

Report of the Departmental Committee on Children and the Cinema. H.M. Stationery Office. 3s.

The Report of the Departmental Committee on Children and the Cinema presented to Parliament in May, 1950, is a masterpiece of lucidity. From an amount of material "at first sight overwhelming", there has emerged a clear, concise and extremely readable and interesting account of the present position of children and the cinema. From this two points stand out above the rest: the large number of children affected and the importance of the cinema in many of their lives. Statistical tables drawn up from information given by different bodies give interesting facts about the attendance of different age groups, and the account of Film Appreciation courses brings to light the information and interest that the children have. "The teacher or group-leader who begins by discussing films is appealing immediately to a field of mental and emotional experience which is part of the normal everyday life of most of those in his class."

One defect of the Report, an inevitable one at this date, is that it has had to base its recommendations almost entirely on opinions. These were informed and given disinterestedly, but their great variety and contradictory nature makes the whole of Section IV (Effects of Cinema Attendance on Children Under Sixteen), of doubtful value. On the question, for instance, of the influence of the cinema in promoting juvenile delinquency, the committee can only conclude, "the link of cause and effect is unproved in a majority of cases and we remain of the opinion that deeper, subtler and more various influences are at work". Even this guarded conclusion was not found satisfactory to one member who felt bound to add a memorandum—an illustration of the indefinite quality of this part of the Report and the inability of the Committee to give much guidance here.

The Committee was conscious of the lack of factual information, and in several paragraphs it urges the need for scientifically based investigation, and at the end of the Summary of Recommendations is one headed "Research". It may be that the terms of reference did not allow for the section called "Suggestions for Research" to be included otherwise than as an Appendix, but the impression is frequently received that though due deference is paid to "research", the opinions of experienced men serve this imperfect world very well as a good second-best.

Where facts were available, the Committee has produced an excellent report alike in its wide survey of the problems and its comprehensiveness. But it was asked to report on the effects of attendance at the cinema on children and to make recommendations, and one may wonder whether it was not given an impossible task, when reliance could only be on opinion and that proved to be a most unsure guide.

P.E.W.

Varieties of Delinquent Youth. By William H. Sheldon, Ph.D., M.D., with the collaboration of Emil M. Hartl, Ph. D., and Eugene McDermott, M.A. Harper & Bros., New York, 1949. \$8.

Those who have read Dr. Sheldon's earlier works, *Varieties of Human Physique* and *Varieties of Human Temperament*, will be acquainted with his general approach to psychological problems. He aims at discovering correlations between physical characteristics and psychological qualities—a sort of neo-Kretschmerism, but with the addition of a rating scale which makes it possible to describe that majority of us who are neither this, or that, or the other, but are, in various degrees, all three at once. The present volume applies these ideas to a juvenile delinquency investigation. Two hundred boys from the Hayden Goodwill Inn, a Boston rehabilitation home for young offenders, were studied over a period of eight years. They were photographed, and their physical characteristics analysed according to Sheldon's scheme. A standardized biography of each boy, including his medical and mental history, a description of his temperament, some sketchy details of his earlier history, as well as an account of the vicissitudes through which he passed in the eight years of study, was added.

This data constitutes the greater part of the work, and if it were all, the book would be a useful reference volume for future students of delinquency, but would be too innocuous to bring forth much comment. It would be entirely uncontroversial. In fact, far from avoiding controversy, Dr. Sheldon revels in it. He has a picturesque vocabulary and a hobby horse, and rants, arms waving, after many a wild-goose in this book. He succeeds in slaying very little!

His basic premise is that "Behaviour is a function of structure", and to him, structure means physical structure. So he endeavours to relate delinquency to his physical types, and finally concludes that delinquency is connected with an incompatible mixture of types. He claims to have identified such "dysplasias" in most of his 200 cases.

Although he pays lip-service to the principle that the existence of physical factors of this sort must not eliminate from consideration the precipitating environmental factors, there is throughout the book a clear presumption that the only really significant considerations are the hereditary ones. Medical students of delinquency have often tended towards this sort of explanation, developing neat little diagnostic compartments labelled "constitutional inferior" or "constitutional psychopath" etc. In recent years there seems to have been a return to Lombrosian ideas even among more sociologically oriented investigators. The Glueck's latest book is a case in point. Yet the reasoning on which such conclusions are based is often most unscientific. Sheldon in the present volume seems to espouse theories in the crudest Lamarckian tradition. Thus he speaks of the "burgeoned" figure being deliberately

sought in America, and being fostered by over-feeding . . . and then being passed on by inheritance—just like that ! And if there had been any study at all of the precipitating factors, it might have appeared that the problem was not always one of the inherently maladjusted person, but often of a maladjustment in the relationship between a type of person and a type of social setting.

But perhaps it is unfair to criticize the book at this level. Sheldon offers it as an essay in psychological biography, and outside the biographies and some excellent preliminary summaries of Sheldon's earlier books setting out his general ideas on the relation between physique and temperament, it is mainly polemical. The Freudians are attacked

with great éclat, especially psycho-analytically oriented social workers. For example, one of the factors observed to be present in some of the 200 cases was the A.M.I.—the " appeal to the maternal instinct ". In exchange for their social workers' protection, the boys with a high A.M.I. had learned to satisfy the need to " mother something " felt by social workers, who " most of them are frustrated women or near women ". And in the light of discoveries by constitutional psychiatrists, the family is quite out-moded. " The basic change will no doubt rest on recognition of reproduction as a kind of licenced and subsidized specialty instead of a *laissez-faire* competition."

H.J.

Film Reviews

The Astonished Heart. (Starring Noel Coward, Celia Johnson, Margaret Leighton.) 89 mins.

The Astonished Heart or *Pride Goes Before a Fall.* Let all psychiatrists take a warning that the cinema teaches them, that the greater their knowledge of the human heart and mind, the greater will be the disaster of their own personal lives, and there is grave doubt whether there can be any other end for them but suicide. Dr. Milne in *Mine Own Executioner* did just avoid that, but the approved method, used by the brain specialist (James Mason) in *The Upturned Glass* and again by the psychiatrist (Noel Coward) in *The Astonished Heart* is a spectacular fall from a height, doubtless psychologically most symbolic.

Those who are not in danger, however, may see untroubled some of the greatest acting and finest production on the screen to-day. It is difficult to over-praise the acting of Celia Johnson, the psychiatrist's unglamorous wife, who makes of the ordinary, something sublime. It was, perhaps, a pity to set the scene in two such extravagant luxury apartments, for the quality of the acting did not need any extraneous material effects, but that is a small defect to set against the finish—almost the perfection—of every movement and word.

But it is the assumptions about psychology that are of interest now, and it is difficult to feel content about the assumptions made in this film. Here, the tragedy of the psychiatrist's personal life is not only the popular theme of authority dethroned, though that is a strong element. The dramatic irony of the conversations in the consulting room, of the doctor's lecture, and of his clinical observations to the woman who, he knows, is intending to captivate him, all this is part of the now familiar theme of the pompous and omniscient psychiatrist whose fall, at any rate, resembles Lucifer's. But it is

not only that the doctor was too clever, that his knowledge of the workings of his heart and mind were not matched by his power to control those workings ; running through the film there seems to be an identification of psychological knowledge with the fruits of the Tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil, forbidden, on divine authority, to men. To those who transgress, there is death and damnation. The search for a Bible in the flat, and the finding of one in the possession of the cook (who seems the only happy person in the story)—the quotation from Deuteronomy, " The Lord shall smite thee with madness and blindness and astonishment of heart ", as the psychiatrist sees Leonora—his complete enslavement to passion with death as the only solution—these, together with a good deal of uncertainty about the value of his treatment to his patients, make a story, the moral of which must be unacceptable to readers of *Mental Health*.

P.E.W.

Round Pegs. 16 mm. 15 mins. Central Film Library.

This is a shortened version of two films previously made on personnel selection in the Army. It is a factual document, coherent and intelligent, based on data derived from different methods of psychological investigation used in the Army to determine a man's aptitude for a particular job, his likelihood of resisting a breakdown and his general adaptability to other people. The commentary, which is clear and well spoken, ends by suggesting that a similar method might be applied in civilian life with regard to vocational guidance, the details of which, however, have still got to be worked out.

This is a well-made film, easily understandable and useful for anyone interested in psychological testing and personnel selection.

E.H.R.