

Sexual discord in marriage. A field for brief psychotherapy. MICHAEL COURTENAY, M.A., M.B., B.Chir. Mind and Medicine Monographs. London. Tavistock Publications Ltd. 1968. Pp. xiv + 137. Price 35s. 0d.

Some years ago the reviewer, struggling to help an unhappy woman, was told by a kindly and distinguished specialist "You are trying to do work that is in the province of the priest or the lawyer." Although good general practitioners have always been comforters, the concept of unhappiness as a legitimate field for scientific medical treatment, as important as heart disease or cancer, is a fairly recent one.

The work on which this book is based has its origin in the discovery by doctors working in the Family Planning Association that many who came ostensibly for contraceptive advice were needing help with emotional problems. This led to the setting up of special clinics to deal with marital difficulties, and in 1958 to training-cum-research seminars under the leadership of Dr Michael Bali nt.

Dr Courtenay in this book summarizes the attempt of one seminar to deal with current clinical problems. Accounts of psychotherapy are often criticized as being vague and unscientific, and not comparable with therapy in other branches of medicine. The members of this seminar subjected themselves to the discipline of making a firm diagnosis of the problem, of seeking a focus to which limited therapy could be directed, and estimating in advance the probable number of sessions needed and the criteria of success in achieving therapeutic aims. This was certainly a discouragement to woollymindedness, and few family doctors impose on themselves such rigorous standards in approaching such 'organic' illnesses as chronic bronchitis or rheumatoid arthritis.

Besides an encouraging measure of success, some interesting points emerged. One was that by focussing on one particular difficulty that the patient brought to the doctor, a change in the patient's attitude to his problems could be effected in a comparatively short time, without any attempt to modify the whole personality. Another finding was that it was not necessarily recent acute problems in stable subjects that were best capable of amelioration, but that what was important was the strength of the patient's motivation and his willingness to work with the therapist. As in other fields of psychotherapy, it was noted that the emotional attitude of the doctor greatly influenced his success or failure with the patient.

This is not a comprehensive handbook of marital problems, but an account of research into a special field of therapy, and as such will be of major interest to doctors with some postgraduate training in psychotherapy and with special interest in marital problems. It is written with honesty and clarity, and is a worthy contribution to the growing literature that is slowly mapping out the unexplored territories of human relations.

The oral gestogens and their uses in general medicine and public health. *Clinical Trials Journal*, special issue—January 1968. SIR JOHN PEEL, K.C.V.O., M.A., F.R.C.S., F.R.C.O.G. London. Stuart Phillips Publications. 1968. Pp. 230. 31s. 6d.

This special issue records the proceedings of an international symposium held at Folkstone in October, 1966 (yes—1966!). With such a long delay in publication there was a real risk of the material being outdated—a situation now meekly condoned in a textbook but hardly acceptable in a journal. In the event, the publishers have been fortunate and this issue surveys comprehensively and largely

accurately what the pill can do and how it does it. The one serious exception is the repeated denial in the text of any evidence of an association between oral contraception and venous thromboembolism. In the opening paper Professor Celso-Ramon Garcia advises that any possible risk of the oral contraceptives should be weighed against the known hazards of pregnancy, and in his editorial introduction Sir John Peel comments "This is precisely what the Minister of Health has done in a public statement which he made concerning the risks of thromboembolic disease". This only reference to the 'new' evidence was available eight months before the publication date of this special issue and surely deserved more emphasis and elaboration. This apart, the publication provides a more authoritative, interesting and comprehensive account of oral contraception than any monograph currently available.

Glancing again through the list of contents one is tempted to emphasize points of special interest to general practitioners—Professor Garcia's masterly summary of his ten years' experience; Professor Scott of Leeds reporting on the value of the pill in dysfunctional bleeding and primary dysmenorrhoea; the elegant study of gonadotrophins by Professor Flowers of Houston, Texas; Mr. Albert Sharman of Glasgow showing that ovulation may occur as early as the forty-second day postpartum, so that starting the pill after the post-natal examination may be too late; the pill and the climacteric; Dr Aviva Wiseman describing six years' experience of oral contraception in the Family Planning Clinic. From general practice Dr J. Eric Murphy compares consultation rates in women before and after starting oral contraception and demonstrates—not entirely convincingly—a reduction from 4.8 to 1.8 respectively in annual rates.

Then the notes of caution are sounded. There are biochemical changes noted in liver function and Dr Victor Wynn describes the changes induced in the carbohydrate and lipid metabolism. Finally, the value of the pill in the under-developed countries is discussed.

But no—these selections do no justice to the reader. There is no one more directly concerned with oral contraception than the general practitioner. Get the journal and read it all. You will have no regrets.

The Eye. Phenomenology and psychology of function and disorder. J. M. HEATON, M.A., M.B., B.Chir., D.O. London. Tavistock Publications. 1968. Pp. xii + 336. Price £3 10s.

This book presents a holistic view of visual phenomena. It brings together facts as diverse as the Platonic discourse (*Charmides*) on the cure of bodily ailments, on why witches are unable to weep, the fact that the U.S. dollar bill has a magic eye on it, and includes many psychosomatic theories such as the rather debatable one that patients with recurrent styes show an excessive interest in childbirth. There is a great deal about religious and mystical considerations in visual perception. Quotations are made from the Upanishads and other religious literatures to illustrate the symbolism of the eye. It shows how visual perception, action and feeling are inseparably related, quoting Blake: "The fool sees not the same tree that a wise man sees". Our desires influence perception. Looking at the same coin, the rich child sees it small and the poor child sees it large. It naturally includes a great deal of the physiology and pathology of the eye; discusses hallucinations, illusions and the effects of hallucinogenic drugs, the place of colour in disease and its effects on individual and community psychology. Symbolism in art and literature forms a most interesting chapter. This book should prove of considerable interest to the general reader. Its width of view is stimulating and interesting and its synthesis of disease and personality concepts is a welcome antidote to much specialist knowledge in depth.