

THE DIANETIC METHOD

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A Cure for All Ills

DIANETICS: THE MODERN SCIENCE OF MENTAL HEALTH.

By L. Ron Hubbard. Hermitage House. \$4.

ORDINARILY, a new book which offers a generalized cure for all the ills of mankind—guaranteed, within twenty hours—would not be reviewed in these columns. This new book on "Dianetics," by L. Ron Hubbard, however, is in a class by itself. In the first place, the author seems honestly to believe what he has written. His own

powerful conviction, in turn, seems to have convinced many others—apparently intelligent people who would be inclined to toss aside a book of this type.

Hubbard offers his reader the guaranty of a method which never fails to cure all emotional—neurotic and psychotic—disorders as well as a variety of physical illnesses, from the common cold to cancer. He describes his dianetic method as follows:

The creation of dianetics is a milestone for man comparable to his discovery of fire and superior to his inventions of the wheel and arch. . . . The hidden source of all psychosomatic ills and human aberration has been discovered, and skills have been developed for their invariable cure.

He then goes on to describe how the method has never failed in the 270 cases which he has treated. What is even better, however, is that he offers the reader the opportunity to perform the same feats of therapy on the various members of his family and friends, who in turn can do likewise for him. No outside help of any kind, professional or otherwise, is necessary for the reader of this book.

No case histories are offered to substantiate his claims, nor is there documentation of any kind to indicate that any previous thinker, medical or otherwise, ever made a significant contribution to the subject of human behavior. The system is fool-proof, and any inadequate results are due to the improper understanding of the method.

It is difficult to describe the method without introducing the author's own special vocabulary, which would take too much space. The dianetic method seems to be based on the use of an auditor who helps the harried individual to relive certain traumatic experiences, especially those related to his intra-uterine life. These traumatic episodes are called "engrams," and the clearing of them allows the individual to find liberation. No special training is necessary on the part of the therapist, and there seems to be a constant verbal repetition of certain experiences until they lose their disruptive force. The whole method is based on an obvious analogy in which the human mind is compared to the electronic calculating machine, with a theoretical use of many of the concepts of cybernetics.

Union to a practicable minimum, we should withdraw our newspaper correspondents from the Soviet capital and allow no space in our newspapers to advertise Soviet intentions or achievements. We should withhold from Russia information about ourselves, about our intentions and achievements in a similar manner. Let her then taste the bitter fruits of isolation and suffer its consequences.

Norbert Wiener, however, is not quoted.

The actual method combines the techniques of free association, emotional catharsis, abreaction, and hypnosis—which the author vigorously denies. But it is doubtful whether these are the crucial factors in his therapeutic results; for I grant that many of his patients have improved under treatment. If so, how do we explain the effectiveness of such therapy? First, he offers faith and conviction in the goodness of man, and an absolute guarantee for the resolution of man's problems and illnesses. This he accomplishes without any religious connotation and within a "scientific" framework. It no longer becomes necessary to turn to God, a political leader, a physician, or a loved one to find a resolution of insecurities or dependencies.

Secondly, he offers a therapeutic relationship with another human being who will listen to the problems of the harried patient. This is always a profoundly effective therapeutic experience, whether performed in a psychiatrist's office or not. I am sure that many of the devotees of dianetics have never previously experienced the tremendous lift which comes when one shares painful experiences with a sympathetic and helpful listener. I am sure that in practical application many a husband—or wife, child, or parent—may make emotional contact for the first time with his "loved one" under the artificial circumstances of dianetic therapy; and get help regardless of the nature or validity of the verbalizations.

A third source of reassurance and comfort through dianetic therapy is its continuous repetitive emphasis on SURVIVAL. This word is used constantly in capitals as the basic "dynamic" of healthy adaptation and as the goal of all human behavior. For a world frightened by atomic-bomb destruction, with limited faith in the after world, no more hypnotic slogan could have been used to entrance people and to allay their fears.

From a psychoanalytic point of view, one is willing to overlook the fact that Hubbard presents no conception of human relationships, that he has no psychodynamic point of view. One can also forgive him for encouraging neurotic people to avoid all professional

sources of help, and even for deluding people into expecting salvation through guaranteed solutions for their problems. After all, there have been many other "faiths," movements, or special therapies which have failed to fulfil these criteria and have still helped people where the experts have failed.

The real and, to me, inexcusable danger in dianetics lies in its conception of the amoral, detached, 100 per cent efficient mechanical man—superbly free-floating, unemotional, and unrelated to anything. *This is the authoritarian dream*, a population of zombies, free to be manipulated by the great brains of the founder, the leader of the inner manipulative clique. Fortunately for us this is an unattainable dream, on the rocks of which every great authoritarian leader has sooner or later met his fate. We have learned by this time that a human being cannot exist without effective human relationships, which must fulfil some of his healthy emotional dependencies; and that mechanical, detached self-sufficiency does not exist except in a psychotic state. Healthy dependencies cannot exist without some type of reciprocal give-and-take, or democratic liaison—otherwise, hostilities sooner or later disrupt the inequitable arrangement. In these basic psychodynamic truths lies our own salvation.

MILTON R. SAPIRSTEIN

Milton—All the Facts

THE LIFE RECORDS OF JOHN MILTON. Volume I, 1608-1639. Edited by J. Milton French. Rutgers University Press. \$5.

IN THIS first of four projected volumes Professor French establishes the scope and scale of his truly monumental study of Milton's life. His intention clearly is to omit no fact either direct or tangential in its importance. Volume I, dealing with childhood, which offers fewest facts suitable for chronicle; and youth, covers thirty of Milton's sixty-four years. The remaining volumes, therefore, should provide amply for the presentation of the tumultuous years of public life and the flowering of poetic genius with the same fulness of fact that marks the first.

Such thoroughness of treatment suggests a late repetition of David Masson's

classic work. But Professor French has written a very different and in many ways a much more usable book. He does not present a biography in narrative. Instead he records, year by year, month by month, and day by day, every known fact, and all the significant conjectures, of Milton's life history. Each entry is thoroughly documented from both primary sources and trustworthy secondary ones. The reader has before him, therefore, not only the facts themselves but also the evidence which justifies their acceptance. Much of this substantiation of fact, it may be said, comes from the numerous scholarly papers and monographs Dr. French has published during the last twenty-five years. For good measure the author includes the false inferences drawn from known facts as well as statements based on ignorance, spite, or hostility. These he corrects or refutes firmly but without rancor.

"The Life Records" is primarily a work of reference. As such it is of the highest importance, for though additional details of Milton's career may still be discovered in remote or unsuspected places, the book, by its dignity, its copiousness, its obvious dedication to truth, gives the reader a sense of profound confidence. Apart from its importance as a work of research scholarship, however, the book has other values. It will interest the thoughtful reader who has delight in poetry for its own sake, since in its pages he can trace the seemingly prosaic happenings and experiences that brought into spiritual and artistic being one who was at once great man and supreme poet.

The work is so full of good things that it is perhaps churlish to complain of omissions or excesses of zeal. One does feel, however, that in a book so vast in scope space should have been found for details of the poet's ancestry. Surely the father's line, and perhaps even the mother's, could have been traced with interesting results. On the other hand, one must question the appropriateness of the extensive records of the father's rather complicated business affairs. The fact that the elder Milton was an important influence in his son's life, and that they engaged jointly in many financial transactions, hardly justifies the inclusion of many tedious documents which add nothing to our knowledge of the poet. In his own "Milton