MENTAL HYGIENE AND THE IMPORTANCE OF INVESTIGATING IT *

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The subject should have been stated on the program as Personal Mental Hygiene and the Importance of Investigating it, to distinguish it from the sociological mental hygiene work which is at present being carried on by the Mental Hygiene Society. By mental hygiene I mean the psychological work to be done in creating, maintaining and restoring normal mental activity in a given individual. There are many reasons why our association should immediately take the lead, set the pace as it were, in this matter of mental hygiene by either appointing a committee to prepare a report for publication in which the different phases of the mental hygiene work could be distributed among its various members in such a way that each subject would be treated by the one best prepared to undertake the work in the particular line, or if it seems undesirable to appoint a committee to prepare a report for publication on mental hygiene until the matter has been taken up and discussed by the association as a whole, would it not be well for the association to set aside at least one of next year's sessions for the considering of this subject.

The three most important reasons why the association ought to investigate the subject of mental hygiene is *first*—the fact that mental testing which should have a therapeutic end in view is nearly everywhere too largely satisfied with diagnostic work; *second*—the fact that there is an almost universal use of some form of mental hygiene and that such use largely lacks the scientific character which it should possess in view of our present psychological knowledge, and *thirdly*—because many of the best physicians would be glad to have the number of their therapeutic methods increased. In considering the opening of an office as consulting psychologist I had an experience recently which shows the desirability of our association taking the initiative in the mental treatment of disease by publishing something in the way of a preliminary report. I visited some thirty of the leading physicians of San Fran-

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cisco to inquire whether they thought there was any opportunity for work there along the line of personal mental hygiene. With one exception, where the physician was doubtful they replied "yes". A few physicians went so far as to say that mental hygiene was the next step in medicine and two of them actually offered me an office without any expense to myself. The fact is, the physicians are coming to realize that they have neither the time nor the knowledge to make proper use themselves of mental hygiene in their practice, and if they do not see to it that it is taken up by persons prepared to undertake it scientifically it will be attempted by those not properly equipped.

The investigating and applying of mental hygiene looks in many directions:

1st: To the methods and the psychological material to be used in teaching it to freshmen and other students in colleges and universities who are entirely ignorant of the laws governing mental action and indeed scarcely aware that people possess minds. An examination of the curriculum of the various American universities and colleges will show that while lectures are everywhere given in physical hygiene scarcely ever is mental hygiene taken up in a place which has largely to do with the activity of the human mind. That mental hygiene is not given in the lectures on general psychology is shown by examining the content of the various psychological text books published by college professors. Such silence in regard to mental hygiene cannot be attributed to psychological ignorance, for we have already collected a large number of laws regarding memory, attention, imitation, suggestion, habit, fatigue, etc., which would greatly help the student to understand and improve his own mental and physical activity. Of course, such a psychological discussion as the one proposed is bound to bring up old and unsettled questions—that of transfer of practice is one that immediately suggests itself. What we do need to do is to get together our psychological knowledge and decide what would be most valuable to present in the way of intellectual and emotional guidance not alone to the college student but to all persons desiring to improve and develop their ability to think correctly. That is, it seems to me that in view of the silence of psychological text books in general regarding mental hygiene this association should now collect and summarize in printed form such material as is now available in the form of syllabi and other unpublished writings whereby psychologists may, so to speak, pool their knowledge along this line in order that students may have presented in lectures on

mental hygiene that which will be most useful to them in their subsequent university work and in later life. Such a report might also be made very useful to the teacher of psychology in meeting the needs of those outside the university who inquire of him as to the best methods of improving the memory, training the attention, etc., for aid in controlling and strengthening the intellectual life.

2nd. To the making of a curtailed summary and a critical study of the work that has been done by psychologists and others in applying mental hygiene to the preventing and removing of mental and physical weakness and disease, and to an expression of opinion regarding the general value of the various remedial mental methods employed.

3rd. To a brief presentation of investigations along psychological and physiological lines which have a significance from the standpoint of mental hygiene although not directly concerned with it. From the standpoint of physiology the interesting work along this line of one of our members, Dr. Cannon, immediately occurs to one as a contribution to this subject. Even psychological work which at first thought seems to offer little that would be of mental hygiene value I suspect will be very suggestive when one examines it closely from the point of view of mental hygiene. Experiments with weights which have been sometimes considered laborious and even tedious at once occur to me as offering material useful from a mental hygiene standpoint.

4th. To the gathering of suggestions from physicians having a psychological turn of mind who are working in other medical departments as well as that of psychiatry as to the particular fields of mental hygiene which their experience suggests as the most desirable and promising for investigation. There are, of course, certain fields as that of adolescence and senility the importance of investigating which will be evident to those having no special medical training.

5th. To the examination of the present statute laws in the various States governing the diagnosis and treatment of mental and physical disease which should be made to ascertain whether a modification of old laws is not needed and whether some new laws should not be introduced to aid in the putting of mental hygiene on a more scientific and satisfactory basis. The question at issue is really whether the work of the psychologist in mental hygiene is to be one of working entirely under a physician or whether his opinion on the data obtained is to be regarded as final, whether, as in the case of the chemist

who makes the urine analysis, or the physicist who makes an X-ray examination, the data are to be submitted to the regular physician often possessing little or no psychological training, for final examination and decision.

Other matters needing consideration will doubtless occur to you which should be discussed in a report on mental hygiene or taken up in a discussion at a session of the association set apart for this purpose. In conclusion I will say, that I shall bring up this matter at the business meeting tonight and I very much hope that others will think also that our association should not longer ignore the thorough consideration of personal mental hygiene.