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WAR NEUROSES

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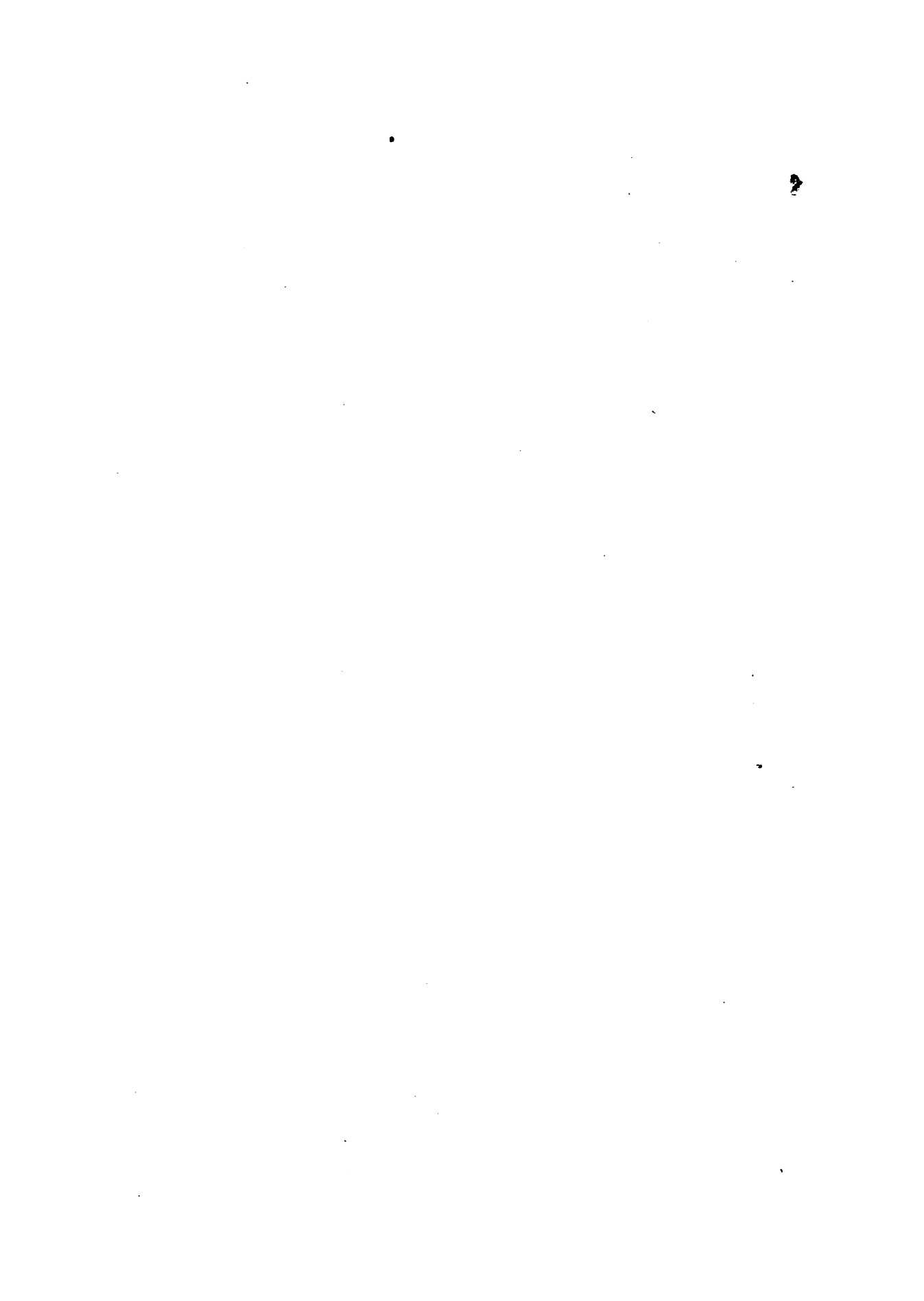


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PSYCHO-ANALYSIS
AND THE
WAR NEUROSES

by

Drs. S. FERENCZI (Budapest), KARL ABRAHAM (Berlin),
ERNST SIMMEL (Berlin) and ERNEST JONES (London)

Introduction by
Prof. SIGM. FREUD (Vienna)



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I.

INTRODUCTION

BY PROFESSOR SIGM. FREUD, Vienna.

THIS little book on the War Neuroses, with which the Verlag opens the "Internationale psychoanalytische Bibliothek", deals with a subject which until lately engaged the greatest current interest. When the subject came up for discussion at the Fifth Psycho-Analytical Congress at Budapest (September, 1918), official representatives of the Central European Powers were present to obtain information from the lectures and discussions. The hopeful result of this first meeting was the promise that psycho-analytical institutions should be established, where medical men qualified in analysis might find the means and time to study the nature of these puzzling illnesses and the therapeutic value of psycho-analysis in them. However, before these results could be achieved the war came to an end, the government organisations broke down, and interest in war neuroses gave place to other concerns. At the same time, significantly enough, most of the neurotic diseases which had been brought about by the war disappeared on the cessation of the war conditions. The opportunity, therefore, for a thorough investigation of these affections was unfortunately missed. However, one must add, it is to be hoped that it will be a very long time before such an opportunity again occurs. This episode, now a thing of the past, has not been without importance for the spread of the knowledge of psycho-analysis. Many medical men, who had previously held themselves aloof from psycho-analysis, have been brought into close touch with its theories through their service with the army compelling them to deal with the question of the war neuroses. The reader can easily gather from Ferenczi's contribution to the subject with what hesitation and misgivings this advance was made. Some of the factors, such as the psycho-genetic origin of the symptoms, the significance of unconscious impulses, and the part that the primary advantage of being ill plays in the adjusting psychical conflicts ("flight into disease"), all of which had long before been discovered and described as operating in the neuroses of peace time, were found also in the war neuroses and almost generally accepted. The work of E. Simmel has shown

what results may be obtained if the war neurotic is treated by the cathartic method, which, as is well known, was the first stage of the psycho-analytic technique.

From the advance thus made towards psycho-analysis, however, one need not assume that the opposition to it has been reconciled or neutralised. One might think that when a man, who had hitherto not accepted any of a number of connected conclusions, suddenly finds himself in the position of being convinced of the truth of a part of them, he would weaken in his opposition and adopt an attitude of respectful attention, lest the other part, of which he has no personal experience, and therefore upon which he is unable to form a personal opinion, should also prove to be correct.

This other part of the psycho-analytical theory which is not touched upon in the study of the war neuroses is that the driving forces which find expression in the formation of symptoms are sexual in nature, and that the neurosis is the result of the conflict between the ego and the sexual impulses which it has repudiated. The term "sexuality" is to be taken here in the broader sense customary in psycho-analysis, and not to be confused with the narrower sense of "genitality". Now it is quite correct, as Ernest Jones points out in his contribution, that this part of the theory has not hitherto been demonstrated in relation to the war neuroses. The work which could prove this part has not yet been carried out. It may be that the war neuroses are unsuitable material for this proof. However, the opponents of psycho-analysis, whose repugnance to sexuality has shown itself to be stronger than their logic, have hastened to proclaim that investigation of the war neuroses has finally disproved this part of the psycho-analytical theory. In this pronouncement they have been guilty of a slight confusion. If the — up to the present superficial — investigation of war neuroses has not shown that the sexual theory of the neuroses is correct, that is quite another matter from showing that this theory is incorrect.

With an impartial attitude and some willingness it should not be difficult to find the way to further elucidation.

The war neuroses, in so far as they differ from the ordinary neuroses of peace time through particular peculiarities, are to be regarded as traumatic neuroses, whose existence has been rendered possible or promoted through an ego-conflict. In Abraham's contribution there are plain indications of this ego-conflict; the English and American authors whom Jones quotes have also recognised it. The conflict takes place between the old ego of peace time and the new war-ego of the soldier, and it becomes acute as soon as the

peace-ego is faced with the danger of being killed through the risky undertakings of his newly formed parasitical double. Or one might put it, the old ego protects itself from the danger to life by flight into the traumatic neurosis in defending itself against the new ego which it recognises as threatening its life. The National Army was therefore the condition, and fruitful soil, for the appearance of war neuroses; they could not occur in professional soldiers, or mercenaries.

The other feature of the war neurosis is that it is a traumatic neurosis, such as is well known to occur in peace time after fright or severe accidents, without any reference to an ego-conflict.

The theory of the sexual aetiology of the neuroses, or as we prefer to call it, the sexual hunger (libido) theory, was originally put forward only as regards the transference neuroses of peace conditions, and can be easily demonstrated in them by using the analytic technique. But its application to those other affections, which more recently we have grouped together as the narcissistic neuroses, meets with difficulties. Ordinary cases of Dementia praecox, Paranoia and Melancholia are fundamentally very unsuitable material for the proof of the sexual hunger (libido) theory and for reaching an understanding of it, for which reason psychiatrists, who neglect the transference neuroses cannot be reconciled to it. The traumatic neuroses (of peace time) have always been reckoned to be the most refractory in this respect, so that the appearance of the war neuroses does not add any fresh factor to the former situation.

Only by advancing and making use of the idea of a "narcissistic sexual hunger (libido)", that is to say, a mass of sexual energy that attaches itself to the ego and satisfies itself with this as otherwise it does only with an object, has it been possible to extend the sexual hunger (libido) theory to the narcissistic neuroses, and this entirely legitimate development of the concept of sexuality bids fair to do for these severer neuroses and for the psychoses all that one can expect from an empirically and tentatively progressing theory. The traumatic neurosis of peace time will also fit into this group when researches into the correlation undoubtedly subsisting between shock, anxiety, and narcissistic sexual hunger (libido) have reached success.

If the traumatic and war neuroses emphasise the influence of the danger to life and not at all, or not clearly enough, that of the "denial of love", on the other hand the aetiological claim of the former factor appearing there so powerfully, is lacking in the usual transference neuroses of peace time. Indeed it is vulgarly supposed that these latter sufferings are only promoted by indulgence, high-living and ease, which provide an interesting contrast to the conditions of life under which

the war neuroses break out. If psycho-analysts, who find their patients have become ill through the "denial of love", through the ungratified demands of the sexual hunger (libido), were to follow the example of their opponents, they would maintain that either there are no danger neuroses, or that the affections following on terror are not neuroses. This has naturally never crossed their minds. On the contrary, they see the convenient possibility of combining in one conception the two apparently divergent sets of facts. In the traumatic and war neuroses the ego of the individual protects itself from a danger that either threatens it from without, or is embodied in a form of the ego itself, in the transference neuroses of peace time the ego regards its own sexual hunger (libido) as a foe, the demands of which appear threatening to it. In both cases the ego fears an injury: in the one case through the sexual hunger (libido) and in the other from outside forces. One might even say that in the case of the war neuroses the thing feared is after all an inner foe, in distinction from the pure traumatic neuroses and approximating to the transference neuroses. The theoretical difficulties which stand in the way of such a unifying conception do not appear to be insurmountable; one can with full right designate the repression which underlies every neurosis, as a reaction to a trauma, as an elementary traumatic neurosis.

Spring 1919.

II.
SYMPOSIUM
HELD AT THE
FIFTH INTERNATIONAL PSYCHO-ANALYTICAL CONGRESS
BUDAPEST, SEPTEMBER 1918

1. DR. S. FERENCZI, Budapest.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

WITH your permission I will commence my exposition of the very serious and important subject that is the theme of my lecture to-day with the recital of a little story which will lead us straightway into the revolutionising events of this war. A Hungarian, who had the opportunity of observing at close quarters a part of the revolutionary upheaval in Russia, told me that the new revolutionary rulers of a Russian town found with consternation that the change from the old to the new regime had not taken place as rapidly as it should have done according to their doctrinal calculations. According to the teachings of the materialistic idea of history they could have set up the new social order immediately after they had got the entire power into their hands. Instead of this, irresponsible elements, which were antagonistic to any new order of things, obtained the upper hand, so that the power gradually slipped from the hands of the originators of the revolution. Then the leaders of the movement put their heads together in order to find out what had gone wrong in their calculations. Finally they agreed that perhaps the materialistic idea was after all too one-sided, as it only took into consideration the economic and commercial relations, and had forgotten to take into account one small matter, the feelings and thoughts of man, in a word, the psyche. They were sufficiently consistent to send emissaries immediately to German speaking countries, in order to obtain psychological works, so that they might get at least subsequently some knowledge of this neglected science. Many thousands of human lives fell victims, perhaps to no purpose, to this omission of the revolutionaries; the failure of their efforts resulted in their making one discovery however, namely, that of the mind.

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