

A CONTRIBUTION TO THE STUDY OF DISEASES OF THE NERVOUS SYSTEM.

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ÆTIOLOGY OF MENTAL DISEASE.

There are few of our asylums where, in the annual report, there does not appear a table setting forth the cause of the mental attack; but for myself I do not regard these facts of the highest value when accumulated year after year, or think that they furnish very important data, and they do not demonstrate, to me at least, the etiology of insanity. In the first place, these reports are compiled on no common plan, and therefore the statistics cannot be reliable. For each case of insanity in an asylum case-book, a single cause, or two causes, are allotted. It is decidedly the exception, I think, to find a single cause producing insanity in any given case, and we entirely lose sight of the collateral causation influences of the attack of cerebral disease, which to me are very important, and, I think, to any thoughtful physician. Instead of finding out one cause which I can say is the cause of a given patient's insanity, I prefer to know primarily whether hereditary tendency has contributed to the production of the mental disorder in any given case, and then to be acquainted with all the influences which have been concerned in the production of the mental disease. I think that, in most cases of mental disease, we are apt to find several factors which we cannot separate properly, and that all have played a part in inducing cerebral disease. Statistics, therefore, of the causes of insanity, are too apt to be inadequate and unsatisfactory to the student of psychological medicine, and he will gain more by studying the detailed records of individual cases and extracting his facts from such study.

Insanity is often a preventable malady. *Prevention.* Primarily, do not exhaust the brains of children by cramming process in education, which cannot fail to injure the nutrition of the brain and impair it. An immense harm is done in this way, by producing premature mental decay and nervous exhaustion, appearing about the age of puberty. The body must be developed in all its parts and organs if we want healthy mind. At present we are developing a race of children whose nervous system is far in excess of their physique, who are predisposed to the acquisition of nearly all the various forms of nervous disease upon slight exciting causes, and many of these types of nervous disease readily lapse into insanity. See to it, you who are family physicians, that the children who grow up under your care, are developed physically, even if it be at the expense of the neglect of early education. It is not the precocious child who makes the strong man mentally. Discourage all precocity and keep such children from study until they have a sound, healthy body for a foundation, and then avoid overstimulating the mind by too many studies at once. A young girl recently came under my care for complete nervous exhaustion, who was trying to master thirteen different branches at once, at her most trying period of bodily development. A system of education which allows such nonsense, cannot be too severely condemned by physicians. It is absurd for young girls to be put through a cramming process of education, which, at the critical period of life, cannot fail to weaken their nervous systems, and when this is combined with a society life, the result is a superficial education, a broken-down nervous system, and an inability in women to go through the trying duties of maternity. It is for the family