BARON D'HOLBACH

A STUDY OF EIGHTEENTH CENTURY RADICALISM IN FRANCE

BY

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BARON D'HOLBACH

A une extrême justesse d'esprit il joignait une simplicité de moeurs tout-à-fait antique et patriarcale.

J. A. NAIGEON, *Journal de Paris*, le 9 fev. 1789

INTRODUCTION

DIDEROT, writing to the Princess Dashkoff in 1771, thus analysed the spirit of his century:

Chaque siècle a son esprit qui le caractérise. L'esprit du nôtre semble être celui de la liberté. La première attaque contre la superstition a été violente, sans mesure. Une fois que les hommes ont osé d'une manière quelconque donner l'assaut à la barrière de la religion, cette barrière la plus formidable qui existe comme la plus respectée, il est impossible de s'arrêter. Dès qu'ils ont tourné des regards menaçants contre la majesté du ciel, ils ne manqueront pas le moment d'après de les diriger contre la souveraineté de la terre. Le câble qui tient et comprime l'humanité est formé de deux cordes, l'une ne peut céder sans que l'autre vienne à rompre.[1]

The following study proposes to deal with this attack on religion that preceded and helped to prepare the French Revolution. Similar phenomena are by no means rare in the annals of history; eighteenth-century atheism, however, is of especial interest, standing as it does at the end of a long period of theological and ecclesiastical disintegration and prophesying a reconstruction of society on a purely rational and naturalistic basis. The anti-theistic movement has been so obscured by the less thoroughgoing tendency of deism and by subsequent romanticism that the real issue in the eighteenth century has been largely lost from view. Hence it has seemed fit to center this study about the man who stated the situation with the most unmistakable and uncompromising clearness, and who still occupies a unique though obscure position in the history of thought.

[1] Diderot, *Oeuvres*, ed. Assézat et Tourneux, Vol. XX, p. 28.

Holbach has been very much neglected by writers on the eighteenth century. He has no biographer. M. Walferdin wrote (in an edition of Diderot's Works, Paris, 1821, Vol. XII p. 115): "Nous nous occupons depuis longtemps à rassembler les matériaux qui doivent servir à venger la mémoire du philosophe de la patrie de Leibnitz, et dans l'ouvrage que nous nous proposons de publier sous le titre *D'Holbach jugé par ses contemporains* nous espérons faire justement apprécier ce savant si estimable par la profondeur et la variété de ses connaissances, si précieux à sa famille et à ses amis par la pureté et la simplicité de ses moeurs, en qui la vertu était devenue une habitude et la bienfaisance un besoin." This work has never appeared and M. Tourneux thinks that nothing of it was found among M. Walferdin's papers.[2] In 1834 Mr. James Watson published in an English translation of the *Système de la Nature "A Short Sketch of the Life and the Writings of Baron d'Holbach"* by Mr. Julian Hibbert, compiled especially for that edition from Saint Saurin's article in Michaud's *Biographie Universelle* (Paris, 1817, Vol. XX, pp. 460–467), from Barbier's *Dict. des ouvrages anonymes* (Paris, 1822) and from the preface to the Paris edition of the *Système de la Nature* (4 vols., 18mo, 1821). This sketch was later published separately (London, 1834, 12mo, pp. 14) but on account of the author's sudden death it was left unfinished and is of no value from the point of view of scholarship. Another attempt to publish something on Holbach was made by Dr. Anthony C. Middleton of Boston in 1857. In the preface to his translation to the *Lettres à Eugenia* he speaks of a "Biographical Memoir of Baron d'Holbach which I am now preparing for the press." If ever published at all this *Memoir* probably came to light in the *Boston Investigator,*

[2] Grimm, *Corr. Lit.*, Vol. XV, p. 421.

a free-thinking magazine published by Josiah P. Mendum, 45 Cornhill, Boston, but it is not to be found. Mention should also be made of the fact that M. Assézat intended to include in a proposed study of Diderot and the philosophical movement, a chapter to be devoted to Holbach and his society; but this work has never appeared.[3]

Of the two works, bearing Holbach's name as a title, one is a piece of libellous fiction by Mme. de Genlis, *Les Dîners du baron d'Holbach* (Paris, 1822, 8vo), the other a romance pure and simple by F. T. Claudon (Paris, 1835, 2 vols., 8vo) called *Le Baron d'Holbach* the events of which take place largely at his house and in which he plays the rôle of a minor character. A good account of Holbach, though short and incidental, is to be found in M. Avézac-Lavigne's *Diderot et la Société du Baron d'Holbach* (Paris, 1875, 8vo) and M. Armand Gasté has a little book entitled *Diderot et le curé de Montchauvet, une Mystification littéraire chez le Baron d'Holbach* (Paris, 1895, 16vo). There are several works which devote a chapter or section to Holbach.[4] The French critics and the histories of philosophy contain slight notices; Rosenkranz's *Diderot's Leben* devotes a chapter to Granval, Holbach's country seat, and life there as described by Diderot in his letters to Mlle. Volland; and he is included in such histories of ideas as Soury, J., *Bréviaire de l'histoire de Matérialisme* (Paris, 1881) and Delvaille, J., *Essai sur l'histoire de l'idée de progrès* (Paris, 1910); but

[3] Diederot, *Oeuvres,* Vol. XX, p. 95.

[4] Among the most important are Damiron J. P., *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de la philosophie au dixhuitième siècle* (Paris, 1858, 3 vols., 8vo); Lange, *Geschichte des Materialismus* (Eng. tr., Boston, 1877); Morley, *Diderot and the Encyclopedists* (N. Y., 1891, 2 vols., 12mo); Plekhanow, G., *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Materialismus* (Stuttgart, 1896); Hancock, A. E., *The French Revolution and the English poets* (N. Y., 1899); Tallentyre, *The Friends of Voltaire* (London, 1906); Fabre, *Les Pères de la Révolution* (Paris, 1910), etc.

nowhere else is there anything more than the merest encyclopedic account, often defective and incorrcct.

The sources are in a sense full and reliable for certain phases of his life and literary activity. His own publications numbering about fifty form the most important body of source material for the history and development of his ideas. Next in importance are contemporary memoirs and letters including those of Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot, Grimm, Morellet, Marmontel, Mme. d'Epinay, Naigeon, Garat, Galiani, Hume, Garrick, Wilkes, Romilly and others; and scattered letters by Holbach himself, largely to his English friends. In addition there is a large body of contemporary hostile criticism of his books, by Voltaire, Frederick II, Castillon, Holland, La Harpe, Delisle de Sales and a host of outraged ecclesiastics, so that one is well informed in regard to the scandal that his books caused at the time. Out of these materials and other scattered documents and notices it is possible to reconstruct—though somewhat defectively—the figure of a man who played an important rôle in his own day; but whose name has long since lost its significance—even in the ears of scholars. It is at the suggestion of Professor James Harvey Robinson that this reconstruction has been made. If it shall prove of any interest or value he must be credited with the initiation of the idea as well as constant aid in its realization. For rendering possible the necessary investigations, recognition is due to the administration and officers of the Bibliothèque Nationale, the British Museum, the Library of Congress, the Libraries of Columbia and Harvard Universities, Union and Andover Theological Seminaries, and the Public Libraries of Boston and New York.

M. P. C.

New York City,
July, 1914.

CHAPTER I

HOLBACH, THE MAN

PAUL HEINRICH DIETRICH, or as he is better known, Paul-Henri Thiry, baron d'Holbach, was born in January, 1723, in the little village of Heidelsheim (N.W. of Carlsruhe) in the Palatinate. Of his parentage and youth nothing is known except that his father, a rich parvenu, according to Rousseau,[5] brought him to Paris at the age of twelve, where he received the greater part of his education. His father died when Holbach was still a young man. It may be doubted if young Holbach inherited his title and estates immediately as there was an uncle "Messire Francois-Adam, Baron d'Holbach, Seigneur de Héeze, Léende et autres Lieux" who lived in the rue Neuve S. Augustin and died in 1753. His funeral was held at Saint-Roch, his parish church, Thursday, September 16th, where he was afterward entombed.[6] Holbach was a student in the University of Leyden in 1746 and spent a good deal of time at his uncle's estate at Héeze, a little town in the province of North Brabant (S.E. of Eindhoven). He also travelled and studied in Germany. There are two manuscript letters in the British Museum (Folio 30867, pp. 14, 18, 20) addressed by Holbach to John Wilkes, which throw some light on his school-days. It is interesting to note that most of Holbach's friends were young Englishmen of whom there were some twenty-five at the University of Leyden at that

[5] Confessions, *Oeuvres,* Vol. XXIV, p. 338.

[6] Bib. Nat. mss. *Pièces originales,* 1529, d'Holbach, 34, 861.

time.[7] Already at the age of twenty-three Holbach was writing very good English, and all his life he was a friend of Englishmen and English ideas. His friendship for Wilkes, then a lad of nineteen, lasted all his life and increased in intimacy and dignity. The two letters following are of interest because they are the only documents we have bearing on Holbach's early manhood. They reveal a certain sympathy and feeling—rather gushing to be sure,—quite unlike anything in his later writings, and quite out of line with the supposedly cold temper of a materialist and an atheist.[8]

HOLBACH TO WILKES

HÉEZE Aug. 9, 1746

Dearest Friend

I should not have felt by half enough the pleasure your kind letter gave me, If I had words to express it; I never doubted of your friendship, nor I hope do you know me so little as to doubt of mine, but your letter is full of such favorable sentiments to me that I must own I cannot repay them but by renewing to you the entire gift of my heart that has been yours ever since heaven favour'd me with your acquaintance. I need not tell you the sorrow our parting gave me, in vain Philosophy cried aloud nature was still stronger and the philosopher was forced to yield to the friend, even now I feel the wound is not cur'd. Therefore no more of that— *Hope* is my motto. Telling me you are happy you make me so but in the middle of your happiness you dont forget your friend, What flattering thought to me! Such are the charms of

[7] Carlyle, Rev. Dr. A., *Autobiography,* ed. Burton, Boston, 1861, p. 137 sq. for Holbach's English friends mentioned in his letters to Wilkes.

[8] These letters, contrary to modern usage, are printed with all the peculiarities of eighteenth century orthography. It was felt that they would lose their quaintness and charm if Holbach's somewhat fantastic English were trifled with or his spelling, capitalization and punctuation modernized.

friendship every event is shar'd and nothing nor even the greatest intervals are able to interrupt the happy harmony of truly united minds. I left Leyden about 8 or 10 days after you but before my departure I thought myself obliged to let Mr Dowdenwell know what you told me, he has seen the two letters Mr Johnson had received and I have been mediator of ye peace made betwixt the 2 parties, I don't doubt but you have seen by this time Messrs Bland & Weatherill who were to set out for Engelland the same week I parted with them. When I was leaving Leyden Mr Vernon happen'd to tell me he had a great mind to make a trip to Spa. So my uncles' estate being on ye road I desir'd him to come along with me, he has been here a week and went on afterwards in his journey, at my arrival here, I found that General Count Palfi with an infinite number of military attendants had taken possession of my uncles' house, and that the 16 thous^d^ men lately come from Germany to strengthen the allies army, commanded by Count Bathiani and that had left ye neighborhood of Breda a few days before and was come to Falkenswert (where you have past in your Journey to Spa) one hour from hence. Prince Charles arrived here the same day from Germany to take ye command of the allies, the next Day the whole army amounting to 70th^d^ men went on towards the county of Liège to prevent the French from beseiging Namur, I hear now that the two armies are only one hour from another, so we expect very soon the news of a great battle but not without fear, Count Saxes army being, by all account of hundred ten thou^d.^ men besides. Prince Counti's army of 50 th^d.^ this latter General is now employ'd at the siege of Charleroy. that can't resist a long while, it is a report that the King of France is arrived in his army, I hope this long account will entertain you for want of news papers: Mr. Dowdeswell being left alone of our club at Leyden I Desir'd him to come and spend with me the time of his vacations here, which proposal I hope he will accept and be here next week. What happy triumvirat would be ours if you were to join: but that is impossible at present; however those

who cant enjoy reality are fond of feeding their fancies with agreable Dreams and charming pictures; that helps a little to sooth the sorrow of absence and makes one expect with more pati[ence] till fortune allows him to put in execution the cherish'd systems he has been fed upon fore some [time] I shall expect with great many thanks the books you are to send me; it will be for me a dubble pleasure to read them, being of your choice which I value as much as it deserves, and looking at them as upon a new proof of your benevolence, as to those I design'd to get from Paris for you, I heard I could not get them before my uncles' return hither all commerce being stopt by the way betwixt this country and France.

A few days before my departure from Leyden I receiv'd a letter from Mr Freeman from Berlin, he seams vastly pleas'd with our Germany, and chiefly with Hambourg where a beautiful lady has taken in his heart the room of poor M^ss.^ Vitsiavius, my prophesy was just; travelling seems to have alter'd a good deal his melancholy disposition as I may conjecture by his way of writing. he desired his service to you. As to me, Idleness renders me every day more philosopher every passion is languishing within me, I retain but one in a warm degree, viz, friendship in which you share no small part. I took a whim to study a little Physic accordingly I purchased several books in that Way. and my empty hours here are employ'd with them I am sure your time will be much better employ'd at Alesbury you'll find there a much nobler entertainment Cupid is by far Lovlier than Esculapius, however I shall not envy your happiness, in the Contrary I wish that all your desires be crown'd with success, that a Passion that proves fatal to great many of men be void of sorrow for you, that all the paths of love be spred over with flowers in one Word that you may not address in vain to the charming M^ss.^ M. I am almost tempted to fall in love with that unknown beauty, 't would not be quite like Don Quixotte for your liking to her would be for me a very strong prejudice of her merit, which the poor Knight had not in his love for Dulcinea.

I shall not ask your pardon for the length of this letter I am sure friendship will forgive the time I steal to Love however I cannot give up so easily a conversation with a true friend with whom I fancy to speak yet in one of those delightfull evening walks at Leyden. it is a dream, I own it, but it is so agreable one to me that nothing but reality could be compared to the pleasure I feel: let me therefore insist a little more upon't and travel with my Letter, we are gone! I think to be at Alesbury! there I see my Dear Wilkes! What a Flurry of Panions! Joy! fear of a second parting! what charming tears! what sincere Kisses! ——— but time flows and the end of this Love is now as unwelcome to me, as would be to another to be awaken'd in the middle of a Dream wherein he is going to enjoy a beloved mistress; the enchantment ceases, the delightfull images vanish, and nothing is left to me but friendship, which is of all my possessions the fairest, and the surest, I am most sincerely Dear Wilkes

Your affectionate friend
and humble servant
DE HOLBACH

Heze the 9th august 1746 N. S.
I shall expect with impatience the letter you are to write me from Alesbury. Will it be here very soon!

HOLBACH TO WILKES

[HÉEZE Dec. 3rd. 1746]

Dearest Wilkes

During a little voyage I have made into Germany I have received your charming letter of the 8th. September O. S. the many affairs I have been busy with for these 3 months has hindered me hitherto from returning to you as speedy an answer as I should have done. I know too much your kindness for me to make any farther apology and I hope you are enough acquainted with the sincerety of my friendship towards you to adscribe my fault to forgetfulness or want of gratitude

be sure, Dear friend, that such a disposition will allways be unknown to me in regard to you. I don't doubt but you will be by this time returned at London, the winter season being an obstacle to the pleasures you have enjoyed following ye Letter at Alesbury during the last Autumn. I must own I have felt a good deal of pride when you gave me the kind assurance that love has not made you forget an old friend, I need not tell you my disposition. I hope you know it well enough and like my friendship for you has no bounds I want expressions to show it. Mr Dowdeswell has been so good as to let me enjoy his company here in the month of August, and returned to Leyden to pursue his studies in the middle of September We often wished your company and made sincere libations to you with burgundy and Champaigne I had a few weeks there after I set out for Germany where I expected to spend the whole winter but the sudden death of my Uncle's Steward has forced me to come back here to put in order the affairs of this estate, I don't know how long I shall be obliged to stay in the meanwhile I act pretty well the part of a County Squire, id est, hunting, shooting, fishing, walking every day without to lay aside the ever charming conversation of Horace Virgil Homer and all our noble friends of the Elysian fields. They are allways faithfull to me, with their aid I find very well how to employ my time, but I want in this country a true bosom friend like my dear Wilkes to converse with, but my pretenssions are too high, for every abode with such a company would be heaven for me.

I perceive by your last letter that your hopes are very like to succeed by M^ss^ Mead, you are sure that every happines that can befall to you will make me vastly happy. I beseech you therefore to let me know everytime how far you are gone, I take it to be a very good omen for you, that your lovely mistress out of compliance has vouchsafed to learn a harsh high-dutch name, which would otherwise have made her starttle, at the very hearing of it. I am very thankful for her kind desire of seeing me in Engelland which I dont wish the less but you know my circumstances enough, to guess that I cannot follow

my inclinations. I have not heard hitherto anything about the books you have been so kind as to send me over by the opportunity of a friend. I have wrote about it to M^srs^ Conrad et Bouwer of Rotterdam, they answered that they were mot yet there. Nevertheless I am very much oblided to you for your kindness and wish to find very soon the opportunity of my revenge. Mr Dowderswell complains very much of Mrs Bland and Weatherill, having not heard of them since their departure from Leyden. I desire my compliments to Mr Dyer and all our old acquaintances. Pray be so good as to direct your first letter under the covert of Mr Dowderwell at M^s^ Alliaume's at Leyden he shall send it to me over immediately, no more at Mr Van Sprang's like you used to do. I wish to know if Mr Lyson since his return to his native country, continues in his peevish cross temper. If you have any news besides I'll be glad to hear them by your next which I expect very soon.

About politicks I cannot tell you anything at present, you have heard enough by this time the fatal battle fought near Liège in 8^ber^ last; everybody has little hopes of the Congress of Breda, the Austrian and Piedmontese are entered into provence, which is not as difficult as to maintain themselves therein, I wish a speedy peace would enable us both to see the rejoicings that will attend the marriage of the Dauphin of France with a Princess of Saxony. I have heard that peace is made between England and Spain, which you ought to know better than I. We fear very much for the next campaign the siege of Maestrich in our neighborhood. These are all the news I know. I'll tell you another that you have known a long while viz. that nobody is with more sincerity My Dear Wilkes

Your faithfull humble Servant and Friend

HOLBACH

Heeze the 3^d^ X^ber^ 1746 ns

By 1750 Holbach was established in Paris as a young man of the world. His fortune, his learning, his sociability attracted the younger literary set toward him. In 1749 he

was already holding his Thursday dinners which later became so famous. Among his early friends were Diderot, Rousseau and Grimm. With them he took the side of the Italian *Opera buffa* in the famous musical quarrel of 1752, and published two witty brochures ridiculing French music.[9] He was an art connoisseur and bought Oudry's *Chienne allaitant ses petits,* the *chef d'oeuvre* of the Salon of 1753.[10] During these years he was hard at work at his chosen sciences of chemistry and mineralogy. In 1752 he published in a huge volume in quarto with excellent plates, a translation of Antonio Neri's *Art of Glass making* and in 1753 a translation of Wallerius' *Mineralogy.* On July 26, 1754, The Academy of Berlin made him a foreign associate in recognition of his scholarly attainments in Natural History,[11] and later he was elected to the Academies of St. Petersburg and Mannheim.

All that was now lacking to this brilliant young man was an attractive wife to rule over his salon. His friends urged him to wed, and in 1753 he married Mlle. Basile-Geneviève-Susanne d'Aine, daughter of "Maître Marius-Jean-Baptiste Nicolas d'Aine, conseiller au Roi en son grand conseil, associé externe de l'Acad. des sciences et belles lettres de Prusse."[12] M. d'Aine was also Maître des Requêtes and a man of means. Mme. d'Holbach was a very charming and gracious woman and Holbach's good fortune seemed complete when suddenly Mme. d'Holbach died from a most loathsome and painful disease in the summer of 1754. Holbach was heart-broken and took a trip through the provinces with his friend Grimm, to whom he was much attached, to distract his mind from his grief.

[9] See Chap. II and Bibliography, Pt. I, for these and his other works.
[10] Grimm *Cor. Lit.,* Vol. II, p. 283.
[11] *Gazette de France,* Aug. 10, 1754.
[12] Jal, *Dict. Critique,* p. 685.

He returned in the early winter and the next year 1755 got a special dispensation from the Pope to marry his deceased wife's sister, Mlle. Charlotte-Susanne d'Aine. By her he had four children, two sons and two daughters. The first, Charles-Marius, was born about the middle of August, 1757, and baptized in Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois, Aug. 22. He inherited the family title and was a captain in the regiment of the Schomberg-Dragons.[13] The first daughter was born towards the end of 1758 and the second about the middle of Jan., 1760.[14] The elder married the Marquis de Châtenay and the younger the Marquis de Nolivos, "Captaine au regiment de la Seurre, Dragons." Their Majesties the King and Queen and the Royal Family signed their marriage contract May 27, 1781.[15] Of the second son there seem to be no traces. Holbach's mother-in-law, Madame d'Aine, was a very interesting old woman as she is pictured in Diderot's *Mémoires* and there was a brother-in-law, "Messire Marius-Jean-Baptiste-Nicholas d'Aine, chevalier, conseiller du roi en ses conseils, Maître des requêtes honoraire de son hôtel, intendant de justice, police, et finances de la généralité de Tours," who lived in rue Saint Dominique,

[13] His career is somewhat doubtful. He travelled in Italy in 1779 and Abbé Galiani, an old friend of Holbach's, got a very agreeable impression of him. John Wilkes, in a letter to his daughter in 1781, seems to imply that he had not turned out very well, and hopes that the baron's second son will make good the deficiencies of the first. In 1806 he published a translation of Weiland's *Oberon* or *Huon de Bordeaux* which went thru another edition in 1825, but those are the only details that have come to light.

[14] Diderot, in writing to Mlle Volland Sep. 17, 1760 says: "On nourrit, à Chenvières, les deux filles de Madame d'Holbach. L'ainée est belle comme un chérubin; c'est un visage rond, de grands yeux bleus, des levres fines, une bouche riante, la peau la plus blanche et la plus animée, des cheveux châtains qui ceignent un très joli front. La cadette est un peloton d'embonpoint où l'on ne distingue encore que du blanc et du vermillion."

[15] Gazette de France, June 1, 1781.

paroisse Saint-Sulpice. There was in Holbach's household for a long time an old Scotch surgeon, a homeless, misanthropic old fellow by the name of Hope, of whom Diderot gives a most interesting account.[16] These are the only names we have of the personnel of Holbach's household. His town house was in the rue Royale, butte Saint-Roch. It was here that for an almost unbroken period of forty years he gave his Sunday and Thursday dinners. The latter day was known to the more intimate set of encyclopedists as the *jour du synagogue.* Here the *église philosophique* met regularly to discuss its doctrines and publish its propaganda of radicalism.

Holbach had a very pleasant country seat, the château of Grandval, now in the arrondisement of Boissy St. Leger at Sucy-en-Brie. It is pleasantly situated in the valley of a little stream, the Morbra, which flows into the Marne. The property was really the estate of Mme. d'Aine who lived with the Holbachs. Here the family and their numerous guests passed the late summer and fall. Here Diderot spent weeks at a time working on the Encyclopedia, dining, and walking on the steep slopes of the Marne with congenial companions. To him we are indebted for our intimate knowledge of Grandval and its inhabitants, their slightest doings and conversations; and as Danou has well said if we were to wish ourselves back in any past age we should choose with many others the mid-eighteenth century and the charming society of Paris and Grandval.[17]

[16] Holbach's intendant was Jew, Berlise. After his death several of his old servants Vincent, David, and Plocque, contested Holbach's will, in which they thought they were legatees. The case was in the courts for several years and was finally decided against them. Douarche, *Les tribunaux civil de Paris pendant la revolution,* Paris, 1905, Vol. I. pp. 141, 261, 325, 689.

[17] Avézac-Lavigne, *Diderot,* p. 5.

Holbach's life in common with that of most philosophers offers no events, except that he came near being killed in the crush and riot in the rue Royale that followed the fire at the Dauphin's wedding in 1770.[18] He was never an official personage. His entire life was spent in study, writing and conversation with his friends. He travelled very little, the world came to him, to the *Café de l'Europe,* as Abbé Galiani called Paris. From time to time Holbach went to Contrexéville for his gout and once to England to visit David Garrick; but he disliked England very thoroughly and was glad to get back to Paris. The events of his life, in so far as there were any, were his relations with people. He knew intimately practically all the great men of his century, except Montesquieu and Voltaire, who were off the stage before his day.[19] Holbach's most intimate and life-long friend among the great figures of the century was Diderot, of whom Rousseau said, "A la distance de quelques siècles du moment où il a vécu, Diderot paraîtra un homme prodigieux; on regardera de loin cette tête universelle avec une admiration mêlée d'étonnement, comme nous regardons aujourd'hui la tête des Platon et des Aristote."[20] All his contemporaries agreed that nothing was so charged with divine fire as the conversation of Diderot. Gautherin, in his fine bronze of him on the Place Saint-Germain-des-Près, seems to have caught the spirit of his talk and has depicted him as he might have sat in the midst of Holbach's society, of which he was the inspiration and the soul. Holbach backed Diderot financially in his great literary and scientific undertaking and provided articles for the Ency-

[18] *Critica,* Vol. I, p. 48, note.

[19] He met Voltaire in Paris in 1778, however, and Naigeon relates that Voltaire greeted him very cordially and said that he had long desired to make his acquaintance.

[20] Collignon, *Diderot,* p. 1.

clopedia on chemistry and natural science. Diderot had a high opinion of his erudition and said of him, "Quelque système que forge mon imagination, je suis sur que mon ami d'Holbach me trouve des faits et des autorités pour le justifier."[21] Opinions differ in regard to the intellectual influence of these men upon each other. Diderot was without doubt the greater thinker, but Holbach stated his atheism with far greater clarity and Diderot gave his sanction to it by embellishing Holbach's books with a few eloquent pages of his own. Diderot said to Sir Samuel Romilly in 1781, "Il faut *sabrer* la theologie,"[22] and died in 1784 in the belief that complete infidelity was the first step toward philosophy. Five years later Holbach was buried by his side in the crypt of the Chapel of the Virgin behind the high altar in Saint-Roch. No tablet marks their tombs, and although repeated investigations have been made no light has been thrown on the exact position of their burial place. According to Diderot's daughter, Mme. Vandeuil, their entire correspondence has been destroyed or lost.[23]

Holbach's relations with Rousseau were less harmonious. The account of their mutual misunderstandings contained in the *Confessions,* in a letter by Cerutti in the *Journal de Paris* Dec. 2, 1789, and in private letters of Holbach's to Hume, Garrick, and Wilkes, is a long and tiresome tale. The author of *Eclaircissements relatifs à la publication des confessions de Rousseau* . . . (Paris, 1789) blames the *club holbachique* for their treatment of Rousseau, but the fault seems to lie on both sides. According to Rousseau's account, Holbach sought his friendship and for a few years he was one of Holbach's society. But, after the success of

[21] Avézac-Lavigne, *Diderot,* p. 75, note.
[22] Romilly, *Memoirs,* Vol. I, p. 179.
[23] Diderot, *Oeuvres,* Vol. I, p. lxvi, note.

the *Devin du Village* in 1753, the *holbachiens* turned against him out of jealousy of his genius as a composer. Visions of a dark plot against him rose before his fevered and sensitive imagination, and after 1756 he left the Society of the Encyclopedists, never to return. Holbach, on the other hand, while admitting rather questionable treatment of Rousseau, never speaks of any personal injury on his part, and bewails the fact that "l'homme le plus éloquent s'est rendu ainsi l'homme le plus anti-littéraire, et l'homme le plus sensible s'est rendu le plus anti-social."[24] He did warn Hume against taking him to England, and in a letter to Wilkes predicted the quarrel that took place shortly after. In writing to Garrick[25] he says some hard but true things about Rousseau, who on his part never really defamed Holbach but depicted him as the virtuous atheist under the guise of Wolmar in the *Nouvelle Heloïse*. Their personal incompatibility is best explained on the grounds of the radical differences in their temperaments and types of mind and by the fact that Rousseau was too sensitive to get on with anybody for any great length of time.

Two other great Frenchmen, Buffon and d'Alembert, were for a time members of Holbach's society, but, for reasons that are not altogether clear, gradually withdrew. Grimm suggests that Buffon did not find the young philosophers sufficiently deferential to him and to the authorized powers, and feared for his dignity,—and safety, in their company. D'Alembert, on the other hand, was a recluse by nature, and, after giving up his editorship on the Encyclopedia, easily dropped out of Diderot's society and devoted himself to Mlle. Lespinasse and Mme. Geoffrin. Holbach and Helvetius were life-long friends and spent much time to-

[24] Journal de Paris, Dec. 2, 1789.

[25] See appendix, p. 73, p. 77.

gether reading at Helvetius' country place at Voré. After his death in 1774, Holbach frequented Mme. Helvetius' salon where he knew and deeply influenced Volney, Cabanis, de Tracy, and the first generation of the Ideologists who continued his and Helvetius' philosophical doctrines. Among the other Frenchmen of the day who were on intimate relations with Holbach and frequented his salon were La Condamine, Condillac, Condorcet, Turgot, Morellet, Raynal, Grimm, Marmontel, Colardeau, Saurin, Suard, Saint-Lambert, Thomas, Duclos, Chastellux, Boulanger, Darcet, Roux, Rouelle, Barthès, Venel, Leroy, Damilaville, Naigeon, Lagrange and lesser names,—but well known in Paris in the eighteenth century,—d'Alinville, Chauvelin, Desmahis, Gauffecourt, Margency, de Croismare, de Pezay, Coyer, de Valory, Charnoi, not to mention a host of others.

Among Holbach's most intimate English friends were Hume, Garrick, Wilkes, Sterne, Gibbon, Horace Walpole, Adam Smith, Benjamin Franklin, Dr. Priestley, Lord Shelburne, Gen. Barré, Gen. Clark, Sir James MacDonald, Dr. Gem, Messrs. Stewart, Demster, Fordyce, Fitzmaurice, Foley, etc. Holbach addressed a letter to Hume in 1762, before making his acquaintance, in which he expressed his admiration of his philosophy and the desire to know him personally.[26] In 1764 Hume came to Paris as secretary of the British Embassy and immediately called on Holbach and became a regular frequenter of his salon. It was to Holbach that he wrote first on the outbreak of his quarrel with Rousseau and they corresponded at length in regard to the publication of the *Exposé succinct,* which was to justify Hume in the eyes of the French. Hume and Holbach had much in common intellectually, although the latter was far more thoroughgoing in his repudiation of Theism.

[26] See appendix, p. 71.

David Garrick and his wife were frequent visitors at the rue Royale on their trips to Paris where they were very much liked by Holbach's society. Nothing is more cordial or gracious than the compliments passed between them in their subsequent correspondence. There are two published letters from Holbach in Mr. Hedgecock's recent study of Garrick and his French friends, excellent examples of the happy spontaneity and sympathy that were characteristic of French sociability in the eighteenth century.[27] Holbach in turn spent several months with Garrick at Hampton.

Holbach's early friendship for Wilkes has already been mentioned. Wilkes spent a great deal of time in Paris on the occasion of his exiles from England and became very intimate with Holbach. They corresponded up to the very end of Holbach's life and there was a constant interchange of friendly offices betwen them.[28] Miss Wilkes, who spent much time in Paris, was a very good friend of Mme. Holbach and Mlle. Helvetius. Adam Smith often dined at Holbach's with Turgot and the economists; Gibbon also found his dinners agreeable except for the dogmatism of the atheists; Walpole resented it also and kept away. Priestley seems to have gotten on very well, although the philosophers found his materialism and unitarianism a trifle inconsistent. It was at Holbach's that Shelburne met Morellet with whom he carried on a long and serious correspondence on economics. There seem to be no details of Holbach's relations with Franklin, who was evidently more assiduous at the salon of Mme. Helvetius whom he desired to marry.

Holbach's best friend among the Italians was Abbé Galiani, secretary of the Neapolitan Embassy, who spent ten

[27] See appendix, p. 72.

[28] See p. 6 sq. and appendix pp. 75 sq.

years in the salons of Paris. After his return to Naples his longing for Paris led him to a voluminous correspondence with his French friends including Holbach. A few of their letters are extant. Beccaria also came to Paris at the invitation of the translator of his *Crimes and Punishments,* Abbé Morellet, made on behalf of Holbach and his society. Beccaria and his friend Veri, who accompanied him, had long been admirers of French philosophy, and the Frenchmen found much to admire in Beccaria's book. One *avocat général,* M. Servan of the Parlement of Bordeaux, a friend of Holbach's, tried to put his reforms in practice and shared the fate of most reformers. Holbach was also in correspondence with Beccaria, and one of his letters has been published in M. Landry's recent study of Beccaria.

Among the other Italians whom Holbach befriended were Paulo Frizi, the mathematician; Dr. Gatti; Pincini, the musician; and Mme. Riccoboni, ex-actress and novelist; whose lively correspondence with Garrick whom she met at Holbach's sheds much light on the social relations of the century.

Among the other foreigners who were friends or acquaintances of Holbach were his fellow countrymen, Frederich Melchon Grimm, like himself a naturalized Frenchman and the bosom friend of Diderot; Meister, his collaborator in the *Literary Correspondence;* Kohant, a Bohemian musician, composer of the *Bergère des Alpes* and Mme. Holbach's lute-teacher; Baron Gleichen, Comte de Creutz, Danish and Scandinavian diplomats; and a number of German nobles; the hereditary princes of Brunswick and Saxe Gotha, Baron Alaberg, afterwards elector of Mayence, Baron Schomberg and Baron Studitz.

Among the well known women of the century Holbach was most intimate with Mme. d'Epinay, who became a very

good friend of Mme. Holbach's and was present at the birth of her first son, and, in her will, left her a portrait by Rembrandt. He was also a friend of Mme. Geoffrin, attended her salon, and knew Mlle. de Lespinasse, Mme. Houderot and most of the important women of the day.

There are excellent sources from which to form an estimate of this man whose house was the social centre of the century. Just after Holbach's death on January 21, 1789, Naigeon, his literary agent, who had lived on terms of the greatest intimacy with him for twenty-four years, wrote a long eulogy which filled the issue of the *Journal de Paris* for Feb. 9. There was another letter to the *Journal* on Feb. 12. Grimm's *Correspondence Littéraire* for March contains a long account of him by Meister, and there are other notices in contemporary memoirs such as Morellet's and Marmontel's. All these accounts agree in picturing him as the most admirable of men.

It must be remembered that Holbach always enjoyed what was held to be a considerable fortune in his day. From his estates in Westphalia he had a yearly income of 60,000 *livres* which he spent in entertaining. This freedom from economic pressure gave him leisure to devote his time to his chosen intellectual pursuits and to his friends. He was a universally learned man. He knew French, German, English, Italian and Latin extremely well and had a fine private library of about three thousand works often of several volumes each, in these languages and in Greek and Hebrew. The catalogue of this library was published by Debure in 1789. It would be difficult to imagine a more comprehensive and complete collection of its size. He had also a rich collection of drawings by the best masters, fine pictures of which he was a connoisseur, bronzes, marbles, porcelains and a natural history cabinet, so in vogue in

those days, containing some very valuable specimens. He was one of the most learned men of his day in natural science, especially chemistry and mineralogy, and to his translations from the best German scientific works is largely due the spread of scientific learning in France in the eighteenth century. Holbach was also very widely read in English theology and philospohy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and derived his anti-theological inspiration from these two sources. To this vast fund of learning, he joined an extreme modesty and simplicity. He sought no academic honors, published all his works anonymously, and, had it not been for the pleasure he took in communicating his ideas to his friends, no one would have suspected his great erudition. He had an extraordinary memory and the reputation of never forgetting anything of interest. This plenitude of information, coupled with his easy and pleasant manner of talking, made his society much sought after. Naigeon said of him (in his preface to the works of Lagrange):

Personne n'etait plus communicatif que M. le baron d'Holbach; personne ne prenait aux progrès de la raison un intérêt plus vif, plus sincère, et ne s'occupait avec plus de zèle et l'activité des moyens de les accélérer.

Egalement versé dans la plupart des matières sur lesquelles il importe le plus à des êtres raisonnables d'avoir une opinion arrêtée, M. le boron d'Holbach portait dans leur discussion un jugement sain, une logique sévère, et une analyse exacte et précise. Quelque fut l'objet de ses entretiens avec ses amis, ou même avec des indifférens, tels qu'en offrent plus ou moins toutes les sociétés; il inspirait sans effort à ceux qui l'écoutaient l'enthousiasme de l'art ou de la science dont il parlait; et on ne le quittait jamais sans regretter de n'avoir pas cultivé la branche particulière de connaissances qui avait fait le sujet de la conversation, sans désirer d'être plus instruit, plus éclairé, et sur-

tout sans admirer la clarté, la justesse de son ésprit, et l'ordre dans lequel il savait présenter ses idées.

This virtue of communicativeness, of *sociabilité,* Holbach carried into all the relations of life. He was always glad to lend or give his books to anyone who could make use of them. "Je suis riche," he used to say, "mais je ne vois dans la fortune qu'un instrument de plus pour opérer le bien plus promptement et plus efficacement." In fact Holbach's whole principle of life and action was to increase the store of human well being. And he did this without any religious motive whatsoever. As Julie says of Wolmar in *La Nouvelle Heloïse,* "Il fait le bien sans espoir de récompense, il est plus vertueux, plus désinteressé que nous." There are many recorded instances of Holbach's gracious benevolence. As he said to Helvetius, "Vous êtes brouillé avec tous ceux que vous avez obligé, mais j'ai gardé tous mes amis." Holbach had the faculty of attaching people to him. Diderot tells how at the Salon of 1753 after Holbach had bought Oudry's famous picture, all the collectors who had passed it by came to him and offered him twice what he paid for it. Holbach went to find the artist to ask him permission to cede the picture to his profit, but Oudry refused, saying that he was only too happy that his best work belonged to the man who was the first to appreciate it. Instances of Holbach's liberality to Kohant, a poor musician, and to Suard, a poor literary man, are to be found in the pages of Diderot and Meister, and his constant generosity to his friends is a commonplace in their Memoirs and Correspondence. Only Rousseau was ungrateful enough to complain that Holbach's free-handed gifts insulted his poverty. His kindness to Lagrange, a young literary man whom he rescued from want, has been well told by M. Naigeon in the preface to the works of Lagrange (p. xviii).

But perhaps the most touching instances of Holbach's be-

nevolence are his relations with the peasants of Contrexévlle, one of which was published in the *Journal de Lecture,* 1775, the other in an anonymous letter to the *Journal de Paris,* Feb. 12, 1789. The first concerns the reconciliation of two old peasants who, not wanting to go to court, brought their differences to their respected friend for a settlement. Nothing is more simple and beautiful than this homely tale as told in a letter of Holbach's to a friend of his. The second, which John Wilkes said ought to be written in letters of gold, deserves to be reproduced as a whole.

L'éloge funèbre que M. Naigeon a consacré à la mémoire de M. le Baron d'*Holbach* suffit pour donner une idée juste de ses lumières, mais le hazard m'a mis à portée de les juger encore mieux. J'ai vu M. le Baron *d'Holbach* dans deux voyages que j'ai faits aux eaux de Contrexéville. S'occuper de sa souffrance et de sa guérison, e'est le soin de chaque malade. M. le Baron *d'Holbach* devenait le médecin, l'ami, le consolateur de quiconque venait aux eaux et il semblait bien moins occupé de ses infirmités que de celles des autres. Lorsque des malades indigens manquaient de secours, ou pécuniaires ou curatifs, il les leur procurait avec un plaisir qui lui faisait plus de bien que les eaux. Je me promenais un soir avec lui sur une hauteur couverte d'un massif de bois qui fait perspective de loin et près duquel s'élève un petit Hermitage. Là, demeure un cénobite qui n'a de revenu que les aumônes de ceux dont il reçoit les visites. Nous acquittames chacun notre dette hospitalière. En prenant congé de l'Hermite, M. le Baron *d'Holbach* me dit de le précéder un instant et qu'il allait me suivre. Je le précédai, et comme il ne me suivait pas je m'arrêtai, pour l'attendre sur un terte exhaussé d'où l'on découvre tout le pays. Je contemplais le canton que je dominais, plongé dans une douce rêverie. J'en fus tiré par des cris et je me retournai vers l'endroit d'òu ils partaient. Je vis M. le Baron *d'Holbach* environné d'une vieille femme et de deux villageois, l'un vieux comme elle et l'autre jeune. Tous trois, les larmes aux yeux, l'embrassaient hautement. Allez-

vous-en donc, s'écrait M. le Baron *d'Holbach*; laissez moi, on m'attend, ne me suivez pas, adieu; je reviendrai l'anné prochaine. En me voyant arriver vers eux, les trois personnes reconnaissantes disparurent. Je lui demandai le sujet de tant de bénédictions. Ce jeune paysan que vous avez vu s'etait engagé, j'ai obtenu de son colonel sa liberté en payant les cents écus prescrits par l'ordonnance. Il est amoureux d'une jeune paysanne aussi pauvre que lui, je viens d'acheter pour eux un petit bien qui m'a coûté huit cent francs. Le vieux père est perclus, aux deux bras, de rhumatismes, je lui ai fourni trois boîtes du baume des Valdejeots, si estimé en ce pays-ci. La vieille mère est sujetté à des maux d'estomac, et je lui ai apporté un pot de confection d'hyacinthe. Ils travaillaient dans le champ, voisin du bois, je suis allé les voir tandis que vous marchiez en avant. Ils m'ont suivi malgré moi. Ne parlez de cela à personne. On dirait que je veux faire le généreux et le bon philosophe, mais je ne suis que humain, et mes charités sont la plus agréable dépense de mes voyages.

This humanity of Holbach's is the very keynote of his character and of his intellectual life as well. As M. Walferdin has said, the denial of the supernatural was for him the base of all virtue, and resting on this principle, he exemplified social qualities that do the greatest honor to human nature. He and Madame Holbach are the only conspicuous examples of conjugal fidelity and happiness among all the people that one has occasion to mention in a study of the intellectual and literary circles of the eighteenth century. They were devoted to each other, to their children and to their friends. Considering the traits of Holbach's character that have been cited, there can scarcely be two opinions in regard to completeness with which he realized his ideal of humanity and sociability. M. Naigeon has well summed up in a few words Holbach's relation to the only duties that he recognized, "He was a good husband, a good father and a good friend."

CHAPTER II

HOLBACH'S WORKS

Holbach's published works, with the exception of a few scattered ones, may be divided into three classes, viz., translations of German scientific works, translations of English deistical writings, and his own works on theology, philosophy, politics and morals. Those which fall into none of these categories can be dealt with very summarily. They are:

1. Two pamphlets on the musical dispute of 1752; *Lettre à une dame d'un certain âge sur l'état présent de l'Opera,* (8vo, pp. 11,) and *Arrêt rendu à l'amphithéâtre de l'Opéra,* (8vo, pp. 16,) both directed against French music and in line with Grimm's *Petit Prophet* and Rousseau's *Lettre sur la musique française.*

2. A translation in prose of Akenside's *The Pleasures of Imagination* (Paris, 1759, 8vo).

3. A translation of Swift's *History of the Reign of Queen Anne* in collaboration with M. Eidous (Amsterdam, 1765, 12mo, pp. xxiv + 416).

4. Translations of an *Ode on Human Life* and a *Hymn to the Sun* in the *Variétés littéraires* (1768).

5. Articles on natural science in the *Encyclopédie* and article *Prononciation des langues* in the *Dictionnaire de Grammaire* of the *Encyclopédie méthodique.*

6. Translation of Wallerius' *Agriculture reduced to its true principles* (Paris, 1774, 12mo).

7. Two *Facéties philosophiques* published in Grimm's

Correspondence Littéraire. L'Abbé et le Rabbin, and *Essai sur l'art de ramper, à l'usage des courtisans.*

8. Parts of Raynal's *Histoire philosophique des deux Indes.*

9. Notes to Lagrange's *Vie de Senèque.*

Holbach's translations of German scientific works are as follows: (Complete titles to be found in Bibliography, Pt. I.

1. *Art de la Verrerie de Neri, Merret, et Kunckel* (Paris, Durand, 1752). Original work in Italian. Latin translation by Christopher Merret. German translation by J. Kunckel of Löwenstern. Holbach's translation comprises the seven books of Antionio Neri, Merret's notes on Neri, Kunckel's observations on both these authors, his own experiments and others relative to glass-making. The translation was dedicated to Malesherbes who had desired to see the best German scientific works published in French. In his *Preface du Traducteur* Holbach writes:—

> L'envie de me rendre utile, dont tout citoyen doit être animé, m'a fait entreprendre l'ouvrage que je presente au Public. S'il a le bonheur de mériter son approbation, quoiqu'il y ait peu de gloire attachée au travail ingrat et fastidieux d'un Traducteur, je me déterminerai à donner les meilleurs ouvrages allemands, sur l'Histoire Naturelle, la Minéralogie, la Métallurgie et la Chymie. Tout le monde sçait que l'Allemagne possede en ce genre des trésors qui ont été jusqu'ici comme enfouis pour la France.

2. *Minéralogie ou Description générale du règne minéral par J. G. Wallerius* (Paris, Durand, 1753) followed by *Hydrologie* by the same author. Second edition, Paris, Herrissant, 1759. Originally in Swedish (Wallerius was a professor of chemistry in the University of Upsala). German translation by J. D. Denso, Professor of Chemistry,

Stargard, Pomerania. Holbach's translation was made from the German edition which Wallerius considered preferable to the Swedish. He was assisted by Bernard de Jussien and Rouelle, and the work was dedicated to a friend and coworker in the natural sciences, Monsieur d'Arclais de Montamy,

3. *Introduction à la Minéralogie . . . oeuvre posthume de M. J. F. Henckel,* Paris, Cavelier, 1756, first published under title *Henckelius in Mineralogiâ redivivus,* Dresden, 1747, by his pupil, M. Stephani, as an outline of his lectures. Holbach's translation made from a German edition, corrected, with notes on new discoveries added.

4. *Chimie métallurgique . . . par M. C. Gellert.* Paris, Briasson, 1758, translated earlier. Approbation May 1, 1753, Privelege Dec. 21, 1754. Originally a text written by Gellert for four artillery officers whom the King of Sardinia sent to Freyburg to learn mining-engineering.

5. *Traités de physique, d'histoire naturelle, de minéralogie et de metallurgie.* Paris, Herrissant, 1759, by J. G. Lehmann, three vols. I. L'Art des Mines, II. Traité de la formation des métaux, III. Essai d'une histoire naturelle des couches de la terre. In his preface to the third volume Holbach has some interesting remarks about the deluge, the irony of which seems to have escaped the royal censor, Millet, *Docteur en Theologie.*

"La description si précise et si détaillée que Moïse fait du Deluge dans la Genèse, ayant une autorité infaillible, puis qu'elle n'est autre que celle de Dieu même, nous rend certains de la réalité et de l'universalité de ce châtiment terrible. Il s'agit simplement d'examiner si les naturalistes, tels que Woodward, Schenchzer, Buttner et M. Lehmann lui-même ne se sont points trompés, lorsqu'ils ont attribué à cet évenement seul la formation des couches de la terre et lorsqu'ils s'en sont servis pour expliquer l'état actuel de notre globe.

Il semble que rien ne doit nous empecher d'agiter cette question; l'Ecriture sainte se contente de nous apprendre la voie miraculeuse dont Dieu s'est servi pour punir les crimes du genre humain; elle ne dit rien qui puisse limiter les sentiments des naturalists sur les autres effets physiques que le déluge a pu produire. C'est une matière qu'elle paroît avoir abandonnée aux disputes des hommes." He then proceeds to question whether the deluge could have produced the results attributed to it and argues against catastrophism which, it must be remembered, was the received geological doctrine down to the days of Lyell. "Les causes les plus simples sont capables de produire au bout des siècles les effets les plus grands, surtout lorsqu'elles agissent incessament; et nous voyons toutes ces causes réunies agir perpétuellement sous nos yeux. Concluons, donc, de tout ce qui precède, que le déluge seul et les feux souterrains seuls ne suffisent point pour expliquer la formation des couches de la terre. On risquera toujours de se tromper, lorsque par l'envie de simplifier on voudra dériver tous les phénomenes de la nature d'une seule et unique cause."

6. *Pyritologie* by J. F. Henkel, Paris, Herrissant, 1760, a large volume in quarto, translated by Holbach. It contains *Flora Saturnisans* (translated by M. Charas and reviewed by M. Roux), Henkel's *Opuscules Minéralogiques* and other treatises. Original editions: *Pyritologia,* Leipzig, 1725, 1754; *Flora Saturnizans,* Leipzig, 1721; De *Appropriatione Chymica,* Dresden, 1727, and *De Lapidum origine,* Dresden, 1734, translated into German, with excellent notes, Dresden, 1744, by M. C. F. Zimmermann, a pupil of M. Henkel. Holbach's translations seem to have been well received because he writes in this preface: "Je m'estimerai heureux si mon travail peut contribuer à entretenir et augmenter le goût universel qu'on a conçu pour le saine physique.

7. *Oeuvres métallurgiques de M. J. C. Orschall,* Paris,

Hardy, 1760. Orschall still accepted the old alchemist tradition but was sound in practice and was the best authority on copper. Holbach does not attempt to justify his physics which was that of the preceding century. Orschall was held in high esteem by Henckel and Stahl.

8. *Recueil des memoires des Académies d'Upsal et de Stockholm,* Paris, Didot, 1764. These records of experiments made in the Royal Laboratories of Sweden, founded in 1683 by Charles XI, had already been translated into German and English. Holbach's translation was made from the German and Latin. He promises further treatises on Agriculture, Natural History and Medicine.

9. *Traité du Soufre* by G. E. Stahl, Paris, Didot, 1766. In speaking of Stahl's theories Holbach says: "Il ne faut pas croire que ces connaissances soient des vérités stériles propres seulement à satisfaire une vaine curiosité, elles ont leur application aux travaux de la métallurgie qui leur doivent la perfection où on les a portés depuis quelques tems." Holbach understood very clearly the utility of science in his scheme of increasing the store of human well-being, and would doubtless have translated other useful works had not other interests prevented. There is a mss. note of his in the Bibliothèque Nationale to M. Malesherbes, then Administrateur de la Librairie Royale, suggesting other German treatises that might well be translated.[1] (Mss. 22194).

[1] HOLBACH TO MALESHERBES

Monsieur

J'ai l'honneur de vous envoyer ci-joint la liste des ouvrages dont M. Liège fils pourrait entreprendre la traduction. Je n'en connais actuellement point d'autres qui méritent l'attention du public. M. Macquer m'a écrit une lettre qui a pour objet les mêmes choses dont vous m'avez fait l'honneur de me parler, et je lui fais la même réponse.

J'ai l'honneur d'être avec respect, Monsieur,

Votre très obéissant serviteur

D'HOLBACH

à Paris ce 6 d'avril 1761

The list of books was as follows:

1. Johann Kunckel's *Laboratorium Chymicum,* 8vo.

2. Georg Ernest Stahl's *Commentary on Becher's Metallurgy,* 8vo.

3. *Concordantia Chymica Becheri,* 4°, published by Stahl.

4. *Cadmologia,* or the *Natural History of Cobalt,* by J. G. Lehmann, Berlin, 1760, 4°.

After 1760 Holbach became interested in another line of intellectual activity, namely the writing and translation of anti-religious literature. His first book of this sort really appeared in 1761 although no copies bear this date. From 1767 on however he published a great many works of this character. It is convenient to deal first with his translations of English deistical writers. They are in chronological order.

1. *Esprit du clergé, ou le Christianisme primitif vengé des entreprises et des excès de nos Prêtres modernes.* Londres (Amsterdam), 1767. This book appeared in England in 1720 under the title of *The Independent Whig,* its author was Thomas Gordon (known through his Commentaries on Sallust and Tacitus) who wrote in collaboration with John Trenchard. The book was partially rewritten by Holbach and then touched up by Naigeon, who, according to a manuscript note by his brother, "atheised it as much as possible." It was sold with great secrecy and at a high price,—a reward which the colporters demanded for the risk they ran in peddling seditious literature. The book was a violent attack on the spirit of domination which characterized the Christian priesthood at that time.

2. *De L'imposture sacerdotale, ou Recueil de Pièces sur le clergé,* Londres (Amsterdam), 1767. Another edition 1772 under title *De la Monstruosité pontificale* etc.

Contains translations of various pamphlets including Davisson, *A true picture of Popery;* Brown, *Popery a Craft,* London 1735; Gordon, *Apology for the danger of the church,* 1719; Gordon, *The Creed of an Independent Whig,* 1720.

3. *Examen des Prophéties qui servent de fondement à la religion Chrétienne,* Londres (Amsterdam), 1768. Translation of Anthony Collins, *A Discourse on the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion,* London, 1724. Contains also *The Scheme of literal Prophecy considered,* 1727, also by Collins in answer to the works of Clarke, Sherlock, Chandler, Sykes, and especially to Whiston's *Essay towards restoring the text of the Old Testament,* one of the thirty-five works directed against Collins' original *"Discourse."* Copies of this work have become very rare.

4. *David, ou l'histoire de l'homme selon le coeur de Dieu.* Londres (Amsterdam), 1768. This work appeared in England in 1761 and is attributed to Peter Annet, also to John Noorthook. Some English eulogists of George II, Messrs. Chandler, Palmer and others, had likened their late King to David, "the man after God's own heart." The deists, struck by the absurdity of the comparison, proceeded to relate all the scandalous facts they could find recorded of David, and by clever distortions painted him as the most execrable of Kings, in a work entitled *David or the Man after God's Own Heart,* which formed the basis of Holbach's translation.

5. *Les prêtres démasqués ou des iniquités du clergé chrétien.* Londres, 1768. Translation of four discourses published under the title *The Ax laid to the root of Christian Priestcraft by a layman,* London, T. Cooper, 1742. A rare volume.

6. *Lettres philosophiques* . . . Londres (Amsterdam,

1768). Translation of J. Toland's *Letters to Serena,* London, 1704. The book which had become very rare in Holbach's time had caused a great scandal at the time of its publication and was much sought after by collectors. It contains five letters, the first three of which are by Toland, the other two and the preface by Holbach and Naigeon. The matters treated are, the origin of prejudices, the dogma of the immortality of the soul, idolatry, superstition, the system of Spinosa and the origin of movement in matter.

Diderot said of these works, in writing to Mlle. Volland Nov. 22, 1768 (*Oeuvres,* Vol. XVIII, p. 308): "Il pleut des bombes dans la maison du Seigneur, Je tremble toujours que quelqu'un de ces téméraires artilleurs-là ne s'en trouve mal. Ce sont les *Lettres philosophiques* traduites, ou supposées traduites, de l'anglais de Toland; c'est *l'Examen des propheties;* c'est la *Vie de David ou de l'homme selon le coeur de Dieu,* ce sont mélle diables déchainés.—Ah! Madame de Blacy, je crains bien que le Fils de l'Homme ne soit à la porte; que la venue d'Elie ne soit proche, et que nous ne touchions au règne de l'Anti-christ. Tous les jours, quand je me lève, je regarde par ma fenêtre, si la grande prostituée de Babylone ne se promène point déjà dans les rues avec sa grande coupe à la main et s'il ne se fait aucun des signes prédits dans le firmament."

7. *De la Cruauté religieuse,* Londres (Amsterdam). *Considerations upon war, upon cruelty in general and religious cruelty in particular,* London, printed for Thomas Hope, 1761.

8. *Dissertation critique sur les tourmens de l'enfer* printed in an original work, *L'Enfer détruit,* Londres (Amsterdam), 1769. A translation of Whitefoot's *The Torments of Hell, the foundation and pillars thereof discover'd, search'd, shaken and remov'd.* London, 1658.

9. In the *Recueil philosophique* edited by Naigeon, Londres (Amsterdam), 1770.

I. Dissertation sur l'immortalité de l'âme. Translated from Hume.

II. Dissertation sur le suicide (Hume).

III. Extrait d'un livre Anglais qui a pour titre le Christianisme aussi ancien que le monde. (Tindal, *Christianity as old as Creation.*)

10. *Esprit de Judaisme, ou Examen raisonné de la Loi de Moyse.* Londres (Amsterdam), 1770 (1769), translated from Anthony Collins. With the exception of some of Holbach's own works this is one of the fiercest denunciations of Judaism and Christianity to be found in print. In fact, it is very much in the style of Holbach's anti-religious works and shows beyond a doubt that Holbach derived his inspiration from Collins and the more radical of the English school. The volume has become exceedingly rare.

After outlining the history of Judaism the book ends thus:

Ose, donc enfin, ô Europe! secouer le joug insupportable des préjuges qui t'affligent. Laisse à des Hébreux stupides, à des frénétiques imbéciles, à des Asiatiques lâches et dégradés, ces superstitions aussi avilissantes qu'insenséés: elles ne sont point faites pour les habitans de ton climat. Occupe-toi du soin de perfectionner tes gouvernemens, de corriger tes lois, de réformer tes abus, de régler tes moeurs, et ferme pour toujours les yeux à ces vraies chimères, qui depuis tant de siecles n'ont servi qu'à retarder tes progrès vers la science véritable et à t'écarter de la route du bonheur.

11. *Examen critique de la vie et des ouvrages de Saint Paul,* Londres (Amsterdam), 1770. A free translation of Peter Annet's *History and character of St. Paul examined,* written in answer to Lyttelton. New edition 1790 and translated back into English "from the French of Boulan-

ger," London, R. Carlile, 1823. A rather unsympathetic account, but with flashes of real insight into "le système religieux des Chretiens dont S. Paul fut évidemment le véritable architecte." (Epître dédicatoire.)

Annet said of Paul's type of man "l'enthousiaste s'enivre, pour l'ainsi dire, de son propre vin, il se persuade que la cause de ses passions est la cause de Dieu (p. 72), mais quelque violent qu'ait pu être l'enthousiasme de S. Paul, il sentait très bien que la doctrine qu'il prechait devait paraître bizarre et insensée à des êtres raisonnables" (p. 141).

12. *De la nature humaine, ou Exposition des facultés, des actions et des passions de l'âme,* Londres (Amsterdam), 1772. (Thomas Hobbes) Reprinted in a French Edition of Hobbes' works by Holbach and Sorbière, 1787. Appeared first in English in 1640, omitted in a Latin Edition of Hobbes printed in Amsterdam. In spite of its brevity, Holbach considered this one of Hobbes' most important and luminous works.

13. *Discours sur les Miracles de Jesus Christ* (Amsterdam, 1780?) Translated from Woolston, whom Holbach admired very much for his uncompromising attitude toward truth. He suffered fines and imprisonments, but would not give up the privilege of writing as he pleased. The present discourse was the cause of a quarrel with his friend Whiston. He died Jan. 27, 1733, "avec beucoup de fermeté . . . il se ferma les yeux et la bouche de ses propres mains et rendit l'esprit." This work exists in a manuscript book of 187 pages, written very fine, in the Bibliothèque Nationale (Mss. français 15224) and was current in France long before 1780. In fact it is mentioned by Grimm before 1770, but the dictionaries (Barber, Quérard) generally date it from 1780.

Before turning to Holbach's original works mention

should be made of a very interesting and extraordinary book that he brought to light, retouched, and later used as a kind of shield against the attacks of the parliaments upon his own works.

In 1766 he published a work entitled *L'Antiquité dévoilée par ses usages, ou Examen critique des principales Opinions, Cérémonies et Institutions religieuses et politiques des differens Peuples de la Terre.* Par feu M. Boulanger, Amsterdam, 1766. This is a work based on an original manuscript by Boulanger, who died in 1759, preceded by an excellent letter on him by Diderot, published also in the *Gazette Littéraire.*

The use made by Holbach of Boulanger's name makes it necessary to consider for a moment this almost forgotten writer. Nicholas Antoine Boulanger was born in 1722. As a child he showed so little aptitude for study that later his teachers could scarcely believe that he had turned out to be a really learned man. As Diderot observes, "ces examples d'enfans, rendus ineptes entre les mains des Pédans qui les abrutissent en dépit de la nature la plus heureuse, ne sont pas rares, cependant ils surprennent toujours" (p. 1). Boulanger studied mathematics and architecture, became an engineer and was employed by the government as inspector of bridges and highways. He passed a busy life in exacting out-door work but at the same time his active intellect played over a large range of human interests. He became especially concerned with historical origins and set himself to learn Latin and Greek that he might get at the sources. Not satisfied that he had come to the root of the matter he learned Arabic, Syriac, Hebrew and Chaldean. Diderot says "Il lisait et étudiait partout, je l'ai moi-même rencontré sur les grandes routes avec un auteur rabinnique à la main." He made a *mappemonde* in which the globe is divided in two

hemispheres, one occupied by the continents, the other by the oceans, and by a singular coincidence he found that the meridian of the continental hemisphere passed through Paris. Some such rearrangement of hemispheres is one of the commonplaces of moden geography. He furnished such articles as, *Deluge, Corvée, Societé* for the Encyclopedia and wrote several large and extremely learned books, among them *Recherches sur l'origine du Despotisme oriental* and *Antiquité dévoilée.* He died from overwork at the age of thirty-seven.

Boulanger's ideas on philosophy, mythology, anthropology and history are of extraordinary interest today. Diderot relates his saying—"Que si la philosophie avait trouvé tant d'obstacles parmi nous c'etait qu'on avait commencé par où il aurait fallu finir, par des maximes abstraites, des raisonnemens généraux, des réflexions subtiles qui ont révolté par leur étrangeté et leur hardiesse et qu'on aurait admises sans peine si elles avaient été précédées de l'histoire des faits." He carried over this inductive method into realm of history, which he thought had been approached from the wrong side, *i.e.,* the metaphysical, "par consulter les lumières de la raison" (p. 8). He continues, "j'ai pensé qu'il devait y avoir quelque circonstances *particulières.* Un fait et non une speculation métaphysique m'a toujours semblé devoir être et tribut naturel et necessaire de l'histoire." Curiously enough the central fact in history appeared to Boulanger to be the deluge, and on the basis of it he attempted to interpret the *Kulturgeschichte* of humanity. It is a bit unfortunate that he took the deluge quite as literally as he did; his idea, however, is obviously the influence of environmental pressure on the changing beliefs and practices of mankind. Under the spell of this new point of view, he writes, "Ce qu'on appelle l'histoire n'en est que la partie la plus ingrate, la plus

uniforme, la plus inutile, quoi qu'elle soit la plus connue. La veritable histoire est couvert par le voile des temps" (p. 7). Boulanger however was not to be daunted and on the firm foundation of the fact of some ancient and universal catastrophe, as recorded on the surface of the earth and in human mythology, he proceeds to inquire into the moral effects of the changes in the physical environment back to which if possible the history of antiquity must be traced. Man's defeat in his struggle with the elements made him religious, *hinc prima mali labes.* "Son premier pas fut un faux pas, so première maxime fut une erreur" (p. 4 sq). But it was not his fault nor has time repaired the evil moral effects of that early catastrophe. "Les grandes révolutions physiques de notre globe sont les veritables époques de l'histoire des nations" (p. 9). Hence have arisen the various psychological states through which mankind has passed. Contemporary savages are still in the primitive state,—Boulanger properly emphasizes the relation of anthropology to history—"On appercoit qu'il y a une nouvelle manière de voir et d'écrire l'histoire des hommes" (p. 12) and with a vast store of anthropological and folklorist learning he writes it so that his assailant, Fabry d'Autrey, in his *Antiquité justifiée* (Paris, 1766) is obliged to say with truth, "Ce n'est point ici un tissue de mensonges grossiers, de sophismes rebattus et bouffons, appliqués d'un air méprisant aux objets les plus interessans pour l'humanité. C'est une entreprise sérieuse et réfléchie" (p. 11).

In 1767 Holbach published his first original work, a few copies of which had been printed in Nancy in 1761. This work was *Le Christianisme dévoilé ou Examen des principes et des effets de la religion Chrétienne. Par feu M. Boulanger.* Londres (Amsterdam), 1767. There were

several other editions the same year, one printed at John Wilkes' private press in Westminster. It was reprinted in later collections of Boulanger's works, and went through several English and Spanish editions. The form of the title and the attribution of the work to Boulanger were designed to set persecution on the wrong track. There has been some discussion as to its authorship. Voltaire and Laharpe attributed it to Damilaville, at whose book shop it was said to have been sold, but M. Barbier has published detailed information given him by Naigeon to the effect that Holbach entrusted his manuscript to M. De Saint-Lambert, who had it printed by Leclerc at Nancy in 1761. Most of the copies that got to Paris at that time were bought by several officers of the King's regiment then in garrison at Nancy, among them M. de Villevielle, a friend of Voltaire and of Condorcet. Damilaville did not sell a single copy and even had a great deal of trouble to get one for Holbach who waited for it a long time. This circumstantial evidence is of greater value than the statement of Voltaire who was in the habit of attributing anonymous works to whomever he pleased.[2]

The edition of 1767 was printed in Amsterdam as were most of Holbach's works. We have the details of their publication from Naigeon *cadet,* a copyist, whose brother, J. A. Naigeon, was Holbach's literary factotum. In a manuscript note in his copy of the *Système de la Nature* he tells how he copied nearly all Holbach's works, either at Paris or at Sedan, where he was stationed, and where his friend Blon, the postmaster, aided him, passing the manuscripts on to a Madame Loncin in Liège, who in turn was a correspondent of Marc-Michel Rey, the printer in Amsterdam. Sometimes they were sent directly by the diligence

[2] Barbier, *Dict.,* Vol. I, p. 175 sq.

or through travellers. This account agrees perfectly with information given M. Barbier orally by Naigeon *ainé.* After being printed in Holland the books were smuggled into France *sous le manteaux,* as the expression is, and sold at absurd rates by colporters.[3]

Diderot writing to Falconet early in 1768[4] says: "Il pleut des livres incrédules. C'est un feu roulant qui crible le sanctuaire de toutes parts. . . . L'intolérance du gouvernment s'accroit de jour en jour. On dirait que c'est un projet formé d'éteindre ici les lettres, de ruiner le commerce de librairie et de nous réduire à la besace et à la stupidité. . . . *Le Christianisme dévoilé* s'est vendu jusqu'à quatre louis."

When caught the colporters were severely punished. Diderot gives the following instance in a letter to Mlle. Volland Oct. 8, 1768 (Avézac-Lavigne, *Diderot,* p. 161): "Un apprenti avait reçu, en payment ou autrement, d'un colporteur appelé Lécuyer, deux exemplaires du *Christianisme dévoilé,* et il avait vendu un de ces exemplaires à son patron. Celui-ci le défère au lieutenant de police. Le colporteur, sa femme et l'apprenti sont arrêtés tous les trois; ils viennent d'être piloriés, fouettés et marqués, et l'apprenti condemné à neuf ans de galères, le colporteur à cinq ans, et la femme à l'hôpital pour toute sa vie."

There are two very interesting pieces of contemporary criticism of *Le Christianisme dévoilé,* one by Voltaire, the other by Grimm. Voltaire writes in a letter to Madame de Saint Julien December 15, 1766 (*Oeuvres,* XLIV, p. 534, (ed. Garnier): "Vous m'apprenez que, dans votre société, on m'attribue *Le Christianisme dévoilé* par feu M. Boulanger, mais je vous assure que les gens au fait ne m'at-

[3] Barbier, Vol. I, p. xxxiii, note.

[4] *Oeuvres,* Vol. XVIII, p. 265.

tribuent point du tout cet ouvrage. J'avoue avec vous qu'il y a de la clarté, de la chaleur, et quelque fois de l'éloquence; mais il est plein de répétitions, de négligences, de fautes contre la langue et je serais très-fâché de l'avoir fait, non seulement comme académicien, mais comme philosophe, et encore plus comme citoyen.

"Il est entièrement opposé à mes principes. Ce livre conduit à l'athéisme que je déteste. J'ai toujours regardé l'athéisme comme le plus grand égarement de la raison, parce qu 'il est aussi ridicule de dire que l'arrangement du monde ne prouve pas un artisan suprême qu'il serait impertinent de dire qu'une horloge ne prouve pas un horloger.

"Je ne réprouve pas moins ce livre comme citoyen; l'auteur paraît trop ennemi des puissances. Des hommes qui penseraient comme lui ne formeraient qu'une anarchie: et je vois trop, par l'example de Genève, combien l'anarchie est à craindre. Ma coutume est d'écrire sur la marge de mes livres ce que je pense d'eux, vous verrez, quand vous daignerez venir à Ferney, les marges de *Christianisme dévoilé* chargés de remarques qui montrent que l'auteur s'est trompé sur les faits les plus essentiels." These notes may be read in Voltaire's works (Vol. XXXI, p. 129, ed. Garnier) and the original copy of *Le Christianisme dévoilé* in which he wrote them is in the British Museum (c 28, k 3) where it is jealously guarded as one of the most precious autographs of the Patriarch of Ferney.

Grimm's notice is from the *Correspondence Littéraire* of August 15, 1763 (Vol. V, p. 367). "Il existe un livre intitulé *le Christianisme dévoilé ou Examen des principes et des effets de la religion Chrétienne,* par feu M. Boulanger, volume in 8°. On voit d'abord qu'on lui a donné ce titre pour en faire le pendant de *l'Antiquité dévoilée;* mais il ne faut pas beucoup se connaître en manière pour sentir que

ces deux ouvrages ne sont pas sortis de la même plume. On peut assurer avec la même certitude que celui dont nous parlons ne vient point de la fabrique de Ferney, parceque j'aimerais mieux croire que le patriache eût pris la lune avec ses dents; cela serait moins impossible que de guetter sa manière et son allure si completement qu'il n'en restât aucune trace quelconque. Par la même raison, je ne crois ce livre d'aucun de nos philosophes connus, parceque je n'y trouve la manière d'aucun de ceux qui ont écrit. D'où vient-il done? Ma foi, je serais fâché de le savoir, et je crois que l'auteur aura sagement fait de ne mettre personne dans son secret. C'est le livre le plus hardi et le plus terrible qui ait jamais paru dans aucun lieu du monde. La préface consiste dans une lettre où l'auteur examine si la réligion est reélement nécessaire ou seulement utile au maintien ou à la police des empires, et s'il convient de la respecter sous ce point de vue. Comme il etablit la négative, il entreprend en conséquence de prouver, par son ouvrage, l'absurdité et l'incohérence du dogme Chrétien et de la mythologie qui en resulte, et l'influence de cette absurdité sur les têtes et sur les âmes. Dans la seconde partie, il examine la morale chrétienne, et il prétend prouver que dans ses principes généraux elle n'a aucun avantage sur toutes les morales du monde, parce que la justice et la bonté sont recommandées dans tous les catéchismes de l'univers, et que chez aucun peuple, quelque barbare qu'il fut, on n'a jamais enseigné qu'il fallût être injuste et méchant. Quant à ce que la morale chrétienne a de particulier, l'auteur pretend démontrer qu'elle ne peut convenir qu'à des enthousiastes peu propres aux devoirs de la société, pour les quels les hommes sont dans ce monde. Il entreprend de prouver, dans la troisième partie, que la religion chrétienne a eu les effets politiques les plus sinistres et les plus funestes, et que le

genre humain lui doit tous les malheurs dont il a été accablé depuis quinze à dixhuit siècles, sans qu'on en puisse encore prévoir la fin.

Ce livre est écrit avec plus de véhémence que de véritable éloquence; il entraine. Son style est châtié et correct, quoique un peu dur et sec; son ton est grave et soutenu. On n'y apprend rien de nouveau, et cependant il attache et intéresse. Malgré son incroyable témerité, on ne peut refuser à l'auteur la qualité d'homme de bien fortement épris du bonheur de sa race et de la prosperité des sociétés; mais je pense que ses bonnes intentions seraient une sauvegarde bien faible contre les mandements et les réquisitions." This is a clear and fair account of a book that is without doubt the severest criticism of the theory and practice of historical Christianity ever put in print.

The church very naturally did not let such a book pass unanswered. Abbé Bergier, a heavy person, triumphantly refuted Holbach in eight hundred pages in his *Apologie de la Religion Chrétienne contre l'Auteur du Christianisme dévoilé,* Paris, 1769, which finishes with the fatal prophecy, "Nous avons de surs garans de nos espérances: tant que le sang auguste de S. Louis sera sur le trône, *il n'y a point de révolutions à craindre ni dans la Religion ni dans la politique.* La religion Chrétienne fondée sur la parole de Dieu. . . . triomphera des nouveaux Philosophes. Dieu qui veille sur son ouvrage n'a pas besoin de nos foibles mains pour le soutenir" (Psaume 32, vs. 10, 11).

2. There already existed in 1767 another work by Holbach entitled *Théologie portative ou Dictionnaire Abrégé de la Religion Chrétienne. Par M^r l'Abbé Bernier.* Londres (Amsterdam), 1768 (1767). This book went through many editions and was augmented by subsequent authors

and editors. Voltaire was already writing to d'Alembert about it August 14, 1767.[5]

In a letter to Damilaville, October 16, he writes (Vol. XIV, p. 406):

Depuis trois mois il y a une douzaine d'ouvrages d'une liberté extrême, imprimés en Hollande. *La Théologie portative* n'est nullement théologique: ce n'est qu'une plaisanterie continuelle par ordre alphabétique; mais il faut avouer qu'il y a des traits si comiques que plusieurs théologiens mêmes ne pourront s'empêcher d'en rire. Les jeunes gens et les femmes lisent cette folie avec avidité. Les editions de tous les livres dans ce gout se multiplient.

And on February 8, 1768, he wrote:

On fait tous les jours des livres contre la religion, dont je voudrais bien imiter le style pour la defendre. Y a-t-il de plus salé, que la plupart des traits qui se trouvent dans la *Théologie portative*? Y a-t-il rien de plus vigoreux, de plus profondément raisonné, d'écrit avec une eloquence plus audacieuse et plus terrible, que le *Militaire philosophe,* ouvrage qui court toute l'Europe? [by Naigeon and Holbach] Lisez la *Théologie portative,* et vous ne pourrez vous empêcher de rire, en condammant la coupable hardiesse de l'auteur. Lisez *l'Imposture sacerdotal*—vous y verrez le style de Démosthène. Ces livres malheuresement inondent l'Europe; mais quelle est la cause de cette inondation? Il n'y en a point d'autre que les querelles théologiques qui ont revolté les laïques. *Il s'est fait une révolution dans l'esprit humain que rien ne peut plus arrêter: les persécutions ne pourraient qu'irriter le mal.*[6]

It is to be noted however that Voltaire's sentiments varied according to the point of view of the person to whom he was writing. In a letter to d'Alembert, May 24,

[5] *Oeuvres,* Vol. XIV, p. 352.

[6] The italics are mine.

1769 (Vol. LXV, p. 453), he calls the *Théologie portative,* un ouvrage à mon gré, très plaisant, auquel je n'ai assurément nulle part, ouvrage que je serais très fâché d'avoir fait, et que je voudrais bien avoir été capable de faire. But in a letter to the Bishop of Annecy June, 1769, he writes (Vol.XXVIII, p. 73): "Vous lui [M. de Saint Florentin] imputez, à ce que je vois par vos lettres, des livres misérables, et jusqu'à *la Theologie portative,* ouvrage fait apparemment dans quelque cabaret; vous n'êtes pas obligé d'avoir du goût, mais vous êtes obligé d'être juste" (Vol. XXVIII, p. 73). Diderot even said of the book: "C'est un assez bon nombre de bonnes plaisanteries noyées dans un beaucoup plus grand nombre de mauvaises" and this criticism is just. A few examples of the better jokes will suffice:

Adam: C'est le premier homme, Dieu en fait un grand nigaud, qui pour complaire à sa femme eut la bêtise de mordre dans une pomme que ses descendans n'ont point encore pu digérer.

Idées Innées: Notions inspirées des Prêtres de si bonne heure, si souvent répétées, que devenu grand l'on croît les avoir eu toujours ou les avoir reçus dès le ventre de sa mère.

Jonas: La baleine fut à la fin obligée de le vomir tant un Prophète est un morceau difficile à digérer.

Magie: Il y en a de deux sortes, la blanche et la noire. La première est très sainte et se pratique journellement dans l'église.

Protestants: Chrétiens amphibies.

Vierge: C'est la mère du fils de Dieu et belle-mère de l'église.

Visions: Lanternes magiques que de tout temps le Père Eternel s'est amusé à montrer aux Saintes et aux Prophètes.

3. Holbach furnished the last chapter of Naigeon's book *Le Militaire philosophe,* ou *Difficulties sur la religion,* Londres (Amsterdam), 1768. Voltaire ascribed the work to

St. Hyacinthe. Grimm recognized that the last chapter was by another hand and considered it the weakest part of the book. It attempts to demonstrate that all supernatural religions have been harmful to society and that the only useful religion is natural religion or morals. The book was refuted by Guidi, in a "*Lettre à M. le Chevalier de . . .* [Barthe] *entraîné dans l'irréligion par un libelle intitulé Le Militaire philosophe* (1770, 12mo).

4. Holbach's next book was *La Contagion sacrée ou l'Histoire naturelle de la Superstition,* Londres (Amsterdam), 1768. In his preface Holbach attributed the alleged English original of this work to John Trenchard but that was only a ruse to avoid persecution. The book is by Holbach It has gone through many editions and been translated into English and Spanish. The first edition had an introduction by Naigeon. According to him manuscripts of this book became quite rare at one time and were supposed to have been lost. Later they became more common and this edition was corrected by collation with six others. The letters were written in 1764, according to Lequinio (*Feuilles posthumes*), who had his information from Naigeon, to Marguerite, Marchioness de Vermandois in answer to a very touching and pitiful letter from that lady who was in great trouble over religion. Her young husband was a great friend of the Holbachs, but having had a strict Catholic bringing up she was shocked at their infidelity and warned by her confessor to keep away from them. "Yet in their home she saw all the domestic virtues exemplified and beheld that sweet and unchangeable affection for which the d'Holbachs were eminently distinguished among their acquaintances and which was remarkable for its striking contrast with the courtly and Christian habits of the day. Her natural good sense and love for her friends

struggled with her monastic education and reverence for the priests. The conflict rendered her miserable and she returned to her country seat to brood over it. In this state of mind she at length wrote to the Baron and laid open her situation requesting him to comfort, console, and enlighten her."[7] His letters accomplished the desired effect and he later published them in the hope that they would do as much for others. They were carefully revised before they were sent to the press. All the purely personal passages were omitted and others added to hide the identity of the persons concerned. Letters of the sort to religious ladies were common at this time. Fréret's were preventive, Holbach's curative, but appear to be rather strong dose for a *dévote,* Other examples are Voltaire's *Epître à Uranie* and Diderot's *Entretien d'un Philosophe avec la Marechale de. . . .*

6. In 1769 Holbach published two short treatises on the doctrine of eternal punishment which claimed to be translations from English but the originals are not to be found. The titles are *De l'intolérance convaincue de crime et de folie* as it is sometimes given, and

7. *L'Enfer détruit ou Examen raisonné du Dogme dé l'Eternité des Peines.* Londres, Amsterdam, 1769. This letter was translated into English under the title *Hell Destroyed!* "Now first translated from the French of d'Alembert without any mutilations," London 1823, which led Mr. J. Hibbert to say, "I know not why English publishers attribute this awfully sounding work to the cautious, not to say timid d'Alembert. It was followed by Whitefoot's *'Torments of Hell,'* now first translated from the French."[8]

Of Holbach's remaining works on religion two, *Histoire*

[7] Middleton's translation, preface.

[8] Cf. p. 94.

critique de Jésus Christ and Tableau des Saints, date from 1770 when he began to publish his more philosophical works.

8. The *Histoire critique de Jésus Christ ou Analyse raisonnée des Evangiles* was published without name of place or date. It was preceded by Voltaire's *Epître à Uranie.* It is an extremely careful but unsympathetic analysis of the Gospel accounts, emphasizing all the inconsistencies and interpreting them with a literalness that they can ill sustain. From this rationalistic view-point Holbach found the Gospels a tissue of absurdities and contradictions. His method, however, would not be followed by the critique of today.

9. *The Tableau des Saints* is a still more severe criticism of the heroes of Christendom. Holbach's proposition is "La raison ne connaît qu'une mesure pour juger et les hommes et les choses, c'est l'utilité réele et permanente, qui en resulte pour notre espèce," (p. 111.) Judged by this standard, the saints with their eyes fixed on another world have fallen far short. "Ils se flatterent de mériter le ciel en se rendant parfaitement inutile à la terre" (p. xviii). Holbach much prefers the heroes of classical antiquity. The book is violent but learned throughout, and deals not only with the Jewish patriarchs from Moses on but with the church fathers and Christian Princes down to the contemporary defenders of the faith. After a rather one-sided account of the most dreary characters and events in Christian history, Holbach concludes: "Tel fut, tel est, et tel sera toujours l'esprit du Christianisme: il est aisé de sentir qu'il est incompatible avec les principes les plus evidens de la morale et de la saine politique" (p. 208).

10. In *Recueil philosophique,* Londres (Amsterdam), 1770, edited by Naigeon. Reflexions sur les craintes de la

Mort. Problème important—La Religion est-elle necéssaire à la morale et utile à la Politique. Par M. Mirabaud.

11. *Essai sur les préjugés, ou De l'influence des opinions sur les moeurs et sur le bonheur des Hommes.* Londres (Amsterdam), 1770, under name of Dumarsais. The book pretended to be an elaboration of Dumarsais' essay on the *Philosophe* published in the *Nouvelles libertés de penser,* 1750.

The special interest connected with it was the refutation Frederick the Great published under the title *Examen de l'Essai sur les préjugés,* Londres, Nourse, 1770 (16 mo). The King of Prussia writing from the point of view of a practical, enlightened despot, took special exception to Holbach's remarks on government. "Il l'outrage avec autant de grossièreté que d'indécence, il force le gouvernement de prendre fait et cause avec l'église pour s'opposer à l'ennemi commun. Mais, quand avec un acharnement violent et les traits de la plus âcre satire, il calomnie son Roi et le gouvernement de son pays, on le prend pour un frénétique echappé de ses chaines, et livré aux transports les plus violens de sa rage. Quoi, Monsieur le philosophe, protecteur des moeurs et de la vertu, ignorez vous qu'un bon citoyen doit respecter la forme de gouvernement sous laquelle il vit, ignorez vous qu'il ne convient point à un particulier d'insulter les Puissances . . . (p. 28).

"Non content d'insulter à toutes les têtes couronnés de l'Europe, notre philosophe s'amuse, en passant, à repondre du ridicule sur les ouvrages de Hugo Grotius. J'oserais croire qu'il n'en sera pas cru sur sa parole, et que le *Droit de la guerre et de la paix* ira plus loin à la posterité que *l'Essai sur les préjugés*" (p. 39).

Holbach in his anti-militaristic enthusiasm had used the words "bourreaux mercenaires" "epithète élegante," con-

tinues Frederick, "dont il honore les guerriers. Mais souffrions nous qu'un cerveau brûlé insulte au plus noble emploi de la Societé?" p. 49. He goes on to defend war in good old fashioned terms. "Vous déclamez contre la guerre, elle est funeste en elle-même; mais c'est un mal comme ces autres fléaux du ciel qu'il faut supposer nécessaires dans l'arrangement de cet univers parce qu'ils arrivent périodiquement et qu'aucun siècle n'a pu jusqu'à present d'en avoir été exempt. J'ai prouvé que de tout temps l'erreur a dominé dans ce monde; et comme une chose aussi constante peut être envisagée comme une loi général de la nature, j'en conclus que ce qui a été toujours sera toujours le même" (p. 19).

Frederick sent his little refutation to Voltaire for his compliments which were forthcoming. A few days after Voltaire wrote to d'Alembert:

Le roi de Prusse vous a envoyé, sans doute, son petit écrit contre un livre imprimé cette année, intitulé *Essai sur les préjugés,* ce roi a aussi les siens, qu'il faut lui pardonner; on n'est pas roi pour rien. Mais je voudrais savoir quel est l'auteur de cet *Essai* contre lequel sa majesté prussienne s'amuse à écrire un peu durement. Serait-il de Diderot? serait-il de Damilaville? serait-il d'Helvetius? peut-être ne le connaissez-vous point, je le crois imprimé en Hollande (Vol. LXVI p. 304)

d'Alembert answered:

Oui, le roi re Prusse m'a envoyé son écrit contre *l'Essai sur les préjugés.* Je ne suis point étonné que ce prince n'ait pas goûté l'ouvrage; je l'ai lu depuis cette refutation et il m'a paru bien long, bien monotone et trop amer. Il me semble que ce qu'il y de bon dans ce livre aurait pu et du être noyé dans moins de pages et je vois que vous en avez porté à peu près le même jugement (Vol. LXVI, p. 324).

In spite of these unfavorable judgments the *Essai* was reprinted as late as 1886 by the Bibliotheque Nationale in its *Collection des meilleurs auteurs anciens et modernes,*

still attributed to Dumarsais with the account of his life by "le citoyen Daube" which graced the edition of the year I. (1792).

12. Early in 1770 appeared Holbach's most famous book, the *Système de la Nature,* the only book that is connected with his name in the minds of most historians and philosophers. It seems wiser, however, to deal with this work in a chapter apart and continue the account of his later publications.

13. The next of which was "*Le bon-sens, ou idées naturelles opposées aux idées surnaturelles. Par l'Auteur du Système de la Nature,* Londres (Amsterdam), 1772. This work has gone through twenty-five editions or more and has been translated into English, German, Italian and Spanish. As early as 1791 it began to be published under the name of the curé Jean Meslier d'Etrépigny, made so famous by Voltaire's publication of what was supposed to be his last will and testament in which on his death bed he abjured and cursed Christianity. Some editions contain in the preface Letters by Voltaire and his sketch of Jean Meslier. The last reprint was by De Laurence, Scott & Co., Chicago, 1910. The book is nothing more or less than the *Système de la Nature,* in a greatly reduced and more readable form.

Voltaire, to whom it was attributed by some, said to d'Alembert, "Il y a plus que du bon sens dans ce livre, il est terrible. S'il sort de la boutique du *Système de la Nature,* l'auteur s'est bien perfectionné." d'Alembert answered: "Je pense comme vous sur le *Bon-sens* qui me paraît un bien plus terrible livre que le *Système de la Nature.*" These remarks were inscribed by Thomas Jefferson on title page of his copy of *Bon-sens.* The book has gone through several editions in the United States and was sold at a popular

price. The German translation was published in Baltimore on the basis of a copy found in a second-hand book store in New Orleans. The most serious work written against it is a long and carefully written treatise against materialism by an Italian monk, Gardini, entitled *L'anima umana e sue proprietà dedotte da soli principj de ragione, dal P. lettore D. Antonmaria Gardini, monaco camaldalese, contro i materialisti e specialmente contro l'opera intitulata, le Bon-Sens, ou Idées Naturelles opposées aux idées Surnaturelles. In Padova MDCCLXXXI Nella stamperia del Seminario. Appresso Giovanni Manfré, Con Licenza de Superiori e Privilegio* (8vo, p. xx + 284).

14. In 1773 Holbach published his *Recherches sur les Miracles,* a much more sober work than his previous writings on religion. In this book he raises the well known difficulties with belief in miracles and brings a great deal of real learning and logic to bear on the question. The entire work is in a reasonable and philosophic spirit. His conclusion is that "une vraie religion doit avoir au defaut de bonnes raisons, des preuves sensibles, capables de faire impression sur tout ceux qui la cherchent de bonne foi. Ce ne sont pas les miracles." The same vear he published two serious but somewhat tiresome works on politics.

15. *La politique naturelle.*

16. *Système social* in which he attempts to reduce government to the naturalistic principles which were the basis of his entire philosophy. The first is also attributed to Malesherbes. There is a long and keen criticism of the *Système Social* by Mme. d'Epinay in a letter to Abbé Galiani Jan. 12, 1773 (Gal. *Corresp.,* Vol. II, p. 167).

But the most interesting reaction upon it was that of the Abbé Richard who criticized it from point of view of the divine right of kings in his long and tiresome work entitled

La Defense de la religion, de la morale, de la vertu, de la politique et de la societé, dans la réfutation des ouvrages qui ont pour titre, l'un Système Social etc. l'autre La Politique Naturelle par le R. P. Ch. L. Richard, Professor de Theologie, etc., Paris, Moulard, 1775.

In a preface of forty-seven pages the fears of the conservative old Abbé are well expressed. The aim of these modern philosophers who are poisoning public opinion by their writings is to "démolir avec l'antique édifice de la religion chrétienne, celui des moeurs, de la vertu, de la saine politique etc. rompre tous les canaux de communication entre la terre et le ciel, bannir, exterminer du monde le Dieu qui le tira du néant, y introduire l'impiété la plus complète, la licence la plus consomnée, l'anarchie la plus entire, la confusion la plus horrible."

17. Holbach's next work, *Ethocratie ou Gouvernement fondé sur la Morale,* Amsterdam, Rey, 1776, is interesting mainly for its unfortunate dedication and peroration, inscribed to Louis XVI, who was hailed therein as a long expected Messiah.

18. Holbach's last works dealt exclusively with morals. They are *La morale universelle ou les devoirs de l'homme fondés sur la nature,* Amsterdam, 1771, and

19. A posthumous work, *Elements de la Morale universelle, ou catechisme de la nature,* Paris, 1790. This is a beautiful little book. It is simple and clear to the last degree. There have been several translations in Spanish for the purposes of elementary education in morals in the public schools. It was composed in 1765. Holbach's attitude towards morals is indicated by his *Avertissement*— "La morale est une science dont les principes sont susceptibles d'une démonstration aussi claire et aussi rigoureuse que ceux du calcul et de la géometrie.

CHAPTER III

THE SYSTÈME DE LA NATURE

EARLY in 1770 appeared the famous *Système de la Nature, ou Des Loix du Monde Physique et du Monde Morale, Par M. Mirabaud, Sécretaire Perpétuel et l'un des Quarante de l'Académie Française,* Londres (Amsterdam), 1770. This work has gone through over thirty editions in France, Spain, Germany, England and the United States. No book of a philosophic or scientific character has ever caused such a sensation at the time of its publication, excepting perhaps Darwin's *Origin of Species,* the thesis of which is more than hinted at by Holbach. There were several editions in 1770. A very few copies contain a *Discours préliminaire de l'Auteur* of sixteen pages which Naigeon had printed separately in London. The *Abrégé du Code de la Nature,* which ends the book, was also published separately and is sometimes attributed to Diderot, 8vo, 16 pp.[1]

There is also a book entitled *Le vrai sens du Système de la Nature,* 1774, attributed to Helvetius, a very clear, concise epitome largely in Holbach's own short and telling sentences, and much more effective than the original because of its brevity. Holbach himself reproduced the *Système de la Nature* in a shortened form in *Bon-sens,* 1772, and Payrard plagiarized it freely in *De la Nature et de ses Lois, Paris,* 1773. The book has been attributed to Diderot, Helvétius, Robinet, Damilaville and others. Naigeon is certain that it is entirely by Holbach, although it is generally held that Diderot had a hand in it. It was published under the

[1] Morley, *Diderot,* Vol. II, p. 155.

name of Mirabaud to obviate persecution. The manuscript it was alleged had been found among his papers as a sort of "testament" or philosophical legacy to posterity. This work may be called the bible of scientific materialism and dogmatic atheism. Nothing before or since has ever approached it in its open and unequivocal insistence on points of view commonly held, if at all, with reluctance and reserve. It is impossible in a study of this length to deal fully with the attacks and refutations that were published immediately. We way mention first the condemnation of the book by the *Parlement de Paris,* August 18, 1770, to be burned by the public hangman along with Voltaire's *Dieu et les Homnes,* and Holbach's *Discours sur les Miracles, La Contagion sacrée* and *le Christianisme dévoilé,* which had already been condemned on September 24, 1769.[2]

The *Réquisitoire* of Seguier, *avocat general,* on the occasion of the condemnation of the *Système de la Nature* was so weak and ridiculous that the *Parlement de Paris* refused to sanction its publication, and it was printed by the express order of the King. As Grimm observed, it seemed designed solely to acquaint the ignorant with this dangerous work, without opposing any of its propositions. One would look in vain for a better example of the conservatism of the legal profession.[3]

Le poison des nouveautés profanes ne peut corrompre la sainte gravité des moeurs qui caractérise les vrais Magistrats: tout peut changer autour d'eux, *ils restent immuables avec la loi* (page 496).

Nest-ce pas ce fatal abus de la liberté de penser, qui a en-

[2] Later *Bon-sens* and *Théologie portative* were doomed to the flames by the condemnations of Jan. 10, 1774, and February 16, 1776.

[3] *Système de la Nature,* ed. 1771, Vol. II, p. 496.

fanté cette multitude de sectes, d'opinions, de partis, et cet esprit d'indépendence dont d'autres nations ont éprouvé les sinstres révolutions. Le même abus produira en France des effets peut-être plus funestes. La liberté indéfiné trouveroit, dans la caractère de la nation, dans son activité, dans son amour pour la nouveauté, un moyen de plus pour preparer les plus affreuses révolutions (p. 498).

The most interesting private attacks on the *Système de la Nature* came from two somewhat unexpected quarters, from Ferney and Sans Souci. Voltaire, as usual, was not wholly consistent in his opinions of it, as is revealed in his countless letters on the subject. Grimm attributed his hostility to jealousy, and the fear that the *Système de la Nature* might "renverse le rituel de Ferney et que le patriarcat ne s'en aille au diable avec lui.[4] George Leroy went so far as to write a book entitled *Réflexions sur la jalousie, pour servir de commentaire aux derniers ouvrages de M. de Voltaire,* 1772. Frederick II naturally felt bound to defend the kings who, as Voltaire said, were no better treated than God in the *Système de la Nature.*[5]

Voltaire's correspondence during this period is so interesting that it seems worth while to quote at length, especially from his letters to Fredrick the Great. In May 1770, shortly after the publication of the *Système de la Nature* Voltaire wrote to M. Vernes:[6] "On a tant dit de sottises sur la nature que je ne lis plus aucun de ces livres là." But by July he had read it and wrote to Grimm:[7] "Si l'ouvrage eut été plus serré il aurait fait un effet terrible, mais tel qu'il est il en a fait beaucoup. Il est bien plus éloquent que Spinosa. . . . J'ai une grande

[4] Grimm, *Cor. Lit.,* Vol. IX, p. 167.

[5] Voltaire, *Oeuvres,* ed. Beuchot, Vol. LXVI, p. 404. Subsequent references to Voltaire are from this edition.

[6] Vol. LXVII, p. 265.

[7] Grimm, *Cor. Lit.,* Vol. IX, p. 90.

curiosité de savoir ce qu'on en pense à Paris." In writing to d'Alembert about this time he seemed to have a fairly favorable impression of the book. "Il m'a paru qu'il y avait des longueurs, des répétitions et quelques inconséquences, mais il y a trop de bon pour qu'on n'éclate avec fureur contre ce livre. Si on garde le silence, ce sera une preuve du prodigieux progrès que la tolérance fait tous les jours."[8] But there was little likelihood that philosophers or theologians would keep silent about this scandalous book. Before the end of the month Voltaire was writing to d'Alembert about his own and the king of Prussia's refutations of it, and the same day wrote to Frederick: "Il me semble que vos remarques doivent être imprimées; ce sont des leçons pour le genre humain. Vous soutenez d'un bras la cause de Dieux et vous écrasez de l'autre la superstition."[9] Later Voltaire confessed to Frederick that he also had undertaken to rebuke the author of the *Système de la Nature*. "Ainsi Dieu a pour lui les deux hommes les moins superstitieux de l'Europe, ce que devait lui plaire beaucoup" (p. 390).

Frederick, however, hesitated to make his refutation public, and wrote to Voltaire: "Lorsque j'eus achevé mon ouvrage contre l'athéisme, je crus ma réfutation très orthodoxe, je la relus, et je la trouvai bien éloignée de l'être. Il y a des endroits qui ne saurait paraître sans effaroucher les timides et scandaliser les dévots. Un petit mot qui m'est echappé sur l'éternité du monde me ferait lapider dans votre patrie, si j'y étais né particulier, et que je l'eusse fait imprimer. Je sens que je n'ai point du tout ni l'âme ni le style théologique."[10] Voltaire, in his "petite drôlerie en faveur de la Divinité" (as he called his work) and in his letters, could

[8] Vol. LXVI, p, 432.
[9] Vol. LXVI, p. 563.
[10] Vol. LXVI, p. 386.

not find terms harsh enough in which to condemn the *Système de la Nature*. He called it "un chaos, un grand mal moral, un ouvrage de tenèbres, un péché contre la nature, un système de la folie et de l'igmorance," and wrote to Delisle de Sales: "Je ne vois pas que rien ait plus avili notre siècle que cette enorme sottise."[11] Voltaire seemed to grow more bitter about Holbach's book as time went on. His letters and various works abound in references to it, and it is difficult to determine his motives. He was accused, as has been suggested, by Holbach's circle "de caresser les gens en place, et d'abandonner ceux qui n'y sont plus."[12] M. Avenel believed that he suspected Holbach himself of making these accusations. Voltaire's letter to the Duc de Richlieu, Nov. 1, 1770,[13] seems to give them foundation.

A very different reaction was that of Goethe and his university circle at Strasburg to whom the *Système de la Nature* appeared a harmless and uninteresting book, "grau," "cimmerisch," "totenhaft," "die echte Quintessenz der Greisenheit." To these fervent young men in the youthful flush of romanticism, its sad, atheistic twilight seemed to cast a veil over the beauty of the earth and rob the heaven of stars; and they lightheardedly discredited both Holbach and Voltaire in favor of Shakespeare and the English romantic school. One would look far for a better instance of the romantic reaction which set in so soon and so obscured the clarity of the issues at stake in the eighteenth century thought.[14]

[11] Vol. LXVI, p. 394.

[12] Vol. XXVIII, p. 493.

[13] Vol. LXVI, p. 469.

[14] Goethe, *Wahrheit und Dichtung*, 11th Book, Goethe's *Werke*, Stuttgart, Vol. 19, p. 55.

Auf philosophische Weise erleuchtet und gefödert zu werden, hatten wir keinen Trieb noch Hang: über religiöse Gegenstände glaubten wir uns selbst aufgeklärt zu haben, und so war der heftige Streit franzö-

The leading refutations directed explicitly against the *Système de la Nature* are:

1. 1770, Rive, Abbé J. J., Lettres philosophiques contre le *Système de la Nature.* (Portefeuille hébdomadaire de Bruxelles.)
2. Frederick II., Examen critique du iivre intitulé, *Système de la Nature.* (Political Miscellanies, p. 175.)
3. Voltaire, Dieu, Réponse de M. de Voltaire au *Système de la Nature.* Au château de Ferney, 1770, 8 vo, pp. 34.

sischer Philosophen mit dem Pfafftum uns ziemlich gleichgültig. Verbotene, zum Feuer verdammte Bücher, welche damals grossen Lärmen machten, übten keine Wirkung auf uns. Ich gedenke statt aller des *Système de la Nature,* das wir aus Neugier in die Hand nahmen. Wir begriffen nicht, wie ein solches Buch gefährlich sein könnte. Es kam uns so grau, so cimmerisch, so totenhaft vor, das wir Mühe hatten, seine Gegenwart auszuhalten, dass wir davor wie vor einem Gespenste schauderten. Der Verfasser glaubt sein Buch ganz eigens zu empfehlen, wenn er in der Vorrede versichert, dass er, als ein abgelebter Greis, soeben in die Grube stiegend, der Mit- und Nachwelt die Wahrheit verkünden wolle. Wir lachten ihn aus: denn wir glaubten bemerkt zu haben, dass von alten Leuten eigentlich an der Welt nichts geschätzt werde, was liebenswürdig und gut an ihr ist. "Alte Kirchen haben dunkle Gläser" "Wie Kirschen und Beeren schmecken, muss mann Kinder und Sperlinge fragen"—dies waren unsere Lust- und Leibworte: und so schien uns jenes Buch, als die rechte Quintessenz der Greisenheit, unschmachhaft, ja abgeschmackt Alles sollte notwendig sein und deswegen kein Gott. "Könnte es denn aber nicht auch notwendig einen Gott geben?" fragten wir. Dabei gestanden wir freilich, das wir uns den Notwendigkeiten der Tage und Nächte, der Jahrszeiten, der klimatischen Einflusse, der physichen und animalischen Zustände nicht wohl entziehen könnten: doch fühlten wir etwas in uns, das als vollkommene Willkür erschien, und wieder etwas, das sich mit dieser Willkür ins Gleichgewicht zu setzen suchte. Die Hoffnung, immer vernünftiger zu werden, uns von den äussern Dingen, ja von uns selbst immer unabhängiger zu machen, konnten wir nicht aufgeben. Das Wort Freiheit klingt so schon, dass mann es nicht entbehren könnte und wenn es einen Irrtum bezeichnete.

Keiner von uns hatte das Buch hinausgelesen; denn wir fanden uns in der Erwartung getäuscht, in der wir es auf geschlagen hatten.

4. 1771, Bergier, Abbé N. F., Examen du matérialisme, ou Réfutation du *Système de la Nature.* Paris, Humbolt, 1771, 2 vols., 12mo.
5. Camuset, Abbé J. N., Principes contre l'incrédulité, a l'occasion du *Système de la Nature.* Paris, Pillot, 1771, 12mo, pp. viii + 335.
6. Castillon, J. de (Salvemini di Castiglione), Observations sur le livre intitulé, *Système de la Nature.* Berlin, Decker, 1771, 8vo. (40 sols broché.)

System der Natur ward angekündigt und wir hofften also wirklich etwas von der Natur, unsere Abgötten, zu erfahren. Physik und Chemie, Himmels- und Erdbeschriebung, Naturgeschichte und Anatomie und so manches andere hatte nun zeit Jahren und bis auf den letzten Tag uns immer auf die geschmüchte grosse Welt hingeweisen, und wir hatten gern von Sonnen und Sternen, von Planeten und Monden, von Bergen, Thälern, Flüssen und Meeren und von allem, was dann lebt und webt, das Nähere sowie das Allgemeinere erfahren. Das hierbei wohl manches vorkommen müsste, was dem gemeinen Menschen als schädlich, der Geistlichkeit als gefährlich, dem Staat als unzulässig erschienen möchte, daran hatten wir keinen Zweifel, und wir hofften, dieses Büchlein sollte nicht unwürdig die Feuerprobe bestauden haben. Allein wie hohl und leer ward uns in deiser tristen Atheistischen Halbnacht zu Mute, in welcher die Erde mit allen ihren Gebilden, der Himmel mit allen seinen Gestirnen verschwand! Eine Materie sollte sein von Ewigkeit und von Ewigkeit her bewegt, und sollte nun mit dieser Bewegung rechts und links und nach allen Seiten ohne weiteres die unendlichen Phänomene des Daseins hervorbringen. Dies alles wären wir sogar zufrieden gewesen, wenn der Verfasser wirklich aus seiner bewegten Materie die Welt vor unsern Augen aufgebaut hätte. Aber er mochte von der Natur so wenig wissen als wir; denn indem er einige allgemeine Begriffe hingepfahlt, verlässt er sie sogleich, um dasjenige, was höher als die Natur oder als höhere Natur in der Natur erschient, zur materiellen schweren, zwar bewegten, aber doch richtungs- und gestaltlosen Natur zu verwandeln, und glaubt dadurch recht viel gewonnen zu haben. Wenn uns jedoch dieses Buch einigen Schaden gebracht hat, so war es der, das wir allen Philosophie, besonderers aber der Metaphysick recht herzlich gram wurden, und bleiben, dagegen aber auf lebendige Wissen, Erfahren, Thun und Dichten uns nur desto lebhafter und leidenschaftlicher hinwarfen.

7. Rochford, Dubois de, Pensées diverses contre le système des matérialists, à l'occasion d'un écrit intitulé; *Système de la Nature.* Paris, Lambert, 1771, 12mo.
8. 1773, L'Impie démasqué, ou remontrance aux ecrivains incrédules. Londres, Heydinger, 1773.
9. Holland, J. H., Réflexions philosophiques sur le *Système de la Nature.* Paris, 1773, 2 vols., 8vo.
10. 1776, Buzonnière, Nouel de, Observations sur un ouvrage intitulé le *Système de la Nature.* Paris, Debure, père, 1776, 8vo, pp. 126. (Prix 1 livre, 16 sols broché.)
11. 1780, Fangouse, Abbé, La religion prouvée aux incrédules, avec une lettre à l'auteur du *Système de la Nature* par un homme du monde. Paris, Debure l'ainé, 12mo, p. 150. Same under title Réflexions importantes sur la religion, etc., 1785.
12. 1788, Paulian, A. J., Le véritable système de la nature, etc., Avignon, Niel, 2 vols., 12mo.
13. 1803, Mangold, F. X. von, Unumstossliche Widerlegung des Materialismus gegen den Verfasser des *Systems der Natur.* Augsburg, 1803.

Of these and other refutations of materialism such as Saint-Martin's *Des erreurs et de la vérité,* Dupont de Némours' *Philosophie de l'univers,* Delisles de Sales *Philosophie de la nature,* etc., which are not directed explicitly against the *Système de la Nature,* the works of Voltaire and Frederick the Great are the most interesting but by no means the most serious or convincing. Morley finds Voltaire very weak and much beside the point, especially in his discussion of order and disorder in nature which Holbach had denied. Voltaire's argument is that there must be an intelligent motor or cause behind nature (p. 7). This is God (p. 8). He admits at the outset that all systems are

mere dreams but he continues to insist with a dogmatism equal to Holbach's on the validity of his dream. He repeatedly asserts without foundation that Holbach's system is based on the false experiment of Needham (pp. 5, 6), and even goes so far as to ridicule the evolutionary hypothesis altogether (p. 6). He speaks of the necessity of a belief in God, by a kind of natural logic. God and matter exist in the nature of things, "Tout nous announce un Être suprême, rien ne nous dit ce qu'il est." God himself seems to be a kind of fatalistic necessity. "C'est ce que vous appellerez Nature et c'est ce que j'appelle Dieu." At the end he shifts the argument from the base of necessity to that of utility. Which is the more consoling doctrine? If the idea of God has prevented ten crimes I hold that the entire world should embrace it (p. 27). As Morley has said, such arguments could scarcely have convinced Voltaire himself.

Frederick was surprised that Voltaire and D'Alembert had found anything good in the book. His refutation was more methodical than that of Voltaire, who called it a "homage to the Divinity" but wrote to D'Alembert that it was written in the style of a notary. Two other refutations emanating from the Academy of Berlin were those of Castillon and Holland. The first of these is a very heavy and learned work, formidable and forbidding in its logic. Castillon reduces Holbach's propositions to three. The self-existence of matter, the essential relation of movement to it, and the possibility of deriving everything from it or some mode of it. Castillon concludes after five hundred pages of reasoning that matter is contingent, movement not inherent in it, and that purely spiritual beings exist in independence of it. Hence the *Système de la Nature* is a "long and wicked error."

Holland's is a still more serious work, which the Sorbonne

recommended strongly as an antidote against Holbach's *Système* which it qualified as "une malhereuse production que notre siècle doit rougir d'avoir enfantée." But when it was discovered that Holland was a Protestant his work was condemned forthwith, Jan. 17, 1773.

Bergier's refutation is interesting as an attack from a churchman of extraordinary keenness and insight into the progress of the new philosophy. In the *Système de la Nature* he recognized the hand of the author of *La Contagion sacrée* and the *Essai sur les préjugés* and dealt with it as he did the *Christianisme dévoilé.* Buzonniere, Rochfort and Fangouse are milder and more naïve in their demonstrations and their works are of no weight or interest. *L'Impie demasqué* is a brutal work which qualifies Holbach as a "vile apostle of vice and crime," and the *Système de la Nature* as the most impudent treatise on atheism that has yet dishonored the globe,—one which covers the century with shame and will be the scandal of future generations.

The work of Paulian is of a different sort. Coming comparatively late, it attempted to review the hostile opinions of many years and then mass them in an overwhelming final attack on the *Système de la Nature.* To this end Paulian rewrites the entire book chapter by chapter, giving the "true version." He then reviews Holland's outline and Bergier's comments, together with seven articles directed explicitly against the *Système de la Nature* in such works as the *Lettres Helviennes,* of Abbé Barruel, *Dict. des Philosophes, Dict. anti-philosophe,* his own *Dict. theologique,* etc., besides many other writings against the new philosophy in general. He then reviews articles by members of the philosophic school against materialism and then goes back to Holbach's sources, Diderot, Bayle, Spinoza, Lucretius, Epicurus,

etc. The work is not scholarly but comprehensive and evidently discouraged further formal refutations.

The *Système de la Nature* had many critics in the stormy days that followed 1789. Delisle de Sales found it a monstrosity,—a *fratras;* La Harpe called it an infamous book, "un amas de bétises qu' on ose appeler philosophie, inconcévables inépties, une immense échafaudage de mensonge et d'invective"; M. Villemain is much more calm and fair; Lord Brougham, like Damiron, Buzonnière, and many others, found it seductive but full of false reasoning; Lerminier was so severe that St.-Beuve was moved to defend Holbach against him. Samuel Wilkinson, the English translator of 1820, is one of the few whose criticism is at all favorable. Holbach has always appealed to a certain type of radical mind and his translators and editors have generally been men who were often over-enthusiastic. For example, Mr. Wilkinson says of the *Système de la Nature,*[15] "No work, ancient or modern, has surpassed it in the eloquence and sublimity of its language or in the facility with which it treats the most abstruse and difficult subjects. It is without exception the boldest effort the human mind has yet produced in the investigation of Morals and Theology.—The republic of letters has never produced another author whose pen was so well calculated to emancipate mankind from all those trammels with which the nurse, the school master, and the priest have successively locked up their noblest faculties, before they were capable of reasoning and judging for themselves."

It seems unnecessary to analyze the *Système de la Nature.* This has been done by Damiron, Soury, Fabre, Lange, Morley, the historians of philosophy, and encyclopædists; and the book itself is easily available in the larger libraries.

[15] Vol. II, p. 261, ed. 1820.

The substance of Holbach's philosophy is susceptible of clearer treatment apart from it or any one of his books, although it permeates all of them.

M. Jules Soury has said, in describing a certain type of mind: "Il est d'heureux esprits, des âmes fortes et saines, que n'effraie point le silence éternel des espaces infinis où s'anéantissait la raison de Pascal. Naïves et robustes natures, mâles et vigoureux penseurs, qui gardent toute la vie quelque chose des dons charmants de la jeunesse et de enfance même, une foi vive dans le témoinage immédiat de nos sens et de notre conscience, une humeur alerte, toute de joyeuse ardeur, et comme une intrépidité d'esprit que rien n'arrête. Pour eux tout est clair et uni; ou à peu pres, et là où ils soupçonnent quelque bas-bond insondable, ils se détournent et poursuivent fièrement leur chemin. Comme cet Epicurien dont parle Cicéron au commencement du *De natura deorum,* ils ont toujours l'air de sotir de l'assemblée des dieux et de descendre des intermondes d'Epicure."

Such was Holbach. His philosophy is based on the child-like assumption that things are as they seem, provided they are observed with sufficient care by a sufficient number of people. This brings us at once to the very heart of Holbach's method which was experimental and inductive to the last degree. Holbach was nourished on what might be called scientific rather than philosophical traditions. As M. Tourneux has pointed out, he had been a serious student of the natural sciences, especially those connected with the constitution of the earth. These studies led him to see the disparity between certain accepted and traditional cosmologies and a scientific interpretation of the terrestrial globe and the forms of life which flourish upon it. Finding the supposed sacred and infallible records untrustworthy in one regard, he began to question their veracity at other

points. Being of a critical frame of mind, he took the records rather more literally than a sympathetic, allegorical apologist would have done, although it cannot be said that he used much historical insight. After having studied the sacred texts for purposes of writing or having translated other men's studies on Moses, David, the Prophets, Jesus, Paul, the Christian theologians and saints, miracles, etc., he concluded that these accounts were untrustworthy and mendacious. He knew ancient and modern philosophy and found in the greater part of it an unwarranted romantic or theological trend which his scientific training had caused him to suspect. It must be admitted that however false or illogical Holbach's conclusions may be considered, he was by no means ignorant of the subjects he chose to treat, as some of his detractors would have one believe. His theory of knowledge was that of Locke and Condillac, and on this foundation he built up his system of scientific naturalism and dogmatic atheism.

His initial assumption is, as has been suggested, that experience (application réitérée des sens) and reason are trustworthy guides to knowledge. By them we become conscious of an external objective world, of which sentient beings themselves are a part, from which they receive impressions through their sense organs. These myriad impressions when compared and reflected upon form reasoned knowledge or truth, provided they are substantiated by repeated experiences carefully made. That is, an idea is said to be true when it conforms perfectly with the actual external object. This is possible unless one's senses are defective, or one's judgment vitiated by emotion and passion.

Holbach's contention is that if one applies experience and reason to the external universe, or nature, "ce vaste assemblage de tout ce qui existe"; it reveals *a single objective*

reality, i. e., *matter,* which is in itself essentially active or in a state of motion.

From matter in motion are derived all the phenomena that strike our senses. All is matter or a function of it. Matter, then, is not an effect, but a cause. It is not caused; it is from eternity and of necessity. The cardinal point in Holbach's philosophy is an inexorable materialistic necessity. Nothing, then, is exempt from the laws of physics and chemistry. Inorganic substance and organic life fall into the same category. Man himself with all his differentiated faculties is but a function of matter and motion in extraordinary complex and involved relations. Man's imputation to himself of free will and unending consciousness apart from his machine is an idle tale built on his desires, not on his experiences nor his knowledge of nature. This imputation of a will or soul to nature, independent of it or in any sense above it, is a still more idle one derived from his renunciation of the witness of his senses and his following after the phantoms of his imagination. It is ignorance or disregard of nature then that has given rise to supernatural ideas that have "no correspondence with true sight," or, as Holbach expressed it, have no counterpart in the external object. In other words, theology, or poetry about God, as Petrarch said, is ignorance of natural causes reduced to a system.

Man is a purely natural or physical being, like a tree or a stone. His so-called spiritual nature (l'homme morale) is merely a phase of his physical nature considered under a special aspect. He is all matter in motion, and when that ceases to function in a particular way, called life, he ceases to be as a conscious entity. He is so organized, however that his chief desires are to survive and render his existence happy. By happiness Holbach means the pres-

ence of pleasure and the absence of pain. In all his activity, then, man will seek pleasure and avoid pain. The chief cause of man's misery or lack of well being is his ignorance of the powers and possibilities of his own nature and the Universal Nature. All he needs is to ascertain his place in nature and adjust himself to it. From the beginning of his career he has been the dupe of false ideas, especially those connected with supernatural powers, on whom he supposed he was dependent. But, if ignorance of nature gave birth to the Gods, knowledge of nature is calculated to destroy them and the evils resulting from them, the introduction of theistic ideas into politics and morals. In a word, the truth, that is, *correct ideas of nature* is the one thing needful to the happiness and well-being of man.

The application of these principles to the given situation in France in 1770 would obviously have produced unwelcome results. Holbach's theory was that religion was worse than useless in that it had inculcated false and pernicious ideas in politics and morals. He would do away completely with it in the interest of putting these sciences on a natural basis. This basis is self-interest, or man's inevitable inclination toward survival and the highest degree of well-being, "L'objet de la morale est de faire connaître aux hommes que leur plus grande intérêt exige qu'ils pratiquèrent la vertu; le but du gouvernement doit être de la leur faire pratiquer.

Government then assumes the functions of moral restraint formally delegated to religion; and punishments render virtue attractive and vice repugnant. Holbach's theory of social organization is practically that of Aristotle. Men combine in order to increase the store of individual well-being, to live the good life. If those to whom society has delegated sovereignty abuse their power, society has the

right to take it from them. Sovereignty is merely an agent for the diffusion of truth and the maintenance of virtue, which are the prerequisites of social and individual well-being. The technique of progress is enlightenment and good laws.

Nothing could be clearer or simpler than Holbach's system. As Diderot so truly said, he will not be quoted on both sides of any question. His uncompromising atheism is the very heart and core of his system and clarifies the whole situation. All supernatural ideas are to be abandoned. Experience and reason are once for all made supreme, and henceforth refuse to share their throne or abdicate in favor of faith. Holbach's aim was as he said to bring man back to nature and render reason dear to him. "Il est tempts que cette raison injustement dégradé quitte un ton pusillamine qui la rendront complice du mensonge et du délire."

If reason is to rule, the usurper, religion, must be ejected; hence atheism was fundamental to his entire system. He did not suppose by any means that it would become a popular faith, because it presupposed too much learning and reflection, but it seemed to him the necessary weapon of a reforming party at that time. He defines an atheist as follows: "C'est un homme, qui détruit des chimères nuisibles au genre humain, pour ramener les hommes à la nature, à l'expérience, à la raison. C'est un penseur qui, ayant médité la matière, ses propriétés et ses façons d'agir, n'a pas besoin, pour expliquer les phénomènes de l'univers et les operations de la nature, d'imaginer des puissances idéales, des intelligences imaginaire, des êtres de raison; qui loin de faire mieux connaître cette nature, ne font que la rendre capricieuse, inexplicable, et méconnaissable, inutile au bonheur des hommes."

APPENDIX

HOLBACH'S CORRESPONDENCE

THE following letters of Holbach are extant:

Holbach to Hume, Aug. 23, 1763.

Holbach to Hume, Mar. 16, 1766.

Holbach to Hume, July 7, 1766.

Holbach to Hume, Aug. 18, 1766.

Holbach to Hume, Sept. 7, 1766.

These were printed in Hume's *Private Correspondence,* London, 1820, pp. 252–263, and deal largely with Hume's quarrel with Rousseau.

Holbach to Garrick, June 16, 1765.

Holbach to Garrick, Feb. 9, 1766.

These two letters are in manuscript in Lansdowne House, Coll. Forster, and were published by F. A. Hedgcock, *David Garrick et ses amis français.* Paris, 1911, pp. 251–253.

Holbach to Wilkes, Aug., 1746, 9 (Brit. Mus. Mss., Vol. 30867, p. 14).

Holbach to Wilkes, Dec. 10, 1746 (Brit. Mus. Mss., Vol. 30867, p. 18).

Holbach to Wilkes, May 22, 1766 (Brit. Mus. Mss., Vol. 30869, p. 39).

Holbach to Wilkes, Nov. 9, 1766 (Brit. Mus. Mss., Vol. 30869, p. 81).

Holbach to Wilkes, Dec. 10, 1767 (Brit. Mus. Mss., Vol. 30869, p. 173).

Holbach to Wilkes, July 17, 1768 (Brit. Mus. Mss., Vol. 30870, p. 59).

Holbach to Wilkes, Mar. 19, 1770 (Brit. Mus. Mss., Vol. 30871, p. 16).

Holbach to Wilkes, April 27, 1775, 9 (Wilkes, *Correspondence,* London, 1804, Vol. IV, p. 176).

The first seven of these letters are published for the first time in the present volume, pp. 6–11 and pp. 75–80.

Holbach to Galiani, Aug. 11, 1769 (*Critica,* Vol. I, pp. 488 sq.).

Galiani to Holbach, April 7, 1770 (Galiani, *Correspondence,* Paris, 1890, Vol. I, p. 92).

Galiani to Holbach, July 21, 1770 (Galiani, *Correspondence,* Paris, 1890, Vol. I, p. 199).

Holbach to Galiani, Aug. 25, 1770 (*Critica,* Vol. I, p. 489).

There are references to other letters in Critica which I have not been able to find.

Holbach to Beccaria, Mar. 15, 1767, published by M. Landry *Beccaria, Scritte e lettre inediti,* 1910, p. 146.

Holbach to Malesherbes, April 6, 1761 (hitherto unpublished). See present volume, p. 30.

Holbach to Hume

(Hume, Private Correspondence, London, 1820, pp. 252–263)

Paris, the 23rd. of August, 1763

Sir,—

I have received with the deepest sense of gratitude your very kind and obliging letter of the 8th. inst: favors of great men ought to give pride to those that have at least the merit of setting the value that is due upon them. This is my case with you, sir; the reading of your valuable works has not only inspired me with the strongest admiration for your genius and amiable parts, but gave me the highest idea of your person and

the strongest desire of getting acquainted with one of the greatest philosophers of my age, and of the best friend to mankind. These sentiments have emboldened me to send formally, though unknown to you, the work you are mentioning to me. I thought you were the best to judge of such a performance, and I took only the liberty of giving a hint of my desires, in case it should meet with your approbation, nor was I surprized, or presumed to be displeased, at seeing my wishes disappointed. The reasons appeared very obvious to me; not withstanding the British liberty, I conceived there were limits even to it. However, my late friend's book has appeared since and there is even an edition of it lately done in England: I believe it will be relished by the friends of truth, who like to see vulgar errors struck at the root. This has been your continued task, sir; and you deserve for it the praises of all sincere wellwishers of humanity: give me leave to rank myself among them, and express to you, by this opportunity you have been so kind as to give me, the fervent desire we have to see you in this country. Messrs. Stuart, Dempster, Fordyce, who are so good as to favor me with their company, have given me some hopes of seeing you in this metropolis, where you have so many admirers as readers, and as many sincere friends as there are disciples of philosophy. I don't doubt but my good friend M. Helvétius will join in our wishes, and prevail upon you to come over. I assure you, sir, you won't perceive much the change of the country, for all countries are alike for people that have the same minds.

I am, with the greatest veneration and esteem, sir, your most obedient and most humble servant.

D'HOLBACH.

Rue Royale, butte St. Roch, à Paris.

HOLBACH TO GARRICK

(Coll. Forster, Vol. XXI; pub. Hedgcock, p. 253)

PARIS, Feb ye 9 th, 1766.

I received, my very Dear Sir, with a great deal of pleasure,

your agreeable letter of ye 24th of January, but was very sorry to hear that you are inlisted in the numerous troup of *gouty* people. Tho' I have myself the honour of being of that tribe I dont desire my friends should enter into the same corporation. I am particularly griev'd to see you among the invalids for you have, more than any other, occasion for the free use of your limbs. However, don't be cross and peevish for that would be only increasing you distemper; and I charge you especially of not scolding that admirable lady Mrs Garrick, whose sweetness of temper and care must be a great comfort in you circumstances. I beg leave to present her with my respects and ye compliments of my wife, that has enjoyed but an indifferent state of health, owing to the severity of the winter. M^r^ and Mad^e^ Helvetius desire you both their best wishes and so do all your friends, for whom I can answer that every one of them keeps a kind remembrance of your valuable persons. Dr. Gem thinks you'll do very well to go to Bath, but his opinion is that a thin diet would be more serviceable to you than anything else; believe he is in the right. Abbé Morellet pays many thanks for the answers to his queries, but complains of their shortness and laconism; however it is not your fault. He is glad to hear you have receiv'd his translation of Beccaria's book, *Des délits et des peines.* and the compliments of our friend Dr Gatti to whom I gave your direction before he went to London. Our friend Suard has entered his neck into the matrimonial halter; we are all of us very sorry for it for we know that nothing combin'd with love, will at last make nothing at all.

I was not much surpris'd at the particulars you are pleas'd to mention about Rousseau. According to the thorough knowledge I have had of him I look on that man as a mere philosophical quack, full of affectation, of pride, of oddities and even villainies; the work he is going to publish justifies the last imputation. Is his memory so short as to forget that Mr Grimm, for those 9 years past, has taken care of the mother of his wench or *gouvernante* whom he left to starve here after having debauch'd her daughter and having got her 3 or 4 times with child. That great philosopher should remember that Mr.

Grimm has in his hands letters under his own hand-writing that prove him the most ungrateful dogg in the world. During his last stay in Paris he made some attempts to see Mr Diderot, and being refused that favor, he pretended that Diderot endeavoured to see him, but that himself had refused premptorily to comply with his request. I hope these particulars will suffice to let you know what you are to think of that illustrious man. I send you here a copy of a letter supposed to come from the King of Prussia, but done by Mr Horace Walpole, whereby you'll see that gentleman has found out his true character. But enough of that rascal who deserves not to be in Mr Hume's company but rather among the bears, of there are any in the mountains of Wales.

I am surprized you have not receiv'd yet the *Encyclopédie,* for a great number of copies have been sent over already to England unless you have left your subscription here, where hitherto not one copy has been delivered for prudent reasons.

We have had in the French Comedy a new play called *Le Philosophie sans le savoir* done and acted in a new stile, quite natural and moving: it has a prodigious success and deserves it extremely well. Marmontel will give us very soon upon the Italian stage his comical opera of *La Bergère des Alpes.* I hope it will prove very agreeable to the Publick, having been very much delighted by the rehearsal of it; the music was done by Mr Cohaut who teaches my wife to play on the luth. We expect a tragedy of the Dutch Barnvelt.

Mr Wilkes is still in this town, where he intends to stay until you give him leave to return to his native country. We have had the pleasure of seeing Mr Chanquion, your friend, who seems to be a very discerning gentleman and to whom in favor of your friendship I have shown all the politeness I could. I hear that Sr James Macdonald has been ill at Parma, but is now recovered and in Rome. Abbé Galliani is still at Naples and stands a fair chance of being employ'd in the ministry there.

Adieu, very dear Sir and remember your

affectionate friend

D'Holbach

Holbach to Wilkes

(Brit. Mus. Mss., Vol. 30869, p. 39)

Paris the 22d of May (1766)

My dear Sir

I am extreamely glad to know your lucky passage and happy arrival in your native country. I hope you know too well the sincere dispositions of my heart as to doubt of the friendship I have vowed to you for life; it has been of too long a duration to be shaken by any circumstances, and especially by those that do honor to you. I shall be very happy if your affairs (that seem to be in a fair way) permit you to drop over very soon to spend some time in this place along with Miss Wilkes to whom Made D'Holbach and I pay our best compliments. I can easily paint to my imagination the pleasure you both felt at your first meeting; everybody that has any sensibility must be acquainted with the grateful pangs in those moving circumstances.

Your case with the hawker at your entry in London is very odd and whimsical you did extrememly well to humour the man in his opinion about Mr. Wilkes. I dare say if you had done otherwise his fist would have convinc'd you of the goodness of your cause, and then it would have been impossible for you to pass for a dead man any longer; which however, I think was very necessary for you in the beginning. I expect with great eagerness the settlement of your affairs with the ministry to your own satisfaction; be persuaded, Dear Sir, that nobody interests himself in your happiness than myself, and nothing will conduce more to it than your steady attachment to the principles of honor and patriotism.

If you don't find a way of disposing of the little packet, you need not take much trouble about it, and you may bring it back along with you, when you come to this place, as to the kind offers you are so good as to make me about commissions, experience has taught me that it is unsafe to trust you with them, so I beg leave with gratitude to decline your proposals as that point.

All our common friends and acquaintances desire their best compliments to you, and believe me, my dear Sir.

Your affectionate oblig'd humble servant
D'HOLBACH

HOLBACH TO WILKES
(Brit. Mus. Mss., Vol. 30869, p. 81)

PARIS 9^{ber} 10th 1766

My very Dear Sir.

I receiv'd with the greatest pleasure the news of your lucky arrival in Engelland. You know the sentiments of my heart, and are undoubtedly convinc'd how much I wish for the good success of all your enterprises tho I am to be a great looser by it. I rejoice very heartily at the fine prospect you have now in view and don't doubt but the persons you mention will succeed if they are in good earnest: which is allways a little doubtful in people of that Kidney.

We have had the pleasure of seeing Miss Wilkes three or four times since your departure, she is extreamly well and longs for the return of her friend Mlle Helvetius the 20th of this month.

Rousseau will very likely hate the English very cordially for making him pay so dear for his books, it is however a sign that he told us a lye when he pretended in his writings to have no books at all, as to his guitar he should buy a new one to tune his heart a little better than he did before.

We have no news here, except the Election of Mr Thomas as a member of the french academy. Marquis Beccaria is going to leave us very soon being obliged to return to Milan: Count Veri will at the same time set out for England.

I'll be oblig'd to you for a copy or two of the book printed in holland you mentioned in your letter you may send it by some private opportunity to Miss Wilkes, with proper directions. a gentleman of our Society should be glad to get 2 copies of Baskervilles' virgil *in octavo*.

Tho Mr Davemport and Rousseau seem to be pleased very much with one another, I suppose they may very soon be tired of their squabbling, and the latter like the apostles will shake of against the barbarous Britons the dust of his feet.

receive the hearty compliments of my wife and all our friends. you know the true sentiments of my heart for you, Dear Sir. I am with great sincerity

your most obedient humble Servant

D'HOLBACH

HOLBACH TO WILKES

(Brit. Mus. Mss., Vol. 30869, p. 173)

Sear Sir

I receiv'd with a great deal of pleasure your friendly letter from Ostende of the 26th. nov. I was extreamly glad to hear your happy arrival at that place, and do not doubt but you met with a lucky passage to Dover the following day, we are now enjoying the conversation of your British friends about elections; that will not be tedious for you if, according to your hopes, you should succeed in your projects.

I see by your letter that instead of coming back directly by Calais you intend to travel with Miss Wilkes throug Antwerp and the Low countries, which I should think not very advisable in this rigorous season of the year, for generally at that time the waters are lock'd up by the frost and travelling is bad et tedious and may be would prove hurtful to your tender fellow traveller to whom my wife and I desire our best compliments. Such a scheme will be more advantagious for you both and more conformable to the wishes of your friends in this place.

I hope your arrival in London will contribute to reconcile abbé Galliani to that place, where he complains of having not heard of the sun since he set his foot on British shore, however he may comfort himself for we have had very little of it in this country. The Abbé must be overjoy'd at the news of the Jesuits being expell'd from his Native country for now he may say

Gens inimica mihi Tyrrhenum navigat aquor. We have no material news in this country except that the queen continues to be in a very bad state of health.

If there is some good new romance I'll be oblig'd to bring it over along with you as well as a couple of french books call'd *Militaire philosophe and Théologie portative* in case you may easily find them in London, for we cannot get them here. I am told the works of one Morgan have been esteem'd in your country but I don't know the titles of them, if you should know them and meet with them with facility, I should be very much oblig'd to you provided you make me pay a little more than you have done hitherto for your commissions.

All our common friends beg their compliments and I wish for your speedy return, and I am Sincerely
Dear Sir

Your faithful affectionate humble servant

D'HOLBACH

PARIS the 10th of decemb. 1767

HOLBACH TO WILKES

(Brit. Mus. Mss., Vol. 30870, p. 59)

GRANDVAL, 17th of July 1768

Dear Sir

I receiv'd with a great deal of pleasure your very agreable letter of the 28th of last month. I am extreamly glad that your generous soul is very far from sinking under the weight of these Misfortunes, and to see that you don't give up the hopes of carrying triumphantly your point notwithstanding the discouragements you have met with lately. I need not tell you how much your friends in Paris and I in particular interest ourselves in all the events that may befall you. Our old friendship ought to be a sure pledge of my sincere sentiments for you, and of my best wishes for your good success in all your undertakings. I believe you can do no better but to keep strictly to the rules you have laid down for your conduct, and I don't doubt but you'll find it will answer the best to your porpose.

I am very much oblig'd to you, Dear Sir, for the kind offers you make in your friendly letter. I have desir'd already Mr Suard to bring over a few books lately published in your metropolis. I am very glad to hear that Gentleman is pleas'd with his journey.

There's no possibility of getting for you a compleat sett of Callots engravings. Such a collection must be the business of many years; it is to be found only after the decease of some curious men who have taken a great deal of trouble to collect them. I found indeed in two shops 8 or 10 of them, but the proofs (les épreuves) were very indifferent and they wanted to sell them excessively dear; in general 200 guineas would procure a collection very far from being compleat

My wife and all our common acquaintence desire their best compliments to you and to Miss Wilkes and you know the sentiments wherewith I am for ever

Dear Sir

your affectionate friend and
very humble servant
D'Holbach

Holbach to Wilkes

(Brit. Mus. Mss., Vol. 30871, p. 16)

Paris the 19th of March 1770

Dear Sir

I receiv'd with a due sense of gratitude the favour of your last letter, and was overjoy'd to hear from yourself that your long confinement as not been able hitherto to obstruct the lively flow of your spirits. A little more patience and you'll reach the end of all your misfortunes, that have been faithfully partaken by your friends in England and abroad, for my own part I wish most sincerely that everything for the future may turn to your profit and welfare, without hurting that of your country, to whom, as a lover of mankind, I am a well wisher.

My wife desires her best compliments to you and your be-

loved Daughter, whom we both expect to see again with a great deal of pleasure in this country next month. Notwithstanding our bad circumstances we are making very great preparations for the Wedding of the Dauphin, and our metropolis begins already to be filled with foreigners that flock hither from all parts of the world. our friend Mr D'Alainville is to set out at the end of April to fetch the Archdutchess at Strasbourg and bring mask (ed) (?) her different stages on the road to Versailles.

We have no news in the literary world except that Voltaire is become lately *le père temporel,* that is to say the benefactor of the *Capucins du pays de Gex* where he lives, a title of which all his pranks seemd to exclude him, but grace you know, is omnipotent, and monks are not over nice when there is something to be got by their condescension.

If the hurry of affairs whould leave you any moments to read curious books I would advise you to peruse two very strange works lately publish'd viz *Recherches philosophiques sur les américains* le *Systême de la Nature* par Mirabaud. I suppose you'll find them cheaper and more easily in London that at Paris.

All your late acquaintances in this Town desire me to present you with their sincere compliments and best wishes; as to mine you know that they have no other object but your Welfare.

I am, Dear Sir, for ever

your most affectionate friend
and humble servant
D'Holbach

P. S. Ill be very much oblig'd to you for sending over to me in 2 vol. small ovtavo.

Holbach to Wilkes

(Wilkes, Correspondence, London, 1805, Vol. 4, p. 176)

Paris, April 27; 1775

"*My Lord,*

"I received with the utmost gratitude your lordship's friendly

letter of the 28th of March. (1775?) I should have done myself the honor of answering sooner to your kind propositions, if I had not been prevented by some gouty infirmities that have assailed in the beginning of this spring. I esteem myself very happy to find that the hurry of business, and your exhaltation to the rank of chief-magistrate, could not make you forget your friendship to me; though my present circumstances do not permit me to make use of your friendly invitation, be persuaded my very dear lord that Madame D'Holbach and myself shall forever keep these signs of your kindness, in very grateful remembrance.

We both desire out best compliments to your very amiable lady-mayoress: who acted so well her part lately in the Egyptian hall, to the satisfaction of that prodigious crowd you have been entertaining there. All members of our society that have had the happiness of being acquainted with you, desire to be kindly remembered; and a continuation of your valuable friendship shall for ever be the utmost ambition

my lord,

of your most sincerely devoted

D'HOLBACH".

GALIANI TO HOLBACH

(Galiani, Corresp., Vol. I, p. 199)

NAPLES, le 21 Juillet, 1770

Bonjour, mon cher Baron,

J'ai vu le *Système de la Nature.* C'est la ligne où finit la tristesse de la morne et sèche verité, au-delà commence la gaité du roman. Il n'y a rien de mieux que de se persuader que les dès sont pipés: cette idée en enfante milles autres, et un nouveau monde se régénère. Le M. Mirabaud est un vrai abbé Terray de la métaphysique. Il fait des réductions, des suspensions, et cause la banqueroute du savoir, du plaisir et de l'esprit humain. Mais vous allez me dire qu'aussi il y avait trop de non-valeurs: on était trop endetté, il courait trop de papiers non

réels sur la place. C'est vrai aussi, et voilà pourquoi la crise est arrivée.

Adieu, mon cher baron. Ecrivez-moi de longues lettres, pour que le plaisir en soit plus grand. Embrassez moi longuement la baronne, et soyez longue dans tout que vous faites, dans tout ce que vous patientez, dans tout ce que vous espérer. La longanimité est une belle vertu; c'est elle qui me fait espérer de revoir Paris.

Adieu.

Holbach to Galiani

(Critica, Vol. I, 1903, p. 489)

Grandval, le 25 d'août 1770

Bonjour, mon très délicieux abbé,

J'ai bien reçu votre très -précieuse lettre du 21 de juillet qui m'accuse la réception de celle que je vous avais écrite le 3 de juin. Je vois que celle-ci a été longtemps en route, attendu que M. Torcia à qui M. Diderot s'était chargé de la remettre, a encore traînassé quelque temps à Paris, suivant la louable coutume des voyageurs qui nous quittent toujours avec peine.

Je suis bien aise que vous ayez lu le livre de Mirabaud qui fait un bruit affreux dans ce pays. L'abbé Bergier l'a déjà réfutè très-longuement et sa réponse paraîtra cet hiver. La Sorbonne est, dit-on, occupée à détruire ce maudit *Système* qui lui paraît au moins hérétique. Voltaire lui-même se prépare à le pulveriser; en attendant nos seigneurs du Parlement y viennent d'y répondre par des fagots, ainsi qu'à quelque autres ouvrages de même trempe. Ce qu'il -y a de fâdieux c'est que l'ouvrage de V. qui a pour titre *Dieu et les hommes* a eté enveloppé dans la même condamnation, ce qui doit déplaire souverainement à l'auteur. Je me rappelle à cette occasion ce que M. Hume dit d'un catholique que Henri VIII fit conduire au bûcher avec quelques hérétiques, et dont le seul chagrin était d'être brûlé en si mauvaise compagnie. Nonobstant toutes ces réfutations, il paraît tous les jours quelques nouveaux ouvrages impies, au point que je suis très surpris que la rêcolte ait été si

bonne dans le royaume. En dernier lieu on vient de publier un ouvrage sous le titre de *Droit des souverains sur les biens du clergé,* qui, sans contenir des impiétés n'en est pas moins déplaisant pour cela: Il va droit à la cuisine, et veut que pour liquider la dette nationale on vende tous les biens ecclesiastiques et que l'on met nos pontifes à la pension. Vous sentez qu'une proposition si mal sonnante n'a pu manquer de mettre le ciel en courroux; sa colère s'est déchargé sur cinq ou six libraires et colporteurs qui ont été mis en prison.

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Abbreviations

B. N., Bibliothèque Nationale.
B. M., British Museum.
L. C., Library of Congress.
C. U., Columbia University.
H. U., Harvard University.
U. T. S., Union Theological Seminary.
G. T. S., General Theological Seminary.
A. T. S., Andover Theological Seminary.
N. Y., New York Public Library.
B. P., Boston Public Library.

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Saffre; Le Secret des vraies Porcelaines de la Chine et de Saxe; Ouvrages où l'on trouvera la manière de faire le Verre et le Crystal, d'y porter des Couleurs, d'imiter les Pierres Prétieuses, de préparer et colorer les Emaux, de faire la Potasse, de peindre sur le Verre, de préparer des Vernis, de composer de Couvertes pour des Fayances et Poteries, d'extraire la Couleur Pourpre de l'Or, de contrefaire les Rubis, de faire le Soffre, de faire et peindre les Porcelaines, etc. Traduits de l'Allemand Par M. D. . . . A Paris Durand, rue St. Jacques, au Griffon. Pissot, Quai des Augustins, à la Sagesse. Avec Approbation et Privilège du Roi (in quarto).

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Seconde Lettre. Histoire du dogme de l'Immortalité de l'Ame Chez les Payens. (pp. 45–93.)

Troisième Lettre. Sur l'origine de l'Idolatrie et sur les fondements de la Religion Payenne. (pp. 94–152.)

Quartrième Lettre. A un Gentilhomme Hollandois pour lui prouver que le systême de Spinoza est déporvu de fondements et pèche dans ses principes. (pp. 154–186.)

Cinquième Lettre. Dans laquelle on prouve que le mouvement est essentiel à la Matière; en réponse à quelques remarques qui ont été faites à l'Auteur au sujet de sa réfutation du Système de Spinoza.

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Latius excisae pestes contagie serpunt Victoresques suos natio victa premit. Rutilius, Itinerar. Lia I, vs. 394, Londres, MDCCLXX. (12mo, pp. xxii + 201.)

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Hoc admonere simplices etiam potest,
Opinione alterius ne quid ponderent;
Ambitio namque diffidens mortalium
Aut gratiae subscribunt, aut odio suo;
Erit ille notus, quem per te cognoveris.
Phaed., Lib. III, Fab. 10.

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Assiduite quotidiana et consuetudine oculorum assuescunt animi, neque admirantur, neque requerunt rationes earum rerum quas vident.—Cicero de Nat. Deorum, Lib. II. Londres, MDCCLXX. (8vo, pp. 394.)

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Discenda virtus est, ars est bonum fieri; erras si existimas vitia nobiscum nasci; supervenerunt in gesta sunt.

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Constituit bonos mores civitati princips.

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Naturâ duce utendum est: hanc ratio observat, hanc consulit, idem est ergo beatè vivere et secundum naturam.

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