

ON THE CAUSES OF THE INCREASE OF INSANITY—HEREDITY.

THE manifest increase of insanity constitutes one of the strongest incentives to public health work, or preventive effort, more especially in effort toward EDUCATING the public, as distinct from COERCIVE sanitary proceedings. To prevent disease,—diseased bodily conditions, is unquestionably to prevent insanity, whether hereditary or otherwise. That lunacy is generally on the increase, seems to be certain, as the number of deaths from suicide certainly is. In the United States, as we have elsewhere noted, in the 20 years from 1860 to 1880, the number of insane persons in the asylum increased 250 per cent. among a fixed number of the native population.

The causes of insanity, or of the increase of it, we will consider under two heads:—hereditary and acquired. We will first notice some conditions of heredity, and later, the causes of these. According to the late and widely known Dr. R. P. Howard of Montreal, in an address delivered a few years ago on means for preventing the increase of insanity, "No man can go mad from any amount of mental suffering, unless he has in him an insane neurosis,—a pre-disposition, whether hereditary or otherwise, to go mad." Referring to hereditary influence, that through the infantile population. Dr. Howard said: It is necessary to classify according to mental organization. Some children are born into the world of strong, healthy parents, physically strong, and of a mental organization healthy, strong and well balanced, that is, well balanced with regard to intellectual and moral faculties. These are fortunate children that God and nature has done well for. A child of such a stamp, under ordinary training, becomes a great man, great in the true sense of the word, no matter in what position of life he may be...that man will do right, because it is right. He will grow up strong in body and mind. No amount of mental suffering will break him down. He will never find his way into a Lunatic Asylum.

"Some children are born weak in body and in mental organization, but at the same time with the intellectual and moral faculties well balanced. Such a child having wise parents and teachers, who will attend properly to his physical and mental education, will have his moral and

intellectual faculties well developed, as he will have his physical force; and although never equal to the other, he will nevertheless be a great man, and never likely to become deranged. But should he be neglected or badly treated in youth, God help him when a heavy trial comes on him.

Then again we have, as Dr. Howard gives it, the "child, perhaps physically strong, with high intellectual and low moral faculties, that is a badly balanced mental organization. If his moral education is not well attended to in his youth, and by such education his moral faculties developed, he grows up a bad and dangerous man; and the more dangerous that he is smart and bright. Such a man is known by his moral crookedness and egotism. It is such men that we find sharpers, swindlers, gamblers, etc., men who worm themselves into the confidence of families, and make their homes desolate. These are men who do not know what honor means. They are mean men;... generally too clever to be caught in the meshes of the law; men who as a rule are the curses of society. When the storm comes on them, not having any strong moral faculties to fall back upon, they break down and become insane.

Yet again, in another class of children "we have the child of high moral and low intellectual faculties. If such a child gets a fair chance, his moral faculties will stimulate his intellectual, so that he may rank in time with ordinary men. But if his intellectual faculties are not well attended to in his youth, he will grow up a religious fanatic, a "one-idea man"... He generally ends in becoming a maniac.

Another class are imbeciles. "These are children of very low mental organization, differing, however, in degree. There are some that can, by great perseverance on the part of parents and teachers, be brought to learn much, yet, under no circumstances will they ever be of a strong mind, and very little trouble of any kind will drive them into a Lunatic Asylum. It is from this class, when neglected in youth and brought up in a state of moral depravity, that our most vile criminals come.... The last order of classification is the congenital idiot. He is generally, but not always, the offspring of imbeciles.

From the foregoing facts Dr. Howard