

PSYCHOTHERAPY.*

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The idea I desire to present is, that, as far as psychic influences are to be curative, they must be applied with that end solely in view and not with a reservation that admits greater development of a neurosis, so that the observer may make an interesting psychic analysis, may keenly dissect and examine in cool, critical fashion the abnormal working of the mind machinery as the physiologist examines the beating heart of the dog—good for science but bad for the dog. It goes without saying that we should apply our very best efforts to comprehend the innermost recesses of the patient's consciousness, but if in our warm pursuit of psychologic data we lose sight of our ultimate aim—the welfare of the patient—so much the better perhaps for scientific study, so much the worse for the patient. There is a very close comparison between this tendency in neurology and the overzealousness in surgery, where a desire to build up statistics, to do rare and unusual operations, to witness in perhaps a purely scientific spirit the progress of disease processes may contribute ultimately to the welfare of mankind at large, but works hardship on the individual sufferers. The analogy will apply probably in all fields of the healing art, but certainly not least in the application to psychic work.

In spite of the effort to reduce psychotherapy to a scientific basis must we not after all confess that it is an art and must be applied as an individual and personal quality? Can it anywhere be claimed that the art may be mastered equally by men of equal ability any more than all men of equal intelligence and industry might paint equally acceptable pictures or write literary productions? I think not. Moreover, the great bulk of the work in this field must be generously interspersed with kindness and genuine human sympathy, with a spirit of friendship and comradeship, if it is to give the best results. The good old family doctor of the days now disappearing, who acted as general family counselor in moral as well as physical vicissitudes, has very successfully filled the rôle of psychotherapist. His very presence brought about favorable results that cold scientific analysis would utterly fail to attain.

Very recently one of my best friends in neurology, whose scientific work is well and most favorably known, was reporting a study of a hysteric situation. He was asked what suggestive work had been done toward removal of symptoms. He very naively replied, "None. In fact, it was the spirit of the game not to disturb the development of hysteric symptoms, but the hope existed that more profound manifestations might arise, that more might be learned of their nature." It may prove disconcerting in the end to find that a dislodgment of well-intrenched ideas is entirely beyond his suggestive powers.

It does not seem far-fetched to compare the development of psychic deviations to those of a purely physical nature. The relative ease of removal is certainly present in the beginning. So we may not privilege ourselves to study the growth of a neurosis coolly; we must apply our best efforts to its cure and store away whatever we may learn of scientific value, the acquisition of which

does not interfere at all with the best interests of the sufferer.

Another phase of this subject and one which gives rise to wide differences of opinion is how far may we use placebos and other means of presumably pure suggestive nature like the static battery, as a quick and easy way of removing troublesome symptoms which may arise in the progress of any neurosis.

There is good reason for believing this rarely justifiable, and certainly the tendency is toward less careful and painstaking efforts to get the patient to realize the mental origin and method of management of his troubles. One might compare this to the use of the coal tar products for the relief of headache. A symptom is relieved, but the underlying cause is in no wise removed or affected except possibly for the worse. Most psychics are indefatigable in their search for medicinal remedies and come to offices laden with thirty or forty prescriptions, about half of which call for one or another of the bromid salts. It may require an hour or more of valuable time and all our persuasive eloquence to put the truth plainly before them. We may not succeed even then, but it is none the less our duty to advise against all drugs, currents, etc., when the cause is a mental or moral one, than it is to write a prescription for quinin when the plasmodia appear in the blood.

I have had patients, with whom I had labored diligently, settle themselves rebelliously in a chair and declare they were not going to leave until they got a prescription for some medicine. They were tired trying my methods which, however successful at times, at other times failed completely to give relief. How easy to write for a cochineal mixture for such a patient to build up an elaborate expectancy and perhaps be later assured by him that it "worked like a charm." If there is a field in which psychotherapy actually cures anything, and it is the firm belief of many, if not most, neurologists that there is, there can be no excuse for weakly succumbing to this temptation to do at times what the quack does all the time, i. e., give some innocuous stuff to satisfy a desire of the patient and let Nature and hopeful expectancy do the rest.

Psychic analysis after the method of Freud and Jung certainly contributes extremely valuable knowledge to our branch of study, but it is questionable whether the material used in these experiments is not in some measure at least sacrificed to scientific enthusiasm.

After all, the largest use we find for psychotherapy, not the most urgent and indispensable but the most frequent, is in simple nervousness arising in patients who have never learned not to be governed by their emotions, whose philosophy has never been developed. When we run on to a genuine neurasthenia or psychasthenia, it takes two, three or four years to get it well, psychotherapy or none. A deep-seated hysteria we do not cure, though we fondly pride ourselves in our ability to "modify the personality." Our influence on the genuine psychoses, when we have crossed the shadowy line dividing them from simple nervousness, does not swell us with pride. It depends in a large measure on our ingenuity in devising employment, environment, and wholesome ways of living whether we succeed or not. The fascination of laboratory experiment and the easy way of the placebo may appeal to us according to our mood, but neither should be allowed to outweigh the one legitimate aim of our efforts—the cure, partial or complete, of the patient.

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