

MISCELLANEOUS

CIVILIZATION, WAR AND DEATH. Selections from Three Works.

By Sigmund Freud. Edited by John Rickman. (Hogarth Press; 3s. 6d.)

Through long years of probing the depths of the human mind Dr. Sigmund Freud has reached certain conclusions in regard to its structure and to the forces which, residing chiefly in the unconscious, exercise a far-reaching influence on the behaviour not only of individuals but of communities.

The three essays deal with questions which are of concern to everyone. Civilization, War and Death. Coming at a moment when civilization seems to be threatened once more and in a still more grievous manner, this volume has a special interest, and enables the reader to gain some idea of the views elaborated by the founder of psychoanalysis, and printed in various publications at different times.

The first essay, 'Thoughts for the Times on War and Death,' was written in 1915 at the time when the world was being shaken by the last war. In it Dr. Freud seeks to lay bare the sources of the disillusionment in regard to the nature of civilization and culture, and of the changed attitude of men to death. The second essay, on 'Civilization and its Discontents,' published in book form in 1929, deals with the regions of civilization and the causes which make for discontent. Man desires happiness in this life: this is the goal he pursues, and very different paths have been taken towards it, none of which, however, is certain to lead to its realization. Hence the discontents which arise from within and without, and it is from the latter, namely from our relations with other men, that the most grievous obstacles to the pursuit of happiness are derived. The reason for this is found in the innate instinct of aggression, in the opposition of love and hate, which civilization endeavours to control but with little success. To present the author's views with greater clarity and justice would lead to quotations which, however valuable, would take us too far. We can but point out that it is through the analysis of the instinctual impulses of man, his need for love and for ties of a love nature binding men together, together with the suppression of hate and aggression, that the author bases his views on the development of culture. 'The fateful question for the human species,' he writes, 'seems to me to be whether and to what extent the cultural process developed in it will succeed in mastering the derangements of communal life caused by the human instinct of aggression and self-destruction.'

The third essay, from which the above passage is taken, 'Why War?' is a letter addressed to Professor Einstein in 1933. All of them deal with a similar theme. It may seem that the views expressed are unduly pessimistic, and indeed, as Dr. Freud himself says, he has no consolations to offer. That which might for some be derived from religion he is inclined to discredit as an illusion, but an illusion we need in order to satisfy some other instinctive urges. But here in justice to the author one needs to understand that he is speaking in psychological terms, descriptive of processes going on in the mind, and is not trying to refute religion on objective grounds. Many personal religious beliefs and practices may psychologically be regarded as illusory; there is nothing startling or new in this, and it is mainly with such beliefs that Freud is dealing.

Though many indeed will doubtless disagree with the author's conclusions—and he himself does not anticipate agreement—nevertheless they command attention and show some of the fundamental causes which lead to disruption in the community and on a larger scale eventually to war. The hopes formed that culture, including religion, would so alter human nature and the character of men as to make war unthinkable appear not to be justified by the facts. Where is the way out of the impasse? Is war, therefore, at some time or another, speaking generally and not with reference to the present situation, inevitable?

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THE GOOD PAGAN'S FAILURE. By Rosalind Murray. (Longmans; 7s. 6d.)

Eirenicism, the method adopted by the œcumenical movement towards reunion between the churches, has been defined as the effort on both sides to achieve, by greater mutual understanding, the elimination of merely apparent oppositions (doctrines which are apparently opposed are often really complementary), and the clarification of really irreducible oppositions. Eirenicism is thus at the opposite pole from compromise. And it is a method which should be applied not only between the separated brethren of Christendom, but between the Christian and the non-Christian. The first essential is the removal of misunderstanding in the use of terms. A deal of confusion is caused, for example, by Christians who persist in speaking of the preservation of Christendom or of our Christian civilization, when in fact they mean the preservation of a social and cultural *status quo* against innovations which may or may not in fact