WILLIAM STIRLING

THE CANON

The Canon

An Exposition Of The Pagan Mystery Perpetuated In The Cabala As The Rule Of All The Arts

William Stirling

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Preface

TO “SYMBOLISTS”

CONTEMPT of ancient learning is a sure sign of an enlightened mind.

We are the men.

Before our time, reason but little influenced mankind.

The demonstration of the above assertion being that in times gone by there were no railways, steamboats, torpedoes, or any of those anaesthetic inventions in regard to time and space on which we pride ourselves, and upon which we base our claim to have advanced the general welfare of mankind.

Marvels of science, mechanical improvements, increase of wealth (and income tax), and the perfection of all warlike apparatus, seem to blind us to the fact that abstract qualities of mind have shown no symptoms of progression. A rich barbarian, pale and dyspeptic, florid or flatulent, seated in a machine travelling at eighty miles an hour, with the machine luxuriously upholstered and well heated, and yet the traveller's mind a blank, or only occupied with schemes to cheat his fellows and advance himself is, in the abstract, no advance upon a citizen of Athens, in the time of Pericles, who never travelled faster than a bullock cart could take him, in all his life.

Science has no marvels; every so-called discovery heralded as marvellous (for men of science understand the power of bold advertisement to the full as well as scientists in clog dancing, in hair dressing, and tightrope walking), is not a marvel in the true meaning of the word.

The Röntgen Rays, the microphone, the phonograph, are all as simple in themselves as is the property of amber rubbed to take up straws. From the beginning there have been Roentgen Rays, and the principles of microphone and phonograph are coeval with the world. The wonder lies not in the discovery (so-called), but in the fact they have remained so long unknown. The real mystery of mysteries is the mind of man. Why, with a pen or brush, one man sits

down and makes a masterpiece, and yet another, with the selfsame instruments and opportunities, turns out a daub or botch, is twenty times more curious than all the musings of the mystics, works of the Rosicrucians, or the mechanical contrivances which seem to-day so fine, and which our children will disdain as clumsy. The conquests of the mind never grow stale, let he who doubts it read a page of Plato and compare it with some *à la mode* philosopher.

I take it that one of the objects of the author of this work is to sustain, that in astronomy, in mathematics, and in certain other branches of learning, the ancients knew a good deal more than modern men of science care to admit.

Knowledge to-day is not diffused, as writers in newspapers, makers of almanacks, members of school-boards, and worthy men who see the means but cannot grasp the fullness of achievement, are never tired of stating, but on the contrary, goes almost contraband. The fact that all can read and write, cypher and scan the columns of a newspaper, can tell the latitude (the longitude more rarely) of Jella Coffee, can prattle innocently of literature, art, spiritualism, and chemistry, can make their pertinent remarks upon theosophy, discuss religion, say a word in season on lithotomy, and generally comport themselves as if their minds were fashioned after the pattern of a kaleidoscope, does not go far to prove the claim of wide extended knowledge.

When all write books and few have time to read, when thought grows rare and talking never ends, a serious book in which a man has put the labour of his life needs some apology for its appearance. Deal with sex problems (pruriently, of course), be mystic, moral, or immoral, flippant, or best of all be dull, success is sure. Still, in an age of symbolism, for everything we see is but a symbol, as

kings, queens, dukes, lords, princes, barons, and sandwichmen, it must perforce be interesting to some to read of why the chief symbol of our present faith came to be held in veneration.

In modern times we use a word, merely to express a thing, and only rarely concern ourselves with the exact value that the word may have.

This may account to some extent for the loose style of many English writers, but to examine into that would be quite foreign to my purpose. Certain it is that in the ancient world, words and even letters all had their value apart from what we, nowa-days, call meaning. Thus it is that oriental nations, and especially the Jews and Arabs, attach to their particular alphabets not merely a divine origin (for I suppose our alphabet is just as divine as theirs), but a particular sense of sanctity. No one supposes if a better alphabet than that we now employ were to be found that we should still adhere from superstitious motives to our own. In the ancient world, apart from letters, every ceremony, each rite, and all the arts and sciences had some peculiar canon which was supposed to govern them. If, in his researches, the author has brought to light some canon which may enlighten architects, and so redeem us from the outrages our builders heap upon us, if he can do even a little to stay the hands of Deans and Chapters from destroying buildings which, by the folly of the nation, have been committed to their care (like sheep to wolves), or put a stop to the restorer, that archfiend, who in consuming thirst for unity tears down a fine Renaissance doorway in a Gothic church, and puts up in its stead what he thinks Gothic, his labour will not have been lost. Could he redeem us from Victorian Queen Anne—but mitigate the horrors of plateglass, set bounds to all the Gothics, ranging from Strangulated, through the degrees of Congregational and

Convulsional down to Ebenezaresque, could he but find a style in which our builders could express their thoughts, and help them build for us, our churches, houses, theatres, and bridges, without adhering slavishly to bygone styles, the twelve shillings which I understand his volume is to cost will be well spent.

Music and literature, with painting, surgery, and economics, with boxing, fencing, and others of the liberal arts, all have a style fit and peculiar to the times, but architecture yet remains a blot and a disgrace to those who live by it, and to all those who use the edifices which it makes, and pay the makers' bills.

But leaving architects bemired in stucco and happy in their "co-operation with the present system," let us return to the folly of the ancients.

Strabo and Celsus, with Diodorus Siculus, Ammianus Marcellinus, Maimonides, Raimundo Llull, with the Rabbi Jehudah hen Gabirol and others, whose names look well writ large in a quotation, have all remarked upon the symbolism not only of the Cross but of all ancient temples.

Pedro Mexia in his curious Silva[1] de Varia Leocion says that the Egyptians and the Arabians honoured the figure of the cross,[2] and thought so much of it, that the Egyptians drew it upon the statue of Serapis, adored it, and held it as a god. To comprehend which it is necessary first to know the Arabians of old times were people very learned in the heavens, and in the phases of the stars . . . made images and statues . . . rings and other things, taking care to do so, at certain times and epochs when the planets and other stars were in a certain posture. And further on he says, "it

is remarkable how the Egyptians esteemed the symbol of the cross above all other symbols."

[1] "Madrid," por Joseph Fernandez de Buendia, Año de 1662.

[2] The Inca, Garcilaso de la Vega, in his "Comentarios Reales," vol. i, chap. iii., "Tuvieron los Reyes Incas en el Cozco, una Cruz de Marmol fino de color blanco y incarnado. . . . . No adoravan en ellas, mas de que la tenian en veneracion; debia ser por su hermosa figura, ó por algun *otro respeto*, que no saben decir."

It may be that, as Pedro Mexia says, the Egyptians looked upon the cross as something sacred, because it is "a perfect and most excellent figure geometrically considered." All things are possible, but a whole people lost in the admiration of a figure for geometric reasons seem improbable. Geometry is a most admirable science, but appeals little to imagination, and still less to any of the well rooted principles of folly inherent in mankind, which generally impel them to choose a subject to adore.

Again Antonio Llobera, in his book called "El Porque de Todas las Ceremonias," printed at Figueras by Ignacio Porter in 1758, informs us that "all temples and churches are symbols or figures of the human body . . . the high altar is the head, the transepts are the arms, and the rest of the temple . . . is the body," so that he knew apparently, that churches were built according to a canon and had assumed the form in which we know them for a special reason. Many have known as much as did Antonio Llobera, and like him either have cared not, or have dared not, push their theory to its conclusion.

The author of the present work has not been so deterred, and argues out his case with much precision and a wealth of figures, proving most clearly that the external measurements of almost every ancient temple, the figures of the New Jerusalem, Holy Oblation, and other temples, real and imaginary, reveal the magnitudes of the sun, moon, and other planets, together with the distance of their orbits. And most ingeniously he argues that, as all these calculations were, of necessity, impossible of comprehension to the vulgar, they were typified by symbols, the principal of all these symbols being the cross. Therefore it follows, in his opinion, that the rage of the so-called Reformers of the church was not a blind unreasoning fury, blended with a dislike to beauty, but a reasoning fury against a symbol that they understood. And he remarks, when speaking of the Puritans, whom he most justly stigmatizes as both “ridiculous and ignorant,” that it was curious that, having cast away the cross, they should still retain the Christ, as both are one.

We know the mystic letters I.H.S., familiar from our childhood on altar fronts, embroidered in gold thread by pious ladies, were used as symbols of Bacchus, and venerated in his temples by the unreasoning but faithful worshipper just as they are with us.

Thor’s hammer was a cross; the ruins of Palenque bear sculptured on their lintels the mystic symbol, and Bernal Diaz tells us that, in Cozumel, upon the altars of the temples, crosses were seen deep graven in the stone.

Thus it appears that almost every nation, every age, has had its Cross, and, if this is the case, what is the reason?

The writer of this work most plainly sets it forth, and, in so doing, connects conclusively our symbolism with that which

seems inherent in mankind, and gently puts aside all our pretensions to the possession of a faith revealed to us alone.

Into these mysteries 1 shrink from entering, but watch him boldly walk amongst the Canon Laws which govern Architecture, Music, Religion, and other things, the laws of which I take on trust.

Unorthodox even in his unorthodoxy, he is sufficiently un-English to be logical and not to shirk, after the English fashion, the just conclusions towards which his reasoning leads.

Following his argument, it appears that, in “The Abbey” when the nave and aisles are packed with rich and pious *Iris de Florence* scented worshippers silently waiting for the circulating plate, they sit within a building built, like the ancient temples were, to typify the body of a man, and the chief symbol which the Romans held in honour they, too, venerate, when, in their pious contemplation, they lift adoring eyes towards the Cross which stands upon the altar or communion table.

R. B. CUNNINGHAME GRAHAM

Chapter I - Introduction.

“*The wisdom of the Egyptians, what was it but principally astronomy?*” —ST. AUGUSTINE, “City of God,” bk. xviii, c. 39.

THE failure of all efforts in modern times to discover what constituted the ancient canon of the arts, has made this

question one of the most hopeless puzzles which antiquity presents. It is discouraging in the extreme to approach the subject at all. The absence of all explicit information from the ancients themselves, combined with the complete ignorance of modern authorities, is sufficient to make one hesitate to lay before the reader any proposition, however plausible, on this obscure subject. It is hoped, however, that the investigation of what appears to be a due to the method practised by the old architects in building the temples, may prove of some assistance in elucidating the principles, which were the common groundwork of the arts and sciences of the past. For it would appear, that there was an established canonical law underlying the practice of building as well as all other arts.

In a general way this has been felt by all competent students of antiquity; and many traces of such an uniformity have been pointed out, but as the root of everything in the old world was primarily centred in religion, it is to the ancient theology, that we must look for the foundation and basis of the old canon.

The priests were practically the masters of the old world. Everything and everybody was subservient to the ecclesiastical jurisdiction, and no work could be undertaken without its authority. That the priests were legitimately entitled to regulate the building of the temples of the gods, nobody will deny. And that they did exercise this control is beyond dispute. For we find that freemasons, or some body corresponding to the mediaeval freemasons, with exclusive privileges and secrets required for building the temples, under ecclesiastical authority, have always existed. And the knowledge which we possess of the mediaeval freemasons is sufficient to show that their secrets were the secrets of religion, that is, of mediaeval Christianity.

It is these secrets of the old priests, carefully guarded by them, and only communicated to the authorized builders of the temples, that we propose to treat of in the following pages, and we shall endeavour to show that these secrets, comprising the esoteric doctrine of religion, have been transmitted in unbroken continuity, at least from the building of the Great Pyramid, down to recent times. It is, of course, far beyond the scope of this small work, limited to a single object of inquiry, to enter into a historical examination of the evidences of this continuity of idea, and since there are already in existence books dealing with this special investigation, it is superfluous to undertake it. It is only necessary to accept the testimony of the old Greek historians, who emphatically assert, that the essential doctrines of the Greek religion were imported into Greece from Egypt. We know that all modem civilization in Europe is of Greek origin. The Gospel itself is indisputably as much a Greek as a Hebrew creation. It is written in Greek, and was first established among Hellenized peoples, and wherever it was accepted in succeeding generations, it brought with it the ideas of Greece. As there is no reason to doubt the assertions of the Greek historians, as to the indebtedness of their nation to the Egyptians for instruction in the arts and sciences, there has clearly been, through the Greeks, a direct communication of Egyptian ideas to the Hellenized portions of the world, to which we ourselves belong.

Just as Pythagoras and Plato, and other Greek philosophers, visited Egypt to study the religion and sciences of that country, so every educated man of a subsequent age studied the religion and philosophy of Greece with the same object, namely, to perfect themselves in that knowledge, of which the Greeks were known to have been the recipients. To us the Egyptians are only a step

further off; but fundamentally the doctrines which we are now investigating were the same both in Greece and Egypt. How much, the original religion and philosophy of the Egyptians may have been improved by filtering through the refining influence of Greece, must be decided when Egyptologists come to have a deeper knowledge of Egyptian things, than they have at present. But whatever changes may have been added by Greeks and Christians to the original Egyptian theology, it is insisted, that the central mysteries were accepted by all priests and philosophers, as the only possible basis of religion. And more than that (for we must not always be content with a sensible reason for anything in human affairs) the absolute conservatism, always observed in religious matters, would scarcely admit that any received doctrine, once established, should be removed.

It must be borne in mind, that only the vaguest ideas at present prevail as to the mystical secrets[1] of the old priests. Everybody knows that the Egyptians, Greeks, and other Eastern nations concealed the vital doctrines of their theology from the ignorant and vulgar, and it was only by a gradual process of initiation that the meaning of the sacred writings and ceremonies were explained. And then, after this preparation, the initiates were allowed to be full partakers in the religious rites. It is a misfortune that all the ritual of the older religions has been destroyed, and it is particularly regrettable that no scrap of the sacred writings, or temple ritual of pagan Greece or Rome, has survived to our time. We do not even know whether the Hebraized or Christianized version of the Masonic ritual, as we now know it, has anything more than a faint resemblance to its primitive form. Besides the ordinary services in the pagan temples, it is well known that there were in certain periods especially mysterious celebrations

of the nature of dramatic shows or plays, in some cases apparently intended to form the concluding spectacle of the initiations. A few ancient authors have alluded to these shows, but when everything is collected from their works, it amounts to very little indeed. Plutarch, St. Clement of Alexandria (who had been initiated at Eleusis before he became a Christian), Lucian, Apuleius, Macrobius and other writers give some slight information, directly or indirectly, on these mystical ceremonies. Besides these, there is a treatise by Jamblichus pretending to expound the whole subject of the mysteries, but this work has been composed with such careful and scrupulous obscurity, that few people have found themselves much the wiser after reading it. There is also the Jewish Cabala, containing an explanation of the priestly secrets and mysteries of the Hebrews, but no one at the present day can fully understand it. There are the works attributed to Hermes Trismegistus preserved by the Neo-Platonists, written in the same philosophical jargon used by Jamblichus and the rest; and there are the references to the doctrines of the heretical Christians called Gnostics, preserved in the controversial works of the early fathers. These are some of the most direct sources of information on the mystical doctrines common to the Egyptian, Greek, Hebrew, and Christian religions.

[1] To avoid misunderstanding, it may be stated here, that throughout the present inquiry the doctrine of the mysteries is assumed to have been a defined scientific tradition, communicated orally to the initiates or mystics, who secretly passed it on from generation to generation. Therefore, mysticism being synonymous with gnosticism, it must not be confounded with the speculative mistiness which is cultivated by certain dreamy philosophers of our day. The mystic (musthj) in the old sense has naturally

become extinct, together with the gnosis which formerly instructed him.

But turning from these obscure and fragmentary references, the law of the Hebrew Scriptures and the extensive commentaries of the Talmud, the Gospel with the offices and ritual of the Church, are each an epitome, in its most complete form, of those mysteries for the expounding of which they were severally created; if these works were clearly understood the difficulty would be cleared up. The deplorable fact, which we have now to regret is, that the priests who ought to be able to tell us the meaning of the Scriptures, which they undertake to expound, know nothing whatever of their real significance. It is probable, that there is not a single Christian priest who knows what the Canon of the Church is, or why a certain office or literary arrangement is canonical or what makes it so. He would deny that the Old Testament and the Gospel are allegorical books, but has no explanation to offer for the absurdities, which occur in these works, if taken literally. In fact, the modern priest, to whom we naturally turn for instruction in the mysteries of the Church, is the very last person from whom we are likely to get any information. Let us therefore leave this man, who does not seem to be aware that his office was created that he might receive the canonical tradition from the mouth of a pre-ordained teacher, and by its light impart the spirit to the letter of the law.

We shall assume, that at the building of the Great Pyramid, the first principles of all later theology were already established and fixed, and it would seem, notwithstanding the modern belief to the contrary, that at that early period the Egyptians had arrived at some elementary knowledge of astronomy and cosmography; that they knew the measures of the earth, and the distance of the planets, and had observed the recurrent cycles of the sun and moon in

their several orbits, and many other simple astronomical phenomena; that from these ascertained facts, they derived a scheme embodying, in the persons of certain hypothetical gods, a symbolical image of the created universe, and the invisible powers which regulate it. The deity in this scheme was conceived according to the exact forms manifested in the phenomena of nature. The whole physical and material universe was symbolized by the seven revolving planets and the sphere of the fixed stars, while the agent, or mover, who inspires all bodies with life, was personified by the figure of a man. Thus the philosophers constructed a system, which attributed to God a body composed of all the matter of the world, and a soul, which was diffused through all its parts. The creed of the philosophers, however, was never openly avowed in the popular religion, but was concealed in the parables of which the old theology was composed. For the old priests never scrupled to believe that history and philosophy "sufficed but for the chosen few," while the populace were carefully instigated to the practice of morality by being instructed in that kind of fiction which, in this country, emanates from Exeter Hall. Strabo admirably expresses the attitude of an educated man to the religion of his day. He says, "The great mass of women and common people cannot be induced by mere force of reason to devote themselves to piety, virtue, and honesty; superstition must therefore be employed, and even this is insufficient without the aid of the marvellous and the terrible. For what are the thunderbolts, the ægis, the trident, the torches, the dragons, the barbed thyrses, the arms of the gods, and all the paraphernalia of antique theology, but fables employed by the founders of states as bugbears to frighten timorous minds?" (Strabo's "Geography," bk. i., ch. ii, § 8).[1] Again, the difference between Moses, and Linus, Musæus, Orpheus, and Pherecydes, is well defined by Origen, who says, that the

Greek poets “display little concern for those readers who are to peruse them at once unaided, but have composed their philosophy (as you term it) *for those who are unable to comprehend its metaphorical and allegorical signification*. Whereas Moses, like a distinguished orator, who meditates some figure of rhetoric, and who carefully introduces in every part a *language of twofold meaning*, has done this in his five books; neither affording, in the portion which relates to morals, any handle to his Jewish subjects for committing evil; nor yet giving to the few individuals who were endowed with greater wisdom, and *who were capable of investigating his meaning*, a treatise devoid of material for speculation. (Origen “Against Celsus,” bk. i., ch. xviii). That is to say, the Hebrew delivered his fictions in the guise of moral precepts, while the pagan Greeks were not so particular.

[1] Cicero, who was an Augur as well as an Advocate, did not seem to have taken his duties very seriously, for he is reported to have said that he could never understand how two Augurs could look each other in the face without laughing.

It is well known to many people that certain numbers had an important place in the philosophical and theological system of the ancients. The Pythagoreans concealed their doctrines in a numerical and geometric system, which was the only form of their philosophy given to the outer world. The Jewish priests also elaborated an extensive system of numeration in the Cabala, and the Rabbis frequently make use of it in the Talmudic commentaries on the Scriptures. The early fathers of the church have preserved considerable expositions of the system in their books controverting the heretical opinions of the various sects of Christian Gnostics. But the purport of all these theories of

numbers has ceased to be understood, together with the greater part of the doctrines of the ancient mysteries of which this numerical philosophy formed a part.

The oldest use of numbers as symbols of an esoteric doctrine is to be found in Egypt, from whence it was derived by the Greeks, and transmitted by them to the modem world. Although we have, unfortunately, no direct evidence of how the mysterious people of Egypt actually made use of their numbers, it would appear that their numerical system formed a part of the dogma in those laws, referred to by Plato as having been ten thousand years old, and was perpetuated, as one of the bases of religion and art by all subsequent peoples. The words of Plato are: “Long ago they appeared to recognize the very principle of which we are now speaking—that their young citizens must be habituated to forms and strains of virtue. These they fixed, and exhibited patterns of them in their temples; and no painter or artist is allowed to innovate upon them, or to leave the traditional forms, or invent new ones. To this day no alteration is allowed, either in those arts or in music, at all. And you will find that their works of art are painted or moulded in the same forms that they had ten thousand years ago (this is literally true, and no exaggeration), their ancient paintings and sculptures are not a whit better, or worse than the work of to-day, but are made with just the same skill.” (“Laws,” 656. Jowett’s translation, vol. v., p. 226). What this canon of art actually was is now unknown, but it is possible to discover the traces of it in the religion and art of the Greeks and Christians.

Theology, in its various forms, has always been the epitome of art, and constituted the law for its guidance. From the times of ancient Egypt this law has been a sacred arcanum, only communicated by symbols and parables, the making of which, in the ancient world, constituted the most important

form of literary art; it therefore required for its exposition a priestly caste, trained in its use, and the guilds of initiated artists, which existed throughout the world till comparatively recent times, were instructed in it. Now-a-days, all this is changed. Theology has dropped her secrets; her symbols have become meaningless ornaments, and her parables are no longer understood. The artist in the service of the Church no longer represents her mysteries in metaphorical shapes, and the priests have as little skill in the old art of myth-making, as they have in interpreting the Scriptures.

Few people have an adequate appreciation of this lost principle—the art, that is, of working symbolically. To us, who have now nothing to conceal, such a practice has naturally gone out of fashion, and the symbol, as a means of concealing rather more than it was intended to explain, has become gradually obsolete. We still write or paint symbolically, but only to make that, which is obscure, more plain. In the hands of the old priest, or artist, on the contrary, the symbol was a veil for concealment, beautiful or grotesque, as the case might be. A myth or parable, m their hands, subtly conveyed a hidden truth, by means of a more or less obvious fiction; but it has come to pass, that the crude and childish lie on its surface is ignorantly believed for the whole truth, instead of being recognized, as the mere clue to its inner meaning. All theology is composed in this way, and her two-fold utterances must be read with a double mind. Thus, when we read in the Scriptures of the Church, or in the saintly legends, a fiction showing more than ordinary exuberance of fancy, we may be sure, that our attention is being specially arrested. When miraculous events are related of the gods, or when they are depicted in marvellous shapes, the author gives us to understand, that something uncommon is being conveyed. When singular and unearthly beasts are

described, such as Behemoth and Leviathan, the unicorn, or the phœnix, it is intended, that we should search deeply into their meaning: for such are some of the artifices, by which the ancients at once concealed and explained their hidden mysteries.

When everything was mystical and metaphorical, it was only natural that numbers should have been brought to the service of Art. Geometry also provided a symbolical code, which may some day be understood. These geometrical symbols enabled the mathematicians to import the secret mysteries into their works, and also gave to the builders a means of applying a numerical system to the temples, which, as Plato says, exhibited the pattern of the laws in Egypt. Considerable traces of this symbolical geometry survive in the arcana of Freemasonry. Most of the practical secrets of the old mediaeval architects, who built the cathedrals according to the mysteries of the church, have perished with the old craft lodges, which preceded the establishment of the modern theoretical masonry. Nevertheless it is possible to gather out of the early architectural and technical books some clue to the old practice of building. All old writers on architecture, as well as freemasons, insist that geometry is the foundation of their art, but their hints as to its application are so obscure, that no one in recent times has been able to explain how it was used.

Philosophy must have been equally dependent upon some system of geometry, for Plato wrote over the door of his academy, “LET NONE IGNORANT OF GEOMETRY ENTER HERE,” and in the “Republic” (bk. vii. 527), he says, “You must in the utmost possible manner direct the citizens of your beautiful city on no account to fail to apply themselves to GEOMETRY”—a science which, he says, “flatly contradicts the language employed by those who handle it.”

From this it may be concluded, that Plato meant to inform us, that no one could understand his philosophy without knowing the geometrical basis of it, since geometry contained the fundamental secret of all the ancient science.

It is known both to freemasons and architects, that the mystical figure called the Vesica Piscis, so popular in the Middle Ages, and generally placed as the first proposition of Euclid, was a symbol applied by the masons in planning their temples. Albert Dürer, Serlio, and other architectural writers depict the Vesica in their works, but presumably because an unspeakable mystery attached to it these authors make no reference to it. Thomas Kerrich, a freemason and principal librarian of the University of Cambridge, read a paper upon this mystical figure before the Society of Antiquaries on January 10th, 1820. He illustrated his remarks with many diagrams illustrating its use by the ancient masons, and piously concludes by saying, “I would by no means indulge in conjectures as to the reference these figures might possibly have to the most sacred mysteries of religion.”[1] Dr. Oliver, (“Discrep.” p. 109) speaking of the Vesica, says, “This mysterious figure Vesica Piscis possessed an unbounded influence on the details of sacred architecture; and *it constituted the great and enduring secret of our ancient brethren*. The plans of religious buildings were determined by its use; and the proportions of length and height were dependent on it alone.”[2] Mr. Clarkson (Introductory Essay to Billings’ “Temple Church”) considered that the elementary letters of the primitive language were derived from the same mystical symbol. He says that it was known to Plato and “his masters in the Egyptian colleges,” and was to the old builders “an archetype of ideal beauty.” The Vesica was also regarded as a baneful object under the name of the “Evil Eye,” and the charm most generally employed to avert the

dread effects of its fascination was the Phallus (J. Millinger “Archaeologia,” xix). In Heraldry the Vesica was used as the feminine shield. It was interchangeable with the Fusill, or Mascle (Guillim’s “Display of Heraldry,” 4th ed. 1660, § iv., ch. xix., p. 354), and was also figured as a lozenge or rhombus. In the East the Vesica was used as a symbol of the womb, and was joined to the cross by the Egyptians forming the handle of the Crux ansata.

[1] The west is the feminine end of a Christian church, and the western gables of Gothic cathedrals are often lighted by a rose-window, or one in the shape of the Vesica Piscis, as at Dunblane.

[2] See also the article in Gwilt’s “Encyclopædia of Architecture” (1876), p. 968.

Geometrically, the Vesica is constructed from two intersecting circles, so that it may be taken as

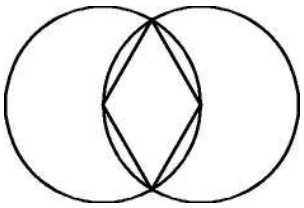


FIG. 1.—THE VESICA PISCIS

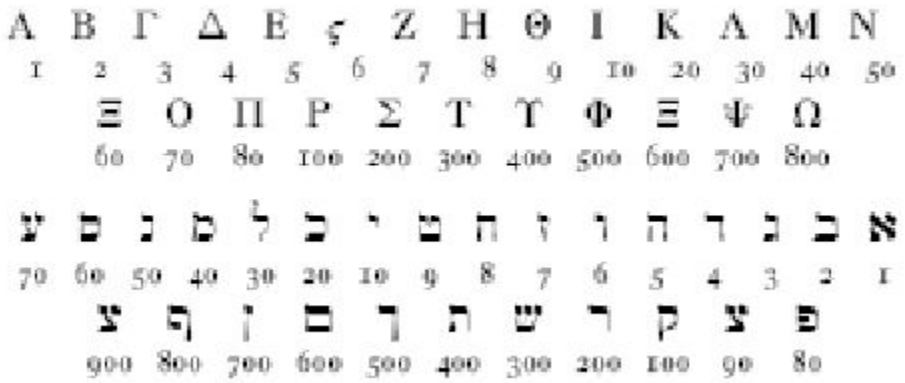
having a double significance. Edward Clarkson says that it “means astronomically at the present day a starry conjunction; and by a very intelligent transfer of typical ideas a divine marriage,” or the two-fold essence of life, which the ancients supposed to be male and female. To every Christian the Vesica is familiar from its constant use in early art, for not only was it an attribute of the Virgin, and the feminine aspect of the Saviour as symbolized by

the *wound*[1] in his side, but it commonly surrounds the figure of Christ, as His Throne when seated in Glory. As a hieroglyph the combination of Christ with the Vesica is analogous to the Crux ansata of the Egyptians.

[1] All the early writers declare that this mystic wound emitted blood and water at the Crucifixion, and it is never omitted in the works of the early masters.

Besides the Vesica Piscis the old philosophers and freemasons were accustomed to use as symbols all the plane geometrical figures. The Pythagorean emblem, the Pentalpha, or five-pointed star, and the Hexalpha, or Solomon's Seal, have been used in the church from time immemorial as symbols of Christ and the Trinity, and have a variety of emblematic associations. The Hexagon was the common symbol of the Masonic Cube or Cubical Stone, while the Triangle, and Square had each their use as geometrical symbols. The Cross has also been from the remotest times a potent mystical emblem among all ancient peoples. Crosses were generally of three kinds, the Tau Cross, the upright or Jerusalem Cross, and the Saltire or diagonal Cross, and each had its peculiar significance.

Everybody knows, that the Greek and Hebrew letters had each a numerical value, so that every word in these languages may be resolved into a number, by adding together the value of each letter of which it is composed.



Thus the word IESOVS = 888, CHRISTOS = 1,480, LOGOS = 373, the Hebrew word, Messiah = 358, IHVH (Jehovah) = 26, ZEUS = 612, MITHRAS = 360, and ABRAXAS = 365. Of course no one supposes now, that the numerical value of the name CHRISTOS has any particular significance, or that the number 1,480 is anything but an accidental number, produced by adding together the letters which form the Greek word for “Anointed;” nevertheless, we believe, that the word CHRISTOS was carefully selected by the Greeks, who constructed the Christian theology, in order to exemplify the old Gnosticism, which forms the basis of Christianity in common with every other old religious system. This number 1,480, as will be shown further on, accurately exhibits an important measure of the Cosmos, and was, apparently, chosen to be the foundation of the scientific pantheism upon which the Christian theology is built, and was a part of the Gnosis, primarily derived from those laws of the priestly astronomers of ancient Egypt, who first devised the canon, which became a fundamental principle in the Greek, Jewish, and Christian Law.

But there is no *apparent* evidence, that the Jews and Christians possessed a sufficiently exact knowledge of the Cosmic scheme, to introduce any of its dimensions into the names of the Deity. And so it would appear. But the

meaning of those works which make up the canon of the Scriptures are no longer understood, and although the knowledge of which we are speaking is carefully preserved in these Scriptures, so unintelligible have they become, that no one at the present day appears to be aware of its existence.

Chapter II - The Holy Oblation.

"*Perusing the nine last chapters of Ezekiel's prophecy, whilst I hoped to find, and feel a* solid body, *I only grasped the* flitting aire, *or rather a* meer spirit; *I mean instead of a literall sense I found the* Canaan *by him described no* Geography, *but* OURANOGRAPHY."—THOMAS FULLER, "Pisgah-sight of Palestine" (1650), bk. v., p. 189.

THE publication by Copernicus of the measures of the universe, which are at once straightforward and accurate, was coincident with the Reformation, and the breaking-up of the old mysticism of the Middle Ages. His scheme was printed in 1543 in his celebrated work, "De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium," the first copy of which was placed in his hands a few hours before his death; but the Pythagorean doctrine of the diurnal motion of the earth, and its revolution round the sun, was taught by him during his life, and received a considerable amount of attention at the beginning of the sixteenth century. In the above work, according to Newcomb ("Pop. Astron.," p. 60), the relative distances of the planets are recorded with fair accuracy, the unit of measurement employed being the interval of the earth's distance from the sun.

	According to Copernicus:	According to Newcomb:
☿	0.326	0.308
♀	0.709	0.718
⊕	1.000	1.000
♂	1.373	1.328
♃	5.453	5.454
♄	9.760	10.070

The moon's distance he computed at $60^1/3$ semidiameters of the earth.

At this time it was a dangerous innovation to publish any but the vaguest astronomical facts, and as Copernicus had some anxiety as to how his statement would be received, his friend Rheticus published a volume, giving a preliminary account of the Copernican theory. Although the Papal authorities did not like the work of Copernicus, it only received their qualified disapprobation, for they put it on the index "subject to correction." However, although Copernicus stands as the first of the modern astronomers, he wrote very much in the same mystical strain as his predecessors, and was by no means like an astronomer of the nineteenth century. What he really appears to have done was to establish a precedent for the open publication of genuine observations, which even the gentle discouragement of the inquisitors was unable to suppress. Whether the measures of the planetary system, which he published, were derived from his own observations, or were only the revelation of an existing tradition, it is difficult to determine. But as he is said to have died without ever seeing his planet Mercury, presumably he could have made no observations as to the distances of this planet, and consequently must have received his data from some one else. This would imply that the astronomers before his time knew the distances of the other planets, as well as that of Mercury. Again, if it were possible for Copernicus to arrive

at the correct proportions of the universe without a telescope, and unaided by any previous observations beyond those which were published, we can see no reason for disbelieving, that the ancients, who are alleged to have gazed at the stars for thousands of years, were incapable of coming to a similarly accurate conclusion.

In the next century the fact, that the diameter of the earth's orbit round the sum is 220 diameters of the sun, is, so far as we know, mentioned for the first time—a statement which implies a true knowledge of the earth’s magnitude. This statement is to be found in Galileo’s “System of the World,” the work which was condemned by the Inquisitors, and for the publication of which he was arraigned, and prohibited from continuing his astronomical researches, or at least from publishing them. The passage in which the measurement of the sun’s distance is given, is such as to make it doubtful if the calculation were made at that time. The context is as follows:—“I suppose with the said Copernicus, and also with his opposers, that the semi-diameter of the grand orb, which is the distance of the earth from the sun, containeth 1,208 semi-diameters of the said earth. Secondly, I premise with the allowance aforesaid, and of truth, that the apparent diameter of the sun, in its mean distance, to be about half a degree, that is 30 *min*. *prim*, which are 1,800 seconds, that is, 108,000 thirds. And because the apparent diameter of a fixed star of the first magnitude is no more than 5 seconds, that is, 300 thirds, and the diameter of a fixed star of the sixth magnitude, 50 thirds (and herein is the greatest error of the anti-Copernicans), therefore the diameter of the sun containeth the diameter of a fixed star of the sixth magnitude 2,160 times . . .

“The diameter of the sun is 11 semidiameters of the earth, and the diameter of the grand orb contains 2,146 of these

same semidiameters, by the assent of both parties; so that, the diameter of the said orb contains the sun's diameter 220 times very near. And because the spheres are to one another as the cubes of their diameters, let us make the cube of 220, which is 106,480,000, and we shall have the grand orb 106,480,000 times bigger than the sun, to which grand orb a star of the sixth magnitude ought to be equal, according to the assertion of this author.

"The error, then, of these men consisteth in being extremely mistaken, in taking the apparent diameter of the fixed stars." (Salusbury's Translation, tom. i., p. 325.)

The first assumption in this remarkable passage, namely, the distance from the earth to the sun called the grand orb, is enormously deficient. The distance according to modern calculations is 91,404,000 = 23,086 semi-diameters at the least, 3,959 or about 10 times the number stated in the text, that is, if Galileo had given the number at 12,000 instead of 1,200 (12,080), it would have been approximately correct. Again, the diameter of the sun is nearly 110 diameters of the earth, not 11 semi-diameters, as stated. Whether, in face of this error, it was possible to compute the earth's distance correctly by diameters of the sun, is a question for astronomers to decide. It seems most extraordinary, that, holding such erroneous conceptions of the magnitude both of the earth and the sun, he should yet bring out the correct result in his final calculation of their distance, measured by the diameter of the sun. It is also curious, that by multiplying the two numbers 1,208 and 11 by 10 we get a real dimension of the sun's diameter and distance. It is true that we have to take the last in diameters instead of semi-diameters to make it right. But, if the whole thing is a mystification, this would be quite sufficient for the purpose, and make detection more difficult. We know that Galileo was delayed for a

considerable time before he obtained his privilege to publish this work, and no one knows what alterations he may have been required to make before the Inquisitors, who first sanctioned the book and then condemned it, were satisfied. It is tolerably certain, from what we know of Galileo's stated opinions, that if there had been no censorship he would have published his work in a more direct form, notwithstanding his obliging complacence to the wishes of the priests, when they used their Procrustean persuasion to make him change his mind, and take their view as to how astronomical matters ought to be announced to the world. His non-resistance on this occasion, as well as the obscure and mystical language in which his four tedious dialogues are written, rather favours the idea, that his views differed very little from those of the Inquisitors after all. This tribunal merely disliked the idea of accurate astronomical knowledge becoming common property, and Galileo showed no serious objection to gratify them. Kepler and Tycho Brahe, the contemporaries of Galileo, always kept their disclosures within the bounds of ecclesiastical license, and Kepler never pretended that he spoke otherwise than in parables in his "Mysterium Cosmographicum"—an obviously mystical work, written entirely as an exposition of the old doctrines which we find in the "Timæus" of Plato.

All these mystifications resorted to by the astronomers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries suggest, that there was no real desire on their part to allow the true facts of their science to become generally known, and a sentence of John Hutchinson's implies, that there was nothing new in the disclosures of Copernicus. For he says: "Such as believe that the motions of the orbs were never known before Copernicus, nor philosophy before, or that it was understood by Sir Isaac Newton, let them study their

books."[1] Again, the assertion, which is so frequently made, that Galileo was the first astronomer who used a telescope, is unsubstantiated by any certain evidence. From a passage in the "Clouds" of Aristophanes we know that the Greeks used burning glasses, and consequently must have known their magnifying powers. Roger Bacon in the thirteenth century alludes to his use of a telescope and microscope. Cornelius Agrippa ("Vanity of the Arts and Sciences") alludes to experiments with hollow, convex, and other glasses, which make little things appear great, and things afar off near. J. B. Porta (1598) also makes a similar statement: "Concave lenses show distant objects more clearly, convex those which are nearer, whence they may be used to assist the sight. . . . If you know rightly how to combine one of each sort, you will see both far and near objects larger and clearer. . . . I shall now endeavour to show in what manner we may contrive to recognize our friends at the distance of several miles, and how those of weak sight may read most minute letters from a distance. It is an invention of great utility, and grounded on optical principles, nor is it at all difficult of execution; but *it must be so divulged as not to be understood by the vulgar and yet be clear to the sharp-sighted*." (Life of Galileo, p.) The English mathematician, Leonard Digges, who died about 1573, is supposed to have possessed a telescope which he used in private. The accusers of Galileo called him plagiarist, liar, and impostor, as well as heretic, so his "Invention" may have been merely the disclosure of what everybody up to his time had concealed. At best Galileo only imitated or improved upon the instruments made by the Dutch, a specimen of which was in the possession of Cardinal Borghese before the year 1609. The great interest taken in Galileo's telescope at Venice is certainly in favour of its novelty, and bears out the received opinion, that the