

Book Reviews

CONTEMPORARY PSYCHIATRY

Contemporary Psychiatry. By LAWRENCE H. SNOW. Lloyd-Luke (Medical Books) Ltd. (for Year Book Medical Publishers, Inc., Chicago). 1972. Pp. 316. Price £4.20.

If one were to judge this book simply by its title, one might easily assume that this was yet another routine textbook of current psychiatric medicine: contemporary therapeutic techniques, newly-introduced psychotropic drugs, and so on. It came as a most pleasant surprise therefore, to discover that, although it is indeed a 'contemporary' text, psychiatry is here examined from a developmental and psychodynamic point of view. Instead of the usual succession of chapters dealing with the various psychiatric syndromes and their treatment, this book starts from basic principles: the ego, its development, conscious and unconscious processes—and shows most clearly (without being 'sectarian', i.e. Freudian) how neuroses and psychoses can arise from faulty ego-development processes occurring very early in the life of the individual. Later chapters deal somewhat routinely with marriage and the family, sexual problems, interview techniques and therapeutic processes, but these in turn are all related very neatly to the developmental mechanisms discussed earlier.

One needs to be familiar with psychiatric terminology and practice in order to appreciate this book fully (it is by no means a layman's text). I found it particularly helpful in that it provided a first-class theoretical framework upon which to hang my psychiatric knowledge and experience, the rationale of which thus became much clearer.

This is not a basic textbook of psychiatry by any means; it is rather an *additional* text, but a most valuable and interesting one. It could be read with profit by all psychiatric personnel.

T. R. WILSON.

GENETICS

The Genetics of Mental Disorders. By ELIOT SLATER and VALERIE COWIE. Oxford University Press. 1971. Pp. 413. Price £5.50.

For many years the numerous admirers of Eliot Slater's contributions to psychiatric genetics have

been hoping that some time he would write a comprehensive textbook on this topic. Now, finally, this has happened. Slater's choice of Valerie Cowie for collaborator is, of course, a very fortunate one.

The expectations which are justified in the case of a book by these two authors are certainly fulfilled; it presents practically all relevant facts, and it does so with extreme clarity, in a well-balanced, critical and constructive way.

The organization of the book is interesting. One might have expected that the major part of it would have been concerned with the fields to which Slater has devoted his main interest and research. This is obviously not so. The endogenous psychoses, the deviations of personality and the neuroses, to the study of which Slater has given so many important contributions, take up only one-third of the text. It is evident that the authors prefer to write more on facts and less on theory and speculation. Hence the very detailed description of the organic disorders, metabolic disorders, and mental subnormality. These chapters contain an overwhelming amount of useful information.

In the chapters on schizophrenia, in addition to presentations of all relevant facts, very careful attention is given to the pros and cons of each of the genetical models under discussion today. At a time when polygenic theories are so fashionable it is noteworthy that the authors, on very good grounds, tend to prefer the monogenic theory, implying full penetrance in homozygotes and approximately 25 per cent penetrance in heterozygotes.

The discussion of the rapidly developing research on affective disorders gives a very instructive survey of the many different pieces of evidence which have been obtained in recent years, and it gives the most complete evaluation of these findings published until now. In the chapters on organic conditions the relatively large section on Huntington's chorea should be mentioned. The detailed discussion of the clinical problems in this genetically simple disorder is of great didactic impetus. The fact that most psychotic pictures in chorea are of 'endogenous' type is indeed fascinating and thought provoking.

The appearance of this book is an event. It is an invaluable source book, and it is such stimulating reading. And it does not contain one superfluous word.

ERIK STROMGREN.