

Reviews

Mental Depressions and Their Treatment. By SAMUEL HENRY KRAINES, M.D. The MacMillan Company, New York, 1957. Pp. 555.

Dr. Kraines claims that his approach to the study of manic-depressive illness is eclectic, but this does not prevent his coming down firmly on the side of primary physiopathology as a *sine qua non* in the causation of this condition. In short, people suffer from manic-depressive illness, its phases or its variants, because they are made that way. Psychological factors are deemed to modify, complicate and perhaps prolong symptoms which spring from a physiological disturbance which is itself due to a combination of hereditary susceptibility, and a physiological, possibly a hormonal, trigger. Many psychiatrists share this view, though not all of them would find it easy to state concisely the grounds on which they support it.

The bulk of the book is clinical description, with numerous quotations from case-records, and a detailed analysis of variations in course and of groups of symptoms.

In an appendix (29 pages), Dr. Kraines elaborates a theory of causation, based on the general body of physiological knowledge that has accumulated during, roughly, the present century. Briefly, this is that the mechanism of the illness is a (usually) reversible disturbance of function in the diencephalic area, including the thalamus, hypothalamus, reticular system and rhinencephalon. As to the nature of the morbid process, the author is less positive. He suspects that in many patients ". . . gonadal pathology is aetiologic", but he is not prepared to exculpate ". . . circulatory changes, nutritional inadequacy, metabolic instability, toxic factors and any other phenomenon which may disturb the functions of the centrencephalic systems . . .". These conjectures, which may evoke nostalgic recollections in the minds of some older readers, lead the author to declare: "Thus, though the symptoms of the manic-depressive disease, funneled through common mediating mechanisms, may appear similar in most cases, the specific aetiologic factor may differ. Ideal therapy is dependent on determining the exact cause; someday, searching, we shall find the origin and the cure." Trite though this is, the book is worth reading; for Dr. Kraines has brought together a great deal of knowledge of the literature on the one hand and an obviously extensive and keenly percipient clinical experience on the other. The latter enables him to give excellent, clearly defined descriptions, especially of the less abundantly recorded variants of the illness, with prominent somatic complaints, that are so frequently seen in out-patient practice, and to provide a concise, practical account of treatment. If, as some might consider, he seems to make things more cut and dried than they really are—and this is emphasized by his leaning towards tidy little theoretical diagrams—he will at least make the thoughtful clinician want to brush up his physiology; and maybe workers in some of the ancillary scientific departments will be stimulated to make specific experimental enquiries. But we still have a long way to go.

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The Subnormal Mind. By SIR CYRIL BURT, D.Sc., Hon.Litt.D., Hon.LL.D. Oxford University Press, London, 1955. Third edition. Pp. xix+391.

When people speak of medical psychology, one is apt to think of Freudian, Jungian or Adlerian psychopathology—or some of their now numerous derivations. It is well to realize that just as psychiatry has been called, rather hyperbolically, the other half of medicine, so there is another half, as it were, of medical psychology, though in this case the metaphor is less of an over-statement. In the practical field, a considerable proportion of this other half is concerned with the study and assessment of such attributes as mental ability, learning capacity, social surveys of behaviour as