

## IMAGE-WORSHIP.

BY THE EDITOR.

ONE objection which is constantly repeated by Greek philosophers and Roman magistrates against the early Christians is their alleged impiety or lack of reverence. As a matter of fact, we know that the early Christians were iconoclasts who lost no opportunity to revile image-worship in any form as idolatry, and later on when they grew in power Christian mobs took special delight in smashing the statues of the gods, the old and venerable ones as well as the latest and most beautiful productions of Greek art. The result is that we have not one statue left of any of the ancient gods that is not in some way injured, broken, or desecrated.

The early Christian repudiated image-worship to such an extent as to regard artists as idol-makers and to exclude them from their communion, and the craft of sculptors was regarded as a disreputable profession.<sup>1</sup>

With the spread of Christianity among the more refined classes the original aversion to art gave way to more tolerant views; but the change took place slowly and can be traced step by step.

Clement of Alexandria tells us that in the use of seal-rings the strictness of the rule to avoid all ornaments may be relaxed. But the symbols that can be tolerated are limited in number. He says :<sup>2</sup>

"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 had 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 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."

Christians in their hostility to art did not invent pictorial illustrations, but only tolerated such symbols as could be interpreted in a Christian way. The fish was the symbol of Ea the Chaldæan

<sup>1</sup> *Constitutiones Apostolorum*, VIII., 32, and Tertullian *De Idolatria*, ii. <sup>1</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *Pædagogus*, III., 11, near the end of the chapter on finger-rings.

fish-deity who being God the Son, the saviour and mediator, resembles Christ in more than one respect. The lyre was an Orphic emblem and represented the power of the divine music that could force the gates of Tartarus and lead the dead back to life. The fisherman reminds us of the Babylonian Adapa, the wise man who is found fishing before he ascends to Anus's throne in heaven.

Tertullian's limitation was soon obliterated and we find the number of Christian emblems rapidly increasing. Though the ideal of the early Christians remained a worship of God in spirit and in truth, the instinct that yearns for visible symbols and pictures gradually asserted itself, and in the sixth century image-worship with incense-burning and knee-bending to pictures and statues was firmly established in Christian churches.

When the statues of the old gods were broken to pieces, so that scarcely one of them was left un mutilated, when the temples lay waste and in ruins, victorious Christianity adopted the pagan methods of worship, formerly scorned as idolatrous. The old gods returned under the name of saints, and the inveterate habit of idolatry reasserted itself. The old symbols were retained, though they had to submit to the new *régime* and acquire a new interpretation.

Even the most orthodox Christian archæologists are aware of the fact that the whole Christian symbology is due to pagan influence and pagan traditions. Thus the dove was the symbol of Ashtaroth and it is a mistake to regard all gems with doves on them as Christian. Bishop Münter protests against the claims of the dove as an exclusively Christian symbol, and adds:

"Probably we cannot even for the olive branch and olive leaf on any one of these intaglios on which they appear, claim a Christian origin, for on every gem published by Clarke, the dove stands on something that resembles a branch terminating in a leaf."<sup>1</sup>

Many of the birds which are commonly taken to be doves and on that account have been regarded as Christian are, according to Bishop Münter, not doves but ravens. The raven was a Mithraic symbol of great importance and in one of the Mithraic degrees (called the Raven degree *κορακικά*) the initiated were called the Ravens (*κόρακες*).

While the palm leaf, the dove, the ship, the anchor, the vine, the  $\omega$  were frequently employed by the Christians of the second century as symbols of their faith, they still abstained rigorously from having any images. Even portraits of Christ (the latter per-

<sup>1</sup> See Dr. Friedrich Münter, *Bischof von Seeland, etc., Sinnbilder und Kunstvorstellungen der alten Christen*, 1., p. 109.

haps more so than other pictures), were repudiated as savoring of pagan idolatry, and thus it happened that non-Christians, gnostics, and even broad-minded pagans were the first to have the Christ-ideal represented by the chisel of sculptors and the brush of painters.

Epiphanius indignantly censures the Carpocratians because "they kept painted portraits and even images of gold and silver and other materials which they pretended to be portraits of Jesus and made by Pilate after the likeness of Christ at what time he sojourned amongst men."<sup>1</sup>

Similar cases are mentioned by other Christian writers. St. Augustine condemns Marcellina for setting up a statue of Christ together with those of St. Paul, Homer and Pythagoras;<sup>2</sup> and Alexander Severus, a broad-minded pagan, is reported to have kept in a sanctuary at his home the statues of Christ, Abraham, Orpheus, and Apollonius of Tyana.<sup>3</sup>

The council of Eliberis in Spain (A. D. 305) prohibited the use of images; it decreed "that pictures or likenesses ought not to be allowed in the churches." But the fact that a motion of this kind was made and carried proves that there was a minority among the Christians who saw no idolatry in having pictures, and we may assume that at this period a tendency began to make itself felt toward a toleration of image-worship, which the church authorities, however, still branded as inadmissible, "lest the images on the wall themselves be adored."<sup>4</sup>

The foundation of the State Church denotes a great victory of Christianity over traditional paganism. Christianity was established in name, but the methods of worship and the dominant conceptions of the ancient religious faith became now officially established as an integral part of the new religion. The original Christian faith as it had found shape in the writings of the New Testament remained the dominant factor, but it was modified through an amalgamation of the doctrines of the Church with pagan traditions and a reception of the old deities under the name of saints. The ancient heroes, the Medusa killers, and the conqueror of the Chimera, Bellerophon, etc., were worshipped under the name of St. George (the Christian saint of that name has never met a dragon of any kind); and Diana as well as Juno and Venus were trans-

<sup>1</sup> *Epiphanius Her.*, XXVII.

<sup>2</sup> *De Hæres.* VII.

<sup>3</sup> Mentioned by Lampridius in *Alexandrum Severum*, XXIX.

<sup>4</sup> See Rock's *Hier.*, p. 374, cf. H. Diward, *Hist. of the Cr.*, p. 38.

formed into Mary, the mother of God, sometimes into Mary Magdalene, sometimes into some other female saint, while various deities of classical antiquity were mostly changed into minor saints, all being regarded as subject to the great Son of God, the Redeemer Jesus Christ.

The strangest thing is that there are a great number of black Marys, and there can be scarcely any doubt that the color of these several black Marys is a pagan tradition which points back to a cult in most ancient times. Many black Marys are found in Southern Italy; there is one, the Madonna di Porto Salvo, in Naples; there is another dark Madonna in Cotrone, Calabria, and another in Loretto, which latter was supposed to have been made by St. Luke, the Gospel writer.

The worship of black Marys has reached even more northern countries, especially Southern France and Spain, where one is mentioned in the life of Ignatius Loyola as being in Monserrato. Even Switzerland possesses a black Mary at Einsiedell, and Bavaria in Altötting. Of the pre-Christian goddesses of black color, Trede<sup>1</sup> mentions a black Artemis Ephesia which is preserved in the National Museum at Naples. Pausanius also speaks of the dark-colored Artemis (Book 2, Chap. II). The same author mentions a black Aphrodite, who on that account was called *Melainis*, i. e., the Dusky One (Book 8, Chap. VI., and Book 9, Chap. XXVII.), and of a Dark Demeter (Book 8, Chaps. V. and XLII.). The Egyptian Isis was always cut from black granite.

The black color of the Christian Mary is generally explained by Christian authors on the ground of the *Song of Songs*, where we read of Shulamite, "I am black but comely" (Chap. I, v. 5), which passage is commonly referred by Protestants to the Church, and by Roman Catholics to Mary; but this explanation is apparently an after-thought.

Christianity, no doubt, exercised a beneficial influence upon the large masses of the poor and degraded, thus leavening the dough of the Roman Empire from its lowest classes upwards, but the State Church did little or nothing for the moral progress of mankind; on the contrary, it rather brutalised the upper classes by making the sentiments of the lower classes predominant.

The age of Constantine is one of the saddest times in history, and the result of the foundation of a State Church was an alliance between the pagan elements of Christianity and the popular superstitions of paganism. The persecutions of pagan philoso-

<sup>1</sup> See Trede, *Das Heidenthum in der römischen Kirche*, Vol. II., p. 381.

phers and sympathisers has been palliated on the plea that it was a reaction against the oppressions which the early Christians had to suffer, but such events as the assassination of Hypatia and similar crimes cannot be extenuated, and the crusade against classic art and the destruction of many beautiful statues of antiquity is a barbarism which finds few, if any, parallels in history. Mobs were let loose on the idols so called, that is, the images of pagan gods in pagan temples, but the barbaric gladiator shows and other cruel spectacles of fights with wild beasts in the arena continued for several centuries under Christian emperors, and are preserved even to this day in the shape of bull fights in Catholic Spain,—a country which in its religious zeal for pagan forms of worship has surpassed even Italy, being, as has been said, the most Roman Catholic country in the world.

The establishment of the State Church is characterised by an official sanction on the one hand of a general destruction of the ancient productions of art, and on the other hand a rehabilitation of idolatry in the shape of image-worship. The culture of classic antiquity was ruthlessly destroyed, but the belief that had produced these noble statues of the Greek deities survived in its rudest and most superstitious form. Image-worship, so much abhorred by the early Christians, became soon the most essential feature of Roman State Christianity.

Roman Catholic archæologists find it hard to understand that church doctrines are subject to change. They refuse therefore to believe that the Catholic Church was ever opposed to image-worship. Prof. Franz Xavier Kraus says (*Geschichte der christlichen Kunst*, p. 58):

“This theory of the hatred of art among the early Christians is the worst fable, to remove which is the first duty of modern criticism.”

Professor Kraus succeeds in the task only by repudiating on this point the authority of Tertullian, Eusebius, Epiphanius, Asterius, Nilus, Augustine, Clement of Alexandria, and the Council of Elvira; but he fails to produce a single quotation of any Church-father who endorses image-worship; nay, rather, there is no one who regards it as even permissible. We might as well deny that the Church ever believed in the divinity of Christ, by branding all statements as unauthorised and forgetting to mention that there is nothing to back the contrary view.