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MR. CROWLEY AND THE CREEDS.

(By G. K. Chesterton.)

With references to my article last week I have received further reproaches, but in nearly every case the letter divides itself into two parts; first, a series of fiery taunts at my confession of "abysmal ignorance," and second, a more solemn remonstrance with me for my "lack of charity." Now I think this places me in a somewhat pathetic position. I am not prepared adequately to define charity, or any other purely mystical virtue. But I should have thought that charity might, roughly, be described as being "a confession of abysmal ignorance"—about abysmal things. The only quite abysmal things are human beings. Charity might, I think, be called an attitude of reverent agnosticism towards the individual soul. If I said that a Jap loved nothing but evil in his heart I should be uncharitable; I should be equally uncharitable if I said it about Mr. Harry Marks. But I cannot conceive in what possible way this charity can have anything to do with our political sympathies or our favourite causes. For this charity is due to all men: therefore, it cannot involve wishing success to the Japanese. Unless it also involves wishing success to the Russians.

And now there lies in front of me a book which is at once a good example of what I have been saying and a good opportunity of passing to something larger and more permanently interesting. It is a poem, with gargantuan notes and introductions, by Mr. Aleister Crowley, and it deals chiefly with his view of Christianity and Buddhism. Before I discuss it in detail I should like to explain why I think it very relevant to our recent discussions.

There are, I think, three classes of people who are annoyed with Mr. Hales and myself for feeling a philosophical or ethical distrust of Japan. The first class are the jelly people who simply have an idea that Japan is a little thing tackling a big one. To these people I have only to say that I drink to their healths. Their sentiment is quite irrational; it is quite right; and it is, moreover, peculiarly European and decidedly mediaeval. I

would only remind them that hitherto in the field of war Japan has been the large Power and Russia the small one. The second class of people are those with whom I have hitherto been arguing. They hold something like this, as far as I can make out. They think that all men have by the light of Nature a certain scheme of morality, and that this scheme of morality is the Ten Commandments as understood in West Kensington. This covers the whole earth. Then on top of that come a number of fussy people with religions who want them, for no reason in particular, to believe in the oracle of Delphi, of the Wheel of the Buddhists, or the coming of the Messiah. These religions, they think, have nothing to do with ethics, and, apparently, do not even affect them. Men's religion may be anything; they may be worshipping Christ or Silenus, or a crocodile, or the stars, or nothing at all, but if you go to their conduct you will find it the same as that of an American Ethical Society. This, I say, is un-historical nonsense. Almost every moral code differs, not in its first moral need, perhaps, but in very important matters—in its view of monogamy, wine, suicide, slavery, caste, dueling, decency, the limits of endurance, the seat of authority. And nearly every moral code on earth arose from a religion, even if some of its followers have dropped the religion out of it. If a high-minded and pious Turk (of whom there are a great many) were to see Mr. Blatchford, say, addressing an American Ethical society, he would, feeling his own traditions on monogamy, wine, suicide, etc., say with perfect truth, "This is a sect of Protestant Christians." But there is a third class of the passionately Pro-Japanese. The first class are those who sympathise with Japan through a chivalry towards small nations: that is, they love an Eastern people for a Western reason. I drink their healths again. The second class consists of those who do not admit that reasons are Eastern or Western at all. They say that religion does not matter. But the third class consists of those who think that religion does matter very much, but who do honestly prefer Buddhism—or, perhaps, Islam or Confucianism—to Christianity. They feel there is a Western and an Eastern philosophy; but they like the Eastern philosophy. To them it is idle to say that Orientalism may contain pessimism: for they are already pessimists. To them it is useless to say that it may undermine the Christian idea of free-will or the Christian idea of marriage, for they do not believe either in free-will or in marriage. Their position is perfectly clear and honest; but it is not any more tolerant than mine. For they are only (with a superb effort) tolerating the things they agree with.

Among these are a great number of my correspondents: but they do not know it. Among these is Mr. Aleister Crowley; but he does know it. He publishes a work, "The Sword of Song: Called by Christians 'The Book of the Beast,' " and called, I am ashamed to say, "Ye Sword of Song" on the cover, by some singularly uneducated man. Mr. Aleister Crowley has always been, in my opinion, a good poet; his "Soul of Osiris," written during an Egyptian mood, was better poetry than this Brown-ingesque rhapsody in a Buddhist mood; but this also, though very affected, is very interesting. But the main fact about it is that it is the expression of a man who has really found Buddhism more satisfactory than Christianity.

Mr. Crowley begins his poem, I believe, with an earnest intention to explain the beauty of the Buddhist philosophy; he knows a great deal about it; he believes in it. But as he went on writing one thing became stronger and stronger in his soul—the living hatred of Christianity. Before he has finished he has descended to the babyish: "difficulties" of the Hall of Science—things about "the plain words of your sacred books," things about "the panacea of belief"—things, in short, at which any philosophical Hindoo would roll about with laughter. Does Mr. Crowley suppose that Buddhists do not feel the poetical nature of the books of a religion? Does he suppose that they do not realise the immense importance of believing the truth? But Mr. Crowley has got something into his soul stronger even than the beautiful passion of the man who believes in Buddhism; he has the passion of the man who does not believe in Christianity. He adds one more testimony to the endless series of testimonies to the fascination and vitality of the faith. For some mysterious reason no man can contrive to be agnostic about Christianity. He always tries to prove something about it—that it is unphilosophical or immoral or disastrous—which is not true. He can never say simply that it does not convince him—which is true. A casual carpenter wandered about a string of villages, and suddenly a horde of rich men and sceptics and Sadducees and respectable persons rushed at him and nailed him up like vermin; then people saw that he was a god. He had proved that he was not a common man, for he was murdered. And ever since his creed has proved that it is not a common hypothesis, for it is hated.

Next week I hope to make a fuller study of Mr. Crowley's interpretation of Buddhism, for I have not room for it in this column today. Suffice it for the moment to say that if this be indeed a true interpretation of the creed, as it is certainly a capa-

ble one, I need go no further than its pages for examples of how a change of abstract belief might break a civilization to pieces. Under the influence of this book earnest modern philosophers may, I think, begin to perceive the outlines of two vast and mystical philosophies, which if they were subtly and slowly worked out in two continents through many centuries, might possibly, under special circumstances, make the East and West almost as different as they really are.