

COMMENTS ON STONE WORSHIP.

AN AFTERMATH.

BY THE EDITOR.

THE philosopher's stone is an idea which is a modern relic of the most ancient form of religion, viz., stone worship which we discussed in an article published some time ago in *The Open Court* (1904, XVIII, pp. 45 and 661).

In the Old Testament Jacob sets up a stone, Bethel, as a house of God—a religious custom which was also practised by the Phœnicians who called their divinely-ensouled stones by the same name which has been recorded by Greek authors as *Baitylos*. It is strange that the Greeks use the Phœnician name when speaking of a holy stone which was kept in a precinct of Delphi, and was called *Baitylos* by Pausanias (10, 24, 5), and by Hesychius, (see *s. v. Baitylos*). A holy stone representing Cybele, apparently not of large size and supposed to be the oldest and most venerable embodiment of the goddess, was kept in her temple on Mount Didymon and transferred to Rome in the year 204 B. C., where it was mounted in silver and inserted into the mouth of a statue of the goddess Roma on the Capitol. (Arnobius, VII, 49.)

Obviously it is no mere accident that in the New Testament Christ and his followers are called "living stones," as we read in the first epistle of Peter, ii. 3-6:

"If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

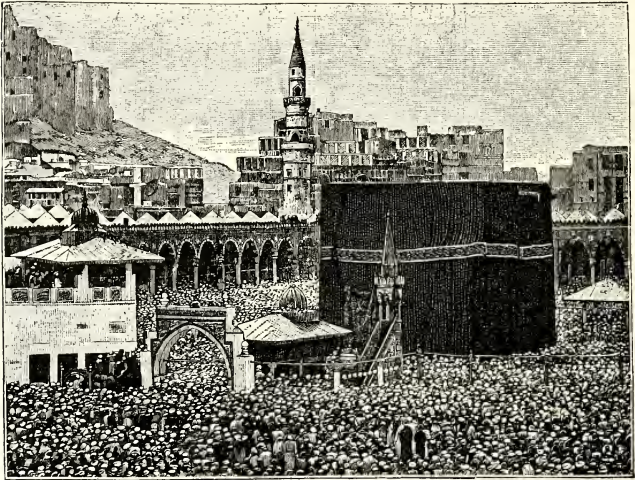
"To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious,

"Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

"Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded."

The stone in Zion refers to the rock inside the temple which being the real sacred place roofed by a *cúpola* was left in its native roughness because it would be desecrated if the stone mason's chisel should change its natural condition into an artificial man-made surface.

In the epistles of St. Paul we find the same awe for the rock as the symbol of Christ in 1 Cor. x. 4. In speaking of the children of Israel in the wilderness he says, "and they drank of that spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ." These sentiments are preserved in modern times in the figurative language



THE KAABA SURROUNDED BY PILGRIMS.

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of church hymns to the "Rock of Ages." These are a few of many instances:

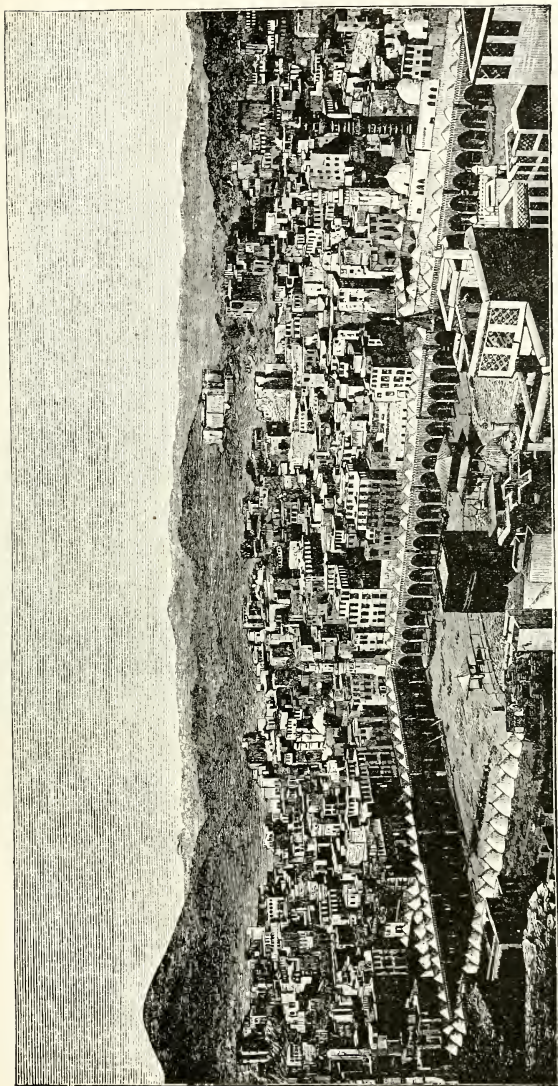
"Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee."

"Hiding in Thee, hiding in Thee,
Thou blest Rock of Ages, I'm hiding in Thee."

"From the riven Rock there floweth,
Living water ever clear."

"In Zion's Rock abiding,
My soul her triumph sings."

Though the idea has passed into Christianity, the church fathers,

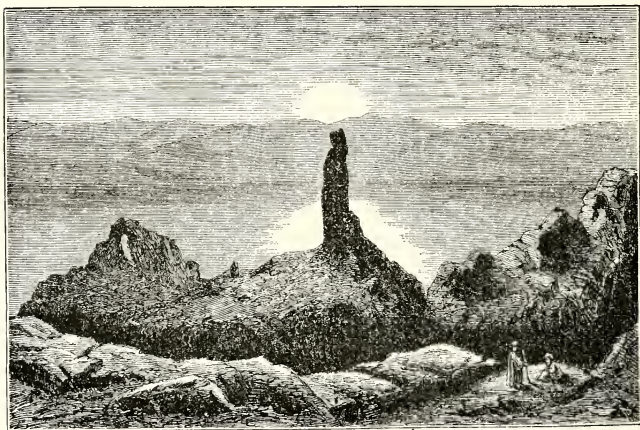


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MECCA, WITH THE KAABA IN THE FOREGROUND.

among them especially Clement of Alexandria, (Strom I, 11 *et passim*) protest very vigorously against showing reverence to sacred stones.

There is no doubt that connected with this idea of the sacredness of the stone is the idea that men may have been created from it. The Greek myth tells us that Deucalion and Pyrrha (the classical Noah and his wife) created men by throwing stones behind them, and St. John the Baptist refers to a similar belief when he says (Matt. iii. 9) that "God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham." In 4 Esdras v. 5 we read that in the last days the



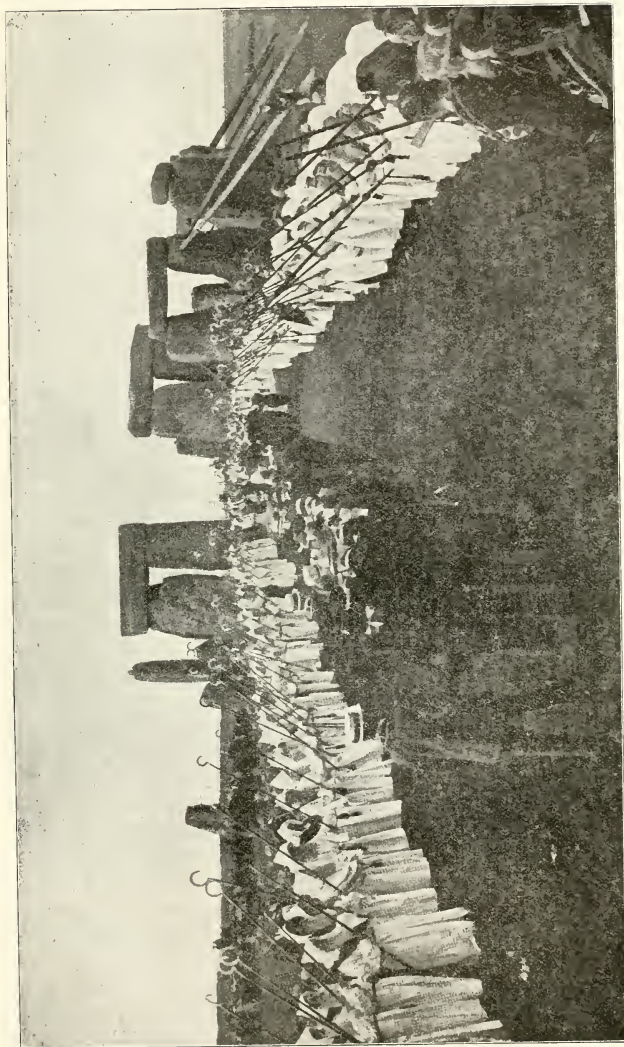
LOT'S WIFE.

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tribulations will grow so great that the stones will cry out, and Jesus himself in Luke xix. 40, treats the stones as living witnesses, saying with reference to the disciples that surround him that "if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out."

The theory has been advanced* that the reverence for stones may have been created by meteors which have been observed to fall from heaven. This is true of the Kaaba, the great meteorite at Mecca which has been an object of worship among the Arabians since time immemorial, and has remained such even with Mohammed

* See Schreiber in his article "Baitylos." (Roscher's *Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie*, p. 746.)



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DRUIDICAL CELEBRATION AT STONEHENGE.

and his successors, whose monotheism otherwise discountenanced idolatry, star worship, stone worship, etc., of any kind. But we have otherwise no evidence that stones are considered as Bethels because of the fact that some stones have fallen from heaven. The idea that rocks or stones are habitations of God originated independently of reverence shown to such meteorites as the Kaaba.

While on the one hand stones may be regarded as habitations of the Deity, we meet in folk-lore tales of all nations in the New as well as the Old World, legends concerning stones which are supposed to be petrified men. Even this notion has been incorporated in the Bible in the story of Lot's wife who, it is stated, turned into a pillar of salt because against God's specific command she turned back towards the burning cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. A pillar on the Dead Sea still bears the name of "Lot's Wife," and the spot is visited by curious travelers to-day.

The last reminiscence of stone worship that is still preserved in our language of to-day is the Mediæval notion of the philosopher's stone, whose existence was still believed in and whose construction was attempted by alchemists only a few centuries ago.

Our article on stone worship would perhaps be incomplete if we did not mention that the ancient site of Stonehenge has been selected as a meeting-place by the Ancient Order of Druids, a society somewhat like the freemasons who in their reunions imitate some of the old traditions of prehistoric ages. Though the religion which prevailed at the time when Stonehenge was a place of worship has passed away into utter oblivion, mankind has not lost an interest in the spirit of the past and we here reproduce a photograph showing the initiation of novices into the order under the auspices of their grand master, who bears the title of The Most Noble Grand Arch. The initiates carry long staves surmounted by crescents, which apparently are intended to represent the moon.

The ceremonies are no longer in rivalry with Christianity, but constitute a harmless play in archaic traditions most of which are built up more on imagination than on a real knowledge of facts.