

Reviews

Mongolism (Peristatic Amentia). By M. Engler, M.D.(Vienna), D.P.M., Assistant Medical Officer, St. Lawrence's Hospital, Caterham. Bristol, John Wright & Sons, Ltd. 21s.

Mongolism is a common condition. Several books on the subject have already been written. However, such is our ignorance of the cause and treatment of this congenital anomaly that any work which will shed fresh light on the subject is to be welcomed.

Engler's monograph is useful if only for the valuable bibliography which it provides and the excellent photographs with which it is illustrated. He has brought together in a small space a great wealth of material which he presents in a very readable manner.

The book is marred like that of Benda by the author's insistence on a particular theory of causation which, since it is unsupported by adequate data, will not carry conviction to most. The three possibilities which have received most attention to date from other workers are as follows. First there are those who seek a primarily genetic explanation for the condition. The family histories provide unpromising material from the standpoint of the geneticist and it is evident that any Mendelian explanation of the condition would be extremely complex. A second line of attack has been to seek for some lack of harmony between the parental blood groups and those of the child similar to that causing kernicterus with the Rhesus group. This approach has also been unsuccessful. A third possibility, which seems the most hopeful, is the discovery of some intra-uterine disturbance analogous to that which is now known to be produced in the embryo by German measles and toxoplasmosis, which would retard the development of the child producing a picture like that of mongolism.

Engler, however, seeks to place the blame on a degeneration of the lining of the uterus, this may be looked upon as a variant of the old theory of uterine exhaustion which can be shown on statistical grounds to be inadequate since the mongol is so frequently the first born. Engler goes so far as to state that in 90 per cent. of cases of mongolism there is some evidence of disease of the uterine mucosa. However, amongst the "evidence" of such disease he lists tuberculosis, syphilis, cachexia, alcoholism, iodine, lead and phosphorus poisoning, treatment with X-rays. If mothers who have continued to produce normal children were questioned in regard to these and many other factors capable of producing disease of the endometrium which Engler mentions it is doubtful whether even 10 per cent. of them would be regarded as having a completely normal uterus.

The close identity of the clinical picture in different cases of mongolism is the most striking attribute of the condition and it will indeed be surprising if it is not shown eventually to be due to some fairly specific factor deranging the normal development of the foetus.

It is to be hoped that in a subsequent edition of his book Dr. Engler will be able to eliminate some of the inconsistencies and limitations in his presentation. Thus it is probable that more extended observation would reduce his surprisingly high figure of 8 per cent. of cases of mongolism with epilepsy. Again his use of the word "idiot" to describe mongolian imbeciles is irritating. Similarly the word feeble-minded has a definite legal significance in Britain, hence Engler's statement that "mongolian idiocy among the newborn occurs in approximately 40 to 50 per cent. of all the feeble-minded" is not only wrong but confusing. The fact that he has only seen one red-headed mongol also suggests that his material is limited.

In spite of these shortcomings the book should be read by all those interested in paediatrics or mental defect.

B.H.K.

The Backward Child. By Sir Cyril Burt, D.Litt., D.Sc., LL.D. New and Revised Edition. University of London Press. 25s.

That "The Backward Child" has reached a third edition shows how necessary this book of Sir Cyril Burt is to those who teach and have dealings with the welfare of sub-normal children.

Most psychologists appear to be detached from the physical side of the lives of their patients. Burt, however, from the time of his early appointment as Psychologist to the London County Council, links up the child's mental development with the physical and environmental aspects of life.

Burt's philosophy is reflected in this book. The first four chapters deal with classification, investigation of cases, definitions and frequency of educational retardation. There follow seven chapters on the causes of backwardness, all relating to social and physical conditions. Then come three chapters on intellectual factors. An analysis of the subject matter shows the stress placed by Professor Burt on the physical life of the child.

A careful reading changes the outlook of the teacher towards his children. He no longer sees them as just minds into which he has to pump an extra dose of the three R's; he is reminded that they have bodies. The teacher is made to realize that his pupils not only live a life in school, but they have a home and a life outside school. The book

stresses that while children need food for the mind, they also require food, clothing and relaxation for the body. Further, while boys and girls assimilate ideas at school, opportunities for first hand experience should be provided in the world outside the classroom.

The direct relationship between the functioning of the mind and the state of the physical condition of the child has been long recognized. But Burt places this factor on a scientific basis as a result of his researches among the child population of this country. With his theoretical work as a basis, the popular agitation of pioneers and the exigencies of war have led to a vast extension of school feeding, but it is to be regretted that housing conditions, of equal importance to food in the development of the child, have deteriorated since the beginning of the war.

Burt concludes his preface to this, the third edition of his book as follows:

"During the period of post-war construction, the treatment of the dull and backward sections of a democratic community will still remain one of the most urgent tasks to be faced."

To do this effectively, the size of the task has to be determined. Burt carried out his surveys on which the statistics of this book depend, between 1920-1923. Based on these figures, he calculated that 10 per cent. of the school population were backward. Since those years, a major event has taken place, namely the second world war, causing serious dislocation in the lives of our children. To what extent their education has suffered has not been generally determined.

A glimpse of what has happened is shown by an L.C.C. enquiry on reading ability among Camberwell and Lewisham children on transfer from infants to junior schools reported in 1949. Twenty per cent. had to be taught reading from the beginning, while 50 per cent. were so backward as to require special attention in reading. Burt's figures for backwardness in these two boroughs are 9.2 per cent. and 1.2 per cent. respectively.

"The Backward Child" provides an outstanding work of reference for teachers and social workers. These will not be satisfied to borrow a copy from the public library. They will find it essential to have a copy of their own, for this book answers the day-to-day problems that arise with backward children.

C.S.

Children and the Cinema. By J. C. Ward. Social Survey, Central Office of Information, Montague Mansions, London, W.1. 10s.

Children in the Cinema. By The Hon. Mrs. Robert Bower. Johns Ltd., Newport, Mon. 1s.

Since the Report on Children and the Cinema (reviewed in a previous issue of this journal), was published, there have been two related publications—a pamphlet by the Hon. Mrs. Robert Bower

containing a summary of the main aspects of the Report with comments, and the results of a Social Survey carried out for the Committee which prepared the original Report.

It should be remembered that the Committee was appointed by the Home Secretary, the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Minister of Education. The mention of the first and third of these sponsors suggests that the chief enquiry was to discover what effect the cinema had on children—particularly whether it had a bad effect—and this information, one may guess, is what most people would expect from such an enquiry. If this is so, then readers of the Report and the Social Survey will be disappointed. Not only is there no evidence, but the difficulty of obtaining such evidence is apparent to those with any knowledge of research after reading these documents.

Mrs. Bower, however, is convinced that there is a strong connection between juvenile delinquency and attendance at the cinema and on this point she submitted an addendum to the Report. She offers the evidence that both are greater in Scotland than in England. Her note of unqualified certainty does not harmonize with the objective tone of the Report, and her comments and the pictures in her pamphlet, give the impression that the Report had more to say on the connection between delinquency and cinema attendance than, in fact, it had. This points to a certain danger if summaries of official Reports are made by those with minority views.

The Social Survey is a most valuable document. It claims in the introduction that, though it was not possible to study in detail the effect of the cinema on children, the broad outlines of the problem have been studied and likely fields for further and more intensive research suggested. This claim seems amply justified. The record of the Survey should be—and presumably will be—in the hands of all who in the future study any problem concerned with children and the cinema.

P.E.W.

Sociometry in France and the United States. A Symposium. Edited by Georges Gurvitch. Beacon House, 101 Park Avenue, New York, 17. \$7.50.

This latest publication from Beacon House contains papers from such notable contributors as Professor Gurvitch, J. L. Moreno and Bengt Danielsson, is really a journal in hard covers, a collection of contributions all more or less about or by, J. L. Moreno and sociology, but it does show that work in both France and the United States aims at establishing a truly scientific basis for sociology. John Stuart Mill maintained that the experimental method could not be applied to the social sciences. His canon of the experimental method grew out of physics; logical aspects were emphasized, material aspects disregarded. Moreno writes that the structure of