

Book Reviews

ALFRED KINSEY

Dr. Kinsey and the Institute for Sex Research.
By WARDELL B. POMEROY. Thomas Nelson & Sons Ltd. Pp. 479. Price £4.20.

Alfred Kinsey's monumental study of human sexual behaviour is, according to the cover notes of this biography, comparable in scientific importance to the works of Darwin and Freud. Without detracting from the importance of the mass of normative data so painstakingly collected by Kinsey and his co-authors, it must be said that the work did not lead to any major change in conceptual thinking on sexual behaviour or generate any new major theory. Like the work of Darwin and Freud it did provoke intense social, religious, moral and medical indignation, but there the parallel ends. Serious criticism has been levelled at Kinsey's selection of subjects for his case studies, and Dr. Pomeroy's biography provides further interesting glimpses into this aspect of the project. Like many of his predecessors in the field of sexual biology, Kinsey had to tolerate much uninformed criticism as well as misinterpretation of his work by the popular press, with whom he came increasingly into conflict. His complete conviction of the authenticity of his work led him to reject vehemently any form of criticism, even from the allied fields of anthropology and psychoanalysis. Increasingly, however, one develops sympathy and admiration for this shy, sensitive biologist who from his early interests in insect taxonomy was led through his involvement in the Marriage Course at Indiana University to enter upon a major study of human sexual behaviour.

The interview remained the instrument of Alfred Kinsey's project, and it was to his credit that he resisted the pressure to use the inferior method of the postal questionnaire.

In the latter part of his life, particularly after the publication of the 'female' volume, Kinsey and the Institute were subjected to increasing criticism from all sides, and eventually political expediency forced even the Rockefeller Foundation to withdraw its financial support from the Institute for Sex Research. This financial blow led to Kinsey's breakdown in health, and his death was perhaps accelerated by the intensity of his quest for supporting funds.

This is a commendable biography of a dedicated scientist whose professional life became totally committed to the study of human sexual behaviour, and it

will no doubt take its place as a companion volume to the 'male' and 'female' on the shelves of medical libraries throughout the world.

JOHN JOHNSON.

B. F. SKINNER

Beyond Freedom and Dignity. By B. F. SKINNER.
London: Jonathan Cape. 1972. Pp. 225. Price £2.25.

The success of operant conditioning in the artificial circumstances of laboratory research has emboldened Skinner to widen his horizons and write this book. It is intended to adumbrate a technology of behaviour modification which could bring about such changes in human culture and conduct that man's misbehaviour resulting in overpopulation, pollution, spoliation of world resources, and the like is abandoned, and a utopian future emerges for a behaviour-controlled mankind. But the premises on which Skinner's argument rests are so peculiar that it follows from them, rather paradoxically, that it cannot, or should not, be said that he intended writing the book or that he can claim any responsibility for it.

His premises are that, from his scientific viewpoint, the behaviour of man is not controlled by free decisions on his part or by a sense of responsibility. Hence the title of the book which proclaims that the concepts of man's freedom and dignity in shaping his behaviour are to be replaced by the dictum (it can only be a dictum) that 'a person's behaviour is determined by a genetic endowment . . . and by the environmental circumstances to which as an individual he has been exposed'. Man thus becomes a creature of circumstance whose behaviour is not decided by him but by environmental 'contingencies of reinforcement'. Admittedly, there are snags in this 'scientific' approach, especially when it comes to the evaluation of such psychological features as character traits or the cognitive activity of thinking. Yet such snags do not deter Skinner, who sweeps them aside by asserting: 'The inadequacy of our analysis is no reason to fall back on a miracle-working mind. If our understanding of contingencies of reinforcement is not yet sufficient to explain all kinds of thinking, we must remember that the appeal to mind explains nothing at all.' Skinner is convinced that the only hope for mankind lies in scientifically viewing man as

a mindless automaton. 'Science', he says, 'does not dehumanize man, it de-homunculizes him, and it must do so if it is to prevent the abolition of the human species'.

So far the scientific technology of human behaviour which Skinner envisages does not exist. Yet if it ever came to pass would we be at the mercy of the controlling power applying it? Skinner believes this danger can be averted. 'The misuse of a technology of behaviour is a serious matter, but we can guard against it best by looking not at putative controllers but at the contingencies under which they control. . . . All control is reciprocal and an interchange between control and countercontrol is essential to the evolution of a culture'. Unfortunately Skinner does not know, and cannot promise, that the establishment of an effective countercontrol of the controlling power will always be possible. Let us hope that his whole conception belongs to the realm of science fiction. It certainly sounds like it.

F. KRÄUPL TAYLOR.

ELIOT SLATER

Man, Mind, and Heredity: Selected Papers of Eliot Slater on Psychiatry and Genetics.

Edited by JAMES SHIELDS and IRVING I. GOTTESMAN. The Johns Hopkins Press: Baltimore and London. Pp. 405. Price £7.15.

A Festschrift, or the publication in book form of a well-known scientist's collected papers, is often a somewhat nostalgic document; the occasion suggests that we are not to have many more (if any) contributions of the kind we have come to appreciate. However, if the task is well done we have at least the compensation that we can re-read many of our favourite papers, and perhaps encounter others that somehow slipped by our attention in the course of a busy life. This selection of papers by Eliot Slater is beautifully done; the choice can hardly be faulted, and the whole business of editing is carried out to the great credit of Shields and Gottesman, the editors. The book begins with an autobiographical sketch, and ends with a 'Retrospect'; these two pieces, which were written specially for this volume, illustrate one reason why papers by Eliot Slater receive a more kindly welcome than those of many psychiatrists, psychoanalysts and psychologists (to say nothing of geneticists)—they are all well written, literate in the best sense, and free of unnecessary jargon. The general standard of writing in the 'human sciences' is deplorable; Slater's prose rises above the average and makes it a pleasure to read—quite apart from the content itself. This sort of achievement is often valued less highly than it should be; how pleasant would all

our lives be if everyone in the business wrote consistently well, clearly and interestingly in the manner of Slater!

The book is divided into six parts, each stressing a different area of Slater's interests and contribution. The first part deals with his general biological orientation; part 2 with manic-depressive illness; part 3 with schizophrenia; part 4 with neurosis and psychopathy; part 5 with methodology; part 6 is more general; its title is 'Society and the Individual'. There is also a list of all his publications, and two forewords, one by Sir Denis Hill, the other by David Rosenthal. It is difficult to say anything specific about 33 papers, ranging from a quantitative discussion of the relation between epilepsy and schizophrenia to a pathography of Robert Schumann, the composer; from a biological view of anti-semitism to a discussion of amnesic syndromes in war. Two features stand out above all others. One is Slater's persistently biological view; he has thoroughly learned the lesson of evolution, and regards man primarily (though not exclusively) as a high-grade animal whose ancestry determines to a greater extent than we might like his actions, his thoughts, and his maladaptive practices. It is no wonder that Slater's main contribution has been in the genetic field; it is here that psychiatry and biology come closest together. Yet it would be quite wrong to put Slater down as what Boring has called the biophils, as opposed to the sociophils; he would, rightly, regard such an opposition as infantile and destructive of the needed cooperation between the two sets of factors, the biological and the social. Few psychiatrists have so clearly kept in mind this dual nature of human beings, or worked harder to maintain a balance between the two sides. Slater impresses one essentially as a rational, as opposed to an emotional worker; perhaps it is for this reason that, as the editors point out, there is no 'Slaterian school' in psychiatry—only zealots create schools, and Slater is no zealot. Reason has shown him the need to take genetic factors into account and accord them an honourable place in psychiatry; there has been no prompting from emotion to make this place pre-eminent to the exclusion of environment. One would wish that environmentalists and 'dynamic' psychiatrists would take up this appeal to reason, and to factual research, rather than balance uncertainly on supposition and belief.

The other feature which makes Slater a *rara avis* in psychiatry is of course the fact that he is not only literate but also numerate. Time and time again, when others would appeal to common-sense, or prejudice, or dogma, Slater would take out his slide-rule and quietly make a few rapid calculations which would indicate the improbability of certain conclu-