

# SCIENCE :

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## INSANITY VERSUS CIVILIZATION.

It is interesting to note the steady progress made by Alienists in solving the many difficult problems which appear to underlie the practice of their profession, and we would give full credit to those who, in a purely scientific spirit, are building a foundation on which a system of treatment for mental diseases may be erected, which shall accord with modern anatomical discovery and the latest theories which have been developed by a careful study of insanity in all its forms.

The last number of the "*Journal of Nervous and Mental Diseases*" may be studied with advantage by those who would gather a few opinions expressed by those who "minister to a mind diseased." In the first place, we have the authority of Dr. J. S. Jewell for stating that insanity is on the increase, and must still increase with the advance of civilization. In this opinion he is confirmed by Professor W. Erb, of Leipzig, and others. Among the reasons advanced for alleging that the advance of civilization is favorable to an increase in nervous and mental diseases, it is stated, that the nervous systems of highly cultivated and refined individuals among civilized people are more complex and refined in structure and more delicate in susceptibility and action, at least in their higher parts, than the nervous systems of savages. As civilization advances, the occupations increase which imply a cultivation of the sensibilities, more especially those comprehended under the sense of beauty. A relatively large number of persons give themselves to the study and practice of art in its various forms, to polite literature, and to sedentary occupations. The more a part of the nervous system is used the more extended its development. In highly civilized communities there is a constant tendency to a loss of balance in nerve development, in which the

*sensitive* side of the nervous system preponderates over the motor part of the same. Now, all disturbances of symmetry or balance in development tend toward disease; they do not constitute disease, but verge in that direction. This state of things is the result of advancing civilization, and involve a world of minor consequences, both for the weal and woe of the people.

Such is the substance of Dr. Jewell's views, who also charges the system of education in public schools with being the cause of increasing the number of cases of insanity, by breaking up the "*nerve health*" of youths. This remark applies equally to the course of study in Colleges and Universities, and the overworked student in hundreds of cases obtains his degree at the expense of loss of health, and retires with general nervous and brain exhaustion, and afflicted with melancholia, hysteria, vascular irregularities, cerebral congestion, neuralgias and other disorders of the same character.

Space will not permit us to describe the many forms in which the adult, in civilized life, courts the approach of the various forms of insanity; but they can be easily surmised, and are often referred to in articles treating on this subject.

We admit, with Dr. Jewell, that the higher developments of civilized life may produce a higher strain on the nervous system which may lead to more frequent cases of its derangement; but we think he draws too wide a parallel when he makes a distinction between our present modes of existence and actual savage life. When speaking of the increase of insanity, it is presumed reference is made to a period covering, perhaps, the last fifty years. Such being the case, we think Dr. Jewell has hardly done justice to the subject, by omitting the many mitigating circumstances attending an advanced civilization, which certainly alleviate many of the mental strains spoken of by him.

Within the last fifty years, the hours of labor have been curtailed both in manufactories and among the industrial classes in cities. Stores which at one time were open until midnight are now closed at 7 P. M. Means of recreation and amusements which until recently were monopolized by a few, are now enjoyed by the millions. Improved methods of transit now enable citizens to enjoy their evenings after the hours of labor, strolling upon grassy meadows or upon the shores of the ocean. Literature of an entertaining character is also now produced so cheaply as to make its use universal. The laws of hygiene are also at this present day better understood, and, by perfecting man's physical condition, instill fresh energy into his mental powers.

We thus find that, so far from all the conditions attending an advanced civilization being favorable to

insanity, many have a tendency to promote the most perfect mental and physical development.

If the Alienist would solve the problem attending the increase of cases of insanity, we would direct him to other sources of the evil than that of civilization; let him probe the open and hidden vices of great cities; let him calculate the effect of the indiscriminate use of alcoholic liquors and the pernicious abuse of potent drugs. We regard opium, tobacco, chloral and sewer gas as some of the offending agents which weaken and debilitate the mental powers, rather than the mild educational cause of our public schools or the attending circumstances of student-life.

Dr. Jewell himself admits the destructive effects of these agents upon the nervous system, but they are classed as due to the influence of civilization. This we think an error, as they are connected with vices of a debased life; and although insanity may be on the increase, we consider it is far from conclusive that to civilization we should attribute the primary cause.

#### SCIENTIFIC SOCIETIES IN WASHINGTON, D. C.

**THE BIOLOGICAL SOCIETY.**—Three papers were read at the last meeting, Friday, Feb. 25, as follows: A Description of *Pronuba yuccasella*, by Prof. C. V. Riley; The Hall Collection of Fossils from New York, by Prof. C. A. White; and Suctorial Prehension in the Animal Kingdom, by Mr. Smiley. Professor Riley's paper was a revision of his communications before the American Association at St. Louis and in other places, concerning a moth, the *Pronuba yuccasella*, which not only deposits its eggs in the capsules of the Yucca, but which is also indispensable to the fertilization of the ovaries of that plant. It was remarked by Mr. Lester F. Ward, in commenting upon the paper, that we have here the most wonderful example of commensalism. Professor White is in charge of the duplicate set from the Hall Collection of Fossils sent to the National Museum. His remarks were a brief description of them as they now appear. There are about 1500 entries, and they represent nearly all the types in the Collection of the American Museum. Mr. Smiley's paper was a description of suctorial organs in the various divisions of the animal kingdom. These organs have in different circumstances, three functions, locomotion, anchoring and the seizure of prey. The author has bestowed a great deal of care on his communication and brought together a valuable mass of material.

**THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL SOCIETY.**—The Society met in the main hall of the National Medical College, Major J. W. Powell in the chair. The following papers were read: Amphibious Aborigines of Alaska, by Ivan Petroff; The Evolution of Marriage Ceremonies and Their Import, by Dr. A. F. A. King. Mr. Petroff described his experience among the shore Inuit population of Alaska, from the lower peninsula north to the Yukon mouth. There is water and marsh, mud and swamp everywhere, and the heavens swell the mass by their contribution of fog, rain, snow and sleet. The natives are enveloped in this watery environment the year round and thrive upon it. They even drink enormous quantities of it, not excepting the salt water of the bays and fiords, in their long fishing journeys. Doctor King's paper was an argument to prove that the progress of civilization had the tendency to set aside the laws of sexual relations which exist in a state of nature, such as the survival of the fittest, the observance of natural periods, and sexual selection. The paper was discussed by Major Powell and Mr. Ward.

#### ACTION OF AN INTERMITTENT BEAM OF RADIANT HEAT UPON GASEOUS MATTER.\*

BY JOHN TYNDALL, F. R. S.

The Royal Society has already done me the honor of publishing a long series of memoirs on the interaction of radiant heat and gaseous matter. These memoirs did not escape criticism. Distinguished men, among whom the late Professor Magnus and the late Professor Buff may be more specially mentioned, examined my experiments, and arrived at results different from mine. Living workers of merit have also taken up the question; the latest of whom,† while justly recognizing the extreme difficulty of the subject, and while verifying, so far as their experiments reach, what I had published regarding dry gases, find me to have fallen into what they consider grave errors in my treatment of vapors.

None of these investigators appear to me to have realized the true strength of my position in its relation to the objects I had in view. Occupied for the most part with details, they have failed to recognize the suringency of my work as a whole, and have not taken into account the independent support rendered by the various parts of the investigation to each other. They thus ignore verifications, both general and special, which are to me of conclusive force. Nevertheless, thinking it due to them and me to submit the questions at issue to a fresh examination, I resumed, some time ago the threads of the inquiry. The results shall, in due time, be communicated to the Royal Society; but meanwhile, I would ask permission to bring to the notice of the Fellows a novel mode of testing the relations of radiant heat to gaseous matter, whereby singularly instructive effects have been obtained.

After working for some time with the thermopile and galvanometer, it occurred to me several weeks ago that the results thus obtained might be checked by a more direct and simple form of experiment. Placing the gases and vapors in diathermanous bulbs, and exposing the bulbs to the action of radiant heat, the heat absorbed by different gases and vapors ought, I considered, to be rendered evident by ordinary expansion. I devised an apparatus with a view of testing this idea. But, at this point, and before my proposed gas thermometer was constructed, I became acquainted with the ingenious and original experiments of Mr. Graham Bell, wherein musical sounds are obtained through the action of an intermittent beam of light upon solid bodies.

From the first, I entertained the opinion that these singular sounds were caused by rapid changes of temperature, producing corresponding changes of shape and volume in the bodies impinged upon by the beam. But if this be the case, and if gases and vapors really absorb radiant heat, they ought to produce sounds more intense than those obtainable from solids. I pictured every stroke of the beam responded to by a sudden expansion of the absorbent gas, and concluded that when the pulses thus excited followed each other with sufficient rapidity, a musical note must be the result. It seemed plain, moreover, that by this new method many of my previous results might be brought to an independent test. Highly diathermanous bodies, I reasoned, would produce faint sounds; while highly athermanous bodies would produce loud sounds; the strength of the sound being, in a sense, a measure of the absorption. The first experiment made, with a view of testing this idea, was executed in the presence of Mr. Graham Bell;‡ and the result was in exact accordance with what I had foreseen.

The inquiry has been recently extended so as to em-

\*Proceedings of the Royal Society.

† M. M. Lecher and Pernter, "Philosophical Magazine," January, 1881.

‡ Sitzb. der K. Akad. der Wissensch. in Wien, July, 1880.

§ On the 20th of November: see "Journal of the Society of Telegraph Engineers," December 8, 1880.