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vernal equinox, and a civil year beginning at Rosh ha-Shānāh in September or October. But both of them were full lunar years adjusted to the solar calendar.

GEO. B. MICHELL.

Dominica, B.W.I.

In answer to Mr. G. B. Michell, I would quote Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, 'שָׁנָה—pr. an iteration, sc. of the course of the sun, or of the changes of the seasons.' Hebrew has the word סָנָה, but not, so far as I can find, שָׁנָה. Of course, Arabic was not in existence as a language in the times of the early Genesis records, and cannot be a certain guide, any more than modern English can guide us certainly in regard to old Saxon.

In his second paragraph, Mr. Michell begs the question at issue. The Pentateuch literature apparently provides the 'case' required. As I have pointed out, the month Abib is called the beginning of the *shanah*, and the Feast of Ingathering (about six months later) the end of the *shanah*.

Has Mr. Michell any evidence to produce which will prove that the civil and ecclesiastical years, with their different commencements, were in vogue in Mosaic times, or among nomads?

A. T. RICHARDSON.

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Entre Nous.

The Religious Motive in 'The Bridge of San Luis Rey.'

Anatole France somewhere says that even the most admirable books seem to him infinitely less precious for what they contain than for what is read into them. There is, indeed, a kind of Divine receptivity about some books, a *releasing* quality. They serve as an outlet for trammelled spirits. Ever, as it were, in the lulls and hesitancies of the author's scrupulous thinking, the reader may step in, and do what he can to assist. Such books are very endearing. Reviewers do not always speak well of them, but they find their way into the heart of the public and stay there. When *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, by Mr. Thornton Wilder, was first published in October 1927, it was given a very mixed reception by the reviewers, but every one who read it talked about it to his friends. For while we all thirst to converse about elemental things, it remains the convention to discuss the latest novel. And when a new story deals with those large issues that haunt and mystify us all, it is usually very widely read.

This story begins excellently, with a masterly simplicity. 'On Friday noon, July the 20th, 1714, the finest bridge in all Peru broke and precipitated five travellers into the gulf below. This bridge was on the high road between Lima and Cuzco, and hundreds of persons passed over it every day.' There is your first glimpse of the situation, seen plainly and clearly enough, but still from the distance; you are interested, but not deeply moved. Then, while you still gaze towards the scene of the little tragedy, you see other figures hastening to and fro, confused, perturbed: the incident has affected them profoundly. 'People wandered about in a trance-like state; muttering, they had the hallucination of seeing themselves falling into a gulf.'

You become more interested, you seem yourselves to be straying across the brilliant Peruvian landscape toward the river and the broken bridge. And now, since you have come so near the gulf, the author, freed from the tyrannies of mundane Time, allows you to see it all happen over again. This time a Franciscan missionary, Brother Juniper, is standing by your side. 'A twanging noise filled the air, as when the string of some musical instrument snaps in a disused room, and he'—that is, Brother Juniper—'saw the bridge divide and fling five gesticulating ants into the valley below.' And now we can listen to this Franciscan's thoughts, in the silence that follows on that twanging noise. 'Why did this happen to *those* five?' he asks himself. 'If there were any plan in the universe at all, if there were any pattern in a human life, surely it could be discovered mysteriously latent in those lives so suddenly cut off. Either we live by accident and die by accident, or we live by plan and die by plan.'

At this point the author takes us indoors, as it were, and has a little confidential chat. For the next six years, he tells us, Brother Juniper devotes all his time to an inquiry into the lives of those five souls, in the effort to prove that each of them had at that moment received the finishing touch from the Potter's Hand. Then at the end of those six years he and his manuscripts are publicly burned in the cathedral square. He has learned nothing, except that he himself is a heretic. Long

after, another secret copy of his book is discovered, and by its aid, and as a result of the author's own inquiries and speculations, this little jewel of prose is cut and polished into five facets, each facet the life of one of the victims, seen, as Rachel Annand Taylor said in the *Spectator*, 'from a strange and enchanting angle.' But, even more than by the gem itself, we are held and charmed by the hand that polishes the gem. These pages reveal a spirit that is penetrating without dogmatism, delicate yet clear-cut in all its motions, powerful without being rude, exquisite without being great. 'For all his diligence,' he says, 'Brother Juniper never knew the central passion of Dona Marfa's life; nor of Uncle Pio's, nor even of Estaban's (these were three of the victims). *And I, who claim to know so much more, is it possible that even I have missed the very spring within the spring?*'

The Christian Church is much more dogmatic than its Founder with regard to the facts which lie beyond human consciousness. Dogmatism has become confused with orthodoxy. But if the moral perfection of Jesus imposed upon itself limits to its omniscience, as, for example, when He said: 'Of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son . . .' then how narrow a horizon of knowledge dare we claim! Every moral failure dims our vision, and can Forgiveness, even if it will, restore what is lost? But what strikes us about Thornton Wilder is how extremely undogmatic, how singularly tentative, are the theories which he allows to emerge from his analysis of these lives. 'Some say we shall never know, and that to the gods we are like flies that the boys kill on a summer day, and some say, on the contrary, that the very sparrows do not lose a feather that has not been brushed away by the finger of God.' Somehow, we think that it is with these last that he agrees, however diffident his manner may be. For again, —perhaps in the most assured of all his sentences,— speaking of a famous actress and her old tutor, he says: 'Whom were these two seeking to please? Not the audiences of Lima. They had long since been satisfied. We come from a world where we have known incredible standards of excellence, and we dimly remember beauties which we have not seized again; and we go back to that world. Uncle Pio and Camila Perichole were tormenting themselves in an effort to establish in Peru the standards of the theatres in some Heaven whither Calderòn had preceded them. The public for which masterpieces are intended is not on this earth.' The man who wrote those words has found his own soul.

Faith, for Thornton Wilder, remains always a working hypothesis, and the conduct of faith, as implicitly asseverated in this curious tale, is a putting of that hypothesis, by every act and thought, to the test. The hypothesis is the only one which Time and History and the spirit of man have ever justified, the one which rears itself higher and higher, and establishes itself deeper and deeper, as the world grows older. It is the faith in a 'Love that moves the sun and every star.' It is this quality of Love that he finds shaping and dictating all things. He distinguishes it sharply from the lesser loves. 'She had never realized any love save love as passion. Such love, though it expend itself in generosity and thoughtfulness, though it give birth to visions and to great poetry, remains among the sharpest expressions of self-interest. Not until it has passed through a long servitude, through its own self-hatred, through mockery, through great doubts, can it take its place among the loyalties.' Another character, Uncle Pio, is further 'ben.' 'He divided the inhabitants of this world into two groups, into those who had loved, and those who had not. It was a horrible aristocracy, apparently, for those who had no capacity for love (or rather for suffering in love) could not be said to be alive, and certainly would not live again after their death. They were a kind of straw population, filling the world with their meaningless laughter and tears and chatter and disappearing still lovable and vain into thin air. For this distinction he cultivated his own definition of love that was like no other and that had gathered all its bitterness and pride from his odd life. He regarded love as a sort of cruel malady, through which the elect are required to pass in their late youth and from which they emerge, pale and wrung, but ready for the business of living.'

But in the final act of Love which draws the curtain on our mortality, a mystery must remain. That was where Brother Juniper went wrong. That is where some of the critics of this book have gone wrong. They think that for faith everything must be defined, and that Thornton Wilder has been much more definite than they are justified in thinking, and so they conjure up interpretations of his philosophy to suit their own fancy. Mr. Cyril Conolly, for example, refers to 'this theory of spiritual ruination preceding death, which is hence never untimely,' and he adds that the theory now adopted by Mr. Wilder was first put forward by Goethe. But if there is one thing about these untimely deaths that is made clear it is that in three instances at least these lives had broken

afresh into blossom just then, and they were ready and courageous for a braver kind of living than ever before.

The Speaker's Bible.

St. Mark's Gospel has been covered in *The Speaker's Bible* in two volumes, and the second of these is now ready (Speaker's Bible Office, Aberdeen; 9s. 6d. net each). As *The Speaker's Bible* was begun and edited by Dr. Hastings and is now carried on by the editors of this magazine it is not our custom to insert anything in the nature of a review of it here. We have occasionally quoted the reviews of others, but the new volume is only just out so that none has appeared as yet, but here are estimates by the last two reviewers of the first volume: 'it is no exaggeration to say that *The Speaker's Bible* is the greatest thing of its kind in existence,' 'the splendid volumes of this famous series.'

The second volume of Mark deals with chapters ten to the end of the Gospel. Sermons, sometimes more than one, are given on forty texts, the most suggestive thought being chosen in each case, and points driven home and illustrated from the newest essays, poetry, fiction, and current events. A study on 'Influence' has been contributed by Dr. W. M. Grant, and one on 'Fruitlessness,' by the Rev. J. H. Morrison, M.A., while Professor Gossip writes on 'The Cry of Dereliction.' From this the following paragraph is quoted. Some years ago a subject index to the first volumes was prepared. As a large number of readers have spoken of the added value this has given to the series, a further index is included in the new volume.

Most envied?

'We are often told that Mark ends in the darkness with a beaten, disappointed Christ. It is not so, of course. Still, it is well other evangelists have gathered sayings from His lips upon the tree we could ill spare.

In John He dies with the shout of a Conqueror. And it is well for us to bear in mind that, as it seems, what lifted the depression from His spirit, was that the poor soul hanging there beside Him, awed by something in this strange convict suffering along with him, threw himself on His grace with a dim, inchoate, nebulous faith that was still faith where faith seemed utterly impossible. And it came like a reviving cup of water to our Lord's parched lips and soul. The thing was working then; and God was standing to His promises; and it was not in vain, but coming true. 'It is finished,' He cried; and gave back to God no broken hope, no failure, no mere gallantry of endeavour that had not succeeded, but a life lived out, and a tremendous task accomplished in the face of every hindrance. Let us remember that. Old Dr. Duncan used to say that of all living beings he most envied the angel who stood by our Lord in the loneliness of His agony in the garden. But why not rather this strange, uncouth, most unlikely comforter when things were darker still?'[1]

Lama sabachthani.

'Ezra,' of the *Methodist Recorder*, who never misses any good thing, had an interesting paragraph lately on the 'Untranslated Words of Jesus' in which he retells a story given by the late Dr. George H. Morrison in an address to children. Some years ago, he says, 'the late Dr. George H. Morrison met, in Glasgow, General Agha Petros, Commander-in-Chief of the Assyrian Forces during the World War, and had an interesting conversation with him, being most interested by the news that at his home, away up in the mountains behind Nineveh, they still speak the very language that the Lord spoke. Sometimes the children of General Petros, like other bairns, are a little unwilling to get up in a morning, and, if it happens to be one of the girls, his wife will go to the bedroom, and say, "Talitha cumi," which means, "Daughter, it's time to get up." Sometimes, again, when his children come home from school they find the house door shut, and if nobody comes immediately to open it they shout for admittance, and what they shout is a word very familiar to Gospel readers —"Ephphtha." "But," says Dr. Morrison, "I think the last thing he told us was even more interesting. He said this: 'Supposing my wife and I go out some afternoon, and we leave the family at home, and then, suppose we make more calls than we intended, and we are late in getting home. Of course, in this country the children would not mind in the least, but in that country they are never quite safe, and when the darkness comes the children get anxious, and so when I come to the door the children say, "Lama, sabachthani? Father, what has kept you, where have you been, why have you left us like this?"'"'

[1] A. J. Gossip, in *The Speaker's Bible*, 'Mark,' ii. 168.

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