

CHASTITY AND PHALLIC WORSHIP.

BY THE EDITOR.

CHASTITY is regarded as the virtue of virtues, and rightly so, for the future of mankind depends on it. Chastity is the characteristic feature that distinguishes the Teutonic peoples, and to it Tacitus does not hesitate to attribute the native vigor of the race. While there was so little prudery among the inhabitants of ancient Germany that the two sexes enjoyed bathing together in the river, actions of indecency were severely punished and early marriage was held in contempt.

Tacitus wrote his book on Germany with the avowed purpose of giving his countrymen a warning, and setting them an example in the undefiled Northern races; and his words sound to the historian like a prophecy; for the sturdy sons of this chastest of all the nations have overrun the earth. Had they not been fighting too much among themselves, had they not been exterminated in many of their too easily acquired new homes by the lack of both concentrated effort and political foresight, the old world would be by this time predominantly Germanic. But even as matters stand now, the Goths having lost again all the territories in Southern and Western Europe, especially Italy and Spain, and also Africa, the Teutons are practically still in possession of the world. Central Europe, i. e., Germany, Austria, Holland, Denmark, Sweden, and Norway, further England with its colonies, and North America are predominantly of Teutonic blood, and they hold in their hands the balance of power. What is the rest of the world—all the Romance nations, the Slavic nations, and the Orientals—in comparison to their united strength?

On a close scrutiny of their rise to power we need not hesitate to say that their success is due to their family life, the relative purity of their morality, the mental and physical health resulting therefrom; in a word, to chastity.

The Old Testament contains the promise of long life and pros-

perity for those who honor their parents, but the honor of parents is a mere application of the virtue of parentage, and the essential feature in the preparation for the exercise of parental virtues is, again, chastity. We might as well say that to chastity is given the promise of the possession of the world.

Chastity is the right appreciation and proper regulation of the sexual functions. It is not abstinence, nor is it exuberance. It is continence for the sake of a right and seasonable use. Chastity is not the suppression of sensuality, not a negation of sexual love, but its elevation, its purification, and consecration. The blessings of chastity are to-day as great as they were in olden times, and the curse of the breaking of its law is as severe as ever.

When the wonder of life, of procreation, of birth, of growth of fertility, and also of decay and death, first dawned upon man, he stood in awe and bowed down to worship. To him the riddle of the world lay in the power of begetting. It was an apparent feat of magic, calling into being that which had had no existence before! And indeed is not even to-day the birth of a child the miracle of miracles? The deity could only be conceived as the begetter, as the great mother (*Magna Mater*), or the highest and best father (*Pater Optimus Maximus*), or both, and the sexual mystery seemed to contain the springs of life, the secret power of creation, the faculty of calling into being from the nowhere of non-existence creatures aglow with life and sentiment. It is not to be wondered at that phallus-worship, the religious reverence for and deification of sexual functions, became established almost everywhere on earth in a certain phase of the development of man. It seems to crop out as a natural and inevitable result of conditions, and has produced, especially among the Oriental races, strange and peculiar rites, among which many are still mentioned in the Old Testament.

Archæologists are probably not mistaken when they interpret circumcision as a sacrifice. It is an offering made to the deity of procreation, and was performed in Egypt on the priestly caste. We understand its meaning better when we consider that the priests of the Syrian *Magna Mater*, Cybele, had to sacrifice their manhood, which according to the legend was done in remembrance of the beautiful youth Attis, the Assyrian Adonis, representing vegetable life, who, fading away, lost his virility and died, only to be resurrected to new life. The Syrians celebrated a day of weeping, a kind of Good Friday, and an Easter festival of rejoicing at the resurrection of Attis.

Similar beliefs prevailed in Egypt where Osiris was slain, and

the phallus of the god lost in the Nile. But his body was mummified by the art of Anubis and his soul passed safely through the valley of death, establishing a precedence for his adherents who follow him through the tomb to immortality.

The religious awe of procreation leads easily to licentious eccentricities, and it is natural that on the awakening of the moral sense a reaction should set in against phallic ceremonies. This took place in Palestine at the time of the prophetic movement, when serious men arose and denounced the popular festivities and full moons and the sacrificial worship on the high places. The rise of monotheism introduced new ideas of God as a spiritual being, and thus for the first time the sexual function was regarded with a certain contempt. Jewish monotheism naturally led to the abolition of phallic digressions in the national cult, but the abolition of all phallic symbols and ceremonies could not suddenly be accomplished. The ancient traditions and symbols had to be discontinued slowly and gradually or became concealed and were obscured by new interpretations.

A noteworthy feature of phallic worship is recorded by Herodotus. He states that the Chaldean women used to sacrifice their virginity in the Temple of Melitta, who is the Chaldean Venus, and he assures us that the same women would later not be approachable by any man, nor were they regarded as less eligible for marriage. This act was simply a relic of phallic worship by which reverence was shown to the goddess in sanctifying the sexual function through a first use within the temple precincts. Herodotus, being a Greek of a much later development in the course of human evolution, no longer understands the meaning of the rite, and mentions similar customs in Egypt with great horror.

The report of Herodotus is confirmed by Strabo (XI., 14) who tells similar stories of the Armenians.

A prominent feature of Oriental worship is the erection of Asherahs or phallic poles (wrongly translated "groves" in the authorised version of the Bible). They did not belong to one special deity, but were regarded as the general sign of divinity, as much so as the key of life in Egypt, and thus they were erected in honor of any god. It must have been deemed all but indispensable in primitive times to designate a spot of worship, the place of a revelation, of a theophany, or any sacred precinct, by the erection of an Asherah, for they are mentioned in connection with all kinds of gods and goddesses, Baal, Astarte, and even Yahveh.

The word Asherah (אֲשֵׁרָה, *asherah*) is derived from the verbal

root *ashar* (אָשַׁר, *ashar*), to be straight, to be erect, and implies the meaning of anything that is prolific, or fructifying, or fecundating, which to a nomadic race of shepherds and camelherds, was all that was needed for their prosperity. Thus *esher*, אֶשֶׁר, means "happiness," and *Asherah* as a personification may be translated "goddess of good fortune."¹ The first Psalm begins: אֲשֶׁר־יְהִי־רָאִי (ash'rej ha ish), which means "Happinesses of the man," etc. And the name Asher, the Lucky One, has appropriately been translated by "Felix."

The Egyptian key of life, which all the gods carry in their hands, is probably also a phallic symbol, denoting regeneration and immortality.

The Eleusinian mysteries were regarded with great reverence in ancient Greece, yet did they introduce phallic symbols, indicating man's hope for regeneration, and these ceremonies were performed with a pure heart until they became obsolete on the rise of Christianity when the Churchfathers denounced them as indecent.

The magician's wand, the divining rod, and presumably also the scepter, have originally the same meaning as the Asherah; they symbolise the power of procreation.

We are informed that even as late as the days of Josiah's Temple Reform, in 623, there were phallic symbols used in the temple, and hierodules were kept at Yahveh's temple in Jerusalem. It seems extraordinary to us, but if we understand that the purer forms of monotheism are the product of an historical development, we shall see that it was necessary and inevitable. Even Yahveh worship, in spite of its purity in the prophetic movement, had to pass through the phase of phallism; but as soon as Yahveh was identified with the ideal of pure monotheism, its prophets and priests set their faces against the antiquated eccentricities of phallic institutions and heralded the dawn of a new and purer era.

It is noteworthy that phallic devotees of both sexes are called "sacred," *qadesh* (from קָדַשׁ, *qadash*, which means to sanctify or consecrate), and we can have no doubt that the offering of virginity as well as the presence of hierodules at the temple was originally done in a pure spirit and in the sincere belief of serving God. Thus it happens that the same word with a slight modification of the vowels came to signify "holy," קָדוֹשׁ (*qadosh*), and קַדֵּשׁ (*qadesh*), "prostitute."

It is no accident that the relation of Yahveh to his people throughout the Old Testament is represented as a state of marriage, and thus the worship of other gods is branded as adultery.

¹ Gesenius, *Hebr. und Chald. Handwörterbuch*, p. 203, gives the meaning "Glücksgöttin."

The Prophet Ezekiel, at the time of the Babylonian exile, tells Jerusalem that "she has not remembered the days of her youth," xvi. 22 (i. e., the honeymoon of married life), but is "as a wife that committeth adultery, which taketh strangers instead of her husband" (xvi. 32). Accordingly the jealousy of Yahveh, alluded to in xvi. 42, is that of an infuriated lover and wronged husband.

Ezekiel's expressions are a mere echo of older traditions, and they are uttered at the time when most of the phallic ceremonies had become only historical remembrances, but his words are borne out in the history of the Old Testament. They are found in other prophets, such as Amos, and traces of similar ideas, partly obliterated, can be found throughout the historical books of the Bible.

Phallicism is not traceable in the Bible alone: it is all but universal in a certain stage of man's religious evolution. M. Élie Reclus declares in his book, *Primitive Folk*, p. 69:

"Hetairism was born in the shadow of the altar. 'Almost all mankind,' says Herodotus,¹ 'consort with women in their sacred edifices, with the exception of the Greeks and the Egyptians.'"

Herodotus apparently forgets that Greece was in the same predicament as other countries; and M. Reclus, objecting to the exception which the Greek historian makes, exclaims:

"Except Greece? What then took place at Corinth? Except Egypt? What about Bubastis and Naucratis? What of the Aphrodite of Abydos, who bore the significant epithet *Porne*?² What of the royal princesses who took pride in the title of 'pallakis' in the temple of Ammon? Juvenal went so far as to ask: What temple is there in which the women have not prostituted themselves? At Jerusalem, Josiah destroyed in the temple of Jehovah the cells inhabited by the Sodomites³ and the women who wove tents for Asherat?⁴ It is known what excessive debauchery took place in the 'groves' and 'high places' of the 'Great Goddess.' The custom is so deeply rooted that in the grotto of Bethlehem what was done formerly in the name of Adonis is done to-day in the name of the Virgin Mary, by Christian pilgrims; and the Mussulman *hadjis* do likewise in the sanctuaries of Mecca.⁵ To the pagodas—'sinks of iniquity'—go the barren women, making a vow to abandon themselves to a given number of libertines; and others, to testify to the goddess of the place their veneration, prostitute themselves, publicly, even at the doors of the holy place."⁶

The reaction against phallic worship, culminating in monkish asceticism with its anti-sexual tendency, seems to have arisen according to a natural law of evolution, for it is paralleled in other countries, especially in India, where it almost coincides with the

¹ Euterpe.

² *Athenæus*, XIII. 5.

³ The *Kedeschim*. Consult the Biblical Encyclopædias on this word; for instance, *Dizionario Ebreo*: Kadessa, *santa e meretrice*; Kadeschud, *postribolo e sacrista*.

⁴ The symbol or image of Ashtoreth, 2 Kings xxiii. 7. See Soury, *La Religion d'Israel*.

⁵ Sepp, *Heidenthum und Christenthum*.

⁶ Dubois, *Mœurs de l'Inde*.

rise of Buddhism. Monkish institutions, however, are not identical with Buddhism; they are one of the factors which prepared its way. Austerities, fasts, castigations, and abstinence were practised long before Gautama Siddhartha was born in Kapilavastu, and the whole career of India's greatest reformer was conditioned by the monkish institutions, which at that time were firmly established all over India.

While monkish asceticism reaches its climax in the condemnation of all natural life, denouncing especially the sexual instinct as the original sin, we must state that the institution of monks and nuns itself is originally based on phallism. Like the self-mutilation practised by the priests of Cybele, it is a surrender of the sexual life to the deity. It is an offering of the very setiment of sexuality to the procreator of all life, it is a betrothal to the deity. That is true of the Vestal Virgins of Rome, as well as of the Virgins of the Sun in Peru, mentioned by Prescott,¹ and even to-day the Christian nun is called "the bride of Christ."

The New Testament continues to represent the relation of the Church to Christ as a marriage and considering the frequency of these allusions, we cannot regard them as accidental. Jesus himself speaks of the marriage-feast of the ten wise and foolish virgins, and in Revelations xix. 7 we read that "The marriage of the lamb is come and his wife has made herself ready."² Even the Apostle Paul, otherwise an outspoken enemy to marriage, compares the congregation of his converts to a bride of the Lord, saying, 2 Cor. xi. 2: "For I have espoused you to one husband that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ."

While we are rightly disgusted with the practices of ancient phallicism, we ought to understand that they were committed with the best of intentions, viz., to realise the virtue of chastity. They are the logical result of a misguided conscience, the product of a pre-scientific religious faith, and the consistent expression of their underlying religious superstitions. We have no reason to assume that any one of the phallic ceremonies was done from a motive of lust or indulgence. They were probably done against the natural instinct as a matter of conviction, just as much as Jephthah had no pleasure in sacrificing his daughter to Yahveh as a burnt-offering, but did it because he thought, and from his standpoint had reason to believe, that Yahveh demanded the sacrifice of him.

The historical facts of a primitive phallic worship, far from

¹ *Conquest of Peru*, Vol. I., p. 110.

² Compare chapters xix. 9, xxi. 2, xxi. 9, and xxii. 17.

being indecent, are, if considered in this light, a monument of the paramount significance, indeed of the holiness, of the sexual function. They prove the respect and awe in which procreation was held by primitive man. Even to-day the religious instinct manifests itself in man's hunger for immortality, and the physical side of this yearning finds expression in the desire for reproduction.

Chastity means holiness of sexual life, and holiness, according to the etymology of the Hebrew word, means consecration. It does not mean extermination, but sanctification. It implies the duty of restraint, of retarding the development of the sexual instinct in children, of fostering a noble conception of the relation between the sexes, of bearing in mind the deep-seated coyness and the poetry of the opening blossoms of marital inclinations, and generally of respect for the duties of parentage.

Chastity is a virtue of bodily sensual creatures. There is no chastity for purely spiritual conditions. If man were purely spiritual, like the angels of heaven, there would be no need of preaching to him the law of holiness. Ideas mingle freely, and there is no beauty in coyness within the realm of abstract thought. When spiritual conceptions with their fructifying interrelations are wrapped in mythical form and represented as marriage relations, what a conglomeration of improper and nonsensical details we have as a result! Such are the cosmogonies of all nations, including the most beautiful one of all, the creation-story of the Greek, Hesiod's Theogony. If understood in their literal sense, Zeus is degraded into a debauched villain, and the great mother of life into a wanton wench. It is the literal belief in myths which made Greek religion appear improper. So long as they were interpreted in their original significance they gave no offence.

Spiritual truths need no coyness; they are universal and can mingle without fear of contamination. It is the body that has to be protected against defilement and pollution: sensual longings must be individualised and bodily contact specialised. Mental comprehension goes out into the world promiscuously, and there is no affair, no idea, no concept, so low and none so high but mind may embrace it and generate new thoughts. Chastity therefore does not pertain to things spiritual which are universal, but is a virtue of concrete existence, of materiality, of sensuality, of sexuality.

Chastity without sensuality, without sexuality, without love, is bareness, not virtue; but chastity of love is holiness, which is the consecration of sentiment to one of the highest purposes of life, the conservation and propagation of the human race.