PHANTASIES IN EVACUATED CHILDREN.

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In view of the many problems that are bound to arise in dealing with "displaced children" in Europe, we thought it might be useful to report the following cases, which illustrate the dangers in accepting accounts, however circumstantial, from children about traumatic situations which had occurred to them. The young child's difficulty in separating fact from phantasy is normally fairly pronounced. Under the impact of traumatic situations, such as personal injury, death or separation from the parents, this tendency to confuse fact and phantasy becomes still more marked.

Ronald P— (born 8.ix.35) was referred to Somerset Child Guidance Centre on 18.v.44 as dishonest, untruthful and uncontrollable by a billeting officer.

The school reported that he was backward in his work, a queer boy, got very excited and noisy, wanted attention. "He seems to have very little feeling for anybody; has no friends; other children find him irritating. He tells fantastic lies. Told neighbour that *his father was a fireman and had been in hospital since the Lewisham blitz.* His arithmetic, writing and spelling are poor." (He was examined 11.vi.44 by Miss Stephen, the County Psychologist, and found to have an I.Q. of 116.)

Miss Stephen reported that he thrives on success. At the beginning of the test I got the impression of a dull child, but he 'lit up.' He has initiative, spontaneity, and makes a good superficial relationship. He did not appear to be very attached to anyone. He is out to make a good impression. He told the psychologist he thought *he had been bombed out of London. He can remember having to stay in the house because there was shrapnel about.* He was not frightened of the blitz. He did not like snakes. There were so many snakes in the country he wants to go back to London after the war.

The Psychiatric Social Worker, Mrs. White, reported that this boy had been billeted for four years (i.e. since 1940, when he was 5) with an elderly woman and her husband in a remote part of the countryside. The billetors were very strict Nonconformists and had brought Ronald up in a religious way, sending him to Sunday School and meeting. The foster-mother was very fond of him, but her health was deteriorating and the foster-father appeared to be very anxious to get rid of Ronald. The foster-parents had a son of 14. Ronald's untruthfulness was a major sin in their estimation.

They had never succeeded in getting in touch with this boy's family, but they had noticed that on the boy's identity card the mother's family name was different to the boy's. The school had a new head mistress, who had found letters from the London authorities, stating that Ronald's father existed, wished to be responsible for the child, claimed that he would help with the boy's clothes, and stated his wife had deserted him.

In September, 1944, more correspondence came to light. A London official had reported in January, 1941, that the boy and his parents had been bombed out of their house and billeted in another part of London. The parents then disappeared, leaving the boy with the London billetor. He was subsequently evacuated with a party of schoolchildren.

Incidentally the father never sent any clothes, and the boy arrived in so ragged a condition in Somerset that his country foster-mother burnt the lot.

The boy was transferred from his billet to a hostel on 4.vii.44 and was seen by the Psychiatrist on 4.viii.44.

He gave a very circumstantial story of his London experiences. Asked about his mother, he stated that *the woman named on his identity card as his mother was not his real mother. His real mother got killed in the blitz. "We was bombed out and she was fast asleep. I was in the air raid shelter with my father; mother was there too. We got out before her; Dad got me out first; he*

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lifted me out of the front door of the shelter. Then he got out. A bomb landed when he got out. Then we ran away; we went straight across. We went back and she was dead. Shrapnel went through the middle of her stomach. The roof of the shelter was bent up. They buried her nearby. We went and found a billet about a mile away. We stayed with her a year. Daddy joined the Fire Brigade and lived with me. Then he found Mrs. R— (the name on the identity card) and went to live with her."

'*Cos the blitzes got worse he was evacuated. Mrs. R—'s house was not damaged, only the windows down; he don't like blitzes at all.*

In the four years he had been evacuated he had received no letters or parcels and had not been visited by either parent, Mrs. R—, or any other relation.

The Psychiatrist (F. B.) reported:

Either this boy has had a real emotional trauma in the air-raids, or else his emotional disturbance is so severe that it has produced this elaborate phantasy.

He attended the Somerset Child Guidance Clinic for treatment, and at his first session produced a drawing of a ship—Queen Mary, a common enough subject in boys of his age—but a remarkable detail was a diver underneath the ship attached by a life line and blowing a stream of bubbles. Asked his associations to the diver, he replied the diver in "Itma," the wireless programme, who it will be remembered appears sporadically during the programme, utters "Don't forget the Diver" and disappears again—a very apt delineation of the forgotten man (or boy). At subsequent sessions he drew a flagstaff with flag—he states flags are flown at school "when any person is dead."

He was fond of woodwork, and I noticed he seemed to enjoy the smell of glue, and tried to exploit his olfactory associations (14th session). The fish glue smell reminded him of fish and chips. He remembered being sent out by his father to get fish and chips. He could also remember buying percussion caps for his pistol. At the next session (15) I used a technique I have found useful in reviving old memories and encouraged him to draw a map of the road he lived in, putting in his own house, the shops, the cinema, the park, etc. He was able to fill in a good many details, including fish and chip shop, sweetshop, Woolworth's, church, clothiers, butcher, cobbler, underground station, bus stop, and remembered the number of the bus route.

In an early session (No. 7) he had stated that his mother had no time to play with him, never took him for a walk, but that she was never cross with him or hit him. After this reconstruction by map (Session 21.vi.45) he remembered that she was tall, dark, used to be cross with him when he went out in the rain and used to smack him.

In May, 1945, a letter was received from a Mrs. S— claiming she was Ronald's mother and asking for his return to her home in Suffolk. Further inquiries proved that she was formerly Mrs. R— (the person on Ronald's identity card). After her husband's death in the 1930's she had lived with Ronald's father, Mr. P—, who had deserted her at the time of the raids, taking Ronald with him. He had refused to tell her Ronald's whereabouts and had deserted Ronald, who had subsequently been evacuated by his billetor in 1940. Ronald was reluctant to believe that Mrs. R— was his mother (21st session). He claimed she was one of his billetors; he claimed that his mother was Mrs. P—, who had gone away and left him with his father, Mr. P—. He said he was placed with Mrs. R— by his father, that her house was a dirty place and he didn't like it at all. He thought he had been with Mrs. R— two years. But at the next session his own map of his London street was produced, and he agreed that this was where he lived with his mother, Mrs. R— and father, and remembered more details of the shelter arrangements, and remembered his father took him away from that home. Finally at the (25th) last session he produced a letter from his mother (now Mrs. S—), the first contact he had had in five years, inviting him to come and live with her in Suffolk. He was pleased and anxious to go back to her and ready to believe she really was his mother.

Discussion.

This boy's phantasy was a serious distortion of the facts. Actually his father had deserted him and his mother was alive. How had this distortion occurred? Reconstruction of the events suggest that at the age of 4 plus, when his identification with the father would be normally well developed, his father had taken him away from the mother. After air raid experiences of unknown severity, his father deserted him. But he was unwilling to give up his identification with the father hero. He had split up his mother into two components, a good mother with the same name as himself who he killed in an air raid—actually this phantasy suggests an elaboration of a parturition phantasy—and a "bad" mother, Mrs. R—, who had deserted him, and on whom he transferred his resentment at his father hero's desertion. For the good mother he flew a flag at half mast. The bad mother had dropped him overboard and left him forgotten, like the diver in deep water. But as his real memories as distinct from phantasies were recalled through the map technique, he was able to reintegrate them and finally accept the "bad" mother.

A somewhat similar case was Edward H— (18.i.36), seen first 23.viii.44, at the age of 8·7, and referred by a billeting officer because of alleged sex play with a little girl in his billet. He

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was examined by Miss Stephen, the County Psychologist, who reported that he had an I.Q. of 85; this estimate could not be considered absolutely accurate, as he appeared to be a very disturbed child.

He told the Psychologist (29.viii.44) that *he had been in the house with his mother and sister when it was bombed and that his mother's head was blown off, that he and his sister were hit in the leg, but that they picked the mother up and took her to hospital.*

He denied all sex play or exhibitionism firmly. He was seen by the Psychiatrist (5.ix.44) and told him the following story:

I lived at Downham in my own house; I got bombed out there. When the sirens went me and my big sister went to the shelter in the garden. It was night time. We picked up the dog and the kittens and took them down. The tom cat wouldn't come to the shelter. We heard a bang on the top of the shelter; I went out and we saw my little sister on the top of the shelter. She was killed. Mother was rushing down. Bomb hit her head on the forehead. It was bleeding. She was on the ground. It was dark. We had a torch. Mother was asleep; we tried to wake her up. Me and my sister picked her up. We went down the steps to the shelter. I held her feet, sister held her head; there were some bandages in the shelter. We bandaged her head; we thought she was alive. We was calling her. She wouldn't answer. We put her in the bunk. We lifted her head up and saw all the blood on the pillow. We screamed when we saw her dead. The house fell down when we got her in the shelter. When the "All clear" went, the bricks fell down and hit our legs. A bomb came down; bricks fell on her leg. Sister had both legs broken. I had a broken leg. I went up to police station. I only had one broken leg. I said me and my sister's got a broken leg. He 'phoned up the Coffin man. Coffin men came and took her (mother). I forget the place they took her to. Policeman 'phoned up the hospital. We didn't get bombed there. The cat got burned to bits, but we got to the shelter in time.

I have used the boy's actual words. Actually the sequence was very jumbled, but I have rearranged the order of sentences to give a consecutive narrative. If such a story had been true it is difficult to imagine a more traumatic experience for a boy of 4. If it was not true, the elaboration of such a phantasy indicated a very serious emotional disturbance.

We were fortunate in seeing the father on leave in December, 1944. He was a C.P.O. of many years' standing, in the Royal Navy and a good witness. He had obtained leave after the incident, visited his children in hospital and seen wardens and incident officers. He reported through Mrs. Sambrook, Assistant Psychologist, that during the raid the children were taken down to a shelter by a neighbour. The "All clear" had gone, the children came up and went home In all 11 people were in the house sitting round the table, while the mother was in the kitchenette getting tea. The house had a direct hit from a stray plane and 9 of the 11 were killed. The two children were the only survivors. The big sister of 17 had both legs broken, and Edward had a broken leg and a shrapnel wound in the forehead and was concussed and unconscious for a fortnight. An ambulance was on the spot at once, picked the children up, and took them to hospital. That night the hospital was bombed, but Edward was unconscious. Next day Edward was moved to another hospital, where he stayed two months. He was joined later by his sister.

Discussion.

In the light of this information it was possible to understand Edward's play, which had begun in November, 1944, with Mrs. Sambrook, under the direction of the Psychiatrist.

One of the main themes that kept recurring was a "tea party," which was observed 9 times in 17 play therapy sessions—obviously Edward was trying to reconstruct his last memories of the intact family.

Other incidents that occurred in his play were his comment on a "headless" woman figure, on a girl doll with a "broken" arm, a drawing of "armless" people. Radio sets were also a recurring theme. These he identified with their owners, some of whom were killed in the incident. Apparently the shelter he frequented in London had a radio and an electric fire. Both of these articles turned up in his play fairly often.

A considerable portion of his play time was taken up in water play with tubes and jets of water (12 sessions out of 17). This was obviously associated with his interest in his urinary excretion and was further associated with exhibitionistic tendencies, which were displayed in some remarkable drawings of a stage (6 sessions in all) in which much play was made of curtains being drawn and closed, and the objects on the stage were clearly "phallic" symbols. Associated with this activity was a good deal of play rehearsing bombing (5 sessions), and I came to the conclusion that his exhibitionism and sex play was also compulsive. That it seemed probable that just as he tried to reconstruct the family scene round the table, his last memory before the bomb fell, so his reconstruction of shelter life, with radio sets, electric fires, probably included sex play and exhibitionism, as it was clear that the children

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were sometimes left in the shelter by themselves. It seems probable that his guilt over the sex play and exhibitionism made him believe that the " loss of his family and his own injuries were a punishment for these practices." (*Vide* this phantasy of the *tom* cat that was burned ; he also told a long rambling story of a cruel butcher who killed a dog by hitting him on the head with an axe.)

His compulsive exhibitionism and sex play were, I think, motivated in a wish to prove that such practices were not invariably followed by disaster, and that he could not be held responsible for the death of his mother and relatives.

These phantasies have a close resemblance in the two examples quoted, though the first boy was of good average intelligence and the second boy was dull intellectually. In temperament, too, the boys differed, the first case showing a sturdy independence, the second boy being shy and withdrawn.

These two examples demonstrate how powerful are the internal emotional forces in the life of the child, and how they can use and distort the events in the child's external world to bolster up and justify the tendencies current at the particular phase of the child's inner life.

Unless social workers and welfare officers are alive to these possibilities of distortion from unconscious sources, they may possibly be misled seriously when dealing with children in their practical case-work in liberated areas.

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