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EDITORIAL.

THE STUDY OF THE MIND.

It is surprising how little a nurse trained only in a general hospital knows about mental disease, how little indeed she knows of the mind itself, and yet that knowledge is of supreme importance to her. In this connection a lecture on "Association of Ideas, Recognition, and Memory," delivered at the Royal Society of Arts by Dr. R. G. Rows, Director of the Section of Mental Illnesses at the Tooting Neurological Hospital, and reported in the *Lancet*, is both interesting and instructive.

The lecture was one of a series organised by the People's League of Health, on "The Mind, and what we ought to know about it." In this connection Dr. Rows opened his address on a hopeful note by saying that the dread which came upon those who found themselves suffering from mental disability was largely based on ignorance, and the experiences of the last few years had shown that mental illness, if taken in the earlier stages and treated on modern lines, was extremely tractable. Modern teaching is based not merely on psychological investigations, and Dr. Rows considers that, in future, advances in our knowledge will come from the study of the physiology of the nervous system generally, and the relations of the organs of the body to that system. From the nursing point of view this shows the importance of such study if, as a profession, we are to do the best for our patients whether as general or as mental nurses, and points to the desirability of affiliated training in these two branches.

The lecturer pointed out that in response to a stimulus there was always a tendency to react, but the same stimulus did not always lead to the same reaction. If there was a real desire to do a certain thing a stimulus would lead in one direction; if, on the contrary, the thing required to be done was irksome, the stimulus would act in an opposite direction. In the primitive nervous system of the lower organisms, although they reacted to a stimulus, there was practically little choice, and this was to a considerable extent true of the human young. At birth the child had not much choice but that of hunger and other physical conditions. If those conditions were satisfied, and led to sleep, nothing much else happened; but gradually, by repetition of stimuli from the external world, the horizon of the child was widened, and it was possible to watch the gradual awakening of its mental activity.

The lecturer said that, in order to have a clear conception of a thing, all stimuli having nothing to do with that thing must be kept out of consciousness, or, in other words, attention must be given. Mental activity was largely dependent upon the healthy state of our bodily organs, and the influence of the mind on the body must also be recognised. In analysing a stimulus it would be found that there were three factors inseparably associated in the process of our reaction to it—the intellectual, the emotional, and the physical. . . . The emotional factor was not sufficiently recognised.

The study of the mind, Dr. Rows concluded, would make life more easy for us and more interesting, in that we should have a greater mental content to serve us in carrying on our fight against the difficulties which surrounded the beginning of life.

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