

## SYMPATHETIC INSANITY IN TWIN SISTERS.

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As a matter of special interest to alienists, and of interest also to other medical brethren, I send the history of two very peculiar cases of insanity, which have been in this hospital for some time. Their special peculiarities are that they are twin sisters, and that the mental trouble of one came on suddenly, without any heredity, and that of the other came on as soon as she saw her sister.

An important question is, How much influence was exerted by sympathy of twinship in these cases? The bond of sympathy in members of the same family is known to all; but the extent and intensity of it in cases of twins is not fully comprehended. Of course, in the case of the Siamese twins, on account of the physical union which existed, the manifest sympathy between them was not so surprising. We would naturally expect in such cases, where there was a continuity of the physical as well as of the nervous system, that anything affecting one would naturally affect the other. That they would think and act alike is reasonable. But in similar cases of those who are the subjects of separate physical and nervous organization, it is yet a subject of conjecture, and so far as I can learn, unknown to the medical or scientific professions.

According to the testimony of their mother, they were from childhood intelligent, refined, and exemplary in their deportment. They were all their lifetime intimately associated in their relations, and remarkably sympathetic with one another—sharing intensely each other's joys and pleasures, and strangely bearing one another's burdens and sorrows. And strange to say, the bond of sympathy was singularly manifested in their sickness. If one became sick, the other was almost sure to get sick, manifesting the same symptoms.

As an evidence of this not being assumed, it was related that one had an attack of pneumonia, and in a day or two the other was similarly affected. Under ordinary circumstances this would have been considerable coincidence. This is only one of many instances in which their peculiar sympathy was manifested.

Every medical man is familiar with the sympathy existing between organs of the same individual—for instance, in cases of sympathetic blindness, owing, of course, to the sympathy of contiguity of the nervous system. But how such sympathy can exist in separate and distinct individuals is inexplicable. With this preliminary, I will now proceed to give an account of these two cases from the inception of their mental trouble:

Their home was in Campbell county, Va. Just preceding their attack, they had gone from home. One went to Lynchburg to visit relatives, in fine health and spirits, and to be present at the marriage of a friend. On the 1st day of February, 1900, without any premonition, she was attacked with acute mania of a violent form, which was, of course, a complete transformation, a subversion of her previous modest, retiring, and ladylike disposition to one of the very opposite. Suddenly she became terribly excited, talking incessantly and incoherently, making wild gesticulations, using profane and obscene language, was noisy, and tore up her clothes and books—everything in her reach that was breakable. She became unmanageable, and had to be forcibly controlled by her friends.

Her condition was unaccountable to her physician and friends; and hoping it might be acute delirium, resulting from some unknown physical trouble, they undertook to treat and control her at home. They kept this plan up about a week, and then telegraphed her sister, who was visiting friends in Portsmouth, Va., to come and help nurse her. As soon as she beheld her sister, she became violently insane, and in precisely the same way. We sent for, and brought the two to this hospital. They were received in a deplorable condition, both exactly alike, with all the symptoms of violent acute mania, as related in the first case. As a precautionary measure, they were placed in different wards, and had no intercourse with each other. Neither knew the other was here. They continued to be violent for some

time; and a curious and most remarkable psychological fact is the similarity of the progress of their attacks. How far such conditions were due to the usual course of such individual cases, or to the unaccountable sympathy existing between them, are matters for conjecture. If they had been entirely distinct individuals, of different families, one might think this condition not so strange, as such cases run very much the same course—differing, however, somewhat in intensity, and also in duration, owing to the direct and indirect heredity and severity of the existing cause in each case, and their susceptibility to mental shock.

Thus, in the second one of these sisters, without, however, any inherited predisposition, we might say her attack was due to the shock of beholding her sister in such a deplorable condition. But here is presented a mystery—why, she, too, should have exactly the same form of insanity, acute mania in a violent form?

Now comes the most wonderful similarity of these cases, and that which makes them peculiar in their remarkable sympathy: As related above, they were placed in different wards, and kept entirely separate, unconscious of each other's presence in the same building, or even in the hospital. After awhile one got better, and it was observed that the other was better at the same time. Both continued to improve, and both became more rational. After awhile both relapsed at the same time. This continued for awhile, and at one time great hope was entertained of their recovery. They were allowed to visit each other, at one time, and recognized one another, but never realized their situation or became rational enough to object to their environment.

Subsequently they both relapsed and continued violent, until finally both became demented about the same time, and both have continued since in this condition.

Thus have I related an exact history of the above cases, without going into their physiological and psychological condition.