

Chapter 6 — Common Causes of Worry and Nervousness

from *Worry and Nervousness: Or, The Science of Self-Mastery* (1914)

by William S. Sadler, M.D.

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Sources for Chapter 6, in the order in which they first appear

- (1) J.W. Courtney, M.D., *The Conquest of Nerves* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1911)
- (2) William S. Sadler, M.D., *The Physiology of Faith and Fear: Or, The Mind in Health and Disease* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co., 1912)

Key

- (a) Green indicates where a source author (or earlier Sadler book) first appears, or where he/she reappears.
- (b) Yellow highlights most parallelisms.
- (c) Tan highlights parallelisms not occurring on the same row, or parallelisms separated by yellowed parallelisms.
- (d) An underlined word or words indicates where the source and Sadler pointedly differ from each other.
- (e) Bold type indicates passages which Sadler copied verbatim, or nearly verbatim, from an uncited source.
- (f) Pink indicates passages where Sadler specifically shares his own experiences, opinions, advice, etc.

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VI: COMMON CAUSES OF WORRY AND NERVOUSNESS

[Note: A section of Chap. 5 discusses the general causes of worry.]

6:0.1 IT IS now in order to consider some of the common causes of chronic worry and nervousness, with a view to discovering how to suppress the operation of these same causes—and thus to prevent this worry and nervousness. The ideal method of treatment for these psychic and neurological disorders is to discover how effectively to “nip the trouble in the bud.”

VI: THE NATURE AND CAUSES OF FUNCTIONAL NERVOUS DISORDER
(Courtney 84)

On this score certain writers, both lay and medical, attempt to dispose categorically of what is, in reality, a complex problem,

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by holding the general strenuousness of modern American life alone to blame for all cases of disordered nerves (C 97).

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Properly defined, the strenuous life is merely one of strong effort and exertion.

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And strong effort, rightly controlled and directed, never occasions undue wear and tear upon the nervous system (C 99).

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As a matter of fact, in the present writer’s experience,

6:0.3 As a matter of fact,

SOURCE

cases of nervous breakdown in which neither hereditary nor acquired predisposition is discoverable are very rare indeed.

So that, for the most part, causes which are held to be direct notably exhausting illnesses of all kinds, surgical operations upon the appendix or upon the reproductive organs, and severe and protracted childbirth—do little more than to precipitate the disaster (C 100).

[Note: Courtney, not Dubois.]

In many cases the seeds of nervous breakdown are sown in very early life.

Through the ignorance of nursemaids, parents or guardians, vivid impressions of a terrifying or otherwise obnoxious nature are constantly made upon the child mind, which sadly interfere with the firm upbuilding of character so essential to the stability and functional harmony of the nervous system (C 87).

But many parents, failing to take the cue from Nature, insist on thwarting her beneficent efforts by requiring their reluctant offspring to not only devote more time to their studies than is necessary,

6: WORRY AND NERVOUSNESS

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EARLY NEUROTIC INFLUENCES

6:1.1 Not infrequently, the foundation for a life-long career of nervousness is laid in early childhood by the thoughtless and ignorant methods of child culture, which so largely prevail.

Regarding this matter, Dubois has written:

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but also to spend several nerve-racking hours' daily in practice upon some musical instrument (C 89).

Some very young children are still given such rank nerve poisons as tea, coffee and alcohol, by ignorant parents of the poorer classes, but popular medical instruction has done much to lessen this evil (C 89).

From the age of puberty up to the time a youth or maiden reaches majority, over-study is the predisposing, as well as the direct, cause of disordered nerves in a certain number of cases.

But it is a cause of minor importance in every way as compared with certain experiences that may be undergone at the time when the sexual instinct begins to intrude itself forcibly upon consciousness (C 90).

Through the ignorance, indifference or mawkish sentimentality of parents, many a youth comes into the possession of procreative powers, the physical, mental and moral significance of which he understands nothing.

If he is of vigorous bodily habit and, at the same time, clean-minded, he may for a long time resist Nature's promptings.

But Nature is imperious, while instinctive morality is at most only rudimentary and puts but a feeble check upon an organic longing.

Under such conditions the habit of self-pollution is easily established.

Once established, it may be continued for years; and, indeed, without perceptible detriment to mind or body.

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In the generality of cases, however, there comes, sooner or later, a rude awakening.

Through the talk of ignorant lay acquaintances, or far worse still, through the unspeakably pernicious literature which is scattered broadcast by the most ruthless of all human vultures,

the “Lost Manhood” quacks, the victim of the habit becomes obsessed with the idea that he has ruined himself mentally and physically.

Even in cases where no such habit is formed, and the youth experiences nothing worse than nocturnal emissions of varying frequency,

it is instilled into his mind by these same fiends that this perfectly natural phenomenon leads inevitably to equally terrible results.

In consequence of this disingenuous enlightenment real evils, such as worry, anxiety, introspection and self-analysis, spring rapidly into existence and make easy the descent into the hell of disordered nerves (C 91-92).

[contd] In the case of the girl the situation is different.

If she is not properly prepared for its advent, the first menstrual epoch may bring with it an emotional crisis which may recur with each successive epoch (C 92).

Life between the ages of puberty and maturity is fraught with still further menaces to nervous stability,

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and among the more common are the tea, coffee, tobacco and alcohol habits, in all of which the balance between nervous waste and repair is constantly disturbed.

This balance is likewise disturbed by either work or pleasure-seeking, whenever the one or the other constantly interferes with sound nightly sleep of nine or ten solid hours (C 94).

For the girl who is popular there is the eternal round of dances, theater and house parties and other forms of social activity, which make such severe demands upon her physically and emotionally that, by the time she “comes out,” her fund of nerve force is often at a low ebb (C 95).

XXXII: NATURE AND CAUSE OF WORRY (*The Physiology of Faith and Fear* 349)

THE WORRY CIRCLE (*The Physiology of Faith and Fear* 357)

[contd] When the attention is directly concentrated upon any part of the body, there is a definite tendency to magnify the sensations arising in that part.

Special, peculiar, or unusual physical sensations always have a tendency to engender more or less fear;

and it is a well-known and generally recognized fact of psychology that fear unflinching increases and focalizes the attention (*PF&F* 357).

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THE WORRY CIRCLE

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[contd] Sensation, fear, and attention constitute the elements which enter into the formation of that wicked and destructive mischief maker, the “vicious worry circle.”

It will be recalled that one of the definitions of worry was, “a spasm of the attention.”

This health-destroying and mind-ruining “circle of worry” starts with some extraordinary conscious impression, upon which the attention is forthwith focussed.

The vividness of the impression is thereby greatly increased and fear is aroused, perhaps worry is born.

Then all this fear and worry reacts by increasing and focalizing the attention anew upon those impressions which were the original source and cause of all this mischief.

In this manner, concentration of the thoughts upon any organ of the body or upon any local pain therein, is usually found to make matters worse or indefinitely to perpetuate the ailment (*PF&F* 357).

[contd] It would thus appear that worry is seldom likely to cure itself by being allowed to run its natural course.

It soon wears for itself definite grooves in the brain and nervous system, and ever tends to perpetuate itself after the manner of this “vicious circle,”

and in almost every case slowly but surely increases its intensity, thereby becoming more and more destructive to mental peace and physical health (*PF&F* 357).

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[contd] We would not dispute the fact that the meek and humble, soul-eyed, hollow-cheeked woman may be on the certain road to heaven,

but we are quite certain that she must have a “stop over ticket for some sanitarium” or hospital where she will have to be long treated for the mental and material results of her constant worry,

as well as for the indigestion, dyspepsia, and nervous prostration, that are so surely produced by this unnatural, unhealthful, and downcast mental state.

And so, the “vicious worry circle” is found to consist of the following factors—attention magnifies sensation; sensation produces fear and worry; and worry further increases and focalizes the attention (*PF&F* 358).

EXCESSIVE SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS (*The Physiology of Faith and Fear* 358)

Among the everyday mental causes for fear and worry should be mentioned the exaggerated self-consciousness found especially in the case of certain young people.

Stage-fright is an acute exhibition of this form of mental uneasiness and physical discomfort.

Many sensitive persons find it almost impossible to get away from these insistent feelings of self-consciousness.

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SOURCE

Their minds are peculiarly concentrated on the thought that other people are thinking about them, and all this certainly is a demonstration of the fact that our thoughts are a real part of ourselves (*PF&F* 358).

[contd] We well remember hearing some one say “an imaginary worry may be unreal, but a worried imagination is the realest thing in the world.”

The basis of our worry may be entirely false and unreal, but the final results of the worry upon the mind, soul, and health are in every sense real and highly injurious (*PF&F* 358).

MENTAL WORK AND REST (*The Physiology of Faith and Fear* 358)

[contd] We must learn to strike an intelligent balance between the dangers which threaten us on the one hand from too much work and the friction attendant thereon;

and, on the other hand, from too much rest and the rust of character which is sure to follow.

We do not want either to “worry out” or “rust out,” but to possess that wisdom which will enable us to lead the normal, rational life which promises deliverance from the threatened dangers of both these unnecessary extremes.

We must be able to strike a practical working balance between friction and rust (*PF&F* 358).

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[contd] Both mental idleness and physical inactivity predispose to worry.

Those who would cease from worry must constantly guard against intellectual inactivity;

for, if it is true that Satan finds mischief for idle hands, it is even more true that he is sure to find worry for the idle minds;

and worry obscures our outlook on life, both for this world and the next; it throttles the higher powers of the mind, it beclouds our view of life and distorts our appreciation of the duties thereof.

Worry is the smoke on the field-glass of life, and quite effectively it blurs our outlook and paralyzes all the creative faculties of the intellect (*PF&F* 358-59).

[contd] Mental work never kills.

Mental work plus worry is highly destructive to strength of brain and health of the body;

while heavy and taxing mental work coupled with unusual worry and its resultant insomnia, presents conditions which will more quickly destroy the physical health and break down the mind than any other possible combination of mental vices and physical sins (*PF&F* 359).

VI: THE NATURE AND CAUSES OF FUNCTIONAL NERVOUS DISORDER (Courtney 84)

In reality, the nervous system is never thus depleted of its forces if due heed is given to even the most elementary laws of hygiene and the reaction of toil upon the individual's consciousness is a pleasant one.

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6:4.4 In reality, the nervous system is seldom thus depleted of its forces if due heed is given to even the most elementary laws of hygiene, and the reaction of daily toil upon the individual's consciousness is a pleasant one.

SOURCE

Depletion follows only where such common physical needs as nourishing food, pure air, sunshine and sleep are practically neglected,

and the energies of mind and body are incessantly bent upon some daily task whose chief emotional reaction is worry (C 101).

[contd] In last analysis, the most important factor in the direct causation of nervous exhaustion is the emotional life of the individual.

Where worry is the dominant note breakdown is practically inevitable, but there are other emotional states which, if persistent, will produce the same result (C 101).

XXXII: NATURE AND CAUSE OF WORRY (*The Physiology of Faith and Fear* 349)

THE "SPIRIT OF INFIRMITY" (*The Physiology of Faith and Fear* 360)

[contd] "And, behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself. And when Jesus saw her, He called her to Him, and said unto her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity. And He laid His hands on her; and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God." (Luke XII:11-13.) (*PF&F* 360).

Here was an unfortunate sufferer who had been held in bondage by an imaginary "spirit of infirmity" for almost a score of years.

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THE "SPIRIT OF INFIRMITY"

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The Master broke light into her darkened mind by announcing that she was free from her infirmity.

She had never been really bound.

She was bowed together as a result of her long worry and sorrow.

So long had she assumed this physical attitude that her body had become permanently deformed—another illustration of a serious physical disorder resulting from purely mental causes (*PF&F* 360).

[contd] Thousands of suffering souls are held to-day by the chains of imaginary bondage.

They have no real physical disease.

Their ailment is in reality only a “spiritual infirmity.”

They might go free at any time, but they do not know it; they will not believe it.

These prisoners of despair are held securely in their prison house of doubt by the force of fear and habit.

They are very much like the elephant in Central Park, New York City, which had stood in one spot for many years, shackled with heavy chains.

He had never left his tracks except when he had been unfastened and led away by his keepers.

One day it occurred to them to remove the fetters from his legs and see if he would leave his place.

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After the beast was free from his shackles, he steadfastly refused to move, even after he was allowed to become exceedingly hungry,

and when food was placed within a few inches of his reach, he stood in his tracks swaying from side to side and trumpeting loudly, but not a step did the huge beast take toward the food (*PF&F* 360-61).

[contd] The elephant was free, but he did not know it; therefore he stood there in his old place just as securely bound by the chains of his own mind as if the steel bands were about him as of old.

And so it is with humanity; altogether too many of us are like unto the elephant, we are absolutely free today,

but not realizing or not believing the glorious fact—not having faith and courage enough to step out into our mental freedom and begin to enjoy our spiritual liberty—

like the elephant, we stand in the place of habit-bondage and bitterly mourn our terrible fate.

We are not surprised when an elephant behaves this way,

but it ought to be a cause for great astonishment that intelligent men and women, sons and daughters of God, will allow themselves to be held down by fictitious bondage and bound down by a mere “spirit of infirmity” (*PF&F* 361).

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FICTITIOUS WORRIES

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[contd] We recently saw a picture which greatly impressed us concerning the uselessness of worry.

It was a picture of an old man, bent in form, sad of expression, suggestive of a life filled with perplexities and anxiety;

and underneath the picture was this statement; “I am an old man and have had many, many troubles—most of which never happened.”

[contd] A recent writer in discussing the question of worry and the weakened condition of the mind which permits the “worry circle” to go on forever revolving, getting worse and worse, puts it very aptly as follows:

“You say you cannot; your friends say you will not; the truth is, you cannot will.”

There is need of a determined effort to strengthen the will, to control the mind.

The methods for the accomplishment of this will be discussed in connection with the treatment of worry (*PF&F* 361).

[contd] Certain nervous diseases are caused by worry.

Most important among these is the condition known as neurasthenia, commonly called “nervous prostration.”

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Patients suffering from this condition are usually spoken of as “all run down.”

The truth is that they are patients who have been “all wound up,” and, as a result of high tension, coupled with mental anxiety, they have broken down, collapsed (*PF&F* 361-62).

[contd] Hypochondria is another disease which owes its origin and perpetuation largely to worry.

Hypochondria is simply a condition in which one worries about having other diseases.

Whenever the most intelligent of men begin to examine their mental or physical life, they usually discover themselves to be sick.

Some one has truthfully said; “we are all afflicted with a disease called life.”

This is a form of hypochondria which it is entirely possible to cure by mental means.

There is another kind of hypochondria which usually requires the coöperation of the physician for its permanent removal.

A third form of nervous complaint largely due to worry and anxiety is hysteria; and hysteria, it should be remembered is the impersonator of almost every known disease (*PF&F* 362).

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MORAL CAUSES OF WORRY (*The Physiology of Faith and Fear* 362)

[contd] The moral habits and spiritual state of the individual not infrequently contribute much toward the production of worry.

Sin is not only a cause of physical sickness, but it also lies at the bottom of many a mental malady.

Immorality, dishonesty, and intemperance, all operate to destroy the peace of mind, while they give rise to that prick of conscience which is altogether incompatible with a tranquil mental state (PF&F 362).

[contd] Religion may be either a cause of worry, or it may play the role of a cure.

We speak of “religion” in the sense of some particular form of theological belief (PF&F 362).

[contd] Worry is frequently generated by false ideas and arbitrary views of the Supreme Being.

Doctrinal and interpretative errors of religious beliefs are responsible for much of the downcast, sad, and despondent experience of many professed Christians,

as well as for the unsatisfactory and miserable experience of thousands who do not profess to be followers of the Christ.

Many earnest and honest souls have such constant wrestlings with the doubt of the forgiveness of their sins, or they live in such incessant fear of death and eternal damnation,

6: WORRY AND NERVOUSNESS

MORAL CAUSES OF WORRY

6:7.1 The moral habits and spiritual state of the individual not infrequently contribute much toward the production of worry.

Sin is not only a cause of physical sickness, but it also lies at the bottom of many a mental malady.

Immorality, dishonesty, and intemperance, all operate to destroy the peace of mind, while they give rise to that prick of conscience which is altogether incompatible with a tranquil mental state.

6:7.2 Religion may be either a cause of worry, or it may play the role of a cure.

We speak of “religion” in the sense of some particular form of theological belief.

6:7.3 Worry is frequently generated by false ideas and arbitrary views of the Supreme Being.

Doctrinal and interpretative errors of religious beliefs are responsible for much of the downcast and despondent experience

of thousands who do not profess to be followers of the Christ.

Many earnest and honest souls have such constant wrestlings with the doubt of the forgiveness of their sins, or they live in such incessant fear of death and eternal damnation,

SOURCE

that the mind is held in constant bondage to these insistent and oppressive thoughts, and all this must inevitably result in the production of a chronic state of worry (PF&F 362-63).

RELIGIOUS FANATICISM (*The Physiology of Faith and Fear* 363)

[contd] Religious devotion and faith, while they may prove the quick and certain cure for some forms of worry, may also be perverted—carried to such fanatical extremes as to produce serious mental worry and even spiritual despondency.

Every now and then, we hear of some one “going crazy over religion.”

Such a one usually belongs to that class of morbidly conscientious and overscrupulous people who possess a nervous system already greatly weakened;

or perhaps they have a strain of insanity in their family, and probably some of their ancestors were alcoholic or syphilitic.

The combination of such physical soil, taken together with the unusual mental strain or excitement, connected with extraordinary religious enthusiasm,

is frequently able suddenly to overturn the mind or else to produce such an unnatural condition of anxiety and worry as gradually to undermine the mental vigor and result in producing some form of insanity.

6: WORRY AND NERVOUSNESS

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Religious fanaticism is simply one-sided moral reasoning, simply the extreme over-emphasis of one aspect of the religious or moral life.

It sometimes results from an apparent exhaustion of the mental energies and overwork of the spiritual faculties (*PF&F* 363).

[contd] Still other sincere persons are suffering from the results of their own misguided zeal.

They voluntarily possess themselves of such extraordinary burdens for the salvation of the souls of their fellow men, that they, in a measure actually assume the worry and responsibility of the world's Saviour;

and, as a result, their brains are overburdened, and their souls are crushed beneath the weight of this constant worry and anxiety for the welfare of their fellows (*PF&F* 363).

[contd] Religious hope of the right sort, when sincerely cherished, undoubtedly exercises a positive power toward the prevention of worry.

It is an important observation which the author is not alone in making, that as the so-called old fashioned religion declines, worry increases.

As men and women depart from the simple faith and trust in the fundamental principals of the Christian religion, there is a growing tendency to worry.

6: WORRY AND NERVOUSNESS

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SOURCE

We sincerely believe that the religion of the soul should be as a bright light shining in a dark place, our guiding star instead of being perverted into a source of worry, grief, and despondency (*PF&F* 363-64).

PHYSICAL CAUSES OF WORRY (*The Physiology of Faith and Fear* 364)

[contd] Many sensitive souls are caused more or less worry through out life by the legacies handed down by father and mother in the shape of physical weaknesses and bodily deformities.

Still others, owing to a weakened nervous system and overstrain, have fallen into a condition of nervous irritability that renders them very liable to anxiety and worry upon the least provocation.

Such persons—in fact all of us—are greatly predisposed to worry by sleeplessness.

Sound sleep is a great preventive of the mental state that borders on worry (*PF&F* 364).

[contd] The state of the physical health is not an infrequent occasion for worry.

Many worry because of the lingering illness or unusual affliction, while others grieve because of the sickness and suffering of their loved ones (*PF&F* 364).

6: WORRY AND NERVOUSNESS

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[contd] There is little doubt that nine-tenths of all the ordinary non-contagious diseases of the body originate in the mind, and it is worry that produces the soil from which these infant disorders spring.

The seeds of mental disease and physical affliction may fall upon us thick and fast, but if they fail to find the soil of worry and depression in which to develop and grow, we are not likely to be seriously affected by their presence.

It requires not only a germ to produce disease, but also a favorable soil in which it may grow.

Worry produces just that condition of mind and body most favorable to the growth and development of all the vicious diseases which prey upon the mind and destroy the body (*PF&F* 364).

WORRY DEPENDENT ON AGE (*The Physiology of Faith and Fear* 364)

[contd] Many of the worries which afflict the human mind are incident to some particular time of life—they are more or less dependent on age.

For example, we have certain worries belonging to the period of childhood, others to adolescence.

Certain difficulties are more likely to harass the soul during the adult period of life, whereas other troubles are more likely to give birth to worry and anxiety during old age (*PF&F* 364).

6: WORRY AND NERVOUSNESS

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WORRY DEPENDENT ON AGE

6:10.1 Many of the worries which afflict the human mind are incident to some particular time of life—they are more or less dependent on age.

For example, we have certain worries belonging to the period of childhood, others to adolescence.

Certain difficulties are more likely to harass the soul during the adult period of life, whereas other troubles are more likely to give birth to worry and anxiety during old age.

SOURCE

[contd] The worries of childhood are just as real as those of later life.

The little girl who is made to wear short dresses which come considerably above her knees, when she has long outgrown them; or the small boy who is compelled to wear clothes which he regards as suited only to infants—

both have their worries; and it should be remembered that their childish grievances are to them very real.

They take these little troubles of childhood very seriously.

Likewise their griefs and sorrows resulting from ridicule and teasing tend to induce unhealthy mental activity, and seriously to warp the nervous system in its early development (*PF&F* 365).

[contd] Another form of worry which may be properly classified among this group, is the fear and worry of old age.

As the years pass over us, the arteries begin to harden, the memory gradually fails, the skin becomes visibly wrinkled and leathery, and old age brings its peculiar worries to the majority of people.

There is a tendency to undue anxiety on the part of the aged that is born both of the retrospective view of life and anticipation as to what the future holds in store.

Especially is this true in the case of those who do not have sufficient means laid up properly and comfortably to care for them to a good old age (*PF&F* 365).

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SOURCE

PERNICIOUS HEALTH FADS (*The Physiology of Faith and Fear* 365)

[contd] Some new-fangled health fad may set the whole country worrying about indigestion and dietetics.

Newspaper articles and health literature are able so to alarm the people as markedly to upset the nerves and digestion of thousands of susceptible persons.

Some editorial novice, who cannot earn his living in a better way, sends out an article to the newspaper syndicate proclaiming that some scientist has discovered that strawberries are poisonous;

and forthwith ten thousand people begin to have stomach trouble from eating strawberries, or begin seriously to worry over their liability to disagree with them.

Some persons cannot read a book on health and hygiene without immediately acquiring a new disease.

It is proverbial that medical students are prone to have, or at least to think they have, the numerous diseases which they study from time to time (*PF&F* 365).

6: WORRY AND NERVOUSNESS

PERNICIOUS HEALTH FADS

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Some persons cannot read a book on health and hygiene without immediately acquiring a new disease.

It is proverbial that medical students are prone to have, or at least to think they have, the numerous diseases which they study from time to time.

It will be a miracle if some healthy, but self-conscious souls do not get hold of this book and—taking some part too seriously—straight away proceed to get nervous or begin to worry about themselves.

SOURCE

[contd] The author would not have it understood that he in any way decries the good that has been and is being accomplished by the great hygienic awakening which is making its way over the land;

we believe that human beings should be capable of studying about themselves for the purpose of gaining needed instruction without allowing their minds to become morbid, faddish, and filled with worry concerning their physical health (*PF&F* 365-66).

[contd] Not only are numerous physical conditions responsible for worry, but it should be remembered that numerous physical disorders may directly result from chronic worry.

Among the common physical ailments which may directly result from long continued worry may be mentioned, insomnia, loss of weight, anæmia, rise of blood-pressure, hardening of the arteries, premature old age, apoplexy, headaches, dyspepsia, constipation, pale skin, poor circulation, and predisposition to catching all contagious diseases including common colds (*PF&F* 366).

SOCIAL SOURCES OF WORRY (*The Physiology of Faith and Fear* 366)

[contd] Among the social causes of worry, family trouble, either real or false, probably comes first.

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SOCIAL SOURCES OF WORRY

6:12.1 Among the social causes of worry, family trouble, either real or false, probably comes first.

SOURCE

Divorces, desertions, and social dissipations result in a vast amount of human worry, sorrow, and sickness (*PF&F* 366).

VI: THE NATURE AND CAUSES OF FUNCTIONAL NERVOUS DISORDER (Courtney 84)

[contd] Oftentimes it is unnecessary to go beyond the domestic circle in search of the exciting causes of the emotional state which exhausts the nervous vitality.

The grief which follows a break in the family group through death or marriage, or the anxiety occasioned by the precarious health, the prolonged absence or even the dissolute habits of one of its members is frequently enough to bring some other member low (C 102).

XXXII: NATURE AND CAUSE OF WORRY (*The Physiology of Faith and Fear* 349)

[contd from 6:11.3] Household problems are another cause of worry.

The proper rearing of the boy, the successful training of the girl, the usual petty cares of the home, to which all women are subject, together with the modern servant problem—

all serve to create anxiety and worry, together with the useless and unnecessary toil connected with the family life.

Housewives are constantly worried over the proper performance of little things that would in no way affect the family happiness if they were left undone (*PF&F* 366).

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SOURCE

[contd] Many a mother, when she wakes up in the morning, begins the day in a state of anxious and nervous agitation; she feels herself already crushed under the weight of all the burdens she will have to bear.

The little household cares and domestic trials which every mother experiences are not to her simple annoyances;

they are actual catastrophes, and she suffers every one of these calamities a score of times before it comes.

By noon her life is swarming with apprehensions, difficulties, and troubles, worry reigns supreme on the throne of her mind, and distraction has come to possess her soul.

At the close of the day this unhappy mother has borne a hundred sorrows which were wholly imaginary, produced entirely by abnormal emotion (*PF&F* 366-67).

[contd] Among social causes of worry are those of jealousy and distrust, the social rivalry and ambition found among the “smart sets” of our metropolitan centres.

Undue sympathy for friends may be set down as another cause of mental uneasiness (*PF&F* 367).

[contd] Social and family friction may cause worry to the point of producing such high blood-pressure as to lead its victims to the use of alcohol, in an effort to secure relief from mental nervous tension.

Intemperance may be set down as both a cause and a result of worry (*PF&F* 367).

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INDUSTRIAL CAUSES OF WORRY

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[contd] Every product of modern inventive genius which tends to decrease the physical work of the body is bound to increase the tendency toward worry.

The less we use the body, the more likely we are to overuse (abuse) the mind by worrying (*PF&F* 367).

[contd] An inordinate worldly ambition may generate worry on the one hand, while there can be no denying the fact that poverty is a provoker of worry on the other hand.

Financial difficulties and business reverses must be set down as among the industrial causes of an uneasy mind (*PF&F* 367).

[contd] Industrial disputes and labor difficulties, the constant friction between combinations of money and those of muscle, produce conditions which are ever provocative of industrial uncertainty, and therefore result in generating mental anxiety and worry (*PF&F* 367).

[contd] Accidents incident to our modern industrial life produce worry both in those who fear them and those who are compelled to suffer because of them;

in fact, the complexity of the demands of our modern social and industrial organization is such as constantly to entoil us in the meshes of anxiety and worry (*PF&F* 367).

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PERVERTED PROVERBS

PERVERTED PROVERBS (*The Physiology of Faith and Fear* 355)

[contd] Many a good old saying, proverbial for its truthfulness when properly understood, has destroyed the peace and happiness of those who have come to worry over its too literal fulfillment.

Take such a proverb as “Look before you leap.”

This old saying certainly contains good advice;

but we have known a number of earnest men and women who have long remained stationary in their life plans, looking with such care and scrutiny over the present and the future,

that they have failed to take advance steps; they have been altogether too fearful to leap; they would not dare take a chance, they were afraid of the risk.

Old age is creeping upon them, and their careers have been ruined by a too literal interpretation and over-regard for such a good proverb as “Look before you leap” (*PF&F* 355).

[contd] Another of the old proverbs, responsible for causing much worry, is the oft-repeated saying, “What is worth doing at all is worth doing well” (*PF&F* 355-56).

While this proverb contains sound and wholesome advice for every young man and woman,

6:14.1 Many a good old saying, proverbial for its truthfulness when properly understood, has destroyed the peace and happiness of those who have come to worry over its too literal fulfillment.

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it must also be remembered that every day of our lives we are called upon to perform a large number of wholly unessential tasks, tasks which are but temporary scaffolding, as it were, compared to the more important character-structure we are building.

It is true that these minor tasks must be done with sufficient care so as not to endanger the real structure we are erecting,

nevertheless, it would be a great waste of energy to try carefully to square, polish, and paint the scaffolding which stands but to-day and to-morrow is torn away (*PF&F* 356).

[contd] And this is true of much of our common work.

Each day's efforts should be wisely divided up into the *essential* and the *unessential*;

and as we review the events of the day in its closing hours, it should be no occasion for worry and self-reproach that some trifle has had to be slighted or altogether neglected.

If the brick and mortar you have put into the real character-structure are sound and good, if your wall has been raised up true to the plumb, let not the miscarriage of some detail either distress or worry you (*PF&F* 356).

[contd] Many conscientious young people have worried altogether too much over such teaching as, "Be sure you are right, then go ahead."

6: WORRY AND NERVOUSNESS

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Owing to their peculiar mental make-up, their naturally diffident and hesitating disposition, they could never be quite sure that they were absolutely right; and so they never went ahead.

For years they remain stationary in their life plans, first contemplating one thing, then another, and then pretty soon they begin seriously to worry because they have not gone ahead (*PF&F* 356).

[contd] “Haste makes waste” is usually found to be true; but there are times in life when it is absolutely necessary that one should make haste; when decisions must be quickly formed and speedily executed; delay would be fatal.

Now, if in the sober after moments it should develop that the highest wisdom had not characterized the formation of these hasty conclusions, it should be no cause for life-long worry and everlasting regret.

Perhaps no one else could have done better under the circumstances; after all, you did the best you could.

If there is anything to learn from your apparent mistakes, learn it cheerfully, and then let the matter forever rest (*PF&F* 356-57).

[contd] And so we see that the misunderstanding and misinterpretation of even good and true teaching may lead to such a one-sided and extreme regard for truth and duty as to create a condition of mental uneasiness and dissatisfaction, eventually leading to chronic worry, with all its evil effects upon mind, soul, and body (*PF&F* 357).

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SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

1. Strenuous living is not alone to blame for worry and nervousness. Other factors are—hereditary predisposition, lack of mind control, and accidental stress or strain.

2. Childhood fears and early emotional disturbances are frequently at the bottom of later nervous manifestations. The early use of tea, coffee, and other narcotics is also responsible for worry and nervousness.

3. The fears, emotions, and indiscretions of the adolescent youth not infrequently lay the foundations for life-long worry, nervousness, and semi-invalidism.

4. Nervous stability is undermined by ignorance of sex hygiene, misunderstanding of adolescent phenomena, and by the use of stimulants, together with the strain of social activities.

5. Sensation, fear, and focalized attention are the elements entering into the formation of the wicked and destructive “worry circle,” by which means anxiety is perpetuated and chronic worry tends ever to grow worse and worse, fed by the very elements of its own creation.

6. Exaggerated and excessive self-consciousness is a common cause of worry. An imaginary worry may be unreal, but a worried imagination is the realest thing in the world.

7. We must strike an intelligent balance between too much work on one hand, and the friction attendant thereon; and on the other hand, too much rest and the rust of character which is sure to follow.

8. Mental work never kills. Mental work plus worry is highly injurious; while mental work plus worry plus insomnia represents a combination which will quickly destroy the health of mind and body.

9. In the last analysis, the most important factor in the direct causation of nervous breakdown is the emotional life of the individual—the mind control—or lack of control.

10. Thousands of souls are held in perpetual bondage by imaginary fetters. They are victims of a “spirit of infirmity.” A discouraged and downcast mental attitude may so habitually bow down the body as to produce permanent physical deformity.

11. When tempted to borrow trouble, when harassed by fictitious worries, remember the old man who had passed through “many troubles—most of which never happened.”

12. The moral habits and spiritual state not infrequently contribute much toward the production of worry. Religion may be either a cause or a cure of worry. As the old-fashioned religion declines, worry seems to increase. Religious fanaticism is undoubtedly a cause for worry and nervousness.

13. Physical weakness, bodily deformity, and numerous diseases all figure as causes of worry. Nine-tenths of ordinary non-contagious diseases originate in the mind as a result of worry. Every age has its peculiar worries; there are childhood worries, as well as old age worries.

14. Some new fangled health fad may set the whole country worrying about indigestion and dyspepsia. Magazine articles and health books are often able to give their nervous readers an entirely new set of imaginary diseases.

15. Common physical ailments which may be traced to worry are insomnia, loss of weight, anaemia, rise of blood-pressure, hardening of the arteries, premature old age, apoplexy, headache, dyspepsia, constipation, poor circulation, and predisposition to catching disease.

SOURCE

6: WORRY AND NERVOUSNESS

16. Among the social causes of worry may be mentioned divorces, family cares, household problems, and servant difficulties; as well as business difficulties, industrial disputes, and labor troubles.

17. "Look before you leap," and numerous other good proverbs may be so perverted as to lead to much worry and inaction. Other proverbs commonly perverted are, "What is worth doing at all is worth doing well; and, "Be sure you are right, then go ahead."

18. Each day's efforts should be wisely divided into the essential and the non-essential; and it should be no occasion for worry if some trifle has been slighted or neglected, as we review the events of the day.

1. Repeated from 5:3.3.
2. Repeated from 5:11.4
3. Repeated from 5:11.3.