

WHEN FREUD VISITED NEW YORK CITY -- AND WET HIS PANTS!

In September 1909 Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung and twenty-seven other leading world scientists attended a four-day conference in Worcester, Massachusetts organized by Clark University's President G. Stanley Hall to celebrate his school's 20th anniversary. Lasting just over three weeks, the expedition would be Freud's only visit to America and was a turning point in his life, the first public recognition of his professional contribution to psychology and psychiatry. As Freud wrote later in his autobiography (1925):

At the time I was only 53, I felt young and healthy, and my short visit to the new world encouraged my self-respect in every way. In Europe I felt as though I were despised; but over there I found myself received by the foremost men as an equal. As I stepped onto the platform at Worcester to deliver my "Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis" it seemed like the realization of some incredible day-dream: psychoanalysis was no longer a product of delusion, it had become a valuable part of reality.

Dr. Freud had declined Professor Hall's first invitation to attend, but when the honorarium was raised from \$400 to \$750 he grudgingly accepted. He spoke in German without notes and although no translation was provided, the conference was extensively reported in newspapers and had a profound and enduring impact. He began the first talk with these words:

Ladies and Gentlemen: It is a novel and confusing experience for me to appear as lecturer before an eager audience in the New World. I assume that I owe this honor only to the connection of my name with the topic of psychoanalysis and, consequently, it is of psychoanalysis that I intend to speak...

American behavioral scientists who attended the conference were entranced. William James, the father of American psychology, came from Harvard just “to see what Freud was like.” He heard only one lecture after which the two men took a private walk which James reported to a colleague:

I hope that Freud and his pupils will push their ideas to their utmost limits, so we may learn what they are. They can't fail to throw light on human nature, but I confess that he made on me personally the impression of a man obsessed with fixed ideas. I can make nothing in my own case with his dream theories and obviously “symbolism” is a most dangerous method.

Although much has been written about Freud's interlude in America, what follows here focuses upon seemingly trivial somatic symptoms – both urologic and gastrointestinal -- which may have had deeper significance than pathophysiology. Much of this is derived from Saul Rosenzweig's authoritative book *Freud, Jung and Hall The King-Maker. The Expedition to America* which although not published until 1992, contained previously unavailable primary source material.

FREUD'S AMBIVALENCE ABOUT VISITING AMERICA

As Freud wrote to his Hungarian colleague Sandor Ferenczi, who with C.G. Jung would accompany him on the trans-Atlantic voyage, “we could soon be ‘up shit creek’ the minute they come upon the sexual underpinnings of our psychology.” Indeed, the Swiss-born psychiatrist Adolf Meyer, now working in Worcester Mass, had warned his countryman Jung, “On this side the abhorrence of touching on the sexual problem is almost insurmountable and it will take much tact and patience to put the whole matter into acceptable form.” Nevertheless, the opportunity for academic acclaim, including an honorary degree, and the increased honorarium, overcame any reticence on Freud's part and he looked forward to the journey.

FREUDIAN FAINTS

Just before boarding the ship in Bremen, the three psychoanalysts stopped for lunch in a popular restaurant and imbibed more wine than was their habit; Jung declared he would mark the occasion by abandoning his long abstinence from alcohol. Perhaps as a result, Jung became unusually talkative and turned the conversation to some mummified “peat bog corpses” which had been discovered recently nearby. He droned on and on until Freud burst out, “What is it with you and corpses?” But Jung persisted and then, right in the midst of the salmon course, Freud suddenly keeled over, fainting into the skeletal remains of his fish. Jung leaped to his feet and carried the limp Freud to a couch; later he joked “Naturally, we will not let Papa pay for us any more.” Afterward Freud minimized the event attributing it to fatigue and having drunk too much wine too quickly. However, Jung believed that the attack had deeper meaning: “All this chatter about corpses meant I had death wishes toward him” – indeed, years later, when recalling the incident, Jung insisted that Freud had confessed as much to him.

This was neither the first nor the last time that Freud fainted under stressful circumstances. In 1912 while attending a small meeting of psychoanalysts in a hotel in Munich, also in Jung’s presence, as described by Freud’s biographer Ernest Jones who was a witness, Freud “suddenly fell on the floor in a dead faint...The sturdy Jung swiftly carried him to a couch in the lounge, where he soon revived. His first words as he was coming to were: ‘How sweet it must be to die.’” In fact, both in 1906 and 1908 and in the very same hotel dining room in Munich, he’d had milder symptoms of weakness and had to leave the table. On the first occasion, Freud was in Munich visiting the ill Wilhelm Fliess, a Berlin physician with whom he had a stormy prior relationship. Concerning the faint in 1912 he explained to Jones, “This town seems to have acquired a strong connection with my relation to this man [Fliess]. There is some unruly homosexual feeling at the root of this matter.” Jones suggested that there may have been some transference by Freud from Fliess to Jung, and to this Freud readily agreed: “You are right in supposing that I had transferred to Jung

homosexual feelings from another part.” In Freud’s view, to have within oneself a homosexual capacity meant simply to be human, but whatever the complicated psychodynamics, it seems evident that Freud’s faints were of more than incidental importance and that the event in Bremen just before the ocean voyage to America foretold further psychic trauma and possibly related physical symptoms soon to come.

SIX DAYS IN NEW YORK CITY

During the rough eight day Atlantic crossing the trio amused themselves by analyzing each other’s dreams, and took turns being seasick. When they arrived in Hoboken on August 29, the weary travellers were met on the dock by Abraham A. Brill who would serve as their guide in New York City. Brill had come from Austria at age 15 in 1889, received his medical degree from Columbia in 1904, then studied in Europe for several years before returning to New York in 1908. In Europe he’d met both Jung and Freud and now was working on the first English translation of Freud’s work.

As Freud wrote home, “He [Brill] immediately led us into the subway, the railroad under the level ground, then to the electric car, then by foot through an endless route to the hotel [the Hotel Manhattan] to which we had already sent our luggage.” Freud’s first impressions were mixed. The “skyscrapers” along Broadway were impressive but “not beautiful”: It is really very expensive here and some of the necessary comforts for us would be quite lacking. But if one becomes oriented, one could get along.” Writing again the next day: “Gradually one gets used to this city. In a week one could get settled.” The visiting party spent six days sightseeing. They visited Coney Island and the Metropolitan Museum, ate in Chinatown and Freud attended his first movie. But the rich food and American custom of drinking ice water played havoc with their bowels and the three colleagues took turns fasting as a preventative.

On their first day in the city, Freud and Jung took a long walk in Central Park. Freud was impressed with the ethnic diversity, noting that “signs are posted which besides being in English, are in German, Italian and Yiddish with Hebrew lettering. The park swarms with Jewish children, large and small.” He also remarked on the gardens and squirrels but made no mention of the content of their talk. On the other hand, Jung writing to his wife was more specific:

Freud and I spent several hours walking in Central Park and talked at length about the sociological (Jewish) problem of psychoanalysis. He is as clever as ever and was extremely touchy; he does not like other sorts of ideas to come up, and, I might add, he is usually right. He certainly has the most comprehensive and rigorous biological point of view one could imagine nowadays. We spoke a good deal about Jews and Aryans, and one of my dreams clearly pointed up the difference

Freud believed that all humans share the same biology so that the same psychological principles apply to any ethnic or racial group while Jung held that the Jewish and Aryan unconscious differ. Freud was more inclined to rational explanations and a major point of conflict was his insistence on the centrality of sexuality as a universal experience while Jung was becoming more inclined to mystical or religious explanations for behavior. No doubt any disagreement on fundamental points must have been particularly disturbing since Freud saw his young colleague as his chosen successor – a Christian crown prince, twenty years younger, handsome, virile, outgoing, Aryan appearing. He was the perfect antidote to anti-Semitic prejudice which disparaged psychoanalysis as “Jewish Science.” Moreover, the timing was terrible. In a few days Freud would be explaining his theories to a skeptical audience of the world’s great scientists. Any disagreement at this time would be a bad sign. As it turned out, their falling-out in Central Park foreshadowed the estrangement that would occur some four years later. By 1914 the two had quarreled so bitterly that they would never see each other again, although both regretted the schism.

AN INCIDENT ON RIVERSIDE DRIVE

On July 6, 1951 Saul Rosenzweig conducted a lengthy interview with C.G. Jung and noted that although it was four decades after the expedition to America, Jung seemed eager to describe an incident which occurred during their fourth day in New York City. As Rosenzweig recalled the conversation:

There was a visit arranged by Dr. Brill to the Columbia Psychiatric Clinic where Brill had studied and was now a clinical assistant. While looking at the Palisades Freud suffered a personal mishap. He accidentally urinated in his trousers and Jung helped him out of this embarrassment.

So long after the event, Jung's memory may have been faulty, however, Freud's grandson, also writing many years later, provided more detail which was based on family legend: "Having urgency and with no toilet in sight, Freud asked Jung to stand next to him and then urinated down his pants leg." Freud's own notes from that day provided no further information and Jones discretely mentioned only that Freud had explained his embarrassing "prostatic discomfort" as being exacerbated by the host country's lack of public urinals: "They escort you along miles of corridors and ultimately you are taken to the very basement where a marble palace awaits you, only just in time." (Jones, 1955, vol. 2, p. 60) This time, not on time.

The exact location of the enuretic mishap is unclear except that it occurred on "a narrow path" near Riverside Drive ("a broad promenade") from where the Palisades was visible across the Hudson. It could have been as far uptown as 168th Street (Washington Heights) near Columbia's Psychiatric Clinic where A.A. Brill was working, or it might have been closer to the University's main campus on Morningside Heights as suggested by a letter written by Jung:

Yesterday we saw Columbia University with its magnificent library. Everything is very beautiful and impressive. From nearby Riverside Drive one sees the Palisades on the other side of the West River [Hudson]. These are very far away and quite outside the city limits. New York is simply enormous.

Historian George Prochnik described the incident this way:

Freud was anxious and probably spent by the action of the past several days. Here he was bordered by the most primitive landscape of his trip to date, next to the man who wanted to kill him – whom Freud wanted to kill. They were walking along the edge of the cliff. And then there was that unruly bit of homosexuality cropping up and crossing all wires. With Jung pushing hard for Freud to expose himself, something irresistible began creeping into the scenario – irresistible and unbearable. Abruptly, Freud began urinating, releasing uncontrollably into his pants, an event which exactly like the fainting fit in Bremen, put Freud in an infantile dependent state relative to Jung.

Medical records left by Freud's personal physician neither confirmed or denied a prostate condition, but urinary frequency was a continuing complaint. In a letter to Sandor Ferenczi (April 20, 1919) declining an invitation to visit, he wrote "I am not up to the trouble of a present-day journey with my prostate, which requires free access to the bathroom every hour, as I would get into most embarrassing situations, as I did for the first time ten years ago in America." Again in 1938, nearly three decades afterward, the event was still on his mind when in a letter Freud attributed his bladder dysfunction in New York to "the first signs of prostatic hypertrophy."

Although the cause for Freud's chronic bladder symptoms remains obscure, urine frequency persisting for a decade or more absent some organic explanation

is unusual. Explanation for the symptoms of chronic prostatitis remains daunting to this day and recent urologic literature suggests that physical symptoms frequently may be associated with a range of psychological symptoms.

(Wennjinger, K. et al. *J. Urology* 155: 965-968, 1996.) More likely than some form of prostate trouble, Freud's condition probably was due to what currently is called "urge incontinence" in which bladder instability is related to spasm or dysfunction of the detrusor muscle which controls bladder contraction. Among many possible causes of urge incontinence, research has shown that nicotine can directly effect bladder function, and sufferers usually are advised to avoid smoking. Therefore, it seems plausible, even likely, that Freud's famous addiction to cigars may have contributed to his overactive bladder. (Wyman, JF et al. *Int J Clin Pract* 2009: 63 (8): 1177- 1191)

Whereas Freud attributed his accident while viewing the Palisades to "prostatitis," in Jung's opinion the event had psychological import, not merely as a result of the physical condition but as its cause. Jung told Rosenzweig that Freud feared that similar accidents might occur during the time of his lectures at Clark University and Jung, suspecting a deeper meaning, offered to help overcome this fear if his friend would consent to some analytic intervention. Freud initially agreed and began "the treatment" and this is how Rosenzweig recalled Jung's description to him:

In due course Freud produced a dream the interpretation of which appeared to require some intimate personal associations. When Jung asked for these details, Freud paused, thought carefully, and then declined, declaring that he could not "risk his authority" by such disclosures. So concluded Jung, "I lost, and this incident started the break between us." Jung already had told Freud that the enuretic symptom concealed a conflict about an inordinate degree of ambition that was expressed regressively by an impulse to urinate – and thus

attract attention to himself at all costs – despite the adult need for continence.

There was sound basis for Jung's analysis; indeed one of Freud's central tenets was that physical complaints may have a psychological basis and that urination, in particular, may have a psychic dimension. In his *Interpretation of Dreams* (1899) Freud recalled that when he was about seven or eight, he twice urinated in his parent's bedroom in their presence, and that his father berated him, stating that he would never amount to anything. In Freud's words:

It must have been a terrible blow to my ambition for allusions to this scene keep constantly recurring in my dreams and are regularly linked with enumeration of my becoming something after all.”

Jung suggested that Freud considered the opportunity to lecture at Clark to be a fulfillment of unconscious fantasies about greatness. Freud disagreed, maintaining that he was the least ambitious of all psychoanalysts. Jung insisted that this denial contributed to the enuresis. In his autobiography, published in 1963, Jung reiterated that when Freud refused to reveal further details of his dreams lest he risk losing authority over his disciple, “That sentence burned itself into my memory; and in it the end of our relationship was already foreshadowed. Freud was placing personal authority above truth.”

PUTNAM CAMP AND AFTERWARD

After the Clark conference Freud and Jung visited Niagara Falls and then accepted the invitation of Boston neurologist James Jackson Putnam to spend a five-day sojourn at his rustic family retreat in the Adirondacks. Freud later recalled, “Of all the things that I have experienced in America, this is by far the most amazing.” For his part, Putnam would become instrumental in legitimating psychoanalysis in this country. At Putnam Camp starchy meals were served four times a day and Freud was convinced that the rich food had aggravated his

chronically “rebellious stomach,” other times described by him as “indigestion,” “a stomach catarrh” or “a mild case of appendicitis.”

After two final days in New York City, the trio of analysts set sail again and after arriving back in Bremen, Freud wrote to his sister: “I am very glad I am away from it and even more that I don’t have to live there...Nor can I claim that I am returning greatly refreshed and rested, but it was extremely interesting and probably highly significant for our cause. All in all one can call it a great success.” But in letters to Ernest Jones, he wrote: “America is a mistake, a gigantic mistake, it is true, but none the less a mistake” and “America has cost me a great deal.” Jones consoled, “It is too bad that America should deal you a mean blow through its cooking,” but he privately observed that Freud’s anti-Americanism had nothing to do with America per se [nor, presumably, with its cuisine.

Dr. Freud spent three weeks in Karlsbad for spa treatments designed to cure “my colitis earned in America” and this time wrote to Jones, “My fatigue vanished altogether with my stomach catarrh which I brought home with me. The memory of the trip comes more and more wonderful.” Nevertheless, for the rest of his life he persisted in referring to his “American colitis” and expressed antipathy about America. He disliked not being understood when he spoke in German, resented the lack of Old World manners and disapproved of the prudery of most Americans. After World War I, he wrote “Is it not sad that we are materially dependent on these savages, who are not a better class of human beings?” They couldn’t even speak clearly: “This race is destined to extinction.”

A GENITOURINARY FOOTNOTE

On November 17, 1923 the 67 year old Freud had a bilateral vasectomy performed by Professor Kun, an associate of the controversial Viennese endocrinologist Eugen Steinach (see Chapter 4). Steinach, who popularized several radical sex change operations in monkeys, claimed that ligating the vas deferens rejuvenated vigor, sexual potency and wellness. The procedure

became fashionable and Freud, already into surgery for his oral cancer, hoped it might prevent recurrences as well as improve his “sexuality,” general condition and capacity for work. Some eight months after the operation, he wrote to Ferenczi, “I have felt nothing reassuring from the effects of the Steinach operation.”

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