

LECTURE.

THE FOUR TEMPERAMENTS.

By Miss Isabel Macdonald, F.B.C.N.

In commencing her lecture on "The Four Temperaments" Miss Macdonald stated that the inspiration for this lay in a voyage of discovery she had made in the Ancient Manuscript Department of the British Museum. In the Guild Book of the Barber Surgeons of York there lay an old drawing depicting the Four Temperaments, as viewed by the ancients. Through the courtesy of the British Museum, a copy of this old work of art, which is not of a later date than the 15th Century, was before the audience. There is eloquence in every line of it if you have studied to even a small extent the old theories on the four temperaments, and the whole of this composite picture is perfectly balanced in its details. In each corner you have the drawing of a figure depicting one of the four temperaments, scrolls held by each give short explanations, and in the centre is the head of the Christ, on a crossed nimbus, representing the ideal of perfection to be attained by the harmonious working or, to use a better expression, the perfect balancing of these four temperaments. The drawing points to the fact that each man possesses some share of each one of the four temperaments, some calling for development by the powers of his will and habits of life, others for control. And here should be stressed a point in order to prevent confusion in connection with other parts of this paper. *No single individual can be regarded as quite strictly of the sanguine, the choleric, the phlegmatic or the melancholic temperament*—these four foundation temperaments portrayed in the corners of the picture. But it is possible to give some glimpse into the complexities of human nature according as one or the other temperament predominates in any given individual.

Let us read the lines on the four scrolls flowing towards the centre of the picture:—

COLORICUS

HAFYNG YE KYND OF HUS (i.e., having the type of us).

FLEMATICUS

THAY AR RESERUID UNTO THE IIII ELEMENTS

(i.e., they are reserved unto (i.e., connected with) the four elements).

MALECOLIUS

THER AR THE IIII VMORS (i.e., there are the four humours).

SANGUINIUS

THAY AR ODER WYSSE CALDE YE IIII COMPLECCIONS

(i.e., they are otherwise called the four complexions).

This word "compleccions," the lecturer said, was very interesting, for a term used to describe temperament by a modern writer, was "mental physiognomy"—a very apt one and wonderfully akin to that used by this barber surgeon or physician of the 15th Century or earlier.

The study of the temperaments is more than 2,000 years old. Hippocrates especially founded a great deal of his medical teaching on connections with them; later Galen and other great fathers of medicine recorded many deductions on a study of the temperaments and arrived at lines of treatment thereby. They recognised four clearly defined types of temperament—the Sanguine, the Choleric, the Phlegmatic and the Melancholic—and based their conclusions with regard to them on a connection with the

so-called humours of the body, regarding an excess of any one of those humours as being responsible for the particular temperament of the individual. Relating the temperament to those humours and also to the elements, they classified them as follows:—

Temperament	Humour	Element
Sanguine	Blood	Air
Phlegmatic	Phlegm	Water
Choleric	Yellow Bile	Fire
Melancholic	Black Bile	Earth

Since olden times a study of the temperaments has become more complex and here the lecturer referred to the causes of this in the mingling of races and nations, the results of the developments in the matter of travel, printing and the like, inter-marriage in different nationalities and so on. The effects of the development of Art in a country, as in the case of the Italians, was mentioned, the great architectural works of the middle ages as they influenced the various peoples and thereby heredity and, to come down to our own day, the crushing and levelling effects of the great machine age which is damming up and repressing the creative faculty in man through which the temperament of a person in earlier times often found expression. No longer do we find beautiful works of art in every department of life which bear the stamp of the "mental physiognomy" of their creators. Much the same applies to educational methods at the present time. Each child has to conform to the mass, and yet the predominating temperament should receive attention, for it is often responsible for success or failure in life. That great sage—one might almost say seer—whose centenary we are just celebrating—Goethe, the author of "Faust," has said that personality counts more than the intellect, and here one might just throw out a suggestion or thought in connection with the term psychology, for, in the original, Psyche meant not mind but soul. Consciously or otherwise your position with your fellows and the world in general is influenced to the extent to which, with the feeling of an artist or at least a philosopher or a psychologist, you can work upon the temperaments and bring them into balance and so translate them too into action and power. To indicate what she wished to imply the lecturer quoted a saying of the great painter Raphael:—"I see visions and I dream dreams," and (this is important) he added "and then I paint them." The sanguine speaks in the first sentence, the choleric in the second and it took both temperaments to work with the genius of Raphael and brings his masterpieces into being.

But to come to a more definite consideration of the temperaments (and especially the lecturer said she would apply this to the psychology of childhood) we should look for the temperament that gives the keynote to the psychological make up—to a child's "mental physiognomy." In the choleric type the ego, the personality, the individuality, or, however you like to express it, is very pronounced. The choleric has a strong "mental physiognomy." By his own power he keeps his whole mental organism well under control although a superficial observation might at times make this statement open to criticism. He acts at the dictation of his own will, feels that he must attain his end whatever the cost, is constant, indefatigable, impetuous and will frequently be aggressive and rough in his methods, but reach his goal he generally does and sometimes changes the face of the world in the doing of it. Choleric are usually fearless, they are those who wrestle with the world, they are rapid in taking decisions. Sometimes their aims and purposes seem curiously removed from the personal aspect especially if there is in them a strong streak of the melancholic at its best. Such a choleric will set before himself a goal that will affect the race more than himself. He finds joy in the struggle and

NOTE.—It is of course impossible to report the above lecture in its entirety without crowding out other important matter, and, on a suggestion made by a member of the audience, Miss Macdonald has received several requests to have it printed in pamphlet form. She hopes to do this in the course of the next few weeks and the cost of copies of the whole lecture will probably be a shilling each; the proceeds of their sale will go to one or other of the Benevolent Funds for Nurses.

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