

THE DRAMA OF ATHEIST HUMANISM. By Henri de Lubac, S.J. Translated by Edith M. Riley. (Sheed & Ward; 15s.)

There is nothing new that a great theologian can do for us. It has all been done before; in the Scriptures, in the Fathers, in the growing life of the Church. What he can do is to let us see ourselves face to face, just as we are, in the light of that revealed truth which Almighty God has set like a candle on a candlestick. This Père Lubac burns, always, to accomplish. For, although, on the face of it, this volume is a descriptive commentary, a scholarly interpretation through their own words of the figures concerned, its intention is that 'in the present state of the world Christianity must become heroic Christianity'. Nietzsche and Auguste Comte made a breach in the tradition of atheism. They were not scoffing at the puerility of the believer; they were rejoicing at the 'death of God' which was about to come to pass; at the kingdom of Man' which should soon be. For Man had come far despite his slavery to 'trustfulness, ingenuousness, simplicity, patience, love for one's neighbour, resignation, submission to God, a sort of disarming and repudiation of one's own ego'. (Nietzsche). The 'morbid beauty and feminine seduction' of this ideal, while its reign was never complete, had flattered 'all that is vain and craven in weary souls—and even the strongest have their hours of weariness'. The freedom which such a recognition seems to give to man, the power of myths to grant us release from the restrictions of Christian bookworms, and to let us flow with the blind but dynamic forces of nature, these are the chances which neo-paganism offers. Against them, says the writer, we propose the religion we practise: 'a religion of ceremonies and observances, of ornaments and trivial solaces, with no depth of seriousness, no real hold upon human activities—sometimes with no sincerity either'. Twenty centuries ago the people we are would have rejected 'the Glad Tidings as a disturbing innovation'. Impatience of criticism, incapacity for any reform, fear of intelligence, are the same marks among the 'most practising'.

'Lord, if the world is seduced by so much enchantment, if there is such an aggressive return of paganism today, it is because we have let the salt of thy doctrine lose its flavour'. It is because that synthetic salt is fit for nothing that Père de Lubac went outside a nineteenth-century Church, where, in individuals he would have found plenty of savour, to a wilful son of Orthodoxy—Dostoevsky. Here is an independent judgment, far away from our world of conventions: he was alive to the glamour of evil'. Like Nietzsche he had rebelled against idealism and morality—'Genevese ideas'—but where the former hymned the praises of the future to result from the denial of God the novelist looked at results in the present and saw, with horror, bankruptcy. Then in the nothingness of Siberia, with the trappings of urbanity removed, Dostoevsky found the Gospel. His was a tempestuous discovery; but none of the storms could hide from him that there was no answer to this problem of

evil he had unearthed. Only he knew with all his being that Christ 'took evil upon his own shoulders to deliver us from it'.

And so the gloom of his work is pervaded by a hymn of hope. His vigorous realism, the truth that shocks, bears no resemblance to positivist truth. For his power is that, immersed in this life, he could not help being 'the prophet of the other life'.

The translator has made a clear, economical and vigorous job of her work, and the force of the French is not too much weakened by latinised English. The total conception I have laid out above; but the penetrating observations, the sincerity and good will of the study can only come out in the careful reading of a fine work.

PAUL OLSEN.

CAN PARLIAMENT SURVIVE? By Christopher Hollis, M.P. (Hollis & Carter; 9s.)

Christopher Hollis has written, as one might expect, a book that is both informative and entertaining. His brief historical summary and analysis of the English party system are excellent, enlivened with that undercurrent of irony of which he is a master, and valuable so far as they go. But it is not the book that was needed at this juncture.

The last sentence of his penultimate chapter reads: 'It (capitalism) can be transformed peaceably into the greater freedom of a distributist philosophy'. And the final sentence of the book summarises the task of this generation of Englishmen, who 'must therefore find a way of giving the worker in the industrial system, in which so many millions of men and women must inevitably live their lives, a way of freedom and responsibility. These are the conditions of liberty and our survival'. But surely it was the task of a Christian political writer to *begin* with those sentences, which have been endlessly repeated by Catholic writers and speakers for many years, and show us the way to achieve those conditions.

There is another sentence to which I would call attention: 'If the price-level is kept stable, then the power of the moneyed interest must inevitably be broken'. That is not in this book: it was written by the same author some fifteen years ago in *The Two Nations*. If the man who voted against the American Loan could have developed these two themes we might well have had the book of the century. As it is we have a skilful defence of the Conservative Party, and the apparently final acceptance of managerial omnipotence and the permanence of big units, both highly debatable propositions. As a matter of fact none of Burnham's prophesies about the onset of the managerial state has come to pass and there is no evidence that the heads of the coal, railway, and other nationalised boards are anything but subservient stooges of the ministers.

It is curious that Mr Hollis, who presumably subscribes to the doctrine of the subsidiary function, should say that 'there is no solution in devolution', and should only have a centralising solution