

**Towards community mental health.** First edition. Edited by JOHN D. SUTHERLAND, *C.B.E.* PH.D. London. Tavistock Publications. 1971. Pp. xii+130. Price £2.40.

Presented here are papers read before The Royal Medico-Psychological Society. Eight workers — psychologists, educationalists and doctors—have contributed to this book, and in their various fields have considered what may be wrong in society and are thinking about how to put it right. Accepted ideas on education in this country take a great beating, as do the industrial hierarchy, the family, and even the caring professions themselves. One has the impression that the authors are more thinking aloud than proclaiming The New Faith, and indeed, some of the arguments cancel out. This is good stimulating reading, and worthy of consideration as a basis for preliminary discussion which might in time lead to tentative moves towards a better and healthier community, but . . . The cynic will observe that this all begins to sound like The Gospel of Psychiatry Unlimited, and the realist will reflect that with an educational system and a health service that are both running with hot bearings, all this is likely to be just pie-in-the-sky. Uncommitted minds will find many ideas expressed here worthy of thought and incubation, even if they are not yet ready for implementation.

**The leaves of spring.** A study in the dialectics of madness. A. ESTERSON. London: Tavistock Publications. 1970. Price £3.15.

Dr Esterson tells the story of a "mad" (schizophrenic) girl and tries to gain and to convey to the reader an understanding of this madness by studying the interactions of the members of the girl's family. Dr Esterson used an interviewing technique described in a previous book (R. D. Laing and A. Esterson, *Sanity, madness, and the family*): the members of the family were interviewed individually and together, the interviews were tape-recorded, and the tape recordings analysed.

As the story of the schizophrenic girl unfolds and as more and more of the attitudes and feelings of her parents, her sister, and her brother are presented, it becomes increasingly plausible that the particular constellations within the family and the interactions between the members of that family were important factors in the genesis of the girl's madness, and also that the girl's madness cannot be understood properly without understanding the family inter-relationships.

This theme of the book is well developed, yet it seems that understanding of the family inter-relationships does not explain everything. Why had the girl become 'the patient' and not any of the other members of the family? Dr Esterson leaves this question unanswered.

Undoubtedly, both psychiatrists and general practitioners can learn from Dr Esterson's

approach to schizophrenia, incomplete though the approach is. Understanding of the family setting, joint interviews and observation of the interactions of the members of the family, relief of family pressures, and 'being on the side of the patient', are most valuable aids to diagnosis and treatment of emotional and mental disorders.

This much can be learnt from the book. But the book has a second part, in which Dr Esterson expounds his philosophical and political views. He is trying very hard to correlate his medical (psychiatric) theories with what he calls the 'dialectical truth', which is something akin to what George Orwell has called 'double think'. This second part of the book consists of a good deal of name calling ('fascists', 'capitalists') interlaced with quotations of Chairman Mao's platitudes and Dr Esterson's views of the world in general. As 'dialectical truth' means accepting anything as truth that suits the political or other purposes of the dialectician the question necessarily arises on reading part two of Dr Esterson's book, to what extent part one, the part dealing with the medical aspects of the girl's illness, has been tainted by the author's bias. This doubt diminishes the authority of the statement of the first part of the book.

This is rather a pity because the book is very much like the curate's egg, i.e. it is good in parts. Whether the reader would like to pay the price of a good farm egg for a tainted egg, though good in parts, must be left to his discretion.

**The tissues of the body.** W. E. LE GROS CLARK, F.R.S. Oxford. The Clarendon Press. 1971. Pp. 1+424. Price £3.25.

This popular textbook continues to be revised with regularity. Although the general practitioner does not have to remember the details of anatomy, he should keep himself abreast of the increasing knowledge of the basic sciences on which his diagnosis and treatment are founded. In this book he will find all that he wishes to know expressed in a lucid and interesting manner. A useful present for the son or daughter who are studying biology or medicine.

**Current problems in clinical virology.** First Edition. Edited by J. E. BANATVALA, M.A., M.D., M.R.C.Path., D.P.H., D.C.H. Edinburgh and London. Churchill Livingstone. 1971. Pp. 1+201. Price £2.50.

"It is no idle boast for us to say that we stand on a strategic pinnacle for the investigation of infectious diseases".

This quotation from William Pickles stands at the head of a chapter by Dr P. R. Grob on 'Virology in General Practice' contributed to this collection of brilliant essays by microbiologists and virologists. The book has been edited by Dr J. E. Banatvala, virologist to St Thomas's Hospital, who also writes an excellent paper on "Virus