Inconstancy of the formal structure of the personality.—F. Wertham and M. Bleuler, Arch. of Neurol. and Psychiat., 1932, xxviii, 52.

Rorschach’s ink-blot test was studied on normal subjects, both before and after the administration of mescaline. It was found that the test under mescaline corresponded closely to the personality of the subject as actually known. The test obtained in normal circumstances, while agreeing in some points, gave an opposed picture of all important qualities. The authors therefore suggested that their observations indicated that the form of a personality is not constant and that the usual psychological ‘type’ of a person does not necessarily describe completely the structure of his personality.

G. de M. R.


An attempt is here made to study ‘trial-and-error learning,’ when the response to be learnt is a relatively simple movement, and the stimulus for that response is also relatively simple. Guinea-pigs, placed in a stand in a sound-proof room, were taught to turn their heads to one side in response to the sound of a buzzer, food being given as a reward when they made this movement. It was found that the average time of response became progressively shorter in successive trials. The habit could be ‘reversed’ by rewarding the animal for turning its head, on the sound of the buzzer, to the other side; or ‘extinguished’ by ceasing to reward the animal.

The argument is that it is difficult to explain these results on Pavlov’s theory of conditioned reflexes; and that it seems probable that some other principle, such as that of Thorndike’s ‘law of effect’ or Troland’s principle of ‘retroflex action,’ must be added to the principle of conditioning in order to explain the simpler forms of learning.

C. S. R.

PSYCHOSES.

Tactual perception in alcoholism.—Walter Bromberg. Arch. of Neurol. and Psychiat., 1932, xxviii, 37.

Studies of the after-effects of tactual sensations made on patients with alcoholic and schizophrenic psychoses showed that the tendencies toward change in the after-effects found in normal persons were present in the patients. In persons suffering from alcoholism the after-effects change in such a manner as to indicate that there are organic changes in the perceptive field. These organic changes may be in the nature of sensory or vestibular
influences. In alcoholism, changed sensory perception is basic for the existence of hallucinations. In patients with schizophrenia, there are no changes in the perceptive field; hallucinations among these patients are related to the special thought-processes of schizophrenia. It is still an open question in what way these special thought-processes influence secondarily the perceptual field.

R. M. S.


The authors are of opinion that thyroid disorders occur in individuals of a personality which reacts to excitement and psychogenic trauma with the development of excessive and prolonged tension. This tension is a physiological response of the organism which with constant overstimulation may produce permanent changes in the thyroid, and these changes render the individual more susceptible to subsequent physical and emotional trauma. The physiological response is of the type which, when constantly stimulated by psychogenic trauma, results in temporary and permanent changes in the thyroid gland and associated mechanisms, giving the clinical syndrome described as hyperthyroidism. The susceptibility of the thyroid gland to change is much increased by biochemical alterations such as occur when the iodine available is insufficient for the normal metabolic requirements of the gland.

Damage to the thyroid gland by infective and toxic processes contributes to the ease of permanent change. The fully developed syndrome represents a vicious circle which can be interrupted by thyroidectomy, but early cases offer therapeutic possibilities and relief may be gained by altering the factors to which the patient must react. In postoperative cases recurrences would probably not result if the tension could be relieved. Therefore, owing to the presence of underlying psychogenic factors of causal significance in hyperthyroid cases, they recommend complete psychiatric studies.

R. G. G.


Although it has been claimed that psychoses in persons suffering from disturbances of thyroid function do not differ from those which occur in cases without thyroid involvement, the authors describe four in which ordinary treatment had no effect whereas treatment of the thyroid abnormality immediately effected a cure. They plead that toxæmia should never be overlooked in any case of psychosis.

R. G. G.
There appears to be a clinical sub-entity in the psychogenic or 'reaction-to-environment' group of psychoses, in which the chief symptoms are persecutory delusions, with or without hallucinations, and without obvious personality or intellectual changes, occurring in highly moral women, and becoming apparent during the fifth and sixth decades after a long prodromal period. The change from normal to psychopathic is so gradual that relatives have found difficulty in fixing the date of onset and persons who have but slight contact with the patient are not aware that the individual is suffering from a psychosis. The writers think that there is a specific etiological factor and that this is an overt or imagined sinful act on the part of the patient, which is not sinful to her, however, as she either projects the blame on others or denies that it would have been consciously desired by her. The situation is thus not dealt with adequately and honestly, and a state of emotional unrest is produced. As a quietus to conscience a persecutory delusional trend is developed slowly and progressively until a well-marked psychosis results.

C. S. R.

Mentally defective persons from mental ages of between one and two years were studied and compared with cases of schizophrenia. The author found tendencies for Gestalt at the three-year level. Above three years there is a tendency to accentuate the horizontal base lines, to control perseveration and to produce wavy lines instead of broken ones for the representation of straight lines, and some effort to cross lines. At the five-year level, there is a tendency to reduce the primitive loops to points, but this tendency is reversible even at the superior adult level, and there is a tendency to make straighter lines and better recognized Gestalten. At the seven-year level, there is a swinging back and forth between loops and dots, a capacity for many vertical and geometric Gestalten determined on the principle of internal organization and for crossed forms. At the eight-year level, most Gestalten forms are satisfactory; slanting forms are recognized, but their relations to the whole figure are not always possible. Pairing determined by slight differences is not possible. The major difficulty at this level seems to be in connexion with the relations of parts to wholes. These things are satisfactorily accomplished above the ten-year level, though even then there is a certain amount of variation in individual cases. At all levels all of the original principles are in evidence and tendencies to revert back to
them are always present. Thus, there is always the tendency for dots to become loops, for straight lines to curve a little, for parallel lines to radiate toward or away from each other. In the schizophrenic cases there were found dissociations due to reversions back to some of the primitive principles such as perseverations, carrying over one form into the next, changing dots to loops, fragmentations, representing dotted lines as wavy lines, micropsia and accentuation of the horizontal plane, and to avoid crossed and angulated forms, as well as failure to integrate the whole field or properly relate some one or more parts to the whole.

G. de M. R.

[124] Reflex response latencies in cyclothymic and schizophrenic cases.—

The patellar tendon reflex was studied by the authors, and it was found that the ratio of standing height divided by reflex time was a suitable unit of measurement.

Under this ratio 18 manic cases showed a mean ratio of 7.99 ± 0.05, eight depressed cases showed a mean ratio of 8.52 ± 0.06, 122 normal students showed a mean ratio of 8.76 ± 0.02, and five cases of catatonic stupor gave a figure of 13.67 ± 2.40.

G. de M. R.

[125] The acid-base equilibrium of the blood in psychotic patients.—

The total base content of the blood plasma in manic-depressive psychoses (and in other psychoses studied for comparison) is normal. The blood chlorides in the same cases are also normal. There is an increased acid-residue in the involutional depressions—of a degree, however, which is not markedly significant. The carbon dioxide content of the plasma, in the psychoses studied, lies within normal limits except in those cases complicated by: (1) 'new admission' factors; (2) toxic conditions; (3) physical abnormalities; (4) resistance to venepuncture.

No relationship exists between habitual motor activity and the degree of acidosis in those cases uncomplicated by resistance to venepuncture or 'new admission' factors.

R. G. G.

In 180 patients the mean systolic pressure was found to be 11.2 mm. lower than that of normal control; the diastolic pressure was 16.7 mm. lower. The pressure was found to have no correlation with height; there was no constant variation with season; the duration of hospitalization was found to have no effect; neither nutrition nor total daily output of nitrogen was found to bear a relation to the blood pressure. In these cases the blood pressure did not vary until the fifth decade.

G. de M. R.


Ten cases of manic-depressive psychosis were given ephedrine hydrochloride intravenously. The rise in blood-pressure was markedly greater than in ten cases of schizophrenia or five normal controls. In the manic-depressive group the blood-sugar curve showed an initial fall below the fasting level, followed by a rise reaching maximum at fifteen minutes and a secondary fall below the fasting level with a third rise towards the end of two hours. In the schizophrenic cases a marked rise occurred, reaching a maximum at the fifteen-minute period, which was sustained for two hours. In the normal person there was a sharp rise, a slight fall and a further rise, succeeded by a gradual fall toward the normal fasting level. The experiment seemed to indicate that the manic-depressive patient possesses a hyperirritability of the sympathetic, whereas the schizophrenic shows a relatively inert nervous system. None of the typical vagotonic reactions was found.

G. de M. R.


The writer's thesis is that an intensive study of children and adolescents, with the better psychological and psychiatric tools now at hand, is accumulating evidence to suggest that there are cases in which a deteriorating process, called praecox for want of a better term, is at work from early childhood. These cases are often thought to be mental defectives, but they are fairly easily differentiated from actual defectives. Their intelligence age first develops pari passu with their chronological age, but later it begins to slow down, and in adulthood they are on a lower level that the I.Q. promised in their childhood, and they remain on this level the rest of their lives. They seem to undergo a deterioration comparable to that which takes place in the organic psychoses.

C. S. R.