

## FIRST INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS ON MENTAL HYGIENE.

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From May 5th to 10th, one of the most stimulating events in the history of Mental Hygiene the First International Congress on Mental Hygiene, took place at Washington, U.S.A. At this gathering representatives were assembled from fifty-three different countries scattered among the six continents, delegates of National and State Mental Hygiene Societies, National and International Organisations in Allied and Related Fields.

In the Preamble, printed on one of the first pages of the programme, the object and scope of the Congress is plainly set forth, so that it should seem to be the best introduction to this paper to quote it at length.

"We, the founders of the American Foundation for Mental Hygiene, are met upon the effort to create and carry forward a means effective to the end of promoting and conserving mental health and ameliorating the scourge of mental ill-health.

"Science takes exception to the law that only those whom nature deems the fittest shall survive. Nature has her hidden remedies for the torture of a broken mind or body, and science is upon the march in search of those remedies, that they may be re-dedicated to mankind. The knowledge so gained forms a sacred trust of civilisation for the maintenance of the strong, for the refitting of the weak and the sick to their health and opportunity, and for their deliverance to a useful life in the community and that pursuit of happiness which is the proper promise of creation.

"In such trusteeship it is our faith that this Foundation will take its place."

For the Nurse especially this Congress is of the utmost significance, since many of those when giving their lectures upon many subjects of widely different scope, advocated that the Nursing Service should be regarded as an important factor in dealing with patients not only in the wards of General and Psycho-pathic hospitals, but also in preventive work among both adults and children. In all those branches of work, medical men seemed at last to have realised that much of this work belongs to the sphere of the Nurse, also, to the end that this work should be carried out as well as maybe, further suggestions were made respecting her training from the standpoint of mental health.

One doctor, Edward A. Strecker, Professor of Nervous and Mental Diseases, Jefferson Medical College, Philadelphia, dealt with the subject of training the personnel of Hospitals, both General and Psychiatric, under the following title, "The Teaching of Psychiatry in Medical, Nursing, Social Work and Other Professional Schools." In the course of his paper he stressed the importance of some psychiatric training being given to the Nurse during her general training, since, as he points out, that organic disease may be often seriously complicated by neurotic additions, and that nurses, especially those engaged in public health work should know some rudiments of psychiatry in order to be able to detect early signs of nervous trouble so as to get such cases brought at once into the psychiatric department for proper examination.

According to the usual procedure adopted at this Congress, it was afterwards discussed by four persons, who had made a special study of the subject, representing the training of medical students, post-graduate courses, nurses and social workers. The Nursing Section was undertaken by a representative of the British College of Nurses, who emphasised the view that the Nurse needed the knowledge

of psychiatry and psychology not only to learn about the mental and nervous conditions of her patients but also to enable her to understand herself and her reactions to the other members of the Nursing Staff, the Medical Staff, as well as the patients in her charge.

Only by understanding the psychological mechanisms of illness, and the consequent regressive state of the patient, can the Nurse be spared the irritation which she feels so often about what she believes to be the "childishness" of her patients. They *do* behave exactly as they used to do in childhood, but we may also notice an interesting correlation between mental and physical symptoms of illness. The mind goes back to these early stages of childhood that have been left behind, just as their bodily condition recedes in strength and independence. They must be washed and dressed, attended to and fed. Their diet follows upon the same line back to infancy with the two hourly milk feeds of the patient actually ill.

Mary Chadwick briefly sketched out a plan of instruction and training for the Nurse upon these lines, giving her first some understanding of herself and then, having this as an important stepping-stone, further knowledge concerning the nervous diseases she will probably have to nurse at some time or another, advancing then, if she takes a course in psychiatric nursing, to instruction which gives special information regarding mental diseases.

Further most interesting discussion concerning the training of the Nurse took place at the Round Table Conferences on Wednesday and Thursday afternoon. "The Preparation of Nurses for Psychiatric Nursing and Mental Hygiene," under the presidency of May Kennedy, on the first day occupied the whole attention and many papers were presented on this subject from several viewpoints. That which stood out as of special importance was the contribution of Miss Edith M. Haydon, Superintendent of Nurses, St. Elizabeth's Hospital, who gave an interesting paper describing the courses in Psychiatry and Mental Hygiene that were given at her hospital, which the Congress guests had an opportunity to visit on Friday afternoon. The discussion of Thursday afternoon was on the subject of "The Place of the Public Health Nurse in the Mental Hygiene Field," and it was further elaborated from the standpoint of an Administrator, a Mental Hygiene Supervisor and the Field Nurse.

Among all the interesting questions dealt with at this Congress, one seemed to offer a new field of inquiry for the Nurse, not only on account of the novelty of the subject and the results which have been found, but that it should have been dealt with twice in the space of a few days from quite different points of view from quite independent sources of investigation. The subject referred to is that of the consequences of difficult or protracted labour that may subsequently be found in the infant. The first paper to be presented was that of Neil A. Dayton, M.D., which dealt with the question of Difficult Labour as an Etiological Factor in Mental Deficiency, from the standpoint of organic results, whereas at a later meeting Mary Chadwick, in a paper read before the American Psycho-Analytical Society on May 7th, entitled "Notes on Suicide Fantasies connected with Traumata of Early Infancy," in which she brought forward material to show the apparent influence of psychological effects of birth traumata, as the predisposing causes of functional neuroses and the psycho-neuroses, having a large percentage of the element of anxiety.

Other subjects interesting to the Nurse can be mentioned in passing, but on account of space cannot be described in detail here: such as the Thyroid Factor in Dementia Praecox, School Clinics, Mental Hygiene Problems of Children with Sensory-Motor Defects, the Treatment of Post-Encephalitic Children in a Hospital School.

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