

Reviews

The Practice of Dynamic Psychiatry. By JULES H. MASSERMAN, M.D. W. B. Saunders Company, Philadelphia and London, 1955. Pp. 790. Price 84s.

Professor Masserman has the knack of conveying the flavour of his personality in print. Those who have heard him speak will have no difficulty, on reading this book, in recalling the unselfconscious enthusiasm with which he expounds a concept or the vividness with which he describes a patient. He is never dull, even if he is sometimes diffuse and—despite his own advice to the contrary—given to the occasional use of jargon: for example, “Ur-defenses” (why not “primitive”?).

This is a massive work which provides continually interesting and constructive reading for those who are already well-informed psychiatrically; and although few will find it possible to go all the way with the author in everything he says, there are even fewer who would not benefit from a leisurely and contemplative study of it.

Masserman’s concept of “biodynamics”—the correlation of psychological and physiological concepts of behaviour into a single comprehensive system—is already known through his *Principles of Dynamic Psychiatry*, to which the present volume is essentially a sequel.

In keeping with the tenets of psychodynamically oriented thought, Masserman lays little stress on categorical diagnosis or disease entities, if, indeed, he is prepared to recognize the latter at all, so far as the greater part of the psychiatric field is concerned. So the reader who is looking for an easy, slick, didactic system of case-taking with a view to mechanical categorical diagnosis and treatment will not find it here. On the other hand, he will find a keenly insightful grasp of the immense and varied complexities of human behaviour, normal and morbid, and a realistically balanced judgment that reflects mature clinical experience and shows what can and cannot be done for given patients in given circumstances. One almost gets the impression of sitting at the author’s elbow while he is interviewing patients—his exposition of the technique is first-rate—paying greater heed to the prospects of getting the patient back on his feet again than to the semantic dementia and the internecine partisanship with which psychiatry is still bedevilled. Between cases, as it were, the author touches upon sociology, philosophy, contemporary schools of psychiatry, mythology and even metaphysics and other kindred topics in their clinical relationships, as well as putting in a pithy, thumbnail historical sketch wherever it is helpful as a background to the making of a particular point. But when it comes to formulations of recommendations for treatment and disposal he comes down to earth and provides an excellent series of draft suggestions to indicate the sort of thing a psychiatrist might say to, for instance, a family doctor, a court, a social counsellor or an insurance company about the patient under review.

Many British readers may think, however, that he places too little value on genetic and constitutional factors and too much on extrinsic circumstances; but in practice, the latter are more modifiable than the former and this is, after all, an exposition of the management of modifiable factors.

There are 114 case reports, some of considerable length, illustrating points made in the text; but they do not make tedious reading. One that appealed particularly was entitled “Situational reaction; indirect iatrogenic trauma”. The cases range over a very wide spectrum and include examples of premarital counselling, vocational suitability, political subversion, compensation neurosis, reports to courts of domestic relations, hypnotic regression and sexual inversion. Occasionally one encounters something more familiar—for example, schizophrenia or a Korsakoff syndrome.

There are some useful appendices, including those on alcoholism, the training of the psychiatrist and mental hygiene, and there is an intriguing section in the book itself dealing with the psychiatrist as a person.

The author ranges considerably beyond the limited field of formal mental illness. He makes no bones about his expansionist outlook and refers to "the enlistment of the psychiatrist's knowledge of and respect for humanity in the challenge of keeping mankind alive and happy here on earth", which he regards as "the greatest current task of psychiatry".

It is to be hoped that the resurgence of reaction to excessive preponderance of psychodynamics, which has been apparent in this country for some time, will not prevent even the most diehard from giving careful and, if possible, unprejudiced consideration to this learned and highly instructive work.

IAN SKOTTOWE.

A Handbook of Hospital Psychiatry: A Practical Guide to Therapy. By LOUIS LINN, M.D. International Universities Press, Inc., New York, 1955. Pp. 560. Price \$10.00.

This book lives up to its title. It is essentially a practical manual showing how the various resources of the average mental hospital can best be deployed in the interests of the treatment of patients, individually and collectively. The author starts with an outline of individual psychotherapy followed by group psychotherapy, the physical treatments, recreation and occupation. He then deals with the treatment team—the social worker, the psychologist, the nurse, and, many will be glad to see, the chaplain, as well as the possibilities of using volunteer workers. This is followed by a large section dealing with groups of patients for whom special consideration is needed; for example, chronic patients, the aged, alcoholics, ex-servicemen, criminals and those who have protracted physical illness. An interesting chapter is entitled "Architecture as Therapy".

Many day to day administrative matters are comprehensively dealt with, and although there is much that is of value in this, allowance has to be made not only for minor cultural differences between American and British patients, but also for the predominantly much greater size of the State Hospitals in America.

The book concludes with a section entitled "The Community". In this, chapters are devoted to the relatives of patients and the most helpful ways of dealing with them, out-patients care, family care, the education of the public and the use of the mental hospital in civil emergencies. There are useful appendices, on among other topics, library services, and a home training programme for retarded children.

This book would be useful to all those concerned in the administration of the larger mental hospitals in this country. It might well form a focal point for discussion and review at a staff meeting or conference of the type that is now happily becoming customary in most progressive centres. Discussion of its contents would certainly lead to stimulating and probably fruitful ideas.

IAN SKOTTOWE.