

Nerve Exhaustion. By Sir Maurice Craig. Pp. 148. (London: J. and A. Churchill, 1922.) 6s.

In introducing the subject of nerve exhaustion, Sir Maurice Craig makes it evident that he is writing for the general practitioner rather than for the student of psychology. He particularly emphasises the importance of the prevention of nerve exhaustion, which is defined as "a state in which there is undue physical, nervous, or mental fatigue." The author considers that the essential factor leading to such a state is "hypersensitivity," which may be physical or psychological, and the recognition of which may enable one to prevent the onset of nerve exhaustion.

It follows from the definition that the condition has a very wide etiology and symptomatology, each of which is discussed under numerous headings. A separate chapter is devoted to sleeplessness and to the individual hypnotics which are used in the treatment of insomnia, but there is no mention of bromural, which is a safe and efficient sedative for most of the milder cases.

In the last chapter it is urged that the treatment of mental disorder should be freed from the legal restrictions which hamper it—restrictions which may have been necessary many years ago, but are now obsolete. The author considers that there are numerous cases of functional nervous disorder which should be allowed institutional treatment without the necessity of being certified, and he instances strong evidence in support of this.

The book will be of considerable value to the practitioner in the recognition and treatment of minor functional nervous disorders.

Guide to the Reptiles and Batrachians exhibited in the Department of Zoology of the British Museum (Natural History), Cromwell Road, London, S.W.7. Third edition. Pp. 56. (London: British Museum (Natural History), 1922.) 1s.

THIS publication is intended more for the general public than for the student of zoology. The author, whose name does not appear, has obtained a good balance in the treatment of the different groups of animals with which the little book deals. Exception must be taken to the statement that the Opisthoglypha, or back-fanged snakes, are, although poisonous, not dangerous. This is not always the case: the South African boomslang, *Dispholidus typus*, for instance, having in recent years been proved to be an extremely dangerous snake, there being more than one record of its bite having caused death in man. Experimentally it has been shown that the boomslang is more venomous than the cobra, puff adder, or any other justly dreaded South African snake.

Excellent in so many respects, it is a pity that so little pains have been taken in the correction of the proofs, some of the sentences, owing to lack of punctuation, being almost incomprehensible. This little guide, which is profusely illustrated by photographs of specimens in the museum, and by illustrations reproduced from the Cambridge Natural History, is, however, well worth the shilling asked for it.

Letters to the Editor.

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The Rat and its Repression.

I HAVE read with great interest the very able and exhaustive article by Mr. Alfred E. Moore in NATURE of May 20, p. 659, on the rat and its repression. As I have taken great interest in the question of rat suppression, I should like to add a few words to what Mr. Moore says.

If the campaign against these vermin were in such hands as his we should go a long way towards exterminating them, but the public does not take sufficient interest in a matter which they always think affects other people more than themselves. The result is that where one man makes a raid against his rats, twenty do nothing to suppress them, and perhaps ten others actually encourage their propagation by the carelessness with which they leave food and consumable stores unprotected.

One could have hoped that the Ministry of Agriculture would have taken up the matter seriously. The amount of damage done to food-stuffs is incalculable. Not only do rats raid our storehouses, but they also attack the crops almost before they are sprouting in the ground. Those who know Norfolk and Suffolk and any grain-growing district are familiar with the squeals of rats nesting in the hedgerows as they go along the roads, and when the seed-corn has been planted fields are covered with well-worn rat tracks, from which these rodents start to grub up the seeds from the ground and devour them. In December and January every field is covered with rat scratchings, which means that so much corn has been devoured. The loss to the farmer is very great and, of course, the public participates in this.

Piecemeal suppression is of little use, as rats are great travellers, but if a sufficient effort were made by the Ministry of Agriculture to stir up local authorities and to provide some funds, which would not amount to very much, to help them, we should have a remarkable result in the clearing from our fields and our food stores of these destructive vermin. The Treasury will sanction millions for unproductive expenditure. Any minister can get practically what he wants for his own particular hobby, but in this matter of real usefulness where capable local administration is at hand, our custodians of the public purse refuse to assist in any way.

Individual philanthropists cannot be expected to find money for a public cause when the representatives of the public stand idly by. What remedy have we for this? Only one; which is that we should put pressure locally upon our parliamentary representatives and send up communications to the Ministry of Agriculture, urging upon them the necessity of some sort of action.

I hope this advice will not fall upon barren ground. There are plenty of men in both Houses of Parliament who will be very glad to help in pushing this agitation forward.

ABERCONWAY.

43 Belgrave Square,
London, S.W., May 24.