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THE MODERN TENDENCY OF THE MEDICAL ART.

In regard to the manner of conducting a thorough diagnosis of an impaired human constitution, Dr. Willard Parker, of this city used, in his lectures to the students of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, to make an appropriate comparison, likening the process to hunting up a thief known to be hidden somewhere in a large house. In place of running about, without system or plan, and looking carelessly about, the proper course is to submit each apartment of the house to a thorough and exhausting search, looking in all closets and recesses; and when sure that the thief is not in any particular room, the apartment should be closed, and the search commenced in another. So, in making a medical diagnosis, the first thing would be, for instance, to inquire into and examine the circulation of the blood, count the pulse, listen to the beating of the heart; then the respirations may be counted, the lungs sounded by percussion and auscultation, etc. All these may be normal, and then the digestion may be investigated; then the various organs of secretion, especially the liver; and if these are all found to be in working order, they may be considered as disposed of, and another section taken up, say, for instance, the nervous system: beginning with the brain, then the spine, the sympathetic nerves, etc. In proceeding in this or a similarly systematic manner, the skillful and acute physician is sure to find the disease, if it is not an imaginary one; even if the latter be the case, it is a disease of the mind, and has to be treated accordingly, sometimes merely with advice for the mind, sometimes with medicine for the body, each being adapted to the character of the patient.

This way of searching for a disease is eminently practical; but it must not be considered to be based on the old idea that a disease is like a thief or an enemy, trying to take possession of certain organs, and who must be driven out by drugs. In ancient times, many human ailments were actually attributed to personified evil beings, who could be driven out by incantations or ceremonies, and we find this belief still prevailing among certain races of savages; and we regret to say, even among certain classes of our civilized and enlightened peoples, there are some who believe in charms, and in magnetic and mesmeric manipulations. But, thanks to the light shed by recent thorough investigations in two important branches of biology, namely, physiology and pathology, more correct views now prevail among all educated physicians; and they now know that diseases are mere phenomena, proceeding from the constant and intimate relations of man with surrounding Nature; and in place of attempting to suppress such symptoms by the use of dangerous prescriptions, the properly qualified physician, knowing that every disease and symptom has a certain cause and must run a certain course, watches carefully, and, recognizing the all-powerful vis medicatrix nature, in place of interfering with Nature, he assists her efforts to save the sufferer. This is the true basis of modern enlightened medical treatment.

This rational way of considering a case shows also how absurd are the claims put forth on behalf of so-called specific remedies and the danger of treating with such nostrums the mere exterior symptoms, which may proceed from one of many different causes; and conversely, the same cause, acting on variously constituted individuals, will produce widely different symptoms. Thus, for instance, when a regiment of soldiers happens to become exposed to excessive cold and wet, a certain number will be laid up in hospital, but they will be afflicted with a variety of ailments. Those who are troubled with weak lungs will exhibit such diseases as bronchitis, cough, pleurisy, pneumonia, etc.; others will have merely colds in their heads, others rheumatism or even gout, according to their previous manner of living; in others the digestive organs will be affected, producing diarrhea, etc. In most of these cases, drugs cannot possibly be of as much benefit as rest and careful, good nursing.

In considering the statistics of diseases and mortality in olden times, so far as such figures can be obtained, it is encouraging to find that, at the present day, the mortality of large cities, such as London and Paris, has enormously decreased, and many diseases which were once very fatal are no longer so. The decreased mortality is due to modern progress in hygienic science, which has led to sanitary measures being adopted in such cities, where formerly people lived under the constant influence of an atmosphere full of effete exhalations, due to imperfect drainage and the absence of cleanliness, a real hotbed of contagion. These sanitary improvements have resulted in the total disappearance of many diseases, such as the plague and scurvy, which used to be always present, more or less, in many communities, and frequently spread and traveled to others. Small pox, of which the ravages were such that at present it is difficult to form any idea of its former malignity and universality, has, thanks to Jenner's discovery, become comparatively rare; while other diseases, such as spotted fever, dysentery, fever and ague, etc., from which many persons formerly died, have lost their fatal virulence, and now are seldom the cause of death.

Medical science is now upon a new, unselfish, and noble career, and is aiding the introduction of sanitary measures by enlightening public authorities as to the best means of preserving the health of communities by anticipating and preventing disease; and it cannot be denied that society in general has been largely benefited by the progress of medical research, and by the labors of investigators in pathology and its kindred sciences, who have given the world the benefit of their continually increasing knowledge and insight into the nature of the ailments to which human nature is subject.

IDEATION IN UTERO.

It is admitted by all physiologists that the mother exerts a general formative control over the fetus in utero. Hitherto the belief has been that this influence is altogether structural, even where it is manifested, not merely in physical resemblance, but also in active tendencies, disposition, and modes of thought and action. But there are manifestations of maternal influence which this hypothesis does not easily cover: for example, those strange, yet well authenticated, cases in which children have described or recognized places which they have never seen before, but with which the mother is familiar. Still more unaccountable has been the common and perplexing feeling which poets and speculative thinkers have held to constitute subjective evidence of previous existence—the feeling that a particular occurrence or locality witnessed or visited for the first time has been seen before—or the sensation that some particular act in the drama of life is but the repetition of something witnessed or performed in some unremembered state or period in the past. In many cases these sensations are, no doubt, vague reminiscences of dreams or equally unreal creations of the waking imagination: still, after this allowance is made, there remain instances which cannot be so accounted for. For these the most satisfactory explanation yet offered is furnished by a suggestion made in the Lancet, the other day, by Dr. Mortimer Granville.

It is well known that, for several weeks before birth, the vital organs are all in more or less full operation; also that portions of the brain are so active as to produce concerted muscular contractions and automatic movements; and there is no reason to suppose that the intimately related cerebrum is not likewise, to some extent, capable of action previous to birth. At any rate Dr. Granville contends, and with a good show of evidence, that, during at least six weeks or two months of the ordinary period of human life in utero, the brain is susceptible of passive ideation, or the reception of impressed ideas derived from the mother's mind.

There is abundant evidence that a lively though fleeting impression made on the mind of the pregnant mother, or a prolonged dominant thought or emotion, can so modify the nutrition of the child's brain as to fix on it a permanent shadow, so to speak, of that impression or mental state. Thus a child will in after years exhibit tokens of special dislike or dread of a particular animal by which the mother has been frightened during the later months of pregnancy, or will have an otherwise unaccountable antipathy to a particular person or article of food, or will unconsciously mimic through life the mother's moods or prevailing states of mind or temper during that critical period. In like manner, it is suggested that scenes or occurrences, deeply engraved or repeatedly forced upon the mind of the mother, may become fixed as images in the fetal brain, while it is yet incapable of thinking; and in later years, when they are vaguely recalled by something similar, an undefinable sense of repetition is felt. Memory, like education, thus has its beginning back of birth; and as the mother's structural and emotional characteristics are echoed in the child, so sometimes her special thoughts and ideas may be. The suggestion is a fertile one, and furnishes a clue to more than one of the mysteries of heredity.

INEBRIETY AS A DISEASE.

Ethically, there is but one view to take of inebriety; and that necessarily involves unsparing condemnation of the practice, and earnest endeavors on the part of society to reclaim those addicted to it. But Science, on the other hand, draws a broad distinction between drunkenness as a vice and drunkenness as a disease. The man who drinks for pleasure, it holds, may look for benefit in the counsels of others or in his own strength of will; but he who drinks because he cannot help it, being led by an irresistible impulse, is a sick man, and needs not a temperance pledge but a physician. It is in this last aspect that we propose to consider the assertion, quoted from a daily journal, that "intemperance is a growing vice, bearing constantly heavier upon the rising generation," and incidentally the subject of inebriety generally in this country.

Dr. George M. Beard, of this city, not long since delivered, before the American Association for the Cure of Inebriates, an address on the "causes of the recent increase of inebriety in America," in which he embodies many of the conclusions which medical men have reached relative to the disease superinduced by alcohol. Inebriety he holds to be a functional disease of the nervous system, and should be treated on the same principle as other nervous diseases. It becomes classed, therefore, with dyspepsia and neuralgia; and like neurosis, it possesses periodicity, and—the fact is a startling one—is hereditary. When hereditary, it is all the harder to combat; in conformity with the laws of inheritance, it may take the place of other disorders, or may, in turn, lead to them; and it often conduces to various forms of insanity. The periodicity of the desire for liquor, the feeling which impels the drunkard who has abstained for a certain period to enter upon a "prolonged spree," is too well known to need more than mere reference.

It is a curious and somewhat paradoxical circumstance that, while drunkenness as a vice—public opinion to the contrary notwithstanding—is actually decreasing, the disease of inebriety is on the increase. "There never was a time," says Dr. Beard, "in the history of our race, when in proportion to the population there was so little intemperance and so little drinking among the higher classes as to-day." The nervous systems of Americans are now such that we cannot bear alcohol