

Reviews

Speech Disorders. By SIR W. RUSSELL BRAIN. London: Butterworth, 1961. Pp. 184. Price 42s.

The speech disorders constitute one of the more complex fields with which neurologists and psychiatrists are expected to be familiar. The difficulties stem in part from the inadequacies of medical education, for little attempt is made to provide the student with sufficient knowledge of normal speech, possibly because this constitutes one of those borderlands in which many disciplines claim territory and none can exert overall authority.

As Sir Russell—now Lord Brain—himself confesses, “it is a confusing subject”; but it is one to which he has brought clarity and understanding, and one too, in which he himself has carried out distinguished original work. The early chapters provide a firm basis for the clinical sections of the book; the nature of language, the acquisition of speech as part of normal development, the relevant anatomy and psychophysiology, are considered in turn. Cerebral dominance is given detailed consideration and there is a particularly fascinating chapter on the history of thought about aphasia.

The clinician may well be tempted to turn immediately to the second half of the book, which deals with pathological variants, but would be well advised to delay doing so until he has completed his studies of the earlier chapters. Here, too, the same clear exposition makes the subject appear deceptively easy. Sir Russell wisely adopts a characteristically calm and unruffled middle of the road approach; he turns away from the most fanatic and preoccupied of the localizers, Kleist and Neilson—“naively psychoanatomical”; away from the clinical psychologists, Goldstein and Head, and their implicit views of the holistic functioning of the cerebral hemispheres, and declares himself an empiricist—“abandoning the attempt to interpret the relationship between the psychological disorder present in aphasia and the anatomical situation of the lesion.

In addition to a detailed and precise discussion of the aphasias, the developmental speech disorders are described. Further chapters deal concisely and fully with the apraxias, the agnosias, with disturbances of awareness of external space, and with disorders of the body scheme. Many of the clinical phenomena associated with these latter disorders are still not sufficiently widely recognized and too many patients with these abnormalities contrive to find their way to the psychiatrist with the inevitable label “hysteria”—a label which so often denotes not only lack of knowledge on the part of the clinician but, as it were, that even greater disability, an anosognosia for ignorance.

The neurologist and the psychiatrist, potential or experienced, stand to gain the most from this volume. The general physician cannot afford to ignore it, and indeed every doctor who uses speech in his work—exceptions do exist—could read it both with pleasure and with profit.

L. G. KILOH.

A Dictionary of Speech Pathology. By S. D. ROBBINS. Peter Owen, 1962. Pp. 112. price 30s.

One should not be misled by the date 1962 on the title page of this dictionary, which refers merely to the year of binding. It was in fact published in 1951 in the United States, and to judge from their yellowing edges, the sheets have not been stored under ideal conditions in the meantime.

It is probably inevitable that a volume of this kind intended at the outset to be definitive and constructive should become an end in itself. The collectors' instinct is such a potent force—who could reject such gems as barbararhythmia, aphthongia or