

THE RELIGIOUS WORLD.

THE ENGLISH CORONATION OATH.

THE first parliamentary session of King Edward's reign closed August 17 without changing the form of the oath of allegiance to be administered at the coronation next spring. Following the attempt to modify the old form of the oath by the omission of certain words offensive to Roman Catholics, several memorials were addressed to the King and the Parliament petitioning that no alteration be made. We quote from the memorial presented by the National Club:

"It is feared by millions of British Protestants that the royal declaration against Transubstantiation and the Sacrifice of the Mass, as prescribed by the Bill of Rights to be made by the sovereign at the opening of the first Parliament, is about to be tampered with; this declaration being a vital and constitutional safeguard of our religious and civil liberties, and of the throne of this kingdom. Moreover, we respectfully submit to your Majesty that this declaration is the only evidence definitely proving that the sovereign is not a Roman Catholic, and is effectual to that end, and that it is therefore imperative that it be maintained unaltered and unimpaired. This declaration was prepared at a time when the danger of a Romish succession to the throne was imminent, and it was felt that no language other than that contained in the Bill of Rights would be effectual to counteract the peril that threatened the country. The avowed aims of the directors of the Church of Rome are the same to-day as they were when this effective barrier was first raised against their encroachments. We therefore most humbly but earnestly beseech your Majesty to permit no alteration in the wording of this fundamental safeguard of our religious and civil liberties as a Protestant nation, the need of which is as urgent now as when it was first framed by our forefathers."

The debate in the House of Lords upon the royal declaration bill, which contained the proposed changed form of oath, was followed up by press comment which has not altogether ceased with the ending of Parliament. The *London Pilot* (Rom. Cath.) says (August 10):

"We are of those who think that the Act of Succession is not really strengthened by the multiplication of paper outworks. The true security that the King of England shall be a Protestant is the determination of the English people that no one who is not a Protestant shall be King of England. Still, since the belief in the value of paper securities is widely diffused, we are quite willing that the king should make a declaration which shall show as far as a declaration can that he is not a Roman Catholic. What we object to is that for this purpose he should be made to reject doctrines which are held by other churches, as well as by the Roman Catholic Church, while he is allowed to remain silent in regard to a doctrine which can not possibly be held by any one who is not a Roman Catholic. Even royal declarations should not be wholly destitute of common sense. We can quite understand Lord Llandaff's preference for the declaration as it is over the declaration as Lord Salisbury proposed to make it. As it stands it is a survival which has ceased to carry any meaning. No rational person supposes that it expresses the mind of the sovereign who makes it. He merely complies with an out-of-date formality, which reflects only the extinct passions of a past age. As Lord Salisbury proposed to alter it, it would have spoken from the present time and perpetuated an anachronism while pretending to remove it. Mr. Balfour's announcement on Thursday [of the dismissal of Parliament] finally disposes of the bill. Until the subject can be taken up in a more reasonable spirit, it had better be left alone."

Some comment on the subject has been aroused in this country also. *The Herald and Presbyter* (August 21) observes:

"A good many persons have been clamoring for a change in the English coronation oath, on the ground that 'its terms are offensive to a considerable proportion of King Edward's subjects, including some of the most scholarly and influential.' The oath is the same that has been in use for several centuries, and in it the new sovereign renounces certain doctrines of the Roman

Catholic Church, such as 'the sacrament of the mass' and 'the adoration of the Virgin Mary,' and characterizes them as 'superstitious and idolatrous.' The Romanists want these expressions changed, as they have wanted them changed every time they have been used. Of course they do. They did not wish them used in the first place. And certain persons who always want to please the Romanists favor having them changed. The next thing would be to omit all reference to them. We think the English have more sense and backbone. The expressions are true, and always have been true. They should not be changed."

Collier's Weekly (August 24) contrasts religious conditions here and abroad thus:

"The attempt to modify the King's declaration has stirred the English people more than we would think possible over here, where the sects get on amiably with each other and where religious intolerance has never—at least in this generation—played an important part in politics. It was proposed in response to numerous entreaties from all parts of the empire to remove the denunciation of 'adoration of the Blessed Virgin' as 'idolatrous,' and to soften other expressions reflecting unkindly on the religion of many millions of the King's subjects. But the first mention of the changes aroused a fierce protest, on one side from persons who objected on religious grounds, and on the other side from persons who objected on political grounds, while the Catholics themselves, deeming the modifications suggested not ample enough, have withheld active support from the Government's bill. It is pleasant to think that a controversy of this nature would be impossible in this country. If we have made no other advance we at least have kept religious intolerance out of politics. Any one who imagines this is a slight accomplishment need only look to the Associations Bill in France, the struggle between church and state in Rome, and now the furious controversy in England, to realize his error."

A BRAHMAN'S INDICTMENT OF CHRISTIANITY.

WHY have Christianity and Islamism both failed to produce any serious impression on peoples who have come under the influence of Brahmanism and Buddhism? This question is asked by *Brahmavadin* (Madras, India, May), and it contains an assumption that will probably be disputed by the leaders both of the Christian and the Mohammedan faith. Assuming this failure, however, as a matter to be taken for granted, *Brahmavadin* proceeds to an editorial answer to the question as follows:

"To our mind the reason of this failure of Islam, and of Christianity also, as it is becoming patent to-day in China and the other parts of eastern Asia, appears to be in the deep-rooted spirit of positive toleration in religious matters which forms one of the firm foundations both of Brahmanism and Buddhism. To the Brahman as well as the Buddhist there is nothing more strange than the belief that any one form of religion comprises the whole of religious truth which God has vouchsafed to man for time and eternity, and that all other forms of religion are so wrong and corrupt as to be merely the work of the devil. The militant and aggressive work of proselytism known to the Christians and the Mohammedans strikes the tolerant Hindu and the Buddhist as irreligious, unwise, and even barbaric. To those who are actuated by such a spirit of toleration, the attempt to supplant one religion and substitute another in its stead appears vain and impotent, and not even in the least calculated to surmount social happiness and individual purity. It may give rise to bigotry and fanaticism, but as an agency calculated to bring forth and spread abroad in human life the light of sweet reasonableness, it is destined to prove a thorough failure. Neither the wave of aggressive Islam nor that of the more insidious Christianity can under these circumstances undermine the citadel of Brahmanism or Buddhism, the foundations of which are laid so well and truly on the rock of vigilant philosophy and a wonderful insight into man's social and religious progress. When the proposition that the new religion offered by the new missionary, Islamic or Christian, is better or truer than the old one, appears to the commonest of Hindu minds to be ridiculous and absurd, what chance is there for these militant religions to win victories

in these new lands unless it be through positive as well as negative inducements which are altogether other than religious? . . .

"The natural development of paganism, if it had been left to grow according to its own laws unmolested by Christian persecution and Christian fanaticism, would in all probability have left Europe in possession of a larger amount of toleration and a smaller amount of selfishness; and the present-day work of the Christian missionary in foreign lands, leading to the destruction of all humanity under the influence of the animal in man, as well as of the excitement due to the display of the power which is in gunpowder, as exhibited in China quite recently, would have remained unaccomplished and perhaps wholly unthought of. That the Brahmanical method of procuring religious growth and evolution is truly the more natural one is brought out clearly from a study of the effects of the Christianity which is newly imposed upon the heathen. The heathen rarely rises to the level of conceiving the ideal Christ of Christianity, and the ideal conduct taught by Jesus is noted for the rarity with which it is followed in Christendom, which has revered Him as the greatest teacher known to man for nearly 2,000 years. Is Christendom to-day prepared to follow fully the precepts contained in the Sermon on the Mount? Modern politics and social movements in Europe give the melancholy answer that Christianity has there proved a failure, and that Christian ideals are not fit for immediate adoption by the rival nations of Christendom."

CHRISTIANITY IN AMERICA BEFORE THE NORTHMEN.

HISTORICAL theories of the early settlement of the Western continent are almost as numerous as are literary theories of Hamlet. The Welsh, the Irish, the Israelites, the Chinese, the Japanese, the Phenicians, and many others are supposed by different writers to have been acquainted in one way or another with America. Each hypothesis has its fond advocates, altho no absolute consensus among historical students exists as to any pre-Columbian discovery, even as to the comparatively well authenticated Norse discovery, except so far as Greenland is concerned. Among the most fascinating of these hypotheses is that relating to an alleged early Christian evangelization of the Central Americans. Some further light is thrown upon this theory in a recent work, "The History of America before Columbus, according to Documents and Approved Authors," by Father P. De Roo, an erudite Roman Catholic priest of Philadelphia. In *The Catholic World* (June), another historical student, Mr. William Stetson Merrill, gives a *résumé* of what facts we possess pointing to a possible early introduction of Christianity among the natives of Mexico, Yucatan, and Peru, basing his statements mainly on Father De Roo, with some references to Dawson, John Fiske, and others. He writes:

"The civilizations found by the Spanish in Mexico, Central America, and Peru were described by their historians. The religious rites, ceremonies, and beliefs excited the amazement of the Spaniards by their remarkable resemblance to Christianity; just as the early missionaries to Tibet found there another pope of a heathen religion, with convents and bells and rosaries. The Spaniards and the Jesuits who reached Tibet could not account for this remarkable fact unless, forsooth, Satan had himself taught these people Christianity out of spite!

Our author's explanation of them is novel. He claims that Christianity was introduced into America before Columbus, before the Norse even, and introduced by the Irish monks, whose widespread missionary labors are so well known. He believes also that the Apostle St. Thomas actually visited our shores, and that St. Brendan in his famous navigation did the same. Through some one, or perhaps through all of these agencies, the doctrines of Christ—in fact of Catholic Christianity—were introduced and taught to the natives, by whom they have been preserved. The following is a summary of the points of resemblance which De Roo claims to prove an early evangelization of America:

"The Mexicans and Peruvians believed in one God, and there are traces of a belief in the Blessed Trinity. The story of the creation is told in their famous book called the 'Popul Vuh'; so

also man's First Fall, the immortality of the soul, intercessory prayer for the dead, rewards and punishments hereafter, resurrection, and the Last Judgment. The account of the deluge is widespread, and its very universality in America has been urged as proof of its actual occurrence; in fact, the advocates of a partial deluge must square their theory with this tradition preserved in tribes separated by great oceans from the scenes to which they would restrict the flood. Even the Tower of Babel figures among the traditions of the Nahuas, Cholulans, and tribes of Central America and California. Turning now to distinctively Christian teaching, one can almost reconstruct the life of Christ, in its theological aspects, from the aboriginal records. Yet more: we find the sacraments of baptism; Holy Eucharist, with its attendant fasting and communion; penance and auricular confession, with its requirements of contrition and its complement absolution. We find an organized priesthood, duly ordained, vested, and maintained; we find celibacy, religious orders, convents of nuns, hermits, pilgrimages, holy water, exorcisms; nay, the New Fire and liturgical prayers.

"It is to be noted that the Aztecs had some practises of a very different character from Christian celibacy and cloistered purity, and the latter practises were admitted by them to be anomalies in their system. According to the Zapotec tradition, they were really foreign features introduced by an early white-skinned teacher or apostle, 'who came by sea, bearing a cross in his hand, and debarked in the neighborhood of Tehuantepec.' This stranger, whom they called 'Wixipecocha,' is described as 'a man of a venerable aspect, having a bushy white beard, dressed in a long robe and a cloak, and wearing on his head a covering shaped like a monk's cowl. Wixipecocha taught his disciples to deny themselves the vanities of this world, to mortify the flesh through penance and fasting, and to abstain from all sensual pleasures' [Father De Roo, vol i., p. 503].

"A similar tradition is that of the Aztecs relating to Quetzalcoatl. A hero-god, he comes from a foreign land to Mexico, venerated under divers names all over Central America, nay, perhaps canonized in Europe, De Roo says. His name signifies 'Beautifully feathered serpent.' He is described as 'a white or pale-faced man, of portly person, with broad forehead, great eyes, long black hair, and a heavy rounded beard' (i., 542). He was reserved in his manners, spent much time in prayer, ascetic, and celibate. His date is perhaps the eleventh century or earlier, for aboriginal chronology is obscure. His works were converting the natives and teaching them the arts of civilized life. Accompanying him were a number of companions, or disciples, who imitated their master in mode of life. Their success may be measured by their fame preserved in widespread traditions, and by the reverence in which their memory is held. He taught the unity of God, the Creator and Lord of heaven and earth; condemned idolatry, and especially human sacrifices. Peace and charity were the cardinal virtues of his creed: 'From these few details of Quetzalcoatl's teaching one naturally feels induced to believe that all the vestiges of Christianity of which we have spoken had their beginnings from him and his disciples, or collaborators, in the American mission' (i., 550). These reforms were not accomplished without opposition from the established priesthood, who finally forced Quetzalcoatl to retire to a western province, where he passes from view. A belief in his future return lingered among the people, and some of the later Christian missionaries were received peacefully under the belief that they were the great hero-god with his disciples, returning to his own.

"Was this remarkable figure a mere leader of a colony from the northeast (so Bandelier); or was he a personification of a nature god—in fact, a sun-myth (so Brinton); or was he the Apostle St. Thomas (so Sahagun); or, finally, was he an Irish monk with a colony from over sea? The last is the conclusion of De Roo, who finds in these aboriginal traditions a confirmation of European allusions to the Irish occupancy of America.

"The points of resemblance outlined above between Christianity and the American religions are certainly remarkable, and they establish the fact to our author of an early evangelization of America. Is he aware that precisely this line of argument has been followed to prove the derivation of Christianity from Buddhism, from Mithraism, from Essenism, nay, from the Greek mysteries? Does he claim that the Abbé Huc was anticipated in his travels to Tibet when he found, to his amazement, a pope—the Lama—a hierarchy, religious orders, penance, bells, and rosaries? Let him read the following passage relating to the relig-