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Foreword in Puner

Erich Fromm
(1959g-e)

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It is a pleasure to introduce this biography of Freud. Although it was not written by a professional psychologist, it shows a sensitivity and grasp of Freud’s personality and cultural function which is quite unusual. This is all the more remarkable in view of the fact that a biography dealing with the life of a great man always encounters certain difficulties. There are those who idealize the hero and can see in him only the embodiment of all virtue and wisdom. As a consequence, they do not give us the picture of a live man, but the cliché of an idol. The other danger in writing a biography is exactly the opposite. The writer lacks the capacity to admire anybody. He can never see a mountain when he is confronted with it, but reduces everything to plains and little hills. His picture has as little life as flat provided by the hero-worshiper.

These difficulties have been most conspicuous in the case of biographies on Freud. He has been less frequently belittled, it is true, although this has been done in many casually printed remarks and articles about him, in which he has been described as an enthusiastic charlatan, or as a representative of a sensuous, decayed Viennese atmosphere. In the formal biographies of Freud it is the danger of hero-worship which has been the most conspicuous. It seems that there are even some psychoanalysts who have not been able to overcome their need to have an idol. They believed themselves free from such infantile impulses as long as they did not worship the current idols in religion or in politics. But they made a religion of psychoanalysis, and an idol of Freud. They saw in him not an unusually creative, imaginative, courageous and uncompromising man, which he was, but a tolerant, kind, just, objective, loving saint, which he was not.

In Freud’s case, the unrealistic, sentimental biography is all the more disturbing because it was the very essence of his work to see man realistically; that is, to understand the forces that motivate him and yet of which he is unaware; to recognize that most of what we think about ourselves is well-meant lies, that we are in fact quite different - not necessarily worse - in our real existence, from the legend about ourselves which we create. To make of Freud a legend shows that one has not really absorbed his ideas and discoveries.

Furthermore, one cannot truly approach the analyst, Freud, without seeing connections between his theories and his personality. One has to understand his deep and yet unrecognized attachment to his mother in order to evaluate fully his discovery of the Oedipus Complex. One has to understand his striving to be a world reformer to see that



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he wanted to conquer the world with an ideal - that of the control of passion by reason - and to understand why Freud built a psychoanalytic movement which was internationally and hierarchically organized.

It is most fortunate that Mrs. Puner's biography of Freud is being published again. Her book is more analytical and realistic than those written by psychologists so far. She looks at Freud with genuine admiration, and yet without idolatry. She understands his own psychological problem and has a full appreciation of the pseudo-religious nature of the movement he created. I am sure that her biography will help greatly to disseminate a true and inspiring picture of the founder of psychoanalysis.