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DR. ALFRED ADLER
"THE NEUROTIC CONSTITUTION"

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NEUROTIC CONSTITUTION

OUTLINES OF A COMPARATIVE INDIVIDUAL-
ISTIC PSYCHOLOGY AND PSYCHOTHERAPY

BY

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Vienna * * *

AUTHORIZED ENGLISH TRANSLATION

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PREFACE

After I had made the attempt to investigate in the "Studie über Minderwertigkeit von Organen," the structure and tectonic of organs in association with their genetic basis, their functional capability and destiny, I proceeded, supporting myself upon already available data as well as upon my own experience, to apply the same method in the study of psychopathology. In the book before us are embraced the most important results of my comparative, individual-psychologic studies of the neuroses.

As was the case in the theory of somatic inferiority, an empiric basis is made use of in comparative individual-psychology for the purpose of establishing a fictive standard of normality in order to enable one to measure and compare with it grades of deviation from it. In both of these scientific endeavors, the comparative method of study reckons with the origin of phenomena, dismisses from consideration the present and seeks to outline from them the future. This method of approach leads us to view the compulsion of evolution and the pathological elaboration as the result of a conflict which breaks forth in the

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organic sphere for the purpose of attaining equipoise, functional capability and adaptation; the same struggle in the psychic sphere is under the command of a fictitious idea of personality whose influence dominates the development of the neurotic character and symptoms. If in the organic sphere, "the individual develops into a unit mass in which all of the individual parts cooperate toward a common goal" (Virchow), if the various abilities and tendencies of the individual tend toward a purposefully directed, unit-personality, then we may look upon every single manifestation of life as if in its past, present and future there are contained traces of a dominating, guiding idea.

In this way it has appeared to the author of this book, that the most minute trait of psychic life is permeated by a purpose-force. Comparative, individualistic psychology sees in every psychic event the impress, so to speak, or symbol of a uniformly directed plan of life which only comes more clearly to light in the neuroses and psychoses.

The result of such an investigation of the neurotic character should furnish proof of the value and utility of our method of comparative, individualistic psychology in the problems of mental life.

THE AUTHOR.

Vienna, February, 1912.

INTRODUCTION

“Omnia ex opinione suspensa sunt: non ambitio tantum ad illam respicit et luxuria et avaricia. Ad opinionem dolemus. Tam miser est quisque, quam credit.”

SENECA, *Epist.* 78, 13.

The study of the neurotic character is an essential part of neuro-psychology. Like all other psychic phenomena it can only be understood when taken in connection with the entire psychic life. A cursory knowledge of the neuroses suffices to enable one to discover that which is peculiarly characteristic in them and all writers who have studied the problem of nervousness have laid particular stress upon certain peculiar traits of character. The opinion was a general one that the neurotic shows a series of sharply emphasized traits of character which exceed the normal standard. The marked sensitiveness, the irritable debility, the suggestibility, the egotism, the penchant for the fantastic, the estrangement from reality, but also more special traits such as tyranny, malevolence, a self-sacrificing virtue, coquetry, anxiety and absent-mindedness

are met with in the majority of case histories and it would be necessary to detail all writers who have thoroughly studied the subject in order to endorse their contributions. Of the more recent ones, Janet, who has carried on the traditions of the famous French school and who has brought to light some very important and ingenious analyses, must be especially mentioned. His emphasis of the neurotic's "sentiment d'incomplétude" particularly, is so wholly in harmony with the results offered by me that I am justified in seeing in my work an extension of this most important fundamental fact of the mental life of the neurotic.

No matter where one begins with the analysis of psychogenic disorders, one and the same phenomenon forces itself upon one's attention after the briefest observation, namely, that the entire picture of the neurosis as well as all its symptoms are influenced by, nay, even wholly provoked by an imaginary fictitious goal. This final purpose has a creative, directive and adjustive power. The potency of this "goal idea" is revealed to us by the trend and evaluation of the pathological phenomena and should one attempt to dispense with this assumption there remains nothing but a confusing mass of impulses, trends, components, debilities and anomalies which has made the obscurity of the neurosis impenetrable to some, while

others have undertaken bold exploratory journeys into this field.

Pierre Janet has certainly recognized this relationship as is shown in his classical descriptions of the "Hysterical Psyche," 1894,¹ but he avoided a detailed description. He expressly maintains, "I have until now only described general and simple traits of character which by means of their association and under the influence of definite extraneous circumstances may produce all kinds of curious behavior and conduct." It is entirely out of place here to enter into a detailed discussion of Janet's description for this treatise would then resemble more a moral romance than a clinical study. Having adhered to this attitude even up to his latest contributions on the subject, Janet, notwithstanding his keen insight into the relationship between the psychology of the neuroses and moral philosophy, never entered the road to synthesis.

It remained for Joseph Breuer, a man well versed in current German philosophy, to discover the gem which lay in his path. He directed his attention to the meaning of the symptoms and undertook to ascertain the source and purpose of the same from the only one who could give them—from the patient. In so doing the author founded a method which seeks to explain indi-

¹ Translated by Dr. Max Kahane.

vidual psychological phenomena historically and genetically with the assistance of a preliminary hypothesis, i.e., that of the determinism of psychic phenomena. The manner in which this method has been extended and improved upon by Sigmund Freud with the host of problems and attempted solutions therewith connected belongs to contemporaneous history and has met with both recognition and contradiction. Less for the purpose of following a critical bent than for the purpose of making clear my own position I beg leave to separate from the fruitful and valuable contributions of Freud three of his fundamental views as erroneous inasmuch as they threaten to impede progress in the understanding of the neuroses. The first objection is directed against the view that the libido is the motive force behind the phenomena of the neurosis. On the contrary it is the neurosis which shows more clearly than does normal psychic conduct how by means of this neurotic positing of a "final purpose," the apperception of pleasure, its selection and power are all driven in the direction of this final purpose so that the neurotic can really only follow the allure-ment of the acquisition of pleasure with his healthy psychic force, so to speak, while for the neurotic portion only "higher" goals are of value.

The neurotic goal (*Zwecksetzung*) has revealed itself to us in the heightened ego-conscious-

ness (Persönlichkeitsgefühl) whose simplest formula is to be recognized in an exaggerated "masculine protest" (Männlichen Protest). This formula: "I wish to be a complete man" is the guiding fiction in every neurosis, claiming higher reality values than even the normal psyche. The libido, the sex-impulses and the tendencies to sexual perversions arrange themselves in accordance with this guiding principle, no matter whence they originate. Nietzsche's "Will to power" and "Will to seem" embrace many of our views, which again resemble in some respects the views of Féré and the older writers, according to whom the sensation of pleasure originates in a feeling of power, that of pain in a feeling of feebleness (Ohnmacht).

A second objection is directed against Freud's fundamental view of the sexual etiology of the neuroses, a view which Pierre Janet approached very closely when he asked, "Is sexual feeling then the center around which all other psychological syntheses are built up?" The applicability of the sexual picture deceives the normal person and especially the neurotic. But it must not deceive the psychologist. The sexual content in the neurotic phenomenon originates primarily in the imaginary antithesis: "Masculine-feminine" and is evolved through a change of form of the "masculine protest." The sexual trend in the fantasy

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