

Book Review: This Stranger, my Son

A. H. Kane

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This Stranger, my Son. By Louise Wilson. London: John Murray, 1968. Pp. 247. Price 30s.

This is a very moving story of a schizophrenic child told by his mother. Tony is the eldest child of an American surgeon's family. As a small child he demanded rather more attention than is usual with the normal child, but it was not until he was eight that his behaviour became difficult enough to warrant psychiatric attention. Even then the psychiatrist said there was nothing really wrong with the boy but his parents needed psychotherapy. As the parents were happily married and had three other normal well adjusted children they did not accept this diagnosis. A year later Tony's behaviour became such as to make his father suspect schizophrenia. More visits to more psychiatrists followed, all of whom gave such conflicting diagnoses and advice that his father was led to say despairingly that he could not make sense of anything he had been told because he got "two different stories on the same day and the same man has a different story to tell on different days". The parents start quarrelling and blaming each other for their child's condition, because if there is one point on which the psychiatrists are agreed it is that it is the parents' fault that Tony is as he is.

The enormous financial problems that mental illness incurs in America are, of course, not relative to this country, but the overwhelming personal problems that a family with a mentally ill member has to endure are as relevant in this country as in America and these the author clearly and painfully describes. In this case there is especially the fear of the patient's violence as well as the acute embarrassment caused to his siblings who are so afraid and ashamed of his behaviour that they never can invite their friends to their home. Even the doctor father in psychiatry-conscious America is driven to keeping the shame of his son's illness secret from his medical colleagues. Both medical and lay readers will find their sympathies aroused by this book and even those who glibly state that it is the family's duty to look after the mentally defective in their home, may pause for second thoughts.

A. H. KANE.

This Stranger, My Son

A Mother's Story

LOUISE WILSON

Chosen in the U.S.A, by the Literary Guild

The moving account by a doctor's wife of living with a schizophrenic child in the family.

'Mrs Wilson's book makes painfully clear how vulnerable parents in her position must be to any suggestion that they have brought this suffering upon themselves.

That they love their children, and have borne more and done more for them than any fortunate parent of a normal child is ever called upon to do nobody could doubt.' THE TIMES

30s. net

JOHN MURRAY

The Ted K Archive

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