

# AN HOUR WITH THE VICTORIAN

## SOCIOLOGY

Sociology may be defined as the line of investigation which deals with social conditions. Socialism is a more or less defined theory relating to those conditions. We all ought to be Socialists, as far as opportunity will permit, although very few of us feel disposed to accept the Socialistic "gilt" in any of its several forms. In connection with the Anglican Church in England an organization has been organized known as the Christian Social League. It is designed for the study, not of Socialism, but of sociology. It is well to get the distinction in mind. The organization goes a little further. It is designed for the study of sociological questions in the light thrown upon them by the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. As ordinarily understood the first object of the church is the study of the individual; questions affecting the regulation of society occupy a secondary place, and this is as it ought to be, for if the churches as such attempted to deal with sociological problems primarily there would be serious results. At the same time it is of the utmost importance that sociological questions should be fully investigated, and it is not well that the popular consideration of them should be left to those who disregard any obligation to make their theories square with the teachings of the founder of Christianity. It seems to me that an unfortunate tendency of modern popular investigations along such lines is to hunt for a name in the first instance. This is one reason why the doctrine of Christian Socialism, as advocated as long ago as 1850 by such men as Charles Kingsley and Thomas Hughes, did not make much headway. People looked upon it as simply a diluted form of the teachings of Karl Marx, who may be regarded as the founder of the modern school of Socialism, and whose ideas were in some respects too far advanced for application to the affairs of the present day. "Hence, while there is not only nothing to be gained by calling Christian Socialism to which any one could possibly take objection, it elicits a very little response from the general body of the public. It must also be noted that the Christian Socialists, as they were called, began at the conclusion. The organization above-named proposes to begin at the beginning. It does not propose to set out with a general panacea for all social evils, but to take up each sociological question as it from time to time presents itself, and as the case may be, to suggest that Jesus will give towards its solution, as well as to suggest such an investigation, carried on by men engaged in the ordinary avocations of life, must be productive of a great deal of good, and it certainly will give very many people a new point of view from which the many and diverse problems that modern civilization has created can be regarded.

## THE ATMOSPHERE

We propose to give a series of short articles in regard to some of the different manifestations of nature, and select for the first the atmosphere. The atmosphere, or the air, is as much a part of the earth as the rocks. If we regard as a whole member of the solar system which we call the earth, we are not upon its surface, but are immersed in a fluid envelope surrounding the solid mass. We are no more upon the surface than are the fishes which live in the fathomless depths of the ocean. The actual surface is, at some point above, our heads, at a distance which is not accurately determined. The atmosphere envelope is not of uniform thickness all over the globe. Being very free to move the centrifugal force developed by the revolution of the earth on its axis forces it towards the Equator, so that the envelope is much deeper there than at the poles. From observations of luminous meteors it is estimated that the atmosphere extends as high as 200 miles, although above 100 miles it must be exceedingly attenuated. The weight of the atmosphere can be ascertained although its bulk cannot. Atmospheric pressure will sustain a column of water nearly 34 feet high with a base of one square inch, or a column of mercury with the same base and 30 inches high. The weight of these quantities of water and mercury is 14.73 pounds, and therefore it is estimated that the weight of the atmosphere is equal to about 15 pounds to the square inch at the sea level. From this it is easy to get at the weight of the air; which is put at nearly 12 trillions of pounds, or 1,180,000,000,000 of the total weight of the globe. In this connection it may be interesting to mention that the total atmosphere upon a full grown man is about 14 tons.

The greater part of the air, nearly 18 per cent, consists of nitrogen gas, about 20 per cent of oxygen gas, and there is a very slight amount of carbonic acid gas. These gases are not chemically combined. Oxygen is the life-sustaining element in animal life and the purpose served by nitrogen appears to be simply that of a dilutant. If it were not present the tissues of the body could not resist the effect of the oxygen. What is known as ozone is a modified form of oxygen. To the pressure of oxygen is also due the combination of substances. In fact physical life is only a slow process of combustion, the consumed particles of the body being steadily replenished by our food. In addition to these gases, which are uniformly the ingredients of the atmosphere, it contains vapor to a certain extent under all natural circumstances, as far as can be observed, and minute proportions of a great variety of other matter. Among them may be mentioned a gas to which its discoverer, Lord Rayleigh, gave the name of argon, and four others which have been called respectively helium, neon, krypton and xenon. It is suggested that these gases, which are exceedingly volatile, do not properly form a part of the earth's atmosphere, but are diffused everywhere throughout space.

A somewhat curious proposition has been advanced in regard to the air, namely, that the particles of it, which are more than 31 miles above sea level, must be regarded as so many satellites, revolving around the earth, subject to the same law of gravity as keeps the moon in its place. Indeed the conditions of air as rarified as it must be at an altitude of 30 miles, are such that some scientific men are disposed to regard it as representing a fourth condition of matter, that is to say, it is neither solid liquid nor gaseous, but something which has been called ultra-gaseous.

## ESTHER

It may possibly be not quite correct to speak of Esther as a character in history, although there are as good reasons for doing so as for including the names of Helen of Troy, Dido and Semiramis in the list. It is true that there is no known reference to her in any other ancient manuscript than the Book of Esther, which forms a part of the Old Testament, but it seems improbable that this book would ever have been held in high esteem by the Jewish race, if it was simply a romance, invented, as some say, to account for the Feast of Purim. The whole story cannot have been a figment of the imagination, for if it were, it would have been discredited by contemporary writers. At the same time it is not by any means clear when the Book was written. The events narrated are alleged to have taken place nearly 2400 years ago, but the story of them is probably a century or more later in origin. It is not very clear why the church fathers thought it necessary to include the Book of Esther in the Old Testament, for it is in no sense of the word a religious writing. The name of God is not once mentioned in it, and it contains no religious instruction of any kind.

The story of Esther told briefly is that she was a young Jewess, who lived in the court of Xerxes, or Ahasuerus, in the Persian capital. Having been left an orphan at an early age, she was brought up by her cousin, Mordecai. She was exceedingly beautiful, and when the king divorced his wife Vashti for disobedience, Esther was chosen in her stead out of all the fairest maidens of the land, who had been gathered together, and after a long period of preparation had been brought before the king so that he might make a choice. At that time Haman, who claimed descent from Agag, king of Amalek, was grand vizier, and Mordecai incurred his displeasure by refusing to do him homage. He therefore accused all the Jews of disloyalty, and secured authority from the king to pillage and massacre them, on the understanding that he should pay a large part of the proceeds of the venture into the royal treasury. For an interesting account of how this plot was defeated, the reader is referred to the Book of Esther itself. A sidelight is thrown upon the designs of Haman by the fact that his ancestor, Agag, had been frantically treated by King Saul. This story is told in Samuel XV, and it is only necessary to refer briefly to it here. Saul defeated the Amalekites and took Agag prisoner, permitting him to enjoy a certain amount of liberty. Afterwards, as the writer of Samuel says, "Saul hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord in Gilgal." It is true that nearly six centuries elapsed between this act and Haman's supremacy in Persia, but evidently Haman had a good memory. It may be mentioned that the name of Haman appears nowhere else in history than in the story of Esther. The utmost influence of Esther was confined to her own time, and the king's revocation of his edict, but the laws of the Medes and Persians were unchangeable, and the order having been given to go forth, it could not be revoked. As an alternative the king directed that the Jews should be permitted to defend themselves. Several months notice of the intended massacre had been given, and in the meanwhile Mordecai, who had detected Haman in a plot against the king, was made grand vizier, and the Jews became very powerful all over the land of Persia, which at that time extended from India to Egypt, both inclusive. Therefore when the day for the massacre came, the Jews simply waited for the attack, and then proceeded to smite their enemies. This they did to such effect that the roll of the dead numbered over 75,000. After this Haman was hanged, and by a sort of poetical justice, upon the same gallows that he himself had prepared for Mordecai.

Such is the outline of the story, which, as told in the Book of Esther, has all the elements of romance. There are some things about it which lend it more or less of a mythical character. Thus the name of Esther is identical with Istar, who was the Babylonian goddess of love and war. Mordecai is said to be a corruption of Marduk, who was the chief god of Babylon. Haman, and Vashti are names borrowed from the mythology of the Egyptians. Hence it has been claimed that the story represents a mythical account, of a struggle between the gods of Babylon and Elam; but there is no valid reason for accepting this explanation, for it is, as has been said above, exceedingly improbable that a nation so careful of preserving the leading facts in their history as the Jews were, would be deceived by a palpable invention. We think, therefore, that we may regard Esther, whose Hebrew name was Hadassah, as an historical personage, and assign her a place among great women because she was able to preserve a race from what would have been little less than absolute extinction. Of her personal appearance not much is told except that she was "fair and beautiful." Her character seems to have been a mixture of craftiness and nobility. Imagination cannot picture anything finer than what is briefly outlined in the fourth and fifth chapters of the Book. Her people were in danger, and it was necessary to obtain the king's favor, so that he might alter the strange laws of Persia; it was forbidden that any woman should approach the king unbidden. Yet she resolved to do so, saying "If I perish, I perish," and so after three days' fasting, she presented herself in

the inner court of the palace, where the king sat upon his throne. For a brief moment her fate hung in the balance, for she had dared what no woman in Persia had ever dared. But when the king saw her standing before him in her radiant beauty, he extended his golden sceptre, and she knew that she had found favor in his sight. History or romance, the story of Esther is replete with the lesson that love and virtue are the greatest forces in the world, when exercised in the cause of justice.

## Ancient Teachers of Religion and Philosophy

By N. de Bertrand Laurin.

### MOHAMMEDANISM

Although, comparatively speaking, Mohammedanism is not an ancient religion, perhaps a short history of this faith, and of the life of its founder, is not out of place, in light of the events taking place in Morocco, in which country the several millions of inhabitants are daily being converted to Mohammedanism. When in Mecca, fourteen hundred years ago, there was born a son to a poor Arab, and three years of age found him an orphan adopted into the household of his uncle Abu Talib. Little did the man think, when he took up the child, that in a few years he would have a nephew, who would be given into the charge of a Bedouin woman who took him in the caravan with her to the desert, there to nurse him and to bring him up until such time as he should grow rugged and strong. But the child did not thrive, and at the tender age of three he once more made the journey across the desert and back to his mother. 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