

INTRODUCTION TO PSYCHO-ANALYSIS AND THE WAR NEUROSES - (1919)

This small book on the war neuroses - the opening volume of our Internationale Psychoanalytische Bibliothek - deals with a subject which until recently enjoyed the advantage of being in the greatest degree topical. When it came up for discussion at the Fifth Psycho-Analytical Congress, which was held in Budapest in September, 1918, official representatives from the highest quarters of the Central European Powers were present as observers at the papers and other proceedings. The hopeful result of this first contact was that the establishment of psycho-analytic Centres was promised, at which analytically trained physicians would have leisure and opportunity for studying the nature of these puzzling disorders and the therapeutic effect exercised on them by psycho-analysis. Before these proposals could be put into effect, the war came to an end, the state organizations collapsed and interest in the war neuroses gave place to other concerns. It is, however, a significant fact that, when war conditions ceased to operate, the greater number of the neurotic disturbances brought about by the war simultaneously vanished. The opportunity for a thorough investigation of these affections was thus unluckily lost - though, we must add, the early recurrence of such an opportunity is not a thing to be desired.

But this episode, though it is now closed, was not without an important influence on the spread of psycho-analysis. Medical men who had hitherto held back from any approach to psycho-analytic theories were brought into closer contact with them when, in the course of their duties as army doctors, they were obliged to deal with war neuroses. The reader will be able to gather from Ferenczi's paper with what hesitations and under what disguises these closer contacts were made. Some of the factors which psycho-analysis had recognized and described long before as being at work in peace-time neuroses - the psychogenic origin of the symptoms, the importance of unconscious instinctual impulses, the part played in dealing with mental conflicts by the primary gain from being ill ('the flight into illness') - were observed to be present equally in the war neuroses and were accepted almost universally. Simmel's studies show, too, what successes could be achieved by treating war neurotics by the method of catharsis, which, as we know, was the first step towards the psycho-analytic technique.

There is, however, no need to consider that these approaches to psycho-analysis imply any reconciliation or any appeasement of opposition. Suppose someone has hitherto rejected the whole of a complex of interdependent propositions, but now suddenly finds himself in a position to convince himself of the truth of one portion of the whole. It might be thought that he will begin to hesitate about his opposition in general and permit himself some degree of deferent expectation that the other portion, about which he has had no personal experience and can consequently form no judgement of his own, may also turn out to be true. This other portion of psycho-analytic theory, with which the study of the war neuroses did not come into contact, is to the effect that the motive forces which are expressed in the formation of symptoms are sexual and that neuroses arise from a conflict between the ego

and the sexual instincts which it repudiates. ('Sexuality' in this context is to be understood in the extended sense in which it is used in psycho-analysis and is not to be confused with the narrower concept of 'genitality'.) Now it is quite true, as Ernest Jones remarks in his contribution to this volume, that this portion of the theory has not yet been proved to apply to the war neuroses. The work that might prove it has not yet been taken in hand. It may be that the war neuroses are altogether unsuitable material for the purpose. But the opponents of psycho-analysis, whose dislike of sexuality is evidently stronger than their logic, have been in a hurry to proclaim that the investigation of the war neuroses has finally disproved this portion of psycho-analytic theory. They have been guilty here of a slight confusion. If the investigation of the war neuroses (and a very superficial one at that) has not shown that the sexual theory of the neuroses is correct, that is something very different from its showing that that theory is incorrect. With the help of an impartial attitude and a little good will, it should not be hard to find the way to a further clarification of the subject.

The war neuroses, in so far as they are distinguished from the ordinary neuroses of peace-time by special characteristics, are to be regarded as traumatic neuroses whose occurrence has been made possible or has been promoted by a conflict in the ego. Abraham's paper affords good evidence for this conflict, which has also been recognized by the English and American writers quoted by Jones. The conflict is between the soldier's old peaceful ego and his new warlike one, and it becomes acute as soon as the peace-ego realizes what danger it runs of losing its life owing to the rashness of its newly formed, parasitic double. It would be equally true to say that the old ego is protecting itself from a mortal danger by taking flight into a traumatic neurosis or to say that it is defending itself against the new ego which it sees is threatening its life. Thus the precondition of the war neuroses, the soil that nourishes them, would seem to be a national army; there would be no possibility of their arising in an army of professional soldiers or mercenaries.

Apart from this, the war neuroses are only traumatic neuroses, which, as we know, occur in peace-time too after frightening experiences or severe accidents, without any reference to a conflict in the ego.

The theory of the sexual aetiology of the neuroses, or, as we prefer to say, the libido theory of the neuroses, was originally put forward only in relation to the transference neuroses of peace-time and is easy to demonstrate in their case by the use of the technique of analysis. But its application to the other disorders which we later grouped together as the narcissistic neuroses already met with difficulties. An ordinary dementia praecox, a paranoia or a melancholia are essentially quite unsuitable material for demonstrating the validity of the libido theory or for serving as a first introduction to an understanding of it; and it is for that reason that psychiatrists, who neglect the transference neuroses, are unable to come to terms with it. But the traumatic neuroses of peace-time have always been regarded as the most refractory material of all in this respect; so that the emergence of the war neuroses could not introduce any new factor into the situation that already existed.

It only became possible to extend the libido theory to the narcissistic neuroses after the concept of a 'narcissistic libido' had been put forward and applied - a concept, that is, of an amount of sexual energy attached to the ego itself and finding satisfaction in the ego just as satisfaction is usually found only in objects. This entirely legitimate development of the concept of sexuality promises to accomplish as much for the severer neuroses and for the psychoses as can be expected of a theory which is feeling its way forwards on an empirical basis. The traumatic neuroses of peace will also fit into the scheme as soon as a successful outcome has been reached of our investigations into the relations which undoubtedly exist between fright, anxiety and narcissistic libido.

The traumatic neuroses and war neuroses may proclaim too loudly the effects of mortal danger and may be silent or speak only in muted tones of the effects of frustration in love. But, on the other hand, the ordinary transference neuroses of peace-time set no aetiological store by the factor of mortal danger which, in the former class of neuroses, plays so mighty a part. It is even held that the peace-time neuroses are promoted by indulgence, good living and inactivity - which would afford an interesting contrast to the living-conditions under which the war neuroses develop. If they were to follow the example of their opponents, psycho-analysts, finding that their patients had fallen ill owing to frustration in love (owing to the claims of the libido being unsatisfied) would have to maintain that there can be no such things as danger-neuroses or that the disorders that appear after frightening experiences are not neuroses. They have, of course, no notion of maintaining any such thing. On the contrary, a convenient possibility occurs to them of bringing the two apparently divergent sets of facts together under a single hypothesis. In traumatic and war neuroses the human ego is defending itself from a danger which threatens it from without or which is embodied in a shape assumed by the ego itself. In the transference neuroses of peace the enemy from which the ego is defending itself is actually the libido, whose demands seem to it to be menacing. In both cases the ego is afraid of being damaged - in the latter case by the libido and in the former by external violence. It might, indeed, be said that in the case of the war neuroses, in contrast to the pure traumatic neuroses and in approximation to the transference neuroses, what is feared is nevertheless an internal enemy. The theoretical difficulties standing in the way of a unifying hypothesis of this kind do not seem insuperable: after all, we have a perfect right to describe repression, which lies at the basis of every neurosis, as a reaction to a trauma - as an elementary traumatic neurosis.