

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES ON ERNST SIMMEL

by Albert Kandelin, M.D.

After the death of Ernst Simmel in November 1947 there appeared several obituary notices in the analytic journals, the work of Ernst Lewy, Robert Fliess, and Max Horkheimer. These are an excellent source to get a view of his life work and character. Now it is possible to add to the biographical data about Simmel from material collected during the work of the History Committee of the Los Angeles Psychoanalytic Society.

Early files are a good source, especially the correspondence; during the course of his activities in organizing, teaching, and writing he exchanged letters with analytic colleagues the world over, including Freud. The collection also includes Karl Abraham, Sachs, Ernest Jones, Edward Glover, Marie Bonaparte and Anna Freud. The early days of analysis in California are illuminated in his letters and reports to his colleagues who were officers of the national organization. Exchanges with Menninger, Knight and Lewy are informative about Simmel's work during the "Topeka Period," the time from 1938 into the forties before the founding of any official California analytic society. Letters exchanged with colleagues in San Francisco include Bernfeld, Windholz, Kasanin, Erikson, recalling the period of the 1940's, the years the San Francisco Psychoanalytic Society was California's sole official component of the parent national association. (It was founded

in 1942; a separate Los Angeles Psychoanalytic Society followed in 1946.)

From Simmel's hand is a brief sketch of his professional career, and several listings of lectures and presentations. Particularly these include those given at meetings of the Berlin Psychoanalytic Society; also presentations at various Congresses and analytic conventions. He prepared a bibliography of his publications beginning in 1908, ending in 1946.

Especially significant is a list of 27 papers from the Grinstein index of German language publications still untranslated. In the obituary written by Lewy, he refers to Simmel's tragic awareness of work left undone, somewhat the result of a casual attitude. Recently material representing unfinished work by Simmel was made available to the History Committee by Michael Hunter, Simmel's elder son. Two years ago Mr. and Mrs. J. Lachenbruch made preliminary studies toward studying, arranging and translating, but their efforts were interrupted and hopefully will shortly be resumed. Especially important would be the translation and publication of any significant work which escaped this due to Simmel's premature death (at age 65).

Regarding Simmel's migration it should be recalled he was invited by Brunswick, Margrit Munk and others of a small group of practicing analysts, all lay people. At about the same time Karl Meninger invited him to Topeka (January 23, 1933). Instead he chose Los Angeles, and arrived in 1934. The formal founding of California's first Freudian analytic organization followed in 1935, with Simmel as its president (the Study Group). Within a few years plans were advanced to form an official society, and at

first the name of California Psychoanalytic Society was considered, but for certain reasons it emerged in 1942 as the San Francisco Psychoanalytic Society, again with Simmel as President. The war delayed the founding of the Los Angeles Psychoanalytic Society, and it didn't occur until 1946, once more with Simmel as President.

Also in 1946 the Los Angeles Psychoanalytic Institute was founded, giving added autonomy to the analytic training program already in effect. In prior years Simmel's training activities were authorized first by the Chicago and later by the Topeka training centers. First efforts toward Institute formation began in 1938, the work of Simmel assisted by Brunswick and Tidd. As early as 1936 Simmel corresponded with Menninger about Institute formation with emphasis on his favorite project, a psychoanalytic hospital. In the summer of 1938 Mr. E. M. Lipetz (now E. M. Lippett), a good friend to Simmel and analysis, stopped off in Topeka en route to the east especially to consult with Menninger and to give a detailed report on California's activities. For his efforts he was rewarded with a copy of "The Human Mind" suitably inscribed by the author "for our idealistic visitor . . . with best wishes for the success of his plans."

Later Menninger had misgivings about the California project, and suggested to Dr. Hill, the national president, that he study the situation. The question involved the possibility that the California efforts constituted unauthorized and ill advised efforts at setting up an institute. Simmel reassured Dr. Hill, denying any illegal actions, and explained the organization he had set up, the Psychoanalytic Institute Foundation, was purely preliminary and primarily for fund raising.

Earlier I referred to Simmel's sketch of his career and a quote from it now will illuminate his position in the early Berlin period. Writing in 1940 he said, "My training as a psychoanalyst did not follow the regular method. When I specialized in analysis in 1917 there existed no regular curriculum. Together with Dr. Eitingon I founded the first Psychoanalytic Institute in 1920 in the city of Berlin. In 1923 I introduced the organization of psychoanalytic training by establishing the psychoanalytic Training Committee. My analyses could not be controlled by other analysts since I was the one who introduced the controlled analyses later at the Berlin Institute. I belatedly underwent my didactic analysis with Dr. Karl Abraham and Dr. Hanns Sachs. I have devoted 22 years to the practice of psychoanalysis."

Simmel's first teaching was in organized psychoanalysis and must have been in the Berlin Institute, and the Ten Year (1930) Report of that group describes the activities of that decade. In the last half of the decade Fenichel, who was later to become Simmel's colleague in Los Angeles, was also active as a seminar teacher. The decade of the twenties was a glorious one for the Berlin group, fated to be shattered by the chaos of the war and the tensions leading up to it. The distinguished roster of analytic teachers in addition to Simmel and Fenichel also included Alexander, Bernfeld, Boehm, Helene Deutsch, Eitingon, Anna Freud, Karen Horney, Muller-Braunschweig, Rado, Roheim, Theodor Reik, Hanns Sachs, Staub and others. In this creative group some were great talents, most of them destined to become famous names in analysis.

Now available in the Simmel archive is a listing of papers he presented to the Berlin Psychoanalytic Society between 1919 and 1931. These number 21 and the titles alone reveal the original, creative and fertile mind of the man. Included here are the classic "The Doctor Game," and also papers on gambling, psychoanalytic treatment in a hospital, addictions, criminology, tics, art, epilepsy, analysis and education, lay analysis, and treatment of schizophrenia. His application of analysis to medical pathology is shown in "Psychoanalytical Observations on the Origin and Progress of Disease" and "Psychogenesis and Psychotherapy of Organ Sickness, and especially intriguing "The Psychogenesis of Appendicitis." Unique and completely original are "On the Intestinal Conquest of Libido" and "The Psycho-physical Significance of the Intestinal Organ in Repression."

Another list of 20 items covers his activities in Germany in the field of applied analysis and gives titles of talks to medical and legal groups, also to sociologists and educators. He spoke to mental hygiene conventions, and several times to the German Congress for Psychotherapy. These included papers on the war neuroses, cathartic hypnotherapy in war neuroses, genesis and structure of a neurotic criminal, and criminal psychology in general. He made a number of appearances before the German Medical Society, to groups of psychiatric residents, and to a legal institute for Juvenile judges. He also presented papers on the psychopathology of delinquency and character disturbances. He spoke to the Child Guidance Association, the Social Welfare Committee, and to the Organization for School Reformers. He published several papers in the Socialist Physicians Journal,

"Psychoanalytical Observations on Sexual and Subsistence Needs," also "Perversions and Criminal Law." He lectured to the Society for Sexual Reform on "The Bankruptcy of Marriage." In 1928 and 1929 he gave several radio talks, general expositions about analysis, a practice he repeated several times after his California migration.

His first publication was in 1908, his doctor's dissertation titled the "Psychogenesis of Dementia Praecox," and about twenty years later he published several papers on the psychoanalytic treatment of schizophrenia. There were publications on "The Analysis of a Gambler," "Addiction," "Psychogenesis of Organic Disease," "Pregenital Primacy and the Intestinal Stage of Libido Organization." In 1925 there appeared his classic "A Screen Memory in Statu Nascendi." Other titles and dates are as follows: "The Doctor Game," 1926; "George Groddek on his 60th birthday," 1926; "The Work of Sandor Ferenczi," 1933; "The History and Social Significance of the Berlin Psychoanalytic Institute," 1930.

After migration he published "The Psychoanalytic Sanitarium," "Self-Preservation and the Death Instinct," 1944; and "Anti-Semitism--A Social Disease," 1946 (as editor).

Lewy has numbered Simmel's publications at more than sixty, and grouped them as follows: war neuroses; institutional psychoanalytical treatment; therapy for psychoses; the psychogenesis of organic disease or psycho-somatic medicine; and the application of analysis to criminology.

Quoting from Lewy, "Some of his metapsychological papers bring into sharp focus certain difficult and controversial concepts and theories about the origin of the libidinal and destructive

drives. . . . Simmel's understanding of the oneness of the psychic and the physical aspects of the human being, especially as evidenced in organic diseases, went beyond the analysis of the dynamics of the individual into interesting attempts to work out a more general metapsychological formulation."

Los Angeles Psychoanalytic Society

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