

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

VOL. XXXV (No. 5)

MAY, 1921

NO. 780

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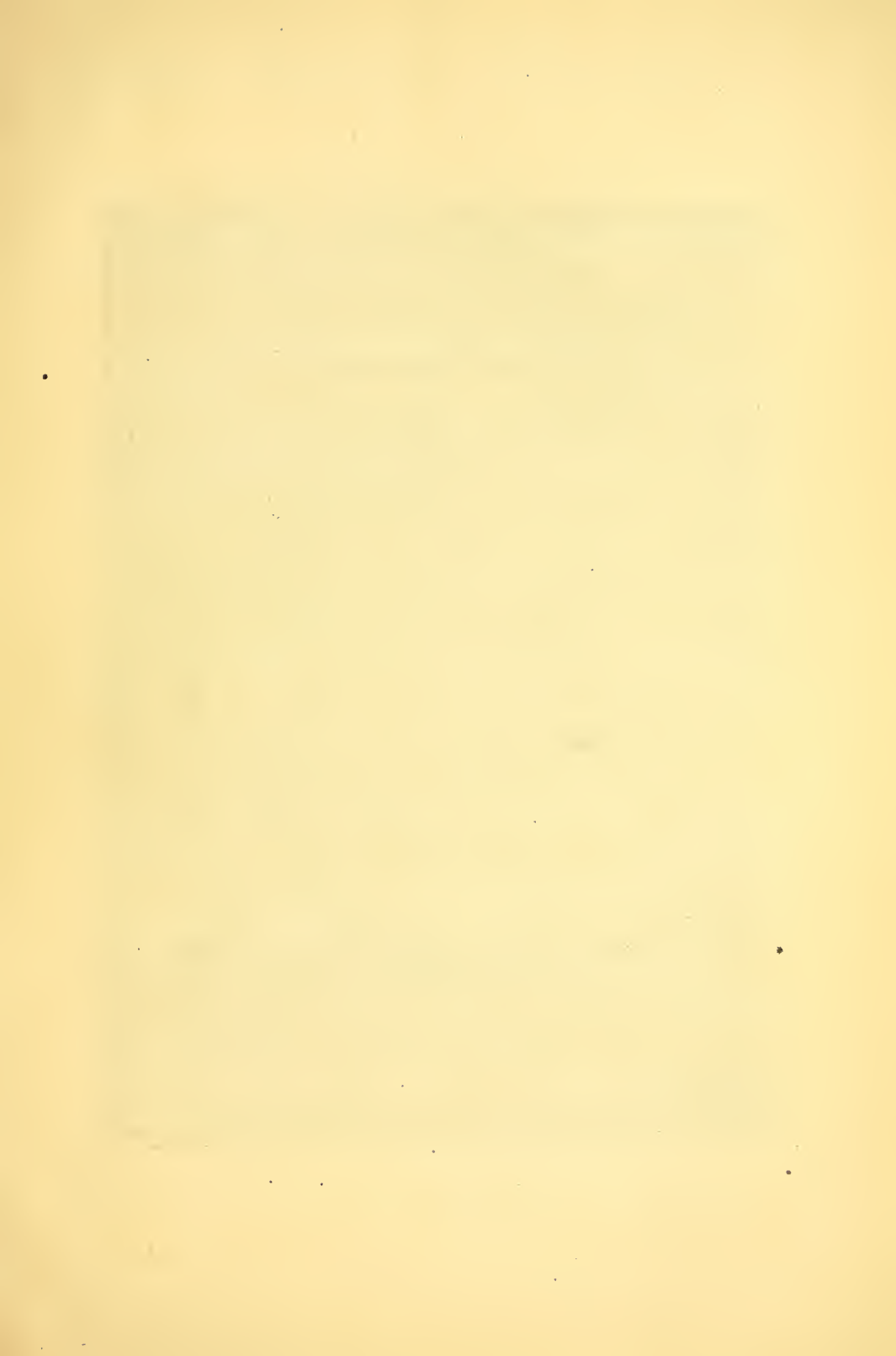
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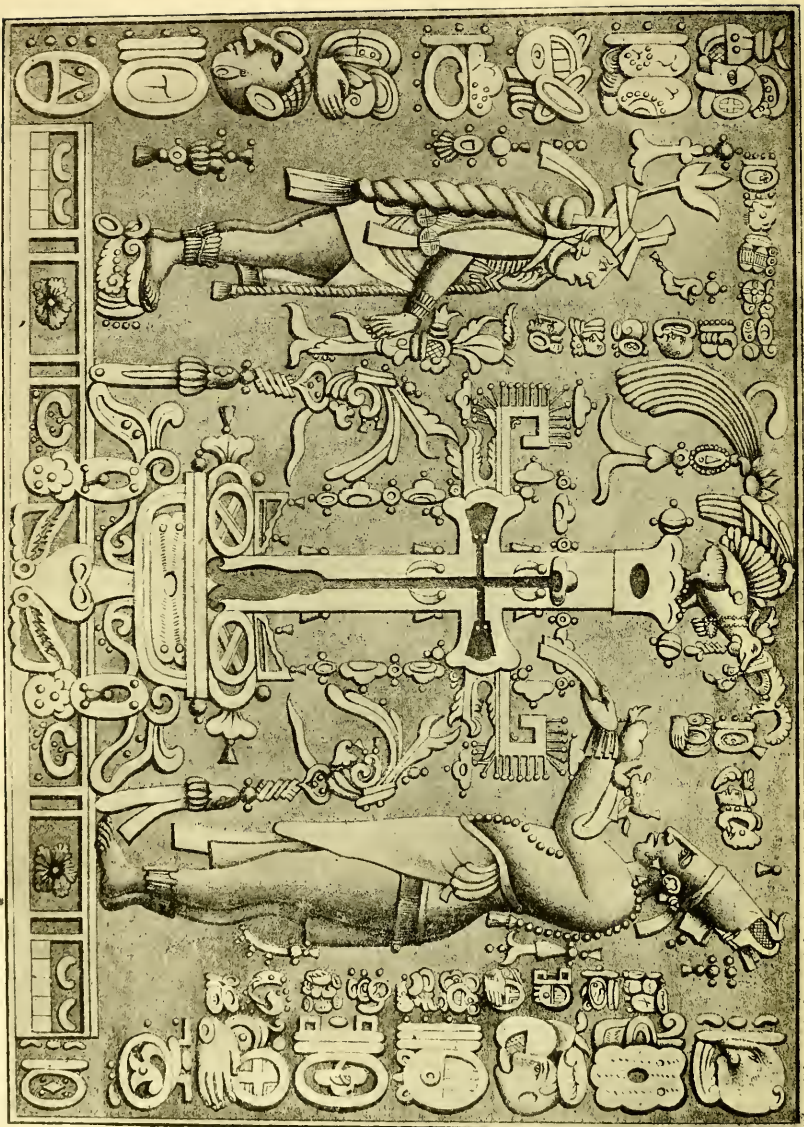
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THE ALTAR TABLET OF THE TEMPLE OF THE CROSS NEAR PALENQUE.

(From Kingsborough's *Antiquities of Mexico*, Part III.)

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THE CROSS.

BY ERIC ROSENQUIST.

FOR the word of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us who are saved it is the power of God. (1 Corinthians i. 18).

It was a Saturday in the latter part of the month of October in the year 732 of the Christian era. Two mighty armies were facing each other on a vast field in the neighborhood of the French city of Poitiers. All Europe was filled with dread. Hearts were beating with anxiety, and fervent prayers rose from the bosom of every devout Christian, while the Mohammedan world exulted in the almost uninterrupted victories of the Saracenic armies which, under the able leadership of Abd Arrahman, had crossed the Pyrenees, burnt the city of Bordeaux, and was advancing upon the wealthy city of Tours. It was on the plain lying between this latter town and Poitiers that the Cross and the Crescent had now met for a decisive struggle which was to determine the fate of Europe, and thus also, we may say, the fate of the civilized world. The result of the battle of Tours, or of Poitiers, in which the Franks, under the leadership of Charles Martel, delivered a crushing defeat to the Moslem host, is well known. The Cross, and not the Crescent, should remain the symbol under which the greatest civilization of the world was to accomplish its triumphant march, until every nation on earth had been subjected to its magic influence.

It is true that about seven centuries later the sign of the Cross should again be pitted against the triumphant Crescent which had again invaded Europe. But though the Mohammedans succeeded in capturing Constantinople, and thus gained a firm foot-hold in the south-eastern part of the continent, the glorious victories of the Hungarian hero, John Hunyadi, the champion of the Cross, saved

the European civilization a second time from the domination of the Crescent. Since the fall of the Byzantine, or East Roman Empire, into the hands of the Turks there has been one continual struggle between the Christians and the followers of Mohammed. Though the latter have now lost all their possessions in Europe, with the exception of Constantinople of which they are but nominal masters, the death-feud is by no means at an end. This bitter war is not caused by racial difference, for the Hungarians who, as champions of the Cross, formed the bulwark of Europe against the invading Turks, were of the same race as these latter, both being branches of the Turanians.

During eight centuries the Mohammedan Moors retained their possessions in Spain, though they had been continually crowded toward the south by the incessant pressure of the Christians. Finally Ferdinand and Isabella, after a struggle lasting ten years, succeeded in capturing the last Moorish stronghold, Granada, and in the year 1492 the Crescent was replaced by the Cross on the walls and towers of that famous city of the Moriscos.

That same year, and, we may say, as a result of the Christian victory, Columbus was enabled to carry the Cross over the great ocean, and transplant it on the soil of our continent.

Suppose it had been the Crescent instead of the Cross!

But barely has the Cross emerged from the din of the battle with its ancient opponent before another struggle looms in the distance. How long will it last? What will be the outcome?

The Cross has met the Rising Sun.

No, this will not be a war between races alone. It will also be another duel between two mighty symbols. The Crescent is defeated—the Rising Sun remains to be defeated. The industrial and diplomatic skirmishes have already begun. When the guns of Commodore Perry boomed at the entrance of the harbor of Tokio the die was cast.

Shall the hitherto victorious Cross be replaced?

No!

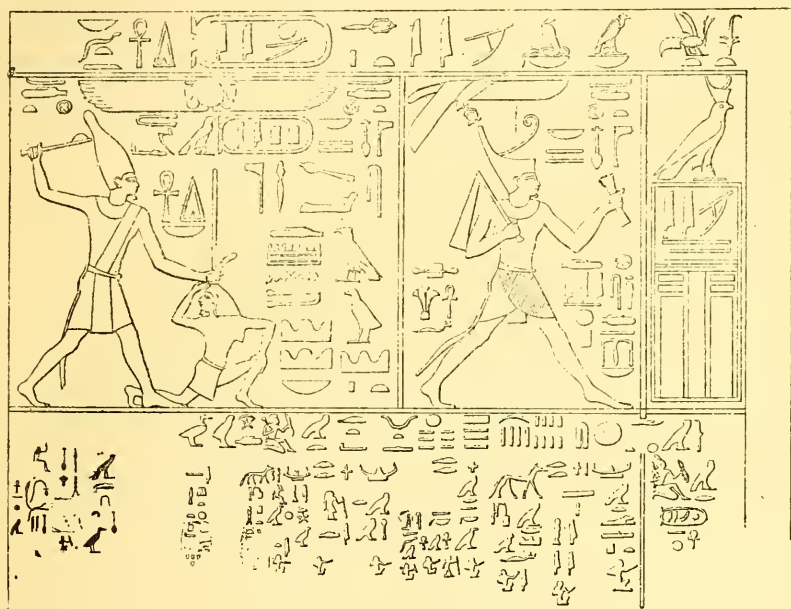
But if we shall be able to rally around the Cross we must know for what it stands. We must be acquainted with its origin as well as with its history. Christian, Jew and Infidel, Protestant and Catholic—whether Roman or Greek—will then unite under the same banner to fight the common foe.

For nearly two thousand years the Cross has been looked upon as an exclusively Christian symbol. To the Jew it has been an object

of hatred, and the Infidel has treated it with derision. Few have realized that the time would come when all these various factions would stand united under one banner emblazoned with the Cross, and inscribed with the familiar motto, *In Hoc Signo Vinces!*

But will the Christian ever forget that his sacred symbol once stood for the founder of his religion, who was condemned to death by a Roman Infidel, and cruelly nailed to the cross by the Jews?

Yes he will forget that when he realizes that the mystic sign has a far more ancient history, and was a cherished symbol long



EGYPTIAN CROSSES.

Reproduced from Lipsius, *De Cruce*.

before the Golgatha legend had ever been penned on parchment, or issued from devout lips.

"The application of the cross," says Arthur Drews, "to mystic or religious ends reaches far back into grey antiquity. From of old the cross was in use in the cult of the Egyptian Gods, especially of Isis and Horus. It was also found among the Assyrians and Persians, serving, as the pictures show, in part as the mark and ornament of distinguished persons, such as priests and kings, in part also as a religious attribute in the hands of the Gods and their worshippers." (*The Christ Myth*. page 150).

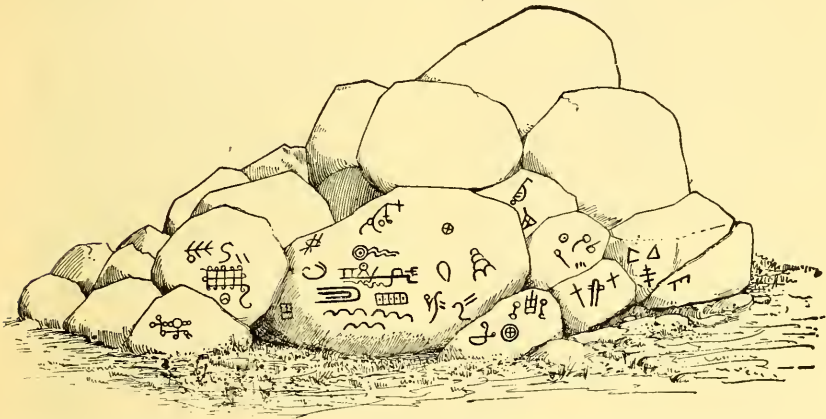
The same author also shows that the cross was a sacred symbol among the ancient Hebrews. In Rome, he says, it was worn by the Vestal virgins upon a ribbon round the neck. "Indeed, it even served as an ornament upon the weapons of the Roman legions and upon the standards of the cavalry long before Constantine, by his well-known 'vision,' gave occasion for its being expressly introduced under the form of the so-called 'Monogram of Christ' into the army as a military sign. But in the North also we find the cross, not only in the shape of the hooked-cross and the three-armed cross (Triskele), but also in the form of Thor's hammer, upon runic, stones, weapons, utensils, ornaments, amulets, etc. And when the heathens of the North, as Snorre informs us, marked themselves in the hour of death with a spear, they scratched upon their bodies one of the sacred signs that has been mentioned, in doing which they dedicated themselves to God." (*The Christ Myth*).

In proving the ancient use of the cross, professor Drews quotes a large number of research works on the subject, demonstrating, beyond the shadow of doubt, the correctness of his statements.

As to the origin of the symbol, Dr. Drews says, "Naturally, indeed, different views can be held as to what the various forms of the cross betoken. Thus, for example, according to Burnouf, Schlie-mann, and others, the Svastika represents the 'fire's cradle,' that is, the pith of the wood, from which in oldest times in the point of intersection of the two arms the fire was produced by whirling round an inserted stick. On the other hand, according to the view most widespread at the present day, it simply symbolizes the twirling movement when making the fire, and on this, too, rests its application as symbol of the sun's course. . . . Not only among the peoples of antiquity and in Europe, but also in Asia among the Indians and Chinese, it is in use from ancient times. In America, too, among the Mexicans and Incas, it played a part in worship long before the arrival of Europeans."

That the cross dates back to the days of the camp-fire can no longer be doubted. While we have many symbols and ceremonies that have been arbitrarily designed, these have never played an important part in the history of the human race. They have been merely, what we may call child's play, or imaginary imitation of something real. Though for a while very popular, they have never lasted a great length of time. What may be termed true symbols and ceremonies are remnants of former methods or customs which once served a useful object. Their origin has always been found

to be extremely simple, while enlargements and embellishments have resulted from the general desire to add a mystic importance, and thus awaken or retain interest in that which has survived its usefulness. As the ancient Egyptians took delight in having their dead bodies embalmed, so as to preserve them long after their usefulness had passed, so have men always cherished the fond desire of clinging to that which was once dear to their hearts. Symbols and ceremonies are heirlooms, which, though no longer useful for their original purpose, yet are valuable as connecting links between passing and coming generations. The aged cherish the fond memory of their childhood days. What would life be in declining years if all memory of the past were suddenly cut off? The idea of cutting loose from the past and live exclusively in the present is entirely



RATTLESNAKE ROCK, MOJAVE DESERT, CALIFORNIA.

contrary to human nature. It lowers man to an inferior level of life. Remembrance of past sorrows as well as joys are necessary for the full appreciation of the present. If individual life is to continue from generation to generation it is necessary that memory survives; and any thing that contributes to that end must be of the greatest value. Symbols and ceremonies are part of the history of a people, and, therefore, part of its life. In order to love a person we must be acquainted with him, and that means that at least some part of his life must be familiar to us. The more of his life we know the more intimate will be our acquaintance. The history of our life reveals our character, and only congenial characters can form firm friendship. To love our country's flag we must know for what it stands.

To love one's flag is to love one's country, for the history of the flag is the history of the country for which it stands.

When we find that the traditions of the cross are indissolubly interwoven with the past life of our ancestors, with the struggles, the achievements and failures, the joys and sorrows of our fathers, then that cross will become dear to us. To worship the cross without knowing what it stands for is idolatry. No people can form a united



X CROSS.



ROMAN CROSS.

Reproduced from Lipsius, *De Cruce*.

nation unless they have some object of love and worship in common. Such love and worship is the cement that binds the loose grains of sand together and forms the solid concrete stone which increases in strength as time rolls on.

Now, where do we find the first indisputable traces of the cross? We find them in the camp-fire where the burning logs lie crossed. It requires no conjuring of the imagination to detect this early trace. Upon this cross the eyes of our primitive ancestors

would be resting during the long hours of the dusky evenings. When the sun had set, and its delightful, life-giving warmth and light had been replaced by the chill and darkness of the night, the flames issuing from this cross would impart warmth to limbs benumbed with cold, and dispel the gloom of darkness, while savory odors from the broiling meat produced a delightful anticipation. To the children of the forest the pleasant and interesting phenomenon remained a deep mystery and an object of the greatest admiration. Can you see that child, eyes sparkling with intelligence, pondering the mystery? The sun, the flame, the cross, the light, and the heat! How are they connected? What is their relation to each other?

In primitive pictorial writing we find the camp-fire symbolized by a cross, sometimes with a ring in the center, indicating the flame.

The cross did not always have the same shape or form. Of the unembellished simple forms, used in most ancient times we have the "Latin Cross," called *Crux immissa* or *capitata*. The "Tau Cross"—so called from the Greek capital "T"—which in the Middle Ages was designated as the "Cross of St. Anthony," and was known as the "Crux commissa or ansata." The X-cross was called *Crux decussata*, and is also known as the "St. Andrew's cross" in consequence of the apostle St. Andrew, according to a tradition, having been crucified on a cross of this form. The "Greek cross" had the four limbs of equal length.

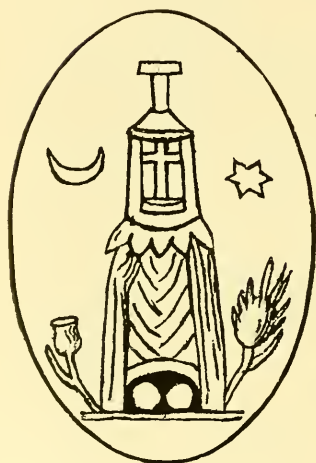
The equally armed cross duplicated with an oblique cross, or the cross, set diagonally, like the Roman letter X, crossed in the point of intersection by a vertical line, ✕, were used as the symbol of the sun. The sun and fire were also symbolized by a ring placed either around the point of intersection, or above the vertical arm of the Latin or the Greek cross. In the mirror of Venus, ♀, the ring refers to the sun. In the ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics a "Tau cross" with an oval above, †, was the symbol of "life." As is well known, the tongue of fire was a symbol of life, or spirit. On the first day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit with which the disciples were filled was symbolized by tongues of fire. "And there appeared unto them tongues parting asunder, like as of fire: and it sat upon each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit." (Acts iii. 3, 4).

As the altar originated in the camp-fire, so did the cross which appears upon the altar.

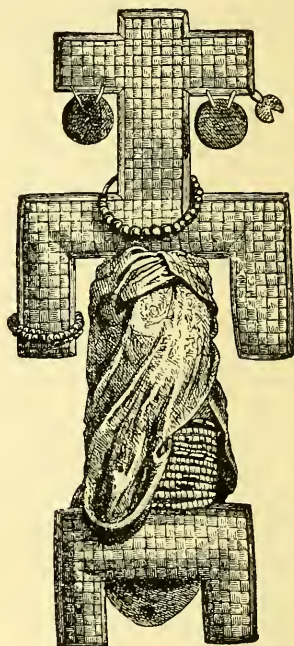
However, the object of the camp-fire was not only to give light and heat, and protect from dangerous lurking beasts, but also to

prepare the food. Thus the bullock, the ram, and the lamb soon became intimately connected with the cross and the fire.

At first the preparing of the meal and the partaking of it by the family or the tribe was a very simple act, but gradually certain ceremonies were observed, and as time went on these, following the natural law of evolution, became more and more complex. Gathering of the wood, bringing it to the camp, building the fire, bringing the animal, slaughtering it, examining the flesh, and preparing it for the meal—all this was very carefully planned and



ANCIENT GREEK CROSS.



LATE CHRISTIAN CROSS.

Reproduced from Lipsius, *De Cruce*.

regulated. We need but read the first chapters of the book of Leviticus to get a fair idea of the punctilious observance of these ceremonies.

The broiling of the lamb over the camp-fire gradually became a sacred, religious ceremony in which the camp-fire finally was replaced by the altar. Thus is easily explained the appearance of the lamb upon a cross, which was one of the most common of ancient Christian symbols. "In the year 692, A. D., at the Quinisext Synod

in Trullo these pictures of a lamb on the cross were forbidden, and it was required that the representation be the figure of the Savior in human shape." (*The Christ Myth*, page 159).

The identity of the cross with the fire-wood on the altar may also be seen in the use of the same Greek word to denote the two. *Xulon* means wood, and also that which is made of wood, as a beam or a cross. In I Corinthians ii. 12 the word is used for the material, wood ("If any man buildeth on the foundation gold, silver, costly stones, wood—*xulon*—, hay, stubble." In Acts v. 30 *xulon* denotes the cross (The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew, hanging him on a tree—*xulon*—." *Stauros* and *xulon* are both used in denoting a cross, and are translated by the Latin word *crux*).

Another incident which points to the identity of the cross with the fire-wood on the altar is found in John xix. 17 and Genesis xxii. 6, 9. The former reads: "They took Jesus therefore: and he went out, bearing the cross for himself." There we find the sacrificial victim bearing the cross upon which he is to be sacrificed. The passages in Genesis read: "And Abraham took the wood of the burnt-offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son: and he took in his hand the fire and the knife: and they went both of them together. And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for the burnt-offering?... And they came to a place which God had told him of: and Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar, upon the wood." Here we also find the victim bearing the wood upon which he is to be sacrificed. In those days the sacrifice of human beings was nothing unusual, and the incident referred to shows that the sacrificial rite was the same, whether an animal or a human being was to be the victim.

When the lamb is found upon the cross at the point of intersection of the two arms, and surrounded by a disk, or ring, symbolizing the sun or fire, there can be little doubt that the cross is the wood, burning on the altar.

That the altar represented the original camp-fire is further seen by noticing the various vessels and utensils which were to belong to the altar. In giving the directions for making the altar (Exodus xxvii. chapter) God says: "And thou shalt make its pots to take away its ashes, and its shovels, and its basins, and its flesh-hooks, and its firepans: all the vessels thereof thou shalt make of brass."

Another illustration is found in I Samuel ii. 12-17. "Now the sons of Eli were base men; they knew not Jehovah. And the custom of the priests with the people was, that, when any man *offered sacrifice*, the priest's servant came, while the flesh was boiling, with a flesh-hook of three teeth in his hand; and he struck it into the pan, or kettle, or caldron, or pot; all that the flesh-hook brought up the priest took therewith. So they did in Shiloh unto all the Israelites that came thither. Yea, before they burnt the fat, the priest's servant came and said to the man that *sacrificed*, Give flesh to roast for the priest; for he will not have boiled flesh of thee, but raw. And if the man said unto him, They will surely burn the fat first, and then take as much as thy soul desireth; then he would say, Nay, but thou shalt give it me now: and if not, I will take it by force. And the sin of the young men was very great before Jehovah: for the men despised the *offering of Jehovah*."

The *offering* was evidently meant to serve as food for those who ministered in the temple or at its doors, both men and women.

Still another instance, showing the close connection between the sacrificial rites and the partaking of food at the ordinary meals, we find in Exodus xxxii. 5-6. Aaron, during the absence of Moses, had made a golden calf which the children of Israel were to worship. He then "made a proclamation and said, To-morrow shall be a feast to Jehovah. And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt-offerings and brought peace-offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play."

In several places it is expressly stated what offerings were to serve as food for the priests and others, and, also, what offerings were to be entirely consumed in fire. We have quoted but a few instances in order to call attention to the various means by which the symbols may be traced to their original source. Reference to the Bible, rather than other works on the subject has been chosen on account of the familiarity of most people with this sacred book.

To get some idea of what the symbol of the cross stands for let us take another glance at the camp-fire.

Our earliest human ancestors have just reached the period of their evolution when the divine spark of human intelligence has enabled them to handle that wonderful phenomenon, or element, as it has been called, light and heat producing fire. They had often seen it before, in the lightning of the thunder-storm, and in the great conflagrations of the forests, started by a bolt from the skies. Like

other animals, they had, by experience, learned to look upon that fire with dread and fear. It had often driven them from their home, when it swept through the under-brush of the forest. Finally some one with more courage than others ventured to pick up a brand and do some experimenting. He could kindle other fires with it, and he could extinguish them. Among the embers of a forest-fire he had found a broiled deer, or some other animal. He tasted it and found the flavor exceedingly pleasant. He offered it to his friends, and they were delighted. He sat down and pondered the wonderful discovery. Suddenly another bright idea struck him. He could broil an animal over his own fire which he had kept burning, since he picked up the fire-brand. Man had now taken the greatest step in the history of his evolution, and the greatest, we may add, up to the present day.

When the first sticks or logs of wood were crossed under that choice piece of meat the symbol of the cross originated, and became, with a circle attached, the hieroglyphic symbol of fire.

How many generations it took before man discovered an artificial means of producing fire, we do not know, but it must have taken a long period of time.

Here we also have the origin of the most important institution of human civilization, *family life* and *community solidarity*, of which the cross upon the family hearth, or altar, became the symbol.

Hitherto each individual had taken care of himself. Even the child, after being weaned, could begin to pick fruit and nuts for its own sustenance. When an enemy appeared they all scampered off and hid themselves among the branches of the trees. But now all this had changed. The food which had hitherto been eaten raw was now brought to the camp-fire to be prepared. Each individual brought what he had been able to procure, the head of the family prepared it, and all the members partook of it in common. The family grew into clans, the clans into tribes, the tribes into communities, but they had but one camp-fire, one altar upon which the wood, or cross, was continually kept burning. It naturally devolved upon the young women, the first "Vestal Virgins," before they had yet chosen their mate, to guard this fire. The boys were with their fathers, hunting, fighting or keeping guard against foes. The mothers were occupied with the little ones. It was a true family life. The virgins were not dedicated to the service for life and doomed to celibacy. Such abominable, vicious customs were unknown until ages later when family life had begun to degenerate. It was the natural, young woman, the daughter in her transition period between

child and responsible woman, who was assigned to the office of vestal virgin, and was to guard the sacred fire.

It was also the duty of these young women to wait on the other members and pass the drinking cup from one individual to another. One cup served for all, and was later made of most valuable material.

See there, the origin of the *holy grail*, another symbol of family and community life.

As the fire on the altar was a means of protection against cold and lurking beasts, so did the cross become a symbol of refuge and safety. The object of the temple was merely to protect the sacred fire from being extinguished by wind and rain. It was the altar that sanctified the temple, and the gift, or sacrifice, that sanctified the altar. Whether the temple consisted merely of a tent, as that of the Children of Israel in the desert, or it took the form of a grand cathedral made little difference.

We now ask, Shall the cross remain the symbol of our family, our community, and our national life?

We erect monuments to serve as silent, yet powerful, witnesses of great, past achievements. Is the building of the first camp-fire, the founding of the family and the home institution, the beginning of community and national solidarity, are these, we ask, worth commemorating by a sacred symbol and a noble monument?

In standing before the cross and the cathedral our thoughts pass back through the history of the human race, and especially of our own civilization to the very dawn of the life of man as a conscious, intelligent being here on earth.

And, let us not forget, the cross does not belong to the recluse, the monk, the nun, the priest who has renounced his allegiance to the most sacred of all institutions, the family and the home. Should we not reclaim the Cross and the Holy Grail. The temple is not identical with the church, or meeting house. The temple is the sanctuary where silent, yet eloquent, symbols, monuments, and ceremonies speak of gone-by times. In the church, the meeting-house, we listen to the sermons of the living orator.

It would be interesting to follow the history of the cross through the various forms of human civilization, in which it has played such a significant part, but volumes would be required for such an undertaking, for, as has been mentioned, the history of the cross is the history of the most highly civilized people in the world. The symbol has, at times, been dragged to the very depths of

degradation and trailed in the mire, but it has risen again to the most lofty heights, and served as inspiration for the grandest and noblest deeds achieved by man. It has been a symbol of sorrow, suffering, and death; but it has also been the symbol of resurrection and final victory of light over darkness, of truth over falsehood. Some day it will lead us back to nature, to a truly natural life in which the curse of sin shall have been removed, and harmony with God restored. We shall then enjoy to the fullest extent, the fruit of past experience. The past, the present, and the future of the human life shall then be united into one delightful, glorious and continuous existence.