The Mind at Mischief

1 - Preliminaries

Tricks and Deceptions of the Subconscious and
How to Cope with Them

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First published - September, 1929
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Chapter 1

Preliminaries

1.1 Other Books By Dr. Sadler

- The Essentials of Healthful Living
- The Physiology of Faith and Fear
- Worry and Nervousness
- The Truth About Mind Cure
- Americanitis: Blood Pressure and Nerves
- Constipation - How to Cure Yourself
- How to Reduce and How to Gain
- The Mother and Her Child
- How to Feed The Baby
- The Cause and Cure of Colds
- The Truth About Heredity
- The Elements of Pep
- Personality and Health
- How You Can Keep Happy

1.2 The Author’s Preface

VERY few of those individuals who suffer from “nerves”, “emotional conflicts”, and other “abnormal complexes”, understand to what extent they are subjects of deception and malicious intrigue on the part of their own minds. A number of excellent books have been written about fear, worry, and the more common phases of the functional nervous disorders, and these books have been helpful to the layman in his effort to understand himself psychologically. We have abundant literature also on the psychoses or the insanities, intended for the professional reader; but practically nothing has been written on those cases of abnormal psychology which occupy a middle ground between these two groups.
It is my intention, in this work, to discuss abnormal psychology of the more benign sorts, “the tricks of the subconscious mind”. I hope thus to assist the layman in understanding these matters more fully, and I trust that the book will prove to be helpful to many men and women who are struggling with intellectual vagaries, contending with one sort or another of “complex” which is causing them serious trouble.

I have long felt the need, in my own practice, of some book which I could place in the hands of a patient - or of his friends - to aid him in his effort to reconstruct his intellectual life and bring his mental workings into more normal channels. And so this volume will deal with the problems of more or less abnormal psychology, paying particular attention to such phenomena as they are exhibited in neurotics, complex victims, hysterics, paranoids, and even so-called spirit mediums. I have been afforded an opportunity, in association with my colleagues in the Chicago Institute of Research and Diagnosis, to observe, over a period of twenty years, a large number of men and women who were sufferers from various personality disturbances - chronic fear, inferiority and other complexes, hysteria, dissociation - as well as a large number of clairvoyants, psychics, automatic writers, trance mediums, etc. It is my purpose to draw upon this experience and to relate the methods employed by modern psychotherapy in dealing with this group of psychic abnormalities.

In my own mind I have long divided psychic sufferers into three groups: victims of the neuroses, of the psychoses, and of personality disturbances. The neuroses embrace common, every-day worry, various forms of fear, phobias, and obsessions, together with brain-fag, so-called neurasthenia, psychoasthenia, and hypochondria. The psychoses embrace the insanities - those mental disturbances of sufficient gravity to unbalance the mind. Under the head of personality disturbances I have thought it best to include those psychic disturbances which, tho more profound and more serious than the neuroses, are not of sufficient gravity to be classed as psychoses; and under this head I group mild forms of dissociation, hysteria, and the more persistent types of mental troubles due to what we may call “tricks of the subconscious”. Into this last group fall many of our so-called psychics and spirit mediums.

I am indebted to numerous American and foreign authors who have done so much in recent years to enrich the literature dealing with this borderland of abnormal psychology. I must also acknowledge my obligation to Robert H. Gault, PhD., Professor of Psychology, Northwestern University, for his painstaking criticism of this manuscript, and express my appreciation of Dr. Gault’s great kindness in writing his Introduction. I am greatly indebted to my colleague, Dr. Meyer Solomon, Associate in Neurology, Northwestern University Medical School, for his careful reading of the manuscript and for his many helpful suggestions, which have added to the repletion of this volume; also for his kindness in preparing a valuable Introduction embodying the neurologist’s view of this discussion.

WILLIAM S. SADLER
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August, 1929

1.3 The Psychologist’s Introduction

WE ARE hearing of the “defense reaction” to-day in many connections. Our interest in sports and our following after the games, we are told, is a defense against the tedium of the routine that fills our lives. Our seeking after intoxication is a reaction of defense against the sordid conditions in which we live and work, or against the humdrum of a daily life that contains no element of romance. In intoxication and in sport are escapes from the real and hateful into a world of fascinating imagery and stimulating romantic struggle. In religion is our defense against the sense of insecurity and of transitoriness that we associate with worldly affairs. The bombast of the bully, his “feeling big”, is
his defense reaction opposed to a sense of inferiority which he cannot tolerate and which he therefore seeks to crush. As one runs through the literature of the psychiatrist and the psychoanalyst of the day, one gains the impression that much of our behavior and almost every emotional reaction that one experiences is a defense; not a defense, to be sure, that one makes deliberately and with foresight, but automatically, one might say, as an indoor plant by the window bends toward the light, away from the dark.

We need not be surprised, therefore, when we discover that the inner urge that drives tens of thousands in the spirit of curiosity, of earnest belief, or of longing, to the private séance where materializations are assumed to be seen and felt, to the auditorium and to the book markets where volumes on the occult are on sale; we need not be surprised, I say, if this inner urge is interpreted as a reaction of defense. But a defense against what in this instance? We are told that the conventional religion of the day is sterilized by dogma; that theology and formalism have brought it to a sorry pass; that it no longer stimulates faith in a life beyond the grave, and that it awakens no anticipatory imagery of continuing constructive activity on our part or of resting in Elysian fields - all this, now and again, from the mouth of the destructive critic. But human nature cries out for continuity beyond the veil. There is that in us that will not tolerate an abrupt closing of accounts, at the moment of death, with all that we have learned to cherish. Precisely, then, as the ditch-digger and the salesmen at the ribbon-counter, as a measure of defense, must get away from their real but unromantic existence by intoxication or in sport, so each one of the masses who follows the occult is rebellious against the termination of existence for his friends and against his own impending finale. Many of them no longer find sufficient defense in the current religion and religious practices, and they turn their faces, therefore, toward materializations so-called, that seem to promise them immediate demonstration of the reality of a continuous existence.

We are never critical of our defenses - of defenses in the sense in which we use the term. We are not in the habit, for instance, of standing off to gaze narrowly upon our day-dreams and to inquire whether our castles in the air have a substantial foundation; how we can ride upon a charger in battle when we are a thousand miles from the army in the field. Whilst we are participating in sport, either as spectator or otherwise, we never stop for a cold weighing of the question whether we have really escaped from sordid affairs. We are satisfied with the air-castle, with the charger, and with participation in the game, and that is the end of it. The follower of the occult likewise is satisfied. The “appearances” he accepts. To deny them is for the seeker to stand in the way of the great urge of his nature. It is, in fact, as much a denial of his nature as it would be for the plant by the window, by taking thought of itself, to attempt a perpendicular growth. We are dealing here, only in other terms, with the “will to believe”, the great urge of human nature to accept rather than to reject.

While we are thinking of this phenomenon - the running after mediums and materializations - and describing it as a defense reaction, let me suggest that it is determined in some measure by the times and circumstances. The girl wearied by hours of working button-holes would not find defense in a day-dream in which she entertains herself with imagery of touring the country roads in a high-powered car if the automobile were yet to be invented, or if touring were not a very highly favored form of recreation. Likewise there is a spirit of the age that helps on a reaction of defense that consists in a following after so-called spiritualistic phenomena. A materialistic spirit abroad is making its contribution.

The author of this book has done a real service to science and to the general public by means of his searching investigations into the nature and operations of neurotics, hysterics, and psychics, and no less by publishing his results and interpretations in not technical form. In the practice of his profession he has come into intimate personal contact with a large and interesting group of men and women who exhibit some phase or another of abnormal psychology. To these contacts he has brought a clear vision for details, and has recorded in this book his conclusions respecting the nature and technique of these numerous psychic phenomena.
The psychiatrists of our day are showing us that in the background of our personalities are wells of latent memories that may account, literally by the wholesale, for the phenomena of dreams, automatic writings, "spirit communications", and many of the phenomena connected with hysteria, dissociation, and other abnormal psychic states.

The remarkable sensitivity of unusual individuals must bear a relation to many of the cases we have in mind. The report of Hansen and Lehmann upon a case of alleged thought-transference or telepathy has tremendous significance. The two subjects of their investigations had bewildered the English public with "demonstrations" of telepathic communication. In the experimental situation they were blindfolded and stationed one at each end of a long hallway. One of them was able to report correctly in a large proportion of instances what was in the other's thought, and this was being accepted as proof of the transfer of thought-waves from one to the other by unnatural - or supernatural - means. But when the investigators had erected a sound-reflector at one end of the hall so constructed that its focus was at the opposite end, and when the transmitter was placed before it, the other man at the opposite extremity of the hall was much more successful than he had ever been before in interpreting his companion's thought. Only one hypothesis can explain this experience. The transmitter's thought was registered without his knowledge in delicate vibrations of his vocal apparatus. These vibrations were transmitted to the air and through it to the supersensitive ear of the receiver. Unusual, indeed! But such sensitivity is not unknown, in certain hysterical types, at any rate. Indeed, we are now learning that the capacities of normal persons to learn to make sensory discriminations of fine differences are beyond our dreams of the extraordinary. In experiments initiated and directed by the writer, normal individuals are learning to interpret human speech by means of the vibrations of another's vocal organs when they are conducted instrumentally to the learner's fingers. The deaf in his laboratory are learning to interpret speech by its feel, to correct their own vocal expression thereby, and by the same means to acquire the pleasures of a language-sense. Not only so, but we have unquestionable evidence from the war-maimed and others of the capacity of men to make extraordinary adaptations to situations that give pause to those of us who are in possession of the normal capacities of human kind.

Truly we are but at the threshold of our knowledge of the latent psychic powers of men.

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1.4 The Neurologist's Introduction

The problems with which Dr. Sadler is grappling in this book, "The Mind at Mischief", are unfortunately too often neglected. All too frequently, also, they are approached from a single-track and narrow-minded standpoint.

The large number of so-called functional nervous disorders and allied phenomena of abnormal psychology are in need of more widespread and popular discussion, with the avoidance of faddism and extremism. It is only thus that the field of neuro-psychiatry will come into its own. It is here that one sees constantly the inter-relations of medicine, especially in the field of nervous and mental disorders, with such universally important psychological phenomena as dreams and spiritualistic séances, on the one hand, and of emotional conflicts of one sort or another with the stresses and strains of daily life, on the other hand.

Most persons have been struggling blindly to adjust themselves to life, to understand and to learn how to manage life and themselves. Adjustments have often been made uncritically. As a result of this uncritical thinking, many false theories or explanations of the human make-up and reactions
have been put forward. There is a crying need for education in health matters, not only in respect to physical hygiene, but also in the domain of mental hygiene, at least from the adolescent period onward, and most surely in adult life. The sooner such self-understanding and self-guidance comes to a developing individual, the better for him. It is to be regretted that, in spite of much book-knowledge, so many of us have not gained this essential insight into ourselves, our fellow men, and life as it is and as it is being lived. It is by an unprejudiced and scientific exposition of the meaning and nature of functional nervous disorders and other forms of maladjustment that we may be helped to such desirable self-knowledge.

To live is to fight. It is a fight to understand and manage and live harmoniously with other persons, other things, and ourselves. We are being driven on by certain impulsive urges. Obstacles to the fulfillment of our desires are constantly arising in our path, both within and without ourselves. We must learn how to play the game of life with efficiency and poise. Alas, much too frequently and too easily, for one reason or another, we are in danger of losing, or actually are losing our poise and equilibrium. When we have temporarily lost our poise - due to the blocking of our needs or wishes - with resulting mental conflict, emotional struggle, stress, strain, and tension, we battle for recovery of poise and inner harmony. In our ignorance, weakness, blindness, helplessness, or misfortune, driven on by urgent wishes, anxieties, and fears, panic-stricken, like a drowning man grasping for a straw, we seize upon harmful, false, or foolish ways out of our difficulties - methods that cause us to flee from reality and that do not really help us to solve our life's problems and meet them intelligently, squarely, and manfully. It is at such times that we are especially suggestible. It is then that we look for, in fact crave, help, guidance, and direction. Not infrequently at such times the blind are led by the blind, or, still worse, by the charlatan and quack. And so arise our psychological and health cults, fads, and fancies. Thus the susceptible flock about the banners of superstition and myth.

It is to such that the message of common sense, which Dr. Sadler here gives, should be most welcome. What is more, it is because of the need of preventing such harmful psychological reactions that his book is particularly helpful.

The struggle of life really reduces itself to efforts in gaining more and more efficiency and poise in making adjustments and satisfying our fundamental yearnings. Dr. Sadler is here showing us inefficient, unhealthy ways of adjustment. They represent undue lack of poise and equilibrium in meeting "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune". He has, perforce, been compelled to deal with human wishes and hungers, unhappiness and happiness, emotional conflicts and forms of mental dissociation. He has made a useful classification of our wishes by grouping the various human impulses under the following five headings:

1. The life urge - the self-preservation instincts.
2. The sex urge - the reproductive instincts.
3. The worship urge - the religious emotions.
4. The power urge - the ego group of instincts.
5. The social urge - the herd group of instincts.

From my own experience and thought upon this subject I can wholeheartedly agree that such an all-inclusive classification more nearly represents the facts than that given by most writers dealing with this phase of normal and abnormal psychology.

It so happens that Dr. Sadler is eminently well fitted to present the subject matter of this book. He is well grounded in the theoretical and practical aspects of medicine and surgery. Day in and day out he is meeting with the practical problems of nervous disorders of a functional nature (that is, of emotional origin). Fortunately, years ago he began to take a deep and active interest in these
problems. Being a thorough student of whatever he undertakes, while at the same time of a practical bent, he has combed the best literature and practices in this field and has put them to the acid test of every-day clinical experience. He is, I am happy to say, a free lance. He belongs to no set school or dogma. Like the bee flitting from flower to flower, he has taken whatever of value he could find from the best students in abnormal psychology (Janet, Prince, Freud and his followers, McDougall, and others) and combined them, with additions of his own, into a very valuable presentation of the phenomena of the subconscious. At the same time, with the avoidance of mysticism, he has explained the situation in such a simple, direct, clear-cut and interesting manner, that anyone of average education can follow him from beginning to end. The training Dr. Sadler has had in writing his numerous previous books on this and related questions, has been of decided help in laying a strong foundation for this one.

We have, then, in this book, a popular, scientifically correct, sensible and practical exposition of the subconscious. "The Mind at Mischief" richly deserves a wide circulation.

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