

## PSYCHIATRY

# Feeble-mindedness

Is sporadic and not necessarily associated with family traits. New ideas are replacing some old beliefs about heredity and mental disease.

► OLD IDEAS on the heredity of mental disease were reversed in a report by Dr. Abraham Myerson of Boston at the meeting of the American Psychiatric Association in Chicago.

Feeble-mindedness, he reported finding from a study of 47 cases, tends to be sporadic and not greatly associated with family feeble-mindedness, as previously held.

"It is time," Dr. Myerson declared, "that the whole concept of feeble-mindedness as occurring in many members of the same group and persisting for generations was thrust into the limbo of the forgotten and misleading."

Schizophrenia, on the other hand, he believes from his study may occur in the families of at least half the patients with this serious mental disease. He found definite family mental disease in 23% of the patients under his care.

Again differing from orthodox psychiatric teaching, he reported finding environmental factors much more directly responsible for epilepsy than constitutional factors.

In the depressive states he found such an appallingly large proportion of mental disease in the families of patients that he considers it a trend of great importance to the human race.

He recommended establishment of a national institute for the study of heredity in mental disease. After 50 years of compiling pertinent facts he believes results will be obtained either justifying drastic national action to remedy the situation or showing that constitution and

heredity play little or no part in causing mental disease.

The theory of schizophrenia being hereditary in nature was further upheld by Dr. Franz J. Kallmann of the New York State Psychiatric Institute and Hospital.

Predisposition to schizophrenia, he believes from a study of the disease in twins and others with close family relationships, depends on the presence of a specific genetic factor. This explains why the disease occurs in a particular member of a family at a particular time.

This theory, however, does not in Dr. Kallmann's opinion contradict current psychiatric belief that the disease can be prevented as well as cured.

## Follow Hereditary Pattern

Brain waves in patients with certain kinds of mental disease also follow hereditary patterns, state Dr. Jacques S. Gottlieb, M. C. Ashby and John R. Knott, of the Iowa State Psychopathic Hospital and the State University of Iowa College of Medicine.

Brain wave patterns of 35 patients with either primary behavior disorders or psychopathic personality, these scientists found, showed a highly significant relationship to the combination of the brain wave records of their respective parents.

Abnormal brain wave patterns were found in 78% of children whose parents had abnormal brain waves, but in only 31% of children of parents with normal brain wave patterns.

Heredity has previously been shown to be a determining factor in the brain wave abnormality found in epilepsy, they pointed out.

## Is Epilepsy Hereditary?

► THE CHANCE that a child of an average epileptic will have epilepsy is one in 40, Dr. William G. Lennox of Harvard Medical School declared.

Epilepsy is not directly inherited but predisposition to it may be transmitted, he said.

The hereditary influence in epilepsy is about equal to that in diabetes, one-half that in obesity (overweight), and one-eighth that in migraine, he calculated from a study of the family history of 2,000 patients and the personal history of 45 pairs of twins affected by seizures.

Strikingly good results in some patients with epilepsy have been obtained by treatment with a drug called tridione, Dr. Lennox and Dr. Harry L. Kozol stated.

This drug was announced to the medical world in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* last December (See SNL, Dec. 22, 1945).

The drug has not been used long enough, the doctors said, to warrant any statement about its long-term effects. Encouraging is the fact that in patients helped by it, brain waves also become normal.

*Science News Letter, June 8, 1946*

## CHEMISTRY

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*Science News Letter, June 8, 1946*



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