

all these jail's problems my personal optimism arises quite from this bad reality, where, however, it was done so far that I am sure that very little changes will give fast and big improvements."

PAUL BOWDEN, *Consultant Forensic Psychiatrist, The Maudsley Hospital, London*

The Alcoholic Family. Drinking Problems in a Family Context. By PETER STEINGLASS with LINDA A. BENNETT, STEVEN J. WOLIN and DAVID REISS. London: Hutchison. 1988. (Basic Books, 1987). 381 pp. £25.00.

Graham Swift, in his finely woven tapestry of a family history novel, *Waterland* (Heinemann, 1983), says of the current generation: "Since you cannot dispose of the past, since things must be, they had to make do." Those of us who deal with families where one member is designated as having alcohol problems are painfully aware of that. What Steinglass *et al* do for us in this book is chart that process of "making do".

While recognising that these families are more different than similar, the phases and the patterns that many of them demonstrate can be understood by examining their family histories, and by exploring the rituals, the routines, and their problem-solving. So this book describes ordinary family life development and compares it with the arrests and distortions which occur when problematic alcohol use is a major feature of family life.

The book consists of six parts: 'A family systems approach to alcoholism', 'The life history of the alcoholic family', sections on the early, middle and late phases of the development of such a family, and finally its treatment. There is a good supply of references, which mercifully are not monopolised by the authors' own work. The book is tightly structured and clearly and evocatively written, with numerous real-life clinical examples. Each part has an introduction and conclusion which link the parts of the book together naturally, with helpful repetition.

This is manifestly the work of precise, perceptive clinicians who have the added ability to 'change gear' into complex clinical research methodologies. Again and again, clinical observations are made; hypotheses are then generated and tested. The results are presented, conclusions drawn, and then off go the authors onto the next set of observations and a repeat of the process. Thus, gradually, the images of the families, their rules and the impact of the alcohol become clear. The "making do" makes sense.

It is possible to criticise the book – in particular, its rather short and dogmatically abstinence-oriented treatment part, especially when earlier in the book there is a description of the usefulness of a family member's drinking (to trigger the intoxicated family system which can have real short-term problem-solving benefits). This

bias may well be the consequence of the heritage of the North American 'alcoholism movement'.

It would have been better for the authors not to try to discuss treatment at all; to leave this book as an elegant account of family processes and the impact someone's drinking may have upon them. That would leave room for the sequel on treatment implications of these observations – Steinglass II!

This book is important. It is not too difficult to predict that it will become a signpost to the alcohol field of the same significance as McAndrew & Edgerton's *Drunken Compartment* (Nelson, 1969) or Orford's *Excessive Appetites* (Wiley, 1985). The authors confess that after "examining couples and whole families with alcohol problems, even during episodes of intoxication, our research perspective has never been the same". Clinicians reading this book may well be subjected to the same transformation.

DOUGLAS CAMERON, *Consultant Psychiatrist, Leicestershire Community Alcohol Services*

Psychiatry Update: American Psychiatric Association Annual Review, Volume 6. Edited by ROBERT E. HALES and ALLEN J. FRANCES. Washington: American Psychiatric Press. 1987. 852 pp. £25.00 (pb), £55.00 (hb).

This is the sixth annual *Psychiatry Update* published by the American Psychiatric Association. Of the 68 contributors, all but Michael Rutter work in North America.

There are six sections, each dealing with a broad topic and each containing several review chapters. Section I, which deals with bipolar disorders, is well written and covers the topic thoroughly. Section II, on neuroscience techniques in clinical psychiatry, is interesting and contains much new information. Section III is concerned with "differential therapeutics", which means the selection of a specific treatment for a specific patient. This is a weak and disappointing section, in which one chapter considers whether the patient needs individual, group, or family treatment while another considers the indications for psychodynamic, behavioural, or cognitive treatment. The token chapter on pharmacological treatment deals inadequately with topics dealt with in full in other sections.

Section IV is an informative set of reviews on violence and the violent patient. The general tendency towards over-inclusiveness, however, is shown by the mention of Wilson's disease, normal pressure hydrocephalus, and Cushing's syndrome in a table of organic mental disorders associated with violent behaviour. Section V, on epidemiology, edited by Myrna Weissman, justifies the entire volume. The first chapter, by Weissman herself, is a splendid introduction to the topic. Equally good is the second chapter, by Lee Robins, on diagnosis in epidemiological studies. The rest of the section at least approximates to these high standards. Section VI, on