NATURE AND NURTURE IN MENTAL DEVELOPMENT. By F. W. Mott, M.D., F.R.S., F.R.C.P. Paul B. Hoeber, New York.

This small volume is fairly crowded with facts and suggestions, all of fundamental importance and sound value. In the first place it comes from one familiar with a subject vast in its origin and in its possibilities for the improvement of the race and of the individual. Then, though the subject matter here is presented in a somewhat rhetorical style as befits rather the lectures in which it first appeared, yet so truly scientific are the given facts and presented in so direct and forcible a manner that they appeal not only to the social worker, the teacher, and the intelligent parent, but are of distinct value to the physician as well.

For the outlines of the structure and functioning of the nervous system are very carefully though briefly given, with special attention to the history of development of both in their relation to their environment, prenatal, natal and postnatal, and in the effect of the environment as well as heredity in determining the mental character and ability.

In the latter part of the book attention is given to the various ways in which this question of environmental conditions or nurture may be theoretically considered and practically worked out through medical inspection in schools, separate schools for the physically or mentally disabled, care and instruction of the mother and all the ways which are being entered by the social worker.

It is not, however, this general outline that rouses our interest chiefly. Dr. Mott's facile handling of the subject of heredity emphasizes with convincing clearness the importance of inherited mental tendency for strength or weakness rather than of specific factors or agents pathologic or otherwise, and with this the hopefulness that lies in the social watchfulness which can counteract the inherited neuropathic tendency, removing the causes which would attack it and moreover strengthening the weak points by proper measures.

The inherent potentiality of the brain is capable of marvelous development through the proper associative paths, even when it lies dormant for want of stimulus from without, which is most strikingly illustrated in the cases of Helen Keller, Laura Bridgman and Marie Huertin, who showed this potentiality in a marked degree when avenues of approach had been found for them other than those of hearing and sight, from which they were cut off.

Herein lies the social heritage which has formed a brain of superior tendencies, abilities, potentialities, which is apart from the acquisition of language and all other external tools and products of the ages of racial advance. The author has not gone at all extensively into the purely psychical factors behind mental behavior, but there is no confusion between the physical basis of mind and the mental activity itself. Here again he moves with a clear handling of facts and suggestive theories for further research, as, for example, in the action of the chemical hormones upon the nervous system, and therefore their relation with the mind.

It is possible only to point out a few of these topics that follow rapidly upon one another in the author's comprehensive and well grounded presentation of the subject. The whole attitude of the book is well worth closer attention, while its substance and form are stimulating to a high degree.

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