

WHY WOMEN GO CRAZY

Worry Over Work and Many Other Causes are Preventable, a Feminine Alienist Says

WHAT is it that sets women crazy? Ask the question of an expert in psychiatry nowadays, and the first thing he will do will be to object to the singular number, and insist on framing a group of causes, with worry probably among the first, and overwork not a bad second.

Answered as it is now by Dr. Mary M. Wolfe, clinical professor of psychiatry at the Women's Medical College of Pennsylvania, and one of the few women, if not the only one, in charge of such a clinic in mental diseases as has been established there, and the expression of opinion which is the outcome embodies a woman's observation of women in one of the largest asylums in the United States, the State Asylum for the Insane at Norristown, Pa., where Doctor Wolfe was in full charge of the women's department.

At this time, when women are coming more and more under the harsh nervous strain of employment, and when all the science that pertains to psychological conditions is advancing with enormous strides, it is both astounding and shocking to be told that nearly half the women who become insane could be cured, and would be cured, if in many of the cases the whole force of popular ignorance and prejudice did not operate to keep them forever cornered in the cul-de-sac of their madness, like animals to which the merest suspicion of hydrophobia is synonymous with doom.

Furthermore, fully 15 per cent. of the insanity that afflicts the sex could be absolutely prevented.

It was to dispel the ignorance and to open the way for a mental salvation for the afflicted that Doctor Wolfe, in the following interview, reviewed the relation of the woman to modern conditions and insanity.

SEVERAL things were impressed upon me in the course of my work with women at the hospital at Norristown. The first was the great reluctance of people to place their relatives in hospitals designed for the care of mental disorders. The next was the great injustice which that prejudice works to the patient. The corollary of that prejudice is the attitude of both the family and the public toward those patients after they have been discharged.

There is absolutely no question in my mind that, under ordinary circumstances, the more quickly an insane person can be placed under the surveillance of an intelligent care the better it will be for the patient and the more likely she will be to recover. The statistics bear out the opinion.

I understand perfectly well how the general public feels as to the stigma resting on any one once declared insane, and that there exists the erroneous idea that such a patient cannot be cured. I understand the stigma attaching to some cases of insanity, such as those due to alcoholic and other excesses. But where the mental trouble is due to some family ailment, I cannot see why there should be any stigma at all. The sooner the public is educated to know that there is no real stigma in many cases, the better for all concerned.

The first thing to do is to educate the young physicians now learning their profession, and through them the general public. An inflammation of the coverings of the brain, for example, should stigmatize a person no more than an inflammation of the lungs, the stomach or any other organ, provided the patient recovers entirely from the inflammation, as happens with a fair degree of frequency.

While at Norristown I had 1450 women under my care. Among them were 125 who had the free run of the grounds all day long, while no more than ten or fifteen of the entire number required medicine to quiet them at night.

Of the patients who come to such an institution, 45 per cent. have a fair possibility of being cured. The formal statistics, because of the general character of patients who are received at such an institution, are prone to be misleading. Of the 45 per cent. who should afford good promise of cure, all cannot be relied upon not to have recurrence. Some, no matter what the conditions they encounter, would have no recurrence; but others, in good environment, would remain permanently cured.

Take, for example, that frequent type of insanity in

women which is found in homes where the husband drinks. The wife, from that cruel combination, privation and worry for herself and children, at length falls into a condition where she must be committed to an asylum. Within a period varying from three to six months she may be honestly well again, and she is sent out into the world.

If we could pick out for that unhappy creature an environment promising even a fair chance for benign conditions, she would go on indefinitely as a well woman. But it is the unfortunate condition of affairs that, too often, she must return to just the circumstances which broke her down in the first place. Is it any wonder that her cure does not remain permanent? About 15 per cent. of the existing insanity in women is due to wholly preventable causes. Alcoholism, either on their own part or on that of their husbands, is the most salient factor. Among the mechanic and middle classes alcoholism on the part of the women themselves is extremely rare. But very many women indeed succumb to the want and worry attending their devotion to some drunken husband.

Much of our current insanity, too, is due to parental alcoholism. There can be no question of the consequences to the children. Many of the nervous and mental troubles due to such heredity are practically incurable. Epileptics, idiots and imbeciles often owe their affliction to their parents, while dementia praecox, which is a precocious enfeeblement of the mind, displaying itself in many ways, is another and a grave consequence. The time at which the alcohol is indulged in has a direct effect on the child, and, again, it may be affected if the father, for some time prior to the child's birth, and occasion the mother any anxiety.

The remainder of insanity in women is due to various causes, physical and moral, and some of it might be prevented by proper physical hygiene or proper environment.

Here, for example, is the girl who works in a mill. She has not herself alone to support. Other members of her family may be dependent on her. She begins to be nervous and upset. Then her efficiency at her work deteriorates. She worries more and more, until hospital care becomes imperative. There, treated for a longer or shorter time, she becomes well again. That girl's

mental trouble was absolutely unavoidable under her social and industrial living conditions. So far as the production and recurrence of insanity



Can This Be Caligula's Sister, Drusilla?



Supposed Statue of Drusilla, Caligula's Sister

which the imagination may conjure up scenes of long-forgotten splendor and imperial pomp.

The sister of an emperor was Drusilla, who lounged and idled in majestic state at the court of her brother, Caligula. The memory of Drusilla, once famous, has been well-nigh as deeply buried as her statue, and it is only in connection with works of art which have immortalized her beauty that we of the twentieth century speak her name, spoken softly in terms of adoration in ages now dead.

Some years ago this statue was recovered. But it was at first thought to be that of a Greek goddess. Only recently have antiquarians and such come to the conclusion that it is the best representation extant of the sister of one of the tyrants history has most delighted to dishonor.

ON THE shores of the picturesque little Lake Nemi, once Speculum Dianae, the Mirror of Diana, traditions of splendor and glory beyond conception have outlived the centuries. Where there were once villas of the noble and wealthy of Rome are now the cottages of peasants. The language has lost in dignity and the landscape in splendor, but the traditions thrive among the people, and the glory that was once Nemi's is not forgotten.

The natives of the district preserved among themselves stories of great treasures, beautiful galleys and barges and whole temples that lay on the bottom of the little lake, and had lain there since the decay of the Roman empire. No one took it seriously, but at last there were a few inquisitive people who investigated, with the result that in 1895 one of the great barges of the tyrant Caligula was raised, filled with statuary and ornament in bronze and gold.

In the last fifteen years the work has gone on, every search bringing to the sunlight some new treasure of art that suggested the luxury and wealth of the old Romans who had their playgrounds about the lake.

Several years ago a real masterpiece was found. It was a bronze statue; antiquarians said it was the statue of Diana, because the lake and its groves had been sacred to the goddess. Recently the great art connoisseurs have decided that this was an error, and

that it is really the statue of Drusilla, the sister of Caligula. It is superbly beautiful in its workmanship, and is believed to have adorned the pleasure gallery of the emperor himself.

The style of draperies and the face closely resemble the famous statue of Drusilla in Munich. This latter is in marble. Upon this likeness, and the fact that it was found among other relics of the cruel emperor's gallery, rests its identification.

Drusilla was the daughter of Germanicus and Agrippina. She was born in the year 15 A. D. Little is known of her life, except that she lived with Caligula up to the time of her death, which occurred in 38 A. D., and that she was very beautiful.

It has been suggested that the strange metamorphosis in the character of Caligula, when he turned from a just, generous ruler into a bloodthirsty tyrant, might have been traced to grief for the death of his favorite sister.

At any rate, he defied her. But then with Caligula this was no special tribute, for he also defied his horse and himself, and raised a riot in Jerusalem by insisting that the gilded statues of his pets and himself be set up in the Holy of Holies.

Along the shores of the Mirror of Diana, or Lacus Neronensis, as it was also called, the nobility of Rome built their villas. Then came the emperor, and all the summer settlement was wont to enter into the religious revels of the worship of Diana with unheard-of excesses and extravagance.

IN MARBLE AND BRONZE

The emperor's barge was covered with porphyry, and the decorations were of marble and bronze. A figured bronze rail enclosed the great pleasure boat, and fountains played on the decks, where the court lounged on cushions and sipped their fine wines.

On the shore was the famous grove of Diana and the temple. The chief priest won his office by slaying his predecessor, and was replaced by being slain in turn by the next aspirant—a peculiar custom indeed for a religious colony.

Here, among the groves, marble palaces and the gay barges on the lake, Drusilla's empy, and doubtless Drusilla herself, graced the gallery of her barbarous lord and brother in days of license and idle luxury.

among mill girls is to be reckoned with, the most prolific cause is unquestionably piecework. I have seen cases where I have cured mill girls and sent them home from the hospital on a trial visit. After a reasonable time I have allowed them to resume work under my supervision. Frequently they change for the worse which I noticed were incident to the girl's return to piecework in the mill. It happened so often that finally I forbade mill girls who had once broken down from taking up such work again.

Then I encountered this difficulty: the girls said their employers refused them any other form of employment. They must either do piecework or go without food.

It is characteristic of the woman at piecework that she is bent on earning as much as she can. She will drive herself ahead, trying to make a record, which is very bad for her physical condition. Ordinarily she will not overwork herself any more than a man does. But it is not merely employment, commonly so called, that can play havoc with the nerves of a woman. There are plenty of them who overwork themselves quite as injuriously in the home.

Take the women—there are many thousands of them—who have children in quick succession, who have some older person to care for, and are not themselves physically strong. Given with the husband temperate, they find themselves driven to overwork in a way quite as distracting as that of the mill girl.

These are instances in which the production of mental disease harks back to causes that are unavoidable. They are major causes, and apply far more to the poor than to the rich, who can more effectively adjust their

circumstances to their condition of health. There is no question that, apart from the preventable causes included among the first 15 per cent. of the cases, overwork, anxiety and ill health are largely preponderant as the origins of insanity in women.

Where insanity occurs in wealthy women, it is much more likely to be due to preventable causes than it is among the poor, although the fact that a woman has money by no means argues that she is free from anxieties or from care.

The woman who is emancipated from all the worrying worries attaching to poverty may have a husband who is unfaithful to her, or is in some other way making her unhappy. Her emotions under those circumstances do not differ materially from those of her less prosperous sister, and she may even be more at the mercy of her anxieties because she has less to engage her mind.

SOCIETY OFTEN A STRAIN

Then, too, the pressure of social obligations can readily attain a degree of stress which proves a factor potent for the production of mental troubles. Women who give themselves up to "society" beyond the limits of their strength and their nerves simply overwork themselves in pleasure instead of in the mill.

When one traces the main causes back to their last analysis, it is chiefly overwork and ill health that produce insanity among women.

Prevention and cure call for a variety of remedies. Industrial conditions require improvement, and what is much to the point, they are being improved, for the public is steadily demanding it. There is room for much more improvement, especially in the hygienic conditions under which women work, not only of buildings but of the requirements and the hours of their employment.

Again, in considering the broad aspect of insanity in women, we must remember that it often happens people are blamed for irritability and lack of self-control on the assumption of a bad temper or a quarrelsome disposition, when back of it all is a physical and mental state of health which neither the family nor even the physician takes into account.

I do not mean to say that every case of irritability is due to a nervous condition. But, on the other hand, where a woman who was formerly of a pleasant and even a kind disposition becomes gradually more irritable, fault-finding and troubled over minor things, her case is presenting a symptom which both family and physicians should take into account. Frequently, by judicious care and the fostering of self-control, such cases would never go far enough to constitute mental disease, and a most pitiful episode, which occurs in many lives, could be wholly averted.

It is to teach medical students, by precept and example, the symptoms they are to look for, the conditions under which they will find them, and the ways in which they are to meet them, that we are conducting the clinic in mental diseases at the Women's Medical College. We hope to make a good fight to prevent at least some of these cases of mental trouble.

It is largely by prevention and by early treatment that women are to be saved from insanity. If we can only make the families of these patients realize that they are doing them the greatest injustice and unkindness in delaying treatment, a valuable advance would be made.

If ever the time arrives when the families of patients who have nervous and mental troubles will be as honest with themselves and the physician as they would be in typhoid or some similar disease, we will have reached a point where much can be done for the sufferers.

Then, too, the philanthropist can find here a field for their generosity in endowing some psychiatric clinic where women can be sent for examination, with a small separate hospital where those women can be cared for who need observation.

Such an institution would be helpful both to stu-



How Overwork Can Mean Madness

dents and the community at large, for there are now practically no hospitals that take in cases of the responsible poor, and they are ordinarily sent to the city poorhouse or asylum at once.

A Curious Tree

IN MOST of the countries of southeastern Asia the Indian fig tree, the sacred and consecrated fig tree, or peepal tree, is found. It is held prominently sacred by the Buddhists, and is revered also by the Hindus, the birth of Vishnu having occurred beneath its branches.

Most botanical descriptions of it are misleading, but it is a handsome tree, growing frequently to a great height. It is an evergreen, which puts forth its flowers in April, and the bark yields freely upon incision an acid milk containing a considerable proportion of India rubber. The leaves are heart-shaped, long pointed and vibrate in the air like those of the aspen.

A branch of one of these trees having a notable history was sent to a city in the interior of Ceylon, where it was planted, and became known by the name of the Bo tree. For 2000 years it received the highest reverence, and is still the chief object of worship to the pilgrims who every year flock to the ruins of the city.