

## Clinical Notes and Cases.

### A CASE OF PROFOUND DISSOCIATION OF THE PERSONALITY.

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A BRIEF summary of this patient's condition was given in our article on "Hypnosis in Mental Hospital Practice" (1), where it was cited as Case 2, illustrating "the great value of hypnosis as a quick method of bridging amnesic gaps". The hope was there expressed that the case would be published separately in full, as it contains numerous features of general interest. Similar cases appear from time to time in the newspapers, and it seemed to us that a detailed account, showing exactly how the amnesias arose and how the case was dealt with, might be welcomed.

#### STATE ON ADMISSION.

The patient was admitted to Cefn Coed Hospital, Swansea, as a voluntary patient on February 22, 1936, in a semi-confused and dreamy state. She said she was single and gave her age as 20, but she was uncertain whether the number of her house was 2 or 44 in a certain terrace at G—. She gave the year as 1935, and she could not name the month. She spoke in an affected, drawling voice, saying, "I feel in an awful muddle. I can't remember when I first met my young man. I am mixing up the names and places and numbers. I cannot concentrate, and when I try to read I do not know what it is about. I feel I have been in a fog for a very long time".

She stated her father had died some weeks ago after a long illness, and that she had been very attached to him, but she could not get on with her step-mother. She also declared that the day before admission she was in a car accident which caused the death of her step-brother, but she was unable to give any details about this. Both these statements were found to be incorrect. She complained she could not sleep because her dead father came to visit her at nights. She gave a fragmentary story about a young man, B—, who had told her they were engaged and that he had furnished a house for her. It

appeared that the car in which the accident had occurred belonged to B—, but everything was shadowy and confused. She was vague and indefinite in her account of herself and seemed to have no background.

#### HISTORY.

The day after her admission her stepbrother, who was supposed to be killed, came to the hospital. He knew nothing of a car accident. He reported that the patient had been working as a domestic servant for six months at Mrs. M—'s house in Swansea, and during that time she had not kept in touch with her family in G—, where her father was seriously ill, but not yet dead. The stepbrother thought this very strange, as she was known to be especially devoted to her father. About two years ago she had arrived home from London with a romantic story of being engaged to an Italian, who was to have come to arrange with her father about marrying her; but the Italian did not appear, and the father concluded there was no such man. The number of her house was 2, and not 44.

Then another young man, A—, and his mother appeared, saying that they had known her for four months. They reported that she had been staying at their house in Swansea for the past week, and had been telling some peculiar stories about her very wealthy grandmother in London. This grandmother was supposed to be coming to Swansea in a Rolls Royce car, and patient took A— round to look for a house for her. The day before admission the patient announced that the grandmother had arrived and they were all to get ready to go to her house for dinner. That afternoon, however, she disappeared and did not reappear till next day. She was very distressed, saying that her stepbrother had been killed in a car accident, and there was no further mention of the grandmother. She did not seem to know where she had been during the night of February 21. No car accident could be traced, but they all went to the General Hospital to see if her stepbrother had been taken there. At the hospital patient fainted and was seen by the house surgeon. During his cross-questioning she complained of "terrible headaches ever since she had fallen down a quarry six months ago". He recommended her to come to Cefn Coed Hospital. She had told A— early in January that her father had died and had actually gone into mourning for him.

Her stepbrother and this boy A— had not previously met, so the discrepancies in her stories were unknown to them. Only when they compared notes after her admission did they realize that something was seriously wrong with the patient. Her employer, Mrs. M—, was also seen, and reported that the girl had departed without warning, leaving a note, "I am sorry I had to do this, but I am going to a job in Cardiff". Mrs. M— had not noticed anything unusual about her during her six months' period of employment. She had had a day off some weeks previously to go to her father's funeral.

It was also discovered that the patient's luggage was missing and neither she nor anyone else knew where it could be.

#### CHANGE OF PERSONALITY IN HOSPITAL.

Four days after entering Cefn Coed Hospital the patient suddenly asked where she was and how she got there. She stated she had "come out of the fog" and now did not know what had been happening while she was in the fog. She was no longer dreamy and her voice had lost its affected drawl. She now gave her age as 22, and said her family had remarked on her dropping two years some months ago. She was now a brisk and alert personality, with a good intelligence, and somewhat alarmed at the predicament in which she found herself. She was fully co-operative and did her best to straighten things out, and she showed a normal astonishment at the conflicting stories she had given.

She now knew that her father was alive, though seriously ill, and she had no memory of a car accident. When she was visited by A— and his mother she did not know them. She said, "His face seemed familiar but I did not know that I had been out with him, nor do I remember staying at his home. He says I stayed there a week". She became very concerned about her relationship with A—. She treated the matter humorously on the surface, but underneath she was deeply alarmed. She wondered whether she was engaged to this unknown man, and she did not like to ask him what had happened between them. She could not describe his house, and all memory of her employment at Mrs. M—'s house had vanished. She had in her handbag a little girl's photograph which A— told her was Mrs. M—'s daughter, and she kept studying it, but was unable to recall anything about that part of her life. She also found a house key in her handbag which she could not account for. She had no idea why she had thought her house might be number 44 instead of 2, as she had never had anything to do with a house numbered 44.

When she was questioned about the other young man, B—, she was quite frank about him, and said she had met him once in Swansea about a year ago and certainly was not engaged to him. She knew nothing about the house he was supposed to have furnished, and she was never particularly interested in him. She was amazed when she heard the story she had told about her grandmother and said, "My grandmother is a patient in a mental hospital and has been for years. How could I have said such things!" She was entirely unable to recall where she had spent the night of February 21, and still had no idea where her luggage was.

As regards the Italian, whom she had not mentioned to us before, she was now quite definite, and gave the following account: She had met him in London two years before and was very much in love with him. He had a home ready for her and a very fine car which she always said was like a Rolls

Royce. When, however, she announced her engagement to her parents, they objected, and her father in particular was very upset about it. As she was so devoted to her father she developed a conflict, especially as her father was seriously ill with cancer. The Italian was to have come down in August, 1935, to see her father at G—, but when she refused to become a Catholic they quarrelled and he did not come. She had not seen him since, and did not know of his whereabouts at the present time.

On the fifth day after admission her visitors told her that her father had died. She took this very well and wrote a sympathetic and quite affectionate letter to her mother on the subject. It was found she had no memory of her father appearing to her at night.

#### METHOD OF INVESTIGATION.

The results in the case to date were now presented and discussed at a staff clinical meeting, where it was established that her amnesia began early in August, 1935. She remembered quite clearly "going out very worried for a walk" after quarrelling with her father over the question of getting married to the Italian; but "since then my head has been funny; I'd go out for walks and not know where I'd been". It was decided to investigate the case under hypnosis and try to fill up the blanks in her memory.

Hypnosis was induced with exceptional ease, and she passed readily into the deepest stage in which negative hallucinations could be produced. She was encouraged to fill up the gaps since August, 1935. The material she produced was extensive, but always to the point. She had five sittings of about one and a half hours each under hypnosis, during which she steadily recounted all she could remember of her movements in chronological order. We took notes of what she said, and next day cross-questioned her in the waking state on the previous day's revelations. Each day she still had occasional small gaps in the recollections recovered the previous day, and these were cleared up under hypnosis before proceeding further with her story. Hypnosis was induced by both of us, and the "rapport" could readily be transferred from one operator to the other as desired. In this way, by exploration in hypnosis, she eventually recalled almost *in toto* the events that had occurred during her six to seven months' amnesia.

It was found that she had been subject to a series of extensive fugues almost constituting a continuous fugue for the whole period. When, under hypnosis, she came to points in her story where she changed from one fugue sequence to another, she complained of momentary severe headaches at each change-over. In the early part of the story the headaches were occasional, but they gradually increased in frequency, and from her account of events in February, 1936, she seems to have had almost daily alternations of her personality, till the strain of events was lifted from her by admission to hospital.

## FINDINGS UNDER HYPNOSIS.

It was found that the amnesia was precipitated by a fall while in a highly emotional state, and was kept in operation by a resulting tangle of events from which she could not escape. When she went for the walk early in August after quarrelling with her father, she came to a quarry and heard a dog whimpering on a rock ledge below. She let herself down by a branch to the ledge to rescue the dog, but she slipped and fell some distance and seems to have been slightly concussed (evidence of first headache shown at this point). A week later she answered an advertisement and went to a post at Mrs. M—'s. At this stage she "forgot all about the Italian and my father", and in October she met the boy A— casually and became friendly with him. They were both keen cyclists and went out a good deal together. Later she was invited to his house on her days off duty and he fell in love with her. He told her this, but she "did not feel that way about him", and she "said he was not to say it again". Then she was reminded of her father by a letter from her mother (another headache). She went home to see him and found him very thin and changed. Her stepmother upbraided her for staying away so long. She tried to tell her stepmother that she had forgotten about her father, but she could not explain "it", and her stepmother said, "Don't be silly; how could you forget him?". She went back to Swansea (headache) and said at this point, "I had another bad head and forgot all about home again".

The other boy, B—, was now in Swansea and he began to cause her trouble. He, too, said he loved her and wanted to marry her. She did not like him particularly and quarrelled with him in order to discourage him, but the more she quarrelled with him the more he importuned her and she began to get frightened as she could not shake him off. Early in February B— said he had taken a house and was going to furnish it for her, and he persuaded her to go and look at it with him. He gave her the key and she put it in her bag. The house was No. 44. They had a violent quarrel because she still would not marry him, and she ran out of the house with the key in her handbag (more headaches at this point).

She now thought her father was dead and that she ought to leave Mrs. M— and go home to comfort her mother. At this time she "saw" her father every night when she was in bed, and she could not sleep because he kept "talking" to her. Then, a week before admission, the boy B— came round to see her at her place of employment, so she decided definitely she must leave Swansea, and she "got more bad heads". The next day Mrs. M— was out and patient suddenly decided to go to Cardiff. She said under hypnosis, "My mind was again not my own". When she went up to get her suitcase she found she had already packed her clothes, so she left immediately. At the station she had to wait an hour and a half for the next train to Cardiff, and the ticket-collector offered to mind her suitcase while she got some food in a

shop across the road. "In the shop I came to myself again and did not know what it was I had been intending to do." So she went to A—'s house. She could not explain there what she had done because she did not know. A—'s mother asked her to stay, and she remained there all the week, but there were a lot of headaches.

On February 21 (the day before admission) she went into the town from A—'s house to get her hair waved and accidentally met B— again. This upset her so much that her "head felt too bad" to get her hair done, and she went back to A—'s house in a thoroughly muddled state, intending again definitely to leave Swansea. Her recollections of this period under hypnosis were not as complete and orderly as all the previous part of her story had been, and she kept interrupting her account with storms of headaches and rapid changes of outlook as first one personality and then the other took up the story. It seems she left A—'s house in the evening to go and say good-bye to Mrs. M—, but instead she wandered about the country round Swansea all night. She arrived outside Mrs. M—'s house about 7.30 a.m. on February 22 (the day of admission), and at this point she said, "I suddenly realized I didn't know what I was doing, so I did not go in". She then thought she would throw herself under a car and end it all. Instead she drifted to B—'s house, and still having the key, went in and sat down. B— found her there, and there was more quarrelling. Eventually he took her for a ride in his car. When he was driving fast near A—'s house she saw a child in the road, and as he took no notice she caught hold of the steering-wheel and the car ran into a wall. She thinks she must have knocked her head against the top of the car, and that B— was bleeding from a cut, but not seriously hurt. She remembers thinking that B— was her stepbrother, but is quite confused about how she got to A—'s house again. She remembered being taken to the General Hospital to see if her stepbrother was there, and she found the building unknown to her though she should know it quite well, having frequently visited her father when he was a patient there before her troubles began.

She was in such a vacillating, confused state in the last twenty-four hours before admission that she was not able to recall all she had thought and done. One illustration of this is her story about her grandmother. As has been already mentioned in the history, her grandmother is a patient in a mental hospital, and just before she left Mrs. M—'s post the girl received a letter from the grandmother asking for a visit. She explains, "I was in such a muddle I thought my grandmother was coming to see me, and the Italian's car was like a Rolls Royce, so I thought she was coming in that".

#### FURTHER PROGRESS.

The gaps in her memory were thus almost completely filled up, and explanations of the psychogenic nature of her illness and its causes were given to her in the waking state. She was intelligent, and readily accepted these after

putting some shrewd questions about the workings of her mind. She behaved normally in the ward and remained quite well till just before her first week-end at home, when she became temporarily unsettled as discussed below. She was discharged from hospital on March 22, and two weeks later called at the hospital to report her progress. She now appeared poised and well-balanced and was arranging to take up a post again from home, as she did not get on well with her stepmother. The result is, up to the present, complete recovery, and the patient is leading a happy, useful life.

#### DISCUSSION.

Where this patient's story, as given under hypnosis, could be checked it was found to be correct. A striking example of this was the resulting recovery of her luggage from the railway station, where it had been left exactly as she described. The car accident could not be verified, and here we feel some difficulty. The occurrence of the accident so near to A—'s house seems to be stretching coincidence too far. If it did occur as she described it her continued vagueness about it might be accounted for by a superimposed traumatic confusion, but in that case why was she allowed to find her own way to A—'s house alone? On the whole one feels that the accident did not occur, and that here hypnosis tapped a phantasy arising either out of her admitted confusion on that day, or purposely elaborated to divert A—'s attention from her inexplicable absence all night. It is regretted, for the sake of completeness, that the boy B— was not interviewed. He undoubtedly existed, because her relatives knew him, but it was felt advisable that he should lose all touch with her whereabouts.

The change in her personality when she "came out of the fog" four days after admission was most striking and definite. While "in the fog" she was dreamy and silly, and could easily be labelled an hysterical person. After the sudden change she showed no further hysterical manifestations except at the appropriate places in her recital under hypnosis. She was normally a level-headed girl who knew her own mind, and was most unlikely to have got herself into the tangle of events she related. There is no doubt she was no longer in effective control of her actions after her fall down the quarry. The dissociation then produced led to difficulties that were dealt with inadequately by further dissociation. She frequently used words in her narrative which showed that she appreciated her difficulties and wanted to run away from them: "Here am I giving up the Italian for my father and God has taken my father from me. How I wish I could be someone else to please my mother! There was my father and the Italian. There was B— and A—. I just did not know what to do. I thought I would just go away and leave them altogether."

The underlying temperamental defect in her character was revealed before her discharge when it was arranged that she went home for a week-end to test

herself. As the time approached she lost her poise and became upset, obviously distrusting her ability to meet the situation, even though she knew the facts had been explained to her relatives. She tried to evade the issue till firm pressure was put on her to make her go. She returned confident, and her relatives reported they found her more normal than she had been for many months. This disinclination to face facts was specially pointed out to her, and its general bearing on her troubles was made clear to her. She was a strongly extroverted personality in sudden acute conflict with a father whom she adored, and a stepmother with whom it is known she could not get on. She was remarkably easily hypnotized and passed rapidly into the deepest stage, in which a single suggestion that there was no such letter as Y in the alphabet resulted in her writing her name with a blank space for the omitted Y. It is obvious that such a personality is easily dissociated. So the shock of falling in the quarry while in a state of emotional turmoil was sufficient to initiate an amnesia. The disinclination to face facts was the fundamental underlying cause, and this allowed the dissociation to remain and increase its scope. In this connection it ought perhaps to be mentioned that nothing she need be ashamed of had occurred between her and the men involved in her story.

As McDougall (2) points out in his *Outline of Abnormal Psychology*, fugues, somnambulisms, hysterical fits and alternating personalities are all manifestations in varying degrees of the same fundamental psychopathological process, namely, a tendency to dissociation. This dissociation may be slight, involving only perhaps a limb, and will then manifest itself as a conversion symptom, or may result in a profound cleavage of the entire personality, so that two or more subsidiary personalities may alternately take possession of the self-regarding sentiment. This patient would appear to have had a dissociation of marked degree which, if untreated, might even have progressed further.

We are indebted to the Medical Superintendent, Dr. N. Moulson, for permission to publish this case.

*References.*—(1) Copeland and Kitching, "Hypnosis in Mental Hospital Practice", *Journ. Ment. Sci.*, 1937.—(2) McDougall's *Outline of Abnormal Psychology*.