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Labour Party (as there is nothing in the constitution of the Conservative Party) to bind a Labour Government (or a Conservative Government) to any decision taken by a party conference or a party committee. As Mr. McKenzie says, once a group of Labour M.P.s has been elected to Parliament, they cease, ultimately, to be servants of the Party organisation outside. This autonomy of the Parliamentary Labour Party (as of any Parliamentary Party) has been so clearly established during the past six years that the question will be asked whether the annual Conference of a great party performs any function at all. The Labour Party Conference has the power to decide from time to time that specific proposals should be included in the party's programme, but, as Mr. Nicholas hastens to point out, this is only the long-term programme, the declaration of pious (or impious) aspirations.

The responsibility for deciding "which items from the party programme shall be included" in the election manifesto rests with the National Executive Committee and the Executive Committee of the Parliamentary Labour Party. It is not very difficult to guess which voices will carry most weight in such a meeting. Three years running (1947-48-49) the Labour Party Conference passed resolutions calling for the abolition of the tied cottage. Three years running the Executive opposed the resolution, Mr. Bevan warning the Conference that,

while it is the task of the Conference to decide policy, it is the onerous task of the Government and the Parliamentary Party to decide how and when to implement it. For the Conference to decide the Parliamentary time-table would be impossible.

In effect, what Mr. Bevan was saying was that the Conference, though it might say what it would like to see done, could not decide what should be done. How wise this principle is has no doubt been "conveyed" to Mr. Churchill since the Conservative annual conference (with Lord Woolton's blessing) wrote the figure of 300,000 houses into the party's election programme!

Neither the facts which Mr. McKenzie and Mr. Nicholas present nor the observations they provoke, are new. Ostrogorski, fifty years ago, discerned the oligarchic tendencies of parties in democratic countries. They may make both parties and democracies look silly. But they do so only if one expects more from a political democracy than a political democracy claims to provide. It is impossible to give mass electorates (or their delegates at party conferences) effective control over policy: all that a constitution can ensure is that the part which the electors play is significant and at times (as in 1945) decisive. Parties crystallise the issues so that the electors can, at a general election, make a decisive choice, but it is equally part of their function to erect a barrier between the electors and those who have the responsibility for action: An Mr. Nicholas says, "the role of policy in party life partakes simultaneously of the real and the sham" and party conferences give colour to the illusion. It is tolerable only because, in spite of the sham which conceals the oligarchy in a modern democracy, the role of the electors can at times be decisive.

H. J. FAIRLIE

**ONEIROMANCY**

*The Forgotten Language.* By ERICH FROMM. Gollancz. 16s.

The interpretation of dreams may be undertaken at many levels. Housemaids and their sixpenny dream-books still linger on, like the Stone Age, in the modern world; but since Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* began to work its revolution, any number of methods of dream-interpretation have been put forward. Not all the contemporary alternatives are mentioned by Dr. Fromm, who leaves out of account the question of pre-cognition (popularised by Dunne's widely read *Experiment with Time*, but now a subject for respectable scientific research) and the possibly allied question of telepathy, about which Freud himself had an open mind. Dr. Fromm's own book is a study of the

of dreams, not only by qualified experts (or those whose professional status is assumed to make them such) but by each man for himself. By considering our own dreams—and since we ourselves invent the dreams we may be presumed to be better qualified than anyone else to interpret them—we can know from day to day how we are getting on, or discover what we really think (as distinct from what we think we think) about people and situations.

No one can doubt the great scientific importance and human usefulness of the findings of Freud, Jung and others. Yet on one reader, Dr. Fromm's book has an effect different from that consciously intended by the author: it makes apparent the double danger with which the new popularity of the science (or superstition) of dream interpretation exposes us. In New York, I was told that three persons in ten are undergoing, or have undergone, some form of analysis. A traffic carried on upon such a scale cannot in the nature of things ensure that more than a small proportion of the analysts are intellectually and morally of the first order. Some may be quacks, but more must be merely fallible human beings into whose hands other fallible human beings entrust their lives, as they once did to Holy Church, investing the analyst with that mirage of infallibility that human weakness perpetually creates out of that motive that Dr. Fromm himself has called "the fear of freedom." "Tell me what I ought to do" is the old human cry; and the advice of any analyst can only be in accordance with his particular conception of what is the good and the true and the beautiful (for, unhappily, the arts too are involved in Greenwich Village therapy). Many analysts regard "normal" sexual adjustment as man's chief end, others (more dangerous still) social adaptation to the group average. One may witness the tragi-comedy of people paying experts large sums to remove from themselves or their children those exceptional qualities that mark them out from the average, of a society busily weeding out its potential leaders and teachers. The analyst's couch is the newest design of the Procrustean bed, and the patient himself actually pays to have his limbs and head lopped off in conformity with a stock pattern of humanity based very often on nothing better than a faith in the average. Should a medical degree alone be regarded as sufficient qualification for such great moral ascendancy over the minds of men?

Against this danger, Dr. Fromm's suggestion that each of us should learn the language of his own dreams might seem a sufficient protection; but is this alternative any better? If Freud is right, half the purpose of any dream is to conceal its true content from the dreamer. Who are more likely to misinterpret our dreams than we ourselves? Dr. Fromm gives some amusing cases from Freud, Jung, and others, of blind-spots. Freud, interpreting a dream of his own, misses, according to Dr. Fromm's gloss of the text, a whole range of symbols that relate to the dreamer's ambition. Jung, on the other hand, claps his telescope to his blind eye when sexuality and religion come into too close proximity. (Dr. Fromm himself, as a good American, has a strong matriarchal bent, if any reader should wish to look for the author's own particular bias.) If the experts are blind to their own shortcomings, are we likely to be wiser, where our own motives are concerned? The veriest quack is at least more unbiased about us than we are ourselves.

Who, then, shall judge? Between the new authoritarianism of a growing body of professional analysts, and the dangers of self-deception, I see no possibility of dream-interpretation made easy. Profound understanding, whether of mathematics, music, religion, dreams, or anything else, cannot be had without natural gifts, and a great deal of study. Each will interpret his own dreams or those of others in terms of his own view of life: dream interpretation is no substitute for a scale of values by which to interpret the dream. In primitive societies (the Old Testament is full of examples) it was well known that

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sayers were good soothsayers—on the contrary, men of Joseph's gifts were very rare, and oracles needed the same careful watching as any other department of public life: they were never considered foolproof until now.

The chapter of this book that should be read with most attention is the historical chapter, on the history of dream-interpretation from antiquity to Goethe, Nietzsche and Bergson: I wish only that this chapter had been a great deal longer and fuller. Dr. Fromm mentions, but does not discuss sufficiently, the question of the different orders of dreams, recognised in both Hebrew and classical antiquity, as well as in the Christian middle ages. Jung certainly recognises that not all dreams come from the same source. There are deeper and shallower regions of the psyche, and who is to say that sleepers may not, as Heraclitus says, "light up from the dead," or from heavens and hells, angels and demons, that lie outside what is generally supposed to be the limit of a human individuality? Really we are very ignorant about such matters, and extremely brash and over-confident in our whole approach to the subject. Dr. Fromm's book contains much that is of interest, but it strikes me as altogether too democratic. Wisdom-for-all is the slogan of our time, but the wise have always known that "narrow is the path and strait is the gate, and few there be that find it."

KATHLEEN RAINE

**SHARKS LTD.**

*Harpoon at a Venture.* By GAVIN MAXWELL. Hart-Davis. 21s.

Urban man with his nostalgia for open spaces must often feel an envy of the people who work in them. Hence the guilt feelings of the tourist who knows he is in but not of the landscape; hence also the compensatory mystique of the sportsman who at least can do things with the landscape by hunting or shooting or fishing in it or even by knocking divots out of it. It is the more second-hand, the envious, pleasure of the spectator of sports that is felt by the reader of such books as *Harpoon at a Venture*—a pleasure which is part aesthetic, part animal and part gambler's. Mr. Maxwell provides this tripartite pleasure most amply, because of the nature of his quarry and the setting in which he hunted it, because of the dangers and physical sensations of the hunt, and because for him this sport was also a business project and he was playing to win. His book is a detailed factual record of something pregnant with symbols and, unlike many other pioneers, he is deeply aware of the symbolism. But he is never woozy, being protected against the D. H. Lawrence virus by his professionalism as a shark-fisher, by some five years of injections of cold fact, by the only too persistent memories of only too prosaic problems.

It is the dry enumeration of these problems which, as with *Robinson Crusoe*, makes half the charm of this book. Mr. Maxwell's adventure began during the London Blitz "in a spirit of nursery makebelieve" when he drew a ring on a map round a small and to him unknown Hebridean island; while still in the Army, he had bought that island, Soay; once out of the Army, he had to decide what to do with it. By elimination—and illuminating accident—he made it a base for hunting the basking shark, the second largest fish in the world, but a monster of which neither he nor anyone else, it seems, knew much beyond garbled hearsay. The problems began at once. He had to buy the right kind of boat—and bought the wrong kind—and devise the right kind of harpoon—and for long was frustrated by a Birmingham manufacturer. And the sharks, of course, were nearly lost in floods of red tape; "every day was a losing struggle with paper and time." He built a factory on his island—an initial mistake, he concedes—which was promptly hit by a cyclone. And he built a slipway too short. But for all that the harpoons began to stick, calling forth his henchman's war-cry, "He feels it! He feels it!"