

THE FIRE WORSHIPERS.

TALMAGE'S IMPRESSIONS AFTER TWO WEEKS AT BOMBAY.

The Bible of the Parsees—Questions and Answers From a Parsee Catechism—Their Reverence for the Elements of Nature—The Tower of Silence.

BROOKLYN, Dec. 23.—Rev. Dr. Talmage, continuing his series of round the world sermons through the press, chose to-day for his subject "The Fire Worshipers," the text selected being Matthew ii, 1, "There came wise men from the east to Jerusalem."

These wise men were the Parsees, or the so called fire worshippers, and I found their descendants in India last October. Their heathenism is more tolerable than any of the other false religions and has more alleviations, and while in this round the world series I have already shown you the worst forms of heathenism to-day I show you the least offensive.

The prophet of the Parsees was Zoroaster of Persia. He was poet and philosopher and reformer as well as a religionist. His disciples thrived at first in Persia, but under Mohammedan persecution they retreated to India, where I met them, and in addition to what I saw of them at their headquarters in Bombay, India, I had two weeks of association with one of the most learned and genial of their people on ship-board from Bombay to Brindisi.

The Bible of the Parsees, or fire worshippers, as they are inaccurately called, is the Zend Avesta, a collection of the strangest books that ever came into my hands. There were originally 21 volumes, but Alexander the Great in a drunken fit set fire to a palace, which contained some of them, and they went into ashes and forgetfulness. But there are more of their sacred volumes left than most people would have patience to read. There are many things in the religion of the Parsees that suggest Christianity, and some of its doctrines are in accord with our own religion. Zoroaster, who lived about 1,400 years before Christ, was a good man, suffered persecution for his faith and was assassinated while worshipping at an altar. He announced the theory, "He is best who is pure of heart," and that there are two great spirits in the world—Ormuzd, the good spirit, and Anriman, the bad spirit—and that all who do right are under the influence of Ormuzd, and all who do wrong are under Anriman; that the Parsee must be born on the ground floor of the house and must be buried from the ground floor; that the dying man must have prayers said over him and a sacred juice given him to drink; that the good at their decease go into eternal light and the bad into eternal darkness; that having passed out of this life the soul lingers near the corpse three days in a paradisaic state, enjoying more than all the nations of earth put together could enjoy, or in a pandemoniac state, suffering more than all the nations put together could possibly suffer, but at the end of three days departing for its final destiny, and that there will be a resurrection of the body. They are more careful than any other people about their ablutions, and they wash and wash and wash. They pay great attention to physical health, and it is a rare thing to see a sick Parsee. They do not smoke tobacco, for they consider that a misuse of fire. At the close of mortal life the soul appears at the Bridge Chinvat, where an angel presides, and questions the soul about the thoughts and words and deeds of its earthly state. Nothing, however, is more intense in the Parsee faith than the theory that the dead body is impure. A devil is supposed to take possession of the dead body. All who touch it are unclean, and hence the strange style of obsequies.

But here I must give three or four questions and answers from one of the Parsee catechisms:

Question—Who is the most fortunate man in the world?
Answer—He who is the most innocent.

Q.—Who is the most innocent man in the world?
A.—He who walks in the path of God and shuns that of the devil.

Q.—Which is the path of God, and which that of the devil?
A.—Virtue is the path of God, and vice that of the devil.

Q.—What constitutes virtue, and what vice?
A.—Good thoughts, good words and good deeds constitute virtue, and evil thoughts, evil words and evil deeds constitute vice.

Q.—What constitute good thoughts, good words and good deeds, and evil thoughts, evil words and evil deeds?
A.—Honesty, charity and truthfulness constitute the former, and dishonesty, want of charity and falsehood constitute the latter.

And now, the better to show you these Parsees, I tell you of two things I saw within a short time in Bombay. It was an afternoon of contrast.

We started for Malabar hill, on which the wealthy classes have their embowered homes and the Parsees their strange temple of the dead. As we rode along the water's edge the sun was descending the sky, and a disciple of Zoroaster, a Parsee, was in lowly posture, and with reverential gaze looking into the sky. He would have been said to have been worshipping the sun, as all Parsees are said to worship the fire. But the intelligent Parsee does not worship the fire. He looks upon the sun as the emblem of the warmth and light of the Creator. Looking at a blaze of light, whether on earth, on mountain height or in the sky, he can more easily bring to mind the glory of God—at least, so the Parsees tell me. Indeed they are the pleasantest heathen I have met. They treat their wives as equals, while the Hindus and Buddhists treat them as cattle, although the cattle and sheep and swine are better off than most of the women of India.

This Parsee on the roadside on our way to Malabar hill was the only one of that religion I had ever seen engaged in worship. Who knows but that beyond the light of the sun on which he gazes he may catch a glimpse of the God who is light and "in whom there is no darkness at all."

We passed on up through the gates into the garden that surrounds the place where the Parsees dispose of their dead. This garden was given by Jamshidji Jijibhai and is beautiful with flowers of all hue and foliage of all styles of vein and notch and stature. There is on all sides great copulence of fern and express. The garden is 100 feet above the level of the sea. Not far from the entrance is a building where the mourners of the funeral procession go in to pray. A light is here kept burning year in and year out. We ascend the garden by some eight stone steps. The body of a deceased aged woman was being carried in toward the chief "tower of silence." There are five of these towers. Several of them have not been used for a long while.

Four persons, whose business it is to do this, carry in the corpse. They are followed by two men with long beards. The tower of silence to which they come cost \$150,000 and is 25 feet high and 570 feet around and without a roof. The four carriers of the dead and the two bearded men come to the door of the tower, enter and leave the dead. There are three rows of places for the dead—the outer row for the men, the middle row for the women, the inside row for the children. The lifeless bodies are exposed as far down as the waist. As soon as the employes retire from the tower of silence the vultures, now one, now two, now many, swoop upon the lifeless form. These vultures fill the air with their discordant voices. We saw them in long rows on the top of the whitewashed wall of the tower of silence. In a few minutes they have taken the best particle of flesh from the bones. There had evidently been other opportunities for them that day, and some few away as though surfeited. They sometimes carry away with them parts of a body, and it is no unusual thing for the gentlemen in their country seats to have dropped into their dooryards a bone from the tower of silence.

In the centre of this tower is a well, into which the bones are thrown after they are bleached. The hot sun and the rainy season and charcoal do their work of disintegration and disinfection, and then there are sluices that carry into the sea what remains of the dead. The wealthy people of Malabar hill have made strenuous efforts to have these strange towers removed as a nuisance, but they remain and will no doubt for ages remain.

I talked with a learned Parsee about these mortuary customs. He said: "I suppose you consider them very peculiar, but the fact is we Parsees reverence the elements of nature and cannot consent to defile them. We reverence the fire, and therefore will not ask it to burn our dead. We reverence the water and do not ask it to submerge our dead. We reverence the earth and will not ask it to bury our dead. And so we let the vultures take them away." He confirmed me in the theory that the Parsees act on the principle that the dead are unclean. No one must touch such a body. The carriers of this "tomb of silence" must not put their hands on the form of the departed. They wear gloves lest somehow they should be contaminated. When the bones are to be removed from the sides of the tower and put in the well at the centre, they are touched carefully by tongs. Then these people besides have very decided theories about the democracy of the tomb. No such thing as caste among the dead. Philosopher and boor, the affluent and the destitute must go through the same "tower of silence," lie down side by side with other occupants, have their bodies dropped into the same abyss and be carried out through the same canal and float away on the same sea. No splendor of Necropolis, no sculpturing of mausoleum, no pomp of dome or obelisk. Zoroaster's teachings resulted in these "towers of silence." He wrote: "Naked you came into the world, and naked you must go out."

Starting homeward, we soon were in the heart of the city and saw a building all afire with lights and resounding with merry voices. It was a Parsee wedding, in a building erected especially for the marriage ceremony. We came to the door and proposed to go in, but at first were not permitted. They saw we were not Parsees, and that we were not even natives. So very politely they halted us on the doorsteps. This temple of nuptials was chiefly occupied by women, their ears and necks and hands aflame with jewels or imitations of jewels. By pantomime and gesture, as we had no use of their vocabulary, we told them we were strangers and were curious to see by what process Parsees were married.

Gradually we worked our way inside the door. The building and the surroundings were illumined by hundreds of candles in glasses and lanterns, in unique and grotesque holdings. Conversation ran high, and laughter bubbled over, and all was gay. Then there was a sound of an advancing band of music, but the instruments for the most part were strange to our ears and eyes. Louder and louder were the outside voices, and the wind and stringed instruments, until the procession halted at the door of the temple and the bridegroom mounted the steps. Then the music ceased, and all the voices were still.

The mother of the bridegroom, with a platter loaded with aromatics and articles of food, confronted her son and began to address him. Then she took from the platter a bottle of perfume and sprinkled his face with the redolence. All the while speaking in a droning tone, she took from the platter a handful of rice, throwing some of it on his head, spilling some of it on his shoulder, pouring some of it on his hands. She took from the platter a coconut and waved it about his head. She lifted a garland of flowers and threw it over his neck and a bouquet of flowers and put it in his hand. Her part of the ceremony completed, the band resumed its music, and through another door the bridegroom was conducted into the centre of the building. The bride was in the room, but there was nothing to designate her. "Where is the bride?" I said, "Where is the bride?" After a while she was made evident. The bride and groom were seated on chairs opposite each other. A white curtain was dropped between them so that they could not see each other. Then the attendants put their arms under this curtain, took a long rope of linen and wound it around the neck of the bride and the groom in token that they were to be bound together for life. Then some silk strings were wound around the couple, now around this one and now around that. Then the groom threw a handful of rice across the curtain on the head of the bride, and the bride responded by throwing a handful of rice across the curtain on the head of the groom. Thereupon the curtain dropped, and the bride's chair was removed and put beside that of the groom. Then a priest of the Parsee religion arose and faced the couple. Before the priest was placed a platter of rice. He began to address the young man and woman. We could not hear a word, but understood just as well as if we had heard. Ever and anon he punctuated his ceremony by a handful of rice, which he picked up from the platter and flung now toward the groom and now toward the bride.

The ceremony went on interminably. We wanted to hear the conclusion, but were told that the ceremony would go on for a long while—indeed that it would not conclude until 2 o'clock in the morning, and this was only between 7 and 8 o'clock in the evening. There would be a recess after awhile in the ceremony, but it would be taken up again in earnest at half-past 12. We enjoyed what we had seen, but felt incapacitated for six more hours of wedding ceremony. Silently wishing the couple a happy life in each other's companionship, we pressed our way through the throng of congratulatory Parsees.

We rode toward our hotel, wishing that marriage in all India might be as much honored as in the ceremony we had

that evening witnessed at the Parsee wedding. The Hindoo women are not so married. They are simply cursed into the conjugal relation. Many of the girls are married at 7 and 10 years of age, and some of them are grandmothers at 30. They can never go forth into the sunlight with their faces uncovered. They must stay at home. All styles of maltreatment are theirs. If they become Christians, they become outcasts. A missionary told me in India of a Hindoo woman who became a Christian. She had nine children. Her husband was over 70 years of age, and yet at her Christian baptism he told her to go, and she went out homeless. As long as woman is down India will be down. No nation was ever elevated except through the elevation of woman. Parsee marriage is an improvement on Hindoo marriage, but Christian marriage is an improvement on Parsee marriage.

A fellow traveler in India told me he had been writing to his home in England trying to get a law passed that no white woman could be legally married in India until she had been there six months.—Admirable law would that be! If a white woman saw what married life with a Hindoo is, she would never undertake it. Off with the thick and ugly veil from woman's face! Off with the crushing burdens from her shoulder! Nothing but the gospel of Jesus Christ will ever make life in India what it ought to be.

Thus I have set before you the best of all the religions of the "heathen world, and I have done so in order that you might come to a higher appreciation of the glorious religion which has put its benediction over us and over Christendom.

Compare the absurdities and mummeries of heathen marriage with the plain "I will" of Christian marriage, the hands joined in pledge "till death us do part." Compare the doctrine that the dead may not be touched with as sacred and tender and loving a kiss as is ever given, the last kiss of lips that never again will speak to us. Compare the narrow bridge Chinvat, over which the departing Parsee soul must tremblingly cross, to the wide open gate of heaven, through which the departing Christian soul may triumphantly enter. Compare the 21 books of the Zend Avesta of the Parsee, which even the scholars of the earth despair of understanding, with our Bible, so much of it as is necessary for our salvation in language so plain that "a wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err therein." Compare the "tower of silence," with its vultures, at Bombay with the Greenwood of Brooklyn, with its sculptured angels of resurrection, and bow yourselves in thanksgiving and prayer as you realize that if at the battles of Marathon and Salamis Persia had triumphed over Greece instead of Greece triumphing over Persia, Parseeism, which was the national religion of Persia, might have covered the earth, and you and I instead of sitting in the noonday light of our glorious Christianity might have been groping in the depressing shadows of Parseeism, a religion as inferior to that which is our inspiration in life and our hope in death as Zoroaster of Persia was inferior to our radiant and superhuman Christ, to whom be honor and glory and dominion and victory and song, world without end. Amen!

DE GIERS' GREATNESS.

The Famous Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs and His Work.

No man has had more to do with shaping the policy of Russia in important matters than Nicholas Carlovitch de Giers, "the Finlander," for many years imperial minister of foreign affairs. Suave and apparently very yielding, he gained a great influence over his imperial master, the czar, and was able to guide him in all matters of foreign policy. As a result, he became a power not only in Russia, but in the world of nations. He is a diplomat by nature and by education, none the less powerful that he made no theatrical exhibition of the power he exercised. He was really second only to the czar, but his



NICHOLAS CARLOVITCH DE GIERS.

victories were of peace rather than of war. He was born May 21, 1820, and was the son of a colonel who came from a great Swedish family which settled in Finland ages before the Russians conquered it. He was educated in the Imperial Lyceum, at Zarskoje-Selo, and when eighteen years old entered the Asiatic department of the ministry of foreign affairs. In 1848 he was sent as diplomatic agent to the headquarters of Gen. Lueders, who was commander in chief during the Hungarian campaign, to help Russia get her grip on the Danubian provinces. After that he went to Constantinople as first secretary of the Russian embassy, and there he kept close watch on the events of the Crimean war. Then his hand appeared in Moldavia and Wallachia. In 1858 he went to Egypt as consul general. Then he appeared again in the Danubian principalities. Everywhere he made history, almost imperceptibly, without trumpet or sword, except, perhaps, as incidental and minor aids. He went to Teheran as Russian minister in 1863, and succeeded in breaking England's influence. He virtually won Asia for the czar, and then was sent to Berne and afterward to Stockholm. He became chief assistant to Prince Gortschakof, minister of foreign affairs, in 1873, whose favorite niece, Princess Kantakuzene, he married. He also reorganized the whole diplomatic service of Russia before Czar Alexander II. was assassinated. Alexander III. sent De Giers to all foreign courts to bear the famous friendly message on the programme to be adopted, and then came the great conference between Alexander III. and Emperor William I. at Gastein, September 9, 1881, at which De Giers and Bismarck renewed the compact which had existed between the late czar and the German emperor. In 1882 De Giers became minister of foreign affairs, and since that time he has been one of the most powerful men in Europe.

A Child's Joys.

The pleasant flavor, gentle action and soothing effects of Syrup of Figs, when in need of a laxative, and if the father or mother be covetous or bilious, the most gratifying results follow its use; so that it is the best family remedy known, and every family should have a bottle on hand.

Mexico and Guatemala are going to fight.

STEVENSON OF SAMOA.

THE BRILLIANT AUTHOR OF "DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE."

A Master of the Weird in Literature Whose First Fame Came by "Treasure Island"—Cut Down at the Age of Forty-Four Years.

The news of the death of Robert Louis Balfour Stevenson was a profound shock to the world of readers to whom his name had become a household word. The immediate cause was apoplexy, although he had gone to the South Sea island of Samoa for lung trouble. His body was interred on the summit of Pala Mountain, 1,300 feet. At the time of his death Mr. Stevenson had half completed the writing of a new novel. He left two other completed novels written, except for the love touches he had intended putting to them before he gave them to the world.

Boys will remember him as the author of "Treasure Island." Perhaps in respect of mingled humor and satire "The Dynamiters," dealing with the Irish "Invincible" outrages, is unlike anything else ever written. But to the mass of his readers he will be best known and longest remembered as the author of "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," which by many critics is considered the finest study in psychology ever penned.

To the ancient city of Edinburgh belongs the honor of having given birth to the great novelist. He was born Nov. 13, 1850, and was, therefore, a little more than forty-four years old.

In the choice of a career he had the example of his father. Thomas Stevenson it was who wrote the famous "Light-House Optics." He had resolved, however, that his son should follow a different profession. Robert Louis was sent to the University of Edinburgh, passed, with honors and in due course was called to the Scottish bar.

But his natural instincts would not be quelled. Many years of his life he spent traveling and in literature. For nearly seven years, up to 1883, he was known chiefly among scholars as a brilliant essayist and editorial writer. Every subject he handled was marked by the perfect grace, ease, rhythm and simplicity of genius.

One of the earliest works published under his own name was an account of his travels in California, the beauty of which always enthralled him. His dawning genius as a story-writer was shown first in "The Dynamiter" and the somewhat fantastic but withal fascinating "New Arabian Nights." Who that ever read his description of the drawing of the cards at the suicides' supper table can ever forget it?

Even then his genius was recognized among a certain section of readers, but it was not until 1885, when "Treasure Island" appeared, that his reputation as an author was soon established. The subject of "Treasure Island" was suggested by a small boy, who, not appreciating the force of "The Dynamiter" or "The New Arabian Nights" wanted "something interesting—something like Robinson Crusoe."

But not until 1888, when the marvellous "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" came, did Robert Louis Stevenson reap the full reward of his years of hard, grinding, almost despairing toil, in which he oftener, perhaps than any other authors who ever lived, was forced to endure the rejection of his manuscripts.

The idea on which this wonderfully told and wonderfully constructed tale is framed had existed dimly in Stevenson's mind for many years. He had tried to formulate it many times, but without results such as would satisfy him. He had about given



ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

up the hope of being able to produce a story which should suggest the idea of a dual nature in man when one night sitting by his fire in an old-fashioned inn with the storm raging fiercely outside, there flashed in his mind, as by inspiration, the true method of handling the story.

In a few days the story was written and ready for publication.

Stevenson, for some reason, always felt chagrined that his fame rested on this work, believing that he had accomplished better things. "Kidnapped," a story told by David Balfour added but little to his fame, but in "The Master of Ballantrae," published in 1889, he wrote what has been regarded as one of the best written stories in the English language.

Here it is that the beauty and purity of Stevenson's style are seen at their best. In directness, terseness and force many critics say he was never approached.

Many students of Stevenson believed that they could discern the influence of Shakespeare in all his works. But equally with Shakespeare he digested Thackeray, Dickens and, above all, Scott, and the sentiment of the last named author may be traced in many of his stories.

In 1891 Mr. Stevenson's health was so badly broken down that his physicians told him he could not live. It was then that he decided to abandon civilization altogether and to go with his wife to the Samoan Islands to spend his declining years. He knew that the climate there was such as to promise him a few years more of life.

Mr. Stevenson purchased 400 acres on the side of a mountain near Aia, the principal city of the islands. The big estate cost him a mere song. With Mr. and Mrs. Stevenson were his aged mother and his stepson, Mr. Lloyd Osborne.

He built his cottage right in the forest. Labor was cheap and he hired many servants to make him as comfortable as possible in his voluntary exile. At first he had a very small and uncomfortable hut, but that was replaced by a two-storied cottage, with wide verandas and large rooms. Around him the natives colonized and they have always adored the novelist.

He would not have a white servant about the place. He believed that whites would corrupt his native boys and girls.

Mrs. Stevenson was the business end of the family, so far as the estate was con-

cerned. She and her young son directed the work on the plantation. Stevenson himself had little to do with the servants, except to sit in solemn dignity as judge in the settlement of disputes between them. Time and time again word has come from Samoa that Stevenson was dying. Consumption was his malady. The real cause of his breakdown was said to be the excessive smoking of cigarettes. From 100 to 150 paper cigarettes a day was his requirement. When he started on a slow sailing vessel from England to Samoa he carried 200 boxes of cigarettes with him, and then, fearing that he might run short, had a large reserve supply of tobacco and paper.

The fact is that Stevenson has been periodically dying for a dozen years. That he was a man whose apparent physical weakness was no real index to his strength is proved by the enormous amount of work



MRS. R. L. STEVENSON.

he has done. When, ten years ago, he visited California, it was said his days were few, but he outlived the prophets and returned to California five years later. Then it was stated that he must surely die, but a cruise in his yacht, the Casco, in the South Seas, brought back his strength. It was while on that cruise that he became enamored of life under the equator, and the beauties of the Samoan islands.

Of the home life of the Stevensons in the Samoan much has been written, not only by himself, but by the few English visitors who have gone to see them.

While Mr. Stevenson surrounded himself with all the comforts of civilized life possible, such as a grand piano, a good library, etc., yet his life in the tropics was generally of a thoroughly happy-go-lucky sort. He went barefooted most of the time and wore as little clothing as even his own unconventional mind and his free-and-easy surroundings would permit. So did Mrs. Stevenson, too, for that matter. A calico wrapper and a man's straw hat was her usual attire.

Stevenson was a warm friend of Mataafa, the king, who was overthrown. He believed him more honorable than any of the white officials on the islands.

Robert Louis Stevenson's religion, summed up in his own language, was that his duty was to make men happy rather than make them good.

A FEEL IN THE CHRISTMAS AIR.

They's a kind o' feel in the air, to me,
When the Chris'mas-time sets in,
That's about as much of a mystery
As ever I run agin'—
Fer instance, now, whilst I gain in weight
And general health, I swear
They's a goneness somers I can't quite
state—
A kind o' feel in the air.

They's a feel in the Chris'mas air goes
right.

To th' spot where a man lives at
It gets a feller a appetite—
They ain't no doubt about that!
And yit they's somepin'—I don't know
what.

That follers me here and there,
And haunts and worries and spares me
not—
A kind o' feel in the air!

They's a feel, as I say, in the air that's
jest
As blame-don sad as sweet!—
In the same is sho as I feel the best
And am spryest on my feet.
They's allus a kind o' sort of a ache
That I can't locate nowhere;
But it comes with Chris'mas and no mis-
take!

A kind o' feel in the air.

Is it the racket the children raise?
W'y, no!—God bless 'em—no!
Is it the eyes and the cheeks ablaze—
Like my own was long ago!—
Is it the beat o' the whistle and beat
O' the little toy-drum and blare
O' the horn—No! no!—It's jest the sweet—
The sad sweet feel in the air.

—James Whitcomb Riley in the Cosmo-
politan.

DR. FRANCES HELENA GRAY.

A Modern Fortia Who Recently Won the Magic Title LL. D.

One of the two women in the British Isles entitled to add the letters LL. D. to their names is Frances Helena Gray, who recently had that title conferred upon her by Lord Elmy, vice chancellor of the Royal University of Ireland. Miss Gray was born in Belfast, her father, William Gray, of Mount

Charles, being a member of the Royal Irish Academy. As a young girl she carried off numerous educational honors. Having a taste for languages which she desired to cultivate, Miss Gray spent a year studying German in the quaint old town of Trier.

FRANCES HELENA and returning home GRAY, matriculated with honors at the Royal University of Ireland and took the third prize in modern literature at the ensuing scholarship examination, open to both men and women. In 1887 she took honors in logic, geology and German, won her B. A. degree in 1888 and in 1889 the degree of LL. B., and finally that of LL. D. Dr. Gray is a tall, slender girl with a delicate complexion, gray eyes shaded by long lashes and finely marked eyebrows. She is very quiet and simple in manner, and her speech has the piquancy added by a dash of brogue. There is nothing of the bluestocking about her. Indeed much of her time is devoted to tennis and golf, in both of which athletic games she is an expert.

How He Won Her.

"I will be yours," she whispered. He smoothed the raven hair that lay on the marble brow and murmured passionately:

"Won at last!"

"No, not one until we are united in marriage," and she laughed softly to herself.

"That's one on me," he said.

He had forgotten that she was the humorist of the Weekly Bugle.—New York Press.

