



PSYCHIATRY

Should Not Ask Psychiatry To Shape World History

Dr. Zilboorg Disagrees With Those Who Would Use Medicine to Control Man's Destructive Impulses

THE present popular idea that psychiatry can be used to create "super-individuals," to wipe out hatred, and to shape history according to modern ideals is all wrong, in the opinion of Dr. Gregory Zilboorg, New York psychiatrist.

Dr. Zilboorg took exception to certain ideas on political psychiatry expressed at the symposium on mental health during the Richmond meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (See SNL, Jan. 7)

The idea of political psychiatry seems, Dr. Zilboorg said, "to be born out of the confusion between the individual's inter-personal relationships and social dynamics."

For example, Dr. Zilboorg quoted one authority who said that "psychiatry is the general science of understanding and controlling the destructive impulses of man."

"Yet we know clinically," Dr. Zilboorg pointed out, "that full control of one's destructive impulses leads not infrequently to depressive states of pathological inactivity."

On the subject of aggression, frequently blamed for many of the world's troubles, Dr. Zilboorg said that while

a "free, uninhibited flow of aggression would obviously lead to murder," a complete blocking of aggression, "will naturally lead to severe depression and suicide, or to a complete withdrawal from life." This withdrawal may take the form of a stupor such as is seen in patients suffering from catatonic schizophrenia, or may appear as such extreme irritability as described by the terms "raving maniac" or "dangerously insane."

Hatred, that "despised element of human nature," is, Dr. Zilboorg said, "a valuable component of our life."

"It makes us and breaks us, but its extirpation, if it were possible, would extirpate us too."

Psychiatry's proper place, Dr. Zilboorg pointed out, is as a branch of medicine and its proper use is for the treatment and aid of individuals. Any attempt to use it as a tool for shaping history will lead to subjugation of psychiatry to history.

The "dazzling halo of confusion" surrounding psychiatry and the grand things now asked of it are due to the mistake, Dr. Zilboorg said, of thinking that ideas are forces and that a proper

communication of ideas is equivalent to a corresponding awakening of forces.

"Ideas are not movers of instinctual forces but rather their representatives," he declared.

Consequently he does not believe ideas can be expected to promote mental health. This is not as pessimistic as it sounds, he pointed out.

"It would seem that the promotion of mental health on a large scale offers some promise of success, for the present at least, not in the field of intellectual propaganda, political reorganization or economic reconstruction, but elsewhere.

"Psychiatry in the true sense of the word is hardly 50 years old," Dr. Zilboorg pointed out, "and, for the time being at least, it seems that the treatment of the greatest number of individuals in the greatest number of clinics by the greatest number of competent psychiatrists is the only safe recommendation one can make without the feeling that one sacrifices one's scientific discipline to speculative construction."

Science News Letter, January 14, 1939

MEDICINE

Warn of Danger in Use of Sulfanilamide Compound

A WARNING that one of the new sulfanilamide compounds, which has been reported as a particularly effective remedy for pneumonia as well as other germ diseases, may be dangerous has been issued by three Baltimore scientists, Drs. E. K. Marshall, Jr., A. C. Bratton and J. T. Litchfield, Jr., of the Johns Hopkins University.

The new drug, which is sulfanilamidopyridine, appears to be more toxic than sulfanilamide itself, the Baltimore scientists report to the technical journal, *Science*. Their findings are based on the comparison of the effects of equal concentrations in the blood of sulfanilamide and the newer compound related to it.

When the new drug is given by mouth, it is not very well absorbed by the body and its lack of poisonous effect reported by those who have used it to treat pneumonia may be due to the fact that not very much of it gets into the blood. If the new drug is combined with sodium (ingredient of common salt) it becomes more soluble and is more readily absorbed from the stomach and digestive tract.

"Until more is known about the drug, it should not be used in conditions where sulfanilamide has been shown to be effective," the Baltimore scientists declare.

Science News Letter, January 14, 1939