

## Book Reviews

Alan R. Rosenberg, Editor

THE TRIAL OF THE ASSASSIN GUTEAU. PSYCHIATRY AND THE LAW IN THE GILDED AGE. By Charles E. Rosenberg. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968. Pp. xvii + 289.

This book first appeared in 1968. To the good fortune of those who have not yet read it, it is now available in paperback.

Charles E. Rosenberg, a major historian of American medicine, became interested in the Guiteau trial while studying late nineteenth-century concepts of hereditarian influences in insanity. Less than a decade after the first appearance of this book, we find that contemporary ideas on hereditary determinants of insanity have expanded and developed remarkably. Once again psychiatric history seems to be repeating itself.

On July 2, 1881, Charles Julius Guiteau, a whilom lawyer, fatally shot President James Abram Garfield, who survived, painfully, until September 19th. Guiteau's trial began on November 14th and the tragicomic courtroom farce ended on January 5, 1882. Guiteau was hanged on June 30, 1882. Those are the dates, but not the history of this important chapter in American legal psychiatry. With careful concern for detail and accuracy, Rosenberg provides a picture of the assassin, the assassination, the national atmosphere, the public response, the trial and its aftermath. Rosenberg also offers one of the more reliable expositions available of the state of psychiatry of that time. The profession was torn by internal conflict as well as by vicious attacks from the newly formed specialty of neurology (the American Neurological Association was founded in 1875).

Rosenberg's analysis is a sober and thoughtful one that demands careful consideration. While his writing style makes for entertaining and exciting reading, the book is filled with much factual information that should change the reader's perspective on many of the issues troubling organized psychiatry and forensic psychiatry today. For example, in the area of diagnostic entities, the controversy about the existence of "moral insanity" (including dipsomania, kleptomania, and pyromania) has its counterpart in our "myth of mental illness"; controversy about "depravity" versus insanity lives on with today's controversy about "sociopathy" as a disease or a freely chosen way of life; the controversy about the role of heredity in the etiology of insanity, referred to above, certainly has its counterpart in contemporary studies on the inheritance of schizophrenia and depression. Rosenberg brings out the role of these late nineteenth-century controversies in Guiteau's trial. Furthermore, the controversy about the "insanity defense" so hotly debated

then, lives on, although I doubt that many psychiatrists today would challenge the legitimacy of the defense for Guiteau.

This book should be required reading in residency training courses and for all forensic psychiatrists interested in broadening their perspective of the field.

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ARMED ROBBERY – OFFENDERS AND THEIR VICTIMS. By John M. MacDonald, M.D. Charles C. Thomas, 1975. \$18.50.

The author makes it clear in the preface that “it is not the aim of this study to seek a comprehensive explanation of the origins of crime” and in the very last chapter also asks that the reader “forgive the omission, therefore, of any elaboration in depth of prevention and punishment.” Without adequate treatment of these two important areas, the causes of armed robbery and the management of the offender, I found my reading becoming a chore.

After an interesting first chapter, which delves into the history of armed robbery and particularly the glamorous and at times heroic side of it, the remainder of the book fails to satisfy the appetite it has aroused. The book does give quite a bit of information about armed robbery, backed by statistical data on incidents, seasonal and time patterns, social factors, and the cost of robbery. Chapters III through XII focus on such subjects as victims, offenders, origins of robbery, homicide and robbery, bank robbery, etc., but in a fashion that emphasizes the mechanics of the crime and its many variations. The rather lavish use of vignettes reminds me of reading the crime reports in a month’s issues of a big city newspaper all at one sitting, a somewhat depressing task.

For fear of being too harsh, I must admit that this volume does present a comprehensive overview of the crime of armed robbery and the human suffering which it may cause. For the professional reader in the behavioral sciences and especially for those involved or experienced in forensic sciences, it is disappointing in its failure to consider the causes or prevention of armed robbery, and in its avoidance of the topic of rehabilitation for the offender. I would expect that the professional law enforcement officer might find it equally disappointing in that it treats even such items as criminal investigation in what seems to me to be a very superficial manner.

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