

Treat Patient — Not Disease

Psychiatry

New Discoveries Applied to Ancient Malady

THE family doctor and the child specialist are needed to join vigorously in the fight against the age-old disease of epilepsy, the convulsive malady that afflicted Julius Caesar and is still one of the chief medical mysteries. This call was sounded by Dr. Douglas A. Thom, of Boston, at the First International Congress on Mental Hygiene, held in Washington. Dr. Thom recalled that the whole mental hygiene movement traces its origin back to a case of epilepsy. Clifford Beers, of New York, who has given twenty years to his conviction that mental health needs to be actively safeguarded, was originally driven into a nervous breakdown by fear that he might become an epileptic.

The physician who notes the first appearances of convulsions in a child has a better chance to prescribe changes in the child's way of living, so as to make him healthier and less nervous and so lessen the chance of the convulsions persisting, Dr. Thom stressed. Emotional troubles are of greatest importance in bringing on convulsive attacks in those who have a tendency to epilepsy, he said.

All the advances of modern laboratory technique have been called upon to find out whether an abnormal bodily process lies at the root of convulsive disorders, Dr. Thom declared. New found discoveries on psychology and mental diseases have been utilized by the specialists who are seeking the source of epilepsy in the individual's temperament. And still doctors are confronted with a large army of victims of epilepsy, and the basic cause still eludes detection. At present, the physician should study the patient and treat him, rather than try to treat the disease, Dr. Thom advised.

The stress of city life is more likely to aggravate convulsive maladies than country life, judging by the number of epileptics in the United States, Dr. H. M. Pollock, of the New York State Department of Mental Hygiene showed. Although more men than women enter institutions for treatment for epilepsy, Dr. Pollock believes that this is because women more often live sheltered lives. The epileptic may be able to live at home and among friends without serious difficulty, whereas in business or public life the uncertainty of seizures sometimes proves too serious a handicap.

Restless

AMERICANS are restlessly experimenting with sex freedom, and the experimenters are failing, Dr. Hornell Hart, professor of social economy at Bryn Mawr College, told the Congress.

In nineteenth century America, the idea that a man or a woman must have one partner for life probably became more pervasive than ever before in the history of human marriage, Dr. Hart said, but now the cult of liberty has made immense inroads in sex relations.

"Soviet Russia has set up freedom in love as an avowed ideal," he continued. "The rest of European-American civilization is dotted with social circles in which experiments with Soviet sex mores are being tried."

The typical outcome of this casting off of repressions is disillusionment and not fulfillment of personality, Dr. Hart declared.

Wreckage produced by the modern sex revolt was traced by him to four causes. "Science has not completely conquered the physical dangers of promiscuity," he said. The experimenters do not carry on their emotional researches in cool intelligent fashion, as the number of unintended babies and cases of disease indicate.

The second cause of failure found by him is that going against society's conventions is a severe emotional and mental strain, which may even break down the personality.

"Puritanism, in various degrees of modification, is widely prevalent in our civilization," he said in explanation. "It can no more be neglected in formulating a program for one's personal mental hygiene than can measles in formulating programs for public health."

The third reason cited to show why the experimenters fail is that, although they crave thrills and adventure, they also feel a deep need for a permanent love and the things that go with it. The last reason is the impossibility of keeping higher values of life vivid when swept by passion in such affairs.

Science must face fearlessly all sides of the question involved, was Dr. Hart's recommendation: "Personal experimentation is a costly method of discovering the truth. The psychiatric adviser needs to cultivate

the means of letting youth learn vicariously, through the sufferings of others."

In concluding, the speaker declared that "It is perhaps no accident that Euro-American civilization—the most monogamistic of history—has been the one to rise highest and most swiftly in technology, in science, in education, in political organization, in social legislation, and in music."

Alcoholism

THE Dutch no less than the Americans have their problem of alcoholism, and they have met it with some success by establishing consultation bureaus for alcoholism in all the greater towns of Holland, Dr. K. Herman Bouman, of the University of Amsterdam, reported to the International Congress on Mental Hygiene. Dr. Bouman said that these bureaus are now subsidized by state, province, and city because the authorities have realized that it is a cheaper proposition to keep up an individual's working power than to have to rebuild that power once it has been lost.

Some of the chronic drinkers come of their own accord to the bureaus to get the medical, psychiatric, and social assistance offered. Some are sent by relatives, doctors, and social institutions. The courts send others.

The picture of alcoholism has changed in Holland, partly from the work of the bureaus, partly from pressure of public opinion, legal measures, and the temperance movement, Dr. Bouman said. Alcoholic admissions to hospitals have decreased. There are fewer crimes of violence. The amount of alcohol consumed in Holland is decreasing.

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A psychologist suggests that the super-film of the future may be accompanied by a sequence of scents wafted through the theater, to bring the audience more completely into the atmosphere of the forest, the apple orchard, the farmhouse kitchen, or other scenes of the story.

How a disease wipes out human beings who are not resistant to it, was shown when influenza was introduced into a Labrador community of 360 Eskimos, causing the death of 300.