

T H E S I S

Functional mental illness is rooted in the social nature of man and is best explained in terms of the social judgment which the patient accepts and pronounces upon himself. The primary evil is to be found in unsocialized and hence unassimilated experiences and tendencies which clamor for attention much like ill-digested food. Mental illness may thus be regarded as the price we have to pay for having the power of choice and the capacity for growth.

A R E P R E S E N T A T I V E C A S E

The following case has been selected as typical of reactions to intrapsychic disharmony in which the patient attempts to face his difficulties, as contrasted with those in which he withdraws into a world of make-believe and with those in which he attempts to "save face."

I n t r o d u c t o r y S t a t e m e n t

John P. a 38 year old brick-mason was brought to the hospital in an extremely agitated condition. He was afraid something was going to happen to his wife and he would not allow her or his children out of his sight. He thought he was going to die and he read mysterious meanings into the most trivial happenings. He had finally gone to the police for protection. Their response was to bring him to the hospital.

P e r s o n a l H i s t o r y

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 childless couple. The foster parents were good people in moderate circumstances. They gave him real affection and brought him up to go to Sunday school and church. When he was twelve years of age both the foster-parents died and he went to live with a sister of his foster-mother.

In school he did good work, graduating with honors from a technical high school at the age of seventeen. He then got work as a brick-mason. He is said to have been an excellent workman. He made good wages, but work was irregular and he has never known how to save 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 good ball-player and something of a singer, having a good baritone voice. Altho he has shown little interest in religion, he still accepts the standards of the church as his own. He is a member of the Odd Fellows' lodge. He is sociably inclined, convivial, sentimental and is well-liked by his associates.

The chief maladjustment seems to lie in the sexual sphere. He reports promiscuous hetero-sexual relations, beginning with his fifteenth year, with regular prostitutes and with 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 about thirty five. They were very kind to him and the daughter performed all sorts of little services for him. Their relationship became intimate and the woman became pregnant. The situation was met by an operation for abortion. The relationship was not discontinued and again an operation was performed. A few years later the woman died of carcinoma.

In the meantime he became acquainted with his wife. He met her at a dance and at once fell in love with her. He saw her with increasing frequency. It was not long before she also was in trouble. He offered to marry her and did so, but not before an abortion had been performed. At the time of admission they had been married three and a half years and had two small boys, one two and a half and the other one year old. Both were healthy and attractive children. The wife came of good middle-class family and in spite of the pre-marital episode was a woman of good character.

T h e I l l n e s s

A year before admission he began drinking somewhat heavily. He had for some time been a moderate drinker, drinking always in company, but now at times he drank alone and heavily enough to lose his job. He then became depressed. He soon got another job and the depression cleared up. Meantime he stopped drinking. This sudden reform was associated with some ideas regarding the Odd Fellows. He thought he was in ill favor with them for having been untrue to the pledge he took when he joined them. They were therefore watching him. He finally applied to the police for permission to carry a revolver to protect himself from his enemies. The permission was of course refused. He then became more and more tense until finally with great emotion he confessed to his wife the promiscuous sex relations, which, it seems, had continued even after marriage. The wife took the confession in good part. Following this he became more and more agitated and fearful and the idea came that something was going to happen to her.

B e h a v i o r i n t h e H o s p i t a l

Thruout his stay in the hospital he has been in full contact with his surroundings and has talked freely and objectively of his difficulties. His mood has been predominantly one of anxiety. While at times cheerful, he seems to be constantly on the lookout for something to worry about and ready to see dire possibilities in the merest trifle.

His social attitude has been frank and co-operative. He has preferred to be with others rather than by himself and has taken part in ward activities and has attended the hospital dances and movie shows. Not long after admission he was assigned to the carpenter shop and has there done good work. He was also given a ground parole and he has not abused it. He is eager to talk of his difficulties and comes frequently of his own accord to the Chaplain's office and will often ask for prayer.

He has never been a man to think seriously or to try to interpret and organize his experiences. He has taken things pretty much as they come. Now, however, his conventional world has been smashed to bits and he is trying hard to understand. He has had the idea that a great war is impending. Asked what part he was to have in this war, he replied, "Well, it's written in the Bible that a little child shall lead them."

The most striking feature of this disturbance is his perplexity and his tendency to see hidden meanings in the most trivial occurrences. He feels that he is in a strange and mysterious universe and he is sure of only 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 need the help they can give you." He has not lived up to their rules. They are aware of that fact and have, apparently by the use of mysterious influences, brought the present disturbance upon him. On one occasion he brought the chaplain a card which had been sent out by his lodge. This card contained a telegraph code designed to cover situations with which odd Fellows have frequently to deal.

Purple thus meant, "Bury him where he is." He was greatly troubled by the fact that in the room where he slept there was a flowerpot covered with purple crepe paper. These fears were greatly augmented by the arrival the next morning of a purple neck-tie, a gift from his wife. He has found also great significance in the number five. On one occasion in his presence another 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 had asked another patient for a match and he had given him five matches. These things seemed to him most ominous.

Very striking also is his tendency to blame himself. He is sure he is responsible for the death of the mistress upon whom the illegal operation was performed; and since his wife had a similar operation, he fears that she also will die of carcinoma. He feels that the lodges are quite justified in singling him out for disciplinary measures. This self-blame stands in marked contrast to the persecutory trends which were so prominent in the beginning of the disturbed period.

PROPOSITIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. Cases of this type are characterized by marked religious concern and by a relatively high recovery rate.
2. The primary causative factor in most such cases is to be found in the sense of personal failure and guilt, due usually to the presence of instintual claims which can neither be controlled nor acknowledged for fear of social disapproval and condemnation.
3. Prominent in the period of onset is intense pre-occupation with the problem of one's own role and of his relationship with that which is supreme in his social relationships.
4. The acute disturbance usually begins with an experience which is interpreted as contact with the superhuman and with an awakening within the patient of a sense of his unsuspected importance. The existing structure of the personality, based as it is upon the internalisation of socially accepted beliefs, is thereby shattered and the patient is left sure of only one thing, that things are not what they seem to be. Ideas of death, of re-birth, of world catastrophe, of cosmic identification and of mission may then come surging in. Such ideas are characteristic of the more acute disturbances.
5. Certain men of outstanding religious genius have passed thru such experiences in the process of finding themselves.
6. Disturbances of this type, in so far as they are characterized by the acceptance of responsibility and the honest attempt to face reality, are not evils but like fever or inflammation in the body, they are manifestations of Nature's power to heal.
7. Such experiences belong in the domain of the student and minister of religion as much as they do within the domain of the medical man. We shall never understand mental illness except as we study the destructive solutions of intrapsychic conflict in the light of the constructive. Neither shall we ever understand religious experience unless we study the struggles of the human soul thruout their entire range from the bottom most depths of the infernal regions to religious experience at its best.