

Correspondence.

"Audi alteram partem."

"THE LONDON COUNTY COUNCIL AND INSANITY IN LONDON."

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—The writer of the leading article under the above heading in THE LANCET of Feb. 1st, in dealing first with the total number of lunatics for whom the County of London is responsible to find accommodation, takes the actual number of 12,118 on Jan. 1st, 1895, and deducts therefrom the number (10,104) on Jan. 1st, 1890, showing an increase of 2014, which he divides by 5, making an average annual increase of 403. But that number is only the mean of an increasing series. Taking the numbers (quoted in the article) for Jan. 1st, 1894—viz., 11,668—it is seen that the average annual increase to that date was 391. According to the annual returns of lunatics now to hand (not including 13 criminal lunatics) the total number of lunatics in this class had by Jan. 1st, 1896, reached 12,848. Calculating the annual average increase on this longer series of years it is found that the average has risen to 457. The averages for each successively extended series of years stand, therefore, as follows: 391, 403, and 457. Still, the last-mentioned number (457) is only the mean annual increase for the extended period. The highest number of the increasing series of which 457 is the mean must, of course, be much larger than the mean. What that number should be is arrived at by the careful actuarial analysis by Mr. J. W. Palmer of entrants and exits shown by the annual returns, in which variations of admission and *exitus* rates and their relations to each other have to be taken into consideration.

Dealing in a similar manner with all classes of London lunatics and imbeciles combined, it must be first pointed out that the statement in THE LANCET that the increase was almost identical with the class dealt with above—i.e., the certified insane—and averaged 400 per annum during the years Jan. 1st, 1890, to Jan. 1st, 1895, is incorrect. The total number on Jan. 1st, 1895 (excluding criminals), was 18,541, while on Jan. 1st, 1890, it was 16,359, showing an increase of 2182, which divided by 5 yields 436. For the previous series of years (Jan. 1st, 1890, to Jan. 1st, 1894) it was 420. Adding another year to the first-named series (the Jan. 1st, 1896, returns show a total on that date of 19,325) the average is raised to 494. The averages for each successively enlarged series were thus 420, 436, and 494; and this, as in the case of lunatics under reception orders, is still only the mean of the increasing increases, the highest number of the series being, as before explained, much higher than the mean. So far from the estimate of the asylums committee being an "alarmist" one, with the exception of the few months following the opening of the Claybury Asylum, the new cases of occurring insanity, in the class for which the County Council is responsible, show, since 1890, an almost constant percentage of the total number under treatment at the beginning of each year. Dealing with the argument that "in 1891 the number of London cases of insanity reported by the Lunacy Commissioners was 16,356, and equal to 3.95 per 1000 of the population, and at the same rate of insanity the cases in 1900 would be 18,229, giving an annual increase of less than 200 in the nine years," it is easy to show that the writer has entirely overlooked the great factor of yearly accumulation to which he draws attention immediately before. By comparing the estimated population for 1894 (excluding the City) it will be found that the calculated number of cases of insanity on Jan. 1st, 1894, reckoned as above, would be about 16,900, whereas the actual figures for that date show 18,041, or rather over 4 per 1000 of estimated population. The excess mainly consists of accumulation caused by the percentage of exits having fallen short of the percentage of entrants. The same remarks apply in a much greater degree to the class of cases for which the County of London is primarily responsible, for in that class the difference between the percentage rate of entrants and that of exits is about double that of the total cases of insanity.

It was upon the basis of the foregoing calculations, and after careful comparison of admission and *exitus* rates,

in which the exceptional increase at the time of the opening of Claybury Asylum was not overlooked, that the number 600 was adopted as representing the present annual increase in certified lunatics for whom the London County Council is responsible to provide accommodation. It may be added that a large number of lunatics ultimately classified as work-house and imbecile cases is first dealt with under reception orders by the asylums committee. Experience has, moreover, shown that considerable fluctuations in actual numbers must be expected from year to year, and the County Council has to provide accommodation sufficient to enable any abnormal temporary requirements to be coped with. It is scarcely sufficient to make deductions except upon a rather long series of years, but it may be pointed out that, taking the ascertained increases for the past two years together in reception order cases alone—viz., 457 for Jan. 1st, 1895, and 740 for Jan. 1st, 1896—the results agree remarkably with the estimates for the same two years taken together, which were given a year beforehand in each case in the asylums committee's annual reports as 550 and 600 respectively. The asylums committee can only base its estimate upon conditions which have existed since the formation of the County of London. As each additional year's returns of lunatics are received careful comparisons are made so as to ascertain more nearly the present normal rate of increase and to what extent it is caused by increase in "occurring" cases or by "accumulation of chronicity." Even supposing, as a remote possibility, that some unforeseen change in conditions should occur before the end of the present century which should have the effect of arresting or decreasing the present rate of increase, it may be pointed out that any slight excess in the number of beds could be profitably utilised for boarders or for promoting improved classification.

I am, Sirs, yours faithfully,

R. N. PARTRIDGE,

Clerk of the Asylums Committee.

Whitehall-place, S.W., Feb. 5th, 1896.

* * The new figures used by our correspondent relating to the year ending on Jan. 1st last show, it is true, further aggregation of certified cases of lunacy in London, but we entirely fail to recognise any trustworthy grounds for the assumption by the London County Council that an increase which is mainly, if not entirely, due to transfer from the existing reserve of uncertified cases and to "accumulation" will not only continue, but will be maintained at an increasing rate."—ED. L.

OUT-PATIENTS AND HOSPITAL REFORM.

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—I have just read with much interest your leading article on the Metropolitan Hospital Sunday Fund as well as your special article on the same subject containing the practical and earnest remarks of Dr. Glover on the evils of the out-patient system of our hospitals. These evils are real and call for speedy amendment. I do not concur with the late respected President of the Royal College of Surgeons of England, Mr. Bryant, who in his speech after the paper read by Colonel Montefiore on the Need of a Central Hospital Board for London, implied that the facts that Dr. Heron and Mr. George Brown referred to at that meeting were few, accidental, and even exaggerated. In a pamphlet that I have lately written on latent gastric ulcer I allude to the fact that the patient whose case I described went to ——— Hospital a few months before his death, and the disease the physician who examined him there thought him to be suffering from was written in the patients' book as "chronic dyspepsia"; but the necropsy proved that he had two gastric ulcers of long duration. This poor man, after waiting seven or eight hours, I am told, went away even without being able to obtain his medicine, and never went again in consequence. Two or three weeks ago a man came to me in much suffering and consternation on account of the great difficulty of swallowing. He said "he had been attending six or eight weeks without deriving any benefit as an out-patient at ——— Hospital." I found the patient had an organic impassable stricture of the oesophagus, probably caused by a cancerous tumour. He had been under the care of a learned physician, but his disease had not been diagnosed. I sent him again to hospital, but with a note to