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EPILEPTIC INSANITY.*

BY DR. MILLMAN, OF TORONTO.

Epileptic insanity, as the name implies, is the disease known as epilepsy combined with mental derangement. Epileptic fits may continue for years with very slight, or, indeed, with no appreciable mental disturbance, especially if the fits are few and far between. In fact, such rare fits are compatible with great mental power. Julius Cæsar, Mahomet, Napoleon I., are said to have had such occasional attacks. But it is true, as Clouston in his work on mental diseases sets forth, "Frequent recurrence of epileptic fits for many years tends in some degree to impair the mental faculties, to dim the reasoning power, to twist or take the fine edge off the feelings, emotions, and sensibilities, to affect the memory, and to change the 'character,' even where there is no actual insanity."

It is usual for the insanity not to follow at once the first appearance of the fits. Most commonly years elapse before it comes on. Violent mania has, however, succeeded the very first fit, or at least the first fit the patient was known to have had.

The mental derangement of the epileptic may assume the form of maniacal excitement, of melancholic depression, of mental enfeeblement or dementia, or of delusional perversion,

or perversions of the moral being: any one or more of these states may be revealed by the patient.

I might here add that, although I have had large experience in observing cases of epileptical insanity, still in preparing this paper I am indebted to the writings of Gower, Clouston, Maudsley, Bennett, Seguin, W. Bevan-Lewis; in fact, from the latter I have quoted quite freely.

To witness a typical epileptic fit, one is surprised that the patient ever again returns to a normal mental condition, and particularly so soon after the fit. There is such a brutal expenditure of force wholly out of proportion to the normal physiological outlay. The explosive violence is so severe that the nervous tracts traversed by the storm are so damaged that transiently they are incapacitated for the further conduction of the nerve current, and the centre itself is paralyzed for the time by its enormous expenditure of energy. The mind, however, is prone to suffer only when the functional disturbance occurs in the highest nervous arrangements of the cerebral cortex—"the substrata of consciousness." It is thus important to remember that any one part of the cerebral cortex may be the site of an epileptic discharge. Discharges in motor realms will afford endlessly diversified combinations and sequences of spasms, while discharges from sensory realms will likewise implicate correspondingly complex centres. Discharges beginning in motor centres may spread to others and finally involve the

*Read before the Ontario Medical Association.