

consideration for the ordinary reader, and his new book, amply fortified by illustrations from cases, should prove popular.

WHO ARE THE GUILTY? (Gollancz, 13s. 6d.) is a study by Dr David Abrahamsen of the psychology of criminals, and reflects the contemporary mood of many penal reformers (as well as of psychologists) in limiting the responsibility of offenders owing to their psychopathic or otherwise abnormal personalities. For Dr Abrahamsen, the criminal is a sick man, and he claims (from a considerable experience in America) never to have found a single offender 'who did not show some sign of mental pathology, in his emotions or in his character or in his intelligence'. He supports his opinion with a wide assortment of case histories, and however sceptical the reader may be of Dr Abrahamsen's general diagnosis, his book is at least useful as a readable example of much contemporary writing on criminal psychology.

THE RIGHT VIEW OF MORAL RE-ARMAMENT by Mgr Suenens, Bishop Auxiliary of Malines (Burns Oates, 6s.), is a convenient summary of the movement associated with Dr Buchman and of the reasons why Catholics must regard it with some hesitation. Mgr Suenens' firm assertion of the incompatibility of M.R.A. with the Catholic Church is welcome in so far as it places in proper perspective the argument that Catholics on the Continent are favourable to the movement and that it is only the intransigence of English and American Catholics that makes co-operation impossible.

SOUTHERN FRANCE is the latest volume to appear in the revised edition of the Blue Guides (Benn, 30s.). As usual, here is an exactly ordered survey of the territory, with excellent maps and valuable introductory information on such matters as wines, cookery, transport and language. A region that includes Savoy, Provence, the Rhône valley, Auvergne, Bordeaux, the Pyrenees and Corsica, is rich indeed, and the six hundred pages of this wholly admirable guide convey all the practical (and up-to-date) details that the tourist has a right to expect, as well as an intelligent and mercifully unlyrical description of a profuse countryside and an immensely varied collection of monuments. It is scarcely necessary to commend the Blue Guides, so assured is their authority by this, but *Southern France* must be hailed as a notable addition to a series that is being most welcomingly resurrected.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

[The following condensation of a letter from one who has had first-

hand experience of the drug mescaline, is printed as a commentary on Professor Zaehner's article, 'The Menace of Mescaline', in the July-August issue of *BLACKFRIARS*. It need hardly be said that the opinions expressed are those of our correspondent and not necessarily those of *BLACKFRIARS*.]

'THE MENACE OF MESCALINE'

Dear Sir,

I should like to make some comment on Professor Zaehner's article, 'The Menace of Mescaline', which appeared in the July-August issue of *BLACKFRIARS*. Like Mr Huxley, I offered to act as a guinea-pig for certain investigators, who, in the search for a cure for schizophrenia, wished to study different types of people under mescaline, which, it will be remembered, inhibits the supply of sugar to the brain and induces a temporary schizoid state. Mr Huxley was one type: a learned intellectual. I was quite another: an ordinary woman whose occupation in life is to look after my family. It is perhaps worth adding that I took mescaline before Mr Huxley's book appeared, that I cannot claim to be religious or convinced of survival, that I knew little of religious or mystical literature, and that beforehand I was exceedingly frightened.

My experience was unlike that of Mr Huxley in that my consciousness appeared to leave my body and to travel far, very far, into that transcendent inner world which he expected to visit: while his was mainly, he says, of changes in what he calls the world of objective fact, but which I would rather call the world as mediated to us by our senses. I have the impression, nevertheless, that I shared his *manner* of awareness, stripped of the ego, and that, taking into account the gulf between his intellect and mine, I know what he is talking about. Hence I can perhaps point out one or two quite natural causes of misunderstanding to which Professor Zaehner seems to have succumbed.

It is unfortunate, perhaps, that Mr Huxley did not experience the terrible side of the visions, for, if he had done so, he might not have given his critics ammunition by suggesting that mescaline would be of value to *everyone*. The latest research indicates that the visions vary a good deal with the individual and that the terrible side occurs more often than he suggests. It would seem that only what may be called a 'grown-up' should be allowed to take the drug. But on the evidence, to call mescaline a forbidden drink, to extend its taboo until sainthood is reached, would seem an emotional judgment. Pioneers must surely expect to take some risks.

Did Mr Huxley claim to have achieved the 'Beatific Vision' through mescaline, as Professor Zaehner suggests? He quotes the words 'Beatific Vision . . . Being Awareness-Bliss—for the first time I understood, not on the verbal level, not by inchoate hints or at a distance, but precisely

and completely what those prodigious syllables referred to', removed from their context. But this surely makes it clear that they are quite simply a *description* of how Mr Huxley felt when insane, in a schizoid state. That is how the guinea-pig does feel, staggered by a glory before which the highest man-made words seem ludicrously inadequate. When he writes later on, 'I am not so foolish as to equate what happens under the influence of mescaline . . . with the realization of the end and purpose of human life: Enlightenment, the Beatific Vision', surely it is not, as Professor Zaehner hints, a contradiction. Is not the first a description of his feelings when insane, and the second his opinion in a normal state? Unless this distinction is kept in mind by critics, few can describe their experiences under mescaline without apparent presumption.

Professor Zaehner feels able to classify the type of apparent mystical experience induced by mescaline from Mr Huxley's case alone. Is this possible or even fair? Again, Professor Zaehner deduces from Mr Huxley's description of the effect on the mescaline-taker's will that 'in this state morality and particularly its highest manifestation, which is charity, ceases to have any meaning'. These statements do not seem applicable to my case at least. On the contrary it was one of compassion induced in me by the vision of a celestial all-compassionate Being after a period of intense bliss that I seemed to direct my consciousness towards the terrible side of the schizophrenic's world in the hope of being some help. And terrible it was. At its furthest point I seemed to find 'the lost', unable to communicate, almost beyond despair. I do not think I had ever before felt the *disinterested* compassion I felt then, divested of my own little ego. There was nothing I would not have done to arouse and comfort them. But I *could* do nothing. I perceived—a salutary experience—that I was unworthy. The lasting effect of this vision is that the word 'sacrifice', which had always been a somewhat irritating concept to me, has become of profound significance, even though I do not fully understand it.

After two years, then, the effects of mescaline on this guinea-pig seem to be these. The world remains more significant and I feel more aware of what artists are trying to express. The words 'sacrifice', 'compassion', 'incarnation', 'love' have taken on immeasurably greater significance. I am more conscious of the sheer silliness of my own little ego, though scarcely less, I fear, a slave to it. I see less and less, under correction, how our human language can ever express even the humbler forms of extra-sensory reality except by paradox.

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