

BOOK REVIEW

Emmanuel Tanay,¹ M.D., F.A.P.A.

A Review of William Adamson White: The Washington Years 1903-1937

REFERENCE: D'Amore, Arcangelo R. T., *William Adamson White: The Washington Years 1903-1937*, Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Washington, D.C., 1976, 189 pages.

This book, published by the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, 1976 (no price given), is a collection of papers written primarily by distinguished psychiatrists discussing Dr. White's contributions to psychiatry.

Mr. Lawrence Moor, librarian at St. Elizabeth Hospital, contributed a biography of Dr. White, and Elyce Z. Ferster, legal scholar, provides a discussion of Dr. White's contributions to forensic psychiatry.

The psychiatric contributors are all former co-workers or students of Dr. White who reveal through their comments and reminiscences a fascinating insight into a significant period of American psychiatry. Each author describes a facet of Dr. White's contributions to psychiatry and thus provides a personalized, historical account of an aspect of American psychiatry at the turn of the century. The whole scope of psychiatry is encompassed in the life history of Dr. White. He was probably the first and last American psychiatrist of whom this can be said. This unique status was the result of the personal qualities of Dr. White and the historical period in which he lived. Dr. White was a superb administrator, who in 33 years of being a superintendent of St. Elizabeth Hospital, transformed the "Government Hospital for the Insane" into a world-renown psychiatric institution. He was an accomplished lobbyist who maintained excellent relationships with politicians. He was a pioneer psychoanalyst in the English-speaking world, a co-founder with Ernst Jones of the American Psychoanalytic Association. Jelliffe, in a letter to Freud written in 1929, describes Dr. White's role in relation to psychoanalysis (page 89):

He knows the political methods by which large extensions of ideas are made possible, and since his time is so occupied with his official position as superintendent of the leading psychiatric hospital in this country, he cannot do individual analytic research. His whole hospital from the nurses up is all analytic, however. He chiefly is of service as he travelled a great deal, addresses many Societies all over the States, and is greatly in demand. He outlines the principles of psychoanalysis everywhere and has done more for its extension over the U.S.A. than any other individual. I think you should know this.

An excellent chapter written by Zigmond M. Lebensohn deals with William A. White as a forensic psychiatrist. Dr. Lebensohn reviews the twenty papers and two books written by Dr. White on forensic psychiatry. All the essential issues that occupied present-day forensic psychiatry have been dealt with by Dr. White and are extensively dis-

¹Diplomate, American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology, Professional Corporation, Detroit, Mich. 48202.

cussed by Dr. Lebensohn. Dr. White subjected to psychiatric scrutiny basic motivations of the criminal justice system and its consequences. He explored the relationship between psychic determinism and the individual criminal. He had extensive practical experience in providing expert testimony, and his comments on the subject are just as useful today as they were 50 years ago.

Dr. White's views on such topics as the indeterminate sentence, the bifurcated trial, informed consent, and others are discussed in the book.

Dr. White's participation in the Loeb-Leopold trial is discussed in various chapters of the book. This particular trial was significant not only to the fate of the defendants but also to the career of Dr. White. It also represented an important educational input into the awareness of the American public about the relationship between law and psychiatry. Dr. White made a significant contribution to what now is called the mental health movement through his efforts at popularizing psychiatric knowledge. In 1919, he wrote *The Mental Hygiene of Childhood*, which is a popularization of psychoanalytic principles.

I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in the broad scope of the relationship between law and medicine, even though psychiatry is the primary focus. The book is very readable, well edited, and provides a fascinating insight into an aspect of the first 30 years of this century. Where else can one find an exchange of correspondence between the superintendent of the "Hospital for the Insane," Dr. White, and the Secretary of the Interior, Franklin K. Lane, dealing with the use of dogs for therapeutic purposes? The Secretary of the Interior inquired: "Would it not be practicable for you to have some dogs over there that the man could play with and chum with?"