

**Mann, Theodore Augustine** [known as Abbé Mann] (1735–1809), natural philosopher and historian, was born in Yorkshire on 22 June 1735, the son of a land surveyor. He was educated at a local school and instructed in scientific principles by his father. In 1753 he was sent to London to be educated in the law, but he ran away to Paris in the following year. Since the age of fifteen he had been of deist opinions, but in Paris his reading and re-reading of Bossuet's *Discours sur l'histoire universelle* brought him to the Roman Catholic faith. He was received into the Catholic church on 4 May 1756 by the archbishop of Paris.

At the outbreak of hostilities with France, Mann travelled to Spain. He joined a regiment in Spanish service and after some months obtained leave to spend a year at the military academy in Barcelona, where he resolved to seek a life more conducive to study. In 1758 he accordingly entered the English Charterhouse in Nieuwpoort, on the Flemish coast, where he was professed on 13 October 1759 and ordained priest on 20 September 1760. Until elected prior in 1764 Mann could dedicate himself to study for thirteen hours each day, and later described these years as the happiest of his life. He made extensive notes on his reading of the Bible and patristic literature, and translated devotional and apologetical works, including St Eucherius's *De contemptu mundi* and Caraccioli's *L'univers énigmatique*. He also wrote an English treatise on phonetics and a French tract explaining Newton's theory of gravitation. After 1764 his responsibilities as prior allowed him less time for study.

Mann was increasingly absent from February 1774, when he was elected to the Imperial and Royal Academy in Brussels, of which his friend John Turberville Needham was director. In July 1775 he submitted a petition for exclaustation so that he could take up more permanent residence in Brussels. In 1776 the British government sought to have him appointed co-adjutor bishop of Quebec, and in Brussels the chancellor of Brabant (M. de Crumpipen), the chief-president of the privy council (count de Nény), and the minister-plenipotentiary (Prince Starhemberg) sought Maria Theresa's influence to expedite his secularization and retain him in the Netherlands. He was released from his monastic vows on 10 May 1777 and settled in Brussels as a secular priest on 5 June. On 28 July he was made a canon of the church of Our Lady in Kortrijk, with dispensation from residence.

Mann was one of the most active members of the academy and contributed numerous treatises on such subjects as meteorology, fire prevention, fluid dynamics, natural history, agriculture and fisheries, population, political economy, antiquities, universal history, and moral philosophy. Many were published individually or in *Mémoires de l'Académie de Bruxelles* (5 vols., 1777–88). At the academy's request he compiled 'Tables des monnaies, poids et mesures anciennes et modernes de diverses nations' (1788).

Three aspects of Mann's academic labours deserve further notice. Firstly he

provided the earliest reliable series of meteorological observations from the Austrian Netherlands. Secondly some have seen an early, populationist, formulation of the 'Malthusian law' in Mann's considerations of the best ways to stimulate demographic growth within the constraints of agricultural productivity (Harsin, 155–9). Thirdly his work on fluid dynamics led to practical proposals for drainage and an official survey of the canals of the Austrian Netherlands.

From 1777 to 1783 Mann was heavily involved in government studies on canalization, agriculture, fisheries, and education. For proposed educational reforms he not only drafted reports and recommendations but was also commissioned to write schoolbooks. His textbooks on the natural sciences went through several editions. Preparatory to Joseph II's ecclesiastical reforms, Starhemberg commissioned a revision of Mann's *Réflexions sur la religion* (1778), a statement of the principles of the Cisalpine position. Such involvement in government projects came to an abrupt end with the resignations of Starhemberg and de Névy in 1783. In 1784 Mann embarked on a year-long scientific tour of France, Switzerland, and Germany in the company of the papal nuncio.

Besides writing academic treatises, government reports, and schoolbooks Mann was a contributor to the *Gentleman's Magazine*, the *Journal des Sçavans*, and *L'Esprit des Journaux*, and edited numerous works for the general public, including a children's encyclopaedia, a geographical dictionary, a horticultural dictionary, histories of the reign of Maria Theresa and of the voyages of discovery (with particular emphasis on those of Cook), and a civil, ecclesiastical, and natural history of Brussels. A treatise against theatre-going, *Le pour et contre les spectacles* (1782), has sometimes been attributed to him.

In April 1787 Mann was called to the deathbed of Anthony Joseph Browne, seventh Viscount Montagu, then resident in Brussels, to reconcile him to the Catholic church and 'to make his dying sentiments known to the world'—which he did, in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, leading to a heated correspondence in that journal. In June he became perpetual secretary of the Brussels academy, responsible for its archives and correspondence. In the following years he achieved election to the Royal Society, long his dearest wish, and to the learned societies of Mannheim, Milan, Rotterdam, Middelburg, and Richmond, Virginia, and to the Society of Antiquaries and the board of agriculture.

During the Brabant revolution of 1789–90 Mann remained in the Netherlands, ensuring that the academy survived the change of regime and, with greater difficulty, the first Austrian restoration of 1790. In 1791 he was again brought into projects for educational reform, and was appointed to the Commission for Studies, the board of education of the Austrian Netherlands, as one of two commissioners whose role was more than advisory.

At the French invasion of November 1792 Mann was evacuated by Lord Elgin. Given refuge in Downing Street he composed treatises to provide the ministry with general intelligence on the Austrian Netherlands. He returned to Brussels in April 1793, at the second restoration, and resumed his work for the academy and the Commission for Studies, but was forced to flee a final time in June 1794, at the second French invasion. Moving on in turn from Roermond, Paderborn, Bamberg, Regensburg, and Linz before the advancing revolutionary armies, he reached Prague late in 1797. He sought permission to return to England in the following year but was refused leave to depart from Austrian territory. Being at that time entirely dependent on an imperial pension he was obliged to remain in Prague,

where he resumed his literary activities. He wrote a treatise on the agriculture of the Austrian Netherlands and compiled a *Table chronologique de l'histoire universelle* for the years 1700–1803. His life's work, *Principes métaphysiques des êtres et des connaissances*, was printed at Vienna in 1807. He had sent the English manuscript to the British Museum in 1801, when he feared his death was imminent (BL, Add. MS 5794). He died at Prague on 23 February 1809.

Mann was known and respected in learned circles throughout Europe for his broad erudition, while in the Austrian Netherlands his reputation and influence were out of all proportion to his achievements. The main concerns of his own investigations were moral philosophy, metaphysics, and fluid dynamics. More importantly his writings increased knowledge of Newton's physics, Cook's voyages, and Cisalpine ecclesiology at every level of French-speaking society.

#### PAUL ARBLASTER

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**Likenesses** R. Rogers, stipple (after C. H. Jones), BM

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