



**Sigmund Freud's Mission.** By ERICH FROMM. (World Perspectives.) *Allen & Unwin*. 12s. 6d.

It seems to be a law of publishing, though publishers never heed it, that the essays in these uplifting series, which are always planned as angelic trumpet blasts to herald the current apocalypse, should turn out to be scrappy and inconclusive. This short book is a particularly irritating specimen. Instead of trying to sort out truth from fantasy in Freud's work, a useful job that still needs to be done, it tries to hoist Freud with his own petard and show that the founder of psychoanalysis was an orally fixated egocentric 'filled with the idea of his own mission' for whom the world was the stage for the drama of the psychoanalytical movement, a psychoanalysed elite that should guide mankind. This simply does not square with known facts such as Freud's persistent refusal to try to evolve or countenance a psychoanalytical world-outlook or to consider psychoanalysis as anything except a contribution to science, to say nothing of his personal aversion to organising and proselytising.

Fromm, while paying any amount of lip-service to Freud's passion for truth, is really operating under the old crypto-theologian's slogan of 'any stigma to beat a dogma'. His choice of sources is revealing. He has to use Jones's biography, of course, but he calls it hopelessly idolatrous, and unless one had read it one would never suspect that Jones had diagnosed Freud as suffering from anxiety hysteria and described the 'exquisite oscillation between credulity and incredulity' that sometimes went on in his mind. The book that suits him best is Helen Puner's not by any means accurate study, which was written from hearsay without any personal knowledge. He seldom quotes from Freud's own writings and has a blind spot for Freud's stylistic charm, categorising him as intrinsically dislikeable. Some of his generalised judgments are interesting; there is a lot to be said for his description of Freud as rebel rather than revolutionary, and for his placing of him in the succession of nineteenth-century thought, though it would have helped to add the label 'mechanist'. Also stimulating is his conclusion that whereas Freudians saw the individual unconscious and were blind to the social unconscious, Marxists did almost exactly the opposite. Sometimes he gets very close to a Marxist position as when he states that the decay of liberalism is expressed in the decay of psychoanalysis. But he switches so abruptly from the banal and the misleading to these radical currents of stimulation that he makes very uneven and tiring reading.

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