

emphasis in psychiatry from the individual's mental life to concern with organization of the environment. Harmful consequences of the change are that insufficient attention will be paid to the complexities of psychopathology, patients will not be given time and opportunity to work through their personal difficulties, and the standards of psychiatric care will be generally lowered. As psychiatrists are called upon to become 'ubiquitous' they may spread themselves too thin, lose their professional identity, fall victims to pragmatism, and become 'promoters of happiness' instead of scientifically imbued clinicians. Therapy already tends increasingly towards prescription of the same drug for the same target symptom, rather than the exercise by the psychiatrist of his own personality to elicit and clarify the latent, abstract, and complex psychogenesis of the patient's symptoms. Already, in Laurin's view, much psychiatric research is mechanistic and 'purely verbal'.

Howard Rome is not so pessimistic. He believes that the psychiatrist can look to advances in technology to relieve him of rote chores, allowing him to concentrate instead on his relationship with patients. The computer will take over the mechanical tasks of diagnosis and treatment, and free the clinician for the 'irreplaceable human encounter' in which he detects, corroborates and amplifies his patient's symptoms and signs. Not only the individual clinician but also the practice of medicine will be transformed. In place of the existent stores of medical data, useless because they are illegible, irretrievable or too expensive to search, computers will permit stores of medical information to be accumulated and used. An advance in medicine will result which is not merely quantitative but 'a qualitative leap in sophistication'.

Gruenberg points out that psychiatry has long been linked more closely to social policy than was the case with other branches of medicine: mental illness is very much a social phenomenon. His own research has satisfied him that recent reforms in psychiatric organization have been beneficial; psychiatrists' enthusiasm for the new psychotropic drugs has made it easier for them to simultaneously accept hospital administrative changes, and integration of hospital with community services, both reforms to the advantages of the psychiatric patient.

In his address Gruenberg makes full use of his own research findings. The alienated chapter in the book is the sole laboratory research report, in which H. H. Jasper discusses neurophysiological advances in the understanding of perceptual awareness. While out of character with the rest of the book, the work reported certainly does not lack social implication, and the audience attending the opening must have

welcomed the diversion from the main stream of the discussion—the more so because Jasper dealt in passing with 'novelty detectors', cells found in the thalamus which respond only when the subject attends to a particular stimulus, and which stop responding when the stimulus is repeated so often as to lose its novelty.

H. J. WALTON.

Basic Psychiatry. By MYRE SIM and E. B. GORDON. Edinburgh: E. and S. Livingstone. 1968. Pp. 262. Price 25s.

This small book covers a wide range of topics in its nineteen chapters. It begins with psychology, psychopathology and neuropathology and pauses for a lengthy time in the field of organic psychiatry and psychosomatics. It moves through the functional psychoses, neuroses and personality disorders at high speed, ending with a brief mention of child psychiatry and mental deficiency; the terminology of the Mental Health Act is scorned in this last section.

The authors believe that the book will appeal to those who wish to gain a ready understanding of the basic aspects of psychiatry and will also be suitable for rapid revision. The subject matter is set out in the form of question and answer, but it is doubtful whether there is any particular advantage in including in section headings such phrases as 'What are the principal features of . . .', 'What do you understand by . . .', before the title of the section in heavier type. This approach would only be of value in comparing and contrasting different forms of illness and highlighting the differentiating features. This is done only rarely, for example in comparing anorexia nervosa, deliberate disability and hysteria; and here one reaches the startling conclusion that anorexia nervosa and deliberate disability differ only in that the age range of the latter is some six years longer.

It is true to say that there is something in this book for everyone, and its vigorous authoritative style makes for easy reading. However, it takes too dogmatic a line for the examination candidate and does not give equal space to conflicting opinions. For the beginner it gives an unduly simplified account of complex problems and offers little opportunity for him to appreciate the fact that there are alternative opinions. This book serves to emphasize the view that there are no short cuts to learning the complexities of human behaviour. One cannot recommend it unreservedly, though it will have some appeal to those who demand firm statements of opinion about controversial matters.

C. P. SEAGER.