PART IV.—NOTES AND NEWS.

FIRE AT THE CAMBRIDGESHIRE ASYLUM.

A rather serious fire broke out at the Fulbourn Lunatic Asylum on March 12th, 1872. The fire is supposed to have originated from some defect in a flue which led from the basement through the centre of the house. In the basement are some boilers, and a steam engine. In the upper storey the flue passed through a sort of lumber room, in which were stored sundry boxes and inflammable material. The fire was discovered about 5:30 p.m., just as the workmen were leaving, and they were attracted by the smoke, and returned to the Asylum. Owing to this fact an ample supply of water was soon available, and the men who knew the building exerted themselves actively in the best way to prevent the spread of the flames. By these means the fire was limited to the Chapel and a room above, in the centre of the Asylum. The chapel and a room above are completely destroyed, and sundry adjacent rooms and portions of the roof are injured. The patients and attendants worked with the utmost zeal and energy, and soon reduced the fire. The damage is estimated at about £700. Had it not been for the speedy aid afforded, and for some other favourable accidents, a great part of the asylum would probably have been destroyed. We hear that offers of assistance were telegraphed from the Three Counties and Sussex Asylums next day. Luckily the patients were but little incommoded. It is fortunate the results were no worse.

The Editor of the Journal of Mental Science.

Hanwell, March 3rd, 1872.

Dear Sir,—It occurs to me that the case I cited in my letter to the Solicitor to the Treasury,* impugning the correctness of the opinion expressed by some of the witnesses at the trial of the Rev. Mr. Watson, "that the insane do not disclose their intention of committing suicide, but on the contrary, carefully conceal it," may be considered an exceptional one, and so taken to prove the accuracy of the allegation. Although I guarded against such an assumption by stating in the outset that I knew of several cases in which the insane did announce their determination to commit suicide, perhaps it may be well to anticipate the objection I name by quoting briefly some of the cases. One patient, interpreting literally the words, "if thy right eye offend thee pluck it out and cast it from thee," actually attempted this, and openly declared his determination to destroy himself, which he ultimately effected by hanging, after failure in other ways. Another, believing himself to be in a state of repose, expressed a strong desire to go to the other world to see what his condition would be there, asked to be put out of his misery, and declared his intention of destroying himself at the first opportunity. I saw this man alone one morning, pacing a large dormitory in a desolate state, took him to the day-room, placed him in the care of an attendant, charging the man not to leave him; the attendant left the patient for a few minutes, and on return could not find him. Search was made in several places, the dock and canal were dragged; in a few hours the body was found hanging dead in a disused cellar, left open by workmen engaged in enlarging the asylum. Another, fairly educated, the son of a successful tradesman, disliking business, and disappointed at his father's refusal to purchase a commission for him in the army, enlisted, grew tired of the life of a private, was bought out of the regiment, engaged in betting at races and gambling, drank to excess, became insane, desponding, and openly declared his determination to destroy himself, which he did by hanging. Another, an elderly man, having failed in business, fretted greatly, passed sleepless nights, was much depressed, fell ill, insane, exhibited a tendency to suicide, refused food, begged to be released from his wretched plight, besought those about him to furnish him with the means of doing so himself, and at length effected his purpose by hanging.

* See page 81.