

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