

Occasional Note.

Chronic Sepsis and Mental Disease.

THERE is no doubt that Dr. Henry A. Cotton's masterly communication to the Annual Meeting of 1923 on "The Relation of Chronic Sepsis to the so-called Functional Mental Disorders" (*vide* p. 434), together with Dr. T. C. Graves' paper on the same subject, and the remarkable discussion which followed, especially Dr. William Hunter's remarks, will give us food for reflection for some time to come. That the removal of focal infections in cases of insanity sometimes resulted in the marked improvement, even complete recovery, has been the experience of not a few psychiatrists in this country. Dr. Cotton is generous when he says that the idea had its origin in England, and it would perhaps be more correct to say that it is only the germ of the idea which lies to the credit of the mother country. But wherever the idea arose it has been left to America to give it practical expression, which, after all, is the important point. And this has been done with a thoroughness and completeness which commands at once our respect and admiration. From Dr. Cotton's account before this was accomplished there were many difficulties to surmount, many unbelievers to convert, much opposition to overcome, and set-backs to pioneer efforts to rally from. From 1905 and onward Dr. Cotton fought the battle with remarkable courage and tenacity, and, in 1918, after some tentative attempts, the momentous decision was arrived at that "chronic sepsis should be eliminated in this group of patients." The result surpassed all expectations, even in the first year. The recovery-rate in this group of cases rose from 37 to 85 *per cent.*—a truly remarkable achievement—a result which has since been maintained and even excelled.

Such was the fare laid before our Association assembled at the Annual Meeting on July 11, 1923.

It no doubt occurred at once to many of those present, "if this can be done in America, it can be done in this country." Dr. Graves shortly afterwards showed that a beginning has been made in Birmingham. It is now up to London and other great cities, where there are abundant facilities at hand for this purpose, not to lag behind. Good team work is required, and the Government and local authorities persuaded that the cost, though at first considerable, will in the end be cheaper than maintaining chronic lunatics.

In a short editorial we cannot discuss the many interesting points, ætiological and others, which arise out of Dr. Cotton's paper. It is sufficient to say that, while not prepared to accept in their entirety

the theoretical consideration he places before us, we cannot fail to be impressed with the practical results, and we feel that he has pointed an avenue of treatment well worthy of extended exploration.

It cannot be gainsaid that the pathologist and biologist during the past decade have slowly but surely undermined our belief in the recoverability of many of the commoner forms of mental disease.

The recoverability of adolescent insanity received its quietus at the hands of Kraepelin, who established dementia præcox as an incurable disease.

Our simple belief in the recoverability of mania, and melancholia received a death-blow when we were told that all such cases were merely episodes in life-long constitutional mental disorder.

Notwithstanding this, cases of dementia præcox, mania, and melancholia continued to recover, and were enabled to resume their station in life.

We were inspired to look upon cases with confusion and delirium as curable. We were told that they were the outcome of toxæmia or exhaustion, or both. Given careful nursing, and medical attention designed to remove the cause, the prospects were bright. But do such cases recover with such ease? How often are we disappointed? Minds permanently blank or disturbed with delusions or hallucinations are as often as not the result.

Thus the idea that there may be one basic morbid condition underlying all these psychoses will not come as a matter of surprise to many psychiatrists. Clinical experience has all pointed to this conclusion.

The advent of the Freudian School did not materially improve matters. As far as the established psychoses were concerned, psycho-analysis and psycho-therapy were soon found to be of limited application.

Dr. Chalmers Watson struck a more hopeful note in his contribution on "The *Rôle* of Auto-intoxication or Auto-infection in Mental Disorders" (*vide* p. 52), and if Dr. Cotton's contention proves true on more extended application, it will herald the dawn of a brighter day for those afflicted with mental disease and for the practice of psychiatry.

When Moore and Noguchi in 1913 demonstrated the treponema in the cortex of paretics, much of the accumulated literature on this disease became obsolete. If, by eliminating chronic sepsis in cases of manic-depressive insanity, dementia præcox, paranoid conditions, the psychoneuroses, and toxic psychoses, between 80 and 90 *per cent.* recover, what a jettisoning of cherished theories, beliefs, and writings there will be!

There was foreshadowed in a previous number of our Journal

(*vide* 260) an appeal for funds to carry out a scheme for intensive research into the cause of insanity and methods of treatment at a number of centres for a period of five years—in other words team-work on an organised plan.

Let us hope that this scheme will mature in the near future, and that there will soon be an opportunity of settling once for all these grave problems, the solution of which is long overdue.

Part II.—Reviews.

The Hygiene of Marriage. By ISABEL EMSLIE HUTTON, M.D. Foreword by Prof. A. LOUISE McILROY, M.D., D.Sc., O.B.E., London: William Heinemann (Medical Books) Ltd., 1923. Crown 8vo. Pp. xii + 112. Price 6s.

It is with some reluctance that the reviewer approaches a work of this kind. Sexology, admittedly a difficult subject to write about, has only in recent years been accepted as a respectable branch of sociology; and like most sociological subjects it has a medical aspect, the importance of which is beginning to be apprehended. The "abnormal" in sexual matters has been much studied, and sexual inversion and perversion present no mystery. It is not the same, however, with regard to the normal sexual life of men and women. We know about ourselves, but it is a secret we carry to the grave. About others we can only guess, and, as often as not, succeed in guessing wrongly. To the rake, every man and every woman is a rake when opportunity occurs. To the virtuous, the world is innocent of sin. True it is that the so-called sexually repressed men and women seem to find satisfaction in imagining evil in others, but it is only imagination after all.

Doctors like Havelock Ellis and philosophers like Freud profess to reveal the truth, and perhaps do, but on the other hand they may not. Their knowledge must be very limited, for everybody has a different sex problem to contend with.

Other writers on the normal sexual life—those whose books are designed for general consumption—are in the main not to be congratulated on their efforts. Their facts may be correct, but the dish is not uncommonly nauseating owing to the overdressing of sickly sentiment, or the facts are put crudely and coarsely and the whole subject degraded.

It is generally admitted, however, that there is a need for some really wholesome and refined but unemotional book on normal sexology, to put in the hands of young people, more especially those actually contemplating marriage. The ignorance of youths and maidens and even of many older people on simple sex anatomy and physiology is well known to physicians—an ignorance which is answerable for many disasters, both physical and mental. After all, the elementary facts of the reproductive side of life and what they