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THE MECHANISM OF 'DYNAMIC APHASIA'

Several years ago one of the authors (Luria, 1947, 1948, 1962, 1963) described a special form of speech disorder, which followed focal lesions of the anterior part of the left hemisphere, and which he called 'dynamic aphasia'. The syndrome of this aphasia, resembling the 'Adynamie der Sprache' mentioned by earlier authors (Kleist, 1930, 1934; Pick, 1905; and others), could be described as follows. The patient had preserved sensory and motor speech; he could easily name objects and repeat words and even sentences. But he was unable to 'propositionize' and his active speech was severely disturbed. In cases of most massive brain destruction the patient was unable even to construct a simple phrase; in less massive cases, severe difficulties appeared when the patient tried to tell a story, to describe a situation or even to use his speech for verbal communication. Although his understanding as well as his motor speech were preserved, he did not use his speech for free communication, and remained practically speechless. When asked to describe a picture or tell a story he said: "...yes...and...how it can be said...Oh, gosh...I really don't know...". We remember a patient with a gunshot wound in the lower posterior part of the left frontal lobe who on attempting to give an oral composition on 'The North...' could only say after 10 minutes: "There are bears in the North..." and after further stimulation added: "That's what I had to report...". Another patient with a similar syndrome tried to give an extended composition on 'The North', failed, and found a solution by reproducing M. Lermontov's well-known verse 'The North...'. Yet, the mechanisms of 'dynamic aphasia' are not clear. The purpose of this paper is to take some steps towards describing the basic disturbances underlying this form of verbal defect.

I. THE PROBLEM

We shall give some examples of the disturbances of speech in patients with 'dynamic aphasia'; we shall then try to formulate a hypothesis and present experimental results to support it.

Patient Mor. (Neuro-Surgical Institute, case 36309), with an aneurism of the left anterior cerebral artery and hemorrhage in the posterior part of the left frontal lobe, was asked to tell the history of his own case.