a great extent withdrawn from the operation of the ordinary methods of hospital investigation and treatment, which have been so fruitful of good in the case of diseases of other kinds.

(*c*) That the establishment, on the ordinary lines, of a hospital for the study and treatment of insanity, with a visiting medical and surgical staff, could scarcely fail to be productive of increased knowledge of the subject, and, consequently, of increased means of prevention and of cure.

(*d*) That the legal disabilities of the insane, and the necessity for subjecting them to a certain amount of restraint, render it impossible for the suggested hospital to be established by private benevolence, or by any other authority than that to which the care and treatment of the insane are committed by law.

(5) *Report of the L.C.C. Asylums' Committee* for 1893–94.

The Manhattan Fire: Some Reflections.

THE serious outbreak of fire which occurred at the Manhattan State Hospital, Ward's Island, New York, on February 18, resulting in the death of twenty-four patients and three nurses, recalls the terrible holocaust of Colney Hatch nearly twenty years ago. Although the Press reports which reached this country contained many inaccuracies, yet it is apparent that there are several features of similarity between the two occurrences.

The buildings involved in both cases were detached and constructed largely of wood, and were entirely destroyed owing to the rapid spread of the fire. Both had fatal results and showed that the chronic lunatic has a strange fascination for fire—a point which cannot be too strongly impressed upon those to whom falls the grave responsibility of directing fire-fighting operations. The late Dr. Seward, an eye-witness of the fire at Colney Hatch, who so gallantly risked his life rescuing patients, said that many patients resisted the efforts of the nurses and rushed back into the smoke and flames. At Manhattan the same occurred: "Rescue was impeded by the unreasoning resistance of the patients, which was responsible for the death of several nurses." The work of rescue was also rendered very difficult owing to the dense volume of smoke and the falling of a water tank.

During war times, at our mental hospitals, added risks and dangers of all kinds were cheerfully undertaken by depleted and diluted staffs, and not least among them was the risk of serious calamity in case of fire. That nothing serious happened was more an evidence of good fortune than good management, and does not imply that the elaborate pre-war arrangements for preventing and combating fire

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outbreaks were not entirely necessary. On the contrary, nothing could be farther from the truth, and the mental hospital authorities on hearing of this recurrence of the tragedy of Colney Hatch will no doubt feel it behoves them to make sure that the war atmosphere in this matter has been lost and the pre-war attitude completely resumed.

> "*We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.*"

Feelings of admiration and respect mingle with those of sorrow that the brave and unselfish efforts of the mental nurses to save their patients from a frightful death led to several of the former losing their lives. United with our nurses in a common heritage, their self-sacrifice shows that they share with them common ideals. Similar heroic conduct at the call of duty is not unknown of mental nurses in this country, and from time to time finds a place in the official reports. If sensational enough these incidents are noticed by the Press, but more commonly, because they do not transpire to those who would make them known, they remain "unhonoured and unsung," but nevertheless indicative of the maternal instinct underlying the true nurse's calling.

We are reminded thereby that those who set out to do faithfully their duty by the insane require to be made of sterner stuff than the sentimental and gushing dilettantes who so often aspire to be "healers of the mind." Their lack of self-discipline and altruism is often shown when failure attends their efforts, by traducing a noble profession which will have them not.

We bemoan the terrible fate of the patient victims for whose safety the Manhattan State Hospital was responsible. This hospital was visited recently on many occasions by a member of our Association, whose impressions lend no support to the reports of deficient appliances, etc., to meet fire emergencies which have appeared in the Press. It was founded in 1905 on Ward's Island, which is situated scarcely a mile from the mainland of New York State, and has a total acreage of 543. Its many separate buildings are mainly built of wood, and it has its own steamboat service. In fact, it is a good-sized village occupying a territory by itself, and has a population of 6,800 patients and about 500 staff, including twenty-eight doctors. Our informant speaks highly of the medical organisation of the hospital, at the head of which is Dr. Marcus B. Heyman. One special feature which struck him favourably was the weekly clinical consultation held by the medical staff for mutual education, to examine patients, and to decide upon the lines of treatment of unusual or difficult cases.

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This is not the first fire to disturb the really fine medical work of this famous institution, of which the State of New York is justly proud. On March 18, 1920, the recreation hall, when filled to its utmost capacity, caught fire and was utterly destroyed. On that occasion no hitch occurred in safely removing the patients. There was no disorder and no one was injured, which speaks well for the discipline and efficiency of the staff in serious emergency.

We keenly sympathise with Dr. Heyman and his staff on the recent calamity, and trust that he will, in due course, be relieved of any further undue anxiety on the score of fire by the entire replacement of the present wooden buildings by those of a more fire-resisting nature —a process which we understand has already begun.

Part II.—Reviews.

Human Character. By HUGH ELLIOT. Longmans, Green & Co., 1922. Crown 8vo. Pp. xvi + 272. Price *7s. 6d.*

Mr. Elliot, who is well known by his philosophical works (1), has attempted a very difficult task; nevertheless we venture to think that this work on human character will be of especial importance to readers of the Journal. The author, whose life work is necessarily connected with the study of human conduct and its disorders, frankly admits that it would be premature to speak of a science of character, and he affirms that until the physiological processes underlying mental processes are better understood we cannot hope to establish a science of ethology. The modern tendency, foreshadowed by Maudsley, to place psychology upon biological foundations and to show that all mental processes have their roots in the three primal instincts common to men and animals, *viz.*, self-preservation, preservation of the species and the herd instinct, is adopted by the author. He also gives adequate reasons why in the study of character it must be recognised, that feeling dominates reason and that emotional tension connected with the primal instincts is the great driving force. Indeed, this was recognised by Schiller in the following lines:

> " Durch Hunger und durch Liebe
> Erhält sich die Weltgetriebe."

As the author remarks, the study of character cannot be undertaken by anyone; it is for this reason we have mentioned some of the numerous works previously published by him, because a " wide knowledge is essential—knowledge of science, knowledge of literature, and, above all, a knowledge of men and women of all kinds and of different races."

(1) *Modern Science and Materialism, Modern Science and the Illusions of Prof. Bergson, Lamarck's Zoological Philosophy,* and *Herbert Spencer in Makers of the 19th Century.*

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