

# ON THEORIES OF INHERITANCE, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE INHERITANCE OF ACQUIRED CONDITIONS IN MAN.\*

BY

J. G. ADAMI, M.A., M.D., F.R.S.E.,

Professor of Pathology, McGill University, Montreal.

Questions of inheritance at the present moment occupy a curious position in the minds of medical men and in medical literature. To judge from the medical press, we medical men are very Gallios—we care for none of these things. And yet, in family as in consulting practice, questions concerning heredity must and do continually present themselves. In attempting to arrive at a conclusion about a given case, we are bound to ask ourselves how far the frailties or follies of progenitors are responsible for the conditions found—how far the accidents or the sins of the individual. Each succeeding day you must have this question of possible inherited defect brought before you; constantly must you be forced not merely to inquire whether certain phenomena are matters of inheritance, but assuredly to recognize that this or other condition runs through all the members of a family and is an inherited weakness. And yet, although the lay reviews discuss the matter familiarly, and although perchance the charming partner you take in to dinner does the same, we scarce write about these things, save in connection with one or two branches of medicine, and when we do, I have no hesitation in stating, though it is a bold statement, that much of what is written is misleading.

Even in my own subject of pathology, treating as it does of the causes, the processes and the results of disease, in the discussion of which the laws of inheritance should obviously be carefully studied, if inheritance plays even a debatable part; turn to any of the text-books in our language and what do we find? A single page, or it may be but a single paragraph, is thought sufficient to introduce and to take leave of the subject. In short, from a concatenation of circumstances the medical study of inheritance is largely “taboo.” Why is this?

It depends upon more than one factor. In the first place, while, as I shall point out later, the study of man is singularly well adapted for determining certain points in connection with inheritance, the fact that the generations of man follow each other at such relatively long inter-

---

\*The first of a series of annual addresses under the auspices of the Brooklyn Medical Club, delivered May 17, 1901.