

A PENITENT DON JUAN

John Peterson, age 38; race, unknown; religion, Baptist; education, trade school; occupation, brick-layer; civil condition, married; physical findings, negative.

Introductory Statement

This patient was brought to the hospital by the police in an extremely agitated condition. He was afraid something was going to happen his wife and he would not allow her or his children out of his sight. He thought that he himself was to die and he read mysterious meanings into the most trivial happenings. He had finally gone to the police, asking for protection. Their response was to bring him to the hospital.

Personal History

He was an illegitimate child and has never known who his parents were. As a baby he was a ward of the State and at the age of two he was adopted by a family in New Hampshire. The foster parents were good New England people and while with them he went quite regularly to the Baptist Sunday school. When he was twelve years old both of the foster parents died and he went to live with a sister of his foster mother. He staid with her one year and then went to a trade school.

In school he did good work, graduating with honors from the trade school at the age of fifteen. After leaving school he followed the trade of brick mason, doing job work. He is said to have been an excellent workman. He made as much as twelve or sixteen dollars a day. The jobs were however irregular and he has never known how to save his money. During the war he served with the Navy.

In appearance he is short of stature but of athletic build and quick in action. He is said to have been a fair ball-player. He is also fond of music and is something of a singer, having a good baritone voice. In his attractively furnished home he has a good victrola and a large collection of records. He was brought to go to Sunday school and church and tho for many years he has shown little interest in religion, he still accepts the church standards as his own. His wife before her marriage was a faithful attendant at a Congregational church. He is a member of the Odd Fellows lodge. He is sociably inclined, energetic, convivial and sentimental. He is well-liked by his associates.

The chief maladjustments seem to lie in the sexual sphere. He denies any difficulties in his earlier years but tells of one occasion in his thirteenth year when he went home with a girl two years his senior and with her taking the initiative he attempted sex intercourse. The attempt was unsuccessful, but he intimates that it made a profound impression upon him. He reports masturbation during his fourteenth and fifteenth years and after that promiscuous heterosexual relations, both with regular prostitutes and those of the clandestine variety.

Upon his return from the Navy he went to live with a family with whom he had boarded before his enlistment. This family consisted of a man of sixty five and his unmarried daughter, a woman of perhaps thirty five. They were very kind to him and the daughter used to perform all sorts of little services for him. Their relationship became quite intimate and the woman became pregnant. The situation was met by an operation for abortion. The relationship was not discontinued and again an operation became necessary. A few years later this woman died of carcinoma.

In the meantime the patient became acquainted with his wife. He had met her at a dance and had been at once impressed with her, tho she was not of the dancing kind. He walked home with her and saw her later with increasing frequency. It

was not long before she also was in trouble. He offered to marry her, but before they were married they had an operation for abortion performed. They have now been married for three and a half years and have two small boys, one two and a half and the other one year old. Both are healthy and attractive children. Since the birth of the second child the wife has been insistent upon the use of contraceptives.

The Illness

He had for some time been using alcohol. He says that he was only a moderate drinker and that he never drank except in company. Last year however he began drinking a good deal more and as a result he lost his job. He then became depressed. He soon got another job and the depression cleared up. Meantime he stopped drinking. This sudden reform was connected with some idea regarding the Odd Fellows. He thought they were watching him and that he was in ill favor with them for having been untrue to the pledge he had taken when he joined their organization. He finally applied to the police for permission to carry a revolver. The permission was of course refused. He then became more and more tense until finally with great emotion he confessed to his wife his promiscuous sex relations, which, it seems, had continued even after marriage. She took the confession in good part. Following this he became even more agitated and fearful and developed the idea that something was going to happen to her.

Behavior in the Hospital

Thruout his stay in the hospital he has been in full contact with his surroundings and has been able to give a fairly objective account of his difficulties. His mood has been predominantly one of anxiety and worry and perplexity. At times however he will be quite cheerful. In general he seems to be on the look-out for something to worry about and ready to see dire possibilities in the merest trifle.

His social attitude has been consistently co-operative and frank. He has preferred to be with others rather than by himself, taking part in the ward activities and in the hospital dances and movie shows. He has had a great many visitors, chiefly members of the Odd Fellows lodge. He once had fifteen in a single afternoon. Not long after his admission he was assigned to the carpenter and has done good work. He was also given a ground parole and has not abused it. He is eager to talk over his difficulties and comes regularly of his own accord to the chaplain's office. He wants to be prayed with and makes such a request without waiting for the chaplain to suggest it.

He is not a man who has ever thought very seriously or attempted to interpret and organize his life experiences. He has taken things pretty much as they came. Now, however, his conventional world has been smashed to bits and he is trying hard to understand. Most of his thinking centers around lodges and around Protestants and Catholics. He states that while at the Psychopathic it came to him that a great battle is impending, perhaps between Protestants and Catholics. In any case a struggle was in process and he divided those around him into friends and enemies. Asked what part he was to have in this war, he replied, "Well, it's written in the Bible, 'A little child shall lead them.'"

The most striking feature of this disturbance is his perplexity and his tendency to find hidden meanings in the most trivial occurrences. He feels that he is in a strange and mysterious universe and he can only be sure of one thing, that things are not what they seem. Central in this world are the lodges and the churches. "Lodges," he explains, "are very sacred organizations. If you are in trouble, you want the help they can give you." He feels that he has not

lived up to their rules. They are aware of that fact and have, apparently by the use of certain mysterious influences, brought the present disturbance upon him. On one occasion he brought me a card sent out by his lodge. This card contained a telegraph code designed to cover certain situations with which lodges frequently have to deal. "Purple" thus means "Bury him where he is." He was greatly disturbed by the fact that in the room where he slept there was a flower-pot covered with purple crepe paper. These fears were greatly augmented by the gift of a purple neck-tie which arrived the day following the receipt of the card. He interpreted these things to mean that he was slated to die. He has also found great significance in the number five. On one occasion in his presence a certain patient had been informed of a gift of five dollars. This patient had said, "Go to hell!" A little later he was visited by five friends in one day. Again he asked a certain patient for a match and he was given five matches. These things seemed to him most ominous.

Throug his stay in the hospital he has been constantly on watch for something to worry about. He was afraid to write to his wife for fear that by so doing he would bring some trouble upon her. On one occasion he came to me in great distress. His wife was to have come to see him that afternoon and had not shown up. He was sure something terrible must have befallen her. I reminded him that forty miles was a good long distance for her to travel and that something could easily have happened to prevent her coming. My efforts to reassure him brought little result, however. The next day word came that she had actually been involved in a serious automobile accident while on her way out to see him.

Very striking also is the self-blame which has characterized his attitude. He is sure that he is responsible for the death of the mistress upon whom the illegal operation was performed, and since his wife also had a similar operation he fears that she also will have carcinoma. He feels that the lodges are quite justified in singling him out for disciplinary measures. He feels that the one way out is to end it all. This self-blame stands in marked contrast to the persecutory trends which were so prominent in the beginning.