

THE SEAL OF CHRIST.

BY THE EDITOR.

THE oldest symbol of Christianity is not the cross but the seal of Christ, which is mentioned even as early as in the oldest canonical writings of the New Testament, viz., the epistles of St. Paul. St. Paul speaks of the seal of Christ repeatedly and it appears that a symbolic sealing was a ceremony of definite significance, applied like baptism, perhaps simultaneously with it, to those who were anxious to partake of salvation in Christ. Paul says in his epistle to the Ephesians:

“That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.”

This must be more than a mere figure of speech, for Paul refers to the same symbolism in passages in which he might have spoken of baptism. He says in the same epistle:

“Grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.”

The same idea is pronounced in the second epistle to the Corinthians, where we read:

“Now he which establisheth us with you in Christ, and hath annointed us, is God; who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.”

The term passed gradually out of use, but occurs in the *Agrapha*, some sayings of Christ not quoted in the canonical gospels, and the fact that this antiquated expression is used in the passage may be taken as an evidence of its belonging to an early age. Clement of Rome quotes a saying of Christ which speaks of the seal in the same sense as does Paul:

"The Lord says: 'Keep the flesh holy and the seal undefiled, that ye may receive eternal life.'"¹

The Revelation of St. John mentions the seal of the living God, which as we know from a comparison of the passages in St. Paul's Epistles, is the same mark as the seal of Christ. In the seventh chapter the seer beholds an angel, "having the seal of the living God," and

"He cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees: till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads."

Interpreters are at a loss what to think of the seal of the living God, and if it is not the shape of two intersecting lines, which among the gentiles was the seal of the God of Life, we have no other explanation than the tetragram, that is the four letters, יהוה i. e., Yahveh, the name of God. But it seems very improbable that the author of the passage should in that case not have preferred to speak of the name of God, for seals were symbolical marks or perhaps initials, but not fully written words or names. Further, since the seal of God is sometimes called the seal of Christ, the seal of God cannot have been the name Yahveh which was exclusively used for God the Father and the God of Israel.

The situation in the vision of St. John is conceived after the same manner as the vision of Ezekiel (chap. ix.), which we have discussed in a prior article.² There the prophet beholds the scribe among the angels setting a mark (viz., a tav †),³ i. e., two intersecting lines upon the foreheads of the faithful, which in the general slaughter that follows is intended to serve them as a sign of protection.

We must assume that the seal was not a real impression made with an intaglio or a sealing matrix but consisted in a mere mark of the finger; for Tertullian, when speaking of the similarities of Mithras worship and Christianity, expressly uses the terms "Mithras there sets his mark on the foreheads of his soldiers," and the context implies that the same ceremony was performed in Christian ritualism. That the mark in either case was the sign of two intersecting lines is not certain but may be assumed to be probable, since the word mark, unless specified what kind of a mark is meant, signifies a tav, or as we now would say, a cross.

¹ See *The Open Court* Vol. XI, page 351, in Dr. Peck's article, "The Agrapha."

² See *The Open Court*, for 1899, Vol. XIII., No. 3, p. 157. The passage is not properly translated in our Bible.

³ The Hebrew letter: ט is written † in ancient inscriptions on coins and on monuments.

The ceremony of sealing was not limited to early Christianity but was customary among several religions, such as Mithraism and Abraxas worship. We learn from Egyptian as well as Chaldean and other monuments what an important part the seal played in the economy of public as well as private affairs of remote antiquity in Asia and Africa. The seal was the symbol of the personality of its owner and represented the man as his signature now does. Thus every man of importance or of considerable property possessed his seal which in Assyria was a little cylinder that was rolled over the wax or the clay, and in Egypt an engraved stone set in a ring. In the Song of Songs we read (viii. 6):

“Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm.”

One of the most instructive allusions to the seal of Christ is made in the Acts of Thekla, one of the oldest books of Christian literature¹ and the context of the passage makes it evident that the seal of Christ was administered at baptism.

It is difficult to prove definitely what the seal of Christ was, but there are sufficient indications to render it probable that it is identical with the sign of the cross, for later church-fathers, who may not have known the original significance of the symbol but were at any rate familiar with the traditional ritual, identify both terms and speak of them in one breath as if they were the same. Cyril, for instance, in his catechetical lectures (*Lib. fath.*, p. 161) says: “Be the cross our seal, made with boldness with our fingers on our brow and in everything, over the bread we eat and the cups we drink, etc.”

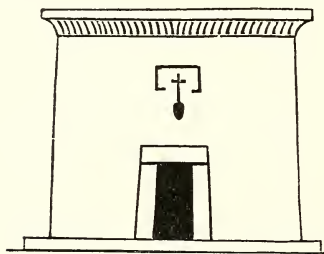
It appears that a certain form of signing oneself prevailed among the early Christians under the name “Seal of Christ,” which was later on interpreted to mean, “signing with the cross of Christ;” and all the practices in church service in which formerly the seal of Christ was used were thereafter called making the cross. The old mode of speech was now and then preserved only and serves us now as a reminiscence of the older interpretation which used this method of marking objects with two intersecting lines in the sense of the pre-Christian tradition, as a method of consecrating something to the service of God. The custom of using the mark of two intersecting lines prevailed among the gentiles, but was not altogether absent among the Hebrews as we learn from the impor-

¹ The significance of the *Acts of Paul and Thekla* has been sufficiently and ably set forth by F. Conybeare in his *Monuments of Early Christianity*, pp. 49-60. London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co. 1894.

tant passage in Ezekiel, (chap. ix, 4), where the tav mark (+), viz., two intersecting lines, is placed on the foreheads of the elect.

This same mark, the equilateral cross (+), was not the Christian cross in any of its forms, neither a pole (⌚), nor a T cross (T), nor a Latin cross (†), for the two intersecting lines of the tav mark are of equal length—a shape which was never used for crucifixion. But it was a sacred symbol, not so much among the Hebrews as among the surrounding Pagans in Assyria, in Phenicia, in Egypt, in Greece, in Rome, and also in other countries which had no connexion whatever with Palestine, such as the North of Europe and the undiscovered countries of America.

The typically Christian cross (commonly called the Latin cross) stands on an elongated foot (†), which, except as the symbol of the Phenician Astarte and the Egyptian heart-cross, is a very rare



THE HOUSE OF GOODNESS.

Showing the ancient Egyptian hieroglyph of a cross standing on a heart.¹

form in Pagan symbolism. The pre-Christian cross is mostly equilateral. The T shaped cross too is quite a distinct symbol. It is prominent in the worship of the rain-god among the American Indians of Mexico, and among the Teutons as a symbol of Thor's hammer.

* * *

Since the publication of his articles on the cross, the author has succeeded in filling out some gaps in the presenta-

tion of this subject, and has procured additional illustrations of great interest which at the time he was unable to procure. He takes the present occasion to insert them as an aftermath rich enough to deserve attention.

In a former article on the cross (Vol. XIII., p. 157) we mentioned among the Egyptian crosses the hieroglyphic symbol of a heart surmounted by a Latin cross (†), which in the ancient Egyptian iconography denoted goodness of heart or saintliness. We can now furnish a picture of the entrance to an institution of charity, which exhibits over the door this symbol covered with an en-

¹The illustration is reproduced after Sir Gardner Wilkinson (*Ancient Egyptians*, I., p.) from the French translation of Mourant Brock's essay on the cross (p. 45). *La Croix l'Égypte et Chrétienne*, Paris, Ernest Leroux, 28 rue Bonaparte. 1881.

closure, denoting a building of any kind. Thus the inscription means "house of goodness."

Mourant Brock in his essay on the cross dwells on the similar



ASTARTE. As it appears on a medal in the British Museum.



ST. MARGARET. After a statue in Westminster.

ity of the statues of Pagan gods and Christian saints and reproduces (on p. 23) from McBardwell's book *Brief Narrative of St.*



CROSS OF CALLERNISH.



ANCIENT CROSS OF THESSALY.



CROSS IN IRELAND.



CROSS IN GREAT BRITAIN.



HEATHEN CAKE.



CHRISTIAN CAKE.¹

*Margaret*² the figures of an Astarte, the patron-goddess of Sidon,

¹ After Dr. Phéné's report in the proceedings of the Victoria Institute, Vol. VIII., p. 338, *Pre-historic Monuments*. Reproduced from Mourant Brock, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

² Three Sidonian coins showing Astarte on the prow of a ship with a Latin cross in her left arm, were published in *The Open Court*, Vol. XIII., p. 158.

and St. Margaret who figures in certain legends as the *fiancée* of Jesus.

A remarkable instance of a Pagan Latin cross is mapped out on the ground in big menhirs near Callernish on the Lewis Island of the Hebrides. Dr. Phéné in a short notice on this megalithic monument says that it measures in length 380 feet, and the central pillar standing in the middle of a small circle is not less than 60 feet high. Its significance is unknown, but Dr. Phéné's statement can scarcely be doubted that Pagan crosses are found both in Great Britain and Ireland.



ETRUSCAN BRONZE.

A goddess dressed in a garment covered with crosses.



LIMESTONE STATUE FROM
MARION ARSINOË.

A harvest goddess whose garment is ornamented with swastikas.

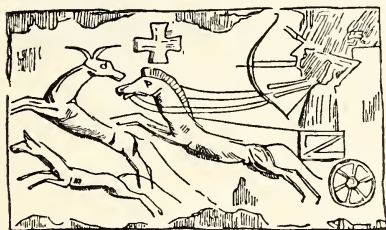
An Etruscan bronze figure, representing a female deity (presumably a universal mother, an Aphrodite or a Juno), standing on a tortoise, shows the goddess dressed in a garment covered all over with crosses. Another statue from Marion-Arsinoë, which represents a kind of Asiatic Demeter or corn deity, for ears of wheat grow round her shoulders, is clothed in a drapery ornamented with swastikas, after the same fashion.

The Museum at Naples contains an interesting medallion rep-

representing Diana with a cross on her head and the sun and moon at her shoulders. Palm branches grow out of the ground at either side of her foot. The ancient character of the image might be suspected if we had not a great number of the most archaic monuments which represent the same trinity of the sun, the moon, and the cross.¹

An ancient Assyrian chalcedony cylinder which was used for a seal depicts a hunting scene and shows a cross in the sky indicating the presence of divine protection in the same way as on other Assyrian monuments the presence of the deity is rendered visible by a winged disc.

The Maltese cross, the emblem of Anu, the great omnipresent god of heaven, was worn by kings (as we know from the monu-



IMPRESSION OF A CHALCEDONY CYLINDER.
(After Menant.)²



SAMSI WOOL.
King of Assyria with a pectoral
cross, the symbol of the
God Anu.³

ments) as an amulet or badge hanging from a ribbon round the neck upon the breast.

A queer kind of cross whose upper branch is round has been discovered in Thessaly. It bears an inscription which makes reference to funerary rites, and there is a probability that it owes its form to the intention of imitating the Egyptian key of life.

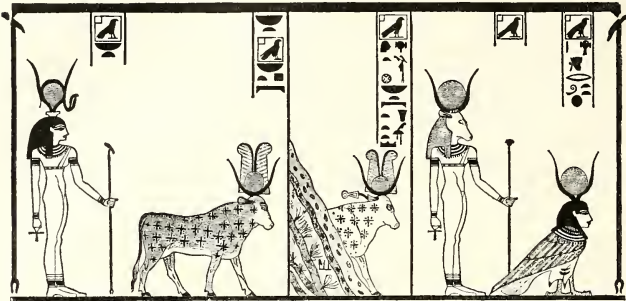
The equilateral pre-Christian cross may owe its origin to notions of a different character. It may represent the synthesis of two opposed principles into a higher unity; a combination of the male and female, or the positive and the negative, or light and

¹ The author wishes to express his indebtedness to the Rev. Michael von Zmigrodzki, Dr. Ph. of Sucha, near Cracovic, Galicia, who in assisting him in his search for a reproduction of the Diana-medal with the cross, called his attention to the French translation of Mourant Brock's essay, *La croix païenne et chrétienne*, Paris, Ernest Leroux, 28 Rue Bonaparte. This interesting work appeared first in a London newspaper, but the author failed in his attempt to obtain a copy of the original through the book trade.

² From the collection of the Duke de Luynes.

³ After Mourant Brock.

darkness, or pleasure and pain, or good and evil; but it seems certain that the idea of mapping out thereby the four quarters of the universe was the most prominent underlying notion and the con-



FORMS OF THE GODDESS HAT HOR.

As a cow covered with crosses and dots (solar discs) in their four corners.¹



ISIS NURSING HER CHILD HOR.¹



HAR-PA-KHRAD. God the child.²

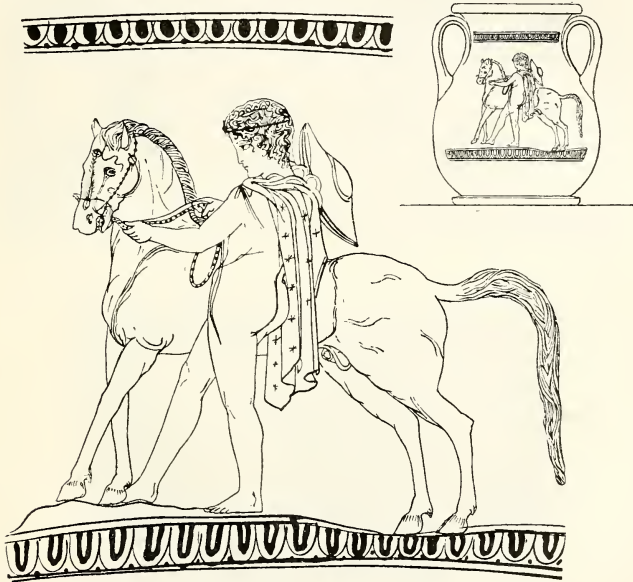
nexion of this symbol of the four quarters with sun worship appears from the fact that the solar disc is frequently inserted in the four

¹ From Lenormant, *L'Hist. de l'Orient*, Vol. V., p. 183.

² From Lenormant, *Hist. Anc. de l'Or.* Vol. V. pp. 183, 184, and 203.

corners, to designate the rising sun, the midday sun, the setting sun, and the invisible sun in the realm of the dead.

The equilateral cross with dots in its four corners appears in the ancient Egyptian monuments as a sacred symbol of Hat Hor, worshipped under the symbol of a cow, as mother of Ra, the sun. Her son proceeds from her flanks as the rising sun under the name Hor, the child, or Har-pa-Khrad, represented either as being suckled by his mother or seated on a lotus flower. Hor, the son,



GREEK AMPHORA, NOW IN BERLIN.¹

becomes in the Osiris myth the resurrected deity who revenges the death of his father and there is made the son of Isis. Isis too is frequently represented as a cow, which indicates that the ideas of both goddesses were invented to serve the same or similar purposes.

There can be little doubt that Isis, the nursing mother goddess, is the prototype for a whole group of similar representations in classic antiquity not less than in Christian art.

¹From Baumeister's *Denkmäler*, III. p. 2001.



DIONYSOS-HERME DRESSED IN A GARMENT ORNAMENTED WITH
CROSSES, LIONS, AND DOLPHINS.¹



ÆNEAS SAVING HIS FATHER.

From an ancient vase. Aphrodite's dress is covered with dotted crosses. Kreusa follows her husband, and her undergarment, too, shows crosses.

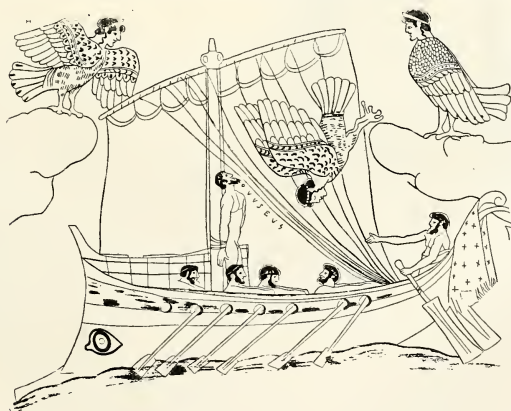
¹ Baumeister's *Denkmäler*, I. p. 432. After Gerhard, *Trinkschalen*, Table IV. 5. The crosses are interpreted as stars, but the fact remains that their shape consists of two intersecting lines—viz., of a cross.

Greek artists represent the cross on the dresses of various deities, such as Aphrodite and Dionysos, and also on the garments



THE BATTLE OF THESEUS WITH THE AMAZONS.¹

One Amazon wears a dress covered with crosses, another one with discs.



PICTURE ON A HYDRIA FROM VULCI, PAINTED IN RED.¹

of men as well as women. Odysseus, when passing the Sirens, has a mantle or some kind of drapery hanging over the stern of his

¹ From Baumeister's *Denkmäler*, III. p. 2000, after Fiorelli; and p. 1643, after Mont. Inst., I. 8.

ship, which here as in other places indicates the efficiency of this symbol for salvation from death or generally for protection in danger.¹

That the cross as an amulet and ornament came to Greece from Asia is indicated in the practice of Greek artists making Asiatic warriors and also the Amazons recognisable by dresses ornamented either with discs or crosses.

The frequent occurrence of crosses as religious symbols of various significance is not limited to the Old World, but is also in vogue among the Indians of the New World where its use unquestionably dates back to pre-

Christian ages. A glance over the Burbank Indian portraits proves that the old custom survives still, and a close acquaintance with the Indian mode of thinking reveals the fact that these crosses have nothing to do with the cross of Christ.



CHIEF BLACK COYOTE.²

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“After several of his children had died, in accordance with Indian custom he underwent a fast of four days as an expiation to the over-ruling spirit. During his fast, in a dream, he heard a voice, resembling the cry of an owl, telling him if he wished to save the lives of his other children, he must cut from his body seventy pieces of flesh and offer them to the sun. This he did and then buried the pieces. The scars are shown on his body. He is a man of much importance in his tribe. After Sitting Bull he came next as a leader in the ghost dance.

¹ In addition to the pictures here reproduced we may quote others. Baumeister contains several in his third volume alone, as on pp. 1797 and 1799 (Peleus struggling with Thetis); on p. 1919 (folding garments), and on p. 1655 (an ancient vase-picture from Melos). See further Lenormant, *Elite des monuments céram.*, Plates 76 and 93, where angels wear a cross on a ribbon round the neck.

² Reproduced with the permission of the publishers of the Burbank Indian Portraits, The Arts & Crafts Pub. Co., 215 Wabash ave., Chicago.



CHIEF STINKING-BEAR,
SIOUX.



RED WOMAN-
SOUTHERN CHEYENNE

CHIEF STINKING BEAR.

RED WOMAN SQUAW.

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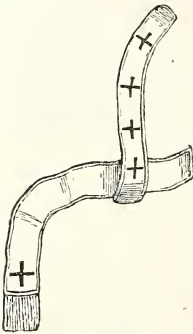
THE RAIN DANCE OF THE COCHITI INDIANS, MEXICO, IN WHICH WOMEN
CARRY A TAU CROSS ON THEIR HEADS.¹

¹ Reproduced from an original photograph as yet unpublished, by Frederick Starr, Professor of Anthropology at the University of Chicago.

The T cross is the symbol of the rain-god among several tribes of the Indians of Central America. We here reproduce a photograph of the rain-dance of the Cochiti, taken by Prof. Frederick Starr of the University of Chicago during his recent visit to the interior of Mexico.

The Christian bishops and officiating priests wear ribbons round their necks called palliums,¹ which were ornamented with crosses, and it is, to say the least, a remarkable coincidence that a young Bacchus wears the same kind of cross-ornamented ribbon on his head.

Roman loaves were marked with crosses, dotted in the corners, but the equilateral cross on the bread was not called a cross, nor did



THE HEAD ORNAMENT OF A
DIONYSOS PICTURE ON AN
ANCIENT VASE.²



DIANA. The original is now
in the Museum at Naples.

it possess the Christian significance of the cross but was the salutary sign, being the mark that served almost all over the world as a symbol of regeneration, of a return to life, of immortality. It was made over the dead, put on clothes and impressed on loaves of bread to prevent evil spirits from taking possession of them.

* * *

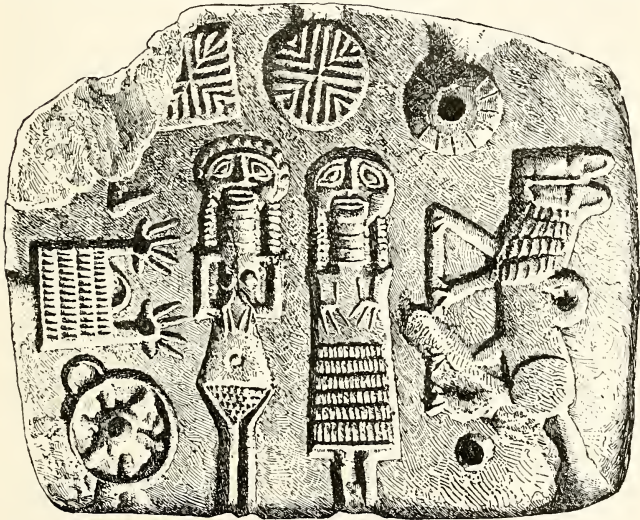
A signing with the cross took place in the Christian worship on almost every occasion; it was made by the officiating priest

¹ The pallium, originally a mantel worn by the Christian philosophers, ascetics, and monks was gradually reduced in size to the shape of a ribbon and became a garment of distinction. It is of pure wool to indicate its pastoral significance.

² Reproduced from Mourant Brock, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

over himself, over the people, over the disc on the chalice of the Eucharist, over each half of the broken bread, and over the gifts given to the church.¹ That the sign of the martyr instrument of Calvary should have played this prominent part in the church service of the earliest Christians is not probable; but we may assume that we are confronted here with an ancient practice which is simply the traditional method of consecration.

We know that the Galileans were more superstitious than their Jewish brethren in Judea; they believed in demons, and looked



MOULD FOR CASTING, MADE OF SERPENTINE.

From Lydia, now in the Louvre.²

upon every disease as a possession of the Devil. Thus it is but natural that the Nazarenes of Galilee, for the sake of keeping away all spirits, should have made frequent use of the salutary sign. It is not impossible that the salutary sign (sometimes called the sym-

¹ See *Liturgies and other Documents of the Ante-Nicene period*, pages 23, 28, 38, 56, 57, 63, 76, 78, 85, 86, 87, 88, and 90.

² From Ohnefalsch Richter, *Cyprus*, Plate C. i. There are eight dies, two deities, one male, one female, one small shrine, one lion with handle attached to the back; and four amulets, one solar wheel in the left lower corner, and on the top one disc with rays, one circle and one square divided according to the four quarters.

bol of the god of life) was even before Christ called the sign of the Messiah, and, considering the important part which Jesus played in their imagination, we may fairly assume that the symbol of salvation was retained in their church use under the name seal of Christ.

The seal of Christ, even though it may have had the same shape as the mark of the cross of later centuries, was not interpreted in the sense of the cross of Calvary. The heroine of the Acts of Thekla is reported to have said to St. Paul: "Give me only the seal of Christ and temptation comes not nigh me." Whereupon the Apostle, apparently extending to her the hope of baptism, answers: "Be patient and thou shalt receive what thou seekest."

Here the different versions vary. The Syriac text states directly: "Receive the waters," but the Latin texts present different readings. One codex uses the phrase the "salutary sign," (i. e., *signum salutis*), while another translates "bath of regeneration" (*lavacrum regenerationis*). It appears that the seal of Christ was impressed on the convert at baptism, probably on his forehead, perhaps on several parts of the body; and the probability is that this *signum salutis* was the same salutary mark which is mentioned in Ezekiel, and was the religious symbol commonly used by many nations in pre-Christian ages.

It is noteworthy, however, that the seal of Christ as mentioned in the Acts of Thekla is obviously not identical with the cross, viz., the instrument of capital punishment. While we cannot doubt that it consisted in making two intersecting lines, we must absolutely exclude the idea that the ancient Christians regarded this sign as a symbol of the cross of Calvary.

When wild beasts were let loose on Thekla and she, not having the intention to preserve her life, expected to die, she purposely did not mark herself with the seal of Christ (that is to say, she made not the sign of two intersecting lines), but "kept her arms straight out in the likeness of one crucified on a tree," so as to be ready to die in a Christ-like fashion.¹

The idea that the seal of Christ, the tav mark of Ezekiel, might be the martyr instrument of Calvary, that is, that the two intersecting lines might be interpreted as the *infelix lignum*, does not in the least occur to the author of the Acts of Thekla, neither when he speaks of the former, that is the seal, nor the latter, the cross.

One explanation only is left, viz., that the seal of Christ was originally the equilateral pre-Christian symbol of the four quarters,

¹ See Conybeare's translations in *Early Monuments*, p. 81.

i. e., the salutary sign, and was not intended at all as a cross in the Christian sense. Nor can it have signified the Greek χ , (i. e., *chi*) the initial letter of the word Christ; for the Jewish Christians being ignorant of the Greek language and script, called it a tav mark; and we can only interpret it as being that mark which was used in pre-Christian times for protection against all kinds of evil influences. That this same sign, by the early Christians called "the seal of Christ," was later on identified with the cross and explained as the Greek letter χ (*chi*), the initial of Christ, the Greek translation of Messiah, was but a natural result of discovering the cross of Christ everywhere. And as soon as this interpretation became firmly established in the church, it is natural that the use of the word "seal of Christ" was discarded for the more definite and typically Christian expression, "making the sign of the cross."