

The Freethinker

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OUR ESTEEMED contemporary, the *Daily Mirror*, recently came out with a startling piece of information which, apart from its news value, has some value as a curiosity for students of comparative religion. From time to time excavations, usually made in the vicinity of Roman camps and fortifications, reveal traces of the cult of the ancient Persian solar deity, Mithras who, as the god of a military cult widely diffused throughout the Roman Empire (and, in particular, —for Mithraism was essentially a military cult—in the Roman army) represented in the third and fourth centuries of our current era, the major rival to Christianity for the religious domination over the Western world. A few

years ago, for example, the remains of a Mithraic Temple were dug up in the heart of the City of London. Now, however—or so the *Daily Mirror* informs us—an actual attempt is being made to revive the long extinct Mithraic cult in the seemingly incongruous surroundings set by our modern industrial civilisation. One might have thought that Galileo or the author of *The Golden Bough*, had made the old Persian sun god a trifle archaic under modern conditions. Surely no one today thinks of reviving the Druidic cult, or of restoring Stonehenge to its pre-historic functions—whatever exactly they may have been? Evidently, however, there are still some super-optimists around, and perhaps a gross materialist might ascribe the current revival of the old Persian solar cult to the unexpected amount of sunshine—most unusual in an English Summer—that we have been privileged to enjoy in recent weeks!

Mithraism on Hampstead Heath

According to our contemporary, the would-be miracle workers who seek to raise Mithras from his long sleep (some fifteen centuries—and not a mere three days as in the case of his old rival, Jesus Christ!) started the revived cult of the Persian sun god in circumstances which appear to be about as bizarre and incongruous as might well be imagined. For the initiation ceremony, as we may perhaps term it, of the now resurrected sun god, transpired on—of all places in the world—Hampstead Heath, that Londoners' playground overlooking the Metropolis. Not only so, but this is presumably the first Mithraic ceremony to be held since the remote era when the Roman Emperor Theodosius banned the worship of Mithras along with that of the other Pagan deities, in the name of the "Jealous God" of Christianity, who thereafter substituted a religious monopoly for the former Pagan system of free religious competition in the celestial sphere. What, however, makes this "resurrection morning" of a peculiar character, was that it seems to have been actually celebrated *after* darkness had fallen; which certainly appears a trifle odd in a cult devoted to the adoration of a sun god. It rather looks as if our modern Mithraists were more afraid of the Hampstead police than of the ancient Persian sun god. We must confess that we are not sufficiently *au fait* with the Hampstead Heath

bye-laws to know whether religious ceremonies are, or are not, illegal there after dark. In any case the Hampstead Borough Council probably did not foresee the revival of a pre-Christian oriental cult on the Heath in mid-Summer 1959, so this particular contingency can hardly have been provided for. But one ceremony which we have always been told by experts on Mithraism, represented the inevitable and unvarying accompaniment

of every Mithraic ceremony is certainly illegal—or so we should imagine—in modern English Common Law. No Mithraic ceremony was ever complete without the ceremonial slaying of a bull, the earthly antitype of the Celestial Bull which was

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

Washed in the Blood of the Bull

By F. A. RIDLEY

supposed to have had the honour (!) of having its throat cut by the divine hand of Mithras himself. (At least every surviving Mithraic monument contains the representation of the young Mithras slaying the Bull) and this rite, like its opposite number, the Christian Eucharist, seems to have been the central religious rite of the Mithraic cult, which was a highly organised International cult for several centuries before, and for several centuries after, the beginnings of the Christian era. We were not informed by our contemporary whether or not a bull was slain during this recent nocturnal revival of Mithraism on Hampstead Heath. If so, its transportation must surely have represented something of a problem, particularly as in these non-Mithraic times killing bulls on common land is illegal. But presumably something of the kind must have occurred. The more so since we are always told by the experts no one could possibly become a Mithraist without first being baptised in the sacramental blood of a newly-killed bull whom the Mithraic priest had just killed in imitation of Mithras. Mithraism baptised with blood and not, as did its Christian rival, with water; in Mithraist theology the phrase "washed in the blood of the Bull" had a literal and not a metaphorical connotation. We suggest that the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (including, presumably, bulls about to have their throats cut in honour of Mithras) might keep an eye on Hampstead Heath particularly since, according to the *Daily Mirror*, the neo-Mithraists intend to carry on with their revival.

Mithras versus Christ

The obscure temporary revival noted above, recalls memories of the long duel waged between the Persian sun god, Mithras, and the Son of God, Jesus Christ, for the religious (and in time, totalitarian) supremacy over the Roman Empire and the Western world. This combat was by no means so one-sided as might be imagined in the present-day circumstances in which Christianity still reigns supreme from the Vatican to Broadcasting House; whereas Mithraism is now only found in connections with ruins—and Hampstead Heath! At one period indeed (the second half of the third century A.D.) Mithras appeared to be on the verge of a decisive victory over

his Galilean rival. A.D. 274 saw one Mithraist Emperor, Aurelian, proclaim December 25th, "the birthday of the unconquered sun" (Mithras), as a public holiday; while another, Diocletian, dedicated the Roman Empire to Mithras and sought to exterminate the rival cult of Christianity with fire and sword. Even the so-called first Christian Emperor, Constantine, hesitated long between Christ and Mithras, and the triumphal arch of Constantine in Rome, contains bas reliefs of Mithras and none of Christ! However, the secular arm eventually decided this issue and Cæsar eventually decreed—largely it seems for political reasons—that Christ was (in racing parlance) a safer bet than Mithras. Probably the real reason lay in the exclusively military character of Mithraism at a time when the Emperors were trying to curtail the excessive power of the army. In any case, Mithraism, which excluded women and slaves from membership, must have been very much of a minority cult. We note, incidentally, that our current Mithraists propose to admit women but "in an inferior capacity." Anyhow, the Christians, once in control of the State power, made short work of Mithras and his Bull. Since the fifth century,

no one has undergone the gruesome baptismal rite of being "washed in the blood of the Bull." (The Christians, after wavering for some time between the Fish and the Lamb as the appropriate rival emblem of Jesus, came down heavily on the latter and "washed in the blood of the Lamb" has now succeeded and superseded that more literal rite connected with the Bull).

Tragedy and Farce

Karl Marx (who also was a regular visitor to the Hampstead Heath of his day) made the famous remark that "History repeats itself, first as tragedy, then as farce." The ancient cult of the sun god, Mithras, looks at present like forcibly illustrating this aphorism. For it originated amid the splendours of the ancient East, and all but conquered the mighty Roman Empire of the Cæsars, whereas now, it looks like perishing obscurely on Hampstead Heath. Or is it perhaps, destined to fade out ignominiously in a London police court as the result of a prosecution by the RSPCA who, presumably extend their humanitarian protection even to Mithraic baptismal bulls?

The Passing Show

By F. A. HORNIBROOK

At last it looks as if the Cyprus trouble which has loomed so largely in the minds of all peoples for some few years, will be settled.

Archbishop Makarios, head of the Greek Church in Cyprus, who was banished some two or three years ago by the British Government being considered responsible for the bloodshed in Cyprus, has now returned to the island and is, apparently firm friends with the Governor and the official set.

One cannot but think that, if Makarios had been a Roman Catholic no government, either Conservative or Labour, would have dared to banish him for fear of losing the Block R.C. vote at a General Election. No government would dare to risk that. But, as it happens, the Cypriot vote is negligible in Britain, so it didn't matter. What courage our politicians display!

★

The outbreak of anti-colour feeling which has been rearing its ugly head in Britain of late, has met with the condemnation it richly deserves amongst all decent people.

Amongst prominent men who have denounced it are several parsons a fact for which one can commend them.

If the Churches have wakened up to this evil they are, as usual, following in the footsteps of the hated Atheists.

Here is what that champion of liberty Robert Ingersoll said on the question at the time of the American Civil War nearly 100 years ago—

"The coloured people have suffered enough:

For more than two hundred years, they have suffered the fabled torments of the damned;

for more than two hundred years they worked and toiled without reward, bending, in the burning sun, their bleeding backs;

for more than two hundred years babes were torn from the breasts of mothers, wives from husbands, and every human tie broken by the cruel hand of greed;

for more than two hundred years they were pursued by hounds, beaten with clubs, burned with fire, bound with chains;

two hundred years of toil, of agony, of tears;

two hundred years of hope deferred;

two hundred years of gloom and shadow and darkness and blackness;

two hundred years of supplication, of entreaty;

two hundred years of infinite outrage, without a moment of revenge.

The coloured people have suffered enough. They were and are our friends. They are the friends of this country, and cost what it may, they must be protected. There was not, during the whole Rebellion, a single negro that was not our friend."

★

A certain clerical gentleman who figures largely in the Press of London, has made a remarkable pronouncement. He said: "It is of little use trying to bring the message of Christianity to hungry people living under unhygienic conditions."

Evidently the reverend one has come to realize that before you try to fill the heads of hungry people with Christian dope, you must fill their stomachs with food.

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Mr. Billy Graham was back in England for a few days last month. Interviewed on the BBC the Rev. Billy pointed out some of the dangers the world is facing such as that the population of China is increasing at the rate of 12,000,000 per year and that of India at the rate of 6,000,000 per year.

What is Graham's remedy? More helpers in the Lord's vineyard to show these people the light. Not a word on the only two real solutions—education and a wide knowledge of Birth Control. But dear Billy cannot advocate Birth Control, for does not his Bible say "Be fruitful and multiply." According to Billy Graham, every word in that book, being the word of God, is inspired. It was Voltaire who said that in trying to save their souls mankind has nearly damned the human race.

—NEXT WEEK—

"ARE THE GOSPELS REALLY TRUE?"

By H. CUTNER

Literary and Philosophic

By COLIN McCALL

"The philosophy of naturalistic Humanism will not come fully of age until it flowers pervasively in poetry, music, painting and the other arts. Poetry is especially well adapted to the expression of Humanist themes and the Humanist way of life." This is how Dr. Corliss Lamont introduces the first (Spring 1959) number of *Anthropos*, a quarterly of Humanist poetry edited by a former Methodist minister, J. Edward Myers (Humanist Education Press Inc., Box 2863 Station B, Toledo, Ohio, U.S.A., 50 cents).

It is always hard to judge the first number of a periodical, especially one devoted to poetry. On the one hand it will be searching simultaneously for individuality and cohesion: for its own particular form; on the other, it may—to take up Dr. Lamont's imagery—display the best blooms all in one bunch. We can but see. I personally found Jesse Jacobs's frontispiece just a little old fashioned; otherwise *Anthropos* is tastefully modern and aesthetically pleasing, which is important with a poetry magazine. If the poetic standard can be maintained, it will fill a definite need.

Apart from George von Hilsheimer's deliberately ironic effort, there is no typographical eccentricity, and there is only one outright failure—a sonnet on Thomas Paine in a hopelessly wrong key. Otherwise, though there are inevitable wrong notes now and then, the touch is fairly sure, yet sensitive: it is poetry not poesy. I have room for only a few examples, and cannot do justice to any of them.

What if the sun should not rise tomorrow
could you read a poem
could you write a poem?

asks Evelyn Thorne: and declares:

We do not have love enough to say
we will have poems, not bombs.

John H. Morgan gets the slow, sonorous effect he wants (and is not being eccentric) in "Genesis," where:

In the Beginning
It

Is
Dark . . .

A deep
Profound
Darkness

While H. A. Easlic finds "Continuity" in the manner of Fitzgerald's Omar:

Out of my blood
Shall grow the flower,

and Jay Wesoff conveys the authentic first feeling of fear in a Jewish boy who has "You killed Jesus" yelled at him by his Christian playmates. But it is fear in the negro mother and the absence of it in her infant that gives Frances Towne the theme for perhaps the best poem of all, which I will not spoil by quoting in part.

From literature to science and philosophy, with Dr. Lamont still much in evidence, as we turn to the latest number of H. J. Blackham's *The Plain View* (Summer 1959, 2s. 6d. from 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London, W.8). Here we have an established magazine that maintains a high standard in keeping with its motto, "What the plain view perceives is neither obvious nor obscure."

Professor H. J. Muller contributes a centenary assessment of "Darwin's Achievement" in *The Origin of Species*, citing American and Russian perversions of evolution. "In some of the high-school text books on biology most widely used in America," he says, "the word 'evolution' does not occur even in the index, although

the subject is sometimes discussed to some extent, very near to the end of the book, under the term 'racial development.'" He mentions the Roman Catholic Church's particularly perverted variety of evolution, and tells us that *Life* magazine "reversed the meaning" of Darwinism by giving the title "Darwin Discovers Nature's Plan" to Sir Julian Huxley's popular centenary tribute. Those controlling education in the Soviet sphere are, says Professor Muller, "still promulgating their own falsification of the subject," and

The sooner both sides come to face up to the truths of Darwinism itself, of the more modern findings that have shown how these principles are implemented, and of the human and social implications of the subject, the greater is the likelihood that all humanity can come to a sane common ground of constructive world co-operation, in time to avoid man-made catastrophe.

And if all this is accomplished, the real job will begin, of deciding how man shall guide his evolution in the future.

The Plain View also contains an informative article on "Springtime in Scriptural Imagery" by Mr. P. G. Roy, well known to FREETHINKER readers, a number of book reviews, and Mr. Blackham's editorial commentary, from which I take an epigram on Darwinism: "The rational account of the world was not the account of a rational world." But my remaining space must go to the 20-page "Humanist Symposium on Metaphysics," edited by Corliss Lamont, which alone makes this *Plain View* worth its price and more.

Any complete philosophy of life must have a sound metaphysics, says Dr. Lamont, and he submits twelve categories as "a tentative metaphysical prospectus for naturalistic Humanism," namely: Substance, Activity, Dimension, Quality, Form, Potentiality, Causality, Necessity, Contingency, Individuality, Relation and Eventuation. He rejects "as ultimates of existence," Mind, Idea, Truth, Spirit, Personality, Will, Purpose, Love, Good, Evil, God, Devil, Beauty, Freedom, Life, First Cause, and Space and Time as Absolutes.

Dr. Lamont's categories are then separately discussed by Sir Julian Huxley and Professors Max Otto, Roy Wood Sellars, Gardner Williams and John Herman Randall Junr. Finally, Dr. Lamont makes a brief rejoinder. Obviously I haven't time even to summarise these contributions and I hope, anyway, that readers will go to the originals; but Sellars—who refers to Dr. Lamont's "masterpiece of exposition"—is illuminating as ever. There is really nothing very mysterious about metaphysics, says Sellars, but "Perhaps *ontology*, discourse about *what is*, is a less misleading word." "*What is*," he continues, "is, surely, active, dynamic; and it has measurable dimensions," which are investigated by science.

Professor Randall also makes a notable contribution to the symposium, but Lamont and Sellars seem to be generally sounder in their conception of Substance. Randall, however, calls Lamont's particulate definition of Substance "antiquated science," and Lamont omits the description as "particles or combinations of particles" from his rejoinder.

Dr. Lamont rightly claims that this symposium has "greatly clarified the central ontological principles that must stand at the base of any adequate Humanist or naturalist philosophy." It has, I would say, given Humanism a distinctly Materialist basis, for which we should all be grateful.

This Believing World

Once again the Roman Church has scored in the matter of world wide publicity. The *News of the World*, which has a huge circulation (and of course thousands of other journals all over the world) published the red-hot news that the Holy Coat which "Jesus wore when he was crucified" will be shown from July 19th to September 20th at Trier in Germany. The fact that, judging from the thousands and thousands of pictures showing the crucifixion of Jesus, he never wore a coat at all on that (so-called) historic occasion is a small matter when it comes to such a miracle as preserving it for over 1,900 years.

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The "News of the World" naturally gives us the "history" of the Holy Coat taken literally from Roman Catholic sources, and therefore literally true. It was first discovered by an old lady of seventy called St. Helena who was the mother of Constantine the "Great," and it was only right that she discovered the Holy Coat just as she discovered the three most famous of all Crosses buried in Palestine. The "true" one immediately cured a sick person, so there was no doubt about it being the Cross on which Jesus was crucified. And of course, bits taken from it can be found all over the world still curing the sick. But Holy Crosses, Holy Coats, and Holy Shrouds, have ever been Godsend to the Holy Church. And what marvellous publicity!

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On the other hand, the new President of the Methodist Conference, Dr. E. W. Baker, has nothing but sad news for Methodists. "All is by no means well within our Church," he moaned, owing to the decline in membership, and in the number of local preachers. In fact, he roundly declared that more people went to church on the Continent than in England—a terrible calamity. Well, we can give him one reason. On the radio and on TV as well as on films at the cinema, it is very nearly always the Roman Church which gets the publicity. Anything the Pope says or does fills our national journals—but who knows or cares what the chief of the Methodist Church does or says? Bing Crosby, as a Roman priest, has in general a huge following—but who has ever heard of an actor making a success of a mere Methodist parson?

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If TV will not allow a forthright Atheist boldly to state his views before its eight million viewers, in compensation we do get people who have been regularly to Venus, Mars, or even Jupiter, to say nothing of others, not quite as fortunate who are regularly in touch with fairies. Most Spiritualists are thorough believers in fairies but the *Sunday Pictorial* the other week proudly presented Mrs. Daphne Charters—with portrait—who knows so much about the precious little pets that it sent Madeleine McLoughlin to find out all about them.

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We now know that fairies drive motor cars, have refrigerators, and live in beautiful little houses. Moreover, they get married just as people who are not fairies do, and have children and nannies and of course even nappies. Miss McLoughlin went to interview some fairies through the kindness of Mrs. Charters, and she was supremely successful, meeting one of their leaders named Normus. Personally? Well, not quite. She neither saw them nor heard them—but that didn't matter, as it was all done through Mrs. Charters who "received and translated their thoughts." This is surely a splendid way of

encountering real fairies, and Mrs. Charters will be attending a Midsummer's International Conference of the tiny dears on August 15th when 3,000 fairies will come along from all parts of the world.

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This Conference no doubt will be a real business one, and vindicate not only Sir A. Conan Doyle and Lord Dowding who both have fought so stoutly for the little people, but also Mrs. Charters and Miss McLoughlin. We must not forget to add that fairies are very affectionate, and enjoy kissing, parties, and dancing—though curiously enough we were not told whether they are or not all out-and-out believers in the Roman Church. They should be, for only there will they find rest and hope and love far away from the horrid bunch of infidels and unbelievers who unfortunately infest the world.

"Que L'Homme Soit!"

By C. BRADLAUGH BONNER

MY ADMIRABLE FRIEND Jean Cotereau has sent me a copy of his recent book *Que l'Homme soit!* which he has dedicated to me in his own hand and, as well, has caused to be printed on this copy "this copy has been specially printed for the President C. Bradlaugh Bonner." I am overwhelmed by his kind attention. It is of a piece with all he does, the intense generous man, whose tremendous energy and astonishing powers of assimilation I have found reason to admire time after time. Cotereau is a giant towering above us dwarfs; at times he finds us rather in his way. Our appetites are not as great as his; we have not his stamina; we cannot keep the pace. In this volume we have his broadcasts for the past eleven years. You must know that on the second Sunday of each month at 9.15, Freethinkers are given the "air" in France; Cotereau, Lorulot and Alfaric have shared the time between them. What a vast range of subjects they have covered! No-one can complain of the narrowness of Freethought who has followed their talks. I will confess straightway that if at any time I am short of a subject for Freethinkers (or Secularists or Rationalists or Scientichumanoethicists) I have only to open this book and I shall find one. As yet I have not had the time to read all the 353 pages. Much of it cannot be rushed; it has to be read, marked and inwardly digested. As Bertrand Russell says in the Preface he has written, these Essays will have a salutary effect on all their readers.

Friend Cotereau is an engineer and a professor of mathematics. In his book we find him as a philosopher who has been able to put his philosophy over to his listeners and has a regular "fan" mail, not always one of admiration. When Freethought goes over the air, it often arouses violent reaction among the believers. Nevertheless our friend has endeavoured to appeal to the moderates and to the novices in reasoning. It is annoying to certain polemicists to be shown that Freethought is essentially constructive, whereas religion destroys; or again that the false comforts offered to one in sorrow by the believer in the Man of Sorrows cannot compare with the genuine sympathy of a fellow being.

The Freethinker seeks to emancipate men's minds, not for his own narrow selfish benefit, but that all may profit. And today when we are faced with the most menacing of the problems which have as yet beset mankind that the benefit of all, is what must guide our thoughts; we must divest ourselves of all the prejudices and false loyalties which have been bred in us so that we can judge clearly and truly. Cotereau's Essays are all to this end.

THE FREETHINKER

Hon. Editorial Committee:

F. A. HORNIBROOK, COLIN MCCALL and G. H. TAYLOR.

All articles and correspondence should be addressed to THE EDITOR at the above address and not to individuals.

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Inquiries regarding Secular Funeral Services should also be made to the General Secretary, N.S.S.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

C. E. RATCLIFFE. It is the capacity for memory which is heritable, not its contents. Modern genetical knowledge rules out an absurdity such as being born with memories of an ancestral life. Such ideas are only fostered by mass circulation papers interested in keeping their readers excited. They do it by a mixture of science, pseudo-science and hearsay, with "evidence" extracted under more or less hysterical conditions.

MRS. E. MACD. See above. The old sop, "I was once a Queen in Babylon" (never a mere commoner!) is, to use an Australian phrase, "strictly for the birdies."

DR. W. H. CILLIERS. Mr. Avro Manhattan is abroad but we shall pass on your inquiry to him on his return.

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 Saturday from 6 p.m. and every Sunday from 5 p.m.: Messrs. L. EBURY, J. W. BARKER, C. E. WOOD and D. TRIBE.

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, July 26th.: Mystery Ramble, assemble Chislehurst Railway Station. Bring packed lunch; tea available (No time given).

INDOOR

Wales and Western Branch N.S.S. (Bute Town Community Centre).—Tuesday, July 28th, 7.30 p.m.: ALFRED WILLETTS. "What the Modern Christian Believes."

Notes and News

It was natural, and right, that the obituaries of Ernest Newman should concentrate on his musical criticism. But one or two of them (including that in the BBC programme, "Music Magazine") recognised the considerable influence of John M. Robertson, for whose *Free Review* Newman wrote in the 1890s. And *The Manchester Guardian* and *The Observer* both referred to his rationalism. The latter paper, however, thought this "Victorian," and music critic Peter Heyworth said: "There was a good deal of the old-fashioned free-thinker about Newman, and it was perhaps from this that sprang his attempts to found criticism of music on a basis

The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY acknowledged, £237 4s. 3d.; A. J. Wood, 2s. 6d.; W. H. D., 2s. 6d.; Anon, 5s.; J. A., 5s.; Anon, 1s.; J. Humphrey, 1l.—Total to date, July 17th, 1959, £239 0s. 3d.

more scientific than that of the 'sensitised palette.' We are not quite sure what Mr. Heyworth means by "old-fashioned"; in the realm of ideas the adjective seems to be reserved for freethought and materialism. One never hears, for example, a Catholic referred to as an old-fashioned Thomist." It is rather puzzling, and we can only think it is a matter of fashion!

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POPE JOHN XXIII's first encyclical is not likely to set the world on fire, but that may not be such a bad thing, since the pronouncements of his predecessor often very nearly did! *Ad Petri Cathedram* (To the Chair of Peter) as the encyclical will be known from its opening words, contains the notable phrase, "We wish to give offence to none." It thinks missionary activity particularly pleasing to God; exclaims, about nuns, "How much these holy virgins accomplish!" and exhorts the sick, the weak and the aged to recall that "by the sufferings of this life, which cleanse, uplift and ennoble the mind, we can gain the eternal joy of heaven." But it regrets—in a section addressed to the Bishops of both the Eastern and Western Church—"the unhappy falling away of so many of your children, who are tricked by the wiles of error."

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MR. JOHN LARDNER, TV critic of *The New Yorker* recently (9/5/59) kept what he calls a "box score" of Bishop Fulton J. Sheen's programme, on which "Bat-O Cleaner, Help Oven Cleaner, Bufferin, Profile Bread, and Vita-Yums—receive a hard sell." The Bishop, said Mr. Lardner, "brightens his scriptural disquisitions with jokes" and the "highlights" on the night in question were: 8.02—Cabdriver joke; 8.04—Joke about a man on trial for cursing; 8.06—Joke about an old Irishwoman; 8.08—Joke about invisible ink; 8.10—Joke about three swimming pools (which had been told two nights before "by a small girl, who got nothing like the laugh the Bishop did"); 8.12—Joke about a visit to the Bishop by a very rich man ending, "Just think what God could do if He had the money"; 8.14—A camel and Chesterfield (cigarette) joke, "involving the passing of a camel through a needle's eye"; 8.16—Joke about Nicodemus; 8.18—Joke about a child with a cowboy gun and a space helmet, who said "I'm from West Mars"; 8.20—Joke about Jonas; 8.22—Joke credited to Harry Hershfield; 8.24—Joke about divorce. There followed a Vita-Yums commercial and final remarks. It sounds very monotonous, but we have to picture Bishop Sheen in all his glory—make up included—on the miniature screen. And gee, brother, that sure is some picture!

★

BEER-DRINKING clergymen are not confined to the Methodist ranks. The Rev. Nicolas Stacey, former Olympic sprinter and now chaplain to the Bishop of Birmingham wants to show that the Church of England is "not the Conservative Party at prayer, that it is a people's Church, not a parson's Church, and that respectability and Christianity are not synonymous." (*Daily Mail* 30/6/59). He wants to show, too, "that the Christian faith is relevant to 20th-century living and that the Church does care for all the actions of man." Which probably explains the story about "naughty nude" pictures in the first issue of the 3d. monthly tabloid, the *Birmingham Christian News*, which he edits.

A Humanist Manifesto

By D. H. TRIBE

In regarding the human situation in our civilisation, we find cause for disquiet. Where there should be cohesion is disruption. Where there should be confidence is uncertainty. Where there should be energy is apathy. Where there could be creation is a void. We are aware that as most social maladies, like ills of other kinds, present many signs and symptoms, so they may display the united effect of many causes. Yet history shows that where there is widespread discontent in a time of material peace and prosperity, ideology is the main agency at fault: that private cynicism is the result of public falsehood: that waywardness develops when we have lost our way. As soon as the official creed of a society ceases to represent the genuine beliefs of its individuals, that society is facing decay.

History is strewn with societies that have thus decayed. Happily it abounds in civilisations that have saved themselves by changing their official creeds. We feel the time is now ripe to apply this remedy to ourselves. Every creed is a composite of ideas, most of which have been borrowed from creeds that have gone before or flourish beside it. Whether the ideas are old or new, they are satisfactory so long as they are useful to the community as a whole and seem reasonable to enlightened elements within it. The official creed of our civilisation is today neither useful nor reasonable.

Throughout its devious history, Christianity has tried to become all things to all men. Yet in the absence of any generally recognised continuous revelation it rests fundamentally upon its sacred writings. We are not here concerned with how far these writings may be allegorical, but with the basic ideas on which their history or mythology is founded. Primarily Christianity is committed to other worldliness, to the supernatural, to spiritual forces, if not to mystic rites that would in any other culture be described as superstitions. Modern science is unable to explain ultimate reality either in cosmic or in microcosmic terms. But it has conclusively established that man is a physical organism in a physical world which follows predictable laws. Whatever the nature of spirituality—if its existence is assumed—it is utterly beyond the human understanding and therefore irrelevant to human needs. This fact is incontrovertible: and as long as fearless proclamation of truth is at all revered in our society, should burst from every lip. Yet even pragmatists, unconcerned with theoretical truth, must admit that Christianity has signally failed to establish on earth that peace, amity and concord which it ceaselessly advertises.

Insofar as it is particularistic and evangelical, Christianity stands like all aggressive ideologies, political or religious, as a sturdy barrier to international understanding. For a hypothetical soul it will always sacrifice an undeniable body. Never able to convert every member of societies where it has enjoyed unlimited facilities for propaganda, or to foment peace among nations that have officially embraced it, it will never unite the world, but remain a cause of dissension in the universal body politic. It may be argued that if its tenets were true, we should neglect such worldly considerations. But its patent falsehoods offend every thinking man.

Certain supporters of Christianity protest however, that whatever the merits of its ideology, it is the prop of our ethical or moral code. True, the Christian ethos contains

provisions which all may deem admirable, but these provisions turn out on analysis not to be peculiar to itself. We must, therefore, ask whether worthy social aims need, or should, be allied with a discredited dogma. Can truth be established on falsehood? Can a hall of honour be built upon the sands of hypocrisy and simulation? Right conclusions rarely follow from wrong premises.

For, even ignoring this conscientious objection, we find that Christian ethics involve principles we can no longer regard as desirable. Firstly, they are choked by a system of promised rewards and punishments in a hypothetical after-life, so that spontaneous goodwill is in danger of disappearing. Secondly, they are subordinated to blind faith in an unsubstantiated dogma. They cling to the Decalogue, four of whose ten injunctions are meaningless in a world which has outlived the tribal god Yahweh, rather than to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Thirdly, they discourage unbiased rationality, on which alone are based both material and moral progress. Fourthly, they place undue stress on the sexual taboo of the Apostle Paul. Fifthly, they consider unworthy thoughts as reprehensible as unworthy deeds. Sixthly, they arose in a primitive society which was not averse from slavery and female subjection, which believed that sin was hereditary and that it might be punished by disease, especially mental disease, and which adopted a completely pessimistic view of human nature—concepts which have not been entirely abandoned even today.

It is surely obvious that we must declare ourselves a secular society, dedicated to the impartial pursuit of truth, and prepared to welcome whatever social prizes this pursuit may secure. Nostalgia must not bind us to the erroneous beliefs of bygone ages. We should look freely, not blinkered; yet forward, not back. Our course must be steered not by the moonshine of dogma, but by the instruments of science.

Modern biology has shown that however the need for food may induce the ruthless attack of one species upon another, within each species is a large measure of co-operation, both as a defence against common enemies, and as an aid in building up community assets. Modern psychology has shown that man is a social animal, valuing the good opinion of his fellows, and the feeling of security which a stable and well-ordered society is able to give. Man can be born again only if his society is born again; and to effect this only man is potent. Sufficiency for all, justice, tolerance, equal opportunity, and the fostering of each individual's creativity and self-respect will do much to reduce man's allegedly natural tendency to crime. Ethics rest on mutual respect and understanding among all members of the human race, on the Golden Rule, which is often described as uniquely Christian but is at least as old as Confucius, on the substitution of social knowledge for ambiguous fables. No longer can ethics be deemed the absolute revelation of a supernal power: for we find that for example, animal and even human sacrifices, once deemed an essential of right living, are no longer encouraged. Unless our ethical and social ideas are given as free scope to develop as our technology, the human situation is parlous indeed.

We look out on—or rather, we own ourselves in the midst of—a world of conflicting loyalties and divided aims. Is this discord inevitable? Is strife to be ever with

us? Without wishing to embrace vulgarity, we do not believe that it is. But we cannot resolve our problems in a spirit of sloth and fear. Our aims must be positive, not negative; dedicated, not dated. With courage and goodwill, kinship and co-operation, we can amicably settle all our disputes. Above all, if we are free from dogma, falsehood and superstition, which destroy peoples as readily as they destroy persons. The future happiness of mankind—perhaps its survival—depends on a broad vision. This then is our ideal—to become in the finest sense of the phrase, men of the world.

Chosen Question

"You Atheists," writes a student, "Theolog," "are fond of pointing to all the ills which God, in your opinion, ought to put right, or ought not to allow. Have you never considered that God is perfect in Goodness but limited in power? His limitations, for all we know, may be self-imposed."

This argument reduces God to a half-wit, because we shall find that besides being limited in power he is a thousand times more limited in intelligence. One characteristic of an intelligent being is that he learns from mistakes. We should therefore expect that when a certain type of animal had proved itself a failure by becoming extinct the experiment of making it would not be tried repeatedly on the same pattern. But this has occurred many, many times in evolution. Reptiles and mammals have given rise to a useless succession of giant types such as dinoceros, triceratops and titanotherium. The only purpose they were serving was that of destroying a lot of their fellow creatures, including some members of our own animal ancestry. Thus the supposed demiurge does not profit by the results of its limitations. Indeed, one species of sea urchins appeared at least a dozen times during the deposition of the English Chalk, none of them any improvement on its predecessor. Three or four attempts should have taught the "Evolver" of the futility of the process. And this is only one case. Actually the fossil record shows far more failures than successes.

If the repeated aimless proliferation of futile forms, useless for no purpose except cruel destructiveness, and often meeting their own ignominious end in some terrestrial catastrophe, is the mark of an intelligent Evolver, he is shorn of everything that would make him an object of respect. And if his limitations are self-imposed, so much the worse for his character.

What are we to think of an Intelligence which supplies the lion with claws and teeth, and the wildebeest with speed? Or which equips bacteria for invading humans and supplies humans with phagocytes to fight them? Would the same power plan tanks for one side and anti-tank ditches for the other? Does this God delight to see the lion tear up the living oryx, or, alternatively, to see the lion go off to die with the broken horn in its belly? Intelligence is not usually associated with delight in inflicting suffering or with the frustration of one's own purpose.

Man himself is drawn into this terrible scheme, in that he has found it necessary to kill some of his fellow creatures, the alternative being that they would kill him. What is even a limited God doing with his intelligence to produce organisms that have killed millions of mankind, and which man, in order to protect himself, has had to destroy? God creates; man destroys. One of them is wrong. Or man creates and God destroys. One, again, is wrong. And all these troubles arise for our theological student because they spring from the quite unnecessary belief that there is a God.

G. H. TAYLOR.

Is The Death Sentence Justifiable?

By DENIS COBELL

In November, 1817, the poet Shelley read in his newspaper of the death of Princess Charlotte, in childbirth; and also the death, by execution, of three artisans who had taken part in a small insurrection in Derbyshire. The death of the Princess was considered to be a national tragedy, whilst the execution of three men for treason was thought to be justified; Shelley put forth a pamphlet, expressing his attitude that the death of the three men was a greater loss to the nation than that of the Princess Charlotte. Shelley was one of a small minority of humane, freethinking people, alive in the early part of the 19th century; but although the death sentence is reserved for certain murderers today, the necessity for its complete abolition is still seen by only a few people. The death, by hanging, of a man who recently murdered a policeman, has received ghastly publicity by the popular Press; the scene outside the prison, at the hour of hanging, being likened to the mobs of Tyburn.

Exodus 21, verse 23, states that a life should be offered for a life; although the death of Christ has theoretically brought the Old Testament decade to a close, the practice is still observed in most Christian countries with conservative politics on this matter. The very fact that the sentence of death stems from religion, and has been much practised in the name of particular religions, is sufficient to warn the agnostic of its inherent dangers, apart from its illogicality in this age of psychological development. A criminal's life may rest upon the result of an injury he has caused: if his victim recovers he will live, but if the victim dies, so may he; this is absurd, for although the result may be different, the intention was the same. Whilst legislation is the only discerning factor in these cases, the psychologist is debarred from revealing the truth; perhaps this misfortune is concurrent with the present selection of cabinet ministers, not one of whom has received a professional scientific education.

That certain persons do possess homicidal tendencies is an established fact. The psychological treatment for these persons is beyond the scope of this article, but it does exist. Statistics, produced since hanging has become more limited in usage, show that the death sentence is not a deterrent; homicide, like suicide, is not committed by sane, right minded people, and therefore nothing will act as a deterring agent. Large sums of money are contributed to societies for the deranged and the mentally handicapped; do the contributors really feel how pitiable the conditions of these people are? If they knew that the state of a murderer was similar to these people, would they still wish to retain the death sentence?

One reason given for keeping the death penalty is that it is thought to afford comfort and protection to some sentimental minds, this justification is refuted above; a man in his normal mind will never commit a murder. It is time, in this age of great mind exploration, that the politicians handed their authority to the psychologist. May man no longer be tied to laws that were introduced before Christ.

RAISING MONEY

From *Chronicles and Characters of the Stock Exchange* by John Francis, Lord Willoughby (1849): Showing how the early kings raised money, he states that King John "adopted the notable plan of imprisoning the mistresses of the priests, confident that the money he could not obtain from their cupidity, he would from their lust."

CORRESPONDENCE

THE RUBAIYAT

It is not clear to me whether Mr. Huxley is suggesting in his article on this subject (June 26th) that FitzGerald invented the poem known as his translation of *The Rubaiyat*. The difficulty about this theory is that FitzGerald never showed any special capacity in original poetic work of his own apart from this particular instance.

Is there in existence any translation of this poem by a scholar of any nationality who knew Persian as well as his own language? I believe Professor Browne is supposed to have left a translation of Omar's work, but it has never been published. Then both Baudelaire and Verlaine were supposed to have made French translations and the German poet Hoffmanstal was thought to have made a German translation. There is, I believe, an unpublished Spanish translation made by a poet of Costa Rica. It is certainly curious that no published translation from the Persian original has any circulation except FitzGerald's, which is alleged by many competent scholars to have a little relation to the Persian original as Gilbert Murray's translations of Greek plays have to their Greek originals.

C. H. NORMAN.

[There have been many translations of Omar Khayyam. Among the latest is the English version by A. Arberry (based on recent discoveries)—John Murray, 1953. A literal translation by Edward Heron Allen of the Ousley MS, with a rendering into English verse by C. G. Tate, appeared in 1926—Sidney Lee, Exeter. A famous French version is *Les Quatrains de Kheyam* by J. D. Nicholas, 1867.—Ed.]

RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION

I heartily agree with Mr. Macfarlane (May 8th). I have met several people brought up without religion, and found their reaction was not one of regret, but of thankfulness that they had missed the horrors of religious instruction. I knew a couple of freethinkers who permitted their girl to be brought up as a Catholic. When she was 14 the parents decided it was time to change things—the result was that with the shock the girl went completely out of her mind and had to be put away; another couple of my acquaintances, decided after their child had four years of religious instruction, to enlighten the boy; the child suffered such mental torments that the parents desisted; the boy is now a priest and praying day and night for his parents' souls. The child of freethinkers, if he does learn the truth later in life, may blame his parents for allowing him to be deceived. But, I'd like to warn parents who send their children to Catholic schools, that the isolation there is a farce. When I was a teacher, we were all warned to put children exempt from religious instruction at the side of the class, but within hearing distance. In Catholic schools, the whole atmosphere is religious and it is usual for catechisms to be hidden under the desks and odd ten minutes stolen from secular lessons to study them. Odd half hours are also stolen to visit the Blessed Sacrament.

I think it is time the Freethinkers gave a lead on this subject.

NAN FLANAGAN.

[Miss Flanagan sends copies of some of the Meditations that she gave to children in her Roman Catholic days. We will print them soon for the interest of readers.—Ed.]

CONAN DOYLE

May I congratulate Mr. Cutner on his sympathetic and appreciative article on Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Like himself I have been a life-long admirer of "Sherlock Holmes." Conan Doyle was indeed one of the princes of story-tellers, and unlike some Freethinkers I have met Mr. Cutner does not regard Conan Doyle as a nit-wit because he believed in Spiritualism. Most Freethinkers regard "fiction" as not worth reading. If so, they

have missed some of the best entertainment in life and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle gave us a full measure of the same. Mr. Cutner describes Sir Arthur as a chivalrous, great-hearted man—which he surely was.

To those who enjoy good reading I heartily recommend Doyle's writings. Forget that he believed in the never-never land.

E. MARKLEY.

[We wonder where Mr. Markley gets the idea that most Freethinkers regard fiction as not worth reading? Our experience doesn't confirm this.—Ed.]

N.S.S. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

WEDNESDAY, JULY 8TH. Present: F. A. Ridley (Chair), Messrs. Alexander, Arthur, Barker, Cleaver, Corstorphine, Ebury, Gordon, Hornibrook, Johnson, Plume, Taylor, and the Secretary. Apologies from Messrs. Griffiths and Manhattan and Mrs. Trask. Replies from Minister of Education and Prison Commissioners were reported. New members were admitted to Edinburgh, Kingston, North London, Wales and Western and Worthing Branches, which with individual members were 11 in all. LCC has refused permission for use of 181 Goswell Road, E.C.1, as offices; other premises would have to be found. The Annual Dinner had been booked for Saturday, March 26th, 1960, in the Pavilions Arms. Mr. Johnson reported the National Council for Civil Liberties meeting which he had attended as Society delegate. A grant to Dagenham Branch was authorised, and speakers were suggested. Advertising suggestions were passed on to Messrs. G. W. Foote & Co. Ltd.

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