

## REVIEWS

and who is at once a symbol of Israel, and the image of Fleg's own searching soul. A Wandering Jew who is wholly the author's creation; identified with the paralytic let down from the house-top and healed, one of the Disciples, eager and loving, yet puzzled, because the promised Kingdom does not come (it is strange how a man of Fleg's discernment fails to perceive what was meant by the Kingdom within), alternately aflame with enthusiasm and chilled by doubt, stumbling at the 'hard sayings,' constant only in anguished devotion towards the human personality of the Master. But when, on the way to Calvary, the beloved voice bids him 'Bear my Cross,' he turns away, because, in the two thieves who follow he recognizes his own kinsfolk (we have here again the obsessing theme of the 'crucifixion of Israel'), and the tie of blood holds his first allegiance. It is the tragedy of the Jewish people throughout the ages; it is that of Fleg himself, whom many Jews look upon as an heir to the prophets.

At the same time, the book is one of the most enthralling lives of Our Lord that have ever been written outside the Gospel; seen from the outside, as He must have appeared to many Jews of His time, on the background of custom and tradition; in no way rationalized, with no trespassing into holy places, and with full acceptance of the supernatural and miraculous, though, inevitably, it lacks that supernatural fulness that could only come with the gift of faith. It is not without blemishes; there are certain passages unacceptable to Catholic readers (notably the references to Our Lady), but even these have nothing that could give offence, and the wonder is that they are so few. It is very nearly a really great book.

B. B. C.

**AFTER STRANGE GODS.** By T. S. Eliot. (Faber and Faber; 3/6.)

Mr. Eliot's Epistle to the Virginians. 'I ascended the platform of these lectures only in the role of moralist.' What, then, are we to think of Mr. Eliot as moralist? In the first place let us recognize the morality in our time of a distinguished poet and critic frankly judging works of literature from moral standards. Every fussy little Puritan, of course, imagines that he is endowed with moral standards, and we are wearied with the petulant raillery of nincompoops against modern art. But it is a new thing for a genuine artist to take up the cudgels for Christian morals. What is the loss, not to the artist as a man, but to his products, from the absence of orthodoxy? That is the enquiry. Mr. Eliot first emphasizes the departure of tradition, 'all those habitual actions, habits arid customs,' from modern life, and then of its concomitant 'orthodoxy,' the more conscious and

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reflexive agreement among men illuminated by revelation as to the norms of conduct. The result is 'extreme individualism in views, and no accepted rules or opinions as to the limitations of the literary job.' Hence the number of transient messiahs in modern literature, hence the frequent absence of any moral or social sense in the characters of modern fiction. The author traces this loss of tradition and orthodoxy in English writers to the decay of Protestant Christianity and he remarks that the disappearance of the idea of Original Sin, of intense moral struggle, is making the human beings in poetry and fiction 'less and less real.' Writers in our time tend to impose on their readers their own *personal view of life* and to exploit their *personality* in their art. This fact is the key to Mr. Eliot's thesis. In other times the Devil chose blasphemy as his mode of operation, but blasphemy has become obsolete with belief. It is Mr. Eliot's conviction that the Evil Spirit has chosen in our time the undisciplined *personality* of men of genius — and he analyses certain cases — as the instruments for his diabolical expression, the sensitiveness of the instrument making it the fitter medium. We are convinced by his argument, but disagree with his examples.

It is clear that this is not a book to please or even interest the ordinary literary critic. He has no time for such things as damnation. But for those sincerely anxious for the fate of literature these lectures are of great importance. The disintegration of belief and of the way of life that comes to be established through belief, in the long run paralyzes literature and at the same time makes the artist a Satanic influence. Mr. Eliot leaves the method of re-establishing a tradition unsettled; he seems inclined to think it can be consciously imposed. That is not hopeful. It must be re-established as it originated — through personal belief and transformation. When society is *vitally* Christian again a *vital* tradition will form itself naturally. That will not be in our time. But we can begin.

A.M.

NEW **PSYCHOLOGY AND OLD RELIGION.** By Edward F. Murphy, S.S.J., Ph.D. (Washbourne & Bogan, 1934; pp. xiii, 265; 6/-.)

The conflict between the law of the mind and that of the members, between the *good* that one wills and the evil that one does, is old, very old. St. Paul knew and spoke of it: 'Unhappy man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death? The grace of God by Jesus Christ our Lord.' If the conflict is old, the psychology which is trying in its way to deal with it is relatively new. That it is largely agnostic or even