BOOK REVIEWS


This report describes the first nine months' work in an experimental reception centre for children deprived of normal home life, set up by the Caldecott Community, with the help and co-operation of the Nuffield Medical Foundation and the Kent County authorities.

It was intended to provide a working model for other centres likely to be established as a result of the recommendations of the Curtis Committee and the Children Act, 1948.

The question of staffing such centres has obviously been fully considered; the staff plan of the Mersham centre seems to work excellently, each child's circumstances being reviewed in the light of reports from those members of the staff who have dealt with him while at the centre. Of particular interest are the descriptions of the duties of the psychiatric social worker who has been in contact with the authorities responsible for the child before admission, and of the psychiatrist under whose direction the case conferences are held.

Although the centre had been intended as a place where the needs of an unselected group of children deprived of normal home life could be assessed, the selection was in fact biased in favour of those who presented problems of social behaviour or mental health, since most of the applications for admission came from departments in touch with children who were in difficulties for those reasons.

The difficulty of placing children who leave the centre shows how inadequate are the present arrangements for the care of children away from home.

This report will be useful to all social workers dealing with problems of family health and welfare, as well as to those mainly concerned with the welfare of deprived children.

JANE E. PATERSON


This is the second of the series of Catalogues listing, describing, and classifying the range of projects in the economic and social fields carried on by United Nations Organization through its several agencies, which include the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization, the World Health Organization, the International Labour Organization, and the Unesco. References to reports and publications bearing on the projects described add to the value of this compact work of reference.


During a famine, conditions are unfavourable both for controlled observation and scientific measurement. Consequently the accounts of the reactions of the human body to chronic semi-starvation recorded by medical men in the field have inevitably lacked precision and left fundamental problems unsolved. Hitherto, most laboratory studies have been limited to experiments on professional starving men. The reports of widespread starvation in the war years led Professor Ancel Keys and his colleagues at the
University of Minnesota to undertake during 1943-44 a study of semi-starvation in volunteers under laboratory conditions. Thirty-two conscientious objectors offered themselves as subjects and lived in the laboratory of Physiological Hygiene for over a year.

During a control period of three months they were given a diet containing approximately 3,500 calories per day. Then for 6 months the diet was reduced by 1,570 calories in the form of potatoes, cabbage, turnips, and cereals, and only very small portions of animal protein each week. The experimental diet resembled approximately that consumed under famine conditions in Europe. During this period they lost on an average 24 per cent. of body weight, and were reduced to a condition closely resembling famine victims. All at some time had famine oedema. The subjects were then studied for a further 3 months in the laboratory under various regimes of rehabilitation, and most of them were observed at intervals for a further 6 to 9 months. A year after the end of the starvation period, all had returned to normal and were apparently none the worse. During the year in the laboratory the basic physiological and psychological state of the subjects was reviewed at regular intervals by teams of investigators. Important observations were made on the weight changes, the distribution of body fluids, the basal metabolism, the energy exchanges during exercise, the capacity for work, the size of the heart, adaptations in the circulatory system, and changes in the cellular elements in the blood. The psychological observations included studies of behaviour patterns, personality changes and intellectual abilities.

The many important findings cannot be summarized in a review article. The Minnesota experiment, which will become a classic, was planned and executed by a co-ordinated team of first class investigators, and there is no record of any comparable experiment either in human physiology or in psychology. The general plan will be of interest and indeed an obligatory study for future investigators into the problems presented by adaptation of the physiological and psychological processes in man to prolonged adverse environmental conditions, and the details are important to those concerned with the practical problems of medicine in a famine.

Unfortunately the choice of presentation of this great experiment is unsatisfactory. "Human Starvation" weighs 3.45 kg. and suffers, like many American books to-day, from over-nutrition. Striving for completeness, the authors have stuffed the book with observations made by persons less competent or less well-placed than themselves, and in consequence the fascinating account of the Minnesota experiment is often buried. Chapter 3, containing 29 pages, is entirely devoted to old work, long dead, which might have been allowed to rest; there are many other examples of the citation of inferior work.

There must be many physiologists, psychologists, and physicians who would like a brief straightforward account of this great experiment for their personal use. Is it too much to ask Professor Keys to provide such an account, which would fall within the limits of a private purse, and slip easily into the suitcase of a physician setting out by aeroplane on famine-relief work?

R. Passmore


The new edition of Yule and Kendall invites comment on one of many dilemmas consequent upon the rapid tempo and increasing output of research in every branch of science. It is to the advantage of a publisher who enjoys the good will of a well-esteemed textbook to keep it in circulation by constant revision after the author himself has lost interest in its fame; but the production of a comprehensive new textbook is a thankless task for young men whose chances of promotion to an important teaching post in university life have very little connexion with proven powers of exposition. The main pre-occupation of the young scientific worker, if disposed to write a book at all, is indeed to write one