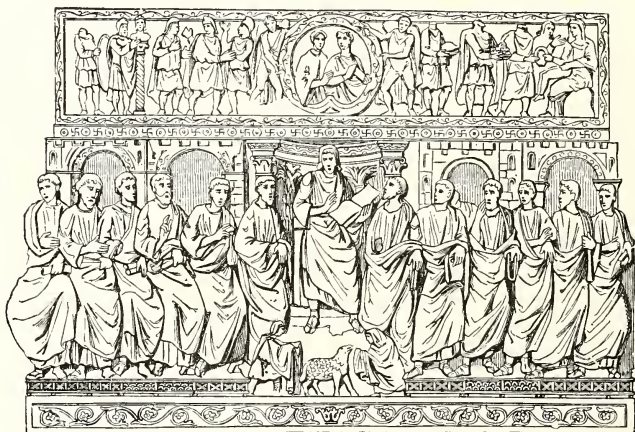


SIGNETS, BADGES, AND MEDALS.

BY THE EDITOR.

CHRISTIANITY did not take possession of the hearts of the people at once and exclusively. It was but one new religion among several others that had been imported from the Orient,



THE SARCOPHAGUS IN ST. AMBROGIO, MILANO.¹

Christ with the twelve Apostles. While the cross is absent, swastikas and solar discs are employed as ornaments.

commanding the general interest and rousing the hopes of seekers after truth. Therefore we must not be surprised to find many Christian sarcophagi and graves in the catacombs decked with symbols that would have been spurned in later centuries as Pagan.

¹ From Lübke's *Kunstgesch.*, p. 266.

Many of the beautiful intaglios and signets that have been found all over the Roman Empire, belong to the second and third century of our era, and it seems that they served partly as amulets, partly as signs of identification, or tickets of admission to the celebration of mysteries. A greater number of them show symbols of the cult of Abraxas, others of Mithras; many of them are Gnostic and some are Christian.

The Christians were upon the whole opposed to pictorial representations of any kind, but considering the wide-spread custom, the churchfathers yielded to the demand, allowing, however, only a limited number of symbols which appealed to Christian sentiments.

Clement of Alexandria, speaking of worldly ornaments, says

that "there are circumstances in which the strictness [of Christian discipline] may be relaxed." He says :

"If it is necessary for us, while engaged in public business, or discharging other avocations in the country, and often away from our wives, to seal anything for the sake of safety, He (the Logos) allows us a signet for this purpose only. Other finger-rings are to be cast off, since, according to the Scripture, "instruction is a golden ornament for a wise man."²

"And let our seals be either a dove, or a fish, or a ship scudding before the wind, or a musical lyre, which Polycrates used, or a ship's anchor, which Seleucus got engraved as a device; and if there be one fishing, he will remember the apostle, and the children drawn out of the water. For we are not to delineate the faces of idols, we who are prohibited to cleave to them; nor a sword, nor a bow, following as we do, peace; nor drinking-cups, being temperate."

Other symbols frequently used in the catacombs by Christians



CHRISTIAN SYMBOLS IN THE CALLIXTINE CATACOMBS.¹

(The Christogram, the Swastika, and the ΑΩ, the latter in two forms.)



THE GRAVE DIGGER DIOGENES. NO CROSS BUT SWASTIKAS.

Picture on his tomb in the catacombs of S. Domitilla. (After Boldetti, reproduced from F. X. Kraus, *Gesch. d. ch. K.*, I., p. 170.)

¹Smith and Cheetham, *Dict. of Chr. Ant.*, I., p. 497.

²Eccles. xxi. 24.

are palm-branches, the phœnix, the peacock, the crown and the lamp. In addition scenes of martyrdom are depicted. The Christian character of many gems is assured through the monogram of the Initials of Christ (✠), a combination of *Ch* (X) and *R* (P). The name of the owner is frequently added to the symbol.

It is sometimes difficult to determine whether an intaglio is Christian or Pagan, for we must bear in mind that at the beginning



MARTYRDOM
GEM.¹



CHRISTIAN GEM.
With name of
owner. (King).



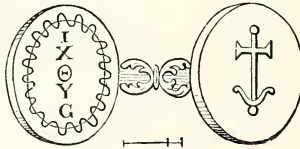
HAND WITH
PALM.
British Museum.

of the Christian era several religious movements took place within the limits of the Roman Empire. The old faith suffered decay everywhere and the new ideas produced a state of mental fermentation which finally led to the destruction of the classical civilisation.

The most powerful movements of the age are the Syrian Gnosticism, the Egyptian Abraxas worship and the Persian Mithras



THE PHOENIX AS A
SYMBOL OF IM-
MORTALITY.²



CHRISTIAN GEM.
IXΘΥC and anchor (Smith and
Cheetham, p. 714).



ANCHOR AND
DOLPHIN.
British Museum.³

religion. All of them resemble Christianity in almost all essential features, especially in the spirituality of God, the need of salvation from sin and corporeal existence, and the hope of an immortality of

¹ This gem (a Christian New Year's present) represents the death of a martyr. The letters ANFT mean *annum novum felicem tibi*. Smith and Cheetham.

² From Münster.

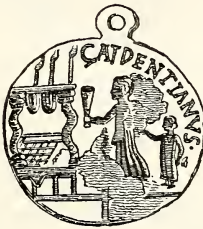
³ The inscription *επιτυχανον* means "succeed!"

the soul in one form or other. It is difficult to distinguish them, for the character of the age is syncretism, a mixture of thought producing everywhere entanglements and identifications of old and



CHRISTIAN GEM.

With name of
owner.

THE GOOD SHEPHERD.¹SHIP GEM.²

CHRISTIAN WORSHIP AND MARTYRDOM.

(A medal reproduced from Kraus, *Gesch. d. Ch. K.*)

SYNCRETISM ON A GEM.³CHRIST STRUGGLING
WITH THE EVIL ONE.⁴

IAΩ GEM (KING).

new deities, of Greek and Eastern conceptions until it becomes impossible to classify them properly.

Perhaps the greatest number of intaglios are Abraxas gems, so called after the inscription which is repeated upon many of them.

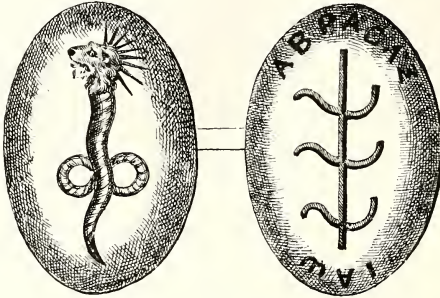
¹ Kraus, *Gesch. d. ch. K.*, p. 94.

² Smith and Cheetham, I., p. 715.

³ In the possession of the Rev. Churchill Babington.

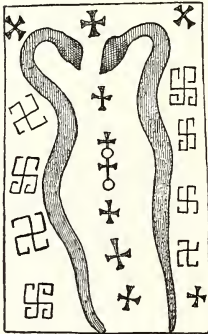
⁴ Didron, *ic.*, II., p. 201.

Abraxas is an Egyptian word derived from *abrak* which happens to be mentioned in the Old Testament and means "bow the knee" or "worship."¹ Abraxas is the Adorable One and is the common cognomen of God.



ABRAXAS GEM WITH THE AGATHODÆMON.²

The proper name of God on the Abraxas gems is Iao, which is always written IAO in exactly the same form of letters as the Christian AΩ, the A and the O of the Revelation of St. John the Divine, which is so frequently represented in the catacombs.



SLAB WITH SERAPHIM.

The Abraxas gems bear symbolic representations of Iao Abraxas, in the shape of a cock-headed man with serpent feet, in one hand a shield in the other a whip. We must remember that the cock was the sacred animal of Æsculapius, the God of healing, and Socrates requested his friends to sacrifice a cock to Æsculapius after his death because his soul was now freed from the disease of materiality due to its contamination by the body.

The serpent is regarded as a sacred animal in the Orient. The seraphim³ of the Hebrew are the guardian spirits that stand in the presence of Yahveh. The Syrian Gnostics speak of the serpent as the symbol of wisdom, and in Egypt winged serpents are frequently mentioned in religious texts. The concurrence of so many similar traditions led to the idea rep-

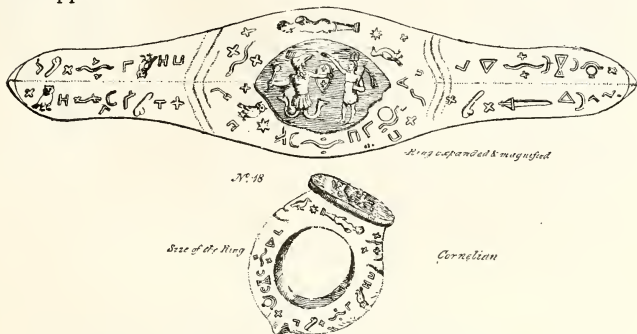
¹ Gen. xli. 43.

² Walsh, *op. cit.*, No. 2.

³ Seraphim is the plural of Seraph which means "snake."

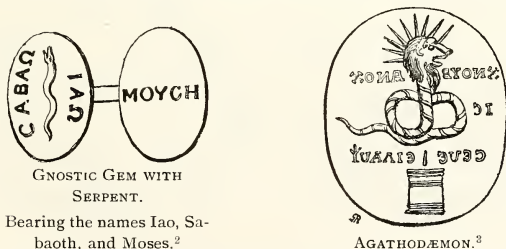
representing the Agathodæmon, the deity of goodness, in the shape of a serpent with a lion's head.

The Agathodæmon played an important part in the Abraxas mysteries and is frequently represented above the sacred cysta from which the priest at the celebration of festivals made his sudden appearance.



A SEALING-RING OF IAO WORSHIP WITH GNOSTIC SYMBOLS OF DOUBTFUL SIGNIFICANCE.¹

The symbol of the Agathodæmon is a treble cross whose transom beams are gently curved. Treble crosses are quite frequent in Christian art, but there is no means of finding out whether there is



Bearing the names Iao, Sabaoth, and Moses.²

AGATHODÆMON.³

any connexion between the Christian treble cross and the emblem of the Egyptian Agathodæmon.

¹R. Walsh, *Anc. Medals, Coins, and Gems*, p. 69. "This remarkable ring was brought from Egypt by a soldier and is now in the possession of Dr. Adam Clarke. It shows in the stone which is a cornelian, the god Abraxas, and another figure which I take to be his priest in the attitude of worship, extending in his right hand either a sacrificial cake or some other object for the sake of consecration. In his left hand he wears a flagellum, on his head a crown. The symbols that cover the ring itself are emblems of reproduction (priapi and phalli), serpents between equilateral crosses, owls, solar disks, stars, triangles, and signs of doubtful significance."

²Walsh, No. 4.

³From C. W. King.

Almost as frequent as the Abraxas gems are the intaglios, signets, and badges used by the worshippers of Mithras. There is an



The sun-god holding in his hand the globe on which the four quarters are indicated.¹



Mithras slaying the bull. On the reverse Cupid and Psyche (broken).²

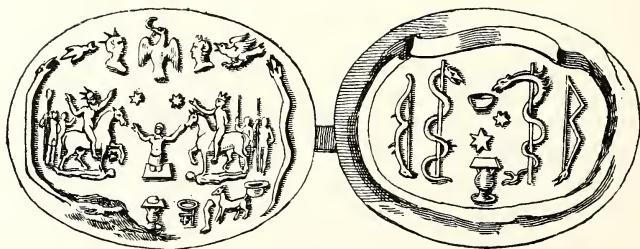


Mithras leading off the bull. Reverse of the gem with the sun-god

MITHRAISTIC GEMS. (Green jasper.)



(After Chiflet, reproduced from C. W. King.)



(Reproduced from Walsh.)

MITHRAISTIC CAMEOS.

Showing Mithras born from the rocks between the Dioscuri, surrounded by Mithraistic symbols, among them the cup and bread of the Eucharist.

unlimited variety of them extant, and yet they all bear a certain resemblance which renders it easy to recognise them.

¹ The inscription reads ABAANIΘIINAABA, and underneath TVΞEVI.

² The exergue reads: CNEIXAPOIHAΞ, and the bevelled margin NBAΦENEMOY NOCIA-APIKPIΦAAEYE, underneath IOE. (After Cumont.)

An interesting intaglio of the Mithras worship shows Mithras standing in the center between the two Dioscuri, both holding a kind of trident (perhaps a symbol of life and light) one having the prongs up, the other down. Above Mithras, the raven, the moon, Helios as the sun-god, and perhaps Hermes. Two serpents serve as supporters in a coat of arms on either side. Underneath Mithraic symbols, among which the table with the sacred bread and the cup of the Eucharist are prominently visible.

A fine intaglio of probably Gnostic significance exhibits the trinity of strength, love and wisdom symbolised in a lion, a dove with the olive-branch on a sheaf, and a serpent. The dove with the olive-branch is the emblem of Astarte, and the sheaf of wheat indicates the fulness of life and reproduction.

Mr. Clark has discovered in Larneca, Cyprus, a number of gems representing doves with olive-branches. They are accom-



A SHIP SYMBOLISING
THE CHURCH.



A CHRISTIAN GEM WITH
SERPENT.



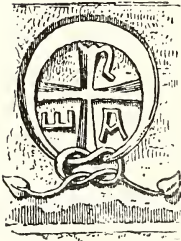
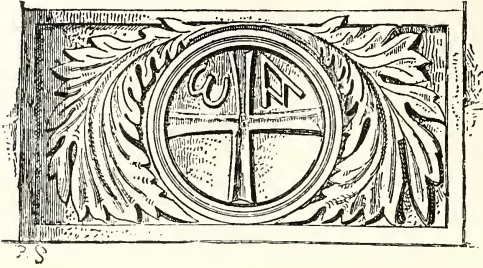
A GNOSTIC GEM.

panied by illegible Phœnician characters (*Travels*, II, p. 326). The same device appears on coins of the city of Eryx, Sicily. Bishop Münster¹ is opposed to treating them as Christian; the birds may be ravens or some other species. Not even the olive-branch is a sure sign of their Christian origin. "It is certain," says the Bishop, "that many gems with doves, which exist in great numbers and are all believed to be Christian, were designed to serve as signets for worshippers of the Queen of Heaven."

The serpent, that important emblem of Syrian Gnostics, the Serapis cult and Mithras worship, occurs in Christian symbols only as the representative of evil, and yet there are Christian gems where the snake is represented in attitudes which exclude the theory of its being a messenger of Satan. A Christian gem, showing the *Christa* T cross between the A and ω , represents the snake between

¹ Münster, *Sinnbilder*, p. 109.

two doves. Observe that the snake is not crushed by the cross, as we find it in later Christian devices, but is in a peaceful communion with the doves. We must add that possibly the snake here takes



THE Ω AND α IN THE CHRISTOGRAM ON SYRIAN HOUSE-FRONTS.

the place of the fish, as the stone-cutter for artistic reasons may have preferred a twining serpent to the unaccommodating fish.



MEDAL STRUCK IN HONOR OF SERAPIS AND ANUBIS.¹

Martyr scenes are frequently represented on medals, but the probability is that all productions of this class belong to a later period.

¹ Walsh, No. 28.

Christians loved to represent Christ as a fish on the rood, but even here Pagan influences made themselves felt. The fish is one of the most ancient religious symbols, dating back to the age of the old Akkadians and Assyrians; but Christians adopted it on account of the word ΙΧΘΥΣ, meaning fish in Greek, the letters of which form the acrostic Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς Θεοῦ Υἱὸς Σωτήρ, i. e., Jesus Christ God's Son, the Saviour. But the Christian stone-cutters bearing in mind the Greek myth of the dolphin who saved Arion frequently replaced the fish by a dolphin. Indeed there are instances in which the serpent takes the place of the fish.

The idea of seeing in the fish a symbol of Christ is an after-thought which came to Christians when they found the fish symbolising the idea of God the Saviour in the mythologies of their gentile neighbors.

The ancient Babylonians believed in a Triad of Gods, Anu, Bel and Ea. Anu is God the Highest and Greatest, but Bel and Ea are treated as his equals. Anu's symbol is the equilateral cross bearing a remarkable resemblance to its Maltese form. While Anu is the Creator in general, Bel is the deity through whose exertion the world is shaped. He struggles with Tiamat, gives shape to heaven and earth, creates man from his own head and is the saviour from evil. Ea is the Babylonian Okeanos. He is the Lord of the waters and of profundity. He is wise and just. He makes the law and saves the Babylonian Noah from the deluge by teaching him how to build a vessel. He is praised in a hymn as riding, like the Egyptian Ra, in the sunboat over the aerial ocean of heaven. He is the protector of art and science, the giver of oracles, the adviser in emergency, the savior who in the beginning of civilisation came out from the deep, clothed in the skin of a fish, to teach people law and order.²

There can scarcely be any doubt that Ea is the Philistine Dagon whose worship is repeatedly mentioned in the Old Testament.³



THE GOD EA CLOTHED IN THE SKIN OF A FISH.¹

¹ Assyrian bas-relief in the British Museum.

² Tiele, *Bab. Ass. Gesch.*, pp. 516-523.

³ 1 Sam. v, 2 ff. 1 Chron. x, 10. Judges xvi, 23. 1 Marc. x, 83 ff. xi, 4.

To the Egyptians the fish was also a sacred symbol, being a symbol of Hat Hor, the holy mother of Har-pa-Khrad, God the child, the rejuvenated son, the revenger and saviour.

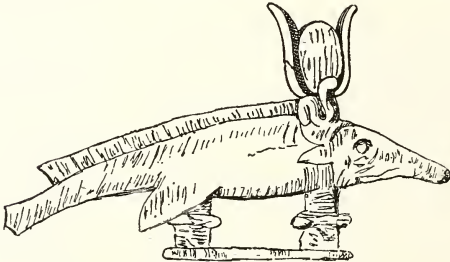
The dolphin was sacred to Dionysos, and as Christ was in many respects identified with this deity, the suffering, dying and resurrected God of the vine, it is but natural that Christian fishes should be frequently pictured as dolphins.

Tertullian adopts the fish as the chief symbol of Christ and speaks of Christians as little fishes. Thinking of the regeneration through baptism, he says :

"But we fishlets are born, after our fish Jesus Christ, in the water."

And Clement of Alexandria sings in his famous hymn :

"Fisherman of mortals of the ransomed heirs,
Who from the hostile floods with sweet life the pure fishes catchest."



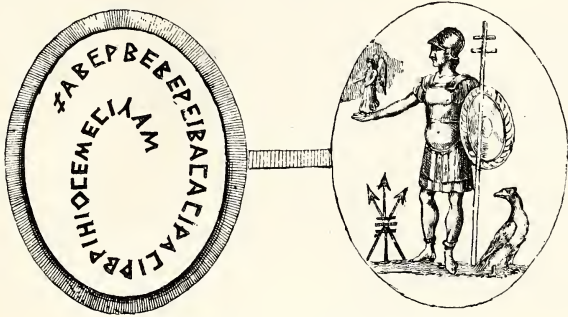
THE OXYRHYNCOUS FISH, THE SACRED ANIMAL OF HAT-HOR.
From a Bronze in the Louvre.

There are many other allusions in Christian literature to the fish¹ and its form is represented everywhere in the catacombs and on Christian gems.

Tot (or Thoth) the god of the scribes in Egypt was regarded as the medium of divine revelation and so he stood for science as well as salvation and held quite a similar place to the Christian logos. As the messenger of God he was identified by the Greeks with Hermes, who now was regarded as the manifestation of his father Zeus and as the saviour from death. The old Greek idea of Hermes as the leader of souls through the gates of death added strength to

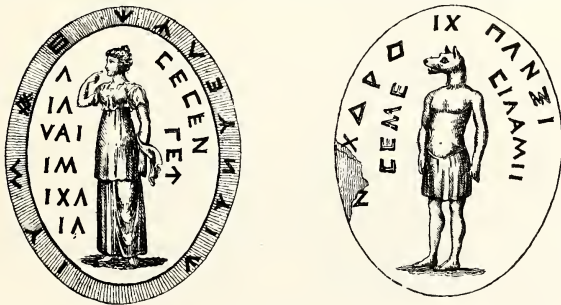
¹ An acrostic on ΙΧΘΥΣ in which every successive line begins with the words Jesus Christ, God's son, the Saviour, and ends in "σταυρός cross," is preserved by Galæus in the Sybilline songs. Another Greek poem of a similar kind which was written on a tomb-stone and was discovered in 1839 is quoted by the Rev. Samuel Cheetham in his *Dictionary of Christian Antiquities*, Vol. I, p. 806.

the new conception, and the Hermes staff, originally a combination of the solar disc and the lunar crescent γ , but misinterpreted in Greek art as two coiled serpents, became a symbol of the God who has the power of resurrecting the dead.



A HERMES-ZEUS WITH A DOUBLE CROSS.¹

Thoth-Hermes is called the thrice greatest and the shepherd of men, which latter word (*ποιμὴν ἀνδρῶν*) has been abbreviated into



ANUBIS GEM.²

Poimander or Pymander and the religion of his followers is described in a remarkable little book which may contain portions of great antiquity.³

¹From Walsh, No. 12. The inscription reads: ΖΑΒΕΡΒΕΒΕΡΕΙΒΑCΑCΙPACIPBΠHΙΘCΕMΕCΙAAM.

²From Walsh, No. 9. Anubis is the jackal or dog-headed deity. He, like Thoth, is identified with Hermes. The female figure on the reverse indicates silence. The inscriptions are a mixture of Greek and other languages.

³Extracts from Hermes Trismegistos will be published in a separate article on the subject.

Serapis, which is a Hellenised form of Osiris-Apis, was a religion which in many respects resembled Christianity. Their sacred symbol was the cross, as we know through Christian authors,¹ and Emperor Adrian (no mean authority in such matters) speaks of Serapis worshippers as Christians, saying that those who consecrated themselves to Serapis called themselves "bishops of Christ." Even if a local blending of Christianity with the Serapis cult in Egypt had not taken place, we must recognise that the monkish institutions of the Serapean temples were an exact prototype of the Christian monasteries which originated in Egypt and flourished there better than anywhere else.

The Serapis cult was a reformation of the old Egyptian Osiris worship, introduced by Ptolemy Soter for the purpose of adapting the old traditions of Egypt to the Hellenic culture of Alexandria.



THE HERMES STAFF
ON A GEM.
(From King.)



HERMES RESUR-
RECTING THE
DEAD (KING).

The double cross (☩) is a symbol of unknown significance, but it occurs in Greek Paganism as well as in Christianity. Christians as a rule interpret the second transverse beam to represent the board bearing the inscription. The third transverse line in a treble cross (☩) is supposed to represent either the seating plug (*sedile*) or the foot-rest (*suppedaneum*).

The most curious specimens of ancient intaglios are those of a mixed nature, exhibiting partly the erratic disposition of their owners and partly their aspiration for universality. We reproduce (p. 287) a curious specimen of this kind—a combination of several symbolical animals. Three heads are attached to the feet of a cock, and the inscription IXΘYC (perhaps added by a later hand) proves the owner's attachment to Christianity. The human head, apparently the homely face of the stump-nosed and bald-headed Socrates, seems to stand for Greek philosophy. The ram indicates

¹ See Socrates, *Ecl. Hist.*, 5, 17, which report is repeated by Sozomenes.

the Egyptian Amon, the horse reminds us of the team of the sun-god, and is probably the emblem of either Helios or Mithras. The fish in the left corner is Christian; but the leaping hare to the right side is the symbol of the transiency of the world.¹



COIN OF CONSTANTINE WITH LABARUM.



COIN OF GALLA PLACIDIA.



COIN OF LUCINIA EUDOXIA.



COIN OF JUSTINIAN II.

ANTIQUÉ COINS WITH CHRISTIAN EMBLEMS.

The owner of the gem, the Rev. Churchill Babington (author of the article on gems in Smith and Cheetham's *Dict. of Ch. Ant.*), says:

"A remarkable sard intaglio, in the possession of the writer, may be mentioned as a kind of postscript. The device is a fantastic compound animal, a *gryllus* of the common type, being probably Roman work of the second or third

COIN OF EMPEROR CONSTANTINUS.²

century. Some Christian possessor has written the word IXΘΥC about it, in order, it would seem, to christianise such a heathen production."

As the worship of the Queen of Heaven, which had been denounced as Pagan in the Old Testament, became re-established in

¹The hare in Buddhist parables stands for the superficial hearer of the word. For the Christian significance of the hare, see Tertullian, *Ad nat.* II, and compare Fr. X. Kraus, *Gesch. der Ch. K.*, I, p. 145.

²This coin is interesting, because the globe, indicating the monarchical pretension to a right to rule over the whole world, is not as yet surmounted by a cross. Walsh, No. 22.

the Church, even to the preservation of the external features of the goddess standing upon the crescent and crowned with a garland of twelve stars,¹ so other ideas and conceptions of pristine religions reappear in the symbolism of gentile Christianity, giving them in an idealised form and after their assimilation to a rigid monotheism, a new lease of life in the territories of the Roman Empire.

So strong was the hatred of idolatry and the fear of imitating Pagan worship among the early Christians that the idea of having,



COIN OF FLAVIUS VALERIUS CONSTANTINUS.²

let alone reverencing, the image of Christ was scouted by the church-fathers, and the first demands for pictures of Christ were felt not in Christian but in Gnostic quarters among men of universalistic tendencies whose philosophical breadth induced them to revere Plato and Socrates, Moses and Christ, and to have their images rendered visible in the same style as the Pagans did with



COIN OF JULIAN THE APOSTATE.³

their gods, by the chisel of the artist. This practice, so severely condemned by the Christians themselves, was gradually accepted by the Church and finally enforced after a bitter strife with the iconoclasts.

¹ So the woman who becomes the mother of the Christ (verse 10) is described in Rev. xii, 1, where we read: "And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars."

² The Emperor stands on the prow of a ship with a phoenix perched on a globe in his right and a standard exhibiting the labarum in his left hand. Walsh, No. 21.

³ Walsh, No. 27.

The oldest representations of Christ are purely symbolical, picturing him as a lamb, then as Orpheus, the Greek God, who descended into Tartarus and was worshipped in Greece on account of the comforting Orphic mysteries in which obviously the immortality of the soul was taught under the form of one or another allegory. The prophet Jonah is another personality behind whom we must seek an allusion to Christ, because, as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the fish, so Christ remained three days in the jaws of death and was resurrected on the third day.

One of the oldest images of Christ, perhaps the oldest in existence,¹ presumably a product of Gnostic art, is a portrait on ivory which shows above Christ's head the chrisma (✠) in a shape which exhibits its close resemblance to the Egyptian crux ansata (⋈).



GNOSTIC PORTRAIT ON IVORY.

The picture of Christ on medals makes its appearance not before the tenth century of the Christian era; and then very soon the Virgin Mary shared the strange honor. The first man who introduced this innovation was Johannes Zemisches, a zealous adherent of image worship who slew the Emperor Nikephoras Phokas, the



COIN OF EMPEROR CONSTANTINUS MONOMACHUS.

After F. X. Kraus.

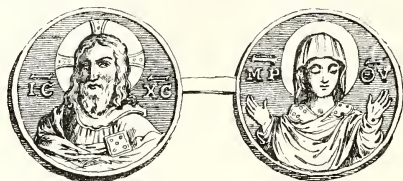
last iconoclast of the Greek church, with his own hand in his palace and was himself saluted emperor by his victorious party in 969. (ICXC.)

The following coin shows Jesus Christ on one side of the medal and Mary (MP ΘY), the mother of God on the other side. It is one

¹ So according to De Rossi's authority, see Smith and Cheetham's *Dictionary of Christian Antiquities*, I, p. 876.

of the most beautiful specimens of its kind, for the general degeneration of the Greek Empire led to the decay of all the arts.

We conclude this sketch with a reproduction of a medal that shows the head of Christ with a Hebrew inscription and dates back to the year one (or in Hebrew א). It is of bronze; one copy was found by an Irish peasant in a potato-field near the site of an ancient monastery of Cork, another copy has been obtained from a



CHRIST AND MARY.

On a medal of the tenth century.¹

Polish Jew at Rostock, and the *Illustrirte Zeitung* informs us that a Parisian jeweller apparently ignorant of the fact that the coin is not unknown has lately reproduced a third copy in silver.

The inscription reads on the obverse: א-ישו
and on the reverse:

משיח מלך בא בשלום וארץ ארם נשחרר

Which means, "Messiah, the King, came in peace and as the light of the world he was made to live."



MEDAL OF HEAD OF CHRIST.

With Hebrew inscription.

There is no need of refuting the idea that the medal does not date back to the year one. It is difficult to judge of its age and place of manufacture without seeing the original, but we may fairly grant that for a counterfeit medal which pretends to be what it is not, it is an excellent piece of workmanship.

¹ Walsh, No. 38.

* This ought to be in our opinion an א. Walsh's transcription is full of mistakes.