

distinguishes itself, namely, the large amount of relevant and well-chosen factual information which it conveys very successfully. For this reason alone this book constitutes a valuable contribution. The non-specialist student who wishes to gain a general idea of the experimental evidence on which genetics is based will find the answer here. The choice of appropriate examples is definitely an original and useful feature of this book. Also commendable is the stress laid upon the part played by genes in morphogenesis and in particular the way in which this matter is treated in a chapter on gene-interaction.

Other good features are the treatment of mutation, including a summary of the biophysical approach, and that of the genetic aspects of evolution, compressed into two clear chapters. Statistical methods appear not once in the whole book, a matter which may be regretted even by those, like the reviewer, who consider statistics as a useful, indeed indispensable, evil. Among the serious shortcomings of the book is a lack of critical attitude which leads to confusion about the fundamental concepts of genetics. For example, clear definitions of gene, allele and locus are not given, and these terms are used inconsistently.

Despite these shortcomings this book is an attempt to produce something which is badly needed, and it is certainly the most successful of these attempts.

G. PONTECORVO

## FREUD'S "TOTEM AND TABOO"

### Totem and Taboo

Some Points of Agreement between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics. By Sigmund Freud. Authorized translation by James Strachey. Pp. xi+172. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1950.) 14s. net.

IT is interesting to re-estimate the value of a work originally published nearly forty years ago. This book of Freud's first consisted of four essays published in *Imago* and represented his earliest attempt to apply psycho-analysis to problems of social psychology. The book aimed at arousing the interest of a wide circle of educated readers, and succeeded. The reaction, on the whole, except among those already attuned to psycho-analytic concepts, was one of acute shock. This was so among anthropologists as much as any, since the main themes taken for analysis—incest, exogamy, taboo, magic and totemism—were important to anthropological theory, and Freud used much anthropological material in his analysis, while going far beyond the bounds of the then range of anthropological thought.

On re-reading the book after a lapse of time one finds the shock much reduced. There are the same ethnographic lacunæ and mistaken generalizations, the same feeling of unreality about the mental lives of the 'savages' in whom Freud saw so many points of agreement with neurotics. Any treatment is bound to seem defective if it includes such statements as that originally totems were inherited only through the female line (p. 107); that totemism constitutes a regular phase in all cultures (p. 108); that the desire to break taboos is always unconscious (p. 31); that in primitive men the process of thinking is still to a great extent sexualized (p. 89); that primitive men are uninhibited, thought passing directly into action (p. 161). Further, the hypothesis of the

break-up of the primal patriarchal horde by the killing of the father and eating his remains is just as ludicrous as ever, when put forward as a *historical* occurrence and the basis of the commemorative act of the totemic meal.

But there is more strength and subtlety of argument in the book than anthropologists were originally prepared to credit it with. Even the fantasy of the murder of the patriarchal father may have a certain suggestiveness if looked at not as history but as hinting at a possible set of symbolic elements in totemic rites. Freud's own critique of the totemic theories of the time is usually shrewd and, in its stress on the need for examining emotional rather than rational characteristics of the phenomena, on sound lines. His support for the arguments against explaining horror of incest in terms of innate instinct was powerful, and well directed. His frank admission of ignorance as to origins of various savage customs is refreshing. Where in part he is vulnerable is where he forgets his own dicta—as in suggesting that the Australian 'marriage-classes' originated in deliberate legislation to prevent incest when the influence of the totem rules began to wane.

Modern social anthropology would not agree with Freud that it is precisely the incestuous factor in the mother-in-law and son-in-law relation that provides the motive for the avoidance that so frequently is customary between them. Compatibility of social rather than sexual elements in the total social situation is the line of explanation now advanced. Yet in Freud's citation of impulses involved in the situation of ambivalence—reluctance of the mother-in-law to give up her daughter, distrust of the stranger to whom the girl is to be handed over, impulse to retain the dominant position in her daughter's house, man's determination not to submit his wife to another authority than his own, etc.—there is much valuable suggestion for further study. Relations between social anthropology and psychology are still ill-defined and unstable. But in any resolution of them the work of the psychoanalysts must be taken very seriously into account. It is very useful, then, to have this new translation of the pioneer work.

RAYMOND FIRTH

## THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

### The Smithsonian

America's Treasure House. By Webster Prentiss True. Pp. 306+64 plates. (New York: Sheridan House; London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1950.) 27s. 6d. net.

"THE best blood of England flows in my veins; on my father's side I am a Northumberland, on my mother's I am related to Kings, but that avails me not. My name shall live in the memory of man when the titles of the Northumberlands and the Percys are extinct and forgotten."

So wrote James Smithson, a lonely Englishman and a bachelor, in the late eighteenth century. But Smithson was a chemist of note and a wealthy man in his own right, and it is perhaps one of the most unexplained acts in the cultural history of Great Britain that induced this Englishman to make provision in his will for the establishment in Washington, D.C., of the Smithsonian Institution for the increase and diffusion of knowledge among men. How conscientiously the American nation has carried out