

## THE CROSS OF GOLGOTHA.

BY THE EDITOR.

CRUCIFIXION was comparatively rare among the Greeks, but it was frequently practised in the Orient, and also by the Romans after they came into contact with Carthage.

The Israelites knew in their law several methods of capital punishment, which were: stoning,<sup>1</sup> burning to death,<sup>2</sup> strangling,<sup>3</sup> slaying by the sword,<sup>4</sup> and "hanging on the wood."<sup>5</sup> The latter was more dreaded by the Jews than any other death on account of the curse which was attached to it in Deuteronomy (xxi. 20-23), where we read:

"If a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be to be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree: his body shall not remain all night upon the tree but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day; for he that is hanged is accursed of God; that thy land be not defiled, which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance."

The Israelites were surrounded by nations which worshipped solar deities and practised the cruel rites connected therewith. They were still, as we learned in a former article, under the awe of crucifixion as a religious rite, in which guilty persons and also innocent victims were offered to God for an atonement or for the fulfilment of a desire. It is but natural that for this very reason the lawgivers of Israel placed a special check upon that kind of capital punishment which was still practised as a human sacrifice by their neighbors; and it was but natural that that which was a sacred offering to a pagan deity became accursed before Yahveh. Crucifixion was not abolished but limited, that the land be not defiled. It is this passage that has proved the most objectionable

<sup>1</sup> Deut. xxi. 21. Lev. xx. 2, 27.

<sup>2</sup> Gen. xiii. 15. Lev. xx. 14, and xxi. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Ex. xxi. 14-17. It is assumed that "putting to death" means strangulation.

<sup>4</sup> Deut. xiii. 15.

<sup>5</sup> Deut. xxi. 22-23. Translated in Christian versions "hanging on the tree."

stumbling-block with orthodox Jews of all times to the acceptance of Jesus the Crucified as the Messiah.

Criminals were frequently hung up on a cross (i. e., they were exposed on a tree or a pole after their death as a *post mortem* disgrace), and the passage in Deuteronomy (xxi. 22-23) is sometimes interpreted in this sense, which, if true, would have limited in Palestine the exposure of the dead body to a few hours or at most one day.

As to the form of the cross of Christ we have no definite information whatever. The cross is called in the New Testament *σταυρός* (i. e., rood, stake, or pole) and *ξύλον* (i. e., wood).<sup>1</sup> The latter is apparently a Hebraism, being a literal translation of צלב.

#### THE SHAPE OF CHRIST'S CROSS.

Judging from the report that a short hyssop stalk<sup>2</sup> was sufficient to reach up a sponge filled with vinegar to the crucified Jesus, the cross of Calvary cannot have been high. The soldiers, it appears, broke the legs of the two thieves and pierced the side of Jesus with a spear while their bodies were still hanging on the cross.

Christ was crucified by the Romans and according to Roman fashion, but the Roman mode of crucifixion varied and was apparently left to the executioner's pleasure who devised all kinds of horrible tortures for his victims. Sometimes criminals were simply tied upon a dry tree or a pole; sometimes they were placed across a sharpened stake (*σκόλοψ*)<sup>3</sup>, which would gradually pierce and tear the vital organs of the body; sometimes the delinquent was seated on a pointed pole which then from below was forced into the body; sometimes the condemned were hung up with extended arms, sometimes with their heads downwards. If natural trees were used, the branches offered good points of attachment, and the hangman selected with preference a bifurcated trunk which constitutes the Y-shaped cross. Whenever such a tree was not at hand, a transom or cross-beam (called *patibulum*) was nailed to a pole. This yielded a figure of which we commonly think when Christians of later generations speak of a cross.

Thus we have the following forms of the cross: 

Christian artists of later centuries have upon the whole adopted the Latin form of the cross, but not to the exclusion of the others,

<sup>1</sup> For instance, Acts v. 30. John xix. 29.

<sup>2</sup> See also 1 Cor. i. 23. Gal. v. 11, vi. 12.

<sup>3</sup> This was an Assyrian mode of execution. See Layard, *Nin.*, p. 379, and Fig. 58. Compare Bonomi, *Nin.*, p. 276, and Fig. 162.

almost all of which are represented in various illustrations of the crucifixion.

Before crucifixion the delinquent was stripped of all his clothes which became the property of his executioners. The loin-cloth which for reasons of propriety always appears in Christian crucifixes, has no foundation in history, and it is not probable that the rude Roman soldier ever made an exception to the rule. The legend that Mary, the mother of Christ, used her veil as a loin-cloth is of a late origin.



THE TAU CROSS IN MARTIN SCHÖEN'S PICTURE "CHRIST ON THE ROAD TO CALVARY." XV. CENTURY. (After L. Veuillot.)

The transom of the cross (*patibulum*) and sometimes the whole cross, had to be carried by the delinquent himself to the place of execution.<sup>1</sup> In addition a tablet was hung round his neck on which the crime was written for which he was condemned. This tablet was nailed to the cross over the head of the sentenced person.

The cross with *patibulum* and tablet renders the figure of a vertical pole crossed by two smaller horizontal lines, thus †.

Christian illustrations represent Christ as bearing the whole cross, while the two rogues carry only their cross-beams. The idea that lies at the bottom of this conception seems to be that Christ's

<sup>1</sup> Plautus: "Patibulum ferat per urbem deinde affigatur cruci."

sentence had been spoken on the same morning and no preparation for his execution had been made. The tablet with the inscription of the crime for which the condemned was executed is specially mentioned in the Gospels, and Pilate, not without a touch of irony toward the Jewish authorities that clamored for the execution of the Galilean prophet, wrote on it in three languages: "Jesus the Nazaree, King of the Jews."

As it is difficult to keep a body in position on a cross, the delinquent was seated, as on a saddle, upon a projecting cleat called in Latin *sedile*, which, however, was not intended for an alleviation of his suffering, but simply as a convenience for the executioners.

Illustrations of the cross with tablet and cleat are sometimes made in the Russian Church thus †.

Justinus Martyr, who is apparently well informed about the details of crucifixions, mentions the seating cleat (*sedile* or *πήγμα*) on which Jesus was placed, like one sitting on horseback, and he compares it to a projecting horn.<sup>1</sup>

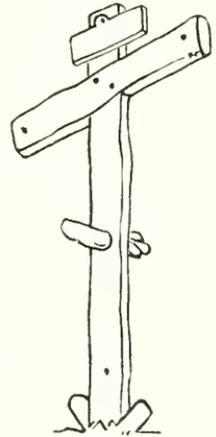
Irenæus, when speaking of the mystic value of the number five, having mentioned the five-lettered words saviour (*σωτήρ*), father (*πατήρ*), love (*ἀγάπη*), etc., says (*Adv. her.*, II., 24, 4):

"The very form of the cross, too, has five extremities, two in length, two in breadth, and one in the middle on which the person is placed who is fixed by nails."

Tertullian (*Ad nat.*, I., 12), when defending the Christians against the accusation that they were worshippers of the cross, says:

"An entire cross is attributed to us; viz., with its transverse beam (*antenna*) and with that projecting seat."<sup>3</sup>

The seating-cleat is indicated in ancient symbols,<sup>4</sup> but the thought of it has been dropped entirely by later Christian writers and also by artists, obviously for æsthetical reasons, and has been supplanted (although not before the seventh century) by a foot-



THE CROSS OF CALVARY ACCORDING TO STOCKBAUER.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> καὶ τὸ ἐν τῷ μέσῳ πηγνύμενον ὡς κέρας καὶ αὐτὸ ἐξέχον ἐστίν, ἐφ' ᾧ ἐποχοῦνται οἰστανουμένοι.

<sup>2</sup> *Kunstgeschichte des Kreuzes*, p. 37. Confer Gretses *De Cruce*, lib. 1., c. 3.

<sup>3</sup> "Sed nobis tota crux imputatur, cum antenna scilicet et cum illo sedilis excessu."—The word *antenna* originally means a sail-yard.

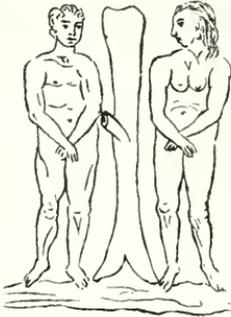
<sup>4</sup> Münter, *Sinnbilder und Kunstvorstellungen der alten Christen*, Vol. II., illustration 28. Reproduced from Bosio, p. 411.

rest (*suppedaneum lignum, ὑποπόδιον*), which, however, has no justification in history or archæology.<sup>1</sup>

#### ST. PAUL'S CONCEPTION OF THE CROSS.

Christianity is the religion of the cross and Paul is the preacher of the Gospel of the cross.

Paul is thoroughly historical, and his Epistles (with few exceptions) are accepted by the most scrupulous and infidel critics as genuine. Even the Acts of Paul and Thekla, formerly regarded as spurious, turns out to be, at least in its original form, one of the earliest Christian books, containing correct local coloring and a great deal of reliable contemporary information.



THE CROSS WITH THE  
CLEAT AS THE TREE OF  
LIFE BETWEEN ADAM  
AND EVE.

The history of this interesting document and its later additions which placed it under the suspicion of critics is quite instructive.<sup>2</sup> The accretions are evidences of a gradual growth of the eagerness to tell stories of miracles in glorification of martyrs. The more Christianity spread the more did it reach the masses of the people, and thus the influence of the uncultured increases in proportion to its external success.

The author of the Acts of Paul and Thekla describes the personality of Paul in these words :

“A man of middle size, and his hair was scanty, and his legs were a little crooked, his knees were projecting (*or* far apart); and he had large eyes, and his eyebrows met, and his nose was somewhat long; and he was full of grace and mercy; at one time he seemed like a man at another he seemed like an angel.”

When Paul, then the Pharisee Saul and a persecutor of Christians, witnessed the heroism of Stephen, when he heard him say, “Behold, I see the heavens open and the Son of God standing on the right side of God,” when he saw him die unflinchingly, he began dimly to feel the significance of a martyr's death. Though Stephen died as a criminal, he ended his life happily and with a prayer for his persecutors on his lips. No doubt that he died with the assurance of inheriting the bliss of the world to come. Being of a delicate constitution, the pangs of conscience which naturally

<sup>1</sup> See Stockbauer, *Kunstgeschichte*, pp. 37-39; and Dr. O. Zückler, *Das Kreuz Christi*, pp. 437-439.

<sup>2</sup> For further details as to the genuineness of the Acts of Paul and Thekla, see Conybeare's *Monuments of Early Christianity*, pp. 49-60.

rose in Saul and which he suppressed for a while, made themselves felt in spite of himself and he succumbed at last to a severe attack of epilepsy while travelling on the road to Damascus. Seeing a flash of light, he fell to the ground and heard a voice speaking in Hebrew, "Saul! Saul! Why persecutest thou me? It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks!" When he asked who it was, the voice continued, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest."<sup>1</sup>

This event is the turning-point in Saul's life. Henceforth Saul, who later on called himself Paul, became a Christian, who gloried in the cross of Christ.

The story is psychologically so probable that with all the documentary evidence of Paul's Epistles,<sup>2</sup> we have good reason to accept it in all of its main features as historical, and need not be concerned about the contradictions that have been pointed out in the details of the reports of the event.

Paul's experiences in prosecuting the Christians taught him the lesson of Golgotha, and keen as he was to comprehend truths by contrasts, he recognised at once a transcendent glory in the ignominy of the cross. The present world is "perishable;" it is a life of "the body of death." But "the perishable" implies "the imperishable," and the present life a life to come. If we die with Christ on the cross we shall be resurrected with him.

The resurrection of Jesus is to him a fact, for the vision on the road to Damascus is taken as the real Jesus, and while from the standpoint of a modern alienist the identification of both in the sense in which Paul understood it cannot be conceded, we would not hesitate to say that there is a truth at the bottom of Paul's belief. When a man dies his soul is not annihilated; it continues as a living factor in the minds of the people. His words and the example of his deeds live on, and the deeds of a man constitute a living presence among the people whom he impressed, which is his spiritual self.

It happens that a dead enemy may be more powerful than he ever was during his life. Brutus was victorious in battle and yet he committed suicide in despair of success because he was haunted by the ghost of Cæsar. Cæsar was not dead to his murderer. The hangman can slay the bodies of innovators, but not their ideals: he cannot dispatch their souls. Spirit cannot be quenched. A cause will thrive with the greater power the more its representatives are made martyrs. Thus we would not hesitate in

<sup>1</sup> Acts ix. 3; xxii. 6; xxvi. 13, 14.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 9; Gal. i. 13; Phil. iii. 6; 1 Tim. i. 13.

this sense to say that it was the soul of Jesus that spoke to Paul on the road to Damascus.

On the strength of his vision on the road to Damascus, Paul regarded himself as an apostle and prides himself on having received the Gospel from Christ directly. For, says he :

“ I neither received it (the Gospel) of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Christ.”

When Christ died the death of a criminal the little Nazarene congregation was overwhelmed with fear and grief at the sad fate of their leader. The belief that he was still alive, that he had been seen in various places in Jerusalem and in Galilee, did not take away the curse pronounced on him that hung on the tree.<sup>1</sup> It was the Pharisee of Tarsus who saw the blessing of the curse and the power of salvation in him who bears the punishment of sin.

If the Pharisee Saul had been a child of our century, he would at once have proceeded to Jerusalem to learn as much as possible about Jesus of Nazareth from the Apostles who had seen him face to face and were familiar with his doctrines. Saul does nothing of the kind ; on the contrary, he avoids contact with the Apostles and retires into Arabia ; and not until he had become clear himself about his conception of the Gospel did he go up to Jerusalem. Yet even then he limited his exchange of thought to the very pillars of the Church, Peter and James, the Lord's brother. St. Paul says :

“ For ye have heard of my conversion in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the Church of God, and wasted it :

“ And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers.

“ But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace,

“ To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen ; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood :

“ Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me : but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus.

“ Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days.

“ But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother.”

The difference of doctrine was considerable, for St. Paul regarded the communism of the Nazarenes and their strict observance of the law as unessential ; nevertheless Peter found no objection to the new Apostle so long as he promised not to create a disturbance in his own little flock. The Apostles at Jerusalem recognised the success of St. Paul in the prosperous towns of the

<sup>1</sup> Deut. xxi. 23.

Gentiles, whose sympathy appeared in the very substantial form of pecuniary contributions, which were quite welcome to the impoverished communistic society at Jerusalem. St. Paul says:

"When James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision.

"Only they would that we should remember the poor."

While Jewish Christianity proved unacceptable to the world, the Gentile Church spread and increased; and it was Paul's gospel of the cross that conquered the world for Christ. Paul says:

"But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."

The power of the Gospel of the cross consists in the recognition of the truth that this world is a world of suffering, and that only by sacrifice for a higher purpose than self can man attain peace and solace. Many details of Paul's doctrines, his gnostic notions of the spiritual body and the arrangements as to the bodily resurrection, his prophecy of the coming of the day of the Lord during his own lifetime, and the transfiguration of the bodies of those who will be left, were at the time of great importance but faded from sight at the non-fulfilment of the prediction, leaving in the foreground and even increasing the great burden of his message of the Christ, crucified and therefore glorified.

It is noteworthy that Paul says nothing whatever concerning the form of the cross of Christ, whether it must be regarded as a simple pole, or as two intersecting beams, as a T, or as being of any other shape. The shape of the cross is indifferent. To Paul the cross means the ignominious and painful death of Christ by



THE TAU CROSS ON THE TRINITY  
DOLLAR.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The original, which is preserved in the Museum of the Royal Mint at Berlin, is cast in silver; some of the figures being soldered on and the details having been finished with the chisel. Its size is more than four times the size of our illustration. The inscription reads "*Propter scelus populi mei percussus eum esaias LIII.*" It was made in 1544 on the order of Maurice, Duke of Saxony, by Hans Reinhard (See O. Henne am Rhyn *Kultur Geschichte des deutschen Volkes*, p. 112).

which he set us an example ; and this conception of the cross has dominated the whole history of the Church, although there was no one of his successors who was his equal in spiritual comprehension and earnestness. On the contrary, there is a constant falling off, which finally resulted in the crudest idolatry and the revival of pagan superstitions.

#### THE EARLY CHRISTIANS.

St. Paul's conception of the cross is spiritual ; it is the significance of Christ's death and nothing besides, but the Church-fathers descant upon the occult meaning of all kinds of forms of crosses, the simple pole, the tree, the wood, the three-armed cross as a Y



THE Y CROSS.<sup>1</sup>



THE T CROSS IN A PICTURE OF  
THE TRINITY.<sup>2</sup>

and as a T, the four-armed cross (equilateral as well as with a prolonged foot), the slanting cross, and finally the five-armed cross, which is done frequently in one and the same sentence, as though the cross of Christ might have possessed all these shapes at once. The Church-fathers at any rate rejected no analogy that could possibly be found in nature and tried all methods that could in any way indicate the mysterious powers of the cross.

The cross as the raw wood of a tree is called the tree of life and becomes thus related to the ancient idea of a world-tree, which

<sup>1</sup> From D'Agincourt, plate CI. Fresco in the chapel of St. Silvestro near the church of the Quattro Incononati at Rome. Painted probably in 1348. See *The History of our Lord*, by Mrs. Jameson and Lady Eastlake, p. 175.

<sup>2</sup> Popularly known as the Italian Trinity and frequently painted in this style between the twelfth and seventeenth centuries. See *The History of our Lord*, by Mrs. Jameson and Lady Eastlake, p. 351.

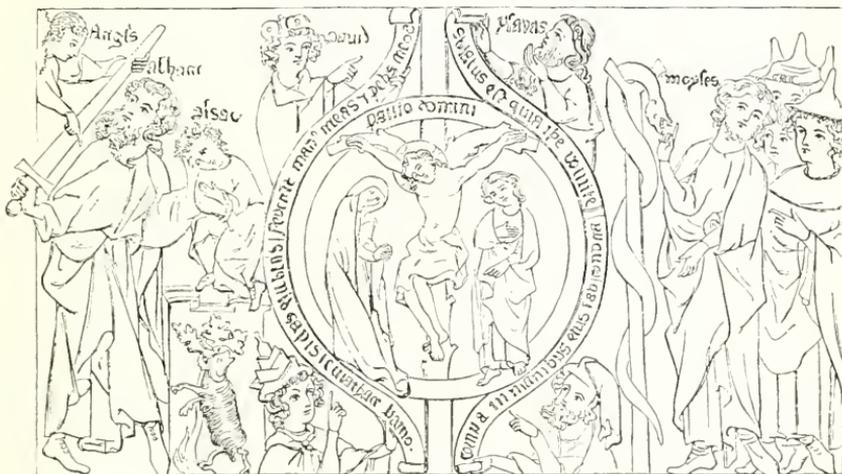
plays an important part in various mythologies, especially as the Teutonic Ygdrasil and the Chaldean cosmic tree, an echo of which still vibrates through the words of the prophet Ezekiel.<sup>1</sup>

One thing is sure, that from the traditions transmitted by the Church-fathers there is no way of settling the question of what shape Christ's cross might have been. The first centuries seem upon the whole to favor the T cross, while since the age of Constantine the four-armed cross begins to be more and more accepted. While the Greek Church adopted the erect equilateral cross (+), the Latin Church finally accepted the high standing four-armed cross (†) as the symbol of the Christian faith.



CHALDEAN TREE OF LIFE.

Professor Zöckler, summing up all that can be said in favor of the theory that Christ's cross had the shape of a T, says:



THE PASSION OF CHRIST ON THE CROSS AS A TREE WITH BRANCHES.  
Mediæval Bible Illustration.

"In favor of the three-armed form of the cross is the typical cabalistic explanation of the number-value of the letter 'T,' which is 300 among the Church-

<sup>1</sup> In Chapter xxxi. the prophet compares the Assyrian to the world-tree, which is described in mythological terms so as to leave no doubt that he follows Assyriological prototypes.

fathers. Barnabas (*Epistles*, IX) mentions the number of the servants of Abraham as being three hundred and eighteen, and expresses them by the letters I. II. T. I=10 II=8. and T=300. Barnabas says that the number 318 (= 117 or 118000, T)



CURTAIN OF AN EARLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH OF EGYPT. (Restored by Swoboda.)<sup>1</sup>

is a prophecy on the cross of Jesus. In a similar sense, Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.*, VI., 4-11), Ambrosias (*Defide Ad Grat.*, I., 3), St. Augustine (*Serm.*, 108

<sup>1</sup> Reproduced from Franz Xaver Kraus, *Geschichte der christlichen Kunst*, I., p. 532.

De Temp.), Paulinas (*Epistles*, XXIV., 23) repeat the same explanation, and also allude to the three hundred warriors of Gideon, the conqueror of the Midianites as well as to the three hundred years of the saving ark of Noah (Genesis, vi. 15). Finally, Tertullian (*Adv. Marc.*, III., 22), Origen (*Hom. in Ezech.*, IX., 4).

The Egyptian cross, the so-called key of life, served the Christians of Egypt for a long time as the symbol of Christianity, and was used for a long time promiscuously with other forms of the cross, among which the equilateral Greek cross seems to have been most conspicuous. Some Egyptian representations of the crucifixion indicate the transition from the pagan to the Christian interpretation of this ancient symbol, the handle of the key of life being changed into the head of Christ while the transom bears his outstretched arms. The execution of these pictures is very crude but (as Kraus says, *l. l.* p. 537) highly interesting to the historian of Christian iconography. They illustrate the rule that ancient symbols are preserved even when radical changes set and become adapted by acquiring a new meaning.

The Egyptian key of life has also been carried to Italy probably through the influence of Egyptian Christians. We find it for instance on a ciborium-column in S. Petronilla (discovered in 1875) in a bas-relief representing the martyrdom of St. Achilleus. Here the form of the Egyptian cross is so changed as to give to the handle the appearance of a wreath, suggesting the interpretation of a crown of life which will be the reward of the Christian martyrs who take the cross of their master upon themselves.

Whether or not the Egyptian key of life plays a part in the formation of the *Christma*, the monogram of Christ (✠) which in some of its oldest forms frequently exhibits the shape of a standing cross (thus †), remains an open question which we hope to discuss in a special article.



THE EGYPTIAN CROSS ON THE MARTYRDOM OF ST. ACHILLEUS.<sup>1</sup> CIBORIUM COLUMN IN S. PETRONILLA (Fourth Century)

<sup>1</sup> Fr. X. Kraus. *Geschichte der christlichen Kunst*. I., p. 198.

In spite of the frequent references of Church-fathers to the tau-form, the four-armed cross became more and more the typical symbol of Christianity, partly because people began to believe that this was the shape of Christ's cross, partly because the four-armed



THE CRUCIFIXION ACCORDING  
TO THE EARLY CHRIS-  
TIAN OF EGYPT.<sup>1</sup>



THE EGYPTIAN KEY OF LIFE CHANGES  
INTO A CHRISTIAN CROSS.<sup>1</sup>

cross was more pleasing to the eye and appeared more complete partly perhaps because it was more cosmopolitan, being more frequently met with in nature and admitted of more interpretations.

<sup>1</sup> Forrer, *Die frühchristlichen Alterthümer von Achmim-Panopolis*.