

4. HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHY

Some Human Oddities—Studies in the Queer, the Uncanny and the Fanatical. By ERIC J. DINGWALL, M.A., D.SC., B.H.D. New York: University Books. 1962. Pp. 198.

Dr. Dingwall is described by Mr. John C. Wilson, in his introduction to this book, as "one of perhaps a dozen full-time psychical researchers in the world today" and as "the world's greatest authority on psychical mediumship." The longest chapter in the book is devoted to D. D. Home, the famous, or rather the notorious, 19th century fraudulent medium, whose life contained so many elements of mystery and who was detested by Robert Browning. He was the supposed original of the poet's "Mr. Sludge". This is the only part of the book concerned with psychical research, at least in the narrower sense.

The other chapters are devoted to the "Flying Friar",—St. Joseph of Cupertino; to the transvestite "James Allen"; to A. V. C. Berbiguier, a manifest schizophrenic, whose bizarre activities were chiefly concentrated on the bottling of malign spirits, and who published his experiences in a three-volume work in 1821; to the famous Deacon of Paris, François de Paris, whose influence survived in the activities of the Jansenist "convulsionnaires" during part of that period styled with unconscious irony "The Age of Reason"; and as a final "bonne bouche", to the redoubtable "Angel Anna", who claimed to be the daughter of Lola Montez, the mistress of Ludwig I of Bavaria, whose trial in England in the early years of this century earned her, along with her rascally accomplice, Johnson, a stiff sentence of imprisonment for procuring young women under the guise of a bogus esoteric religious cult.

Dr. Dingwall has attempted in the book to give a more detailed and less popular account of these strange examples of humanity. His treatment of the problems these people present would have gained by a greater psychiatric insight, attainable only by specific training and experience, yet the pathographer in search of material to study will find an abundance in this learned and well-documented book. Whatever views on miracles the reader may hold, one reader at least was very grateful to Dr. Dingwall for a highly entertaining publication which can be confidently recommended as such to all readers, whether medical or lay, whose insight in the problems raised here need not go any deeper.

E. W. ANDERSON.

The Gilded Cage. By ISTVAN BENEDEK. Translated by KAROLY RAVASZ. Budapest: Corvina Press. 1965. Pp. 352. Price not stated.

The scene of Dr. Benedek's story is Hungary, a country which I had the opportunity to visit professionally three years ago. I learned then that psychiatric hospitals there are as much, if not more, neglected in finances, equipment, and staff as ours, and that there is an appalling shortage of psychiatrists and psychiatric nurses. I visited a large psychiatric hospital where the general treatment of patients seemed to belong to what we would call the pre-Conolly age, although modern drugs were used in profusion. Hungarian legislation for the mentally ill is archaic, and practically all patients in mental hospitals are there on committal, usually carried out through the police, so that admission to mental hospitals still has the social stigma of lunacy.

Dr. Benedek describes these shortcomings of the psychiatric services of his country and his efforts to establish a new kind of psychiatric hospital, which over here we would call a "therapeutic community". He relates his fight against bureaucracy (in a political system where bureaucracy is all-powerful), against economic difficulties (in a country impoverished by wars, occupations, and revolutions), against ignorance of nursing staff (in a country where no qualified nurses other than Sisters in religious orders existed before 1946), and against resistance of the patients themselves (who took their time to shed their fears and distrusts of mental institutions, physicians and nurses).

He realized that open doors and freedom from physical restraint are, though necessary, not by themselves sufficient to help the mentally sick, but that there are needed "organized work therapy, entertainment and suitably apportioned freedom, the humane treatment with its community life and collective discipline without resort to force."

The book is written half as an autobiography, half as a novel, interspersed with dissertations on mental illness. It contains detailed anecdotal descriptions of the progress of a number of patients undergoing work therapy and the development of the particular therapeutic community that Dr. Benedek calls "The Gilded Cage". The discourses on the diagnosis and genesis of mental illness are, perhaps, of least interest to medical readers, but are probably meant to help laymen to understand the mentally ill. From the doctor's point of view, the interest of the book lies in the description of the therapeutic community and of its interaction with society.

The book is somewhat too lengthy, its dialogues too detailed, and the translation of Hungarian pseudonyms into English irritatingly facetious. Nevertheless, it is an interesting book, especially for those who have seen little of therapeutic communities.