

An Hour with the Editor

DURATION OF EXISTENCE

In the article on this page dealing with the Roman emperors, mention is made of the cult of Mithras, and it is stated that his followers looked for final absorption into the divine essence after a probationary stage on earth and a series of progressive stages hereafter. To those persons, who are not familiar with the character of the various religions of mankind, it may be in the nature of a surprise to learn that the Romans, previous to their acceptance of Christianity, held the conception of a future existence to be attained through the merits of a vicarious sacrifice offered in their behalf by a god, who was inferior to the Supreme Deity, and that through this sacrifice and by lives of virtue and self-sacrifice they might attain to the highest possible consummation of existence, namely, a state of perfect unity with the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe. If we take any unbiased statement of this cult and substitute for the name Mithras that of Christ, and for the final extinction of individuality in the universal Being an eternal personal existence, we will find it not materially different from a philosophical statement of the fundamental principle of Christianity. It is not proposed in this article to make any comparison between these two religions, although one might be made with advantage, and if it were presented clearly it would afford one of the strongest possible demonstrations of the truth of Christianity; we mention the tenets of the followers of Mithras only to show that the idea of a future existence, in connection with which our present life plays an important part, is by no means confined to the Christian faith.

If it is often said that the doctrine of a future life is not taught in the Bible, but that, on the contrary, the whole tenor of the Sacred Canon is to the effect that immortality is a gift of something not inherent in human existence. This is not quite true; but it is true that the future life is rather taken for granted than taught by the Biblical writers. In this respect the Bible resembles the writings of Confucius, who does not seem to think it necessary to prove those things of which humanity is self-conscious. For example, he teaches the worship of ancestors, which would be a senseless thing if our ancestors ceased to exist with death. Buddhism expressly teaches a duration of existence after the present life, but the term of being is limited in all cases, although the limit is not always the same. Nirvana comes to different souls after different periods of probation. The idea of Buddhism and Mithraism is the same, namely, a final extinction of individuality in the universal. The essential difference in this respect between Christianity as taught by the Churches and these great rival religions is that Christianity holds that individuals must bear eternally the consequences of their lives on this earth. It is important to bear this fact in mind, for in these days the spirit of criticism of things religious has permeated all classes of society and is indulged in by people of almost all ages. There are thousands of people who are of the opinion that the belief in a future life originated with the early Christian Fathers, and it has frequently been asserted that it was an invention intended to give them a means whereby they could impose their will upon mankind. We are frequently told by persons, who refuse to accept Christianity, that heaven and hell are simply inventions of ecclesiastics, who desired to have something with which they could reward their friends and punish their enemies. But the more we learn of the other great religions the more surely we see that the idea of an existence after death has been held at all times and in all countries and by the wisest men of all ages. Such men as Zoroaster, founder of one of the most ancient of all religions, Buddha, whose teachings are accepted by the majority of mankind today, the unknown founder of Mithraism, Plato, Socrates and countless other great leaders of human thought believed that death does not end all. At all times there have been those who scoffed at the claim that there is a future life, but the names of most of them are as forgotten as their teachings are. Christian teachers have made a mistake in not pressing this fact upon the notice of those who look to them for instruction, for if they did so, if they impressed the people with the knowledge that belief in a future life is and always has been the common property of mankind, they would lay the surest foundation for the acceptance of Christianity as the highest development of religious thought.

In one of his poems Bret Harte, at least we think it was he, tells us that we have received our Christ and God from the Jew, whom we affect to despise. This also is a thought that is worth keeping in mind, for the Jewish conception of the Deity is the one we are told we should accept. Herein may we suggest there is an error. We have been accustomed to say with the Jews that the gods of the heathen are idols, whereas in point of fact heathendom's conception of the Deity was in some cases a far more exalted one than that entertained by the Jews. To the latter Yahveh, or Jehovah, as the name is more generally written, was their God, not the universal God of mankind, but a Being who had expressly charged Himself with the care of the descendants of a particular individual. He was "solly anthropomorphic," that is, He possessed all the attributes of men, only in a very high degree. He loved; He hated; He did things He was sorry for; He could be persuaded that He was about to make a mistake; He was pleased with the smell of burning flesh; He was relentless. This is not the God

of the Gospels; it is not the God of Christianity any more than it is the God of Buddha or Mithras or Zoroaster. We know that this article will be read by hundreds of persons who think more perhaps than they might be willing to admit about the Deity and a future existence, but who find themselves unable to accept what they have been taught upon these subjects. To such persons we say that the essential facts of Christianity are not new, are not the inventions of ecclesiastics, are not mere modern adaptations of Jewish traditions. They are the common property of mankind. These essential facts, as we understand them are: There is a God who is supreme in the Universe; there is a future existence which we will all share; this life is a probationary stage in our progress to the consummation of that existence, which consummation is unity with God; it is possible to obtain salvation from the consequences of our errors; and finally and principally, God is a spirit and that we worship Him must worship Him in spirit.

Christianity is the greatest and best of all the religions because it is founded upon the doctrine of love, which its Founder told us is the fulfilling of law. The greatest teachers of the past got no further than law. Think this over for a little while, and perhaps it may lead you to see Christianity in a new light, a light that will dispel the darkness with which politics, ignorance and superstition have surrounded and obscured the simple truth taught on the hillsides of Palestine by a Homeless Wanderer nearly two thousand years ago.

TALES FROM THE CLASSICS.

The Story of the Finding of Wineland the Good

Our school books tell us that long before the time of Christopher Columbus the Norsemen sailing the north seas came to the eastern shore of North America. The following account is taken from the saga of Eric the Red, and relates how the Norsemen discovered America in the year 1000 A.D.

It was Lief the Lucky from Norway who went to Greenland to preach Christianity, and it was he who persuaded Eric's wife Theodild to forsake the old gods and adopt the new faith. Eric himself was not so ready to listen to Lief's teachings, and his conversion was only brought about after his wife had left him, refusing any longer to live with a pagan. His example was speedily followed by many in Greenland, who were all baptized by the preacher from Norway.

It was some years after this, when following Theodild's refusal to live with him, Eric had taken another wife, that Karlsefni from the Hofdi-Strands sailed to Greenland on a trading expedition. Eric and Gudrid welcomed the newcomers as guests and entertained them so hospitably that Karlsefni and his friends remained all winter at Brattahlid. When springtime came the fever for exploring seized again upon the Norsemen, and they determined to embark on a voyage to that land, unknown to them as yet save by hearsay, but famed for its fertility and riches, which they designated Wineland the Good.

There were two ships and one hundred and sixty men, and for many days they sailed with no disaster. By and by sighting land they anchored their ships in a deep bay, and, finding it a good country, with green pasturage and an abundance of fish and fowl, they determined to pass the winter there. But they made no preparation for the coming cold weather, and the wind came suddenly down from the north, and the rain and the snow fell, and the explorers found themselves short of food.

"Let us pray to our new God," they said. "He will not fail us in the hour of our extremity." But the days passed on and the storms continued and their suffering was very great. Thorhall, the huntsman, giant and swarthy, of few words but great strength and skill, laughed at their prayers. He had remained faithful to the old gods, and taunted them now that the God of the Christians has forsaken them. Then one day he disappeared. They searched for him three days and three nights, and at last they found him, lying prone upon a rock near the sea, his body stiff and almost lifeless, his hands clenched, muttering, "muttering to himself." He accompanied them home, however, and upon their arrival they found that a great whale had been cast ashore, and with joyful thanksgiving they sat down to a repast which the cooks at once prepared. Then said Thorhall, standing in his place at the board, "Did not the Red-beard prove more helpful than your Christ? This is my reward for the verses which I made to Thor the Trustworthy for three days and nights. Sel-dom has he failed me."

But the whale meat immediately began to make the people ill, and they cast the carcass into the sea; whereupon the sun shone, the storms ceased and, going out in the boats they drew in fish in abundance. It was shortly after this, during a voyage which he took in defiance to the wish of Karlsefni, that Thorhall was wrecked on the coast of Ireland, taken prisoner and put to death.

It is now to be told of Karlsefni that he cruised southward of the coast, with Snorri and Biarni and their people. They sailed for a long time until they came at last to a river, which flowed down from the land into a lake, and so into the sea. There were great bars at the mouth of the river so that it could be entered only at flood-tide. Karlsefni and his men sailed into the mouth, . . . They found self-sown wheatfields on the land there, wherever there were hollows; and wherever

there was hilly ground there were vines. Every brook was full of fish. They dug pits on the shore where the tide rose highest, and when the tide fell there were halibut in the pits. There were great numbers of wild animals of all kinds in the woods. . . . Now one morning very early when they looked about them, they saw a great number of skin canoes, and staves were brandished from the boats, with a noise like flails, and they revolved in the same directions in which the sun moves. . . . Thereupon the strangers moved toward them, and went upon the land marveling at those whom they saw before them. They were swarthy men and ill-looking, and the hair of their heads was ugly. They had great eyes and were broad of cheek. They tarried there for a long time looking curiously at the people they saw before them, and then rowed away to the southward around the point. When the strangers came again it was in the spring, and they and Karlsefni began to barter with each other. Especially did the stranger desire to buy red cloth, for which they offered in exchange peltries and quite grey skins. They also desired to buy swords and spears, but Karlsefni forbade this. In exchange for perfect unsullied skins, the Skrellings (strangers) would take red stuff a span in length, which they would bind around their heads. So their trade went on for a time, until Karlsefni and his people began to grow short of cloth, when they divided it into such narrow pieces that it was not more than a finger's breadth wide; but the Skrelling still continued to give just as much for this as before and more.

This point they made their headquarters, sailing west and south in the summer time and returning to pass the winter here. Three years passed away in this fashion, and then the men began to divide into factions, of which the women were the cause; and those who were without wives endeavored to seize upon the wives of those who were married, when the greatest trouble rose. . . . When again they sailed away "They had a southerly wind and so came upon Markland, where they found five Skrellings . . . of whom . . . two were children. Karlsefni and his people took the boys . . . and taught them to speak and they were baptized. . . . They said the kings governed the Skrellings. . . . They stated that there were no houses there and that the people lived in holes and caves. They said there was a land on the other side over against their country, which was inhabited by people who wore white garments, and yelled loudly, and carried poles before them, to which rags were attached; and people believe that this must have been Hvitrmanland (Whiteman's-land, or Ireland the Great). Now they arrived in Greenland, and remained there during the winter with Eric the Red.

THE ROMAN EMPERORS.

The young priest of the Sun, who by the extraordinary events related in the last preceding article had become emperor, is usually spoken of in history as Helio-gabalus. This is an adaptation in Greek of the Syriac word Elagabalus, which comes from two other words, El, meaning the Sun, and gabalus, meaning the Creator, or perhaps more correctly, "the former." The change was made by the substitution of the Greek word "Helios," the name for the Sun for El. Elagabalus was the title under which the Sun was worshipped, but it was also applied to a black stone, probably a meteorite, which was said to have fallen from heaven and was regarded as the representation on earth of the Supreme Deity. This name the Emperor applied to himself, and there is hardly any doubt that in his supreme vanity he imagined that he himself was an incarnation of the Deity, which he had been educated to worship.

When he reached Rome he made a splendid procession through the streets, the most conspicuous object being the black stone, which was surrounded with all manner of precious gems. The Emperor stood up in the chariot, which bore the stone, and rode backwards, so that his face might always be turned towards the sacred object, to do honor to which he commanded that the streets should be sprinkled with gold dust. His installation as Emperor was accompanied by ceremonies of barbaric splendor, he himself appearing in gorgeous robes, with his face painted and his eyebrows blackened. The Senators viewed the innovation with disgust. They had been used to tyrants and were only too familiar with brutality; but effeminacy was abhorrent to them. Nevertheless they performed the various mean offices assigned to them by the Emperor in connection with Sun worship, having been schooled by years of experience to accept whatever happened as inevitable. Elagabalus gave himself up wholly to luxury and licentious living. Such are the accounts of his life that historians refuse to accept as wholly true the accounts given by contemporary writers. He reigned for three years and nine months, during which time he had several wives and concubines, too many to be enumerated. He lost all sense of manhood, at one time causing himself to be known publicly as his wife's husband. His grandmother, Julia Moesa, saw that in a very few years he would pay the price of his horrible life, persuaded him to adopt his cousin, Alexander, as his successor and to confer on him the title of Caesar. He had scarcely done this than he repented of it and sought to slay the young lad. His effort was defeated only to be renewed within a few months, and the second attempt, though unsuccessful, so inflamed the Praetorian Guards against him that they rose against him and

slew him, proclaiming Alexander emperor in his stead in the year 222.

At this stage in our sketch of Imperial Rome it may be well to pause and consider for a little the religious life of the people, for as we are approaching the time when Christianity was beginning to make its influence felt, and it is therefore desirable to inquire a little into the religious ideas held by the Roman people. Helio-gabalus introduced a degenerate form of sun-worship and it seems to have become very popular, for its practice was associated with orgies which commended themselves to the passions of the dissolute youth of Rome. Women were at this time held in almost universal contempt by the subjects of the Caesars. During the reign of Helio-gabalus, one of the Censors in a public speech declared that if in the economy of nature it had been possible for the race to be preserved with the intervention of women, mankind would have been infinitely happier. He said that to the influence of women all the evil in the world was due, and declared that the only justification for the marriage relation was that the welfare of the State demanded that men should sacrifice their pleasure in order that children might be reared up to take their places.

The popular religious cult prior to the reign of Helio-gabalus was the worship of Mithras. Mithras was one of the gods of ancient Persia. He was originally the god of light, but he was not identified with the Sun. This was a later idea, but even it was abandoned, and Mithras became the god of purity, goodness and wisdom. He was represented as striving constantly to overcome evil and his priests urged all men and women to aid him in his ceaseless work. He himself was represented, as performing endlessly a sacrifice whereby mankind, by the aid of fasting, self-sacrifice and the undergoing of certain ordeals, might ascend into heaven and attain perfect union with God. The soul after death did not at once reach this consummation, but passed through nine grades; until it became absorbed finally in the Fountain of Being. Such was the cult of Mithras expressed in simple terms and freed from the excesses and exaggerations which its votaries engrafted upon it. The Romans became somewhat familiar with it in the time of Pompey the Great, that is, about 70 B. C. Trajan declared it to be the established religion of the Empire in A.D. 100 and Commodus nearly a hundred years later once more proclaimed it. It was upon such soil as this that the seed of Christianity was sown by the early fathers, and we may gather from what has been said first, that the new faith would be regarded by the priests of Mithras as a mere variation of that which they taught, except that it assigned to a Crucified Jew the merits which their own deity possessed; and second, that the transition from the cult of Mithras to that of Christianity was not very abrupt. It must be borne in mind that the Romans were not idolaters. The great majority of them at the time of which we speak were doubtless absolutely irreligious, but the educated classes and those who endeavored to live rightly, when not Christians, were worshippers of an all-pervading Power, which they did not always attempt to define. Roman public opinion was at this time rapidly ripening for the acceptance of a new faith. The opposition to Christianity was, as was pointed out in a previous article, largely political and had its origin in the hatred by the Romans of the Jewish people, for they regarded it simply as a phase of the Jewish faith. Roman hostility to the Jews was not religious, but arose out of the intense devotion of the Jews to their own nationality and their claim to be in a special way the chosen people out of whom should come a Prince who was to set up a world-empire.

MINERAL, VEGETABLE, ANIMAL

In the children's plays the words are put in this order: Animal, vegetable, mineral; but in nature the sequence is as stated above. First comes the mineral, then the vegetable, then the animal. It may be assumed, although it cannot be proved, that this was the order in which things appeared upon the earth, but what we mean when we speak of the sequence of things is that minerals seem to be the original condition of things; that from minerals plants are produced, and from plants animal life is sustained. Animal life is not, so far as we know, sustained directly by substances in a mineral form. It may be that some of the simpler forms of animals, such as earthworms and jelly-fish, do not require the intervention of plant life to convert mineral matter into material that will sustain them; but the rule that vegetables are the "middlemen" between inert matter and conscious life is so general that it may be regarded as universal.

There are four substances, which as yet have not been shown to be of the same origin or to be composed of other substances, which are necessary for the support of animal life. They are carbon, oxygen, hydrogen and nitrogen. These are also necessary for the support of plant life. They are what chemistry calls elemental substances, which means that analysis has not yet shown that they consist of any elementary substances in combination. Of such things something like sixty are known. Some of them are gold, silver, iron and other metals. It may be assumed that all elemental things are metallic, given such a degree of pressure or temperature as is necessary to make them solid. We all now know that air can be liquefied, and if it can be reduced to a liquid, it can also be reduced to a solid. One of the earlier experiments in the reduction of gases to a solid form may be cited. A cannon

was fitted with a cap in which there was an orifice, that could be opened or closed at pleasure. The vent-hole of the gun was plugged tight. In the cannon was placed a quantity of chalk and a cup of sulphuric acid. The cannon was then closed by screwing on the cap, and elevated upon its trunnions. The acid was thereby precipitated upon the chalk, and of course the result was the production of carbonic acid gas. Produced under great pressure the gas was in liquid form. When the orifice was opened a thin stream of liquid was emitted, which at a very short distance from the mouth of the orifice assumed the form of gas; but as the expansion of the liquid into gas called for heat, some parts of it took away from the other parts their latent heat, and the result was that while part of the liquid went off in the form of gas, the remainder was precipitated in the form of a white substance resembling snow. This white substance was carbonic acid gas in a solid form but minutely divided, just as snow is water in a solid form minutely divided. It may be assumed as a working hypothesis that the elemental form of matter is metallic. Whether metals are all variations of one elemental substance need not be considered here, and at any rate, while the possibility of this may be admitted, chemistry is as yet not in a position to express any opinion on the point.

From this elementary metallic form of matter our bodies are built up; but as has been said above we only need a few of the elementary substances. Those absolutely necessary are the four named; but certain animals, including man, require another, namely lime, in considerable quantity. Other elementary substances also enter into our physical make-up, but only in a small degree. Others are needed by our bodies to assist in the assimilation of the things which form our corporeal structure. Common salt is one of the most familiar of these. As far as is known the body cannot be nourished by the use of mineral substances. The case of clay-eaters is sometimes cited as proof to the contrary, but what nourishing material there is in the edible clay is probably of vegetable origin. Synthetic chemistry has produced articles of food, but we think it is true that this has never been done from elemental substances. This is not very material to the subject, for although it may be shown that elemental substances can be so treated in the laboratory as to be capable of supporting life, this only establishes that it is possible artificially to produce the results of vegetable action. We are dealing not with the remotely possible achievements of chemistry, but with things as they are in nature, and therefore may say without fear of contradiction that animal life would be impossible, if it were not that vegetables prepared the mineral kingdom so that it is capable of supplying food.

The basis of all foods is carbon, which is also the basis of all vegetable life. Absolutely pure carbon is very rare. Only the purest diamonds present it in a perfectly pure state. If the snow-like carbonic acid which was seen when the carbonic acid gas was emitted from the cannon, could have been preserved in that form, and the oxygen in it could have been got rid of, so that nothing but the carbon was left, and that carbon could have been crystallized, the product would have been a diamond. Theoretically diamonds can be manufactured, and it is said that they can be produced very readily, although as yet only in very minute form. It is out of this material that the flesh, fat and muscles of our bodies are built up, but carbon will not make flesh until vegetables have treated it in their mysterious laboratories. The wisest man in all the world cannot do what a cabbage can. The cabbage can take carbon out of the air, where it is always present in combination with oxygen, and make out of it something upon which we can support life. The fact that flesh is a food only shows that when once the plant has fitted carbon for the support of life, it remains fit for that purpose until it has undergone complete transformation. To illustrate the various stages in which carbon is nutritious take the case of a piece of bread. The carbon of the wheat is nutritious when in the grain, and the only purpose of cooking it is to render it more readily assimilative by the digestive organs. The mass of the bread contains carbon cooked. In the crust it is further cooked, but it approaches a state in which its nutritious qualities are being destroyed. If the outside of the crust is burned to blackness the carbon is reduced to its elementary condition and ceases to be nutritious. The same thing holds true of other food products, their nutritious value may be destroyed by excess of heat, which counteracts the effect of the processes that take place in the vegetable world.

The line of thought touched upon in this article may be followed with interest by persons, who like to know something about our life and how it is maintained. It will show that there is a complete and wonderful circulation of matter from the mineral through the vegetable to the animal and then back to the mineral again. This circulation has been going on for countless centuries. The carbon in the world is no more and no less than it was a million years ago, and for all we can tell the material which forms the silken cheek of a baby once formed part of one of the huge monsters which roamed the world in days so long ago that geologists cannot state the distance in time with even an approach to accuracy.

White—Have you any trouble in making both ends meet?

Green—Not a bit. The end of my money and the end of the week always come at the same time.—Harper's Bazar.