

PSYCHIATRY

Emotional Disturbances May Cause Physical Diseases

EMOTIONAL disturbances may be the cause of such physical diseases as stomach ulcers, goiter and diabetes. Not merely the symptoms of such ailments, but actual changes in the tissues of various organs and glands may be produced by emotional factors alone.

These facts, showing the close relation between mind and body and personality, were brought out at the meeting of the American Psychiatric Association and were particularly emphasized by the association's presiding officer, Dr. George R. Kirby of New York.

Just as medical leaders stress prevention of diseases or failing that, their prompt diagnosis in the early stages when there is most hope for cure, so psychiatric leaders are urging prevention of the diseases, both mental and physical, that arise from purely emotional factors.

Education has played a big part in reducing the annual toll taken by tuberculosis, diphtheria and typhoid fever. In the same way, education can reduce the amount of disease due to mental, nervous or emotional disturbance, Dr. Kirby pointed out.

People should learn to take their worries and difficulties to a psychiatrist just as they take physical aches and pains to a physician. Merely telling the story of an unhappy situation, talking over an anxiety or difficulty with the psychiatrist will help, but the psychiatrist can often give further aid in restoring peace of mind. In this way

many physical ails can be prevented.

There are no statistics showing how many cases of stomach ulcers, colitis, diabetes, goiter or even heart trouble were caused by emotional disturbances, Dr. Kirby said. But figures from various big diagnostic clinics show that for about half the patients who come in with complaints of physical disease no sign of such disease can be found by the most careful examination with X-rays and all the other aids of modern medical science.

Even in animals emotional shock or

disturbances can produce physical diseases. This has been shown most strikingly in diabetes, the condition in which the body is unable to utilize properly the carbohydrates eaten in the diet and in which sugar is excreted via the kidneys. An emotional diabetic condition has been produced and variations in the symptoms of diabetes have been shown to occur in response to emotional stress so that it seems actually possible in some cases to measure the degree of emotional reaction in terms so tangible as ounces of sugar, Dr. Kirby said.

Psychiatrists hope that physicians in the future will not only examine a patient by taking his pulse and blood pressure and by X-ray pictures but will analyze or examine his personality and his emotional make-up as well in order to find what is the real cause of his ailment and how to treat it.

Science News Letter, June 9, 1934

PSYCHIATRY

Bobbed Hair and Tinted Nails Called Self-Mutilation

SELF-MUTILATION, ranging from such socially accepted forms as bobbed hair and trimmed, crimson-painted fingernails to the abnormal cutting off of an arm or starving one's self to death, were discussed and explained by Dr. Karl A. Menninger of Topeka, Kansas, before the meeting of the American Psychiatric Association.

Dr. Menninger calls this self-mutilation localized self-destruction. It is also seen in certain apparently sincere but unsuccessful attempts at suicide. The motive in these cases is not to die but to punish one's self as atonement for some real or fancied wrong-doing.

A dramatic example given by Dr. Menninger was the case of an attractive young woman of thirty who first killed her three-year-old daughter and then, as a measure of punishment and atonement for this crime, threw herself on a railroad track in such a way that an oncoming train cut off her forearm. The young woman had suffered from a severe depression in which she felt that life was full of sorrow for which she was chiefly responsible.

She was confined in a hospital and was showing some improvement when her mother insisted on taking her home without the physician's consent. Thereupon the young woman killed her child

and mutilated herself. She said she had killed her child to save her from such suffering as she herself had endured.

After getting her own arm cut off she rapidly recovered from her mental disease and has remained well ever since. Examination after her recovery brought out the fact that she and her mother "never got along together." The psychiatrist's explanation of the case is that she hated her mother so much she committed murder and then offered propitiation by mutilating herself. In her confused mental state, her mother, child and self were all the same to her.

Speaking of socially accepted forms of self-mutilation, Dr. Menninger said that fundamentally men's shaving and hair cutting indicate some wish to be accepted by civilization in return for the sacrifice of a totem or badge of virility.

Science News Letter, June 9, 1934

In recent years, Indians have shown evidence of their business capacity by conducting cooperatives in cattle and timber, and other business ventures.

Lighthouse keepers along the Maine coast are gathering up the birds that lose their lives near the lighthouses, so that the Acadia National Park naturalists can study them for any information of scientific interest.

▼
RADIO
▲

HYGIENE OF HAY FEVER
an address by
Dr. Harry S. Bernton
Professor of Hygiene and Preventive Medicine at Georgetown University

Wednesday, June 13, at 3:30 p.m., Eastern Standard Time, over Stations of the Columbia Broadcasting System. Each week a prominent scientist speaks over the Columbia System under the auspices of Science Service.