

Nervous Children of This Twentieth Century

He is a quiet little fellow, gentle, shy, dreamy, melancholy; and rarely in high spirits. Women say of him, "What a nice boy! You don't often see such a well-behaved child."

Don't put too much faith, my good dames, in his apparent placidity. Look keenly into those dreamy eyes. This quiet little fellow, is fiery at heart. Though silent, he is sensitive; though seemingly inert, he is headstrong; though hesitant in appearance, he is determined; though mistaken for a dolt, he is an independent or a rebel; though you think of him as a child, he is a man in embryo.

This child is a paradox—extraordinary in his nature. He is an enigma to all but the few who hold the key to the mystery: he is an uneven temperament, at once sensitive and sensitive, and his activity is rarely in a perfect equilibrium. That is why three souls, instead of two, dwell within him—the weak soul—and it is not often that he is aware which of the three is in control. His character is not an affair of "quality" as in cases of hysteria or psychasthenia; it is an affair of "quantity." We can measure a motor effort, but how are we to measure a sentiment, an emotion, an idea, an inference, a judgment? Nunciate all. The psychic life of our little patient consists wholly of nuances.

And how hard it is to get at the secret of their inner existence. It reveals itself so slightly, so rarely, and such difficulty. The keen and delicate sensibility that is the basis of their nervous organization is ever alert, ever ready to vibrate under any of the fugitive impressions of the passing moment. If the impression is too abrupt or too violent, their sensibility curls up, shuts itself into its shell, recoils, and the individual who has taken the initiative too brusquely finds himself gazing into amazed and sorrowful eyes.

MENTAL TURMOIL

Yes, the quiet, gentle child is first of all a sensitive. Endowed with a gift for keen, deep, prolonged feeling, but not for rapid reflection, he keeps his troubles, his woes, his pains to himself—little troubles, little woes, little pains, but a school of life in which, later on, he will suffer from all the things that torment good sensitive souls: the falsity of men (and of women), the immense gap between the dream and the reality; the impossibility of moral perfection; the mystery of things and of people; the anxiety that attends the course of fate, the uselessness of being sincere, the impossibility of harmony—all these bad realities.

The force of things drives him upon himself; he shuts himself up in reticence and reverie, weaves pretty, imaginary stories that never finish, but in which he himself always plays the hero's part. He lives an intense inner life, because he doesn't know how to get outside himself or to do the deeds he wants to do. His shyness spreads between him and the world a sort of temple veil which he cannot read, and he becomes moody, gloomy and close-mouthed. His surroundings exaggerate the condition, for all about him are children who cheer him without pity, who rarely say as much as he ought to say, and ere long he gets to keeping everything to himself, whether or not he suffers in consequence.

This reticent little fellow is therefore a forerunner. He dodges quarrels and contradictions and always gives in to those of his comrades who boss him about in imperious tones. He has a mind of his own, but not the courage

to speak it out, and he is dominated over, at least in appearance, by people who bellow loudly enough, unless, as sometimes happens, he thinks best to run away from them. And he shuts up only tighter when there are capital reasons for his being gay or sad. Great joys, like great woes, leave him silent; he is merry or weebone a week after. Don't try to force his story; he demands it, becoming aggressive. His windows close automatically, and he is angered if you try to peep through.

And he has a heart for intimacies, for he is emotional and easily fatigued. Being emotional he is in terror of people he doesn't know. What Philistines mistake for haughtiness and coldness is only the reserve of a timid spirit. If he seems cold, it is because he represses every outburst of feeling out of fear lest people misconceive him. If he has an air of severity, it is only because that is the attitude of a pent-up sensibility, a soul that is "elsewhere." To be some where else is not this the dream of every sensitive nature imprisoned among the uglinesses of the world. And because easily fatigued, he is "serious"; he lacks the strength to be merry. He must rest before he can be in high spirits; for are not high spirits a tax upon vitality? He is not rich enough in individual energy to let loose his joy. Sometimes he has fits of voluntary jollity that amaze and alarm his elders, for they seem forced; these are the jollities of grimace. A child too serious is a weary child. To cheap and wholesale companionship, he instinctively prefers the company of sympathetic friends—those who feel and suffer as he himself does.

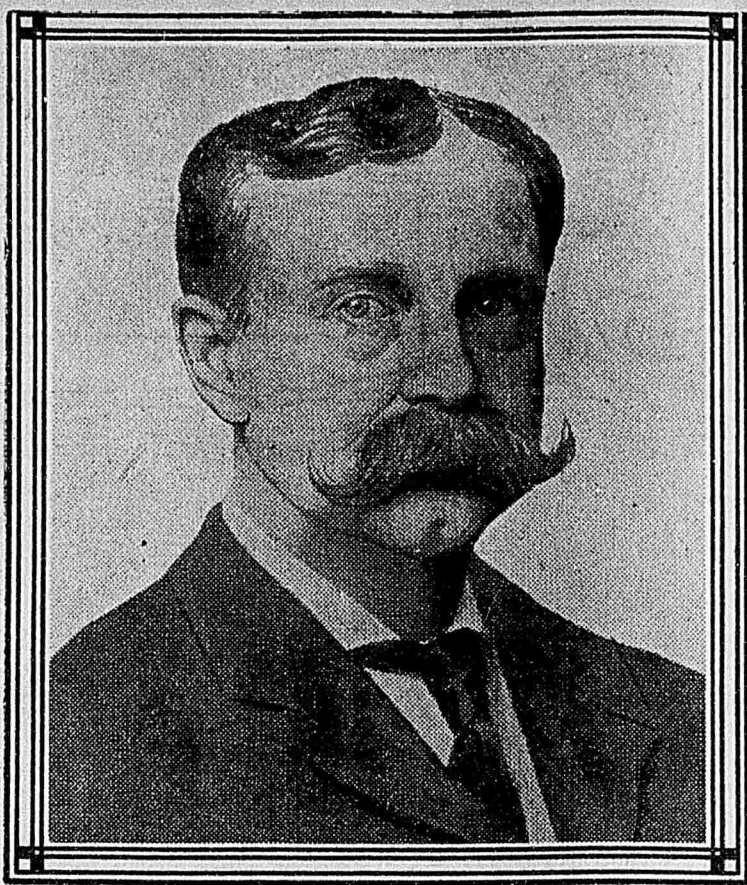
CONTRARITIES OF THE SENSITIVE

He is timid—sometimes more so, sometimes less. Occasionally his timidities amounts to a savage misanthropy. He is timid with his parents, his friends, his comrades, and yet, under a sudden impulse or with strangers, he dauntless as a messenger boy; timid with two or three companions, he loses all fear when confronting five hundred people.

And this sensitive child has passions, though neither very strong nor very lasting. He has emotions at once sudden and violent, but the passion that is like a torrent that constantly digs its bed deeper and deeper is not for him—such, for instance, as the passion for gambling, or for the chase, or for war, or for religion, or for politics. He may show signs of such, but the passion changes. Hobby succeeds hobby. He is by instinct a dilettante. Yet he is always tremendously in earnest. A paradox, likewise a fact. But who will believe it? The world understands and loves only those who seem self-consistent—all of a piece.

He loves religion—to begin with—and readily becomes a mystic. Later he will love poetry. He has gifts for expression; he will discharge in verse or prose the subtleties of his active and melancholy spirit. He worships all that is vague and without precise form. That is why he takes to philosophy, to abstractions rather than to the concrete; he likes to generalize, and his knowledge is always broader than it is deep. One day he will learn his lessons magnificently, the next day exuberantly. This denotes an inequality of nervous tension, which parents and teachers will not pass over lightly. If over pedagogy becomes scientific. And it is for the same reason that he rarely finishes what he has begun. He is incomplete and always falls short of duty, of his own justice. He spends his youth and perhaps his life in not doing what he wants to do—in not doing it because he lacked the courage. So he has stronger regrets than desires. And yet he has firmness, tenacity, and continuity in his ideas for the future. It is to the present that he fails to adjust himself. It is the present that he fails to make immediate use of.

It cannot be said that he has no will;



JAMES A. PATTEN.

The "wheat king" of Chicago.

he has one and a good one—if by will you mean purpose; but he has no faculty of putting the purpose into action. His motives are not strong enough to determine his choice, and in the social struggle he dares not decide for himself; he wonders what people will say. He becomes a man of action again when he is alone. He is no fool, for he clearly knows what he wants and pursues distant ends with a rare tenacity, yet he hesitates every time he has to make a decision relating to the small affairs of daily life. So people imagine almost anybody can coax him to do almost anything, in the realm of trivial choices, though all the while he is inflexibly pursuing the distant goal of his dream. He is far away and generally silent. We should take an interest in silent children; they have something to say.

He goes out into life indifferent and without concern, his eyes fixed upon the object of his secret ambition. Don't imagine that this docile fellow is at heart subversive. By no means! He is an independent; he has an instinct, a taste, a zest for independence. He has neither the ideas nor the habits of a sheep. Often you will find him a rebel. His sensibilities are roused by the daily spectacle of cruelty. He is alive to its senseless savagery, and beneath an appearance of calm dwells an ardent soul, always in a state of excitement, and ever ready to give battle to all things evil and to spread broadcast his generosity.

This child conceives the world to be an Eden of frankness and honesty—a garden of the ideal. Is not candor the weakness of delicate souls? He loves neither lying nor insincerity. In his actions there is no hidden motive, because, whether under the influence of emotion or of fatigue, he is unable to conceive a large number of ideas and acts at one and the same time. He believes everything people say to him, for he himself has no desire to deceive. But he is rich in ideas when alone.

The nervous child is kind, with an active kindness that cannot but respond to the misery that surrounds him. To the clash of immediate interests he prefers vague, far off, beautiful

things, without always knowing just what they are.

But always he is uneven, drifting ready from depression to excitement. Alongside his lovable traits, we find traits extremely offensive. Sometimes the quiet child becomes violent; he has fits of rage over mere trifles, though they soon pass, leaving him ashamed. Besides, he is obstinate; at times you find him ramming his way to the object he has in view without reflecting and without taking account of obstacles; he is intoxicated by the glamour of things that fascinate his imagination and angered by the slightest contradiction; he is alternately enthusiastic and discouraged; he is headstrong and tenacious by turns, given to anxiety and eternally giving anxiety. He is restless, and his restlessness keeps him in an inferno of perpetual torment. He is out of contact with things past, disgusted with things present, and uncertain about things still to come—unless the whim takes him to display unreasoning confidence.

PHYSICAL NEEDS.

Keenly attentive to what pleases him, a moment later he is inattentive; selfish, then absurdly generous. He is a paradox; he is extremely faithful to his friends—then inconstant; a jumble of strange moods, he would be an unmanageable puzzle but for his knowledge that all his traits are engendered by quantitative variations in the nerve current that supplies his energy. And by a curious paradox of nature, the children who are most eager for independence are precisely the ones that most demand control at the hands of imperious authority. Such children, if by happiness you mean the perfect adaptation of a life to its surroundings and its occupations, this child has a constant need of novelty and excitement. Never satisfied with realities near at hand or with the monotonous enjoyments of ordinary people, he is ever in quest of new sensations, impossible pleasures, and the complete bliss that nature refuses to give. Happiness is within one, and those who are over-lapsing seeking it are doomed not to find it.

Such a child has a right to our careful attention. Little understood, mistaken for a sort of hysterical invalid or even for a degenerate, he becomes only the queerer because of the unjust verdict pronounced by those around him. Yet his only offense is that of possessing a small, simply the common capital that he ought to possess. If everybody was nervously capitalized as slenderly as he, we should call him normal. All his nervousness comes from insufficiency of the nerve current and from the alternate excitation and depression that results. This is not to be regarded as a disability; inherent in the nature of man, it is to be a condition of quantity, and it is to be combated first by physical means, then by physical, and not by cruelly ridiculing him or uselessly scolding him.

Let us extend all our solicitude to this shy, restless child, who has within him the germs of great powers as well as the germs of a deplorable weakness, and who may win a lofty position one day if he is not crushed by unreasonable exactions, overheavy responsibilities, extreme restrictions, and stupid obligations. While everything is possible to him, there is a chance that he may come to be only a tissue of contradictions, a chaos of extremes and contrasts, a garden of antinomies, and agreeable dilettante and excellent "copy" for psychological novelists. Let us shield him against the overwork that torments him, and if we aren't careful, will by and by make him a picturesque valetudinarian, a recluse or going about in gloom with nothing to interest him. His fantastic hobbies, his nervousness, has more talent for feeling than for selecting the object of feeling, and since he lacks certitude (perhaps by reason of his clear-sightedness), he spends his efforts over dreaming of one sort of happiness after another only to drop back into weariness and apathy let us add what is necessary to his experiences, give his restless sensibility a clearly defined object or two, and seek to direct his life.—By Dr. Albert Deschamps (translated from his book, "Les Maladies d'Enfance").

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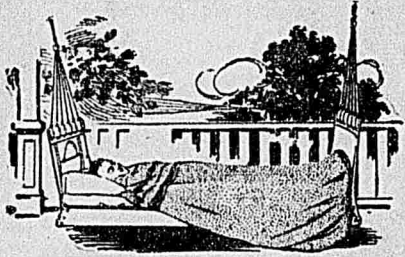
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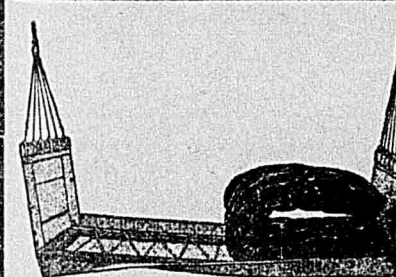
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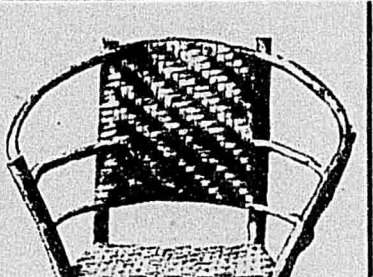
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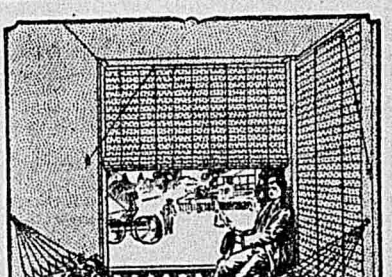


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works of Shakespeare when 40 years of age. When Mr. Archer, some years ago, confessed that he had not read Dr. John Brown's "Macario Fleming," he was lectured by some of the serious critics, and one of them kindly assured him that there was hardly "an educated man, woman or child in England, Scotland, or even Ireland, who had not read it." Some time ago a critic, referring to the announcement of a new play, entitled "Steupe of Evidences," suggested that it would probably be found to relate to Scott's hero, popularly known as Thomas the Rhymer. The author, however, assured him that the play had no connection with Scott's poem, and added, "which I am ashamed to confess I have never read." If we were all as sensitive, such confessions would be numerous.

There are many books, even by the greatest writers, which are only interesting to the pedant and the dry-as-dust. By way of illustration as to the difficulty of reading every famous work it might be noted that it was stated in a certain literary paper of 1865 as an important item of information that such a great reader as Lord Roseberry had only just read "Tom Brown's Schooldays" for the first time. Arthur Hugh Clough, the poet, confessed to never having read a "quarter of the 'Pierro Quene' and Andrew Lang once stated that he doubted "whether any one living had read through the 'Pierro Quene,' says Mr. Saintsbury." This is, perhaps, an underestimate of the staying power of readers of the poets' poet. It is astonishing what one can do when young, ambitious and inexperienced. We all know the story of Macaulay and the "Pierro Quene," and here is might be mentioned that James Payn was not altogether wrong when he contended that Macaulay is responsible for much of the nonsense talked about reading and great authors. He frightened thousands into pretending that they knew authors when they had but the slightest acquaintance with them. That terrible schoolboy, the marvelous boy who perished in his pride in the middle of the last century, was the innocent cause of much misdirected energy and enthusiasm.

It is, however, pleasant to turn to one of Hazlitt's pleasant essays in which he says, "There are other authors I have never read, and yet whom I have frequently had a great desire to read. Chaucer's 'History' is one of these, and 'Don Quixote,' in the original," and he adds, "I should like to read Froissart's 'Chronicles,' 'Holinshed' and Stowe and Fuller's 'Worthies.'"—London Globe.

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