Reviews and Notices of Books

Hysteria. By Ernst Kretschmer. Translated by O. H. Boltz (Nervous and Mental Disease Monograph Series, No. 44). New York: Nervous and Mental Disease Publishing Company. 1926. Pp. 120. Price not stated.

In this admirable essay on hysteria the author draws attention to the resemblance of hysterical symptoms to reflex reactions and other low level motor mechanisms. He also points out how such reflex reactions may be intensified by a voluntary effort. This is exemplified by the chattering of the teeth often playfully indulged in by children, or the leg clonus which can be maintained if the muscles are in a hypertonic state. He points out that this voluntary effort, which he terms the 'hypoboulic' will, is distinct from higher 'volition' in so far as it is vague in its direction but intense in its application, having the 'all-or-none' character of other lower psychic manifestations. At best it may serve to maintain and intensify higher volition, but under the influence of shock or conflict the two types of will may come into opposition either coincidently or in alternation. This is what happens in hysteria. Many of his examples are drawn from war cases, of course on the German side. The effort to bring the explanation of neurotic symptoms into line with processes familiar in other fields of the physiology of the nervous system without insistence on structural lesions is commendable and stimulating. This essay should be carefully studied by all those interested in the psychoneuroses.

R. G. Gordon.


This slender volume is very welcome. Written by a psychiatrist of wide experience, its purpose is to make the results of psychiatry available for general psychological enquiry and to emphasise the value and significance of the approach to normal mental processes from the psychopathological side. Further, it stresses the importance for the psychiatrist of the foundation of medical training in the knowledge of fundamental physiological laws, which hold good and are applicable wherever we find the functioning of the living organ, and which are certainly apposite when we come to consider the function of the mind.

The author distinguishes in every psychical process three essentially different elements: intellectual activity, feeling, and will. This division is confirmed by the findings of psychopathology. He is at pains to demonstrate, in respect of these three elements, that their psychical constituents correspond
to the functioning of cells in the grey matter of the cerebrum, and that, physiologically speaking, specifically different functions are always fulfilled by specifically different cells; and he concludes that each of the three "specifically distinct elementary psychical functions" is "fulfilled by its particular types of cells, which are grouped each within its special organ" in the organ-complex of the brain. It is entirely unphysiological to suppose that the same cell should have two different elementary functions, such as feeling and intellectual activity, and there is no reason to believe, on account of its special attributes, that the brain in this respect occupies a special position among all living organisms.

With Dr. Thalbitzer's views on the actual localisation of the 'feeling centre,' for example, we confess we are not in agreement, nor do we think his contentions for the association of the frontal region of the brain with 'thought proper' impressive; but of the soundness of his main argument we think there is no question. A book of this kind serves as a useful corrective and reminder when a possible localisation of psychic elements is unthinkingly negatived by those who are not familiar with the evidence furnished by nervous and mental disease.

S. A. K. W.


This little work is one of the 'New Psychology' handbooks and presents the subject in a popular form. The historical development of the concept 'mind' is discussed, and chapters follow on the brain and nervous system, and on brain processes and mental activity. Treatment is discussed from the point of view of physiological psychology, which really is pure physiology. Later the subjects of psychic energy, telepathy, clairvoyance, sleep, dreams, intuition, hypnosis and subconsciousness are briefly dealt with. In the last chapter —"Present position of research"—it is well pointed out that the question of 'brain and mind' has been obviously regarded from too limited a standpoint and that it is possible to assume that every cell of the body may possess a 'mind' of its own. Much useful information has been condensed into these pages and the author deals with a difficult subject in such a way that the publication will amply fulfill its purpose.

C. S. R.


This handsome and eminently useful textbook on the nervous and mental diseases of children owes its origin, in a sense, to the well-known volume on
Emotion and Insanity

S. A. K. W.

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