

difficulty in reconciling the view that "sexual perversions are always expressions of serious mental disorder or other character disorders" with doubt about the validity of "calling one or the other sexual activity abnormal" and insistence at the same time that sexual deviations are primarily medical problems.

The book was also intended to serve students of medicine, psychology and related fields. For the student of medicine it contains perhaps insufficient depth or detail. The student might also find difficulty in following some of von Mendelssohn's categorical statements; if in the absence of conflict a diagnosis of neurotic reaction is always erroneous, some psychiatric disorders are impossible to classify or designate. However, for the intelligent layman and student in the social sciences this should prove a useful introduction to the subject. In its content and style it is to be preferred to the gargantuan prose of those high priests of journalism who nowadays exhort the public to mind its mental health in the weekly Colour Supplements—with *recherché* recipes by Freud (C.) in the back pages into the bargain.

MARTIN ROTH.

**The Recognition of Mental Illness in London:** (Maudsley Monographs, No. 15). By ANNETTE R. L. LAWSON, B.Sc. (SOC.), PH.D. London: Oxford University Press. Pp. 122.

This monograph follows the pattern of its series in reporting a meticulous piece of research, and is written in a clear and stimulating way. It was an examination of the reasons for the admission of patients to a London Observation Ward, under the former Lunacy and Mental Treatment Acts. Non-medical, social factors were found to be important, and often decisive, in the admission process, which consisted of two stages. The first occurred when there was a breakdown in the tolerance which society showed to the sick person, and an urgent visit was requested from the D.A.O. The second stage was from this time to the point of admission to hospital, or the decision to act in some other way, which might be taking no action at all. "The perception and recognition of illness and the request for help seemed to depend particularly on social and psychological facts, such as the social class and living arrangements of the sick person, which reflected his personal situation and relationships and the attitudes and beliefs of people about him." At the second stage, the actual "disposal" of each case depended more than anything on social and administrative policies and on available resources.

In some ways, it was a pity that this research effort should have gone into a situation which has changed completely in the few years since 1959. It was always rather extraordinary that a highly trained profession should have abdicated this important piece of decision-making to untrained laymen—perhaps an indication, more than anything, that they disliked doing it. Since his contact with the patient was usually brief, the D.A.O. could be a convenient scapegoat. However, by 1959, the D.A.O. in many areas had already ceased to be merely a "body-snatcher" and had begun his metamorphosis into a trained social worker. This was certainly not so in London, where the D.A.O. was required to deal only with urgent psychiatric problems and, as this study shows, had little concern beyond the individual referred. The second largely obsolete factor is the Observation Ward itself. The policy of *psychiatrie du secteur*, on which our mental health facilities are now based, means that each area service must deal with its own emergencies in its admission unit. Since the average length of stay is now so short, there is no longer any point in having a separate Observation Ward. In London, there are special problems which make the working out of this national policy more difficult, but it seems unlikely that even the St. Francis' unit (which is the last) can continue in anything like the way described here.

This monograph concludes with a plea that policies such as community care should be based on accurate research data, rather than hunches. Of course, we are all in favour of research, in the same way that we are opposed to sin. But it is really a counsel of perfection to maintain that a policy should never be laid down until it has been statistically proved to be the best. There is a strong ideological drive behind the community care principle, and the moral fervour involved in this may be very beneficial to patients, though it is difficult to measure. Nevertheless, Dr. Lawson's warnings should certainly not be forgotten, and similar research to hers, repeated under present conditions and on a wider scale, would be immensely valuable. The present study is an excellent model of how this should be done.

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The "Libre Blanc" is a first volume embracing the deliberations of "L'Evolution Psychiatrique", an association of French psychiatrists founded in 1928.