

HOMŒOPATHY AND MENTAL HEALTH IN CHILDREN

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The problem of mental health is a very real one and is very much in the public eye just now. There are two main groups of mental illness—one, unfortunately, where the child is born with a mental disability and even homœopathy can do very little to help in that category.

In the second group are those who are born apparently normal and develop normally, and then under the stress and strain of life develop a mental illness. It is for that group, taken in childhood when certain characteristics show themselves early, that homœopathy can do very much.

Man is essentially three parts: spirit, mind and body. And for comfortable happy living you need the health of all three. Disease of the spirit or mind can react on the body.

It is well-known that bodily conditions of disease or discomfort, such as asthma, or even an epileptic fit, can be brought on by fright, by anxiety or by shock, which primarily affect the mind, and although we are mainly going to think about the mind, the spirit must first be mentioned as that is the most essential part of man.

I find that both spiritual and mental "dis-ease" basically are "fear". Spiritually there is the fear of God, and man tries by a thousand and one ways to get rid of, or overcome, that fear, or to ignore it. But the successful way, and the way that I have found personally, is that the only way to overcome that fear of God is to meet Him in the way He has made through Christ, when one finds that perfect love will cast out fear.

TWO BASIC FEARS

I read recently that a psychologist said there were two basic fears and all the others were acquired. She said the two basic fears were "fear of noise" and "fear of downward movement". It seems to me that if our basic fears are fear of noise and fear

of downward movement, then it is a pity that the first basic fear is so easily overcome, otherwise we might live in a less noisy and more peaceful world. But perhaps it is that children treat themselves homœopathically by making so much noise that they cure their own fear of noise.

Acquired fears are as innumerable and fantastic as one can imagine but they are deep-seated and most extremely difficult to eradicate. They may start in very young childhood, but there is also a very close relationship between parent and child.

I have frequently, in the out-patient department, been asking about fears in the child, and asked, say, if there was fear of thunder. "Oh, yes!" says the mother, "but then, I am afraid of thunder myself". Fear of heights? "Yes, but I am afraid of heights also", replies the mother.

It is extraordinary how quickly a fear in an adult, particularly a parent, can communicate itself to a child. It is true that in many cases the parent is able to conceal a fear, but it is also true that most children of between five and seven years, go through a period of fear of the dark, fear of thunder, and all sorts of rather obscure fears which they can overcome in the ordinary way as they grow older.

PLANTING BY CARELESS WORDS

But again I do want to stress one thing—that fears in childhood can sometimes wreck a whole life, and that sometimes these fears are implanted by a careless or unthinking word. I have one adult of about 40 years who has spent a great deal of time in the hands of psychiatrists and nursing homes, who told me of a really tragic happening when she and her little sister were about six and four years old respectively.

They were playing on a swing, a very natural thing to do, and the swing hit the younger child on the head. Six months later this child died of meningitis, and the elder child overheard her mother say that it was considered that it was this blow by the swing which had caused the little sister's death. She says she can still hear what her mother said, and the tone of voice in which she said it; her whole being seemed to shrivel up in despair and she has felt like it ever since.

Only recently I was talking to a young mother whose baby was only 11 months old. We talked about various things and she said he had had a bad spell with his teething and gone off his food a little bit, and the child was going to stay with his grandmother.

We were discussing his appetite and I mentoned to her that it would be better not to speak about the child not taking his food properly, to his grannie, in front of him. The mother seemed surprised and asked: "Surely he would not understand?"

I asked her: "Does he not understand?" and she thought for a while and then said: "Oh, yes! He understands everything I say to him." Little children do understand to a most extraordinary degree the things that are discussed within their hearing, when it is thought they are too young to take it in.

Then I was thinking—what makes mental disease? It really almost seems to be just an exaggeration of normal behaviour. Man's moods are as changeable as the English weather and you get this also in the child. He will cry from disappointment and then very quickly get over it, and that is considered a perfectly normal reaction for a child.

But when you get adults or adolescents who suffer disappointment and they become overwhelmed by it, an exaggeration of a normal reaction, when they retire into themselves, become introspective, weeping and shutting themselves up with this disappointment to the exclusion of normal living, we label them hebephrenic schizophrenics.

A child will laugh and get tremendously excited and jump about, and it is considered to be perfectly normal, but when you get an adult who laughs hilariously and generally behaves in a bizarre and wildly extravagant manner, it causes embarrassment—and then we call them catatonic schizophrenics.

Again, when you get a child rushing in from the garden telling you there is a lion behind a tree you laugh and accept it as a childish imagination; but when an adult solemnly says she is Queen Elizabeth I and you must address her as "Your Majesty" then we call her a paranoic schizophrenic.

Sometimes one wonders whether it is not a reflection on our civilisation, because usually it is we who consider ourselves

normal, but they feel more at ease in our company than we do in theirs!

The value that homœopathy has to help to control and bring within normal limits these depressions, hilarities or imaginations, is really what I wish to discuss. It is rather wonderful, really, the way homœopathic remedies do help and I want to give you just a few symptoms, indications and outlines. Exaggerations of normal behaviour do show themselves even in children, and surely when mental health is concerned, prevention is far more important than cure.

ARSENICUM ALBUM

First of all, ARSENICUM ALBUM. I can think of three children and they produced a similar picture. They are all, interestingly enough as you will hear later, boys. Under-weight for their age, they have fine skin, very restless, going all the time, and they will rush away to play and then come rushing in again, and as they enter the consulting room they are followed by exceedingly anxious mothers.

They create a disturbance in the home because they are very difficult to feed, and this is usually why they are brought to the clinic. The mothers say they cannot get them to eat; they pick their meals and refuse to sit still, they want to get down.

They tend to chew over the little food in their mouths and not to swallow it, as though there is something that they just dislike about it. The ARSENICUM ALBUM patient is always a very fastidious patient, and even these children (and that is where I stress the fact that they are boys) dislike getting dirty or having sticky fingers.

Most of them will turn away from a meal if they dislike the look of it, or even if they dislike the feel of the food in their mouths. I think the main difficulty is that they have been presented with some food that revolted their excessive sensitiveness by the appearance or the feel of the food.

They are very particular about their dress, and one mother said her small boy had made a terrible row that morning because he insisted on having a clean shirt and bow tie to come to the clinic.

ANXIETY FOR OTHERS

Another feature is that they are unduly anxious over other people. One of the children was going on well and was perfectly happy until one of his small friends went to stay in Scotland, and when he was brought to me all his symptoms had returned and he was continually asking about his little friend in Scotland.

That is one thing I have always noticed about the ARSENICUM ALBUM patient—there is anxiety about other people. There is the child who, when the family are going away on holiday, will urge the family to get up early to be sure to catch the train.

One of the boys used to play with his toys and leave them about and when he was undressed at night he was not particularly tidy how he put his things, but he would toss one shoe across the room, watch how it fell and then place the other shoe to match, and in his play all his toys had to be in symmetrical patterns. ARSENICUM ALBUM has brought all these children into a normal way of health, the anxiety of the mothers has been dispelled and the boys are more peaceful and altogether easier to live with.

I had a patient the other day who said that when he was young if anyone stood behind him when he was having a meal he could not eat for fear they might blow germs on to his food. I am sure a dose of ARSENICUM ALBUM would have made him less "germ conscious".

AURUM

This is the second remedy, and the AURUM child is not a happy child, he is a depressed child, that is likely to cry and develop an imaginary sense of failure; he may even, later on, become suicidal. He is gloomy and difficult, in that he does not seem to react.

I know one boy, a teenager, who was brought to see me by his mother, who said his school reports worried her. The master said "he does not take any interest in anything, his manner is so bad and if he is crossed in any way he just simply 'flares up'."

That is typical of the AURUM patient—there is a sense of being inadequate and if they are rebuked they just flare up and everything is awful for the time being. This boy got a dose of AURUM, and I had a letter from his mother during the school

holiday saying that his school report was entirely different and the master is commenting on the complete change in his behaviour.

ARGENTUM NITRICUM

This is another remedy for a difficult patient. There is actually in the Repertory a little phrase "against whatever was proposed he had the most extraordinary objection", and you can imagine conditions in a family where there is a child who is determined to be difficult.

I had one child, a girl, who had all sorts of queer fears. ARGENTUM NITRICUM patients do have many fears. The main one is that they are afraid of high places and things falling upon them, but they have all sorts of strange fears.

This child had been in a minor motor accident in which nobody had been hurt, but her mother had not been with her at the time. They were going on holiday and when they came back the girl started being difficult about going to bed; about going to school; refused to go out to tea with her friends; refused to go anywhere really, except that her mother had persuaded her to go to school.

She would say: "Well, what if I die on the way to school?" "What if I am run over?", and whatever the mother would answer she would say: "Well, I might, you know!" and the mother could answer nothing. "What if I do not wake up?" "What if I go to sleep in the bath?" It went on and on until the mother was almost a nervous wreck. It took me a long while to come to the right remedy, but as soon as she had ARGENTUM NITRICUM she became a normal happy little girl.

Incidentally, the Repertory on homœopathy does stress strongly the abnormal likes and dislikes in food, and patients requiring ARGENTUM NITRICUM crave fat, crave salt and crave sweets. No other remedy has that particular trio as strongly.

NATRUM MURIATICUM

This is a very useful and interesting remedy, probably most useful for adolescents. It goes very helpfully into that age of difficult emotions and reactions generally, and what one can call

"temperamental behaviour". NATRUM MURIATICUM does help wonderfully.

They feel things very keenly and brood over them to an abnormal degree. They are extremely sensitive to what is said to them and shut themselves up within themselves. They cannot rage and get it off their minds, but go away by themselves and brood over it and stay unhappy.

Nearly always they are very sensitive to music and that it is a well-known thing for many mentally disturbed patients and it helps to sooth them. Again, they have a strong reaction to salt, really a craving for it, and a typical NATRUM MURIATICUM patient will pour salt over his food like sugar, and many children needing NATRUM MURIATICUM will steal salt like other children take sugar. They very often suffer severe headaches.

One lad was sent to me by a probation officer who was interested in him and realised the lad had had a very severe emotional strain. His mother had died and he had been brought up to about 15 years by his elder brother, whom he admired tremendously and for whom he had a great affection.

Then that brother was called up to go into National Service and the poor lad was stranded and got into trouble with the police. He had developed asthma and gave a very typical NATRUM MURIATICUM picture. Not only did it cure his asthma but it helped him into a much happier frame of mind.

Another case was a girl just about to leave school, again with the asthma, and much worse since her brother had got into trouble. She was very fond of him. Her reaction to me was very typical, a slow, resentful teenager. But this type do respond if you just show them a little quiet sympathy, and very soon she was telling me about her troubles. When she came to see me recently she said she has left school and is out at work, and is a completely transformed girl, and had had no further attacks of asthma.

PHOSPHORUS

We must not forget PHOSPHORUS which is another remedy for children who are full of fears. This is the remedy for one that is terrified of thunder; you get the patient (child or adult) who

dives under the table or into the airing cupboard, anywhere to get away from the sound and sight of thunder and lightning. PHOSPHORUS will nearly always bring them into a sense at least of being able to bear it. In addition it deals with their fears such as being afraid of the dark and of being left alone.

These patients are tremendously apprehensive about disease and what is going to happen to them. We had one child in for a small operation, and for three weeks it had to be postponed because she ran a very high temperature the night before the operation was due each time, and each time we came to the conclusion that it was just that the child was "scared stiff", as we say. Then a dose of PHOSPHORUS was given, and she was much helped by the Ward Sister, and everything was all right.

The PHOSPHORUS patient is always afraid of what is going to happen to himself (in contrast to the ARSENICUM patient who is afraid of what is going to happen to his parents or friends). The PHOSPHORUS patient faints at the sight of blood, and gets very upset and distressed, and in likes and dislikes in food he cannot get away from the desire for ice-cold things. I know my reputation was completely "made" for two of my young patients, one had measles and the other pneumonia, when I said they could have ice-cream! They were both very rapidly cured by PHOSPHORUS.

SILICA

Another rather curious fear is the fear of SILICA—that of points and pointed things. I had a child in the out-patients recently who was terrified of needles. She had had her polio injections at school and had had several fillings at the dentist's where she had been given injections, and the thing that interested me was that, when she was finally brought to me by her mother, she was literally sweating and shaking and was so frightened.

She did not say she was afraid of injections, but of "needles". It is of points and pointed things that the SILICA patient is frightened, although they are timid generally but they are really terrified of needles. This little girl had a very bad verruca, and one of the things that I noticed about her was that her foot was extremely cold, damp and offensive, which is typically SILICA.

She got a dose in high potency. It was the worst verruca I had

seen but it was completely cured and the child was much better in herself. She came in happily to see me and her fears had gone.

TUBERCULINUM BOVINUM

There is another condition which perhaps I might mention, that causes a great deal of trouble and wasted time, and that is "temper". There are two remedies which I think of specially for excessive temper in children. The kind I mean is where the child will throw things and throw himself down in the road if he does not get his own way.

I can well remember a boy of ten years, brought to me at Shepherds Bush when we had the clinic there. He had had pneumonia several months before, and his mother said he was so bad tempered since and if she crosses him he charges out of doors and throws stones—"not at my windows, but at the neighbours' windows, because he knows that is going to cause more trouble to me".

As his symptoms seemed obscure I said that I wanted to listen to the boy's chest, and I have never heard such a row about it! We had to get the sister up from the dispensary to help to hold him as he flew into one of his rages; the sister was bitten and my spectacles were flung across the room.

He had had these excessive rages and tempers since his pneumonia. He was transformed by a dose or two of TUBERCULINUM BOVINUM, so much so that two years later he asked his mother to bring him back for some "temper" medicine.

CHAMOMILLA

The other remedy is CHAMOMILLA. I want to stress that the CHAMOMILLA child or adult is the one who has a difficult reputation; they are unmatched for crying and yelling, and if you give them a toy they fling it on the floor. But the CHAMOMILLA child is unusually sensitive to pain. Everything is so much felt that they are suffering very badly.

They get relief by rapid movement. Carry the child up and down or rock them very hard and it does seem to give some sort of soothing and ease from the pain—also with the adult. The adult who is very sensitive to pain and tends to be rude to all

the people who are looking after him, is suffering so much that he does not know how to contain himself. It is wonderful how CHAMOMILLA will help and really transform these sufferers.

LACHESIS

We have one more remedy, LACHESIS, which can help in such a wonderful way where there is jealousy, and that does cause a lot of trouble in families, especially where the first child has had the mother all to itself until the second baby comes along, and then it shows its jealousy in extraordinary ways.

Sometimes, in fact, it seems as if the child is making as much trouble as possible for the mother by either hurting the baby or being naughty while the mother is attending to the baby—anything to draw attention to itself. The morning is the worst time, when the mother will tell you that the child awakes “ugly”, and the LACHESIS patient is one who sleeps into an aggravation and always awakens ugly in the morning, and that is a terribly difficult time for the mother. I have two or three children where LACHESIS has simply and literally transformed them, and the domestic scene has changed from one of strife and difficulty to one of peace and harmony.

This is only a very small proportion of the remedies which may help, but you may see how they can control the tendencies which, at a later date in adult life, could lead to the sort of behaviour which we call “mental behaviour”. The sad NATRUM MURIATICUM patient; the ARSENIC patient underweight, irritable and restless; the TUBERCULINUM or CHAMOMILLA patient with their tempers, are each truly well worth while helping in the early years and getting the children into a happy-controlled and tranquil state of mind so that later on in life they can face things without such severe and upsetting reactions.

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