

Original Articles.

A CASE OF GENERAL PARALYSIS OF TEN YEARS' DURATION; DEATH FROM HEART DISEASE.¹

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FORMERLY the duration of general paralysis of the insane was stated to be from two to three years, and the average residence of cases in an insane hospital was nearer two than three years, as the hospital rarely received them till the disease was quite advanced. An earlier recognition of the symptoms has extended the average time, as has been clearly shown by Dr. C. F. Folsom in a recent paper. Much depends upon the acuteness of the observer, and much upon the surroundings of the patient and the care which he receives, nothing being so favorable as a quiet and well-regulated life, and nothing so unfavorable as excitement and confusion. Probably the average duration of the disease in the better class of patients is from four to five years. Cases of much longer duration are known to have existed, but those which have lived nine or ten years are very rare.

The following case is interesting, as showing a fair degree of intelligence after, at least, ten years' duration, through nine of which he was more or less under my observation. For portions of the history of this patient I am indebted to the records of McLean Asylum:

A. G. B. was admitted to the McLean Asylum, May 22, 1875. He was forty-five years of age, a graduate of Harvard College, and a lawyer by profession, whose chief business had been the care of estates and investment of funds for other people, in which he had shown good ability, and had been considered reliable and honest. He had made for himself a competency, and lived freely and rather luxuriously. In early life he had been a private secretary to the historian, Prescott, and was a man of literary tastes, and also well versed in the modern languages. After coming to the Asylum and being put under guardianship, it was found that he had lost much of his property through unwarranted extravagance and foolish purchases, especially through the payment of exorbitant sums of money for land adjoining his home estate, which was in the country, and that his trust accounts were in a state of chaos for a period of from one to two years previous to his commitment. Indeed, could it not have been clearly proved that he had been mentally unsound during that time, he would probably have been arrested by those whose property had suffered. His friends stated that one of his brothers died insane, and that for six years he himself was quite intemperate, but for the six years just previous to 1875 he was temperate, though fond of wine and champagne. They had recognized no disease till about ten weeks prior to his admission to the Asylum, when, while in Boston and very busy, he had some kind of an ill turn, in which he complained of severe pain in the back of his neck, and seemed dazed. He was very restless that night, and the next day was excited and forgetful of the names of his family, and able to see only one-half of an object. Two days afterwards they noticed a staggering gait, thickness of speech, tremor of the hands, and a tendency to talk continually. He improved somewhat for a week, but, finding himself un-

able to sign a check, became very much excited, was extravagant, talked of his great wealth, wanted everything, and, if refused, was very angry. He finally became abusive and uncontrollable, and was brought to the Asylum. When admitted, he walked with an unsteady and feeble gait, was excited, and there was considerable difficulty in articulating words. He was very angry when he found where he was (his friends had not told him), and made many threats.

May 26th, four days after admission, the record states, he is in a very chaotic state, does not remember the names of people which he has been told within ten minutes, and does not know his own room.

June 1st. Continues about the same, with slight increase of his unfavorable symptoms. Thinks that he goes to walk and sleeps in various rooms, is extravagant, and offers large sums of money for his discharge.

June 20th. There is no improvement. Is becoming filthy.

July 13th. He has had several congestive attacks from vaso-motor disturbance, one of which was very severe, confining him to his bed for several days, and rendering him utterly incoherent and oblivious of passing events. When he rallied, it was found that his memory was much more impaired than it had been.

August 6th. He is somewhat clearer mentally, and there is some physical gain. He is more quiet, though always exhilarated.

August 30th. His ideas of great wealth continue, and he still confuses persons, talks all the time when he can find an audience.

He has four children, but insists that he has six, giving names to the two extra ones, and describing their appearance. He says that he is going home to make their number an even dozen. He is now easily controlled, and his wife removed him from the Asylum a little more than three months after his admission.

He was taken at once to his home. He made search for the two imaginary children, but was soon convinced of their unreality. He gradually became more quiet, and before the end of a year his extravagant delusions concerning his wealth left him, but his exhilaration, his difficulty in articulation, the tremor of his tongue and lips, and his ataxic gait continued. Owing to the ravages he had made in his property, he lost his home, which had been one of affluence, and was reduced to comparative poverty. He moved to Cambridge a year or two after leaving the Asylum, and spent much time in the College library. His memory for past events and for what he read was comparatively good, but for the minor matters of ordinary life it was unreliable. He could, for instance, never do the marketing unless his wife wrote down for him every article needed. He passed much time in translating Italian and Spanish, I understand, with accuracy, and prepared a book of Proverbs which he had translated from the Spanish. During this whole time he became poorer and poorer, but this gave him little or no anxiety. His wife was at work, and he had enough to eat and drink, and could continue his reading and translating. All other things seemed of no importance. He was almost uniformly good-natured and tractable, recognizing in a degree his condition, but hopeful and full of schemes for the future. He was subject to periods of confusion and partial unconsciousness, after which he would be less clear for a time.

¹ Read before the Boston Society for Medical Observation, April 2, 1888.

In 1881, after living in Cambridge three years, he moved to Boston to a poorer home and greater poverty. He and his family would have actually suffered had they not been helped by richer relatives. His children were poorly clothed, his quarters were small, his wife hard at work, but he was complacent and comfortable. He still continued his translations, and some time in 1881 was asked to translate for a lawyer friend a paper relating to an Italian patent. The validity of the patent, as I understand it, turned upon the rendering of a certain word. With his usual self-confidence, he allowed himself to be put upon the witness-stand in the United States Court, bore himself well, and his opinion was sustained. For this service he received ten dollars, which he spoke of to me with great glee, and immediately made many plans to increase his wealth by similar work.

It was then over six years since he had left the Asylum, one year of which he had been very much impaired, and the other five comparatively clear and comfortable. In the early part of 1882 his mental condition became worse. He was more forgetful, less attentive to reading, and more careless in his appearance. He was more subject to periods of dulness and confusion. He now conceived an animosity to his oldest son, a quiet and well-behaved boy of sixteen, and abused him roundly. He began to drink occasionally, a small amount of liquor making him very irritable and quite drunk. He was very penitent after these indulgences, but they were often repeated.

In September, 1882, he came to me and asked to be sent to the Danvers Hospital, giving as his reasons that he was not so well as he had been, that he could not resist drinking, and that his children disturbed him. It was very evident that he was losing mental strength. He seemed to enjoy the process of being committed, especially an interview with the judge of probate, very much. He remained at Danvers two months. On his return, though he was more quiet, his memory had failed, he was often dazed, and frequently lost his way in the street. He had a good deal of difficulty in going down stairs. It was arranged, soon after his discharge from Danvers, that he should go to McLean again, and he was readmitted there November 9, 1882. The certificate of the physicians at this time was:

"He has never been well since he was first discharged. He is in a state of almost constant exhilaration, is sometimes irritable, and easily excited. There is tremor of the lips and tongue, and his gait is impaired."

He remained willingly at the Asylum, spending most of his time in reading, and as was the case while at Danvers, became more quiet under the influence of a regulated life and proper food. He was allowed a good deal of freedom, made several visits home, and was discharged much improved May 1st, after a residence of about six months. From that time till the autumn he continued quiet and comfortable, but there was a deterioration in his mental power and physical strength. He could write very little, his handwriting was sometimes almost illegible, and he read mostly works of a lighter character than formerly.

In October, 1883, he again came to me and wanted to go to the McLean as a place of refuge and quiet, realizing fully that he was losing ground. He was sufficiently clear to be admitted as a voluntary patient, and it was thought best not to go through the for-

mality of a regular commitment. He was received October 23d. I again quote from the Asylum records: "It is thought that he has failed mentally since he was here before, as well as physically. Now he frequently asks his way to his room, and could not go about town alone. He has an idea that he can go into a law office and do clerical work, or may go into a partnership with some one." At the same time, his memory was a good deal impaired and his handwriting was tremulous, and in his letters the words were misspelled or omitted.

These periods of hospital life were always of benefit to him, and he always came away less excitable and in better physical condition.

After leaving the Asylum in December, 1883, he continued to fail mentally and physically. His gait was more enfeebled, his steps were of unequal length, his articulation worse, but he never lost his hope or his confidence in his future prospects. He became less cleanly and more irritable. He could converse intelligently and continued his reading, but in a desultory fashion. It was no longer safe to permit him to go any distance from his home alone.

While in this condition, in the spring of 1884, he suddenly died with symptoms of angina pectoris. He was not in Boston, and I did not see him at the time. The physician who was called detected valvular disease of the heart. Nothing had called my attention to his chest, and I had not examined it for a long time. He had no disease of the kidneys. He had, to my certain knowledge, suffered from general paralysis of the insane for more than ten years.

With the exception of the case of another gentleman, who is still living and in pretty good mental and physical condition, who is also suffering from general paralysis, I have never been able to follow a patient with this disease for so long a time.

The case which I have related seems to me remarkable, not only from the fact that the patient lived so long, but, also, that after a period of utter incoherence and great prostration, he rallied so far that there were four years when the disease was apparently stationary, during which he lived very much as sane and well people do, and that he preserved such a good amount of intelligence and physical strength to the end. I think there is every reason to believe that he would not have died from the effects of general paralysis for some time longer.

During all the years of my acquaintance with him the diagnosis of his disease was unmistakable, and there was no difference of opinion among all the physicians who saw him, who were accustomed to observe similar cases. There was no reason to suspect that he had ever had specific disease. The knee-jerk was always diminished, and latterly, entirely lost. The pupils were sluggish and small, but equal in size.

From the time that I first saw him there was loss of mental power, difficulty in articulation, an unsteady gait, either excitement, extravagance, or a comfortable sense of well-being, even under the most trying circumstances, and, with the exception of the four years in which there was little apparent change, his progress was steadily downwards, with occasional short improvements.

—The International Ophthalmological Congress will be held at Heidelberg, from the 9th to the 12th of August next.