NEUROSIS IN SOCIETY

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Foreword

by

The Lord Taylor of Harlow, MD, FRCP, FRCGP, FFL

Good clinical medicine, whether it is concerned with body or mind, starts with the careful observation of disease patterns. Only when the natural history of a disease episode has been established can prognosis be reliable and the effect of treatment properly assessed.

Professor Andrew Sims is a naturalist-psychiatrist in the tradition of Thomas Sydenham. For many years, he has been observing the nature, varieties and course of psychiatric illness, with a special interest in the severe neuroses. He has established beyond doubt that the severe neuroses are serious and intractable diseases, which carry with them a substantial mortality risk, even if suicide is excluded. He has observed and charted the close interaction between neurosis and the community whether it be the wider community of work and society, or the closer community of the family. Within these frames of reference, he has reviewed the full range of possible treatment, to see how far each technique yields results which are acceptable both socially and medically.

In this important book, he records his own observations, set against the published experience of many others. Severe neurosis is a subject of great difficulty. Any clear account is bound to be controversial if only because of the volume and diversity of speculative thinking in this field. Professor Sims sweeps through this confusion without being caught up in any particular dogma. He checks each assertion against the natural history of neurosis as he knows it, but leaves the reader to draw his own conclusions.

I have enjoyed particularly his accounts of the social neuroses, for example those caused by, or associated with, the Birmingham IRA bomb episodes. Today, he sees the epidemic neuroses spreading more rapidly than ever before, with the mass media as the vectors. He points out the mixed nature of many neuroses, with obsessional or hysterical features mixed with anxiety and depression. He quite rightly sees reactive or exogenous depression as a neurotic illness, the treatment of which is extremely difficult.

This is a book of great significance, to be read and pondered over by psychiatrists, physicians and general practitioners, as well as by those of the professions supplementary to medicine who have to deal with the neurotic in society. It should do much to improve the quality

of care and understanding which the neurotic in society receives. It should also provide a springboard for further research, in particular for epidemiological studies. Sound epidemiology is the great enemy of unsound clinical speculation. The clear and honest picture which Professor Sims has painted provides a sound foundation on which future investigation of this difficult subject can be built.

House of Lords and Glyn Ceiriog, North Wales, 1982