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PSYCHOTHERAPY.

RALPH LYMAN PARSONS, M. D.

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PSYCHOTHERAPY.*

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The fact that the mind has an important influence on bodily conditions is very well understood. The subject has been discussed by many able writers, yet it is of so great importance that it is always worthy of consideration and of re-consideration. It may be that this is especially true at the present time, when the knowledge of the physical means for the prevention and for the cure of disease has become so great as to divert the attention, in no small degree, from the potency of those mental influences which are, sometimes, still more important.

A distinguished philosopher has said, "In nature there is nothing great but man; in man there is nothing great but mind." It might be added that the mind constitutes the man; it makes him what he is; considered in its broadest sense, it comprises whatever in his being is not material; it builds up, controls and governs the body. Even when the physical man is asleep, or in a state of unconsciousness, the sub-conscious mind is always active; it keeps those functions, the integrity of which is essential to the continuance of life, in a state of activity; it continues, in some degree, to receive impressions from without; and these impressions may and often do become the subjects of cerebral activity.

How the mind may affect the body, in a state of health, the excretions, the sweat, the saliva, the appetite, the digestion, the catamenia, the capillary circulation—as in blushing, or in the pallor caused by fear—is too well known and of too frequent occurrence to call for more than a passing notice. In woman, parturition is often delayed by her anxiety for seclu-

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sion and quietude during the great crisis; or her milk is suppressed, or is rendered poisonous by an accession of fear or of anger. The action of the heart is habitually more or less influenced by the emotions of fear, of joy, or of anger; and the effect on a heart that is weak or diseased may be such as to stop its action altogether, as in the case of the late Dr. John Hunter. The sudden blanching of the hair, through mental shock, is not of infrequent occurrence. The case of Louise Lateau is of especial interest, as an illustration of the influence of fixed attention on a particular part of the body. She was a devotee and had contemplated the tragedy of the crucifixion with profound attention and emotion. On Fridays she would lie on her back, with her arms extended, as in the crucifixion. Each afternoon, while she was thus lying in a state of deep religious absorption, the stigmata of the five wounds made their appearance. While this girl was, undoubtedly, a pronounced neurasthenic and of a hysterical temperament, there was nothing in her physical condition, nor in the general state of her health that would at all account for the occurrence of the stigmata. Their cause was mental and mental only. She was so closely watched by physicians, undoubtedly both capable and honest, that physical means of producing the stigmata could not have been employed without detection. Many similar cases have been reported. Sympathetic pain is not uncommon; as when a person experiences severe pain in some part of the body on seeing another person who seems to be suffering from an injury in the same location.

The influence of the mind on the body may be so profound and so persistent as to be a cause of actual physical disease. Fear often renders the subject especially susceptible to epidemic influences. Fright is not an infrequent cause of epilepsy. Fear of hydrophobia may cause the symptoms of the disease, although the subject has not been inoculated with the virus.

On the other hand, the agency of psychic causes in the cure of ordinary physical disease is very great; but at this point there should be a definite understanding of what is meant by the term psychotherapy.

Psychotherapy, then, as the term is used in this paper, is intended to include all the curative agencies in action which are not material in character; and also all immaterial extraneous

influences in so far as they act favorably on the mind of the subject.

In many, if not in most instances, psychic influences are intimately associated with material agencies; as with drugs, stimulants, diet, bodily exercise, occupation, condition of the air, altitude, climate, etc. But the associated material agencies are here so obvious, so obtrusive even, that they oftentimes receive the credit of being the real, the efficient agencies in the cure of the patient, when in fact their influence has been quite subordinate, if not entirely negative, or even prejudicial in character.

And so, in the treatment of patients who suffer from any disease whatever, it should be borne in mind that however well adapted the material remedies employed may be, the aid of the psychic forces should also be brought into use by every available means. To this end, the persons associated with the invalid should be congenial and of a cheerful temperament. The physician in attendance should be of a hopeful temperament and should be able to inspire his patient with hopefulness. His pains-taking care in making his examinations, the confident manner in which he states his conclusions and the minuteness with which he gives his directions may exert an important influence on the mind of the invalid and in no small degree promote his chances of recovery. Ignorant charlatans who have the ability to inspire their patients with hopefulness and confidence sometimes succeed in effecting a cure when learned and skilled physicians who lack this ability have failed.

All remedies that are really efficient in themselves may have and usually do have an added curative effect when administered to persons of intelligence and whose mental faculties are unimpaired. The expectation of a definite, favorable result adds greatly in bringing about this result. The strictness and particularity with which directions for treatment are given and carried out serves to stimulate the expectant attention; and this, in turn, stimulates the psychic forces to a state of activity. The hopefulness engendered by the fact that something is being done, whether by the administration of medicines, baths, electricity, massage, or any other suitable curative means aids in bringing about the desired result. While material agents may destroy organized, living, physical structures, they can never

repair nor build them up without the aid of the psychic forces as the builders.

Not only do the psychic forces aid material remedies in the cure of diseased conditions, but they are often efficient agents in themselves. As the expectation of a fatal result, on the part of the patient, may lead to that result; so encouraging assurances of recovery are often efficient in promoting recovery. An exercise of the will, on the part of the patient, may even overcome the adverse influence of the disease and an unfavorable prognosis combined. Skilled physicians sometimes depend upon the psychic forces alone in the treatment of their patients, stimulating hopeful expectation by the administration of substances that are entirely inert, as, for instance, in giving placebos for the relief of constipation. It has been found that motherless babies thrive better in the care of indigent women at their destitute homes than at hospitals where their food, surroundings and attendance are of a much higher order. The mental influence of the foster-mother on the baby, the mothering the baby gets, in the former case, more than counterbalances the advantages afforded by the hospital.

Cures are undoubtedly effected through the agency of what are called the Faith Cure, Mental Healing, Christian Science, and other agencies that act, in the first instance on the mind alone, and through the mental forces on the body. From time to time, healers make their appearance under whose mental influence sufferers from physical ailments seem to be cured; and some of them, undoubtedly, are cured. They leave their canes and crutches with the healer; they think that they are cured; they can now do what they could not do before, and this certainly constitutes a cure. And so, there can be no doubt that many of the pilgrims to Lourdes and to other religious shrines are really cured of their physical disabilities, and that these cures are effected mostly, if not altogether, through the influence of the mind. Their faith has healed them. If this faith, if this mental influence, can be brought into action without the intervention of the healer, without the pilgrimage to the shrine, the result will be the same. If the mental forces of the absent patient can be brought into favorable action, what is called absent treatment may be effective without the presence

of the healer, although in most cases the presence of an objective stimulant, as the healer or the shrine, is essential.

It is by no means to be inferred that all mental healers and Christian Scientists are dishonest, or are knowingly practicing a fraud upon the public. On the contrary, some of them have the most sublime faith in the efficacy of their methods; and it is largely because of this sublime faith on their part that their cures are brought about. They inspire their patients with something of their own hopeful enthusiasm and thus stimulate the activity of the real agents in the cure, the psychic forces of the patient.

The ameliorations and cures which are, undoubtedly, effected through hypnotism depend upon the same principle. In neither case is there any emanation from the agent to the subject. The agent simply stimulates the psychic forces of the subject to a state of activity. These forces alone effect all the physical changes that are brought about.

Perhaps the most striking illustration of faith in the efficacy of inert substances, as medicines, is to be found in the use of the higher attenuations of homeopathic drugs. A single minim of the tincture of any drug when carried to the thirtieth centesimal attenuation would suffice to medicate an amount of vehicle so enormous as to be quite beyond the power of conception. A globe one hundred million miles in diameter would suffice to contain only a small fraction of the supposed medicine that might theoretically be made from one minim of the mother tincture. The amount of the drug in each dose is of course correspondingly diminished. The material effect of a dose of this supposed medicine must be utterly inappreciable and without physical effect. And yet recoveries follow its administration; and physicians of a high degree of culture and of intelligence have faith in its curative power. If such medicine does have curative power, it must certainly be through psychotherapy.

If it be objected that such cures as are claimed to be effected by such means are not real cures, but either that the disease never existed or that the cures are imaginary, it may be replied that the variety of both disease and cure is quite the same as in analogous cases which are diagnosed by competent physicians and cured by means of material remedies.

And if it be objected that the psychic forces are too mysterious in their nature to entitle them to consideration, it may be replied that material remedies are no less mysterious in their mode of action. We know nothing of the fundamental grounds of their activity in either case.

Thus far no mention has been made of the psychic forces with reference to what more especially concerns the members of this Association—the treatment of diseases involving the integrity of the mental faculties. While in the treatment of mental diseases the favorable influence of certain agencies which act directly and immediately on the mind is understood and appreciated, it is very doubtful whether the full measure of their importance is always kept in view and the principles involved are put into practice. Nor is the reason for this far to seek. In former times insanity was thought to be a disease of the mind itself, a sort of demoniacal possession which needed to be exorcised rather than cured.

In opposition to this view, alienists have laid so much stress on the doctrine that insanity is simply an expression of disease of the brain that they have, to some extent, left out of consideration the psychic forces upon which the functions of the material body depend for their activity and their integrity. Moreover, the alienist has under his special care patients whose mental faculties are in a state of disorder; and who are consequently less amenable to psychic influences than those who are not insane. It naturally follows that physicians who are engaged in the treatment of diseases affecting the mind are, perhaps, more likely to neglect the psychic forces, as a means of cure, than are those physicians who are especially engaged in the treatment of physical ailments.

However, alienists do fully recognize the importance of psychic influences on the insane in certain particulars. Thus all are agreed that such patients should be removed, as far as possible, from disturbing mental influences; and that their surroundings, their associations, their occupations and their amusements should be carefully and intelligently adapted.

But much more than this is needful in all cases in which the mind is still responsive to mental influences. In order to attain the best results, as careful, individualized mental treatment should be prescribed and carried into practice as in the

case of material remedies. Just what this psychic treatment should be must, of necessity, depend not only upon the condition and requirements of the patient, in each case, but also upon the temperament, personal experience, aptitude and ability of the physician who prescribes and of the agent who carries the prescription into practice. In a general way, the following suggestions may be made, by way of illustration: A patient whose intellectual faculties are susceptible of improvement should be constantly in companionship with and under the influence of persons of sound mind; and these associates should systematically exert that influence by conversation within the sphere of the patient's intelligence, and by calling his attention to objectivities in connection with any occupations or amusements in which he may be engaged. It is not to be inferred that all insane patients should always be kept from companionship with other insane patients. On the contrary, such companionship may be so arranged as to make it a beneficial object lesson. Insane patients often perceive and understand that the ideas and acts of other insane patients are irrational; and, whether they acknowledge it or not, are led to suspect that some of their own ideas and acts may also be irrational. On the other hand, the intimate association of large numbers of the insane is without advantage and may be detrimental. This is especially the case when those who are associated are ungenial, or when many sufferers from mental depression are kept in close companionship.

Schools and lectures such as are sometimes employed as substitutes for or as adjuncts to individualized methods of psychic treatment are of advantage, especially in the larger hospitals where individualized psychic treatment is difficult of attainment.

In the carrying out of a plan of individualized psychic treatment, the due exercise and stimulation of the moral faculties should not be forgotten. To this end, the patient may be interested and occupied in the care of animals, or in doing something for the pleasure or the benefit of others.

The highest and at the same time the most difficult sphere for psychotherapy is in the management of those cases of incipient or of convalescent insanity which are characterized by unfounded suspicions, hallucinations, or delusive ideas. And

here it is well to ignore, for the time being, at least, the doctrine that insanity is always and only a symptom of disease of the brain. It will be helpful, rather, to keep the facts clearly in mind that many cases of insanity have their beginnings in a brain activity which is due to mental causes; which, in the first instance, is entirely compatible with a condition of sanity; and that the continuance of this abnormal activity often results in a brain habit which it is beyond the power of the subject to control; that is, the psychic cause has brought about a condition of insanity; but that no change in the organic substance of the brain has taken place may be inferred from the fact that some of these patients seem to recover with great suddenness; almost instantly, indeed; and from the fact that they recover under the influence of psychic remedies alone.

The following history may serve to illustrate the causative influences and the psychic treatment adopted in a case of hallucinatory insanity.

Miss A., a young woman of neurotic heredity, but of good physique, good social position, and of good education, suffered a severe mental shock through social disappointments and infelicities. Her appetite became impaired, her sleep disturbed, and her power of self-control greatly diminished. A state of hysterical excitement with great mental depression supervened. After a little hallucinations of hearing were experienced. She heard voices by day and by night, talking about her, making vile accusations against her, and addressing her with opprobrious epithets. She insisted that the voices were real, that they came from different locations, especially from a room over her own, and demanded that her persecutors be removed. An examination of the places from which the voices seemed to proceed did not remove her belief in their reality. The irritation caused by the voices was so great as at times to throw her into a state of ungovernable rage, during which she would scream, slam the doors, throw articles of furniture about and make use of violent and profane language—acts which were entirely foreign to her normal habits. Although her appetite was not especially impaired, she had lost in weight and become decidedly neurasthenic. In addition to the usual psychotherapeutic treatment, removal from the original causes of mental disturbances with suitable occupations and amusements, such tonic

remedies were prescribed as seemed to be indicated. After this line of treatment had been followed for a period of time, without a favorable result, the following additional psychotherapeutic measures were adopted: She was informed that in many instances persons were annoyed by voices which had no existence; that if they were able to convince themselves, or could be convinced that the voices had no real existence the annoyance they caused would be greatly diminished, if not quite abolished. She was told of persons who have habitually heard such voices, but who suffered little annoyance from them because they fully understood the cause. She was also shown the printed history of such hallucinated persons, in corroboration of the oral statements that had been made. She was also told that she ought to give credit to the testimony of reliable persons who assured her of the non-reality of the voices; that the greater part of all she knew was not of her own knowledge, but was founded upon the testimony of others. In addition, the mechanism of hearing was explained to her, somewhat as follows, to-wit, "You see that I am now talking with you. You hear my voice, but only in this way. The words I am speaking to you are simply a vibration of my vocal organs. But it is not this vibration that you hear. This vibration of the vocal organs in turn causes the vibration of the air; of the drum of the ear; of the little bones of the ear; of the structures within the ear; of the nerves that lead from the ear to a certain part of the brain and finally of the cells themselves. If any of these had not been made to vibrate there would have been no hearing. But now that the cells of this part of the brain have been made to vibrate, you hear my voice. Now, if these cells, through habit or through any other cause, should vibrate in the same way when I am not speaking, you would seem to hear my voice just as you do at present. I cannot give you medicine, nor do anything that will stop these false voices. But if you will accept the explanation and the assurance I have given you I have no doubt that they will cease to annoy you; and, then, they may stop altogether. This was repeated, on occasion, when the patient was in a quiescent, receptive mood, and in a restful, recumbent posture; but no attempt was made to induce hypnosis. As was hoped, the voices soon ceased to annoy and after a little ceased to be heard altogether. With

the stopping of the voices, the other manifestations of mental disturbance passed away. The patient had recovered.

✓ No mention has been made of hypnosis as a means of placing insane patients in a receptive state of mind, when an attempt is being made to influence their mental faculties; in part, because the result would be very uncertain and might be unfavorable; and in part because such individuals can rarely be hypnotized. They are usually so suspicious or are so much absorbed in their own ideas that they do not readily yield themselves to the required conditions. In lieu of this, a favorable mental influence may sometimes be exerted by advice given and suggestions made when the patient has fallen into a natural sleep, or is in the somnolent state between sleeping and waking.

While there are few insane patients who cannot be favorably influenced by psychotherapeutic methods, it must be admitted that the great majority of those who are under hospital care are not very susceptible to such influence; and yet, it is not unlikely that many of these last have at some time been more susceptible to the favorable influence of psychotherapy than at present. Indeed there is reason to believe that there are few incipient cases of insanity, of partial insanity, or of those in the convalescent stage which may not be benefited by carefully considered, tactfully applied, and thoroughly individualized psychotherapeutic measures.

Assuming, then, that psychotherapeutics might advantageously be employed with greater frequency and to a greater extent than has hitherto been done, it remains to be inquired what obstacles are to be removed and what measures are to be inaugurated to this end. It is obvious that the person who undertakes the practice of psychotherapy in a given case, in addition to being of a suitable temperament and to having made a careful study of the principles involved, should gain the entire confidence; and should be on terms of friendly, sympathetic intimacy with the patient. After having become thoroughly conversant with the history and mental peculiarities of the case, he should wait patiently for a favorable opportunity, when the patient is in an agreeable and receptive mood, and then exercise such special mental influences as may be within his power; repeating his advice, his teachings, or his suggestions as occasion may offer the opportunity. The time which

may seem to be lost in waiting is not really lost, if the agent is suited to the work in which he is engaged. His influence, while placing himself on harmonious terms with the patient, may be really no less helpful than his more systematic efforts. The exact methods to be employed in psychotherapy must of necessity be left entirely to the judgment of the practitioner. On the one hand the varieties in disposition, circumstances, education, mental capacity, and vagaries of the subject are almost infinite, and can be learned only by personal study; and on the other, the variety in the mental status and equipment of agents who will be suited to the work are equally great. However, in order to obtain the best results the agent should, at least, be equal to the subject in mental capacity, education, culture, and intelligence.

Naturally, the physician in charge would be the person best suited to put the methods of psychotherapy in practice; but in large hospitals for the insane the medical superintendent could rarely undertake this duty, on account of the time that would be required. The task might even be too great for the members of the medical staff. In this case it might be advisable either to increase the number of the medical staff, or to employ non-medical assistants who are especially adapted to this sort of work. Of course the duties of such assistants should be entirely distinct from those of ordinary nurses, attendants, or supervisors. While they should do their work under the general direction of their medical superior they should be allowed to choose their own methods and to carry them into practice without interference.

In a paper entitled, "The Constructive Forces," which was read before this Society a few years ago, a special reference was made to the immaterial forces through which and by which the body is built up and kept in a state of repair. It is the object of this paper to suggest a consideration of the influence which the immaterial, the psychic forces have or may have upon both body and mind in a state of disease. In pursuance of this object, reference has been made to the influence of the mind upon the body, in a state of health; to mental states as causes of ordinary maladies, and to their influence in the cure of these maladies; to mental influences, on the one hand as causes, and on the other as aids in the treatment of insanity;

and, finally, to some of the conditions which are required for the efficient practice of psychotherapy in the treatment of the insane.

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