Dyslexia or congenital word-blindness was first described by Kerr (1897) and Morgan (1896) in children with otherwise normal intelligence. Berkhahn (1885) had not yet brought out as clearly the criterion of normal intelligence. "Congenital word-blindness" (Morgan) became the object of numerous studies. Today the expression "word-blindness" is often felt to be unsatisfactory and is replaced by the also debated term "alexia." Anglo Saxon authors at present speak mostly of "reading disability" and Scandinavian ones of "specific dyslexia." The change in the name is at the same time an indication of a change in the delineation of the disease: while in the past predominantly serious cases were considered, in which alexia persisted into adult age, as time went on milder reading problems were more often included. Most psychiatric texts discuss congenital word-blindness or alexia under mental deficiency, even though the latter is not present. Cases in which difficulties in reading and writing are due to a general lack of intelligence, or to neurotic or psychotic behavior, are not specific but secondary and do not belong here. Of course, specific dyslexia is often mistakenly regarded as mental deficiency by practitioners, and often unsatisfactorily distinguished from other types of reading problems.

Clinical Data

We are dealing with an inability of children to learn to read normally. Similar letters such as b and d are occasionally mixed up. Most of the time, however, single letters can be recognized correctly, but not combined into syllables or syllables into words.

This behavior is demonstrated by an observation of Kuromaru and Okada (1961). A typical reading difficulty occurred in a 12-year-old Japanese boy, regarding the "Kana" script, which is built up from letters and syllables in a similar way as in European scripts. In the "Kanji" script, however, which is more difficult to learn, in which every symbol stands for an entire word, the boy's reading difficulty was only minimal.

Disturbances of writing are almost always associated with the reading problem, and frequently there are also speech difficulties and left-handedness. The ability to read and write numbers is generally intact.
Characteristic is the clear distinction between the performance in reading and writing on the one hand, and on the other hand the performance in other courses, and the general intelligence of the children. Children of high ability often compensate by memorizing, and adults by practice and experience, so that in such cases the dyslexia can only be detected by testing. Neurological or brain pathological abnormalities tend to be absent (Faust 1954, Weinschenck 1962).

History
The description by Kerr and by Morgan was followed by numerous publications, of which the more important ones were summarized by Solms (1948) and by Hallgren (1950). The publications, which have appeared in great numbers in the last 20 years in the U.S. and in smaller numbers in Germany, were mostly written by psychologists or educators. Often they do not distinguish between primary and secondary reading difficulty, and don't consider other, frequently associated, problems.

Different environmental causes have been proposed, but without the demonstration of a difference from a control series which would be needed for scientific proof.

The first report of familial occurrence of congenital word-blindness is by Thomas (1905). He described two families: in one there were two brothers affected, in the other seven children and the mother. The next studies, which consisted of single pedigrees, or of single selected families, found mostly secondary cases in two or three generations. A survey may be found in Hallgren. The studies of the following authors will only be listed here: Fisher (1905, 1910), Hinshelwood (1907, 1917), Stephen-son (1907), Warburg (1911), Tamm (1927), McCready (1926), Bachmann (1927), Mayer (1928), Illing (1929), Wawrik (1931), Duguid (1935), Laubenthal (1936, 1938), Rönn (1936), Mach (1937), Orton (1937), Ley (1938), Marshall and Ferguson (1939), Skydsgaard (1942), Eustis (1947), Liessens (1949), Spiel (1953), Kuromaru and Okada (1961), and Goody and Reinhold (1961).

Weinschenck (1962) reported on five males with congenital legas-thenia, who were sent to the youth section of the University Psychiatric Clinic in Marburg because of serious behavior disturbances or delinquency. In only two cases had the correct diagnosis been made before. In case 5 the father was unknown, the maternal grandfather psychotic. In case 2 the father was also affected, in case 4 the father, grandfather, father's sister and two brothers were affected. The half-sibs of the proband [half-brothers and sisters of the case] from a second marriage of the mother were normal. In case 3 one sister was affected. Especially interesting is case 1: a twin sister and another sister were also affected, of the other nine siblings a female twin pair of unknown zygocity was also affected, while the remaining seven (including another twin pair) were normal.

The most thorough and voluminous study about the heredity of dyslexia we owe to Hallgren. His proband series contained 79 children