

THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY.

Vol. V.

DECEMBER, 1925.

No. 12.

When was Jesus Born?

P. E. KRETZMANN, St. Louis, Mo.

The beginning of the Christian era, and therefore the supposed year of Christ's birth, was first fixed by Dionysius Exiguus, a Scythian monk, who lived in Rome at the beginning of the sixth century. He was greatly interested in computations pertaining to the church-year and did much toward establishing a uniform practise with regard to the celebration of Easter. He placed the birth of Christ in the year 754 a. u. c. (after the founding of the city of Rome). Even before his time several of the Popes of Rome had tried to determine the date of Christ's birth. It is said that Pope Julius I (336—352) had the imperial archives of Rome searched for the exact date of the birth of Christ, and it has been established beyond a doubt that Pope Liberius fixed the celebration of Christmas for December 25. By the middle of the sixth century, then, the date of the birth of Jesus was generally accepted to have been December 25, 754 a. u. c.

In an article in *Lehre und Wehre* of December, 1902, the writer shows that the computation of Dionysius Exiguus was undoubtedly erroneous. Using chiefly chronological tags from the Bible, all of which render the year 754 a. u. c. altogether improbable, the essayist finally concludes that the year 750 a. u. c. is the correct year of Christ's birth and that the Christian era should therefore be moved back four years. This idea was held quite generally among orthodox theologians about two decades ago.

But in the mean time, evidence was brought forth which indicated that a further correction in the computations must be made in order to harmonize facts from secular history with the Scriptural account. Work has been done chiefly by Sir William Ramsay, but subsequently also by Robertson, Deissmann, McKinley, and others, and the difficulty may now be said to have been solved with a reasonable amount of certainty. The argument proceeds

Masonry in the Garb of Christianity.

PROF. O. C. A. BOECLER, St. Louis, Mo.

(Concluded.)

Mackey (*Encyclopedia*, Article "Prince of Mercy") says: "The twenty-sixth degree of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite is also called the Scottish Trinitarian." And why is it designated by this term of Christian theology? Mackey enlightens us by saying: "It is a Christian degree in its construction and treats of the triple covenant of mercy which God made with man — first with Abraham by circumcision; next with the Israelites in the wilderness, by the intermediation of Moses; and lastly, with all mankind, by the death and sufferings of Jesus Christ. It is in allusion to these three acts of mercy that the degree derives its two names of Scottish Trinitarian and Prince of Mercy." Because

of its "construction" and "allusion" it is called the Trinitarian degree. The dogma of the Trinity is not set forth for the acceptance of the candidate, for Mackey says: "But the real dogma of the degree is the importance of truth." It appears to be Christian, for in the presence of the initiate the Most Excellent reads: "Jesus of Nazareth, born of a virgin without sin, was chaste and holy. He descended into hell, He arose again and ascended to heaven, He charged His disciples to teach His pure doctrines, and gave them the gift of miracles. He will appear again at the end of the world, and a new creation and a new age of innocence shall commence." (Cp. *Scotch Rite Masonry, Illustrated*, J. Blanchard.) According to this same *exposé* by Blanchard the officer mentioned reads the following texts in the presence of the candidate: Gen. 49, 10; Is. 9, 6; John 1, 14; he reminds him of the threefold covenant mentioned by Mackey; and finally, taking water, he pours a small quantity of water on the candidate's head and says: "I pour this water on thy head as a symbol of the purification of the soul by suffering and sorrow, by which parting with the stains of sin and the sordidness of vice it becomes fit to return to its eternal home in the bosom of the Father, who loveth all the children He hath made." This degree, then, should be Christian in construction, when, as we have learned, the doctrine of the immaculate Virgin is taught, the "virgin without sin [?]" ; and here the doctrine of salvation by works, besides a parody on Baptism, is enacted. Neither has this degree the semblance of a right to be called a Trinitarian degree; for even though the Father and the Son are mentioned, neither the name nor the work of the Holy Ghost is even faintly hinted at. Blanchard quotes these words from the ritual: "God is three and one, for His essence illuminates, warms, and makes fruitful at once"; and again we see how Masonry, in a very clumsy manner, seeks to imitate Christian doctrine and to pervert it. Even though it is called the Trinitarian degree and the Delta is used as a symbol, the candidate takes the oath "in the presence of the Great Architect of the Universe."

The Knights Templar degree, the twelfth of the American Rite,—not York Rite, for Mackey calls this a misnomer,—is usually called the Christian degree, and the Knights Templars make a great display of Christian trappings. But Mackey, who offers three columns of discussion regarding a quarrel among the Templars concerning the uniform to be worn and almost five more columns on the correct plural of Knight Templar, whether Knights

Templars or Knights Templar, does not feature this degree as a Christian one either in design or construction. From Simon's *Book of the Commandery*, p. 29 ff., we learn that numerous texts from Holy Writ are read during the ceremonies; among them are: Jas. 1, 1—10. 26. 27; Matt. 11, 28; 1 Pet. 2, 21; Col. 2, 8; Matt. 26, 14—25. 36—50; 27, 24—37; also a compilation of the story of Christ's resurrection and ascension. From this same source we learn, p. 38, that during the initiation the Knights sing the following hymn:—

The rising God forsakes the tomb,
Up to His Father's court He flies.
Cherubic legions guard Him home
And shout Him welcome to the skies.

Break off your tears, ye saints, and tell
How high our great Deliv'rer reigns;
Sing how He spoiled the hosts of hell
And led the monster Death in chains.

Say, Live forever, wondrous King,
Born to redeem and strong to save;
Then ask the tyrant, Where's thy sting?
And where's thy vict'ry, boasting grave?

Morris' Dictionary (Article "Jesus Christ") tells us: "The birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of this exalted personage constitute the sublime lessons of the Knights Templar order, which is emphatically the Christian branch of Masonry. The passages from the gospels that describe His Passion are read during the ceremonies." According to *Revised Knight Templarism, Illustrated* (Ezra A. Cook, publisher), the candidate for initiation is assured that the order with which he now seeks to unite is founded upon the Christian religion, and he is required to promise and vow to use his sword in the defense of the Christian religion and comforted with the thought that the Almighty will be his Strength and Salvation now and forever. He is warned that he who violates his vow is worthy of no better fate than that which Judas suffered, and is asked, "Does your conscience upbraid you for any known or overt act unrepented of?" and is admonished to remember that he will be called to render an account to that Supreme Judge from whom not even the most minute act of his life is hidden; he is also instructed that he must observe a term of penance, all men having erred, and error needing repentance, and therefore he is being offered a coarse diet and rough habit, and severe duties are imposed on him. The candidate is told: "Pilgrim, the scene

before you represents the conclusion of the hallowed sacrifice offered by the Redeemer of the world to propitiate the anger of an offended Deity"; and partaking of the Fifth Libation, in drinking wine from a human skull, he must repeat the words: "This pure wine I now take in testimony of my belief in the mortality of the body and the immortality of the soul; and as the sins of the whole world were once visited upon the head of our Savior, so may all the sins of the person whose skull this once was, in addition to my own, be heaped upon my head, and may this libation appear in the Judgment against me, both here and hereafter, should I ever knowingly or wilfully violate this most solemn vow of a Knight Templar. So help me God and keep me steadfast!" Thus the initiate hears the name of Jesus, listens to portions of the story of His holy Passion read in his presence, and is told that Jesus, by His death, propitiated the anger of an offended Deity, but he is never urged, on the pain of losing his immortal soul, to embrace that Savior by faith; on the contrary, he is instructed that the black cross which the Prelate, the official chaplain of the order, suspends from his neck "is also an emblem of our order, which you will wear as a constant memorial for you to imitate the virtues of that immaculate Jesus." Aye, even in His suffering and death, Jesus is held up to the candidate as an example only; for he hears: "You are now, as a trial of your faith and humility, performing a penance. Of this our Lord and Savior has left us a bright example; for although He was the eternal Son of God, He humbled Himself . . . to endure the pains and afflictions incident to human nature and finally to suffer a cruel and ignominious death upon the cross." And the usual Masonic reward for a truly Masonic life is held out to the candidate in this degree; for the Eminent Commander, holding a skull in his hands, addresses him thus: "Then let us improve the short space allotted to us, that, when our weak and frail bodies, like this memento, shall be reduced to sepulchral dust and ashes, our disembodied spirits may soar aloft to that blessed region where dwells light and life eternal." At the very conclusion of his initiation the newly dubbed Knight hears from the lips of the same official as he hands him a metal star: "Wear this star as the emblem of the reward which the Great Captain of our salvation has promised to those who conquer in His name." The lengthy and tedious ceremonies of this Knights Templar degree are very much like a pompous pontifical Mass and a strange jumble of Scripture-passages, Scriptural historical facts, seeming truths, and

naked lies of the devil. Masonry, especially in this degree, is as strong a delusion as popery is. This is heathenism pure and simple, practised in the name of "the Sovereign Architect of the Universe," in whose presence the candidate has taken the oath upon his soul, binding himself "under no less penalty than that of having my head smote off and placed on the highest spire of Christendom." We might add here that Rebold, in his *History of Freemasonry*, p. 348, says this concerning the prescribed prayer the Prelate uses: "In this prayer [prescribed in the charter of York] we perceive no mention made of a Trinity, the Deity invoked being none other than the Great Architect of the Universe, that Great First Cause recognized by the Noachidean doctrine, and the belief in the eternal existence of which can readily be concurred in by men of every confession."

In the light of what has now been learned about the character of the Knights Templar degree, we are better able to form a correct opinion of the customary Easter service of this order.

Masonry is tolerant. Tolerance is its badge of honor, we are assured time and again. Masonry leaves "the minds of its disciples on all sectarian points perfectly untrammelled." And Mackey (*Lexicon*, Article "Religion") continues: "The religion of Masonry is pure theism, on which its different members engraft their own peculiar opinions; but they are not permitted to introduce them into the lodge or to connect their truth or falsehood with the truth of Masonry." When Knights Templars, therefore, choose a Baptist Church for their religious devotions on Easter Sunday and a fundamentalist pastor as their speaker, they are at liberty to do so. But if one of the infidel preachers of to-day is their selection, they are still good Masons. They may believe that "the sins of the whole world were once visited upon the head of our Savior," or they may refuse to believe this and maintain that Jesus, by His life, suffering, and death, merely set an example for our imitation. Masonry as such considers these "sectarian doctrines" of no import. They may or may not recite the tenet of the Apostles' Creed: "He descended into hell." They may, as loyal Masons, choose nothing but hymns of a distinctly Christian character for their Easter programs, but they may also content themselves with singing the song of patriotism: "My Country, 'Tis of Thee." If Sir John Bowring, a widely known English Unitarian, could compose "In the Cross of Christ I Glory" (No. 95 in our hymn-book) and "God Is Love; His Mercy Brightens" (No. 510 in our hymn-book) and mean and sing them in a Unitarian sense, why should not

Masons be able to sing Christian hymns in a Masonic way, in the spirit of Masonic theism? "Words are often forced to commit suicide." Masonry is the bedfellow of modern infidel theology, as we may infer from these words of the *National Trestle Board* (a Masonic magazine) of February, 1924: "It is the Modernist, whether of the churches or fraternity, who has sensed the call of the time and is making effort to answer thereto." Masonry is the hotbed of syncretism, egregious compromise in religion, and the baldest kind of indifferentism, arrogantly parading, at sundry times, in the tawdry uniform of pretended Christianity.

The oath and what it contains is the only confession of faith and of doctrine which the candidate is obliged to accept, and this oath is never administered in the name of the Triune God or of Jesus, but always in the name of Almighty God, the most high God, God, our heavenly Father, the Holy One of Israel, the Great Architect of the Universe, the Supreme Architect of the Universe, the Grand Architect of the Universe, or the Sovereign Architect of the Universe, whether it be in degrees one to thirteen of the American Rite or in the first to the thirty-third degree of the Scottish Rite. And when a member of Knights Templarism or a member of Scottish Rite Masonry of the thirty-second degree chooses to enter the ranks of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine, he adopts "the Arab's creed," takes his oath on the "Bible and on the mysterious legend of the Koran," and prays: "May Allah, the God of Arab, Moslem, and Mohammedan, the God of our fathers, support unto the entire fulfilment of the same. Amen, Amen, Amen." (Compare the *Mystic Shrine, Illustrated*; Ezra A. Cook, publisher.) So, then, the god of a full-fledged Knight Templar, the declared exponent of the Christian religion, the god of the Scottish Rite Mason, who is satisfied with a few degrees which are said to be Christian in design, construction, or allusion, the god of the Mystic Shrine, who teaches his votaries that "those who die in the faith will be resurrected in glory," is any kind of god, as long as the word god is uttered, whether it be the sun, the first cause, the creative principle, the generative principle, or a supreme intelligence, generally mentioned as "the Great Architect of the Universe."

Lux e tenebris, Mackey informs us in his *Encyclopedia*, p. 479, is "very commonly used as a motto in the caption of Masonic documents as expressive of the object of Masonry, . . . and has a recondite meaning." He illumines us farther on: "So *lux* being

truth, or Masonry, and *tenebrae*, or darkness, the symbol of initiation, *lux e tenebris* is Masonic truth proceeding from initiation." We agree with him that darkness is a fitting symbol for Masonic initiation. But light can never grow out of darkness, except by a divine fiat or the workings of the Spirit of God. Like always produces like, and so Masonry, by initiation, leads its votaries, degree by degree, from darkness to darkness, into outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. The Triune God alone is Light, and He has manifested Himself only in Christ and exerts His light- and life-giving powers through the Holy Ghost and by His means of grace, that man may possess spiritual, heavenly, and eternal light by faith in Christ Jesus.
