

Chapter 13 — The Conscience Complex

of *The Mind at Mischief:
Tricks and Deceptions of the Subconscious and How to Cope with Them* (1929)
by William S. Sadler, M.D., F.A.C.S.

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Sources for Chapter 13, in the order in which they appear

- (1) William S. Sadler, M.D., "Are You Overworking Your Conscience?", in *The American Magazine* (March 1927), pp. 48-49, 98-99
- (2) William S. Sadler, M.D., F.A.C.S., *How You Can Keep Happy* (Chicago: American Health Book Concern, 1926)
- (3) William S. Sadler, M.D., *The Physiology of Faith and Fear: Or, The Mind in Health and Disease* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co., 1912)

Key

- (a) **Green** indicates a Sadler text (book or magazine article).
- (b) **Yellow** highlights most parallels.
- (c) **Tan** highlights parallelisms not occurring on the same row.
- (d) An underlined word or words indicates where the two parallel texts pointedly differ from each other.
- (e) **Pink** indicates passages where Sadler specifically shares his own experiences, opinions, advice, etc.
- (f) **Light blue** indicates passages which strongly resemble something in the Urantia Book, or which allude to the Urantia phenomenon.

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X I I I — T H E C O N S C I E N C E C O M P L E X

13:0.1 MODERN civilization would not last long if human beings lost their conscientious regard for the sanctity of their pledges and lapsed into indifference regarding personal, social, and moral obligations. Modern business is transacted largely on the basis of mutual confidence, and it is worth a great deal to have it said of us, “His word is as good as his bond.” Nevertheless, every physician who has much to do with nervous troubles and emotional disorders soon comes to recognize that thousands of well-meaning individuals are suffering from mental torture and various nervous disorders as the result of **overworking the conscience**.

13:0.2 I am very sure we could not get along without conscience, but at the same time it seems a pity that so many splendid men and women should make themselves ill by overscrupulousness. Certainly it is possible to find out how to live conscientiously without having to suffer the tortures of what we have come to regard as the *conscience complex*.

“Are You Overworking Your Conscience?”
 (*The American Magazine*, March 1927)

13:0.3 “Doctor, this thing is just driving me wild. I simply can’t make things go. I have tried my best, but I have made a perfect failure of it.” **This is the way a middle-aged woman of hyper-conscientious temperament introduced her story to me the other day.**

SOURCE

13: THE MIND AT MISCHIEF

[contd] Through the solemn stillness of the church the preacher's voice rang out with dramatic intensity: "And Jesus said:

'Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof on the day of judgment'" (AYOYC 48).

[contd] Seated in the congregation was a highly strung middle-aged woman of over-conscientious temperament. For some unaccountable reason—it may have been the earnestness of the preacher, or it may have been that she was more overwrought that day—the woman seized this scriptural admonition, and proceed to translate it into literal terms.

Vowing to speak no idle word, her communications consisted chiefly of abrupt sentences reluctantly forced from her as the necessity arose. She no longer chatted with her family or visited with her neighbors—

her conscience condemned the pleasantries they indulged in as idle words (AYOYC 48).

This good lady, a few years ago, had heard a sermon on the Scripture text,

"But I say unto you,

That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment."

She took it seriously, literally,

and began to think of all the social palaver, the frivolous chit-chat, and the various other ways in which we loosely use words—not to mention our humor and jokes—and made up her mind that her social circle folks would have much to account for on the day of judgment.

She decided to reform her own communications in this respect, and so she largely lost humor out of her life, ceased to tell funny stories,

and could not make a social call

without condemnation by her own conscience because of the use of idle words.

SOURCE

[contd] Several months later, this hyper-conscientious woman was numbered among my patients. Her digestion was all awry, her sleep disturbed,

her nervousness increased; even her religion had gone back on her, and had become sour and mildewed. It was a hard job to get her back to anything like a normal mental state (*AYOYC* 48).

[contd] I am constantly meeting people who are sick, physically and mentally, because of needless conflict with their consciences.

And it is the purpose of this article to analyze some of these conscientious scruples, and to talk about conscience in relation to health (*AYOYC* 48).

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13:0.4 You can imagine her condition after one month of trying to live this artificial and unnatural life.

Her digestion became affected, her sleep was disturbed,

her religion was all but ruined,

and her happiness had vanished.

Her husband became so alarmed that he took her to see a doctor.

13:0.5 And this is but an introduction to the story I want to tell you about conscience in relation to health.

I am meeting people all the time who are sick because of conscientious worries,

and I want to discuss some of these cases

with a view to helping thousands of others who may be in needless trouble with their consciences.

WHAT IS CONSCIENCE?

13:1.1 I can do no better than to outline here the method I had to use in the case of this poor soul who had gotten into such a jam with her conscience.

SOURCE

[contd] To make my position quite clear, let me say at the outset that I do not believe that

conscience is “the voice of God to the soul.”

The sentiment is a pretty one which probably originated in the brain of some poet—

but it isn't true (*AYOYC* 48).

[It is better not to know so much than to know so much that ain't so (Josh Billings [1818-1885]).]

[contd] Conscience is nothing more nor less than a name which we apply to our inherited and acquired standards of right and wrong.

And these standards are tremendously influenced by education, training,

association, and environment, especially environment (*AYOYC* 48).

Let us return to the case of the hypersensitive woman, who, in mortal fear of being called upon in the day of judgment to account for every idle word she uttered, wrecked her health physically and almost mentally.

I had to wrestle with that woman's conscience for weeks. I explained to her that, while conscience is a state of mind that tell us always to *do* right, it never tells us what *is* right.

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In the first place I had to explain to her that

conscience was not what she thought it was—“The voice of God to the soul.”

I don't know just where that definition of conscience had origin,

but it must have been at the hands of one of the poets.

It may, in a way, embody a beautiful sentiment,

but it is not true,

and in this respect it recalls the quip of the humorist who said that

it was “better not to know so much than to know so much that ain't so.”

Conscience is nothing more nor less than the inward sense of our inherited and acquired standards of right and wrong.

Conscience is dependent upon education and training,

and is tremendously influenced by our associates and environment.

13:1.2 *Conscience is a state of mind that tells us always to do right; it never tells us what is right.*

SOURCE

I tried to make it clear that other mental powers must be brought into service, to find out what is right—

such as judgment, reason, discrimination, choice—

and that it was the part of the other mental powers to determine what was right under certain circumstances,

and that conscience was merely the mental monitor which admonishes us to do the right thing after we have determined on our course of action (AYOYC 48).

[contd] She and I discussed religion by the hour, and little by little the harsh grip that her conscience had on her conduct of life began to loosen.

To-day that woman is getting well, having learned the part her conscience should play in normal existence (AYOYC 48).

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I tried to make it clear to the woman in question that other mental powers must be brought into service to find out what is right—

judgment, reason, idea discrimination, and choice—

that it is the part of the other mental powers to determine what is right in the circumstances,

and that conscience is merely the monitor which admonishes us to do the right thing after we have thus determined it.

I had to explain to her that it was wrong to offend her neighbors by not visiting with them; that the second great commandment of Jesus was to “love your neighbor as yourself.” I had to remind her of the doctrine that Christ came that our “joy might be full”; that we were to “cast our burdens on the Lord” and “rejoice evermore.” I had to look up a lot of texts for this woman, such as “A merry heart doeth good like a medicine.”

13:1.3 I found her religion was all soured and mildewed, and it was no small job to get it sweetened up,

but we succeeded.

She is getting back into normal ways of living, and is regaining her health;

but six months or a year of this sort of foolish living had about spoiled her disposition.

SOURCE

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III: JOY KILLERS—THE LITTLE DEVILS THAT SPOIL HAPPINESS
(*How You Can Keep Happy* 165)

10. CONSCIENCE—EMOTIONAL CONFLICTS (*How You Can Keep Happy* 227)

We must remember that it was conscience that led the zealous Hindoo mother to throw her helpless babe into the jaws of the crocodile (*HYCKH* 229).

Conscience has led, in times of darkness and ignorance, to queer crimes,

fanatical beliefs, and horrible persecutions,

and I can assure you that conscience also leads to suffering, sickness, and disease (*HYCKH* 229-30).

It would be easy to fill this whole volume with stories of earnest, well-meaning men and women, young and old,

who made themselves really sick and exceedingly unhappy

I had to remind her that

it was conscience that led the zealous Hindu mother to throw her helpless babe into the jaws of the crocodile—

until the British authorities put a stop to it.

Conscience has led many people, in times of ignorance, to commit acts that we now call crimes.

Conscience has been behind

many a fanatical and horrible persecution,

and to-day we see that it still leads its willing victims into paths of disease and ill health.

13:1.4 Different races have different conscientious reactions in the presence of the same situations. In this connection we must remember that we are all confronted with the problem of adapting our primitive instincts and emotions to the demands of civilization, and that conscience is not equal to the task of sitting as sole judge and arbiter of the conflicts which this problem entails.

13:1.5 A dozen chapters could be filled with true stories of well-meaning men and women, young and old,

who have made themselves ill and unhappy

SOURCE

because they allowed conscience to intrude into unwarranted realms and unnecessarily to interfere with their pleasure, decisions, happiness, and other habits of living (HYCKH 227).

“Are You Overworking Your Conscience?”

(*The American Magazine*, March 1927)

In this country we can trace much of our trouble with conscience to the teachings of the Puritans.

These sturdy forbears rather inclined to the idea that anything pleasant was sinful;

and life with them was a somewhat dreary succession of blue laws.

Even to-day I meet a number of their descendants—over-conscientious souls, who, when they discovered they are having a good time,

immediately become conscience-stricken, and look around shamefacedly to find out what is wrong (AYOYC 48).

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by allowing their consciences to intrude into unwarranted realms and thus unnecessarily to interfere with their pleasures, decisions, and habits of living;

but, fortunately, there is no mental twist or intellectual kink of this kind that the average individual can not straighten out if he goes about it with a will.

13:1.6 Much of our trouble with conscience grows out of the teaching of the Puritans,

which rather inclined to the idea that if anything was pleasurable it was sinful.

As soon as some overconscientious souls find out that something is enjoyable—that they are having fun—

they rein themselves up suddenly and look around to find out what is wrong.

They have an idea that they can't have a good time until they get to heaven—that this world is a “vale of tears,” and that there is no use looking for a good time here below. Of course, this mental attitude fosters and augments the hyperconscientious tendencies which so many people have.

SOURCE

[contd] Far be it from me to decry
conscience!

I recognize the health value of being in
possession of a conscience “void of
offense toward God and toward men.”

But I want people to realize that worry and
fear, when they become wrongly linked up
with conscience, are able to torment and
torture the innocent soul,

and produce much sickness (*AYOYC* 48).

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13:1.7 Far be it from me to decry the
conscientious tendency in the human
species.

I merely want to see that it is used and not
abused. I want it to be so utilized as to
help us enjoy better health and a larger
measure of happiness.

As a physician, I well know that wrong-
doing is at the bottom of a large amount
of sickness and suffering. Immorality is
the cause of a tremendous amount of
modern disease, and the guilty
conscience, one that is rightfully guilty,
predisposes to worry, nervousness, and
even semi-invalidism; but fear is not only
the handmaiden of sin; fear comes to be
misapplied to a great many innocent and
harmless things in life.

13:1.8 We all recognize the value of so
living as to have “a conscience void of
offense toward God and toward man.”

We know that sin is at the bottom of a
great deal of human misery;

but we should also know that worry and
fear, when hooked up with conscience,
are able to torment and torture the
innocent soul,

and through a misunderstanding of
conscience, produce ill health and
unhappiness.

HEALTH COMPLEXES

I WOULD like to tell you about another woman who got conscience, religion, and diet all jammed up together.

She happened to be one of those persons whose digestion goes on strike when she gets tired.

As a result of this, she had eliminated one article of food after the other from her diet,

until after eight years she reached the place where there wasn't anything left but baby food and a few special invalid preparations.

From one hundred and fifty pounds she went down to ninety-one. A careful examination of her stomach showed everything was all right (*AYOYC* 48).

[contd] But in the midst of all this worry about her digestion, she began reading books on diet,

and somehow got a religious twist to her dietetic practices.

Then her conscience become involved in the matter. She decided, and rightfully so, that the laws of health were the laws of God, and imagined that she had transgressed them beyond forgiveness (*AYOYC* 48).

13:2.1 I have as a patient a woman who was more or less nervous;

when she got tired out and worried, her digestion went on a strike;

and, as was only natural when she had these stomach-upsets, she would think back and remember what she ate at the last meal. If she had eaten tomatoes, she perhaps would recognize a little of the tomato flavor when belching, and would come to the conclusion that tomatoes had upset her digestion;

therefore, she wouldn't eat tomatoes any more.

13:2.2 After six or eight years of this, she came to the place where there wasn't anything left but baby food and a few special invalid preparations.

From 150 pounds she had gone down to 91.

In the midst of this worry about her digestion she began reading all the books she could find on diet,

and soon had a religious twist to her dietetic practises.

She decided, rightfully enough, that the laws of health were the laws of God,

SOURCE

[contd] I remember well the first time I talked with her.

She quoted to me the text: “Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost?”

That is good scripture, and I think some people who are utterly careless and wholly conscienceless in their way of living would do well to heed it.

But this poor soul needed rather to get hold of the text describing how the apostles ate their meat with gladness (*AYOYC* 48).

[contd] I explained to her that the stomach trouble was due to upset nerves,

and began her reëducation along these lines.

She now has her conscience pretty well under control when it tries to impinge on the realm of dietetics,

although she still has a standard of right and wrong about eating (*AYOYC* 48).

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and thus her dietetic worries were also of a conscientious nature.

13:2.3 I remember well the first time I talked with her.

She quoted the text to me that our bodies are “the temple of the Holy Ghost.”

That is good Scripture, and I think some careless and conscienceless folks would do well to remember it;

but this poor soul needed rather to get hold of that text describing how the early apostles “ate their meat with gladness.”

After explaining the difference between diet and religion,

and making it clear to her that her stomach trouble was altogether due to her upset nerves,

I administered a few months of reeducation along these lines,

with definite periods of rest in the middle of each day.

She is now learning to manage her conscience when it talks to her in a foolish way about eating,

and she is making a steady gain in weight.

13:2.4 This woman still has a standard of right and wrong about eating.

Conscience has a domain in which she allows it to function,

SOURCE

[contd] There are certain foods that her conscience will not permit her to eat; but whether she has her potatoes fried or baked is now immaterial to her.

Previously, she regarded the eating of fried potatoes as a sin. Now she knows she can eat them and other erstwhile tabooed foods without fear, if she is not tired out nervously (AYOYC 48).

[See Leviticus 11.]

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but she does not allow it to dictate as to whether she shall have her potatoes fried or baked.

She has learned that when she is not tired out nervously she can digest fried potatoes just as well as baked potatoes.

The eating of fried potatoes, by the way, was one of the dietetic practises she regarded as a sin.

She read somewhere that when potatoes are fried the starch becomes smeared over with oil and can't be digested.

I had to explain to her that if it was not digested in the mouth and stomach, farther on in the digestive tract old Mother Nature had provided a means for performing just such digestive feats, and that it was a shame not to make use occasionally of Nature's provision and thus to keep the machinery limbered up.

13:2.5 Of course, I know that some people should give more conscientious attention to their diet. I have a patient now, a man about fifty years old, who is living on the scavengers of the earth, sea, and sky, and is going to check out of this life ten or twelve years earlier than he would if he would consult his conscience in regard to what he eats and drinks; but I am not discussing that case now; I am talking about the folks who make themselves sick by hyper-conscientious worry.

THE PHYSICAL CULTURE COMPLEX

[contd] A SHORT time ago I came in touch a man who has made a religion out of physical exercise.

If he doesn't perform certain exercises every morning, walk so many miles each day, and do just the same number of exercises each evening before he retires, he is exceedingly unhappy (*AYOYC* 48).

[contd] He actually told me that he went to church one Sunday and did not enjoy the service,

because his conscience told him he had not taken his regular amount of exercise the week before.

His friends are beginning to regard him as a pest; even his wife has put him in the nuisance class.

His outdoor social life is spoiled because he cannot exercise as other people do.

13:3.1 Let me tell you about a man, now thirty-five years of age, who has made a religion of physical exercise.

He thinks he must go through certain exercises every morning, walk so many miles each day, do just the same number of exercises each evening before he retires.

I think he has allowed his conscience to intrude into everything he does of a physical nature, unless it be yawning; he can still yawn as Nature wants him to, I believe; but everything else must be done systematically, by rule; yes, by conscientious rule.

13:3.2 He was greatly benefited years ago by his devotion to physical exercise. It did improve his health and efficiency, but this idea has grown in his mind until he has allowed his physical culture fad to become an annex to his religion.

He actually told me not long ago that he went to church one Sunday and didn't enjoy the service

because his conscience told him he had not taken his regular amount of exercise the week before.

He thinks exercise, talks exercise, almost eats exercise.

His wife and friends think he is becoming a nuisance.

His outdoor social life is spoiled because he can't do anything as other people do—

SOURCE

His exercise has to be individual to himself (AYOYC 48).

[contd] What am I doing for this chap?

I am inducing him gradually to break away from his slavish régime by pressing home the fact that life needs **variety** to give it spice, and that from a health standpoint monotony is a dangerous thing (AYOYC 48).

[contd] In going to his absurd extreme in the matter of exercise, he not only enslaved himself but he enslaved his conscience.

Fortunately for him, he is beginning to see the light. In a month or so, if he doesn't have a relapse, he should graduate from the nuisance class and become an ordinary, normal human being (AYOYC 48).

I have a patient at the present time who thought it was wrong to engage in an innocent pastime that all the members of her family indulged in.

Finally, she made up her mind she wouldn't be queer, and joined in with the rest.

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because he must have a certain amount of exercise in a certain way.

13:3.3 What are we doing for him?

How are we going to set him straight on this point without upsetting his conscience in moral matters?

We are attempting to have him redefine conscience to his own mind, and are explaining to him the value of being more free and spontaneous in health practises;

showing him the danger of monotony,

pointing out that he should **vary** his exercises, that he should be able, if the occasion requires, to do without them one day and then return to them the next day.

We are trying to show him, in short, that

he is a slave to his own system;

and already we are beginning to succeed.

13:3.4 **I have a patient at the present time, an earnest soul, who thought it was wrong to engage in an innocent pastime that all the rest of her family indulged in;**

but she did not wish to be queer, so she gave in and did what the rest of her family did.

SOURCE

Then her conscience got overly busy and bawled her out for having a good time.

In less than three months her health was

hard hit by insomnia and indigestion (AYOYC 49).

[contd] She is getting over the attack, because we persuaded her

that conscience was an intruder, and that it was a matter of personal choice whether or not she enjoyed this trifling pastime.

She now believes it is far better to play with the members of her family

than to indulge what she now says was her conscientious ego.

In fact, she regards her previous hyperconscientious reaction as Pharisaical (AYOYC 49).

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And then her conscience began to worry her.

In less than three months her health was wrecked;

insomnia, indigestion, and various other ills came to distress and plague her;

she was a sick woman, ready to take to her bed, all because her conscience worried her over this simple little matter.

13:3.5 She is getting well now because we persuaded her

to take this pastime out of the realm of conscience; told her

that conscience was an intruder, that this was a matter of personal choice.

She has come to see that it is far better to play with her family

and to keep in touch with them,

than to indulge what she now says was her conscientious ego.

She now regards her hyperconscientious reaction as Pharisaical.

THE PROFESSIONAL COMPLEX

13:4.1 I know an overconscientious physician, a splendid doctor, who broke down worrying over his patients.

In taking care of an accident case, he not only showed ordinary human sympathy, but went through nervous reactions that might make you think he was responsible for the accident. I once asked him, while he was taking care of a patient who had been injured by an automobile, "Did you run over the man?" "Why, no," he said. In his surgical work he not only took the ordinary precautions, and even extra precautions, but allowed conscience, in an unnecessary and harmful degree, to intrude itself. In spite of warnings, he persisted in this overwork, overworry, overanxiety; the result was a breakdown, and it will probably be a year before he ministers again to ailing humanity. I think he has learned his lesson.

[contd] ANOTHER interesting case recently came under my observation in the person of a hyper-conscientious school teacher, thirty-seven years of age.

She was easily the best teacher in the group to which she belonged;

but she was not satisfied with being the best teacher.

She wanted to be more than superlative. She was so over-conscientious (and I think there was an element of personal pride and egotism also) that she worked early and late,

and put in uncalled-for extra time on her profession.

She also attended every meeting that had to do with teachers and teaching,

13:4.2 Here is another case: a school teacher, thirty-seven years old, a hyperconscientious woman,

easily the best teacher in the group to which she belonged.

Not satisfied with being an ordinarily good teacher, even the best in her school,

she was so overconscientious (and I think there was an element of personal pride, professional egotism, also) that she worked early and late;

put in uncalled-for extra time on two or three backward pupils;

attended everything that had to do with teachers and teaching;

was the leader and moving spirit of the Parent-Teacher Association;

SOURCE

and took advanced work every summer for ten or twelve years, foregoing all vacations and relaxations (*AYOYC* 49).

[contd] What was the result? Suddenly she went to pieces.

For a year now, she has been resting.

She said to me the other day, "Doctor, I have learned my lesson.

I am not going to try to be the best teacher in the world any more.

I shall be satisfied if I'm a good teacher.

This breakdown has educated my conscience.

Some of the things my conscience made me do to be a good teacher in years gone by, my reeducated conscience will not allow me to do in the future.

I have learned my duty to myself

as well as to my pupils" (*AYOYC* 49).

[contd] In the realm of family life, I could relate scores of experiences showing how the over-conscientious mother has ruined her health

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took advanced work every summer for ten or twelve years; never had a real vacation.

Result, a sudden breakdown.

For a year now she has been resting,

and she said to me the other day: "Doctor, I have learned my lesson.

I am not going to try to be the best teacher in the world any more.

I am going to be among the best teachers.

I am going to do an honest day's work, but I am not going to allow conscience to tyrannize over me any longer.

This breakdown has educated my conscience,

and told it a few things it didn't know.

Some other things my conscience made me do to be a good teacher, in years gone by, my reeducated conscience will not allow me to do in the future.

I have learned that I have a duty to myself

and my family

as well as to my school and its pupils."

THE MOTHER COMPLEX

13:5.1 Experiences by the score could be related which would go to show how the overconscientious mother may ruin her health,

break down her constitution,

SOURCE

by wrongfully sacrificing herself to her family.

When parents have done their duty by their children, why should they worry their heads off?

Perhaps the children don't do things just as we would like to have them.

Maybe they have a program of their own, and run away from home to carry it out; or skip off to get married.

Why should Father and Mother—particularly Mother, for she seems more inclined to do this sort of thing than Father—

jeopardize health and happiness by over-conscientious worry? (*AYOYC* 49)

The young mother who gets up in the middle of the night to see if the children are breathing all right is the type that had better watch her “conscientious” step. I met such a one not long ago.

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by unduly ministering to a sometimes not altogether appreciative family.

When parents have done their duty to their children, why should they worry?

Maybe later on the children will not act just as we would like to have them.

Maybe they will have a program of their own and will run away from home to carry it out, or skip out to get married.

Why should father and mother—particularly mother, for she seems more inclined in this direction—

lessen their usefulness, diminish their efficiency,

jeopardize their health, not to say happiness, by overconscientious worry

and useless regret regarding these family episodes, which seem to be a part of life on this planet, and which happen even in the best of families.

13:5.2 A few years ago I had under my care a splendid young mother, about twenty-six years of age, who had three small children.

She went completely to pieces. There was nothing the matter with her except overconscientious attention to her family, particularly the children. She was one of those who get up in the middle of the night and go to the bedside of the children to see if they are breathing all right, are covered, and so on.

SOURCE

She was constantly worrying over her children's bringing up,

and when she stopped to think that they would have to go to school in another year or two, it was too much for her.

How could she bear to have any one of them out of her sight!

Something would certainly go wrong in school—they would get hurt, catch diseases, choose the wrong playmates (*AYOYC* 49).

[contd] AS THE result of all this conscientious worry, she went to pieces, and for eighteen months had to stay away from her family.

The children were left in the care of a stranger;

and the father told me, confidentially, that they did very much better in the hands of this woman,

that they got along better, and developed more character, than they did under their mother's solicitous care (*AYOYC* 49).

[contd] I am not relating this instance to detract from the value of intelligent and faithful parental training.

It's the finest thing in the world, within given boundaries.

But why carry things too far? (*AYOYC* 49)

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She was constantly worrying over their feeding,

and when she stopped to think that the oldest one would have to go to school in a year or two, it was too much for her.

How could she bear to have her children out of sight?

Something certainly would go wrong in school—they would get hurt, catch diseases, meet bad companions.

As the result of all this she simply went to pieces, and for eighteen months had to stay away from her family.

Her children had to be left in the care of a stranger,

and the father told me, confidentially, that they did very much better in the hands of the practical nurse;

that they developed more character than they did under their mother's solicitous care.

It would crush her, all but kill her, no doubt, if we were to tell her that; yet even she has begun to realize, in the last year, that children have a habit of growing up in spite of everything.

13:5.3 All this is not said to detract from the value of intelligent and faithful parental training.

These are necessary;

but why ruin your health by overanxiety?

SOURCE

[contd] The trouble is that some people are born with an over-anxious tendency,

and develop it to the point where it becomes, in medical parlance, an *anxiety neurosis*.

When this tendency gets linked up with an overworked conscience—

well, someone has to pay the piper (*AYOYC* 49).

[contd] I have seen conscience become a misshapen thing in the lives of sons and daughters, who have laid their happiness on the altar of parental duty.

I admit this sacrificial spirit is beautiful—

we have to admire it while condemning it—but it just isn't human. What a disastrous thing it is, for instance, when a young woman,

whose brothers and sisters are all married and settled down,

13: THE MIND AT MISCHIEF

When you have done your duty, why not be satisfied?

The trouble is that certain people are born with this overanxious tendency.

They develop it sometimes to the point where we call it an *anxiety neurosis*,

and when they happen, besides, to be of the overconscientious type,

the combination means serious trouble

unless these tendencies are recognized and early brought under proper control.

THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT COMPLEX

13:6.1 Then there is the case of the overconscientious sons or daughters who devote their lives to taking care of their parents.

Their spirit is beautiful,

like that of a mother's devotion to her child;

but how disastrous it is, say, for a young woman—

maybe the youngest of three or four children,

all the rest married and settled down—

SOURCE

feels she is called upon by her conscience to devote her life to the care of her father and mother (AYOYC 49).

[contd] It may be a lovely picture of filial devotion;

but what is going to happen to her when she gets old? She is seldom welcome in the homes of her married brothers and sisters.

Oh, of course, I know there are exceptions. But look around among your own relatives, friends, and acquaintances, and see the position of the daughter who stayed home to look after the old folks. More often than not she finds herself sitting in a doctor's office, somewhere between forty-five and sixty years of age,

worn in heart and health.

Usually it is too late to break the mold into which she has set;

but she sees clearly that she should have got married, like her brothers and sisters,

and that they should have made the care of the father and mother a joint undertaking (AYOYC 49).

13: THE MIND AT MISCHIEF

to devote her life to taking care of father and mother,

perhaps going occasionally to help her sisters or sisters-in-law when there is to be an addition to the family, and meanwhile toiling as a teacher or at some other vocation to make a comfortable home for one or both of the parents!

13:6.2 It is beautiful,

but it is a sad spectacle when the parents pass on,

and this old maid sister is unwelcome in the homes of any of her married brothers and sisters.

She is too old to teach school. She can't enjoy the company and affection of the children of other parents, and so her health fails,

and she finds herself somewhere between forty-five and sixty years of age, sitting in a doctor's office

broken in heart and in health.

Of course, it is too late then,

but she sees clearly that she should have married like her brothers and sisters,

and then they all together should have cared for the father and mother;

SOURCE

[contd] GENERALLY speaking, daughters suffer from this spirit of self-abnegation more than sons; but the other day I saw a man of forty-seven

who has sacrificed himself to care for his parents.

Five brothers and sisters are happily married, with children of their own;

and now this bachelor, as he nears the fifty mark, is growing cynical and bitter.

He considers taking care of his parents an unpleasant duty.

But he is determined to see it through. Some queer twist of conscience makes him regard himself as the sole bearer of the burden, because of his unmarried state; and he does not feel at liberty to change that state (AYOYC 49).

[contd] In my medical journeys into the minds of folks, I have discovered that children are not only selfish and sometimes actually ungrateful for the loving care bestowed upon them

13: THE MIND AT MISCHIEF

or that the son or daughter most favorably situated should have borne the burden.

13:6.3 Just the other day I saw a man of forty-seven,

unhappy and discontented. He has only one satisfaction in life—the knowledge that

he has sacrificed everything for his parents.

Five brothers and sisters are happily married and have children of their own,

and now this lone bachelor is beginning to become cynical and bitter.

He is soured on the world.

He considers taking care of his parents an unpleasant duty.

He is determined to see it through,

but life for him is all but ruined.

13:6.4 The obligation to care for parents is real and genuine, but who is going to care for the old bachelor or old maid? Have they no rights in this situation?

Children can be selfish,

SOURCE

but that parents are often very selfish too.

I'll go further than that and say that every parent is selfish who monopolizes the life of a son or daughter,

thus preventing the child from getting married and living a natural and normal life (*AYOYC* 49).

[contd] I grant you, in cases where for some reason or other a son or daughter does not get married,

it seems only natural that such unmarried child should live with the parents and make a home for them in their old age.

Please do not misunderstand me: I do (*Continued on page 98*) not refer to such voluntary celibacy. That's a matter of personal preference.

I have in mind those instances where sons or daughters have deliberately thwarted their instincts,

and spoiled their own lives by devoting themselves exclusively and wholly to the care of their parents.

That, I believe, is both wrong and unnatural, and results in a tragedy in later life (*AYOYC* 49, 98).

13: THE MIND AT MISCHIEF

but parents can become very selfish, too,

and I believe every parent is selfish who monopolizes the lifetime of a son or a daughter,

thus making it impossible for him or her to marry and live a normal life.

In cases where for some other reason a son or daughter does not get married, I grant you,

it seems only natural that such unmarried children should live with their parents and make a home for them in their old age.

I do not have such voluntary associations in mind; I refer not to such cases,

but to those in which the son or daughter has definitely refused to marry

in order to care for the parents.

That, I believe, is both wrong and unnatural, and results in a tragedy in later life.

13:6.5 Even the Saviour, when offering up His life on the cross and beholding His mother, did not suspend His work for the world, but called the attention of His disciple John to His mother and asked John to look out for her. He went on with His life work.

I am willing to recognize that this care of parents may be our supreme obligation next to the living of our lives, but I cannot conceive that it is right to allow over-conscientious devotion to such a duty utterly to nullify one's life's program.

THE FAMILY COMPLEX

[contd] This hyper-conscientiousness is found in other family relations also.

13:7.1 Then we see this hyper-conscientiousness in other family relations.

I have in mind two sisters. They are trying to live together in their home;

I have in mind two sisters who are trying to live together.

but, as time goes by, their personalities are beginning to clash.

As time goes on, their personalities are developing,

and each has more and more of a desire to live her own life;

They are so fearful of hurting each other's feelings

but they are always fearful of hurting each other's feelings.

that they keep themselves in hot water all the time, trying to explain their actions one to the other.

They keep themselves in hot water all the time because one of them can't do anything without trying to explain it to the other.

If they would go right ahead and live their individual lives, and get over this squeamishness about hurting each other's feelings, it would be much better.

If they would go right ahead and live their lives and get over this squeamishness about hurting the other's feelings, it would be much better;

But they are so conscientious about not offending that they both live under a horrible strain (AYOYC 98).

but they are overconscientious, and so unhappy.

SOURCE

13: THE MIND AT MISCHIEF

I had to sit down and explain to them not long ago, when they came to me with their troubles, that if each one of them would go about her business, and be natural and normal, and not feel that she had to live as the other lived, within a year's time they would be fairly happy.

[contd] A great light will shine forth some day when it is recognized that

for people in the same family to try to live together when they grow up is going against Nature.

It is Mother Nature's plan to scatter families (AYOYC 98).

[contd] And all that I have said about hyper-conscientiousness in the family applies to husband and wives in their daily efforts to get along together.

Occasionally, a wife become over-conscientious about her home, to the exclusion of the needs of her husband and children. The house receives attention out of all proportion to its inmates (AYOYC 98).

[contd] I want, too, in this article to warn parents against worrying over their failure wholly to eradicate inherited traits in their children.

13:7.2 It would be well for all of us to realize that

when people in the same family try to live together after growing up, they are going against Nature.

It is the plan of Mother Nature to scatter families

and thus to work against inbreeding.

She seems to want a widespread distribution of the germ plasm of the race, and so she sees to it that the task of living together becomes more and more difficult as we grow older.

13:7.3 All that I have said about hyper-conscientiousness in the family applies to husbands and wives in their daily efforts to get along together.

I don't often see cases of this sort;

but occasionally a wife becomes over-conscientious as to her duties in the home aside from the children.

Another thing:

I wish especially to warn parents against worrying over their failure wholly to eradicate inherited traits in their children.

SOURCE

Remember that children inherit not from their parents, but rather *through* their parents,

and that when you have done your duty as parents to overcome defective heredity in your children, you should cease to worry about it.

Let them go out into the game of life and gain the experience

that will teach them to correct these inherent weaknesses.

Too many parents try to live their children's lives for them. And what is the result? The children lack moral strength and individuality, becoming pale editions of their parents (*AYOYC* 98).

XIII: THE BLOOD-PRESSURE AS MODIFIED BY PSYCHIC INFLUENCES (*The Physiology of Faith and Fear* 131)

A CASE OF MISSIONARY WORRY (*The Physiology of Faith and Fear* 135)¹

[contd] A worried city missionary ... had been treated several weeks with electricity and with baths for stomach and nervous troubles.... Careful inquiry ... disclosed the fact that she worried considerably over the subjects of her missionary endeavor.

13: THE MIND AT MISCHIEF

Remember that children inherit not from their parents but rather *through* their parents,

and that when you have done your duty as parents to overcome defective heredity in your children, you can cease to worry about it.

Let them go out into the game of life, and there gain that experience

which will admonish them to put forth personal efforts to correct these inherent weaknesses.

Parents are responsible only for doing their duty; they can't make over their diversified children; they have to accept them as they are born and make the best of their hereditary endowments.

THE MISSIONARY COMPLEX

13:8.1 Several years ago I had

a city missionary who worried over her religious prospects.

After studying her for a number of weeks, I became convinced it was a case of worry, pure and simple. I told her she would have to get another brand of religion. That was a great shock—not only to hear that there was something wrong with her religion, but to have a doctor suggest that her physical troubles were rooted in her religious experience.

13:8.2 I asked her to go home and think the matter over;

At first she resented our efforts to admonish her on this point; but one day she was told the story of the simple-minded boy,

but before she left the office, I told her the story of a feeble-minded boy,

who when he went on his pony to the mill for chop-feed,

who insisted on carrying two bushels of chop-feed on his shoulders while riding horseback,

came riding home with the two-bushel sack on his shoulder.

and on being asked why he did so, replied:

When asked why he didn't put the sack down on the horse and sit on top of it, he wrinkled his brow, scratched his head, and said,

“Well, I reckon, if the horse can carry me I ought to be willing to carry the feed.”

“Well, I reckon if the horse is willing to carry me, I ought to be willing to carry the feed.”

She went home and began to think matters over, finally arriving at this conclusion: “If Christ's death on the cross can't save sinners, no amount of anxiety or worry on my part can effect their salvation” (*PF&F* 135).

I tried to illustrate to this missionary that the good Lord had no more trouble carrying her on top of her burdens than underneath them; He had to carry them all anyway.

SOURCE

[contd] She appeared at the office the following day,

asserting that she had got a new brand of religion—a faith that could free her from useless worry and unnecessary anxiety.

She affirmed that she had learned the meaning of such Scriptures as,

“Casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you,” and “Come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”;

and strange to report, the taking of her blood-pressure showed that it had fallen to 140, and it subsequently went down to about 135 (*PF&F* 135).

“Are You Overworking Your Conscience?”
(*The American Magazine*, March 1927)

I have on my hands at the present time a mighty interesting case.

I shall call this patient the professional reformer type.

He has worked so hard and so continuously, endeavoring to make the world over,

and, incidentally, trying to make everybody do things just as he does them,

that he has gone all to pieces (*AYOYC* 99).

13: THE MIND AT MISCHIEF

She came back in a few days

to tell me that my efforts had been successful, that my story had turned the trick,

that she really had found a new religion,

or rather, as she expressed it, “not a new religion, but a new dip in my old religion.”

She had come to see a new meaning in

“Cast all your care upon Him, for He careth for you,” “Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

And she recovered.

13:8.3 At the present time I have a very interesting case on my hands;

I suppose he would be called a professional reformer.

He has worked so hard and so continuously, trying to make the world over,

trying to get everybody to do things just as he does them,

that he has broken down—gone to pieces trying to save the world.

SOURCE

[contd] Personally, I subscribe to the theory that it is the job of every human being to try to make the world a better place in which to live;

but in doing so we should preserve a sense of values and proportions. This man I speak about had lost his, and could see no hope for the future in anyone's ideas but his own.

I know that this is ticklish ground I am treading on, for we all have our pet hobbies;

and I am not meaning to quarrel with a single reader about this matter.

But why should some well-meaning folks suffer a nervous collapse stewing and worrying over their methods of reforming the world, when it is more than likely that **other people** are doing the same work in a way that is just as good, and perhaps even better? At least the matter is worth thinking over (AYOYC 99).

13: THE MIND AT MISCHIEF

Now, I am willing to subscribe to the idea that every human should try to make the world a better place to live in,

but I think the task ought to be handled with some sense of values and proportions.

Why should we get sick trying to make everybody do some trifling thing just the way we do it?

I know that this is ticklish ground I am treading on, for we all have our pet hobbies,

and I have no wish to quarrel with a single reader;

but I insist that it is not a wise expenditure of energy to break down your health trying to reform the world.

You won't be a success as a reformer if you are sick, grouchy, and a victim of chronic worry.

13:8.4 If this uplift business is so good, get **other people** in it with you. Don't be so egotistic as to think you are the only one who can do it. Share this splendid enterprise with your friends and neighbors, and thus save your own health and contribute to the spiritual edification of your friends.

CONSCIENCE AND LOVE AFFAIRS

WHILE thinking over this article, I remembered the case of an overscrupulous fellow I met many years ago.

Until he was about fourteen years of age he appeared to be an average, normal boy.

Then a tendency to over-conscientiousness began to manifest itself during adolescence (AYOYC 98).

[contd] He became so over-conscientious in his high-school work that he would study until two o'clock in the morning so as to be absolutely perfect in his lessons.

He would also apply himself to the athletic activities of the school,

goaded on by the same stern sense of duty.

By the time high school was over, he was pretty well worn out.

Starting in college, he broke down after the first year,

because he took everything, including himself, too seriously.

13:9.1 A number of years ago I met a man who had ruined his life through yielding to the tendency to be overscrupulous.

He had been an average, normal boy,

and it was not until adolescence, when he was about fourteen years of age, that this tendency to worry, and to worry conscientiously, began to manifest itself in his experience.

13:9.2 He was so overconscientious in his high school work that he would study until 2 o'clock in the morning to try to be absolutely perfect in his lessons,

and then he would apply himself to athletic activities

with the same religious ardor.

He had no fun in any of these; the games were a duty to him, a stern duty to do his best—not his best in the ordinary sense, but in a religious, hyper-conscientious sense.

In college this young man broke down after the first year.

He took everything, including himself, so seriously.

SOURCE

After collapsing at college, his parents sent him West.

Here he met a young woman

who fell in love with him.

But his conscience wouldn't let him fall in love with her,

because of his ill health.

Then he worried

for fear the girl would break down or go crazy through her love for him.

The result was he got so nervous that for months he was almost unmanageable (AYOYC 98).

13: THE MIND AT MISCHIEF

After his collapse at college, his parents sent him west

to the ranch of a relative,

and out in that country some young woman

chanced to lose her heart,

became infatuated with him,

and then he all but had a second collapse.

His conscience wouldn't let him fall in love with this girl,

because he was not in the best of health

and not prepared to marry.

But he worried over her.

He would be everlastingly responsible if anything happened to the girl,

if she should break down or go crazy through her love for him;

so this young fellow really did the best he could to go crazy himself.

He became hysterical, and for months was almost unmanageable.

I suppose the only reason he didn't go insane was that he didn't have that tendency in the family. What he inherited was the tendency to hyper-conscientiousness, not to insanity.

SOURCE

[contd] Of course they had to bring him home,

and for more than two years he moped and worried over

what the girl thought of him and his conduct (AYOYC 98).

[contd] FINALLY, I ran across this lad, and after two years of careful planning and hard work, we succeeded in getting his mind directed to other things.

He was getting along well until he happened in on some revival meetings.

It required his attendance at only two or three of these meetings, with their strong emotional appeal,

to throw him off his balance again.

He looked back over his life, and decided that all his sufferings and sorrows were due to the fact that he never really had been converted (AYOYC 98).

13: THE MIND AT MISCHIEF

13:9.3 They had to bring him away from the ranch, of course,

and then for more than two years he moped and worried over

what would happen to this poor girl.

He couldn't write to her; that would encourage her; and if he didn't write, she might go insane, and then he would be responsible.

After two years of careful planning and hard work, we succeeded in directing his mind in other channels,

and he was getting along finely when up in his section of the city they started revival meetings;

after attending two or three of these meetings, with their emotional appeal

and their effort to quicken conscience,

he was all astir once more.

He made up his mind that his sufferings were due to the fact that he never really had been converted,

that he had never been right with God.

He heard a sermon one evening on the text, "Whoso covereth his sins shall not prosper." He looked himself over and decided that he had not prospered, and immediately came to the conclusion that he had been covering his sins.

SOURCE

[contd] He gave up his position,
and spent weeks trying to get right with
God, talking of his sins and confessing
them (AYOYC 98).

[contd] This went on for six months.

Fortunately, we were then able to relieve
the nervous strain by getting him away for
the summer to a boys' camp,

where he served as physical instructor.

He came back fairly well, and secured a
new position.

Within a few weeks

his conscience got to work again, and he
began criticizing the conduct of his firm's
affairs, and worrying about it.

13: THE MIND AT MISCHIEF

He gave up his position.

He spent weeks and weeks trying to get
right with God, talking of his sins and
confessing them.

He prayed and prayed, and of course his
parents became alarmed again. I tried to
reassure them, but a sister, who was a
little bit on the same order, began to
worry over him, and the whole household
was again thoroughly upset.

13:9.4 This went on all winter and into
the spring and summer;

he was relieved only by patient effort and
by getting him away for the summer to a
boy's camp,

where he acted as an instructor in certain
activities and otherwise participated in
recreations and outings.

He came back in the autumn fairly well,
and obtained a new position;

but within a few weeks

a situation arose, a very ordinary one in
business, in which he was requested to
keep still; it was a sort of commercial
confidence, but when he was admonished
to say nothing about it,

his conscience bothered him.

Could it be anything wrong? If everything
were all right, why should he be asked
not to disclose these secrets?

By Christmas time he was in deep water,
and his conscience compelled him to
resign his position.

SOURCE

Well, to make a long story short,

from the time he was twenty-five years of age until he was forty his conscience led him to seek twenty-five different jobs! (AYOYC 98)

[contd] And now what has happened?

As he neared forty, he veered 'round the other way, and decided he had been foolish about this matter of conscience.

Life, he felt, was meant to be lived and enjoyed. But instead of following out this philosophy in a sane and sensible manner,

he cut loose,

and went in for all the amusements and questionable entertainments that he formerly had shunned as a conscientious duty (AYOYC 98).

[contd] Naturally, he failed to find the satisfaction he was looking for,

and so he reverted to one of his conscientious spells of depression.

13: THE MIND AT MISCHIEF

To make a long story short,

there is a list of twenty-five positions which this man held from the time he was twenty-five years of age until he was forty.

13:9.5 And now what has happened?

He began to grow more philosophical

as he neared forty, and concluded that he had been foolish about this matter of conscience.

He looked back over his life and decided that conscience had been a tyrant, a slave-driver, and that he was going to be free of it;

but instead of acting on his philosophy, keeping his feet on the ground, and proceeding in a sane and sensible manner,

he flopped over to the other extreme.

He decided that life was meant to be lived and enjoyed,

and so for six or eight months he cut loose

to have a good time,

and went in for all the amusements and questionable entertainments that he formerly had shunned;

and when he failed to get peace of mind and comfort of soul out of this life,

he reverted to one of his conscientious spells of depression,

SOURCE

And this time he got into real trouble.

Realizing that he had deliberately gone into sin,

he thought that he had committed the unpardonable sin.

It took another year of effort on the part of friends, ministers, and doctors to try and get this fellow straightened out; and any minute his hair-trigger conscience may get him into hot water again! (AYOYC 98)

[contd] Fortunately, very few of us inherit such a tremendous tendency to overscrupulousness.

In fact, most of us who are born with this tendency have it to such a mild degree that we can overcome it without much difficulty (AYOYC 98).

13: THE MIND AT MISCHIEF

and this time he had real trouble.

He knew he had done wrong; no question in his mind about the sin of his recent experience.

In his efforts to set himself right with God,

he encountered the mental difficulty that he had deliberately gone into evil,

that he had committed the unpardonable sin, and so on.

It took another year of effort on the part of friends, ministers, and doctors, to try to straighten him out.

But he then started in to worrying over the fact that he had never married, that he hadn't done his duty to the world, that he never would be happy now. He had no wife and children to comfort him. Pretty soon he would be an old man.

13:9.6 I could fill a whole chapter with the story of this one man and the way he wrecked his career, making himself a nuisance to himself and all his associates. His aged mother's chief worry is still this wabbly, unbalanced, hyperconscientious boy.

Fortunately, very few of us are born with such a pronounced tendency to overscrupulousness;

and if we have it to a mild degree, we can easily overcome the handicap.

SOURCE

13: THE MIND AT MISCHIEF

13:9.7 Let us therefore learn to live cheerfully and gracefully;

[contd] Generally speaking, it would do us all good to take ourselves less seriously.

let us become experts in taking ourselves less seriously.

Let us master the art of living with ourselves as we are and the world as it is.

Let us master the art of living with ourselves as we are, and with the world as it is,

By all means, accord conscience its proper place,

according conscience its legitimate place,

but at the same time clearly recognize that human reason and trained judgment have *their* part to play in restricting its sphere of action (AYOYC 99).

but recognizing that reason and judgment have their part to play in relegating conscience to its legitimate sphere of action.

1. "A Case of Missionary Worry" first appeared in *The Physiology of Faith and Fear* (1912), then in *Worry and Nervousness* (1914), *Americanitis* (1925), and "What You Need to Know About Your Blood Pressure" (in the May 1926 issue of *The American Magazine*).