

**Mental Subnormality and Community Care.** London: Political and Economic Planning, 1961. Pp. 23. Price 3s. 6d.

Political and Economic Planning are to be congratulated on compressing so much information into so small a space. The topical subject of mental subnormality is still one about which relatively few reliable data are available. The steering group directed by Dr. F. M. Martin of Edinburgh University has carefully sifted the material, rejecting much that is unreliable or outdated and including that which is essential to an understanding of the problem. The study was carried out with the aid of a grant from the Nuffield Provincial Hospitals Trust and is part of a 3-year study of community mental health services. The report concludes that the 1913 Act offered "at least as many obstacles as aids to the adequate care of the mentally subnormal", noting that the new Mental Health Act endorses a policy of reintegration with the community.

The booklet gives in compressed form an excellent survey of the current situation. A point which may be criticized is the perpetuation of the illogical dichotomy between "sub-cultural" and "pathological" defect, terms which imply two different ways of looking at the same phenomenon.

The authors note the modern view that judgments based on social competence are unreliable whilst shifts of appreciable size in the intelligence quotient are the rule rather than the exception. They accept an estimate of prevalence of severe subnormality of 4 per 1,000 and note Carter's observation of a fourfold increase in cases of Down's disease at the age of 10. They compare the discharge rate of 10 per cent. from institutions for the mentally subnormal with 60 per cent. for mental hospitals, suggesting that there is "no reason to suppose the demand for institutional places for the medium grade defective will suddenly diminish. . . . it will probably increase." They note the need for greater help on the part of the social services for those parents who opt for keeping their handicapped children at home and urge that the barriers separating hospital and local authority service should be cut across.

BRIAN KIRMAN.

**Oligophrenia. Mental Deficiency in Children.** By M. S. PEVZNER. New York: Consultants Bureau, 1961. Pp. 406. Price \$15.

There has been little first-hand information in English about the treatment of oligophrenia in the Soviet Union. This defect is now remedied by the publication of a text by Dr. Maria Pevzner. As is usual with Soviet work in this field, the volume was published in the original by the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences in Russia. It is a positive feature of the care of the backward in that country that the concept of "ineducability" is not recognized, and that all children remain within the educational framework, as would have been the case here if the recommendation of the British Medical Association to the recent Royal Commission had been accepted.

As Dr. Jack Tizard points out in his introduction, Maria Pevzner is senior psychiatrist to the Institute of Defectology, which is a research institute with close ties with the University, the medical schools and the educational system. The emphasis is dynamic and exploratory, there is little concern with static psychometry. An attempt is made to divide children on the basis of Pavlovian typology into those with a predominance of excitation, of inhibition and so forth. Dr. Pevzner says that no adequate scientific basis has yet been developed for the organization of special schools, a remark which could be equally applied to this country. Her studies are of the utmost interest in this respect and point the way to further exploration. The weakest aspect seems to be the neuropathological concepts, which are unlikely to meet with general acceptance. The author advances the thesis that the excitatory type of oligophrenia is due to disturbance of the circulation of the cerebrospinal fluid, but does not give the evidence for this view. The strength of the work is that it is obviously based on long experience and intimate knowledge of individual children and orientated to "the correct organization of an educational program directed towards the compensation of the disability and adapted to suit the requirements of each individual variant of the condition."

The editor is Joseph Wortis, which is a guarantee of a high standard of English and of accuracy in translation.

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