

commencement, extent, manner of propagation, periodic occurrence, geographical distribution, racial influence, although still obscure in many points, that directs our attention towards certain laws which govern susceptibility, and therefore, cohesion of the human aggregate. Most instructive are those epidemics which are psychic, in which no physical, material contagion exists, but which are communicated by, and disturb the mind purely through the senses. Of these there have been outbreaks in different parts of the world in one form or another and at one time or another. The ground for their development is always prepared by great exhausting upheavals (famine, war, plagues, etc.) which unbalance the human mentality, paralyse restraint, judgment and throw, therefore, the savage animal, imitating nature and common instincts of man into most extraordinary relief.

These psychic epidemics depend all upon a morbid enthusiasm of one thing or another, often augmented by hatred, leagued with baser passions, but frequently cloaked in, and supported by, a mantle of virtue. Their desire is to satiate long suppressed emotions, jealousy, revenge and sensuous pleasures which are ordinarily suppressed by conventions.

Furthermore, these mental states have generally been taken advantage of by the unscrupulous who, in order to gain their own ends and profits, join, encourage and propagate the particular expression of a deranged mentality.

Thus whole cities, districts and countries have succumbed to strange mental attitudes and actions.

Of these psychic epidemics many exist, but hardly any is more interesting and instructive than the so-called "Dancing Mania" which, in changing but essentially similar form, occurring in greater or lesser extent in all countries of the old and new world, has been in evidence from the middle ages to the present generation and has appeared under, and consequent to, similar environmental influences.

The facts and evidence of this epidemic were carefully collected, critically reviewed and masterly presented by Hecker in his great work on the Epidemics of the middle ages, which appeared from 1832 to 1834, and which includes an account of the "Black Death," "The Dancing Mania" and "The sweating sickness." At the instigation of the council of the Sydenham Society, appreciating the importance of the work, an excellent English translation by Babington appeared in their publications in 1844, with annotations and references to originals, making the work available to English readers. Creating a great impression at the time in its historic and psychological bearings, it was gradually more or less lost sight of, even by the medical profession and historians for whom it had been principally written. Thus, at the present day, much of its historic and psychological value and influence has been obliterated.