BOOK REVIEWS

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF BEHAVIOUR DISORDERS
Norman Cameron

Fashion in psychopathology comes and goes rather rapidly; it was not long ago that analytical attention was primarily directed towards studying individual reactions to a stock selection of infantile traumatic situations. Now, with the current trend towards sociological interpretation, certain analysts are looking away from the patient, in fact ignoring him altogether and evaluating the symptom complex he presents in terms of environmental influences. Carried to extremes this discipline regards the social pattern as a matrix of equivalent units each differing only in the history of its experience. It is from near this extreme position that Professor Cameron has reinterpreted psychiatry.

The first part of his book is devoted to a statement of the sociological forces which form one major cause of emotional stress. The development of the individual in relation to his environment is described in detail, and such controversial issues as infantile sexuality, oral and anal erotism, are woven sensibly into a coherent picture of learning and maturation. The rest, the major part, is a description of the classical psychiatric syndromes. The symptomatology of each is accurately described, and they are re-evaluated in terms of biosocial psychopathology.

The author unfortunately dismisses without adequate explanation a large body of accepted knowledge in the fields both of psychology and psychiatry. He denies any constitutional basis for personality differences, and ignores the existing evidence for hereditary factors in the etiology of schizophrenia and the cyclical insanities. Empirical modern therapy is dismissed. It is brusquely, if correctly, characterized as "cerebral assault." The result is a lengthy but very one-sided book of considerable naiveté. As a good illustration of the latter point, it is noted that the fanciful Freudian dichotomy of a conscious and an unconscious mental life is dismissed, but in the next sentence the author himself divides mental processes into those that are "reportable" and those that are "unreportable." In the sociopathology of everyday life this book is of interest and value, but as a reasoned re-evaluation of the etiology of behaviour disorders it is biased and misleading.

WAR, POLITICS, AND INSANITY
C. S. Bluemel

This book is deceptive in its dust cover—red, white, black, and flashy; but under this is a quiet blue board with discreet lettering. The style is simple, almost too simple, a little ingenuous for one with degrees and the title of psychiatrist, and it is difficult to avoid a sense of disappointment that the author did not go deeper into some of the interesting problems he touches.

The thought and style are clear, as can be judged from such remarks as, "In the legend of democracy it is a postulate that the majority is always right. Manifestly the principle is faulty, for opinion may be wrong even when it is unanimous"—obvious perhaps, but often forgotten—or again, "Despite the beauty of the thought (i.e., that the majority is always right), it is impossible to distill wisdom from mass opinion."

When Dr. Bluemel discusses obsessive, compulsive, and aggressive behaviour, both the inadequacy of language to express complex ideas and the inability of present-day psychological thinking to discriminate between different moving forces and intentions becomes evident. It is true to say that a man who is always worrying about his own teeth and staring at other people's has an obsession, and equally true to say that Columbus was obsessed with the idea of a new world in the west. Nevertheless the two obsessions are different in kind; the potential results are different from the beginning, and the motive forces, could we see them, must surely also be different. The compulsion of Florence Nightingale to look after the sick is very different in quality from the compulsion of Carry Nation to smash up public houses. But present-day psychology has not found an instrument by which to measure these differences; until it does so it will see only the outer skin, as it were, of behaviour. Certainly to discuss such different kinds of "obsession" in one breath—as this author does—implies a faulty approach.

The chapters "Democracy in Action" and "An Appraisal of Democracy" are interesting reading because the inherent rightness and workability of democracy are too often taken for granted in spite of the opposite views of many of the greatest philosophers, and in spite of the fact that a wholly democratic state has never existed. It would be interesting to have an analysis of the philosophic implications of the democratic idea and psychological assessment of achievements of approximately democratic governments.

In the last chapter, "The Future of Democracy," the author puts forward a scheme for limiting the franchise and governmental responsibility to the academically and morally qualified. "When the world is governed by normal men it will cease to be the arena of the battle captains and men will live together in peace." Yes, indeed. But what is "normal"? And how is the danger to be overcome that abnormal or subnormal people will impose their own standards, calling them "normal"? Where, in fact, are "normal" men to be found?