

- Fear, nerves, tension have been known to affect health and vigor.

ANXIETY AND ILLNESS

He came into the hospital one Monday: a man whose arms were pimped with a bothersome skin disease. "Almost every Monday I have a breaking out like this," he said.

"What do you do on Sundays?" asked the doctor.

Usually, said the patient, he visited a young lady. It developed that for some years the couple had been engaged, but the woman repeatedly postponed naming the wedding day. Each Sunday the man pressed for a decision; each Monday was the day after a frustration. And "almost every Monday" his skin protested his anxious state by breaking into eczema.

To the same big eastern hospital came a man critically ill with asthma. After weeks of treatment he was relieved, and a day set for his discharge. Suddenly, on the night before his sche-

duled departure, all his former dangerous symptoms returned. Treatment was resumed; again his breathing became free; again arrangements were made for the journey. And again asthma returned in full force.

The record showed that this patient was a college teacher who had become embroiled in a faculty fight and feared for his job. Here was a situation of uncertainty such that it seemed better to remain within the protecting walls of the hospital than to go back to the scene of former strife and face the likelihood of dismissal.

Obviously in these cases there was more than the physical condition; there was also a mental or emotional disturbance which had its counterpart in the physical mechanism.

Medical men have long called certain ill-understood

symptoms "functional," thereby segregating them from "organic" diseases in which the ailing organs show anatomical defects. A headache that can be correlated with a brain tumor is an organic disturbance, but a headache that plagues its victim without traceable connection to any structural fault is "merely functional." Many a baffled doctor disposes of "functional" cases with the pronouncement, "You only imagine you are sick. Quit worrying, go home and forget it."

Such advice rarely is effective. And labeling such cases "psychoneurosis" does not dispose of the patients, who drift from one doctor to another, eventually perhaps to a faith healer, and some night may show up at a testimonial meeting, cured.

On the other hand, the neurotic may chance to apply to a physician who considers the patient as a whole. The old-time family physician was often of this school, and Dr. S. Weir Mitchell was a shining practitioner of its art in the 19th century. Scientifically trained doctors practicing it today, while

growing in number, are still few. It is only within recent years that study of the emotions as factors in illness has received serious attention in medical schools and research centers, and it is being discovered that in a wide range of disease emotional states show themselves to be a complicating, often a controlling, influence.

In 1934 Dr. Flanders Dunbar and her associates at the Presbyterian Hospital in New York began investigating possible emotional factors in two widely different kinds of diseases, both generally related to organic impairment: diabetes and diseases of the heart. In each group emotional factors were found to affect more than half of the patients. In times of emotional disturbance the diabetes was worse and the cardiac symptoms intensified.

There is increasing evidence that pent-up, repressed anxiety which cannot be discharged in action is discharged in the form of disease. In many cases of high blood pressure no organic cause can be traced. And even when there is a definite organic cause, the patient of-

ten responds directly to improvement in his emotional state.

Dr. Erwin Moos reports the case of a man with a systolic blood pressure of 280, who was also afflicted with a lung disorder, and whose urine showed traces of albumen. Rest and drugs brought no beneficial effect, but one day the patient remarked that he had done great wrong to his estranged wife. The doctor immediately arranged a meeting, and after a friendly discussion between the two, the man's blood pressure fell to 150, his lung symptoms abated, and the albumen disappeared. Several years later the patient was in good health with a blood pressure of only 130.

The whole physiology of anxiety is bound up with the idea of protection, and has its origins far back in human history. How to save one's skin was a supreme problem of primitive man. Every day there was the necessity of taking strong action either in fighting or fleeing. These demands gradually built into the body

an automatic scheme of swift adjustment for action.

In time of fear or anger powerful changes go on within the body: the heart muscles are stimulated to more rapid pulsations, circulation is shifted from the stomach and intestines to the heart, brain, lungs, and skeletal muscles — all resources are mobilized for most effective fight or flight. The mechanisms of these automatic reactions are largely chemical — caused by powerful substances secreted by the glands and the nerve endings. And every impression from the outside world that threatens the security of the individual, that provokes him to anger or inspires him to fear, automatically calls into play this complicated biochemical mechanism to prepare the body for action.

Now the man who has just lost his fortune in a bank failure suffers a fear just as real as was the fear of a cave man confronted by a wild beast. However, whether the cave man ran, or stood and fought, he needed the stronger heart-beat, the change in blood

distribution. But to the victim of the bankruptcy these adjustments are superfluous. They prepare him for action which does not take place. They glut his system with powerful substances he does not need, and which cause internal conflict. Such conflicts tend to be suppressed,

but the fact that they are unconscious does not mean they are innocuous. Quite the opposite. The poisoning effect of a source of anxiety seems to increase in inverse ratio to the victim's awareness of its identity. — G. W. Gray, *from Harpers*.

THE HUMANITY IN ME

What I call my character or nature is made up of infinite particles of inherited tendencies from my ancestors — those whose blood runs in my veins. A little seed of laziness from this grandfather and of prodigality from that. Some remote grandmother perhaps, has stamped me with a fear of horses or a love of dogs. There may be in me a bit of outlawry from some pirate forefather, and a dash of piety from one who was a saint.

Religion is not a personal affair so much as it is communal. You are a Jew because you were born a Jew; for the same reason you are a Catholic, you are a Presbyterian, you a Buddhist, you a Mormon. As we enter life we find these cells already made in the human beehive and crawl into them.

Original ideas? Where will I find them? All the ideas there are exist now, floating in the human sea. I, an oyster, absorb a few, and call them mine. Even the phrases of the Lord's Prayer have been traced to Talmudic sources...

Let us, therefore, put away coarse egotisms and partisan passions, and learn to love humanity, to think and feel in terms of humanity. — *From Four Minute Essays, by Dr. Frank Crane.*