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PSYCHIC EPIDEMICS

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THE physician, in order to diagnose and prognose a disease in a patient properly, finds it necessary to obtain full knowledge of the whole personal and family history. Thus also, the medical historian approaches and studies diseases as generic phenomena and expressions from which he endeavours to formulate general laws which govern human existence. For the historian, whether his pursuits are medical, political or moral, is confronted by human life as aggregate. He may even go beyond it and treat the human phase only as a part of a general living being. His duty is to determine what is common to all life, to what extent its forms differ and how its parts move in, and are related to, their environment. For one of the greatest questions is, whether all organic life and again each unit of life represent only aggregates of individuals, or, whether they are entities in the same sense that the individual himself is an entity, not a simple summation of cells. Here each component must follow certain laws which are dictated by the unit as a whole. This is of fundamental importance in the interpretations of human history, no matter from which standpoint we view it. Does the human collective unit move of necessity according to certain laws, are its actions determined? Should we, as the great medical historian, Hecker, early in the nineteenth century put it, "be able to deduce from the grave facts of history a convincing proof that the human race, amidst the creation which surrounds it, moves in body and soul as an individual whole?" Is the individuality of persons and nations which we value so highly, only a ripple on the vast ocean of mankind, whose movements bring forth the ripple, but in their own massiveness and force remain hidden underneath, unnoticed by the casual observer, until a violent outbreak through a gale discloses their presence and power to a surprised spectator?

It is in this connection that medical history may demand general recognition, for it discloses plainer than any other branch of history two closely related common human characteristics—susceptibility and cohesion. It is especially the history of epidemics, their origin, their