

quently been puzzled in reading the history, as outlined by the family physician, and particularly his answer to the question as to the duration of the insanity. Too often the answer is vague and unsatisfactory. Often one event or experience is cited, while if the real facts were given we might learn that the mental symptoms were merely the culmination of a long train of pernicious influences in a person already predisposed by heredity and environment to mental disease. The alleged causes are by no means invariably the real ones in the development of insanity, and the clinical facts brought out rather indicate preliminary symptoms that have been passed over unnoticed by the friends of the patient.

An attack of mental disease cannot be regarded as a simple or localized phenomenon. There is a harmony of action existing between the brain and the nerve centres in the cord and the special ganglia of the organic systems of the body. The sensory apparatus often presents the first indications of degeneration. The mental cortex is apparently the centre of the organism. The higher the centre the greater do we find the power of resistiveness. If the defences are weak, as in the great number whose history is blighted by the taint of heredity, the natural resistiveness is noticeably weakened. It is for this class especially that the importance of the early recognition of premonitory symptoms appeals to us, for in those not naturally predisposed to insanity many of the symptoms to which I have called attention occur without any mental attack. The element of heredity so often prevails that the importance of careful study and attention to the preliminary symptoms, especially the manifestations of disturbance in the lower nerve centres, indicating that a storm is approaching, cannot be too strongly urged. The progress in our knowledge of mental diseases is certainly pointing more clearly to the fact that all the varied phenomena that we now know as insanity should be regarded as merely an expression of departure from a normal condition in which the whole nervous system is concerned.

We cannot shut our eyes to the fact that insanity is on the increase and that if we are to combat that advance success must be sought by adopting prophylactic measures. To prevent insanity were better than to cure it, which, we know too well, is often impossible. The task may indeed be a difficult one in which to accomplish anything like a measure of success, when we are so often brought face to face with the baneful influences of heredity. Even, however, with that seemingly insurmountable barrier in our pathway, we may, I am persuaded, do much, not only by discouraging its propagation from generation to generation, but, by an early recognition of those symptoms which so often are a prelude to insanity, may in many instances turn aside the current which points towards a condition we are all gratified to see our patients escape.