

secret is a fantasy; this fantasy is protected and acts as a private comfort and explanation for a failure to develop their lives further. The doctor is often told because of the promise of confidentiality which maintains the secret; it is often, however, the first step to sharing the secret more widely so that the patient can then move on to recover.

### Conclusion

This analysis was prepared in the course of thinking about difficult patients, and many of them inevitably belonged to more than one category. We were surprised by some of the patients who were high scorers, especially by the large number of black holes and those with family complexities and secrets. We believe that time spent with "black holes" would often be better spent with other patients.

Family interviews are increasingly part of our everyday practice. In nearly all our families there seemed to be a secret that had lain untold for many years. We would almost go so far as to suggest that in those patients who do not quite make sense, in whom the story and persona don't quite fit, there is a secret.

We are encouraged to find that many of our difficult

patients now seem less troubling. We think this has come about partly because we have re-examined our own management based on these categorisations and partly because the patients have benefited from this new approach. Some have been confronted while others have sensed a change: Family B have been seen together with encouraging results; Mrs J is talking more openly about her secret.

To examine those patients we carry around with us is a way for general practitioners to make sense of them. At the very least this analysis is a comfort for the doctor. At best patients may find they do not need to be ill.

### Correction

#### Uptake of immunisation in district health authorities in England

In the introduction of their article (25 June, p 1775) Professor Brian Jarman and colleagues cited the proportion of routine immunisations performed by general practitioners in Northumberland as 27%. In fact Northumberland District Health Authority estimates that in 1987 80% of preschool immunisation were performed by general practitioners.

## ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO

Sir John Millais has contributed to a recent number of the *Magazine of Art* an article entitled "Thoughts on our Art of to-day," which presents many points of interest. The author is a thorough optimist, and believes that ability and talent are as abundant as ever, and that art has not degenerated, but that the demands of art have changed and expanded with the advance of time. It may be pointed out that the intelligence and taste of the public have changed also; a considerable amount of knowledge of the physiology of expression is diffused among us, so that the average man is much more a student of human form and action than in former times. All educated people look at, and, to some extent, admire and learn from the best productions of art. What is it that the artist tries to teach in his figure paintings? We do not here refer to Sir John Millais's works, or those of any particular artist. The author complains of the art critic that "he makes no allowances for the charm of mutilation or the fascination of decay." He does not say that such cause of admiration is to be defended, but that it is popular; he says, on the other hand, that "the great painters all painted in *bright* colours, such as it is the fashion nowadays for men to decry as crude and vulgar." Having referred to the prevalent taste which leads many men never to have green in a picture, and who will even stipulate when giving a commission that the canvas shall contain none of it, he says, "But God Almighty has given us green, and you may depend upon it it is a fine colour." In this ejaculation, in contrast to admiration of the professional art critic for "the charm of mutilation, or the fascination of decay," we see an indication of the desire of the physiologist to find expression of the artist's idea of the perfect man in noble attitude and action, such as may elevate and instruct; the beholder may then say, "Here is what a man may be and do." To express on canvas, as the writer may do in word-painting, the higher being and lives of men, is worthy of the artist and his noble profession. Sir John appeals to Nature's work as a defence for introducing a colour which happens to be out of fashion with a certain set of critics; we would add like remarks as to modes of expression in figures which are in vogue among some painters. Should we be called upon to admire the semblance and attitudes of maudlin weakness and hysteria sometimes represented in females as forms of beauty? or complexions showing the sickliness of anaemia or gross asymmetry of the body, and infants far gone in marasmus; figures with most of the mobile features and members hidden or absent from the individual, figures with forms of beauty but destitute of the expression of brain action? We are interested in the artist's work, not only because it is beautiful, but because it may teach us something of the more perfect types of the human figure in rest and in action, and may put before the public that which they tend unconsciously to imitate in gait and bearing. A good figure is a good teaching; children may be impressed and instructed by the picture of a noble man or woman, as well as by the story of noble deeds. We are glad to think with Sir John Millais that the present generation of young men is no more retrocedent in power in art than in science and literature; it would be sad if it were otherwise.

We may learn many things from art besides the admiration of beauty;

workers in the profession of art inherit a mass of knowledge as to the types of human form and action of great value to the physician, who studies human perfections as well as its weaknesses. The artist's work is in many ways the reverse of that of the scientist. It has been said, "A work of art can only be said to be finished when all traces of the means whereby its completion has been arrived at have entirely disappeared." The scientific worker desires not only to arrive at a satisfactory end of his work, but also to demonstrate, if possible by specimens, the steps of the inquiry by which his conclusions were reached; the amateur artist is sometimes satisfied with producing an affect pleasing to the eye, without analysing the means he uses. This remark may be applied to figure compositions—an effect in figure painting may be beautiful without being admirable; it may not represent a healthful man or woman, though put forward as the artist's representation of youthful beauty. Just so in social life; attitudes are sometimes adopted as being attractive which we commonly see as indications of weakness, nervousness, or hysteria. We would urge upon the art student the study of the physiology of expression; it is a delightful study, and one that can be carried on in any place where there is man, woman, or child, as is well illustrated in the works of Leonardo da Vinci and Sir Charles Bell, all mankind are his subjects for a study; fine mobile expression in face and limbs may be seen in poorly cut bodies, and in the study of defects he will learn to avoid them.

All students must advance their education with the advance of the times; the art student has given more attention to anatomy than to physiology as a science, yet his work is eminently concerned with the physiology of brain expression. Sir John Millais, speaking of young men of talent, says, "We must not forget that only by insistence upon their individuality of conception and expression can they hope to advance to the first rank." We submit that to conceive a figure well, it is advisable to be able to describe action and attitudes of the human body, and to know something of the causes, as well as the circumstances, which produce them. Several artists have said that it is so difficult to paint hands, and that this explains why they are so often omitted in figure sketches, yet it is well known that after the face these members are the most expressive of brain condition. Are hands generally represented free to express the mental state, or occupied in holding an object, in resting, or hidden and got rid of where they cannot be seen? Does not this arise from want of study of expression in the human hand? Our author gives his personal experience thus: "Sometimes as I paint I may find my work becoming laborious, but as soon as I detect any evidence of that labour, I paint the whole thing out without more ado." If fatigue incapacitates an artist's hand for good work, this may give the clue to the meaning of the signs of weakness too often seen in figures drawn on canvas with heads and backs bent, and hands which indicate weariness in the living model, only too truly imitated when the draughtsman is incapable of seeing the signs of fatigue in the subject of his study. Further study of the physiology of expression might enable the young artist better to conceive his figures, and to model them to express the ideas he wishes to convey. (*British Medical Journal* 1888;ii:132)