

## PROFESSIONAL REVIEW

## NURSING PSYCHOLOGICAL PATIENTS.\*

By Mary Chadwick, S.R.N.

The intention of Miss Mary Chadwick, S.R.N., F.B.C.N. in bringing out her book "Nursing Psychological Patients" is to help nurses, not only to understand something of the condition of patients suffering from the numerous forms of psychological trouble, but to give them working principles by which to co-operate with the doctors and to govern their own behaviour in speech, manner and attitude generally.

It is not yet often realised either by doctors or nurses how important this is to the welfare of these patients. One sometimes sees nurses of quite the wrong type employed in special institutions, and some psychologists even prefer them without special knowledge, presumably for fear that they will do more harm than good. They perhaps forget that the patient is half an hour with the doctor and the rest of the twenty-four with the nurses. Speaking particularly of obsessional neuroses, the author says: "The nurse is as necessary to the doctor during the treatment of these severe neurotic cases as in the after-treatment of major operations or pneumonia, and it is only through close co-operation that both may gain an adequate understanding of the case."

"The nurse who is in constant attendance upon the daily life of the patient may be able to contribute much information from her observation that the doctor might not otherwise hear from the patient; while the nurse will be greatly helped by some account of the unconscious processes at work that are causing the symptoms which she observes and with which she has to deal throughout the day and night."

Miss Chadwick has put into her book the fruits of minute observation and careful thought. She traces the causes of many physical and mental ills back to avoidable or unavoidable misfortune of infancy and childhood, the causes often being multiple; one wonders uneasily if any human being can escape unscathed. It would be almost impossible, after studying her book, to nurse these unfortunate patients without intelligent interest. The nursing "is far more complicated and arduous than that of other cases which may be classified under the heading of medical or surgical nursing, and yet it is seldom indeed that these illnesses are not complicated by some symptoms of neurotic origin, which are often passed over as of little importance or may even be unrecognised, although they will frequently be responsible for delay in expected convalescence or the recovery of complete health." The author goes on to say that the nurse "by understanding what lies behind the manifold symptoms of the trouble, may more easily and adequately help her patients, as well as find the work less worrying and tedious to herself." She warns nurses that they must watch their own reactions, and goes so far as to advise a course of psycho-analysis, but many will consider this open to question.

She is a whole-hearted believer in the Freudian theories, and emphasises the fact that one cannot carry out treatment on certain lines without believing in its efficacy.

A nurse may help to re-educate the public concerning psychical disorders, and "by her own attitude and knowledge concerning their origin and scope to lead others to change their opinions, on the one hand from believing them to be mere shams and an empty bid for sympathy and indulgence—on the other, incurable madness or moral lapses beyond cure or sympathy."

Training of all nurses in this important branch has much to be said for it. "The line of demarcation is frequently so very tenuous between physical and mental sickness,

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that, in the near future, it is quite possible that we may see the three great branches of medicine, surgery and psychology working closely together in co-operation, without splitting up the training into such water-tight compartments."

The book begins with a short historical summary of beliefs about nervous disorders and methods of treatment from ancient times to the present with its marked progress and quickening of general interest due to the Great War.

The author then deals in turn with the symptoms, causes and treatment of hysteria, neurasthenia and obsessional neuroses, the neuroses of childhood and the psychical troubles prevalent among women, men and boys.

Of hysteria she says: "The most typical symptoms that we associate with hysteria are already present in a great number of children, some of them indeed being the normal emotional reactions of the young child, the abnormality becoming apparent only when they appear in the adult," and she shows how the "eternal triangle of the nursery is reproduced in the sickroom as soon as the doctor calls in the nurse. . . . We have a substitute father in the

doctor, a mother in the nurse, and a child between them, hungering for love and attention, in the patient who reaches this goal through the illness, which could scarcely be so well obtained in any other setting. The danger of many forms of nerve cure is that they play into the hands of the patient, who thus wants to go back to happy irresponsible childhood, and lead to the unfortunate result that recovery is so slow and may even then not be permanent

To show the patient that the nurse believes the illness to have been caused by the mind or the wish to escape from something in life would give the patient the idea that the nurse felt she was pretending, which would in all probability lead to an exacerbation of the symptoms to prove that they were genuine. It is equally dangerous to be a provider of too much gratification for the old childish wishes, since in this way the illness may tend to become permanent in order to retain the loving protector always.

"But sometimes the child in the hysterical adult wants the stern mother, who will supply the deficiency of her own will-power and will be willing to act as an external conscience. . . . The nurse may be in turn affected by her own unconscious impulses, according as she is the 'gentle mother' type or a disciplinarian," so she has always to be on her guard.

"We need our nurses . . . to be all that one could wish from the standpoint of nervous balance, with a normal attitude towards life and its responsibilities and possessing more than the average share of attractiveness and good health."

The chapter on neurasthenia is very interesting, showing it to be caused frequently by the underlying emotions of guilt and love and the usually unsuspected connection between the alimentary canal and the affections.

Nurses are warned not to take sides or interfere in the affairs of their patients, however difficult this is to avoid. However "the mere fact of being able to talk of these worries to someone who understands the trouble these things may cause, who does not offer blame nor praise, unasked for sympathy in empty words and endless advice, will in most cases provide relief.

"Most specially should nurses be cautious when dealing with the difficulties which arise between husband and wife, for these are particularly common in psycho-neuroses."

The neuroses of childhood are chiefly traced to errors of upbringing on the part of mother or nurse, though the latter "is always ready to accept all its early virtues, good habits and health as the results of her ministrations, but usually is not willing to accept any responsibility for adverse manifestations."

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