

CULTIVATING A WILD ROSE

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From time to time harassed parents present themselves at the Psychological Clinic with daughters who have distressed them by "wayward" or "immoral" tendencies. They are totally at a loss to know how *their* daughters have developed along unconformed lines. The home training has been good. The girls' welfare has been considered above everything. They have been exposed to church and to other agencies which society employs to keep its members intact. In most cases the parents have sought so ardently to impress the child with her ingratitude to them, and the disgrace and disappointment they feel in her, that they have neglected to give her even a glimpse of what is perhaps their strongest motivation—their interest in her personal happiness. She is antagonistic and believes herself totally out of accord with her family. In her turn she does not understand how she came to have parents so entirely different from herself. Spurred by various emotional urges she sets out on a crusade to "live her own life." Usually she discovers herself inadequate to meet life as independently as she would like. She finds also that the consequences of independence are somewhat staggering. It is difficult to understand how anyone who has worked with these parents and their daughters can withhold sympathy from either. Of course, on a small scale, this situation exists in almost every home where there are parents and children. It is only when the situation assumes alarming proportions that we are consulted. One of the girls brought to us was president of a Christian Endeavor and the daughter of devotedly religious, and unquestionably respectable, people. Her father, when he discovered she was pregnant at the age of sixteen, first had an operation performed and then brought her to us to learn what was the matter with her. Though naturally a mild man, under the stress of these circumstances, he was ready to believe that his daughter was a pathological liar, a thief and sexually abnormal. Her lying was done to clear herself of blame, her stealing to satisfy her desire for such things as pretty trinkets and bought lunches instead of lunches carried from home. Her sexual non-conformity seemed to have been brought about by persuasion too strong for her moral fiber combined with meager information and a curiosity to "know life." From following this and

other similar cases which come to the Psychological Clinic I have come to expect that when there is a limited moral stamina the essential character of these girls is not apt to be altered. This remains true in spite of the fact that some of them, have sufficient intelligence to adjust themselves inconspicuously in society, even after a false step. One possible exception to this general expectation I report here. It is not a spectacular conversion, but in spite of its similarity to other cases, it appears to me that it includes features sufficiently unusual to bear mention.

Rose, a pretty, blond girl of eighteen, was brought to the Vocational Guidance Clinic both because of her failure to hold positions and because of what her family termed "waywardness." She had left high school in her junior year because she was bored with school. She had given up a number of good positions because she lost interest in the work. She did not hesitate to deviate from the truth when prevarication was useful. Although popular with boys, she had almost no girl friends. On two occasions she had remained away from home all night without adequate explanation. She is the youngest daughter of good, self-respecting, middle-class, Jewish parents. Their other children are industrious, conformed and in every way satisfactory to their parents. They were at a loss to know how to deal with Rose whom they considered lazy, deceitful and likely to become immoral. Rose, in turn, resented what she considered a too rigid supervision of her affairs by her family. Though naturally pleasant with people in general, she was often sullen and non-committal at home. Outside she was animated and took wide-awake interest in social activities that came her way.

At the time of Rose's first contact with the Clinic, Dr. Viteles, the examining psychologist, deferred his diagnosis pending a medical and psychiatric examination. He further recommended that Rose be referred to me as Social Worker. He thought that an acquaintance between the Social Worker and Rose outside the immediate confines of the Clinic might result in a better understanding of Rose's discontent with the standards imposed by her family. I began my contact with Rose by accompanying her to the hospital where she was to have a medical examination. By the time our immediate business was over, I had learned among other things that she had a very natural feminine love for clothes. So we did some window shopping comparing tastes in color, style, etc., and before long we were on very friendly terms. Rose confessed a desire for

many pretty kinds of wearing apparel which it was impossible for her to have. She told me that she had several cousins living near her home whose parents were wealthy enough to give them very beautiful clothes. She described minutely two evening dresses and one evening coat belonging to a cousin who was a year and a half younger than herself and then said, not resentfully, but with a tinge of envy, that she had not even had one evening dress, nor for that matter any occasion for wearing one. I mentioned how few girls her age had such things and touched lightly on the possibility of her earning them for herself if she would not persist in throwing up each position which became disagreeable in some way or another. We both laughed about it and she agreed that she was not very badly off and that her parents were as generous as they could afford to be. She readily understood that her parents could not supply her with more than ordinary clothes and that she must work for her living. Nevertheless, she was apparently unable to resist breaking the commandment written by an ancient law-maker of her race to the effect that nothing which is our neighbor's shall be coveted. Another thorn in her flesh was that she loved dancing of all kinds and would have liked to have taken lessons in order to become proficient but this sort of thing would never have been permitted by her parents. However, her feelings on these scores were casual compared to the strong antagonism she felt toward any older person, especially older women who attempted to impose their standards on her in particular or on her generation in general. She had left one very good position because she could not bring herself to cater to the older women who were customers in the establishment in which she worked. Her dislike amounted almost to an obsession.

Talking with Rose and members of her family, we became convinced that although her parents professed liberal views concerning young people and verbally encouraged their children to bring guests into the home, in reality they exercised a very strict supervision over all of their children's activities. The mother was unwisely sponsoring the cause of an older man who was pursuing Rose and whom Rose claimed to dislike thoroughly. On the other hand, Rose chose men friends to whom her mother felt she could not give her approval. Instead of recognizing the similarity between the conflict of generations in her own home and other homes, Rose persisted in considering herself cursed by the most perverse family in the world. Rose's general attitude led Dr. Viteles to suggest a psychiatric exami-

nation. I went with Rose to make her first contact with a psychiatrist. After I had discussed our findings briefly with him he saw Rose alone for about ten minutes and then reported to me that she was a type of Psychopathic Inferior and that she had had much more extensive experiences than her family or we had suspected. She was assigned to one of his assistants and asked to return each week for a talk with him. Had Rose fallen in with the spirit of this prescribed mental hygiene it might have resulted in a more wholesome adjustment on her part. However, the psychiatric visits were soon stopped soon after they had begun because of Rose's attitude toward them. She insisted to me that she knew what the psychiatrist wanted to hear and told him that rather than the truth. No amount of persuasion on my part would prevail upon her to cooperate in a straightforward manner though she said she would continue to go if I wanted her to do so. She insisted that the psychiatrist had made his theory before hand and was trying to prove it.

Shortly after the beginning of our contact with Rose and before the psychiatric visits had been discontinued, she went off on an escapade which lasted three days and threw her family into a state of turmoil which left them totally at loss to know how to deal with her. When she did return home it was in the company of a woman who was surmised, on evidence obtained by the family in trying to trace Rose, to be connected with a house of ill fame. Rose's mother answered the door-bell at one o'clock in the morning, the third night after Rose had left home. Rose was thrust into the house by this woman with an admonition to her mother to take good care of her because she was not a bad girl. For several days Rose remained home, lying down most of the day with her face to the wall and refusing to answer any questions or indeed to talk at all. She had come home in entirely new apparel. Finally she was persuaded to go into the Clinic on Saturday morning. Dr. Viteles expressed a willingness to talk over her affairs with her if she were interested in having him do so. She talked guardedly to the effect that everything which had happened had been her own fault. The woman who had brought her home was a friend and had not influenced her in any way. She related that she had had dinner and gone to the movies with a boy who lived in her neighborhood and whom she had been forbidden to see because he had "got into trouble." After the movies, he had suggested that they stay in town together for the night. She agreed impulsively, hardly realizing what she was do-

ing. Later she felt that she could never go home and when the man mentioned a house he knew of, she decided to go there. The details of her three days away from home she never revealed. However, while discussing prostitution with Dr. Viteles, she asserted definitely that she was not interested in leading the life of a prostitute.

Rose was very much upset by her experience. That she was tense and unhappy was evident. Also there was something about her manner which defied interference. I invited her to lunch and afterward we went in town, did some more window shopping and went to a matinee. Rose gradually relaxed after she discovered that I had no intention of questioning her or alluding to her recent escapade. By the end of the afternoon she was apparently enjoying herself without any reservation. Her family had been questioning her endlessly and trying to impress her with the fact that she was disgraced, but she had answered nothing. I saw her early the next week and asked her if she would like me to arrange a gynecological examination at the Hospital. She agreed without any questions and I knew that she understood we feared a venereal infection. She was very much relieved when the results were negative. The doctor in the hospital became interested in her and talked with her for some time. His verdict was that her problem was social. He agreed with us in thinking that if Rose had lived in a home with slightly freer standards, her non-conformity might not have developed to such great proportions.

I saw Rose a number of times in the weeks that followed. Voluntarily she sometimes spoke of conditions at home. Her family, worried by her recent deviation, were holding her in very close restraint. At no time was she free from observation. Somewhat humbled by the experience herself, she did not chafe under this close supervision of her affairs. She stayed at home and sewed or went to the movies with some member of her family for diversion. That this humdrum existence would not be endurable to her very long was evident. With Rose's energy and love of pleasure and excitement it was inevitable that under such close restraint it would not be long before she would kick over the traces again. Therefore, we helped her to obtain a position in order to keep her busy. Then we had a conference with several members of her family. In talking to the family, Dr. Viteles pointed out the importance of refraining from holding up other girls of the family to Rose as examples. He also suggested the influence of too strict standards

in the matter of freedom permitted to men in promoting Rose's non-conformity. As an example he cited an incident which had been described to us both by Rose and members of her family. Her aunt had been giving a party for the young people and during the evening Rose left with one of the young men for a ride in his new car. According to both accounts the couple returned in about fifteen minutes. When she reentered the room Rose's cousins expressed their disapproval by hardly speaking to her and as she expressed it "making her feel like a criminal." Her ride, she told us, had been a very innocent excursion but in thinking over the embarrassment caused by her cousins' suspicions she reflected that one way to look at the affair was that she might as well be "bad" if she was going to get credit for it anyhow. Rose knew that her family did not trust her and while they may have been over-suspicious at times she failed to admit that they unquestionably had reason for some doubts concerning her. Dr. Viteles made specific recommendations for a programme to regulate Rose's activities in such a way that she would be permitted more freedom without her family's relinquishing a reasonable amount of supervision.

The final diagnosis in Rose's case was normal mentality. However, from the beginning of our contact with Rose, Dr. Viteles considered the prognosis for successful adjustment doubtful. We made an effort to make the home situation as conducive to adjustment as possible. We secured a position for Rose. We established a friendly relationship with her in order to give her any encouragement or guidance she might desire. One point we stressed in our contacts with Rose was that, while we agreed that in some cases her family's regulations might be too strict, we insisted that her digressions were more extreme than the restrictions. She came to feel that we understood though we did not approve of her behavior and she talked things over with us confidentially in a way that she felt she could not speak with any member of her family. For a time she was outwardly more reasonable in her attitude toward her family although there was always an underlying antagonism toward them as well as an envy of her more fortunate cousins. The Psychological Clinic worked intensively with Rose for a period of five months at the end of which time there were no serious complaints from home. For the next three or four months casual inquiries concerning her behavior were favorably answered.

About a year after Rose first came to the Clinic, we received

a request for a report of our work with her from the Municipal Court. Next we learned that she had been committed by that court to Sleighton Farm. The bare fact that Rose was at Sleighton Farm without any supplementary information considerably dampened our already faint hope for a permanent change in character. Her tendency toward non-conformity was becoming firmly established. It seemed that we had succeeded only in staving off the time when her non-conformity had eventually brought her into sufficient conflict with society to distinguish her from the normal group. On investigation we learned that she had been lax in her relations with men to such an extent that the family could no longer ignore the situation. Gossip in her neighborhood assigned to her the responsibility for the venereal infection of several boys in the neighborhood. She denied the accusation and offered to go to court for an examination to prove that she was not infected herself. The test results were negative, but her attitude and manner were so unbearably arrogant and bold, that the family requested that she be committed to Sleighton Farm as a possible means of bringing her to her senses. Unusual as it is, the results of her commitment appear to have justified this move in her case.

As is well known, many times when girls are sent to institutions with the idea of reforming them, the reform takes the opposite direction to the one desired and the subject emerges with the knowledge of her associates' experiences to supplement her own, accompanied by a desire to try out her newly-acquired knowledge. Fortunately, Rose had judgment and discernment in these matters which, while to all intents and purposes latent, came to her rescue when she discovered herself suddenly ashamed of the pass to which she had come. For a time her desire to be again a part of her normal social group waged a duel with her pride but in the end the strongest motivation triumphed and she did not spare her pride the wages of defeat but freely admitted her folly. In other words Sleighton Farm played the part of the proverbial darkest hour which precedes the dawn. Rose's family had consented to her going only because of her callous lack of concern about her home and family, their standards and affections. Her mother accompanied her to the institution ready at any sign of softening in Rose's attitude to retract the sentence but Rose persisted in her relief at "going anywhere to get away from the family." She showed no feeling on parting with her mother. In a conference with the superinten-

dent of Sleighton Farm, she spoke of the Staff of the Psychological Clinic as having taken a personal interest in her and helping her more than anyone else had done. The institution wrote for a report. With our answer we sent a request that Rose be invited to write us if she cared to do so but we did not hear from her.

Almost a month passed when a very much humbled Rose appeared in the Clinic. She wanted to know if I knew where she had been and seemed anxious to renew my acquaintance. She wanted me to know, she said, that she had changed. We had a long talk during which I was treated to a vivid account of some of the inside lights of institutional life. Rose recognized that she was superior to the general run of girls at Sleighton Farm and she was ashamed of her association with them. Her standards were not so far removed from those of her parents as she had imagined. She was genuinely shocked by some of the things she learned from her associates. Nevertheless, she made some friends among the girls and came to consider herself very much more fortunate than she had formerly thought herself to be. Her family had written regularly and also sent her boxes. Many of the other girls heard from their families only on such occasions as Christmas, or didn't hear at all. Many never had visits from home and described their families in such a way that Rose's estimation of her own grew better by comparison. She roomed alone and had time for thought. She began to wonder how her little brother was and to wish she could see him, but still she was too proud to say so. Finally when her family came and offered to take her home she jumped at the chance.

As far as Rose knows her own mind she is committed to a conventional mode of living. How long the impression will last is a matter of conjecture. However, a very fortunate circumstance has occurred which should be propitious for a reform. The family has moved to another city because of a change in the father's business. Several factors which Dr. Viteles considered from the beginning to be unfavorable for a satisfactory adjustment of Rose to her family and community were removed when the family left the city. First of all, while Rose has come to think more highly of her family's opinions, they in their turn have learned not to expect too much of Rose. They no longer look for her to model herself after her older sisters because they realize at last that her whole make-up is different from theirs. Also she will no longer be irritated by daily comparisons of her own and her cousins' worldly status. In addition,

a new neighborhood where Rose's former activities are unknown, will furnish an opportunity for her to create a different place for herself among her associates. She believes that she is very anxious to make a good reputation for herself in her new environment.

Three months have passed and Rose's conduct has been entirely satisfactory to her family, and she in turn is reasonably in accord with them. Let us touch wood!