

IV

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G.H. RAISES the question of practical charity towards neurotics. He is right in saying that neurotics are increasing in numbers. He makes the following difficulties about our contact with them as fellow men and women. I quote him, and give my humble suggestions.

(a) 'Very few people have a nervous system strong enough to cope with a neurotic without undue strain—in fact without becoming infected.'

This is a matter of degree, just as neurotics themselves differ in degree. The more severely disturbing cases should be referred to—but not left to—the experts (who often break down themselves, be it noted). Both for neurotics and for their friends, it is often a form of martyrdom. On the whole, near relatives should keep out of it if possible. The inter-personal relationships that have contributed to the neurosis are still operating, and those near and dear to them often do more harm than good by meddling. But charity—a cup of cold water in Palestine, a cup of tea in higher latitudes—is still obligatory. Don't try to 'cure' them. Leave that to the experts—who often fail. But time and grace rarely fail.

(b) 'It seems as if neurotics attach themselves more particularly to sensitive people—who are therefore more vulnerable.'

True again. If you are very vulnerable, try to minimise contacts. If you are strong enough, and the case is mild enough, you can do a great deal of good by this very sympathy.

(c) 'By its nature, this disease makes its victims demand the full and constant attention of their audience; it often becomes impossible for any work to get done when they are around—or not properly done.'

True again. But full and constant attention is bad for everybody and *a fortiori* for neurotics. The impersonality of a good *ad hoc* institution will do more good. There are many such, but still not enough, and their waiting-lists are usually long. Once 'in', visiting by friends and relatives should be as assiduous as the expert staff will allow. Don't let the neurotic feel he has been 'put away'. We do, as the late Father Leycester King, S.J., pointed

out so often, need more Catholic institutions of this kind, particularly homes sited in the country where normality may be restored by sound plain food, natural pursuits and a simple liturgical life. 'We have Catholic nursing homes', I once heard him say, 'where Catholic nurses look after you after a Catholic surgeon has removed your Catholic gall-bladder, but few homes for the mentally distressed.'

(d) 'It sometimes seems as if patience and humouring does no good to the neurotic, but merely increases the selfishness which seems to be the root of the neurosis. (Yet thwarting has frightening effects).'

Every word of this is true. It is the whole case of the writer of these answers. G.H.'s next two paragraphs may also be answered here. Neurosis is indeed a modern 'plague'. It is a disease like any other. As with any disease, diagnosis, i.e. facing the facts and interpreting them by expert knowledge, is the essential beginning. All but the mildest cases should be seen by an expert. A surprisingly large proportion will be found to be suffering from some handicap, that simple charity can do nothing to help.

Neurosis does spread. It is particularly harmful in a family where there are children. In such a case there is a clear indication for hospitalisation, if only for a short period.

Last two paragraphs: in such cases, charity may be heroic, but my whole point is that it should never be foolish. There is no doubt that friendship leads many a neurotic (and worse) back to health. But without special gifts, and preferably expert training in this direction, mere kindness often, as G.H. suggests, defeats its own end.

I don't know if this is an authoritative answer, but it is based on my experience and on the teaching of a great psychiatrist now unfortunately retired from practice.

V

IF, AS many think, we are nearing the end of a stage in the Church's development—it is suggested we are 'nearing the "Unitive" stage of the Church's life', 'entering into the "Age of Mary"',—if (as I think very likely) there is truth in some of this, it seems obvious