

Worcester State Hospital
Office of the Chaplain

SPUNT, ARNOLD

R. Leeper
A. T. B.
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General Description

A stockily built boy of twenty, short in stature but with heavy torso (Ht. 5' 4", Wt. 143 lbs.). Appearance generally pleasing. Nativity, Chelsea, Mass.; race Hebrew, the father being a Russian and the mother an Austrian Jew; education, equivalent to second year H.S.; civil condition single; physical findings negative.

Reason for Commitment

Committed to this hospital, May 27, 1928. He had been previously at the Boston Psychopathic Hospital, (Sept. 1924), twice at McLean Hospital and once at the Evans Memorial Hospital in Boston. Prior to first commitment he showed much the same type of behavior that he shows now. He was mischievous and negativistic and the ideation was much the same, the perhaps not so incoherent or symbolic. In the intervals between hospital commitments he has been at home, at one time for a period of eight or nine months, during which period he worked in his father's upholstering factory. Each time the psychotic tendencies have returned in rather acute form and recommitment has been necessary.

Personal History

Heredity and Early Influences

The patient's present condition appears as a natural continuation of trends present from earliest childhood. He is the youngest of a family of four brothers, of whom the others have made unusually good records not only intellectually but socially and athletically. Two of them are graduated of Tufts and one of Harvard. Arnold from early childhood tended to be more shut-in and sensitive than they, perhaps because, as his father reports, he got more petting and affection than was good for him. He didn't care to play with other children, saying that they were not clean enough or good enough for him. He spend a good deal of time reading. Before he graduated from the 8th grade he had to stay out of school for a while because of worry over his scholastic standing. He later graduated with honors. In his first year of high school (1922-23) he became melancholy and depressed, worried about his work and about his appearance, claimed that his face had changed. Finally at his own request was removed from school and shifted to a private school - Powder Point. The next school year he spent at the Allen Chalmers Military School, and the summers of 1923-24 at Camp Morrillac. The adjustment at these different places was unsatisfactory except that some-friends here Arnold did succeed in winning some recognition in athletics. He also made some freinds here and one of the teachers took a special interest in him and did much to enable him to finish. In one of these places, he was the only Jewish boy and was the butt of considerable razzing because of his race and his appearance and his sensitiveness to such forms of joking. He also resented being obliged to attend the church services. He retaliated by mischief of different kinds and he frequently stole things from the other boys. Meantime the worry about his appearance kept increasing and he seemed to be retiring more and more into phantasy life.

The family back-ground was apparently one of his sensitive spots. The parents were poor when the children were young and the now moderately wealthy

they have many of the attitudes and interests and habits of thought of the poorer Jewish groups from whence they came. They are likeable, democratic, rather alert mentally and both father and mother have been active members and leaders in a number of different organizations, a fact in which they take some pride. But they are certainly lacking in culture, either American or Jewish. Arnold in his remarks to them when they visited him here has given evidence that he has been sensitive to these deficiencies. The brothers however made successful social adjustments in college.

Vocational Adjustments

During the period at home after his first commitment to McLean, he worked at painting and miscellaneous work in his father's factory but not with full responsibility. The men were instructed to be considerate of him and he did not have to work unless he felt like it. However, he seems to have done fairly well.

Sex Adjustments

The family thinks he took almost no interest in girls and that there was no masturbation until after his illness began. According to his own account he indulged in sex play with quite a few girls and would seem to have spent much of his time thinking about them. He masturbates, now, sometimes quite openly. At least seven or eight occasions have been observed. Many of his remarks show phantasies of a definite sexual nature.

Social Adjustments

As a child he was strongly inclined to be bookish and shy. He depended especially on his brother Harry and seemingly felt lost when Harry went off to college. He was active in sports but not a leader. He was sensitive to teasing. He found great enjoyment in driving a car and used to spend much time cleaning and tinkering around it.

History of Present Illness.

The first marked symptom seems to have showed itself when he was in the eighth grade in school, and in spite of the fact that he had been doing good work in school he worried so much about graduating that he had to be taken out of school. He was at that time treated for "acidosis". At the summer camp the following summer he did well at first, then kept by himself and finally returned home, complaining that he was different from the other boys, that his nose was different and his eyebrows wrong. He often stood before the mirror examining his face. After entering high school in 1922 he became more melancholy and self-depreciative. He finally gave up school and entered a private school. Here also he did well at first, then stayed by himself and wanted to leave. In the summer of 1923 he was sent to a boys' camp against his wishes. There he resorted to his characteristic way of getting what he wanted by making himself objectionable. In the fall of 1923 he entered a military school in West Newton. Here he behaved in a childish manner. The following summer (1924) at home he complained about the excess of hair on his arms and body and stood for long periods grimacing or gesturing, often standing before the mirror. He later became mute and had to be taken to the Psychopathic. From there he was sent to McLean Hospital on September 18, 1924. Here he was mute and kept his eyes closed but showed curiosity and read newspapers. There were many impulsive acts such as upsetting the bed, throwing food, assuming strange attitudes, sometimes sitting for hours

without paying attention to anyone. Again he would shout out obscene and vulgar words. By November he showed some improvement, then became noisy, untidy, exposed his person, asked why poison was put in his food. Tube feeding became necessary. He became apathetic and his conversation inconsequential and irrelevant. In April he had improved sufficiently to be discharged. After a few months at home he again became acutely excited and was returned to McLean Sept 1. He became mute, untidy and indulged ~~in~~ excessively in masturbation. Periods of excitement alternated with catatonic stupor. He was discharged Nov. 5, 1927 in a stuporous condition to the Evans Memorial Hospital. He remained there until the transfer to Worcester State Hospital in May 1928.

Characteristics of the Psychosis

Field of Attention

It seems often that he is not paying attention to things outside of himself, but he often gives evidence of having been actually attending to something while apparently wrapped up in his own thoughts. This is particularly true of comments made in his presence about himself. It may be that his responses are unsatisfactory because of the way he colors things with his own day-dreams. Thus on one occasion he punched an old man he passed in the hall and explained that the man was Kaiser Bill.

Mood

Variable, Sometimes depressed and troubled and quiet; at other times plainly absorbed in erotic interests; at other times talkative and frivolous. During the last month there has been a rather steady trend of erotic phantasy and a self-doubting and troubled feeling.

Intellectual Functions

Answers often irrational and foolish, but more apparently because of emotional resistance than to impairment of the intellect. Thus he keeps careful track of the date, as shown by his letters, but when questioned will give wild and unrelated answers. Similarly when questioned about his reading will refuse to answer sensibly. Letters an incoherent jumble.

Social Attitude

Mischievous and negativistic. Refuses to work. Marks up walls and wood-work, squirts fire-extinguishers all around the ward, destroys books and has to be constantly watched. Does not seek for companionship but seems glad to have others around. During the last six weeks Arnold's daily program has usually included from one to four hours of work, several hours walking and a little reading. He sometimes works willingly and rather steadily at such things as rolling the tennis court, mowing the lawn. He sometimes is willing to sweep out part of the ward and to remove pencil markings and other disfigurements on the walls for which he is responsible. At painting he worked three hours every day for a week. At other times he refuses to work. He seems to like best work which he was accustomed to do before his admission. While out walking he will sometimes walk swiftly and vigorously, but he commonly lags along and often wants to stop and rest.

When left to his own devices on the ward he will sit and read by the hour. Again he will get up and wander around or find a pencil and paper and write letters. On some rainy days he has spent as much as four hours or so thus writing. There is also a marked tendency to get into mischief. Thus, on several occasions he drank all the vinegar he could find in the kitchen, another time he drank some bluing. He has also swallowed a piece of tin, he has marked the walls and woodwork of the ward with a pencil and the screens with soap, he has marked up the record books in the office, he has lifted the telephone receiver off about every chance he has had, he has sprayed the ward with the contents of the fire-extinguisher and he sometimes goes around punching patients who are not able to resist, while avoiding those who are able to retaliate. He acts much like a small child trying to get attention.

With all his disagreeable traits his reactions to people are often such as to make them like him. A number of the men around, both patients and employees take pleasure in speaking to him and at least three or four of the girls in the cafeteria answer his smiles and are willing to steal seconds on desert for him. He commonly addresses girls, nurses, etc. as "Dearie" or "Darling". Sometimes he makes objectionable remarks, such as, "How's your prick?" He sometimes attempts to touch or pull their clothing.

Peculiarities of Behavior

He has shown many marked mannerisms, which, however, shift from time to time. He was thus given to walking with an exaggerated military gait, moving the pictures or flower pots in the halls as he walked thru, picking off leaves and other things and eating them while out walking, stepping in mud puddles. These activities have however diminished during the last seven weeks. It may be that the policy which has been followed of encouraging him to do these things if he wished has been a contributing factor. He was told that it was only himself who was being hurt and that nobody cared particularly whether he did them or not. Other activities of an ephemeral sort but intense while they lasted were the tendency on several mornings to unearth all the small rocks he saw in the pastures he passed thru, or his tendency to steal soap and use it in marking up the window screens. He used to pick up every empty cigarette package he saw on the road and tear it up with the remark, "No smoking in the United States". Since the time he was encouraged to start smoking himself about two weeks ago he has totally dropped this. He smokes for other reasons than the pleasure he gets out of it. Thus, on one occasion he remarked, "I do not like to smoke. I want to be a Harvard." Several times he has urinated on the floor and then stood at attention beside the spot until told to clean it up.

Content of Thought

Philosophy of Life and Eschatology: His world is a chaotic one and he gives only here and there a glimpse of it, for most of his ideas are superficial in character. The most striking thing is his apparent concern with the idea of rebirth. Thus on one occasion he cherished a picture of a baby, saying it was himself. He then remarked spontaneously, "Everybody's going to be babies again." On another occasion when asked the date he said "1918- No, 1908. Three weeks more and I go back into the belly." "Whose?" "Mother's".

Symbolism and Hidden Meanings: Apparently a marked tendency to read hidden meanings or double meanings into things, tho the evidence is not wholly clear. There seems to be little insight symbolism. What there is seems rather of the arbitrary sort, an attempt to see meanings in trivialities.

Anxiety: Mostly about trivialities. Asked what he is thinking about, he will frequently reply, "I am worrying about my eye-lashes and the pimples under my eyes." The record indicated that he has spent a good bit of time before the mirror worrying or thinking about his personal appearance. For the most part, however, his mood is frivolous and facetious and silly.

Sense of Guilt: There have been recurring periods in which his attitude seems self-accusatory and his mood depressed. He requests sometimes to be allowed to go to a reformatory. Asked on one occasion why he should go there he replied, "for George Washington actions". He added that he ought to go for a long time, anywhere from four to twelve years. He has talked of cutting off his penis.

Persecutory Trends: During the residence at McLean there were ideas of poisoning in the food. In general persecutory ideas have not been much in evidence.

Self-Importance: Marked. Marked. He thinks of himself as coach of Harvard, as President Coolidge, as God. On one occasion while reading the newspaper he remarked, "I feel like God reading to his people. I contradict the things in the newspaper. I read to all the people of the world." He often gives as his reason for doing something, "It gives me the presidential feeling. It makes me feel like President Coolidge." He is also occupied with the idea of Kaiser Bill. Over and over again he repeats the statement, "Kaiser Bill fucked my mother." When asked on one occasion what reason he had for believing this he replied, "She put a blue cloth on the basket."

Incapacitation: Not evident.

Erotic Interests: Very pronounced. He is constantly occupied with erotic phantasies, he masturbates openly and exposes himself shamelessly before the nurses. He tells of early sex misconduct, sex play with girls, homo-sexual incidents, racy shows he has seen. He has phantasies of sex intercourse, etc.

Religious Concern: Sporadic and rather formal. On one occasion he repeated during a visit from his parents a prayer in Jewish. His mother translated this as follows: "Oh, God I am sick and no one but you to help me. Make me well so I can go home." He said this however without the appropriate affect. On the whole religious concern may be said to be absent.

Integration: A pretty thoroughly disorganized and disintegrated personality. He is hallucinated, believes that his grandfather appears to him and talks to him, and the rebirth phantasies indicate a profound regression.

Reaction Pattern:

There has been some awareness of danger and some panic. There has also been a distinct attempt at bluffing and self-assertion. The dominant reaction, however, is that of retreat into phantasy. In his dreams he has given rein to all sorts of crude erotic cravings. It is clearly a case of throwing up the sponge and going under.

Clinical Label

The shameless eroticism, the silliness, the incoherent character of his thinking as shown in his letters all indicate a fairly complete dissolution, and place him in the Hobephrenic group of Dementia Praecox. The ideation, particularly in the rebirth phantasies, has a suggestion of the catatonic struggle, but this is now merely residual.

Treatment

Some interesting suggestions as to the way to deal with this boy are to be found in the methods described on page 4 under Peculiarities of Behavior." By ceasing to oppose him and giving him free rein to go ahead and step in mud puddles to his heart's content, he quickly lost the desire. Continued treatment along this line may bring some amelioration of his present condition. This case will not however yield to psychoterapeutic treatment. As to glandular medication, the fact that he is a fairly vigorous lad does not give much ground for hope in that direction.

Prognosis

Rather hopeless. A case of rather complete disintegration. Unlikely that he will ever come back. Even if he does it will not be permanent. The fact that he has nothing to come back to makes the situation particularly unpromising.