

Christine Jorgensen Story Well Written Up to Changeover

Christine Jorgensen: A Personal Autobiography, introduction by Harry Benjamin, M.D. (Paul S. Ericks-on, Inc., \$6.96)

Much has been said and read about the "search for identity." When that search also involves a search for gender, the problem is compounded.

The introduction to this book is written by Harry Benjamin, M.D., an endocrinologist who is engaged in research on transsexualism.

Christine Jorgensen was born George Jorgensen Jr. on May 30, 1926, an apparently normal baby boy who emerged an attractive and feminine young woman in Denmark 26 years later. In this volume, the world-famous transsexual relates her experiences before and after transformation.

George Jorgensen Jr. was an effeminate, smooth-cheeked youth who had served as a private in the United States Army. Having preferred dolls to fire engines as a child, his inclination toward femininity was intensified when he realized he was in love with a former Army buddy. This, according to Dr. Benjamin, was not the love of a homosexual, but actually the love of a woman for a man.

"A homosexual relationship can only exist between two men who also feel themselves to be men. A homosexual, therefore, does not want to change sex. In typical fashion, Christine shows her dislike for homosexual inclinations when she speaks of her 'growing horror of myself,' not understanding that her problem was trans — not homo-sexual," is the opinion of the doctor.

He believes that Christine's case cannot be ascribed to anything but an inborn, although not hereditary condition. He explains the theory that there is a nerve center in the lower brain, which is the seat of the instincts, that has some control over sex behavior in later life. Prenatally, this center is basically female in all fetuses, whether they be male or female. "In those, however, who are genetically (i.e., by their chromosomal constellation) male, their newly formed, tiny sex glands must produce male hormones so that the female center become masculinized. Otherwise it remains female and feminine sex behavior will be the consequences after the animal is born even if that animal is anatomically a male."

Absolute scientific proof is as yet lacking that such abnormal events during pregnancy can produce the gender role disorientation in later life. If the theory is conclusively proven, it will upset the applecart for the psychoanalysts who have attributed transsexualism to childhood conditioning.

Dr. Benjamin proclaims this autobiography "a human document of great medical value." His reference is to the psychological reaction of the patient rather than to specific medical information, as the accounts of the hormone injections, the psychotherapy, and the operations are not presented in great medical detail by the author.

The determination of George Jorgensen to follow through on his decision to change gender is a story of courage, depression, hope, frustration, rejection and ridicule. During the transforma-

tion, he was assailed with such would-be witticisms as "Is Christine really George?" and "Christine by George!"

The book contains a number of photographs, the most interesting of which are the before-and-after shots of the author. There are also pictures of the medical men, Dr. Christian Hamburger and Dr. Georg Sturup, of Copenhagen. The remainder are publicity pictures of the author taken during her theatrical career.

Although Christine makes the statement that "... there had been perhaps thirty cases of sex conversion on record before mine," it is estimated that about 2,000 persons have undergone sex change surgery, with virtually all of the operations having been performed in Europe, Morocco, Japan and Mexico. Johns Hopkins Hospital and the University of Minnesota are the pioneers in this work in the United States.

The Harry Benjamin Foundation, headed by Dr. Harry Benjamin, is supported by the Erickson Foundation of Baton Rouge, which also pays the cost of transsexual research at Johns Hopkins, according to a quotation from a New York Times article published last November.

If this is, indeed, a "personal" autobiography — and most of us didn't know there was any other kind — it is well written, up to the point of the transformation. From there on, the author concentrates on her aspirations for a theatrical career.

As for Christine Jorgensen, she has adjusted to the world better than the world has adjusted to her. —Doris Willkom