

"THE HABITUAL INEBRIATES ACTS."

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—As one who has worked for many years among the class from which the habitual inebriate is largely drawn I was pleased to read the very pertinent remarks of Dr. L. A. Parry on this subject in THE LANCET of Sept. 21st, p. 786.

It seems to me that either the scheme of private or local reformatories must altogether fail and the entire class of inebriates become the special care of the State, or else the managers of the former institutions must make up their minds to a radical alteration of their present "rose-watery" rules and procedure. Lady Henry Somerset refers to "dangerous" cases being sent to her. Now, with the greatest respect for this lady's opinions, I prefer to take the view which I believe is unanimously held by prison officials—i.e., that inebriates are far more undisciplined than felons. In other words, the inebriate (continuing, like Dr. Parry, to speak mainly of the female variety) usually is "dangerous" in the sense of being a brutalised, half-unsexed virago, who on the slightest thwarting of her individual desires will indifferently assault, as likely as not with the nearest lethal weapon, whosoever may have incurred her displeasure. What does she care for the flowers and the gardens, the cleanliness and the food—all the "sweetness and light" of the reformatory? She would gladly barter all for a single half-quartern of rum, and meanwhile she sighs for the fighting, the squalor, the obscenity of her filthy lodging-house or slum. What if she did find herself at short intervals in gaol? The sentence was not as many weeks as she is now serving years, and at the worst it served to recruit her powers for fresh debauchery or the propagation of a race of degenerates. I have been told on what I believe to be good authority that many of the women whom Lady Henry Somerset doubtless classifies as "dangerous" have shammed insanity or have committed assaults or damage with the single idea of escaping from the reformatory. Could anything be more farcical? The climax of absurdity is reached by one institution, which I forbear to specify, which insists on the *sexual purity* of its candidates for admission; as if an inebriate were not the one woman of all others whose loss of self-respect has long robbed her of such an attribute.

I am, Sirs, yours faithfully,

A. W. P.

Sept. 23rd, 1901.

SOME MEDICAL ASPECTS OF THE PAN-AMERICAN EXPOSITION AT BUFFALO.

(FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT.)

IN former communications to THE LANCET¹ respecting the model brigade field hospital exhibited at the Pan-American Exposition the most important features were described. With an account of the United States army ambulance a description of this exhibit will be complete.

The United States army ambulance of the latest pattern is intended to be drawn, when in the field, by four mules and has a total weight, unloaded, of slightly less than 1400 pounds. The inside width of the wagon-box is 82 inches, its length over all is 106 inches, and the length of the litter space is 91 inches. There are hinged seats, capable of accommodating 12 patients when seated, these seats swinging back out of the way against the sides of the ambulance when the latter is used for recumbent patients. A stout post, permanently fastened in position, rises from the centre of the litter space in front to the roof of the ambulance. This post is provided with leather-covered metallic hooks, about half-way up, which receive the inner handles of the two litters, forming the upper tier. A similar post at the rear of the ambulance provides support for the rear of the same litter shafts, the post swinging up out of the way and being strapped to the roof when not in use. The two litters of the upper tier are supported on their external aspect by having the litter handles of the outer poles inserted in loops of leather straps suspended from the ambulance roof. The lower tier of litters is loaded directly on the ambulance floor, between the supporting posts and the packed seats of the ambulance. The latter thus has accommodation for four recumbent patients or for two

recumbent patients and six seated. The fact that both recumbent and seated patients can be carried at the same time is of great practical importance. The ambulance is furnished with small hammocks, hung along the sides, similar to those used in sleeping cars, for the carriage of the patients' effects. The roof is of light wood, covered with "pantasote," a new material which is waterproof, fireproof, durable as leather, and not readily torn by brush or overhanging branches. The wagon wheels have broad tyres and iron axles. There are accessory springs, so that the vehicle rides as easily with three or four occupants as when loaded with eight or ten. Water is carried in metallic receptacles underneath the floor of the ambulance and behind the rear axle. It is readily accessible, yet when the tail-gate of the wagon is dropped, as in loading patients, the containers are perfectly protected from injury. The box underneath the driver's seat is intended to contain three boxes of the same size so as to be interchangeable, one containing dressings, another stimulants, and the third condensed foods. The front wheels of the ambulance "cut under," so that the vehicle can turn in its own length. This ambulance is a result of a careful study of the transportation of wounded by a board of medical officers from experience gained during the recent Spanish-American war. As showing its superiority over other patterns it is only necessary to say that it has lately been adopted in the Canadian militia and that samples have already been ordered for trial by the Governments of Great Britain, France, Spain, and Chili.

That the equipment of army field hospitals of the United States is in a high degree excellent is freely admitted by army surgeons of other nations. The commendations passed upon these hospitals in China were very high, and when the fact is taken into consideration that the ones in use there were not nearly so well equipped as they are at present it will be easily understood that the arrangements of the United States Army Medical Department are worthy of close attention by similar departments of other armies.

NOTES FROM INDIA.

(FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT.)

The New General Hospital, Calcutta.—Bombay City and the Recent Census.—Mr. Neild Cook's Deputy.—The Indian Medical Service.—Vaccination and Small-pox in Bengal.—The Standard of a Well-filtered Water.—Regimental Cooks.

AFTER considerable delay the new block of the Presidency General Hospital was formally opened by the Lieutenant-Governor on August 31st. It is a plain building outside but replete with every convenience within. Great care has evidently been bestowed upon its construction which is up-to-date in every particular. There are three storeys identical in their construction and arrangement and each storey has two large open wards with service rooms and offices adjacent, while between the wards in the centre of the building are groups of rooms for private patients, sisters, resident officers, &c. Altogether it will provide accommodation for about 160 patients. There is an excellent verandah for each storey and the roof has been arranged to form a magnificent promenade. The operation-room over the portico facing the north is particularly good and has been fitted up on the latest scientific principles. Electric fans, lights, lift, and water pumps constitute the excellent electrical installation. The kitchen and the nurses' quarters are in separate detached buildings. One oversight has certainly been made, but there is still time to remedy it. A large dirty pond is situated close to the front of the building and within the grounds. Surely this should be filled up, as it is of no use, but may be a positive danger to the inmates.

The returns of plague mortality from various places continue to show large increases. In Mysore, Bombay city, and Karachi the disease is active. At Bombay the Governor has published some interesting figures to explain the decline of population shown by the census. He calculates the excessive mortality of Bombay during recent years at 115,000. The census being taken during the height of the outbreak it is estimated that 36,000 residents were living outside the island and that perhaps as many more had gone further afield. The most densely peopled parts of the city show 598 persons to the acre as against 282 in the thickest part of Calcutta. It has been discovered by the census that there

¹ THE LANCET, Sept. 14th (p. 749) and 21st (p. 809), 1901.

are no less than 53 dialects spoken in the city, and that only about a fourth of its total population were born in it. Two houses were found to contain 691 and 663 inmates respectively and the most crowded room had 54 occupants!

During the absence on privilege leave of Mr. J. Nield Cook the Corporation of Calcutta have asked for the services of Dr. T. F. Pearse, one of the plague officers. There being little plague in Calcutta at the present time work in this department must be reduced to a minimum. Dr. Pearse should be well qualified for the post as he holds high diplomas in medicine, surgery, and public health.

It is understood that the Secretary of State for India has sanctioned the strengthening of the Indian Medical Service by the addition of 26 officers and that the Government of India will shortly announce their intentions as to recruitment.

A resolution of the Government on vaccination in Bengal has just been issued. Small-pox was very rife during the past year and in some of the districts only a small proportion of the population has been protected by vaccination. The Lieutenant-Governor refers particularly to the insufficient protection afforded by the arrangements in Calcutta, but finds evidence of real progress in other towns where vaccination is compulsory. The difficulty in Calcutta is the large immigrant population. In the outlying districts the proportion of protected persons is very small. The total number of deaths from small-pox in Bengal was 25,302, against 14,514 in the preceding year. Out of 476 persons admitted into the Campbell Hospital in Calcutta only 124 had been vaccinated. It must be admitted that the obstacles to extensive vaccination are enormous.

Mr. Hankin in his report to the Government of the North-West Provinces lays it down that a public water-supply may be considered "well filtered" if it contains less than 100 microbes per cubic centimetre. This is a somewhat lower standard than that of some authorities, but according to it the municipal water-supplies in the North-West Provinces are shown to have been "well filtered."

The experimental scheme under which British troops in India are to do their own cooking is a matter of the highest importance. When soldiers are in the plains during the hot weather there may be difficulties, but during the cool season and when in the hills there is no reason why the cook-boy should not be abolished. The experiment was tried a few years ago with the Gordon Highlanders and for months together not a single case of enteric fever occurred. I understand that men trained in England are to be eventually attached to regiments in India. It is not sufficiently recognised that though the native can cook he is a very dangerous cook. He will keep dirty pots and pans, fowl water, and fouler dishcloths, and he has not the remotest idea of sanitary precautions. The cooking must, of course, be well done or there will be other troubles. It behoves the authorities, therefore, to supply the trained men without delay or the substitution of the soldier-cook for the native one may in the meantime prove disastrous to the proposed change.

Sept. 7th.

BIRMINGHAM.

(FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT.)

Houses and Health.

In the present day we are met with many schemes for the development of ideal modes of dealing with the various influences which retard our physical and moral progress. One or two enthusiasts full of abstract notions of virtue and philanthropy combine with some followers to form an association, an attractive title is assumed, and the propaganda go forth. In many instances the objects set out are laudable and praiseworthy; in the majority there is an unbiased desire to benefit the human race; but there is generally a vast difference exhibited between what is theoretically advanced and what is practically possible. An instance of this kind is displayed in the Garden City Association which has recently held its conference in Birmingham. The present conditions of life in cities were pointed out as likely to reach a point in which the race would become degenerate, when we should be no longer able to hold our own. The advantages of a garden city were explained to be increased light and space, cheapness of land, readiness of market, facilities in getting to and from work, and all the attractions of a country life. We are all aware that the

unfavourable conditions of life in crowded cities must be detrimental to health, and we view the slums of such localities with abhorrence and dismay. But the plan of reformation is not so easy as the promoters of the Garden City Association would wish. The minor industries of agriculture and gardening may possibly be fostered by such benevolent advocates; but the greater manufactories of towns must be located for the present, we fear, in confined areas. Though in some instances the managers of large industries have taken their works outside the city and have thus brought comfort to their operatives, it is somewhat utopian to expect that this course can be pursued on a scale sufficient to meet the demands of the ever-increasing growth of the population. The sacrifice of commercial interests entailed is too heavy.

Epidemic of Scarlet Fever.

The Health Committee have to face an increase in the cases of scarlet fever. At this season the type of cases is mild and the mortality in proportion to the number has been low. Still, the increase in the numbers admitted into the infectious hospitals is great enough to give apprehensions as to the accommodation at the disposal of the committee. Thus last week there were 471 patients in the scarlet fever hospital, as compared with 324 in the corresponding week of last year, and the record shows an earlier time of the increase for the season. Arrangements are being made to provide extra room for any additions, and there is every reason to believe that due preparations will meet any emergency. Cases of typhoid fever form a large item in the work of the Health Committee. 28 cases were reported last week, with 60 cases already in the hospital. A large number of these cases are also treated at the General Hospital and the Queen's Hospital, where it is considered by some unwise to admit such patients. Certainly disasters at times occur among those who attend to them, in spite of all precautions and care.

Poisons in Medicine Bottles.

A lamentable instance of death lately occurred from the want of some distinctive mark between bottles containing poison and those containing medicine. A man, aged 39 years, complained of having a cold and remained in bed. The medical attendant prescribed two draughts in small bottles, one to be taken at night and one in the morning; a small bottle of carbolic acid was also bought at a dispensing chemist's for inhaling. It was supplied in a bottle almost identical with the others, but labeled "Poison" in red. The bottles were placed on a tray by the servant and were carried upstairs. The night draught was given as directed. In the morning the wife of the patient administered, as she thought, the second draught, but immediately it was swallowed the patient became aware that the wrong bottle had been emptied and he died in 20 minutes. Many plans have been proposed for avoiding such mistakes. The most feasible would be, it seems to me, that all poisons should be sold in screw-stoppered bottles, which would thereby attract attention to the contents, though this would not be infallible unless other medicine bottles were universally precluded from having this form of stopper. Nothing, as a matter of fact, can supply the want of thought and care which should be associated with the function of nursing the sick.

Vaccination Exemption Certificates.

At a meeting of the West Bromwich Board of Guardians attention was recently drawn to the excessive fees which were charged for vaccination exemption certificates. It was stated that in many instances not only did the fathers lose a day's work in attending before the justices but were charged 3s. or 5s. for the certificates. The chairman pointed out that the guardians had no jurisdiction in the matter and ruled any discussion on the subject out of order. A notice to move a resolution another time was carried.

Sept. 24th.

MANCHESTER.

(FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT.)

The Blind of Manchester and Salford.

HENSHAW'S Blind Asylum has long been known beyond the limits of Manchester and Salford as an institution that has deserved well of the community, but for some time it has had its critics, which, perhaps, is not to be wondered at, for the old ways of an institution tend to become stereotyped.