



Keep Out of the Past.

BY ELLA WHEELER WILCOX.

Keep out of the Past, for its highways
Are dark with malarial gloom;
Its gardens are sere and its forests are
drear,

And everywhere molders a tomb.
Who seeks to regain its lost pleasures,
Finds only a rose turned to dust;
And its storehouse of wonderful treasures
Are covered and coated with rust.

Keep out of the Past. It is haunted:
He who in its avenues gropes,
Shall find there the ghost of a joy prized
the most,

And a skeleton throng of dead hopes.
In place of its beautiful rivers,
Are pools that are stagnant with slime;
And these graves gleaming with a phosphoric
light,
Hide dreams that were slain in their
prime.

Keep out of the Past. It is lonely,
And barren, and bleak to the view;
Its fires have grown cold, and its stories
are old—

Turn, turn to the Present—the New;
Today leads you up to the hilltops
That are kissed by the radiant sun,
Today shows no tomb, life's hopes are
in bloom,
And today holds a prize to be won.

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BY C. ELTON BLANCHARD.

II. MYSTICISM IN RELIGION.

The wise King Solomon recommended, it is recorded, a special invocation that would quiet the most refractory spirit, let it be god or devil. This prayer ended with the words which might be translated: "And I furthermore adjure thee by these awful and mysterious letters, to wit: Aleph, Beth, Gimel," etc., going through to the end of the Hebrew alphabet. Just as a minister today might say, when his city was stricken with yellow fever, as he prayed from his pulpit: "I now warn the spirit of fever, by the use of those awful, dreadful and mysterious letters, A, B, C, D," etc.

About this time in ancient history arose the custom of making names from the letters beginning certain words relating to the person or thing in question. Thus Michael, the angel, comes from the first letters of the Hebrew words which mean, "One who looks like unto God." If we could get some idea of how Michael looks we would then have a better conception of the physiognomy of the Almighty.

A queer influence of the mystic is found in the fact that some claim the numerical value of the letters composing the name Yevah is 5660. These advocates count the time from creation to Christ as 5761. This leaves the year 1899 as the year A. D. that will be made notable by the end of the world, clean-

ing out of space this sin-stained old earth of ours!

But to show that modern religion still retains much of this same mysticism,—and without discussing the morality of the practice, allow me to mention the custom of copying in triplicate prayers to the saints. Such a prayer fell into my hands by accident recently. It was addressed to St. Joseph, and began, "Oh, St. Joseph, whose protection is so prompt and whose intercessions with God are so effectual." At the bottom of the paper was added, "Copy this prayer three times and give it to three persons, and you can obtain any request from St. Joseph."

We must observe that mysticism which became so valuable an instrument in the hands of the priests, shaped the modes of worship, the customs and even the laws of the nations. Let us examine for a moment the rites of worship and sacrifice.

Among the earliest nations of recorded history, the Homeric conception of the universe was generally accepted. This was that the earth was a plane, a flat expanse surrounded by an ocean stream which was a kind of enclosure to keep mortals from approaching the "ends of the earth". Later this ocean stream became peopled with monsters which devoured any reckless and disrespectful adventurers who dared to navigate it beyond certain prescribed limits. A safe distance above this plane was the plane of heaven. Only once were mortals unwise enough to undertake to seek this mysterious country except through the portals of death. This was at the tower of Babel. The gods soon put a stop to this promising undertaking by confusing the tongues, a very simple matter for the gods! Above the plane of heaven was high heaven. Beneath the plane of earth was hell, and lower hell. This was the conception of the universe generally held by all the ancient nations. With this conception in mind it is easy to understand how the smell of burning sacrifice would ascend upward to the nostrils of the gods. No doubt the practice today of looking upward during prayer originated with the idea of turning the face upward toward the gods. If you will turn to your bibles, Exodus xxx., you will find the special directions of Jehovah for making the incense, used about the altars, of such delightful smell that it would especially please the Almighty, and the penalty for using

this recipe for private purposes was that the offender was to be cut off from his people!

Of all the 200 bones of the human body which pleased the gods, the bone at the base of the spinal column was the most pleasing. Hence the name "sacred bone", or sacrum. Thus began in this age of bloodshed, killing and warfare, the study of anatomy. Thus began also the robbing of the ignorant by the crafty, the oppressing of the weak by the strong. When I see the strongest monkey in the cage snatch away from others more than his share of food, when I see a big boy on the street abuse and mistreat the little ones, I think this is quite natural. Their fathers have done the like before them for many ages. How easily in these times the priest secured the best portions of food, and without any labor on his part. Read again your bibles, Lev. x., and you will learn how this food was to be eaten by him and his family. Turn to I. Samuel ii, and you have the story of how the sons of Eli took some of God's share of the meat, which made him rage terribly. Ponder this matter for a moment and you will see how dreadful has been the influence of the mystic upon the race, and how hard it is to throw off this influence today, in this age of reason. Often the oppressed and the oppressor are ignorant of any fault.

This stronghold of mysticism is made stronger still by the love of life and the fear of death. As a modern spectre it haunts the realm of philosophy, and the renowned Herbert Spencer named it the Unknowable. We no longer fear ghosts, hobgoblins, imps or real devils, but for all this superstition gives us a vague, undefinable, indefinite, inscrutable, mysterious something as a notion of soul or spirit. We hear it spoken of as the thing that animates the body, the ego that is behind the mind and its will, and is the real entity. This mysterious unknowable is very like the fog which the old sage of the Anglo-Saxons saw rising in the shape of the giant Grendel. It is the most intangible of monsters and hides from us the real aspect of things and spreads a blinding and infectious mysticism about all our conceptions.

So powerful had mysticism become that by the time the meek and lowly Jesus appeared upon the stage of action anything that did not show signs of the mystic, had no weight. This demand produced the miracles, or alleged miracles.

Writing his life, and shaping the system of religion which was afterward named in honor of this reformer, the carpenter's son, the writers of his life, writing as they did many years after his death, used this magic power of mysticism for all it was worth. All that imagination could lend to fact was employed, and Jesus became the greatest of magicians. Why need this be? Because only as such would his teachings appeal to the people of that time. Now, given the stamp of time and the seal of authority, this same old mysticism chains some of the greatest of minds, to say nothing of the millions of the masses, in a life of mental dwarfage, every day of which they outrage their reason and their best common sense. When we reflect that intelligent people, intelligent in every other respect, can harmonize the mysterious chaos of ideas which the orthodox Christianity represents, in this the greatest day of intellectual supremacy, he can readily understand the influence of mysticism in the past. For example, how a god can satisfy an offense of a race against himself by allowing this race to kill a part of himself temporarily inhabiting a common body of flesh and blood, and how such an act of murder forever sets at naught, if we can only believe it, the whole evil career of man, is more than reason can fathom, and when a person confesses such a faith we may rest assured that mysticism, the same old blinding fog, envelops that individual and he is lost in a fate that is more to be lamented than imaginary hells.

We must now acknowledge that the church, as soon as it attained the power, set about the suppression of all forms of black art, magic, and witchcraft. Constantine began this work by threatening the severest punishment. He made the exceptions that magic could be used in curing disease and to prevent rain and hail storms during the harvest. This illustrates how much under the spell of mysticism were the people, from the pope to the poorest lackey. Yet, in spite of this suppression, the mystic powers were abroad. Luther, who set fire to all Europe by driving a nail in the church door to hold his noted protestations, would have us believe that he was a special subject for the antics of the mysterious beings. He tells us of many personal encounters with the devil, one in particular when he drove his satanic majesty from his study room by