

Book Reviews

CARING FOR THE ELDERLY

Survival of the Unfittest. By BERNARD ISAACS, MAUREEN LIVINGSTONE AND YVONNE NEVILLE. Routledge and Kegan Paul. 1972. Pp. 170. Price £2.50.

This book is of interest to psychiatrists for several different reasons. It documents the vast and unprecedented problems of caring for sick old people; it offers a perceptive analysis of the physical difficulties and psychological hazards (both for the patient and the family) involved in the care of the aged patient at home; and there are some shrewd observations on community care.

The authors' clinical and social data were derived from two sources: a review of 612 patients referred to a geriatric unit (with control groups of patients in medical wards and G.P. lists) and a survey of 240 patients who had died in a two-month period. They draw a distinction between sick old people in general and a hard core who are the special concern of the geriatric service. These latter patients are distinguished by being older, more often living alone, socially disadvantaged, and with symptoms which make them dependent on others. The authors offer a definition: 'Geriatrics is *not* the medicine of the hard core, but it might be defined as the method practised by doctors who are conversant with the problems of the hard core.' Like psychiatry, one might add, geriatrics is a field of medicine in which the doctor is obliged to address himself to the total problem of the patient's situation.

The authors stress the practical problems of looking after these patients. Their story is best told by their case histories; of, for instance, the consultant geriatrician 'impeded by rows of wet sheets and napkins criss-crossing the room and flapping their damp folds into the doctor's face' (the patient's daughter washed the bed linen of her incontinent mother between 11.0 p.m. and 4.0 a.m. every day). Other case histories record the constant anxiety of relatives unable to keep a twenty-four hour watch on an old person prone to falling. Personality deviation and senile dementia provide, however, the most poignant distress in the stories of these families. Of special interest are 22 patients who at first sight had been rejected by their relatives, but detailed enquiries revealed long histories of personality disorder, alcoholism and family breakdown: 'it was the parents

who rejected the children long before the children rejected the parents'.

The home help service was the most important part of community care. Although intended for domestic duties only, more than half the home helps assisted the patient in excretory functions, even washing the patient's dirty linen in their own washing machines. This was the big success of community care, perhaps (the authors comment) because it gave these women an opportunity of giving personal service without demanding that they carry responsibility. They put forward the interesting suggestion that the home help might become the centre of a network of voluntary and statutory help, because she is the person who knows what the patient needs. This is an important idea. The statutory services involved in community care are understaffed in many areas and even then not always fully used. The authors show that this is the case in their geriatric service, and no doubt the same is true for mental health. Raising bands of voluntary workers is no easy task, but there are informal networks of neighbours who could perhaps be drawn in if the home help lived in the same neighbourhood as her clients. It may be that an important task in community care will lie in the better understanding of these groups, of how to mobilize and support them in caring for the sick and disabled of their area.

Those responsible for organizing geriatric services will need to study the statistical material which your reviewer has glossed over in his interest in gaining an insight into the world of the geriatrician. Read this lively and well written book before you next consult with your geriatric colleagues.

W. LAWTON TONGE.

PSYCHOPHARMACOLOGY

Advances in Neuro-Psychopharmacology. Edited by O. VINAR, Z. VOTAVA, and P. B. BRADLEY. North-Holland Publishing Company, Amsterdam. Pp. v-553. Price Dfl. 95.00.

This book contains the proceedings of the symposia which were part of the VIIth Congress of the Collegium Internationale Neuro-Psychopharmacologicum held in Prague in August 1970. A wide range of topics of current interest are covered, from the clinical and pharmacological effects of lithium therapy to the

effect of drugs on interpersonal processes. A short but comprehensive paper by Dr. Lehmann of Montreal deals with present conflicts and crises in psychopharmacology, now that the subject has come of age.

Serendipity, pragmatism and millennial enthusiasm are giving way to a multidisciplinary scientific approach; but there are limiting factors to the more successful chemical control of mental processes, and these include not only the deficits in basic scientific knowledge but also ethical questions concerning human experimentation and the advisability of proceeding with the search for basic knowledge and new potent agents in the present climate of world affairs. It is a reasonable certainty that knowledge is likely to be abused by a public hungry for relief from anxiety and for pleasurable sensation, or by governments wishing to control the mental processes and behaviour of dissidents and outsiders. This dilemma of the abuse of knowledge affects all science in the twentieth century in an urgent way: but the answer is surely not less but more science and reason in our affairs, and a socially responsible attitude on the part of scientific workers in all fields.

The publication of symposia is usually an expensive business, and this one is no exception. It is, however, a useful volume for an informed person wishing to get a view of the growing points of the subject.

D. M. LEIBERMAN.

Lithium: Clinical and Biological Aspects. Edited by F. A. FREYHAN. Reprinted from *International Pharmacopsychiatry*, 1970, 5, 77-264. Basel: S. Karger. 1971. Pp. 187. No price stated.

The past few years have seen a great upsurge of interest in the use of lithium in the treatment of affective disorders. Several factors have played an important part in this: increased accuracy in diagnosing affective disorders, new insights into the biochemical and physiological bases of such disorders, and advances in the monitoring and control of serum levels of lithium ion.

Current clinical evidence shows that lithium is as effective as—and indeed may be superior to—other drugs normally used to treat recurrent affective disorder. It appears to exert a correcting and regulating effect on those pathophysiological mechanisms which underlie or which are associated with abnormal mood variations.

This collection of papers brings together some of the most recent and important data on the clinical use and mode of action of lithium, and provides an informative guide both for the clinician and the research worker.

T. R. WILSON.

ADOLESCENCE

Modern Perspectives in Adolescent Psychiatry.

Edited by J. G. Howells. Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd. 1971. Pp. 614. Price £9.00.

This is the fourth volume in Howell's 'Modern Perspectives' series. It has been preceded by works on General Psychiatry and two on Child Psychiatry. The editor emphasizes that each should not be regarded as a textbook, but as part of a series that will eventually constitute a complete international system in the theory and practice of psychiatry.

In this volume devoted to Adolescent Psychiatry the contents are divided into a scientific section with 7 papers covering the physiology, psychology and sociology of adolescence, and a clinical section with 14 papers covering the epidemiology, classification, description and treatment of psychiatric illness in adolescents.

It seems to the reviewer that this book highlights a paradox behind the undoubted success of the series. The previous volumes (and in particular the two on Child Psychiatry) represent a valuable addition to any psychiatric library. With their cumulative index, they provide a ready source of information and references on a wide range of important topics in child psychiatry. It would seem, however, that this has occurred by a happy chance rather than by deliberate policy, as the editor's avowed aim is not to present a series of comprehensive reviews of the literature, but rather a forum for 'creative opinion' with contributors explaining their own special subjects and choosing what they regard as relevant from the literature.

On these criteria this new volume can also be held to have succeeded. As before, Howells continues to draw contributions from authors whose ideas and work are not readily accessible to British psychiatrists: included are two papers from the U.S.S.R. and one each from West Germany and the Netherlands. There is a range of styles of presentation, from a careful account of the epidemiology of adolescent psychiatry, through a number of interesting personal accounts of therapy, to the editor's own speculative and idiosyncratic suggestions for a new system of classification in psychiatry.

The volume does not succeed, however, in presenting an overall survey of adolescent psychiatry. Some of the papers present a restricted and narrow view of their subject which will lessen the value of the book for a trainee (e.g. 'Psychoses in Adolescence'), and in others one feels the author has had difficulty in making adolescence his main theme (e.g. those on 'Intelligence' and 'Depression'). The cumulative index takes 100 pages of this 600 page volume. For