REVIEWS

PROBLEMS OF MYSTICISM AND ITS SYMBOLISM. By Dr. Herbert Silberer of Vienna. Translated by Smith Ely Jelliffe, M. D., Ph. D. New York: Moffat, Yard & Company, 1917. Pp. 451. \$3.00 net.

In his brief "Translator's Preface" Jelliffe tells us that mysticism is one of the products of the sublimation tendency which "represents the spiritual striving of mankind towards the perfecting of a relation with the world of reality—the environment—which shall mean human happiness in its truest sense." He would regard this work by Silberer as a contribution to what may be called the science of paleo-psychology "in that it shows the essential relationships of what is found in the unconscious of present day mankind to many forms of thinking of the middle ages."

I may say here that although in fundamental traits man is no different today than he was many years ago, still, as I understand Jelliffe, and Jung, and even Stanley Hall, the contention that the conscious thought of human beings of earlier times still exists in the unconscious of the man of today, means nothing less than the hereditary transmission, by the germ plasm, and into the so-called unconscious, of not only symbols but even actual individual thoughts or ideas of a definitely acquired nature. The burden of the proof of such a possibility rests with those who make this claim. And up to date, there is no substantial evidence, so far as I am aware, in its favor. In fact, one can prove, by analytical and critical thinking and sifting of the evidence, that this cannot be true. In fact, some have already proven this to their and others' complete satisfaction.

In part I of the book proper Silberer gives in full a parable which he found in an old book dealing with the hermetic art. The original principles of the so-called hermetic art, sometimes also called alchemy and the royal art, "is related to several 'secret' sciences and organizations: magic, kabbala, rosicrucianism, etc." The latter will therefore come in for discussion, the author concludes.

Silberer regards the parable as a dream or fairy tale, which he proceeds to analyze psychoanalytically, a short exposition of psychoanalysis as a method of dream and myth interpretation of necessity preceding the analytic discussion of the parable.

Part II is called the analytic art of the work. His psychoanalytic interpretation of the parable leads him to conclude: "the wanderer in

his phantasy removes and improves the father, wins the mother, procreates himself with her, enjoys her love even in the womb and satisfies besides his infantile curiosity while observing (the) procreative process from the outside. He becomes King and attains power and magnificence, even superhuman abilities." The psychoanalyst might agree with this interpretation. The disbeliever would be unable to follow the author in his analysis and conclusions and agree to its truth, except as to the last sentence quoted.

He then analyzes alchemy, the hermetic art, rosicrucianism and freemasonry, especially as regards the philosophy with which they are interwoven, and the hidden driving forces of which these are symbolic expressions.

He finds that there are three possible interpretations: the psychoanalytic, the chemical (scientific), and the anagogic.

This leads him to the third or synthetic part. After a lengthy exposition of the psychoanalytic principles of introversion and regeneration, Silberer takes up in a chapter entitled "The Goal of the Work," the fundamental meaning or object of mysticism. He speaks of "union with God," which he prefers to interpret as self-annihilation rather than to give a sexual interpretation or setting. He also declares: "The attainment of an inner harmony, of a serene peace, is what, as it seems to me, is most clearly brought out as the characteristic of the final unification—not merely by the Hindus or Neoplatonists, but also by the Christian mystics and by the alchemists." This paradisaical state, with its "recovery of the harmonious state of the soul," demands absolute freedom from conflicts.

The truly "royal art," as elaborated by Silberer in his final chapter on "The Royal Art," which at first had to do merely with gold making and magic, is indeed the perfection of mankind, the freeing of the will, the turning of the dependent into independent, the slave into a master, the attainment of omniscience, omnipotence. To attain this requires work.

If I understand Silberer aright, he means to say that mystics seek inner harmony, perfection, omniscience, omnipotence and wish fulfillment through union with God, which union one may interpret sexually or as self-annihilation, the author inclining to the latter interpretation.

Some notes and a bibliography are appended.

There is lacking in this book a directness of expression, by virtue of which one can quickly grasp the meaning of the author. There is a vagueness and ambiguity, and a circuitous method of presenting that which the author wishes to say.

Truth is interwoven with fiction. There is much to praise and much to criticize.

The average reader will find it difficult to know just what the author's final conclusions are. One is apt to become confused here and there. There is not given to us a real, compact summing up of the views of the author. A few conclusions here, a few there, and a round-about method of discussion do not lead to directness, simplicity and clarity of thinking and expression.

In the chapter on "The Goal of the Work" the author most nearly approaches the crux of the problem. But he gets hold of it only to let go again.

Silberer has not satisfactorily solved the problem of mysticism. He has given some valuable hints. He has added much error and confusion.

The translation by Jelliffe is satisfying and all that it should be.

MEYER SOLOMON.