

What's Wrong With Us?

OUR NEUROTIC AGE: A Consultation.
Edited by S. D. SCHMALHAUSEN. New
York: Farrar & Rinehart. 1932. \$4.

Reviewed by JOSEPH JASTROW

TO convey an impression of the content of more than five hundred pages in less than twice as many words requires a feat of discriminating omission. This latest of Dr. Schmalhausen's symposia is called a consultation. The world—the social-psychological-political world—is the patient, and twenty-eight specialists give their verdicts. Its maladies are many; the symptoms are more than seven times seven devils, with no adequate technique of exorcism. So far as the world is "we" we wear clothes, when we should go nude; we prize chastity, which is a disqualification; we censor the obscene, confusing motives; we mobilize against alcohol, lacking the art of sober release; we are infantile in public affairs; we breed stupidly and stupidity; we mismanage our conscience; our law is sadistic; our religious life is prone to manias; our marriages are jazz episodes; homosexuality is rampant and misjudged; our parents putter and botch; our family life is a sham; our literature is psychopathic; our history is a distortion; we think crudely and viscerally; we commit suicide without discrimination; we fear death irrationally. The world is also the stage setting of our own creation. This reeks with racketeering, is caving in under the predatory excavations of capitalism, is an exhibit in the social mechanics of madness. Still more and worse, we have inverted the values of sanity and complexes, of civilization and savagery; the mind is in the breaking. The only white hope on the red jacket reads: "The neurosis of today may give birth to the culture of tomorrow."

For each phrase in this sorry sketch of the survival of the unfittest there is an essay, some with chapter and verse, others with rhapsodic denunciation and superiorly radical despair. The central clue—the *point de repère*—is neurosis; though besides the editor, only a few hold to the text. The editorial thesis makes "pathology the new normality," raising the question: "Is the normal mind sane?" We as personalities are floundering, our "spiritual" compass shattered, our maps askew, "civilization in a nose dive." It is an elaborate diagnosis and leaves slight prospect of survival in the mind of the patient if he accepts the expert findings, or any reason for surviving. Yet this searching and damaging understanding is presented as "the first and most important step toward social sanity."

The unity in so variegated a diagnostic enterprise is a common arraignment, which is hardly a basis for constructive effort. The critical reader will supply his own perspective of truth and importance; he may read for stimulation, for irritation, hardly for consolation. Since apparently no one is keeping step, the correction of faulty alignment seems hopeless; and still the attempts go on to marshal the ranks and files and direct the procession and discover its objectives, though the incorrigible optimist seems extinct, even in politics.

A distinctive mark of neurosis is the loss of perspective, whether in personal affairs or in the outlook upon the maze of forces among which the individual must find his tortuous way. One begins to question whether all the neuroticism attaches to the patient, whether possibly touches of special varieties of the universal taint may be operative among the consultants. The din of the clash of idols affords about as helpful an environment for calm contemplation and responsible reflection as a boiler factory. Too constant contemplation with what's wrong with the world may be as symptomatic as a complacent acceptance or a hypocritical pretense that all's well.

There is enough solid substance in the volume to redeem it; there is more than enough uncritical discarding to condemn it. The symposium has become a clinic. The habit of attending clinics can be overdone; it may be an index of a normal craving for experience, or it may be a catering to a neurotic tendency.



New York has a false air of solidity which deceives many persons. It is easy enough to see that Hollywood is unsubstantial; even the mountains surrounding it are quite obviously built of *papier mâché*.

They have been used as moving picture sets, and they will be used as moving picture sets again. If the moving picture industry finally moves from Southern California they will undoubtedly be taken down and moved with it.

Nobody can think of Chicago as actually existing; a person would go mad if he did; it is a grotesque nightmare, and easily recognizable as such. Paris and London are largely projections from the past with only a minimum of reality in the present. One gets that before he has been in either city a day.

But New York has so frequently the air of being real that it continues to fool millions of people throughout their lives. In truth it is the most fantastically illusive city of them all. I have heard its great veins throbbing with blood, and seen its gigantic towers of stone and steel suddenly flower with miraculous foliations. It has innumerable projections into a fourth dimension, so that one may travel upward seventy stories in an elevator, get off, step out a window, and find himself on a high plateau in Tibet.

An aviator friend of mine, who used to do skywriting in smoke, told me that frequently he has lanced right through one of the tall towers as if the tower itself were built of fog and shadow; and that often what he had written in English with his airplane would turn into Sanskrit or Hebrew in the air behind him, and now and then would sing itself away into space.

The air about New York has become so electrified by machinery and human energy that the ordinary laws of physics are sliced and ripped to tatters a dozen times a day. I remember going into a basement bowling alley one rainy evening and observing that the patrons were using their own heads to fling at the pins; the heads were cut off with a butcher's cleaver and handed to them by a gentlemanly attendant when the game began, and stuck on again afterward—one or two of them, I thought, a little askew.

A certain lamp-post, at which my little dog paused every day, became, under special conditions of humidity, a radio machine; I remember the alarm depicted on his canine face the first time he ever heard a symphony orchestra broadcasting a selection from Wagner—the ride of the Valkyries, I believe it was.

There is a peculiar condition of the mind—many of my readers must have experienced it—which I can indicate most easily by a reference to experiences of my own which through many repetitions have become familiar to me. I will be lying on my bed in the daytime, and feel a sudden impulse to turn my head towards the door. I do so. Something flicks out the door; I do not quite know what it is, but it is something. A ghost, perhaps? I should say nothing quite so tangible as a ghost. Something a trifle less material, something more like an angel than a ghost . . . or, perhaps, more like the aura of a saint. For a ghost is built of heavier stuff than either an angel or an aura, or a halo. It has, in fact, been my experience that I cannot see a halo at all, unless atmospheric conditions are exactly right; and as for taking them off and rolling them along on their edges like hoops, I never believed it could be done. But to see this Something which flicks out the door, requires, I repeat, a particular condition of the mind. I am well aware that in saying this I lay myself open to the crass jests of the ribald-minded, but I have faith that I address myself to none such in the pages of this periodical.

It is this particular condition of the mind which must be cultivated if one is to get the most out of New York. I have frequently had the notion that a number of old pagan gods, chased out of other parts of Christendom, inhabit New York City, and preside over such phenomena as I have hinted at, govern and direct these mystic transmutations. It is not so easy to determine whether these gods are informed of any ethical motive, or only amusing themselves.

Neither physical forces nor psychic powers have, necessarily, any connection with the spiritual; if you are acquainted with mediums you must know this. I have known mediums who could put me in touch with Savonarola or Napoleon at a minute's notice, who were themselves, nevertheless, confirmed gin drinkers and very untrustworthy as to financial transactions.

I shall not go into details concerning the time I saw seven silver gods, with crystal feet, walking along a lunar rainbow over the city, nor elaborate upon the statement that one time I walked out the back-door of a speakeasy in the East Forties and found myself on the deck of a dhow in oriental seas; nor descant upon the time I walked down Fifth Avenue at four in the morning playing on the Scotch bag-pipes while all the buildings danced and leapt about me like wild goats upon the mountains.

These are but minor examples of what is going on in New York all the time. If you do not see these things, I cannot congratulate you upon your blindness; but as for me, I am obliged to credit the testimony of my own eyes. Some day I intend to write an entire book about this phase of New York; it will be merely reportorial, and not imaginative or interpretative. Too many writers see a little bit of something, and then go and build an entire opus out of guess-work and speculation and fancy. The hero of the book—it will be a novel, so of course it will have to have a hero—will be the Something which flicks out the door.

Don Margolis

Evolutionary Theory

THE CAUSES OF EVOLUTION. By J. B. S. HALDANE. New York: Harper & Brothers. 1932. \$2.50.

Reviewed by HOMER W. SMITH

IT is frequently asserted of evolution, even by biologists who hold no *a priori* prejudice, that it won't work. The issue at stake is not so much whether evolution has occurred or not, as whether a natural theory of the evolutionary process can account for all the facts. In the present brief and semi-technical volume Professor Haldane summarizes the present evidence and answers this denial.

Evolution demands, on the one hand, raw material in the form of variations in the nature of organisms and, on the other hand, a selection of these variants such that some will survive and some will not. Current ideas regarding the causes and nature of the variations on which natural selection acts differ radically from the ideas entertained by Darwin. The Lamarckian theory of the inheritance of acquired characters has been supported to date by no irrefutable evidence, and it is contraindicated by so many facts that it is not seriously considered by many biologists—although it is still affectionately mentioned as a forlorn, but not forgotten, hope. The newer science of genetics has substituted for it a process of random variation based upon extra-nuclear factors and genes, and it is with this mechanism of variation that the author is concerned. He describes briefly and as non-technically as possible the concept of the gene and its role in Mendelian heredity; the interaction of genes on the same character, the abnormal linkage of genes; the multiple representation of particular chromosomes and of whole sets of chromosomes; the phenomena of mutation, and the quite recent observations on the influence of environment upon the rate of mutation. On this basis he analyzes the intervarietal and interspecific differences in several plants and animals.

Professor Haldane has made signal contributions to the mathematical theory of selection in Mendelian populations and he is therefore particularly well fitted for the discussion of the process of natural selection. He treats this subject summarily in the text and in mathematical detail in an appendix to the book. Out of his analysis he concludes that natural selection is a reality and that the process of variation, though different from what Darwin believed it to be, is yet such as to yield a raw material on which natural selection can work. But he emphasizes that our view of what is selected, or possesses advantage in relation to the enormous complexity of the organism's life and environment—in short, of what fitness is—must be broadened to include adaptations much more subtle than the crude types of interaction between organism and environment usually noted in this connection.

In regard to the evaluation of evolution as a whole, if we explain it in terms of the capacity for variation inherent in individual organisms and the selection exercised on them by their environment, then this self-contained description excludes the intervention of a mind higher than that of the evolving individuals, except in so far as such a mind is concerned in the general nature of the universe and its laws. But, on the other hand, the author holds, the individual mind, although a product of evolution, may in the future accumulate the necessary knowledge to enable it to direct the evolutionary process and perhaps even increase its speed. This honest, monistic philosophy is shared by many, but not enough, biologists of the day.

"There cannot be many persons living," says the London *Observer*, "who addressed the British Association forty-four years ago, but one of them is—of all people in the world—Mr. Bernard Shaw. It was at Bath, on September 7, 1888, that he discussed before the Economic Section 'The Transition to Social Democracy'; the paper is reprinted among the 'Fabian Essays' in the new edition of his works."

The BOWLING GREEN

Translations from the Chinese

IGNOTUM PRO PERICULO

THE mounted cop on 45th Street
Sidles his fine horse
Round a little delivery tricycle
Letting him toss and caracole
Until he gets the idea
It's not really dangerous.

And I've seen also sleek proud critics
Shy and bridle and step sideways
Blowing their nostrils with suspicion
At some new vehicle of art
Of an unfamiliar shape.

HE KEEPS MOVING

I've always been curious (said the Old Mandarin)
About armored trucks,
But I've never really had a good look at one;
I don't suppose I ever will.
When I wish to pause and examine them
Some instinct of caution
Moves me on.

SUBPOENA

Greeting! the letter began,
And I thought, how wrong to believe
That Americans are discourteous.
I read further:
It was from The People of the State of New York,
They said, *We command you*
That all business and excuses being laid aside. . . .
And I discovered that a printer
From whom I had ordered one casual volume
Now sought to prove me liable
For a whole de luxe series.

EMBARRASSMENT IN A FISCAL TROUSER

When I abandoned my Eastern robes
I learned that trousers
Have their drawbacks.
For when my impoverished friend
Said, Lend me a Dollar,
I replied sombrely: I've got exactly two bucks,
I'll split with you;
And I went down into my jeans.

Then I remembered:
In that pocket were two clean Ones
Folded tightly together,
But also two magnificent Tens
For I had cashed a check
To meet urgent needs.

The two little wads felt just alike,
Which would my hand bring up?
If the Tens emerged should I feign amazement
And the sudden death of an Ancestor?
Apprehensive, I drew out the engravings—
It was the Ones
And I say to myself, like your Western gamins,
Gee, what a break.

Under the copious gowns of the East
Such little moments of fiscal uncertainty
Are graciously concealed.

PROBLEMS OF TRADE

An advertisement in the *Publisher's Weekly*
Advises the wary bookseller
To put *Wah' Kon-Tah* (that fine book about Indians)
Conspicuously on the counter
"Where customers can point to it
If they hesitate to pronounce the title."
But if customers are so bashful
What can the wretched pharmacist do
About that new antiseptic
Hexylresorcinol Solution S. T. 37?

JACK BE NIMBLE

Near and nearer, this season of outgo
(Cried the deflated old Mandarin)
Comes my 5000th check
On the Prune Exchange Bank.
O times of flush and times insolvent,
How many joys and necessities,
How many grunts and gripings
Are recorded in this manuscript serial.
These are my memorial,
O complicated civilization,
These 5000 transfers
Of arduous kale.
Surely some ritual of achievement
Should solemnize
The 5000th check.

SCIOLIST

The learned behaviorist
Who had lectured for twenty years
At the Imperial University
On Analytical Gynosophy
And Predicated Stimulus and Response in Woman
Met a young wench at the Feast of Lanterns
Who proved him cockeyed
In thirty minutes.

ADVANTAGES OF TRAVEL

In your country, pondered the pensive Old Mandarin,
Chow dogs are valued as social ornaments,
Bred as pets for beautiful ladies.
In China you find them
Hung up in the meat-shops
On sale as food.

Many a social favorite
Remains a favorite
By staying a long way
Away from home.

SAM SINGER

The taxi-driver was singing in his cab.
("California, Here I Come")
Feeling good, Sam?
Rotten. I was singing because I'm hungry,
I ain't had my supper yet.

I used to make 40 to 50 a week,
Now I got to get by on 18 or 20.
I need some warm underwear pretty bad,
It gets cold in the cab at night,
But the wife and I was figuring today.
We can spare about 5 bucks
And the baby (she's five years old)
Needs a coat.
I got an old jacket
I can put on under this one,
And listen, buddy,
Believe me I ride a lot warmer
When I know the kid's warm
And looks decent.

WEIGHING MACHINE

1c CORRECT WEIGHT, THE DATE, YOUR FORTUNE—
The coin rang, and a printed ticket
Said 190, *You are very self-contained*
And though not unsociable
Happiest when alone.
Ah, too much weight, too little fortune,
But how did the machine
Know I was coming?

ICI ON PARLE . . .

Trying to talk a foreign language
I speak in faulty accent
And get all subjunctives wrong.
What wonder if I err
In the most alien tongue of all,
The Truth.

INCOGNITA

All afternoon I was plagued
By a strong sweet perfume
An aroma of amour, unaccountable,
That seemed to be part of me,
On my fingers and in my clothes.
I, the old anchorite, wondered much,
And found myself thinking impossible thoughts.
At last I diagnosed this influenza of musk:
It exhaled from a casual folder of matches
Which I had picked up in a tea-shop.
It was inscribed *Harvard Club of New York, Ve-Ri-Tas*.

O unknown Lucifer of Harvard,
Who is the lady who smells so sweet
That you keep her supplied with your matches?

OLD STROM

I remembered then
Felix Riesenbergs story of Old Strom
Grizzled quartermaster on the liner *St. Louis*
(Have you forgotten the smart *St. Louis*
With her trim lines and two slender funnels?)
Old Strom made one voyage as a deck steward
Then he begged to return to the wheel.
"I'd rather not be tucking ladies into them chairs;
I don't like the smell of them ladies;
They all smell different:
It's unnatural."

BOOKS IN THE DARK

Suddenly I thought of all my books
Locked up in a house in the country.
Darkness and cold creep in
Between the bravest pages.
Do you miss the lamplight, William Hazlitt?
Do you remember me at all, John Donne?

THE FOLDER

CHERUB

SIR:—Who among the Green's clients
has the great-heartedness to rescue the
poor, forlorn cherub, sitting now these
many weary weeks in the echoing vast-
ness of the Army Supply Base and wist-
fully contemplating the thousands upon
thousands of cigarettes, the cars, the
trucks, the gats, the lingerie and toilet
water, to say nothing of the dozen baby
carriages, the "2 pcs. salami" and the "1
French dictionary and 3 pcs. candy"?

BOB LEAVITT.

Mr. Leavitt encloses the extraordinary
list (advertised in the *Herald Tribune*
under "Legal Notices") of merchandise
seized for violation of the U. S. revenue
laws. Yes, there is the entry, "1 cherub,"
among many other incongruities. The
catalogue is signed by Mr. Philip Elting,
who very reasonably describes himself as
Collector, and among the curiosa he has
collected are:—

1 book marker, 6 bibs, 1 religious art.,
1 roulette wheel, 1588 cigarettes, 3 diapers,
1 beverage set, 1 Studebaker sedan, 1 raw
skin, 1 lot marijuana weeds, 4 novelties,
8 bxs snuff, 2 elephants, 54 doz. hair-
springs, 2 daggers, 1 pr sandals, 1 wood
platform on rollers. . . .

These, and much else (including the
Unclaimed Cherub) "will be sold at pub-
lic auction at the Seizure Room, Army
Supply Base, Brooklyn, on Thursday, De-
cember 15, 1932. This sale will begin at
10 A.M."—Kinsprits to the rescue! Get the
Cherub out of the Army Supply Base for
Christmas.

"The Intimate Notebooks of George
Jean Nathan" quote Theodore Dreiser as
saying: "What I am still looking for, in
the midst of all this success that seems
to have come to me, is some little greasy
one-horse publisher who wouldn't know
a mahogany desk if he saw one but who
has a high and very real love for litera-
ture and who will let me talk with him
through the nights of all that is in my
mind and heart. I am sick of these busi-
ness-men publishers with their offices
that look like the *Ile de France*."

"Apart from the necessity of replenish-
ing his stock by attending sales and buy-
ing books; the wearing task of looking
narrowly at larcenous fellow-creatures;
the pangs that it must cost him to sell
the books that he wants to keep; and the
attacks made upon his tenderer feelings
by unfortunate impoverished creatures
with worthless books to sell; apart from
these drawbacks, the life of a second-
hand bookseller seems to me a happy
one."—"Over Bemerton's," by E. V. Lucas.

Some one has stolen one-third of the
original manuscript of Scott's "Guy Man-
nering" now on exhibition at Columbia
University. Some one ought to steal at
least one-third of the original manuscript
of nearly every contemporary book before
it goes to the printer. Our literature runs
too much to bulk.—*N. Y. Times*.

SIR:—I noticed just around the corner
from you a piece of commercial candor
which is too good to go without public
appreciation:

"After seventy-eight years of honorable
dealing, now comes S. Baumann & Bros's
great half million dollar furniture dis-
posal sale."

I also noticed that the *New Yorker* took
a dirty crack at you in connection with
the Waterman autograph contest. I was
under the impression that you were
nearly sinless in that respect, and if I am
right then you have grounds for a snappy
comeback to the editor. E. S. C.

I didn't see the *New Yorker's* crack, so
I can't very well retrocrepitate. But in re
Mr. Waterman's egging on children to
write to authors for signatures, I stated in
this paper that I thought it a gross im-
position on the good nature of hard-working
people. To this comment Mr. Waterman
made grieved reply: he was surprised that
America's Writers grudged this little ser-
vice for the younger generation; but if
anyone was seriously discommoded by
appeals, he would lend him some sort of
centipede machine—called, I think, a pan-
tagraph—which would make 100 signa-
tures at once. CHRISTOPHER MORLEY.