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THE CAUSES OF MENTAL IMPAIRMENT IN CHILDREN.

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SENSORIAL DEFECTS. DEFECTIVE ORGANS AND FUNCTIONS.

Faulty habits of thought and action, early established by accidental conditions, mould character and influence mental growth. Whether the effect will fall upon the individual only, or be transmissible, may fail to appear, but the presumption is that it does pass on. For example, a child of an active, restless brain exhibits amusing capacities in extravagant words and thoughts, and encouraged to cultivate this, forms the habit of using loose comments, inexact remarks merely of amiable hyperbole or acid derogation, misrepresentations, additions, and embellishments of simple facts, too often about people, colored by their own temporary estimate of these, a growing imagination, in short, lies and falsifications. Let this continue, and the outcome is moral astigmatism, growing into possibly creative fancies, and poetic or fictional scribbling, more probably a moral pervert or worse. A healthy contact with frank critics of a similar age and walk in life, plus a fair amount of good sense, and this facility may prove a boon. An atmosphere of silly adulation on one of shallow parts, and the resultant may be merely a blatant ass. Let these qualities arise in one of small moral fibre, or of selfish vanity, and a dangerous enemy to the community is fostered. At all events the character sustains thereby a warping which is permanent.

Take another illustration, suggested to me by a gentleman himself, an acutely sensitive sufferer from similar misfortune. Suppose a child to be endowed with normal brain and mind, but with perhaps less than usual audacity, and yet of impaired power of articulation as from some anatomic defect, cleft palate, or such like fault, or more commonly the disorder of stammering. As companions learn his difficulty in giving utterance to spontaneous thoughts, they take advantage of this in various ways, not aggressively it may be, but slowness to speak is recognized as a bar to many activities, both in the value of thought and physical movements. This child has certain ideas which should be promptly uttered to produce their best effects. They should come out clear and precise, just as the mind formed them, and in all this they fail. A second attempt is made to use other words, easier to phonate, or of shorter or simpler sentence construction, but of probably less vigor than first conceived. Even a