

A N U N H A P P Y S C I E N T I S T  
(Case A N 3 in Psychopathology, by Edward J. Kempf)

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Case A N 3 in Kempf's Psychopathology is one of great value to the student of human nature. In the first place it is a case of exceptional intrinsic interest which raises many far-reaching questions. It is also noteworthy by reason of the fact that the patient was a scientific man of high intelligence who has analyzed his experience with unusual honesty and acumen. For this reason it has been widely used in the introductory sections of courses in religion and mental health.

The Central Question

The turning point in this man's life, the decisive parting of the ways, is undoubtedly to be found in his panic in the face of an opportunity to marry a charming young woman of wealthy and influential family who was deeply in love with him, a woman who reminded him of his idolized mother. When she made it clear to him that she was ready to marry him he ran away to Florida. Never afterwards was he able to bring himself to see her, even though she remained unmarried and he dedicated his life to her, seeking to honor her through his scientific work and living so ascetically that for twenty years there was not the slightest indulgence of the unruly sex drive. Our consideration of this case may well center around the attempt to explain this remarkable behavior on his part.

1. Constitutional Pre-disposition

The first question which comes to us is whether there may not have been some constitutional pre-disposition which stood in the way. Was he not perhaps a homo-sexual? Dr. Kempf indicates that there were homosexual tendencies. As a boy he had been called a "sissy." He developed a strong attachment to an older scientist who became his guide and protector. Some of his later dreams show a homo-sexual trend. On the other hand, we note that in his masturbation phantasies a woman was always the object. This consideration may be regarded as decisive. Without questioning the presence of some homo-sexual tendencies, his dominant interest seems to have been in the opposite sex. The homo-sexual tendencies of the later years may have represented a regressive adaptation to his tragic failure in life.

2. Mother Fixation

A second question is raised by the fact that Miss Y. reminded him of the mother whom he adored. To marry her might therefore be felt as incest. This explanation has been frequently offered. It is in accordance with the concept of "mother fixation," of which we hear so much to-day. There can be no question that there was in this case such a "fixation." But what can we learn from it regarding the real evil in such fixations? The answer seems clear. It is not that he loved his mother too much, but that erotic phantasy got mixed up in the relationship. Here then is something which wise parents and teachers have always recognized as an evil and have sought to guard against. Another common evil - not so clear in this case - is that of becoming dependent upon the parent, of failing thus to grow up and stand upon one's own feet. We seem thus justified in saying that there is no danger of a boy loving his mother too much or a mother her son. The danger is that love may seek immediate satisfactions rather than the best interests of the loved person in the long-run. True love calls for wisdom and self-denial.

That Miss Y.'s resemblance to his mother was not the real difficulty is indicated furthermore by the fact that such a resemblance is often a positive factor in the choice of a mate. The well-known popular song "I want a girl just like the girl who married dear old Dad" is an expression of this tendency; and in that tendency there is nothing necessarily unhealthy.

## 3. The Sense of Guilt

The real difficulty in this case is to be found in the sense of guilt arising out of his practice of masturbation. It lay in the fact that there were within him desires and tendencies which he could neither renounce nor acknowledge for fear of condemnation (Cf. Alexander: Psychoanalysis of the Total Personality, Lecture V).

How this practice got started is by no means clear. He explains it by his unsatisfied need for affection. Apparently there was no erotic element in his mother's love for him. She had not smothered him with affection, as mothers sometimes do when their own love life is unsatisfied. One thing only is clear. The boy was sensitive. He adored his attractive mother and she became in his eighth year the object of his erotic phantasies. To explain this in terms of a frustrated need for affection may be a rationalization on his part. Certainly the sex drive is innate and not infrequently it manifests itself early in children - in some cases earlier than in others. This may, and often does, occur spontaneously even under the most favorable environmental conditions. Perhaps such sexual precocity may be the reverse side of a potentiality, provided only it is wisely handled.

Such was not the case with this boy, however. The mother's mistake lay, not in inducing such phantasies in her son, but rather in not discovering them and helping him to deal with them intelligently. Apparently neither she nor the father took account of the fact that a boy has the problem of sex to deal with and that he must deal with it in one way or another.

It is to be noted that entirely uninstructed as he was in such matters, he apparently feels this erotic indulgence as something forbidden (Cf. Rank: Modern Education, pp. 40-53). He thus develops neurotic symptoms which give the parents much concern. They do not succeed in discovering the cause. However the symptoms eventually disappear of themselves.

In any case adolescence finds him with the problem still unsolved. Sex is for him something fascinating and terrifying, it exerts upon him powerful influences which he can neither control nor acknowledge, and he suffers tortures in his struggle with the habit of masturbation.

Lowering the Conscience Threshold

It is not until his nineteenth year that the problem is brought out into the open. This happens only by means of a blunder. His well-meaning landlady remarks one day at table: "You boys ought to eat more slowly. Look at A. See how well he masturbates." The resulting embarrassment leads to a talk between himself and his room-mate. He thus discovers that he is not the only boy with difficulties of this sort and he adopts his room-mate's solution. He visits a prostitute. Later on he has affairs with married women. In this way his extreme tension is relieved. He finds a workable solution. This results from the fact that he has now socialized his problem. He has got to the place where he can talk about it. This socialization is however on a very low level - that of prostitutes and of those who consort with prostitutes.

The Girl of His Dreams

At the time he meets Miss Y. he is thirty-three years of age. He has at that time embarked upon a promising scientific career. His sex problem he has solved by entering into an arrangement with a young widow, Mrs. X, and her mother. He becomes the only roomer in their home, paying handsomely for the privilege. It is clearly understood that the relationship is to be on a matter-

of-fact basis and that it is not to involve any permanent obligations.

It seems for him a happy arrangement. His idealistic needs are provided for through his love for Miss Y., his physiological needs through his relations with Mrs. X. However, things do not work out according to plan. Mrs. X becomes emotionally involved and the bottom drops out from under him just at the time his relations with Miss Y. have reached a climax.

### Why the Panic?

Why now is this man able to have successful sex relations with a woman of the prostitute type but becomes panic-stricken before a woman of the mother type?

#### 1. The Psychoanalytic Explanation

The orthodox psychoanalytic explanation is in terms of the Oedipus complex. The boy loves his mother with an erotic attachment which makes him look upon his father as a rival whom he also fears. His love for his mother is thus associated with fear and with the taboos attaching to incest. In so far as Miss Y. is associated with the idea of his mother, any marriage with her is also tabooed.

#### 2. The Religious Factors

As already said, this explanation seems inadequate. A true explanation must take account of the religious factors. It is to be noted that according to his own account he "idolized" his mother. This means that he associated her with what for him was divine. It is also clear that he had never succeeded in transcending the loyalty to his mother. There had been no transfer of loyalty from the finite to the Infinite, no synthesis of the tender elements of his interpersonal relationships as represented by his mother with the sterner elements represented by his father. More than that he had made his mother one object of erotic phantasy. He had thus defiled her. In any case he had thought of her in a way which he could not bring himself to acknowledge to her. As the prototype of his mother, Miss Y. would arouse in him the same feelings. She would represent for him the divine, the God with whom he had never come to terms. She would also arouse the guilt feelings because of the forbidden masturbation phantasies.

The answer now seems clear. He was unable to marry Miss Y. not because she reminded him of his mother but because both she and his mother represented what to him was divine. He was unable to marry her because she was associated with the God with whom he had not come to terms and with the problem which he had been unable to face. His case is illustrative of the principle which Hooking sets forth, that no happy love relationship is possible except where both parties have first found their own divinity (Human Nature and Its Re-making, Chap. 42). We seem then justified in concluding that the tragedy in this case is to be found in the fact that here was a man with the potentiality for a fine love relationship who finally met the woman of his dreams but was unable to enter into his paradise.

### Possibility of Marriage

Under what conditions might it have been possible for him to have married this woman? is the next question which confronts us. Suppose that at this critical time in his life he had come for advice to his minister or to his doctor, what help could we give him?

One thing to be recognized is that if he could have brought himself to consult a physician or a minister his problem would be well on the way toward solution. That was something which he had never done. The established reaction pattern in his case, the one which had become habitual through repeated

use, was that of escape. Whenever a difficulty arose he ran away from it. So in this major crisis of his life he headed for Florida. He ran away just as he had always done. If he had consulted a physician, that in itself would have been tremendously important from the standpoint of his future.

The essential thing for him is to get rid of the fear of telling. Just as the sense of guilt is due to the presence of desires and tendencies which one can neither control nor acknowledge for fear of condemnation, so psychotherapy may be reduced to the principles of confession and forgiveness, together also with re-education. The physician's task is that of listening sympathetically and intelligently in order that the patient may be able to socialize his difficulty and see it in perspective.

Would it be necessary for him to make a confession to Miss Y.? The answer is, No. What is necessary is that he should be freed from the fear of telling and that he should be able to look at the situation from her standpoint as well as his own. It may also be said that if it had seemed best to tell her and if she had been able to receive the confession in good part, that should have made possible a fine relationship between the two. The point to stress is that many marriages are therapeutic relationships. They involve the sharing on a high level of the intimate problems of life, and that the basis of a true love relationship is to be found, not in faultless conduct, but in mutual trust and common loyalty to the best. Thus, even tho he had made a sorry mess of his life in the past, that fact need not have prevented a happy marriage if only he had been able to fulfil the conditions. Those conditions involved his readiness to make a clean breast of things and move to become better.

#### A Struggle for Salvation

How are we to evaluate the course which he actually followed? We notice his motives become highly idealistic. He decides to burn out of himself the baser elements. He throws himself into his scientific work. He permits no indulgence of the sex drive, none whatsoever. He seems to deserve no little credit. We notice, however that what he gives is not what is required of him. What is required is that he should face the music, that he should square accounts. Instead he practices self-denial. It is a good example of the counterfeit coinage so characteristic of neurotic self-punishment (Cf. Alexander, op. cit., p. 93; also Horney: The Neurotic Personality of our Time, (New York, Norton, chaps. 13 & 14.) It enabled him to maintain his self-respect. We note that he goes for eleven years without any nervous breakdowns. But it was not a true solution. The point to emphasize here is that he was in a desperate situation and that heroic measures were necessary to keep going at all.

#### Eventual Failure

In the end he failed. He began to fall behind in his scientific work and was given an easier job in another department. That for him was the beginning of the end. It destroyed his hope of honoring Miss Y thru his scientific work. He was now a failure in both vocational and love relationships.

In the face of this total frustration and failure, he began to brood, to dwell on his grievances, Then came the break-through of the hostility which had been present but disguised ever since his conflicts with his father in his early years. He made elaborate plans to kill the department chief who had been responsible for his demotion.

The Father's Influence

We have thus a manifestation of the other theme in this man's life - his reaction to his father.

In any consideration of the father it should be remembered that we have only his report and that even scientists are not always free from bias, especially in that which concerns them personally. An unprejudiced observer might have given us a very different picture. What is clear is that looking back over his life from the sixth decade he still feels great hostility toward his father and at the same time he gives evidence of great respect and perhaps even some admiration. He describes his father as very strict and very religious, a man who exercised arbitrary authority and who ruled by force and by ridicule. The younger children, it seemed, rebelled against this father's despotic rule. He wanted to but did not dare. The incident which he gives us from his tenth year is illuminating. It undoubtedly dramatizes what had been going on for a long time. One day at table he had done something to displease his father and was sharply reprimanded. He became defiant. The father ordered him to stand with his back to the table and press his nose against a flower on the wall-paper. He refused point blank. The mother then enters the scene and persuades him to yield.

It need not be assumed that this was by any means a turning point or that the mother thus demanded his "crucifixion." What it does mean is that the parents stood together and ruled by the combined authority of fear and love, with the father as the embodiment of force and the mother of tenderness. The mother does persuade him to yield to his father's arbitrary authority, but she does not succeed in banishing his hostility and resentment. It is furthermore clear what happened to his hostility. Instead of flaming out in open anger and rebellion, it was driven underground. It expressed itself in the form of smoldering bitterness. It left him sputteringly ineffective in a way which made him despise himself.

He made however the discovery that whenever he became sick and helpless his father was likely to become very tender toward him. This discovery was the basis of some of the psychoneurotic episodes described in the case, episodes which occurred at intervals through his life.

Following his graduation from college another older man enters his life. This man is the older scientist who becomes interested in him and becomes his sponsor in his scientific endeavors. We may look upon this man as the prototype of the good father. His influence together with his success as a scientific worker enable him to carry on for a number of years, until in his fifties he receives a devastating vocational set-back at the hands of the departmental chief. This chief now becomes the representative of the cruel father. Now the bitterness which had been smoldering all these years breaks through into open flame and he plans to eliminate the tyrant.

He did not however go through with his plan, but finally confessed to his brother-in-law and consented to be taken to St. Elizabeth's.

This later development was clearly paranoid in type. It involved ideas of persecution, also of self-importance. The question of possible homosexual tendencies may therefore be raised once more in the light of Freud's theory, (see the Schreber Case) that all paranoid formations are the result of homosexual attachments, and that ideas of persecution are directed only against persons who have once been extremely significant to the patient.

It is quite clear in this case that the Departmental Chief whom he proposed to kill was the representative of his father. It is also clear that there were at this time, in dreams which he reported, some clear homo-sexual trends. It seems however simpler and much more in accordance with the known facts to hold to the view that any such tendencies would be called forth by the tragic failure in which he found himself involved and the necessity of adjusting himself to those who held his fate in their hands.