

A department of psychotherapy.

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A DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOTHERAPY. (18)

Psychotherapy is considered so simple by some writers that it is all summed up in the words "affirmative suggestion;" and the crudeness with which this is carried out is hardly credible to men of common sense, were one not to hear the glib utterances of its exponents about their methods.

Such methods are perfectly empirical, are prefaced by no analysis nor more precise diagnosis than at most "a psychoneurosis," and consist mainly of an impressive and confident manner and the firm assurance either that there is nothing the matter or that this "suggestion" has the power of removing all incommoding symptoms.

This procedure is, we believe, inferior even to that of the Christian Scientist, who does at least change his patient's mental attitude towards something, even though it be by a delusional interpretation of the universe.

It is to substitute for this crass notion of psychotherapy something more rational, and to illustrate by examples the potentialities of the applications of science to psychic disorders that this department has been inaugurated. In it will be found, from time to time, the more practical results of the best French, American, German and Austrian work in this field.

WILLIAMS.

NERVOUS SYMPTOMS OF ARTERIOSCLEROSIS AND
THEIR REMOVAL BY DIET. (19)

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Not in all persons is the blood pressure much raised by the toxins which sclerose the blood vessels. In these cases the earliest signs are often those of perturbed "nerves." Thus, in the case of a man of 64, referred to me by Dr. Philip Roy, having disregarded a matutinal insomnia, a sudden epileptic attack after working at a high elevation was the first signal. Four of these occurred within two months. The blood pressure never exceeded 180 mm. The only indices of cerebral lesion were slightly unequal reflexes and a lessened sense of altitudes in the left hand. Incipient sclerosis of vessels of right sensori-motor area having been diagnosed, he remains well twenty months later as a result of a diet of low protein content, to subdue the toxicosis which was believed to be the source of the disorder.

A physician of 68 was referred by Dr. A. E. Balloch, after a year's grief and worry. He slept badly, had paresthesiæ in his hands, feet, and hearing organ. He took narcotics in increasing amounts. He lost weight and power of endurance. His optimism was replaced by dullness or distress by turns; and he wept much over his griefs. No objective changes of reactions of nervous system were revealed by examination. The tension was 160 mm. By sclerogenetic toxicosis was diagnosed from the matutinal nature of the insomnia, the paræsthesiæ without sensory changes and the loss of endurance. A diet low in proteins and purins lead to disappearance of unpleasant symptoms. He remains well two years later.

It is not only in the aged that the syndrome mentioned above occurs and can be removed by these means. A case of metabolic psychasthenia comes to mind. An engineer of 38, referred by Dr. Atkinson, was a powerful, energetic man, formerly accustomed to active work. He began to be unable to concentrate upon the office work to which he had confined himself for over three months. Previous to this, he had been much less active; and latterly, he had been very much worried by an official inquiry into a contract for which he had been mainly responsible. For no cause known to him, he feels a dread in the mornings, and an indecision in business matters is now realized to have been present several months. He had been improved by three weeks in the woods, during which he was very somnolent, but relapsed at once upon his return, and could hardly stand his morning suffering. There was no insomnia.

An examination showed the reflexes were rather active, but there was no other objective change in the lower neurones; there was no amnesia; the sexual hygiene was normal. He was much depressed, and longed to go away from it all for a year, which he could well afford to do.

He was sent for three weeks into the mountains. This time he fully recovered, on account of the light diet which he took. Breakfast and supper were fruit and milk, and his midday dinner was vegetables and 6 oz. of meat; after a few days cereals were added morning and night. He is now perfectly well and at the head of a large business demanding much office work.

As prevention excels cure, such results are evidently better than those obtained by the removal of and effects by baths, electricity or chemical eliminants (diuretics, sudorifics, purgatives), or antagonists (iodides, nitrites), or still worse, narcotics, hypnotics or calmatives, which only mask the disease while it progresses.

In a future note the diet will be described in detail.

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Violent Tic of Hysterical Form Removed in One Day by Psychotherapy.

TO THE EDITOR:

A striking instance of the success of rational procedure where empirical ones had failed was shown to the Washington Medical Society at two meetings in January. A young Hebrew man in North Carolina with iliocolitis suddenly developed on going to bed one night an intense clonic contracture of the recti abdominis and diaphragm. This recurred every night, often keeping him awake for hours. It became less and less controllable, and soon occurred in sitting during the day. Then it began to come on standing, until his life was a burden.

The application of electricity with the fervid assurance of its efficacy made no impression, nor did "powerful and infallible" medicines.

The boy came to Washington, and was at once referred to the writer by his physician, Dr. Martin. On recognizing that the disorder was a tic of hysterical type, the psycho motor discipline devised by Brissaud was employed.

In this case, it consisted of inducing the patient to perform slow, even rythmical contractions of the recti while taking slow deep-breaths. In this way control was gained over the muscles, so that when the paroxysms were about to begin, he had now a means of mastery, and substituted the newly learned movement for the automatic one which formerly took its own bent. He learned in one day; too quickly as it proved; but after a slight relapse two days later another sitting cured him; and he was shown recovered at the next meeting of the society. Even for this very simple case, empiricism had failed where a little psychopathological knowledge reached the cause, and led to the very simple means used for its removal without either psychoanalysis or reconstruction of the mentality. Such a symptomatic cure must of course be extended to a pathogenic one, i. e., the re-education of the patient's hysterizability. To indicate even the elements of this, another opportunity will be required.—Tom A. Williams, M. B., C. M., Washington, D. C.

