BOOK REVIEWS


Since Professor Bleuler succeeded to the Chair which his father had made illustrious he has concerned himself particularly with the clinical study of relations between endocrine disorders and mental illness. His enormous industry has enabled him to work through the large, prolix, and contradictory literature of the subject, with results evident in this useful reference book. The bibliography contains no fewer than 2,717 items, and there is good evidence that Professor Bleuler has read them all. In the general section he examines the evidence for linking specific endocrine changes to individual mental illnesses, and finds it entirely insufficient. He describes a general “endocrine psycho-syndrome” and believes that there is much similarity between it and the post-leucotomy syndrome. The psychopathology of endocrine disorders receives systematic treatment in a series of chapters occupying approximately half the book: here the investigations carried out by the author and his colleagues in Zurich serve him in good stead. The final section of the book is devoted to the endocrinology of mental disorders, especially of the schizophrenic group: it is a conscientious but rather uncritical review of a highly technical literature, for evaluating which it might be profitable in succeeding editions to enlist the cooperation of a biochemically expert endocrinologist, in the same way as Dr. R. Hess has been entrusted with the electroencephalographic contributions. It is certainly to be hoped that further editions will be forthcoming of a work so timely and serviceable.


This volume brings together some 32 contributions on the chemistry of the nervous system by authors who have done original work in the field they discuss. Thus, Sir Rudolph Peters writes on pyruvate metabolism, J. H. Quastel on acetylcholine synthesis and narcosis, and D. Nachmansohn on metabolism and function in the nerve cell. Keynes and Lewis review recent work on electrolysis and nerve function, and J. D. Rossiter discusses denervation. In such a work there is bound to be some repetition of information, but for the clinical neurologist the book will be a valuable source of reference, since it brings together much otherwise scattered material, most of it already familiar to the biochemist in the original papers. A final brief chapter on “The Thermodynamics of the Message” by Norbert Wiener is presumably a pious offering to the cybernetic climate of opinion that was fashionable some years ago when the book was originally planned. Indeed, the references in several sections also illustrate the delay in publication that the editors mention. Nevertheless, its claim to be “a fair guide to present knowledge” seems justified. Its price will unfortunately severely restrict its sale in this country.


To English readers the title of this book is misleading. The co-authors, a psychiatrist and a sociologist, have described the functions and social structure of one ward in an American private institution for mental illnesses, namely the well-known Chestnut Lodge Sanitarium. This hospital employs 165 people to look after 60 patients, most of them schizophrenics, who pay a minimum of 1,500 dollars a month; the intramural creed is psycho-analytical and is strong enough to replace the physical treatments of schizophrenia with a form of intensive psychotherapy. Any resemblance to an English “mental hospital” is therefore almost coincidental.

The book’s sub-title is more acceptable. On their basic assumption that “at least some aspects of the disturbances of the patients are a part of the function of the institution”, Stanton and Schwartz have undertaken to survey a whole community. Nothing is sacred: the personnel (staff and patients), their morale, their modes of communication, the hierarchy of power, are all examined by the method of two years’ “formal and informal participation in the life of the community”. The resulting “9,000 single-spaced typed pages and about 3,000 pages of statistical data” are compressed into a book of nearly 500 pages.

The essence of the study is descriptive and its principal interest lies in the authors’ examples of clinical and administrative practice, in their anecdotes, and in those of their speculations which derive from prolonged and intimate observation. It is to their credit that most of the field-work can be studied without reference to the more controversial body of theory which has inspired it. Though the findings do not lend themselves to valid generalization, few members of the medical profession concerned with the institutional care of the mentally sick will be able to read this study without profit and a prick of self-criticism.

This is a survey of the legislation regarding the admission of mental patients to hospital in more than 30 countries. The various methods of admission in different countries are surveyed under a number of heads: voluntary admission, involuntary admission, emergency admission, and admission for observation. Special categories of patients are then discussed: alcoholics and addicts, offenders and prisoners, and sexual offenders. This section of the book is perhaps the most interesting and illustrates how in many ways this country lags behind in much-needed reforms.


This survey is an analysis of the work of nursing staff in a mental hospital and two mental deficiency hospitals. It was directed by Mr. H. A. Goddard who analysed the work of nurses in general hospitals (published as The Work of Nurses in Hospital Wards, in 1955) and organized along the same lines. The purpose of the study was to determine how to make the best use of available resources. The present grave shortage of mental nursing staff makes this imperative and Mr. Goddard makes some valuable recommendations.


This book approaches the treatment of schizophrenia from the psychoanalytical viewpoint and claims to be a "comprehensive, lucid discussion of the whole subject of treatable schizophrenia". However, only scant mention is made of physical methods of treatment.

The author's opinion is that deep psychotherapy is the treatment of choice. He does not attempt to give any evidence to support this opinion, nor is there evidence for his many other views, for example, that the patient's "schizophrenic problems and preoccupations, interests and attitudes, derive their peculiarity primarily from his attitudes towards his mother", a mother who is described as "immature and obsessive and hysterical" and "anxious, guilt-ridden, ashamed".

If the author had given facts to support his views, this book might have had considerable value.


In this book, the author's aim has been to provide "a fairly concise background of factual information" regarding psychiatry. So far as the clinical aspects are concerned, he has succeeded: psychiatric syndromes are clearly described and there is an appendix of case histories. These include verbatim interviews which give the histories a liveliness usually absent in such books.

BOOK REVIEWS


Les Grandes Activit6s du Lobe Temporal. Published under the direction of Pr. Th. Alajouanine with the collaboration of various authors. (Pp. 298; 94 figures. F. fr. 2,200.—) Paris : Masson 1955.


Contributi del Laboratorio di Psicologia, Vols. xlivili and xlix. (Pp. 426 and 540 respectively ; illustrated. No price given.) Published by Vita E Pensiero, Milan. 1955.
BOOK REVIEWS

J Neurol Neurosurg Psychiatry 1956 19: 65-66
doi: 10.1136/jnnp.19.1.65

Updated information and services can be found at:
http://jnnp.bmj.com/content/19/1/65.citation

These include:

Email alerting service

Receive free email alerts when new articles cite this article. Sign up in the box at the top right corner of the online article.

Notes

To request permissions go to:
http://group.bmj.com/group/rights-licensing/permissions

To order reprints go to:
http://journals.bmj.com/cgi/reprintform

To subscribe to BMJ go to:
http://group.bmj.com/subscribe/