

Book Reviews

Wreath on the crown, The story of Sarah Jacob the Welsh fasting girl. JOHN CULE. Llandysul. Gomerian Press. 1967. Pp. 143. Price 18s.

One hundred years ago the whole country was discussing the strange story of the Welsh fasting girl who, according to her parents, had not eaten for two years but who, when put to the test, died within a fortnight. The story which is now retold by Dr John Cule makes fascinating reading and is recommended.

You are extraordinary. ROGER J. WILLIAMS. New York, N.Y. Random House, 1967. Pp. xv+252. Price \$5.95.

The author of this volume is an eminent biochemist, the discoverer of the vitamin pantothenic acid, and the writer of many works on his own speciality. This book, however, is directed at a popular readership, and has as its theme the fact that all men are individuals and each one is unique biochemically, physically, and psychologically.

What little merit there might be in restating this obvious fact is destroyed in this instance by over-emphasis, special pleading, and tedious reiteration. In the fields of medicine, psychology, philosophy and religion, the most astonishing claims and inferences are made from this simple premise and the *non sequitur* reigns supreme. On the question of alcoholism, for instance, Freud, Pavlov, and the Behaviourists are alike dismissed; the disease is not psychiatric, it is nutritional, and on the flimsiest evidence the following bald claim is made: "Yes, abundantly good nutrition can abolish craving for alcohol by human as well as animal subjects!" Other equally breathless excursions are made into the realms of philosophy and religion.

There may be a small public, overawed by statisticians and sociologists and the concepts of admass and lumpen-proletariat, who would benefit from a lecture on individuality: it is difficult to imagine any general practitioner who has not already got that message, and who would not be irritated by the wilder flights of fancy in this volume.

Mental subnormality. W. ALAN HEATON-WARD, M.B., CH.B., D.P.M. Third edition. Bristol. John Wright & Sons Ltd. 1967. Pp. 100. Price 8s. 6d.

This is a very comprehensive paperback. Since the previous edition much fresh knowledge of the causes of mental subnormality, mainly chromosomal and genetic, has accumulated. This is reflected in the section on causation, which runs to 29 pages. The fact that the section on the care of the mentally subnormal comprises eight pages reflects our comparative helplessness in face of this human tragedy. However, Dr Heaton-Ward writes from experience, with common sense, wisdom and compassion, and emphasizes what can be done when these qualities are brought to bear on apparently hopeless problems. There is a good section explaining the common intelligence tests, and a full review of the legal aspects of the care of the mentally subnormal both in England and Scotland with

a note on Ireland. Most family doctors have in their care at least one mentally subnormal patient, and, what is often as important, his family who are affected by his existence. This closely packed book, at a bargain price for a medical monograph, will be a useful acquisition for the general practitioner's reference shelf.

Intestinal absorption. British Medical Bulletin. London. The British Council. 1967. Pp. 205+296. Price £1 10s. 0d.

The intestinal epithelial cell is revealed in these papers as a fascinating unit of biological activity. Those wishing to bring their knowledge of the physiology and pathology of the intestinal tract up to date will find this number invaluable.

Public attitudes and mental health education: The Northamptonshire Mental Health Project. 1963. A. GATHERER, M.D., D.P.H., D.I.H., and J. J. A. REID, T.D., M.D., B.SC., M.R.C.P., M.R.C.P.E., D.P.H., Northamptonshire County Council. Pp. 43+appendices. Price 5s. 0d.

Does the community care?

'Community care' is becoming a threadbare phrase, worn before its time. It is used in connection with all kinds of illness and many social needs which are not by any means the concern of medicine; it rolls glibly from the tongues of politicians and after-dinner speakers wishing to impress, but few have attempted to measure the potential for community care and the need for community knowledge of even the easy things.

With commendable courage the county of Northamptonshire planned and undertook a study of one of the more difficult subjects that could be chosen, the community's awareness of, and attitudes to illness of the mind. After many weeks of planning initiated by the county health department and the Northamptonshire branch of the British Red Cross Society, an observer network was created from members of voluntary and other local organizations in many localities throughout the county. Volunteer lecturers and interrogators were trained in the use of comprehensive questionnaires and the co-operation of both the local press and the regional broadcasting station was secured. Voluntary societies included lectures during their regular programmes—themselves subject to critical analysis by the lecturers—and special conferences were organized for groups not normally approachable. In this work the organizers were assisted by the clergy, schoolteachers, industrialists, police and youth club leaders.

The aim of the questionnaire was to find out how much the people in Northamptonshire knew about mental illness, both before and after a planned campaign of health education. Questions were framed to elicit people's reaction to the problem of mental illness as a whole in relation to other medical social problems, their knowledge of the characteristics of mental illness and where those who were mentally ill could get help. About a thousand completed questionnaires were examined before the health education campaign, and the same number afterwards to determine what impact, if any, the health education effort had made.

The interpretation of the questionnaire data is by no means easy but fortunately some aspects of the study had been touched on by the British Broadcasting Corporation in a national programme 'The hurt mind' enabling comparisons to be made between the responding inhabitants of Northamptonshire and their counterparts elsewhere. Even allowing for differences in examination method