

# BOOK REVIEWS

## Weakness at Reading

*Reading and its Difficulties: a Psychological Study.* By M. D. Vernon. Pp. viii+211. (Cambridge University: London, September 1971.) £3.20; \$10.50.

THIS book is a sequel to Professor Vernon's *Backwardness in Reading*, published in 1957, and it deals for the most part with research which has been carried out since that date. A wide variety of experiments are cited: on visual perception, on auditory and linguistic development in children, on the relation of reading to intelligence, and on the social and motivational factors which are associated with high and low scores on reading tests. Finally, Professor Vernon examines some of the evidence relating to specific dyslexia (a disability, or group of disabilities, in which weakness at reading is accompanied by directional confusion, difficulty in spatial and temporal sequencing and very strange spelling mistakes).

As usual, Professor Vernon's standards of thoroughness and scholarship are admirable. The evidence on perception of form and print is particularly well presented; and above all I should like to pay tribute to the chapter on dyslexia, which I wish could be made compulsory reading for everybody concerned with educational planning.

I have one chief criticism. In parts of the book, particularly in the chapters on the relevance to reading of intelligence and of social and motivational factors, Professor Vernon seems to me to have been too charitable to research of dubious merit. Occasionally, it is true, she refers to inadequacies of experimental design or suggests that an author's interpretation of his findings may be questionable. It may well be, however, that educational research, if it is to prosper, requires not mere improvement here and there but radical re-thinking. Countless man-hours have been spent on "measuring" such allegedly useful entities as "IQ" and "reading age", on making judgments about parental support or children's degree of application (sometimes, incidentally, value-laden and arrogant ones, for example, "On the basis of interviews . . . they divided the parents into four classes: demanding, over-anxious, unconcerned and normal", page 107), and on correlating and in some cases factor analysing the resultant scores. Yet an IQ figure is a summary of a person's performance on a wide variety of tasks, the component elements of which are unknown; correlation coefficients are liable to be treacherous even for the sophisticated (because, having obtained

them, we may still not know what to do with them), and surveys of what has happened in a particular educational milieu must surely be of less interest to science than generalizations about what can be made to happen by systematic manipulation of the environment of individual children. I wish, therefore, that Professor Vernon had done more to encourage research workers in the educational field to move in this latter direction rather than content themselves with large-scale surveys of the traditional kind.

This, however, is basically a criticism of current educational research, not of Professor Vernon, who in fact has done an excellent job with the material at her disposal.

T. R. MILES

## Medical Illustration

*History of Medical Illustration from Antiquity to AD 1600.* By Robert Herrlinger. Pp. 178. (Pitman: London, 1971.) £7.

THIS book was designed as the first volume of a two volume series to cover medical illustration from the earliest times to the present day. Regrettably because of the premature death of the author, only the first volume was completed and this covers the period from antiquity to AD 1600. The author, a distinguished medical historian, also received recognition as an art historian and as a result his illustrations are particularly notable for their artistry as well as their appositeness.

There is a masterly foreword by Dr Poynter, director of the Wellcome Institute of the History of Medicine. The book is profusely illustrated with nearly four hundred illustrations, many of which are beautifully reproduced in colour. Apart from the occasional American spelling the translation is good and lively. The text presents a scholarly interpretation and communication of historical research and there is a proper enquiry of the aims of medical illustration at particular periods. Herrlinger demonstrates by text and illustration that schematization is more typical of medical illustrations of the middle ages than naturalism, but everywhere the text shows the erudition and clarity of mind of the author. He regards the early cauterization pictures as examples of the use of indication lines and later points out that couches and beds supporting invalids are symbols of illness rather than actual representations. In like manner, he illuminates the symbolism behind the apparent crudity of many medical illustrations and reaches the conclusion that antique medical

illustration included schematic, semi-schematic and naturalistic forms, in fact, all the categories of modern medical illustration. The early references to "squatting figures" are carried throughout the text and illustrations to make a continuous and recognizable record. Herrlinger explains this curious posture found in many early texts as derived from the need to make thighs and genitals accessible when the corpse is laid on the table for dissection and therefore feels it is more apt to use the term "mensa figures". There are a few spelling mistakes, for example "skillful" for skilful on page 49, but this is unusual and the text is on the whole beautifully printed.

This is a bibliophile's book not only for the quality of the printing and the binding but also because of the many references to title pages, frontispieces and other bibliophilic details to delight the heart of all who love books. It is somewhat disappointing therefore to see that the plates are not always set as conveniently in relation to the text as one would like. With such profuse illustration this can be difficult, but there seems little reason for setting plate 3, referred to on pages 15 and 16, at page 35, and plate 2 is referred to on page 41 and is set at page 18. Again plate 4 is referred to on page 19 and is set at page 36.

There is a list of locations of the manuscripts referred to in the text and an index devoted more to illustrators than illustrations. Herrlinger pays particular attention to Vesaelius; nearly thirty pages detail the development and influence of this prince of medical illustrators. Sixteenth century illustrations of surgery and instruments are treated less fully although there is a section on sixteenth century title pages.

These are relatively minor objections, however, to a fascinating history, although I doubt that many medical students would be prepared to spend this amount of money even on a beautifully produced, authoritative and profusely illustrated work of medical history and illustration. Certainly every medical library should have a copy.

EDWARD HITCHCOCK

## Training and Testing

*Animal Psychophysics: The Design and Conduct of Sensory Experiments.* Edited by William C. Stebbins. Pp. xii+433. (Appleton-Century-Crofts: New York, December 1970.) \$18.75.

THIS book is the outcome of a symposium held at the University of Michigan in 1969, during which the