



Drought and the Ten Plagues

PASSOVER this year begins on next Thursday, April 18, which is Nisan 15 by the ancient Hebrew reckoning. This great Jewish feast, celebrating the flight of the Children of Israel from the rule of an hostile and oppressive government many centuries ago, rouses speculation with a decidedly modern slant.

Drought, we know, had sent the Israelites into Egypt, generations earlier, when a more favorably-disposed dynasty held the throne. Did drought have anything to do with their departure from the land? Was there drought in Egypt when the Ten Plagues broke the hard heart of Pharaoh, so that he let Israel go?

Unless one wishes to set all the Egyptian plagues down as direct interventions of supernatural power, and hence not subject to further discussion, there are some hints in the account as given in Exodus, VII-XII, that may serve as a basis for interesting conjecture.

One of the most notable of the ten plagues, the locusts, are normally an added affliction that goes with drought years, as any farmer in our own West can testify. The "darkness" that came after the locusts may possibly have been one of the terrible sun-obscuring desert windstorms that sometimes rage for days, as dust storms this spring did in America. The plague of hail, which preceded the locusts as the darkness followed them, is again something that may occur naturally in a hot summer, even when there is drought.

The other plagues point less directly at drought conditions, yet they may have been indirectly due to water shortage in the Nile. The "blood" that filled the river, and was the first of the plagues,

may possibly have been a swarming growth of one-celled red-hued plants or animals, such as sometimes occurs in hot weather.

The plague of frogs that followed may have been simply these animals fleeing from uninhabitable water, lest they should die therein as the fish had died. The heaps of dead fish and frogs that "stank" could easily account for the subsequent plague of flies. The "lice" swarming from the dust may be a mis-

translation for fleas or other itchy vermin natural to dry sand and soil.

And with the water supply short, and Eastern sanitation of the fifteenth century B. C., the arising of a "murrain of the cattle" and "boils and blains" on the populace generally, followed finally by a deadly epidemic among the children—perhaps of typhoid fever or dysentery—forms an easily imaginable picture.

Small wonder that the Children of Israel wanted to get out of the country!

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PSYCHOLOGY

Russians Putting Psychology To Work for Industry

A THOUSAND psychologists in over 200 laboratories, some of them mobile, are selecting, classifying and training Soviet Russia's man power for better industrial service, Prof. Florian Heiser of Connecticut State College found during a trip-survey of the U. S. S. R.'s psychological research, now being analyzed and studied with an eye to American conditions.

With no industrial psychology before the revolution, the U. S. S. R. now has a Union of Psychotechnicians that includes over a thousand trained psychologists.

Each republic has its central laboratory, and branches have been established in all large industrial groups. The central office of the railways has a special laboratory, and 26 laboratories-on-wheels in railway cars which tour the country to examine and offer guidance to workers and applicants.

Russia's industrial psychologists have not contented themselves with the analysis of job requirements and devising of tests for selecting the best fitted workers. They have been studying the effect on workers' efficiency of working hours, rest periods, lighting, ventilation, nutrition, and recreation.

A new interest in individual men and their interests is indicated by the shift in emphasis of the research of vocational psychologists since the spring of 1934.

Before that, the main idea was to find out how to fit men to the jobs. Now the purpose is to study the individuals and steer them into the professions or jobs for which they are best suited.

A large scale program of testing and counseling in the secondary schools is being undertaken for the purpose, not of making men conform to jobs but of finding the right jobs for the men.

"As a psychologist, one is naturally gratified in seeing such large scale applications in every field of social usefulness," Prof. Heiser commented.

Even though the basis of the Revolution was the improvement of the people through the improvement of their environment, and the Marxian theory stresses the great importance of environment and the unimportance of difference in birth or heredity, still Prof. Heiser found programs of research on heredity flourishing in Russia. The work being conducted by Profs. S. G. Levit and H. J. Muller, the latter formerly of the University of Texas, is well received and heavily subsidized.

Another important study is being made by the internationally known Prof. A. R. Luria on 350 pairs of identical twins. Identical twins are those in which both members have the same heredity, and are, therefore, particularly useful in studying the influence of environment.

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