

Mental Hygiene's Future Development

Mental Hygiene

Psychiatrist Predicts 950,000 Patients By 1970

By Dr. William A. White

President, First International Congress of Mental Hygiene

APPROXIMATELY one-half of all the hospital beds in the United States are for mental cases, and the last survey of the hospital situation showed that the beds for mental cases were increasing more rapidly than for all other classes put together.

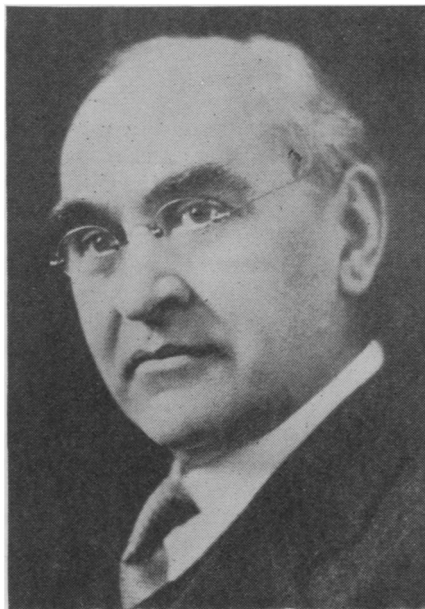
This condition of affairs has led the statisticians to make some rather interesting estimates, which, roughly speaking, are these: that in 1970 the United States will have a stable population of approximately one hundred and fifty million people. The various augmenting and retarding factors will have come to a state of comparative equilibrium by that time.

The number of patients in hospitals for mental disease in 1970, based upon the standards which are at present operative, will be, in round numbers, 950,000. What this figure means can be more easily understood if we realize that in 1880 the number of patients per 100,000 of the general population who were in such hospitals was 63; whereas the 1970 figure will represent 635 per 100,000, in other words—merely one-thousand per cent. increase in a century.

The above figures indicate the tremendous importance of the problem of mental disease. It represents inefficiency on the part of over five per cent. of the population of a sufficient degree to necessitate institutional care. This means, of course, a tremendous burden, not only economic, but in various other ways upon the rest of the population, and particularly upon the immediate family. Represented in actual dollars and cents, the figure for such a degree of crippling would be staggering.

It is my feeling that unless times change very materially it will be the tremendous economic pressure which will force an increasingly acute consideration of this tremendously important public health problem.

I believe that mental hygiene in some of its aspects will become, as a necessary result, a part of the regular curriculum of medical schools and probably of academic courses; that physicians will recognize the psychological factor in disease much



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Almost 2,000 specialists in treatment and prevention of mental disease are coming to Washington from Europe, the Orient, and all parts of America to confer together at the First International Congress of Mental Hygiene. The congress will be held in Washington, May 5 to 10. President Hoover is the Honorary President, and Dr. William A. White, Superintendent of St. Elizabeth's Hospital of this city, is named as President.

No formal, learned papers will be read before the assembled delegates at this congress. Instead, those scientists who have been asked to bring their newest theories and researches to Washington are preparing in advance lengthy accounts of their work. This material will be translated into English, French, German, and probably Spanish, and copies will be furnished to the psychiatrists, psychologists, educators, doctors, and sociologists who wish to discuss the various topics. The original writers of the papers will be allowed only ten minutes to sum up their work before the discussion begins, for the greatest benefit of the meeting is expected to come from the exchange of ideas and information between the mental health specialists of thirty countries.

more fully; that general hospitals will have wards, as they are already beginning to, for the reception and care of acute mental illnesses; that the educational system will be much more keenly alert than it is at present to determine the existence among the student body of potential mental disorder; that great executives will become conscious of the part it plays in creating the lost motion in their organizations; and that in all

these ways it will be more frequently and effectively identified.

It is necessarily to be believed, in conjunction with these developments, that an improved, a more adequate therapeutics will grow up along side of this increasing number of patients and that we shall continue to find, as we already do, that a very material percentage of liabilities can be converted into assets. What the relation will be between the therapeutic successes and failures it is pretty difficult to even guess.

Aside from all of these developments, which are not difficult to foresee, however, one must believe that the future of mental disorders, even the immediate future—the next twenty-five years—will show a very radical change of attitude on the part of the people at large and of the medical profession in particular, toward mental diseases. Along with a broader knowledge of their significance and a better understanding of their meaning there will be a greater tolerance for some of their symptoms. There will be less inclination to resent, hate, and punish the offender. And society will necessarily come to the realization that mental disease is only an exaggerated form of mal-adaptation, which is only another way of saying, by the use of a sociological term, unhappiness.

People will realize that the mental mechanisms involved are the same and that all the various forms of mental disorder, social inefficiency, and personal unhappiness must become the subjects, not of criticism and resentment, but of scientific study with a view to their correction or improvement; that they are as worthy of such study as are the diseases of the body, and, as a matter of fact, from the point of view of the most valuable of man's possessions—his mind—they are more worthy and more important.

Society will also have to realize that all of these troubles of the mind are one of the prices it has to pay for civilization, and inasmuch as it will not throw away civilization, and could not if it would, it will get down to the concrete problem of an attempt at as great an understanding of man by himself as he has hitherto gained of his environment.

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