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Founded by Edward C. Hegeler

A CHRISTIAN GOOD SHEPHERD.
From a fresco of Cyrene. (See pages 716-718.)

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HEAD OF CHRIST.
By Leonardo da Vinci.

Frontispiece to The Open Court.
THE OPEN COURT

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

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THE PORTRAYAL OF CHRIST.

BY THE EDITOR.

The early Christians were full of faith and enthusiasm and
believed that everything Christian was absolutely new and that
the new truth they had received was spiritual, not born of sense;
that it was quite contrary to nature, to the human in man, and
different from everything that existed or had existed in the pagan
world; that it was supernatural and so formed a contrast to science
and to art. Under these circumstances the conception of Christ
was in their opinion beyond representation, and it was even deemed
sinful to attempt a portrayal of him who was the incarnation of
the mystery of truth. With the progress of history this overexul-
tant view was gradually modified. The original iconoclasm hostile
to art sobered down and in the course of its growth Christianity
developed a Christ type that satisfied the religious conception
of the Christ ideal. The height of the development of Christian art
was reached in the time of the Renaissance, but the period of de-
determining the Christ type, the struggle of art for the permission
to determine it, will prove both interesting and instructive; it will
allow us an insight into the nature of man's religious needs in art,
and an epitome of this chapter in the history of Christian art will
throw light on the function of the ideal in human life.

Every religion, every age, every world-conception has ideals,
and in its early period Christianity was not believed to stand in
need of having its own ideal worked out in an artistic form, for
such a conception was deemed to be pagan and idolatrous. We of
a later generation understand how narrow was this view, and that
among nations imbued with a natural artistic instinct it could not be maintained forever, but it took centuries to overcome the prejudice against graven or painted images, and to develop in art the Christ type, a portrayal of the God-man, the ideal of Christianity.

* * *

By a great majority of the early Christians Christ was thought to be ungainly, because Isaiah (lii. 2) says of him: "He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him." This same chapter is most significant because it describes the expected Messiah as "a man of sorrows" and contains among other verses the following passage: "Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed."

It will be difficult to explain what the prophet meant when writing these lines. In the Polychrome Bible the explanation is offered that the prophet here personifies the ideal of the people of Israel, and declares that while Israel in its downtrodden condition appears ungainly in the eyes of the world, it has yet a great mission to perform. But the passage seems too personal to allow such a personification of the genius of the people, and it is more probable that here reference is made to a definite personality, who though not possessing striking qualities is promised to be a man helpful to the cause of Israel. The sufferings and humiliations to which he is exposed are accounted for on the ground that in standing up for Israel, he suffers for Israel's sake. The man referred to by the prophet did not attain sufficient prominence in the history of the nation to be remembered by name. Hence he is forgotten while the passage itself is preserved on account of its literary beauty as well as the depth of sentiment which it contains.

The early Christians insisted on obliterating the personal appearance of Christ because Paul (2 Cor. v. 16) expressly declares, "Yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth we know him no more." This view is further elaborated by Clement of Alexandria who says that Christ scorned beautiful appearance lest any of his hearers would be disturbed thereby in the admiration of the beauty of his words. And according to Origen Jesus had no definite form but appeared different to different people. Here we have a strange parallel to Buddhist views for it is stated in the Book of the Great Decease that "when the Buddha entered
THE PORTRAYAL OF CHRIST.

into an assembly he always before he seated himself became in color like unto the color of his audience and in speech like unto their speech."

The idea that Christ was ungainly could not in the long run influence the development of Christian art. This anti-artistic notion defeated itself and produced no monuments that were preserved. The conception of Christ as the "man of sorrows" which was predominant among the early Christians, had a more lasting effect, but the Christians of a later age, especially after Constantine's conversion, saw the brighter side in the personality of Christ, and so they remembered the passage in Ps. xlv. 2: "Thou art fairer than the children of men; grace is poured into thy lips, therefore God hath blessed thee forever," and under the influence of this thought, Christ was regarded as an ideal man, beautiful and majestic in appearance. This view gained more and more influence and finally determined the type of the Christ picture which was to become acceptable to Christendom. When the type was approximately agreed upon, it found expression in a description of the personality of Christ which in former centuries was assumed to be genuine but is now almost unanimously regarded as spurious. This document is a letter purporting to come from a certain Lentulus, a predecessor of Pontius Pilate, who calls himself "President of the people of Jerusalem" and addresses his epistles "To the Roman Senate and People." The letter was probably composed in the twelfth century and reads as follows:

"There has appeared in our times, and still lives, a man of great virtue named Christ Jesus, who is called by the Gentiles a prophet of truth and whom his disciples call the Son of God, raising the dead and healing diseases. He is a man of lofty stature, handsome, having a venerable countenance which the beholders can both love and fear. His hair has the color of a ripe hazel-nut, almost smooth down to the ears, and below that somewhat curling and falling down upon the shoulders in waves. It is of an Oriental color and is parted in the middle of the head after the manner of the Nazarenes. His forehead is smooth and very serene, and his face without any wrinkle or spot, and beautiful with a slight flush. His nose and mouth are without fault; his beard is abundant and auburn like the hair of his head, not long but forked. His eyes are gray, clear and sparkling. He is terrible in rebuke, calm and loving in admonition, cheerful but preserving gravity, has never been seen to laugh but often to weep. Also in stature of body he is tall; and his hands and limbs

1 Cf. the author's Gospel of Buddha, Chap. 6r.
are beautiful to look upon. In speech he is grave, reserved, and modest; and he is fair among the children of men."

Another description of the personality of Jesus, probably earlier in its real date but much later than the pretensions of the former report, is preserved in a letter from John of Damascus to the Emperor Theophilus, an author of the eighth century who claims to rely on older authorities. His description differs slightly from that attributed to Lentulus mainly by speaking of the hair of Jesus as curling and of a glossy black, his complexion as of a yellowish color like that of wheat (in which particular it is said he resembled his mother), and further it is stated that his eyebrows touched one another.

The difference between the two descriptions is mostly verbal and indicates that they are expressions of the same prevalent views. While the Christ type noticeably converges toward the same ideal it is peculiar that in the latter account his complexion is described as "of a yellowish color like that of wheat." A comparison to wheat indicates a symbolism, and in this connection it is remarkable that in the night when the Buddha passed away he was dressed in a cloth of burnished gold, and that on this occasion the skin of the Blessed One became so exceedingly bright that the burnished cloth of gold appeared dull in comparison with it. The same transfiguration took place also in the night the Buddha attained enlightenment, and it seems that this idea of a radiance brighter than gold in a transfigured saviour is based on an ancient tradition. Further we must bear in mind that the grain of wheat is considered in pagan as well as in Pauline thought (1 Cor. xv. 35-42) as a symbol of immortality, promising a resurrection from the grave. Ears of wheat figure in the Eleusinian mysteries.

* * *

While Eusebius and St. Augustine still vigorously objected to the custom of making or keeping portraits of Christ which they deemed sheer idolatry, the need of having their Saviour visible before their eyes was felt more and more among the Christian people. It was a human want and had to be satisfied, and the old prejudice inherited from the Jews who would brook no likeness of the Deity of any kind was gradually overcome by portraits which were claimed to have originated in a miraculous way as not made with human hands. The Abgar picture of Jesus, called the Edessenum (the same idea being imitated later on in the Veronica legend) prepared Christianity to tolerate portraits of Christ. Such was the first phase in the development of Christ portraits, but a
definite conception of the Christ face worked its way out almost simultaneously and independently of Edessenum and even previous to the Veronica.

Considering the prejudice which obtained in the circles of early Christians against art, and especially against portraits, it is not surprising that the first representatives of Christ were found not among Christians but among pagans, and next to the pagans among the heretics. Alexander Severus (c. 205-235 A.D.) is reported to have kept in the chapel of his palace among the busts of the sages and religious leaders of the world, portraits of Orpheus, Abraham, Apollonius, and Christ, but the latitude and the philosophical spirit of the broad-minded pagan emperor did not meet with the approval of the early Christians who regarded as un-Christian the very respect with which busts of great men were treated, and saw in the very fact of the emperor having a portrait that claimed to represent Jesus an evidence that he did not understand the spirit of the new faith.

The next mention of portraits of Christ gives us the information that they were found among the gnostic sect of Carpocratians, who claimed that they had been copied from a portrait painted at the command of Pontius Pilate. We read in Irenæus of a certain woman “Marcellina who came to Rome under [the episcopate of] Anicetus and led many people astray. They style themselves gnostics. They also possess images, some of them painted, and others formed from different kinds of material; while they maintain that a likeness of Christ was made by Pilate at that time when Jesus lived among men. They crown these images, and set them up along with the images of the philosophers of the world; that is to say, with the images of Pythagoras, and Plato, and Aristotle, and the rest. They have also other modes of honoring these images, after the same manner as the Gentiles.”

We need not enter here into a discussion of the nature of the statue which stood at Cesarea Philippi,² for we deem it most probable that it was a representation of Hadrian erected as an expression of gratitude toward that popular and so-called provincial emperor, but we ought to mention that this monument is sometimes also explained as a representation of Æsculapius (Asklepios) on account of the inscription which according to Eusebius was “To the Saviour”² or “To the True Physician,”² but we must know

² See The Open Court, for December, 1908, pp. 721-722.
² τῷ σωτῆρι.
² τῷ ἀληθινῷ λατρεῖ.
that while Æsculapius was called the true physician, Emperor Augustus had acquired the title "Saviour" several years before the Christian era when the expectation of a saviour was quite common and the title "true physician" was often used in connection with this designation.

* * *

In the cemetery of St. Sebastian at Rome, the torso of a marble bust was discovered by excavators in the year 1887, which Orazio Marucchi has rather rashly declared to belong to a head of Christ. It is a pity, however, that the face itself is broken off and only the neck with some curls of hair falling upon the shoulders is preserved, which makes it very difficult to form a definite opinion. The main

AN ALLEGED BUST OF CHRIST.
After Marucchi.

justification in support of Marucchi's view appears to be the style of the locks which are very similar to those we are accustomed to see in many Christ pictures of an early date. According to the style and treatment of the marble, this bust has been assigned to the fourth century or may even be of an earlier date, and if it was indeed meant for a Christ head it would be a relic of greatest interest as the oldest representation of Christ in existence.

The mutilation of the head makes us pause. Is it not possible and even probable that this Christ bust (if such it is) must have been of pagan or gnostic origin? If that be so, the broken condition in which it was found would be accounted for. Pagans have never destroyed or injured statues of the gods of other peoples. When
the Romans waged wars on other nations, they were most careful not to offend foreign deities and even attempted to conciliate their wrath, while Christians considered it a meritorious deed to smash idols.

In a similar spirit the ancient Persians destroyed temples for religious motives, believing it wrong to incarcerate gods within walls. If Marucchi's bust was really made with the intention to represent Christ, we feel inclined to assume that being of heretical
origin it fell into the hands of a mob of iconoclastic Christians who regarded the very making of images as idolatry; and in this case we may have before us the torso of a Christ such as existed in the homes of men like Severus or of some wealthy Carpocratian.

* * *

Since it was originally idolatrous to make or to tolerate any Christ picture at all, the early Christians represented the Saviour by symbols, either under the form of the monogram of Christ, or as a lamb, or as a fish; or as Orpheus because the Orpheus cult in classical antiquity taught the immortality of the soul.

It is strange that a pagan god could have been selected as a type under which to symbolize Christ, but the situation is easily explained if we consider that Orpheus was one of the later gods. He was the magic singer who, as inaugurator of the Orphic mysteries, had descended into hell and (like Odysseus) had come out
of it alive; he was an outsider of the old orthodox Pantheon of paganism; no altars were erected to him, nor was he represented in the form of statues to be worshiped in temples. His name was whispered into the ears of neophytes in the Orphic mysteries, and his figure was chiseled on the tombs of the dead in company with his beloved wife Eurydice and with Hermes, the leader of souls.
There he appears, not as a powerful god but as a divine man, as a prophet, a poet and musician. Orpheus attempted to lead his wife Eurydice back to life, but he was not successful because he failed to fulfil the condition that he should not look back. In his anxiety to behold his wife he turned and saw her disappear; yet after all he had the confidence that she was not dead but alive, and that the time would come when they would again be united. This human feature in the story of Orpheus made his figure dear to all. In fact the Orphean and other mysteries helped to prepare the way for Christianity, and so even the Christians felt in sympathy with the meaning of the legend.

Hermes (in Latin Mercury) is mentioned in connection with the Orpheus legend, and we will state incidentally that he too escaped the general odium heaped upon the gods of the orthodox Pantheon in the days of early Christianity. He, psychopompos, leader of souls,

played an important part in the time of transition as representing the idea of resurrection. His name was identified with a spiritual interpretation of the old views. He represented the new thought at the close of classical antiquity. He was called the thrice great, Trismegistas, and the shepherd of men, Poimander.

There is scarcely any antipathy to this pagan conception of immortality, and it was but natural that the Christians saw their own Saviour, Jesus Christ, in the figures of Orpheus, Odysseus and even in Hermes. The portrayal of Orpheus on tombstones did not remind them of idols. Orpheus was not worshiped with incense and sacrifices as the other gods before whose statues altars were erected. He was not considered as a demon but as one who in his own experience exemplified the bereavement which will come to all people sooner or later. He was a prototype of the Saviour who would bring the boon of life eternal to suffering mankind.

Odysseus was another symbolical personality of the same type
who was remembered by the Christians. They did not represent his descent into Hades, however, presumably because the details smacked too much of the old pagan notions, but they pictured him as he passed by the sirens, a form of harpies or death-demons. He could hear their voices and yet would not fall a prey to their allurements.

It is interesting to notice that the Christian Odysseus pictures are imitations of pagan art, as the same motif exists in a painting on a hydra discovered in Vulci. The latter shows Odysseus passing by the Sirens, and their despair is so great that one of them throws herself down into the floods, just as the sphinx of Oedipus precipitates herself into the abyss when he solves her riddle. The idea of Odysseus as a victor over the demons of death is not made prominent in the ancient representations, although it is not entirely absent, but in the Christian pictures of the same subject there is no
other interest in the scene than this idea of symbolizing the attainment of immortality. It is remarkable, however, that in this pagan representation the prow of the ship of Odysseus is covered with a cloth bearing crosses, suggesting the idea that the cross as a sign of salvation was used as a powerful magic charm before the appearance of Christianity.

The Christian representation of Christ as Odysseus is found on the sarcophagus of Tyranus, whose monogram appears in an empty field in front. The sculpture is well done, and we may assume that the person at the left of the monogram represents Tyranus himself.

* * *

With the fading respect for ancient pagan mysteries, comparisons of Christ with pagan heroes and demigods were gradually abandoned, while another type, that of Christ as herdsman, became more and more popular. Though this simile was also inherited from paganism, it was more justified than Orpheus in Christianity because of the parable in the New Testament in which Christ is compared to a good shepherd.

The figure of Christ as the good shepherd appears on communion cups at the end of the second century, although the custom was still vigorously denounced by Tertullian. Yet in spite of all opposition it spread more and more, and in the catacombs representations of Christ as the good shepherd were found in great numbers.

We here reproduce a Christian good shepherd from a fresco of the Cyrene catacombs which is somewhat different from the cor-
Sarcophagi of the fourth (possibly fifth) century. In the Lateran Museum.
responding pictures in the Roman catacombs, because we have here a Greek representation which differs a little from the Roman type. The good shepherd wears the paxnula over his tunic and is surrounded by seven big fishes which float about him in the air. Furthermore he wears on his head a wreath of leaves. There is obviously a symbolic meaning in the number of the fishes and lambs, both being seven.

There are numerous sarcophagi which show the figure of a youth carrying a lamb, and considering the fact that we have to deal here with a type that was a favorite motif in pagan days, we must not claim every one of them as Christian. There is in the

![](image)

**FRAGMENT OF SARCOPHAGUS.**

In the Lateran.

Lateran, for instance, a sarcophagus which is thoroughly pagan in taste and exhibits not one but three shepherds carrying lambs. It is remarkable that the one in the center is bearded while those on either side are youths. The rest of the surface is filled with little cupids gathering grapes, pressing wine, and one of them milking a ewe. The crooks in their hands mark the three lamb-bearers as shepherds, the workmanship of the high relief is excellent and archeologists attribute the sarcophagus to the fourth century.

Another sarcophagus in the Lateran of unknown date, scarcely later than 400 A. D., shows in the center a medallion which might be regarded as a Christ portrait holding in his left hand a scroll, and yet there is otherwise no Christian emblem but on the contrary
we see before us only unquestionably pagan scenes, such as incense offerings made by cupids, and on the ground lies a rooster sacrificed as a gift to Æsculapius after death in gratitude for having been cured of the malady of life in the flesh. There are two genii with torches, one of them lowering his torch over a prostrate woman. May not the portrait with the scroll represent the deceased person, possibly an author, a lawyer, or an orator? Or may we not have here a pagan teacher like Apollonius who was portrayed in a similar way? Who can tell!

On top of this obviously pagan sarcophagus there stands another marble relief of the same character. Two flying cupids hold up a wreath encircling a portrait and on either side appears the group of Cupid and Psyche.

SARCOPHAGUS ATTRIBUTED TO THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY.
In the Lateran.

The Lateran contains also sarcophagi which bear a more or less decidedly Christian character. There is one which exhibits in a medallionlike shell the portraits of the couple for whom the sarcophagus was made. On either side is a shepherd boy, one leaning on an inverted crook and the other bearing a lamb, while a dog is looking up affectionately. If it is Christian, we have no definite proof, and being a mere fragment we are unable to deter-
of an orante is standing with two women who seem to bid her goodbye.

It is thought that gold-bottomed glasses (fondi d'oro) were not manufactured later than in the 4th century, and many can be dated in the third. They represent subjects alluded to in passages of contemporaneous ecclesiastical literature, and since large numbers of them have been discovered in the catacombs which were not used after the year 401, we are justified in assigning them mainly to the fourth century. One interesting specimen bears the inscription pie seses, "Oh pious man, thou shalt live." It shows Jesus as the beardless good shepherd standing on a mound, on his right hand Paul and
on his left Peter with the cross. Underneath, the Christ idea is represented by a lamb standing on a hill from which four rivers are flowing. The apostles are represented as six sheep, and the locality is indicated by the inscription to be in the neighborhood of Jerusalem. The same conception of Christ as the good shepherd appears in reliefs on lamps and on sarcophagi, and also in the shape of statues. The most beautiful among these is the so-called statuette of the good shepherd now preserved in the Lateran.

The pagan origin of this symbol cannot be doubted. Hermes, one of the pagan forerunners of the Christ ideal, as we have mentioned above, is called Poimander, "shepherd of men," and the picture of a shepherd presumably without any reference to religion occurs several times simply as an idyllic picture, a motif of country life. In a fresco originally in the Naso catacombs of pre-Christian Rome,
there is a series of pastoral scenes representing the four seasons. Spring is illustrated as a girl carrying a basket of flowers while a shepherd with his staff in one hand holds with the other a goat lying across his shoulders. His attitude is very similar to that typical of the good shepherd, but he is nude, whereas Christian pictures show the good shepherd always clad in a tunic. 6

Visitors to Rome will find a lamb-bearing youth represented in a fresco painted on the wall of the triclinium, or dining-room, of Livia, the wife of Augustus. The scene pictures a sacrifice and in the background stands a youth in a white tunic carrying a lamb to be offered on the altar.

In this connection we will remind the reader of the interesting fact that the figure of the good shepherd appears on the Buddhist sculptures at Gandhara where it serves a purely ornamental purpose. The type had been carried thither by the Greek artists imported during the middle of the second century B. C. by the Yavana Kings, the Greek conquerors of the Punjab who, walking in the footsteps of Alexander the Great, built up a Greco-Indian empire. The Buddhist good shepherd is dressed like his Christian parallel and holds the lamb in the same way; yet the former is without any doubt the older by two centuries.

Here is a straw in the wind that proves how much humanity all over the world is indebted to ancient Greece; for consider that the same artists who carried the ideal of a good shepherd eastward to Gandhara produced also the prototype of the Buddha who was modeled in his original form after the Greek conception of Apollo. 6

[To be continued.]

6 The writer regrets that he has not been able to find any illustration of this gazelle of the catacombs of the gens Nasi. He would be grateful to any one who would point out to him where such a reproduction can be found. These catacombs lie on the Via Appia, but some of their most remarkable antiquities have been removed. One sarcophagus has been taken to the Vatican Museum, and the custodian of these catacombs, while showing the walls of the family chapel where the frescoes had been, informed the author that they too had been transferred to some part of the Vatican collections; but no trace of them could be found there.

6 An illustration of the Buddha of Gandhara will be found in The Open Court of October, 1913, page 613. In the same number (page 614) there is also an illustration of the Buddhist lamb-bearer on a piece of Gandhara sculpture representing the Buddhist nativity.