

## IN MEMORIAM

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### Franz Alexander, M.D.

1891–1964

**F**RANZ ALEXANDER was born in Budapest, Hungary, in 1891. His father, of whom he was always very proud, was Bernard Alexander, professor of the history of philosophy at the University of Budapest, and well-known for his writings on philosophy and Shakespeare.

Franz Alexander studied medicine in the Universities of Budapest and Göttingen and in the Physiological Institute in Cambridge, England. He received his degree in medicine in Budapest in 1912, where he studied under Professor Franz Tangl, well-known physiologist, and Professor Leo Lieberman, physiological chemist. During the next three years, working at the Institute for Experimental Pathology under the guidance of Professor Tangl, he published three experimental studies on the metabolism of the brain.

After military service as a physician through the first World War, and while serving as assistant in the psychiatric clinic at the University of Budapest, he became acquainted with the works of Sigmund Freud and was soon convinced that the method of psychoanalysis was the key for the future study of mental and biological processes, both in psychiatry and in medicine as a whole.

He had a training analysis with Dr.

Hanns Sachs, and became one of the first students in the Psychoanalytic Institute at Berlin, which had just been opened by Dr. Max Eitingon. In 1924, he became a lecturer at the Berlin Psychoanalytic Institute, where he gave courses in psychoanalysis, chiefly for medical students and physicians. In 1930, he was invited to come to the University of Chicago as visiting professor of psychoanalysis. Here he gave introductory courses in psychoanalysis in the medical school, in the department of social sciences, in the law school, and in the school of social service administration.

In these early years, Alexander was much interested in the application of psychoanalysis to criminology, i.e., for the understanding and the diagnosis of criminal personalities. In his Berlin days, together with Hugo Staub, a lawyer and valuable co-worker, he published in 1929 a psychoanalytic study on criminology—*Der Verbecher und sein Richter* (published in English as *The Criminal, the Judge, and the Public*, Macmillan, 1931; republished in 1957 by The Free Press). In the same year, he started a seminar on criminology for judges and attorneys in the Berlin Psychoanalytic Institute. This interest led in 1931 to his being in-



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vited by the Judge Baker Foundation in Boston to undertake a research project in criminal psychology in collaboration with William Healy. The results of this study were published as *Roots of Crime* (Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1935).

Then, in 1932, he returned to Chicago to become the first director of the Chicago Institute for Psychoanalysis, founded in 1932, an organization devoted to the training of psychiatrists and to research in the field of psychoanalysis.

The first major research project which Alexander organized at the Institute for Psychoanalysis was a psychoanalytic study of emotional factors contributing to the causation of peptic ulcers and other gastrointestinal disturbances. This project was unique in several respects. First, it was a collective psychoanalytic study. Traditionally, psychoanalytic research had been done by individuals as a part of private practice. One disadvantage of this traditional approach was the fact that an analyst often had to wait years before he had another comparable case to study. In this collective research at the Institute it was possible for a number of analysts to select a considerable number of cases of the same kind, to make extensive notes on each interview, and thus to obtain records which could be studied over and over again and systematically compared.

A second unique feature of this research was its underlying working hypothesis that the emotional factors underlying some somatic diseases are of a specific nature. Previously, the notion that psychic factors played a role in somatic illnesses had been based usually on clinical impressions, which had not been precisely analyzed. Consequently, the descriptions of such cases were usually very vague, attributing the disease to such general factors as nervousness, overwork, excessive responsibilities, unstable personality, worries, etc. In this research, what Alexander and his collaborators attempted was a much more

precise and systematic study of the emotional attitudes revealed by the patient during psychoanalytic treatment.

As already mentioned, peptic ulcers and other gastrointestinal disturbances were the somatic diseases first studied at the Chicago Institute for Psychoanalysis. The results of these investigations were published under the title of "The Influence of Psychologic Factors Upon Gastrointestinal Disturbances: A Symposium," first in *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly* in 1934, and later in book form (Chicago Institute for Psychoanalysis, 1935).

On the basis of these gastrointestinal studies, Alexander developed his vector theory of the personality, which generalizes and, to some extent, expands intuitive impressions that had previously been formulated in terms of the "oral erotic," "anal erotic," and "genital" character types. Oral eroticism, for example, he now suggested was one special case of a receptive vector which included, beside desires for food, "the wish to receive help, love, money, a gift, a child, or the wish to castrate, to steal, to take away something." Somatically, Alexander postulated, the same group of wishes might disturb not only the stomach functions but also "other organic functions which involve incorporation, such as, for example, the inspiratory phase of the respiratory act or swallowing." Similarly, he regarded anal eroticism as a special case of eliminatory and retentive vectors. (These theoretical views were published under the title of "The Logic of Emotions and Its Dynamic Background," *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, XVI, 1935.)

The gastrointestinal studies, however, were only the beginning of an interest in psychosomatic medicine which continued throughout Alexander's life and which made him an outstanding leader in the development of this field. In 1939, he played a leading role in the organization of this Journal. He continued, until

the time of his death, to be one of the editors of *PSYCHOSOMATIC MEDICINE*.

The studies on gastrointestinal diseases were followed by a long series of other collaborative researches on the emotional factors in bronchial asthma, in essential hypertension and other cardiovascular diseases, in rheumatoid arthritis, and in thyrotoxicosis, and by lesser studies on a number of other psychosomatic diseases. In 1950, he summed up the results of much of this research in a comprehensive work on psychosomatic medicine (*Psychosomatic Medicine*, W. W. Norton & Co., New York).

Alexander's psychosomatic studies culminated in efforts to improve the meth-

odology of psychosomatic research. In 1953 he organized an extended research, aiming to test by statistical methods the validity of the concept that the emotional patterns associated with a number of different psychosomatic diseases are to a considerable degree specific for the disease. (A final report on this research is soon to be published.) Finally, after he moved to California and until the time of his death, he was conducting a collaborative study in which the psychophysiological correlations described in *Psychosomatic Medicine* were subjected to further experimental validation.

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