

the accused person. Attempts to reform the McNaghton rules would be in the nature of attempts to put pieces of new cloth into an old garment ; the resulting state would be worse than the first. It will be better to await a complete reform of our penal system. In the main, the author of this book agrees with this position, although he offers suggestions for improvement in law and practice. He holds that " the idea that the State should frankly give up punishing people who transgress the law, and treat them as social problems rather than as sinners ", although it may sound the wildest of anarchistic notions, is being rapidly put into practice, although we may be quite unaware of the fact. The new Mexican legal code has abolished the very word " punishment ", and Soviet Russia is moving in a similar direction. This view does not imply the relinquishment of all unpleasant forms of dealing with offenders. It is striking to find this view enunciated by a lawyer. Those who are labouring for the adoption of a more rational attitude towards offenders may not live to see the results of their work, but they may be satisfied with observation of the trend of the tidal current.

It is impossible, within the limits of a review, to deal with all the momentous questions which are raised in this excellent book. It is provided with a profuse bibliography, and many hundreds of cases are quoted. The research was promoted and financed by the Commonwealth Fund, and the author may be warmly congratulated upon the manner in which he has carried out his most difficult and laborious task. His book will find a place in every legal library, and no psychiatrist who is called upon to give evidence in criminal trials can afford to neglect its careful study.

M. HAMBLIN SMITH.

To Be or Not To Be : A Study of Suicide. By LOUIS I. DUBLIN, Ph.D.
New York : Smith & Haas, 1933. Pp. x + 444. Price \$3.50.

The time was ripe for the appearance of a general review of the suicide problem, such as that which is contained in this book. It is more than fifty years since Morselli's classical work was published. Durkheim's *Le Suicide* is, of course, of much later date, but no English translation of this is available. Recent statistics are of much greater reliability than were those upon which the earlier works were based. Mr. Dublin is specially competent to deal with this matter, on account of his position as statistician to the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company of New York.

Any consideration of suicide leads us into a variety of fields, and raises questions of great interest, social, economic, legal, religious and psychological. All these matters are adequately handled by the author, who appears to have consulted every available source of information.

Nearly all countries for which statistics are to be had show a recent increase in their suicide rate, although this rate is largely affected by racial and religious factors. But the statistics on this matter must be handled with great discrimination, for there has been a marked alteration in the age-grouping in many countries. When this latter factor is taken into consideration, it is shown that the male suicide rate for England and Wales is less than that of the immediate pre-war period ; but there has been a real increase in the female rate. Suicide remains, however, a distinctly masculine reaction. In only one age-group, that of 15 to 19 years, is there a preponderance of female suicides. The emotional disturbance of adolescence, which may be greater in the female than in the male sex, and the occurrence of illegitimate pregnancy

are obviously important factors. Suicide is much more frequent in urban than in rural districts. But urban conditions must not receive the entire blame for this phenomenon; for it is possible that those persons who are able to adjust more easily to life's difficulties tend to remain in rural surroundings. A similar consideration probably applies to the low suicide rate amongst the negro population in America. The rate amongst Catholics is markedly lower than that for Protestants. The rate amongst Hebrews, which was formerly low, shows a very definite tendency to rise. As regards the figures in general, the author points out that the statistics must not be taken as being complete. It is likely that not a few suicides are erroneously recorded as accidental deaths, and some are deliberately concealed. On the other hand, some suicides were not really intended, the individual not having meant to take matters to the extreme. Much the same may be said of many so-called "attempts at suicide". But the motives which prompted to actions of this kind are deserving of most careful psychological investigation in every case.

The social attitude towards suicide shows great historical variation. The author gives a most interesting summary of these changes in attitude. Suicide is stated to have been very prevalent in ancient Greece and Rome. Probably this statement is true, although the complete absence of statistics should cause us to speak with much reserve on the point. The influence of Christianity produced a great alteration. And when the Church was able to dominate society, its attitude became reflected in European legal systems. The rise of the "new learning" swung the pendulum in the opposite direction, although this was, later, affected by the teaching of Kant and his followers. Many of the old indignities once inflicted upon the corpse of a suicide are of much antiquarian interest, and may be traced back to primitive magic. There are still certain legal anomalies. For example, attempted suicide is still a crime in England, although it is, in practice, no longer treated as such. It is not a crime in Scotland. So the legal position of a man differs when he attempts to drown himself from the English or the Scottish bank of the Tweed.

The suicide rate is materially affected by economic conditions. These, no doubt, have their effect in producing the recent increase. But the rate for unemployed labourers is not high as compared with that for other social classes. It is interesting to find that the author believes that relatively few people take out life insurance with the idea of benefiting their estates by suicide; the suicide rate increases as the duration of the insurance lengthens. All kinds of curious questions are raised by the figures given in the book. Why, for instance, should the rate for auctioneers and watchmakers be high, while that for railway workers and barge-men is low? It is of interest to learn that suicide is much less common among those who have children than among those who have not; this saving effect, however, is more marked upon women than upon men.

We can attain no real comprehension of suicide unless we study the mental mechanisms which produce the act of self-destruction. Having regard to the fact that the author is a layman, this aspect of his subject is well handled. He fully grasps the importance of the newer psychological theories. He points out the way in which a sense of inferiority may occasion suicide. He quotes Freud to explain the action of the "death wishes", and he makes this puzzling part of the psycho-analytic theory clear to readers. From the psychological point of view, the methods adopted by suicides are of much interest. There has been a recent increase in the use of firearms and coal-gas, accompanied by a decrease in the use of poison. The would-be suicide seeks for the method

which affords the greatest psychological satisfaction, this being well illustrated by the complicated and bizarre methods sometimes adopted, even when simple procedures were easily obtainable.

Can we do anything to reduce the incidence of suicide? Improvement of economic conditions is, of course, possible. And the author praises the work done by mental hygiene agencies of various kinds. The custom of remanding for observation those who attempt suicide may be mentioned. This practice often gives opportunity for the rectification of faulty conditions in the environment of the patient; and a little good advice, even when based upon superficial investigation, works wonders in not a few cases.

The book may be commended to all who are concerned with its subject as being an able, an exhaustive, and a well-documented review.

M. HAMBLIN SMITH.

Prostitution: A Survey and a Challenge. By GLADYS MARY HALL, M.A. London: Williams & Norgate, Ltd., 1933. Pp. 196. Price 7s. 6d. net.

Miss Hall extends the usual definition of her subject, and includes unpaid as well as paid promiscuous sex relationships. The former ("amateur" prostitution) she considers to be increasing at the expense of the latter ("professional" prostitution). This increase she ascribes to a general laxity in sex matters, combined with a desire for adventure, and she believes it to have been accentuated by the more diffused knowledge of contraceptive procedures. She adduces a considerable volume of evidence in support of her view; but the value of this evidence is, to some extent, vitiated by its anonymity. We know, however, that both forms of sex promiscuity exist, and their relative incidence is comparatively unimportant.

In an able review of the factors leading to promiscuity, Miss Hall urges that actual poverty is an unimportant cause. In this view she has the support of other serious students of the subject, although the view is quite contrary to the popular opinion. The desire to obtain what are often described as "luxuries" may operate, but this raises the question of what luxury is. Again contrary to uninformed views, Miss Hall rejects intellectual defect as a prominent causative factor, and in this view also students of sex will agree with her. If by "mental deficiency" is meant emotional instability, the case is altered. Miss Hall believes that a condition of "over-sexed constitution", temporary or permanent, is often to be found in members of the prostitute class; and there is, no doubt, something to be said for this view, although it may be impossible to obtain precise evidence on the point. The lonely lives led by many working girls in large towns is responsible for much sex promiscuity. The nature of the varied factors which create the male demand for the services of prostitutes is treated with much insight; this side of the question has been too generally ignored.

A very useful summary of the laws relating to prostitution in various countries is provided, and the reasons for the general failure of attempts at severe repression and of official regulation are analysed. It is stated that much legislation was intended to preserve public health. It is, however, more likely that the original object of the laws was to penalize breaches of public morality.

The book shows evidence of a careful investigation of its subject. It is