

Straws in the Wind

A QUEER CHOICE

BY G. K. CHESTERTON

I HOPE that poor literary gents, as we cultured people say, may be allowed to study some extreme Hitlerite pamphlets as curiosities of literature. I mean upon points of pure logic and language, without any reference to our own opinions on politics or religion. I may be a monkey-worshipper; you may be a pious *cultor* of the cult of the Great Sea-Serpent; but if I am a logical monkey-worshipper, and you are (as I feel sure you are) a lucid and cultivated snake-worshipper, we are free on quite other grounds to criticise any fallacies or solecisms in the devotional works dedicated to the sacred alligator or the holy hippopotamus. And I have just read a passage in a pamphlet of the extreme German-Christian school, which states positively about the Germans, "God Himself has pronounced us His chosen people."

A very large number of humble and harmless Jews, not usurers or even financiers, but fiddlers, actors, schoolmasters, chess-champions, mathematicians, astronomers, and such riff-raff, have been beggared and beaten and hounded out of Germany, on the ground that the Jewish culture had grown too powerful or Jewish ideas too prevalent; and that the Jewish spirit is an exclusive spirit and the Jewish God a jealous God. I am not discussing that as a point of politics. There is a Jewish problem; there is certainly a Jewish culture; and I am inclined to think that it really was too prevalent in Germany. For here we have the Hitlerites themselves, in plain words, saying they are a Chosen Race. Where could they have got that notion? Where could they even have got that phrase, except from the Jews?

But then the purely literary and logical fun begins. In the same propagandist print, we read elsewhere the remarkable business proposition, "We will have a German God or none"; in which case it seems likely that they will have none, since there may not be a German God to be had. But I pass over the metaphysical difficulties. I never heard of anybody stipulating that God should be a Scotchman; nor by what delicate diplomatic approaches the Maker of all mankind can be naturalised as a Portuguese. But what interests me is the merely logical point about the Chosen Race. For it seems, after all, that it is not the God who chooses the Race; but the Race that chooses the God. The Bible at least tells a consistent story of a Deity protecting a particular family; but here the family seems somehow able to patronise a particular Deity; and tell Him to be a German, as the Hebrews would never dare to tell Him to be a Hebrew. Well, it is all Hebrew to me. But my interest, as I say, is in Reason; and choosing your Creator seems to me very like choosing your grandfather.

On the obvious logical or practical ground, therefore, there seems to me very little to argue about. Hitlerites may howl against the Old Testament; but they would never have learned even their own non-

sensical notions, if the Protestant movement had not magnified the Old Testament. Where else could they have found this fad about one biological stock inheriting the Divine favour, instead of earning it? The notion of a Chosen Race was unknown to Pagan antiquity; it was unknown to Confucianism and Buddhism and all the broad and brotherly philosophies of Asia; it was not only unknown to Islam, but most gloriously disproved by Islam; which has united in one faith the African negroes and the stately princes of Persia. It was, of course, unknown to the Christian Middle Ages; it has been unknown to Catholic culture ever since. Nobody mentioned it among the philosophers of the Renaissance. Nobody would have dared to mention it among the philosophers of the Revolution. The denial of all such brutal tribal insolence was the one thing common to the Catholic tradition at its lowest and the Jacobin excitement at its loudest. Where could the Germans have got it, except from the Jews?

The justification it originally had for the Jews need not be discussed now; especially as the Nazis would flatly deny it now. But it will be well to insist, before the European complication becomes too insanely complex, that there is a very special spiritual case against this notion. And the objection is a piece of very practical psychology. The peril to Christendom of the North Germans is not, as we often state it for the sake of brevity, the peril of Nationalism. Nationalism means the worship of the Nation. Cut off from the common duty to God and mankind, it is a thing insufficient and ultimately insane. It is an idolatry; but it is a worship. And even a man worshipping an idol has this remaining health in him; that he is not worshipping himself. But when he is worshipping his Race, he is worshipping himself. The curse of merely tribal pride is that the tribe not only turns into a march of idolators, but into a march of idols. It becomes a procession of stone images; each image worshipping itself for having a heart of stone. A man can feel he is unworthy to serve an idea; even if it is a rather narrow idea of a nation. But he cannot be unworthy to be a Zulu or a Teuton; because he is a Zulu or a Teuton. The ordinary little Frenchman, playing dominoes and drinking *vin ordinaire*, does not think he resembles Joan of Arc or even Napoleon; he only hopes he might be worthy to follow them into battle. But the truly tribal German does imagine that he resembles Arminius or Barbarossa; he believes he inherits some such heroic quality with the colour of his hair. He cannot be unworthy of Germany, for he is a German; and in his heart he only admires Germany because it is as German as himself. That is why he makes that modest little request; that God should be as German as himself.

The heart of all this European quarrel is a heresy; a heresy preached from Prussia, but unfortunately preached most successfully to Germany. Nor could we state the heresy, and the blasphemy, more cor-

rectly, compactly and logically, than by stating that it is the demand for a German God. But, owing to the very logical implication of the racial idea, it means even more than every German having a German God. It also means every German being a German God. I do not believe there will be any chance of peace in Europe until that heresy, as a heresy, has been defined and destroyed.

Some Mediæval Stonemasons and Their Craft

By L. E. Williams

THE sentimental traveller of the last century, if he had become smitten by the Gothic Revival, viewed the works of the mediæval artist through barriers of matted ivy. Tintern and Fountains were to the Victorians symbols of the inevitable decay of human endeavour, and the ivy shroud was as much part of the building as the crumbling stonework. A legend became current that the mediæval masons were a band of mysterious beings, a deliberately anonymous fraternity which, labouring with little scientific skill but great piety, built buildings of supreme beauty more by miracle than by knowledge. From the architect who spoke of the excellence of monastic planning and from the engineer who described the functions of the buttresses and vaults of a great church, the Victorians averted equally pained faces.

To-day more is known about the mediæval artist than at any time since the close of the middle ages; the ivy is stripped from the walls and the crumbling stones secured with bronze cramps, and one thing that has been learned in the process is that the builders wished to be anything but nameless. At Amiens a stone labyrinth in the floor contains the name of Robert of Luzarche who began the church in 1220, and at Rheims another inscription commemorates four master masons;—Gauchier who did the vaults, Jehan le Loup who began the portals, Bernard of Soissons who made the rose window and Jehan d'Orbais, architect of the chevet. Rheims cathedral was begun in 1211 and le Loup finished the chevet after the death of d'Orbais. Further examples can be multiplied from the grave stones of masons showing that they had no wish to lose themselves in their work. A beautifully cut inscription on a tomb preserved in Rheims from the now destroyed church of S. Nicaise runs,—“Here lies Master Hugh Libergier who began this church in 1229.”

The mason Durandus who vaulted the nave of Rouen cathedral in 1233 cut his name proudly on the last boss “Durandus me fecit,” and at Ropsley in Lincolnshire one of the piers bears the inscription “Ista columna facta fecit ad festum sancti michaelis anno domini MCCCLXXX et nomen factoris Thomas Bate de Corby.” He was no shy ascetic who cut that stone on a September day in 1380!

Eudes de Montreuil was Saint Louis' favourite architect and accompanied him on the crusade of 1248 remaining to build the fortifications of Jaffa. Of him it was said that “he concerned himself with

things mechanical and was not one of those to puff themselves up.” The perfect craftsman's epitaph!

In 1225, Villars d'Honnecourt, a master mason on his way to supervise the building of a church in Hungary visited Rheims and made sketches of the work that Jehan d'Orbais had in hand. Villars was a Cambraision from Honnecourt, a village on the Scheldt about fifteen miles from Cambrai. He travelled widely in France and the Holy Roman Empire in search of work, and his note book has luckily been preserved and is now in the Bibliothèque Nationale at Paris. Stopping at Laon, Villars carefully sketches the cathedral towers and notes their peculiar design. At another time he draws the rose window of the west front at Chartres, and again at Lausanne. His sketches are not for show, but from the notes written with each, evidently intended as practical helps in his craft. That he loved drawing and was familiar with the pen is clear from the jottings of cats and dogs and insects that caught his eye as he passed, and these are mixed with such practical details as “How to cut the mould of a great arch in the space of 3 feet” and “How to set up a spire on a tower and cut the moulds.” The method for this latter is to divide a vertical line into four parts each of which is equal to the base of the spire. The proportion here shown is that of the cathedral at Bayeux. Although this one book is all that has survived of its kind there is nothing to suggest it was unique. Probably every master mason, like every architect to-day had such a note book, in which he jotted down anything that might be useful.

But very few mediæval plans or working drawings have survived. That they were used is certain, if only from the contemporary evidence of the stained glass window at Chartres which shows a master mason drawing with a pair of compasses, and the tomb in S. Ouen at Rouen of Alexander and Colin de Berneval, two masons, who are each depicted with a drawing in his hand. The scarcity is not surprising as drawings were made on vellum (Villars d'Honnecourt's sketch book is entirely of vellum) and the material being expensive was cleaned off and used over again. Under a list of names of deceased members of the Chapter at Rheims has been found the drawing of part of the west front of a church. The drawing has been cut up and bound as leaves of a book, and the last entry being dated 1270 the design must have been made many years earlier. Some designs have been preserved intact; one such done in the thirteenth century of the west front of the cathedral, is at Strasbourg. An early example in England is the curious plan of the monastery buildings at Canterbury, though this is not a working drawing but rather a survey of the drainage system and water supply.

The setting out of full size details was often done on wood, and the account rolls of Roslyn Chapel show that the master mason drew large designs on “Eastland boards” imported from the Baltic. At Limoges, where the side aisles are roofed in stone, is still visible the scratched lines of a workman's setting out of the nave stonework, and at Ystad, in Sweden, is a tile from the Franciscan church on which a rough design has been made for a tracery window while the clay was still wet. The actual