ABSTRACTS

Psychopathology.

PSYCHOLOGY.


Miss McConnel discusses the difference between social symbolism and dream symbolism and states that failure to distinguish these two forms has led to controversy between anthropologists and psychoanalysts. The author's aim is to expose what she supposes to be the fallacy latent in the psychoanalyst's interpretation of typical dream symbols. Criticising the psychoanalytical interpretation of snake symbolism which she thinks is repressed sexual desire, and of water as a symbol of rebirth, she states that it is not surprising to find the psychoanalytical interpretation of snake symbolism, owing to the causal relationship existing between the snake as a symbol of sin in religious tradition, and in the dream as repressed sexual desire. She thinks that it occurs in dreams primarily as a symbol of sin and secondarily as a sex symbol. She believes that the beneficent aspect of the snake found in certain primitive races is the exact opposite to the destructive attitude of European traditions. The significance of the snake in each dream respectively corresponds to its social significance in each community. In the European community it symbolises the impulse against which social authority is waging war, but in the New Guinea native's dream the snake is identified with the repressing agency in the form of a beneficent being; it cannot therefore in this case be a phallic symbol. The author thinks that this comparison proves that Freud's dictum "Everywhere we find the same symbolism and in every case understand without further information," is too hasty a generalisation. She thinks that he ignores anthropological data.

Robert M. Riggall.


Miss McConnel has failed to grasp the distinction between the two different mental processes which the term symbolism denotes in psychoanalysis. Ernest Jones accepts for present purposes the expression "social symbolism" but points out that her term "dream symbolism" is too specific and substitutes "unconscious symbolism" which will include the symbolism of neurotic phantasies, jokes, etc. Miss McConnel's suggestion that dream symbols owe their meaning to cultural sources is valid only in so far as these are social symbols and does not apply to unconscious symbolism as understood by psychoanalysis. She thinks that the conscious thoughts attached to the snake idea are enough to account for the symbolism and overlooks the further accretions added to this idea from the unconscious. Pointing out that unconscious ideas are concrete and particular, and that the formation of general
and abstract concepts savours more of conscious mental systems, he states that Miss McConnel is mistaken in her view that the psychoanalytical interpretation of snake symbolism is 'repressed sexual desire.' When the snake occurs in a dream as an unconscious symbol it generally represents the paternal phallus. The New Guinea native's dream of the snake symbolising "a beneficent being" does not, therefore, surprise the psychoanalyst. It is further pointed out that Miss McConnel is mistaken in attributing to Ernest Jones certain ideas associated with what she calls a "conviction of sin complex."

ROBERT M. RIGGALL.

NEUROSES AND PSYCHONEUROSES.


The author first deals at length with the history of the term neurosis and its changes in meaning: at first used by Cullen, it meant in Romberg's time any sort of nervous disorder, organic or functional; since Virchow it has gradually narrowed down to those nervous disorders for which no anatomical basis is known, and many of these, such as the Parkinson syndrome and chorea, have only recently been removed from its sphere. The question remains, are there any real psychoneuroses, or will further pathological study find a basis for them all? Attempts at purely physical explanations are unsatisfactory, and mental factors have to be taken into consideration, even if only in their relation to altered bodily functioning. Oppenheim's views date from a time when brain and mind were held to be identical. The psychological structure of the neuroses seemed to have been made certain by Charcot's studies in hysteria, when Beard brought forward the syndrome neurasthenia, in which subjective symptoms were combined with objective somatic disorders, responsibility for which could be disclaimed by the patient, so that neurasthenics thought themselves and were counted 'the salt of the earth.' The view that this syndrome of oversensitive and fatigable nerves was due to modern conditions and stress of life led to an inclusion within it of all sorts of conditions, notably mild degrees of schizophrenia and manic-depressive states, and to a turning of attention away from constitutional and hereditary factors, and from the study of mental processes and the development of character and personality.

The pendulum has now swung back, and psychopathology has full sway, but the underlying somatic factors have only recently come into their own with the study of constitution; and here there is too much vague talk of endocrines, with little clearer understanding of facts than in the humoral pathology of Hippocrates. We must study mind and body together and their interaction but keep clearly in view what sort of disorders of function we may expect to find. It is doubtful whether we shall ever find a pathological anatomy for the neuroses in the sense that we find it for general paralysis—there is obviously no gross disorder of the brain, such as syphilis, tumour, or softenings; the changes are not such as these, as if a child pulled a clock to pieces, but rather