

## Book Reviews

**PROF. FRANK FISH**

**An Outline of Psychiatry for Students and Practitioners.** By FRANK FISH. Second Edition. Bristol: John Wright & Sons Ltd. 1968. Pp. 292. Price 42s.

'Psychiatric teachers have to admit that sound aetiological understanding has been reached in respect of only a few of the disorders which they treat; . . . until basic knowledge in our specialty advances, psychiatrists will have to tolerate this uncertainty; but they are not obliged to dwell on it in their teaching. On the contrary, it is possible to show that many of the clinical phenomena of psychiatric illness can be observed systematically and can be described in clear-cut terms.' Thus, in his generous introduction, Professor Carstairs admirably pinpoints the most characteristic qualities of the late Frank Fish's book, justly entitled an 'outline'. He describes himself as 'neo-Meyerian'; an eclectic who accommodates the best of every viewpoint and gives room to many not his own with a disclaiming 'some psychiatrists believe . . .' or 'others hold . . .'. Often, though, a named theory is set down flat and naked for the reader to make what he will of views clearly cold-shouldered by the author; but all are included. Occasionally outraged tolerance is expressed in summary dismissal, as when, speaking of shortened forms of psychoanalysis, 'frowned on by the purists' he remarks 'they seem to be worried that the patient may be cured by the wrong technique'.

To cover the ground in less than 300 octavo pages requires rigorous jettisoning and compression. Child psychiatry and subnormality are accounted stowaways more fit for other craft, while catalogue and schema work overtime to squeeze in the bulging cargo. Eight types of anxiety states and twenty of organic states (not diagnoses) are listed. Happily, concise, assimilable summaries and aphorisms abound to lighten this plain fare. Occasionally the stripping down leaves a bare patch, however; in the description of aphasia, dysarthria is not mentioned in contrast, nor the greater facility of impulsive utterance in aphasics. A very serviceable index, glossary and annotated bibliography are provided, but there is no list of references to the authors mentioned in the text (Leonhard, for instance), and authority for many firm assertions on disputed topics is missing. Students

of the author's own sceptical temper will find this a trying omission, and it could well have displaced the bulky chemical formulae of psychotropic drugs. Exemplification, too, is sparse, though apt where provided, as in the following instance of 'Engagement Neurosis': 'The intended spouse is told: "I am ill, darling: it would be unfair to marry you." He or she replies: "You are ill, darling: you need me all the more. I will look after you." There is thus no escape from the prospect of marriage.'

The downright, clear-cut approach is particularly successful in the chapters on psychosomatic disorders and on schizophrenia, where terse summary is applied to admirably selected and arranged material. Some lengthier histories of psychiatry contain less pithy information and point than this thirteen-page résumé. The paragraph on contradictory evidence in court is a refreshingly pertinent signpost to the pitfalls of this area of psychiatric activity. The reasonable suggestion is made that 'autonomous dysthymia' should be substituted for 'depression' to indicate illness, thus distinguishing lay and psychiatric connotations of this term; but 'secondary autonomous dysthymia' is too self-contradictory for satisfactory use to indicate 'reactive depression'. Despite an accompanying warning that it can cause tissue necrosis and abscess I am sorry to see paraldehyde injection given approval.

The author is comprehensive, including epidemiology and recent psychopharmacology in his scope. He had a wider acquaintance with German psychiatry than the majority of his British-born colleagues, and this enriches large parts of this book; prominently the chapter on abnormal personalities. The flavour of his writing was savoured in meeting Frank Fish: with the professorial mantle laid aside he added pungency by unabashed proclamation of his own allegiances and humour in his salty observation on the contemporary psychiatric scene.

DAVID C. WATT.

**CURRAN AND PARTRIDGE**

**Psychological Medicine: an Introduction to Psychiatry.** By D. CURRAN and M. PARTRIDGE. Sixth Edition. Edinburgh and London: E. and S. Livingstone. 1969. Pp. 447. Price 35s.

A short textbook of psychiatry which has reached its sixth edition and has been reprinted six times