

EDITORIAL

THE letter on the subject of Neurotics and Charity which we published in the August-September issue of this year has stirred up considerable interest. Articles and letters have been sent to the Editor in large numbers describing the right psychological treatment that the Christian should attempt when confronted by a neurotic neighbour. Some of these contributions we published in the October issue and others are presented to the reader in the following pages. The enthusiasm for the subject is a sign of the direction of many minds today. For some decades now people have become increasingly engrossed in psychology, a fact which in our own field is mirrored in contemporary spiritual reviews which contain quite a high percentage of psychological articles. For various reasons, however, *THE LIFE* has so far refrained from laying much stress on this subject. A great deal of the positive contribution made by modern psychoanalysis has in fact been taught under a different form by theologians and spiritual writers for many centuries. A study of any of the classic mystical writings, such as *The Cloud of Unknowing*, reveals a 'sound psychology', and indeed present-day authorities on the subject quarry freely from those writings. What is new in the modern science is its technique and systematization. As a therapy used on its own for curing the maladjusted or neurotic, its effects seem slight compared with those of ordinary straight-forward medicine. And finally the technique itself seems to lead people—especially the amateur dabbler—into a sterile interest in their own internal processes. For these reasons the general reader is on safer ground when studying the essentials of psychology hidden in the traditional spiritual books, than in being led to think he knows something of the technique of the psychotherapist through picking up a smattering of the terminology in general articles on the subject. Meditation on the works of Walter Hilton or St John of the Cross will not encourage him to interpret his own dreams or look for reasons for his own misconduct in the squabbles of his parents.

At the same time it is important not to minimize the value of the discoveries of sound psychology nor to ignore its place in the training of the Christian in his struggle for integrity in Christ. It has become a practice in many religious orders to call in some type of psychotherapist when dealing with difficulties which are

obviously not entirely a question of morals, such as for example severe attacks of scruples.

It is useful therefore from time to time to consider the relevance of modern psychology to Christian life. But there should always be present this *caveat*—the practice of the technique or the use of the knowledge acquired by psychology should be restricted to the expert and as far as possible to the Christian expert. The world is at present overpopulated by the amateur psychologist morbidly interested in everyone's dreams and detecting complexes and neuroses in every show of irritation or loss of temper.



CHARITY AND THE NEUROTIC

DR F. B. ELKISCH

G.H.'s letter in the August-September issue of *THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT* has found wide interest. Two priests and two doctors have already given their expert advice on a situation in which an ordinary person with no specific psychological experience or training is called upon to meet, efficiently and in a Christian manner, the difficulties of living with a neurotic member of the family. The correspondents pointed to the danger of being eaten up by the neurotic and admonished those who are in constant contact with them to be prudent and not to mistake for Christian charity a weak, doormat-like attitude which allows the neurosis of the individual unlimited freedom in producing itself in ceaseless speech, the performance of all those many and varied antics of which the neurotic is capable and intruding into the privacy of other members of the family. The nature of neurosis and the correct attitude towards it was widely discussed and, if in approaching the problem from a slightly different angle, I touch on something that has been said before, I beg the reader's indulgence.

As a scientific problem 'neurosis' has been tackled for a long time now. It began fifty years ago with Freud who, through his method of approaching the unconscious mind, has become the father of modern depth-psychology. Since then many workers have been engaged in discovering the nature of neurosis and its cure. While all this work is of great theoretical and therapeutical importance, little attention has been paid to the practical difficulties arising from living in close touch with neurotics. Whilst