

A D E V O T E D H U S B A N D

Oscar O., age 52; born in Sweden, in U. S., 29 years; religion, Lutheran; education, grammar school; occupation, mechanic; civilcondition, married; physical findings, negative.

I n t r o d u c t i o n

Oscar O. is a stockily built man with barrel chest and heavy muscles who was sent to the hospital as a result of an attempt at suicide. He was found in his home with the gas turned on and both wrists cut. According to the commitment papers the motive was self-sacrifice in order to relieve the world of its sins. He is quoted as saying that he came in "on a bet." The onset of the illness according to the patient was "quite long;" it was a whole week. The wife states that she first noticed the symptoms two days before. There had been a previous commitment in 1919 due to a disturbance of a somewhat similar nature. On this occasion he was released within four weeks.

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

Social and Religious Background

He comes of a middle-class Swedish stock and was born and raised in a city. His father's father was a farmer. The pt. knows little about him. His father's mother lived to the age of 96. His father as a young man went to sea and served for several years as steward on a sailing vessel. He then married and settled down in the second largest city in Sweden. He was a home-loving man and in his later years he became quite religious. He was employed in a large flour mill. The mother's father, who lived to the age of 80, was a shoe-maker. Her mother, who took care of Oscar from his fourth to his twelfth year, he describes as very strict. Of his mother he says that in her later years she became very religious and her letters are always filled with religious admonitions.

Oscar was the second in a family of nine children, of whom seven were boys.

There is no record of mental disorder in the family.

Early Years

Oscar O. considers himself to have been a fairly normal child. He recalls no difficulties in the matter of toilet-training. In school he went thru seven grades. His scholastic rating was only fair and he did not like school. However he did not repeat any grades, and he was proud of the fact that he could lick any other boy in his class.

Vocational Adjustments

On leaving school he was apprenticed to a tin smith. This required four years. After working for a while as a journeyman, he went to sea. He returned after a year and worked two years at his trade, then went to sea again and served four years in the coast-wise trade in U.S. For the past twenty two years he has been working at his trade in Boston. His vocational record has been good. He had no difficulty in holding jobs and he made good wages. For the past three years work has been scarce in the somewhat specialized trade in which he is now engaged and his share of jobs has meant only fourth time employment.

Sex Adjustments He is happily married and has two bright and promising daughters. His attitude with reference to sex is free from any apparent attempt at concealment. He admits a certain amount of difficulty with masturbation in early puberty but he says that there was never any worry over this and that it was only a stage in his development which soon passed. His first heterosexual experience was at the age of 16. On this occasion a girl of somewhat loose character suggested intercourse and he made an attempt but without success. A year later there was a real love affair. A girl of his own age was much in love with him and he had a natural desire to get close to her. He suggested intercourse and she consented but added, "That is your desire, not mine." This remark made it impossible for him to accept. During his years at sea he went not infrequently to houses of prostitution but was never infected and never worried over his sex adjustments.

His wife he met in a restaurant where she was working. He became interested in her and then discovered that she came from his own home town in Sweden and that she had gone to school with his brother. At the time of their marriage the patient was 31 years old and the wife several years younger. The daughters are now 19 and 17 years of age. The older one is a typist. The younger is still in high school. Both are bright and attractive girls.

According to the patient, the marital adjustments are satisfactory. The wife seems to be the stronger of the two. She seems to have more decision of character. She says of him, "He always says anything I say is all right." He, however, says that he has good will power. Whenever he wanted anything he had his own way. But judging from little incidents which come out in the story one gets the impression that he did not often choose to assert that will-power and that his own individuality was submerged in that of his wife and daughters.

He once remarked spontaneously that his great interest in life is love but that he did not mean sex. "Sex is just a little touch of love. A man should love more than just his wife. He should have the feeling of love for everybody."

He owns a neat little bungalow in an attractive residence section, but there is a mortgage of \$400 upon it and a second mortgage of \$1000. The wife also works and so does the older daughter, the latter as a stenographer, but for them also work is hard to get and they are afraid of having to lose their home.

Social Adjustments Oscar O. is apparently one of those whose social attitudes have been determined by more or less conventional standards. He has been a decent, self-respecting member of the group. He claims to be something of a free-thinker. In politics he inclines toward socialism but he avoids arguments. In religion he claims to come from Missouri. He demands proof. As a boy he was dragged off to church and Sunday School by his grandmother and he hated it. He never did "grab anything in religion." And never in his adult life has he been a church-goer. In his years as a sailor he adapted himself very readily to the sex-morality of the seaman but he seems always to have kept well within the limits of respectability as judged by the standards of his accepted group.

It may be noted that the patient says of his father that he was a home-loving man who when he got married settled down to devote himself to his wife and family. What he says of his father seems to apply equally to himself. His marriage seems to have brought about a complete change in his manner of living and his wife seems to have become the dominant influence in his life. Aside from his labor union which he does not attend, he belongs to no social

organizations. His spare time seems to be spent at home with his family. He and his family play cards together or with their friends. They go to the movies together. Sometimes they go out driving in their Model T Ford. He states that he does a good bit of reading and that he is especially interested in zoology. He likes to read how animals are born and how they take care of their young. Both on this occasion and thirteen years ago the onset was very sudden. It was only two days before the recent suicidal attempt that the wife noticed anything wrong. The first symptom to attract her attention was his increasing self-absorption and loss of sleep. That was on Friday. By Sunday he had become extremely agitated. He kept pacing the floor, moaning and lost in thought. When spoken to, he was irritable, especially toward his wife. He made a hot fire in the furnace, complained of the heat and blamed her for it. He asked her to go away and leave him alone. He finally became so irritable that she did leave. On her return that night she found him in his room with the gas turned on and both wrists slashed.

She ascribes the difficulty to lack of work. For three years he had worked only a fourth of the time and since Christmas he had not worked more than ten days. In consequence he spent most of his time around the house. Frequently she would be away working. She also gives some weight to a letter which he had just received from a brother-in-law in Norway. This letter was full of wild religious ideas about the coming end of the world, etc. According to the patient himself, this letter played no part in the disturbance. His own account of the disturbance is as follows:

"I must give it to you in order. You can't understand unless we go back to the beginning thirteeen years ago. You must know how the whole thing started, how I made 'a sort of bet with God.' I was at a socialist meeting one night. A man there spoke of Jesus and his giving his life for others. He asked if there were not many other men who would be willing to do that.

"That night I was thinking about what the socialist speaker said and that I would gladly give my life for my family alone. In the night I was waked up and a voice said, 'You must be put to the test to see if you will really give up your life!' And it seemed as the God were right in front of me and the voice seemed to be God's voice and words from the Bible came into my head. I began to feel very nervous. It seemed as tho something was getting into me. I did not tell my wife. I felt that she would not unders and, I got up and ran out into the street in my underwear. Of course that was a very strange thing to do, but it was just like the old Greek who found out how to weight a ship. He was in his bath-tub at the time the idea came to him and he got so excited that he jumped up and ran out without anything on. You get an idea so big it just carries you away. But a policeman brought me back and I slept until 8 or 9 o'clock in the morning.

"I think it was the same night that blood came into my mouth and something said it took almost 2000 years to produce a man like me. I had lived for 2000 years. It was just like I had gone thru many generations. Sometimes I was born rich and sometimes I was born poor.

"A day or two later I was going to my work when I fell asleep and rode right past the shop. But it wasn't far to the end of the car-line, so I paid my fare and came back. But again I fell asleep and rode past the shop. It seemed like something was keeping me from going to work that morning, so I went on this time to Lincoln Park. Again I fell asleep and dreamed that as I got off the conductor said, 'Is that your packet?' When I got off the conductor used just those very words. This made me feel sort of funny and nervous-like.

"The next day I went with my wife and children to a bunco party. Five or ten minutes before we got there the same voice said, 'The front door will be closed and a man will come to the window and ask you to climb thru because the key is lost.' When we got there it all happened just like the voice said.

'And then we went to a show. Just before we got there my wife asked the name of the show. The voice said, 'The Last Straw.' I looked up and saw a sign which read, 'The Last Straw.'

"All this made me feel pretty funny.

"About a week after that I was sent to the hospital. After that dream I was nervous. I had a feeling like when they bind up your arm and give you a blood test. I was sort of filled up. It was a queer feeling - something you don't understand what it is. I had the feeling that there were two sides and that I had to go to one side or the other in order to get salvation. I was out in the park. I had my child on my arm and my wife was with me. I got up and started to go. I felt I had to. My wife, she looked at me and saw my eyes were blood shot. She wanted me to go to the doctor, but I felt if I did I would break my agreement with God. Just then a policeman came along and my wife called him. He started to take the child away and I started to fight. Then other policemen came and they took me to the Psychopathic.

"In the Psychopathic I was put in a strait-jacket. The first night I had a dream. I seemed to be crucified and the whole room was full of devils. They were trying to hurt me but I was full of power. You see I was in a delerium. I dreamed I was dead. I dreamed I was laying in the grave just like Jesus did.

"But in about three days my mind came back. I was sent to Danvers and stayed there three weeks.

"After my release from Danvers I got along very well. I had steady work and there was nothing to worry about. During the last three years work has been scarce and there has been plenty of time to think. No, I had not been thinking much about religion. My wife was told at Danvers that the trouble came from readin the Bible, so I put the Bible in the attic. I didn't want to make her nervous. And I didn't go to church.

This last attack began when something told me to go and get the Bible. I started then to pray to God. I had been feeling lonesome, and I had it in my mind that there is a God. Then it came to me that I had a second installment to pay. I had to finish paying off my bet with God. I came then into a state of fear. Something said to me, 'Are you willing to commit suicide?' And it was just like I had to do it. I turned on the gas. That was for my wife. Then I slashed my wrists, one for one daughter and the other for the other daughter. But everything I have done before came to a good end and I have the feeling that this will too. I just felt that I had to do it to keep my promise. I have the feeling now that I am a new man. All this is over. I have done my part.

"Did this attack come on suddenly? No, it took a whole week. And it took a whole week before.

No, I had not been blaming myself, but I had been worrying a lot. That was why I began praying. It was then that the question came, Are you willing to work for God?

"What would I have been able to accomplish by taking my life? I suppose I might have been able to spend less time in purgatory. You see there is a small prize and then there is a large size. I was praying for the large prize Something said to me, 'There is nothing in the world but you and God. The spirit of God lives in every person.'

"What happens to a man when he dies? Well, it came to me that there are two kinds of spirits, material and spiritual. The former you can see and hear. When a man dies, he remains for some time a material spirit. Later on he will become a spiritual spirit. The length of time will depend upon his character. Each individual, you see, has to be clarified. That is, he must go through something resembling purgatory. No, I didn't read that anywhere. It just came to me.

"No, I didn't exactly hear anything. It's just like when you sit and think. Something comes to you. Sometimes it comes quick, just like something talking to you. I suppose it comes from God. I can't see any other explanation. Yes, it comes from the best part of myself. I never got any messages from the devil, though one time something did say to me that the devil is a part of God.

"Yes, I did say that when this came on it was just like I hypnotized myself. When I talk with a doctor, I talk about self-hypnotizing. A doctor understands that. He doesn't understand about religion.

"Yes, it is true that I did one time think of myself as Christ. That was before I understood. You get happy and you wake up and you think you are it. You get puzzled as to who you are.

"My plans? I want to get to work just as soon as possible and get along the same as before. I don't want to take any more of them fits. When this thing came on I thought I would have to preach, but the voice said, 'You were going right the way you were going. I don't need you to preach. I have other men I can send to do that.'

At the staff meeting the patient made a very good impression. He told his story clearly and showed remarkable insight. He went into considerable detail but he was asked if he did not consider his experience something very unusual. He replied, "No, it's just like eggs in an incubator. First one cracks and then another."

On another occasion he was asked what he thought of when he saw the sun. He replied, "I think of God. It's one of the things that makes me think there must be a God. I really think the earth is like an incubator and the sun gives the heat. I got that idea in a dream."