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Book Reviews

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BOOK REVIEWS

Moral Problems of Mental Defect, by Father J. S. Cammack, S.J. Published by Benziger Bros., New York. Price, $2.25.

This work is the second in an undertaking called the Bellarmine Series, to be published under the direction of the Jesuit Fathers of Heythrop College, Oxon. The author, who is Professor of Moral Philosophy at Heythrop College, feels that there is need for the Moral Theologian and those who have to apply Catholic morality to take advantage of modern researches about moral responsibility in abnormal mental states. The method he follows to put this information before his readers is a critical examination of the present-day concepts and definitions of mental defect and moral defect. This method makes it possible to eliminate technical analysis and statistical presentation so that the book is much more readable than one would expect in a work of this type.

It ought to be noted that the author limits his field in another way, confining his attention chiefly to the English scene. Chapters I to IV, about half the book, are devoted to the question of mental defect simply. They present the findings of the Brock Committee in a setting of other contemporary authorities. It is such a presentation of the Brock report as everyone familiar with it has hoped for.

The latter part of the book examines the legal and psychological concepts of moral defect. It points out that though this concept probably had its origin in the false philosophical doctrine of the moral sense, modern psychological study is in the process of divorcing the concept from that error.

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In a true sense of the word, this is not a "new" book, for it was first published in England in July, 1937, but it met with such success and was so favorably received throughout Great Britain, that an American edition was published in January, 1939. Certain minor changes and additions have been made to clarify the author's position on a few questions, especially those relating to sex.

The success of the book is no doubt due to the fact that it has filled a long-felt want, both among priests and medical men, for a clear stating of the Church's position on questions that confront them constantly in the present age, and which the average medical—good, practicing Catholic though he may be—may find difficult to solve.

The book carries a splendid, time-saving index, which simplifies the finding of almost any medico-moral problem. Parts of the book are difficult reading, but the problems are sometimes so delicate as to require extreme care and precise thought in handling them.