

THE EPISTLE

Saint James' Episcopal Church
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November 2022

This Month's Cover

Our cover this month is El Greco's *Apostle Saint Andrew*, an oil on canvas completed c. 1610. It is a relatively small painting, measuring about 2'4"x1'9", and is on display in the *Szépművészeti Múzeum* (Museum of Fine Arts) in Budapest, Hungary. It depicts Saint Andrew holding the X-shaped cross on which tradition says he was crucified. Saint Andrew (feast day November 30) was the brother of Saint Peter, and it was he who first told Peter about Jesus (John 1:40ff). He was a patron saint of Byzantium, and is the patron saint of Scotland (the blue X on the British Union Flag represents Saint Andrew, and thus Scotland). El Greco depicts him as an elderly and wise looking man who goes to his martyrdom peacefully. The artist's masterful work on the face, especially the eyes, and his extraordinary balancing of the colors of the robes, have earned acclaim for this painting as being one of his greatest works.

El Greco, a painter, sculptor and architect, is considered the first and greatest of the Spanish School of artists, although he himself was not Spanish, but Cretan. He was born Domenikos Theotokopoulos in Candia, Crete in 1541, and he signed all his paintings with that name in Greek (Δομενίκος Θεοτοκοπουλος), often following it with *Kres* (Κρες), Cretan. Little is known of his early life, although in 1983 an icon painted in the Byzantine style and signed by him was discovered in a small church in Crete. In a 1556 Cretan document he is referred to as a Master Painter. Around then he moved to Venice (Crete was a Venetian possession at that time), and in 1570 he moved to Rome. There he studied under Titian, although his strongest Italian influences were from Michelangelo and Tintoretto. Sometime before 1577 he moved to Toledo, Spain, where he

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remained for the rest of his life. It was there that he came to be known as El Greco (The Greek), although he never signed any of his works as such. He executed a prodigious number of paintings and altarpieces while in Toledo, and also became quite popular as a portraitist, particularly among the ecclesiastical hierarchy. He died in Toledo in 1614.

After his death, El Greco's work was not fully appreciated, his only important disciples being Luis Tristan and his son, Jorge Manuel Theotokopoulos. With the development of French Impressionism in the latter part of the 19th century, an appreciation of his work revived, and the recognition of his true mastery arose in the 20th century.

Richard R. Losch+

A Word from the Editor

In 1897 the British Poet Laureate Rudyard Kipling wrote *Recessional*, each stanza of which ends with the refrain, "Lest we forget, lest we forget." I usually write these reflections several weeks in advance, and I started writing this one on September 11. I was appalled to hear a news report that according to a recent survey, over 50% of American high school and college students have no idea of what 9/11 is all about other than that a few years ago a couple of buildings were bombed. They do not know where, why, by whom, or what resulted from it. Granted that almost all of them were not even born when it happened, but for a relatively recent event that we swore "We will not forget," it seems that we have forgotten all too much and all too soon. Most of you who are reading this will say, "Of course I have not forgotten," and I am sure you have not. In fact, the young have not forgotten either. You can't forget what you never knew in the first place, and they never knew because we have failed to teach them. It is the same with the Holocaust, whose very motto is "Never Forget." I saw a video of a student at a prestigious college who was being interviewed in a survey about the Holocaust. She said, "Wasn't that when the Germans were mean to the Jews a couple hundred years ago?" I do not

blame her for her ignorance. She was ignorant because no one ever taught her. It is easy to pass the buck and say that there is no excuse for these people to be so ignorant, because 9/11 and the Holocaust are being talked about all the time. That may be true, but has anyone ever sat *them* down and talked directly to them about it, or have we simply assumed that they would pick it up just because people talk about it? In 1866 Katherine Hankey wrote a long-beloved hymn with the refrain, "I love to tell the story, / 'Twill be my theme in glory / To tell the old, old story / Of Jesus and His love." Why do we love Jesus? The only reason can be that someone taught us about him. If not, we would never have known about him. When is the last time that you shared the story with someone else, especially a child? Those children who do not know about 9/11 or the Holocaust have never really been told about them. And all those people who know little or nothing about Jesus have never really been told about him. Expecting them to learn about him just because others are talking about him is naïve. Who is ultimately responsible for their ignorance? We are. Evangelism is not about filling the pews or fattening the coffers, it is about sharing the good news of salvation. Those who do not know history, they say, are doomed to relive it. Those who do not know about salvation may be doomed to a far worse fate, and even more so will be those who failed to tell them about it. Tell the story.

Father Rick Losch

Be Wordly Wise

Idiot

This is a favorite word on social media to describe anyone with whom one disagrees. Although it is used as a pejorative these days, through most of its history it has had more of an implication of condescension or of sympathy. Today it denotes a person of notable ignorance, low intelligence, or extraordinary lack of common sense. Until the era of political correctness made the word unacceptable, in psychological terminology an idiot was an adult with the mental age of an average

two-year-old or less.¹ It was also used to denote anyone with a severe mental disability from birth, as opposed to a lunatic, who was someone who developed a such a disability later in life. Needless to say, these words are taboo in science today.

The word idiot has an interesting evolution. It came into English in the 14th century meaning a person so mentally deficient as to be incapable of ordinary reasoning.² It came from the Middle French *idiote*, which meant simply a very ignorant or uneducated person, and did not imply being simple-minded. That in turn came from the Latin *idiota*. That meant a layman (someone who is unfamiliar with a particular craft or skill) or a generally unskilled or untalented person. It had no reference to intellectual ability. In Late Latin it took on a secondary meaning of a generally ignorant or uneducated person. The word came into Latin from the Greek *idiotes* (ιδιωτης). This is a plural form that was used as a singular noun, and had the same meaning as the Latin *idiota*, except it also meant a private person, such as one who is loath to share his personal thoughts and feelings with others. A contemplative hermit would be an *idiotes*, as also would be a social loner or a “wallflower.” That in turn derived from the Greek adjective *idios* (ιδιος), meaning personal, or literally “one’s own.” The next time you are tempted to call someone an idiot, remember that this word has had a great variety of meanings over the ages. If we were to accept the original meaning, an idiot would be someone who minds his own business (which is often the smart thing to do).

Richard R. Losch+

¹ The psychological terms coined in 1910 by Henry H. Goddard were Idiot (IQ of 0-25), Imbecile (26-50), and Moron (51-70). These terms were abandoned as imprecise and politically incorrect in the late 20th century.

² In the Middle Ages, the “village idiot” was considered blessed because he was incapable of understanding sin, and was thus innocent of it. The expression idiot meant someone who was severely retarded. The villagers would care for him in order to receive a blessing themselves. Unfortunately, oftentimes people so designated were of normal or even high intelligence, but were profoundly autistic or had severe cerebral palsy.

By the Rivers of Babylon (Part II)

(Continued from last month)

Many Judahites had Jahvistic names. These are names that incorporate some part of the sacred Name of God, JHVH (יהוה), as a part of the name (e.g., Elijah, Josiah, Johanan). No Babylonian would have had such a name. The Babylonians were assiduous record-keepers, writing in cuneiform on baked clay tablets that have survived intact over the millennia.¹ They recorded not only property, contracts and inventories, but also personal, legal and business activities, as well as personal and official communications. In these records we find many Jahvistic names in business, social, and legal documents, indicating that a large number of Judahites held important and powerful positions in Babylonian business, finance and politics. For example, Babylonian custom required that a witness to a contract be at least equal socially to the people making the contract. We find many contracts between high-level Babylonians being witnessed by people with Jahvistic names. There are also records of some Judahites who are identified as royal courtiers, and some were government officials (Dan. 2:12).

The records reveal that even the common Judahites, while not living in luxury, lived fairly decent lives. There were many settlements whose populations were almost exclusively Judahite, yet there is no indication that these were either enforced ghettos or pockets of poverty. It appears that the Judahites simply preferred to live with one another. This is not surprising when we consider the ethnic neighborhoods that are so common in America today. One of these was a settlement that in Babylonian was called *âl-Yâhuda* (Judahtown). Cuneiform and Hebrew clay tablets from the site indicate that it was a normal working- and middle-class community.

This is not to say that life was sweet and pleasant for the

¹ The records of most ancient civilizations were kept on more fragile media such as papyrus, and have decayed beyond restoration or are lost altogether. Thanks to the arid Egyptian climate, many of their papyrus records have survived for thousands of years.

exiles. Some were oppressed and some persecuted, and most no doubt felt the cultural pressures of being outsiders forced into a foreign country, especially where religion was involved. Religion was a particularly difficult matter, as they were forbidden to worship God, and on a few rare occasions were required to worship the pagan Babylonian gods. Many refused, and were severely punished (Dan. 3:8ff).

The Babylonians strongly encouraged education, so the Judahites established schools to teach both children and adults. When they could, they secretly taught their history and religion, and worshiped God there. This began a deep appreciation of the value of education that is still robust in Jewish culture to this day. These schools were called *batei kneset* (בתי כנסת), houses of assembly. The Greek is *synagogé* (συναγωγή), gathering together, from which we get the word synagogue. They continued this practice after returning to Judah, and even several centuries later in Jesus' time the synagogues still focused strongly on teaching.¹ After the destruction of the Temple in AD 70, synagogues, in addition to teaching, became the primary centers of worship. This led to the development of Judaism into a form similar to what we know it today.

Even those who were born in Babylonia or were too young to remember their homeland still heard tales from their elders, were steeped in the ancient traditions, and longed to return to Judah. Some, on the other hand, had developed good lives in Babylonia, and were quite content to stay there. Many had married Babylonians. When Cyrus the Great gave them the opportunity to return to Judah, it is not surprising that many were enthusiastic about returning, some were reluctantly willing to do so, and some chose to stay right where they were. To this day there is a large population of Jews in Iraq (Babylonia) and Iran (Persia) who are almost unquestionably descendants of the ancient Judahite exiles. Unfortunately, those in Iran are increasingly being made to feel unwelcome there.

¹ The Yiddish word for synagogue is *shul* (שול), school.

When the exiles returned to Judah, they rebuilt Jerusalem and the Temple. This begins what is known as the Second Temple Period, which ended with the destruction of the Temple by the Romans in AD 70. Ezra, with the help of the Persian-appointed Judahite governor Nehemiah, purified and reformed the religion. They instituted the practice of the Jewish faith in much the same form as it was observed by Jesus five centuries later.¹ From that time on, the adherents of that religion can properly be called Jews rather than Israelites or Judahites.²

Richard R. Losch+

The Dawn of Civilization

A student once asked anthropologist Margaret Mead what she thought to be the first sign of civilization. He expected an answer about the first signs of tool-making, art, or religion. Her answer was that it was a broken leg. A prehistoric skeleton from long before the time of tool-making, art or religion bore a leg that had been broken and had healed. In an era when survival depended on finding food and defending oneself from predators, no one with a broken leg could have survived on his own. The fact that he lived long enough for his leg to heal indicates that someone else took care of him during his convalescence. That was the first sign of civilization.

Last month a team of medical archaeologists published an

¹ In AD 70, almost 40 years after Jesus' death, the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and leveled the Temple, taking all the Temple artifacts back to Rome. After that Judaism abandoned animal sacrifice, which had been practiced only in the Temple. The authority of the hereditary Levitical priesthood dissolved, and the synagogues, under the influence of the Rabbis (teachers), became the centers of not only teaching, but also worship.

² Notwithstanding, although technically incorrect, it is common to call the descendants of Jacob Jews after they received the Law at Mount Sinai. Before that event they should be called Israelites. Calling them Hebrews is questionable, as that term's definition is ambiguous. Abraham was a Hebrew (of the tribe of the *Ivrit*), yet the Arabs, descendants of his son Ishmael, would never be referred to as such. In common usage Hebrew refers to the Israelites, the descendants of Abraham's grandson Jacob.

article in *Nature*¹ describing the discovery of a skillfully executed amputation performed 31,000 years ago. The patient was a boy about 10 years old whose left leg was amputated just below the knee. He survived the surgery, because he lived to be about 20 when he was buried.² We can only speculate about the details, but this was clearly a surgical procedure and not simply the chopping off of the leg. He may have been sedated with some kind of herbal concoction. The amputation was done with a sharp stone knife (undoubtedly flint or obsidian), and was probably done outside in the sunlight rather than inside in a dark torch-lit cave. The skill with which the bone was cut shows that the surgeon knew what he was doing, and did not treat the procedure in the same way as he would have treated the butchering of a meat animal.

This amputation took place on the island of Borneo in the Upper Paleolithic Era, right at the time of the last Glacial Maximum. That is 24,000 years earlier than what was previously thought to be the earliest example of successful human surgery. It shows that we must be careful not to underestimate the intelligence, civilization and skills of our prehistoric ancestors.

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The Epistle is Online

The last nine years of *The Epistle* are online. Go to <http://rlosch.com> and click on the “Epistle” tab at the top. On a mobile device, click on the blue menu at the top right and select the “Epistle” page. You can read it online or download it as a .pdf file. This is an easy way to share articles with others.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ *Nature*, founded in Cambridge, England in 1869, is the world's leading multidisciplinary science journal. All articles published in *Nature* are peer-reviewed, and are respected internationally as authoritative.

² In that era, he would have been considered an adult as soon as he was well into puberty, around the age of 12-14. A 40-year-old would have been considered an old man, even though a very few lived to be 60 or more.

The Doorway to Egypt's Past

In July of 1799, Napoleon anticipated a British attack on his holdings in Egypt. His army was setting up defenses in the town of Borg Rasheed when they discovered in the rubble a large stela of grandiorite, a hard gray volcanic rock. On it were engraved about a hundred lines of text written in three scripts, Hieroglyphics (the ancient Egyptian sacred writing), Demotic (the alphabet-like script for writing the Nile Delta language of about the 3rd century BC), and Greek (a common language in Egypt since Alexander's 4th century conquest). Since the French name for the town was Rosetta, the stela came to be known as the Rosetta Stone. It was shipped to Napoleon's Egyptian Museum in Cairo. After the British captured Egypt in 1801, King George III presented it to London's British Museum, where it still resides today. It lay there as nothing more than a curiosity until about 1820, when a French schoolteacher, François Champollion (1790-1832) recognized its potential and spent the next two years trying to decipher it. On September 14, 1822 he shouted the famous "*Je tiens l'affaire!*" ("I've got it!") and passed out from excitement and sheer exhaustion. He had cracked the code, and opened the door to most of what we know today about ancient Egyptian history. Until that time, Hieroglyphics and Demotic were complete mysteries, so about all that was known about ancient Egypt came from legend, the writings of foreigners like Herodotus, the few references in the Hebrew Scriptures, and meanings inferred from the thousands of pictures and statues in Egyptian temples and tombs.

When Alexander the Great died, his empire was divided up among his generals. In 305 BC Ptolemy I Soter, an ancestor of Cleopatra VII Philopater (*the* Cleopatra) became the first Hellenic Pharaoh. The Ptolemaic dynasty considered themselves to be Egyptians, although most of the population did not. Nonetheless, the primary language of the Ptolemys was Greek, with Egyptian (written in Demotic) often being used with Greek in official decrees. Hieroglyphics continued to be used for sacred writings, as they had been for millennia. After the

fall of Rome and thus that of Egypt, the knowledge of Hieroglyphics and Demotic was lost. Champollion's teacher, Antoine Isaac Silvestre de Sacy, had made progress in deciphering some proper names in Demotic, but it was Champollion who cracked the mystery of both Hieroglyphics and Demotic. What gave him the edge over his predecessors was not only the Rosetta Stone, but his wisdom in recognizing its importance.

The stone is large, weighing 1675 pounds. It measures 3'8"x2'6", and is almost a foot thick. It is only a portion of the original stela, but even so the part of the inscription that survives was enough to allow the decoding of the mysterious Hieroglyphic and Demotic scripts. Thereafter the rest of the meaning of these scripts was unfolded in the thousands of temple and tomb inscriptions and papyri found all over Egypt.

In the spring of 196 BC the Pharaoh Ptolemy V celebrated the first anniversary of his coronation. He marked the occasion by commanding the making of the stela along with several copies (none of which have been found), to be placed in temples all over Egypt.¹ It opens with a long list of his titles and epithets, claiming that he was noted around the world for his piety and his love for Egypt. This is followed by a list, allegedly made by the priests, of all the wonderful things he had done for Egypt in the first year of his reign. The third section is a detailed description of how he is to be honored in all the temples throughout the land, and it closes with a command that copies of the stela are to be made and placed in all the temples.

Once Egyptologists could understand the basics of Hieroglyphics and Demotic, they were able to read the countless ancient texts in both languages, thus further enhancing their knowledge of these languages. Fortunately, in the arid Egyptian climate, papyri and paintings have survived that would have crumbled into dust centuries ago in most other parts of the world. The Rosetta Stone has opened them to us.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ This was the standard way of making public proclamations in Egypt in the days before newspapers, radio and TV.

The Samaritans and Mount Gerizim

During the time that the Israelite exiles were in Assyria (after 701BC) and the Judahites in Babylonia (597-538 BC), those that remained behind were for the most part the unskilled and uneducated masses. They continued their religious practices, but without the guidance of priests and teachers they often went far astray. Although many reverted to the paganism of the Gentiles, many tried to remain true to God. Without leadership, however, they often greatly misunderstood what they were doing. Especially in the northern region around the Sea of Galilee, they were unfamiliar with most of the teachings of the prophets, and thus considered only the Torah to be valid sacred teaching, and most of that was transmitted through oral tradition.¹ The Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament) was not written down in the form we know it today until after the Judahites returned from Babylonia. The portion of the Law known as the “Written Torah” is in these books.

When the Judahites returned from Babylonia in 538 BC, they found a spiritual as well as a physical ruin. Ezra, with the support of the governor Nehemiah, reformed and stabilized the religion (which thereafter can properly be called Judaism). They rebuilt the Temple, and again it became the center of the faith and the only place that animal sacrifice could be offered. Those who refused to accept the reformed and purified faith were expelled, including those exiles who had married gentiles who would not conform. Most of these simply left and moved north into Galilee. There they mingled with the descendants of

¹ We must not be too hasty in dismissing the validity of ancient oral tradition. Without easy access to writing materials, the ancients were very adept at remembering what they had heard. Today if we hear a speech, the best most of us can do is to relate to others in our own words an approximation of what was said. It can be like the parlor game “Telephone.” In ancient times many people could hear a long teaching and relate it to others almost word-for-word. Professional teachers would pass on important teachings verbatim from generation to generation. This is why we can trust that much of what we read in the Bible is quite close to what was originally taught, even though it might not have been written down for many years.

the Israelites who were let behind after the Assyrian exile in 701 BC. The capital of the northern kingdom of Israel before the exile had been the city of Samaria, and these people came to be called Samaritans. They despised the Jews of Judah as arrogant oppressors, and the Jews despised the Samaritans as heretics and outcasts who had interbred with gentiles. That enmity lasted for centuries, and was still strong in Jesus' time.

The Samaritans believed that Moses was given the Law not on Mount Sinai, but on Mount Gerizim in Galilee after he had led the Israelites to Canaan. Joshua, who led the capture of Canaan, is honored almost as much as Moses. Their version of the Ten Commandments was slightly different, with the Tenth Commandment being about the sanctity of Mount Gerizim. They rejected the prophets, poetry and histories of Hebrew Bible, accepting only their own version of the Torah. They believed in the resurrection of the dead, but that it will be brought about by the *Taheb* (תהב), the Restorer, who may be the returned Moses. They also revere King Saul, not King David, and therefore they rejected Jerusalem as a holy city. Their holy place was Mount Gerizim. Although it is not mentioned in the Bible, many extra-biblical writings confirm this. The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus wrote of Pontius Pilate's massacre of Samaritans worshiping on Gerizim.¹ When Jesus spoke with the Samaritan woman in Galilee she said, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem" (John 4:19f). For the Jews, the scholars and rabbis (teachers) were the guardians and interpreters of the Torah, and the priests served only as guardians of the Temple and offerors of sacrifice. For the Samaritans, the sacrificing priests also interpreted the Law, and scholars and rabbis took a secondary position. To this day the Samaritans call themselves Children of Israel (*B'nai Yisrael*, בני ישראל), which is the same thing the

¹ This was in response to a rebellion in AD 36. In AD 67 the Romans slaughtered 11,600 Samaritans, again on Gerizim, in response to the general rebellion that culminated in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

Jews call themselves. They do not, of course, call themselves Jews (*Yehudim*, יְהוּדִים), meaning Judahites or People of Judah. Regarding the Law itself, the foundation of both Jewish and Samaritan Law is the Torah, but in each religion there is also a huge body of law based on rabbinic (and for the Samaritans priestly) interpretation of the Torah. These interpretive bodies of law differ significantly between Samaritanism and Judaism.

In about 450 BC, during the period that the Persians had hegemony over Palestine, the Samaritans built a temple on Mount Gerizim. It was their equivalent to the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem, and it became the center of Samaritan worship and animal sacrifice. During the Hellenistic period around 200 BC they expanded it, and it flourished until 110 BC, when the Maccabean king John Hyrcanus destroyed it. The destruction of their temple by a Jewish king seriously exacerbated the already strong hatred of the Samaritans for the Jews. The absence of any mention of the Samaritan temple in the New Testament is not surprising, as it had been gone for 140 years by the time Jesus was teaching in Galilee. Even though it was first built in Ezra's time, there being no mention of it in the Old Testament is also not surprising, as they would have paid no more attention to that than to the Phoenicians building a temple in Sidon.

The Samaritan temple, whose remains have been carefully excavated by archaeologists, was primitive in comparison to Ezra and Nehemiah's reconstructed Temple in Jerusalem, even though that Temple paled in comparison to Solomon's. The Samaritan's temple demonstrated a flaw in their relationship with God. It was rife with inscriptions about gifts to God, identifying the gift and the giver. The gift might be money or a valuable object for the temple, and the inscription seems to have been to remind God, who lived in the temple and would see it often, of the gift.¹ At least fifty of these also contain a

¹ A similar misunderstanding of one's relationship with God was common among many Christians in the Middle Ages, when people thought that they could indebted God to them and buy their way out of Purgatory by buying indulgences. Unscrupulous prelates took advantage of this ignorance.

request for a reciprocal gift of “good remembrance” from God (this probably means some kind of special blessing). Because the ruins were scattered when the temple was destroyed, we do not know the exact location of these inscriptions, but they were probably in the sanctuary where worshipers could see them. Even though most of the worshipers were likely not literate, they would still know what the inscriptions said. Reading silently was almost unknown in those days. When someone read anything he read it aloud, so even those who could not read soon learned what the inscriptions said.¹ This was not uncommon in Middle Eastern pagan temples, where worshipers as part of the ritual would pass the inscriptions, read them aloud, and respond with something like “May you be remembered.” It seems that this may have been a significant part of the Samaritan ritual at the Gerizim temple. This is not surprising, because before the destruction and exile of the northern kingdom of Israel in 701 BC, one of the serious problems there was the infusion of pagan worship not only among the people, but even in their shrines (1 Kg. 12:25ff). Since those left behind after the exile were the ignorant masses, they were the most likely to have been infected with pagan influences. These people were the ancestors of the Samaritans, and this is one of the reasons the Jews despised them so much.

Many Samaritans became followers of Christ. One notable one was Saint Justin Martyr (c. AD 100-165), an early Christian apologist. The Samaritans have survived, with a number of Samaritan communities in the regions around Galilee even today. It is questionable how much longer they will last, however. Even though there is no significant antipathy between Jews and Samaritans today, they are despised by the Arab Muslims, who would be happy to see them disappear altogether.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ This was also true among the Romans. Julius Caesar was noted for being able to take a document he had never seen before and read it silently without even moving his lips. Considering that most documents had no spacing between the words and little or no punctuation, this was an amazing feat.

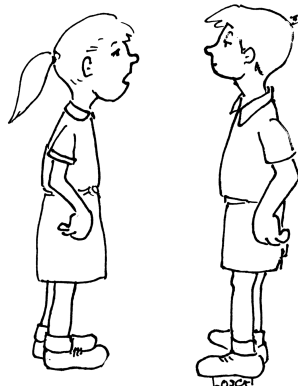
A Touch of Trivia

When the movie *2001: A Space Odyssey* debuted in Washington in April 1968, it looked like a total disaster. On the first night, 241 people walked out of the theater in the middle of the show. The reviews were so bad that the author, Arthur C. Clark, was literally in tears. It was an instant hit with young people, however. They came in droves, and by the end of the year it had become the highest-grossing film of the year. Today it is ranked as the sixth most important movie in history.

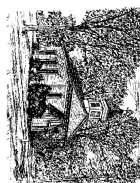
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JAMIE

by Richard R. Losch



"The magic word to get what you want isn't 'Please' anymore. It's 'I'm offended.'"



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