ST. CATHARINE OF ALEXANDRIA.*

[CONCLUDED.]

The notion that Christ as the Viceroy of God on earth had a bride constantly remained as much in the minds of the people as the idea of the anti-Christ. The world was regarded as divided into two camps, the kingdom of God governed by Christ, identified with the Church under the leadership of the Pope, and the empire of unbelief which composed the entire pagan world and also the heretics of Christianity. In the mystic literature these ideas turn up again and again, and during the Middle Ages the bride of Christ is usually thought to be the Church, while among Protestants it is generally the soul. As an instance we will quote a passage from Hildegard of Bingen, an abbess and a prophetess who saw visions quite similar to those of St. John the Divine in the Revelations. She herself was almost illiterate, but her adviser, presumably her father confessor, reduced her prophecies to an approximately correct Latin and had them published.

Pope Eugene IV happened to visit in 1147-48 the Abbot of Treves. There he met Henry, Archbishop of Mentz who through Kuno, the Abbot of Disibodenberg had become deeply impressed with the spiritual profundity and genuineness of Hildegard's visions, and when a report of them was submitted to the Council of Treves, the Pope, urged by the Abbot Bernard of Clairvaux who happened to be present, readily acknowledged the divine origin of Hildegard's revelations and encouraged her in a personal letter to continue in her writings.†

We quote a passage from one of the prophecies recorded in the book Schias ascribed to Hildegard, the substance of which is re-

* This article was begun in the November number and was preceded by another on the same subject entitled "The Bride of Christ," which appeared in August.

† For further details see Wilhelm Preger's Geschichte der deutschen Mystik, pp. 33 f.
peatedly expressed in similar words, and which makes reference to the Antichrist as well as the bride of Christ which here symbolizes the Church:

"I perceived a voice from heaven which spoke to me: Although everything on earth tends toward the end, yet the bride of my son in spite of the fact that she is hard pressed in her children as well as she herself by the messengers of the Son of Perdition as well as by himself, shall by no means be annihilated however much she may be hard pressed. On the contrary she will rise at the end of time stronger and more vigorous, and more beautiful, and glorious, so that she will meet the embraces of her Loved One in a more graceful and lovely manner, and it is this that the vision which thou seest indicates in a mystical way."—(Quoted from Preger, loc. cit., p. 34.)

The sensualism of Hildegard's prophecy is quite in keeping with the hyperspirituality in which hysterical minds of her type love to indulge.

The idea that the Church was the bride of Christ has continued down to modern times, and has been cultivated even among Protestants, who have been most reluctant to accept the legend of St. Catharine, because the very idea of attributing a personal bride to Christ seems to give them a shudder, as if it were blasphemy, for it savors too much of mediaeval legends, saintworship, and paganism. Yet the belief in a symbolical bride is still retained as is evidenced by many chorals sung even to-day which celebrate the marriage of the Lamb, or the marriage of the King, the bride being mostly the soul, or the elect, represented by the wise virgins. We quote the following lines:

"The Bridegroom is advancing
    Each hour he draws more nigh.
Up! Watch and pray, nor slumber
    At midnight comes the cry.

"The watchers on the mountain
    Proclaim the bridegroom near.
Go, meet him as he cometh
    With hallelujahs clear."

In another choral we read:

"Jerusalem the holy
    To purity restored;
Meek bride, all fair and lowly,
    Go forth to meet thy Lord."
"With love and wonder smitten
And bowed in guileless shame,
Upon thy heart be written
The new mysterious name."

And a third churchsong of the same character begins with this stanza:

"The marriage feast is ready,
The marriage of the lamb.
He calls the faithful children
Of faithful Abraham.

"Now from the golden portals
The sounds of triumph ring;
The triumph of the Victor,
The marriage of the King."

The church hymns here quoted are by no means all the songs of this character. There are many more that belong to the same class, for instance: "Behold the Bride-groom Cometh," beginning "Our lamps are trimmed and burning"; and "The Lord is coming by and by," with the refrain, "Will you be ready when the Bridegroom comes?" We mention further, "Wake, awake, the night is flying," and there are several others more.

Protestantism has most assuredly gone to the extreme in rejecting romantic similes and fantastic notions, yet the underlying idea is the same as in pre-Christian festivals and, if we discovered in an ancient cuneiform inscription the two lines:

"The triumph of the Victor,
The marriage of the King!"

our Assyriologists would not hesitate to say that the words have reference to Bel Marduk, who after his victory over the dragon Tiamat enters in triumphal parade to celebrate his marriage with Istar Tsarpanitu.*

The legend which makes Catharine the bride of Christ has been much neglected since the rise of Protestantism, which had more influence upon the Roman Catholic Church than is commonly conceded. There are innumerable pictures of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth century representing the mystic marriage, but the Reformation seems to have acted as a blight on the romanticism of the legend. Even Roman Catholic artists had become too sober, we might say, too prosaic, and perhaps too timid, to revert to this formerly so very popular subject.

* Schrader, Keilinschriften und das Alte Testament, pp. 371 and 394.
The London National Gallery contains at least six St. Catharines, one among them (No. 168) is the famous St. Catharine of Alexandria by Raphael. Another (No. 249) is by Lorenzo da San Severino, a mystic marriage of St. Catharine of Siena, to whom (as we have seen in our previous article on "The Bride of Christ")

* The Open Court, Aug., 1907, p. 461.
on account of the sameness of the name the same mystic relation is attributed. The "Two Catharines" by Ambrogio Borgognone† is also one of the National Gallery collection (No. 298).

St. Catharine of Siena was a most striking figure in the Middle Ages and did not fail to impress the people with her extraordinary powers as a saint. She lived 1347-1380, at the time when the idea of the mystic marriage had already taken deep root in the hearts of the faithful. Being the daughter of a poor dyer she rose from the humblest surroundings. As early as in her thirteenth year she joined the Dominican order in which solely because of her sanctity

![Image](image_url)

By Pinturicchio, 1454-1513.
National Gallery, London.

and in spite of her lack of culture she took a leading position and played a prominent part even in the historical events of the age. Popular belief naturally fastened upon her all the honors of her namesake of Alexandria, and her mystic marriage has been pictured in her home, the Dominican convent at Siena, and by Umbrian painters.

The Pall Mall Magazine in a series of articles entitled "Half Holidays at the National Gallery," in an attempt to make the subject

†Ibid., p. 462.
intelligible to the modern Protestant spirit, makes the following comment upon San Severino’s picture:

“The mystic marriage which forms the subject of this picture, where the infant Christ is placing the ring on her finger, suggests the secret of her power. Once when she was fasting and praying, Christ himself appeared to her, she said, and gave her his heart. For love was the keynote of her religion, and the mainspring of her life. In no merely figurative sense did she regard herself as the spouse of Christ, but dwelt upon the bliss, beyond all mortal happiness, which she enjoyed in communion with her Lord. The world has not lost its ladies of the race of St. Catharine, beautiful and

pure and holy, who live lives of saintly mercy in the power of human and heavenly love.”

It stands to reason that the rivalry of the two Catharines led to acrimonious disputes which in those days were taken more seriously than the later born generation of a scientific age can appreciate. St. Catharine of Alexandria being the older one had a prior and a better claim and could no longer be ousted from her

* A copy of this picture in the church of St. Giobbe at Venice bears the name Previtali, which, considering the fact that they are apparently made by the same hand, is strong evidence that the artist worked under two names.
eminent position, so a compromise was made in which the two Catharines were regarded as being both genuine brides of Christ, yet at the same time it was understood that ecclesiastical authority would henceforth tolerate no other saints to aspire for the same honor.

A painting by Pinturicchio (also in the National Gallery) shows the donor kneeling with folded hands before our saint who listens to his prayer with a truly royal grace.

Two more pictures of St. Catharine in the National Gallery of
London are the one by Carlo Crivello, the other by an unknown master of the Umbrian school.

Considering the fact that in Northern Germany and in the Netherlands the Reformation spread with great rapidity in the first
half of the sixteenth century, and that with it every trace of a belief in a mystic marriage was thoroughly wiped out together with all saint-veneration or reverence for legendary lore, we are astonished to find a great number of Catharine pictures in these very countries.

MADONNA AND CHILD TOGETHER WITH FEMALE SAINTS AND DONOR’S FAMILY.

Artist known as “Master of the Life of Mary.”

We call special attention to a picture painted by an artist called Meister der heiligen Sippe (i.e., the master of the holy family) who represents the mystic marriage like a German family scene in which the bride is a typical German noblewoman of the time, well educated,
with an expression of simple-hearted devotion, and dressed with painstaking elegance.

Another artist, known as the Master of the Life of Mary, places the scene of the mystic marriage into a gracefully blossoming arbor, the foliage of which is so ideally sparse as to indicate very early springtime. Here too the features of all the saints are genuinely Teutonic, exhibiting the self-satisfied complacency of wealthy patricians, while the modest donors with their austere faces are crowded into the corners.

In a painting called "The Glorification of the Virgin" an unknown master of the German school presents us with a general view of the Christian world-conception of his age. In the heavens appears the Trinity. In the center God the Son is represented as the Christ-child in the arms of his mother, while on her right is God the Father and on her left the Holy Ghost. Below on earth the male saints are headed by John the Baptist, while St. Catharine takes the leadership of the female saints.
In further evidence of the extraordinary popularity of St. Catharine in Germany we reproduce two pictures of Master Wilhelm, who may have used the same model for both, showing here once in profile and then full face. Yet we shall find that all his saints possess a great family likeness in that they possess extremely small hands and unusually large foreheads. Of a similar type, though not quite so pronounced, are the St. Catharines by Stephen Lochner and by the Master of the Life of Mary, while an unknown artist of the Westphalian school endows his St. Catharine with hands of normal size.
The life of the saint has been made the subject of careful study especially in England, where Mrs. Jameson* and Dr. Einenkel have treated the subject with great ability. Both have come to the conclusion to look upon Hypatia as the prototype of St. Catharine’s martyrdom. The latter deems the similarities of the life of the saint and her pagan parallel exceedingly striking. He says (pp. xi-xii):

*Sacred and Legendary Art, II, 87-88.
"Time, place and background exactly agree. Both ladies are of high and noble origin; both deeply, and from their childhood, imbued in the sciences of paganism; both reasoning with philosophers, and, indeed, philosophers themselves; both suffering and dying for their belief. Here, too, in the religious story as in Egyptian history, we have a representative of the worldly power playing an
SAINTS CATHARINE, HUBERT, AND QUIRINUS.

By Stephen Lochner in the Munich Gallery.
important part in the tragedy, he being in reality the only slayer of the virgin. If we come to speak of the alterations which the plain historical facts have undergone, there is indeed not one of them which might not easily be accounted for, either by the change of religion or by the changes of times.”

In the oldest report of the legends, the Menologium Basilianum, we read that “seeing the slaughter of animals, she was so greatly moved that she went to King Maximus.” This is a trace left of a religious movement against bloody sacrifices. Though the Christians had adopted the argument and used it against the pagan mode
of worship, they did not make it as prominent as it appears here. For the God of the Christians was also the God of the Jews, and as such he had demanded bloody sacrifices as much as any of the pagan gods. In fact, if we can trust historical reports, the temple of Jerusalem must have reeked with the blood of slaughtered bul-

MADONNA AND CHILD, WITH SAINTS BARBARA AND CATHERINE.

By Bernardino Luini, 1470-1535. St. Catharine may be recognized by the wheel which she wears as an ornament while the emblem of St. Barbara is the tower with three windows.
locks and other cattle which the pious Jews in their zealous devotion offered in uncounted numbers.

There were Oriental philosophers in Alexandria who had been under Jaina and Buddhist influences and denied the righteousness of the ceremonial shedding of blood. But we need not even go so far as distant India to explain the feeling that revolted against bloody sacrifice. The Neoplatonists had given frequent utterance to the same sentiment, and the great religious leader, Apollonius of Tyana* left no opportunity unimproved to preach against the impiety of bloody sacrifice.

THE VIRGIN ENTHRONED.

Sienese of late fifteenth century. The Virgin is attended by saints among whom is St. Catharine.

We cannot doubt that whatever be the historical source of the St. Catharine legend we have here tradition which is ultimately based upon a myth of a solar bride. It is certainly not a mere accident that the emblem of St. Catharine is the wheel which from time immemorial has been the symbol of the sun, and we must remember that the ancient punishment of an execution on the wheel was originally meant as a sacrifice to the sun-god.

Does Fra Angelico perhaps follow an ancient tradition when he represents St. Catharine clothed in a garment covered with the stars of the heavens? The story of the bride of Christ certainly testifies to the tenacity of religious ideas, and perhaps also to the truth that even in different religions, pagan as well as Christian, the same ideas and the same allegories turn up again and again, as if they were the permanent element in all historical changes.