

# An Hour with the Editor

## THE UNIVERSAL QUEST

For several weeks there have appeared on Page 3 of this section of the Colonist a series of extracts from the sacred writings of several religions. There is a great deal of difference in the phraseology, but all who have perused them must have been impressed with the great similarity in their spirit. We must, in reading them, and in reading the religious literature of other nations generally, remember that what appears plain and simple to us may seem as involved to them as what they understand seems to us. The most intricate statement from the Vedas would seem no more involved to us than the Athanasian Creed would seem to a Buddhist. We all see the truth through mental glasses colored by our education and environment. A story is told of a conversation between an educated Hindu and a Christian missionary. The latter was speaking about the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, and the Hindu said he could readily believe it, because he had always been taught that the Divine at times became incarnate. The missionary forthwith expressed his horror at such a thought, and the Hindu declined to hear anything further from him. This is not to say that the Hindu was right or that the missionary was wrong. It is only related to show how easily misunderstandings arise from want of a common standpoint of discussion. It may be that there is nothing more inconsistent with Christianity in the Hindu belief of successive incarnations than there is in the opening verses of the Epistle to the Hebrews, which read as follows: "God, who in sundry time and divers manners spake unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the world." To insist, as some will, that the reference is to the Hebrew prophets only and that God never spake to any other people, is to assume something that cannot be proved. The Great Teacher told us that we should know things by their fruits. We do no violence to His teachings, nor to the true spirit of Christianity, if we assert that the grapes of truth found in other sacred writings than the Hebrew Scriptures did not grow upon the thorns of ignorance, nor the figs of righteousness upon the thistles of evil. Truth is truth wherever you find it, and is always divine.

The quotations referred to show that in many lands and in different ages mankind has been searching for the same thing. If the quotations referred to embraced the writings of the great philosophers of antiquity they would only strengthen this conclusion, namely, that the universal desire of humanity is to know something of the Deity. Confucius was one of the few great teachers who gave up the quest. He said it was too difficult, and that it was better for men to confine themselves to the right ordering of their lives. At best we cannot hope to fathom the Infinite. Many persons thought Col. Ingersoll blasphemous when he said, "An honest God is the noblest work of man," and some silly people have thought that such an expression as this demolished the Creator. But Ingersoll did not mean it that way at all. He himself did not believe in a God, but believed the idea to be the creation of the human imagination, something that Herbert Spencer described as an hypothesis to explain what was not otherwise explainable. No one is capable of absolutely comprehending the Incomprehensible; we all, when we think of God, form him in the likeness that best suits ourselves. To the ancient Hebrews He was a Being who charged Himself chiefly with the care of their nationality. Who loved and hated individuals, was angry or sorry and was capable of repentance. The ancient Hebrew did not see God in nature at all. The ancient Hindus saw Him in everything, and as they were as unable, as we are, to reconcile the various phases in which power is exhibited in creation, they invented a multitude of minor deities. The Pagans of the Mediterranean countries did the same thing. The idea of a Supreme Being responsible for good and evil alike was as difficult for them to grasp as it is for us to grasp it, and so they multiplied gods and demi-gods. We are not as different from the ancient Pagans of India, Greece and Rome as we may think we are, for we are told that we ought to believe in a personal Devil, and in hosts of angels. Thus we see that in our search after the Unknowable we reach conclusions not very different from those attained to by those who popularized religion in the centuries that have gone by and in lands which we call heathen.

Jesus attempted to make plain to our understanding what the limits of our investigations must be, and it is an all-sufficient limit. In His infinite wisdom He did not attempt to trouble us with abstract speculations as to the nature of the Divine. He did not give us instruction as to how the earth and the heavens came to be. He told us that God is a spirit and that He must be worshipped in spirit; He told us that love is the fulfilling of divine law. He said that those who are pure in heart shall see God. Herein is Christianity as taught by its Founder infinitely superior to the mysteries of Heathendom and the profoundest thoughts of Pagan philosophy. It gives us a conception of the Deity that we can comprehend. There is no need of any great mental talent to learn how to observe the Golden Rule. There is no intricate system of mythology or theology involved in it. So through Christianity, rightly understood, the world may find the object of the universal quest. At first sight it does not seem to be a very imposing thing. That is why those who

have professed to teach it have wrapped it around with the swaddling clothes of dogma and ecclesiasticism, as though the naked truth was something not to be looked upon by every eye.

The universal quest will not be fruitless. The world will yet come to acknowledge the "truth as it was in Jesus," for the more any one studies His teachings, stripping them of everything that prevents them from being seen, the more clearly it appears that in Christ Jesus the world will find its Saviour. The old painters always depicted the Christ-child naked. They could think of nothing worthy to cover the little form. There is coming a day when the truth as taught by Jesus will be seen without human trappings, and the world will know it as the object for which it has been seeking through the centuries.

## THE ROMAN EMPERORS

The Emperor Julian, usually spoken of as Julian the Apostate, was one of the most remarkable men whose life history records. When we read the story of his remarkable activity we seem to be dealing with two distinct persons. It seems difficult to believe that the retiring student, who won the admiration of the schools of Athens by his patient devotion to learning, could be the same man who crossed Europe like a whirlwind to meet the advance of the forces of Constantius, or that the theological disputant, who sought at Antioch to demonstrate that the old Paganism was better than Christianity, could be identical with the warrior who invaded Persia and threatened the very existence of that ancient kingdom. That the awkward student and the man, who, disdaining the protection of armor, went into his last battle and performed prodigies of valor until an arrow struck him down, could be one and the same person, seems out of keeping with experience, and when we read that he spent years of study at the great Grecian centre of learning, drove the Germans and their allies out of Gaul, led three successful invasions into the territories of the Northern Barbarians, accepted the title of Augustus and with mastery skill prepared to maintain his new honor against his former superior, reformed social conditions, well might overthrow Christianity and carried on a brilliant campaign against Persia, and yet died at the age of thirty-two, we are lost in wonder, if not in admiration at his ability, versatility and activity.

Julian was no less remarkable physically than mentally, although in the former respect he was in some respect the reverse of admirable. He was of fine physique, strong and active, but as a youth he was awkward, and as a man he was uncleanly. He wore a heavy beard, which was plentifully colonized by insects; he boasted that his body was covered with hair, and it may be assumed that it was in no better condition than the appendages to his face. He used to display his hands black with filth to show that he was not effeminate. He wore his nails exceedingly long and never cleaned them.

He had been educated a Christian, but as he came to mature years he relapsed into Paganism. Hence his name, "the Apostate." This was, perhaps, not at all remarkable. Constantine the Great, the first emperor to identify himself with Christianity, was only a soldier, who gave little thought to anything except so far as it aided him to achieve universal dominion and maintained him in power. Constantius, who was nominally a Christian, was really a voluptuary, who, though he gave a formal recognition of the Faith, paid no attention to its precepts. The Christian Church was torn by the dissensions between the Arians and the Athanasians; that terrible prelate, Cyril, Nubian bishop of Alexandria, was waging persecution against the Neo-Platonists of Egypt, and endeavoring to wipe out philosophy in the blood of its adherents. The principles of Christianity had not influenced the lives of its most prominent adherents, and there was great reason for doubt if on the whole the new religion was in any respect whatever an improvement upon the old, so far as its effect upon the character and practices of its adherents went. Julian was a student of the ancient philosophers. He knew that Pythagoras, Socrates and Plato had sought to solve the mysteries of life, creation and the Deity, and that their lives had been noble and pure. There seemed nothing to be gained by forsaking the well-trodden paths, which had been followed for centuries and under which the nation had prospered, for the really untried ways of Christianity, whose adherents were not agreed to what it really meant. Finding nothing in the new religion, as then taught, which appealed to him, he abandoned it and adopted the ancient worship of the Roman people. Yet he was tolerant of the views of others and did not countenance persecution.

When Julian had been proclaimed Augustus by the soldiers in Gaul, where he had been living a life of abstinence, and had inculcated the many virtues among the people, finding that Constantius was unwilling to recognize his new title, he determined to make his position secure. Constantius was at that time carrying on a desultory campaign against Sapor, King of Persia, but he declared his intention of punishing Julian for his presumption. Julian was not a man to wait for an attack. Carefully disposing of his forces so as to render Gaul and Italy free from invasion, he took a body of 3,000 men and set out on a rapid march across Europe. He met with no oppo-

sition, principally because his great fame had preceded him, and his reckless progress created the impression that he was followed by an irresistible army. He crossed the Danube near Vienna and again at a point nearer the sea. Without pausing he traversed the Balkan range and entered upon the plain of what is now Turkey, only to learn that Constantius had died while preparing to oppose him.

Being now in undisputed possession of the crown, Julian advanced to Antioch, the eastern capital of the Empire. Here he found conditions that were very repulsive to a man of his simple, earnest and moral nature, for with all his gross physical habits, he was a man who lived a well-ordered life. In Antioch everything was given up to luxury and abandonment. In this city, where the Christians first received their distinctive name, vice abounded, not in a cruel form, indeed, but in those ways which appealed to the consciousness of an Eastern people. The teachers of Christianity thought more of advocating their peculiar doctrines than of inculcating right principles of living. It is little wonder that the ascetic Pagan, who had been a student of ancient learning, revolted at the exhibition of lax morality with which he was in every way confronted. He endeavored to correct the abuses which disgusted him, and as far as that could be accomplished by reforming the imperial court, he did so.

Pressure upon the eastern frontier prevented Julian from carrying out the social reforms which he inaugurated, and he put himself at the head of an army with the intention of overthrowing Persia. The campaign which followed was brilliant. He adopted the plan which had proved successful along the Rhine, when he was confronted by the Germanic tribes, and boldly crossed the Euphrates and Tigris to carry the war into the heart of the enemy's country. He was met by a plan of defence devised with as great ability as his attack, and carried out with equal promptness. Sapor ordered the inhabitants of the invaded territory to abandon their homes and take refuge in the walled cities, bringing with them as much of their supplies as possible. Then the whole land was laid waste, and Julian found himself without means of subsistence for his troops in a desolate region, upon which the fierce sun of summer beat with relentless force. Undeceived in arms, his troops were no match for the desolation which they encountered, and though every effort was made to bring up supplies by way of the rivers, the source from which they could be drawn was limited, and there was nothing left but retreat. On the return march the Persians harassed the Romans, and in one of the skirmishes, when he had removed his armor to obtain relief from the intense heat, Julian was struck by an arrow. His death is said to have been marked by a splendid fortitude. After he had summoned his attendants around him and addressed them, he bade them good-bye, and then called to his side two of his favorite scholars, with whom he discussed the nature of the soul while his life ebbed slowly away. At length, asking for a drink of water, he moistened his lips, lay back upon his pillow and died. He named no one as his successor, and he left no children, his wife having died in childbirth.

## TALES OF ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS

### Jerusalem

This is a story of the time of Herod the king, who reigned in Jerusalem before and during the life of Jesus of Nazareth. It is a story of another Galilean, a young merchant, who came from Sepphoris, "the town that is perched on the hillside like a bird," to do business in Jerusalem on the eve of his wedding, and fell into the hands of Herod's spies.

Elazur, with his donkeys laden with oil from Lebanon, and ripe fruits from the sunny hillsides of his home, finds himself nearing the gates of the great Jewish city just as the stars are paling in the eastern sky. Though he has traveled all night, he feels no weariness, for his thoughts have been all with her whose beauty rivals that of the springtime garden flowers, and who is gentle and shy as the little white doves the worshippers bring to the morning sacrifice. No foreboding of trouble or danger comes to him as he hears the temple where the Levites, at the command of the captain of the guard, are opening the gates; and here he pauses to watch the preparations for morning service. A lamb is to be the principal sacrifice. "The altar of burnt-offering is purified, the piles of wood laid over the glowing coals take fire, the musicians fetch their instruments and uncover them. The guard is changed." All is done by torchlight. Some priests mount to the roof of the temple to watch for the first dawn of day. "When the sky is so bright that one can see Hebron to the southeast of Jerusalem among the mountains, they call out, 'Barkai ad-Hebron' (the dawn has reached Hebron), and at once the cry resounds: 'Priests, come to your ministry. Levites, come to your pulpits. Israel, come to your place.' This last cry refers to the representatives of the people. A band of them, relieved weekly, helped with the sacrifices and passed the night in the temple.

Elazur takes up his journey. The town is beginning to stir, people are flocking into the streets and many of them eye with favor the tall, straight form of the young Galilean and the dark, handsome face, very much alight just now from his surfeit of inward happiness. All sorts and conditions take the morning air on their way to the different places of worship,

for there are hundreds of synagogues in Jerusalem. "The two fine gentlemen yonder, dressed quite in the Greek style, who are talking Greek to one another, go to the Synagogue of the Alexandrians. The worthy citizen, carrying his prayer-book and his phylacteries under his arm, attends the Synagogue of the Coppersmiths, where he pays for his seat, while the lady with her hair fresh from the hairdresser, and the bunch of roses, has no idea of hiding her rich morning costume behind the lattice of the woman's gallery in a synagogue; she trips toward the Temple Hill to let herself be seen in the Forecourt of the Women. The worshippers disperse in all directions; most of them look anxious, and if they talk or walk together, they look nervously about them. . . . Meantime the sun has risen. . . . Yonder Pharisee, overtaken in the street by the time for prayer, suddenly stops and binds his ponderous phylacteries on arm and forehead. The laborer, basket in hand, up in the fruit tree, stops his picking and prays in his temple of boughs. There is prayer on all sides. Only in Herod's palace silence reigns. The tyrant still sleeps, and his parasites walk on tiptoe. The nation prays, and wherever it prays it adds in thought to the spoken prayer an appeal for deliverance from tyranny."

Only Elazur, proud in spirit at all times, and with an added joyous dignity this morning, seems unimpressed by the shadow of evil that hangs over the great city. Some children at play, near the roadway, smile up at his pleasant face, and in return he laughs a greeting and throws them a handful of fruit. It is while they are scampering for it that a royal servant on horseback draws near, and his own heart full of the bitterness of malice and intrigue, is angered at the happy demeanor of the young merchant. He draws up his horse for a moment.

"Why are you not at the Synagogue?" he demands brusquely, and Elazur, wholly undaunted, replies with a smile, "I have made my prayers already."

"Then pray for a more civil tongue to your betters!" cries the servant, leaning from his horse and striking at Elazur with the broadside of his sword. The children scamper toward the shelter of the trees, but the young Galilean stands his ground, and looks fearlessly up into the frowning face above him.

"I have yet to speak with my betters this morning in Jerusalem," he replies quietly; "you are the only one I have had speech with." Perhaps he sees the little crowd of people coming along the road toward them, and feels safe in defying the royal servant. There are a score or more of donkey-drivers with their beasts, and the man on the horse, knowing they will take the Galilean's part, spurs his horse on, throwing back a curse to Elazur.

Later on, when the fresh morning breeze has all but died away, he reaches the marketplace, midway between the Palace of the Maccabees and the Palace of Herod. Here he unloads his wares and gives his donkeys in charge of a lad who will care for them. His precious oil is in two great flasks behind him; in front of him he piles his fruits, watermelons, grapes, figs. Many come to buy, attracted more by the bright young face of Elazur than by the choiceness of his wares. While they have speech with him they seem to be imbued with something of his own buoyancy and merriment, for he makes a fresh joke with every newcomer, and there is a never-ceasing laugh about his corner of the market-place. In a thoughtless moment he mentions the name of Herod, carelessly, though not disrespectfully, and seeing the look of fear that immediately comes to the face about him, he asks laughingly why they tolerate the rule of a man who makes their lives such a burden. It is quite enough, the careless remark has been heard by one of the countless spies, and word is immediately sent to the market guard, who march through the crowd of frightened people and command Elazur to follow them.

He refuses. He explains that he spoke in jest, that he has nothing against any man in the world; and he stands up so bravely and speaks so honestly and clearly that the soldiers are fain to believe him. Then arrives the servant who had accosted him in the road, and gives such damaging, though lying, testimony that the soldiers can not refuse to arrest the young man. He defends himself against them, and his strength is so great that the two soldiers cannot move him from his place. The crowd closes in. The guards, afraid of creating a disturbance so close to the palace, and wholly in sympathy with the courageous young stranger, are not obeying their commands to the latter. "Closer still the crowd presses, the crowd that has listened to Elazur's merry jests, and bought his shining fruit and his golden oil, and then, all of a sudden, there is no Elazur, only a crowd of people, pushing now this way and that, with the two guards in the midst of them. A tall young figure, bent almost double, slips in and out among the stalls of the market-place, and makes its way to the gate, out of which it slips unnoticed, for there is another crowd at the great entrance, who knows nothing of the drama in which the young Galilean had figured. And by-and-bye the two guards make way through the people, who in turn leave the scene of what was almost a tragedy. Presently there is no reminder, except the scattered fruit and the overturned urns of precious oil; and Elazur is making all speed toward the hills outside the gates of Jerusalem.

Note.—The citations in the above article

are from "Jewish Artizan Life," by Franz Delitzsch.

## THE VEGETABLE KINGDOM

Out in the garden this morning the primroses are in bloom and the crocuses and snowdrops are showing signs of impatience with the season, although it is only January. Of course there is a reason for this, and it is something after this sort. Certain flowers, and more particularly those that grow from bulbs, begin in Autumn to get ready for next year's bloom. Some time last November something told the crocuses that it was time to get their petals ready, for although it was growing cold out in the air, there would shortly come a time when they would be safe in coming out of their summer sleep and make the lawns vivid with their golden yellow. And they obeyed the whispered command. The petals were all folded up ready to be opened when the rain and the sun said it was time to do so. A few weeks ago, they thought the time had already come, and they thrust themselves out into the air; but Mr. Jack Frost said: "Not so soon, little folk," and back they went to their beds. Now they are coming out again, although they may yet be a little early. But in good time they will find everything ready for them; they will bloom for a few weeks and then retire to sleep the whole summer through. The snowdrops are also ready, and the narcissi, the hyacinths and the tulips are only waiting the word of command. They are not as impatient as the crocuses, these restless little sprites of the vegetable kingdom.

Probably plants are not intelligent. At least there is no reason to suppose that they think. And yet why is it that morning flowering plants always open in the morning and evening flowering plants in the evening? The light and heat may be just the same at both times of the day, but they never are deceived into thinking morning evening or evening morning. There are people who say that house plants know what is said to them, and that if you tell them that they are beautiful and you want them to do their best, they will respond; but perhaps this is only fancy and simply means that blossoms will reward intelligent care. And yet think of a cactus. It grows in very dry places, but it makes its skin so thick that it can retain all the moisture it manages to get from one source or another. On the other hand the plants that grow in moist places have thin skins. They have no need to take precautions against loss of water. If you pick a bouquet from the riverside, it will be withered long before you get it home; but if you pick one in a dry place, the flowers will hold up their heads for a long time. Of course you can, if you wish, dispose of the whole question by saying that this is the nature of the plants, but that does not explain anything. What is the "nature" of a plant? Where does the plant hide it? You cannot discover it with a microscope, and you cannot find any place where you think it might be. Take a lobelia seed in your hand. It is such a tiny thing that you may lose it if your breath blows upon it. You might subject that seed to all the learned men in all the universities in the world, and they might use all their appliances and they could not tell you whether the plant that will grow from that seed will be short and compact, or will send out long trailing branches that will hang down from your baskets or your window gardens. And even if there is some difference between the seed of a dwarf and one of a trailing lobelia, which an expert gardener can discover, neither he nor any one else can tell you why one trails and the other does not. Goldsmith, or was it Cowper, wrote of Nature that she

"In its shell russet and rude  
Folds up the tender germ uninjured with inimitable art;  
And e'er one flowery season fades and disappears,  
Prepares the blooming wonders of the next."

This is really all we know about it; but when we learn that down in the tropics, where there is plenty sunshine and moisture, a plant will produce an abundance of leaves and relatively few flowers, and consequently relatively few seeds, while up in the north, where there is less moisture and less heat, the leaves are fewer, the flowers more numerous and the seeds very much more abundant, you will realize that a plant acts very much as you would with your intelligence. If you were sure that each seed you planted would produce a flower, you would only plant a few seeds; but if you knew that there would be a struggle for existence among the little plants and that only a few out of many would come to perfection, you would plant many seeds. Doubtless the plants are not intelligent, but they act very much as if they were.

A book on botany lies open on the table. It is very scientific. It has words in it that no one would dare to spell without looking in the dictionary, and he might not be sure of finding them there. It contains a greater pretence at knowledge than you can find anywhere else outside of a book on theology; but it cannot tell you why flowers that need bees to fertilize them know that they must be wide open in the morning so that their glowing colors may attract the busy creatures, while others are content to wait till night, when the moths are out in search of food.