SEROLOGICAL FRACTIONS IN SCHIZOPHRENIA


Taraxaein, isolated in 1955 by Heath and his colleagues at Tulane University, New Orleans, from the serum of schizophrenic patients, has led a precarious life since then. Its existence has been questioned, and its effects denied. Heath injected it intravenously into monkeys and observed profound changes in behaviour as well as electrical changes in the brain similar to those observed in schizophrenic patients; he then administered it to prisoners in the local gaol who volunteered to submit to the experiment, and reported that they developed characteristic symptoms of schizophrenia. Other psychiatrists repeated these investigations and obtained negative results. Heath attributed this to the instability of taraxaein. In 1959 Kety wrote a survey of biochemical theories of schizophrenia which included a balanced but damaging statement on the weakness of Heath's claims. Others, however, in Detroit, Stockholm, and elsewhere produced more favourable findings. A symposium was held at New Orleans in 1961 at which the current status of the problem was reviewed, almost entirely from a favourable standpoint. In this book reporting the symposium there are four sections, dealing respectively with fractionation procedures, animal assays, mode of action, and clinical studies. The first of these sections is at this stage the crucial one. It seems clear that a variety of fractionation methods is in use for the separation of a protein which when injected can disturb the behaviour of experimental animals. The chemical nature of the substances thus separated is uncertain. Hoagland and his associates at Worcester put the matter cautiously in one of the contributions to the symposium: 'an abnormality exists in the globulin portion of the plasma proteins of schizophrenics, but it has not been determined whether this is due to the presence of a new protein or to the increased amount of a naturally occurring plasma protein. Nor has it been proved whether the abnormality is causally related to the disease or an incidental by-product of it.' To the subject, thus properly left sub judice, the papers in the symposium are a useful background.

C. W. M. WHITTY

Recent Advances in Biological Psychiatry. Vol. 5


It is widely (and correctly) believed that psychiatry in the United States is dominated by psychoanalytical doctrine, somewhat modified by American pragmatism and the current emphasis on the use of drugs. Nevertheless, there is now much research activity which is concerned with the biological characteristic of mental abnormality, just as there is now much investigation of epidemiological and social aspects. There are two societies explicitly devoted to such studies: the Society of Biological Psychiatry and the American Society of Medical Psychiatry. At the seventeenth annual meeting of the former of these societies a number of papers, many of them embodying previously unpublished work, were read and are reproduced here. They indicate a vigorous effort at biochemical and clinical study of mental disorder and the mode of action of reserpine, mono-amine oxidase inhibitors, and psychotomimetic drugs. The majority of these studies are sober and restrained; the Academic Lecture, however, which was delivered by Professor Cazzullo of Milan, was rather sweeping in its claims.

The special subject dealt with at the meeting was anomalies of development. Here, as in the metabolic studies, animal experiments were reported, as well as laboratory and clinical observations on human beings. Many of the papers dealt with the interplay between the foetus or the neonate and its mother: there was a refreshing absence of speculation about the psychological happenings in the baby's mind. Although the findings in a...
few of the papers arouse mild scepticism, for example, the favourable effects of ribonucleic acid upon the impaired memory of old people, they are all stimulating and suggestive.


In the enormous literature on schizophrenia much attention has been given to those states which in clinical structure are practically indistinguishable from schizophrenia, but which rarely occur in families with schizophrenic members, are relatively seldom associated with a recognizable schizoid premorbid personality, and follow a more favourable course than the 'general run of schizophrenics. Dr. Labhardt has singled out from these schizophreniform illnesses a subgroup precipitated by severe emotional stress, as delineated by his teacher, Professor Staehelin. He has collected 61 such patients, seen in the Basle University Clinic between 1938 and 1958. Dr. Labhardt has examined these patients systematically. Eight of them were at a later stage diagnosed as showing unequivocal schizophrenia; the remaining 53 were studied separately. The main conclusion was that this is a recognizable group, in whom the clinical features, though resembling schizophrenia, differ in the understandable content of the psychotic symptoms, the patients' good rapport and empathic accessibility, and their rapid recovery. The condition would be regarded in English psychiatric terminology as a schizo-affective reaction.


In the 20 years of its existence this textbook of psychiatry has commended itself to medical students and to those doctors who wanted a straightforward, fairly dogmatic presentation of the subject 'without frills'. The present edition resembles the last closely, except in its detailed account of the Mental Health Act, the section on the use of drugs, and the classification of neurotic disorders. In regard to the last of these innovations, the authors believe that by considering them under the general heading 'personality problems' they are breaking away from traditional views; but they are, in fact, reverting to the standard German approach, well set out in Kraepelin's great textbook and embodied in Eugen Kahn's work on 'psychopathic personalities', which was translated by Flanders Dunbar. It has many advantages but is not easily reconciled with the authors' Meyerian conception of the psychoses.

The book is easy to read, unpretentious, as factual as the subject permits, and reasonably free from technical language and concepts. It deserves to maintain its wide popularity.


The late Professor Kretschmer was the last of those able men who gave German psychiatry before the advent of the National Socialists a pre-eminent international position. His books on 'Physique and character', on 'Sensitiver Beziehungswahn', and on 'Genius', had far-reaching influence, and his more expansive expositions of medical psychology and psychotherapy were widely read. The man himself was not so well known outside Germany. In this attractively written autobiography Kretschmer shows his feelings and his devotion to his Swabian origins. He delineates his parents affectionately, and traces his ancestry back to some men of note, the theologians Brenz and Johann Bengel and the scientists Kepler and Gmelin. His pride in them is frankly avowed. An account of his student days in Tübingen just before the first world war, his subsequent appointment as Dozent, and his struggles in defence of his point of view lead up to the clinical activities and research of his later years. He devotes a chapter to recounting evidence of his antagonism to the National Socialist authorities during his tenure of the Chair in Marburg. There is an ingenuous strain of self-satisfaction running through the memoirs which is not without its charm.

**Book reviews**

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


