

PREVENTIVE MEDICINE—AN OBSESSIONAL NEUROSIS

There is much talk today about preventive medicine. We are just witnessing a vast commercial prophylactic campaign against Poliomyelitis, the "success" of which in this country has depended on mass hysteria following the unfortunate death of a football star. Whether the creation or fanning of this pandemic of hysteria can be justified by the possible prevention of a few hundred cases of poliomyelitis is difficult to judge or measure, but there can be no doubt that our civilization is more in danger of self-destruction through hysteria and other neuroses than it is from poliomyelitis.

At the same time, as the vast paraphernalia of advertising and propaganda, of a kind with brain-washing, is let loose to frighten us all into immunization against everything, we are also increasingly regaled with the universality of the psycho-somatic truth. Perhaps we are all being paralysed by fear rather than by the inroads of viruses—who would find no pleasant pastures on which to grow in the absence of fear, that smell of fear which, as all beekeepers know, will aggravate a bee, let alone a virus, into assaulting us.

Owing to absence of thought, the fact that there is a name makes us think there is a thing. People still want to think of diseases as things, to give them names, to call them names, rather than to understand their meaning within the whole human situation in which they manifest themselves. To accept the current bacteriological and virological idea of disease is to regard disease as meaningless. It is a sheer bad luck, an evil chance, if some individual is injured by an odd encounter with a bacteria whereas, on the other hand, we are assured that accidents with motor cars are symptoms of the psycho-somatic disease of "accident-proneness".

It should have become clear by now that certain diseases are associated with certain phases of history. Not only do all

the details of a civilization, its philosophy, art, religion, and social forms, belong together in one Kulturkreis, but its illnesses, too. It would seem that they arise out of the very age in which they occur, and represent the unsolved tasks of that age. It even appears that the experience of these diseases (not just the suffering) can play a part in that process of developing and maturing consciousness which our human life is. It must have been within the experience of most observant physicians that a child or adult whose development is stuck may be released into a new period of their life following an illness, whilst on the other hand some make their illness apparently the sole meaning of their life. Those whose experience is mainly with handicapped children have repeatedly seen great progress follow an acute childhood illness and on the other hand there is much experience of a long period of ill health following such an illness. Whether these latter are the cases where the child has not been able to work the illness through, or where it has been suppressed, should be studied.

However, one does have, as against the current view that illness is a meaningless misfortune, the more widely based view that illnesses have their place, their meaning within the developing individual and social life. Any profound observer of human life will have noticed that the way someone falls ill is as characteristic of that person as, for instance, the shape of his nose. The character dominates an individual life and makes it a whole and it was one of Adler's contributions to have shown the unity maintaining itself even through neurosis and psychosis. If poliomyelitis then belongs especially to this age of hyper-intellectualism and lack of faith, so too does brain-washing, advertising, mass hysteria, and mass immunization. If cancer belongs to it, so do the mass mutilations of surgery, and the life-destroying X-rays, and it is difficult to judge which is worse, the disease or the treatment. All such methods are caught within the play of opposites and heal-on crashes are not by themselves fruitful, but destructive.

The root of these troubles seems to be that we take a static view of phenomena. We crystallize living processes such as diseases, and give them names and make them into things. We

take our present consciousness with its prejudices and current stock of concepts, and think that this is a normal human consciousness and that whatever disturbs its comfort and security is bad. Illness is therefore bad, anxiety and fear are bad, and should be tranquillized. The realization that our present consciousness is a crisis and transition, and that problems are not so much solved as outgrown is rare. If we are to take our homœopathic method in earnest, that is to say, if we are going to endeavour to look at the problem as a whole, we must constantly see it within the historical development of mankind, and whence and whither. If Homœopathy is to become what it should become we cannot remain fixed on a point of dogma, or take it that health is a obvious thing.

In the second half of life which moves towards death, the meaning of life can no longer be in outer achievement but in inner completion and realization. Death itself must be given its positive significance. Inner achievement, the overcoming of one-sidedness and all partial viewpoints become tasks and it also belongs to the wisdom of this period that consciousness and life are in a polar opposition to each other. Consciousness does not develop where life progresses uninterruptedly. The inwardly conscious animal develops embryologically by invaginations, interiorizations, obstructions to the exteriorizing linear and planar growth of plants. The nervous system, with which is associated our most conscious life, is almost unable to grow after birth. To regard mere health, vegetative well-being, as an adequate goal for human endeavour is about the most Philistine value ever fostered.

Would it be possible to bring about by other means the positive results of disease? If illness is one of the profound ways by which the unconscious wisdom of life restores one-sided and exaggerated development, should it not be a legitimate aim to achieve such curative results by a conscious insight and curative education or re-education? In that case we can go forward to an era, one of whose main aims will be the conquest of illness because disease, like war, will no longer be necessary. But the notion of the conquest of disease in order

to remain undisturbed in our present state of "normality" is a vulgar and degrading idea.

It may not, from the human point of view, be in any way of the same significance whether the principle of similars is used in mass immunizations to prevent the experience of certain diseases, or whether it is used to guide treatment to a healthy cure. If the prevention of such illnesses is to be undertaken then it is an obligation to achieve culturally what would otherwise have been gained through overcoming the illness. If we fail to do this we are frustrating the development of the full powers of human personality, or else compelling these powers to expression through even more dangerous bye-ways of new diseases.

Unfortunately, in spite of two world wars and the evidence of almost universal neurosis, the revelations of modern psychology remain almost entirely unassimilated. The very understandable fear of the Unconscious Psyche leads to all these purely externally conceived theories of disease, and these mass programmes of modern magic. The mass ritual extirpation of tonsils, increasing the risk of paralytic poliomyelitis by up to ten times for the rest of life, is now declared by leading experts to be seldom justified. It is succeeded by mass rituals of inoculation against the disappearing tuberculosis and all the rest. Such behaviour, looked at in detachment, bears all the marks of compulsive behaviour and obsessional neurosis.

—*Editorial, The Brit. Homœo. Journl., July '59.*