



MODERN GOD

A modern touch to ancient worship is provided by this strange figure worshipped by the Indians of Panama. The spirits of heroes of both aviation and medicine are combined in this gaily painted airplane manned, on the wings, by two human figures bearing the unmistakable likeness of Dr. William Patterson, Scottish physician deified by these Indians years ago.

PSYCHOLOGY

Self-Preservation is Aim of Suicides Among Primitive Men

SUICIDE as a means of self-preservation sounds like a paradox. Yet self-preservation is the drive behind suicide in the case of primitive man and even, perhaps, of civilized man when mentally sick, Dr. Gregory Zilboorg of New York City points out. (*American Journal of Psychiatry*, May.) Dr. Zilboorg is chairman of the new Committee for the Study of Suicide, Inc.

Actually, suicide appears as a perversion of the instinct for self-preservation, Dr. Zilboorg explains. Primitive man, wanting above all to preserve himself, and having the idea that by dying he entered eternal life, killed himself in order to live forever.

"This is quite obviously a non-realistic and purely infantile way of achieving a seemingly adult goal—a fact justifying the use of the term perversion," Dr. Zilboorg says. "We can see now why it is that the suicidal drive appears to be

endowed with such an elemental force; it has such a force because it springs from the most vital drive man possesses, the instinct of self-preservation. It is this instinct shifted into the psychological field that drives the human ego to the assertion of immortality, and thus to fantasied preservation of the ego through death.

"One might even say that what man today attempts to achieve by means of books, monuments and works of art was achieved by primitive man largely through suicide.

"Here and there within the frame of our civilization this old method of self-assertion revives and re-enacts itself with the result that the individual destroys himself. Although this is demonstrated more obviously in psychopathological material, it is not necessarily pathological. In conclusion let us recall the almost universal idealization of the

act of suicide among primitive races, and in the light of our hypothesis we will see that this idealization is in fact but another method of re-stating and re-asserting one's own immortality."

This theory covers only one side of the problem of suicide, Dr. Zilboorg says, but it indicates, he believes, that the solution of the psychological and biological nature of suicide is to be found by ethnological study.

Science News Letter, July 25, 1936

ETHNOLOGY

Indians of Panama Now Worship an Airplane God

CHOCO Indians in Panama are making a god of the airplane. And a curious god it is, suggesting to those who know a little of aviation and a little of ethnology that these Indians have blended the spirit of Lindbergh and the spirit of their old Scottish patron saint, Dr. William Patterson.

Evidence of this new deity has reached the Smithsonian Institution at Washington. It consists of a plane skillfully carved out of the very lightweight balsa wood, and gaily painted in blue, even to insignia. These Indians know airplanes. They even provided a whirling propeller for the airplane image, it appears from the mark where a propeller seems to have once been attached.

Balancing lightly on the wings are two small human figures crudely cut, but each wearing the unmistakable hooked nose of Dr. William Patterson. Thus the Choco Indians retain their loyalty to a Scotsman whom they deified 200 years ago.

Dr. Patterson was a member of a Scottish colony in Panama in the seventeenth century. He was kind to the Tule Indians, helping medicine men to treat their patients, and when he died Indians of the region began to think of Dr. Patterson as a god who had once lived and worked wonders among them.

Carved images of the long-nosed doctor, wearing his Scottish cap and his walking suit and carrying his crooked stick, adorn the canes used by Indian medicine men in their rites of curing the sick. So widespread is the cult of the old doctor that Indians in South America revere his image.

Ethnologists explain that among Indians of the region it is customary for a medicine man to keep an assortment of statues of gods, representing animals, forces of nature, deified individuals—and now, the airplane. The gods help the medicine man to cure a disease, or