Book reviews


This volume is based on a 1961 Yale research conference of neurologists, psychiatrists, psychologists, physiologists, and pharmacologists discussing the place of the E.E.G. as an indicator of brain function and reactivity in normal and altered behaviour. The book begins with an excellent introductory description of the normal E.E.G. by the editor, and the subsequent papers are grouped in three sections. The first section on sensory systems and learning includes studies on conditioning, evoked responses, behaviour during hippocampal after-discharges, and memory. The second section on neuropharmacology deals with such substances as serotonin, catecholamines and cocaine, as well as with the general problems of quantification of E.E.G. and behavioural changes with psychotrophic drugs. The final section concerns epileptic disorders, including interictal psychosis and the inevitable 'six and fourteen per second' positive spike discharges. There is thus much of interest for workers in many fields along with detailed references. However, the book is relatively expensive and in view of its varied and interdisciplinary content may seem more fitted for the library than for a personal collection.


Any attempt made at the present time to relate mental processes to the physical organisation of the brain is bound to be speculative. The author’s hypotheses are of great interest, but in general do not allow predictions which can be tested experimentally.


The late Professor Conrad was well known for his contributions to the heredity of epilepsy, the psychopathology of schizophrenia, and the analysis of memory disorder in the Korsakov syndrome. His other major work, on constitution, which was published in 1941, received on the other hand very little notice. In the preface to this second edition Professor Conrad remarks on this neglect, which he found puzzling, and he casts around for explanations. Rightly he concludes that the monograph was overloaded with speculation and unnecessary hypotheses. How obscure the theorizing had been is very plainly shown in Jasper’s lengthy exposition of Conrad’s main theme, in his psychopathology. By purging the book of much of this speculative material and reviewing the various studies that have appeared since the first edition, Conrad has made it far more accessible and acceptable, though it is still difficult reading. For us who have been accustomed to regard Kretschmer and Sheldon as the fountains of wisdom about physique and personality, this critical and original work has a fresh and stimulating impact. The author’s genetic-dynamic view cannot be briefly summarized; it is logically worked out and goes some way towards justifying his claim that, right or wrong, it explains relationships which others have only observed and measured.


Every new textbook needs a justification. Professor Weitbrecht’s introductory apologia stresses his avoidance of dogmatic statements and the dry assembly of facts about diseases; he has tried instead to provide students with basic principles and general notions which will enable them to organize what they subsequently learn. Inevitably the book falls short of so ambitious a programme, but it differs from most German manuals of psychiatry in that it presents controversial issues fairly and recognizes the fluid situation in regard to such matters as psychotherapy and the nature of the atypical psychoses which have schizophrenic features. There are many case histories, presented in detail. Although Professor Weitbrecht has evidently never heard of any writings on psychiatry in the English language, his book is an interesting one, and gives a good conspectus of the form orthodox German psychiatry has taken in the last few years.


This simple, conventional, and consistent exposition of psychiatry, as currently taught in the United States, is intended for general physicians. It is remarkably free from critical comments, does not dwell on legitimate misgivings or delineate the areas of ignorance, and it concentrates on the general at the expense of the particular. Dr. Hofling says in his preface that a major pitfall which he meant to avoid was the ‘temptation to slight background material to get quickly to the clinical material’: this no doubt accounts for the brevity of the clinical details. The language of the book has been favourably influenced by an unusual arrangement: the Professor of English in the University is also Senior Research Fellow in the Department of Psychiatry and he has reviewed the entire manuscript, ‘offering stylistic corrections and pedagogical suggestions’.


Sir David Henderson possesses the qualities needed for writing an interesting personal chronicle—an easy and
relaxed style, a generous spirit, and a clear recollection of men and events now passing into history. He has turned his retirement to good account in producing this combination of autobiography and historical survey. The story of Scottish psychiatry has been little known, at any rate in England and America, and the detailed record of its ups and downs from the days of Andrew Duncan makes it clear that the Scottish contribution has been noteworthy, though at times occluded. However the most attractive chapter of the book is that on 'Personal training and experience', in which Sir David recalls with characteristic warmth of feeling a varied and fruitful professional life. His obiter dicta are a humanist's commentary on some important aspects of conduct and a psychiatrist's appraisal of the achievements and setbacks in his chosen field.


Twin studies are beset by many difficulties, of which the method of selection is perhaps the one most likely to affect the results. The starting material of this investigation was all the pairs of male twins born in Finland in the years 1920-29 and alive at the beginning of 1958 and resident in Finland. Forty-nine of the 125 identical pairs interviewed by the author were considered to be suffering from a psychiatric illness. The most startling result was that of 16 schizophrenic twins the identical co-twin was discordant in every instance, although many showed schizoid traits. There was about 50% concordance in the diagnostic classifications of neurosis and psychopathy. A diagnosis of neurosis was made in eight of the co-twins of the psychotic patients, suggesting that neurotic and psychotic symptoms are not genetically distinguishable. Fortunately, in an investigation so much at variance with previous studies, a full account is given, both of the method of selection of patients and of their case histories, since problems of selection and diagnostic classification are fundamental in genetic studies on twins with psychiatric illnesses.


A monograph which is based on the careful study of 222 homosexual men in a psychiatric clinic gives promise of a more objective review of the psychological and clinical problems than is to be found in most writings on this subject. Dr. Freund has been making systematic observations in the Prague University Clinic for the last eight years, and the results set out here cover the manifold varieties of homosexual behaviour, diagnosis of homosexual proclivity by laboratory examination, its relationship to abnormal mental syndromes, and its aetiology and pathology, as well as treatment by hormones, by the somatic therapies used in psychiatry, and by psychological methods. Under the last head there is a comprehensive survey of existing information about the effects of psychotherapy on homosexuals, with an account of how the author used aversion therapy, with modest success. Dr. Freund's scrupulous care not to make unsubstantiated claims is conspicuous throughout this informative, well-documented monograph.

**BOOKS RECEIVED**

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


**CORRECTION**

In the October, 1964, issue in the paper 'The role of infection in the Guillain-Barré syndrome' by S. C. Melnick and T. H. Flewett, in the last sentence on page 405 and page 406 an error has occurred. This sentence should read:—'The significance to be attached to these findings is doubtful, for the majority of these cases show evidence only of herpes simplex infection... etc.'

**NOTICES**

The second symposium to be held under the auspices of the Fulton Society on the 'Frontal lobe' will be held in Vienna in September 1965. Further details may be obtained from Professor Dr. Victor Soriano, Calle Buenos Aires 363, Montevideo, Uruguay.

The next meeting of the International Medical Film Congress is to be held in Paris from 22 to 26 March 1965. The films shown during the Congress will be concerned with psychiatric, neuro-psychiatric, psychopathological, or psychosomatic topics. Further information may be obtained from La Délégation française du Centre International du Film Médical, 36, Rue de Ponthieu, Paris 8ème, France.

The next meeting of the World Congress of Psychiatry will take place in Madrid from 5 to 11 September 1966. Further information may be obtained from the office of the Congress, c/o Facultad Medicina san Carlos, Calle Atocha, 106, Madrid.
