

## ALPHA AND OMEGA.

BY THE EDITOR.

IN the catacombs the *Chrisma*<sup>1</sup> is commonly combined with the letters  $\alpha$  and  $\omega$ , the latter for unknown reasons always written in cursive script, not  $\alpha$  but  $\omega$ , while the former is a capital. The  $\alpha$  and  $\omega$  are intended to symbolise him who says, "I am the alpha and the omega, the first and the last" (Rev. i. 11).

The idea of comparing God to letters of the alphabet is foreign to the Greek mind and reminds one of the arguments of Brahman sages who philosophise on the letters of the syllable *Aum*, the first letter of the alphabet in whose praise hymns were sung, as containing seed-like all the revelations of the Vedas.

The sanctity in which the Egyptians held the sound *Iao*, as being the god with the Adorable Name (i. e., Abraxas) may have impressed the early Christians. Observe that the name  $\text{I}\alpha\omega$  is also (like the Christian symbol  $\alpha\omega$ ) spelt with a cursive  $\omega$ , not with the capital  $\Omega$ . We can easily understand that the *I*, being a mere dash, was dropped.

There are a great number of Abraxas gems bearing the name of  $\text{I}\alpha\omega$  in a script which closely resembles the Christian symbols  $\alpha\omega$ . Since the *Iao*-worship is older than Christianity we may assume that Christians being reminded thereby of the passage in St. John's Revelation, adopted the use of the letters.<sup>2</sup>

It seems probable that the  $\alpha\omega$  is a symbol that is older than Christianity and had a pagan significance before it was interpreted as an illustration of Revelation i. 2, but nothing definite is known and we can only make suggestions.

<sup>1</sup> In the catacombs the earliest well-dated inscription with the *Chrisma* is of the year 71 A.D., the last ones belong to the sixth century.

<sup>2</sup> Another hypothesis which, though less probable, is by no means impossible, may find a place in a footnote. The soul (called in Egyptian  $\kappa\alpha$ ) is spelled in Koptic script  $\kappa\omega$  which bears close resemblance to the Greek  $\alpha\omega$ . But a derivation of the symbol  $\alpha\omega$  from *Iao* seems more probable than from  $\kappa\alpha$ .