BOOK REVIEWS

psychiatry by Dr. S. Crown, and psychological research in the field of neurology by Professor O. L. Zangwill. In addition, Dr. J. D. Sutherland contributes a provocative essay on scientific tasks for the psychological clinic. Although these papers solve no major problems, they at least testify to the growth of fruitful collaborative study in the clinical field.

The only paper to offer a real theoretical challenge is Professor R. C. Oldfield's essay on "The Place of Experiment in Psychology". If, as this book suggests, the modern trend in the subject is to apply on an ever-wider scale what is already known, it is reassuring to learn that there is one British psychologist, at least, who cares about finding out something new. As so little is known in psychology anyway, it may be hoped that Professor Oldfield's paper will be closely studied by all who believe in fundamental science.


This work contains a detailed, comprehensive, and up-to-date review of the psychological experiments on visual perception. The author has considered a variety of approaches, and although her final conclusions regarding the nature of perception are not very different from those put forward by Bartlett in 1932, the more recent work has enabled her to clarify the concept of schematization which Bartlett took over from Head. The author has concentrated on systematizing the psychological aspects of perceiving. She does not herself attempt to connect these with physiological processes. Indeed, in the final chapter she suggests that something other than a purely experimental approach to the psychological data will be necessary before the connexions between psychological and physiological mechanisms can be understood.


The author describes the development of the Industrial Neurosis Unit at Belmont Hospital from earlier experiments of a similar kind. At this Unit patients are treated who have been incapacitated for work by neurotic symptoms, often of prolonged duration. Nevertheless about 44% of men make a satisfactory adjustment to work after discharge. The main mode of treatment is social and psychological, and involves getting the patient to participate actively and productively in the hospital community as a step to social participation in the world outside.

The most interesting section of the book, contributed by Joseph Sandler, relates to the statistical analysis of follow-up data. Many factors which one might have expected to have a prognostic value prove not to be significantly related with the degree of adjustment after discharge. This applies to age on admission, length of stay, wage level, skill, education, amount of unemployment, delinquency record, intelligence. Factors which did have a significant relation with after-history included marital status, amount of previous psychiatric treatment, diagnosis and other types of temperamental assessment, and recorded behaviour while actually in the hospital. Some suggestive comments are made about what is meant by "employability" and the ways in which it may be assessed.


This book will be welcomed by those who have so far withheld definite opinions regarding the value of mechanical models of the brain, as it is written for the major part in non-technical language by one who knows what he is trying to explain. But although mathematics are confined to a separate appendix, considerable concentration is still required to follow many of the arguments, even though the principles are illustrated by familiar events such as a cat creeping up on a dying fire.

The author starts by analysing the essentials of animal behaviour, and deduces that the most fundamental characteristic is that of adaptation to environmental changes. Similar activity is demonstrated by the homeostat, a device long known to engineers and used in automatic steering and heating apparatus. The author shows that it can be reproduced by a number of electro-magnetic cells interconnected at random. Such a design bears many more similarities to what is known of the structure of the brain than the much criticized and complex calculating machines.

There are many aspects of mental activity, even some of adaptation, which the author leaves unexplained, but which readers who feel they can profit from model building may themselves be able to find analogies for in the activity of Dr. Ashby's model. Others may remain of the opinion that they are more likely to further knowledge of cerebral activity by direct study of the brain itself and of its functions.

BOOKS RECEIVED

(Review in a later issue is not precluded by notice here of books recently received.)


