

When Insanity Holds the Scepter

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By Russel V. Lee

Craziness occurs in kings. Psychotic emperors, presidents, prime ministers and dictators have left their smudged marks on every page of history. Some rule today. An inquiry in depth into the role of madness in human affairs would provide a fascinating field to be cultivated by a team of historians and psychiatrists. The harvest of bizarre events wrought by deranged leaders would be a rich one.

This is not surprising, for 5 per cent of all men are mad. By simple statistical probability some of these men will achieve power. Indeed, this likelihood exceeds probability for a number of reasons. In a dynastic regime tendencies to aberration, which are often genetically linked, are passed on to the heir-apparent, often exaggerated by inbreeding.

In a democratic regime the very qualities of egocentricity and megalomania, characteristic of many psychoses, are precisely those that lead men to aspire to high office. In fact, there are those who say that the very fact of aspiration to high office is *ipso facto* proof of mental derangement. I would not go so far.

In our time we have seen one of the most highly developed and intellectual peoples of all time completely subjected to the absolute power of a textbook paranoiac—Adolph Hitler. Such phenomena, alas for mankind, tend to be recurrent.

In the days gone by such eccentricities, while deplorable, were tolerable. Sometimes they were amusing enough to add to the nation's gaiety, as in the case of mad King Ludwig I of Bavaria, or farouk, the last ruler of Egypt. To be sure, the demented George III lost the British crown the brightest jewel, and a little later the diminutive, strutting paranoiac, Napoleon Bonaparte, bathed all Europe in

blood and left the flower of France to perish in the snows of Russia.

The events of the terrible twentieth century, which led up to this awesome demouement, provide the best examples of the power of madmen to abolish rational behavior. The century opened on an optimistic and complacent world—a world that believed in progress, a world that believed that with the application of the great scientific discoveries and the spread of liberal democracy in time all would be well. We knew, of course, that there were a few despots in the Russia, but we believed this would change. We were practical. We talked peace and armed ourselves to the teeth. But without we were stupid—stupid enough to tolerate madmen in positions of power. They brought us to the brink of destruction. Kaiser Wilhelm II was the first. This unfortunate birth-maimed, mother-hating, vain, insecure, strutting, ridiculous adolescent ruled Germany—Germany with its magnificent technology, its superbly trained army, its played with it as a boy does with lead soldiers. Even his people recognized that he was not a normal man, but they did nothing.

When the events at Sarajevo took place the Kaiser was unopposed to stop the avalanche toward war. There are, of course, many explanations as to why World War I began. One would not have begun if the Kaiser of Germany had been sane. It might have been prevented if the eyes of all the Russias had been opened.

Nicholas II was sane, if not an intellectual by any reasonable standards by his wife, Alexandra, who took the slave of the electric and metal, Rasputin. So, by and by, we had the hypochondriac Kaiser and the weak-willed czar in the two most powerful positions in the world. The result was the senseless World War I—a war in which the best young men of France and England died in the mud

of Flanders with genetic effects on the stock of both countries that are all too apparent today.

The Peace of Versailles, which could have ushered in the brave new world, was a travesty. It was the product of strange men, none of whom was strictly normal or psychologically stable. The chief character, of course, was Woodrow Wilson—one of the tragic figures of history. His was the most brilliant brain that had ever occupied the Presidency, with a popularity in Europe never approached by any American before or since, in a position where he could have brought Europe to a war-sick world.

But he was not mentally sound. He had had a number of "little strokes"; his fine mind was shattered; his judgment was gone; and he was unaware of the change. He went on with his disease to complete despatch and, by virtue of gross fraud on the part of his second wife, Edith, and his physician, occupied the Presidency for nine months of total incapacity.

The others were abnormal in different ways. Georges Clemenceau, the Tiger of France, was indeed a tiger psychologically, devoid of mercy, devoid of foresight, savage toward his enemies, fit perhaps for war, completely adequate as a general staff chief. Lloyd George, whose character was defined by his own hypocrisy, was hurt by a major depressive. Venetia, of course, was a nothing. These men, not one of whom was mentally fit, wrote the most important peace in history up to that time.

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the man of steel and ruthless slayer of millions of his own people; completely devoid of scruple of any kind, he was a sociopath, a moral imbecile, and in complete control of Russia.

Hitler could well have been used in the medical school classroom as a classic example of paranoia. Alas for the world, he achieved a wider stage. He had profound egocentricity, delusions of persecution (the Jews) combined with considerable sagacity—all characteristic of the paranoid state. We all knew he was abnormal. We identified him, and he all but did us in. France had a series of alcoholic prime ministers during the interlude.

We need widespread discussion of this problem by doctors, psychiatrists and political scientists. Doctors occupy a special position. A position of privileged communication and maintenance of complete reticence about the patient's condition must be abrogated when the patient is the President, a Congressman, an important judge, or any other public official whose aberrations could cause public harm. In any case we are an official's captivity. He may feel he has been attacked, the doctor should inform the official and give a properly constituted body to plan on such information.

All other officials should be required to have a physical examination each year, as well as comprehensive psychological testing. In the case of high level officials, the findings should be transmitted to a properly constituted committee of the Congress which, if the report justified it, could recommend to Congress that the official to question be removed from office.

Respectfully,
Russel V. Lee, M.D., Psychiatrist
New York, N.Y.