CRIMINAL LUNATICS AND THE CRIME OF ARSON.

ONE HUNDRED CASES.

BY

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THE grouping of types of criminals who commit the crime of arson is not an easy matter. Roughly speaking, there are four groups:

1. The incendiaries who remain undiscovered.
2. Those who receive the benefit of the Probation of Offenders Act or are placed under the care and guidance of relatives.
3. Those who are sent to prison.
4. Those who are found or certified insane and sent to Broadmoor.

Obviously one cannot comment on the first group. Of the second and third I have no recorded experience. Therefore I will confine myself solely to the fourth group.

In the annals of crime arson is of sufficiently frequent occurrence to warrant a search into the records of patients who have come to Broadmoor after this offence. Arson cases average about 4 per cent. of the total number of inmates. These cases are not selected, but are the last hundred "arsons" in sequence, who have been under care since the beginning of the century. I have come into personal contact with 31, and observations are chiefly made from this number. The information concerning the remaining 69 is gleaned from the notes of my predecessors, and I owe them my thanks for their care and precision in writing up the case papers.

Arson may be divided into *fraudulent* and *purposeless* groups. I apply the term "fraudulent" to that class which worries insurance companies. It comes into the sphere of ordinary crime as merely an exploitation (obtaining money by false pretences), and has nothing to do with the subject proper, because insanity as a rule does not enter into the question, and the criminals concerned do not come under asylum notice. Therefore any further reference to arson in these notes, unless otherwise stated, will refer solely to the other group. The word "purposeless" is open to criticism, because many of the offences will be seen to be committed with a definite end in view on the part of the offender—for example, revenge—but it is meant for those cases where there is no pecuniary or further gain to the perpetrator other than the commission of the act.

Types.

In this series purposeless arson is usually committed on readily inflammable material, and resolves itself into two types: (1) *stack-firing* (65 cases), and (2) *setting fire to buildings* whose chief constituent is wood (35 cases, 10 of which were those of farms or outhouses in outdoor areas). It is obvious, then, that most of the offences take place in the country, and the following figures show that the majority of the perpetrators were connected in some capacity with farm or outdoor work. As large a proportion as 77 per cent. are classified as "labourers." This classification includes agricultural and general outdoor labourers, gardeners' assistants, and domestic servants. The remaining 23 per cent. are classed as "various," which includes many forms of occupation, from coal-trimmer and policeman to commercial traveller and "of independent means." Both sexes are included—91 males, 9 females.

Reasons.

The chief reasons given were:

Revenge	...	...	...	...	...	32
For being refused work.	...	...	...	...	...	
For dismissal.	...	...	...	...	...	
For grievances, real or fancied.	...	...	...	...	...	
Fond of fire	...	...	...	...	...	5
"Desirous of seeing a blaze."	...	...	...	...	...	
Wanton destruction	...	...	...	...	...	5
Response to voices	...	...	...	...	...	4
Self-destruction	...	...	...	...	...	3
"Various"	...	...	...	...	...	28
"Unassigned"	...	...	...	...	...	23

"Various" includes solitary instances as follows. "To burn the devil"; "cursed by a witch"; "call of the Blood Alliance"; "because it was cold"; and many others, chiefly showing a response to delusions of a persecutory nature. "Unassigned" occurs in those whose mental condition was that of dementia praecox, epilepsy, hysteria, due to alcohol, etc.

Trial.

At the trials the following were the findings and sentences:

1. Insane on arraignment, and detained during His Majesty's pleasure	...	...	35
2. Guilty but insane, and detained during His Majesty's pleasure	...	...	26
3. Guilty, and penal servitude or imprisonment	...	...	39

Of (3) it is of interest to note that before the Mental Deficiency Act, 1913, the number sentenced to penal servitude or imprisonment was 27; after the passing of the 1913 Act, but before the 1927 Act, the number sentenced to penal servitude or imprisonment was 12. Of the 27 sentenced before the 1913 Act, 14 were subsequently certified as mentally defective; 1 as suffering from dementia praecox; and 12 as backward + psychosis. Of the 12 sentenced after the 1913 Act, but before the 1927 Act, 5 were subsequently certified as mentally defective, and 7 as backward + psychosis.

In the series 17 had previous convictions for arson:

- 1 had 4 previous convictions, was very backward + psychosis.
 - 4 had 3 previous convictions: 3 mentally defective; 1 backward + psychosis.
 - 3 had 2 previous convictions: 1 mentally defective; 2 backward + psychosis.
 - 9 had 1 previous conviction: 4 mentally defective; 5 backward + psychosis—
- a total of 8 mentally defective and 9 backward + psychosis.

Epilepsy and Automatism.

In the series 13 suffered from epilepsy (11 grand mal, 2 petit mal). Of the total, 7 (5 grand mal and 2 petit mal cases) showed automatism after their seizures, but only 3 of the grand mal and the 2 petit mal patients committed their offences during post-epileptic automatism. A short summary of these 5 is appended.

Petit mal cases:

1. Policeman with a history, from many sources, of curious acts after seizures. Several mysterious fires occurred on his beat and were traced to him, yet he was unaware of having caused them.
2. Grocer, with bad family history; his father, paternal grandfather, and three paternal uncles had been insane. He himself was weak-minded, unstable, and alcoholic, in addition to being epileptic. He set fire to his own house.

The grand mal patients who committed their offences during automatism were all very backward types. Reports showed:

1. "Made persistent attempts to set fire to the house."
2. "Mentally weak, with 'arsonical monomania.'"
3. Set fire to a barn. "Struck others after fits." "Impulsive."

Alcohol.

Alcohol was the stated exciting factor in 7 of the series. There were numerous others the reverse of abstainers, but the above seven appear to have been in a condition of, or bordering on, delirium tremens.

Stack-firing does not come under this exciting factor; they all seem to attack their own habitations. Every one set fire to the house in which he was then residing, whether as householder or lodger. Perhaps the extravagant carelessness of the intoxicated may have been an added cause, or an endeavour to consume the terrifying illusions or hallucinations conceived by their faulty perceptions. All of this type were of the physically robust and energetic class; five were general labourers, one a grocer, the last an "artist." The grocer is the one referred to under "Epilepsy." The "artist" attended school until he was 14 years old, reaching Standard V; he was described as lazy and eccentric, and had previously been in a mental hospital. His general demeanour and work showed that the "artist" was a misnomer, and he proved to be merely a verbalist.

General Paralysis.

Only two suffered from general paralysis of the insane, a disease surprisingly rare in Broadmoor.

1. Reached only Standard I at school, and had always been mentally retarded.
2. Engine driver. Set fire to several outhouses, called people's attention to the fires and gleefully watched the firemen's effort to subdue the flames; probably an expression of the playful tendencies of the general paralytic.

Dementia Praecox.

In a condition noted for negativism and impulse one would expect it to loom more largely in the list, but only three suffered from this disease.

1. Commercial traveller. Had delusions of persecution, that he was followed by his enemies everywhere, and set fire to a haystack in order to get to prison, where the high walls would keep them away.
2. Clerk. Became apathetic and disinterested in his work. He watched a bungalow being constructed, and when the work was completed and the furniture installed, he broke in and set it on fire, causing its total destruction. He is alternately lethargic and restless, solitary and negativistic.
3. Gardener. Had periods of seclusiveness and inattention to work. Even during remissions is not anxious to discuss his case.

GENERAL NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS.

In these 100 cases one feature is outstanding, and that is the lack of education. Forty-four were mentally defective and could not be educated. Fifty lacked the power of application, and were so retarded that their educational attainments were limited. The remainder, supposed to be of brighter intellect, were more of the verbalist type, garrulous no doubt, and considered by some to be good conversationalists. On the surface they were apparently good, but none really had any depth of general education. The "clerk" can talk glibly of ships, but is poor at figures. The "commercial traveller" was an inferior writer of letters. The "lady of independent means" could talk of her wealth (not delusional), but on general topics was poor. One might correctly, then, assume that purposeless arson is only committed by persons who lack education. They have been untrained in the usual warnings of childhood, and if they have received warnings or chidings against fire they have soon forgotten or have not absorbed them.

In prison life one finds many reasons assigned for committing offences, and, true or otherwise, they are often excuses such as out of work and hungry, or a profession of amnesia. Except in the alcoholic and epileptic groups in this series, it is remarkable how often a definite reason, without excuse or attempt at mitigation, is given. Again, in prison, innocence, real or false, is often the plea, but, save the above exceptions, in this incendiarism it is notable how seldom there is denial of guilt. Occasionally there is an endeavour to show justification, but the reason is given freely, and the perpetration of the act admitted in most of the cases.

It would appear proverbial that "once a stack-firer, always a stack-firer," and all with repeated offences of arson showed remarkable consistency in their methods. With one exception, those who had been previously convicted set fire to haystacks and used the same methods of incendiarism. The one exception set fire to a barn his first time, and served a sentence of penal servitude. On release he not only committed a like offence, but actually set fire to the same barn. These are signs of the ineducable, the dull, and the backward—their minds running in one groove, with no foresight, ability to plan, initiative, or originality.

Of the 65 cases of stack-firing 36, or 55 per cent., of the culprits were definitely certifiable as mentally defective, while of the remainder all but half a dozen were of the backward type. This includes all those who never reached a high standard at school (Standard VI being credited as "high") owing to inability to learn or lack of application. All of them would certainly come under the classification of moron, the majority as feeble-minded. They are the more notable types of unemployed, or, more correctly, unemployable, who, owing to repeated refusals of work, or dismissal after brief trial, think the world "up against them," believe they are unwanted, and develop resentment and the sense of persecution, with which their inferior minds and morals cannot cope. Usually they progress, or

rather degenerate, into definite delusional insanity, culminating in some purposeless act, such as stack-firing. As to them the world has obviously shown its dislike, they therefore choose an obvious expression of their defiance by demonstrative incendiarism.

In Broadmoor, in this series of cases of patients found or certified insane, stack-firing is clearly the act of those definitely retarded, peculiarly the province of the mentally defective. They lack active cerebration, cannot conceive the terrible consequences which might ensue, the probable loss of life, serious damage, and the possibility of punishment. Rather in their childish ways do they look on themselves as heroic. In one case there was loss of life, in others heavy pecuniary loss, one case resulting in £36,000 damage. In these two outstanding cases the perpetrators were defectives who would nowadays be promptly certified under the Mental Deficiency Act. There are records of only two female stack-firers, both farm domestic servants. Probably the fact that until recently women were non-smokers, and did not, as a rule, carry matches, may have had something to do with that.

Of the 35 who set fire to buildings or their contents 11, or 31 per cent., were definitely certifiable as mentally defective; 18, or 52 per cent., were backward and showed psychoses; the remaining 6, or 17 per cent., were supposed to have had a fair degree of education. Whereas there were only 2 women among the stack-firers, in this group there are 7, or 20 per cent. of the total.

Whilst under asylum care the majority of the patients are, as a rule, well-behaved, but few seek to take advantage of any opportunities to learn, even when they possess limited ability. Those who, labouring under the stress of persecution, committed arson, have usually other wilfully demonstrative methods of showing dislike, such as tearing up sheets, etc., and require careful supervision. There is little room for improvement, and they generally degenerate into dementia.

I am indebted to the Home Office and to Dr. H. P. Foulerton, medical superintendent of Broadmoor, for permission to publish these notes, and, in conclusion, I would add that any observations expressed are not necessarily official opinions.

AN INSTITUTE OF RAY THERAPY.

A VOLUNTARY "LIGHT" CLINIC FOR LONDON.

An Institute of Ray Therapy has recently been opened in the borough of St. Pancras—in effect, a voluntary special hospital in which actinotherapy is the sole method of treatment—and both by reason of its scale and equipment and the manner in which its work is to be organized it merits the attention of the medical profession. The building, in the Camden Road, with its pleasant white exterior and lattice shutters, gives a distinctive touch to a rather drab thoroughfare. It is still, in large part, in the workmen's hands, but a considerable block is completed, and patients are already being treated. Ray therapy, it should be understood, means only what is popularly known as light treatment, and the subtitle of the institute is "Sunlight Clinic"; it has nothing to do with x rays or with massage or any form of hydrotherapy.

Some fifteen months ago a business man of Kentish Town, Mr. G. F. Kimber, called upon Dr. William Beaumont, the physician in charge of the municipal sunlight clinic, St. Pancras, and offered to give £10,000 towards the establishment of an institution for ray treatment for the poor, the institution not to be run for profit, but to be on the lines of a voluntary hospital, providing treatment free for the necessitous and otherwise for working people, at small fees adjusted to the patient's means. A trust was created, an organization brought into being, a site discovered, and the work put in hand, part of the original donation being expended in the purchase of land and buildings. Dr. Beaumont himself, the honorary medical director, disclaims any idea that it has been a "one man show," but there is little doubt that he and his wife, who is the honorary secretary, have been the moving spirits in a venture which it is hoped may eventually be the means of treating 20,000 cases a year, and do much to establish on proper lines the position of actinotherapy in this country.

The institute has been formed with three objects in view: first, to provide treatment for sick and poor persons by means