Book Reviews

Mental Retardation: Diagnosis and Treatment.

It is not clear for whom this book is intended, though the editor says in his Preface that it aims 'to bridge the gaps, both real and semantic, that so often exist between [the various disciplines]'. The contributions of the 17 authors are illogically arranged; for example a chapter on metabolic and endocrine causes of retardation, and another on degenerative diseases causing retardation, are separated by four other assorted chapters including one on psychiatric management of the mentally retarded child. Little thought seems to have been given to the relevance and importance of the material included. The style is irritating; no one will be better informed nor will any gaps, semantic or otherwise, be bridged by such tautologous definitions as 'A psychological evaluation has been defined essentially as the activity engaged in by the psychologist, whether testing, interviewing, or whatever, which leads to his contribution in understanding or solving a problem.' We cannot recommend this book to paediatricians.


Although the volumes in this series are intended to act as summaries of recent work rather than as comprehensive textbooks, the first volume, entitled 'Modern Perspectives in Child Psychiatry' did in fact follow the pattern one would expect of a textbook in child psychiatry and was probably mainly of interest to workers in this field. The present volume not only draws upon a wider range of knowledge by including authors from many cultures, but at the same time deals extensively with modern research into basic principles of child development and its disorders, in a way that should make it as interesting and rewarding to paediatricians as to their psychiatric colleagues.

In his introduction Leo Kanner contributes an excellent and balanced account of the development of child psychiatry, emphasizing particularly its unfortunate neglect of paediatrics in its highly productive but limiting preoccupation with psychoanalysis and psychopharmacotherapy. He rightly criticizes Child Guidance Clinics for the rigid crystallization into what he calls the 'Holy Trinity' of psychiatrist, psychologist, and psychiatric social worker, and for the increasing isolation of psychiatry from the mainstream of medicine which has followed.

In the first section, dealing with basic principles of child development and their relevance to its disorders, D. H. Stott contributes a comprehensive review of research on the relationship between the physical and psychological hazards of pregnancy and later abnormalities in the child. Stella Chess reviews the research on interaction of temperament, environment, and parental attitudes in the genesis of emotional disorders, emphasizing the need for investigation of neurological and physical handicap as well as temperamental and intellectual capacities. Though one-sided in its neglect of dynamic considerations, it forms a useful corrective to our current excessive preoccupation with unconscious emotional determination.

While Chess focuses largely on data from large-scale, superficial studies, M. David and G. Appell restore the balance with a beautiful study in which the interaction between mother and infant was observed in the greatest detail in a small number of families. Their demonstration of the profound way in which maternal attitudes are transmitted to infants is completely convincing and though most practising child psychiatrists may have been forced to similar conclusions already, careful perception of the subtle mechanics of the process does much to reduce the uncertainties inevitable with the coarse observations on which routine clinical work must be based. This is complemented by a most interesting paper by P. H. Wolff describing in detail the attitudes and concerns of mothers before birth, events during labour and delivery, and the subsequent