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INSANITY—ITS INCREASE AND CAUSES.

Several years ago it was asserted in the *SANITARY JOURNAL* that in Great Britain and on this Continent, if not throughout the civilized world, insanity was evidently increasing. The press generally, and medical journals in particular, did not recognize the fact of the increase, but, for the most part, rather denied it, and attributed the fact of increased numbers in the various lunatic Asylum chiefly to a better appreciation of the value of these asylums in the management of the insane, and hence a greater number taking advantage of asylum accommodation for their demented friends, and to other causes. Within the last year it seems to be almost universally admitted that there is really an increase in the number of cases of insanity, and at the present time few subjects are creating greater interest; while the causes of the increase are being considered and discussed.

Not infrequently the question is asked, "what is insanity"? The line of demarcation between the sane and the insane has never been very well defined; the most experienced experts being sometimes very much puzzled in their endeavors to decide whether a certain person is or is not in his or her right mind—whether or not such a person is wholly responsible for acts committed. A distinguished expert in lunacy before a royal Commission in Great Britain once said: "gentlemen, there is but one sane mind in the universe". No man's mind, as no man's body, is perfect; and judgment, too,

upon the sanity or insanity of any one must be formed and passed by imperfect minds. Unquestionable, whether there is or is not any particular mark or boundary over which one hitherto in a "right mind" must pass before being regarded as "*Non compos mentis*, in the present rapid "progress" of the human family, in the race for life, for wealth, for position, for present luxuries or future ease, in the over indulgences permitted and encouraged by improved conditions, without improved powers of self control, a larger number of minds than formerly are becoming unbalanced and incapable of performing the duties of life.

And what are the real, definable causes? Numerous indeed and varied they are. Says Prof. Hitchcock of Amherst College, Mas.: "Whenever we read the tables of causes of insanity in the reports on Lunacy we are appalled not only at the number of inmates, but also at the number of causes which induce insanity. Religious influences too weak or too strong—moral impressions, emotional energies,* will, much or little aestheticism, debauchery, licentiousness, irresolution, and many others, may be found under the mental and moral causes; while the physical or bodily causes are almost covered by the sweeping assertion that every disease, and almost every bodily accident, injury, or sometimes disorder, can plainly be said to be the cause of the insane condition."

Now are not these causes, mental and physical alike, almost all if not all, more or less removable or preventable? Yes,