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INFANTILE INSANITY.

From the Annual Report of Dr. Woodward, of the Worcester Lunatic Hospital.

THERE is another class of unfortunate individuals, far more numerous than I had formerly supposed, and much more interesting than idiots,—I refer to **INSANE CHILDREN**.

Since I have been connected with this Hospital, I have been consulted in a number of cases of this description. These little patients have intelligent faces, well-formed bodies, good developments of the head, and active minds. Their movements are free, easy and graceful, many of them are sprightly, even handsome; they are generally restless, irritable and extremely mischievous, and are rarely able to speak. In some cases, as soon as there is any mental development, the peculiar characteristics begin to appear, without any known cause. In other cases, epileptic fits have preceded these peculiarities. In one case the use of instruments in labor was supposed to be the cause; epileptic convulsions probably sometimes arise from difficult parturition. No person familiar with these cases would be likely to mistake them for idiots; they look differently, walk differently, and have different developments of body and mind.

Some of these children have been benefited by medical treatment. One, at the present time under my care for epilepsy, seems to be improving favorably. My attention has recently been particularly directed to this subject as I have been, within a few days, consulted in three different cases, of which the epileptic child, above named, was one. I have strong hope that some of them may be cured, and then instructed. Like other insane persons, there is difficulty in fixing the attention, they move with great rapidity from one thing to another, and are impatient of restraint.

In some such persons particular faculties seem much more active than others. One lad, in whose case I was consulted, was not able to articulate, and of course had never learned to read, but was observing of many things, particularly of mechanical operations, drawing, &c. He has left many traces of his skill on the buildings and fences of his former residence, which are yet to be seen. He has now arrived at manhood, but I have no knowledge of his present condition or of his progress in improvement for the last few years. When a lad, he was extremely mischievous, but sprightly and interesting.

Within a few days I have seen a very interesting case of this description, a girl 12 years old, who has a well-formed head, an intelligent and handsome face, a bright black eye, and easy and graceful manners. She is respectful and obedient in her conduct, gentle and affectionate in her temper and disposition, and usually quiet and unobtrusive, but is easily excited, impatient when urged to do anything disagreeable to her, and if opposed utters a scream, but cannot articulate. She constantly hurries from one thing to another, and, like the insane, wants a safety valve to let off her excitement. She is excessively fond of music, would listen with apparent delight to the tones of a piano, seemed to have an irresistible desire to perform herself, and would strike the keys with eagerness and great satisfaction. In her visit to me she would seize the bellows which hung in the room, and blow them with great effort and apparent delight. She is perpetually active, but is far less mischievous than formerly. She has very little power of attention, and has, as yet, never been taught. I have referred the case to my friend, Dr. Howe, whose great success in a case apparently far more forbidding, is universally known, and I am happy to say he is interested in it, and I have no doubt will find his active benevolence excited when he shall see her.

A child 2 years old was lately brought to me at the request of the family physician, who had consulted me respecting it. It is unable to sit, to use its limbs, or talk, its face is intelligent, by no means idiotic. It has powers of mimicry unequalled by any child of its age I have ever met with. Having understood that it would imitate its father in whatever motions he made, I tried some experiments with it, and was astonished and amused to find it copy my movements so exactly, and that, too, with the most roguish expression conceivable, apparently much delighted.

I have now the case formerly alluded to under my care for epilepsy, which, for some months, has been severe and of frequent recurrence. This child has an intelligent face, and a good development of the head, except that it is small. Its form is graceful, and its movements easy and natural. Since it commenced the use of remedies, it has been more quiet and tranquil, less mischievous, sleeps better, has fewer fits, and they are less severe. If the epilepsy can be cured in this case, and I think it may be, I shall have great confidence that, under the care of its excellent mother, it may be taught to articulate, and finally be educated. Indeed, since I have seen this interesting child some effort has been made to teach it to talk, and with some little success.

What has struck me as particularly worthy of remark in all these cases is, that while some of the faculties of the mind are active and many of them capable of improvement, others are torpid or perverted, bearing, in this particular, much resemblance to certain cases of insanity.

I have been consulted quite recently in a case of insanity which commenced in infancy, and has continued in some degree to this time, now twenty years. When an infant, this young man had epileptic fits; these did not continue long, and the child was apparently healthy; sprightly,

and intelligent, till 8 years of age or upwards, and learnt as well as other children. He then became affected with *false vision*, saw *spiders*, and *other vermin*, crawling over him and all about him, and particularly in his food, so that it was with difficulty that he could be prevailed on to eat. This delusion continued for some time. At that time, now ten or twelve years, I was consulted in the case, and prescribed some remedies. The delusion left him after a while, and he has since been in most respects better, is able to work, but not to learn much, although his mind seems not to be particularly inactive. He is talkative and inquisitive in an unusual degree, asks childish questions, but is inattentive to the answers, and not profited by the information which he obtains. He is able to read and write some, but has not been able to acquire much knowledge. The present winter he has attempted to acquire some additional learning; commenced going to school and gave his attention to arithmetic; he made but little progress, and soon began to complain of his head, and confusion of thought, finally ceased to speak, because he says he could not speak right. For five or six weeks he has been almost constantly mute, speaking only occasionally. Since that time he has twice run away from his home, and wandered he knew not where, was lost and confused in his mind.

When he returned home the first time, he was greatly rejoiced to see his friends, and to get back again. When found the second time, he was brought to me, to be placed under my care; his vision is not now disturbed, he does not talk because he is not satisfied with what he says, and he is tired of life. A few days since he purchased a pistol to take his own life, but it was taken from him before he made any attempts. He is a stout, hale, full grown young man, his head is of good size and well formed, his motions easy and graceful, his speech natural. He eats rather sparingly, is anxious to get well, and willing to adopt any means recommended for his cure.

The subject of educating demented persons is new, it is at present exciting much attention, and the results are looked for with deep interest. The brain in such cases may not be affected with organic changes, but only be in an extremely torpid or inactive state. Some such cases, after a long torpor in which all hope of recovery has been lost, have spontaneously come out of apparently the most forlorn condition, and been restored to health and mental soundness. So the idiot and congenital insane may have a brain capable of greater or less improvement, if persevering efforts are made to excite it to activity.

If *one* old case of insanity in *ten* can be restored to soundness of mind by the appliances of insane hospitals, should not all of this class have the benefits of such a trial? In a large proportion of these cases the physical health can be improved, perverted habits can be changed, and the mind be made to enjoy, in some degree, what it has been deprived of under the influence of long-continued and neglected disease. So if *one* idiotic or demented person can have his powers of mind rendered active by effort, and some degree of knowledge imparted to him by which his enjoyment and usefulness can be increased, even if *ten* fail of improve-

ment, it will be worth the effort in all. But the case is more favorable than this supposition allows. I have no doubt that nearly all can be improved physically and mentally, and that the experiment will be productive of much good. It is certainly worthy of the consideration of the Christian and the philanthropist.

ON ASCITES.

By C. J. B. Williams, M.D., F.R.S., &c.

WE now go on, from inflammatory affections, to *ascites*, which is a species of flux, or, more properly, dropsy of the abdomen. There is an increased secretion of serum, frequently to a great extent, and this we have found to be sometimes the result of chronic peritonitis; at other times, however, it is a consequence of disease, not of an inflammatory nature. It may arise from the sudden suppression of another flux, such as diarrhœa, or the stoppage of the catamenia. Sometimes, ascites occurs as a part of general dropsy, from disease of the heart or imperfect action of the kidneys, or a general cachectic state. More commonly, ascites arises from an obstruction to the return of the blood from the abdominal vessels, as in disease of the liver. In such case, it is frequently unaccompanied by any considerable swelling of the legs or other parts of the body. The usual symptoms are: swelling of the abdomen, attended by fluctuation, and a dull sound in the most dependent parts, but the position of this varies; where there is a slight degree of effusion, the fluid in the abdomen may be best felt in the sitting or standing posture, in the pubic and iliac regions. It may be felt by the usual process for ascertaining the presence of fluctuation, by pressing the hand on the abdomen on one side, and gently tapping on the other; each stroke from the finger is followed by a movement of the fluid, which is impelled onwards to the opposite side. There must be some quantity of liquid to effect this. It very frequently happens that the intestines, or some of the solid contents, fall down to the middle part of the abdomen, and cut off the communication between the two sides; and, therefore, though there is a considerable quantity of fluid, you get no fluctuation. In that case, you may ascertain it by pressing the hand on the lower part of the abdomen, and adopting the process on a smaller scale. There may, however, be a source of error here; the soft parts do not fluctuate; but, where there is a solid tumor, there is a sort of fluctuation induced. I have been deceived in this manner, repeatedly, and no very correct idea can be obtained by percussion. If you strike the abdomen high up, a fluctuation or tremulous motion is propagated to the finger; the same thing is found with a tumor, such as the enlarged liver or spleen, and, on one occasion, I was thus led to mistake an enlarged spleen, of enormous size, for a tumor in the ovarium. The same thing will occur when you try fluctuation between bodies at a short distance; and it is difficult to say, where the walls of the abdomen are thick, or where there is a considerable amount of soft or fatty matter, whether such fluctuation is the result of the liquid