

■ Thieves who do not mean to steal.

HOW TO DEAL WITH KLEPTOMANIAC

When the police finally caught the Phantom Burglar they could hardly believe their eyes. The man who had broken into 403 women's bedrooms, and performed human-fly stunts to get into them, was a crippled victim of infantile paralysis.

He admitted his thefts — cheap jewelry, powder puffs, filmy handkerchiefs, even love letters. He said that he knew he had done wrong, but couldn't restrain himself — the things he stole gave him a feeling of fulfillment which he could not attain in a normal way.

Because he knew the difference between right and wrong, as well as the nature of his act — the standard sanity test in 29 states — a plea of insanity would not have been accepted. The jury found him guilty, and the judge sent him to Sing Sing.

Yet he was no ordinary

thief. He was sick. He was a kleptomaniac. He needed psychiatric treatment, not punishment. By rare good luck he got it. He was put under the care of Dr. Ralph S. Banay, psychiatrist-in-charge at Sing Sing from 1940 to 1943 and now associate director of research on Social Deviation at Columbia University.

In the course of many interviews Dr. Banay discovered why this man was a kleptomaniac. He had contracted infantile paralysis as a boy, and he was thus unable to compete with other boys. To make matters worse, he had an athletic sister who provided a constant contrast to his own inadequacy. Since his parents made no attempt to guide him into pursuits at which he might excel, he grew up nursing his grievances. Then he found he was distasteful to girls.

In a confused attempt to

assert himself, he embarked on his career of crime. His gymnastic burglarizing gave him a feeling of physical mastery. The inexpensive feminine knick-knacks he stole were substitutes for the love that had been denied him.

Dr. Banay made him understand this connection between his childhood frustration and his adult conduct; and understanding is often half the battle for a cure. Once he realized that his frustrations had produced his craving to steal, he began looking for normal ways to fulfill those desires.

Dr. Banay believes his patient is now entirely adjusted to society. But he has had no chance to prove it. The Phantom Burglar is still serving his prison term.

Not all kleptomaniacs suffer such a fate. Five years ago a well-to-do clergyman was hauled into court as a common auto thief. His lawyer argued that any automobile thief who owned a car, and could well afford another if he needed it, must obviously be unbalanced. But the clergyman was legal-

ly sane, and therefore guilty. Fortunately, the judge sentenced him to a mental hospital. He was discharged a year later, fit to take his place in society.

Today he is nationally known under a new name earns a salary in five figures, and has a tireless talent for helping unfortunates.

Discovery of what caused his kleptomania was half the cure. He had unconsciously disliked his profession, but he had clung to it because his admiring congregation satisfied his yearning for approval, which an overly critical mother had exaggerated in him as a child. This yearning was later aggravated by a wife who constantly found fault with him as a husband.

Divorce and a confession of his religious duplicity would have been the obvious way out, but he hadn't dared to kick over the traces. By stealing cars he gratified a suppressed desire to be a ruthless he-man *without having to admit his difficulty publicly or even admit it to himself*. Once he understood and accepted his con-

ficts, he was able to rehabilitate himself.

Doctors recognize kleptomania for what it is — a *sign* of illness, comparable to pyromania and pathological lying. *Kleptomania is a symptom, not a disease.* Disturbances that are known to cause kleptomania (or compulsive stealing, as it is more properly called when used in its broadest sense) are physiological irregularities: brain disorders like epilepsy, paresis and feeble-mindedness; and acute mental conflict.

Store detectives and court psychiatrists believe that much compulsive stealing in women occurs as a result of physiological disturbances. Women who steal during pregnancy, for example, are actually victims of a capricious pregnancy appetite. Some courts know this and treat thefts committed at these times with extreme leniency.

Compulsive stealing among epileptics, paratics, and victims of other serious brain disorders is very much like sleep walking. These people literally do not know what

they are doing, but most kleptomaniacs are entirely conscious of their acts.

Kleptomaniacs are frequently people whose emotions have been thrown off balance by their parents' failure to maintain happy family relationships. When these people are unable to overcome their childhood frustrations, compulsive stealing may occur

"The normal person," says Dr. Sandor Lorand, internationally known psychiatrist, "is the one who can make social, working and family adjustments. Kleptomaniacs fail in all these."

The ways they fail are legion, but the failures usually have some relationship to marital maladjustments or celibacy. A husband's inattention has driven many a woman to theft. Girls shocked by strained relations between their parents often develop abnormal feelings of isolation, avoid wedlock, and resort to stealing. Kleptomaniac bachelors generally suffer from a feeling of inferiority.

While these mental conflicts can be adjusted, the

success of the treatments depends largely on the patient's desire to overcome his social conduct. A well-to-do married woman who was caught recently stealing velocipedes was one patient who wanted to be cured. She was obviously not a felon. She stole bicycles, tricycles or scooters, took them home, painted them, and sold them cheaply to mothers of children whose fathers were overseas. Then she gave the money to the Red Cross.

She was the only sister of five older brothers, who used to tease her and call her a sissy. As a girl she tried desperately to win their admiration with tomboyish behavior. When she discovered one day that she could ride her bicycle faster than one of her brothers could, she experienced a thrill she had never known before. Subconsciously, she remembered that thrill as an adult.

Her marriage was happy until her husband started to neglect her for his business. Then frustration was transformed into a compulsion to steal, and the objects she

stole were like the one which had gratified her as a child.

She was arrested and sent to a psychiatrist. When she was made to understand the cause of her conflict, she turned her urge into constructive channels.

The stealing of a thief who is not a kleptomaniac is a means to an end. The kleptomaniac's stealing is an end in itself. For this reason kleptomaniacs seldom take anything expensive. The object has symbolic rather than material value.

The way to prevent kleptomania is to teach parents to understand their children and to maintain satisfactory family relationships. Since family relationships can be intricate, the parents' job demands conscientious attention.

Nobody knows how prevalent kleptomania is, partly because many kleptomaniacs are not caught, and there is consequently no record of them, and partly because, those convicted appear on the records as ordinary thieves. States and cities alone arrest about one hundred thousand thieves a year.

This figure does not include Federal arrests, or arrests of pickpockets and shoplifters.

Typical of the kleptomaniac shoplifter was an awkward girl who had a very pretty younger sister. She found release from her feeling of inferiority in stealing costume jewelry. She never wore it or sold it — just hid it away at home. The psychiatrist to whom she was sent for treatment recognized that just having the jewelry around provided her some consolation. He worked with her for about a year. Today, as a successful dress designer, she has won the admiration of her less-gifted sister.

Kleptomania has been called a privilege of the wealthy. The kleptomaniac who is poor is usually assumed on circumstantial evidence to be a common thief. The rich get the benefit of the doubt. Yet the Phantom Burglar was poor. So was a young music teacher treated by Dr. Lorand.

This 22-year-old girl started teaching piano at the age of fourteen. She stole knick-knacks from her pupil's

homes and, later money from her father and stepmother. The knick-knacks she hid in a bureau drawer. The money she sent to an impoverished aunt.

Treatment revealed that her thefts were caused by an unconscious resentment of her father, who had abandoned his family when the girl was nine months old. The mother had slaved to make ends meet. When the mother died the child was sent to live with the aunt, who also made sacrifices in order to support her.

Her father remarried. When she was nineteen he sent for her. Her hatred for him soon included her stepmother. Every time her thefts were discovered, she swore she would never steal again. But she always did.

The psychiatrist made her father understand that her thefts were an expression of defiance and insecurity. They were not committed for gain. Poor as the girl was, she never profited from them. Not once did she spend the money on herself. Not once did she sell her stolen goods to a "fence." If she had not

had the attention of a psychiatrist, she might have gone to jail.

Since kleptomania results from personal maladjustment, it is obviously not hereditary. Also, the kleptomania compulsion is infrequent among children — though most children do some stealing until they are taught not to.

When juveniles continue to steal in spite of their training they usually do so because of a lack of affection or because of too much pa-

rental domination.

Dr. William Healy in his book, *The Individual Delinquent*, describes another sort of case, in which a ten-year-old girl played with a small boy who taught her to swear and misinformed her about things.

Dr. Healy convinced the mother that this experience was the cause of the child's thefts. By devoting more time to the girl, answering her questions correctly, and keeping her busy, the mother effected a complete cure. — *D. Ferguson in Coronet.*

POWDER

The three-year-old boy had taken his mother's powder puff and was fixing his face as he had so often seen her do, when his five-year-old sister grabbed it from him.

"You mustn't do that," she said, "only ladies use powder. Gentlemen wash themselves." — *Stator.*