



JUSTICE AND

LUSTY CULT LEADER LEFT LASTING MARK ON HIS OREGON EDEN

By PETER LEVINS

LOTS of water has coursed down to the sea since the prophet Joshua the Second, known in his pre-beard days as Franz Edmund Creffield, thundered, fulminated and bowled over the females of Benton County, Ore., but it is still a question whether the region will ever quite recover from the experience. Nothing remotely like him had struck the community before, and there has been nothing like him since.

He was unique, and it's probably just as well.

When he first appeared in the town of Corvallis, in the year 1902, he wore the habiliments of a modest Salvation



**Joshua
Minus
His
Beard**

Franz Edmund Creffield bowled over the women when he sported a full beard and called himself Joshua the Second, but he didn't look so alluring after prison barber worked over him. This picture was taken after adultery conviction in Portland. He re-grew the beard following his release 15 months later.

Army worker. This might have been merely a neat disguise, employed whilst he looked over the ground. At that time there was nothing particularly startling about his appearance, except possibly his large liquid eyes. He was 35, smooth-shaven, and had a slight German accent.

He also wore clothes. (Note—It should be thoughtfully kept in mind that he never was so startling as when he didn't have on any clothes.)

Apparently he found the prospects promising, for presently he dematerialized, and when he again appeared in Corvallis, early in 1903, he wore his predestined aspect and identity. That is to say, he sported a luxuriant red-brown beard, a head of hair that fell to his shoulders and he called himself Joshua the Second.

(Joshua the First, as we all know, led the Israelites after the death of Moses. Upon him fell the task of leading the people over the Jordan and of commanding their armies in battle against the heathen they were ordained to dispossess.)

Speaking in a booming voice that seemed to carry the authority of Jehovah, he proclaimed that he was the sole prophet of the Church of the Bride of Christ and he commanded the people to follow him or be damned. He soon demonstrated that he possessed an extraordinary appeal; within a month he had converts galore, mostly women.

The first meetings were held openly in the homes of followers, and were comparatively mild affairs. Later, as the male converts gradually dropped away, leaving only the prophet and a somewhat dumb assistant known as Brother Brooks, the services grew more interesting.

TO thwart unspiritual small boys, the shades would be pulled down, then Creffield would begin to chant and sway, to wave his arms, and to call upon the Full Spirit to descend upon the meeting. His flock would chant and sway and moan, all eyes fixed on the heavenly leader.

About to Bestow Stupendous Honor.

Suddenly he would thunder, "Vile clothes, begone!"

He then disrobed, and many of the women did likewise, pulling off their waists, skirts and numerous petticoats, all the time chanting and moaning and crying aloud.

"Roll, ye sinners, roll!" he roared, and they rolled.

The prophet rolled, too, right among 'em.



Maude Hurt Creffield, who married the self-styled prophet after he was tarred and feathered by indignant menfolk.



Esther Mitchell, who believed she would become mother of a second Christ, but was fated for quite another role.

They Both Believed in the Prophet

Soon he let it be known that a stupendous honor was about to be conferred upon Corvallis in general, and one maiden of Corvallis in particular. He said that the Lord had commanded him to select from among his followers she who was to become the Mother of the Second Christ.

Virginal eyes glowed with awe and wonder. Several of the mothers grew uneasy, and when it became apparent that the prophet was staging a sort of elimination contest among the candidates, these mothers left the sect, taking their daughters with them. But many remained, and new females, some extremely young, appeared at every meeting.

That Spring, Creffield decided that they needed more room for their exercises, so the girls and women helped him build a large wigwam of poles covered with boughs on Kiger Island in nearby Willamette River. One of his most willing workers was a beautiful girl named Esther Mitchell. Her age was 17.

Some of the sect brought tents, and small wigwams were also built. Throughout the Spring and Summer, meetings were held almost every afternoon, but with the coming of cooler weather and heavy rains, the wooded island retreat no longer lent itself to rolling in the raw. So headquarters was shifted to the residence of O. P. Hurt in Corvallis.

Creffield nailed a sign over the Hurt front door, "Positively No Admittance, Except on God's Business." This gave the less-sympathetic inhabitants quite a start, for Mr. Hurt was a respected citizen and a member of a pioneer family. Moreover, he had a pretty daughter, Maude, 19.

THE local press was decidedly unsympathetic. A reporter for the Corvallis Times scrutinized the scene, then wrote:

"Certain caprices of religious fanaticism have been manifested at the house that are so unusual as to suggest a condition bordering insanity. Walks about the house have been torn away. Much of the furniture of the house has been reduced to ashes in a bonfire held last night in the yard, on the theory that God wills it.

"The shrubbery and fruit trees and all the flowers have been dugged up and destroyed. Kitchen utensils have been beaten to pieces

and buried. It is reported that house cats and dogs have been cremated."

Creffield and Brother Brooks were taken to the courthouse for a sanity hearing. Creffield, plainly contemptuous of the whole proceedings, warned Deputy Sheriff Henderson not to "talk that way to God's anointed." They were ruled sane, but were warned to leave town. The prophet chuckled confidently.

Now Mr. Hurt, thinking better about the whole thing, decided he wanted no more of the prophet and his flock. He hadn't realized just what Joshua was up to.

On top of that, prints of surreptitiously snapped photos taken during a spiritual orgy on Kiger Island, were circulated in Corvallis. The pictures showed Creffield, quite naked, amid a group of unattired females, several of whom could readily be identified.

The reaction among the menfolk can be imagined. Enraged fathers and husbands dispatched their wives and daughters to the state hospital and the home for wayward girls. Some 15 members of the sect thus passed out of circulation, while others got warnings to mend their ways.

As for Creffield—

On the evening of Jan. 4, 1904, a group of purposeful men called at a local dwelling where the prophet and his stooge had quarters. They escorted the pair to the edge of town, stripped them, covered them with tar and feathers, and warned them never to show their faces in Corvallis again.

Brooks obeyed. Not so Joshua.

Mrs. Hurt and her daughter, Maude, searched for and found the well-anointed prophet hiding miserably in the woods. They spirited him into their home, cleaned him off, and fed and comforted him. A few days later their guest, using his non-Biblical name, married Maude Hurt.

Undoubtedly the bride felt that she would soon become the Second Mother, and exulted in the thought. But Creffield's carnal quest did not end with her.

Leaving Maude home with her parents, he tangled in Portland with a married woman who had been a Kiger Island roller. Her husband caught them together, then swore out a warrant, charging adultery.

But when the cops went to get Creffield, he had disappeared.

THEY searched and they searched but in vain. The prophet's own father-in-law, Mr. Hurt, offered a reward of \$150 for his arrest, and saw to it that Maude obtained a divorce. Three months passed, then one day in June young Roy Hurt, adopted son of O. P., made a most startling discovery.

Crawling under the Hurt house in search of worms and can't carry them in, he suddenly found himself looking into the great blazing eyes of a bearded, filthy and naked creature. The boy ran screaming to his father, who summoned the police.

Hide Under the House While Women Fed Him.

Needless to say, the creature was Creffield, and his beard now hung all the way down to here.

"You're Creffield, ain't you?" a police officer asked.

"I am Joshua," he replied, tottering. He was thin as a rail and so weak he could hardly stand.

It developed that he had occupied this lair for more than two months, subsisting on scraps of food brought him by Mrs. Hurt, Maude, and a few other women admitted to the secret. He had discarded all his clothes before crawling under the house; his only covering had been a ragged and filthy quilt.

Placed on trial in Portland, he readily admitted the adultery charge but insisted that such matters were not at all improper in a prophet.

"Christ broke the Sabbath day and the Jews put him to death," he said. "I've broken your laws and you will undoubtedly do the same to me. Like Christ, however, I will rise again and ye all shall suffer."

The jury needed only 12 minutes to find him guilty. Then Judge Sears asked him if he had anything to say. He said he did. He let loose a Biblical harangue, the gist of which was that he forgave them, for they knew not what they did.

"Two years in state's prison," said the Court.

"God bless you," said the defendant.

He entered the prison at Salem on Sept. 16, 1904, and was released 15 months later. Soon afterward Corvallis again heard from him.

Writing from San Francisco, he told Esther Mitchell that God had

PROPHET JOSHUA

selected her to become the Second Mother. He also wrote O. P. Hurt: "God has resurrected me. I have now got my foot on your neck. I will return to Oregon and gather together all my followers. Place no obstruction in my way, or God will smite you."

"JOSHUA II."

NEXT he got in touch with Maude, his ex-wife, then living in Seattle with her brother, Frank, and the latter's wife. Would Maude re-marry him? She replied that she would provide he would come to Seattle. He rejoined her there at once and they were married by an orthodox minister.

It developed that he had big plans. He knew, he said, of a lovely secluded spot on the Oregon coast that would be most suitable for a colony of the faithful. But he would need a little cash—what about the Hurts disposing of their Seattle property? After all, it would be for the glory of Jehovah.

The Hurts did as he suggested, selling their house and plot in Seattle and buying a strip of wooded waterfront property south of Waldport, Ore. Then Creffield had them go there, while he drummed up a following.

On April 18, 1906, the prophet journeyed into Oregon, but carefully avoided Corvallis. He got off the train at Airline, then drove in a livery-stable rig to Wren, 12 miles west of Corvallis, where he boarded another train for Newport, on the coast north of Waldport. There Maude and the Hurts met him with the news that San Francisco had just been destroyed by an earthquake and fire.

Creffield nodded knowingly. "The other cities will be next," he told them. "We must rescue the faithful before it is too late."

He sent the word through the mails to Corvallis, and the response was most satisfactory. Females from 15 to 50 descended upon the new Garden of Eden via the Corvallis & Eastern Railroad and the ferry across Yaquina Bay. And among them was Esther Mitchell.

Again Corvallis' menfolk hit the roof. Girls in their teens had started for school and disappeared. Husbands came home from work to find the beds unmade, the stoves cold, and their wives nowhere in sight. One woman left this note pinned to a pillow:

"I don't want to leave in the daytime because the children will see me and cry to go with me. I must leave while they are asleep. I have taken \$2.50 of your money. This will not pay all my fare and I will have to walk 90 miles or more to where I want to go."

At the Garden, Joshua ruled that all his followers, numbering about 50, would have to burn their clothing and wear a sort of "holy" wrapper, an ungainly garment resembling a heavy cotton bathrobe. So a large fire was built, and the ecstatic women and girls tossed all their finery into the flames.

Lean-to and wigwam huts were set up. Everyone slept on the ground. The colony's meals, which were very plain, were cooked over open fires. What the faithful lacked in physical comforts they made up in the smug knowledge that they, at least, were to be saved.

Singly and in twos the men of Corvallis entrained for Newport, taking along their shooting irons. However, when they arrived at Waldport, they learned that the prophet—as one might expect of a prophet—had learned they were coming, and had skipped. This information was telephoned to Corvallis.

At this juncture, George Mitchell, 21-year-old brother of Esther, came to a decision.

POCKETING a revolver, he hastened to Albany in the hope of catching up with Creffield waiting there for a train to Portland. But the fugitive had already made the change and was now headed north with his young wife, having bought tickets for Seattle. Mitchell had to remain overnight in Albany; he arrived in Seattle on the morning of May 7.

Meanwhile—

Creffield and Maude had taken lodgings in a rooming house. At 8 A. M. they came out of the house and walked down Second Ave. They were now both dressed in orthodox clothes, but the prophet still wore his beard. At Cherry St., they turned and walked to First Ave., and in front of Quick's drug store Maude stepped on a weighing machine while Creffield stood looking into the window.

It was here George Mitchell caught up with them. He stepped up behind Creffield, held his gun at his target's left ear, and fired. The prophet dropped without a sound.

Maude Hurt Creffield, small and wiry, turned and screamed. She threw herself at Mitchell and tried to get the gun. Then she went to her husband, while the killer stood by. A moment later a police officer had come from a nearby corner; Mitchell handed over the gun without a word.

"What's all this about?" the cop inquired.

"This man," cried the frantic Maude, pointing to the bleeding figure on the sidewalk, "is my husband, Joshua the prophet. He will arise in three days and walk."

George Mitchell did not conceal his elation. At the police station, he asked for a telegraph blank, and then wrote this message to Maude's father: "I got my man, and I am in jail here."

Creffield's body was turned over to the Bonney-Watson undertaking establishment, and on May 9, over the protests of his still-hopeful followers, including Mr. and Mrs. Frank Hurt, he was interred in Lakeview Cemetery. No services were held; the only attendants were Maude and the undertakers.

That was the end of Joshua the Second. But it was not the end of the story.

Faithful Followers Await His Return.

Down at the Garden of Eden, 300 miles to the south, the faithful awaited the return of their leader. Food supplies had been exhausted; the weather had turned cold. Some wished they hadn't consigned their more protective garments to the prophet's purifying flame.

On May 15, George Hodges, a timber cruiser of Salado, Ore., emerged from the woods near Waldport to find five wrapped females, one of them with a baby in her arms, shivering on the beach. They informed Hodges that they were followers of Joshua, the prophet who had just destroyed San Francisco.

"We are expecting him back," said one. "He went north to Queen Charlotte Islands, off the coast of British Columbia, to buy a new Garden of Eden."

"Joshua's dead," Hodges told them. "He was shot and killed in Seattle a week ago."

They laughed. It must have been somebody else who was killed, because nobody could kill Joshua.



(News map by Staff Artist Bourne)

Hodges hastened on to Newport, with the result that soon husbands, fathers and brothers again trekked to the coast to bring their womenfolk home.

IN the ensuing trial of George Mitchell in Seattle, the late prophet came in for a thorough damning from many quarters. It was fairly obvious from the start of the proceedings that nothing drastic would be done to the defendant; indeed, the general feeling was that he had performed a fine deed.

Among those in the courtroom was the defendant's sister, for whose honor he had killed.

William D. Gardner, superintendent of the Oregon Boys' and Girls' Aid Society, testified that a large number of young girls had been sent to his institution from Corvallis by their parents, and that most of them had confessed to "criminal relations" with the prophet in the belief that they were to become the mother of a second Christ.

"Creffield was a degenerate of the worst sort," District Attorney John Manning of Portland wrote Kenneth MacKintosh, prosecutor in the Mitchell trial. "He practiced unspeakable brutalities on ignorant and unsophisticated girls."

A Corvallis citizen testified that Esther Mitchell had been sent to the state home to get her away from Creffield. When released, she had immediately returned to her idol. "She was obsessed," the witness said.

Esther listened to all such testimony without the slightest change of expression in her face. Other spectators eyed her curiously, wondering what might be going on in her mind, but she gave them no clue.

Another witness declared his home had been shattered by Creffield. His daughter, he said, had left Oregon State College in the

Field of Operations

Creffield first appeared in Corvallis, Ore., as Salvation Army worker but came back as bearded cult leader. Map shows towns and cities which figured in story that ended, so far as he was concerned, in Seattle.

the expected speedy acquittal. Friends and well-wishers crowded around Mitchell.

But not his sister, Esther.

Two days later George and his brothers, Fred and Perry, went to the King St. Station in Seattle to board the 4:30 P. M. train for home. The waiting room was crowded with Summer tourists as well as recent spectators at the trial. Also present was Esther, standing alone near a pillar in the big depot.

Fred went to her and asked her if she wasn't going to say good-by to George. She nodded, but without any particular show of enthusiasm. Then she and Fred rejoined the others. She took George's hand and the four of them walked toward the train gate. The train for Portland was about to leave.

Suddenly Esther reached her right hand under the light coat on her arm, brought forth a pearl-handled revolver, placed it against George's left ear, and fired. He dropped to the marble floor without a sound.

THE girl explained to the police that George simply had to die because of the terrible thing he had done in killing the prophet. She and Maude, whose story agreed with hers in every detail, had planned it together, and Maude had bought the gun. Maude had wanted to do the killing, too, but Esther had won out.

Esther said she had loaded the weapon and placed it in the bosom of her shirtwaist, but Maude had objected, saying that perspiration might prevent the gun from firing. Esther had then carefully wrapped it in a handkerchief before putting it in her waist.

Both girls were held, and presently Esther was found not guilty because of insanity, and was committed to the Washington State Asylum at Steilacoom. Maude, held in the county jail for disposition, didn't wait to be tried; one morning she was found quite dead in her bunk. The autopsy showed she had taken strychnine.

Three years later, on April 5, 1909, Esther was paroled from the asylum on condition that she return to Oregon.

One of the first things she did was to visit the office of the Portland Oregonian, a newspaper, where she asked for the whereabouts of her brother's grave. While an employe was looking up the information, she disappeared. Some weeks later she died, aged 20, in the home of friends not far from Waldport.

Col. A. E. Clark of Portland, who defended her in her trial, remembers Esther as "a girl of fine appearance and of high intelligence, except for her one tragic delusion."



Got His Man

George Mitchell, brother of Esther, tracked Creffield to Seattle and accomplished his purpose. But Esther wasn't inclined to be grateful.

last term of her fourth year because Creffield had told her that all learning was the work of the Devil. "She even destroyed the graduation dress she had been working on all Winter," he said.

The girl's mother had also been affected, going so far as to break up all the family dishes except some plain white crockery. The trial ended on July 10 in

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