CERTAIN DISTURBANCES OF THOUGHT.*

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The most difficult thing in the world is to comprehend one's own train of thought. Such myriads of impressions surge upon us during our waking hours and even when we sleep—they come so rapidly—their intensity is so varied—that only a few out of the number really are registered and assimilated. Incessant repetitions are essential for permanent retention. Ultimately each of us accumulates a fund of ideas. If this were not so we would never advance—we could not transact our special or our everyday affairs. Much of our thought is like walking—we first creep, then stand, then take a few steps—slowly and carefully, concentrating our attention on this to the exclusion of everything else, and finally after much labor and practice, we succeed in walking without any special volition, and can even carry on an intricate train of thought or an earnest conversation, without any attention to our locomotion, unless some accident happens. So with thought. A few hundred words serve the average man, while the latest dictionary claims to contain four hundred thousand. The scholar has a larger vocabulary, but outside his special sphere he does not much exceed the average man in the number of words he uses. We all abbreviate; we teach a phrase or even a single word to convey much, as in slang, in Wall Street, in business, and so on.

In fact, much of our thought becomes automatic—we have a greater or less stock of “ready for use” ideas, which serves us fairly well for ordinary conversation, business, and correspondence. Even when we retire for meditation, we will find that we largely use “stock” ideas. We are also apt to be distracted by external influences, or disturbed by the noisy talk of bystanders. In other words, our attention wanders, or strange or unhappy associations of ideas derail us, such as befell Tristram Shandy, at the moment of his conception, “‘Pray, my dear,’ quoth my mother, ‘have you not forgot to wind up the hall clock?’ ‘Good

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God,' cried my father, 'did ever woman, since the creation of the world, interrupt a man with such a silly question?'"

Now, if sane people find it difficult to pursue a clear, purposeful, uninterrupted train of thought, which shall carry them by an air line to their goal, we would naturally expect much more difficulty among the insane. In the ever-increasing volume of writings on the psychoses, very little, until within a few years, has been said about thought and its disturbances; attention being chiefly given to hallucinations, delusions, memory, volition, emotions, and conduct. Now we find studies on the genesis and associations of ideas, their time reactions, their disintegration, etc., forging to the front.

My purpose to-day is to record some matters within my own ken, with special reference to a few peculiarities, such as neologisms, verbigeration, and desultoriness. All the examples given have occurred in patients coming under my own care or observation—in the various services at the Connecticut Hospital for the Insane, and the majority in cases of dementia præcox.

My first case was a catatonic. During a mild stupor lasting several months she lay on her back, with thighs and legs flexed rigidly, gazing fixedly at ceiling, and incessantly repeating in a monotonous rhythm these words: "Aaron—ske—bum—ske, bum—ske—bub—bub—be—bub—bub—be—bub—bub—be—bum — — —ske—*bum*." During this condition she was seen and studied by the late Dr. D. Hack Tuke, who took a deep interest in her and corresponded with me about her. On the subsidence of stupor, she could not give any explanation of this. She had no relative or acquaintance named Aaron, and she said she had never read the Old Testament much. Since 1884 she has shown a few marked mannerisms, but never any return of the characteristic catatonic symptoms. She is quite bright, has a good memory, is oriented, and at times is witty. For example, the writer once quoted from Mother Goose, "The cow jumped over the moon," when in a flash she said: "Beef-steak was high then." Again, a certain man had pulled off a small section of gas pipe and used it on a fellow patient. Such events inevitably get about hospitals. One year later, having a great aversion to a fellow patient, she one day whispered to me, "Can you bring in J. H.'s gas pipe?"

Another catatonic often talked in a strange dialect which he said was Choctaw, and at my request he repeated the "Choctaw alphabet," some of which I managed to write down phonetically, notwithstanding his extremely rapid utterance. "Aramelia, Borragewa, Cadaminta, Derrorlinger, Eleleezer, Flammacootia, etc." He kept this, practically unchanged, up to his death—a period of fifteen years. This man was an illiterate laborer, who could not give any explanation of how he had acquired this "language." He never deteriorated after the initial stage, and to the end was clear, with a good memory, and able to participate in ward work, play a good game of checkers, cards, etc. He, however, though possessed of rather good intelligence, seldom read, and cared not for the daily news. He had always lived in a small village, had never travelled, had never seen an Indian, and it was impossible to trace any connection between his "gibberish" and any previous association of ideas. In two other cases an artificial language was used. None of these patients would write it.

In other catatonics the following expressions have been caught: "Cattamooner bolower," "abertility," "slammerdinger," "rattle-bittle," etc. Repetitions of senseless syllables—so common in catatonia—need not be reproduced here. As catatonics do not arrive at the extreme dementia manifested by the hebephrenics—as they have frequent remissions—and as many are brighter than the average, it would seem possible to eventually gain some clue to the origin of their neologisms and verbigerations, but my own efforts, which have been often repeated, have failed.

Among hebephrenics word-coinage is extremely rare. Personally I cannot recall a single case. In the paranoid forms of dementia præcox it is very common. In fact, when present, it seems to me to be pathognomonic. The following are examples: E. P., male, insane twenty years, is troubled by "thrashes," which trouble him irregularly about every two weeks. These "thrashes" affect chiefly his lungs, stomach, intestines and muscles, and within ten minutes after they begin he claims to be utterly exhausted, and goes to bed, where he remains from two to four days. He is very keen and intelligent, showing no intellectual deterioration for years, but he is very suspicious, always on his guard, never mingles with his fellow patients, and generally

remains in his room. He is a good worker and mends and presses all the ward and attendants' clothing. He has always refused to describe the "thrashes," saying the doctor knows all about them. From occasional inadvertent remarks, it seems as if some wave or motion came on him from outside the house, especially as he always insists on keeping his window closed, even on the hottest day.

Another patient, M. T., was constantly annoyed by "struze," which were introduced through her skin as a rule, but sometimes in her food, when for weeks she would refuse to eat, and was fed by tube. She would often retch or squirm in order to get rid of the "struze."

Another patient, J. B., a most efficient seamstress for years, constantly complained of "spectrones" and "sobreeks," which were "tapped on" her day and night; to prevent which she resorted to extraordinary defensive measures.

W. F. has his body filled with "bowlstry-holes" made by "tootering-rods."

J. F. H. has numerous neologisms with a probable erotic significance, as he writes numerous letters to women containing remarks like the following: "I have the dudest putty you ever did see." "No ordinary putty; it is a dudey putty." "A lot of fuzzy didels using their diddy pupels too montch." "I am getting the dudest putty and talk about stinkalation." "They infringed on my robbey dudel the bottyest dudel you ever saw." "Fuzzy dudel," etc.

G. Y. insisted that his name as a boy was "Pompoose." When asked how he spelled this name he replied: "Po—double O—double O—P—Po—double O—double s—e." Dr., "Where does the 'm' come in?" G. Y., "That comes in when you say the word; not when you spell it."

Closely allied to neologisms are the invented names of persons displayed chiefly by manic cases, especially when of long standing. A woman, Julia B., under my care since 1898, during which time she has not deteriorated and has manifested only a mild pressure of activity with occasional flightiness, will never answer to her own name, and insists on being addressed as Daisy Elvinee Wiseman, and always calls the writer Charles Julius Bromberg. She has a separate name for every nurse and fellow patient, and

never gets these mixed. On a visit from a nurse who left here nine years ago she at once called her by her substitute name. Similar happenings have occurred many times. This patient is very shrewd, always on guard, and no one has yet succeeded in trapping her into giving any name besides those she has invented, nor has she ever given any explanation, although repeatedly asked.

O. M. will not answer to any name but "Dr. Edward Evenson Gregory," but he does not impose on or invent for others any new names. When presented at one of the clinics of the Yale Medical School as O. M., he said: "Gentlemen, that is not my name; my name is Dr. E. E. G.," etc. When "properly" addressed he expresses a host of absurd and fantastic delusions, many of them fabricated.

Some patients in place of neologisms substitute phrases or expressions which are often very remote from any apparent association of ideas, and which are repeated daily and hourly until they become automatic.

M. B., an alcoholic paranoiac, formulated some pseudo-hygienic and physiologic aphorisms, which he inflicted on any one who would listen to him. "Man is a vein and blood being, and, therefore, should be holy and porous." "Folks would have handsomer noses if they had the worm out of their stomach." "The evacuations of the brains loosens the eyebrows." "Heavy air begets sorrow" (not so bad). "Tiredness too much for my aches." "Don't walk around like a pipe-wrench." "Intuity (coined) of life is perfect." "Consentation of thought is superfluous." "Choose synagogues to eat onions." "Vegetable diet only for cannibals." "A custard pie is not a keyring, and blood is not ink."

Although not strictly bearing on our subject, one case may be mentioned, where the only salvage from the mental wreck consisted of three delusions, which were repeated for several years without the omission of one jot or title.

J. B., "I own *glass-gold* mountain, made of pure gold, silver, and glass. It is in the western part of France; is two miles high; you go up on a roller; and from the top you can see the whole world and the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. In the oceans you see turtles big as a ten acre lot, with legs fifty feet long and feet as big

as this room. When they turn on their back and kick up their feet no ship dares to go within two hundred miles of them." Once the writer said, "What a lot of turtle soup they would make?" when J. B. said, "D—n you, there is no soup."

Second story: "When I was a boy I saw a rock and said, 'Here is *refined oil*.' So I poked the pith out of some elder and drove it into the rock, and out came the refined oil. You put a wick in one inch long and a gallon will burn a thousand years. You wrap a woman weighing *eight hundred* in sheets soaked in this oil and she will come down to seventy in less than ten seconds.

Third story, tells how he finished the war by one shot, which travelled a hundred miles and killed every rebel. Only twice in the last six years of his life did he ever make a remark apart from the above, even never asking questions in regard to personal needs. One appears above, the other was, "I want to go to bed." This patient was illiterate, never read, had always lived a solitary life, and in no way in the history of his life experiences could we find any clue to the genesis of these delusions.

Many more cases might be cited, but we must pass to our final subject, desultoriness. When complete, as in three of my cases, absolutely no connection can be traced between any phrase and those preceding and following.

E. H. writes daily two or three letters, one of which follows:

Sept. 28, 1909.

DEAR PAPA: Come after me. They take patients down to the city. I am able to wash. I do not have four nurses. Miss L. bathed on Thursday. I will not go over on four. I have not been to any dances. Uncle David was not in the laundry Thursday. I will have to have my room changed. I will wear my blue dress skirt. Will Booth was out to the carpenter shop. I go out with the bundle every day.

Your daughter, E. H.

Come to save my life.

The above concerns chiefly events in her daily routine, with two examples of mistaken identity (Uncle David and Will Booth). Her voluntary speech is rather meager, but shows the same abrupt change of goal in every sentence.

G. T. is a high-grade imbecile, with violent excitement at irregular intervals, when he will talk or shout for hours and even

days, a succession of words, having absolutely no connection with each other, and occasionally a short phrase. In words of more than one syllable he always places emphasis on the first. "Jack, codfish, rum, frost, Pedro, settee, hell, loafer, yard stick, damnation cold bath, yellow dog, Taft, blower," and so on. He talks about one hundred words a minute, and rarely repeats a word. In the intervals he talks sensibly, and assists intelligently in caring for the sick or feeble. His every-day vocabulary is rather meager.

A. C. is a catatonic, showing a circular phase—a period of lucidity, with excellent memory, good conduct, coherent thought, and an interest in affairs. Next comes on slowly a moderate unrest, when for a few days he talks in a curiously small, thin falsetto—at times a mere squeak—all day long, even at meals, and for a large part of the night. Absolutely no connection of phrase appears; there is complete desultoriness. "Go away. You haven't got my upper lip. G— d— you. High tide. You can't kill me and I can't pick your pocket. I didn't set the fire. These hands are here. Mary Ann Jones. That is a lie. Pull down your eyebrow. I haven't any dinner. Bring back, bring back," etc. This man can talk thus for hours without repeating himself, except for occasional interjection of cuss-words and a few stereotyped obscenities.