

Neurotic disturbance is so much in evidence in America that it has given us an unenviable notoriety, in this direction, among the nations in general. We boast of our high civilization, but however desirable this may be, if peoples and races lower in the intellectual scale are more free from this fundamental deficiency in nerve force, there is something abnormal in our midst, and we will do well to seek for the underlying cause. It is common to attribute the undue prevalence of nervous disorders to our dry and exciting climate, or some other "glittering generality" which does not bring the responsibility directly home to the individual. Human pride constantly demands scapegoats," and the supply is unlimited. But it would be better for us, collectively and individually, to "confess judgment," for that in itself tends to mitigate penalty. When a fault is definitely located its rectification is well advanced.

Overwork conventionally bears a large share of the blame for nervous collapse, but far oftener, the cause is over indulgence in some of its many forms which have selfishness for their root. What we call "the pressure of modern life" is really born of a selfish ambition. Broadly defined, selfishness includes every abnormal concession to the lower nature. Any such surrender is mental and moral in its character, for those manifestations which seem distinctively "physical" are only the outpicturing and expression of that quality of mind which is back of them.

Certain physical habits—so called—as for instance, the immoderate use of tobacco, stimulants, drugs, strong tea and coffee, and other hygienic transgressions are admitted producers of nerve disturbance. The sensations produced by these agencies, including those that are earlier and seemingly pleasurable, and later, from their abuse, those which are painful, are all really psychical and not physical, per se. The physical organism is only the medium which by use of the nerve channels conveys pleasurable or painful sensations to the mind—the unseen selfish self. There is an interior, spiritual and more real self which is intact, but as this is generally latent and largely unrecognized, the lower and provisionally dominant self is that which is in evidence. But in this brief sketch, space will not permit of a consideration of the deeper selfhood.

The selfish self receives both gratification and pain, in varying degree, through the medium of its physical equipment. The latter is not the recipient of the message, but only the wire which conveys it. The man—or mentality—as sovereign, should exercise the power to control, transform and adjust the messages which are sent out and received at his headquarters. While this is the ideal, it may be admitted that its realization must be gradual because the evolutionary stage for its fullness is not yet reached. Human emancipation from materialistic slavery is a matter of degree and development. But the laws of growth need iteration and reiteration, for they form the only highway for a forward movement. To find the tap-root of certain vegetables requires deep digging, and so the primal and vital elements of causation for human expression are hidden by those which are secondary and near the surface.

Selfishness, when broadly defined, is not limited by avarice regarding the mere possession of things, but as before noted, it includes every sensuous gratification of the lower nature which is indulged for its own sake. It deceives its own victim, for man is so constituted that penalty finally far outweighs all the seeming present advantage. A true self interest is normal but

selfishness is the abnormal area which lies beyond. It would draw in and not give out. It gradually develops a vortex in which the ego becomes submerged. The equilibrium between what is subjective and objective is lost and the subject of the unbalance is often least of all aware of the seat of the difficulty. As life in its rounded fullness is a matter of harmonious relations the focusing of the consciousness upon self brings morbidity and confusion.

Irritability, censoriousness, resistance and extreme sensitiveness are among the well recognized symptoms of nervous prostration, but their potency among its causes is not so generally understood. Their work is subtle, hidden and powerful. How futile, and even absurd, to put drugs into the stomach for the cure of such conditions. The burdened nerves are not to blame, for they are only the passive wires of communication. But they become disabled and shattered by the friction induced by messages of discord, unrest and pessimism. The seat of the trouble is back of the material organism, and to deal with that exclusively is only to manipulate results without touching causes.

As a change of outward environment causes a change of thought currents, it often mitigates nervous depression so long as novelty and strangeness continue, but sooner or later the pressure of the centralized consciousness comes back upon the congested self. Permanent healing must begin at the centre. External panaceas do not turn but only briefly interrupt the current which flows into the egotistic whirlpool. The bitterness of the current of life must be sweetened at the fountain. When the mind persistently revolves in the little circle of selfhood the sense of normal relation and harmony is lost, and the end is a refuge in some conventional retreat where an unscientific and materialistic treatment affords little hope.

The abhorrent sensationalism of the daily press is also concurrently responsible for much of the nervous unrest of the present era. Whatever is morbid, tragic, abnormal and diabolical is thrust before the eyes and minds of people in its loudest form, and if anything is lacking, enough is manufactured to keep up a mental inebriety. A gigantic mass of discord is produced for a daily dose. The psychic storm is continuous, and only thought isolation and control will guarantee immunity. It hardly need be noted that selfishness is the main cause of modern sensationalism.

Antagonism is a most potent factor in nervous degeneration. This is but another side of selfishness. As one sets himself against people or things, they all seem to him correspondingly belligerent. Nothing is more destructive than a continual resistant and pessimistic spirit. We are not detached human units, but life is the product of multiform and complex relations. To ignore this great truth causes a sense of separateness and this breeds selfishness and a discordant physical articulation and correspondence. We are living in a social universe and personal mal-adjustment brings penalty.

It is possible for everyone to consciously cultivate trust, passivity, non-resistance and optimism in increasing degree. Salvation and poise come from persistent high thinking. One may take the principles here briefly outlined and work out his own conclusions and at length his own conditions.

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