

Book Reviews

C. R. SEARLE, *Eugenics and politics in Britain 1900–1914*, Leyden, Noordhof International Publishing, 1976, 8vo, pp. viii, 147, Dfl. 45.00.

Francis Galton (1822–1911) coined the word “eugenics”, which he defined as, “the study of agencies under social control that may improve or impair the racial qualities of future generations either physically or mentally”. Its objective was the increase of the level of human fitness, and obviously the political and social implications, amongst others, were immensely important at the beginning of the present century. Likewise efforts to demonstrate the dominant influence of heredity, rather than environment, on social life and character were also prominent at the turn of the century.

Dr. Searle’s excellent and scholarly study is, therefore, concerned basically with the interaction between biology and social thought and the political repercussions of scientific discoveries. This is an important topic, skilfully handled and presented.

ALAN D. GILBERT, *Religion and society in industrial England. Church, chapel and social change, 1740–1914*, London, Longman, 1976, 8vo, pp. x, 251, £3.50 (paperback).

Another title in the excellent series *Themes in British social history*, this book is a study of the relationships between religion and society from pre-industrial to industrial England. It is based on the statistics of religious practice, and a wealth of original and important data is presented, together with the confirmation of opinions made without them. The legitimate claim is made that it is “the first general historical study to cover the sociology of English religion” in this period, and the first to apply to the topic quantification and simple statistical techniques. The religious trends that the author identifies and traces are kept in their natural context as part of a larger canvas of social change.

Dr. Gilbert’s scholarly book will thus be of importance to the medical historian of the 1740 to 1914 period, who is concerned to find and follow the external factors influencing the growth of medicine, of which religion is one of the more important.

J. MICHAEL PHAYER, *Sexual liberation and religion in nineteenth century Europe*, London, Croom Helm, 1977, 8vo, pp. 176, £7.50.

The author, a social historian, is concerned with the process of secularization of sex, which occurred abruptly about 1800. When the system of controls set up by the community, religion, and superstition were removed, sex became secular. By tracing a variety of local records, he shows that the proletariat were responsible for promoting the new attitude, but at the same time they retained their traditional communal and religious life. This was especially so in France, where the process was a relatively slow one, but one that can be measured by the enthusiasm for a new folk heroine, St. Philomena. In Germany sex behaviour is found to be one of the earliest earmarks of class society, certainly as far as Catholic regions are concerned.

Professor Phayer writes well and has obviously carried out extensive research which he documents in his book. His study is an illuminating one, and, although it will not go uncontested, it does open up new areas of nineteenth-century social development into which no doubt other workers will delve.