

THE CORRESPONDENCE OF LORD ACTON AND RICHARD SIMPSON,
Volume III, edited by Josef L. Altholz, Damian McElrath and James C. Holland.
Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1975. 369 pp. £14.

This is the third and final volume of the letters which passed between Sir John Acton (Lord Acton halfway through) and Richard Simpson, the proprietors and editors of the *Home and Foreign Review*, the quarterly successor of the *Rambler*. It confirms my opinion that the publication of the whole of this correspondence was unnecessary, though it will no doubt be useful to experts on the period. The most interesting letters should have been selected and printed entire, thus disposing of the editors' bugbear about Cardinal Gasquet's omissions and alterations, and this would have made a volume which might have been paperbacked for students and others. For the truth is that the majority of the letters do not illuminate the characters of their authors or the Victorian scene. Most of them are to-and-fro editorial worries over contributions, proofs, printers and costs, with bibliographical queries and answers which demonstrate Acton's extensive learning and knowledge of the archives of Europe, but do not add to ours. Nor are the difficulties of finding jobs for deserving convert clergymen in the British Museum and elsewhere of riveting interest a century later.

There are only two or three letters on the decision to end the review, as a result of the papal brief addressed

to the Munich Congress at the end of 1863, and Acton appears to have been glad enough to make an end, partly because the paper was no longer selling well and partly because Simpson and Wetherell, the assistant (paid) editor, could not agree. Simpson felt the loss most, but his health was not good and he was able to give more time to his Shakespearean studies. Acton's occasional remarks on Roman and English politics do not add anything to his published articles and there is very little from the crucial year of the first Vatican Council, though quite an exchange after Acton had published a letter in *The Times* and come into collision with Manning, in the controversy about the civil allegiance of Catholics which culminated in Gladstone's pamphlet of 1874 and Newman's celebrated reply, the *Letter to the Duke of Norfolk*, which is barely referred to here. Just because Acton and Simpson knew each other's views so well their comments on current events are scrappy and allusive, though Simpson is often amusing on the Ultramontanes—Coffin, he says, is a good *foolometer* to Manning's views. The modern editors elucidate every reference with great industry and, as far as I can judge, accuracy.

MERIEL TREVOR

DURKHEIM ON RELIGION: A Selection of Readings with Bibliographies, edited by W. S. F. Pickering. *Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1975. 376 pp. £6.95.*

Durkheim is well established in the sociological pantheon. As such he is a frequent victim of the quick summary, and his views on religion are peculiarly susceptible to this treatment. Religion for Durkheim, so a thousand notebooks must run, is the product of society. It expresses the way men first made sense of their world, or (more exactly) the way men actually *made* their world. It's a kind of primal act: the common existence that makes society also makes religion. When men come together—in particular in ceremonial assemblies—an emotional effervescence is generated and, since this is experienced as overpowering and external, it gives rise to the notion of the sacred. This

in its turn evokes the collective ideals and the respect for them that bind society together. It is in this function of integrating society that the nature and origin of religion is to be found. Religious symbols turn out to be at the same time symbols of society and when people worship the gods they are really worshipping society. In the famous phrase, God is society.

So the introductions and the critiques often go, and it hardly seems to matter if the summary is crude. One can now move on to what the next founding father of sociology has to say about religion.

William Pickering, thinking otherwise, provides the materials to be more thorough. Jacqueline Redding

and he have translated from the French a number of articles and reviews Durkheim wrote between 1886 and his death in 1917, as well as a chapter of his *Suicide* and some 60 pages of *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, first published in 1912. This last must have been a difficult decision, for the English version of the book is (like *Suicide*) still in print, but the collection would have been unbalanced without some extract from it and much is gained by the clarity and directness of this new translation.

When a book survives to become a classic, as *The Elementary Forms* has done, it can become dislocated from its context and the arguments of which it formed part. This is remedied here by the inclusion of some contemporary reviews (those of van Gennep, Goldenweiser, and Richard—reviews which are critical, not eulogistic) and Stanner's recent demonstration that Durkheim's absolute separation of sacred and secular is untenable. The collection is completed by bibliographies, a comprehensive index, and abstracts of Durkheim's other writings having a bearing on religion. Occasional footnotes link the various pieces, and the book itself is extremely well produced.

However thoroughly the subtleties of Durkheim's thought on religion are examined, he is in one sense firmly among those who count religion as illusory. For him what is real about religion is the energy that is generated by religion itself (i.e. ultimately by society) and which the individual experiences as strengthening. The religion can, however, become inadequate if the moral code it evokes becomes inappropriate to its society, as happens when the society changes but the religion does not. All this is hardly the way the believer sees religion, but his view is irrelevant to Durkheim's interpretation—the believer's interpretation is regarded as an illusion. This position little vitiates Durkheim's contribution to our understanding of the way religion is moulded by society, but his general disregard for what the participants understand to be going on is a serious neglect and he has been much criticised for this reductionism.

It is always intriguing when a long forgotten *savant* reappears. Dr Pickering produces Gaston Richard, a contemporary and one-time colleague of Durkheim who withdrew from the

orthodoxy Durkheim was able to impose on French sociology and whose career and influence were in consequence somewhat restricted. He is represented here by a long review of Durkheim on religion and a note by Pickering on his own work. According to Richard, Durkheim turned French sociology of religion down an arid and retrogressive channel. He had neglected the individual, despite the fact that the most profound religious experience was found in solitude before the Absolute. (Richard was a man of his time too.) Because it was established, his general theory was going to steamroll on; the illogicalities involved in encompassing all religion without noticing its variety would be unquestioned. Moreover, looked at from the outside as it were, Durkheim's approach was simply the working out of a previously held philosophical position that religion must be the invention of man. In other words Durkheim was no longer doing sociology but a sort of voracious metaphysics—he was not regarding sociology as one among a number of autonomous forms of explanation, but the only form of explanation.

That argument is over. (So Richard may turn out to be no more than a trenchant critic of Durkheim.) All disciplines have become more circumspect, the functionalist orthodoxy is long since broken, and the necessity to incorporate the way people see their situation is well established. In the end, though, solely pursuing people's perceptions of their situation can be just as restricting as solely considering the function of what is being examined, and realisation of this has led to a return to the theories (and indeed the passing ideas) of the early sociologists. This book and a number of other recent studies of Durkheim are perhaps part of this process.

The early sociologists were bothered by the same things as we are. Durkheim was basically concerned with the changes that had taken place in society, and which were very evident at the end of the 19th century. His analysis of the way religion works really had to do with his analysis of the 'traditional' society, with its communal flavour, that was disappearing in the West. This is the irony (and the ambiguity) of his position. He argued that the individualism which was now characteristic of society had been

developing from the beginning, but received decisive impetus from the events that made 'modern' society. He reckoned, on the one hand, that Christianity, in providing an individual ethic, was involved in this. But, on the other hand, Christianity, as a traditional religion, was not appropriate to the new situation that had thus been created. Christianity was illusory because our aspirations were no longer met by these old ideals and old gods. Yet it remained one of his presuppositions that moral ideals must be backed by the sacred—by some form of religion. The new ideals we need and which are 'yet to be born' will emerge, he thought, in some kind

of collective effervescence, comparable to the enthusiasm generated by the French Revolution, though that proved transitory. He suggested in a talk in 1914 that the warmth to form these forces was to be found in the working classes.

This book is, as it says, a collection rather than a commentary. There are many possibilities (as well as apparent inconsistencies) in what Durkheim says. No doubt these will be pursued in the volume to follow, which will contain Pickering's detailed consideration of Durkheim on religion.

ANTONY ARCHER OP

RELIGION AND ATHEISM IN THE USSR AND EASTERN EUROPE, edited by Bohdan R. Bociurkiw and John W. Strang. *Macmillan*, 1975. 412 pp., £10.

No less than twenty authors contributed to this heavy tome. This is right and proper since no one specialist has (or could have) mastered the entire field. A collective work like this, fruit of a Symposium held in Canada in 1971, is the only way out. Rather than dwell on its inevitable unevenness, it might be more illuminating to see how each author brings not only his own ideas but his own questions to the material. The most value-free—but it is sleight of hand—are the sociologists. David E. Powell, for example, discusses 'Anti-religious Propaganda and Political Socialisation in the USSR' for all the world as though he were recording the role of dominant mums in Manhattan. The political scientists have the same detachment. Thus William C. Fletcher provides a 'functional survey' of 'Religion and Soviet Foreign Policy' which shows how the Orthodox Church is set to work on behalf of the state. It uses Peace Congresses, newsletters, wining and dining. The scholarly tone which characterises the book is maintained throughout.

But there are hints of suppressed emotion, for example, in Joshua Rothenberg's treatment of the fate of the Jews. He holds that the Jews have been chosen—the too-chosen people—as the ideal national group to be the forerunner in the long-range Soviet objective of the fusion of all the national groups into one 'Russianised conglomerate'. On one level he is discussing a policy choice; on another he is hinting at the tremendous toll in

human frustration to which such a policy leads. The Ukrainians are another group whose 'nationalism' has made them deeply suspect; and when the nationalism combines with religion, as it does with the largely forgotten Uniates, the results are tragic. In Vasyl Markus's moving account of their situation, the Uniates are presented as the victims of both the Soviet police and the Russian Orthodox Church into which they were forcibly integrated after the war. Gerhard Simon comments: 'Obviously, the extraordinarily difficult but nevertheless burning question of the Uniates is completely ignored by Rome'. Something odd happened to the translation here. It is 'Obviously'? Or 'Manifestly'? Or *Selbstverständlich*? It's puzzling whichever way one takes it.

Once we move out of Soviet Russia itself, nationalism tends to combine with religion in more complex but more predictable patterns, and cool analysis takes over once more. The Catholic Church is strong in a country like Poland because it could plausibly claim to embody the 'soul' of the nation and above all because it had no recent record of oppression or collaboration with the Nazis. The stern measures taken against the Church in Czechoslovakia, where one can speak of 'Re-Stalinisation', are only possible because the Church was not identified with the nation in the same way. Tito would be less able to impose his will in Croatia, were it not for the memory of the Ustasas who slaughtered Serbs in the name of