The psychoneuroses and their treatment by psychotherapy

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THE PSYCHONEUROSES
AND THEIR TREATMENT
BY
PSYCHOTHERAPY

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

In translating this work, I have had in mind a very definite purpose. For a number of years, like many another, I have been struck by the immense number of minor psychic disturbances which render numerous individuals unhappy, discontented, ill, unable to hold their own in their milieu, even making confirmed invalids of many.

These individuals, variously classified as to their maladies, at different times, as suffering from functional neuroses, nervousness, neurasthenia, phobias, fixed ideas, obsessions, hysteria, psychoneuroses, etc., have been neglected for many years as objects of scientific medical inquiry. The reasons for this are obvious. They centre about the cardinal fact that the psychic life of the human being is the most complex series of phenomena in the most highly evolved creature with which human intelligence is acquainted.

The psychic problems of the individual have been left for the most part to the poet, the artist, the dramatist, and the story writer.

I do not mean that the physicians of times past have not made serious attempts to understand these questions. They have, and the student of medical history may well admire the results obtained, even if to-day they may seem inadequate, if not provoking. Even taking this knowledge into consideration, however, it appears that the problems of medicine have been so many, and so difficult of solution, that the human mind has naturally and wisely grasped at those for which some adequate solution seemed practicable. It is for this reason that the comparatively simpler problems of the bodily activities, their modifications, etc., have received their wealth of study, which is one of the crowning glories of medical science in the last century.

The time came, however, when the intricacies of the nervous system commenced to be resolved, and scientific medicine arrived at a point where its hypotheses began to yield valuable results in the fields of neurology and psychiatry. With the establishment of firmer foundations, it became worth while to delve into psychic problems, with some hope of sound deductions and practical results, and within the past few generations we have seen scientific medicine take its place in this domain heretofore left to the thousand and one uninformed and quasi-scientific cults which have for centuries constituted parasitic foci in every community.

It was with the intention of furthering a knowledge of what scientific medicine could do in the domain outlined that I first translated Dubois' excellent work on the "Psychoneuroses." Its fundamental postulate was an appeal to the intelligence of the individual.
Dubois, however, was incomplete. He did not lay sufficient emphasis upon the instinctive, or, more widely speaking, the emotional side of the human machine, in its psychical situations. It is for this reason that I have, with the aid of my wife, translated the present volume, which is the product of Professor Dejerine of Paris, and one of his former assistants, Dr. Gauckler.

Herein is found that emphasis lacking in the work of Dubois. Herein Dejerine and Gauckler uncover the emotional factors which are present in all of the group of disorders under discussion. This work provides us, in the best manner at present available, the other side of the human being, which had, I feel, been somewhat neglected by former authors.

The reading of this book will show how many patients may be treated and cured without the more detailed analyses elaborated to meet more complex situations.

Just as in the domain of internal medicine a compound cathartic pill will relieve the vast majority of constipations, requiring only in a smaller percentage of cases a more intricate and time-consuming gastrointestinal therapy, so in the domain of the psychoneuroses a prompt handling of an emotional situation, or a sound dialectic may secure for a large number of patients the relief necessary to effect an adjustment, while for a lesser number, although their number is by no means small, only a psycho-analysis will effect a cure.

With these few words we leave the work to the judgment of the individual reader. The hope, that, it will prove of some service to all, patients as well as their physicians, has been the stimulus and purpose which has led to its translation.

April, 1913.

Smith Ely Jelliffe.
PREFACE

WHEN, more than thirty years ago, I began to devote myself to the study of diseases of the nervous system, I was struck, from the very beginning of my practice, with the slight success which resulted from treatment of neuropaths by medicines, whether combined or not with physical measures, and little by little I was led, by personal experience, to ask myself whether it would not be wise, in the case of all patients coming under the classification of neurasthenia or hysteria, to depart from the usual therapeutic methods, and seek the cause of their disease outside of the objective symptoms which they presented.

I thus became more and more convinced that it was not the physical, but rather the moral which was the cause of all the symptoms of which these patients complained, and finally, after having practised Dr. Weir Mitchell’s methods for several years, my convictions were established. In using this method of treatment, which is based practically on isolation, rest in bed, over-feeding, douches, massage, and electricity, in fact on purely physical measures, I was not long in discovering that unless the patient’s state of mind improved the therapeutic results were far from satisfactory.

It was thus that I soon came to see that in order to treat neuropaths, with the hope of curing them, the first and most important thing was to get hold of their morale, in other words, to practise psychotherapy. This is what I have been doing for the last twenty-five years.

The influence of the morale on the physique has been known in all ages. It is in fact a popular belief that the health may be seriously affected by grief or vexation, but physicians have been, as a rule, the last persons to recognize that these might be connected with a very special class of affections, requiring particular treatment, based not on symptoms but on causes: and, without wishing to deny—at least in many cases—the accuracy of the old adage “Mens sana in corpore sano,” I nevertheless believe that, in the case of most neuropaths, whatever may be their symptomatology, the saying is not correct. With them, as a matter of fact, if the body is not sound it is because their morale is unhealthy, and because they have either suffered or are still suffering morally or spiritually.

As a method of general education, or moral guidance, psychotherapy is as old as the world. All philosophies, and all religions, above all, the Catholic religion—for the psychotherapist is nothing more than a confessor, or director of the lay conscience—have applied it, or are still applying it. Few, however, are the physicians who understand this, or who know how to make use of it, when they know the cause.

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To be convinced of this, one only has to see what a large number of neuropaths are being subjected to some physical treatment, as if they had some true organic lesions. I am alluding to those patients, whose number is legion, whom I have described under the name of false gastropaths, false enteropaths, false cardiopaths, false genitopaths, sufferers from spinal disease, and false cerebral disease; who present symptoms which often seem serious, but whose origin is wholly psychic, and who are treated every day purely and solely on the lines of symptomatic therapy, with the result that the idea becomes more firmly fixed in their minds, that there is some disease localized in the organ of which they complain. I have seen thousands of these invalids.

I hold that the physicians who understand and know how to practise psychotherapy are still very few in number. I do not, however, consider direct suggestion as a psychotherapeutic measure, either when produced more or less openly in the waking state or by means of hypnosis. Such methods have the serious defect of acting only on the subconscious, and on the cerebral automatism, and are not directed to the superior faculties of the individual.

Suggestion, though much more frequently used in hysterical cases than in troubles of neurasthenic origin, whether practised in the waking state or during hypnotic sleep, is directed only to the symptom, and not to the cause; its action is only on the surface, it does not reach the depths. By this process one often succeeds more or less quickly, in certain cases, in getting rid of a paralysis, a contracture or an anaesthesia in an hysteric. But, without taking the drawbacks into consideration, and they are very numerous, the result is very uncertain, unless, by winning the confidence and appealing to the reason of the patient, or in other words by means of psychotherapy, one succeeds in making him confess his manner of living, and explains to him how and why he fell ill, and how and why he can become cured, so that he will not relapse.

Even though these methods, which are directed only to the cerebral automatism, are sometimes successful in causing some of the objective manifestations of a hysterical condition to disappear, they are absolutely without efficiency when it comes to the very complex and intricate symptoms of a neurasthenic. For here the mental condition is wholly different. One cannot cure a false gastropath or cardiopath by a brusque command. It is a case for mental pedagogy, which often requires a long time and careful development to be effectual.

It has been stated repeatedly, and with some reason, that isolation in a sanitarium is fundamental in the treatment of the psychoneuroses. In a general way this is true, but it is not absolutely imperative. In the case of many neuropaths isolation is not necessary, and the psychotherapist need not insist on it. Isolation, in fact, is nothing but a
means, without which, in many cases, it would be impossible to practise psychotherapy, and which has its special indications.

A sojourn in a sanitarium is possible only to the wealthy or those who are comfortably off, and is wholly out of the question for the poorer classes of society. But the psychoneuroses are not met exclusively among the well-to-do. Neurasthenia and hysteria are, in fact, very common among the working population of Paris, and are often found in very severe forms. I have therefore tried to introduce in the hospital the suitable conditions of treatment which one would find in a sanitarium, and for fifteen years I have established in my service at the Salpêtrière an isolation and psychotherapeutic ward, where several thousand patients have been treated. The results obtained by this measure have far surpassed the hopes I had in the beginning, for they have proved quite as satisfactory, and even more rapid, than those in private practice. I will not go into the details of my methods of working in the hospital. The reader who is interested in this question will find all the necessary information in a work entitled “Isolement et Psychothérapie,” published in 1904, by my pupils Camus and Pagniez. I merely make, in passing, the statement that at the Salpêtrière, as well as in the city, it is the moral treatment which is the cause of the success obtained.

According to some authors, particularly Dubois (of Berne), psychotherapy ought to be “rational,” that is, based solely on reasoning and argument. I have always been of the opposite opinion, and I have frequently expressed myself on this subject, both in my courses at the Faculty of Medicine and in my clinical lectures at the Salpêtrière. If reason and argument were sufficient to “change one’s state of mind,” the neuropaths would find in the writings of the moralists and philosophers, and spiritual advisers, everything they would need to reconstruct their morale, and consequently their physical well-being, and therefore they would have no need of a psychotherapist.

Reasoning by itself is indifferent. It does not become a factor of energy or creator of effort; but the moment an emotional element appears the personality of the subject whose mentality one is seeking to modify, is moved and affected by it. According to my way of thinking, it is an error to consider both the judgment, which is a primitive phenomenon, and the impression or sentiment which follows it as psychological processes of the same nature. The impression and sentiment are nothing but the result of the more or less ready adaptation of our personality to the judgment which caused them, and though secondary are no less able to provoke reactions.

From my point of view, psychotherapy depends wholly and exclusively upon the beneficial influence of one person on another. One does not cure an hysterical or a neurasthenic nor change their mental condition by reasoning or by syllogisms. They are only cured when they
come to believe in you. In short, psychotherapy can only be effective, when the person on whom you are practising it has confessed his entire life, that is to say, when he has absolute confidence in you.

Between reasoning, and the acceptance of this reasoning by the patient, there is, I repeat, an element, on the importance of which I cannot insist too strongly; it is sentiment or feeling. It is feeling which creates the atmosphere of confidence without which, I hold, no psychotherapy is possible, that is to say, unless reasoning produces effective action there is no "persuasion." I am, in fact, convinced, and have been so for a long time, that in the moral sphere the bare idea produces no effect, that is to say, the idea alone does not move one, unless it is accompanied by an emotional appeal which makes it acceptable to consciousness and thus brings about conviction. There is something analogous to faith in this, some individual element which makes the success of the psychotherapist depend upon his personality.

This is the one and only place to refer to the ancient adage—"It is faith that saves . . . or cures."

I have been aided in the collaboration of this work by one of my pupils, Dr. Gauckler, with whom I have already published several works on psychotherapy.

J. DEJERINE.