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MRS. MELANIE KLEIN

EXPLORING THE CHILD
MIND

Mrs. Melanie Klein died in a London hospital yesterday in her 79th year.

Her name may not be widely known to the general public and is only gradually gaining recognition in psychiatric and psychological circles. Yet her work revolutionized psychoanalysis and has directly or indirectly exerted a profound influence on psychiatry, psychology, child upbringing and infant care and more remotely on such disciplines as sociology, anthropology, and art criticism.

Melanie Klein was born in 1882 in Vienna of Jewish parents. She was trained

in psychoanalysis by Ferenczi and Abraham and she started practising in the Berlin Psycho-analytical Society. Soon her interest centred on the then hardly explored possibilities of child analysis and in 1921 she published her first paper. She gradually evolved a technique in child analysis which gave her access to the



deepest layers of the child's mind. She provided the child with small toys and used his free play and spontaneous communications in the same way in which associations are used in psychoanalysis of adults. Both her technique and her findings provoked strong criticism, even from her psychoanalytical colleagues. First of all her technique aroused opposition since she used Freud's interpretative technique without any concession; she would give neither advice nor reassurance nor any educational guidance.

She used this technique in her work with children, however small, and the youngest was under three years old. Her aim was to analyse the child unconscious and by rendering it conscious to help the child to integrate various aspects of his personality. Secondly, her findings were found shocking and therefore unbelievable; even to those who had come to accept Freud's views about child sexuality Melanie Klein's discoveries came as a shock. Freud, in analysing adults, had established that many of their feelings, anxieties, and phantasies had their roots in childhood. Analysing children Melanie Klein discovered that many of the processes described by Freud had their roots already in earliest infancy, for instance, in a patient aged two and a half she found evidence of a superego and an Oedipus complex which had already a long and complex history. She also recognized that aggression and sadism play in a child's mind a role still greater than had been assumed by Freud. The discoveries she made in child analysis enriched her understanding of adults.

In 1926 Ernest Jones, one of the first to recognize the potential greatness of her work, had invited her to come to England and work within the British Psycho-analytical Society, and it is in London that she spent most of her working life and did her greatest work—for instance, her study of the depressive and paranoid-schizoid illness and their origins in infancy. In other psychoanalytical societies her work is often referred to as "the English school", not quite correctly, since only some of the analysts of the British Psycho-analytical Society were trained and taught by her and used her technique, though there is no doubt that the whole of the British society is deeply influenced by her work.

To work with Melanie Klein and to come into contact with her was an experience leaving a deep impact. The power and acuity of her intellect had strength and integrity, her originality and abundant creativeness left one in no doubt that one was in touch with an outstanding personality. Those who worked with her were inspired by her attitude as well as by her achievements.