

officers are guided by neither law nor practical knowledge it follows that they sometimes give extravagant orders. This is proved by the examples of Venice and Milan. In the former of these towns a circular was issued forbidding the segregation of patients affected by small-pox, and in the latter the official report advised parents that in the case of measles sound children should be brought into contact with diseased ones when the epidemic was mild, "in order that they should catch a mild form of the disease, which every one must have." I have great belief in the evolution of medicine and consider that the study of the cause of disease already forms, and will in time more surely form, one of the chief interests of medical men. With this evolution the horrors to which you allude in your journal—which, also, are not a speciality of Italy—will entirely disappear.

I am, Sirs, yours faithfully,

C. RUATA,

Direzione della Scuola di Farmacia, Università di Perugia.
Perugia, March 16th, 1894.

"DECREASE OF PRISON POPULATION."

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—Perhaps you will allow me a few lines in answer to your last annotation on the prison population. I nowhere assert that the census return takes the dimensions of the prison population as a test of the movement of crime; I merely remark that the size of the prison population is not an accurate test. I do not attach much value to the police estimates as to the numbers of the criminal classes, inasmuch as these estimates are mere guesses; the best way of arriving at the proportions of the criminal classes is to look at the percentage of recidivism. Recidivists are the criminal classes, and if they are increasing in number, as we know they are, the proportions of the criminal classes are not declining. My reason for giving the total number of commitments to prison was based on the following grounds. The census of the prison population includes commitments of all kinds—persons on remand, persons for trial, persons under sentence for non-payment of fines. I gave the total commitments to match the census return, and I am surprised that this point should be used against me, inasmuch as it is equally valid against the Registrar-General. This gentleman, in attempting to account for the decrease of the prison population, does not eliminate any class of commitments before going forward with his explanations; and I followed him in this respect, in the first place, because I did not wish to find fault with trifling inaccuracies, and in the second place because the inclusion or omission of remand and discharge cases, according to my method of arriving at the decrease of the prison population, makes comparatively little difference to the final result. Finally, I prefer my figures to the Registrar-General's because these figures do not accurately give the number of commitments on conviction. For instance, all juveniles sent to reformatory schools were, until last autumn, sentenced to a preliminary period of imprisonment. These cases are not included in the Registrar-General's table of commitments. Nor does his table include, as I said before, the commitments where a fine is not paid. In 1891 these commitments after sentence in court of summary jurisdiction amounted in round numbers to 59,000, and surely a table which omits such a vast number of commitments is to be regarded as incorrect. In addition to this the Registrar-General accused me of making an incomprehensible blunder, not in the number of convictions, be it remembered, but in the total number of committals, and he produced what he called the total number of committals in opposition to my figures. I showed in my letter to you that the Registrar-General's total committals are wrong and that mine are right.

In the *Nineteenth Century* for 1892 I have dealt with the question of serious crime in the last decade. I have shown there that if the decade 1870-79 is compared with 1880-89 the most serious forms of crime have increased, not decreased. My method of arriving at the decrease of the prison population is objected to, but it is not said on what grounds. My method is that when a prison population decreases it decreases from two fundamental causes, acting singly or in combination. These causes are (1) a decrease of commitments; and (2) a decrease in the duration of sentences. I shall be very glad if anybody can point out any other causes except the outburst of a fatal epidemic or the pardoning *fiat* of the Government. The conclusion arrived

at by the census return which I have been battling against all along is the following statement: "So far from the average term of imprisonment having declined in the interval between 1881 and 1891, the very opposite had occurred, and the average term had become, if anything, slightly longer." This conclusion, in my humble opinion, is erroneous. The other conclusion, although it is somewhat like a contradiction of the first, to the effect that the longer sentences have been shortened and the shorter have had other penalties substituted for them, I have never assailed. But the first conclusion, as I have shown in my letter to you, and also in *The Times*, is wrong, and it vitiates the report.

I am, Sirs, yours truly,

March 28th, 1894.

WILLIAM DOUGLAS MORRISON.

* * So far as the published "judicial statistics" afford the means for calculating the average term of imprisonment in 1881 and 1891, it appears to be beyond question that this average term declined during that period, and this is stated in the census report to be due to the fact that the effect of the shortening of all but the very shortest sentences is more than counterbalanced by the substitution of other punishments for the preponderating number of short sentences of imprisonment. We cannot agree with Mr. Morrison that he has proved in any of his letters that the total average term of imprisonment has been decreased.—ED. L.

VACCINATION OF GIPSIES.

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—My object in addressing you just now is to bring to your notice, and that of the profession, how badly the wandering gipsy population of England is protected against the ravages of small-pox and the risk incurred from that unsatisfactory state of things, in the hope of being the means of some steps for the vaccination of the class of people referred to being adopted by Parliament. By the early post on Monday morning last I received notice from the inspector of police at Harwich, in obedience to a general order by the chief constable of the county of Essex, that a gipsy family had arrived at Parkeston, which is at the eastern end of one of the sanitary districts (Tendring rural) under my care. I visited the locality the same forenoon and found a van of the ordinary size, the inmates of which were a man and his wife and nine children, the ages of the latter ranging from twenty years to eighteen months. On my inquiring as to the vaccination of the family, the mother quickly told me that they had all been vaccinated except the youngest. Being desirous, however, to have ocular demonstration of this fact, I requested that I might be allowed to examine the arms of the children. This was strongly resented, and, on my insisting, the mother admitted that none of them had undergone the operation. Of course I intimated I would report the matter and would do my utmost to have vaccination carried out. This, I hear from the police, has so far had the satisfactory effect of their moving from the locality, and I shall endeavour to hunt all such vans out of my districts. I brought to the gipsy's notice that the van was overcrowded and was met by the statement that only four slept in the van and the others in a small cart and on the ground underneath the van, where the mother made a bed for them. I have since verified this by the police.

It is most difficult for sanitary authorities to deal with this class of people under the existing laws, as a movement is made out of the district before any legal process can be put in force; I have applied to the chief constable for any hint he can give me, but he is as much at a loss what to do as I am. The risk, however, must be admitted to be enormous to the public at large, and it would be a boon if some means could be devised to lessen or prevent it. With apologies for so far trespassing on your valuable space,

I remain, Sirs, yours faithfully,

J. W. COOK, M.D.,

Colchester, March 28th, 1894.

Medical Officer of Health.

"EPILEPSY AND ERRORS OF REFRACTION."

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—The annotation in THE LANCET of March 24th last upon my paper in *Brain*—winter number, 1893—dealing with cases of epilepsy, their refraction and their treatment

by glasses, seems to me to be likely to give to the reader an imperfect idea as to my position on the subject. Your article appears to convey the impression that I have concluded that epilepsy can be cured by glasses *alone*. In no place have I stated this; on the contrary, I have been careful to put forward the fact that medical treatment was continued. It may, however, be pointed out that in the eight cases of cure and relief, of which brief histories were given, and also in others not given in detail, the patients had taken long courses of bromide of potassium without apparent effect, and that their improvement dated from the time they commenced to wear their spectacles. I have simply added the correction of errors of refraction to the course of treatment pursued by the physician, and have given the results of this in my paper. I am convinced that the removal of such a source of irritation as an error of refraction will, in many cases, when combined with medical treatment, lessen both the number and the severity of the attacks. As yet there are no sufficient data as to the results of treatment by glasses *without drugs*, and therefore no opinion on this point can be offered.

I am, Sirs, yours truly,

Harley-street, March 31st, 1894.

H. WORK DODD.

LIVERPOOL.

(FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT.)

The Recent Assizes.—Reprieve of Condemned Men.

THE three men convicted of the murder of a policeman at St. Helens have been reprieved, as has also the man convicted of the murder of his paramour at Manchester. The woman who was convicted of the murder of her husband under circumstances showing great deliberation and of the most revolting character paid the last penalty of the law on the 2nd inst. at Her Majesty's prison, Walton. The medical evidence in the St. Helens case has been subjected to much hostile criticism in the local papers, a proceeding to be deprecated since medical witnesses for the Crown are debarred from making any reply. It is satisfactory to record that the body of the ill-fated police-constable was subjected to the most careful examination, first by Mr. McNicoll and Mr. Knowles of St. Helens and subsequently by Mr. F. T. Paul of Liverpool and Dr. Robertson of St. Helens, but no lesion which could account for death was found. While it would have been more satisfactory had the cause of death been manifest to the eye, it was impossible to separate it from the violence received but a few hours before death actually occurred. A perusal of the condensed history of the case as given in THE LANCET of March 24th will show that the term "deferred shock" was a very fair and probable explanation of the cause of death. Nor must it be forgotten that by the old and present law persons are answerable for death following within a year and a day after an act of violence. It is to be hoped that the sentence on these men will be sufficient to deter others from cowardly attacks on the police, and it would be well if some of the misplaced sympathy showered upon prisoners in sensational cases were extended to the bereaved relatives and friends of the deceased. As has been already stated, the learned judge who tried the case lamented that the officers did not use their staves or batons sooner. In this he followed what the late Lord Bramwell, when Baron Bramwell, said thirty years ago, "I don't see why a policeman should wait until he is half killed before he defends himself."

The Watch Committee and Immoral Houses.

The report of the chief constable, which has just been issued, has some apposite remarks on this subject. Some years ago the Watch Committee of the Liverpool City Council decided to put in force the provisions of the Criminal Law Amendment Act with reference to the suppression of immoral houses. In his report for last year the head constable gives the following particulars. During the year 124 brothel keepers were arrested, 767 were summoned to appear and did so, while 58 were summoned but absconded, making a total of 949. Of these, 831 were convicted and 58 were discharged. It is somewhat significant that of the 891 persons who answered to the summons 124 were men and 767 were women. The terrible persistence of this evil, as observed in THE LANCET some years ago, is shown by the fact that, in spite of repeated fines and imprisonments, the numbers

were 222 in excess of the previous year. The head constable expresses his regret that though 831 houses were convicted as brothels, not one single owner or agent could be made amenable for allowing them to be so used owing to the difficulty of proving a guilty knowledge on the part of such agents or owners; and yet the Home Secretary and the chief metropolitan magistrate have decided that the existing law is sufficient if properly and rigorously administered.

A Year's Returns of Drunkenness.

Among other items of painful interest in the head constable's annual report are the tables relating to drunkenness. From Table 16 it appears that during the year there was a total of 5409 apprehensions for being drunk for the first time, the respective numbers of the two sexes being: males 3487; females, 1922. Those apprehended for a second offence were much fewer, being: males, 185; females, 257—total, 442. It has been repeatedly urged by those who ought to know the truth that the "five shillings and costs or three days" does deter many men and women from repeating the offence, and that a very large number are convicted once only. These figures would appear to confirm this view. Another curious feature in this table is that there were no convictions of males for being drunk more than seven times; for the eighth time and down to the twenty-fourth time women monopolise the table and the figures. As many as twenty-four females were convicted of being drunk twenty-four times. The next table shows that more than one-third of the apprehensions for drunkenness occurred on Saturday, Monday being the next heaviest day.

Accidents and Life-saving.

A more gratifying table is that showing the great and valuable services rendered by the police and others in saving lives. Of a total of 353 persons who fell into docks, canal, &c., 39 were rescued from drowning by the police and 275 by others. There were also 71 persons rescued from burning. The year's accidents exceeded 2500, and in a large proportion of these valuable aid was rendered by the police.

April 3rd.

NORTHERN COUNTIES NOTES.

(FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT.)

Lecture on Sewerage at Chester-le-Street.

DR. TAYLOR, of Chester-le-Street, gave an instructive and interesting lecture on Sewerage in that town last week, in the course of which he stated that the difficulty of getting rid of sewage was such that in spite of all the plans to utilise its products there were only three or four towns in the kingdom where the expense of utilisation was recouped in any way. The plan adopted at Chester-le-Street cost £400 per annum, or 10d. per head of the inhabitants.

British Dental Association.

The annual general meeting of the British Dental Association was held last week in the College of Medicine, Newcastle. The members assembled in the city on Wednesday and had a conversazione in the Natural History Museum, which was given by the local reception committee in order to afford opportunity for welcoming the visiting members to Newcastle. Mr. C. S. Tomes, F.R.S., was elected president and gave a reception, at which he delivered his presidential address. On Friday night the annual dinner was held in the Grand Assembly Rooms. Professor Philipson welcomed the association to Newcastle and hoped that ere long the University of Durham College of Medicine would be able to offer a complete dental curriculum. Excursions to South Shields and Tynemouth, Durham, Burradon Colliery, and Jesmond Dene were arranged for Saturday afternoon. Members of other branches of the profession were courteously invited to the meetings and receptions.

Cumberland and Westmorland Convalescent Institution.

The annual meeting of governors and friends of this institution has been held at the town-hall, Silloth, under the presidency of the mayor. The thirty-first annual report of the committee congratulated the subscribers to the institution upon its continued progress and prosperity. The number of patients admitted during 1893 was 699, being the largest in any one year. The subscriptions, donations,