

The Freethinker

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"IT IS A SAFE ASSUMPTION," admits Dr. John Robinson, Bishop of Woolwich, in *The Honest to God Debate*, "that a best-seller tells one more about the state of the market than the quality of the product".

Last St. Patrick's Day, we were told in *The Observer* that "Our Image of God Must Go" as a preliminary to becoming *Honest to God*, published two days later with an initial print order of 6,000. Like that other book with

which Dr. Robinson's name is associated, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, this paperback has hit the literary jackpot, and already over 350,000 copies have been distributed in the English-speaking

world alone, and translations issued in six European and one Asian languages.

As Herbert McCabe, OP, announced in his review in *Blackfriars*, "the very extent of its popularity should make it compulsory reading for anyone who wishes to understand the religious climate of the day".

In analysing some of the reasons for this vast, and for a theological book unprecedented, popularity, Dr. Robinson admits frankly that it derived more from the way in which the book was presented to the public and the fact that it was written by a bishop than from any intrinsic merit. The title of the *Observer* article, he explains, struck him as "negative and arrogant", but was forced upon him. This, he thinks, engendered much of the hostility roused by the book and prompted the Archbishop of Canterbury to call his official reply *IMAGE old and new*. It is likely, however, that it was not so much the title—which is hardly more journalistic and "arrogant", though perhaps more "negative", than Dr. Robinson's own title *Honest to God*—as the baldness of argument in the article, which sparked off the controversy. For here we had what seemed to many a clear endorsement of the main secularist and atheist arguments "Non-Sense".

When presently we read the book we found that the Bishop had constructed a formidable linguistic filter, heavily fortified with capitals, italics, and quotation marks, to avoid losing the Christian baby with the "mythological" bathwater. All this was done at the expense of clarity, consistency, and—some have said—intellectual honesty. The author of *For Christ's Sake*, a politically heterodox but theologically orthodox Anglican parish priest, the Rev. O. Fielding Clarke, makes the unkind, though justified observation: "A great deal of this book is not heresy, but just 'non-sense'! It is about time someone said so".

Of a book so rich in contradictions and obfuscations, it is very hard to give a summary that its author will not challenge. But he seemed essentially to want anti-theism without atheism, anti-supranaturalism without naturalism, transcendence without transcendentalism, immanence without pantheism, liturgy without ritual, prayer without intercession, Being without a Being, personality without a Person, Love without a Lover, and (turning, as it were, Sir Julian Huxley's formula on its head) revelation without

religion. Presumably he also wanted the Church of England without the Thirty-Nine Articles. "Many observers would say," concedes his publisher, the Rev. David L. Edwards, "that this kind of thinking cannot be honest until it has cut itself off from the historic churches". Others have been blunter. Reviewing the book for the *Sunday Telegraph*, T. E. Utley began: "What should happen to an Anglican bishop who does not believe in

God? This, I hold, is the condition of the Bishop of Woolwich, as revealed in his paperback *Honest to God*, and it raises, I maintain, a question of Church discipline which cannot be shirked without the gravest repercussions on the whole

Anglican Communion . . . What will ultimately be left except a belief in the need for bishops, if only to give evidence in trials about obscenity and to talk to pop singers on television?"

Very wisely the Church of England seems unlikely to follow Mr. Utley's advice. To a book so full of reservations and qualifications it would be extremely hard to make a heresy charge stick and a prosecution of this sort, whether successful or not, is invariably bad publicity for the Church bringing it.

Dr. Robinson's Surprise

Dr. Robinson has expressed himself as surprised as his publishers at the interest aroused by the book. He had expected a somewhat specialised audience. In *The Honest to God Debate* he tells us: "Indeed, my slight treatment of many topics was governed by the fact that I had already written on them extensively and was presupposing a public which, if it had not read these books, could easily do so".

One wonders what this public might have been. Hardly professional theologians; or if so, reading more out of curiosity than compulsion. I do not intend any disrespect to Dr. Robinson, a former Cambridge don and noted New Testament scholar; but even by theological standards *Honest to God* is a pretty poor thing. It makes very little attempt to reconcile apologetics with modern science in the way that Dr. Mascall does. Indeed it implies, as no astronomer or rocket researcher could do *qua* investigator, that the radio-telescope and rocketry have annihilated "a God who is spiritually or metaphysically 'out there'". Such a God must be attacked by the linguistic philosophers. Nor is the Bishop persuasive in the language of traditional theology, which for the most part he chooses to use. He has much to learn here from his professional reviewers, notably Father McCabe, whose criticisms seem, in the light of the acclaim which has been denied their own more intellectually deserving works, most generous.

Status Symbol

The book is largely based on the "tortuosities of the Teutonic theologians", as Mr. Fielding Clarke describes Tillich, Bonhoeffer and Bultmann, and mostly at the level where "one merely regurgitates them". Though a considerable stylist, Dr. Robinson has written a book which, from its aetiology in a convalescent room under

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

"The Honest to God Debate"

By D. H. TRIBE

obvious intellectual and emotional strain, and its sallies into pop prose (God "like a rich aunt in Australia", etc.) has many of the qualities of the potboiler. Yet it does not have the ready intelligibility or clearly defined position of the authentic paperback populariser. Indeed, we are told that the book was not intended as such. For all the book's contradictions and drawing back when on the verge of resolution of his sceptical processes (into a frank atheism, as many observers have noted), its author must, I think, be acquitted of any charge of conscious duplicity. A slick propagandist might voice occasional agnosticisms to put the reader on his side, but would hardly be so embarrassingly frank in his complexities and confusions. Here perhaps is the key to the book's success. Many have read it out of professional necessity; many more out of curiosity. Doubtless many have bought it, like its precursor the Bible, and not read it at all. Nothing succeeds like success. Certain books and automobiles are equally status symbols. But it is likely that the book has succeeded largely because it is so conspicuously a child of its time.

Little in it is really modern. Its "heresies" are as old as Christianity itself. Even the expression of them derives from writings almost a generation old. "Rethinking" (? double-thinking) ancient formularies is a long-established practice of the Church of England. It was in 1866 that *ex animo* consent to the Thirty-Nine Articles was replaced by "general assent". But the whole book has a combination of qualities which is peculiarly contemporary. For the many thousands who have found the book "an answer to a heart-felt need", it is probably a paragon of deep calling unto deep, confusion unto confusion. The curious blend of despair and hope, simplicity and unintelligibility, frankness and seeming disingenuousness, radicalism and reaction, pietism and social commitment, science and scientism reflect those thought processes of a technological bourgeoisie that have aided the growth of Scientology, Subud, the Aetherius Society, Theosophy, Buddhism, Christian Science and Faith Healing.

The Debate Continues

To *The Honest to God Debate* (SCM Press, 6s.) Dr. Robinson contributes a section, "The Debate Continues", "not intended as a comprehensive reply to his critics" but where he "clarifies his position". If possible, this section is more confusing than the original book. Taxed with heresy, he replies in almost Galilean (the mathematician) language, "I have no desire to 'preach any other gospel', nor do I wish to deny anything in the faith which the Creeds enshrine". So he comes to the conclusion:—"Our destiny is to be with him for ever. For some this will be heaven, for some hell—for most a mixture of both. But this does not necessarily mean that God, as almighty Love, is statically content that any of his creatures should live with him for ever and find it hell". Advised by his critics that he had lost the opportunity of adapting Trinitarianism along the "Teutonic" lines, he has come up with the not very hopeful formula: "It is *in* the Spirit (the medium of the New Being) that we come to the Son and through the Son that we come to the Father".

We are as far away as ever from discovering what Jesus really "reveals" to us (save "love", which is at the "depth" of all our being). "What is history and what is myth is often a delicately balanced decision, and will turn on our assessment of the documents in general". Of the Risen Christ, "How the disciples first came to the conviction, how physical or psychological were the appearances, or what precisely happened to the body, are secondary, though important questions". We are, however, promised a new book (? *By Jesus!*).

Dr. Robinson still makes no attempt to face up to the

challenge, which surely someone must have brought to his notice, that if the radio-telescope and rocketry abolish the God "out there", then surely the electron microscope and depth psychology abolish the God "down there".

What general conclusions can we draw from this interesting controversy? Has the Bishop of Woolwich made Christianity seem more relevant to the man in the street? I doubt it. Rather is it likely that he has made it seem less relevant to the man in the pew. Many ordinary churchgoers have, as was to be expected, responded explosively, so that the bishop received a lot of letters from what Mr. Edwards calls "unrestrainedly emotional, uneducated people", unpublished because that might seem to "hold them up to ridicule" (? also prosecution, as obscenity is often next to godliness). After a time many of them may well wonder, like the student in the *For Christ's Sake* Preface, "if the whole thing [Christianity] isn't a gigantic hoax". If not, they may go to Fundamentalism or Rome.

The anti-"religious" anarchism of the Bishop of Woolwich leaves no proper role for the Church at all. The long-term advantages to Freethought are obvious. Even in the short term Secularism should gain a rich harvest. Overnight we find ourselves on the side of the angels. Atheism has become respectable. God has become "this product" (*Private Eye*, October 18th).

More Christian Libels

By H. CUTNER

FROM TIME TO TIME I have received a particularly silly tract on agnosticism. I seem to remember dealing with it in these columns before, and I certainly have no intention of dealing with its ignorant arguments again. Anybody who has heard an evangelist, or who has read anything against Freethought, will know what I mean. I have always felt that the well known proverb—answer a fool according to his folly can never apply to a true Christian. You simply can't invent an argument stupid enough, and the best thing is to let him believe in his angels, devils and miracles.

But of course no true evangelist ever misses a chance of having "a smack" at Voltaire and Paine; and this the author of *Agnosticism* does with gusto. Tract-writers of the nineteenth century did so and their modern successors write of Voltaire or Paine "repenting" on their deathbeds; Voltaire shrieking for the Church and Jesus. Paine yelling for Jesus and brandy. Needless to say, both infidels were also trembling with fright at the idea of frizzling in red-hot furnaces for eternity.

G. W. Foote dealt in his *Infidel Deathbeds* with the impudent lies about Voltaire. In any case, even if Voltaire had recanted, how could this prove Christianity? Voltaire, dying or thinking that he was about to die, might well say anything to get rid of the slimy priests surrounding him. His enormous work as humanitarian, poet, historian, playwright, as well as his vitriolic and contemptuous attacks on Christianity, are his monument.

As for Thomas Paine, finding that there was not a grain of truth in the story of his "recantation", Christians began immediately to invent one—or several. After all, why should they be adjudged sinners when it was all done for the glory of God, as Paul said?

The tract on *Agnosticism*, with a show of learning, gives a book by a Stephen Grellet as an "authority", as if the revered Stephen was not as big a liar as the rest. Get a Christian to send out one dearly beloved lie about Paine, and I defy anybody who loves truth ever to catch

(Concluded on page 364)

Elijah Strikes Oil

By F. A. RIDLEY

WAY BACK in the 19th century, Robert G. Ingersoll published *The Mistakes of Moses*. I regret to say that I have not read this work of the great American Freethinker, but I have no doubt that even then, enough was known of Biblical criticism to enable so perspicacious a critic as Colonel Ingersoll to draw a formidable indictment with the forensic skill for which he was deservedly famous. However, probably the greatest mistake ever committed by Moses still lay effectively concealed beneath the sands of Araby.

For it is indeed a tragic thought that, as the Israelites under Moses's inspired leadership moiled and toiled for forty years in the Arabian wilderness in their long-drawn quest for "the land flowing with milk and honey", subsisting precariously meanwhile on a meagre diet of quails and manna, beneath their feet had they only known it, was oil in fabulous quantities, sufficient probably for them to have cornered the Egyptian corn market and to have bought up Pharaoh and his court into the bargain! Surely Moses's commercial instincts, if not precisely his divine inspiration, must have failed him conspicuously during his forty years' geographical proximity to the vast subterranean deposits of "black gold". Evidently in 1300 BC (or whenever the Exodus took place), the children of Israel had not then evolved that highly-developed commercial sense for which they were later to become world-famous and which Shakespeare (who may never have seen a Jew) was later to satirise in his immortal caricature of Shylock. Surely had Ingersoll lived to witness the discovery and exploitation (chiefly by his own countrymen) of such vast hitherto untapped oil supplies in the Arabian peninsula, he would have added this colossal omission to his already so impressive list of "the mistakes of Moses".

However, and long before modern engineers dug the first oil wells beneath the arid sands of the Arabian wilderness, another man of God, indeed a prophet of the Lord hardly less eminent than Moses himself, did—or so it has come to appear—not only discover but actually utilise the oil deposits that nowadays are to be found in such abundance throughout the Middle East.

We refer to that great prophet, Elijah, celebrated in Jewish rabbinical theology as the god-ordained herald and prototype of the Messiah. In the theology of Judaism, even Moses ranks as scarcely superior to the prophet whom Jehovah eventually transported to Heaven in a fiery chariot, positively—or so we should imagine—the first space ship! There has been in the ignorant past, much controversy as to how in the first millenium before Christ, when the prophet flourished (round about the 9th century BC is the date most usually assigned to him), a fiery chariot, presumably drawn by horses heavier than air, could possibly have survived, let alone travelled, through outer space. However, whilst it may still be premature to say that this particular problem is now solved, a recent discovery has thrown a ray of light upon the prophet's final exit—a ray that if followed up to a successful conclusion, may eventually prove that Elijah's fiery chariot was the first oil-propelled space craft.

For there is now evidence—or at least the hope of evidence—that Elijah, unlike his great predecessor, Moses, did glimpse the presence of oil beneath the adjacent desert. In brief, Elijah was the first oil speculator; if we may use an Americanism for (what is now) an American near-

monopoly, the Daddy of them all.

Under the alluring heading, "Elijah Points the Way to Oil", the *Daily Mail* of October 10th told us that:

Faith in the Bible backed by geological survey, led to a site where drilling for oil started today. Mr. Wesley Hancock of Montana, remembered the story of the contest between Elijah and the Prophets of Baal described in Kings I. He believed that the water Elijah poured three times on the burnt offerings on the altar was really petroleum because it was ignited and consumed.

Mr. Hancock, Christian son of a Jewish mother, today placed twelve placards bearing names of Hebrew tribes in a semi-circle by the rig near Kibbutz Usha in the Zevulun valley in Israel. He then kneeled to pray for success of the venture which represents the investment of £357,000 [His prayers, we imagine, must have been from the heart—or pocket, F.A.R.]

The drill was started by the Israel Development minister, Mr. Yosef Almogi. Mr. Hancock said that if oil was discovered, the profits would go towards bringing Jews to Israel. Evidently in view of the large sum of money involved—and money proverbially talks all languages, presumably including Hebrew—Mr. Hancock must have a good deal of faith in his Biblical predecessor.

What, if anything, lies behind this modern interpretation of the ancient (pre-exilic) Biblical legend? Are we dealing here with a simple myth or with an obviously distorted legend? If a pure myth then neither Elijah nor the prophets of Israel, nor Mr. Hancock's hypothetical oil "that consumed the altar" had any actual existence at all with the unfortunate result (for Mr. Hancock at least), that he will probably lose his money, since no Elijah, no oil.

Personally speaking, I regard such a view as exaggerated and unlikely. My view of the "historicity" of Elijah *et al*, is much the same as was that ascribed to the learned Teutonic professor who, having shut himself up in complete solitude in an ivory tower in order to resolve the vexed question of the authorship of the Homeric poems (approximately contemporary with Elijah), emerged with the penetrating conclusion that "whilst they could not possibly have been written by Homer, yet they were probably written by someone else of the same name". Similarly with regard to Elijah, one can probably assert something on the same lines. We seem to be dealing with a legend and not with a myth, *viz.* there is probably a kernel of historical fact overladen by much obviously mythical accretions. (In his recent masterly work, on the *Trial of Jesus*, I think that Dr. Paul Winter has pretty conclusively demonstrated that the crucifixion story in the Gospels, is in the same category.)

In the Old Testament story there are obviously historical, as well as mythical elements. Prophets of Elijah's type certainly existed in pre-exilic Israel, and one of them may well have borne the very appropriate title (for a prophet of Jehovah) Elijah: *viz.* Jehovah (Yah is good). Moreover there were certainly fierce struggles between the emerging Jehovist cult and its intolerant prophets of this "jealous God" and the "false prophets" of Baal, with corresponding atrocities. All this is heavily underlined in the Old Testament narratives, as also the fact that some Hebrew kings were Jehovists (who "did right in the sight of the Lord") whilst others, who sinned against the Lord were evidently Baal worshippers, like Ahab, an historical character mentioned in the contemporary Assyrian inscriptions.

(Concluded on page 364)

This Believing World

The BBC TV programme "Festival", adapted from James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Stephen D.*, must have come as a shock to Roman Catholic viewers who hadn't read the book—as no doubt to other Christian viewers as well. It was a scathing denunciation of the Roman Church in Ireland, complete with a priest delivering and enjoying a lengthy extract from one of Father Furniss's pamphlets on Hell and the awful agony of babies roasting in Hell-Fire for eternity for not having been baptised by their parents. And it showed "our Lord" as a thorough believer in Hell, for did he not say, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire . . ." (Matt. 25, 41)?

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It should be emphasised that this picture of Jesus is the Biblical one, and does not support the one we get of Jesus "meek and mild" so beloved of Sunday-school teachers and radio parsons generally. Why these people get away with it is simply because so few Christians read their Bible, and so many have never read it. Joyce's contempt, if not hatred, for Roman Catholicism came out splendidly in the play.

★

The Spiritualist journal "Psychic News" chortles with wild joy that Douglas Johnson "triumphed" so marvellously in ITV's *Sunday Break* on October 26th last. He was given a free hand of course, as were Mr. D. H. Tribe (President of the National Secular Society) and Father O'Dwyer; but all we got from Mr. Johnson was that he was a medium and a Spiritualist, that Spiritualism was not a religion, and that he fervently believed in a life after death. He no more produced any evidence for this than did Father O'Dwyer for the Resurrection.

★

We got nothing from Mr. Johnson but a reiteration of his beliefs, and as far as *proving* anything he utterly failed—except, naturally, for *Psychic News* and its readers. The unbelievable twaddle of the "Other World"; that it "exists" in what he called "interpenetrating this world" is a high light from the books of Mr. Arthur Findlay, and has about as much validity as a space ship on its way now to Jupiter. All Mr. Johnson could do in fact was to say that he "experiences" something or other which we can believe or not. We don't.

★

At last we have the final word from Mr. John Deane Potter on "ghosts". He tells us after reading "thousands of letters" (*News of the World*, October 27th), that he "cannot discard the evidence". Well, we may not have read thousands of letters about spooks but we have read many "authentic" and "undisputed" proofs in dozens of books and hundreds of articles, which can best be described as unutterably silly. Even the best are no more worth considering than the story Miss Moberly and Miss Jourdain told of a visit to Versailles where, 100 years afterwards, they saw a garden party fully enacted by Marie Antoinette and her court. The book, *An Adventure*, has since been exposed as a pack of lies. Still, after insisting that he cannot "discard" the evidence, Mr. Potter concludes, "frankly I began sceptical and still remain so".

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MORE CHRISTIAN LIBELS

(Concluded from page 362)

up with it. It has got, not seven-league boots on, but seventy-league boots, and then some.

The latest which caught my eye came from the staid and saintly *Daily Telegraph* dated October 12th. The gallant Peter Simple (whose simplicity so bores me that I hardly ever read him) previously warned everybody against putting up a statue to Paine, but the project "is still going forward". No wonder, he said, that the people of Thetford "are furious" though what he actually meant was that he himself was furious. He actually thought that quoting Dr. George Catlin proved that Paine was a "scoundrel". I don't think Mr. Simple has read a line of Paine's numerous works, or knows anything about his personal life. In Thetford, many people are delighted that a statue to one of the world's great men will soon be unveiled, a statue moreover sculptured by the President of the Royal Academy, Sir Charles Wheeler.

Thomas Paine is of course a world-wide figure, and deserves a place in every encyclopedia in the world, in all the histories of England, as well as histories of English literature. He was, as readers of *The Rights of Man* know, the first practical founder of a welfare state, and advocated old age pensions, universal suffrage, and the abolition of slavery, long before Christians ever thought of them. As far as a great deal of his criticism of the Bible is concerned, the intellectual Christians, striving hard to retain some of the old old religion, have admitted he was right on scores of points. The others—the unintelligent ones—simply do not know what Paine wrote, and their opinions are not worth the proverbial brass farthing. Mr. Simple called Paine an "atheist" which he altered to "deist" under correction. No man who has read *The Age of Reason* could possibly call Thomas Paine an Atheist.

Still I must admit that Mr. Simple was less unkind than was the late Theodore Roosevelt, who managed to get three lies in three words, when he called Paine "a dirty little atheist". Paine was neither dirty, nor little, nor an atheist. So let us honour Mr. Simple for just one falsehood.

Thomas Paine, one of the world's really great men, will probably be libelled many years ahead. But perhaps the good sense of people as people, not Christians, will prevail. And the little town of Thetford become the Mecca of all Paine lovers.

ELIJAH STRIKES OIL (Concluded from page 363)

I conclude, accordingly, that Elijah may have existed, and that he may have overcome the priests of Baal. But with the aid of oil? We shall follow Mr. Hancock's drilling operations with a more than technical interest.

One conclusion emerges clearly; if no oil eventuates from Mr. Hancock's researches, then Elijah's oil, if not Elijah himself, can be relegated to the mythical domain. But should "black gold" be found, there would be at least a plausible basis for the Hancock hypothesis. A percipient German general once remarked that the world only contained three really well-organised institutions: the (then) German General Staff, the Standard Oil Company, and the Roman Catholic Church.

Upon the tomb of the great chemist, Robert Boyle, were written the immortal words: "Here lies Robert Boyle, first cousin of the Earl of Cork and the Father of English Chemistry". We suggest to Mr. Hancock that in the event of his striking oil in Israel, he raise a monument inscribed: "Elijah: a prophet of God and godfather of Standard Oil".

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Lecture Notices, Etc.**OUTDOOR**

Edinburgh Branch NSS (The Mound).—Sunday afternoon and evening: MESSRS. CRONAN, MCRAE and MURRAY.
London Branches—Kingston, Marble Arch, North London: (Marble Arch), Sundays, from 4 p.m.: MESSRS. L. EBURY, J. W. BARKER, C. E. WOOD, D. H. TRIBE, J. A. MILLAR.
(Tower Hill). Every Thursday, 12—2 p.m.: MESSRS. J. W. BARKER and L. EBURY.
Manchester Branch NSS (Car Park, Victoria Street,) Sunday Evenings.
Merseyside Branch NSS (Pierhead).—Meetings: Wednesdays, 1 p.m.: Sundays, 7.30 p.m.
North London Branch NSS (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Every Sunday, noon: L. EBURY.
Nottingham Branch NSS (Old Market Square), every Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

INDOOR

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Tuesday, November 19th, 7.30 p.m.: H. J. BLACKHAM, "Objections to Humanism".
Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, November 17th, 6.30 p.m.: D. S. WRIGHT (Department of Psychology, Leicester University), "Psychology and Religion".
Manchester Branch NSS (Wheatshaf Hotel, High Street), Sunday, November 17th, 7.30 p.m.: W. COLLINS, "From Greenland's Icy Mountains".
Marble Arch Branch NSS (The Carpenter's Arms, Seymour Place, London, W.1), Sunday, November 17th, 7.30 p.m.: ANTONY GREY (Secretary, The Homosexual Law Reform Society), "Towards a Sexually Sane Society".
South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday, November 17th, 11 a.m.: V. V. ALEXANDER, "India as a Secular State".

Notes and News

ON SUNDAY, November 17th, the BBC television programme, *Meeting Point*, will be devoted to a discussion of the book, *Objections to Humanism*, edited by H. J. Blackham, Director of the British Humanist Association, and published by Constable at 16s. Besides Mr. Blackham, those taking part will be Antony Quinton, New College, Oxford; H. A. Williams, Dean of Trinity College, Cambridge; and Professor H. D. Lewis of King's College, London. The Chairman will be Norman Fisher.

TODAY'S sixth-formers want to learn about other religions as well as Christianity. This was the decision of a group of 30 who attended a weekend conference organised by the Ockenden Venture, better known for its work in caring for refugee children from Germany. "One sixth-former was convinced that religious teaching was propaganda rather than help" (*The Times Educational Supplement*, 11/11/63), and another "had considerable support" when he said that sixth-formers should be informed about "a number of religions, and agnosticism and atheism, so that they were better equipped to choose for themselves".

THE SAME issue of *The Times Educational Supplement* (11/11/63) contained a review of the Aldwych Theatre pro-

duction of *The Representative*, which contrasted the second performance (no technical hitches, no acting uncertainty) with "that described in the morning papers". Whatever *The Representative's* deficiencies as dramatic literature, said the *TES*, "there is no denying the immensity of its power: a dull prose power, to be sure, but stunning in its impact . . .". Strange, though, that the reviewer should notice especially "the terrible *Godless* emptiness at the heart of the vast annihilation machine" at Auschwitz. What Auschwitz—and Nazism—lacked was humanity. And the same applied to the Vatican. No one could call Pius XII godless, but he was no humanitarian either. He was, in fact, a cold, calculating politician with distinctly fascist leanings.

★

WHATEVER OUR criticisms of Anglican bishops, we have to admit that they have a good recent record against apartheid in South Africa. Dr. Ambrose Reeves, then Bishop of Johannesburg, was deported three years ago, and his successor, the Right Rev. Leslie Stradling, was recently warned by the South African Foreign Minister, Mr. Eric Louw, "to remember what happened to Bishop Reeves". Mr. Louw also referred to the resignation through ill-health of Dr. Joost de Blank, the Archbishop of Capetown, suggesting that the Archbishop "did well to find a reason for not returning to South Africa. He realised that his political excursions were making him unpopular also in Anglican circles". The bishops should confine their attention to "the spiritual care of the members of their Church", Mr. Louw said, and they "would be surprised how many thousands of their Church members support the [South African] Government's policy".

★

CANON John Pearce-Higgins, Vice-Provost of Southwark Cathedral, is also Vice-Chairman of the Churches' Fellowship for Psychological and Spiritual Studies, and concerned about the lack of interest in psychical research. The Church's thinkers have in the main, the Canon said, "accepted the findings of modern science with its almost completely materialistic and deterministic explanation of the phenomena and have therefore done their best to fit their theology into the mould of science" (*The Guardian*, 4/11/63). And he regarded this as disastrous. Nearly two-thirds of the English people either positively disbelieved in survival or at least were doubtful about it, according to mass observation studies, and even among church people something like 40 per cent were not really sure whether they survived death. The Canon was speaking in Southwark Cathedral on November 3rd.

★

PREACHING IN St. Paul's on the same day, Labour Party Chairman Anthony Greenwood laid down six main requirements for "bringing Britain close to being a Christian country". It was not sufficient, he said, to have an Established Church and carols in department stores (*Daily Mirror*, 4/11/63). In fact, belief in God didn't seem to enter Mr. Greenwood's reckoning. He was far more concerned with freedom and fair shares for all. And so are we.

★

PENDENNIS OF *The Observer* rather belatedly discovered (3/11/63) that Nobel Prize Winner Dr. Francis Crick, FRS, was responsible for the Cambridge £100 prize competition essay on "What shall we do with the College Chapels?" The fact had been known in Humanist circles for some time, and had not been kept particularly secret. Dr. Crick, it will be remembered resigned his fellowship at the new Churchill College when a chapel was proposed, rightly considering it an anachronism.

Monotheism and Science

By EDWARD ROUX

CANON A. F. SMETHURST, in *Modern Science and Christian Beliefs*, put forward the view that science can only arise (or did in fact only arise) in the midst of civilisations which had adopted monotheism. From this premiss, which seems to me to have a certain amount of historical foundation, he comes to the conclusion that the God postulated by the Christians does in fact exist. The historical evidence is in fact not quite as clear as he would like it to be, but does take us part way. It has puzzled some historians why the civilisations of India and particularly of China, which were so advanced in many ways, should not have discovered the philosophy and techniques of experimental science.

Smethurst argues that a people that accepts polytheism must regard the universe as inhabited by arbitrary and conflicting powers. The universe therefore does not possess that orderliness which makes it amenable to the kind of systematic investigation which is science. One can therefore understand why scientists did not arise in India with its amazing complexity of gods and religions. China presents a rather different picture which Smethurst does not discuss. Confucianism, the official if not the most popular "religion" of China is not antagonistic to the concept of an ordered world. The Chinese did in fact make outstanding contributions to technology (magnets, compasses, astrolabes, spectacles, gunpowder, printing, to name a few) but failed to systematise their knowledge into a coherent system of "finding out", which is what science is. The reasons for this failure are obscure.

My own view is that the key to the unique development of Western science lies in our Grecian heritage which came to us partly through the Arabs. In the history of human thought we find that the Greeks produced something new. This was because a form of speculative thinking arose which was divorced from religion and the control of a totalitarian church and priesthood. Smethurst admits that the Greeks were polytheists, but he argues that Aristotle, whom he regards as one of the founders of scientific thought, had come to believe in a single divine mind or first cause.

Are we not concerned with two consequences of the same basic development which Smethurst confuses as cause and effect? Granted freedom to discuss and speculate, intelligent thinkers would discover the orderliness of the universe. Some, like Democritus and Lucretius, were led by this to an attitude similar to that of modern scientific agnosticism. Others more mystically inclined, like Plato, were led to some kind of monotheism. This does not show that monotheism is necessary to science. It may show that the two may be compatible under certain circumstances.

On the other hand one can quote examples of monotheistic religions which, because they were totalitarian, hindered the advance of science. One looks in vain in the Hebrew and Christian Bible for that free and open dialectic form of reasoning in which the Greeks delighted. There are some indications in the book of Job and in Ecclesiastes of an incipient scepticism which glimmers through the heavy editing of orthodox transcribers. Even so, those few parts of the Bible which have this character are usually said to exhibit Greek influence.

In spite of monotheism, Christianity in the Middle Ages produced no science and there are many examples of how scientific speculation was later suppressed (Copernicus,

Bruno, Galileo, the prohibition of the dissection of bodies). It was the Renaissance (the rediscovery of Greek learning) which made scientific development possible, and this was accompanied by the dismemberment and weakening of the Catholic Church.

Whatever conclusions we may draw as to the historical connections of monotheism and science, we can agree that both systems postulate an ordered universe.

However the point is worth making that the universe of the scientist is more ordered than the universe of some theists, particularly those who are known as Christians. The Christian order, unlike the scientific order, can be temporarily disordered by the will of God. Thus the Christian accepts revelations, miracles, survival of the soul, resurrections, and the efficacy of prayer, as deviations from the normalcy of nature.

Assuming that there is a God, that he is intelligent and that he made the world, there is no logical reason that he should not occasionally interfere in the systems he has created in order to make adjustments or carry out experiments, assuming that this would interest him. It seems unlikely that he would produce obscure bits of legerdemain, as described in the Bible, in order to convince men of his existence. An intelligent God would probably think up more intelligent ways of doing this.

If the world was created by a supreme, intelligent being we can still get no idea as to why he or it produced the particular kind of world we have. What was he out to achieve, and how far has he achieved it? Did he in fact know how the world would evolve or was it in the nature of an experiment the outcome of which he has still to discover? Is man the main object of his creative endeavours or simply a rather unpleasant by-product?

It is really not much use asking these questions, because we have no sure evidence in the first place that a supreme being exists. Theologians may answer them in detail and at great length, but in different and contradictory ways, depending on the particular faiths they have adopted. The existence of all these faiths and beliefs is no evidence that what is believed in really exists. It is evidence only of man's desire to believe.

[Reprinted from *The Rationalist*, South Africa, September, 1963.]

Denis Diderot

By C. BRADLAUGH BONNER

TWO CENTURIES and a half have passed since the great editor of the *Encyclopédie* was born at Langres in the east of France. Based on the English *Cyclopaedia* of Chambers, it was authorised by the Chancellor D'Aguesseau to the publisher Le Breton, who engaged Diderot as editor; and the latter went to D'Alembert for the scientific mathematical parts. Diderot had been a pupil of Jesuits and D'Alembert of Jansenists. Though educated in rival sectarianism, they were both freethinkers. They gathered round them a remarkable band of contributors, such as Montesquieu, Buffon, Turgot, Rousseau; scarcely a name famous in science or literature at the time is missing. And despite the violent attacks by the Jesuits, the influence of the *Encyclopédie* was tremendous.

What manner of man was Diderot, the moving spirit? Son of a cutler, for whom he had a deep affection, Denis, when the time came to earn his living, would be neither a lawyer nor a doctor as his father wished, nor a

priest, but a man of letters. Two hundred years ago, the pen was a very weak reed with which to earn daily bread. Diderot's *Philosophical Thoughts*, which he published in 1746, show that he was not choosing an easy path as a couple of quotations will demonstrate.

What voices! What cries! What groans! . . . Who condemns them to such torment? *The God they have offended.* Who then is this god? *A god full of goodness.* Would a god full of goodness take a delight in bathing himself in tears? . . . the most upright soul would be tempted to wish such a being did not exist.

What is God? a question that we put to children, and that philosophers have much trouble in answering. We know the age at which children should learn to sing, to read, to dance, to begin Latin or geometry, it is only in religion that no account is taken of his capacity. He is scarcely capable of understanding what you say before he is asked, "What is God?" At the same time, from the same lips he hears of ghosts, goblins, were-wolves—and of god.

The reader will not be surprised to learn that he spent a period in prison for his writings; but he will probably be astonished when he learns why. One bright summer morning, a police officer accompanied by three myrmidons came to Diderot's house with a warrant for his arrest. Diderot, telling his wife not to expect him back for dinner, stepped into the police carriage and was driven off to the prison of Vincennes. There he learned that for a slighting remark in his *Letter on the Blind for the Use of Those that See* on a certain Mme. Dupré de Saint Maur he was condemned to jail, from which he was transferred to more pleasant quarters through the agency of Voltaire, and released after three months of captivity. Such was the France of the time.

It has been said of the Encyclopedists (by Faguet) that they wished (1) to change the heart of France; (2) to direct French thought to rational, scientific and practical considerations; (3) denounce the imperfections of French government; (4) destroy the Christian religion; but (5) to change nothing in the form of government, save perhaps to render the royal authority even more despotic. Yet it was in part the influence of the *Encyclopedia* which brought about the fall of the monarchy and finally the establishment of the republic.

All the same individual authors among the Encyclopedists were much indebted to individual monarchs, Diderot was one. In 1759 the licence permitting the publication of the *Encyclopedia* was revoked.

D'Alembert and Rousseau left Diderot to complete the great work at his own risk; and he did that by 1765, thanks to the protection of Malessherbes. The booksellers had made their fortunes out of it, but not Diderot, who was obliged to sell his library; which he did to the Empress Catherine of Russia, who bought it for 15,000 francs on the condition that Diderot looked after it as librarian in his own home with a salary of 1,000 francs per annum. Eight years later he paid a visit to the Empress, who received him with honour. In 1784 when Diderot was dying, Catherine, at the request of Frédéric-Melchior Grimm, had Diderot transferred from the garret where he had dwelt for thirty years to a fine apartment in a fine street. There he passed the last fortnight of his life, doing all he could to cheer the people around him; every evening taking a lively part in the conversation of the many friends who visited him. At the last of these little gatherings, so his daughter reports, he declared "the first step towards philosophy is incredulity".

On the evening of July 30th, 1784, he remained at table at the end of the meal. His wife asked him a question, receiving no reply, she looked at him and saw that he was dead. As he himself wrote: "All is annihilated, perishes, passes away. It is only the world that remains; only time

that endures. I walk between two eternities. To whatever side I turn my eyes, the objects which surround me tell of an end, and teach me resignation" (translation in Morley's *Diderot*).

Those who have not already read *The Nephew of Rameau, La Religieuse, Le Voyage à Bourbonne*, will find in them different aspects of Diderot's genius. John Morley's *Diderot and the Encyclopedists* is a masterly and fascinating study.

Points from New Books

By OSWELL BLAKESTON

EVEN IF Leslie Hedge's new novel, *After The Flesh* (Hamish Hamilton, 16s.), had another theme, Mr. Hedge would remain a novelist we should all read. He has such admirably sensible things to say about modern topics which condition modern ethics. For instance he describes an old man watching TV as an ancient spider watching a succession of flies—running flies, jumping flies, motor-cycling flies, horse-racing flies. How could "the telly" be put in its place more neatly?

As it happens, Mr. Hedge's novel has a theme of particular relevance to free-thinkers. The "I" of the book, Father Hugh Alderton, took a vow of celibacy when he was in an Anglo-Catholic seminary. Two other students shared the solemn promise, for the ardent boys were determined to become the corpse-women (dead to the world and feminine to the godhead) who gave original sanction to the cassock. One of the three drifts to Rome, but Peter Randall and Alderton are ordained in the Church of England.

The reader is plunged into the unharmonious mingling of sacred and secular which makes the life of an Anglican curate. There is a plot at Alderton's church to buy a monstrance—the school children call it "the monstrous fund"—and introduce benediction and the talk between the young curates about "the mystery" of benediction is as jolly as chat about golf. Randall is envious. "Benediction," he cried rapturously, "You lucky devil. We shall never get benediction here; we're too near our right reverend father in God for luxuries like that". And what spiritual orgies the novice clerics have with their vestments ("music and incense sends me"), and how "in touch" one feels because one can exchange pleasantries with a pretty parishioner and be asked to keep a little secret "under your biretta". In fact Alderton's only sorrow seems to be that his vicar will not let him marry the rich parishioners, although in winter the curate is allowed to bury in the cold graveyard the influential whom he would never have been allowed to marry.

Then comes the bombshell. Father Alderton gets a letter from Father Randall: Randall is going to break his vow and take to himself a wife. Alderton is thrown into dire confusion. Can the lusts of the flesh really be so potent? His emotional crucible boils over, and very soon Alderton is sharing the bed of a school mistress. Even if this means being unfrocked, he unfrocks the girl first.

Actually, it is for him the beginning of a shattering revelation that his mortifications have been the rationalisation of fears. He sees the wife of a vicar in a neighbouring parish burst into tears when she is informed that the Lambeth Conference is about to put a seal of approval on family planning. She sobs: "Who do they think they are—for years saying you mustn't, then suddenly saying one can? Does that mean it would have been all right all

along? Is it retrospective? Can we smother the brats we wouldn't have had if we'd known?"

Alderton, between bouts of his own temptations which include seduction by an old woman with breasts like a couple of ancient offertory bags, has to face even more searching questions. His vicar refuses to remarry a divorced woman and wrecks the happiness of two good people. Why is it, he is asked, "that Christians are ready to believe that God goes around monkeying with the laws of nature—that's what miracles amount to, isn't it?—yet they'll never consider he might suspend the moral law in appropriate cases?"

By becoming a human being, Alderton finds his answers and the strength to say boo to a bishop and denounce laws as excuses for one set of people to exert power over others. Simultaneously, Alderton wrecks his comfortable future, for he has no training to fit him to deal with the world as a layman; and yet he has learnt how, in moments of inspiration in bed and when in conflict with the self-righteous, to fight the good fight.

Meanwhile Randall moves from smug strength to strength through compromise. His wife helps him to get a living in a church where he may have to wear "a Sarum nightshirt" and forget about benediction. But some sacrifices have to be made to satisfy legitimate ambition?

The whole story is told with great sincerity, and one really experiences the gut-grinding of Alderton's conscience. Most freethinkers will congratulate themselves that they have not been forced to win freedom in the same terrible school of endurance, but all will be moved by Leslie Hedge's skill. Who will ever forget the scene when Alderton buys contraceptives and finds in the packet a reprint of the message from the bishops about family planning?

The "Daily Herald" and M R A

"THE MEN and women of Moral Re-Armament burn with sincerity. They do good as they see it. But I believe they achieve much more harm than good". So concluded Myles Hall in his three-part investigation into MRA (*Daily Herald*, October 28th, 29th and 30th). Mr. Hall touched on MRA's fantastic claims—and convenient forgetfulness. "If MRA members ever stopped to *think*", he said, "they would realise what their efforts really add up to. But they don't". Before an MRA "force" moves into a trouble spot, there is no analysis of the problems to be faced. "The aim is to bring peace—however uncertain and however phoney". Argument and reason become "irrelevant", implying "doubt of God's latest instructions". It is, said Mr. Hall, "all so persuasively simple—and dangerous".

Among the many protesting letters that poured into the *Daily Herald* from Moral Re-Armers, was one from a collection of Labour aldermen and councillors (printed on November 4th) who had been on the platform with Frank Buchman when he launched MRA in East London in 1938. And, in typical fashion, they listed other "national trade union and Labour Party leaders" who had helped with the launching. Among them was Herbert H. Elvin, TUC Chairman 1937-38. Two days later the following letter appeared over the name of Geo. H. Elvin:

It is typical of Moral Re-Armament to mention well-known names, but they excelled themselves (Letters, Monday) by mentioning names none of whom can answer for themselves.

It is completely untrue to say that my father, Herbert Elvin, helped to launch the movement in East London. He was associated with them for a while, but left because of general disillusionment and because the movement failed to publish the sources of their income.

CORRESPONDENCE

BIG BUSINESS GOES STAR-GAZING

I should never have thought it possible that a man of Mr. F. A. Ridley's experience could write "Big Business Goes Star-Gazing" (November 1st). Does Mr. Ridley seriously believe that more than a tiny fraction of capitalists consult the stars before floating a company, making a takeover bid, buying or selling shares, etc.? If he does, on the strength of an article in *Tit-Bits*, then I must have greatly overestimated Mr. Ridley's sagacity.

I might just add one more question. What connection has graphology with astrology? The handwriting experts who, Mr. Ridley tells us, are consulted by the capitalists of Hamburg, are unlikely in turn to consult the stars.

STANLEY DREW.

NATURE CURE

With reference to the quote from the *Daily Express* (16/10/63) in Notes and News (1/11/63) five cases of "spontaneous cure" of cancer;—surely the most likely explanation of this would be that the people concerned had either been treated by a Nature-path or had treated themselves on Nature Cure lines, either intentionally or accidentally.

Fasting and dieting are known by intelligent people to be nature's own methods of healing and no doubt this was why "prayer and fasting" were recommended in the Bible. Fasting did the cure and prayer got the credit.

I have been cured of quite a number of ailments myself by this means and am a firm believer in the philosophy of a Nature Cure.

Was it Hippocrates who said, Man is what he eats and drinks, what he breathes and what he thinks?

Whoever said it, it's true.

R. GLASSBORAN.

[Mr. Glassboran strikes us a little too glib, and he makes the mistake of hypostatizing "nature" and crediting it with its "own methods of healing". Intelligent people may be aware that fasting and dieting have value, but would be rash to recommend them as cancer cures. The quoted cases seemed to involve natural cures, whether they were "nature cures" remains to be seen.—ED.]

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