

PSYCHOLOGY AND MEDICINE¹

THE influence of psychological factors in the genesis of both mental and physical ill-health is to-day a generally accepted fact, although opinions differ widely concerning the nature and medical significance of these factors. The general notion that the mind is of more importance in health than was admitted by the materialism of the previous century, it must be admitted, is in a great measure due to the work of Dr. Sigmund Freud in the special field of the psycho-neuroses.

With this change of outlook there has come a demand for the psychological instruction of medical students and practitioners, for as Dr. E. B. Strauss² remarks "it is undoubtedly a fact that the average student of medicine leaves his medical school with scanty understanding of the mental side of his future patients."²

The question therefore arises as to the form such instruction should take, and its place in the curriculum of medical studies. These two questions are closely connected. Considering the line taken by Dr. Kretschmer in this text-book, some preliminary training in the elementary details of clinical psychiatry is required, and this is suggested by the author himself. Were it however feasible, some preliminary grounding in general psychology might with advantage precede special medical studies, concurrently, let us say, with biology.

We agree entirely however with Dr. Kretschmer's general conception of the kind of psychology required to meet the needs of medical students. It must be a psychology which is empirical, based on well-attested facts, and keeping steadily in view the special problems of medicine and psycho-therapy. It will therefore not be necessary to treat in great detail the mental processes concerned in cognition, higher thought activity, and so on, which are of more importance in educational psychology.

Just as a knowledge of physiology is required as a basis for the study of physiological disorders, so too a general

¹ Ernst Kretschmer, *Dr. Med. A Text-Book of Medical Psychology*. Translated with an introduction by E. B. Strauss, M.B., M.D. (Oxon.).

² *Op. Cit.*, Introduction.

knowledge of psychology is necessary for the study of psychological ailments. And to a certain extent these branches of study overlap. The psychologist needs some knowledge of anatomy and physiology, especially in regard to the structure and function of the brain and nervous system, the organs of sense perception, and of certain neuro-glandular mechanisms which have an importance for psychology.

It is not however considered necessary to go very fully into the field of either psycho-physics or psycho-physiology which experimental psychology has already amply exploited.

As we are chiefly concerned here with psychology, a preliminary question has to be discussed in the first place, namely the nature of "psyche" or soul, and its relation to the body.

Keeping strictly to the empirical point of view, psyche or soul is defined in terms of experience. "By the soul or psyche we mean that which we directly experience: the psyche is all that is perceived, felt, imagined or willed." Certain difficulties arise out of this conception, for not all that is experienced is the psyche. Some part of that experience is on the one hand related to the self or the ego, and constitutes the ego; on the other hand, a part of experience is related to the outside world, which we look on as non-ego, and this in a certain way includes the body. The ego-experience spreads to the body, which in some way becomes a part of the ego. My conception of myself embraces not only my mind but also my body, so the psyche is interjected into the ego, and is "sensed as a kind of entity or as a kind of secondary inner personality which is as it were telescoped inside the more superficial personality (i.e. the body) where it lodges."

The antithesis between matter and spirit which crops up in our thinking is, as Dr. Kretschmer states, closely related in its psychological origin to the *ego—non-ego* polarities.

This has given rise to various interpretations of the mind-body problem, spiritualistic or materialistic, monistic or dualistic. The ultimate solution of this problem does not really concern the empirical psychologist, for whom it takes on another strictly empirical character, namely the ways in which experience is affected by the functioning of the body.

We may start therefore by considering the phenomena of

sensory impressions, of general and special sensibility, which in the first place serve the biological purpose of enabling the individual organism to orientate itself in relation to itself and to its environment, thereby maintaining its vitality, by permitting the organism to establish contact with useful stimuli and to avoid harmful stimuli.

Whether such sensory impressions reach consciousness or not is from this, the biological standpoint, a secondary matter. Sensory perception is not limited to responses of this kind but furnishes the basis for our conceptual thinking of the world around us, and moreover excites certain feeling responses. The chief psychic functions and their anatomical and physiological basis therefore come up for consideration in the first place, bringing one later to the study of the psychic apparatus and its evolution or development.

The term "psychic apparatus" covers all that generally comes under the headings of mental imagery and thought with its expression in language and art, affectivity and means of expression, or in other words, knowing, feeling and doing, or thoughts, feelings and actions.

Approaching this subject from the evolutionary or genetic standpoint insight may be obtained into the peculiarities of mental functioning observed in pathological conditions, when certain analogies are found with the mental imagery and affective dispositions which folk-psychology discovers in primitive races.

Primitive imagery, according to Dr. Kretschmer is mainly *asyntactical*, that is to say it consists of a series of images the interrelations of which have not as yet become logical or syntactical, such as occurs in more developed races.

Then again, the connexion between imagery and affect is more conspicuous in the primitive mind, and is the source of "taboo" and "magical thinking."

Psychic experience can undergo considerable transformation through the influence of affective factors, a process to which the term *Catathymia* is given. A feeling of fear for instance as is well known may profoundly alter the significance of objects or events. When things have a strongly affective significance there arises the tendency to *project* the affect on to the object, which is then looked on as something dangerous, uncanny and taboo. Then again, under these

same affective influences one's attitude to things may take on an ambivalent character (ambivalence of feeling) in which positive and negative feeling tones coincide, as is the case for example when an object is considered as both sacred and unclean, or when a person, generally in some higher station, is both loved and feared.

"Means of expression" is a term covering all forms of movement from simple vegetative rhythm and motor responses to the highest form of affectively determined volitional activities. In this connexion the question arises at what particular point in the scale of expressional activity can one infer the existence of consciousness. We only know, directly, consciousness in ourselves; as for other persons or animals, we infer consciousness by comparison and analogy, that is to say, indirectly.

At the lower stages of development volitional and affective expressions are not as yet clearly differentiated, nor are the conscious processes underlying them. What we observe in ourselves as volitional activity or will when considered objectively is found to consist in selective reactions, or reactions determined by conscious choice and purpose.

This survey of the development of psychic life brings up the question whether in the psychic life of the civilized adult one may be able to detect precipitated remains of his earlier stages of development. "Does the psyche exhibit tree-like the rings which record its phylogenetic progress?"

Some modes of psychic functioning do, it appears, show certain analogies with that found in primitive types; especially in the region of dream phenomena, hypnosis, hysterical twilight states, and the disordered thinking seen in schizophrenia. Phylogenetic levels are more clearly recognizable in expressional activities, as for instance in certain rhythmic movements, such as stereotypy, verbigeration. Some psychotic patients of the kind known as catatonics will go on repeating the same note or sentence, hopping on one leg or walking round and round in circles. Then again in "panics" individuals may exhibit a perfectly wild, random, unco-ordinated set of motor activities.

With regard to the unconscious and dreams, Dr. Kretschmer generously acknowledges, even when he differs, the pioneer work of Freud. In order however to avoid some of the ambiguities attaching to the term unconscious, the word

sphere, or as the translator renders it, "sphaira," is introduced. We can best form an idea of the meaning given to "sphaira" by comparing consciousness with the field of vision, in which some objects which are in the centre of the field are clearly seen whilst others which are more or less towards the margin are less clear; at the extreme limits the visual objects are blurred and set out of the range of sight, they are beyond the range of the visual sphere.

Consciousness has thus a quantitative connotation, and we can speak of images being in the focus of clear consciousness or awareness whilst other are peripheral, or to use Kretschmer's term, "sphairal." Such sphairal psychic processes are then those which occupy the border zone of consciousness and are exceedingly vague and obscure. If, as Kretschmer maintains, we must identify psychic life with direct (conscious) experience, an unconscious psychic life is a contradiction in terms; for that which is entirely and essentially unconscious, and what is in no way experienced, can rightly no longer be called psychic. This opinion is not as might appear quite out of keeping with the Freudian theory of the unconscious, according to which the contents thereof, though *now* irrecoverable by ordinary means of recollection, were at one time psychic experiences, or derived therefrom. The point is however too subtle to be discussed here. In any case Kretschmer holds to the important fact that such "sphairal" experiences have dynamic qualities affecting behaviour.

Turning now to the subject of Instinct and Temperament, instincts are defined "as those inherited components of the total affectivity which adhere firmly and systematically to certain vital aims." These are primarily nutrition, self-preservation and reproduction, around which may be grouped a number of *instinct related dispositions* which individually are very variable and susceptible to educational influences. The instincts when they encounter obstacles to their expression may undergo certain transformations or metamorphoses. In relation to medicine we may again quote the author: "that the psychology of the instincts and their reciprocal action in connexion with the higher psychic life is one of the corner stones of medical psychology. The conflicts arising therefrom account for the majority of the neuroses, reactive psychoses, and a host of apparently phy-

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sical ailments which are fundamentally nothing else than masked psychic conflicts."

The subject of the temperaments has from the time of Hippocrates been an object of lively interest, and many are the opinions concerning their nature. "The idea of temperament centres for the most part round affectivity," writes Dr. Kretschmer. "It denotes the characteristic general disposition in relation to the two main factors of sensitiveness and impulsiveness." The opinion generally held to-day regards temperament as having a "humoral" basis, being conditioned by factors derived from the glands of internal secretion, or endocrine organs.

There seems also to be a fairly recognizable correspondence between individual temperament and physique, according to which certain temperamental types may be distinguished, of which the bodily "habitus" may be an external indication.

We see for example the cheerful, sunny temperament frequently associated with individuals of stocky, comfortable build, whilst others who are of a long-boned, lanky type are more often cold, reserved, and apparently more sensitive. Types which correspond to Kretschmer's division of temperaments are the Cyclothyme and Schizothyme.

Temperament is an important factor in the psychological constitution, for it contributes largely to the way in which character eventually develops, as well as exercising a profound influence over the mental and physical activities in regard to "psychic tempo"—as alertness or sluggishness.

In conclusion we would make a brief reference to the chapters of this book in which the author treats of the various forms of psychotherapy; which is amplified by valuable advice on the handling of patients, directed to the beginner rather than to the expert. Reviewing the various treatments such as Suggestion therapy, Hypnosis, Psycho-analytic treatments, Dr. Kretschmer finds some value in each, according to circumstances, but whilst rejecting the exclusive tendencies of psycho-analysis, affirms that other treatments are insufficient unless accompanied by an analysis that may probe and unravel the roots of the conflicts issuing in neurosis.

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