

It is a pity that Dr. Blair has not concentrated more upon his clinical experience at the expense of the blurb. When he does he is clear and sensible. But there would seem to be no need to pay fifty shillings for information which comes free, and all too frequently, through one's letter box.

PETER DALLY.

The Experience of Anxiety. A Casebook. By M. J. GOLDSTEIN and J. O. PALMER. New York: Oxford University Press. Pp. 293. 1963. Price 16s.

This is not so much a book in its own right as a teaching aid. It contains 24 case histories of patients suffering from neurotic or psychotic reactions, childhood disturbances or character disorders. Each case history is followed by a set of questions and a short reading list. The authors regard the book as helpful in the undergraduate seminar teaching of abnormal psychology. It does not tell the student how a case had been analysed by others, nor does it give him the impression that there is only one correct analytical answer or solution. In fact, it commendably does not even speak of answers or solutions, but prefers the term hypotheses. The questions are so arranged that the students are guided towards "one series of hypotheses that best accounts for the relevant case material". The authors admit that there may be more than one good set of hypotheses, but they stipulate a "basic agreement that most psychopathology is learned".

The main drawback of the book lies in this stipulation. The authors who frankly state that their theoretical position is "halfway between social learning theory and psychoanalysis" do not completely ignore the significance of innate tendencies, organic aetiologies and clinical manifestations in evaluating the diagnosis and prognosis of psychiatric patients, but they pay so little attention to anything that is outside their theoretical scheme that they present a rather biased account of abnormal psychology. True, this is the fashion today in many non-medical circles who regard themselves as qualified to understand and treat psychiatric patients. But they have had to rationalize their views by evolving a doctrine according to which the mind is hardly more than a variant of Descartes' thinking substance. In its modern version, the doctrine asserts that the mind is a learning substance which passively reacts to experiences by acquiring particular defence mechanisms, motivations and drives which become integrated into personality traits and modes of adjustment. It follows that, if past experiences were faulty, a badly adjusted personality results. It also

seems to follow that new experiences of a psychotherapeutic kind may put this right. In any case, this is the general view of abnormal psychology that is conveyed in this book.

F. KRÄUPL TAYLOR.

Difficult Patients. By J. A. SMITH. Chicago: Year Book Medical Publishers. Pp. 238. 1963. Price 49s.

In spite of many useful comments and reminders scattered throughout its pages, this book is on the whole disappointing and rather frustrating. First, it is extremely superficial and is written in a too colloquial and often slovenly style. For instance "disinterested" is repeatedly used when "uninterested" is meant, and the text is marred by frequent ugly and unnecessary split infinitives.

Secondly, the author gives the impression, quite unwittingly, I feel sure, because he clearly gives the greatest attention to his many "difficult" patients, that even he has little sympathy with or sympathy for them. Thirdly and most important, there is a disappointing lack of constructive suggestions and advice as to treatment and management.

The author's chief therapeutic principle appears to be that of "de-emphasizing" the main presenting complaint and encouraging the patient to talk about his general activities. He clearly does not believe in attempting to explain and clarify the mechanisms by which such physical symptoms as headache, fatigue, digestive disorder, impotence, etc., can be produced by emotional disorder, nor apparently in helping his patients to realize how their frustrations and conflicts can be caused through their personality defects and past and present inter-personal relationships.

The book consists mainly of some 60 case histories, many very detailed and some both vivid and entertaining, listed under the main presenting symptoms. The chapter on sexual difficulties presents some shrewd advice and comments, particularly on the various causes of impotence and frigidity, which should be very useful to some general practitioners.

This book is too superficial for psychiatrists and cannot be recommended for students. As for general practitioners, I lent it to one who is exceptionally experienced and interested in psychiatric problems, and he writes: "I think it contains useful information for a young G.P. but I would not give it to my new young partner because he might get the impression—too easy to get in general practice—that the difficult patient is a bore. It is somehow uninspiring; but it has a wonderful freedom from technical terms." With this I fully agree.

L. C. COOK.