Short Notes and Clinical Cases.

A PSYCHOANALYTICAL METHOD OF GETTING TO SLEEP.

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SOME time ago a well-known daily newspaper published considerable correspondence concerning various methods of getting off to sleep. The writer was slightly troubled by insomnia at the time, and frequently had some difficulty in getting to sleep, so he tried a number of the suggested methods.

The most successful method in his case proved to be the process of painting large imaginary figure 3's extremely slowly on a large imagined black wall with an imaginary brush and tin of white paint. The author of this method had said that after anybody had painted three of these 3's in this very slow manner he would find it quite impossible to remain awake.

This process certainly usually worked very well in the writer's case. He usually went off to sleep after he had finished painting only one or two of the 3's; but if not, almost invariably after he had finished the three of them. It may be pointed out that the reason the figure 3 was selected is almost certainly because of the unconscious phallic significance of this particular number. Especially does this apply when the 'sacred' number 3 is itself employed three times, producing the mentally very important number nine. Many of the other correspondents emphasized the importance of thinking of pleasant thoughts when attempting to go to sleep, and unconscious phallic symbols generally have a pleasant connotation—except when they occasionally happen to be associated with the castration complex, when the feeling is very much the reverse of pleasant. Castration associations will, however, in practice, probably never appear when one is attempting to go to sleep, although they may sometimes be produced immediately after an individual dream.

Most men when asked if they have a favourite number, or what is their favourite number, will reply that they have not got one. If pressed, however, they will frequently spontaneously respond with the number three, and may state that, after this, they prefer the number nine. It is now known, as a result of psychoanalytical experience, how

this arises. In this connection one is reminded of the American millionaire who, as recently reported, invariably bought stocks and shares in multiples of three.

Practically the only instances in which the method of painting imaginary 3's failed to result in sleep was when the writer unconsciously broke off, while still awake, the imaginary painting process before three of the numerals had been completed. This sometimes happened near the centre loop of either the second or third 3. When this breaking-off occurred, he would then lie awake, perhaps for an hour or two, faintly thinking of various things in a not very clear manner until he eventually dropped off to sleep.

This happened a number of times before he fully realized that, on each of these occasions, he had unconsciously broken off the imaginary painting process. When this latter fact was fully realized, he wondered what could be the nature of the intruding thoughts which had caused the imaginary painting to be broken off. By this time he had developed a 'talking-to-oneself' derivative of a note-writing method of self-analysis*; so he applied this 'talking-to-oneself' process to discover the nature of the intruding thoughts, uttering any idea which occurred to him in a quiet voice while lying in bed, and continuing this process as long as he could.

He found that this process enabled him to discover the nature of the intruding thoughts on any given occasion; and that, on following it, he invariably went to sleep within a quarter of an hour or so, whereas otherwise he might have lain awake for one or two hours. Apparently, when following this method, the mind continues with free associations until some heavy repression, in the Freudian sense, is approached. If one persists in attempting to follow the process, when this latter stage is reached, the strain apparently becomes too great, and the mind goes off to sleep rather than undertake the work of dealing with the heavily repressed material. The process has removed some of the superficial irritating thoughts, and sleep then apparently provides a good excuse for avoiding the heavy repressions.

In addition to enabling one to get off to sleep more quickly than otherwise, when the mind happens to be disturbed, some advantages of this method are, that the time spent upon it assists one's analysis, and one is also more apt to dream about the heavily repressed material. These dreams can be dealt with the following day, thus further assisting the analysis. Whenever the writer has any difficulty in getting off to sleep now, he always employs this method straight away instead of bothering about painting 3's. However, since he has become fairly

* See the appendix to the writer's paper, "A Method of Self-Analysis," in the forthcoming issue of the *British Journal of Medical Psychology*.

deeply analyzed, he does not have the trouble in getting off to sleep that he formerly had.

Some disadvantages of the method are that it requires considerable persistency, and people would probably be unable to follow it until they had considerable experience either of note-writing self-analysis, or of analysis with an analyst. Still, some may find the method of slowly painting imaginary 3's useful.