REVIEWS

THE SEMI-INSANE AND THE SEMI-RESPONSIBLE (DEMIFOUS ET DEMI-RESPONSABLES). By *Joseph Grasset, Professor of Clinical Medicine, at the University of Montpellier.* Translated by *Smith Ely Jelliffe, M.D., Ph.D., Clinical Professor of Mental Diseases, Fordham University, N. Y.* New York and London, Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1907, pp. xxxv, 415.

THIS book has not only received considerable attention from scientific journals but, if one may judge from the number of reviews and abstracts appearing in lay periodicals, has aroused interest outside of the medical profession. Any book which serves to educate the public concerning the relationship between crime and mental disorder should be welcome at the present time, and all efforts to bring about a better understanding between jurists and psychiatrists are praiseworthy. The greatest obstacle in the way of closer co-operation between law and psychiatry is the arbitrary legal division of all people into two distinct classes — the sane and the insane — and what medico-legal expert is there who has not been exasperated almost beyond endurance by the magistrates who insist that the expert witness ought to be able to state, and must state, whether the accused is sane or insane. As the author aptly shows, a theoretical distinction so sharp, if true to the facts, would be of the greatest convenience, and “most magistrates adopt it, or rather would like to impose it upon physicians. Yes or no? Is the accused sane or is he insane? Is he or is he not responsible for the crime or the misdemeanor which he has committed? Shall we condemn him or shall we commit him? This is the dilemma in which justice would like to trap the expert, who has the appearance of trying to evade responsibility, if he will not answer categorically and emphatically yes or no.”

Thus the very title of the book is attractive and fills an important function if it does no more than call attention to the fact that human character and personality cannot be estimated in one dimension alone, but must be studied as to height, depth, width, hardness, softness, richness, resistance, and stability. It would be well if the book were to be placed upon the bench and before the eyes of every judge, where its title page might be a constant reminder of the unfairness of demanding impossible responses from medical witnesses.

But however pleasing the title, the psychiatrist, eagerly exploring the book for a vindication of the views which he has so long held in the face of many difficulties, will be unable to refrain from some

disappointment that Grasset has not taken better advantage of the opportunity afforded by his happy choice of subject. That there are semi-insane and semi-responsible persons all thoughtful men would perforce agree were they but cognizant of the data relevant to the argument, but the unbeliever would find little in Grasset's book to render him uncomfortable in adherence to his false convictions. The book states a demonstrable proposition which it fails to demonstrate. The logic of the book is puerile and the thought difficult to follow because of its circumstantiality. A frank exposition of available clinical material illustrative of the class under discussion would have sufficed for the convincing of the most obstinately adverse-minded person. But Grasset, in place of demonstrating the existence of the semi-insane, dissipates his talents in the endeavor to differentiate sharply the three classes, the sane, the semi-insane, and the insane, one from the other, thus convicting himself of the very arbitrariness of which he complains in the law and its magistrates. In place of two classes he gives us three, leaving us even worse off than before, for now we must make three artificial and impossible divisions instead of one. Grasset exhibits in his study of the psychic world the same old tendencies which led the ancients to regard the earth as flat and permitted the concept of jumping-off places: because his mind's eye cannot contemplate more than a given area in a given time, he has been led into the error of assuming the existence of lines of circumscription corresponding with the limits of his mental horizon.

The language of the book is too figurative to satisfy the scientist and too technical to meet the needs of the layman. He devotes a chapter to the refutation of what he calls the "*one block*" and the "*two block*" theories, and employs as "a figure or mode of explanation" a diagrammatic representation of mental activity in the shape of a polygon composed of superior and inferior psychic centers with their association tracts. Had not the translator in his preface recognized the need of "first aid" to the reader and thus been impelled to furnish an explanatory key to Grasset's linguistic code, even those well versed in psychiatric lore must have failed to recognize in Grasset's *polygon* the much-used and much-abused aphasia scheme of Wernicke and have been compelled to abandon in despair any hope of attaining the author's viewpoint. But the reviewer can find nothing in the otherwise helpful preface of the translator to clarify his understanding of such paragraphs as the following:

"In other words the actual idea of psychical centers forces us to admit two classes of patients, the mental and the psychic. The mentally afflicted have lost their reason, freewill, and conscience, and their superior intellectuality; they are insane. The psychically afflicted have not lost all that goes to make up reason and superior thought, but they are nevertheless disturbed in their psychism, which is not normal; they are semi-insane."

If there be anything in such paragraphs,—and the type is characteristic of the book—to convince the laity and the law that psychiatry has at last advanced to the point where its opinion is worthy to be sought and respected, it is lost upon the reviewer.

For a popular book there is too much of pornographic detail to afford healthful reading; for psychiatrists there is an insufficient amount of accurate clinical description.

The first personal pronoun appears so frequently as to be unpleasantly obtrusive, and the author sacrifices too much space to "the disagreement between my contradictors and myself."

The psychology of the book is weak and unworthy of a subject so weighty and of a psychiatrist so well known. Many examples of this defect could be quoted did space permit. A single example will serve to illustrate: "*Evidently he was not insane in the complete sense of the word . . . ; but he had acted without knowledge, memory, or responsibility.*" If such action does not denote insanity "in the complete sense of the word" the reviewer confesses to absolute incapability of judging the merit of this book and acknowledges incompetency in stating an opinion as to the mental state of a given subject.

This is not the place to enter into an argument for or against so-called simplified spelling, but it may be said that the typographical form of many words lends a decidedly foreign accent to the book and the reviewer at least was somewhat "opprest" by the peculiar and unfamiliar form of words such as "possest" and "discust."

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A THEORY OF MIND. By John Lewis March, A.M., Ph.D.
New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908. pp. vii, 453.

SETTING out with the perhaps too capacious statement that "the study of mind thus stands at the present time without an accepted theory," Professor March, of Union College, certainly supplies the