of proportion to the increase of population, but that the numbers of the insane have greatly so increased, and that they have been so redistributed as to give the impression of an actual increase of the disease. In conclusion, the Commissioners suggest the causes which have been, and are, at work to produce this continually augmenting accumulation of the registered insane, especially in institutions. These causes may generally be summarised as greater accuracy of registration; extended views as to what constitutes insanity requiring confinement; the retention in workhouses of a diminished proportion of pauper lunatics; the four shilling grant; the increased popularity of asylums, &c.