

IN MEMORIAM

Felix Deutsch, M.D.

1884—1964

ON THE day of Felix Deutsch's death, January 2, 1964, I happened to be viewing a film of one of his interviews. He had been failing during the past year, and now it was marvelous to see him as I had always known him—erect, brilliantly vigilant, sensitive, almost motionless except for the extraordinary mobility of his features and his hands. With them he directed the interview like a symphony conductor.

Unlike some great figures, whose genius communicates itself through tightly reasoned prose, Felix Deutsch almost had to be seen to be appreciated. He was a clinical virtuoso. In personal contact, and particularly in the clinical interview, his talents found their fullest expression. His mind was creative, inquiring, quick, intuitive, restless, and imaginative. In conversation, even with a patient, he was deceptive. At times he would seem to be missing the point, or stubbornly pursuing an irrelevancy, until one suddenly realized that his perceptions had been darting far beyond the ordinary focus of communication, or that he was bringing out an unconscious trend with a tenacious refusal to be distracted by rationalization.

Others have written about him as a teacher, a pioneer psychoanalyst, a warm friend.¹ He has been mourned as all of these. This note will stress his contribu-

tions to psychosomatic medicine, his first love.

He received his medical degree from the University of Vienna in 1909 and had postgraduate training in internal medicine in Vienna interrupted by one year in Munich under the great internist, Friedrich Mueller. He also studied for a time at the Obersteiner Institute for neurological research. In various clinics, particularly the Wiedner Krankenhaus, where he became head of the Department of Internal Medicine and Director of the "Herzstation," he made original contributions to the study of renal, pulmonary, and cardiac disease. During the first ten years after graduation he published nineteen papers in these areas of medicine. From the beginning of his career to the very end he maintained a deep interest in physiology and organic processes.

However, he became more and more aware, in typical pioneering fashion, of the role played by emotional factors in illness. Dr. Helene Deutsch describes graphically an anecdote showing his dawning awareness of these. One of his cardiac patients was the mother of a son at the front in World War I. From following her closely he became convinced that her serious congestive symptoms were related to concern over her son and that she would have a remission if she could only see him. When the reunion occurred, then, indeed her cardiac symptoms underwent dramatic improvement. His conviction grew. Like Groddeck,

1. Kaufman, M. R., Rochlin, G., and Mann, J. In memoriam. Felix Deutsch: 1884-1964. *J. Am. Psychoanal. A.* 12:439, 1964.

who was also making his speculative explorations in this area, Felix Deutsch found his way to psychoanalysis through clinical intuition and clinical observation.

Unlike Groddeck, who was older, Deutsch had personal analysis and by the early 1920's was launched on his career as psychoanalyst and psychosomatic investigator. At the start this was mixed with continuing work as an internist. As late as 1933 he was still writing, for instance, about methylene blue as medication against suffocating gases. He furthermore undertook a variety of experimental explorations in hypnotism and other ways of attempting to satisfy his almost insatiable curiosity. But more and more he turned to psychoanalysis. His colleagues looked upon him first with incredulity and then with annoyance, saying that he must make up his mind between medicine and psychiatry. He chose the latter but rather than abandoning medicine strove constantly to integrate the two disciplines.

At a celebration of the seventieth birthdays of both Helene and Felix Deutsch, M. R. Kaufman, in a larger review than is possible here, stated:

It is rather curious that in this country the credit for the conceptual framework which we now call psychosomatic medicine is given to writers in the middle 1930's, when actually in a paper entitled "Psychoanalysis and Internal Medicine," published in April 1927, Felix Deutsch not only used the term psychosomatic, but essentially formulated the basic concept as we understand it today. This is stated not only for the purpose of correcting an historical omission, but also to emphasize that already at that time his clinical and theoretical formulations led him inevitably to this frame of reference.²

The variety of psychosomatic questions he asked can be seen in his bibliog-

2. Read at the celebration of the seventieth birthdays of Drs. Felix and Helene Deutsch by M. R. Kaufman, M.D. Privately published by the Boston Psychoanalytic Society and Institute.

raphy of these years: he wrote about circulatory aspects of cardiac neurosis, discussed a remarkable series of patients with thyrotoxicosis in close living proximity to each other, and took up such diverse topics as psychogenic fever, euthanasia, blepharospasm, and angina pectoris. Always a vigorous athlete himself, he wrote eighteen articles on "sports-medicine," especially the cardiovascular aspects.

In 1936 he came to the United States, to spend the rest of his life in Boston, except for a brief period as Professor of Clinical Psychosomatic Medicine at Washington University in St. Louis from 1939 to 1941. His fascination with psychosomatic phenomena continued, as attested, by his contributions to the study of anorexia nervosa, congenital blindness, vasospastic disorders, skin disease, asthma, and hayfever, and including his delightful and little-known essay on the fantasies of Charles Kingsley, who had perennial coryza, as revealed in *Water Babies*.³

Felix Deutsch's interests widened. He developed his method of interviewing, the associative anamnesis, linked with his approach to brief treatment, sector therapy. He continued to make fundamental contributions to psychoanalysis—for example, his discussion of the importance of fused sensory perceptions in free associative material—and he was intrigued by the application of psychoanalysis to wider areas such as art, whether that of the contemporary, non-objective painter or that of the child. Typically, he took up painting briefly himself; talent is often many sided, and he did remarkably well at it, but laid it aside because he had so much to think about and to write.

Some would say his interests widened too much. He has been criticized, and with some justice, for being too intuitive, hasty, impressionistic. His exuberant

3. Deutsch, F. Artistic expression and neurotic illness. Read at Smith College, July 27, 1947.

course ran counter to the trend of the times in psychosomatic medicine, counter to the increasing emphasis on precision, statistical control, and experiment. Though his own experiments continued, they themselves were quickly conceived, perhaps almost impulsively, really part of his intense exploratory zeal. However, he remained a fabulous clinician and a naturalist par excellence. It is worth remembering that the swing toward quantitation may itself be one-sided. Felix Deutsch's keen observations of such variables as postural movement in the interview situation may have a value far beyond that measured by chi square in many a current publication. Actually his "posturology" heralded the whole "natural history" approach to the study of behavior now being pursued brilliantly by a group of anthropological-

ly oriented investigators who are mapping out the details of linguistic and kinesic communication.

In spite of writing approximately 200 papers and 10 books, Felix Deutsch did not communicate, in writing, the sum of his clinical lore. Those of us who had case conferences and supervision with him can testify to the miscellaneous nuggets of wisdom which he kept producing from his own experience. In a recent symposium on cardiovascular disease, Arthur Mirsky, speaking about the vogue today for interdisciplinary teams, expressed doubt whether any such was of great value unless it was headed by a "great interdisciplinarian." Such was Felix Deutsch. Psychosomatic medicine owes much to him and mourns his passing.

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