

out of the way. I think it is more difficult; I think it is the deepest demand on the therapist. It will usually involve teasing out tentative, and practically unformed priorities, and giving them the right culture-medium of interest and enthusiasm to grow. They won't just be sitting there, fully formed, waiting to get out; they need to be fertilized.

If constant self-analysis is indulged in, these little hopes, often tenuous enough as it is, will become smothered. But without them, there can be no will to emerge from the difficulties, whatever pattern these may have assumed. The reason for this misguided emphasis is not difficult to understand: we have, as in all branches of science, become obsessed with mechanism. There are a million ways in which an imbalance can evolve; they are almost infinitely complex, and therefore fascinating—too fascinating. It is our detached interest as scientists and intellectuals that has beguiled us into caring more about explaining than helping.

All of us could spend the rest of our lives understanding the ins and outs of our imperfections, but, when it comes down to it, the only problems worth giving one's attention to are those which specifically obstruct our growth.

ROLAND PETERS

*12 Southwood Lane
Highgate Village, N6*

HISTORIES OF PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITALS

DEAR SIR,

Many psychiatric hospitals for mental illness and mental handicap were established in the later years of last century or in the early twentieth century and they are now passing their jubilees or reaching their centenaries. These occasions present an opportunity to review their histories. At present it is often not easy to obtain the interest of the lay press or the public in the publishing of histories of psychiatric hospitals. Nevertheless it is important that histories and facts should be recorded while there are still staff closely identified with these hospitals and who possess the background of knowledge about a hospital's development and achievements.

In the future the study of the histories of psychiatric hospitals may become a more popular topic of study, and historians will then have cause to be grateful for the information which has been accumulated. Psychiatric hospitals have relieved the community over the years of an enormous burden of hard work, distress and misery, and their contribution to the common weal, which it is at present fashionable to devalue, may ultimately be recognized for its true worth.

D. A. SPENCER

*Meanwood Park Hospital
Leeds LS6 4QB*

READING LIST IN PSYCHIATRY

The Third Edition of the Reading List is available on request to the Royal College of Psychiatrists, 17 Belgrave Square, London SW1X 8PG. Price 30p per copy. Please enclose payment with your order (plus the cost of postage) together with a self-addressed envelope. The list measures 270 mm x 215 mm and weighs 50 gm.