Book Reviews

A Neuropsychiatric Study in Childhood. By MICHAEL RUTTER, PHILIP GRAHAM, and WILLIAM YULE. (Pp. vi + 272; illustrated. £3.75.) London: Spastics International Medical Publications. 1971. Studies sired by the Institute of Psychiatry, University of London, traditionally bear the hallmarks of erudite authority, unimpeachable method, and meticulous attention to detail. This study is no exception. It forms part of the large-scale epidemiological survey of schoolchildren resident on the Isle of Wight undertaken by Michael Rutter and his colleagues. In this, the entire population of statutory school age (almost 12,000) was screened for a variety of handicapping conditions, including neuroepileptic disorder contrasted with lesions below the brainstem, these being compared with chronic diseases not involving the CNS, e.g. asthma, diabetes, and cardiac states, the whole yielding a uniquely comprehensive compendium of clinical data. The present section, published as a double volume in the series Clinics in Developmental Medicine, deals with organic brain dysfunction in its relation to child psychiatric disorder.

Does such dysfunction predispose to psychological disturbance and, if so, can this be solely attributed to the presence of physical handicap, or is it specifically related to disorder of the brain? Are there, in fact, specific patterns of psychiatric disorder associated with organic brain lesions? These, and related areas of inquiry, are explored, for we are reminded that few hard facts have so far emerged in this sphere despite a plethora of papers which are both skilfully and critically reviewed. The point is also made that as the acute field of paediatric disease comes progressively under control, more and more emphasis will be laid upon this more chronic group of neuroepileptic disorders and especially upon their social, educational, and behavioural concomitants, as reflected in recent legislation.

The volume is introduced by Professor Birch of Yeshiva University, New York, as fulfilling the need for a detailed body of normative information on the neurological and behavioural characteristics of a representative . . . population of children'. In so doing, it 'provides a model for (extended) neuro-behavioural enquiry'. The book should, therefore, be of interest to a variety of disciplines: paediatricians, neurologists, psychiatrists, psychologists, educationalists, and sociologists, each of whom must surely find something of value among the wealth of data presented and the conclusions that emerge, some at variance with traditional views.

Though perhaps a shade expensive, the publication is beautifully produced, and the sections on neurological and psychiatric assessment, which detail the clinically based schemata adopted in the survey, may well be regarded as an additional bonus, to be read with profit by clinicians (medical and non-medical) involved in this sphere of work. To them, in particular, the book is unreservedly commended.


The editor, J. Wortis, introduces the book with a lucid and helpful article entitled 'What is Mental Retardation?' He makes the rather surprising remark that 'Medical clinical practice would do well to focus its interest mainly on the biological types of retardation and limit its involvement with psychosocial types to differential diagnostic tasks'. Happily this implied withdrawal of the doctor from the social and community aspects of mental retardation is not reflected in Dr. Wortis's choice of chapters for this book, which include 'Pedagogy' (a singularly unfelicitous choice of title for an excellent article); 'Nutrition', 'Social Work', 'Parent Organizations', and 'Architecture'. The last is a remarkable chapter opening with the words 'If you wouldn't design it for your own home and family, don't design it for the retarded'. The illustrations should make us hang our heads in shame at much of the provision for the retarded in this country.

The impression left by this generally excellent volume is profoundly encouraging; one feels that the last few years have seen a collective pulling up of socks by everyone working in this field. The approach to it has become at once more scientific, human, lively, and hopeful. We look forward to further volumes in this series.


There are over 40 papers in the first Symposium; about one-third are in German with English summaries. The Symposium covers a very wide range of subjects including asthma, bronchitis, scoliosis, and cystic fibrosis, with papers reporting development of the lung, pathology, pulmonary function tests, epidemiology, bacteriology, and therapy. The scope is too broad to offer a comprehensive up-to-date coverage of all these fields. There are useful papers on the long-term prognosis in asthma and also on the use of steroids in