

Book Reviews

THE PROBLEM OF MENTAL DISORDER. The McGraw-Hill Publishing Company, Ltd. 1934. (pp. 388. 24s. net.)

This is a study undertaken by the Committee on Psychiatric Investigations of the National Research Council of America, whose Divisional Chairmen, Professor Madison Bentley, Cornell University, and Professor E. V. Cowdry, Washington University, are the editors. The work was supported by a grant from the Carnegie Corporation and it is certainly a far-sighted policy of this body to give a portion of their funds for research into mental problems.

The material is excellent, the twenty-five papers are of a high standard and there is evidence of originality of thought, and of clinical or laboratory experience in each of them. They are indeed teeming with both facts and suggestions, and no matter how senior the psychiatrist, he will find something to learn. Moreover, there is that subtle difference in style of writing and arrangement of the book which makes this American symposium most fresh and fascinating.

The book was undertaken because the Committee felt that while the curative arts are constantly discovering new measures and medications for preventing and relieving many of the graver ills of the body, no like agency is successfully coping with the mentally disordered in public and private institutions for the insane and in the open life of the community. They realised that nearly every hospitalised patient means a disturbed and disorganised family and were conscious of the magnitude of the problem, since the number of mentally disturbed and un-governed outside the hospitals probably exceeds that of the hospitalised cases. There is a vast army of mental sufferers under the care of physicians and psychoanalysts, and also under faith-healers, magicians, quacks, astrologers, mystics, and the like. The problem of mental disorder not only includes those who are insane, but also the queer, the vagrant, the flighty, the incorrigible, the suspicious, the irascible, the unstable, and reclusive people. All these are individuals who, because of defective self-direction and of unbalanced performance, are more or less incapacitated for effective living in society.

It was therefore decided that a general approach might be made by undertaking an inventory of the scientific support which may now profitably be used to extend knowledge of mental disorders, and of the best ways and means to direct diagnosis and therapy.

The first five papers are entirely medical, and the full value of them can only be got by physicians who have specialised in the work. The names of the contributors give confidence at once for they are already known to English students of psychiatry and psychology. The first is by Dr. C. Macfie Campbell, Boston Psychopathic Hospital, who deals with Clinical Psychiatry, and speaks here as a physician to the sick personality. He suggests several avenues of research leading towards an extension of psychiatric knowledge and, as can be expected from such a physician the view-point is wide. The second is by Dr. A. Myerson, Boston, who takes the general physician's attitude and his primary search is therefore for the pathological condition underlying the symptoms presented. This type of research, as everyone knows has, been well rewarded in the past in G.P.I., pellagra, and the toxic psychoses and may yet elucidate the cause of other mental disorders. Dr. Wechsler, Columbia University, takes the neurologist's point of view and puts emphasis first and last upon the study of structure and function and insists upon the utilisation of scientific and experimental methods in fathoming such problems. Dr. Adolf Meyer, John Hopkins Hospital (whose teaching has inspired so many of our English psychiatrists), takes the psycho-biological point of view and contributes a most concentrated and clear thesis. Dr. Kubie writes upon psychoanalysis and presses for research in discovering the neurotic origins and tendencies of childhood; he counsels rigid, methodical and liberal training for the psycho-analytical practitioner, pointing out how many very superficially trained people practise what they call psychoanalysis. These five papers should be considered separately and then reflected upon, when they will be found to have many common features which dovetail into each other and make this little series complete in itself.

The major part of the book deals with subjects which are only indirectly connected with mental disorders and consists of twenty papers, each of them upon a different theme. The members of the personnel of the Universities of

Harvard, Washington, Chicago, McGill, Hopkins, Boston, Cornell, Columbia and others contribute papers, as also do workers of the Rockefeller Institute, Lilly Research Laboratories, etc. General biology and genetics are represented as are also such diverse subjects as endocrinology, nutrition and pharmacology; anthropology and education account for two short papers, the latter a most refreshing one.

Some of the papers in this section are quite suitable reading for those who are not physicians, and social workers, biologists, and psychologists will find its pages stimulating.

The book, however, is not an easy one and cannot be read in a few days for each article demands thought and reflection. The whole trend of the text is to encourage scientific workers from every field, to help in elucidating the great problem of mental disorder, which as the editors point out, touches to-day not only individuals but also nations. Gratitude is due to the collaborators for so widely selecting the papers and for their comments upon them.

ISABEL EMSLIE HUTTON, M.D.

FROM BIRTH TO MATURITY. By Dr. Charlotte Buhler, Professor at the University of Vienna. Kegan Paul. 7/6.

From the very outset, this book gives one re-assurance. First—because it deals with the normal child, and second—because it is written by Professor Charlotte Buhler, the sanity of whose outlook, and the carefulness of whose studies are well known. We feel certain, therefore, that the book will fill a long-felt want in the reading of parents, teachers and students, while those who have had the pleasure of meeting Dr. Buhler and hearing her lecture will be glad to have at least some of her observations and deductions in a more permanent form.

Dr. Buhler's method is that of observation and collation of facts, from which certain conclusions are deduced. Never does one feel in reading her records that facts have been suitably presented in order to prove or illustrate certain theories held by some one school of psychology. Here the method of investigating is really scientific.

The book, as it promises, deals with the normal child from birth to maturity. About one half of the volume is devoted to the comparatively short pre-school period. This

division, is, in our opinion, justified, since so much less research has been done on these early years than on the later stages of childhood.

To the uninitiated, almost any means of testing the development of an infant seems little short of miraculous—the avenues of approach are so few. It is fascinating, therefore, to watch not only how that approach is made, but how the tendencies and development of very young children are gauged. The testing for "maturation" covers six fields of activity. The tests are careful, comprehensive and thorough-going, so that there is little danger of a wrong conclusion being reached owing to lack of sufficient evidence. According to the results of these tests, those who are in charge of the child are advised as to what stimulus may be necessary for its all round harmonious development—thus the possibility of any unwitting neglect of any part of the child's "maturation" is likely to be checked. By these tests, too, any retardation or neurotic trouble is quickly noted, and the cause of such investigated.

In the study of early childhood, one or two points come out with extraordinary clearness. One of these is the importance of environment. Again and again it is shown how children who are brought up in an Institution are likely to suffer in intellectual development. They are well cared for physically, but that whole world of interest and intercourse which is a child's right in an ordinary home, is not open to those children, and the effect of this lack of stimulus is very marked. The evidence arising out of these tests, too, is made the basis for the choice of home for the adopted child. This is a point which has been overlooked too long. How often has one seen the wrong child sent to the wrong home, which is either incapable of giving it the stimulus it requires, or else provides a stimulus to which the child is incapable of reacting.

Another interesting point is the evidence that children are better to develop at their own rate. With a bright child many parents and teachers are inclined to "force the pace," but the foolishness of such a step is clearly shown since development which comes at its own time is not only quicker in the end, but stronger and surer also. At the same time it is made clear that the right opportunity should be given to encourage development at the right time, otherwise reaction is apt to be slow, and performance clumsy and unsure.