The Case of Bartleby

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In medicine generally and psychiatry in particular, the problem of what to teach and how to teach it is not yet resolved. Indeed, it seems from those who specialize in learning and teaching that, as one might suspect from common observation, some people learn and other people teach in very different ways.

Programmed learning for instance, may be satisfactory for particular people trying to learn particular subjects, while others doing the same or different subjects find it boring and repugnant and prefer to have their educational fare served in a tastier though not necessarily more nutritious fashion.

As I have noted elsewhere,[1] there are many brilliant accounts of the inner experience of psychiatric patients which can help the novice studying this difficult and puzzling field for the first time.

There are also a number of fictional accounts, some of them quite excellent, to be found in *The Abnormal Personality Through Literature*[2] edited by Dr. and Mrs. Allan A. Stone. This collection is a good one. It has the advantage of being readable and this is important for the medical student or resident. These young people are burdened with an enormous amount of reading, little of which is written for enjoyment. It is rarely entertaining and much of it is composed of a sort of gobbly gook, which requires the reader to exert himself mightily in order to quarry some meaning from a mass of words. Readable accounts of any illness and especially psychiatric illness are therefore of unusual value.

It is curious that the Stones' book has none of its many sections devoted to catatonia, which is one of the stranger, more dramatic and mysterious of human experiences. When much else has been covered so well, I do not know why this has been omitted. It might be that the Stones had not come across a fictional account of this condition or possibly that none exists. Yet their own book shows that they must have read one written by a great master of fiction, but for some reason they appear to have overlooked it.

On page 194 of their book there is a reference under the heading of "Obsessions" to a short story by Herman Melville called "Bartleby The Scrivener".[3] The quotation which the Stones use consists about half the page and refers to Nippers, the second of the Scriveners present in the office where Bartleby's tragedy occurred.

Melville's account of Nipper's obsessional neurosis is vivid and well worth including in this section. Nevertheless, to include it and exclude the title subject of the story, Bartleby, is an error of judgment. An error,

however, for which there is some excuse and even justification. It was only after I heard the story read twice on the radio, by the able able actor, James Mason, that I began to recognize what a brilliant picture of catatonia it was.

The fault, if one is arrogant enough to call it a fault, is Melville's. He has written so well and made it so interesting that one becomes too deeply involved in the fate of the unfortunate Bartleby and its effect upon his perplexed employer to concern oneself with a psychiatric analysis of his illness. The story is so absorbing that Bartleby's clinical condition pales besides his terrible isolation and the effect of his strange remoteness upon a well-disposed employer and rather less well-disposed fellow employees.

From a medical point of view then, Melville has done too well. He has written an exciting and fascinating story around Bartleby's terrible illness. But the mystery and tragedy of the affair reduces one's interest in and even one's awareness of the illness. Artistically this is excellent; medically, it is a misfortune. However, once I managed to disengage myself from the magic of Melville's writing, enhanced greatly by James Mason's splendid and sensitive delivery, and read Bartleby at leisure, I recognized that this was a supremely well-written account of the development of a catatonic illness and the effect of that illness upon the sufferer's relationship with a very small group of people.

The story tells one nothing about Bartleby's inner experience but this is not always a disadvantage. At the beginning of their careers, medical students and young psychiatrists are seldom aware of the inner experiences of their patients. They must first learn to observe how their patients behave and see what effect that behavior has upon themselves and upon others. Once novices can do this, they are much better able to enquire into their patient's experience and to have some understanding of its meaning.

"Bartleby the Scrivener" is a blow by blow account of a man being gradually sucked down into the quick sands of catatonia and while he moves towards his doom others watch helplessly, unable to do anything.

The narrator of this story tells us that he is "a rather elderly man" with an office on Wall Street who had the lucrative post of a master in chancery until that position was abolished, much to his annoyance. He records:

". . . *that I was not unemployed in my profession by the late John Jacob Astor; a name which, I admit, I love to repeat, for it hath a rounded and orbicular sound to it, and rings like unto bullion. I will freely add that I was not insensible to the late John Jacob Astor's good opinion."*

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The narrator is then an elderly, slightly pompous, but not unkindly legal gentlemen who employs a number of law copyists or Scriveners. There are three of these at the beginning of the story, they are called, Turkey, Nippers and Ginger Nut. Turkey is an Englishmen in his 60's, about the same age of his employer. He seems to be an alcoholic and comes in the worse for drink nearly every afternoon. However, his work is of such quality until the meridian of 12 o'clock that his employer continues to keep him in his office. Nippers, the second, is an obsessional man who is usually depressed and irritable in the mornings but cheerful and expansive in the afternoon. Ginger Nut, a promising lad, is the office boy who seems to be thoroughly healthy and lively.

It is to this office that in response to an advertisement:

"... a *motionless young man one morning stood upon my office threshold, the door being open, for it was summer. I can see that figure now—*

pallidly neat, pitiably respectable, incurably forlorn! It was Bartleby."

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Bartleby is installed close to his employer but concealed from him by a green folding screen. The lawyer tells us:

"At first, Bartleby did an extraordinary quantity of writing. As if long famishing for something to copy, he seemed to gorge himself on my documents. There was no pause for digestion. He ran a day and night line, copying by sun-light and by candlelight. I should have been quite delighted with his application, had he been cheerfully industrious. But he wrote on silently, palely, mechanical-

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However before long, trouble starts when Bartleby is asked to help compare a small paper. This is how the narrator describes what happened:

". . . Imagine my surprise, nay, my consternation, when without moving from his privacy, Bartleby, in a singularly mild, firm voice, replied, 'I would prefer not to'.

"I sat awhile in perfect silence rallying my stunned faculties. Immediately it occurred to me that my ears had deceived me, or Bartleby had entirely misunderstood my meaning. I repeated my request in the clearest tone I could assume. But in quite as clear a one came the previous reply, 'I would prefer not to'.

" 'Prefer not to,' echoed I, rising in high excitement, and crossing the room with a stride. 'What do you mean? Are you moon-struck? I want you to help me compare this sheet here—take it,' and I trust it towards him. " 'I would prefer not to,' said he."

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The narrator is perplexed by Bartleby's behavior but he calls in Nippers and they proceed to do the work. A few days later he once again calls upon Bartleby. He shouts:

" 'Bartleby! quick, I am waiting.'

"I heard a slow scrape of his chair legs on the uncarpeted floor, and soon he appeared standing at the entrance of his hermitage.

" 'What is wanted?' said he, mildly.

" 'The copies, the copies,' said I hurriedly. 'We are going to examine them. There'—and I held toward him the fourth quadruplicate.

" 7 would prefer not to,' he said and gently disappeared behind the screen.

"For a few moments I was turned into a pillar of salt, standing at the head of my seated column of clerks. Recovering myself, I advanced toward the screen, and demanded the reason for such extraordinary conduct.

" 'Why do you refuse?'

" 'I would prefer not to.'

"With any other man I should have flown outright into a dreadful passion, scorned all further words, and thrust him ignominiously from my presence. But there was something about Bartleby that not only strangely disarmed me, but in a wonderful manner touched and disconcerted me. I began to reason with him.

" 'These are your own copies we are about to examine. It is labor saving to you, because one examination will answer for your four papers. It is common usage. Every copyist is bound to help examine his copy. Is it not so? Will you not speak? Answer!' " 7 prefer not to'."

The narrator is so disturbed by this that he calls in his three clerks for consultation:

" 'Turkey,' said I, 'what do you think of this? Am I not right?'

" "With submission, sir,' said Turkey, in his blandest tone, 'I think that you are.

" 'Nippers,' said I 'what do you think of it?'

" 'I think I should kick him out of the office'.

(The reader of nice perceptions will here perceive that, it being morning, Turkey's answer is couched in polite and tranquil terms, but Nippers replies in ill-tempered ones. Or, to repeat a previous sentence, Nippers' ugly mood was on duty, and Turkey's off.)

" 'Ginger Nut,' said I, willing to enlist the smallest suffrage in my behalf, 'What do you think of it?

" 'I think, sir, he's a little luny,' replied Ginger Nut, with a grin.

" 'You hear what they say,' said I, turning towards the screen, 'come forth and do your duty.' "But he vouchsafed no reply."

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This passage is particularly interesting, for it is Ginger Nut, age 12, who spots and voices what has long been apparent when he says:
" 1 thing sir, he's a little luny'." The narrator now describes with great frankness the annoyance which Bartleby's strange behavior produced in himself and others:

". . . The passiveness of Bartleby sometimes irritated me. I felt strangely goaded on to encounter him in new opposition, to elicit some angry spark from him answerable to my own. But, indeed, I might as well have essayed to strike fire with my knuckles against a bit of Windsor soap. But one afternoon the evil impuse in me mastered me, and the following little scene ensued.

" 'Bartleby,' said I, 'when those papers are all copied, I will compare them with you'

" 7 would prefer not to.'

" 'How? Surely you do not mean to persist in that mulish vagary?

"No answer.

"I threw open the folding-doors near by, and turning upon Turkey and Nippers, exclaimed:

"'Bartleby a second time says he won't examine his papers. What do you think of it, Turkey?

"It was afternoon, be it remembered. Turkey sat glowing like a brass boiler, his bald head steaming, his hands reeling among his blotted papers.

" 'Think of it? roared Turkey. 'I think I'll just step behind his screen, and black his eyes for him'."

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However the lawyer will not let Turkey put these threats into action:

". . . I burned to be rebelled against again. I remembered that Bartleby never left the office.

" 'Bartleby,' said I, 'Ginger Nut is away; just step around to the post office, wont you? (it was but a three minutes' walk) and see if there is anything for me.'

" 'I prefer not to.'

" 'You will not?

" 'I prefer not'."

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"I staggered to my desk and sat there in a deep study. My blind inveteracy returned. Was there any other thing in which I could procure myself to be ignominously repulsed by this lean, penniless wight?—my hired clerk? What added thing is there, perfectly reasonable, that he will be sure to refuse to do?

" 'Bartleby!'

"No answer.

" 'Bartleby,' in a louder tone.

"No answer.

" 'Bartleby,' I roared.

"Like a very ghost, agreeably to the laws of magical invocation, at the third summons, he appeared at the entrance of his hermitage.

" 'Go to the next room, and tell Nippers to come to me.'

" 'I prefer not to,' he respectfully and slowly said, and mildly disappeared.

" 'Very good, Bartleby,' said I, in a quiet sort of serenely severe self-possessed tone, intimating the unalterable purpose of some terrible retribution very close at hand. . ."

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It was not long after this that the narrator discovered that Bartleby has been living in the office:

". . . Upon more closely examining the place, I surmised that for an indefinite period, Bartleby must have ate, dressed, and slept in my office, and that too without plate, mirror, or bed. The cushioned seat of a rickety old sofa in one corner bore the faint impress of a lean, reclining form. Rolled away under his desk, I found a blanket; under the empty grate, a blacking box and brush; on a chair, a tin basin, with soap and a ragged towel; in a newspaper a few crumbs of ginger-nuts and a morsel of cheese. Yes, thought I, it is evident enough that Bartleby has been making his home here, keeping Bachelor's Hall all by himself. Immediately then the thought came sweeping across me, what miserable friendlessness and loneliness are here revealed! His poverty is great; but his solitude, how horrible!"

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"I now recalled all the quiet mysteries which I had noted in the man. I remembered that he never spoke but to answer; that, though at intervals he had considerable time to himself, yet

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I had never seen him reading—no, not even a newspaper; that for long periods he would stand looking out, at his pale window behind the screen, upon the dead brick wall; I was quite sure he never visited any refectory or eating house; while his pale face clearly indicated that he never drank beer like Turkey, or tea and coffee even, like other men; that he never went anywhere in particular that I could learn; never went out for a walk, unless, indeed, that was the case at present; that he had declined telling who he was, or whence he came, or whether he had any relatives in the world; that though so thin and pale, he never complained of ill-health. And more than all, I remembered a certain unconscious air of pallid—how shall I call it?—of pallid haughtiness, say, or rather an austere reserve about him, which had positively awed me into my tame compliance with his eccentricities, when I had feared to ask him to do the slightest incidental thing for me, even though I might know, from his long-continued motionlessness, that behind his screen he must be standing in one of those deadwall reveries of his."

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". . . My first emotions had been those of pure melancholy and sincerest pity; but just in proportion as the for-lornness of Bartleby grew and grew to

my imagination, did that same melancholy merge into fear, that pity into repulsion. So true it is, and so terrible, too, that up to a certain point the thought or sight of misery enlists our best affections; but, in certain special cases, beyond that point it does not. They err who would assert that invariably this is owing to the inherent selfishness of the human heart. It rather proceeds from a certain hopelessness of remedying excessive and organic ill. To a sensitive being, pity is not seldom pain. And when at last it is perceived that such pity cannot lead to effectual succor, common sense bids the soul be rid of it. What I saw that morning persuaded me that the Scrivener was the victim of innate and incurable disorder. I might give alms to his body; but his body did not pain him; it was his soul that suffered, and his soul I could not reach."

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Bartleby is indeed unreachable and his speech usually consists of stereotyped phrases such as:

" *At present, I prefer to give no answer."*

The lawyer tries to wheedle Bartleby, but he succeeds no better than he did with threats:

" *'Say now you will help to examine papers tomorrow or next day; in short, say now, that in a day or two you will begin to be a little reasonable:—say so, Bartleby.'*

" 'At present I would prefer not to be a little reasonable,' was his mildly cadaverous reply."

By this time the little group in the office have become infected with Bartleby's preferences and are themselves using his words saying:

" 7 *prefer this and I would prefer that'."*

Soon afterwards, Bartleby announces that he has given up writing anymore. The narrator states:

" *'Why, how now? what next? exclaimed I, 'do no more writing?'*

" 'No more.'

" 'And what is the reason?'

" 'Do you not see the reason for yourself?[1] *he indifferently replied.*

" 7 looked steadfastly at him, and perceived that his eyes looked dull and glazed. Instantly it occurred to me that his unexampled diligence in copying by his dim window for the first few weeks of his stay with me might have temporarily impaired his vision."

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However, not long after this Bartleby says again:

" '*I have given up copying,' he answered, and slid aside.*

"He remained as ever, a fixture in my chamber. Nay—if that were possible-he became still more of a fixture than before. What was to be done? He would do nothing in the office; why should he stay there? In plain fact, he had now become a millstone to me, not only useless as a necklace, but afflictive to bear. . ."

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The narrator eventually decides that he must get rid of Bartleby and he tells him as much:

"I buttoned up my coat, balanced myself, advanced slowly towards him, touched his shoulder, and said, 'The time has come; you must quit this place; I am sorry for you; here is money; but you must go.'

" 7 would prefer not,' he replied, with his back still towards me.

" 'You must.'

"He remained silent."

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However, Bartleby doesn't go and to the

narrator's questions—he answered nothing:

" "Will you, or will you not, quit me? I now demanded in a sudden passion, advancing close to him.

" 7 would prefer not to quit you,' he replied, gently emphasizing the not.

" 'What earthly right have you to stay here? Do you pay any rent? Do you pay my taxes? Or is this property yours?

"He answered nothing.

" 'Are you ready to go and write now? Are your eyes recovered? Could you copy a small paper for me this morning? or help examine a few lines? or step round to the post office? In a word, will you do anything at all, to give a coloring to your refusal to depart the premises?'

"He silently retired into his hermitage."

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After a moral struggle the narrator decides that he will try and help Bartleby by keeping him in the office in spite of the fact that he is doing nothing. But this becomes difficult for reasons which he explains clear-ly:

"I believe that this wise and blessed frame of mind would have continued with me, had it not been for the unsolicited and uncharitable remarks obtruded upon me by my professional friends who visited the rooms. But thus it often is, that constant friction of illiberal minds wears out at last the best resolves of the more generous. Though to be sure, when I reflected upon it, it was not strange that people entering my office should be struck by the peculiar aspect of the unaccountable Bartleby, and so be tempted to throw out some sinister observations concerning him. Sometimes an attorney, having business with me, and calling at my office, and finding not one but the Scrivener there, would undertake to obtain some sort of precise information from him touching my whereabouts; but without heeding his idle talk, Bartleby would remain standing immovable in the middle of the room. So after contemplating him in that position for a time, the attorney would depart no wiser than he came.

"Also, when the reference was going on, and the room full of lawyers and witnesses, and business was driving fast, some deeply occupied legal gentleman present, seeing Bartleby wholly unemployed, would request him to run round to his (the legal gentleman's) offices and fetch some papers for him. Thereupon, Bartleby would tranquilly decline, and yet remain idle as before. Then the lawyer would give a great stare, and turn to me. And what could I say? At last I was made aware that all through the circle of my professional acquaintance, a whisper of wonder was running round, having reference to the strange creature I kept at my office. This worried me very much. . ."

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Eventually, the narrator fearing that his business will suffer due to his colleagues' doubts about his sanity in keeping so strange a Scrivener, deserts his own office and leaves Bartleby behind. He wonders whether Bartleby will follow but he does not. He discovers, however, that Bartleby has remained and cannot be moved from the office. Attempts are made by the new tenants to get the narrator to remove Bartleby; he dutifully goes back and tries to work out some better arrangements for him:

" 'Bartleby,' said I, in the kindest tone I could assume under such exciting circumstances, 'will you go home with me now—not to my office, but my dwelling—and remain there till we can

conclude upon some convenient arrangement for you at our leisure? Come let us start now, right away.'

" 'No, at present I would prefer not to make any change at all.'"

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The narrator now concludes that he can do no more and leaves quickly for his new office. Not long after this he learns that Bartleby has been conducted to the Tombs and goes to visit him there:

". . . And so I found him there, standing all alone in the quietest of the yards, his face towards a high wall, while all around, from the narrow slits of the jail windows, I thought I saw peering out upon him the eyes of murderers and thieves.

" 'Bartleby!'

" 7 know you,' he said, without looking round, 'and I want nothing to say to you.'

" 'It was not I that brought you here, Bartleby,' said I, keenly pained at his implied suspicion. 'And to you, this should not be so vile a place. Nothing reproachful attaches to you by being here. And see, it is not so sad a place as one might think. Look, there is the sky, and here is the grass.'

"7 know where I am,' he replied, but would say nothing more, and so I left him."

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However, before leaving the prison, he makes arrangements for Bartleby to be fed by the turnkey who makes it clear that unless he is paid Bartleby will not get the best food:

"Thinking it would prove of benefit to the Scrivener, I acquiesced, and, asking the grub-man his name, went up with him to Bartleby.

" 'Bartleby, this is a friend; you will find him very useful to you.'

" 'Your sarvant, sir, your sarvant,' said the grubman, making a low salutation behind his apron. 'Hope you find it pleasant here, sir; nice grounds—cool apartments-hope you'll stay with us some time—try to make it agreeable. What will you have for dinner today?' " 7 prefer not to dine today,' said Bartleby, turning away. 'It would disagree with me; I am unused to dinners.' So saying, he slowly moved to the other side of the enclosure, and took up a position fronting the dead-wall.

" 'How's this?' said the grub-man addressing me with a stare of astonishment. 'He's odd, ain't he?

" 7 think he is a little deranged,' said I, sadly."

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The turnkey however, wonders whether Bartleby may not be a forger because he was so "pale and genteel-like." A few days later the lawyer goes back to see Bartleby again and the turnkey tells him:

" 'Are you looking for the silent man? said another turnkey, passing me. 'Yonder he lies—sleeping in the yard there. Tis not twenty minutes since I saw him lie down.' . . .

"Strangely huddled at the base of the wall, his knees drawn up, and lying on his side, his head touching the cold stones, I saw the wasted Bartleby. But nothing stirred. I paused; then went close up to him; stooped over, and that his dim eyes were open; otherwise he seemed profoundly sleeping. Something prompted me to touch him. I felt his hand, when a tingling shiver ran up my arm and down my spine to my feet.

"The round face of the grub-man peered upon me now. 'His dinner is ready. Won't he dine today, either? Or does he live without dining?

" 'Lives without dining,' said I and closed the eyes. " 'Eh!—He's asleep, ain't he?

" "With kings and counselors,' murmured I."

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Then ends the story with a little account of Bartleby's history:

". . . The report was this: that Bartleby had been a subordinate clerk in the Dead Letter Office at Washington, from which he had been suddenly removed by a change in the administration. When I think over this rumor, hardly can I express the emotions which seize me. Dead letters! does it not sound like dead men? Conceive a man by nature and misfortune prone to a pallid hopelessness, can any business seem more fitted to heighten it than that of continually handling these dead letters, and assorting them for the flames? For by the cart-load they are annually burned. Sometimes from out of the folded paper the pale clerk takes a ring—the finger it was meant for, perhaps moulders in the grave; a banknote sent in swiftest charity—he whom it would relieve nor eats nor hungers any more; pardon for those who died despairing; hope for those who died unhoping; good tidings for those who died stifled by unrelieved calamities. On errands of life, these letters speed to death.

"Ah, Bartleby; Ah humanity!"

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DISCUSSION

Melville was a genius whose writing can and ought to be assessed at many different levels. It would be as inept to view Bartle-by's tragic isolation simply as a case history as it would be to treat *Moby Dick* as a manual about paranoia in the Whaling Captains. Bartleby is the most outside of all outsiders, the utterly isolated soul, compared with whose stellar remoteness, shabby flotsam like Turkey and Nippers, neither of whom seem to have any family life, appear as the acme of conviviality and sociability. Seen in this way, Bartleby becomes a parable about the human condition which is a variation on the same gigantic theme as Moby Dick but on a much smaller scale. One might call it a prose sonnet as compared with an epic, telling us of man opposing the universe.

However, in addition to being a brilliant account of the failure of benevolence, kindness and good intentions to reach into another's world, it is one of the finest and most keenly observed descriptions of the descent in to catatonic illness. Bartleby is treated with warm hearted consideration by his employer who shows every wish to help him to the extent even of endangering his own reputation. In spite of this real and sustained concern the lawyer does not seem to have ever entertained the possibility that Bartleby might be very ill, although he proves to be sick unto death. It is true that he is referred to as deranged, but the kindly narrator who did so much else for him never once sent for a doctor or apparently even thought about so doing. This failure is all the more striking when Ginger Nut, the office boy aged 12, early in the story recognizes that Bartleby is "luny"— in other words, insane.

How can we account for this extraordinary omission which must be ascribed to Melville himself since he does not take an author's license to discuss these matters-something he was never loath to do and which was a common enough custom in 19th century narratives? I suspect that the stereotype of an insane person current in New York at that time (1840-1850) was that of an over-active, menacing and probably dangerous person.

Bartleby in no way resembled that stereotype. He was gentle, unassuming, uncommunicative, almost immobile, forlorn, but unbelievably obstinate. While the scrivener

did little or nothing to annoy in an active way, his passivity generated uncertainty, resentment and even rage in his employer and fellow employees. This is hardly surprising for he took no part in the bustling social life of their busy office and although he began by being very industrious, before long he had become completely idle, failing to do his share of the work. He was not filling his role as a scrivener. Not only did he fail to fulfill his function of scrivening but he offered no explanation for his failure apart from the stereotypic "I would prefer not to."

The rest of the time he stared at the blank wall. His employer and fellow employees were completely bewildered by this. Had he said, "I feel ill" when he became incapacitated, this would have undoubtedly aroused pity and concern. He would have been perceived as a candidate for the sick role deserving of help and compassion, but Bartleby did not raise this possibility himself and nobody heeded the bright and observant Ginger Nut.

In spite of Bartleby's small response to kindness and forbearance, the narrator was determined to do all he could to help. By good example he encouraged his staff to be gentle with Bartleby. It appears that this strange parasitic relationship might have gone on indefinitely had not his fellow lawyers begun to question his keeping an eccentric scrivener in the office. With this, the narrator's reputation as a man of sound judgment and good sense, which he valued highly, was at stake. He then made a further attempt to get Bartleby to leave, even offering him a place in his own home, but the unhappy man remained immovable, replying with his eternal "I would prefer not to." Unable to be rid of Bartleby, unwilling to throw him out on the street, the narrator did the only other possible thing, he left himself and moved his office. Bartleby remained in the building and the new tenants after trying to make the narrator responsible for this waif, had him escorted to the tombs.

This illustrates neatly some of the social consequences of failing to claim or to be accorded the sick role. Had the narrator been assisting a sick and ailing scrivener, far from being reproached, he would have been acclaimed as a charitable and kindly man. Housing an idler, however, was something entirely different. Bartleby was presumably taken to the Tombs for trespassing since he was not, we are told, indigent. The narrator continued to try and help Bartleby, even though still rebuffed, he provides good food for him, but after a short time in prison the scrivener lies down, curls up in what sounds like a fetal position and gently dies.

At the end of the story the narrator tries to find an answer for Bartleby's strange behavior and manages to ascribe it very ingeniously to working in the dead letter office in Washington, such a theory would undoubtedly appeal to some socially minded psychiatrists today.

Scrivening itself sounds a soul destroying occupation to me, but neither Turkey, Nippers, nor even little Ginger Nut, a mere novice, seem to have considered it to be so. Human beings are remarkably adaptable and if they are esteemed by others, they may acquire considerable self-esteem in performing functions which appear dull or even repulsive to outsiders.

Tempting, as it may be, to ascribe the development of grave mental illnesses to work which appears to be tedious and repetitive, as T. T. Paterson has shown in his book, *Glasgow Limited** even in boring, heavy, unpleasant and dangerous work, men may be well contented provided they have a sense of achievement, a congenial peer group and consider that they are being treated fairly. When these conditions obtain they seem no more likely to get mentally disturbed than in far more exciting and rewarding occupations.

If Bartleby had been living today, one

hopes, though not necessarily with much justification, that he would have been recognized as being very ill and treated for his illness. He could hardly have found a kinder employer or one more devoted to doing everything possible to help. However, even with such an employer, as the narrator of this story is forced to recognize, there is a point beyond which kindness and sympathy is not enough.

Today empathy, often vaguely defined, is sometimes substituted for kindness and sympathy, although there is little evidence that this does much more for those who are ill, however gratifying it may be for those who think they excel in this particular but evasive virtue. People suffering from schizophrenia today still drift into catatonia, like Bartleby, their lives becoming more and more constricted.

Sometimes, of course, they are precipitated in to it at whirlwind speed. Dr. Bernard Aaronson's experiments[5] suggest that certain kinds of change in time and space perception are frequently associated with catatonia. Bartleby's recorded speech is so little and so stereotyped that we can only infer what his experience may have been. Self reports from others who have become catatonic show that this condition is frequently a response to an overwhelming sensory bombardment. To cope with this, the sick person tries to reduce sensory input by a reduction of all activities but in so doing, frequently cuts himself off from that social consolation and support which is usually given to the sick. Indeed, this is what happened with the unfortunate Bartleby who alienates a benevolent employer and repels his fellow scriveners who were not initially ill-disposed towards him.

Using experiential tests,[6 7 8] my colleagues and I have found further support for the view that sensory overloading frequently produces behavior closely resembling that which afflicted Bartleby and distressed his employer.

That Melville's rich and strange narrative is as interesting today as when it was written shows how little the manifestations of this illness have altered during the last century or so. This suggests that contrary to Dr. Thomas Szasz'[9] views, we ought to concern ourselves not with myths of mental illness, but with the painful facts of widespread diseases which cannot be evaded by rhetorical statements or semantic niceties.

Finally there is one point which I would underscore. It was not the shrewd and kindly lawyer, acquainted with John Jacob Astor, the worldly wise, if somewhat alcoholic Turkey or the sharp and obsessional Nippers, who first considered that Bartleby might be seriously ill; it was the lively and alert, Ginger Nut, aged 12, who recognising the obvious far earlier than his seniors when he said, "I think, sir, he's a little luny."

Then as now, sophisticated people frequently fail to see what stares them in the face while the naive do not ignore what common observation shows them. Perhaps there is no harder thing for the learned to do than to sit down in front of the facts like a child, unscreened and unarmored by notions and theories which are sometimes our most cherished impediments to understanding.

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