

others that might be recalled as fads in medicine, to show that with an inexact science the pendulum of fashion may swing too far out for either truth or safety. I believe there is a danger of the pendulum swinging too far out in the matter of contagion in tuberculosis, to the neglect of hereditary predisposition. In correspondence with medical examiners for our company, I catch traces of the thought that is in the air—that tuberculosis is not hereditary. The idea permeates the lay mind, and has taken a considerable hold upon a certain portion of the professional mind as well. The agent is always alive to press the new quasi-scientific fact upon the doctor who examines; and gentlemen, it is surprising the impression which a good, hard-eyed agent can make upon some doctors—examiners—by looking him square in the face and saying slowly, and as one who knows: "But doctor, consumption is not hereditary, you know that, being a doctor, and reading the latest advances in the science of bacteriology." I have, myself, experienced just such nerve from agents. Now, I wish to say advisedly that, Koch, the microscope, asepsis, and all the recent advances in medicine and surgery notwithstanding, we have not a monopoly of the wisdom of the ages in our present time. Men saw, and observed, and reasoned, and thought before the microscope revealed the tubercle bacillus, and they noted that tuberculosis was hereditary. We cannot afford to let go old landmarks, which are the crystallization of centuries of thought and observation by great minds, without taking chances of making great errors.

There is a law in nature, which seems to be universal, viz.: that in the evolution of the species—and by species we mean, for the purpose of this paper, man—the characteristics last to be acquired by the individual, race, or species, are those which are first to be lost in time of stress. This is very evident in nervous diseases. One of the latest acquirements of man, as a species, is higher mentality. This distinguishes him from the lower animals. So an individual whose full development is arrested, is very liable to show a greater or less degree of mental instability. Again, such an individual is liable to show a peculiar susceptibility to the infections which attack human beings. Time will not allow me to discuss this point from the strictly scientific side. The amount of thought which has been given to the question of heredity has been enormous. Some of the best minds that the world has produced have given their best efforts to the elucidation of the subject. In the middle ages, Von Helmont; later, Buffon, Herbert Spencer, Haeckel, Weismann, Nageli and Darwin—names surely to conjure with in science—each worked strenuously to arrive at definite conclusions. Pure mathematics have been invoked as an aid to systematize such conclusions, and I am tempted to give you a