

The Freethinker

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JUNE 24TH, 1959, marked the centenary of one of the most notable and beneficent events in the generally calamitous history of modern war. For, upon June 24th, 1859, the French and Austrian armies under the nominal command of their respective emperors, Franz Joseph of Austria and Louis Napoleon ("Napoleon the Little," as Victor Hugo scornfully termed him, in contradistinction to his uncle, the great Buonaparte) fought a bloody, but inconclusive battle at Solferino in Northern Italy: one of the most sanguinary of the century, in which the casualties of both armies combined were estimated at not far short of 100,000. The war was one of those nondescript conflicts, generated by power politics and territorial ambitions, and embodying no principles of any permanent significance. Actually, though not a decisive victory (in the Napoleonic sense at least), the French had rather the better of the affair, and the peace which was concluded soon after went in favour of the "little Napoleon" and of his Italian allies.

The Origins of the Red Cross

But, though Solferino was not one of the decisive battles of European or world history and, as just another battle, there would be no point in specially commemorating its anniversary, by a fortuitous irony it eventually proved to be a key event in military history. It deserves commemoration, though on quite unmilitary grounds. For it was on the bloody battlefield of Solferino that there was born one of the most beneficent ideas and, ultimately, organisations, that have made their appearance in modern times: the International Red Cross which, like most beneficent and important ideas arose initially in the mind of a single humane and far-sighted individual. This was the Swiss publicist and humanitarian, Henri Dunant, who was so appalled by the frightful human suffering which he saw on the night after the battle that he both published his experience and then set to work actively to devise means for preventing the repetition of such horrors in the future. Henri Dunant's book, *A Memory of Solferino*, soon became an international best-seller and was translated into most European languages. But it proved eventually to be more even than that, for it resulted in the first Geneva Convention of 1863, which became the effective starting-point of the organisation to be known as the Red Cross, a terminology somewhat inappropriate it would appear, since its illustrious founder, Henri Dunant himself, whilst making the probably inevitable appeals to Christian sentiment in his book addressed to a no doubt Christian public, was himself a Freethinker. He drew his inspiration, which led directly to the foundation of the Red Cross, from the secular and humanist ideals of the French Revolution and from its enlightened forerunners, the great French Humanists and Freethinkers of the school of Voltaire and Diderot.

Henri Dunant

Jean Henri Dunant was a Swiss citizen and a native of

Geneva—nowadays the "Mecca" of international organisations of every conceivable kind and for every conceivable purpose—where he was born in 1828 and died in 1910. His book, *A Memory of Solferino*, met with instant success, for he had the initial advantage of living in that age of reform and social progress to which, in England, the novels of Charles Dickens bore such effective witness.

Moreover, the particular reform initiated by Dunant was one overdue and urgently required. For surgery on the battlefield was incredibly primitive—piles of sawn-off limbs cluttered up the military hospitals of the period, while probably a far larger number of the wounded got no medical care at all. Hence, this particular

problem was not only humanitarian but utilitarian, which no doubt explains both the immediate success of Florence Nightingale in her drastic reformation of the British Army medical service, and Dunant's impassioned protest against the horrors that he had seen on the battlefield of Solferino. In his case appropriate action quickly followed the publication of his book. A Geneva Conference met in 1863 and Dunant was invited to join the organising committee. Nor was it only pacifists who cooperated with the new scheme. Among Dunant's colleagues on the committee was no less a person than General Dufour, Commander-in-Chief of the Federal Swiss Army, while another famous Swiss military man, General Jomini, a veteran of the Napoleonic Wars and the foremost military writer of his day, wrote Dunant a most cordial letter pledging his support. Ironically enough, Jomini had actually dictated the French strategy at Solferino! Later, Henri Dunant was most cordially received by the King and Queen of the arch-militarist State of Prussia, though he complained of a cool reception from the rising Prussian statesman Prince Bismarck. It is scarcely surprising that with such influential support, the International Red Cross, which was officially founded at another Conference in Geneva in 1864, quickly became the powerful and universally recognised institution that it has remained ever since. Its originator, however, enjoyed a chequered career, and much of his later life appears to have been passed in acute poverty—the usual reward some cynics might comment which mankind bestows on its benefactors and of which history unfortunately offers so many tragic examples! However, Dunant was not forgotten and in 1901 he received the first Nobel Peace Prize as a result of the bequest left by that eccentric Swedish genius, Alfred Nobel, who bequeathed his discovery of dynamite to his contemporaries and the idea of perpetual peace to his successors! Dunant's own monument was the Red Cross, and it is a worthy one.

Henri Dunant—Freethinker

One of the commonest claims advanced by the Christian Churches is that the care of the sick and unfortunate undertaken in hospitals is ultimately due to the practical application of Christian philanthropy. Actually, if we were

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

Henri Dunant Founder of the Red Cross

—By F. A. RIDLEY—

to take the Gospels literally, Jesus appears to have believed that all sickness was directly due to devils, and the only kind of doctors he approved of were witch doctors—exorcists—who cast them out. Although the Red Cross emblem of the new organisation was obtained by reversing the colours of the flag of Dunant's native country, Switzerland, it has been given a Christian significance. Later on, when Muslim lands took up the idea, the corresponding organisation received the similarly motivated title of Red Crescent, in view of which it is ironic to recall that the actual founder of the Red Cross was a pronounced Freethinker, who drew the initial inspiration for his philanthropy neither from the Bible nor the Koran. His latest biographer, Martin Gumpert, reproduces verbatim the following words of his hero: "Let us destroy both infamies! The two great enemies of Humanity are the Church and the State; they are the intellectual and moral sources of slavery—two arbitrary and comple-

mentary driving forces—one brutal and Macchiavellian, a hypocritical despotism, the other, callous and dishonest, swollen with pharisaical darkness, tyrannical and fanatical." "You know that I hate State Churches, the 'Reformed' as well as the 'Orthodox.' But just as little do I love the Baptists, the Methodists, the Wesleyans, the Salvationists, Congregationalists and all the other 'ists' in the world. But till my last breath I shall try to demolish all such trash. I shall all too soon have reached my end, but Christianity will have to pay for all the shames it has heaped up through the centuries. It is cowardly, mean and hateful to persecute conscience, as happens today in Russia, Spain and Switzerland." (c.f. Gumpert, pages 268-9.)

We wonder how often these words will be mentioned in what we hope will be the International Commemoration due to this noble benefactor of his species, Henri Dunant, Founder of the Red Cross and Freethinker!

The Rubaiyat

By W. E. HUXLEY (Member of the Iran Society)

MR. CUTNER does well to stress the difference between FitzGerald's version and the Persian which bears the name of Khayyam. And he is right in stating that the English version is not a translation at all. At the most it is a paraphrase.

Apparently Mr. Cutner does not read Persian, and has never dwelt in Iran, so he can never be sure that he is not repeating the errors of others. As I do not labour under these disabilities, and studied the matter when dwelling in Iran, perhaps your readers may be interested in my conclusions, although infallibility is not claimed.

The Persian verses were not written by one hand, or in one period. Khayyam was head of a school which attracted the sons of grandees from far and near. He was an expert mathematician and astronomer. He was not looked at askance during his lifetime because his knowledge of the Heavens served only to magnify and glorify the Might and Majesty of Allah.

Khayyam collected and published the *Rubaiyat* to amuse. He probably never imagined the authorship of them would ever be attributed to him. They were arranged in alphabetical order (of rhymes) which FitzGerald calls childish. But as the quatrains have no connection with each other, it is difficult to imagine a better method.

Persians take little heed of cemeteries. They are never cared for as in Europe, and even dogs (regarded as unclean animals) can and do defile them. Although D'Herbelot tells us that Omar Khayyam *a vecu en odeur de sainteté*, he was not really considered a Holy Man and it is surely too much to ask us to believe that his grave has been tended for over eight hundred years. It is doubtful whether the position of the savant's grave was known for hundreds of years prior to the time that FitzGerald made Europe ring with his name. But the yarn is good for the tourist trade.

Other days, other ways! In old Iran, if a man fancied another bedmate, he took her home. No one thought any the worse of him, not even his other wives. Ladies no doubt gossiped, but men would not be so indelicate as to mention it. Such things were a man's private affair, and of no concern to others.

It was youngsters with nowhere else to take their girls who planned to meet them in field or forest or desert. And there are so many such references that one must realise that schoolboys—teenagers—had a great hand in

composing the *Rubaiyat*. The verses are often bawdy, like our limericks. For example:

Oft times the air is rent by joyful cries,
Drink the Sagi's wine, and win the big prize,
For he that leaves his mother's womb today,
Tomorrow will explore a woman's thighs.

All it means is that babies grow up, but the mode of expression simply screams "Teenage."

Does the following sound like the work of the learned head or the naughty, inattentive boy in the back row?

Though wretched and luckless because of sin
No paynim I, so haply Heav'n I'll win,
But on the morn that of drink I shall die,
Heav'n or Hell—I'll have a wench—and gin.

Here is one which probably dates from a much earlier era:

On the ramparts of Tus I saw a bird
With the skull of Cyrus having a word,
Repeatedly it cries "Alas! Alack!
Why are drums and bells no longer heard?"

The bird, of course, is a vulture, one of those huge but very timid creatures which devour the flesh of Zoroastrian corpses. "Bells and drums" are martial music.

If Omar Khayyam composed any of the quatrains, I like to think that the following, at least, is his. It is the only one which really befits a headmaster.

Be meek, mild and humble, revere the Truth,
Share thy bread with the poor, to foe shew ruth.
None slander nor oppress, then I myself
Will ope for thee Heav'n's Gate. Bring wine, fair youth.

It is unknown how FitzGerald obtained his first copy of the *Rubaiyat*, but evidently he then knew only a smattering of the language. He could not read the verses unaided.

Mirza Baquir was shocked when FitzGerald insisted on studying them. No doubt he would have much preferred Sa'adi's *Gulistan*, the usual study book. But since FitzGerald was insistent, he spun the yarn that the author was a Sufi who meant something quite different from what he said. FitzGerald was not quite so dense as the Munshi imagined, and refused to swallow it. And not being able to translate with anything like accuracy, he wrote the exquisite poem we all know so well, giving it a semblance of Persian dress. If there be any trace of the influence of other Persian poets, FitzGerald must have imbibed it from his munshi.

Ah, fill the cup: what boots it to repeat
How Time is slipping underneath our feet?
Unborn Tomorrow and dead Yesterday!
Why fret about them if Today be sweet?
Tamām Shud.

Precious Blood

By COLIN McCALL

I HAVE NEVER, ALAS, been to Naples, though I hope to go there before I die! If I do I shall make a point of visiting the cathedral, for it is the scene of what M. Roger Peyrefitte has called "the most widely celebrated miracle in the Christian world," the liquefaction of the blood of St. Januarius, after whom the cathedral is named. Meanwhile I have devoted not a little time to reading about the occurrence.

Let us start with the man—if man there be. *The Lives of the Saints* by Omer Englebert (English translation, Thames & Hudson, 1951), states that "St. Januarius was martyred during the persecution of Diocletian" in 305, when "bishop of Benevento and about thirty years old"; that he "had his head cut off not far from the great amphitheatre of Pozzuoli"; that head and body were buried there but "were transported to Naples . . . a few years later"; and that "To it were added two phials in which a Christian woman had gathered some of his blood, and all were placed in a subterranean chamber over which the present cathedral was built." But *The Saints—a Concise Biographical Dictionary*, edited by John Coulson (Burns & Oates, 1958), is less emphatic. "The history of his martyrdom is somewhat obscure," it says, "as there are no references to him in the early Roman martyrologies, the present entry being derived in all probability from the writings of Bede in 733. It is believed, however, that Januarius was bishop of Benevento in Italy," etc. Donald Attwater (*A Dictionary of Saints*, Burns & Oates, New and Revised Edition, 1958) goes further: "According to legend," Januarius was bishop of Benevento and was put to death at Pozzuoli in the fourth century, "but nothing exact is known of him or of those who suffered with him."

Thus three Catholic reference books. As Englebert adduces no evidence for his statement, I take it he is only stating what, in the words of the other two, is "believed" "according to legend." No references to the Saint in the early Roman martyrologies; the earliest reference to him "appears to be that of Uranius (431)"; "nothing exact is known of him." I suggest we can unqualify this last to "nothing is known of him."

Attwater would seem to confirm this when he says that "All the fame of Januarius rests on the phenomenon called the liquefaction of the alleged relic of his blood." Note, "All the fame"; note, too, "the alleged relic." Englebert entertains no such doubts, of course. "Scientists have never explained this phenomenon," he says, and "Polemists have found no other explanation than the fraudulent intervention of the clergy." Sufficient answer to the latter charge is found (for Englebert) in Montesquieu's *Voyages*: "I can declare that the miracle of St. Januarius is not a trick; the priests are in good faith."

The Coulson volume also rules out "fraud or deception" on the grounds of testimony "by numerous people including many sceptics, scientists and others frankly hostile." But, it says, "From the scientific point of view it cannot be said that there has been an adequate investigation of the phenomenon," and it quite honestly indicates some of the dubious features of the "miracle." I will consider these in a moment; but first, what is the phial like?

The Saints describes it as "a flagon-shaped flask about four inches high and two and a quarter inches in diameter, the flask itself being enclosed in a glass reliquary on a

jewelled stand." Peyrefitte (*South from Naples*) says it is of crystal and that "Beside it is another, smaller phial, almost empty" (the contents having been given to Philip V of Spain), the two phials being "fixed within a glass container which in its turn is encircled by a silver band with a handle attached to it." Presumably there are two phials to conform with the Englebert story above, but the smaller one is not mentioned in Coulson. Still, there is agreement between the latter and Peyrefitte on the important point that there are "two thicknesses of hermetically-sealed glass between the relic and the atmosphere," as Coulson puts it. And "we have no knowledge of the pressure changes which may be occurring" inside. They agree, too, that the relic itself is ordinarily a dark opaque substance which half fills the phial.

I say "ordinarily," not only in contrast to the state at liquefaction, but because the relic "appears to vary in volume, at one time filling only half the flask, while at another it occupies two-thirds or more." This is one of the dubious aspects noted in *The Saints*. The variation may, it argues, "be more apparent than real, for there is no means of telling whether the mass is solid throughout, or whether empty space is enclosed within a solid crust." But it then admits a "greater difficulty"; that "the weight of the relic has been found to vary at different times by as much as twenty-seven grammes." Greater difficulty, to be sure, for the empty space can hardly add weight! There is, of course, the possibility that the substance varies from time to time in both volume and weight. And though it may not reflect very honourably on the clergy, it is a possibility that I put forward here.

Liquefaction occurs, according to Englebert, "generally three times a year, on September 19th, on December 16th, and on the first Sunday in May," the first being the Saint's feast day. But Coulson says: "About eighteen times a year, in the presence of a large congregation, the relic is exposed before another relic believed to be that of the martyr's head. After a period varying from a few minutes to several hours, during which the priest repeatedly inverts the flask and invocation is made to heaven for the miracle to take place, the solid mass is seen to liquefy, becoming bright red in colour, and on occasions it has bubbled and frothed." Peyrefitte describes the atmosphere as resembling a theatre rather than a church, the congregation (or audience?) clapping and cheering when the liquefaction occurs. For a miracle, he thinks "it happens too frequently." Likewise, Coulson would expect the miraculous to be "a rare event."

Both writers refer to the liquefaction which has taken place during repairs, but they use different terms. Coulson talks of "seven occasions, when a jeweller has been repairing the casket"; Peyrefitte of "once when repairs were being made to the phials." "Casket" is regrettably—perhaps deliberately—vague, and I don't know what is meant by it. It may mean the jewelled stand, but if so, why does Coulson change his term? He doesn't say whether the phial containing the relic has ever been repaired. He does, however, think it "highly unlikely that God would work a miracle" during repairs, whatever their nature.

For those who think it highly unlikely that God would work a miracle at any time, an item from the *Hibbert* (concluded on page 204)

This Believing World

It was most intriguing to note that "Cassandra," of the *Daily Mirror*, in giving evidence in the Liberace case, claimed that he was an Agnostic but wished that he had the faith of Christians, and complained that the singing of Ave Maria in a Liberace show by a nun was sheer "profanity." We cannot help wondering whether Cassandra took the oath or affirmed? And we can only hope that his sorrow in being unable to accept Christianity is not shared by many Agnostics. Some of us who have gone, it is true, a little further in rejecting Christian claims than our reverent Agnostics and Rationalists, feel nothing but joy at getting rid of credulity and superstition—but, alas, we cannot command the circulation of the *Daily Mirror* to explain to its millions of readers why.

★

We are all for museums and so are quite ready to enthuse over the latest—at the headquarters of the Marylebone Spiritualist Association in Belgrave Square. There will be found an oil painting painted in complete darkness by David Duguid—one of the most blatant frauds ever unearthed in Spiritualism—and plaster casts of the hands of "pixies"; though, rather surprisingly, no mention is made of the beautiful ballet dresses worn by fairies as they hop from flower to flower at the bottom of everybody's garden. Naturally, there are plenty of "spirit" photos as well, and "the original book of Black Hawk, the guide of Evan Powell"; though, again surprisingly, the original shorthand notes of Harry Price's secretary, recording the details of the disaster to the R.101 airship, by its dead commander, appear to be missing.

★

The "Daily Sketch" has been investigating the question of Devils making people ill, and has come to the conclusion that some illnesses cannot be explained without the presence of His Infernal Majesty. He was completely conspicuous in the case of a lady called Elizabeth Griffiths, whose "fits of ungovernable rage" doctors were unable to cure. So a parson was called in, and "the rite of exorcism laid down in the Bible" rigidly followed and, of course, the Devil was immediately cast out, thank God. She is now quite normal.

★

The "Daily Sketch" investigators talked with ministers, doctors, and healers, and they all believed that Jesus Christ, as reported in the Bible, really did work miracles by casting out "evil spirits"—that, is Devils—though "few people have taken this part of the New Testament seriously," a pathetic confession considering that Christianity has been forced on to Europe for over 1,500 years. However, once doctors really believe in exorcism and Devils, they are forced to believe in the power of Jesus Christ on exactly the same evidence. And Superstition, Credulity and Fear once again come into their own—as they did in the Middle Ages. The remedy—Science, more Science, and still more Science.

★

In a TV interview, Dr. Billy Graham admitted that he was wrong when he said in England a few years ago that all our troubles would be over if every living person in the world was converted to Christianity. He was not quite so sure about it now. We suspect he will have to change his mind on many other things as he grows older—for example, converting the people of Russia. Those there who still believe will no doubt continue to believe after hearing him—whether in English or Russian is not quite clear—but what about the instructed non-believers? How many genuine Atheists has he converted in his campaigns.

Dr. Graham has, of course, raised a storm with his attack on the "necking" or "petting" which goes on quite openly in some of our parks, about which he has declared quite firmly, "I don't retract a word." This has brought him a reply from the Rev. F. Martin, in the *Sunday Graphic*, who admits that he has "a very soft spot for Billy Graham"; but he is "getting a little tired of his cluck-clucking kind of Christian utterances." To describe Dr. Graham's evangelical oratory as "cluck-clucking" surely savours of profanity if not blasphemy, but Mr. Martin adds that his (Dr. Graham's) view of morals "will do far more harm than good." Not only that—"you cannot judge a country's religion by revival meetings," declares Mr. Martin, and charges his fellow worker for Christ as "talking nonsense." Still, Christians do love one another!

PRECIOUS BLOOD

(concluded from page 203)

Journal of October, 1921, will be of interest. On page 156, Dr. Frederic Newton Williams, L.S.A., L.R.C.P., is quoted in connection with his visit to the Naples municipal hospital and his talk there with the young American pharmacist in charge of the dispensary. "While there," said Dr. Williams, "a young acolyte from the Cathedral di San Gennaro (St. Januarius) came in and asked the pharmacist for the usual mixture for use at the feast which was to take place the next day (the first Saturday in May). With a smile and a few words of banter, the pharmacist prepared a mixture of ox-bile and crystals of Glauber salt (sulphate of soda) and, keeping the written message, handed it to the messenger to take back to the cathedral sacristy. After thus dismissing the acolyte, the practical pharmacist simply remarked to me that miracles took place nowadays, and this one was prepared in a hospital pharmacy with very satisfactory results . . . Thanks to my genial companion, the 'miracle' was quite successful." [The slight discrepancy with Englebert—first Saturday, instead of first Sunday, in May—may mean that the festival covers more than one day. Certainly there is considerable imprecision among writers on some of the festivals and what they commemorate—C. McC.]

So long as the opportunity for scientific analysis is denied, such an allegation must remain unproven. But I can't help thinking about the variable volume and weight. Moreover, Naples seems singularly favoured in the matter of liquefactions. Januarius is far from unique in the city, his relic sharing its liquefying property with numerous others, including those of St. John the Baptist and St. Patricia in one church, St. Gregory the Armenian. And, not to be outdone by the mere blood of saints, that veritable fluid of fluids, that Christian nectar, the milk of the Madonna, liquefies in the church of St. Luigi—also, needless to say, in Naples. The late Italian philosopher, Benedetto Croce, told Roger Peyrefitte of a discussion with a priest who defended the Januarius "miracle." Croce asked if the priest had taken the other cases into account, and the priest replied: "No, it only adds complications."

Indeed it does. Let us by all means avoid complications. Let us not ask awkward questions. After all, the priests enjoy it, the Neopolitans enjoy it, the visitors enjoy it. Why should we be spoil-sports just because we think it a disgusting fraud?

—NEXT WEEK—

THE SPUTNIK GOD

By Dr. J. V. DUHIG

THE FREETHINKER

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Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (rear of Morley Street Car Park).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Messrs. CORINA and DAY.

Edinburgh Branch N.S.S. (The Mound).—Every Sunday afternoon and evening: Messrs. CRONAN, MURRAY and SLEMEN.

London (Finsbury Square, E.C.2).—Every Wednesday, 1 p.m.: Messrs. L. EBURY and C. MCCALL.

London (Marble Arch).—Meetings every Sunday from 5 p.m.: Messrs. L. EBURY, J. W. BARKER and C. E. WOOD.

London (Tower Hill).—Every Thursday, 12—2 p.m.: Messrs. J. W. BARKER and L. EBURY.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Blitzed Site).—Every weekday, 1 p.m.: G. WOODCOCK. Sunday, 8 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK, MILLS and WOOD.

Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Pierhead).—Wednesdays, 1 p.m.; Sundays, 7.30 p.m.: Various speakers.

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Every Sunday, noon: Messrs. L. EBURY and A. ARTHUR.

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY. Sunday, 6.30 p.m.

Orpington Humanist Group. Sunday, June 28th. Ramble through Whitely Forest. Assemble at Sevenoaks Station at 10.50 a.m. Trains—Charing Cross, 9.37 a.m.; Victoria, 9.47 a.m.; Orpington, 10.34 a.m. Bring packed lunch, Tea at Sevenoaks.

INDOOR

Kingston Technical College Catholic Group (Fassett Road, Kingston).—Friday, June 26th, 5.30 p.m.: Debate—"Man Made God." For, HECTOR HAWTON; against, Father J. CHRISTIE, S.J.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, June 28th, 7 p.m.: A. ROBERTSON, M.A., "Reunion All Round."

Notes and News

DURING THE Printing Trades dispute, every effort will be made to keep THE FREETHINKER published and despatched. But we ask our readers to make allowances should there be any extension of the dispute.

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WE WERE very sorry to hear that J. Gremling, Vice-President of the World Union of Freethinkers and President of the Freethinkers of Luxemburg, lost his seat in the Luxemburg Parliament at the recent elections and hence will cease also to be a member of the Benelux Council. We need hardly say though, that M. Gremling will continue his work for Freethought as actively as ever.

★

THOSE WHO have read *The Keys of St. Peter*—and anybody who hasn't should remedy the deficiency immediately—will not be surprised to hear that author Roger Peyrefitte and his Milanese publishers have been charged with vilifying Roman Catholicism—the State religion of Italy—and offending the honour of the late Pope Pius XII. The trial is due to begin on Thursday, June 25th, and the charges will be brought by the State, which ordered

The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY ACKNOWLEDGED, £230 15s. 2d.; Anon (U.S.A.), 7s.; W.H.D., 2s. 6d.; F. Baker, 2s. 6d.; Anon, 1s. 3d.—Total to date, June 19th, 1959, £231 8s. 5d.

seizure of all copies of the book in March, 1958, "pending investigation." Villifying the Pope is a penal offence in Italy.

★

MISS JOYCE EGGINTON (*News Chronicle*, 29/5/59) has given us another interesting glimpse at the "religious revival" in America. She attended a church social in a private suite at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel, with cocktails at 8 p.m. and dancing until 2 a.m. There she met one of the sidesmen, "a Madison Avenue advertising man," and "a pretty girl in a debutante gown," who urged her to join the church social club. Miss Egginton was informed that "We have dancing . . . and French classes and a golf section. Then there's badminton and bridge as well as a swimming pool on the church premises. *You need never feel lonely.*" (Our italics.) Presumably there are occasional religious services, too!

★

SEVERAL envelopes recently received from Freethinkers in America have borne a small blue "sticker" with the slogan "Keep Church and State separate," the two institutions being represented by illustrations. To English eyes, the Capitol at Washington, the emblem of the State, looks rather confusingly like St. Paul's Cathedral, but the stickers are obviously mainly for internal American use and they are altogether admirable for that purpose.

YOU AND US

"YOU WILL SAY to yourself 'I don't know this name and address,' and quite correct you will be....I was introduced to THE FREETHINKER by a friend." That is the start of a letter from a Glasgow reader. He goes on to tell us that the friend, as he is now, was really a complete stranger at the time, and that "we met casually at the local and, as usual, the subject got round to religion."

Our reader's experience is, we are glad to say, not unique. We depend, in fact, very largely on this type of personal contact to make our paper better known, and religion is a fairly frequent topic of conversation. At the moment we are considering a selected advertising campaign. If our resources were larger, we could advertise widely and reach many potential readers who are at present unaware of our existence.

Even so—let us face it!—THE FREETHINKER can never hope to be a big circulation periodical. It is not to everybody's taste: if it tried to be it would lose its special quality. And we flatter ourselves that it *has* a special quality: a forcefulness and fearlessness that has characterised it from the days of G. W. Foote. A flavour best expressed, perhaps, as "stimulating"—the word used by our Glasgow reader. But precisely because it is a paper written with a particular readership in mind, THE FREETHINKER depends very considerably on that readership for its continued appearance.

Thanks to the thoughtfulness of our printers, Messrs. G. T. Wray Ltd., we don't think the printing dispute will stop us. Later, however, production costs may rise and our price, regrettably, may have to go up again. But that is the future and our main concern is with the present. Please make THE FREETHINKER known among your friends and acquaintances and, if possible, help the Sustentation Fund.

The Creator of Sherlock Holmes

(1859-1930)

By H. CUTNER

IF I WERE ASKED to name one of the greatest story tellers this country has ever produced I should unhesitatingly say Arthur Conan Doyle. This year celebrates his centenary—he was born in 1859—and it has quite amused me to read some of the more or less grudging notices which have appeared about him in some of our newspapers and journals.

Of course we have always had great story tellers. The greatest—in my opinion—is Charles Dickens who has no rival in literature in the art of holding a reader's interest on every page, and who is supreme both in tragedy and humour. But there are many who come very near him, Walter Scott, Charles Reade, W. M. Thackeray, Captain Marryat, Charles Lever, to say nothing of Jane Austen, the Brontës, and George Eliot. Among Doyle's contemporaries there were dozens of very fine story tellers—like Rider Haggard, Quiller Couch, Jack London—but I have no wish to compile dozens of names. Leaving aside his Sherlock Holmes, Conan Doyle wrote quite a number of first-class stories—indeed, they can be rated very high in the art, and certainly greater than some of his critics are disposed to consider them. Except for a few, I mistrust the judgment of many of our literary critics, and often wish I could cross swords with them. Unfortunately, literary criticism is a closed shop except for those lucky people who have had some success already in other fields—as an MP, or on the stage, or as a broadcaster, etc. I have always maintained that G. W. Foote had a few contemporary literary critics his equal, yet his militant Free-thought was so much against him that he was never allowed a chance to show how discerning a critic he could be.

Mention Conan Doyle to any moderately well-read person, and Sherlock Holmes immediately overshadows his other work. In creating him, Doyle made his detective-hero a household word. Not even the most famous of the characters of Dickens—Mr. Micawber, Mrs. Gamp, Bill Sykes, the whole galaxy of them—are better known all over the world than the great detective and his "buddy", Dr. Watson, who is, of course, partly Doyle himself. But Doyle was by no means the creator of detective fiction as so many people think. The "daddy" of them all is Edgar Allan Poe, whose three famous stories featuring Monsieur C. Auguste Dupin contain the germ of nearly all detective stories written after they were published. But it could be argued that even Poe was not really the first to give us a genuine detective story. The famous French police spy, E. F. Vidocq, published his *Memoires* in 1828, and Poe, who was an omniverous reader, possibly had read and mastered the four volumes they comprised packed with thrilling stories of crime and detection. Where Poe scored was that in creating his Dupin, he foreshadowed almost entirely the great deductive reasoning of Holmes—Dupin boasting that "most men, in respect to myself, wore windows in their bosoms", and went on to give evidence of his prowess in the wonderful stories Poe bequeathed us. Incidentally, Poe "created" many other kinds of fiction; and I am one of those who claim for him the honour of being the greatest master of the short story who has ever lived.

Conan Doyle himself had studied medicine in Edinburgh and was inclined to give one of his teachers, Dr. Joseph

Bell, the credit for the powers of observation and deduction which have made Holmes so world famous; but nobody who reads *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, *The Mystery of Marie Roget*, and *The Purloined Letter*, can doubt for a moment that Dupin was really Holmes's Master. This is no discredit to Conan Doyle. There were plenty of good detective stories before Holmes came on the scene written by, among others, Gaboriau, Pinkerton, Dick Donovan and Julian Hawthorne, but Doyle brought to the art something new.

As a young doctor, he found it difficult to attract patients to his surgery, and so wiled away the time writing stories. I wonder how many of the readers of this journal know that he even wrote one for the *Boys' Own Paper*? It appeared in the volume for 1887, and it has the true, authentic Doyle touch. It is entitled *Uncle Jeremy's Household*, is written in the first person, and the narrator actually lived in Baker Street—perhaps the first mention of the street to which all Holmes lovers pay a pious, if ineffectual, pilgrimage at least once in their lives.

Doyle's first Sherlock Holmes story, *A Study in Scarlet*, appeared a year later, and a most exciting one it is, not at all relished by Mormons who are depicted as sort of pre-Nazi monsters. But the truly great Holmes did not actually become famous until the stories we all know (I hope) began to appear in the *Strand Magazine* in 1891.

In the meantime, Doyle had tried his rapidly maturing hand at other stories—some of which, like *The White Company*, are minor masterpieces. His versatility was amazing. He could write melodramas like *The Firm of Girdlestone*, a Regency story like *Rodney Stone* with its magnificent pugilistic background, Napoleonic adventures like *Brigadier Gerard* and a gripping little play which enhanced even the great reputation of Henry Irving. I think I read all the stories which bear his name—particularly some volumes of short stories in which difficult form he was almost unrivalled.

It is in his *Stark Munro Letters* that he made clear his Materialism. Unfortunately, I have not got this volume from which I should like to have quoted. Conan Doyle, of Irish stock, was brought up a Roman Catholic—his uncle, Richard Doyle, a famous Punch artist, had in fact resigned when that satirical journal during the middle of last century poked fun at the Roman Church. It must have been difficult for Conan Doyle to have rejected the Church and its beliefs, but in the *Stark Munro Letters*, dealing as it does with his medical experiences, he was quite clear in his unbelief.

In addition to all his literary activities, Conan Doyle took the English side during the Boer War, and even worked in South Africa as a doctor. His pamphlet defending England had a circulation of 100,000. It was not England which wanted Apartheid but the Boers.

In any case, Conan Doyle was honoured with a knighthood which he fully deserved, and he continued writing his marvellous stories—all of them intensely readable—until the outbreak of World War I when he professed his faith in Spiritualism. Soon he was producing books and articles and giving lectures all designed to confirm his belief—even in the actual existence of fairies. He even believed that Harry Houdini, as sturdy an anti-Spiritualist as ever lived, was in reality a perfect medium who could

"dematerialise" himself at will—for example, when he was performing his celebrated illusion of walking through a brick wall. In fact, there was no end to Doyle's credulity and it made him an easy prey for the run of all mediums.

There is no doubt that Conan Doyle took his belief in Spiritualism far more earnestly than anything else in his life's work, but how thoroughly wrong he was can be seen in the report of his famous debate with Joseph McCabe in 1920. McCabe was at the height of his powers at the time, and he ruthlessly analysed the ignorance, the stupidities, and the downright fraud, inherent in Spiritualism. Doyle had never come across an opponent with McCabe's ability and memory allied with such great powers of debate; and in this particular discussion McCabe came out unscathed. A long correspondence followed in the *Literary Guide* but, of course, very few of Doyle's Spiritualist followers ever read anything against them. As his son, Adrian Conan Doyle, recently said in a TV interview, his father was not one man but many. The man who fought for the innocence of Oscar Slater and Edalji, who fought for the innocence of Oscar Slater and Edalji, both wrongly imprisoned, and *won*, was somehow quite different from the man who believed that there were fairies six inches high flitting from flower to flower; or from the man who could write so superb an historical romance as *The White Company*.

Let us forget his Spiritualism, and remember the many splendid stories he has left to posterity as well as the memory of a chivalrous great-hearted man—a combination of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson.

FREEDOM OF THINKING IN ENGLISH SCHOOLS

by C. BRADLAUGH BONNER.
(concluded from page 194)

IN THE SECOND case the teacher's son, withdrawn from the lesson, but owing to lack of room space, at the back of the classroom, asked his father how he could say such a lot of stuff in which he did not believe. In the last case the teacher declared that, being without religion himself, he would see that there was no denominational bias in his lesson. These are extreme cases. Teachers are normally conscientious and do their best to execute the tasks allotted to them, but where there is no interest in the teacher, the lesson commonly does not interest the pupils; and when there is keen interest sectarian bias is likely to show. Some teachers do encourage their pupils to try to think religious problems out for themselves, somewhat on these lines: that such are the arguments for and against, and the pupil should be prepared to deal with them. The top classes are often taken by the head teacher, who may or may not be competent; one way of "passing the buck" is to take advantage of the BBC broadcast lessons for Sixth Forms. One Head declared that his Sixth Form Bible lessons never "went beyond Plato." Another invited non-Christian sixth-formers to take part in his Bible lessons, and found himself faced by a Parsi armed with Bertrand Russell's *Why I am not a Christian*.

The Head Teacher is allowed considerable latitude in the preparation and organisation of the curriculum, but ultimately he is responsible to the school governors, among whom representatives of the Churches are always to be found, and subject to the Ministry of Education through its inspectors, who are usually broad-minded men and women who believe it their duty to inspire and help rather than to criticise adversely.

It was the expectation of educationists a century ago that with the spread of scientific knowledge, the detached scientific outlook would also spread. The study of the sciences should sharpen the critical faculty and develop

sound judgment rather than overload the memory with detail. So swift and vast have been the increases in scientific knowledge that memorisation of detail has been inevitable, and too often the pupil is called on to memorise arguments as well as factual detail instead of being taught to develop sound arguments for himself. Life is too short; science too long.

It thus often happens that the critical faculty is encouraged more in the humanities than in the sciences; but the majority of advanced pupils are naturally drawn more to the sciences since they offer more remunerative careers. In present day school it is the wage value of a subject which counts; the humanities offer little in obvious financial reward as compared with the sciences and mathematics. Only enthusiasts are therefore likely to pursue letters to university standard. As for theology or for philosophy . . . !

I think it will be agreed that the English teacher has, in theory, considerable latitude in method and presentation of his lesson; that he should therefore be in a position to encourage independent thinking on the part of his pupils when and where that may occur. This implies that the teacher himself is capable of, and trained in, independent thinking himself; and, as I have already had occasion to remark, the ordinary teacher is human. What is most often lacking in man is courage, moral courage, to put the question to the test of action. The most powerful social pressure is for conformity, particularly in matters irrational; so the irrational prevails; minds are closed to its examination, through fear. In the English school, deriving more from the daily religious assembly than from the Bible lesson, it is tacitly agreed that "good" and "Christian" are synonymous; this is the great obstacle which confronts teacher and pupil. The members of minority religions (e.g. Catholics and Jews) tend to form cliques apart with their own shibboleths, with a feeling of superiority over the majority, and a certain sentiment of heroism, the Spartan few against the hordes of Asia. The solitary child may be somewhat overwhelmed by isolation, which may produce unhappiness and cannot be without effect at all. The fact that the hullabaloo raised at Mrs. Knight's broadcasts on *Morality Without Religion* brought in many letters, 45% of those sent in, in favour of the broadcasts, shows that the atmosphere is becoming more tolerant of freethinking, and this is slowly making itself felt in the schools. The high reputations of people such as Bertrand Russell, Sir Julian Huxley and Lady Wootton, who are household names, or, again, of Eden Philpotts and Ernest Newman, all outspoken freethinkers, counterbalance the influence of Cardinals and Archbishops to some degree.

As far as the inculcation of independent thinking was concerned, the 1944 Education Act, which came into force in 1950, was retrograde. It is still difficult to assess what may have been the effect of this law on the schools. It has given the clerical elements greater power and has inspired them to greater activity. On the other hand, the whole trend of thinking has been away from the antiquated dogmas of pre-electronic ages; Biblical miracles appear slight, even absurd, in face of the miracles of modern science.

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LEICESTER DANCE AND OUTING

THE Leicester Secular Society dance on June 6th, at the De-Montfort Hall, in aid of the Leicester Spastics Society, was a huge success. Unsettled weather, a first rate dance orchestra and a reasonable price drew a record crowd of 1,123 dancers, and "house full" notices were then put up. The Society wishes to thank everyone who helped to make the first effort in this particular field such an outstanding success, particularly the members of the Youth Club, who sold a thousand raffle tickets realising over £15. We intend to present a cheque to the spastics as soon as the accounts are settled.

On Sunday, June 7th, a party of 30 Freethinkers from Leicester were entertained by fellow member Mr. B. B. Pinder and Mrs. Pinder at their charming bungalow standing in ten acres of unspoiled woodland at Overstone, Northants. On our return journey we paid a brief visit to the Charles Bradlaugh memorial in Northampton. It was indeed a day to remember. C.H.H.

CORRESPONDENCE

A CRITIC

Mr. Cutner would like "examples of what I mean." Any issue of "This Believing World" will give him several.

For instance, in the latest copy to hand, he overreaches himself in his attempts to shock and scandalise the pious. He says that the modern indifference to religion is "enough to make the Holy Spirit burst with anger." Any Christian with any pretensions to intelligence could make mince-meat of this. The "Holy Spirit," as "God," is conceived as infinite, and what is infinite cannot burst, since bursting is nothing other than the result of an attempt by a finite thing to expand beyond its natural limits.

Mr. Cutner, let's face it, is not a careful and painstaking man, but a hasty and careless one. His natural medium is the Hyde Park soapbox, where his crudities and gaucheries are borne away by the breeze and are forgotten as soon as uttered. He should avoid situations in which his words are permanently recorded against him, if he is unwilling to face criticism. S. W. BROOKS.

[Mr. Cutner writes: "You were asked to give examples of what you complained about and this—as I expected—you have utterly failed to do. There is nothing wrong with the expression, 'the Holy Ghost bursting with anger,' for as you very well know, the Bible constantly describes God Almighty getting terribly angry against somebody or other; and is not the Holy Ghost God Almighty? And, of course, I always appreciate, even if hostile, any criticism.—Ed]

PUBLIC LIBRARIES

There must be many members of our Society who are also members of public libraries. Would it not be a good idea if every member suggested two books each month, written by freethinking authors, and so further the cause of the Society. I myself have had placed in the Dundee Public Libraries books by C. Cohen, Paul Blanshard, Avro Manhattan, Robert Ingersoll, Bertrand Russell, Joseph McCabe, etc. G. HALLYBURTON.

[This is an oft-repeated suggestion. We are glad to know when and where it comes to fruition.—Ed.]

ZAMENHOV

Apropos of your Quiz question on Zamenhov, it may interest readers to know that 1959 is the centenary year of the birth of Zamenhof. The name "Esperanto" was the pseudonym used by Zamenhof when he published his first book, *Doktoro Esperanto, Lingvo Internacia* (Warsaw, 1887). It was not long before "the language of Doctor Esperanto" became simply known as Esperanto. G. DICKINSON.

THOUGHT AND ACTION

The view expressed by E. G. Macfarlane (May 8th) is what I have held for years; namely, that it is mere gutless ineffectiveness for Atheists not to allow their opinions to become known, and to connive at the continuance of the *status quo* in religious teaching in schools. From statistics collected by Leuba and others we see that the most learned sections of the professional classes are Atheists—but if only they would let the world know it!

Mr. Macfarlane is a sterling example of intellectual integrity and logical clarity. It does no good at all simply to think; one must also act. Freethinkers who perform only the former func-

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tion are of no more use to freethought than if they had never been born. They must act their freethought in public, as Mr. Macfarlane does.

ALAN ROSEN (U.S.A.).

N.S.S. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 10TH, 1959.—Present: Messrs. F. A. Ridley (chair), Alexander, Arthur, Barker, Cleaver, Corstorphine, Ebury, Hornbrook, Johnson, Manhattan (representing Leicester), Taylor, Mrs. Trask, Mrs. Venton, the Treasurer (Mr. Griffiths) and the Secretary. Apology for absence from Mr. Plume (to represent Wales and Western). New members were admitted to Dagenham, Edinburgh, North London, Wales and Western and West Ham and District Branches which, with Individual members, made 15 in all. Renewal of affiliation fee to the National Council for Civil Liberties was approved and Mr. R. Johnson appointed as delegate to the Council's A.G.M. The success of the Thomas Paine meeting was reported. Advertisements stating the society's willingness to conduct secular funeral services had been placed in two funeral directors' journals and the Co-operative Funeral Managers' Association had been notified. Official replies to letters on adoption, criminal statistics, grants to denominational schools and religion on the BBC were given. (Individual N.S.S. members will receive details of these by post.) The Benevolent Fund and Conference and Standing Orders sub-committees were re-elected. A possible Press Propaganda Group of Messrs. Alexander, Hammersley and Shipper was proposed and an advertising campaign for THE FREETHINKER was given preliminary consideration. Mr. Ebury read a statement suggesting a discussion of delegates' duties, card votes and rights of individual members in case of a card vote. This would be discussed at the next meeting. It was agreed to approach South Place Ethical Society requesting their co-operation at Saturday evening meetings at Hyde Park. The next meeting was fixed for Wednesday, July 8th, 1959.

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