

PSYCHIATRY

Oswald Killing Discussed

With the gunning down of President Kennedy's suspected slayer, psychiatry lost a chance to find an answer to the vital question: What goes on in the mind of an assassin?

► SOCIETY was called the loser when Lee Harvey Oswald was murdered.

It would have been valuable to find out just what kind of person Oswald was and his motive or motives in the alleged assassination of President Kennedy, Dr. Fredric Wertham told SCIENCE SERVICE. Dr. Wertham is a New York psychiatrist and expert on violence who is now writing a book on that subject.

A psychiatric examination would have thrown light on the kind of person Oswald was, Dr. Wertham said. This examination could have been conducted whether or not he was guilty, and would have shown to what extent he was abnormal or normal.

Now since Oswald was so senselessly killed, the only clues to his personality are in his writings and speeches, and from others' memories of him.

However, Dr. Wertham said that from looking at pictures, he would classify Oswald as a "typical asthenic" physical type, characterized by slender build and slight muscular development.

Short Lives of Assassins

Very often, Dr. Wertham said, this type of person is withdrawn and introverted, traits indicative of a schizoid personality. Being schizoid does not mean a person is mentally ill or violent in nature. Most schizoid persons live their own quiet lives.

"We know so little about people who try to kill public figures," said Dr. Robert T. Morse, chairman of the American Psychiatric Association's public information committee in Washington, D. C. "Assassins do not live long enough for us to study them much."

He said that much about the character of assassins could be learned at a trial in which leading psychiatrists would testify. Still more could be learned if the assassin were committed for a time to a mental institution.

That there are fascinating psychiatric aspects to assassinations was evident with the man who tried to kill Franklin D. Roosevelt when he was President-elect, Dr. Morse said.

"That man complained of terrible pains in his stomach and said he felt the only way to get rid of them was to kill Mr. Roosevelt, because Roosevelt had not done anything about his pains," Dr. Morse said. "How psychotic can you get?"

About the only thing psychiatrists can say about assassins with much certainty is that they fall into the paranoid group, he said. This is a common form of mental illness, but very few persons so afflicted become homicidal.

When they do, they usually are absorbed with the idea that some person or group

is plotting against them, he said. They use much premeditation in planning the elimination of that "enemy."

"Another interesting side to assassins seems to be their preoccupation with achieving immortality regardless of the price," he said.

He compared this attitude with that of the ancient Greek who set fire to one of Athens' most cherished temples and then let himself be captured. The Greek explained that he sought lasting fame.

Dr. Morse said the man who shot accused assassin Oswald could have been suffering from this sick idea even more than Oswald himself.

Aspect of Lynch Law

Criminologists, legal experts and upholders of law and justice will deprecate the Oswald murder as a mistaken assumption by an individual of the function of police, judge and jury, under the hard-won law that protects the innocent as well as punishing the guilty.

The taking of the law into one's hands has some of the aspects of lynch law, the rough and ready administration of so-called justice in the early days of the West, and what has too often happened in less civilized areas of the world.

The purpose of our system of justice is to protect against further acts of violence and wrongdoing, not just to deal out punishment. The death penalty is considered the ultimate protective measure for society and is utilized legally for that purpose in some states. Some even question whether legalized executions are justified and few will be found to uphold murder even of accused murderers.

The Oswald murder slams the door on many phases of investigation of what may have been a plot of unknown proportions.

• Science News Letter, 84:355 Dec. 7, 1963

John Fitzgerald Kennedy
35th President
of the United States
Born May 29, 1917
Assassinated Nov. 22, 1963

► THE PROGRESS OF SCIENCE, medicine and technology was advanced by the late President, who was shown on the cover of the Science News Letter, Nov. 2, addressing the centennial celebration of the National Academy of Sciences. While the world mourns, pertinent science aspects on this tragic killing are presented in this issue.

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GENERAL SCIENCE

Kennedy Signed Bill For Mentally Sick

► ONE OF THE FEW PIECES of successful legislation passed this year and one of the last to be signed by President Kennedy was a bill to help the kind of mentally ill person who probably took his life.

On Oct. 31, Kennedy signed S. 1576 authorizing a \$329 million program on mental health and retardation.

On the day when he was shot in Dallas, Nov. 22, the National Association for Mental Health was meeting in Washington to plan how to improve treatment of the mentally ill.

Dr. Robert H. Felix, director of the National Institute of Mental Health, Bethesda, Md., in his keynote speech to the meeting had said this:

"When the President signed this legislation into law less than a month ago, the opening volley was fired in our struggle to make the new era in the treatment of the mentally ill a reality."

Quoting Justice Holmes, Dr. Felix said, "At the peril of being judged not to have lived, it is required that a man should take part in the actions and passions of his times."

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COMMUNICATIONS

President's Rites Viewed Throughout the World

► IN THE BIGGEST international television link-up ever attempted, millions of Europeans on both sides of the Iron Curtain witnessed live with excellent reception President Kennedy's funeral procession.

On Nov. 25 from 11:36 a.m. EST to 12:05 p.m. EST 24 European nations, including Russia, Czechoslovakia, Rumania, Hungary and Poland behind the Iron Curtain, saw live the representatives of more than 50 nations marching behind the flag-draped coffin of President Kennedy.

Relay I, American communications satellite built for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration by the Radio Corporation of America, carried the broadcast, which was picked up by Eurovision, the European television network, and Intervisio, the Eastern European television network.

Telstar II, the other operating television communications satellite built and owned by the American Telephone and Telegraph Co., is in position to transmit live programs to Europe only in the early hours of the morning in Washington, D. C.

Both satellites are "active" instead of passive such as Echo I that acted as a radio mirror in reflecting signals from a transmitter to a receiver. Active repeater satellites, such as Telstar, Relay and Syncom, which have no television transmitting facilities, amplify the signal transmitted from the ground station and retransmit it to another receiver thousands of miles away.

Only 97 years ago the first transatlantic telegraph cable providing instantaneous telegraph communication between the U.S. and Europe was successfully completed.

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