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## THE DIANETICS CRAZE

DIANETICS, by L. Ron Hubbard (Hermitage House; \$4).

IT IS NOT SO MUCH the content of this book which deserves analysis as its effect on the average reader's mind. *Dianetics* has been steadily climbing on the best-seller list since its publication, and, next to the spectacular success of the Velikovsky book, its popularity is the most frightening proof of the confusion of the contemporary mind and its tendency to fall prey to pseudo-scientific concepts.

The book opens with the statement: "The creation of dianetics is a milestone for Man comparable to his discovery of fire and superior to his invention of the wheel and arch." Dianetics, we learn (from the Greek *dianoua*—thought), is the science of mind. "The hidden source of all psychosomatic ills and human aberration has been discovered and skills have been developed for their invariable cure." With the help of these skills everybody can achieve "release" within less than 20 hours, and can grow into a "dianetic clear," or an individual with intelligence considerably greater than the current norm. A few lines later we learn: "It is new that life has as its entire dynamic urge *only* survival."

The dianetic prophet, L. Ron Hubbard, a civil engineer and science-fiction writer, has revealed "as an established scientific fact" that man is uniformly and invariably good. He claims as one of his great discoveries "a hitherto unsuspected sub-mind." The concept of the unconscious mind is replaced by the "reactive mind." The reactive mind receives its recordings as cellular "engrams" when the "conscious" mind is "unconscious." These engrams disturb our thought processes. No physical or emotional pain is ever forgotten unless it is removed by dianetic therapy.

The dianetic patient "returns" to his pain and changes into an individual full of memories but without pain. Lying in a quiet room he falls into a state of "dianetic reverie" and his "auditor" (and everybody can be everybody else's auditor) tells him "to go to rather than re-

member" various periods of his life, including his prenatal existence. So he travels on his "time track" back to his mother's womb and draws checks on his "standard memory bank," reaches his "cellular level engrams," and—in the re-experiencing of them—they are finally erased and refilled automatically as "standard memory." The result of this treatment is the dianetic "clear," who "is to a current normal individual as the current is to the severely insane."

I must confess I have never been confronted by such a bold and immodest mixture of complete nonsense and perfectly reasonable common sense, taken from long-acknowledged findings and disguised and distorted by a crazy, newly invented terminology. Most revolting is the repeated claim of exactitude and of scientific experimental approach, for which every trace of evidence is lacking. The author lives continuously on borrowed concepts, though at the same time he attacks them most ungraciously and ungratefully. Whatever makes sense in his "discoveries" does not belong to him, and his own theory appears to this reviewer as a paranoid system which would be of interest as part of a case history, but which seems quite dangerous when offered for mass consumption as a therapeutic technique.

Hubbard's concept of psychosomatic disease is definitely wrong. Psychosomatic ailments are not simply caused by emotional disturbances; they are diseases in which the emotional and the organic factor are closely involved and interdependent. But the author does not stop at the usual group of recognized psychosomatic ailments. He announces (p. 93): "At the present time dianetic research is scheduled to include cancer and diabetes. There are a number of reasons to suppose that these may be engramic in cause, particularly malignant cancer." He prescribes that "the pre-clear should take a daily dose of ten to twenty milligrams of vitamin B, while in therapy," because otherwise he might have nightmares. And, of course, like the leader of any crackpot movement, he suspects and condemns the skeptic and disbeliever:

Should the pre-clear discover that anyone is attempting to prevent him from starting or continuing dianetic therapy, the fact should be communicated immediately to the auditor. Anyone attempting to stop an individual from entering therapy either has a use for the aberrations of that individual or has something to hide.

This physician has no use for the aberrations of dianetics-addicts, but he earnestly hopes to prevent readers of the book from trying their luck with its methods. There can be no doubt that many will feel helped by the new fad, and, unfortunately, it was only to be expected that somebody would get the idea of inventing some kind of home-psychoanalysis. No method of psychotherapy exists—however bizarre it may be—which will not exert a temporary effect in the hands of disciples who are haunted by anxiety and despair. However, the harm that may be done by dianetics-auditors and their victims should not be underestimated. Hubbard says:

A pre-clear should not be disheartened or dismayed to find himself with a flicker of "coronary trouble" on Tuesday, the shadow of a "migraine" on Saturday and a cough on Wednesday. . . . Anything so restimulated by therapy cannot reach any dangerous heights and is of passing duration.

The flicker of coronary trouble may be a serious occlusion, the psychosomatic ulcer may be a disguised cancer, and the cough a tumor of the lungs. While the patient is spending his hours in dianetic reverie, precious time for saving his life may be lost: it may prove fatal to have put too much trust in the promises of this dangerous book.

The examples of dianetic auditions which are quoted are of fantastic absurdity, especially where they are concerned with the poor patient's pre-natal life and his mother's sex habits and abortions. I wish there were enough space to reprint some of them. This reviewer, in exploring the book, suffered a most painful "cellular engram"—to use the author's language. And he ardently wishes that something could be done to prohibit the activities of psychotherapists of this sort. Our exploiters of mass anxiety are a serious menace to public health. MARTIN GUMPERT

Dr. Martin Gumpert, born in Berlin, studied medicine at Heidelberg and Berlin Universities and practised for a decade in his native land before coming to the United States. Especially interested in the problems of old age, he has written many books in that and other fields. He is a member of the staff of Gold-water Memorial Hospital, New York City.