

the second contents itself with the description of a few of the principal types of high-power circuit breakers. It is difficult to see why this should have been included. Switch contacts are fully described in a previous chapter (iii), including those used in high-power switches, whereas the subject of circuit breakers proper would require a volume or two to do justice to present knowledge. This part of the book, too, suffers from what might be called a failure to indicate scale. For example, multiple break is certainly advantageous for a certain range of voltage, but is much less so for low or high voltages.

The remainder of the book—two chapters on contact materials and “sliding contacts”—is better, even though the former tends to be somewhat of a catalogue of physical properties. The discussion of the properties required of contact materials might very well have been greatly extended, particularly on such aspects as contact bounce, contact wear and so on.

The indexing could be greatly improved; examples taken at random are “restricking voltage” and “recovery voltage”, for which the index is of little help in showing one where to find an explanation of the difference between these terms.

It is to be hoped that in the second edition the author will enlarge the first three and the last two chapters at the expense of the others, and that some attempt will be made to form a logical structure in which the gaps in our present knowledge appear as missing steps and not merely as things one might like to know. At the moment, the book tends too much to the popular science type, namely, a collection of interesting facts arranged under headings, but with no proper background. Perhaps this is partly the fault of the present state of the subject.

Pleasing features of the book are its handy size, clear illustrations and imposing lists of references at the end of each chapter.

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## CHILDREN'S IDEAS OF DEATH

### The Child's Discovery of Death

A Study in Child Psychology. By Sylvia Anthony. (International Library of Psychology, Philosophy and Scientific Method.) Pp. xvi + 231. (London: Kegan Paul and Co., Ltd., 1940.) 11s. 6d. net.

THIS is an investigation of the idea of death possessed by children of various ages, and of their emotional reaction to this idea. It is partly experimental (using the story-completion technique devised by Prof. Piaget of Geneva) and partly observational. The explanatory principles used are largely those of psycho-analysis, and the inquiry is motivated not merely by academic curiosity but also by the problems of the practical care of children, which are more than usually important at the present time.

The author finds that young children think more about death than is commonly believed, and that they are, in general, less prone to anxiety about it than adults suppose. She does not, therefore, defend the common grown-up desire to protect the child from all perception and thought of dead things or of death. On the other hand, she agrees that it is desirable to avoid stories or expressions of attitudes which tend to give ideas of death a frightening or horrible character. She also agrees with the psycho-analysts that feelings of guilt connected with the death of other people are common in children's fantasies on this subject, and suggests that the adult may help to relieve the morbidity of these feelings of guilt by allowing the child to express feelings of hostility as well as of affection towards those who have died.

In studying the development of ideas of death with advancing intelligence, the author finds a first stage (generally at less than five years of mental age) in which no meaning appears to be given to the word ‘dead’. Later (from about six years of mental age onwards) there is clear understanding of the concept with reference to human beings, although it is some years later that reference is made to logical or biological essentials in explaining the meaning of death. The recognition of the inevitability of death in others generally precedes recognition of the inevitability of the child's own death, and this latter may be found an idea too painful for ready admission into consciousness, and ideas of living for ever may be elaborated.

A lasting refusal to allow into consciousness the idea of the reality of death may lead to a disintegration of personality through a perpetual conflict between reality as the child sees it and the reality which is a basis for the society he lives in. Such a refusal may be due to an inborn predisposition to reject unpleasant ideas, but the author is more inclined to the idea that it commonly results from such an emotional experience as the too early loss by death of a loved person which makes the idea of death more than normally painful at the critical stage. In either case the child will need psychotherapeutic help, and the understanding adult may help to avoid a repression of this kind by avoiding a morbid expression of the idea of death by his or her own words and example.

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