

Isolation in the Cure of Psychoneuroses [*Le Rôle de l'Isolement dans le Traitement des Psycho-Neuroses*]. (*Gaz. Méd. de Paris*, April, 1909.) *Valentine, Paul.*

The writer starts with the conception that psycho-neuropaths are, broadly considered, persons with an inadequate capacity for adaptation to their social environment. The struggle for existence is for them too severe or too deceptive; they endure badly the shocks, the uncertainties, the privations, the surprises, and the sorrows of life. According to the particular abnormal mode of reaction to their environment we distinguish among them hysterics, neurasthenics, epileptics, the obsessed, toxico-maniacs, mattoids, and borderland cases. Sooner or later such persons commonly come under treatment; the problem we have to consider is how they may best be restored to an approximation to normal mental and physical health sufficient to enable them once more to play their part in ordinary social life.

Such persons suffer from two main sources of disorder: their nutrition is congenitally faulty—dystrophia; and their nervous working exhibits the characteristics of irritable weakness—dysphoria. Ultimately these two sources of disorder act on one another in such a way and to such a degree that a vicious circle is set up, and they become unfitted for ordinary social life. How are they to be restored?

As far as the nutritive element is concerned we must attempt to regulate metabolism by means of attention to diet, elimination, exercise, and by gymnastics, massage, electricity, hydro-therapeutics, change of air, etc. When we turn to consider the primarily nervous sources of disorder it is obvious that the environment in which this latter has originated is one ill-adapted to promote the recovery of the patient. "If the patient has a family, this will, with rare exceptions, be found to be a forcing-house for the maintenance and multiplication of pathological disturbances. Mutual suggestion between brothers and sisters, between parents and children, continually reinforces the morbid ideational associations. Granted the rôle of inheritance in the origination of psychoneuroses, it would be very surprising indeed were this not the case. Hence the almost invariable failure of those practitioners who persist in treating such patients in their own homes." If the patient have no family, still, in his old home he will be influenced by the old associations—recollections of the gaming-table, the practice of some form of sexual fetichism, or what not—which, from the nervous side, have contributed to the production of his disorder. The more carefully we study these cases the more evident becomes the importance of therapeutic isolation. But its use must be thoroughly understood to enable us to apply it with discretion.

Until a few years ago isolation in an asylum was synonymous with solitary imprisonment; the patient was entirely cut off from the normal world. Then, as soon as he was regarded as cured, he passed at one bound from this quasi-conventual condition to the complex life of every day, for which his nervous system had now become unfitted by prolonged inaction. But the relapses which so frequently resulted from this mode of treatment have led, in France and elsewhere, to an attempt to combine the advantages of a provisional isolation with means to fit

the patient for his anticipated return to the realities of ordinary life. Instead of solitary confinement for our psycho-neuropaths, we endeavour to secure a progressive re-education of their will, whereby they will be enabled to take their places side by side with normal members of society.

With this end in view, the technique of the suggestive method has been re-modelled. Not only do we endeavour by this means to procure sleep and rest, to relieve physical pain and mental distress; we now also employ a mode of "mental orthopædics." A dialectic at once sympathetic and firm, infrangible and supple, adroit and persuasive; such is the method initiated by Dubois, of Berne, and now utilised by the great majority of psycho-therapeutists. The re-education of the patient must be adapted at once to the special psycho-affective type of the individual patient, and to the conditions of life to which he will have to return. It is needful that the patient should have absolute confidence in his physician, and that the latter should himself have sufficiently broad knowledge of general pathology, literature, history, art, and above all of philosophy; for nothing will be more effective for the correction of the ego-centric error of the neuropath than to introduce him, even in a fragmentary and superficial manner, to a positive knowledge of man and the universe.

Before returning to normal social life the patient should pass a period of probation in family life under continued medical supervision.

[English experience of the application of psycho-therapeutic methods to the insane has been far less encouraging than would appear from the above paper to have been the case in France.] Dr. Paul Valentin concludes what most English alienists will, I think, be inclined to regard as a somewhat fanciful essay in the following terms:

"I conclude, therefore, that the *maison de santé* of the future for the use of psycho-neuropaths will bear no resemblance whatever, either from a distance or on close inspection, to a convent or to a prison—nor, indeed, will it resemble, as some hypnotists appear to wish, the Palace of the Sleeping Beauty. It will be a medical home, part hospital, part school, and part private house, in which the effects of isolation will be tested by a preliminary experience of social life; it will ultimately attain the rank of a true 'institute for the accomplishment of human perfection.'"

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7. Sociology.

On Penal Responsibility [*De la Responsabilité Pénale*]. (*Bulletin de la Société de Médecine Mentale de Belgique, No. 144, April, 1909.*) Francotte.

In this paper, read as the introduction to a discussion on criminal responsibility in mental disease, Dr. Francotte has dealt chiefly with the question as it regards the feeble-minded or the "borderland cases" of Maudsley. The author goes over very much the same ground as was covered in the debate between Ballett and Grasset at the Congress of Geneva, his conclusions agreeing in the main with the views put forward by the second of these alienists. He proposes that the law should explicitly recognise the existence of what Grasset has termed the "demi-