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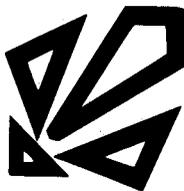
## Book Reviews . . .

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**“Experiments in the Rehabilitation of the Mentally Handicapped”**, H.C. Gunzberg. 336 pages. Butterworth London (Pds.5.00 UK).

“Two, a boy of 17 (mongol) and a girl of 17, were the subjects of a local authority experiment. The experiment did not work, largely because the house parents were inexperienced and too much was expected of them. . .”. Thus is written a tale of rehabilitation in which experience fell short of experiment; but we might add that experiment seems bound to continue so long as professionals will have it so.

Actually this offering in this book is by far the most interesting. This is a multi-authorship book and this particular piece is by Dr Elizabeth Gemmell, and her work in the greater Sheffield area. Although the experience of the house parents, mentioned above, fell short of experiment, Dr Gemmell’s experience certainly does not. She writes from intimate experience of work of rehabilitation from several hostels in Sheffield, and this is the only piece in this book that gives any impression at all that work with rehabilitation of the handicapped can in fact be interesting and stimulating. If people are going to work in the field of mental retardation it somehow has to be made real and this is what Dr Gemmell’s paper does, in a way that most of the other non-anecdotal “scientific” papers do not. Dr Gemmell makes no secret of the facts that many of the hostel’s male rehabilitees were in trouble for pilfering, and sexual offences in particular indecent exposure. Otherwise in the book you might think retarded people were abnormal by virtue of being asexual.



There are problems about talking about rehabilitation in the field of mental retardation. Some people would have it that that is the only thing that it has to be about anyway. Everything one does is rehabilitation in some form or other. Others would have it that rehabilitation is something to do with community placement of young adults, either from large residential institutions or outside the nuclear family. This book tends to accent this later definition but has a number of articles which cannot be construed in this light, e.g. Developmental Play for Severely Subnormal Children, which really don’t belong under a tighter definition of “rehabilitation”.

There is an over accent in this book on administrative measures. We hear once again about the Swedish model in Grunewald, and the Wessex model by Kushlick. But really it’s time we all stopped looking at other people’s models. In Australia one of our national problems is that we copy things from the Northern Hemisphere and in so doing overdo them. We did this with women’s spike heel shoes (they just had to be spikier in the Antibes) then we did it with the mini-skirt and then platform shoes. Victoria is also now doing it with the Premier’s report on mental retardation. It has to be the Nebraska model — total de-institutionalization. Reading this book one realizes that despite more

advanced “de-institutional” programmes in Sweden and the United Kingdom than we have ever had, overall they are more conservative than we now pretend to be. A number of people in this book are trying to give large institutions a proper place in the system.

There are several papers on evaluation of rehabilitation programmes but as one discussant of one paper proclaimed “there is too great a tendency to be satisfied when positive results are obtained without really asking why certain steps or certain trials were not successful”. This type of evaluative research has real problems when an aggressive sociological stance becomes contingent on its findings. We haven’t for instance changed anything very much by renaming “moral training” of the nineteenth century into “social training” of the twentieth.

Overall this is an interesting enough book by well disciplined speakers and researchers. The discussions tend to be the most interesting part but then you can’t have discussion without first having a paper. Gunzberg’s summing up is of his usual stimulating excellence as is the quality of his editorship.

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