Reviews and Notices of Books.


Any serious attempt at a solution of the numerous and complex problems offered by epilepsy deserves consideration, for they must be obvious to any observer other than the superficial. The rationale of treatment should be the outcome of exact knowledge of its etiology and pathogenesis, but such knowledge is still to seek. The late Dr. R. G. Rows busied himself greatly with the question of epilepsy as it occurred in soldiers during the war, and relied very largely upon military cases in endeavouring to find a common basis for all kinds of epileptic manifestations. His collaborator, Dr. W. E. Bond, has published the results of their investigations just as the record was written by Dr. Rows, indicating in a brief preface that he was disinclined to alter anything, even if theories of his partner are "open to question, or since disproved." The reviewer is thus rather under the impression that the book cannot perhaps be taken to represent finality in respect of its authors' views and, if so, criticism is to some extent disarmed.

Be this as it may, the conclusion herein reached is to the effect that in every type of case the one common factor is "a disturbance of consciousness with which is associated an emotional state." The reception of a stimulus from the outer world or from some organ of the body "leads to the revival of a memory and the emotional state associated with it." Hence there is "fixation of the attention," the consequence being movements of head, eyes, pupils, and other parts of the body "usually associated with the processes of attention," and also movements of the limbs or organs of the body "by means of which the emotions are expressed." The aura is a recalled memory, and if the reaction spreads beyond the stage of an "intense emotional state and increased concentration of attention" this occurs "through the extrapyramidal paths which proceed from the cortex to the subcortical ganglia," (sic). The 'cry' of the epileptic patient "frequently suggests a condition of extreme fear"; in such cases the motor reactions are movements of the head, limbs, body (and of internal organs), "which are usually employed to express the emotions."

This courageous attempt to unify the processes of epilepsy, whatever the clinical type, whatever the actual existing condition (cerebral tumour or shell shock), whatever the degree and duration of the phenomena, would
perhaps be more plausible were it not based to some extent on anatomo-
physiological considerations which are open to obvious objections. The
authors rely on the presence of vasomotor nerves on the vessels of the central
nervous system as being "definitely proved," whereas the recent researches of
Florey render their existence more problematical than ever, and Leonard Hill
has shown that if they exist their power must be entirely insignificant. For
the exteriorisation of the centrally produced movements anatomical paths are
postulated the existence of which is unproven, and old experiments of Bechterew
and others are relied on which are capable of other explanations than those
accepted for their theory by the authors. But apart from these and analogous
difficulties to which no reference can here be made, it will we think be admitted
that the crux of the matter, or at any rate one of the cruxes, resides in the
problem of whether the movements of epilepsy have any 'meaning' or not.
The authors consider the epileptic 'cry' often one of fear, but many who have
heard the peculiar inspiratory rush of air through the larynx as the diaphragm
spasmodically descends will not accept this interpretation. They believe that
the writhing convulsions of the epileptic express emotion, and that the rigidity
of head and eyes expresses attention. This view of the 'meaning' of the
contortions of the attack we cannot entertain, and consider that it is belied
by any objective examination of what actually takes in a fit. It is a curious
thing that while Hughlings Jackson is extensively quoted, and with approval,
there appears to be no citation of his opinion that in the convulsion the in-
dividuality of each movement is lost, that it is nothing else than "a single
big useless movement," and that subsequent (clonic) movements "do nothing
but mark time." That the phenomena of Jacksonian epilepsy are the expression
of recalled memories of intense emotional states and of increase of attention
seems to us just a little absurd. Of what emotion is clonic convolution limited
to the forefinger and thumb of one hand the expression? Nor can the clinical
picture of many examples of petit mal be made to accord comfortably with
these views. The authors have set out to prove too much and are consequently
in difficulties when their theory is applied widely.

S. A. K. W.

Experimental Investigations into the Emotional Life of the Child,
compared with that of the Adult. By H. ENG. Translated by
GEORGE H. MORRISON, M.B. With 9 plates. Oxford Medical Pub-
243. Price 21s. net.

Laboratory experiments were undertaken by means of the plethysmograph
to investigate the emotional life of the child between the ages of seven and
fourteen. It was sought to determine whether psychical experiences of a
definite character are accompanied by definite changes in the volume pulse
curve and in the respiratory curve, and if the changes in these curves which
Epilepsy, a Functional Mental Illness: its Treatment
S. A. K. W.

J Neurol Psychopathol 1927 s1-7: 273-274
doi: 10.1136/jnnp.s1-7.273.273

Updated information and services can be found at:
http://jnnp.bmj.com/content/s1-7/27/273.citation

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/