Book Reviews

THE SUBNORMAL MIND. By Professor Cyril Burt. Oxford University Press. 1935. 10/6.

This book is an expansion of the third series of Health Clark Lectures delivered at the University of London in 1933. Although intended primarily for doctors, the matter is dealt with in such a manner as to form what the Americans call an orientation course in the subject of mental subnormality for all interested in this work, whether doctors, psychologists, teachers or social workers.

The term "sub-normal" has been considerably extended. There are chapters on the intellectually subnormal, both mentally deficient and dull or backward, the morally subnormal or delinquent, and the emotionally subnormal or neurotic. Partly because of his own special experience in the field and partly acting on the belief that prevention is better than cure, Professor Burt has dealt mainly with the wide range of problems as they occur in children. As he says, "at these younger ages, the nature of the difficulties and of the causes that produce them, is presented in a simpler and more transparent form."

In his opening chapter on the normal mind, he maintains that psychology is to be considered not so much a branch of physiology as a branch of biology and further, that individual psychology is of most importance for the medical student and others interested in this problem. He then sets out from the practical psychologist's case-history sheet, to define the various tendencies that can be usefully assessed and to devise a method for the quantitative measurement of each. He pays particular attention to the intellectual and temperamental aspects and tries to indicate the extent to which they are in-born or acquired, and general or specific factors.

The chapters on intellectual subnormality are a summary of the author's more extended works already available on these subjects and serve as an introduction to those who are not familiar with his larger works and a very useful refresher to those who are, and also a foretaste of his long-awaited book on the backward child. It is important to note his caution that the study of a backward group alone is not sufficient. Our conclusions should always be based on the comparison of such a group with a control group of normal children taken from the same mass of the school population.

He clearly distinguishes between the extrinsic and intrinsic cases of backwardness and shows that while the former are amenable to short periods of tutorial treatment and restorable to ordinary classes, the latter require permanent adjustment of the curriculum to their mental level. He advocates special classes for the juniors and special schools and a complete remodelling of the curriculum for the seniors.

In discussing the delinquent, he treats crime as a natural psychological reaction and suggests a psychological diagnosis of the underlying causes and a course of treatment rather than punishment in order to re-educate the young delinquent in the hope of producing a law-abiding adult citizen instead of a hardened criminal. The chapter on the delinquent along with the four succeeding chapters on the neurotic and their ascertainment and incidence, should serve as an excellent introduction to work in the field usually covered by Child Guidance Clinics.

In his discussions of the neurosis, the author has not adopted a dogmatic position based on the findings of any one system of psychology, but has rather tried to show how each and all of the many varied theories may help to elucidate the actual cases which occur most frequently in clinical work with children.

He proposes to distinguish two main groups of neuroses. In the one, the inhibiting emotions—fear, sorrow, submission and disgust—are predominant; in the other, the aggressive emotions—anger, self-assertion, curiosity, sex and the like. Teachers would call the former "nervous" and the latter "naughty" and doctors, "neurasthenic" and "hysterical," but the author suggests the terms "asthenic" and "sthenic." They are distinguished in the main as follows: the former, less deeply psychological than the latter, are based on more recent causes and are more dependent on physical conditions.

After discussing the different types with much illustrative detail from actual cases, the author gives some tentative figures for the frequency of incidence of the neurotic child. From his own figures obtained in a sample borough in London, he finds as many as 4% in urgent need of special treatment, and another 13% requiring further investigation of the case. He states that if these cases could be dealt with intensively in early life by some such means as child-guidance clinics, we should save countless individuals from definite breakdown in later life and enormously diminish the amount of unhappiness, inefficiency and social friction.

In three appendices are given his Tests of educational attainments, his revised scale of Intelligence Tests and a questionnaire on neurotic symptoms.

Anyone who wants to ascertain the present status of these various types of diagnosis in clinical work with children in England, could not do better than make a careful and thorough study of this book, which requires frequent perusal to realise the full wealth of material which it contains.

D.K.F.

IMAGINATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD. Ruth Griffiths, M.A., Ph.D., with a Preface by Professor Flugel. 358 pp. Kegan Paul. 12/6.

This book is an interesting record of an original and valuable piece of research. The work upon which it is based was done partly in Brisbane and partly in a school of the London County Council when Miss Griffiths was Research Assistant to the Burden Mental Research Trust, and one of the particularly interesting features of the book is the comparison between the two sets of statistics.

At the outset, Miss Griffiths set herself the task of investigating the imaginative content of the minds of elementary infant school children, and devised a new means of technique for this purpose. She selected thirty London, and twenty Brisbane children; of the London children fifteen were boys and fifteen girls, with chronological ages of between 5 and 6 years. These children were divided into three groups: 5 of each, boys and girls, being chosen as having an intelligence quotient of more than 115; those of the next group falling between 90 and 105, while those of the remaining ten children were in every case below 80. Of the Brisbane children, also in age between 5 and 5½ years, the highest intelligence quotient was 129 and the lowest 79.

Each of the children was interviewed separately, on successive school days, for a period of 20 days or until 20 interviews had been completed, and each interview lasted from about 20 to 40 minutes. At these interviews a selected series of tasks was presented to the child. Everything he said was taken down, and the work done was itself preserved and selections of it are reproduced wherever possible.

The tasks suggested to the children were the telling of a story, the making of drawings, the description of images that came up in the mind after the eyes were covered with a hand, the

recital of dreams, and an investigation of the interpretations of 20 ink blots made by the investigator, only four of these being shown at an interview. Each child was left free to draw or talk as he wished, and the order in which the tasks were done was left to the individual choice of the child. Part I of the book is the record of the actual work produced.

Part II is concerned with a theoretical discussion of the conclusions suggested by the nature of the material given in Part I, and contains Chapters on Phantasy and Emotional Life, Some Aspects of Childish Thinking, The Function of Phantasy, The Symbolic Process in Children's Thinking, Phantasy and Education, Play and Children's Dreams; chapters are also included on Children's Drawings, Imagery in Children, and the Ink-Blot Reactions.

The first conclusion of very considerable interest to which Miss Griffiths comes, is that there is a coherency and even something of a consistency underlying the group of material presented by any one child. This coherence is not formal but emotional. She admits that, regarded from a logical point of view, there is a great deal of confusion in these products, but points out that "For the child, who so far has no experience of the ordered logical classification in adult perception, there can be no sense of confusion." What then is the underlying unity in the child's material? Miss Griffiths finds the answer to this to lie in the relation between a child's emotion and his phantasy. Quite rightly Miss Griffiths regards phantasy as the expression of a child's emotional problems and it is a delight to read the clarity with which this point of view is set out.

Miss Griffiths notes how varied are a child's emotional problems, and how urgently they press upon him for solution, and points out that for a child, attack upon the solution of his problems can only be made piece by piece and in a phantasy fashion, each solution of each part of the problem being tried out in a piecemeal fashion before the whole can be comprehended.

This is a notable advance upon views current among educationalists of the nature and meaning of phantasy in childhood.

The second and very valuable observation made by Miss Griffiths is the relation of day-dreaming or phantasy to work. She notes the relationship between absorption in phantasy and inhibition in work. It is significant that this conclusion emerges, not from the evidence of