

THE FREETHINKER
LONDON, ENGLAND
28 OCTOBER 1934
(pages 685-686)

A Mixed Bag.

Personality: Its Nature, its Operation, and its Development. By J. Louis Orton. (Thorsons: 5s.)

The Cure of Stammering, Stuttering, and Other Functional Speech Disorders. By J. Louis Orton. (Thorsons: 2s. 6d.)

The Fight: the Organ of the League of Socialist Freethinkers. (Nos. 1, 2 and 3. (38, Clerkenwell Green, London, E.C.1. 2d. each.)

Is there a Universe? The Negative Argument. By David; Blair McLachlan. (London; the Golden Vista Press: 2s. 6d.)

Mrs. Annie Besant; a Modern Prophet. By Theodore Besterman. (Kegan Paul: 10s. 6d.)

Mr. Orton is by now doubtless well-known to Free thinkers; he is an original without being a crank. All his work is written from a purely and temperately rationalist standpoint.

As this very original author realizes, abstract psychology is mostly nonsense, as essentially silly as "abstract physiology" would be. Abstract psychology is mere verbiaged metaphysics, a weary legacy from the barren schoolmen who regarded the soul as a supernatural abstraction, and so insisted upon substituting their limited and specialized erudition for common sense.

Mr. Orton is not a schoolman, but a practical healer, whose nice historic sense enables him to be a sound and—what is much rarer—an amusing Rationalist. This writer is less sound, I think, when he writes—in his chapter on yoga, for instance—from mere hearsay and reading; but, as a whole, *Personality* is the best work on practical psychology that I have seen. In one respect, at least, Mr. Orton is almost unique; he is free from superstition, even scientific superstition.

It is a pleasure to recommend *Personality*; as a gift to the voting and enquiring human, it can be suggested! As a gift, entirely without reservation. Get it; read it; give it. I can guarantee the buyer against disappointment.

Mr. Orton's little book on stammering is a needed contribution to the arts of speech-clarity and eloquence. Speech and its modes are so dependent ultimately upon neurology, that the Author is unquestionably right in his insistence that here—as elsewhere—surgery has been almost entirely superseded by psychology. To all voice-trainers, -users, and -healers, this little book is invaluable.

Mr. Orton is at his best when he speaks practically; and here he has full chances.

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To the all-too-thin ranks of Freethought periodicals, *The Fight* is now to be added.

To the Good Communist Atheism, or "Godlessness," is necessarily the ideal, and, where and when practicable, the inter-state religion; very much as certain Anglicans still tend to regard Christianity as "part and parcel of the law of England."

These early numbers are, of course, tentative and experimental ; but they are uncompromisingly hostile to the state-superstitions known as religions. And in this respect they will be welcome to Freethinkers. It must be added, in fairness, that many Freethinkers will demur at accepting wholly the political gospel according to *The Fight*.

This new periodical is written well enough; for among its contributors are the Great Red Hopes, Thomas A. Jackson and A. L. Morton, who are always belligerent and forthright propagandists.

The *Freethinker* is not a political paper; so the hornet's nest shall remain undisturbed by the gentle and impartial reviewer; but, as was affirmed by G. W. Foote, the first virtue is courage, and the second virtue is courage, and the third virtue is courage. By this standard *The Fight* does not betray its title.

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Those possibly-fortunate mortals who, like my unworthy self, love curiosities in print, will be enthralled by Mr. David Blair McLachlan's small but pungent contribution to the Art and Faculty of Metaphysics.

It would be easy to quote from Mr. McLachlan's brochure in order to indulge in a cheap sneer or two. But this would be altogether too cheap a way wherein to treat true transcendentalism.

Here, O brave reader, is a strong Scot who valiantly tries to get to grips with the universe; which is more than most humans ever dream of attempting.

Mr. McLachlan fearlessly arises soaringly into mind-regions whereinto the mere poet-critic finds it all-but-impossible to follow; but that, after all, may be the poet-critic's fault. Not all achievements are possible to us! all. To quote Browning, other heights in other lives, God willing. This is to be understood, if necessary, in a purely Pickwickian sense; so let no ardent heretic admonish me.

There are phrases in Mr. McLachlan's treatise that any good Freethinker will approve. Here is an example:—

Theistic mystical literature is hard to understand. To be joined to God is supposed to excuse any extravagance and obscurity of language.

Mr. McLachlan is an ardent and erudite anti-religionist and anti-clerical. Mysticism is defined, in Hastings' Encyclopaedia, as *Union until God*, "which to me is a senseless expression." It must be, of course, until "God," that elusive (though omnipresent) priestprop, be defined.

The author writes the purest secularism when he affirms:—

Law and order are best left to educated common sense. People can be virtuous without being intellectual cranks. There is nothing more reasonable than morality. No supernatural sanction is necessary. Life is a game of which law and morality are the rules. Immorality is dishonourable play. It is not "cricket."

Here is another sentence, plucked at random: "Ireland has never had a day's peace since it became Christian."

To those Freethinkers who, like myself, find an interest in Celtic Fairylore, Stonehenge, Druidry, and esoteric speculations, this small work will be treasure-trove; but to the orthodox—even the orthodox Freethinker—it will merely be irritating. The writer is an original thinker; he may lie a crank, but his mind is extremely well-oiled.

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For more than one reason the Freethinker will find Mr. Besterman's study of Annie Besant of intense interest. Here is one

of the most changeful human lives ever lived; recorded by a kindly, tolerant, and impartial historian.

Annie Besant was one of the greatest followers that the world has known; her character was a mixture of unoriginality and devotion ; of Inconsistency and courage; she was at once reactionary and pioneer.

Mrs. Besant's later career was foretold with almost uncanny accuracy by the shrewd and downright Foote, when she broke finally with Freethought. ,She never forgave her critic, possibly because, unconsciously to herself, she may have realized—and bitterly realized—his correctness.

Malthusianism, Socialism, Atheism, Freethought, she abandoned; almost suddenly. She became the prey of the doubtfully-wise and omniscience-claiming pundits of the Theosophical Society. Madame Blavatsky, herself a thorough and courageous heretic, was among other things a resolute anticlerical. When she passed-out, Annie Besant, after innumerable scuffles, gained the headship of the Theosophical Society, and soon after that began coquetting with organized religion, and incubating a future "saviour," who did not "come off."

In this tragic and farcical situation there is a photograph of the former sub-editor of the *National Reformer*, surrounded by priests of the Liberal Catholic Church. Annie Besant continued to betray the principles of the Theosophical Society by trying to attach it to "religion."

It is not wonderful that the High. Priestess of Neo-Theosophy should claim the ability to recall her past incarnations for something over seventy thousand years.

Yet—yet—in her day of mind and of strength, Annie Besant did as good work for Progress as was ever accomplished by woman. Remembering this, it is easy to forgive, and even to understand, the lapsing into reaction and supercredulity. In her heyday, Annie Besant was a Freethinker. No Freethinker will fail to enjoy Mr. Besterman's fascinating and modest book, which is a masterpiece in the art of concentrated biography.

Victor B. Neuburg