

DEATH AND THE RIGHT HAND. By Robert Hertz, translated by Rodney and Claudia Needham. (Cohen and West; 18s.)

'Death is not the matter of a moment.' This is the Ainu view of the matter but perhaps it is the best summing up of Hertz's main point in the illuminating essay, first published in 1907, on the 'Collective Representation of Death'. We are shown first the beliefs and rituals of death among the Dayak of Borneo. After death the body is left in a temporary shelter, its first, preliminary burial, and as the corpse decomposes, the soul lives on in a pitiful and dangerous state, neither in this world nor the next; only later are the bones given final burial as the transitional wandering is ended and the soul finally incorporated in the land of the dead. Death then is not a mere destruction, but just as in life one social status follows another, so in death there is the slowly developing movement of the soul as it graduates from one existence to another. Exclusion is followed by a new integration.

The theme of Hertz's essay emerges fully as he extends it from his own specialist sphere in Borneo *via* Australian aborigines, American Indians, ancient Egyptians, Zoroastrians—until its general application becomes unmistakable. This is the mark of real originality. For anyone, relatively speaking, can describe this European folkway or that African custom. But Hertz broke through to an idea which gives us new understanding of far-off customs as well as a new perspective to our own familiar ideas, so that apparently disparate and meaningless rituals, Irish wakes, Jewish memorial rites, cremation, mummification, ritual cannibalism, all acquire a new coherence. Death is seen not as the matter of a moment, the biological moment when life leaves the physical body. Rather the fate of the body still demands attention in the interim while the soul is still restless, half-chained to earth, and to its mourning friends. Only when the physical body has been consumed and resettled is the soul freed for its new status, the drama of death complete, and the mourners released.

Hertz's constant preoccupation with the inner coherence implicit in apparently arbitrary beliefs and rituals is also expressed, even more cogently, in the later essay (1909) on the pre-eminence of the right hand. Here again a materialist or physiological approach is rejected as insufficient, if not actually wrong, in sociology. Just as death is more than a physical event, so the superiority of the right hand is more than a biological asymmetry, so that we cannot understand their significance without glimpsing the depth of symbolism and religious values bound up with them. Hertz is writing as a sociologist, a member of the French school associated with Émile Durkheim, and as he treads his way through the obscurities of, on the one hand, the 'dichotomy of Sacred and Profane', and the mythical shape of 'Society' on the other, his part in the metaphysics as well as the brilliance of that school is obvious. Yet his ideas have been found illuminating—and continually so—by social anthropologists, whether in the study or in the field. And when one has grasped the point of 'The Right Hand', the world somehow never looks quite the same again. In the general symbolic classification Hertz outlines, the world is conceived as dualistic, and man, with

the pre-eminence of his right hand, is represented as at the heart of that dualism.

This translation will be most welcome. The original French edition is not easily accessible, and, indeed, not widely known in the country, and this volume is all the more valuable in that Hertz's original references have been meticulously checked and corrected, and a few additional notes added by Dr Needham. Besides, we now have a critical discussion of the essays by Professor Evans-Pritchard, stressing the importance of the French sociological writers; this, he says, is the third translation to appear in what it is hoped may become a continuing series. For their historical importance then as well as their influence in modern social anthropology these essays are well worth study. What is more, anyone who is interested in some of the symbolism implicit in our life and language will still find a rich harvest in *Death and The Right Hand*.

RUTH FINNEGAN

ST FRANCIS DE SALES: Selected Letters. Translated with an introduction by Elizabeth Stopp. (Faber; 25s.)

This book should be welcome to both private and public libraries. The introduction has some twenty-six pages, and the letters, one hundred and twenty-five in all, are well chosen. There is also an interesting Index of Correspondents as well as an Index of Letters with reference to the Annecy edition. The General Index is brief but adequate.

The translations read smoothly, and there are no awkward pauses due to those obvious gallicisms which are unfortunately not rare in present-day translations of this kind of literature. Perhaps there is a slight insistence of the use of the semi-colon, where a shorter, complete sentence would have been more acceptable. This is more apparent in the middle section of the book. Letter 10, page 89, gives a direct translation of what the *Présidente Brulart* evidently said herself to St Francis: . . . 'as long as I am serving God I don't care what kind of sauce he puts me in'. This is rather curious to the English reader who has unfortunately too long associated 'sauce' with something coloured in a bottle, rather than a concoction of artistry.

One can easily condone such a triviality, however, when reading the beautiful rendering of Letter 4 (Annecy XII) to the *Baronne de Chantal*. Here the translator has evidently been moved by what is a lovely pice of writing in the original, and has done it full justice.

The arrangement of the letters is perhaps a little annoying; it would have given more satisfaction if one could have seen, as a whole, the treatment of one correspondent. Instead, we are broken off from *Madame de la Fléchère* and returned to St Jane Frances. Nothing much is gained, a little is lost.

The introduction gives a short, clear sketch of the saint's life with the right emphasis on familiar landmarks. Objection might be raised to the statement that *Granier* 'did the best possible thing for him (St Francis) at this stage by appointing him to the *Chablais*' (Introd., p. 18). More light, if needed, is shed on this most generous of characters if, as is surely true, it