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Patients with Drinking Problems

SIR,—Dr. Griffith Edwards's paper on this subject (16 November, p. 435) was of great interest. In my ophthalmic practice I have four chronic simple glaucoma cases under treatment with these same problems. The clinical association between fluid intake and consequent ocular hypertension is of course well known, but its importance not always recognized.

One patient presented on several Mondays with ocular hypertension in his only eye. The cause was puzzling, as during the week his tension was much lower. I went into his drinking habits and found that he consumed eight or nine pints of beer regularly on Saturday and Sunday evenings. Another one-eyed patient had similar connected drinking and ocular problems. Advice to change to spirits and to cut down

total fluid intake has in due course earned me an admonishment from his general practitioner to the effect that the patient looks like getting cirrhosis of the liver, thanks to my advice.

The point of this letter is to suggest that when trying to determine the aetiology of glaucoma, particularly in middle-aged males, apart from the usual purely ophthalmic diagnostic procedures, and inquiry into emotional problems or worries, it may also help to inquire into the patient's drinking habits, the results of the latter inquiry being often of appreciable interest and help in treating a very difficult and complicated disease.—I am, etc.,

C. W. A. SEARLE.

London S.W.15.

The XYY Male

SIR,—Your legal correspondent (9 November, p. 398) discussed the recent trial in Australia at which a man was acquitted of a charge of murder, apparently because he had an XYY sex chromosome complement, and, rightly, he suggests that no particular significance should be attached to this case at this point in time. At about the same time a French court reached a decision which did not lead to the acquittal of another XYY man who had been charged with murder.

There are possibly now those who have entered one score on the credit side and another on the debit side of the ledger, the significance of credit and debit depending very much on the different professional backgrounds of the scorers. The defence in both cases might have been different had it not been for the discovery in 1965 and 1966 of the high incidence of XYY males in the British maximum security hospitals, an incidence so high that it was clearly not due to chance, nor were there any grounds for suspecting it due to biased sampling. This

discovery has led to a world-wide search for these males in maximum security institutions, in prisons, among juvenile delinquents, and among the psychiatrically disturbed. At the same time the discovery has itself been discovered by the popular news media, and a good deal of nonsense has been written and broadcast about the "born criminal" and about the "criminal" chromosome.

Those who speak in this way, and possibly also some of those who are professionally concerned with the XYY male, tend to overlook two rather disturbing features about our present knowledge of these individuals. The first is that the bulk of our information on XYY's is based on the examination of adults found from the surveying of groups of men which by definition consist of men the great majority of whom, if not all, have criminal records. The second feature is our lack of knowledge of the incidence of XYY males at birth or in the general adult population of men. Until this is made good it seems that the only conclusion that can be reached at

present about a male with extra Y chromosome is that, by comparison with an XY male, he incurs some increased risk of developing a psychopathic personality. There are no data which permit a quantitative evaluation of this increase; it may be small or it may be considerable.

There is, however, no evidence which indicates that an XYY male is inexorably bound to develop anti-social and criminal traits, and in fact our own experience in Edinburgh suggests a spectrum of behaviour ranging from the apparently normal through those with a mild personality defect to those who are severe psychopaths. Some are high-grade defectives, but by no means all, and the concept of the "born criminal," if it means that XYY males are predestined to lives of crime, is highly misleading. To call an extra Y chromosome the "criminal" chromosome as has been done by the popular news media seems odd, when no such notoriety is accorded the extra X chromosome in XXY males, for there are reasons to believe that they also incur some added risk of behavioural disturbances.—We are, etc.,

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Breathalyser Tests

SIR,—Dr. J. H. Henderson (9 November, p. 391) need not worry about people washing their mouths and dentures before giving an Alcotest ("breathalyser") sample.

It has been repeatedly shown¹ that the only thing that will reliably eliminate the mouth alcohol effect is time, and that neither washing the mouth with water nor the presence