

it is of comparatively little use to urge its members to more labours. Again, the latest investigations into the causation of mental disorders reveal the importance of early symptoms. We desire to know the prodromes, the events of the onset—we should ascertain and record all the facts of physical and mental deterioration in the precise order of occurrence. It will be for the committee to consider such questions as these, and so to thoroughly revise and modernise the statistics of insanity.

Dr. Wigglesworth, in his most interesting and practical presidential address on some of the problems of heredity, showed how important to the welfare of humanity such studies are; and it would be well if that address made a deep impression on the minds of the Statistical Committee and issued in some more precise and useful methods of recording observations than those we at present employ. We attended the meeting in full confidence that our President would set before us facts and conclusions garnered by his wide experience and illumined by his great ability. Whatever may be said in adverse criticism of overgrown asylums, it is evident that they impose no disability on high thinking and scholarly attainments. We congratulate the Association on having elected a President who has done so much to render our last annual meeting entirely worthy of the high aims of our Association.

We have no doubt that this number of the JOURNAL will be perused with great interest, as we have been able to present to our readers much of the transactions of the Liverpool meeting. We need not refer in detail to the various items of interest, but would remark on the high standard of the work done. While the Association can attract men of science and men of affairs its progress cannot be other than triumphal.

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*The Prevention of Syphilitic Insanity.*

The prevention of disease, apart from the so-called preventable diseases, has at last attracted the attention of the public, as evidenced by the movements now in progress in regard to tuberculosis and cancer.

Syphilis, the most preventable of all diseases, is also now beginning to be brought into notice by the medical profession,

and we trust that the same success may attend efforts in this direction as in the two above-named diseases.

The dissemination of syphilis of late years has been permitted to be carried out to an unlimited extent, especially under the ægis of the religious (?) feeling of the country, and the plea of the liberty of the subject. The liberty of the subject to spread scarlatina and even smallpox has been greatly interfered with, but this more dangerous disease is allowed to be disseminated under the most favourable conditions, until at last it is becoming a national evil.

Insanity resulting from syphilis is probably the most obvious of all the innumerable evils resulting from it, although in every medical text-book on every disease the part that syphilis plays is luridly painted.

Statistical evidence of syphilitic insanity is, however, very defective, and bears witness to something wanting in our methods of arriving at the actual rather than the apparent causes of disease. In the Report of the Commissioners in Lunacy for the year 1901, seven deaths only are ascribed to syphilis, whilst in the quinquennial average of the assigned causes (either sole or combined) on admission the number is 341. Upwards of 1200 patients suffering from general paralysis are admitted in each year, whilst no less than 1500 died of it in 1901. Yet this disease is said by some observers never to occur without syphilis. This is, however, by no means the only form of insanity which can be traced to syphilis, so that the want of record of this element of causation is indeed striking, and definitely points to a conspiracy of silence. How this difficulty is to be overcome is indeed a serious question; physicians have naturally an objection to hurting the feelings of patients' friends by stating syphilis as a cause on the death certificate, and this objection cannot readily be removed. Statistical evidence of any value could probably only be obtained by a voluntary census of the existing cases in individual asylums and if possible of all asylums. Even this would probably fall far short of the truth.

Heredity of syphilis is probably an important factor in the predisposition to insanity, being ascribed in 2 to 5 per cent. of idiots, and detectable in many persons of unsound mind.

The question we have to ask is, If syphilis were abolished, what would be the reduction in the number of cases of insanity?

Observers would give very different answers to this question, and the estimates would probably range from 5 to 15 per cent. However valuable such an estimate might be, it would not be sufficiently reliable to form a foundation for an application to Parliament for legislation to prevent the present untrammelled propagation of the disease. The Statistical Committee appointed by the Medico-Psychological Association will do good work if it can devise a method by which, without offending the susceptibilities of patients, some definite record of inherited and acquired syphilis in the insane, and of its share in the production of insanity, could be obtained, with a view to aiding in future legislation for the prevention of this disease.

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*Drug Therapeutics.*

The investigation of the therapeutic action of drugs from the darkest ages has ever been of the most unsystematic kind, nor can the present methods of arriving at their actual value be considered as satisfactorily scientific, many new drugs being introduced into professional medical use in a manner that is open to very grave objection.

The common method is for a firm of druggists to get hold of a new chemical compound whose immediate physiological effect has been tested by laboratory experiments, to persuade a number of physicians to try it, and to select for advertisement the reports that are favourable, ignoring all others. The actual advertisement is then made in what is really a monthly drug list, garnished with a little scientific quotation and a few medical platitudes, to give it the semblance of a therapeutic journal of a professional character.

The drug is then still further distributed to medical men and druggists, and some few sanguine members of the former class venture on trying it, or the public, reading the advertisements or hearing of the marvels from the chemist, press their doctors to prescribe it.

If a physician of repute takes it up, it becomes the vogue until some other novelty arises, so that at seaside resorts the chemists complain that they are heavy losers by their stocks of drugs, which in one season are contained in every prescription, and in the next are absolutely disused.