

Book Reviews

Depression in Childhood: Diagnosis, Treatment and Conceptual Models. Edited by JOY G. SCHULTERBRANDT and ALLEN RASKIN. New York: Raven Press. 1977. Pp 192. \$15.00, \$10.20 (paperback).

This book is the result of a conference on 'Childhood Depression' convened by the National Institutes of Mental Health in Washington, U.S.A. during 1975. The edited proceedings are presented and form an important contribution to this complex and still controversial topic.

The contributors are all acknowledged experts in the field of depression, and they give a wide range of views, presented in a balanced way. Naturally the style tends to vary, which makes the book somewhat disjointed. As is often the case, conference reports tend to be repetitive, and this is made even more noticeable by the discussion papers which follow each chapter in the first half of the publication.

In some ways the book might be considered somewhat disappointing because more questions are asked than answered. However, it does give guidelines for the definition of childhood depression and offers suggestions for further research.

The conclusion of the conference was that childhood depressive disorders 'are real clinical phenomena' which require further study. No recommendations were given on treatment, except to say that it was thought premature to fund any large programme at this stage of limited knowledge.

For anyone actively working in the field of depression with children or adults, this collection of papers provides a wealth of information and some stimulating ideas. It is also useful in that it reviews past and present thinking for others generally interested in childhood depression and provides the best comprehensive overview available so far.

J. B. PEARCE, *Consultant Child Psychiatrist, Guy's Hospital, London*

Topics in Child Neurology. Edited by MICHAEL E. BLAW, ISABELLE RAPIN and MARCEL KINSBOURNE. London: SP Medical and Scientific Books. 1978. Pp 356. £17.50.

This book reprints some of the symposia and

workshops held at the Toronto International Congress of Child Neurology in 1975. There are major sections on neonatal neurology, temporal lobe seizures in childhood, behaviour disorders, and learning disabilities. Of particular interest are three careful reviews on minimal brain dysfunction and hyperactivity. Some reviews, however, such as that on anti-convulsant drug therapy in temporal lobe epilepsy in childhood are remarkably light-weight for a publication of this stature. All in all, a book to be selectively read, and not bought.

ANTHONY HOPKINS, *Physician in Charge, Department of Neurological Sciences, St Bartholomew's Hospital, London*

Psychological Problems of the Child and his Family. Edited by PAUL D. STEINHAUER and QUENTIN RAE-GRANT. Toronto: Macmillan. 1977. Pp 459. £10.00.

This textbook of child and adolescent psychiatry, reasonably priced by current standards, is written by twenty-three child psychiatrists, all but one at the University of Toronto. The editors present it as a basic text for 'students and practitioners' of medicine and the mental health professions' and aim to integrate 'biological, developmental, psychoanalytic, and systems perspectives' in such a way that it is comprehensive, authoritative, understandable and enjoyable. Their success has been patchy.

There are five sections: The child and his family; assessment of the child and his family; common syndromes in child psychiatry; psychological crises for child and family; and principles of intervention. The first contains all the book has to say about personality development in childhood and the last summarizes all treatment approaches. For the beginner both sections are too sketchy to be illuminating.

The highlights of the book occur when clinical good sense is applied in the description of common problems and their management. The broad distinction made by British child psychiatrists between conduct and emotional disorders, based as it is on the epidemiological differences between groups of disturbed children may mislead the clinician into false assumptions about the individual child. The

section on 'neurotic behaviour disorders' in which the anxieties and conflicts of antisocial children are made explicit is helpful. In the chapter on psychological aspects of chronic illness attention is drawn to the 'continued confrontation with the discomfort of others' to which parents of congenitally deformed or severely scarred children are exposed. We are reminded that young children in hospital cry not only as their mothers leave but when they arrive, and that it is this that deters some mothers from frequent visiting. The chapter on family disruption links the inherent instability of foster homes to the fact that foster children are in the care of a social agency, and that this acts as an obstacle to total commitment between child and foster parents.

The book abounds in homely hints for the practitioner. But the uninitiated reader will not be able to distinguish these from the frequent errors that escaped the editorial eyes.

While it is reassuring to find much common ground in basic assumptions and clinical practice between child psychiatrists in an important Canadian centre and British clinicians, there are also astonishing differences. The diagnostic grouping of child psychiatric conditions is not related to the international WHO study, nor to the important British contribution to this enterprise.

More disturbing is the relationship between the text and the literature cited at the end of each chapter. The references are there and, with some glaring omissions, they are reasonably comprehensive and up to date. But they do not inform the text, much of which is didactic in the European tradition.

In only a single chapter is there any attempt at a critical review of the literature to back up what the authors have to say. The reader in search of knowledge is on his own. He does not know what the books and articles referred to are likely to contain; whether they express opinions only or describe research investigations. He remains uninformed about the major research ventures in child psychiatry; he is taught nothing about research methodology; and he remains ignorant of the important controversial issues in the specialty and of the extent and boundaries of current knowledge.

SULA WOLFF, *Consultant Psychiatrist,*
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Human Growth and Development. Wolfson College Lectures 1976. Edited by JEROME BRUNER and ALISON GARTON. Oxford University Press. Pp 167. £4.25, £2.25 (paperback).

Here are six distinguished contributors in good

form for the occasion, so that the lectures make deceptively easy reading. Hinde on the social development of monkeys is of interest in his own right despite the book's title, whilst Rutter on early sources of security and competence manages to write freshly about the child's extraordinary resilience. Bruner and Clark are concerned with the details of what takes place as the child struggles to master the rules of language, whilst Inhelder brings us up to date on genetic epistemology. The final lecture finds Jack Tizard totally down to earth in his critique of society's part in the care of pre-school children, whose mothers need period respite if they are not to become overwhelmed by their responsibilities.

So what does all this add up to? It is perhaps rather like bringing together a group of talented soloists to form a sextet, in that the quality of the ensemble may leave something to be desired—and it would have been a septet if Basil Bernstein had not wanted time to reflect on his material before publication. Would that others had been as strong-minded, for, despite some attractively presented ideas and useful references it is a little hard to think who would want to invest in such a mixed bill of fare.

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Mechanics of the Mind. By COLIN BLAKEMORE. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1977. Pp 208. £10.50, £3.95 (paperback).

In this book Colin Blakemore, one of Britain's ablest and most productive researchers into the mechanisms of the brain, gives a series of cameo sketches of brain research from a historical perspective. The text is from the 1976 Reith Lectures, but in addition there is a profusion of elegant illustrations ranging from Renaissance painting to electron micrography.

The search for understanding of the mechanisms of the brain, with its central disciplines of neurophysiology and experimental psychology has been gaining impetus steadily during this century. Blakemore starts his account of this field with some of the anatomical speculations about the relationship of the brain as something we can see and touch, to the less tangible aspects such as personality and behaviour. Next he looks at the state of knowledge of the nature of sleep and the physiology of consciousness. Then there is a chapter on visual perception, the field in which Blakemore has himself become distinguished. Memory, language, and a discussion of how brain research directly affects people and society (via, for