A Pleasant Holiday Occupation ❦ Strawberry Picking

Woman's Dual Life

by Dr. LEONARD WILLIAMS

Even those who were against the franchise never grudged the victory to modern women in her fight for personal and economic independence. But neither in the fighting period nor in the hour of triumph did she, or anyone else, realise that she might have to pay a heavy price for her success. This unwelcome fact is only just beginning to emerge; and inasmuch as the story is mainly a physiological one, I make no apology for dealing with the matter from that point of view.

There are certain glands in the body known as the endocrine glands, each of which elaborates an essence which it delivers straight into the blood stream. These glands are small, but their essences, or "harmones" as they are called, are very potent. Chief among these glands are the thyroid, the suprarenal, the pituitary and the gonads or sex glands. These do not exhaust the number—as examples they may serve. Now, it depends in a very large measure upon the exact proportion in which these essences or hormones are admixed in the blood of an individual, what the physical and mental make-up of that individual will ultimately turn out to be. Strange, incredible almost, as it may seem, it depends upon this admixture whether you are tall or short, dark or fair, clever or stupid, energetic or lethargic, male or female.

Do the qualities that modern woman cultivates in earning her living unfit her for happy marriage? Facing the problem from a new and physiological standpoint, the writer of this article throws a singularly clear light on the whole question.

In the matter with which we are at present concerned, we need inquire into the influence of one gland only—the suprarenal. There are in reality two suprarenals in every normal individual, just as there are two eyes and two lungs and two kidneys, but for convenience we speak of it as a single gland, which in action it is. The suprarenal, or adrenal as it is also called, consists of two parts, an outer part and an inner, the respective functions of which differ very widely from one another. The outer part, or rind, or cortex, is composed of material which differs very considerably from the material which constitutes the inner portion, or core, or medulla. The outer portion, or cortex, is the male portion, and the inner portion, or medulla, is the female portion. These words, male and female, are here used in a very extended sense, meaning that the outer portion or cortex supplies the combative element, whereas the medulla supplies the timid, yielding element.

The suprarenal gland as a whole—that is, when it includes both portions, cortex and medulla—is called the gland of fight and flight. If you frighten people, some will run away, others will turn and rend you. If you frighten a stag it will run away, but if you frighten a bear it will immediately attack you. The attitude, whether of fight or flight, which any animal will adopt in an emergency depends entirely upon the relative size of cortex and manulla in its suprarenal capsule. If the cortex is the predominant partner, the surprised or frightened animal will attack; if the medulla is in the ascendant, the animal will run away.

It is exactly the same thing with human beings; the surprised or frightened man, if he is really manly, turns to fight, his instinct is to hit out; the instinct of the woman is to scream for help and run away. Now the relative sizes of these two elements, cortex and medulla, in the suprarenal capsule of any individual is influenced largely by environment. That is to say, if a man lives so completely sheltered a life and his innate combative element, his predominant suprarenal cortex, is never employed, it atrophies from disuse and the medulla gradually gains the ascendant. Similarly, a youth with a cortex which was originally but mediocre, if placed in circumstances where he is obliged to fight in order to defend his own interests and, say, those of his widowed mother, his cortex increases in size and he himself gains in pugnacity and effectiveness. If, however, he does not react in this way, if there is no increase of adrenal cortex, there ensues what is known as a "failure of adaptation."