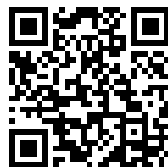

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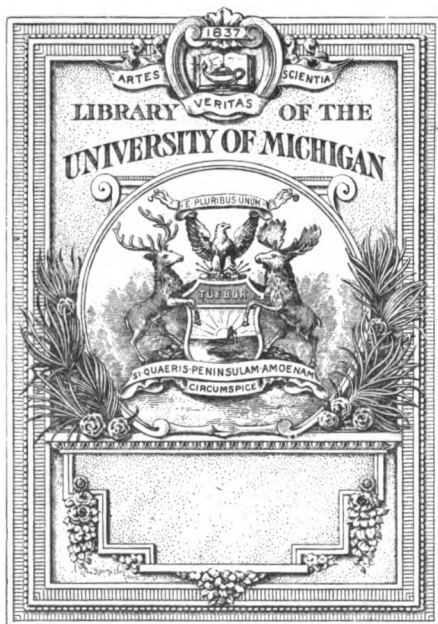
THE ORIGIN OF TRIADS AND
TRINITIES

A CONTRIBUTION TO THE HISTORY
OF RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

BY

JOHN NEWTON, M.R.C.S., L.S.A.

LATE PRESIDENT OF THE LITERARY AND PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY OF LIVERPOOL;
THE LIVERPOOL MICROSCOPICAL SOCIETY; THE LIVERPOOL BIOLOGICAL
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THE ORIGIN OF TRIADS AND TRINITIES

THIS is surely a surpassingly interesting question, whether it be regarded from the secular or the religious point of view. Considering the flood of new light which has been thrown upon every branch of knowledge during the past century, it seems at first sight amazing that the question should still remain unanswered. But the reason is not far to seek. Religious bigotry and intolerance have for ages warned off every sincere inquirer after truth from attempting to solve the Mystery.

There are, of course, other numbers besides *three*, especially *four*, *seven*, and *twelve*, which for thousands of years have been regarded as sacred, and occupy a remarkable position in the figured monuments, ritual, and sacred writings of the Ancient Religions. But the origin of their sacred character has been sufficiently worked out, and the resulting solutions have been generally accepted. We cannot do better, therefore, than begin with a brief consideration of these, and so proceed from the known to the unknown.

To the earliest races of men the glorious Sun, source of all life and light, the visible creator of

all living things, was doubtless the first object of universal worship, and the sunrise and sunset were the two daily miracles of their lives. Before their eyes, too, at night-time were, first, the Moon "walking in brightness," with her continually changing form, and the fixed stars that never changed. These, then, were visible to and observed of all. Untold ages probably passed away ere men, watching the unveiled expanse of heaven, observed that there were "five other wandering stars," besides the Sun and Moon, travelling at various rates of speed across their sky. Systematic observations of these appear to have been made by the ancient Babylonians about 4000 years before the Christian era, who, regarding them as gods, and believing that they ruled the destinies of men, associated Astrology with Astronomy, and established the worship of "the sacred *seven*."

The Year, marked by its recurring seasons, and otherwise, was most conveniently divided into *twelve* portions by the period of time from one new Moon to another, the appearance of each new Moon being celebrated as a religious festival.

Again, it is not difficult to understand how *four* came to be regarded as a sacred number. To primitive man the necessity must have been ever present for some method of aiding the sense of direction by establishing fixed points for reference. The sunrise and sunset, the right and left hand, as he faced the east—in other words, the *four* Cardinal

Points—supplied him roughly with what he wanted, became a part of his daily life and religion, and the starting-point of all geography.

Thus we see that the sacred numbers, *four*, *seven*, and *twelve*, had their origin in Astronomy, and were intimately associated with the worship of the heavenly bodies.

One “sacred” number only remains to be considered, namely, *Three*, but that is incomparably the most sacred and important of all.

Of its superior antiquity as a sacred number there is overwhelming proof. With the first glimpse of a distinct religion and worship among the most ancient races, we find them grouping their gods in triads. Thus Monier Williams testifies: “It is certain that the Aryan race, from the first development of its religious sense on the soil of India, has shown a tendency to attach a sacred significance to the number *three*, and to group the objects of its adoration in triple combinations.”¹

And Dr. Budge tells us: “Throughout Egypt generally, the company of gods of a town or city were three in number. . . . The conception of the triad or trinity in Egypt is probably as old as the belief in the gods.”² Of the Babylonians Professor Sayce writes: “The old Accadian cult seems to have had a fancy for trinities or triads, and at the commencement of

¹ “Religious Thought and Life in India,” p. 5.

² “The Gods of the Egyptians, or Studies in Egyptian Mythology.” 2 vols. 1904, vol. i. pp. 113 and 114.

the Semitic period we have a triad which consisted of Anu, Bel, and Ea."¹ An astronomical triad of the Sun, the Moon, and the Evening Star (the planet Venus) is delineated on the boundary stones, the bas-reliefs, and the cylinder seals of Babylonia and Assyria. So much for the trinities of ancient Egypt, Babylonia, and India. It would be easy to show, if space permitted, that triads of gods were equally common in the religions of other countries of the ancient world. The question then arises: Can any reasonable explanation be given for the universal prevalence of these triads and trinities? *Why always three?* Why not *seven* or *ten*, as Maurice suggests?² Or why any definite number in the Godhead? as J. H. Newman queries ("Grammar of Assent").

Let us first glance briefly at some of the attempts to meet the difficulty. It has been often and confidently asserted that "the doctrine (of the Trinity in Unity) is most reasonably regarded as involved in that primeval revelation which God vouchsafed to our first parents in Paradise."³ Again, it was assumed that man himself is a trinity of body, soul, and spirit; an earthly image, said the Fathers, of the Triune God.

Dr. Budge points out that the Egyptian triad, such as that of Osiris, Isis, and Horus, usually con-

¹ "Gifford Lectures," p. 218; "Hibbert Lectures," pp. 110 and 193.

² Maurice, "Indian Antiquities," vol. v.

³ Rev. G. Rawlinson, "History of Ancient Egypt," vol. i. p. 321, and many others.

sisted of a supreme god, a goddess, and their son, and he considers that the triad was suggested by the family trio—husband, wife, and child. Again, the sexual elements were always considered as essentially triads, and some have held that in this way the idea of triads and trinities arose. It will soon be seen that all these attempts at explanation, whether merely fanciful or founded on facts, fail to account for the totality of things, and must be rejected.

Many years ago the writer determined to investigate the origin and meaning of that curious armorial bearing, "The Three Legs of Man," which is very much in evidence in Liverpool, and the results of his labours were published in 1884. It will be seen from the following short summary that they throw an unexpected light on the subject we are discussing.

In his essay, it was shown that this device was derived about A.D. 1256 from Sicily, of which island it has been the badge or arms for 2300 years, down to our own day. It was borrowed by the ancient Greeks from the Babylonians and Assyrians, with whom it was a Sun-emblem of the deepest significance. Starting with the Sun's disc as a circle, they desired to represent it as rapidly moving. Sometimes they gave it wings, at others they drew it as a wheel trundling along, while motion in one direction was indicated by taking away part of the rim of the wheel, leaving sufficient to indicate its



course. And thus was produced the Suastika of the Hindoos, the Fylfot of the Northern nations, one of the most characteristic and universally diffused of all the mystic emblems of Sun-worship. Lastly, the elements of the wheel were reduced to three only, and, united with the universal idea of the Sun as a swift racer, resulted in the three-legged symbol, so common on ancient Greek coins, such as those of Aspendus and Syracuse. Other revolving solar emblems are pictured on these coins, as three cocks, three winged lions, three phalli.



Why always three ?

There seems to be only one probable solution. *Three stood for the plural, as the most economical mode of expressing it.*

The gradual evolution of a number which would serve to express the plural is indelibly impressed on the earliest languages known to us, as the Sanscrit,

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Egyptian, Babylonian, Hebrew, Arabic, and Greek, which, instead of singular and plural only, employ three numbers, singular, dual, and plural, "preserving to us the memorial of that stage of thought when all beyond two was an idea of indefinite number," and three was at length invented to express it.

The invention of numbers must have had its starting-point at a late period in the history of our race. "Savages have no idea of abstract terms, and by their very nature, numbers are such abstract and empty conceptions that it tries our ingenuity to the utmost to find any attributive element in them, to which expression might be given, and which might in time become the proper name of a merely quantitative idea." So far Max Müller ("Essays," i. 35), who thinks there would be much less difficulty with "one" or "two," and many tribes are known, even in our day, who have got no further. According to Lichtenstein the Bushmen could not count beyond two. Spix and Martins make the same statement about the Brazilian Wood Indians. The Botocudos had a word for "one," but everything beyond was "many." The natives of Cape York, Australia, count as follows:—

One	Natat	(1)
Two	Naes	(2)
Three	Naes-Natat	(2 + 1)
Four	Naes-Naes	(2 + 2)

Other Australians have words for *one*, *two*, and

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three, while for *four* and *five* they say "ungatua," *i.e.* "the whole" ("hand" being understood).

A recent corroboration is supplied in the Report of the United States Expedition against the Philippine Islanders. "Major Waller made the curious discovery that the natives were to some extent like the American Crows in the matter of counting. Two seemed to be their limit. They could watch and guard against one or two detachments operating against them at one time, but they became utterly bewildered when three were sent against them at the same time. Our success was complete."¹

It was a vast advance for mankind beyond such a mental state when the numeral *three* was invented, and came into general use. Many centuries may have run their course in the interval. They now *had a word which could be used for the plural generally*, something wherewith to express the illimitable, the innumerable, the undefined—a word, which thenceforth took a prominent place in the language and religion of the higher races.

The other sacred numbers, *seven* and *twelve*, presuppose, as we saw, a certain knowledge of astronomy, and *are of much later origin than "three."* But so soon as they came into general use, *they too were used to express the plural*, with the sense of completeness: many examples of which occur in the Bible, as where Peter asks, "How often shall I forgive my brother? until seven

¹ Lord Avebury, "Origin of Civilisation," p. 455. For many similar instances, see Tylor, "Primitive Culture," vol. i. chapter 7.

times?" Our own Trial by Jury, in which twelve men are absurdly expected always to agree in a common verdict, is a striking proof of the survival of twelve, still used as the official plural.

But the use of the number THREE to express the plural prevailed all over the world, as the natural result of that economy which governs our actions—the Law of Least Effort, as it has been called.¹

Its remote origin in time is strikingly displayed in the figured numerals of all nations, for they still bear indications of that stage of thought when *three* was invented, and also of the long interval of time that must have elapsed before any further progress was made. The weight of evidence is all in favour of Egypt as the birthplace of the first numerals, the first writing, literature, and religion. The Egyptians alone had brains and leisure enough for the mighty task. They alone have left us evidence of every step, from the rudest savage pictures to cursive or demotic writing.

We start, therefore, with the Egyptian numerals. They commence thus, with the figures










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






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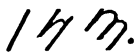
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¹ An interesting illustration of this has recently appeared in "A Study of a Child," by Louise A. Hagan : Harper, 1898. "As I am writing this, he is in the kitchen, and I hear him at the knife-drawer saying, 'Fee-fee knife,' meaning three. He always says 'Fee-fee' when he means to say there are more than one or two." So this was his sign for the indefinite plural. He had been taught to count up to a dozen.

Here we see how they clung to *Three* as the limit for ages of their numerals, until it had become a part of their daily thoughts and lives. Still more remarkable is it, that they continued in their hieroglyphic writing to express the plural by simply repeating the picture-sign *three times*, and this system was continued for 4000 years, at least down to the Ptolemies. Thus  is the hieroglyph for "god," and  for "gods." Or else the picture-sign was followed by  or  which denoted that it was in the plural. The Chaldean numbers followed the same mode: . . . then  (3 + 1) standing for 4, and  (3 + 2) standing for 5.

The Roman numerals belong to a much later period, when by adding the Etruscan sign for the open hand, , a figure for 5 had been obtained. Yet here, too, we start with the "digits," or finger hieroglyphs . . . *Four* is  minus one, or , *Eight* is  plus three, or . Even our modern numerals, derived from India, start from the primitive digits, by making them cursive:



The Egyptian mode of representing the plural by repeating the hieroglyph three times has survived to our time in Heraldry, as a glance at Guillim's fine folio volume of 1724 will show. There are fifteen coats of arms on one page, all triads.

It is noteworthy also that trade marks, if plurals,

are often triads: *e.g.* "Three Castle" Tobacco, "Three Star" Brandy, "Treble X" Ale, &c. Indeed, whichever way we turn, the number *three*, the primitive plural, is with us still.

If we turn to our legends and folk-lore, these venerable stories accentuate the importance of the number *three*, both in itself and in its plural use. De Gubernatis says:¹ "These marvels are always *three*, as the apples are *three*, the beautiful girls *three*, the enchanted palaces are *three*, the heads of the dragon are usually *three*." A reference to Grimm's "Fairy Tales," or to Hartland's "Legends of Perseus" (a vast collection from many languages, ancient and modern), will abundantly confirm this. Triplicity is the very soul of astrology, magic, and divination, as we see in the second idyll of Theocritus, or the witches' incantation in Shakespeare's "Macbeth":—

"Thrice to thine, and thrice to mine,
And thrice again to make up nine,
Peace! the charm's wound up."—Act i. Sc. 3.

Shakespeare, indeed, is full of instances of three-fold repetition, and also of the use of *thrice* to express the sense of "greatly," "manifold," "often."

"O fool! fool! fool!"—OTHELLO, Act v. Sc. 2.

"Villany, villany, villany."—Act v. Sc. 2.

"Sing willow, willow, willow."—Act iv. Sc. 3.

"O Cassio, Cassio, Cassio."—Act v. Sc. 1.

¹ "Zoological Mythology," vol. ii. p. 416.

Hamlet's father's ghost as he disappears :—

“Adieu! adieu! adieu! remember me.”

The Duke of York's valour :—

“Thrice within this hour
I saw him down : thrice up again and fighting.”
—KING HENRY V., Act iv. Sc. 6.

“Thrice-valiant countrymen.”—Act iv. Sc. 6.

“Thrice is he armed that hath his quarrel just.”
Second Part of KING HENRY VI., Act iii. Sc. 2.

It would be easy to fill a volume with examples from our old poets. We will end with a French one, Guy de Maupassant's “Summary of Human Life” —

“Les petites marionnettes
Font, font, font
Trois petits tours
Et puis s'en vont.”

If we now turn to Religion, of all things the most conservative, we shall find that triads and trinities abound in its rites, ceremonies, and beliefs, having drifted down to our time from far-off ages.

There is the Christian triad, Faith, Hope, Love, which we may compare with the æsthetic triad, the True, the Beautiful, the Good ; the human triad, Body, Soul, Spirit ; and the evil triad, the World, the Flesh, and the Devil.¹

¹ Note that we have *three* degrees of comparison, and only *three*, the positive, comparative, superlative.

We read that Paul was caught up to the *third* heaven (2 Cor. xii. 2): and we know that the ancient Persians had a *third* heaven, as a reward for the good thought, the good word, the good deed.

We learn from the "Book of the Dead" that the disembodied spirit on coming into the presence of Osiris, after reciting many sins, which he solemnly denies having committed, ends by protesting: "I am pure! I am pure! I am pure!"

The threefold repetition for emphasis is common to all religions and languages. In the Old Testament it occurs frequently. "A threefold blessing from Jehovah" was to be pronounced over Israel by Aaron and his sons (Numbers vi. 24). "Holy, holy, holy, is Jehovah" (Isa. vi. 3). "O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of Jehovah" (Jer. xxii. 29). "The Temple of Jehovah, the Temple of Jehovah, the Temple of Jehovah, are these" (Jer. vii. 4). "I will overturn, overturn, overturn it" (Ezekiel xxi. 27). Delitzsch tells us that "Hail, hail, hail, to the King, my Lord" was the usual formula with which the Assyrian scribes commenced their letters. Our approval and joy are expressed in public by *three* cheers; if excessive, by *three times three*, as with the ancients. And in public expressions of grief, the triple invocation of the dead, the triple libation of the Manes, and the custom of casting a little earth *three* times on the grave or remains are mentioned by Homer (Odyssey, ix. 65 and xi. 27),

Virgil (*Æneid*, vi. 505) and Horace (*Odes*, I. xxviii.—xxxvi.). In our day *three* volleys are fired over the grave at a soldier's funeral.

Baptism by trine immersion is older than Christianity. It was practised by the ancient Romans; see Juvenal, vi. 522. And by the peoples of the vast continent of India, for thousands of years, trine immersion in their sacred river has been practised as necessary for salvation. In the Talmud, it is enjoined that water be poured *three* times over the hands, in washing them. *Three* sprinklings, however, were held as sufficient, in the absence of water. Among the Persians, the infant at birth was washed *three* times all over with ox-urine. In the Baptismal Service of the Prayer Book each infant is to be provided with *three* godfathers and godmothers as his or her sureties, who "promise and vow" *three* things in his or her name. The banns of marriage are put up *three* times. The Fathers say: "Ubi tres sunt, ibi est Ecclesia." The Prayer Book enacts that there shall be no Communion Service unless there be *three* communicants, and every parishioner shall communicate *three* times in the year. There are *three* orders, Bishops, Priests, and Deacons.

The Earliest Religion of Mankind.—The invention of numbers, the first great step in science made by primitive man, gave precision to his vague and wandering thoughts, and was followed by the first definite Religion. In the long ages without

numerals mankind took for granted that everything they saw possessed a life or indwelling spirit like their own. And so they tried to propitiate and gain over to their side everything that they thought could help or harm them. The fisherman offered sacrifice to his nets for good success, the sailor to the waves before venturing to sea, the soldier to his sword, and the artisan to his tools. These old grovelling ideas still survive—in India, for instance. When among the higher races the idea of definite numbers arose, it must have started from unity, from man himself the beginning of numbers, and he would look around through all Nature for One so surpassingly grand and powerful as to claim all his worship. As, moreover, all the great early Religions are known to have originated in sunny climes, such as Egypt and India, we may be sure that *Sun-worship must have been the first settled, definite Religion of the world.* That such was the case may be proved by overwhelming evidence. In Egypt, for thousands of years, the reigning Pharaoh was worshipped as Ra, the Sun-god incarnate. Thus the Sun ruled over all Egypt, and his winged disc was the express image of Divine protection. The oldest temples were Sun-temples, like our own Stonehenge, and the temples and churches of every age and clime have been oriented, down to the latest parish church. Our clergy still turn to the East in reciting the Creeds; our holy day is Sun-day, and our religious festivals, as Christ-

mas and Easter, are survivals from Sun-worship. Still earlier than any temples is the custom of perambulating "*deasil*," or *Sunwise*, three times around sacred shrines, hill tops, holy wells, &c., existing all over the old world, from Scotland and Tibet to Ceylon.

But we have said enough to prove the universality of Sun-worship, and now turn to the second numeral. As Hunger and Love are the two passions that rule the world of the living, the sexual dual would inevitably suggest a second numeral. With it would come the idea of a dual god, the two sexes united into one, as the most vivid symbol of the origin of life and of creation, a profound thought which was worked out in many ways. How widespread and popular this form of worship became there are abundant proofs. But we pass on.

With the invention of *three*, and its universal adoption to express the common plural, as well secular as religious, a new era began. It filled the mind with a new and mightier conception. It satisfied in some degree the eternal striving to express in terms of the finite the conditions of the Infinite. We have already seen that its importance and sacred character are apparent in the rites and ceremonies of the Ancient Religions. And this is further emphasised by its continual appearance in their figured representations.

A remarkable instance is that supplied by Dr. Schliemann. He discovered in a tomb at Mycenæ a gold signet ring, on which is engraved a Palladium, like those at Troy—a rude-shaped human body, above it three ears of corn. Thus the Earth or Harvest goddess, Demeter or Ceres, is symbolised, and three ears of corn stand for the harvest. The most sacred rite of Brahmanism is the investment of the “twice-born” with the sacred thread, consisting of *three* strands each composed of *three* threads. Miss Gordon Cumming was so struck with the frequent recurrence of **THREE** in the Buddhist rites, ceremonies, and pictures that she inquired diligently of the priests at every temple for the reason why, but they appeared to be utterly ignorant of it. Plato, we see, was powerfully attracted by this triplicity, and has given us not a few sketches of pantheistic trinities, but he never answers the preliminary question, “*Why three?*” Plutarch, however, supplies a shrewd guess. He tells us that the phallus was represented as triple in the mysteries, because it represented the god who was a First Cause repeated many times by self-generation—and that *many times* and *thrice* were often used as equivalents in Greek.¹



With the invention of *three* the cycle of numbers was doubtless long considered complete. It was the first plural, the perfect number of the Pytha-

¹ See Plutarch “On Isis and Osiris,” c. 36.

goreans, having beginning, middle, and end, and so being the number of the whole (Arist. *De Cælo*, i. 1). What says Manu (*Rig Veda*, vii. 3): "A man is perfect when he consists of *three*—himself, his wife, and his son." It was the *pluralis majestatis*, the fullest expression of power and greatness.

The all-conquering Sun early became regarded as a trinity, for being the transformer of all things in his daily and yearly course, his manifold attributes were conveniently summed up in the universal plural.

But every care was taken that it should be understood that the three were really but one. Dr. Budge tells us ("The Gods of Egypt," i. 115) that when the priests of Heliopolis formulated their theogony they asserted that their god Tum, a form of the Sun-god, produced from himself the two gods, Shu and Tefnut. And Plutarch relates that the supreme god of the ancient Persians, Oromasdes, "thrice multiplied himself." The triple Mithra and the triple golden Horus are Persian and Egyptian examples. Ra was addressed as Kheperu or Horus in the morning, Ra at midday, and Tum in the evening. Agni, the Fire-god of Ancient India, is thus invoked in the Veda:—

"One in thy essence, but to mortals three
Displaying thine eternal triple form,
As fire on earth, as lightning in the air,
As Sun in heaven."

—MONIER WILLIAMS.

The most sacred of human utterances, the mysterious A. U. M. symbolising the threefold

manifestations of the One Supreme Being as Brahma, Vishnu, Siva, was thus sung of by Kalidasa (55 B.C.):—

“In these three persons the One God is shown,
 Each first in place, each last, not one alone.
 Of Brahma, Vishnu, Siva, each may be
 First, second, third, among the Blessed Three.”

—MONIER WILLIAMS.

We see in all these cases that *the Trinity was an attempt to magnify the One who stands out distinctly as the starting-point of the conception.* All these were Sun Trinities, the One being multiplied into a triad, the primitive universal plural, in the attempt to express the myriad attributes of his Almightyness. “There is but One, though the poets call it by many names,” as the Veda says. “The idea of One God, the self-existent, the source of all life, of all reason, is the only idea which can make the universe intelligible, and has justly been held fast by all the great thinkers of the world from Pythagoras down to Hegel, as the one keystone of all sane thinking,” as Professor Blackie justly says. A divided God is unthinkable. Three suns to our system, three captains to a ship, three kings to a state, three commanders-in-chief to an army, are instinctively rejected by the mind as absurd, impracticable. *We may therefore sum up by pronouncing that the first established Religion was the worship of One God.*

On the other hand, it is easy enough to see how

readily a trinity would slip into polytheism. The primitive *three* had originally nothing to do with Religion. It was simply the last term reached by the first numerals, and long served to express all beyond. But when transferred to the service of Religion, it became in time a snare, the high-road to polytheism and idolatry. The One World-god was soon known under many names, forms, and titles, and each "nomen" became "a numen," a separate object of worship; thus Ra, the name of the primitive Sun-god, is followed in the funeral rituals by seventy-five titles of honour and distinction. The Shemites, alone among the early races of mankind, have adhered to the worship of One God, avoiding polytheism and idolatry in every form. The Jews, the most illustrious example, have always taught, as the very foundation of their religion, the famous Shema (Deut. vi. 4): "Hear, O Israel, Jehovah is God, Jehovah is One." Every Jewish child is taught thus much of the Holy Tongue, and its daily recital has been continued for thousands of years. Jehovah was the one name of Israel's God. "Thou, whose name alone is Jehovah" (Isaiah xii. 1). "The unity of God, that truth which other religions were feeling after and tending towards, stands out clearly and distinctly as the characteristic of the religion of Israel, and is fearlessly claimed as an inheritance from the patriarchal age" (Gore, *Lux Mundi*, p. 72). The holy name Jehovah occurs 6823 times in the Hebrew

Scriptures, though it appears in but four places of our Authorised Version! This is "Thy Name" so frequently referred to. It is, of course, the name of a person, as certainly as Moses or David. How, then, can Jehovah consist of three persons? Surely we have here overwhelming proof to the contrary occurring in nearly every page of the Old Testament.

Now Jesus was born a Jew, educated as a Jew, and died a Jew. We feel sure that he recited the Shema twice a day, like every other Jew. He tells the woman of Samaria, "We know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews." At the outset of his ministry he is asked: "What is the great commandment of the Law?" Jesus at once recites the Shema: "Jehovah is thy God, Jehovah is One," as any devout Jew would have done. Nor is there the slightest wavering from this in the entire New Testament. One would have expected, therefore, that Christianity would have been founded on the strictest Monotheism, as indeed it was. "One God and Father." "When ye pray, say, Our Father." "There is one God, and one Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus." "The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" occurs frequently in the Epistles. Whilst nailed on the Cross, Jesus cries: "My God, my God! why hast Thou forsaken me?" And after his resurrection, these are his parting words to his apostles: "I go to my Father and your Father, to my God and your

God." Yet, most strange to say, within three or four centuries an elaborate Trinity had been incorporated into the creeds and doctrines of the Christian Church, and its general adoption secured by the most terrible curses in case of rejection. And so things have remained to the present day! What could have brought about this astonishing change? We must remember that Christianity sprang from Judaism. It was closely associated with the Temple and the Synagogues, and this little Jewish sect lasted but for a short time. Within forty years after the Crucifixion Jerusalem was a heap of ruins, the Jews had been massacred or sold for slaves, and the miserable remnant hunted down, scattered, their very name a byword and a reproach. By the end of the first century the Jewish Christian Church had disappeared, and Christianity had to cast in its lot exclusively with the Gentiles. It had to make its way in an utterly alien soil, where every form of idolatry was established. The Roman Emperor was worshipped as an Incarnate God, to whom temples and altars were dedicated. He was styled "Dominus et Deus," whilst to make the confession, "Christianus sum," was to pronounce one's death sentence. This terrible persecution became in time less severe, and the Christians, longing for a visible object of adoration such as the idolaters around them possessed, gradually drifted into the belief that they possessed all in Jesus Christ. Had he not descended from the glories of heaven to the

pains and miseries of earth, and suffered death on the Cross for their sakes? He should be their Incarnate God, a glorified humanity, ever present to the eye of faith. And this form of the Divine, which had once walked this earth, had shared their joys and wept over their sorrows, carried the day. But how was it to be reconciled with the stern Monotheism of Israel? Only one way presented itself. There were the old Trinities associated with so many Religions uniting three persons in the One God. They would adapt the idea to Christianity, to which it would add a new prestige. The particular Trinity they selected is now well known. Professor Sayce says: "The indebtedness of Christian theological theory to ancient Egyptian dogma is nowhere more striking than in the doctrine of the Trinity. The very terms used of it by Christian theologians meet us again in the inscriptions and papyri of Egypt." It is the old solar trinity which was addressed as Horus or Kheperu in the morning, Ra at midday, and Tum in the evening, all being forms of the Sun-god. They also borrowed other dogmas of the ancient Egyptian religion, as the Incarnation, the Immaculate Conception by a Virgin Mother, and the Resurrection of the body, which duly appeared in the Creeds.

And now we see some meaning in the strange phrases that have puzzled so many generations in the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds, such as "Light of Light, Very God of Very God, Begotten not



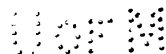
Made, Being of one Substance with the Father." These are all understandable enough if translated into the language of the Solar Trinity, but without this clue to their meaning, they become sheer nonsense or contradictions. Thus in the Athanasian Creed we are told: "In this Trinity none is greater or less than another," but just after we read: "Equal to the Father as touching his Godhead, inferior to the Father as touching his Manhood;" and as we are also told: "God and Man is one Christ," it follows that as part of him is "inferior," he cannot be equal to the Father. And so on. The simplicity and symmetry of the old Sun Trinities were utterly lost in forming these new Christian Creeds on the old Pagan models. The difficulty of finding a third person to complete the triad was overcome by taking God's Holy Spirit as a third and separate person, and the Trinity was thus complete. It was embodied in their Creeds, with the threat, frequently repeated, that if any one refused his assent to these words, "without doubt he shall perish everlastingly." And for 1300 years they have been so recited. Dr. Gore has frankly told us the result: "The Christian or Trinitarian teaching about God rarely appears (now) on the scene. Devout Christians have come to think of the doctrine of the Trinity as a doctrine necessary for holding the Divinity of Christ without sacrificing the unity of God" (*Lux Mundi*, p. 97). But merely as a hypothesis, framed to get over this difficulty,



the doctrine of the Trinity is worthless. It creates a host of difficulties and solves none. In adopting the Egyptian triad as the foundation for a Christian Trinity, they were ignorant of its origin. Why did they wish for *three* persons? They might have saved themselves much trouble if they had been content with a Divine Father and a Divine Son. But the trinities had all the prestige of a vast antiquity and universal adoption, and could not be ignored. The Gentile converts therefore eagerly accepted the Trinity compromise, and the Church baptized it. Now at length we know its origin. It dates from the first attempts at numerals.

To recapitulate: the numerals *one* and *two* were comparatively easy of creation, but *three* was a great advance, and as it came into use, it was seen that it supplied all the Egyptians wanted, a common plural that completed for a time their scanty system of numbers, and laid the foundation for their hieroglyphic system.

Then it followed that as the Sun was the One World-god, and all its glorious titles and manifestations could be comprised in this universal plural, the number *Three*, the Sun became a trinity. Yet from Sun-worship this wonderful Egyptian people created (as Maspero records) "a religion which embodies the highest and most spiritual conceptions of the Godhead, and uses the language of the purest Monotheism." The Jews alone were preserved from the later polytheism of Egypt,



Greece, and Rome. We cannot conclude better than by giving from the Talmud the story of an ancient Jewish martyrdom (A.D. 132):—

“They led Rabbi Akiba out for execution just at the time when ‘Hear, O Israel’ fell to be repeated, and as they tore his flesh with curry-combs, and as he was with long-drawn breath sounding forth the word **אחד** (One), his soul departed from him.”

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Philos sum

