Night Supervision.

A coroner's jury were lately summoned in reference to a fatal accident in Colney Hatch Asylum. It appears that one patient killed another in a dormitory visited four times each night. This is not by any means the first time that such an occurrence has taken place, and the questions raised are sufficiently serious to open a discussion on means of prevention in the future. Theoretically every insane person should be under constant observation, but the magnitude of the difficulties raised by such a sweeping assertion can hardly be appreciated by those who are not practically intimate with the conditions of asylum life. First of all it is not desirable to keep our patients too long wrapped in cotton wool. We have to strengthen their impaired self-control, to guide them to health by a development of their mental faculties. The number of those enjoying liberty on parole is a real test of good administration, and as that number increases so may the doors be left unlocked and irksome discipline relaxed. Conditions of comparative freedom must, however, be faithfully considered in regard to mental variations day by day. Even then the unexpected happens, and consequently there is an unworthy temptation to apply the bad old rule, "never trust a lunatic."

Then with regard to the majority of cases for whom parole is out of the question, there is a broad but ill-defined distinction between those who are "harmless" and those who are "dangerous." No human prescience is sufficient to foresee when the harmless may suddenly develop into the dangerous, and we may take it that the Colney Hatch murderer belonged to this class, otherwise he would certainly not have been sent to sleep in a dormitory visited at infrequent intervals, but would have been kept apart or under special supervision. The coroner's jury suggest to the Asylums Committee of the London County Council "the desirability of providing some means of communication between the dormitories and the attendants, and a more frequent supervision of the inmates."

The first suggestion is by no means new. Patients have made it of their own accord, not only those who have slept in dormitories, but also those who have occupied single rooms. We are not aware of any such system in use in the asylums of

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this or other countries, and it would be desirable to ascertain if anything has been done, anything which is not liable to frequent abuse nor prohibitive in cost. The country has long demanded similar protection in railway trains, and the results are as yet far from satisfactory.

The second suggestion is engaging much attention at present. Adequate supervision at night has long been desired by every superintendent, and we need only refer to the discussion on the paper by Dr. Middlemass and Dr. Elkins at our last Annual Meeting, to show that it occupies a foremost place in our thoughts. No doubt fatal accidents of the kind will continue to occur by day as well as by night. These are risks which are inseparable from asylum life, and risks which have been duly noticed by the Parliamentary Committee in their efforts to secure compensation for those whose duties place them in posts of danger. Yet these are risks which should be minimised by every possible effort. It is evident that the question is ripe for discussion, and we hope that practical suggestions will be forthcoming by which, without great increase of staff, patients in dormitories may be assured of safety.

Notes and Queries.

Dr. MERCIER has made a suggestion which might easily be developed into a valuable aid to those who are concerned with the progress of mental science. He thinks that part of this JOURNAL should be reserved for Notes and Queries. There are many questions demanding solution, and closer thinking might well result in concise statements of opinion as to undecided or undefined points. This has already been brought under notice in the short-lived career of a French journal to which we referred in January of last year.

L'Intermédiaire des Neurologistes et des Aliénistes was designed to be a medium for the exchange of ideas connected with neurology and insanity. Unfortunately it did not prove a success. Perhaps the comparatively small numbers of those to whom it appealed did not suffice to maintain an extra periodical so limited in scope. Dr. Mercier's proposal, however, is well calculated to stimulate and to inform. It gives promise

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