

Book Reviews

I. PSYCHIATRY

Approaches to Cross-cultural Psychiatry. Edited by JANE M. MURPHY and A. H. LEIGHTON. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press. Pp. 406. Price \$9.75.

Cross-cultural psychiatry is a field rich in anecdotal material, dramatic instances and lofty generalizations, and relatively poor in hard data of observation, largely because anthropological field-work is such a laborious undertaking and few field workers have been adequately equipped by training both in social anthropology and in psychiatry. Alexander Leighton is one of those few and has contributed more than any other single person to the slowly growing body of theory and data in this area. It must be admitted, however, that this volume, consisting of studies by Leighton and a baker's dozen of his collaborators in field work in New York City, in Nova Scotia, among the Navahos of New Mexico and an Eskimo community in the Bering Straits, is not the most rewarding of the several volumes which have appeared under his joint authorship.

Leighton's own contributions are marked, as usual, by a precision in the choice of words which matches the clarity of his thinking; but these very virtues quicken in the reader an attitude of critical scrutiny in relation not only to his own text but to that of the other writers. This is a tribute to the success of his teaching; but the fact that so many practical problems become apparent makes one wonder whether his own forte is not the formulation of theory rather than its exemplification in practice. Early in this volume, for example, he defines *psychiatric disorders* as "all those behaviors, emotions, attitudes and beliefs commonly regarded as proper for the attention of a psychiatrist". This at once introduces cultural relativism with a vengeance; it presupposes the role of the psychiatrist, and a commonly accepted definition of the range of activities to be encompassed in that role. Clearly, strict adherence to this definition would mean that different behaviours, emotions, attitudes and beliefs would be counted as psychiatric disorders in different countries and at different times. Implicitly, in this work, such disorders have been defined in terms of an agreement reached with the Leighton-directed teams as to what is proper for the attention of the

psychiatrist. There is clearly room for wide disagreement here. In his previous work *Psychiatric Disorder among the Yoruba*, Leighton has shown that by formulating and discussing very explicit criteria for the recognition of symptoms and for categorizing the significance of such symptoms a large measure of agreement can be reached between observers in ratings made on subjects from markedly different cultures. The second chapter of this volume consists of an interesting essay on this theme, the cross-cultural identification of disorders. Here the nettle is firmly grasped, the criteria boldly stated: among "psychophysiological disorders", for example, are to be counted "skin eruptions of the eczematous type, asthma, hay fever, hypertension, hypotension, peptic ulcer and colitis". These conditions can certainly be identified and counted, but it remains a delicate problem to decide in which cases psychological factors have played a major part.

The ensuing chapter on the concepts of psychiatric disorder held by members of an Eskimo community is based on 24 interviews conducted in English during 1953-54 by Dr. Jane Murphy with an Eskimo woman with an evidently imperfect command of the language; in the course of these she was asked for life-history data on each of 495 members of her community. The limitations of this method of carrying out a census of psychiatric disorders are candidly discussed; the interrogation certainly elicited in good measure this informant's attitudes, which were believed to be representative of those of her community.

Throughout the book, one is aware of Leighton's recognition of the imperfections of the measures yet available and of his attempts to narrow their range of error: almost wistfully, he has included a chapter by a pharmacologist on "The Possibility of Using Physiological Indicators for Detecting Psychiatric Disorder"—a short chapter, but with no less than 143 references which concludes that "it would be premature at this time to venture into cross-cultural psychiatric studies with physiological tests."

There are chapters addressed to the recognition of psychiatric disorders in adolescents and in children which could be read with advantage by research workers in these fields, and the book ends with a series of short research reports from Canada, the Navaho country and Mexico which exemplify that

combination of observations on attitudes and behaviour with observations of their social and cultural settings which has been Leighton's special interest over several decades of research.

G. M. CARSTAIRS.

Transcultural Psychiatry. Ciba Foundation Symposium. Edited by A. V. S. DE REUCK and R. PORTER. London: J. and A. Churchill Ltd. 1965. Pp. 396.

"The more I listen to discussions on transcultural psychiatry" said Professor Margetts early in this Symposium, "the more I am coming to believe that perhaps there is no such thing." One sees his point. Unfortunately, there is no record of whether this opinion was modified by the conference now presented in this volume. Some twenty leading authorities—indeed, practically all major contributors to this subject with the exception of the Scandinavian workers—participated. The papers, which are of a very high general standard, span a wide range of topics with impressive wit and intellectual versatility. Each paper is followed by a discussion; if there were any of those *non sequiturs* and general inanities which often appear in literal transcripts, to the lasting embarrassment of all, they have been removed by sensitive editing. In short, the sceptic could not ask for a more cogent apologia.

Doubts about the status of transcultural psychiatry hinge upon two issues. There is the theoretical question of whether comparison of the mentally sick of unlike cultures is a radically different exercise from comparisons within one culture: there is also the practical problem of whether such transcultural studies are feasible. The impression that emerges from this volume is that on both counts the leaders in the discipline are primarily engaged in elucidating problems rather than providing solutions. The reader rapidly comes to the view that much of the fascination lies in the difficulty.

While transcultural psychiatry remains an aspiration rather than an achievement, there can clearly be no textbooks of the subject; but the present collection of papers provides a lively introduction and can be warmly recommended.

NORMAN KREITMAN.

Laws Governing Hospitalization of the Mentally Ill. Formulated by the Committee on Psychiatry and the Law Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry. New York. Vol. VI. Report No. 61. May 1966. Price 50 cents.

This booklet has been written by the Committee on Psychiatry and the Law of the American Group

for the Advancement of Psychiatry. It is easily read—indeed, there are only some ten pages which are relevant.

Reading it emphasizes how fortunate we are in this country with our present admission procedures and laws governing the treatment of the mentally ill. It is surprising to read that only 20 per cent. of admissions to mental hospitals in the United States were in the voluntary category in 1963, and that it is still necessary to protest that nearly half the patients reaching mental hospitals do so by way of the police station.

The proposed procedures for admission are very similar to those in this country. It is difficult to understand, however, why the Committee advises that there should be both "informal" and "voluntary" admission.

This booklet is, of course, intended for American rather than British psychiatrists, but is of interest in showing current trends in another country.

A. A. BAKER.

Hysteria and Related Mental Disorders. By D. WILFRID ABSE. Bristol: John Wright & Sons Ltd. 1966. Price 42s.

If melancholia, as Sir Aubrey Lewis has put it, is one of the great words of psychiatry, so is hysteria. It has preoccupied the most eminent, and has been the subject of multi-volume text-books. It has been accepted, rejected, reviled, re-named and re-studied. If the high-point of interest in hysteria was reached at the end of the nineteenth century—and the book reviews in *Brain* at the time communicate a remarkable excitement—interest has progressively declined and irritation has progressively increased. Possibly this is because something in the welter of facts and opinions is essential both to descriptive and psychodynamic psychiatry, but no one is quite sure what this is.

Professor Abse has had extensive clinical experience with hysteria, including cross-cultural and war-time experience. In addition he is trained in general psychiatry as practised in the teaching and the mental hospital, and in psychoanalysis. It is obvious that he has read widely in psychiatry, psychoanalysis, medical history, philosophy and linguistics. Why, then, is his book so unsatisfactory? Perhaps because it aims to be all things to all men: to appeal to those who know nothing of psychoanalysis and those who know a great deal, to provide a comprehensive critical review of hysteria and, as suggested by the sub-title, "an approach to psychological medicine"; to be scientific, statistical and clinical; to bring