

NOTES ON THE HEBREW INSANE.¹

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This contribution is made up of observations and statistics gathered for the purpose of furthering the study of the Hebrew insane.

This subject was brought to the attention of the British Medico-Psychological Association at their meeting in London in 1900, by a paper read by Dr. Cecil F. Beadles, of Colney Hatch Asylum. While aware of the fact that statistics at times are likely to prove misleading, still the number of cases and length of the period from which these data are collaborated may make them worthy of consideration. The insane Hebrew—and in this classification I include Jews of all nationalities—has occupied the attention of the profession from Bible times, as mentioned in the Books of St. Mark, St. Luke and St. Matthew.

More recently there has appeared an article bearing on this subject entitled "The Comparative Pathology of the Jews," by Maurice Fishberg, M. D., of New York, published in the New York Medical Journal, Vol. 73, 1901, and from which I quote from time to time. This investigation covers the period from December 13, 1871, to November 30, 1900, inclusive, and all patients admitted to the Manhattan State Hospital, East, during that time—a total of 17,135 cases. The first element to attract attention is the enormous increase in admissions of Hebrews in recent years. This undoubtedly may be accounted for by the great increase in immigration of Jews from Europe to this country in search of more lucrative vocations than they enjoy in their native lands and, as they are attracted by the many

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opportunities afforded by the metropolis, they remain. Many of these, predisposed to psychoses, unable to cope with the unequal conditions, break down and eventually find their way to the hospital. The men who are admitted are largely drawn from those who are employed in sweat shops and as hucksters; these on the one hand laboring many hours a day in close, ill-ventilated shops with little or no exercise, and on the other closely packed in squalid tenements at night—constantly ignoring the law of cleanliness—are thereby placed in the most suitable surroundings to bring out hereditary tendencies toward insanity. The Hebrews as a race are hysterical and neurasthenic. Raymond² states that "hysteria is frequent among both men and women in Warsaw (Poland). The Jewish population of that city alone is almost exclusively the inexhaustible source for the supply of hysterical males for the whole continent." By those who are associated with Hebrews in hospitals the men are looked upon as neurotic. It is difficult in many cases to obtain satisfactory histories of this class of patients owing in part to the suspiciousness of friends of patients and in part to their unwillingness to admit hereditary influences. On the first show of returning reason the relatives or those dependent on Hebrew patients make continued importunities for their release and in cases where these requests are complied with the patients are at once permitted to resume their struggle for riches, with the result, in a great many cases, of prompt return to the hospital. Such cases as become chronic are usually the most troublesome of the hopeless insane. They are as a rule ignorant, vicious, suspicious, complaining and frequently morally perverted.

The influence of hospital life on the Hebrew insane in itself is very beneficial owing, no doubt, in large part, to removal from unsanitary and mal-hygienic surroundings, to regularity of habits, rest to an overworked nervous system, change of diet and removal from the overcrowded conditions of those quarters of the city from which they, for the most part, are drawn.

The recovery rate is fairly good for Hebrews under 30 years

² Fishberg, "Comparative Pathology of Jews."

of age, but the tendency for most of them who have become unbalanced and seemingly recover is to swell the number of re-admissions to the hospitals as, owing to their excitable ways of living, they readily break down and are returned to the hospital. A perusal of the case books shows masturbation and loss of money to be frequent assigned causes of mental breakdown in addition to unhygienic surroundings and hereditary tendencies.

The notes in this paper are made only on the male Hebrew insane, inasmuch as the females are committed to the Manhattan State Hospital, West.

Of the 17,135 cases admitted to the hospital, 1722 were Jews, or 10.05%. In reckoning from the opening of the hospital we find 72 Hebrews with histories of syphilis, or 4.18% of Hebrew admissions. This figure is low and shows that the Hebrews suffer less from this disease than Christians. Of the 1722 Hebrews admitted 95 have a history of alcoholism, 5.516%. This figure is also low and shows alcoholic excesses to be comparatively rare in the race. In order to ascertain what changes there might be by taking the figures from more recent dates I have tabulated the five years ending November 30, 1900. During this time there were 3710 admissions, and of these there were 573 Hebrews, or 15.44%. This shows an increase of Hebrew admissions as compared with the figures before mentioned. Of these 573 Hebrews, syphilis was present in 5.58%. Alcoholism was present in 5.24%. Paresis was present in 18.05% of the Hebrews admitted. This latter form of insanity, while high in the Hebrew race, is probably not as high as the proportion which obtains among Christians. Dr. Savage³ in discussing Dr. Beadles' paper states "in my experience there is very little general paralysis, either among the men or women (Jewish). Just as other races are affected, general paralytics among Jews have nearly all had some history of syphilitic degeneration."

I intend to continue my investigation of insanity in the Hebrew as compared with other nationalities, and I hope to be able at some future meeting to submit the results for your consideration.

³ Journal of Mental Science, Vol. XLVI, page 736.