The significance of histological alterations in the small intestine and in the liver in the syndrome of confusional insanity (Sul significato delle alterazioni istologiche dell'intestino tenue e del fegato nelle sindromi amenziali).—U. De Giacomo. Riv. di pat. nerv. e ment., 1931, xxxviii, 633.

The author examined the liver and the small intestine in seven cases of confusional insanity. The histological lesions constantly met with correspond more to an irritative process of a toxic nature than to an inflammatory process of an infective origin. The author reviews the character of these lesions and concludes that they illuminate the pathogenic concepts of Buscaino on the pathogenesis of the essential and symptomatic forms of confusional insanity.

R. G. G.

Psychopathology.


The psychogalvanic reflex has mostly been used as an amplification of the association experiment to determine the emotional attitude to special stimuli, stressing reaction time and amplitude. If the curve is regarded as a whole, however, it can be taken as a sample of the vegetative-emotional reactivity in general under the standard conditions of the experiment. A classification of the curves according to their general appearance is therefore proposed, based on the shape of the reactions and their way of succeeding each other. Psychogalvanic reactivity is regarded as an interaction of two components: one (called negative) due to increased potential of the palm, another (called positive) due to increased potential of the back of the hand, and causing a deflection of the needle in the opposite direction. From the shape of the reactions the share of each component can be determined. Curves from patients differ from normals in three respects. The reactivity may be decreased, it may be unstable, or the positive component shows more decrease than the negative one. These three pathological traits can be expressed quantitatively, and therefore be used for comparison of the reactivity in different groups of patients. Most disturbance is found in manic, schizophrenic and organic psychoses, least in hysteria. In organic cases (and less markedly in depressions) decreased reactivity is the most important pathological factor, in schizophrenia decrease of the positive component. In manic excitement, hysteria and constitutional abnormalities lability is the outstanding feature.

Within the group of depressions (including the more depressive neuroses) the mood has the most decisive influence upon the reactivity: it is far more
disturbed in tense and anxious than in depressed or relatively normal moods. If the anxiety gets its normal outlet in restless behaviour, the outstanding pathological feature will be a great decrease of the positive component. If this restlessness is absent (controlled, suppressed?) the reactivity is on the other hand high and unstable. This indicates that the negative component represents a more instinctive, primitive part of the affectivity, less influenced than the positive one by the higher, more cognitive levels.

Lability predominates in younger patients and in cases of short duration, decreased reactivity in older ones and when the duration is longer. Depressions without content show a more normal attitude than the rest. Organic trends give a marked decrease of the reactivity. Clinical improvement is accompanied by a definite return of the psychogalvanic reactivity towards normal.

C. S. R.


The aim of this research was to determine differences, if any, as between types of children from Zurich and from Geneva. Rorschach's tests enable us to diagnose the mental age of children and incidentally to distinguish between extrovert and introvert types. In the absence of a standard of racial endowment it is impossible to make dogmatic statements about racial differences on the psychological plane; but the degree of infantilism can be assessed from achievements in these tests. There was a difference of some significance noted between children living in institutions and those who resided with their families. The latter were more negative in tendencies, timid and depressed. These characteristics are accentuated in the case of neuropathic children. The proportion of various types of child assessed by the Rorschach test is not the same as amongst children living at home. Introverts are in excess, negativism and obstinacy six times more frequent, and they tend to be withdrawn into themselves.

E. M.


The main conclusion is that sodium amytal produces a marked change in the behaviour of certain types of psychotic patients and a less pronounced change in the emotional attitude of normal individuals, on the basis of the release of inhibitions. It allows the study of the thought-content of stuporose patients, which was previously not possible, and gives material which can be used in psychotherapeutic efforts.

C. S. R.
Kretschmer's types (Sur les types de Kretschmer).—Sigurd Petersen. 
L’hygiène ment., 1931, xxvi, 121.

It is suggested that the Kretschmer types of physique—(1) the narrow-skulled leptosome type, (2) the athletic type, (3) the dysplastic types (eunuchoid, polyglandular, and the hypoplastic infantile), (4) the pyknic type—form a substratum from which the various psychiatric reaction types spring. This method of study is useful in determining the ingredients in a mixed psychosis and in defining the candidates for future psychosis.

E. M.

Contribution to the study of the microglia in mental disease (Contributo allo studio della microglia nei malati di mente).—C. E. Roberti. Riv. di pat. nerv. e ment., 1931, xxxviii, 461.

In pure confusional states, that is to say, not superadded in the course of other mental illnesses, the microglia does not seem to react to an appreciable degree, so far as it is possible to judge by the very partial result obtained with the common methods of staining. It has been demonstrated at least in animals that microglia plays a small part in experimental intoxication.

In the schizophrenic syndrome the behaviour of the microglia is maximal; the cells contribute very markedly to the pathological picture of dementia praecox. This is in accordance with the conception that this syndrome is encephalitic in nature.

In a symptomatic confusional syndrome secondary to active morbid processes in the brain the microglia shows the alterations typical of the dominant malady without there being any particular changes directly due to the confusional state.

R. G. G.


This is a novocain-formalin precipitate reaction with blood which is supposed to demonstrate toxæmia, but the author’s experiments lead him to regard the test as non-specific, and he does not think it can be used to prove the toxic origin of dementia praecox.

R. G. G.