

PSYCHIATRY

Violence Pattern in U.S.

The acceptance of violence as a part of the way of life and the prevailing callous attitude toward killing may give extra impetus to those inclined toward violence.

➤ A LEADING CRIMINAL PSYCHIATRIST said the assassin of President Kennedy probably had a "Christ-like feeling" as he squeezed the trigger.

Dr. Mauris Platkin, chief of the criminally insane section of St. Elizabeths Hospital, a federal institution in Washington, D. C., blamed the tragedy on sick minds festering in an "atmosphere of permissiveness to violence."

He said the fact that recent racial bombings and shootings have gone largely unpunished has given extra impetus to those inclined toward violence.

"Many people hated President Kennedy and have threatened him," Dr. Platkin said, "but few would actually do violence without some great fanning of their feelings."

"All strong figures who would tend to upset certain long-standing ways of living are targets for the more disturbed minds who try to translate their feelings into action."

"The fact that President Kennedy was a Catholic made him even more vulnerable. Some people still feel Catholics are out to rule the world."

He said far more patients had said they wanted to kill the President during the Kennedy Administration than was true during the Truman and Eisenhower administrations.

On the other hand, Dr. Platkin said, many would-be assassins would have been

deterred by the fact that President Kennedy was "a likable man who, with his wife and children, typified the best in American families."

Dr. Fredric Wertham, New York psychiatrist, also believes that the violence-spiked atmosphere in this country helped spur President Kennedy's assassin to his crime.

He cited as one example the numbers of people who speak callously about the millions who would be killed by nuclear bombs.

Other examples, he said, are the great increase in the violence of the acts committed by juvenile delinquents, and the violence played up on television, radio, comic books and newspapers.

Dr. Wertham believes that Americans today are being "conditioned" from birth to accept violence as part of their way of life.

When a single person kills or attempts to kill a leader or ruler, that is often the act of a very mentally ill person. It is scientifically called "magnicide," meaning the killing of someone big.

However, when two or more persons act together in an assassination, a disturbed state, mental illness or the psychological situation is not the explanation, Dr. Wertham told SCIENCE SERVICE. Social and political factors are much more likely to prompt the killing.

• Science News Letter, 84:357 Dec. 7, 1963



Cornell University

BEES STING BACK—Prof. Roger A. Morse (left), apiculturist at the New York State College of Agriculture, Cornell University, and his graduate assistant, Allen W. Benton, use an electrical device to shock the venom out of honeybees. The venom is collected for chemical analysis and testing for possible medical uses.

BIOCHEMISTRY

Mental Illness Cure In Brain Chemistry

➤ RESEARCH into the chemistry of the brain, not psychiatry or drugs, holds the key to curing mental illness.

Dr. Hudson Hoagland, executive director, Worcester Foundation for Experimental Biology, Shrewsbury, Mass., told the National Association for Mental Health meeting in Washington, D. C., that research in his laboratory, in three others in the United States, and work in Sweden and the USSR, has confirmed the presence of a compound in human blood that disturbs animal behavior.

This compound is a globulin, a blood substance that is complexed with a small molecule. It is much more active in animal tests when it comes from the blood of a patient with schizophrenia, the most common serious mental disease, than when it comes from a normal person.

Dr. Hoagland gave credit to Dr. Robert Heath and his colleagues at Tulane University, New Orleans, for discovering a similar compound about eight years ago. They called this substance, which they extracted from the blood of schizophrenic patients, taraxein.

At that time, the New Orleans investigators reported that the substance was able to produce transient psychotic episodes in normal men following its injection.

"There is some preliminary evidence," Dr. Hoagland said, "that normal persons may have in their blood an inhibitor of the active behavior-disturbing substance."

• Science News Letter, 84:357 Dec. 7, 1963

PUBLIC SAFETY

Check Violence Threats

➤ A TIGHTER CHECK is foreseen on all threatened violence toward those in authority as an aftermath of the assassination of President Kennedy.

Depending upon what is found to be the origin of the plot, there will probably be a crackdown on those who advocate hate and violence, such as the known "Hate Kennedy" groups that were particularly prevalent in Texas.

Law enforcement agencies and psychiatrists alike are continually confronted by the question as to what manner of person is dangerous and is likely to commit murder. They try to determine whether an assassin or other murderer can be spotted by his other less violent actions before the act is committed.

Not all murderers are mentally ill or committable to institutions in the psychiatric sense. Most of them are obviously unusual, even before the act.

The problem of the Secret Service, Federal Bureau of Investigation and police agencies is to winnow the serious and dangerous from among the multitude of threats

that every Government official or other prominent persons receive.

There are hundreds of threatening letters received in Washington. Politics affecting unstable personalities originate some of them. Even letters that do not threaten violence but are of a "crank" nature and paranoid in their nature may give evidence of future violence.

The Secret Service does investigate carefully, to the best of its resources, the many threats against the President of the United States.

Little or no publicity is given these letters and this is in the public interest.

Perhaps out of the Kennedy murder there may arise a worldwide system, replete with computers and communication links that will join federal, state and local law enforcement agencies in a surveillance of all those who show any tendency to violence. This may be troublesome and tend to violate personal liberties at times, but operated rigorously within our laws it would save lives.

• Science News Letter, 84:357 Dec. 7, 1963