being ignorant of the fact of its having existed in the family, yet become subjects of it. It is curious that in these cases the same species of insanity is usually developed that had existed in the ancestor; but this, of course, must be subject to considerable irregularities arising from varieties of temperament, &c. &c.

We find in some persons a much greater degree of resistance to the encroachments of disease, than in others, and few will deny that this applies with equal force to mental as bodily diseases. This will account for the fact, that in some cases a trifling exciting cause, mental or physical, may produce such irritation of the brain as may be followed by the establishment of mental disease, while in others it may have no effect in developing any abnormal condition of that vital organ.

In this outline of my theory of the proximate cause of insanity, it may be thought that, having coupled irritation of the brain and congestion of its vessels so frequently together, I look upon them as synonymous terms; such, however, is far from being the case, and although a congestive state of the vessels of some portion of the brain will very generally be found to accompany insanity, yet I believe its real cause to be irritation of the nervous structure of the brain, although it is very possible that we may have to act on the brain through the vascular system to remove such state. Neither the brain, nor any portion of the nervous system can bear compression in any shape, and we consequently find that any invasion upon its limits is always attended by some manifestation of its dislike of restraint. In the nerves, this is shown by neuralgic pains, &c. In the brain, generally by impairment of some of its functions, by headache, &c. This may be caused by the agency of any medium, either by the pressure of fluid, such as that from congestion of its vessels, or by the growth of bony or other tumors pressing upon any portion of its nervous substance. In these cases we find, if the compression is not carried too far, that the organ is only irritated; but unless the removal of this cause is possible, of course recovery must be hopeless. Any deposition in the cranium, such for instance as that arising from inflammation of any portion of the brain or its membranes, or that following injuries of the head, or the results of apoplexy, may cause such irritation of the brain as to induce insanity.

Having thus briefly stated the views which have led me to form this theory of the proximate cause of insanity, I shall not pursue the subject any farther, for although very much more might be written, I hardly think a more prolonged investigation of the theory in its present state, would materially assist in elucidating those facts by which it must, of course, ultimately stand or fall. I would, however, venture to hope, that it may, imperfect as it is, receive that candid consideration which a subject of such exceeding interest and importance deserves; and if it shall be the means of throwing any light upon so confessedly obscure a point, I shall be most amply gratified and repaid.

York, December 28, 1843.

EXTRAORDINARY CASE

OF

SEVERE ULCERATION OF BOTH LEGS.

By W. WHITCOMBE, Esq., of Presteigne.

TO THE EDITORS OF THE PROVINCIAL MEDICAL JOURNAL.

GENTLEMEN,—Should you deem the following case worthy a place in the Provincial Medical Journal, I shall feel obliged by its insertion.

I am, Gentlemen,

Your obedient servant,

WILLIAM WHITCOMBE, M.R.C.S.L.

Presteigne, Dec. 30, 1843.

1841, Jan. 19th. Visited M. A. W., aged fifty-two. She states that, thirty years since, she had an ulcer on the left leg, near the instep, which continued for several years; that she became, at length, pregnant with an illegitimate child; that, during pregnancy, the ulcer healed; that, after weaning, an ulcer spontaneously appeared on the right leg; that it continued several years, and eventually extended over the whole of the leg. Being an union patient, she was then removed to the poor-house, where the leg was amputated immediately below the knee. States that the stump healed soon, and this occurred about two years since. After the stump had healed she left the house, and came to reside at her present residence; and, shortly after, an ulcer again showed itself on the left leg (the one originally affected), Being afraid of being again removed by the parish officers, she has been unwilling to apply for medical or other assistance, having a small out-door allowance; but her neighbours had advised her to apply for an increase of that allowance on account of her infirmities. I was, therefore, requested to see her, since, though belonging to a parish in another union, she was a resident in a parish I attended.

Her present appearances are ulceration extended completely round the tibia and fibula; these bones entirely denuded of all integument or muscle to within two inches of the knee joint. The whole of the foot had come off at the ankle joint *six weeks previously*. She has hectic fever and diarrhoea; asked me if the leg could not be taken off below the knee; ordered brandy, and nourishing broths. In consequence of my applying to the board of guardians at their next meeting, the officers of the parish to which she belonged were communicated with, and they sent their own medical officer to visit her, who had her removed into the workhouse, a distance of twelve miles, where, as I afterwards heard, she gradually sunk, in about ten days.

From the fact of an ulcer of a scrofulous nature appearing, for a period of thirty years, upon one or other of the legs; and, after the age of forty-five years, when the menstrual discharge had ceased, becoming so extensive as to require amputation of the one extremity, I certainly felt at a loss for reasons justifying the removal of the remaining one.

As this case has been the only one I have met with of such an extensive nature, I have forwarded it to you for insertion.