

One main trouble with the Christian religion in the modern mission field is that it is too fixed and unyielding; instead of recognizing customs and adapting itself to them, it denounces them and attacks them, thereby arousing an unnecessary hostility. We mention this merely in passing; we do not mean to say anything more about it, for the field of religious controversy is so big and so full of pitfalls that we are not going to venture into it.

Howbeit, it is a fact which anyone can see for himself, that most of our Christian observances are adaptations of much earlier pagan ones. We have before this pointed out that even Christmas and Easter were both pagan holidays which were re-shaped to fulfill the demands of the Christian religion.

For example at the coming of Easter everyone will make great use of eggs and rabbits. What for? Have eggs or rabbits anything to do with the rising of Christ from the dead? No. But the egg among the pagans was, and still is, a symbol of life, because it contains the germ of re-creation; and the rabbit is worshiped because of its unusual fecundity, symbolic of the productiveness of nature.

Easter was the pagan celebration of the advent of spring, making the annual re-birth of life after the death of winter. This symbolism found a close parallel in the rising of Christ, and accordingly Easter was transformed into a Christian institution.

With it came the egg and the rabbit and other pagan emblems, all of which had a deep religious significance to ancients but whose meaning has been lost to us moderns. We use eggs and rabbits as Easter tokens simply because everybody else does it, and without knowing what their application to Easter is, or caring to inquire.

Our modern adaptation of Easter therefore has both gained and lost in significance. Even the "40 days" of Lent was an afterthought. In earlier times the Lenten fast was observed for various lengths, and there was no great uniformity.

In the Greek church it is still only 35 days. In the fourth century 36 was agreed on as the proper duration, and it was not till the fifth century that this period was lengthened out to 40 days, to make it correspond with the fast of Jesus in the wilderness.

As a matter of history, the term "40" was not used by the ancients in the sense that we use it. Their ideas of numbers were very vague, and 40 was employed merely as a round or indefinite number, equivalent to "a good many."

The number five was illustrated by the fingers on one hand, 10 by those of both hands, 20 by all the fingers and toes—and that was about the limit; any number above that was likely to be called roughly 40.

We see this number 40 recurring often in all oriental matters, pro-