

which always brings home to some of us the puritanism of our schooling, the having to be good.

But the Bible has been reinterpreted. The Dead Sea Scrolls have added a new and startling dimension to the figure of Christ, a strange element which bears a remarkable resemblance to the philosophy of yoga. As if this were not enough, we are now informed that Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed, not by the wrath of God (when is He going to destroy London?) but by an atomic explosion. The Soviet scientist, Agrest, proposed the following explanation in a recent issue of the *Literaturnya Gazeta*. Space travellers from another world reconnoitred the earth by throwing out from their rocket sounding missiles containing tektites; then landed, and blew up Sodom and Gomorrah, accidentally slaying Lot's wife, who may have been standing near a salt face. Having constructed their launching pads in Anti-Lebanon, they departed. This statement opens up unlimited scope for theorizing and delight. Now at last everything is going to fit in, and if we are not careful we shall find ourselves reconciling the most opposed views and swallowing everything that the scientific priesthood drops us. For if Russian scientists, trained in the most rigorously materialistic school of thought ever to have dominated half the earth, can submit to such ideas as these, what can those of us with less knowledge think? Indeed, another Russian theory postulates that Mars's satellites are artificial, and the *New Scientist* flippantly suggests that the erection of Stonehenge, the thunderbolts of the Olympic gods and other legends may have similar, 'spacemen' explanations. 'But,' the journal goes on, referring to Agrest's theory, 'however ridiculous Mr Agrest's suggestion may seem, it cannot be turned down out of hand. In the United States serious scientists think it worth while to turn a radio telescope on stars which might have inhabited planets to see if a powerful radio signal is being beamed towards us. If it is sensible to think that other living creatures can make radio transmitters of power incomparably greater than those on earth, it is equally sensible to think that they might have had rockets big enough to pay us a visit. Agrest's plea is that biologists and nuclear physicists should take a look at some of the archaeological remains to see whether there are traces of other worldly visitors. The suggestion is not as screwy as it at first appears.'

Through scientific evidence and exploration of the lesser-known byways of the mind not only the world, but the universe, past, present and future, is incomparably vaster than it was. Casual statements by eminent Russian scientists change our lives while leaving us exactly as we were before. We live in a state of excitement which is partly intellectual, waiting for the next discovery which will surely reveal, or rather, prove, everything. If spacemen came once, spacemen may come again. Before we rush into any wild and unconsidered actions, let us pause a while and remember that man, inhabitant of Sol III at least, is still a confused and semi-evolved being.

I. H.

Footnote for the uninitiated. Tektites are smooth, glassy lumps of curious shape found in Texas, Australia and elsewhere. Their origin is widely believed to be extra-terrestrial, though some scientists dispute this. Agrest seems to think they are the debris of a burned-out missile. They contain radio-active isotopes of aluminium and beryllium.

Our July Choice

A Case of Conscience

by James Blish

SINCE it appeared this novel has become widely known, to the general public as well as to fans. As a short story in Edmund Crispin's *Best SF* it was much noticed and greatly admired; and now, expanded to a full-length novel in which the issues are thoroughly worked out, the characters more firmly drawn, the suspense and excitement heightened, it more than deserves the Hugo Trophy it won at the World SF Convention in 1959.

Father Ruiz-Sanchez, Jesuit member of a four-man scientific expedition to the planet Lithia, becomes slowly troubled by its reasonable perfection, which is such that the planet must either be in the state of a Garden of Eden or a creation of the devil to tempt man away from God. For him to hold this view is, of course, a heresy, since the Church does not believe that the devil can create anything, let alone a perfectly ethical life without a deity. The Lithians, however, manage to mingle godlessness with a perfectly ethical way of life. This—in our time—most unusual theme creates interest and excitements all its own; a compelling moral problem and the four men involved: the hard-headed realist, the dedicated scientist, the priest, and the man who is content to ask nothing of any world, or any man. The action takes place both on Lithia and on an Earth whose inhabitants live underground in atom shelters whose usefulness has passed, an Earth which seethes with all the problems inherent in a world of sub-cities. The introduction of a Lithian into this ant-hill has unforeseeable, though quite logical, results.

A Case of Conscience will exercise your wit with the problems it presents, and the lively intelligence with which it is written will delight you. Whether or not you are a Catholic (the author himself is an agnostic) you will find this book very good SF.

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