

STAUROLATRY.

BY THE EDITOR.

THE cross as an instrument of execution was an object of horror to the Romans of classical antiquity. It was the symbol of suffering and of death, and this is perhaps one important reason why the cross is not represented in early Christian art. The figure of two intersecting lines was in itself not objectionable, for it was



ARAMÆAN WARRIORS, WEARING THE
CROSS AS AN AMULET FOR PRO-
TECTION IN BATTLE.¹

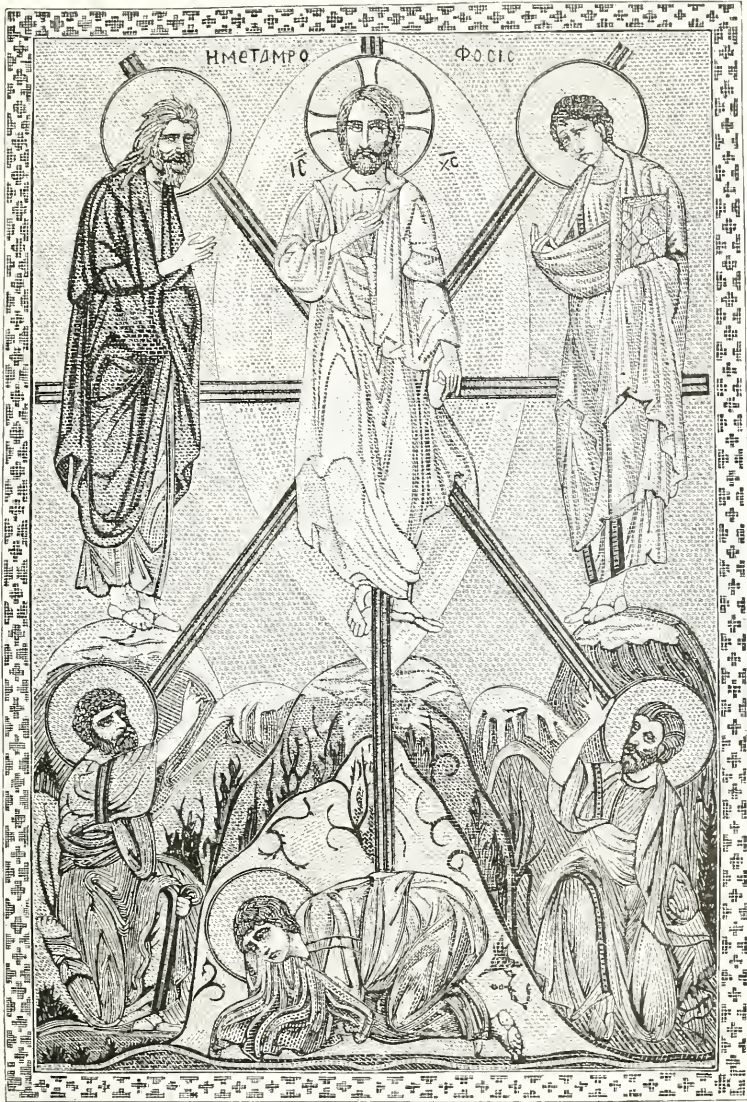
actually used as a salutary symbol under other names in various religions, but it became objectionable as soon as it was commonly designated as a cross. At this juncture Constantine's adoption of the labarum, subsequently followed by the official identification of this sign with the Chrisma, served excellently the purpose of gradually accustoming the cultured and aristocratic classes of the Roman Empire to the basic thought of the religion of the cross.

Constantine, the first Christian emperor abolished crucifixion, not for reasons of humanity

but because it had become too honorable a death for criminals, and its continuation appeared to him as a profanity. Only then when crucifixion became a tale of past ages and the ignominious details of this kind of execution faded from memory, did the cross

¹ From Egyptian monuments of the eighteenth dynasty. (After Wilkinson. Reproduced from Lenormant, *L'Hist. de l'Orient*, I. p. 290. The same use of the cross, as an amulet worn round the neck, was made in Greece, as we know from ancient pictures, published by Gerhard.

become the emblem of the Christian church, its coat of arms, the symbol of invincible power and transcendent glory.



THE TRANSFIGURATION OF CHRIST, SHOWING A COMBINATION OF CROSS AND CHRISMA. (From L. Veuillot.)

The Chrisma, having served its purpose in the time of transition, lost more and more its significance as the coat of arms of

Christianity and yielded its place to the cross, which now assumes a definite shape, the four-cornered upright cross, an erect, elongated figure of two intersecting lines (†).

The Rev. Mr. Sinker sums up his opinion of the adoption of the cross (which is from the standpoint of the orthodox believer) as follows :

"A double, and indeed manifold, meaning attached to the cross from the earliest ages. Derived as a Christian sign from the monogram, and connected with traditions of ancient learning, by its Egyptian form, it may be said to have stood for all things to all men. To the earliest members of the Church it represented their Master, who was all in all to them ; and thus in their view, a somewhat wider and happier one than in later days, it represented all the faith—the person of Christ, His death for man, and the life and death of man in Christ. The Laternan and other crosses point to baptism and all its train of Christian thought, without immediate reference to the Lord's sacrifice."



THE COAT OF ARMS OF CHRISTIANITY DURING THE CRUSADES.

Wall-painting in the École des Beaux Arts, Paris. (From L. Veuillot.)

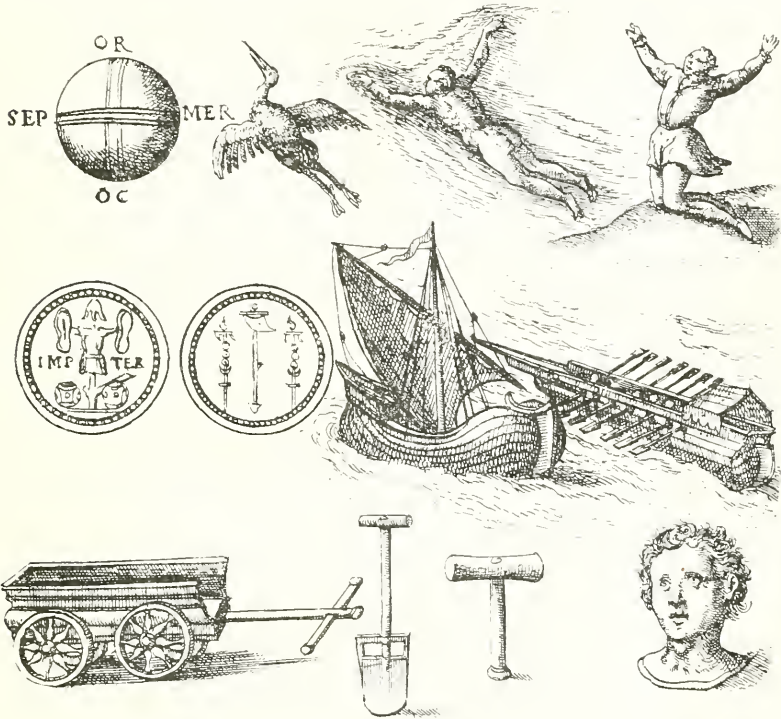
Originally (i. e., in the Epistles of Paul) the cross is a mere idea, the thought of the death of Christ and the mortification of the flesh ; but soon the shape of the cross becomes the main object of interest ; yet this shape remains for a long time quite indefinite.

The Church Fathers compare the cross to almost anything: the tree of life in Paradise, Noah's Ark, the staff of Moses, the rod of Aaron, the pole on which Moses erects the serpent, the wood of the burnt-offering on the altar of Abraham, the arms of Moses upheld in prayer for his people, the horn of the unicorn, the four quarters of the compass, the posture of the swimmer, the attitude of adoration, the nose of the human face, the combination of ideas as a crossing of thoughts, the pole of a wagon, the spit of the paschal

lamb, the letter T, the military standard, the anchor, the sail yard of a ship, and the oars of a boat. Nor is the list exhausted.¹

Here is an instance of the praise of the cross by Justin Martyr :

“And this [the cross], as the prophet foretold, is the greatest symbol of His power and rule ; as is also proved by the things which fall under our observation. For consider all the things in the world, whether without this form they could be administered or have any community. For the sea is not traversed except that



THE CROSS IN PRACTICAL LIFE, ACCORDING TO THE CHURCH-FATHERS.
(Reproduced from Lipsius *De Cruce*.)

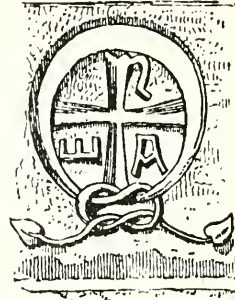
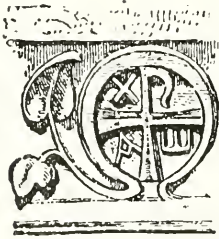
trophy which is called a sail abide safe in the ship ; and the earth is not ploughed without it : diggers and mechanics do not their work, except with tools which have this shape. And the human form differs from that of the irrational animals in nothing else than in its being erect and having the hands extended, and having on the face extending from the forehead what is called the nose, through which there is respiration for the living creature ; and this shows no other form than that of the cross. And so it was said by the prophet, ‘The breath before our face is the Lord Christ.’² And the power of this form is shown by your [the pagans] own symbols

¹ Justin Martyr, *Dial. with Tryph.*, c. 86; Tertullian *adv. Marc.* III, 18; Cyprian *Test. Against the Jews*, 22, and other passages in Origen, Minutius Felix, Nicodemus, etc.

² From *Lamentations*, iv, 20.

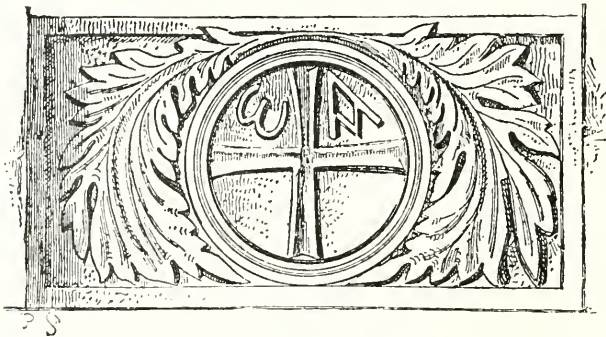
on what are called banners [‘vexilla’] and trophies, with which all your state processions are made, using these as the insignia of your power and government, even though you do so unwittingly. And with this form you consecrate the images of your emperors when they die, and you name them gods by inscriptions.¹

“For it was not without design that the prophet Moses, when Hur and Aaron upheld his hand, remained in this form [of the cross] until evening. For indeed the Lord remained upon the tree almost until evening.”



CROSS-MONOGRAMS ON THE DOORS OF HOUSES IN RETURZA AND SERDJILLA.
(After De Vogüé.)

In the third century, the glorification of the cross had assumed such dimensions that Christians were called *staurologaters*, or worshippers of the cross. This accusation elicited an answer from Ter-



CROSS BEFORE A SYRIAN HOUSE. (After De Vogüé.)

tullian and from Minutius. Tertullian does not positively deny the charge. He says (*Ad Nationes*, 12):

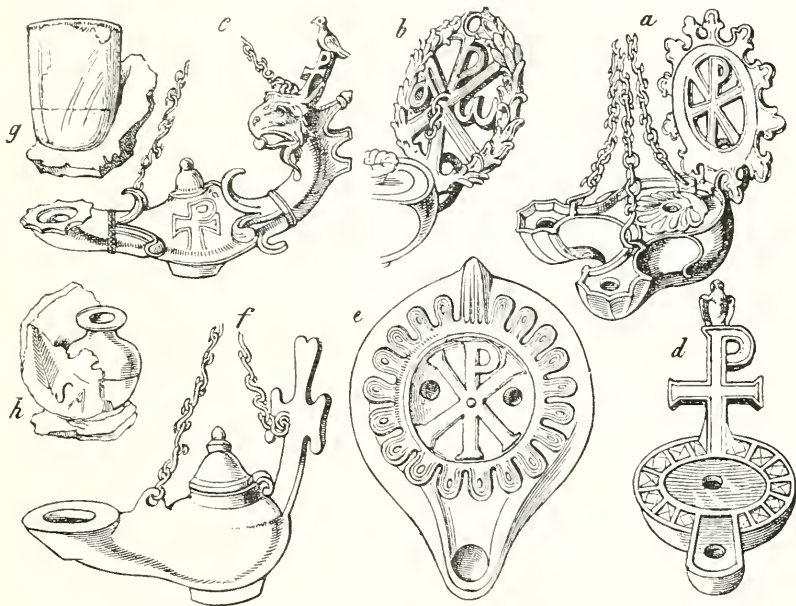
“As for him who affirms that we are ‘the priesthood of a cross,’ we shall claim him as our co-religionist. A cross is, in its material, a sign of wood; amongst yourselves also the object of worship is a wooden figure. Only, whilst with you the figure is a human one, with us the wood is its own figure. Never mind for the

¹This passage is important, for it implies that not only among the savage tribes of Asia and America but also among the ancestors of the Græco-Romans the custom of making the cross over the dead as a benediction antedates Christianity.

present what is the shape, provided the material is the same: the form, too, is of no importance, if so be it be the actual body of a god."

"The camp religion of the Romans is all through a worship of the standards, setting the standards above all gods. Well, all those images decking out the standards are ornaments of crosses. All those hangings of your standards and banners are robes of crosses. I praise your zeal. You would not consecrate crosses unclothed and unadorned."

Tertullian actually places the cross with its magic power above Christ and speaks of it as the cause of his victory whereby that old "serpent, the devil, was vanquished."¹ Moses showed by the mir-



THE CHRISMA IN THE CATACOMBS.²

acle of the brazen serpent on the pole the power of the Lord's cross.

"Whereby also to every man who was bitten by spiritual serpents, but who yet turned with an eye of faith to it, was proclaimed a cure from the bite of sin, and health for ever more."

¹ Ap. 16. *Ante N. Cl. L.*, xi. p. 85.

² The Catacombs contain no crosses which date back to the Pre-Constantine age. All the crosses whose age can be determined, as for instance such forms as *f*, are later. The Chrisma however, is very prevalent and appears sometimes in the Egyptian form as in *e* and *d* (transformed from the key of life), or in the labarum-form, as in *a*, *b*, *e*. The symbol $\Lambda\omega$ (as in *b*) is frequently added to the Chrisma. Glass vessels (such as *g* and *h*) were formerly thought to contain blood of martyrs. Some of them, for instance *h*, contain the inscription \overline{SA} , *Saturnii*, which is read either *Sanguis Saturnini* or *Sanctus Saturninus*. Similar vessels are found in pagan tombs.

Nicodemus (or rather the author who under that name wrote the Gospel of Nicodemus) tells the story of the soul of the good thief who was crucified with Christ. While Enoch and Elias were speaking to the prophets, a man of a miserable appearance arrived carrying the sign of the cross on his shoulder. We read (ch. xx. 5-12):

"And when all the saints saw him, they said to him, Who art thou? For thy countenance is like a thief's; and why dost thou carry a cross upon thy shoulders

"To which he answering, said, Ye say right, for I was a thief, who committed all sorts of wickedness upon earth.

"And the Jews crucified me with Jesus; and I observed the surprising things which happened in the creation at the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus.

"And I believed him to be the Creator of all things, and the Almighty King and I prayed to him, saying, Lord, remember me, when thou comest into thy kingdom.

"He presently regarded my supplication, and said to me, Verily I say unto thee, this day thou shalt be with me in Paradise.¹

"And he gave me this sign of the cross saying, Carry this, and go to Paradise and if the angel who is the guard of Paradise will not admit thee, shew him the sign of the cross, and say unto him: Jesus Christ who is now crucified, hath sent me hither to thee.

"When I did this, and told the angel who is the guard of Paradise all these things, and he heard them, he presently opened the gates, introduced me, and placed me on the right-hand in Paradise."

Methodius in his *Sermon on the Cross* calls it "an instrument consecrated to God, freed from all discord and want of harmony." The form of the cross is to him Divinity itself. He says:

"Man with his outstretched hands represents the cross. Hence when the Lord had fashioned him in this form in which He had from the beginning framed him, He joined on his body to the Deity."

The cross accordingly is "the confirmation of victory;" "the way by which God descends to man" and "the foundation of man's ascent to God." "Through the cross the demons can be conquered by men who are otherwise weaker than they;" and adds the pious preacher:

"It was for this mainly that the cross was brought in, being erected as a trophy against iniquity, and a deterrent of it, that henceforth man might be no longer subject to wrath," etc.

The cross has as little been represented by the early Christians as Christ, for in fact they repudiated all art as idolatry, but as Christ was worshiped by them as God incarnate, so the idea of the cross became an object of adoration, and nothing is more natural

¹ Although the Gospel of Nicodemus (formerly the acts of Pontius Pilate) was not written by Nicodemus who visited Jesus by night, it is an important book (probably a product of the third century) which was much read and admired among the early Christians.

than that with the gradual adaptation of Christianity to its surroundings Paganism should again assert itself and reappear as unconcealed image-worship which was practically the old Paganism clad in a Monotheistic interpretation.

The Christian sentiment of the cross as "consecrated by the body" of Christ and full of "comeliness and beauty" becomes more and more an important feature of pious literature, finding a classical expression in St. Andrew's address to the cross, which he delivered in the presence of his executioners. St. Andrews is reported as having said :

"Rejoice, O cross, which has been consecrated by the body of Christ, and adorned by His limbs as if with pearls. Assuredly before my Lord went up on thee, thou containedst much earthly awe : but now invested with heavenly longing thou art fitted up according to my prayer. For I know, from those who believe how many graces thou hast in Him, how many gifts prepared beforehand. Free from care, then, and with joy, I come to thee, that thou also exulting mayst receive me, the disciple of Him that was hanged upon thee ; because thou hast been always faithful to me, and I have desired to embrace thee. O good cross, which hast received comeliness and beauty from the limbs of the Lord ; O much longed for, and earnestly desired, and fervently sought after, and already prepared beforehand for my soul longing for thee, take me away from men, and restore me to my Master, in order that through thee He may accept me who through thee has redeemed me."¹

This sentiment formerly limited to the circle of a few sectarians now begins to assert itself, and takes possession as by intoxication of the whole population of the Roman Empire.

The cross in any shape (as a T as a X and standing upright with four corners +) became a sign of magic power which was used for exorcism and for the performance of miracles. Thus the author who assumed to be Barnabas says of the magic power of the cross :

"In like manner He points to the cross of Christ in another prophet who saith, 'And when shall these things be accomplished ? And the Lord saith, When a tree shall be bent down, and again arise, and when blood shall flow out of wood. Here again you have an intimation concerning the cross, and Him who should be crucified.

"Yet again He speaks of this in Moses, when Israel was attacked by strangers. And that He might remind them, when assailed, that it was on account of their sins they were delivered to death, the Spirit speaks to the heart of Moses, that he should make a figure of the cross, and of Him about to suffer thereon ; for unless they put their trust in Him, they shall be overcome for ever. Moses therefore placed one weapon above another in the midst of the hill, and standing upon it, so as to be higher than all the people, he stretched forth his hands, and thus again Israel acquired the mastery. But when again he let down his hands, they were again destroyed. For what reason ? That they might know that they could not be saved unless they put their trust in Him.

¹ Acts and Martyrdom of the Holy Apostle Andrew.

"And in another prophet He declares, 'All day long I have stretched forth my hands to an unbelieving people, and one that gainsays my righteous way.'

"Moses then makes a brazen serpent, and places it upon a beam, and by proclamation assembles the people. When, therefore, they were come together, they besought Moses that he would offer sacrifice in their behalf, and pray for their recovery. And Moses spake unto them, saying, 'When any one of you is bitten let him come to the serpent placed on the pole; and let him hope and believe, that even though dead, it is able to give him life, and immediately he shall be restored. And they did so. Thou hast in this also [an indication of] the glory of Jesus; for in Him and to Him are all things.'

When in the age of Constantine, the reverence of the cross that must latently have prevailed among the lower classes for a considerable time, overcame the prejudices of the cultured classes, the need was felt of having its form definitely settled and this was finally done in favor of the elongated erect form (†) which at once became the coat of arms of Christianity. Unfortunately the victory of this form of the cross was ultimately established by one of the grossest pious frauds that were ever committed in the history of religion, viz., the "invention of the cross," which is still celebrated among Roman Catholics as a festival of great importance.

To narrate the history of this farce would lead us too far; suffice it to state that Cyril, a bishop of Jerusalem, informs us in his *Catecheses* of the discovery of the cross of Christ by the pious Empress Helena, the mother of Constantine.

Contemporary writers know nothing about it and the bishop is not a very reliable authority. His reputation is of doubtful character, for he is a man who was tried and found guilty of robbing the church of precious vessels and other marketable goods. Cyril found willing ears and succeeded in selling large quantities of the wood of the cross of Christ. The business flourished beyond all expectation, and now a new miracle happened: the miraculous wood became self-propagating, and thus God in his mercy enabled the good bishop to satisfy the demands of all pious Christians, who gladly availed themselves of this opportunity of buying pieces of wood for outrageously high prices.

Cyril was an eloquent preacher and he used all his oratorical art to glorify the cross. He says in his *Catechetical Lectures* :

"Let us not be ashamed of the cross of Christ; but though another hide it, do thou seal it on thy brow, that the devil, beholding that princely sign, may flee far away, trembling. But make thou this sign, when thou eatest and drinkest, sittest or liest down: risest up, speakest, walkest; in a word, on every occasion" (p. 40).

"Be the cross our seal, made with boldness by our fingers on our brow, and in everything; over the bread we eat and the cups we drink; in our comings in and goings out; before our sleep, when we lie down and when we awake; when

we are in the way, and when we are still. Great is that preservative. And it is without price, for the poor's sake; without toil for the sick, since all its grace is from God. It is the sign of the faithful, and the dread of devils; for He has triumphed over them in it, having made a show of them openly. For when they see the cross, they are reminded of the Crucified; they are afraid of Him that hath bruised the head of the dragon" (p. 161).

"Every deed of Christ is a boast of the Catholic Church; but her boast of boasts is the cross. . . . The glory of the cross has led into light those who were blind through ignorance, has loosed all who were held fast by sin, and has ransomed the whole world of men. . . . It has ransomed the whole world" (p. 142).

But Cyril had good reasons to extol the miraculous wood of the cross which he offered for sale. He says:


"Though I should deny it (the crucifixion), this Golgotha confutes me, near which we are now assembled; the *wood of the cross* [*stauros*] confutes me, which has from hence been distributed piecemeal to all the world."—*Cyr. Cat. Lect. Lib. Fath.*, p. 144.

Henry Dana Ward who quotes these same passages in his *History of the Cross* (p. 46), adds in comment of the lucrative business which the cunning bishop made with this "self-propagating wood":

"The *wood* receives the glory and Cyril the *price*."

Compare Paul with Cyril, and you will appreciate the change which the triumph of Christianity and its establishment as State religion has wrought in the minds of its leaders. Historians speak of the downfall of Paganism, but practically we have a rehabilitation of Paganism under the new name of Christianity.

The cross triumphed, but it was no longer the cross of Calvary. The old Pagan symbol of intersecting lines was re-adopted with a new interpretation. It was adopted by the Christian church in an age of superstition and ignorance, leading to image-worship and staurolatry which was not much better than the Paganism which it replaced. And yet the new interpretation of the cross contained a deep thought that could not be crushed by the heathen reaction of Constantine's age.

The Crucifixion was abolished, and the cross became the emblem of power and authority. Kings and emperors set it upon their crowns and scepters. They placed it upon a globe (in the same way as did the ancient Egyptians in this shape ) and carried it in their hands on festive occasions.¹

In modern times the cross has become the favorite form of decorations with which princes honor their retainers for faithful services.

¹ The ball with the cross appears first on coins of Theodosius II, who holds it in his left hand while the right hand grasps the labarum.

After Christianity had become victorious, the persecuted at once turned persecutors, and Theodosius issued edicts which forbade all Pagan worship, and there was soon scarcely a temple or a statue of the old gods left in the Roman Empire which had not been destroyed, or mutilated, or desecrated, by the hands of fanaticised Christian mobs. When Theophilus, the Bishop of Alexandria, demolished the Serapeum at Alexandria, the monks were astonished to find the sign of the cross engraven in its sanctuary. Socrates, the church historian (book 5, ch. 17), says :

“In the temple of Serapis, now overthrown and demolished throughout, there were found engraven in the stones certain letters which they call hieroglyphical; the manner of their engraving resembled the form of the cross. The which, when both Christians and Ethnics beheld before them, every one applied them to his proper religion. The Christians affirmed that the Cross was a sign or token of the passion of Christ, and the proper symbol of their profession. The Ethnics avouched that therein was contained something in common, belonging *as well to Serapis* as to Christ; and that the sign of the cross signified one thing unto the Ethnics, and another to the Christians. While they contended thus about the meaning of these hieroglyphical letters, many of the Ethnics became Christians, for they perceived at length the sense and meaning of those letters, and that they prognosticated salvation and life to come.”

Sozomenes reports the same event as follows :

“It is reported that when this temple was destroyed, there appeared some of those characters called hieroglyphics, surrounding *the sign of the cross*, in engraven stones; and that, by the skillful in these matters, these hieroglyphics were held to have signified this inscription—the life to come! And this became a pre-ence for becoming Christians to many of the Grecians, because there were even other letters which signified this sacred end when this character appeared.”

The cross, i. e., the figure of intersecting lines was used as a religious symbol in pre-Christian times; it was preserved in such modernised religions of imperial Rome as the Serapis cult, and we can fairly assume that it was a sacred symbol with almost all Gnostic sects, gaining a rapid recognition among the Christians who at once identified it with the martyr instrument, on which Jesus died. Now when the victorious Christians destroyed the last remnant of Paganism, they were astonished to find that the symbol of their own faith had served similar purposes in the old Pagan religions.

If they had been familiar with the institutions and doctrines of the Serapis cult, they would have discovered that many typically Christian ideas, such as the sonship of God, God the Son as the Saviour, the death of God and his resurrection, God the Son as the Divine Word, the divinity of the Mother of the Saviour, and also

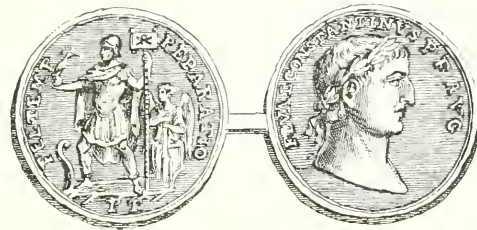
celibacy, monkhood, tonsure, rosaries, sacraments, etc., find their prototypes in Pagan institutions.



COIN OF CONSTANTINE.

The Emperor is represented as holding in his hand the ball of empire, still without the cross.

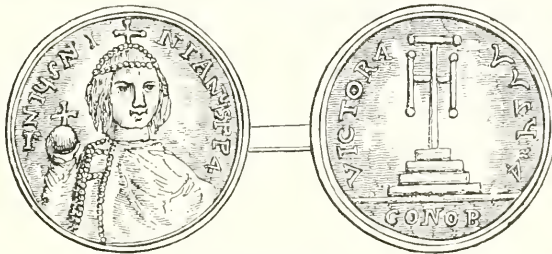
The historian must bear in mind that the Christianity of Jesus was different from the Christianity of the State Church of Constan-



COIN OF CONSTANTINE.

The Emperor holds in his hand the ball of empire with the phœnix perched on it.

tine, surnamed the Great. They are as contrary to one another as two opposite poles. The intermediate link is the early Church of



COIN OF JUSTINIAN.

The Emperor is represented with a Greek cross on his crown and on the ball of empire.

gentile Christians founded by St. Paul. The character of the Christianity of Jesus is reflected in the Gospels, especially, the Gospel

according to Mark, which is the oldest and most reliable account of the life of Jesus of Nazareth. The Christianity of the State Church of Constantine is a medley of Roman, Greek, Egyptian, Assyrian, Syrian, and Indian religions, somewhat tempered by Platonic philosophy and translated into the terminology of the early Christian Church. Its appearance is due to the fermentation of religious belief, which resulted from the general exchange of thought among the nations after the days of Alexander the Great, and it is the product of development and the résumé of a powerful crisis.

Although the State Church represents in many respects a new and a higher phase in the religious life of mankind, there is no break, no sudden rupture, except in the minds of those who had lost the historical connexion with the past.

The Christianity of Jesus became the centre of the new religion that was preparing itself in the minds of the people under the name of Christianity, and when it was officially recognised by the Roman Empire, the imperial State-Christianity reassimilated all those Pagan elements which proved strong enough to survive the crisis.