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SEPTEMBER, 1911

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The Open Court

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Devoted to the Science of Religion, the Religion of Science, and the
Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea

Founded by EDWARD C. HEGELER.



THE LAST SUPPER.

A mosaic in Ravenna regarded as the oldest known presentation of that event.
(See "Pagan and Christian Love-Feasts," p. 520.)

The Open Court Publishing Company
CHICAGO

LONDON: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Ltd.

Per copy, 10 cents (sixpence). Yearly, \$1.00 (in the U.P.U., 5s. 6d.).

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THE GENIUS OF VACCINATION DRIVING OUT THE DEMON OF SMALL-POX.
Japanese Colorprint by Shuntei.

Frontispiece to *The Open Court*.

THE OPEN COURT

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VOL. XXV. (No. 9.) SEPTEMBER, 1911.

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PAGAN AND CHRISTIAN LOVE-FEASTS.

BY THE EDITOR.

ONE most obvious difference between paganism and Christianity has been pointed out again and again as the prevalence of joy in the former and of a somber gloom in the latter. The reason is easily traced in the nearness of the pre-Christian religions to



A BABYLONIAN COMMUNION.

nature, while in the Christian era the seriousness of the Christian conception of life is so emphasized as to look upon pleasure as sin. It is only of late that Christianity in its most modern phases begins to overcome its hostility to the world and in this sense to approach

again the pagan spirit which appears in its noblest form in the religious sentiment of ancient Greece.

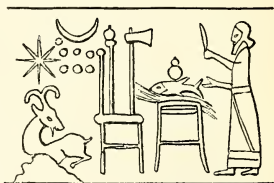
Love-feasts, however, are older than Greek civilization. They are pictured in the ancient Babylonian monuments and it is remarkable that they contain two features of special significance. In one monument we see worshipers partaking of a drink, raising their cups in solemn consecration. In other monuments a sacramental fish plays a conspicuous part. We here reproduce two such Babylonian ceremonies.

The deities who are present are represented by their symbols. In one case, a fish *eucharist*, we see sun, moon, and the seven planets; in the other, a fish *sacrifice*, the star, the moon, the seven planets, the capricorn and the three symbols, the scepter, the mace and the axe.

The reason for this fish sacrament in Babylonia is easily found in the fact that Nina, the spouse of Tammuz, the vegetation god who



A BABYLONIAN FISH EUCHARIST.



A BABYLONIAN FISH SACRIFICE.

annually dies in the fall and rises to life again in spring, is a fish goddess. Perhaps for this reason the fish is sacred also to the fish goddess of Hierapolis. Considering that Tammuz plays the same part in Babylonia and Assyria as Christ in Christian countries, we need not be astonished that the capital of Assyria was called Nineveh, which means the house of the fish.

The Open Court for January 1910 contained a translation of the Egyptian Harper's Song which is an ancient version of the German student song *Gaudeamus igitur*. In fact we have reason to believe that the *Gaudeamus* is historically connected with the Harper's Song and may be considered a lineal descendant of it. The same sentiment has come down to us through the ages in the mysteries of Dionysus and other religious institutions. Traces of it have been preserved in ancient Babylon and also in the convivial scenes depicted on pagan tombs of the worshipers of Mithras and Dionysus. The most remarkable forms of these are found in

the tomb erected in honor of Vibia who was the wife of Vincentius, a priest of Sabazius (Dionysus). The death of Vibia is represented as the rape of Persephone by Pluto under the guidance of Mercury.



THE EUCHARIST OF VIBIA.
Painting on the Tomb of Vincentius.

The latter leads her before the throne of the rulers of the nether world. In the relief here reproduced the good angel guides Vibia through the portal of death into the Elysian Fields where men sow and reap without labor fruits that can be eaten without cooking.



THE SEVEN PRIESTS OF SABAZIUS.
Painting on the Tomb of Vincentius.

Vibia is represented twice on the picture, first at the entrance and second seated among the blessed ones who have been deemed worthy of the bliss of Elysium (*bonorum iudicio iudicati*). The fish is con-

spicuous among the viands on the table. Vincentius himself takes part in a love-feast as a member of a sacred seven, some of whom wear the Mithraistic miter.

Cumont¹ hints at the possibility that though Vincentius was certainly a pagan he may have belonged to a Jewish pagan sect in which Judaism had influenced the worship of Sabazius, but there is not the slightest foundation in fact for this hypothesis. It is based on the obvious similarity between the conception of life that we find portrayed in pre-Christian catacombs and that of Christianity



A LOVE-FEAST OF THE FABIAN FAMILY.

Painting in the cemetery of Peter and Marcellinus in the Via Labicana (Roller, pl. LIII).

which can be traced in the catacombs of a later date. But on the one hand we can explain all the ideas of the Vincentius frescoes from pagan customs and on the other hand Judaism proper contains nothing of these ideas, nor do we know anything of Jewish pagan sects which "admitted neophytes of every race to its mystic ceremonies." We do not deny that in such a secret society or sort of lodge as the one to which Vincentius belonged Jews might have been admitted as well as Gentiles, but there is no question that the character

¹ See his article "Asia Minor," *Open Court*, May, 1910. To be found also in his *Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism* (Chicago, Open Court Publishing Co., now on the press), p. 65.

of the cult was decidedly un-Jewish, and if there were Jews among its members they had certainly abandoned the faith of their fathers.

This tomb being so undeniably pagan deserves a few more words. Prof. Ernst Maass in his *Orpheus* (p. 209) describes the inscription as follows:² "The head priest of Sabazius (Dionysus) and other gods, a certain Vincentius, had erected in Rome a family sepulcher for himself and his wife Vibia. The inscription reads: 'Vincenti hoc (ostium) quetes [*quietis*] quot [*quod*] vides; plures me antecesserunt, omnes exspecto. Manduca bibe lude et veni at me; cum vives [*vives*], benefac; hoc tecum feres.'

"Numinis antistes Sabazis Vincentius hic est,
qui sacra sancta deum mente pia coluit."

[“This which thou seest is the entrance of the rest of Vincentius. Several have preceded me, all I expect. Eat, drink, frolic, and come



A PAGAN FISH EUCHARIST.

Now in the Lateran. From d'Agincourt, *Sculpture*, pl. VIII, 20.

unto me. As long as thou livest thou shalt act righteously (*benefac*): this thou wilt take with thee.”]

The idea contained in this last maxim seems to have crept into the Greco-Roman world from India. It incorporates the main Buddhist doctrine of *karma*, that the works of a man are his very self and that in them he survives. The same sentence is found almost literally in the Buddhist Samyutta-Nikaya (iii. 1, 4) where we read concerning the *karma*:

“’Tis this that he can call his own,
This with him take as he goes hence.”

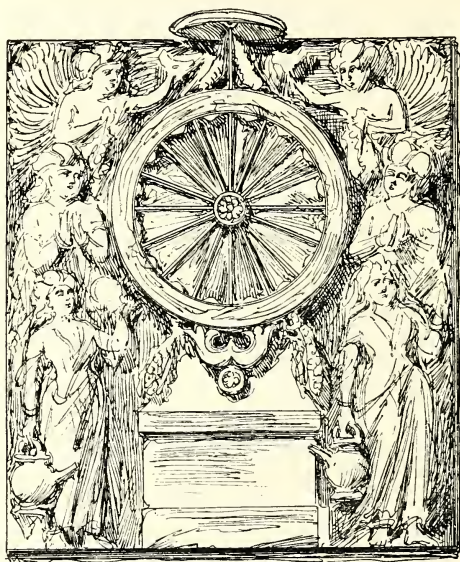
—Tr. by Warren.

It has entered Christianity in the proclamation of the voice from heaven recorded in the Apocalypse (xiv. 13), “They rest from their

² An English translation of this chapter of Maass's work is given in *The Open Court*, XIV, 321-332. For this passage see page 322.

labors and their works do follow them." This tomb of the pagan priest Vincentius is by some accident situated in the vicinity of the catacombs though not connected with them. Its presence there is no argument for the assumption that it is Christian, though this has sometimes been claimed for it.

Other representations of pagan feasts have been preserved on sarcophagi which are probably Mithraistic. One of these (see p. 517) is preserved in the Lateran and has been reproduced by d'Agincourt in his *Sculpture* (pl. VIII, 20) and republished by Becker (p. 121).



THE BUDDHIST TRINITY SUPPORTING THE WHEEL OF THE LAW.

Another one is preserved in the Borgia collection in the National Museum at Naples, and a third one according to Roller (pl. LIV) in the Lateran. Incidentally we may mention that Becker in his *Darstellung Jesu Christi* (page 21) locates this monument in the Villa Borghese before the Porta del Popolo.

It will be noticed that these pagan eucharists preach the joy of life and seem intended to consecrate the convivial pleasures in so-called love-feasts or eucharists, and the same idea pervades the

Christian love-feasts or agapés, both with reference to the number seven of the participants and the conviviality of the scene.

This relief preserved in the *Museo cristiano* of the Lateran has been claimed as Christian on account of the fish and the breaking



A CONVIVIAL SCENE.

A sarcophagus preserved in the National Museum at Naples. The pagan character is assured by the gaiety of the scene.

of the bread, but this interpretation is very doubtful because the fish appears on other pagan monuments, and so does the cross on the loaves and the secular character of the drinking. Further we note



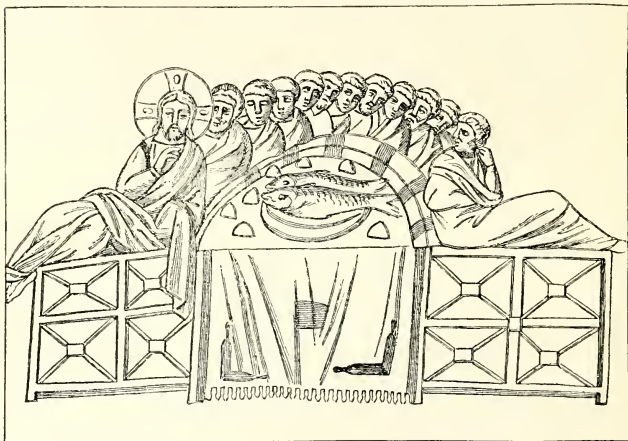
A PAGAN LOVE-FEAST.

Now in the Lateran Museum. From Roller, *Les cata. de Rome*, pl. LIV. The pagan character is assured by the winged Eros at the left.

an apple in the hand of one of the guests and the support on which the dish rests resembles very strongly the Buddhist trisul, the symbol of the Buddhist trinity.

The other two reliefs where the guests feast on a boar's head are typical illustrations of the *Gaudeamus* spirit that prevailed in Dionysian love-feasts, which is preserved in a pagan epitaph quoted by Orelli (II, 7410) as follows: "Omnes qui legitis moneo: Miscete Lyaeum et teneros coitus formosis ferte puellis. Caetera post obitum tellus consumit et ignis." This may be freely translated: "All ye who read be warned to drink and kiss. All else is doomed to death."

Present Christianity knows nothing of a fish eucharist, and if we did not possess definite indications and inscriptions proving that



THE LAST SUPPER.

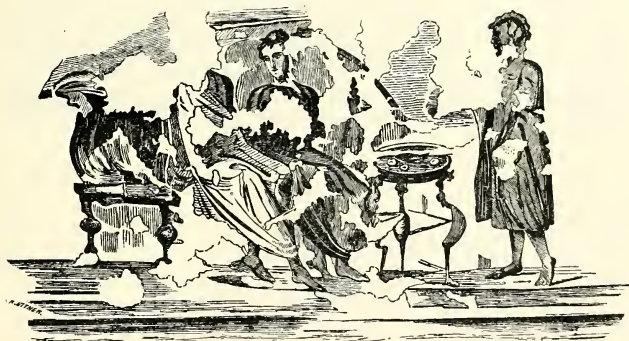
A Mosaic in the Church of St. Apollinaris at Ravenna. After Garucci.—According to Kraus (*Geschichte der christlichen Kunst*, I, 435), this picture is the oldest known presentation of the Last Supper, and it is noteworthy that here the fish diet is made very prominent. It pictures the moment when Judas has left the table to betray his master, and accordingly we count only eleven disciples.

such an institution existed we would scarcely believe it, for it is never mentioned in church history nor in any official doctrines of the church. It came and went, but while it existed—which was about the same time as when Christ was worshiped under the symbol of the fish and a little later—it played a very significant part and was deemed highly important. This is evidenced by the numerous fish eucharists painted in the catacombs. In one case the scene appears more like a family supper. In one of the many frescoes of

St. Calixtus the eucharist character is rendered apparent by the presence of a woman in the attitude of prayer and of a priestly person



A EUCHARIST OF BREAD AND FISH.
Fresco in the cemetery of St. Calixtus.



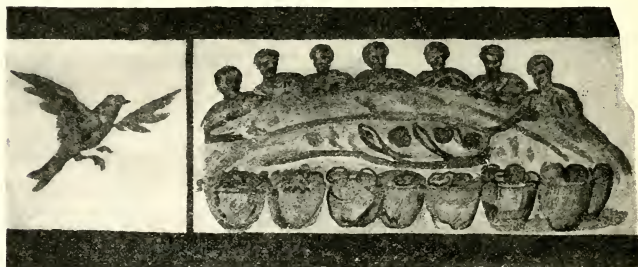
FRESCO IN THE CEMETERY OF DOMITILLA.

A meal of fish and bread, presumably a eucharist and possibly Christian.

extending the right hand in blessing over the fish, in spite of the fact that the dress of the latter is more pagan than Christian, his right

arm being bare after the fashion of Buddhist priests and Greek ascetics. While the picture is not badly executed we are struck by the awkwardness of the three fingers of the praying woman. At any rate it is noticeable that the fish is plainly pictured as a part of the eucharist, and if we had not additional evidence that such was the case we might assume it merely from these illustrations in the catacombs.

The significance of the fish eucharist is also attested by two inscriptions, one the epitaph of Pectorius dating about the fourth



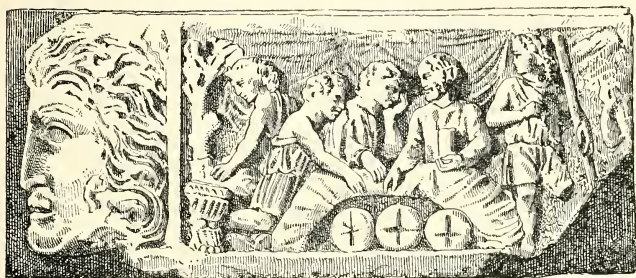
TWO CHRISTIAN EUCHARISTS.

(Matt. xv. 37). Note the seven participants in both.
From the cemetery of St. Calixtus.

century, discovered in 1839 in the St. Pierre l'Estrées cemetery near Autun in Gaul (the ancient Augustodunum), the other the epitaph of Abercius quoted in the *Vita Aberici* by Simon Metaphrastes and also in *Anecdota Graeca* by Boissonade (p. 462). Both are written in Greek hexameters, but the texts are doubtful in many places. Pitra publishes a complete bibliography on the former in his *Spicilegium Solesmense* and Garrucci in his *Mélanges d'épigraphie ancienne* (Paris, 1856) has published both.

The inscription of the tomb of Pectorius reads as follows: "Preserve, oh divine generation of the heavenly fish, a holy heart after

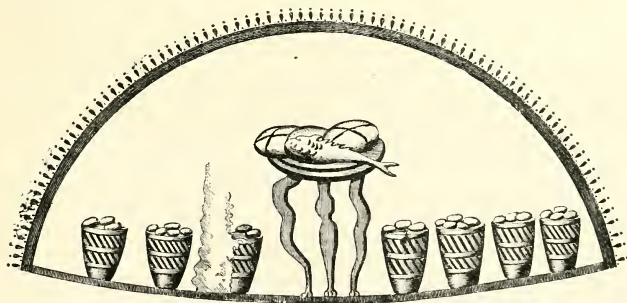
thou hast received among mortals immortal life in the divine water. Refresh thy soul, beloved, with the inexhaustible water of the wealth-yielding wisdom by receiving the honey-sweet food of the Saviour of the saints."



LOVE-FEAST WITH WINE AND BREAD.

Relief in the Kircher Museum at Rome, presumably pagan. After Roller, pl. LIV, 7.

The lines thus far show the acrostic *IXΘΥΣ*. They continue: "Eat hungrily holding in thy hands the fish. With the fish fill me I pray, Lord, Saviour. Well mayst thou rest, mother I pray thee,



THE SEVEN BASKETS OF BREAD.

(Matt. xv. 37.)

From the cemetery of St. Calixtus.

oh Light of the dead. Aschandios, my father, dear to my soul together with my sweet mother and my brothers, in the feast of the fish remember thy Pectorius."

The epitaph of the Phrygian bishop Abercius, who died in the second century, reads as follows:

"A citizen of a distinguished city, I, during my lifetime have ordered this monument to be made, so that when the time comes my body may find here a resting place. Abercius is my name; disciple I of the holy shepherd who tends the sheep upon the mountains as well as in the plain. Great eyes he has, all things beholding. He taught me the life-giving faith. To Rome he sent me to see the royal city and the people there. I saw the people wearing seal rings and Peter and Paul combined therein. The plain of Syria I also beheld and all the tombs, wandering through Nisibis and the valley of Euphrates. Everywhere found I fellow believers from the East. Faith, however, produced and proposed as food the fish from the spring, the very great, the pure one which the holy Virgin had received. And this one (the fish) he gave to the friends to eat throughout, offering good wine mixed, and bread. This I have declared, myself being present, Abercius writing thus, 72 years old; this in truth is my age. Every one thinking like me pray for me. Let no one make upon my tomb another tomb. Whoever does so shall pay to the treasury of the Romans 2000 gold pieces and 1000 to the city of Hierapolis."