

CHAPTER 14

CONSCIOUS SCHIZOPHRENIA

IF PSYCHOLOGY lacks something in the way of being a science, it has nevertheless enriched the language. Take the word schizophrenia. That's a mouthful; once the tongue has mastered this polysyllable the temptation is strong to use it freely, usually to describe an irresponsible person whom you don't like. That, however, is gross name-calling and does injustice to the fellows who are trying so hard to elevate psychology to a science.

What they mean by schizophrenia is a pathological condition of the mind; the patient suffering from it (although they say he doesn't suffer at all, but rather enjoys his ailment) finds it difficult to cope with reality and takes refuge in a world of dreams. It seems that this slipping off the cliff

of reality becomes automatic, that the patient's mind is completely out of his control. His will doesn't function.

However, with apologies to the psychological fraternity, I beg leave to borrow this fine word to describe the mental apparatus of men who, by all the known standards, must be accounted quite sane, but who likewise periodically give the world they live in the go-by. In fact, these men must be designated as men of superior intelligence and above the average discernment; sometimes they are called the "intellectually curious." They, too, regularly drift off into illusionary realms, but unlike their pathological counterparts they do so deliberately and quite consciously. They do so, indeed, to retain their sanity, which is under constant bombardment in the environment in which they are compelled by the need of existence to live. They split their personalities, so to speak, between the real and the ideal because of an inner necessity. They are—I hope the psychologists will indulge this free use of their word—conscious schizophrenics.

The conscious schizophrenic (hereinafter designated by the symbol C-S, to save typesetting) can be described but not explained. He was not dropped on his head in infancy, his father may or may not have been a drunkard, his mother never spat into his eye. Mental diagnosis cannot fathom the tap-root of his capacity for distinguishing between principle and behavior, between good and bad, between the beautiful and the ugly. All that can be said of him is that somewhere along the road of experience he picked up that mysterious thing called values, by which he measures the ideas and practices of the social order he was born into; and he has a habit of finding that social order somewhat below his mark. His yearning for something better takes the form of either open criticism or silent resignation; in either case he finds it necessary to take mental flight to a world in which his

standards prevail. He is an Epictetus, a Thoreau or a Nock, if he had the gift of articulation, or he is my farmer friend in Vermont who shuts himself up with a well-prepared library every fall. Then, again, he might be the successful stock broker who admits he is nothing but a croupier and finds it necessary to take an intellectual bath every evening lest he lose all respect for himself.

But, what is there in the make-up of this C-S that acts as a magnet for values? His peculiarity is accentuated by the fact that most of his neighbors are as immune as their quadruped brothers. You cannot dismiss the matter by inventing a word for it, like "complex"; that explains nothing. Is it a "complex" that causes the editor of a daily sheet to recognize the obscenity of his own headlines?

Nor can you toss off the C-S by labeling him "maladjusted." The fact is, he is so well adjusted that, if he has a mind to, he can squeeze out of the social order a larger share of the material things it has to offer than those who find it the best of all possible worlds. He conforms because it pays him to conform, not because he is impelled to it by animal instinct. He is the ex-soldier who knows that the "G.I. Bill of Rights" is an outright fraud, says so, and deliberately takes advantage of it to the hilt. The run-of-the-mill veteran may do the same thing but is incapable of questioning the rightness or wrongness of it.

I know a lawyer employed by the Internal Revenue Bureau who describes himself as a chaser of cheaters who cheat the cheaters; is he maladjusted because he recognizes a basic immorality in the work he is doing? (Or is he, forsooth, suffering from a sex disorder?) A successful practitioner in psychology—or is it psychiatry?—tells his close friends that the rich women who maintain his establishment could best be cured of their ailments with a scrubbing-board or a horse-whip; is he maladjusted because he pre-

scribes otherwise, takes their money, and then repairs to a volume of Byron to save his wits? No verbal ingenuity can make a mental case out of the man whose intellectual integrity is a notch above his behavior.

The C-S reveals himself only to his equal, and without the aid of a psychiatric couch or a dimly lighted confessional. If you hit him as one who can understand, the advertising man will gladly tell you how he gets the stench of his slogans out of his nostrils by nightly association with the mediaevalists. The man of affairs who has just come from a session in Washington needs no other shock treatment; he rids his lungs of the foul air he has been breathing by a tour among his rare book collection. It is under the compulsion of his values that the union leader tells you, privately, how rotten his business is. But, only a C-S can detect one; the professional mind-healer, whose standard of mental health is conformity to an average, will never understand him. (By the way, does this fetish of happiness-through-conformity reduce psychology to hifalutin propaganda for Socialism?)

Sometimes the C-S lets his values get the better of his judgment, and then he teeters on the brink of real schizophrenia. It is when he makes the assumption that his values ought to be common property and decides "to do something about it." He becomes a reformer. His reason should tell him that the people he proposes to reform would have come to his values if they had been susceptible in the first place. They escaped contagion simply because they were immune. That being so, what sense is there in trying to reform them?

The best that a reform movement can accomplish—barring the use of force, which reforms nothing—is to give wider advertising to its values and thereby catch a few of the sensitized who somehow escaped. That is about all the profit the reformer can reasonably expect for his efforts, aside from the specious self-glorification of "doing good."

On the debit side, there is the inestimable harm of uprooting many from their comfortable ignorance. They were far better off when they knew nothing about the values they are constitutionally incapable of absorbing.

When you consider the futility of reform, to which all history gives evidence, you begin to understand the C-S. You no longer wonder why the rich man, whose private life is adorned with virtue and culture, consorts publicly with the official who (as the rich man will whisper to you) began his political career as a collector of tribute from prostitutes. Or, why many, recognizing the essential immorality of the income tax, will go to all extremes to avoid as much of it as the loopholes will allow, but will not raise a finger toward the repeal of the Sixteenth Amendment. So long as the conditions permit the enjoyment of a double life, indulging abstractions and principles in private while playing the practical game for all it is worth, sacrifice is out of order. Why should the professor of economics jeopardize his livelihood by refusing to teach what he knows to be distortions of fact and theoretical absurdities in the official text book? In the quiet of his den he reads the books that satisfy his sense of decency.

And this, by the devious route of speculation, brings us to Socialism and to Russia. When the privacy of property is denied the privacy of conscience cannot be tolerated. Ideals which do not conform with the prescribed "social good" are obviously a threat to it and must be obliterated. But, the C-S is by nature a non-conformist; ideals, principles, abstractions, values, insinuate themselves into his being with little or no invitation on his part. He is a rare bird, to be sure, and his habitat is everywhere, in the pent houses and in the slums, even in Russia; he is as ubiquitous as he is rare. Under the repressive conditions of Socialism he is more likely to rebel than where, as in this country, he can still indulge

his values in the privacy of his cronies. Hence, it can be concluded that there is a keener appreciation of freedom in Russia than in this country. The very strictness of surveillance is evidence that, even among the commissars, and even though it is unseen, there is a boiling pot of individualism in the U.S.S.R.

When, as seems inevitable, the U.S.A. is similarly turned into a semi-penal institution, and the C-S can neither enjoy the material things of life nor the luxury of his values, he will put his best foot forward. He will come all out for freedom, not because he gives a hoot for freedom in general but because he needs it to fulfill his own life. Every revolution in the history of the world was instigated by a frustrated individualist.

In the meantime, as the process of socialization increases in intensity and scope, you will find the C-S retreating more and more from the confining social order. The rich man will retire; the poor man will try his luck on a patch of land. Or, he will emigrate to the wilds of Brazil or Timbuktu. The first effect of Socialism on American Society will be the flight of that element which alone can give it cultural and spiritual tone. The conformist mob, entirely devoid of values, will take over and a low level of mediocrity will obtain. But, unfortunately for Socialism, the C-S will germinate even in its midst—he is that kind of bird—and will make trouble.

It is cheap moralizing to condemn the C-S as a hypocrite. Who is qualified by his own behavior to point the finger of scorn at him? Surely not the cleric whose pulpit rests on dollars the source of which had better not be investigated. Nor the reformer who profits by the very iniquity he aims to remove. Nor the president of a college plentifully endowed with privileges and monopoly profits. Every institution which enjoys tax-exemption is estopped from evaluating the status quo. And how many of us can truthfully say that

not one cent of our income is unearned, or, to go to the extreme, would reject a wage, a profit, or a dividend, or a subvention from the tax-fund? The C-S has the good grace to know (and sometimes to admit) that his existence is steeped in moral squalor; his flight to intellectual decency does him credit.

What is more, this rare bird is a carrier of values which would disappear from our ken if he were extinct. He chirps of freedom, of culture, of decency, even though he lives by other means, and his song is good to hear. Besides, if he did not exist, neither would this book.