

(The following book reviews were written for PSYCHIATRY. They were assigned to me before I knew of the interest in "vegeto-therapy" on the part of many of our supervisors.)

Character Analysis. By Wilhelm Reich. Translated by Theodore P. Wolfe. New York, Orgone Institute Press, 1945. xxii and 328 pp.

The Sexual Revolution. By Wilhelm Reich. Translated by Theodore P. Wolfe. New York, Orgone Institute Press, 1935. xxvii and 273 pp.

These two books make an attack so fundamental upon the established mores that it would require more space than I am allotted to do justice to the author's reasoning. It may be sufficient to say that he is aggressively mechanistic and hedonistic in his point of view. The chief end of life is for him the attainment of pleasure and the escape from unpleasure and the aim of all psychotherapy is the establishment of orgasmic potency. Such potency is primarily a physiological, not a psychic matter. Treatment requires the breaking down of the character armor, which he equates to the "neurotic equilibrium," and the liberation of genitality from its pre-genital fixations. Masturbation and extra-marital relationships he encourages as part of the process in his "vegeto-therapy."

Freud's view that culture owes its existence to instinctual repression and renunciation he denounces as a hangover from patriarchal religion and authoritarian family structure. In his view the giving up of infantile and anti-social impulses pre-supposes the gratification of the normal physiological sexual needs, and sublimation, as the essential cultural achievement of the psychic apparatus, is possible only in the absence of sexual repression. In an ordered sex-economy there must therefore be such gratification as corresponds to any given age. This means that infantile masturbation would not only not be prohibited but any adult would be severely dealt with who would prevent a child from developing his natural sexuality and that a love relationship between two adolescents would not only not be prohibited but would be given social protection and help. Fifteen or twenty years ago it was a disgrace for an unmarried girl not to be a virgin. To-day in all social circles we see the view developing that it is a disgrace still to be a virgin at the age of 18, 20 or 22. In spite of the influence of church, scholastic medicine and puritanical minds, it is now being recognized as unhygienic, imprudent and morally disastrous for two people to bind themselves in legal marriage without having first convinced themselves that they are matched in the basis of their life together, that is, in their sexual life.

The book is not without some gleams of insight. A real contribution, in the mind of this reviewer, is the discussion of the masochistic character and of the Freudian concept of the "death instinct." The basic conflict, Reich holds, is not that between eros and death instinct but between the ego and the outer world. There is, he says, no such thing as a wish to experience unpleasure or annihilation. Any such tendency is only apparent. Actually the masochist is striving for a pleasurable goal hidden behind that frustration and his suffering is objectively given, not subjectively desired. And suicide in a melancholic may be only the last possible means of release from painful tension.

One is not surprised to learn that Reich was expelled in 1934 from the German Psychoanalytic Association and one is inclined to question the statement that this action was due just to his anti-fascist identification and the Association's fear of the Nazis. It is to be noted that Reich is very critical of the Soviet Union also for its reactionary sex economy.

The two books give evidence of originality and of careful work but they

are annoyingly deficient in reference foot-notes. The sweeping statement that in matriarchal societies children enjoy complete sexual freedom and that sexual suppression of the child appears only to the extent that patriarchy develops is thus not supported by any references to his sources of information. Certainly his general position differs widely from Malinowski's balanced conclusions (1) and they seem wholly lacking in sociological and anthropological

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1. Sex and Repression in Savage Society. New York, Harcourt, Brace, 1927, (xii and 285 pp.) pp. 193 - 224.

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perspective.

Reich seeks to preserve some of the ancient moral values. He believes in a lasting sexual relationship. He would only do away with the legalistic, authoritarian family structure and replace external compulsive morality by inner responsibility. The question may be raised whether his philosophy of life may not all too readily lend itself to the undergirding of the inevitable post-war moral let-down.