

EXPECTANCY OF LIFE IN MORBID CONDITIONS OF THE RESPIRATORY SYSTEM.

IN valuing the expectancy of life in conditions of the respiratory tract, it is all important to have regard for every element bearing upon the hereditary, social and moral aspects of the life in question. There can be no denying the fact that heredity plays an important part in the conditions of the respiratory tract. The old dictum of Heine, "We cannot be too careful in the choice of our parents," should always be before our eyes in dealing with this complex question. It is contrary to the natural law that we can in any manner escape our hereditary predispositions.

In reference to hereditary diathesis, this also may be laid down to that acquired disease, and the effects caused by disease cannot in general be transmitted in such a way that the offspring presents lesions identical with those produced in the parent. There is the possibility of a certain amount of transmission, not of the identical lesion caused by the disease in the parent, but by a modification or impaired condition of the germ plasm. We must recognize that constitutional disease, by leading to disturbance in the activity of the important organs, plays not only directly upon these organs, but, secondarily, upon other organs; that it leads, for example, to altered conditions of the blood, and so to altered nutrition of the cells of the body. Many other cells—the germ cells—may be directly affected. their idio-plasm modified, and the offspring directly influenced. Conditions affecting the parents are capable of influencing and modifying the descendants. It is this which is forcibly brought home to us in our medical work. It is changes of this order which are almost invariably unsuspected by the biologists, for they are not within their ken. The changes brought about in the tissues by what is assigned chronic intoxication may be so slight as to be unappreciable. Microscopical examination may reveal nothing; only by their physiological effects can their existence be recognized.