
The author of this monograph insists upon the need for the investigation of the rôle played by internal secretions in the whole province of medicine, and especially in psychiatry. He traces historically the course of thought which has gradually developed in our views regarding the etiology of insanity, from the early conception of diabolic possession to the present day, when the latest tendency is to seek the etiology of mental aberration in disorders of internal secretion.

The author considers dementia praecox more from the psychological than from the psychiatric point of view, and insists that the three recognized forms are not strongly demarcated from one another. He therefore prefers the term schizophrenia, the predominant symptom always being a weakening and splitting of the personality. He draws attention to the psychic disturbances which occur in diseases such as Graves’ disease, myxœdema, acromegaly, etc., which are known to depend upon disorders of endocrine glands, and also to the psychic changes noticeable in the various eunuchoid conditions. It is significant that the age of onset of the psychosis is puberty, when certain glands—thymus and pineal—are undergoing involution, while others—thyroid and pituitary—are coming to play an increased rôle in internal economy, and the genital glands are undergoing an enormous development, with which is correlated an altered psychic reaction. Thus schizophrenia appears to him as the result of a more or less firmly established disturbance of the whole endocrine system. This disturbance shows itself somatically in many ways, which are discussed in some detail. Animal experiments being inadmissible, an experimental basis for the relationship between endocrine disorders and dementia praecox is sought by: (1) ‘Pharmacological analysis’; this is practically a quest for Jung’s X toxin and yields only indirect results. (2) ‘Serological analysis’; this is an application of Abderhalden’s work as elaborated by Loeb, Maas, and Fauser, but while demonstrating that altered activity of the endocrine glands plays a part in the total picture of the psychosis, it fails to indicate precisely what this part may be. (3) ‘Organothreaputic analysis’; under this heading comes the successful treatment of cases of dementia praecox by means of glandular preparations, especially thyroid extract. The author considers that it is not so much hypofunction as ‘dysfunction’ of the endocrine gland which is to blame. But in addition to dysfunction there is a loss of the normal balance in the system. Finally, he puts forward the suggestion that both dysfunction and loss of balance in the endocrine system may be found ultimately to depend upon a disturbance of the vegetative nervous system which regulates the activity of all internally secreting organs. It is regrettable that references to the literature bearing upon the subject are scanty, and one misses in particular any mention of Sir Frederick Mott’s work.

Alfred Carver.
Innere Secretion und Dementia præcox (The Rôle of Internal Secretions in Dementia Præcox)

Alfred Carver

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