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STAMMERING IS OUTGROWN

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THE article "Treating the Stammerer" by Mr. Leon Mones, reviewed in the *QUARTERLY JOURNAL* for January 1919, contains so much to which valid exception should be taken that time and space do not permit a comprehensive answer. Therefore a reply to the most important issue raised in his article will have to suffice as a criterion by which to judge his whole discussion.

The spontaneous recovery from stammering, called "outgrowth" by the public, and "outgrowing" by the purists, is the most important subject of the whole field. If there is such a thing as outgrowth and if the means thereof can be applied to all stammerers, then the disorder may be extirpated without money and without price. The obdurate persistence with which many—probably most—authorities deny this outgrowth is most significant. Just recently Dr. J. S. Greene, Director of the new speech clinic of New York, has scoffed at an idea of outgrowth of stammering and Fletcher, Makuen and many others have said substantially what Mones says, namely, "as a matter of fact, stammering is not outgrown." We will see.

PERSONAL TESTIMONY OF OUTGROWTH

Mrs. H. M. A——— of Santa Monica, California, testifies that her son began to stammer when he was a child, that she required him to refrain from the habit and that he recovered. It is unnecessary to give other specific instances for they exist everywhere and may be found by anyone who cares to make inquiry. This testimony comes from the stammerers themselves, from their parents, and from friends and acquaintances. The credibility of this testimony is unquestionable. The witnesses have nothing to gain by misrepresentation. On the contrary, to have stammered is considered something of a stigma, so the testimony of the stammerers themselves may be taken as against their own interest and therefore must stand as unusually acceptable, and the testimony of their relatives and friends would naturally be of the same nature. Since this testimony is unbiased, is universal, is unlimited, is always subject to verification, it alone must be accepted by any fair-minded person as sufficient evidence that the outgrowth of stammering is a fact.

TESTIMONY BY AUTHORITIES TO OUTGROWTH

Dr. Frank A. Bryant says (Some Speech Disorders, p. 26) "occasionally, light grades disappear spontaneously during late childhood or adolescent life. . . . Experience does not prove, however, that a majority of children who are affected outgrow the difficulty." Here we have a witness testifying against his own interest, for Dr. Bryant is in the business of correcting stammering for fees and, naturally, would not exaggerate the spontaneous recovery.

Mr. Sidney Bluemel says (Stammering and Cognate Defects of Speech, Vol. II, p. 283) ". . . there are approximately three times as many stammering children as stammering adults. Late in childhood or during adolescence many stammerers gradually lose the impediment." Note the close agreement of this testimony with that of Dr. Bryant's, except as to the number of recoveries.

Dr. Hermann Gutzmann (Das Stottern, p.139) concludes two concurrent histories with the words, "Das Mädchen verlor den Fehler von selbst, bei den Knaben wurde er mit den Jahren immer stärker." This is also testimony against the interest of the witness and it bears out the more frequent recovery of the girls than the boys.

It would take too much space to give the similar testimony of Conradi, Rudolf Denhardt, Romberg, Thorpe, and others. All this testimony, considered as a whole, defeats the categorical denials. If it is to be discredited, evidence in rebuttal or valid reasoning is necessary, and neither have been produced by those authorities who deny the outgrowth of stammering.

STATISTICAL EVIDENCE TO OUTGROWTH

This evidence has been given so frequently—and never refuted—that a mere sketch of it should be sufficient here. The sex ratio of stammering in the common schools, is boys to girls, approximately 3 to 1, and in adulthood, men to women, approximately 9 to 1. The school ratio, reduced to the same terms as the adulthood ratio, is boys to girls, 9 to 3. That is to say, two-thirds of the girl stammerers have disappeared. Where have they gone? They could not have died off in greater ratio than the boys, for mortality statistics are to the contrary. There could not have been a great increase in the number of boy stammerers, for contraction of the disorder is comparatively slight after the age of twelve. They could not have been cured by the commercial

means, for the returns from stammering institutions do not show any such preponderance of female attendance and 90% of the alleged cures are mythical, according to Dr. Makuen. Only one conclusion is possible, and that is that two-thirds of the stammering girls have recovered by the time they reach adulthood. What do those who deny the outgrowth of stammering say to this conclusion? Nothing. What can they say? for some of them supply the very statistics which make the conclusion inevitable, and none of them deny those statistics. What they do is to keep on denying the outgrowth.

THE NATURE OF STAMMERING INDICATES RECOVERY BY OUTGROWTH

What is the nature of stammering? Habit. The habit characteristics stick out of it to such an extent that even those who laboriously and vainly try to prove it a disease are constantly calling it a habit. Scripture, Reed, Bryant ad lib, Swift, Browning, Bluemel, and many others, including Mr. Mones himself, testify to this habit nature. (Specific references will be cited for anyone who desires to question.) But that testimony is unnecessary. The disorder may be acquired by imitation and much of it—possibly most of it—is so acquired. It is intensified by continuance in its indulgence, and it is dissipated by discontinuance. It is without complication, except resultant nervousness perfectly accountable to the torture which the victim suffers. The muscular effort is admittedly voluntary. The accumulated fright is the sum of the unfortunate speech experiences, that is, repetitions, and therefore habit. One might continue to a considerable extent to give the habit characteristics of the disorder, and in doing so every supposed disease characteristic disappears. Scripture, and McBeath similarly, have shown how sickness, which was formerly supposed to be an element of the disorder, is really an inducer of the habit. (Pedagogical Seminary, June, 1916, p. 156, and Journal American Medical Association, Nov. 1, 1913, respectively.)

THE ALLEGED IMMUNITY OF THE GIRLS IS EVIDENCE OF OUTGROWTH

The relative scarcity of women stammerers has been an insurmountable obstacle to the opponents of the outgrowth of stammering. That scarcity of women stammerers is too obvious to be denied. Immunity is the only resort of those who deny the real

explanation. But they pronounce the disorder a neurosis (Mones, and most of the others) and it is the men, and not the women, who are relatively immune to neuroses! But does that deter them from adhering to the immunity of the women? No; not any more than the overwhelming evidence of outgrowth deters them from denying outgrowth.

Now what shall we say for these authorities who deny the outgrowth of stammering? Are they ignorant of the most important feature of the whole stammering field? How then, can they claim to be authorities? and by what right do they attempt to lead others? Or are they unable to comprehend the overwhelming weight of evidence against them? Then they must be ignorant of the very elements of science, and equally unfit to lead others. Is it any wonder that with such leaders the field of stammering is the unconscionable chaos which all admit it to be? How can truth be drawn from a well in which error is persistently poured? How can relief be brought to the stammerers against so strong a tide against it.

CONCLUSION

Stammering is certainly outgrown by a great proportion of the cases, but that fact has been kept so far back in the darkness that it will be a long time in coming to light.