

Current Topics

Catholic Missions in New Guinea

We print elsewhere in this issue a first instalment of a remarkably fine publication recently issued by the Australian Catholic Truth Society. It is entitled *Adventures in Papua With the Catholic Mission*, and is an account of actual experiences and of facts gathered on the spot by Miss Beatrice Grimshaw. Miss Grimshaw is a special correspondent of the London *Times*, and a very distinguished novelist and writer of works of travel. But truth is stranger than fiction; and Miss Grimshaw's story of the unconquerable spirit of devotion and self-sacrifice that is being manifested in the Catholic Mission in Papua, and of the marvellous work that is being accomplished under circumstances of almost incredible difficulty, is more entrancingly interesting than any of her novels. Miss Grimshaw has a genius for word-painting, and her descriptive passages constitute in themselves a literary treat. She has, moreover, the gift of telling her tale in simple but at the same time dramatic and wondrously moving fashion. Most Catholic journalists become fairly seasoned against appeals for objects other than those which have a direct and immediate claim upon them; but we confess that we had not got half-way through Miss Grimshaw's story before we found ourselves wondering whether there wasn't something we could scrape together to send to those brave, patient, struggling nuns. Many of our readers will, we are sure, feel the same. If they do, we hope they will not let the matter end with 'feeling.' In any case, let not a single one of them miss reading this absorbingly interesting story written by a master hand.

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There is nothing in the shape of direct appeal in the narrative, and practically no attempt is made to 'improve the occasion' by preachment of any kind. The story is left—as well it may be—to be its own sermon. Once and once only does Miss Grimshaw turn aside to point a moral; and she does so in a manner that certainly adorns her tale. Referring to the marvellous fidelity with which the missionaries 'persevere to the end' in their hard and hazardous labors, she remarks: 'What explanation can the man without religion give? Enthusiasm is common enough. Charity, thank God, is not rare, devotion, self-sacrifice—the world outside knows them well. But over all these flowers of fallen human nature spreads—as we in the world see them—the destroying blight of intemperance. Who can be always at the blossom time of good? Who does not weary, turn slack and slow, get tired of effort? A year or so—a month or so—even a day or so—and the flower drops from its stem. The winter comes. But the fire flower at the heart of the Catholic Mission spreads its petals of immortal flame to-day, to-morrow, and for ever. It is the flower, the fire of the Sacred Heart. The missionaries do not tire. I did not ask them if they did. Their faces, their work, were proof enough. After twenty years a Father, a Brother, a Sister, lives on in the bright enthusiasm of the earliest days; just that kind of light-hearted, eager industry and interest that—anywhere else—one would mark as certain not to last. Again, where is the agnostic's answer? Auto-suggestion, delusion? Dreams? As well look on at a giant dynamo making the light of a thousand homes, harnessing the power of a myriad horses, and say that it gets its force from its own bright, polished wheels. . . . The dreams, the delusions that can drive this weak machine of the Mission to do the work it does, must be dreams and delusions of a firmer make than most hard realities. Dreams, surely, worth the study of even an intelligent man.' The point, undoubtedly, is well taken.

An Agnostic's Queries

We conclude our answers, as promised last week, to the second and third questions on the list sent to us by a Christchurch correspondent, and submitted to him by an Agnostic or Rationalist acquaintance. Ques-

tion 2: 'How is it that the story of a Christ's miraculous birth and of His death, are found in all the older religions, notably those of Krishna and Buddha? Does it not look as if the Christian Bible is merely the Christian records of the same myths, in that these myths formed important parts of many so-called pagan religions long before Christ came to this earth?'

Answer: No; it only looks as if the questioner had a very superficial and imperfect acquaintance with the facts. The 'myths' referred to by him formed no part—'important' or otherwise—of the original story either of Krishna or of Buddha, but were, admittedly and demonstrably, very much later accretions. In the older framework of the *Mahabharata* (or legendary poems) Krishna appears merely as a great chieftain and ally of the Pandava brothers; 'and it is only,' says a writer in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Art 'Krishna'), 'in the interpolated episode of the *Bhagavad-gita* that he is identified with Vishnu and becomes the revealer of the doctrine of *bhakti* or religious devotion. Of still later date are the popular developments of the modern cult of Krishna associated with Radha, as found in the *Vishnu Purana*.' The *Bhagavad-gita* here spoken of is a dramatic poem which was written by an unknown author who lived in India about the second or third century, and which, according to Prof. Monier Williams, Dr. Lorinser, and the authorities generally, was interpolated in the *Mahabharata* certainly not earlier than the third century. The *Vishnu-purana* above referred to—one of a class of sacred poetical books—furnishes the main foundation of the actual popular Krishnaworship, and of the legends alluded to by the questioner; and of these *Puranas* Sir Richard Temple, G.C.S.I., D.C.L., says: 'A critical investigation of the contents of the existing works bearing that name must necessarily lead to the conclusion that in their present form they not only do not belong to a remote age, but can barely claim an antiquity of a thousand years.' The late Prof. H. H. Wilson, Boden Professor of Sanskrit in the University of Oxford, bears the same testimony: 'I believe the oldest of them (the *Puranas*) not to be anterior to the eighth or ninth century.' The *Vishnu-purana*—the special *Purana* which, together with the *Bhagavatapurana*, treats of the life of Krishna, and of the doctrines and practices of Krishna worship—is placed by Chambers's *Encyclopaedia* at an even later date. 'The Vishnuite doctrines,' says the writer of the article 'Vishnu,' were gathered into one body in the 11th century as the *Vishnu-purana*.' So it comes to this: That our Agnostic friend, who expresses a wish 'to be convinced one way or the other,' actually professes himself contrained to give up Christianity because it borrowed from a religion which—as a religion—was non-existent when Christianity was established, and which only became 'a going concern' centuries after Christianity had achieved some of its greatest triumphs! It is easy to see, in this discussion, on which side the credulity really lies; and we would advise the questioner to no longer be content to accept without examination the ill-founded and sweeping assertions of shallow and unscholarly writers but to make an honest effort to sift the facts fairly and fully for himself by careful study of competent and unbiassed authorities. It would seem fairly clear that if there has been any borrowing as between the religion associated with the name of Krishna and that of Christianity, the borrowing has been done by the former and not by the latter. Dr. Lorinser, expanding the views of Professor Weber and others concerning the influence of Christianity on the legends of Krishna, holds that many of the sentiments of the *Bhagavad-gita* have been directly borrowed from the New Testament, copies of which, he says, found their way into India about the third century. As we have already mentioned it was in the third century that the *Bhagavad-gita* was written. Prof. Monier Williams himself, after a lifetime devoted to the study of this subject, gives a measure of approval to this theory.

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Precisely the same remarks apply to the alleged parallels to the Gospel stories of Christ which are sometimes claimed as attaching to the life of Buddha,

Bird and Jansen

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