

*Superstition is the sewer of
dogmatic creeds and blind faith*

**Carrying off the putrid waters of the Chaldeo-
Noachian deluge to the present day**



DOWN TO EARTH SERIES
THE SEWER OF DOGMATIC CREEDS

First published in *The Theosophist*, Vol. III (No. 3) December 1881, pp. 60-62.
Republished in *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (SUPERSTITION) III pp. 348-55.

Owing to the fanciful reports of superficial and prejudiced travellers, to their entire ignorance of Asiatic religions and, very often, their own — Western nations generally are labouring under the strange impression that no people in the world are as stupidly superstitious as the non-Christian populations of India, China and other “heathen” countries. Unblessed with the light of the Gospel, they say, these poor Pagans groping in the dark, attribute mysterious powers to the most unseemly objects: they will stake the future happiness or woe of their father’s soul, upon the hopping crow’s accepting or rejecting the rice-ball of the “Śrāddha” ceremony; and will believe, as the now famous Kolhapur conspirators did,¹ that “owl’s eyes” worn as an amulet will make the bearer invulnerable. Agreed: all such superstitions are as degrading as they are ridiculous and absurd . . .

But greatly *mistaken*, or as grossly unjust is he who affirms that such strange beliefs are limited to Paganism, or that they are the direct result of the heathen religions alone. They are international; the cumulative production and necessary effect of countless generations of the arts of an unconscientious clergy of *every religion* and in every age. Adopted by the archaic priestly hierarchies, the policy of subjecting the ignorant masses, by working on their untutored imaginations and credulous fears, with the object of getting at their purse *via* the soul, was found effectual and was universally practiced by the priest upon the layman from the first dawn of history down to our own modern times. Everything in nature, whether abstract or concrete, has two sides to it as every poison must have its antidote somewhere. Religion or belief in an invisible world being based upon a dual principle — God and Satan, or GOOD and EVIL, if PHILOSOPHY — the outflow of true religious feeling — may be likened to a filtered stream, on the other hand, SUPERSTITION is the cloaca of all dogmatic creeds that are based upon blind faith. Literally speaking, it is the sewer carrying off the putrid waters of the Chaldeo-Noachian deluge. Unstemmed, it ran in a straight course, through Paganism, Judaism and Christianity alike, catching up in its current all the garbage of human dead letter interpretations; while on its muddy banks have crowded the priesthood of all times and creeds and offered its unwholesome waters to the adoration of the credulous as the “holy stream,” — calling it now Ganges, anon the Nile or Jordan.

Why then should the Western people accuse the non-Christian nations alone of such beliefs? Little does the “truth of God” abound through *such* lies, and it is showing poor respect to one’s religion to introduce it to the stranger’s notice under false pretences. History shows us that, while seemingly occupied in destroying every trace of heathenism, and condemning belief in ancient folklore and the effects of “charms” as the work of the devil, the Christian proselytizers became the keepers of all such superstitions, and, adopting them gradually, let them loose again upon the people, but under other names. It is useless for us to repeat that which was said, and better

¹ [See *Indian Unrest* (1910) by Sir Ignatius Valentine Chirol (28 May 1852 – 22 October 1929) British journalist, author, historian and diplomat. Chirol believed that Imperial Germany and Muslim unrest were the biggest threats to the British Empire.]

said, and proved by the statistical records of crimes perpetrated through superstition, in every Christian country. Beliefs of the grossest, as most dangerous, character are rife in Catholic France, Spain, Italy and Ireland, in Protestant England, Germany and Scandinavia, as in Greek Russia, Bulgaria and other Slavonian lands, and they are as alive among the people now, as they were in the days of King Arthur, of the first Popes, or the Varyago-Russian Grand Dukes. If the higher and middle classes have civilized themselves out of such absurd fancies, the masses of rural populations have not. The lower classes being left to the tender mercies of the rural priest — who, when he was not himself ignorant, was ever cunningly alive to the importance of his holding the parishioner in mental slavery — they believe in charms and incantations and the powers of the devil *now*, as much as they did *then*. And, so long as belief in Satan and his legion of fallen angels (now devils) remains a dogma of the Christian Church — and we do not see how it could be eliminated, since it is the cornerstone of the doctrine of (now devil) salvation — so long will there exist such degrading superstitions, for the whole superstructure of the latter is based upon this belief in the mighty rival of the Deity.²

For once justice had triumphed in Russia over the dead letter law.

There hardly comes out one number of our *Journal* without containing some proof of what we say. Only last year from sixty to a hundred persons of both sexes were tried in Russia for arbitrarily burning alleged sorcerers and witches, who were supposed to have spoiled some hysterical women. The trial lasted for months and disclosed a ghastly list of crimes of the most revolting nature. Yet the peasants were acquitted for they were found *irresponsible*. For once justice had triumphed in Russia over the dead letter law. And now, there comes news of the effect of the same superstition of a still deadlier character. The following will read like a mediaeval tale during the days of the “Holy” Inquisition. The *Russian Courier*³ contains an official report from Tchambar (Government of Penza) to the governor of the province, which we will summarize thus:

At the end of December last, during Christmas time, the village of Balkasheme became the theatre of a horrid and an unheard-of crime, caused by a superstitious belief. A landowner, N.M., inherited a very large property and went just before Christmas day to receive it at Penza. The inhabitants of the village — one of the many struck this year with famine — are generally poor; and two of the poorest and the hungriest of them resolved upon robbing the landowner during his absence. Unwilling though to pay the penalty for their crime, they went first to a village *Znaharka* (literally “a knowing one,” a witch). In a Russian village where the witch is as indispensable as the smith and public house, or an astrologer in a village of India, these professions multiply in proportion to the wealth and demands of each locality. So our two future burglars consulted the “sorceress” as to the best way of effecting the robbery and avoiding detection at the same time. The witch advised them *to kill a man*,

² [See “The Holy of Holies and Its degradation,” “The Origin of Good and Evil,” and “The Original Sin is a Jewish invention,” in our Black versus White Magic Series.]

³ [*Russkiy Vestnik*.]

and cutting out the epiploon⁴ from under the stomach, to melt it, and preparing of it a candle, light the latter and, entering the house of the landlord, plunder it at their ease: by the enchanted light of the human candle they would remain invisible to all. Following out the advice literally, the two peasants sallied forth⁵ from their huts at 2 after midnight, and meeting on their way a half-drunken wretch, a neighbour of theirs, just leaving the public house, they killed him and cutting out his epiploon buried him in the snow near a cowshed. On the third day of the murder, the corpse was dug out by the dogs, and an inquest appointed. A large number of peasants was arrested, and, during the search of the village houses for proofs, a pot full of melted fat was discovered, an analysis of whose contents was made, and the substance proved to be human fat. The culprit confessed and giving out his accomplice, both confessed their object. They pleaded guilty, but said they had acted upon the advice of the witch, whose name, though, they would divulge upon no consideration, dreading the revenge of the sorceress far more than human justice. The fact is the more remarkable as both murderers had been hitherto regarded as two poor but steady, sober, and very honest young men. It seems next to impossible to find out which one of the neighbouring “witches” — for there are many and some are never known but to their “clients” — is guilty of the murderous advice. Nor is there any chance of getting at any clue from the villagers, as the most respectable among them would never consent to incur the displeasure of one of these devil’s familiars. We believe, indeed, having a right to say, that the above *superstition* leaves far behind it, in criminality, the comparatively innocent belief of the Kolhāpur conspirators in the efficacy of the “owl’s eyes.”

Another recent case is that of an “enchanter.” During the month of the same December last, the village council of Aleksandrovska voted the expulsion from their midst and forcible exile to Siberia of a wealthy peasant named Rodinin. The accusation showing the defender guilty “of the great crime of being thoroughly versed in the science of enchantments and the art of causing people to be possessed by Satan,” having been read, the verdict of the jury was found unanimous. States the Accusation Act:

“As soon as the defendant Rodinin approaches one, especially if any person accepts a glass of brandy from him, he becomes possessed on the spot . . . Instantly the victim begins to howl, complaining that he feels like a river of liquid fire inside him, and piteously assures those present that Satan tears his bowels into shreds . . . From that moment he knows no rest, either by day or by night, and soon dies a death of terrific agony. Numerous are the victims of such wicked enchantments perpetrated by the defendant . . . In consequence of which, the local jury having found him ‘guilty,’ the authorities are respectfully requested to do their bounden duty.”

The “bounden duty” was to parcel Rodinin off to Siberia, and so they did.

⁴ [Also known as the greater *omentum*, *omentum majus*, gastrocolic *omentum* or, especially in animals, caul. *Epiploon* is a large apron-like fold of visceral peritoneum that hangs down from the stomach. The term comes from the Greek *epipleein*, meaning to float or sail on, since the *epiploon* appears to float on the surface of the intestines. It is the first structure observed when the abdominal cavity is opened anteriorly.]

⁵ [*i.e.*, rushing or bursting forth, like a sortie of troops from a defensive position to attack the enemy.]

Everyone in the West knows of the popular and universal belief — prevailing both in Germany and Russia — about the miraculous power of a certain three-leaved fern when culled at midnight on St. John's day in a solitary wood. Called out by an incantation to the evil one, the blade of grass begins growing at the end of the first verse and is grown by the time the last one is pronounced. If unappalled by the terrific sights taking place around him — and they are unsurpassed in horror — the experimenter heeds them not, but remains undismayed by the shoutings of the “forest imps” and their efforts to make him fail in his design, he is rewarded by getting possession of the plant which gives him power during his lifetime over the devil and *forces* the latter to serve him.

Church believes in the devil, while despising and “renouncing” him at the same time.

This is faith in Satan and *his* power. Can we blame the ignorant or even the educated yet pious persons for such a belief? Does not the Church — whether Catholic, Protestant, or Greek — not only inculcate in us, from our earliest age, but actually *demand* such a belief? Is it not the *sine qua non* of Christianity? Aye, will people answer; but the Church condemns us for any such *intercourse* with the Father of Evil. The Church wants us to believe in the devil, but to despise and “renounce” him at the same time; and alone, through her legal representatives, she has a right to deal with his hoary majesty and enter into direct relations with him, thereby glorifying God and showing the laymen the great power she has received from the Deity of controlling the Devil in the name of Christ, which she never succeeds in doing, however. She fails to prove it; but it is not generally that which is the best proved that is the most believed in. The strongest proof the Church ever gave of the objectivity of Hell and Satan, was during the Middle Ages when the Holy Inquisition was appointed by Divine right, the agency for kindling hell-fire on earth and burning heretics in it. With laudable impartiality she burned alike those who disbelieved in hell and the devil, as those who believed too much in the power of the latter. Then the logic of these poor credulous people who believe in the possibility of “miracles” at all, is not quite faulty either. Made to believe in God and the Devil, and seeing that evil prevails on earth, they can hardly avoid thinking that it is good proof that Satan has the upper hand in his eternal struggle with the Deity. And if so — his power then and alliance are not to be scorned. Torments in hell are far off, and misery, suffering, and starvation are the doom of millions. Since God seems to neglect them, they will turn to the other power. If a “leaf” is endowed with miraculous powers by God in one instance, why should not a leaf be as useful when it is grown under the direct supervision of the Devil? And then do we not read of innumerable legends, where sinners, having made a *pact* with the Devil, have dishonestly cheated him out of their souls toward the end, by placing themselves under the protection of some Saint, repenting and calling upon “atonement” at the last moment? The two murderers of Tchembar, while confessing their crime, distinctly stated that as soon as their families would have been provided for through their burglary, they meant to go into a monastery and taking the “holy orders, repent”!! And if, finally, we view as gross, degrading superstition, belief in the one leaf, why should the State, Society, and hardly a century ago — *law*, have punished for disbelieving in the Church miracles? Here is a fresh instance of a “miracle”-working leaf just clipped out of the *Catholic Mirror*. We com-

mend it for comparison, and then perhaps our readers will be more merciful to the superstitions of the “poor heathen” unblessed with the knowledge of, and belief in, Christ.

A miracle-working leaf clipped out of the Catholic Mirror.

Father Ignatius, who is at present preaching a mission at Sheffield, furnishes the following account of a very remarkable “miracle” of healing, alleged to have been wrought on a Brighton lady by a leaf from the bush on which the Virgin Mary is said to have descended during the recent celestial manifestations she is alleged to have vouchsafed at Llanthony Abbey. After describing the apparitions, Father Ignatius goes on to say that God was confirming the truth of these apparitions by the most blessed signs possible. The leaves from the bush had been sent to many persons, and were being used by God to heal. He would mention one great miracle that had been wrought. An elderly lady who kept a ladies’ school in Brighton, and was, therefore, well known, had suffered the most excruciating suffering for thirty-eight years from a diseased hip-joint that would not allow her to lie or sit down with comfort. She was a complete cripple. In fact, he himself had seen her turn quite livid with the pain from the joint. He sent her a leaf, not that he thought it would cure her, but with the idea of giving her some memorial of the apparitions. When she went to bed that night she took his letter and the leaf with her, and the words, “According to thy faith be it unto thee,” which she had read in *Hawker’s Morning and Evening Portion*,⁶ were ringing in her ears. She prayed, and applied the leaf to the abscess, on her leg, and instantly the abscess, disappeared, instantly the discharge ceased, instantly the pain ceased, and instantly she was able to place her foot properly on the ground. Since then she could walk about like other people, and she had been delivered entirely from a life of terrible excruciating suffering. He would give the name and address of the lady to anyone who wished to investigate the case, and the lady was quite willing to afford every information.

An “apparition” at Llanthony Abbey, or an “apparition” in the cabinet of a medium — we really do not see much difference in the two beliefs; and if God condescends to work through a leaf, why should not the devil, the “monkey of God,” do likewise?



⁶ [Robert Hawker (1753–1827) Anglican priest in Devon, called “Star of the West” for his popular preaching.]