

which not only give deep and fresh interest to life, but which make for the liberation and enrichment of the human spirit. As the Spokesman of a race to which has fallen a large share of the government of the modern world, and as the chief exponent in literature of the fundamental conception of life held by the Western world at a time when the thought of the East and the West are being brought into searching comparison, Shakespeare must be studied in the near future with a deeper recognition of the significance of his work and its value as a source of spiritual culture. In these chapters the endeavor has been made to present the man as he is disclosed by the results of the long and loving study of a group of scholars, chiefly English, German, and American, who have searched the whole field of contemporary literature, records, and history with infinite patience and with keen intelligence, by the history of his time, and by a study of his work. The plays have been presented in those aspects which throw light on the dramatist's life, thought, and art; the many and interesting questions which have been discussed with great ingenuity and at great length by Shakespearian scholars have been touched upon only as they directly affect the history, thought, or art of the poet." μ.

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## A POMPEIIAN MOSAIC.

### THE OLDEST RELIC OF THE ORIGINAL CHRIST-MYSTERIES.

*To the Editor of The Open Court:*

This mosaic which many years ago was found in "the tanner's house" in Pompeii is now in the Museo Nazionale at Naples, under the name of *Cranio Umato* (No. 109982); accordingly, it dates back *nearly to the time of Christ*—Pompeii was destroyed in the year 79 of our era. The ideas that may be expressed by the figures of this mosaic are, consequently, also from the time of Christ—which must be considered interesting at all events. (See accompanying cut.)

The central and dominating figure of the mosaic is a skull in which two peculiarities are noticeable: a large left ear, and indications of eyes in the dark eye-holes. To the right of the skull are a ragged mantle, a staff and scrip; to the left there are a knight's mantle, a lance and scarp. Above the skull is a level and under it a butterfly above the wheel of time (an Egyptian symbol).

These figures appear to be a "key of life," since they give a clear description of the way to the goal of early life (which goal is called, incorrectly, "salvation"),—a true statement of the development that alone can carry man to the next step of the ladder of evolution. Here let us consider some of the ideas that can be found in our mosaic.

The *wander* symbols say: If man is to reach the goal of life, then he must turn away from the animal, sensual life, leaving the ways of the low life. The symbol of *Death*: during this wandering the low attributes of his nature—the animal remnants—will lose life. The *knight's* symbols: as, by and by, the animal nature disappears, so a new nature, that of the "God-Man," will appear; and as a "knight"—i. e., as a ruler of the animal!—this man will, aided by divine powers, conquer "the land of the fathers," i. e., *realise the union with God*. The *building* symbol indicates that this development is a slow process, as the placing of stone upon stone when a house is erected. The symbol of *new life* (the butterfly) means that this process is a natural process, as natural as the resurrection of the butterfly in its "fullness of time." Finally, the symbol of *time* is interpreted to

mean that this development *is to be realised here*, while the wheel of time is rolling on, and before the death of the physical body.

These ideas of wandering, of building, of knights' contests, of new life through death, are entirely Christian, and it seems strange that this was not understood long ago; the reason may be that the "Christianism" which, principally, tries to



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avoid the punishment of sins (i. e., to *avoid being educated by the perfect Father*)—that "Christianism" cannot maintain the old ideal: "Be ye perfect, as your Father in the heavens is perfect," Matth. v. 48.

Behold! According to the Gospels the Christian is a *wanderer*: he wanders from earth to heaven, from darkness to light—from Egypt to Canaan (compare

St. Paul). Following after the Christ, upon *via dolorosa*, does he seek *Death* for "the old man who is corrupted by delusive lusts." He is *building*, working at the inner temple of God (St. Paul), and "he builds his house upon a rock." He is a *knight*: doubly powerful, as he is the ruler of the animal, does he struggle incessantly with the enemies that would prevent him from living in "the land of the fathers";—and you remember how St. Paul (in Eph. vi.) describes the "full panoply of God" in which the Christos-knight is to be invested. He seeks *the new life*, that of regeneration, the resurrection of the butterfly<sup>1</sup> from the chrysalis state. And behold, how *the Gospels explain to us the left ear and the eyes of the skull*: Man wandering upon the way of Death, will hear the voice of truth, "and understand by the heart" (the *left ear*, therefore), and he will see the perfect light. The *wheel of time*, finally, is also, in the spiritual meaning, an essential symbol of original Christianity:

"I must work. . . . *while it is day. Night cometh, when no man can work.*"

John ix. 4.

But, some one may say, the mosaic contains no *allusion to Jesus Christ*. It does—it has two! The level has the shape of an A—which shape was not necessary at all!—, and the wheel contains an O. Should not this be A and O, "*Alpha and Omega*," which is one of the names of the Christ (Revelation i. 8 and xxii. 13)? And in the wheel of time we find the figure ✱ which is the *very oldest sign for "Jesus Christ,"* i. e., the Latin I, and the Greek X; and this combination of Latin and Greek is even characteristic for the time of transition called "the time of Christ."

At the excavation of Pompeii, we have been told, there was found upon a wall the following inscription:

*"Rejoice in the fire, Christians."*

This inscription has been taken as mockery at the Christians; but the meaning may very well be quite another. For the primitive Christians were struggling for perfection "like that of the heavenly Father"; therefore they rejoiced in the fire, in *the fire of purification*—this may be the reason why the background of our mosaic has the green color of hope.

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The possible meaning of *the colors* of the mosaic may also be worth considering. Several utterances of the Revelation (for instance, iii. 4, ii. 17, vi. 6, xii. 3) together with the extensive color-symbolism, still to be found—although often misshapen and misunderstood—in the Roman Church, make it evident also that *the primitive Christ-Mysteries used colors as signs for certain ideas*. And this must be considered quite natural; for *light* is the only medium of messages from heaven to earth and it is, therefore, the natural symbol of *perfect truth*, coming from God; and the various modifications of the light, called *colors*, which are produced by its "refraction" by earthly things, correspond naturally with *the modifications of perfect truth*, produced through its "refraction" by terrestrial matters.

The white light can be decomposed, you know, into *Red, Yellow, and Blue*. This can also be taken spiritually: man cannot comprehend the divine "uncolored," truth; and she modifies herself for his sake as *Love, Wisdom, and Strength*—or however we are to name this divine trinity and unity. Possibly the key of color symbolism of our fathers might be this:

<sup>1</sup> The Greek word *Psyche* (used, for instance, in Joh. xii. 25) means "soul" and—"butterfly"!

*Red* is the symbol of *Love*.

*Yellow* is the symbol of *Wisdom*.

*Blue* is the symbol of *Strength*.

Probably our fathers, who were "guileless as doves," have thought as follows : man's blood is *red*, because his life emanated from divine love. The red sky of morning and evening tells us that the love of God is the beginning and end of all things—and when young folks use a red pink to say : "I love thee !" then that is most profound, indeed ! The gold is *yellow*, because it is the symbol of perfect wisdom, which "rust cannot devour" ; and when the sky is *blue*, it is to tell man about the almighty God who "made the expanse in the midst of the waters," with its numberless dwellings.

Certainly there is a deep meaning in the tale of the *rainbow* that was set in the clouds as a sign of God's covenant with man : according to his love, wisdom, and power, He will no more destroy man by flood, but lead him to the goal—even if the way be long. Also in accordance with this the *High Priest* (Num. viii. 7) seems to be invested. The inner dress was "fine linen," which indicates : white ; the outer garments and ornaments were "gold, blue, purple, and scarlet," accordingly the three primary colors. When we assume that the high priest represents the perfect ego in man, the *God-Man*, then we shall easily comprehend why he was to be dressed in that manner.

The three primitive colors produce three mixed colors : *Reddish-yellow*, *Green*, *Violet*. Also these colors have, apparently, a natural-symbolical signification. The flame of the altar of sacrifice is *reddish-yellow* : it is love and wisdom that, united, teach man to sacrifice the animal, i. e., his own animal nature, upon the altar. The *green* color (union of blue and yellow) is the color of hope : when man has wisdom to see the activity in the universe of the divine power, then hope is born in him. "Friendship is *violet*," they say, and that is quite correct ; for as red and blue make violet, so is true friendship the union of love and strength. How significantly did necessity put in order the colors of the rainbow : red, orange, yellow, green, blue, violet, i. e., love, sacrifice, wisdom, hope, strength, friendship ; for love causes sacrifice, sacrifice will bear wisdom, from wisdom hope emanates, hope gives strength—and strength will lift man into "*the friendship of God, which will take man to the highest summit of blessedness*" (Philo) and is, therefore, the *last aim of life*. How do we wish men to understand this simple truth : *man's eye can sense only a few of the violet rays!*

Nearly so our good fathers may have conceived the basis of color-symbolism ; and we dare not forget that men long before "the time of Christ" knew this truth : "As below, so above" (Hermes Trismegistus), which says that the cause of all that *is* and *happens* in the physical world is something that is and happens in the psychical world.

And now we return to our mosaic, whose colors it will not be difficult to explain.

The *Skull* is gray : a mixture of the colors of Perfection and Death. This is quite right ; for man's wandering through the desert of purification has only one purpose : to separate that which is eternal from the imperfect and transitory with which it has been mixed. The *wandering* symbols are grayish ; for they belong to him that is upon the way of death. The mantle, however, is more red, the staff more yellow, and the scrip bluish,—which is all as it should be ! For he who is wandering unto death must conceal his nakedness with the mantle of love, must lean upon the staff of wisdom—and in the strength of God is the food which will

keep up his life during his wandering in the desert. The *building* symbol has also the three primary colors: the wood is nearly red, the nails are yellow, the *plumb* is blue; for love, even if it be imperfect, is the substance of temple work, wisdom *determines* its form (as the nails of the level make firm its shape)—but the divine strength is that which enables man to build so that the produce does not fall to the earth spontaneously. The *knight's* symbols are, of course, also red (the mantle), yellow (the lance), and blue (the blade of the lance)—for God's strength will strike down the enemies who will prevent the building warrior from living in the land of the fathers. The butterfly, symbol of *regeneration*, has—also of course—the three primitive colors that we now have mentioned so very often: for she is the representative of the High Priest! The *wheel of time*, finally, is reddish-yellow; for it must be a flaming wheel of fire: "The chaff is to be burned with inextinguishable fire"—and this our life is destined for the separation and annihilation of "the chaff."

On the mosaic are, as far as we can see, two *white* figures: the string of the level, and the scarp of the knight. The string in man which points towards the center of the earth, and towards the highest point of the sky—you may call this string "conscience," or something else—this string is white: it is the Divine in man. But in the warrior it will grow until, like a scarp, it will twine round his whole being. Maybe there is (it was there about twenty years ago) on the upper part of the blue blade of the lance a *white square* like this:



Probably this figure is explained by the mystic words of Rev. ii. 17:

"To him that overcometh will I give . . . a white stone, and upon the stone a new name written."

CARL MICHELSEN.

St. John's day, 1902.

## MR. MICHELSEN'S POMPEIIAN MOSAIC.

### EDITORIAL COMMENTS.

Mr. Michelsen's "Pompeiiian Mosaic" is very interesting, and its reproduction will be welcome to the readers of *The Open Court*, although we cannot accept his interpretation that we are here confronted with Christian symbolism. The truth is that the ideas which permeated Christianity, viz., that life is transient, that all living beings are wanderers to a goal that can be reached only in the consummation of death, and that we have to struggle for the attainment of the eternal, were quite common all over the Roman empire during the first century of the Christian era. The Stoic philosophers are imbued with the same spirit; the life and teachings of Apollonius of Tyana reflect the same views; and the Mithraic religion is so similar to Christianity in all these and in a few other points, that for a long time it was a powerful rival, contending for supremacy in the Western world.

Mr. Michelsen's interpretation of the level as *A* and the wheel as *O* is rather bold. The wheel, in addition, is a symbol frequently used by other religions, especially Buddhism. The spokes of the wheel, it is true, form a six-rayed star, but there is not the slightest reason to interpret it as the symbol of *I* and *X* (the Greek *CH*), to mean *Jesus Christ*. The same six-rayed star served as the symbol of Julius Cæsar, and in many other ways.