

Notes on the Nimbus.

BY

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“The Lord shall be to thee an everlasting light, and
thy God thy glory.”

ISAIAH LX. 19.

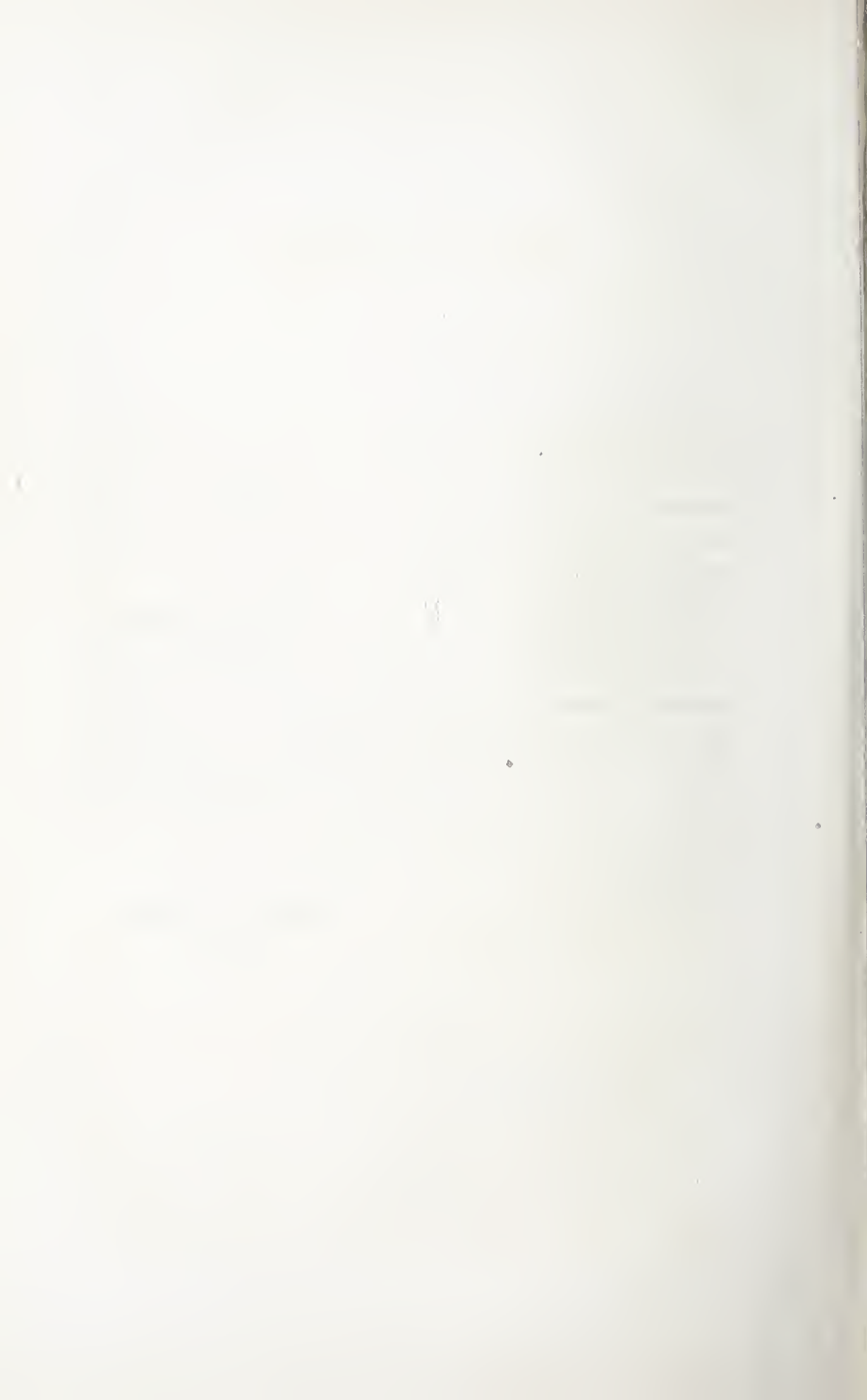
THESE "Notes on the Nimbus," which have been thrown together during the intervals of a very engrossing business, are merely suggestive of subjects which may prove to be interesting to antiquaries. I do not *publish* the paper, because it has no pretension to determine any of the points advanced in it.

The engravings and wood cuts are accurately reproduced from the authorities referred to, but as these are in most instances themselves only copies, their perfect accordance with the originals cannot be vouched for; a circumstance which I feel bound to suggest, as it materially affects the value of the arguments which are in some degree founded upon them.

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THORNIDYKES, BOLTON,

August, 1854.



Notes on the Nimbus.

FROM the earliest ages of symbolical art, it was a custom to embellish the effigies of divine and saintly persons, with the distinctive mark of a nimbus of fire or light, either emanating from, or resting upon the head. The pagan gods of antiquity were crowned with this fiery ornament, darting beams of radiant splendour from the brows of the greater divinities, or shedding a milder effulgence from the heads of demi-gods and heroes. The origin of the custom is hidden in the obscurity of antiquity; we can only conjecture the circumstances which may have induced it, and endeavour to state such of them as appear to be probable and reasonable, though in the attempt we may disappoint many who can find no charm in symbolism when unaccompanied by mystery.

The sun is of all natural objects that which uneducated humanity has in every age, and in almost all climes, looked upon with the greatest awe and reverence. Before the glorious rays of its light and heat—the apparent material source of life and vegetation—men willingly bent themselves in adoration; and even when reason and education had some-what influenced them with a knowledge of a spiritual power, by which the sun itself was created and controlled, many nations retained that luminary as the visible sign or emblem of the unseen God, to whom, through it, they continued to offer sacrifice and worship. Rays of fire or of

light thus naturally became emblems of divine power; the statues of pagan deities were clothed or armed with fiery emanations; Jupiter bore the lightning, Apollo was crowned with sunbeams, and Diana wore the crescent moon as a diadem, while numerous persons of both sexes are fabled to have been translated to the sky, there to sparkle for ever as stary constellations. Eastern paganism invests its idols even to the present day with similar attributes. The heads of gods of Japan, fig. 1, and Burmah, fig. 2, are surrounded by rays corresponding with those of the classical Apollo, fig. 3. The Crowns worn by ancient eastern potentates, fig. 4, were but materialized glories—the divine emanations copied in burnished gold.

The Jews and Moslems though they do not *represent* their prophets and law-givers with the nimbus, always attribute to them this distinguishing ornament; the face of Moses shone after his interview with the Almighty on Mount Sinai; and a mysterious light radiated from the features of Mahomet after the angel Gabriel had cleansed his heart from impurity, by wringing from it the black and bitter drops of original sin inherited from Adam. The Chinese represent not only their deities but also their great lawgiver and philosopher Confucius, fig. 5, with nimbi similar to those on Christian saints and martyrs.

The assumption of the character of divinity with its attendant attributes, was not uncommon with the ambitious kings and heroes of antiquity, and may have led to the long

1. From an engraving of Chinese Deities in Picart's Religious Ceremonies, vol iv., p. 303.

2. Chinese Goddess Puzza. Engraved in Picart's Religious Ceremonies, vol. iv., p. 221.

3. Head of Apollo, with nimbus of seven rays, engraved in Didron's Christian Iconography, p. 35.

4. Heraldic Celestial Crown of seven points.

5. Head of Confucius, from a Chinese picture, engraved in Picart's Religious Ceremonies, vol. iv., p. 210.



1



2



5



3



4



series of pagan reputed gods and demi-gods, believed in, and worshipped by eminent gentile nations. Such assumption may have been suggested, and very probably aided, by a natural phenomenon, inexplicable to people ignorant of the laws of science, but well calculated to strike them with wonder and awe: sparks of electric fire may be emitted by friction from the hair of many persons under certain circumstances: and it may have been a prosecution of this idea which induced the Emperor Commodus to powder his hair with gold dust, that while walking in the sun it might appear to sparkle with supernatural fire: even in comparatively recent times, a religious imposter in Turkey is said to have succeeded in deluding many people into a belief of his sanctity and divine power, by the use of phosphorus on his hair. But whatever its origin, the nimbus or glory on the heads of powerful or pious persons, was a well understood symbol, before the advent of Christ upon earth. The poet Virgil, who lived and died before that time, thus exactly describes the appearance of a prophetic glory which appeared on the head of the young Ascanius before the flight from Troy.

“ Sudden a circling flame was seen to spread
 With beams refulgent round Iuliu’s head ;
 Then on his locks the lambent glory preys
 And harmless fires around his temples blaze.”*

The nimbus was adopted as a religious symbol by the early Christians, and examples of it exist in the Roman catacombs, which are attributed to the sixth century. In ancient illuminations, the wall paintings, and the stained glass of old churches, heads of arch-angels, angels, evangelists, apostles, saints, and martyrs, are usually encircled by a ring of brilliant colour, assuming the appearance of light, which is presumed to signify that as accepted servants of the Almighty, they have been honored with this especial

* Pitt’s Virgil’s *Ænead*, Book 2.

mark of His favour. *Circles* of light are never placed on the heads of persons alive at the time of the representation being made, however holy or powerful they may have been ; but there are a few examples remaining of men with the reputation of great sanctity who were pictured when still in this life with a glory of a *square* form.* The nimbus of departed saints, when represented by painting, is sometimes merely a thread of light bounding the outline, and entirely transparent within, while in other instances the outline is marked by numerous rays or beams of light, by flowers, stars, or other ornaments ; when, however, the sculptor crowned *his* workmanship with a nimbus, he was compelled to adopt a different arrangement, and had recourse to a disk or plate of metal, which could be richly ornamented with jewels, gilding, and enamel, corresponding with, but surpassing in brilliancy, the coloured decoration, at that time profusely lavished upon the entire figure. The glass painters had it quite in their power to represent a transparent nimbus, yet they, for the most part, preferred an imitation of the opaque glory of the statuary ; indeed, figures in glass appear rather to have been copied from stone sculptured images, than from the human figure.

The nimbus was frequently made the medium of indicating by its colour, or symbolical ornamentation, the person upon whose head it was placed ; thus the figure of the Blessed Virgin was often crowned with a glory of blue enamel, bordered with golden stars. The names of many saints were also inscribed upon the margins of their respective nimbi. Angels and arch-angels had usually within their nimbi peculiar ornaments which probably indicated a distinctive symbolism to be afterwards described.

From a natural desire to enhance the merits of their founders and other eminent men, numbered by the Church of Rome among her saints, the monastic orders frequently

* The square is an ancient symbol of the earth, and the circle of heaven.

departed from the simplicity of early Christian symbolism, and represented on their images and paintings attributes approaching to those which have been considered peculiar to the Deity, thus the nimbus was often, in such cases, represented not as *resting upon*, but as *proceeding from*, the heads of these highly honoured saints, an important distinction which materially effects the symbolical meaning. There is an example of this extravagant practice in a painting of St. Francis, where he is seen standing with extended arms, as if on a cross, within an auriel composed of seraphim; wounds on his side, hands, and feet, similar to those of the crucified Jesus;—emitting rays of light; the head surrounded by a brilliant glory, and attended by three angels in attitudes of profound adoration; almost all the attributes which could make St. Francis equal to the Saviour are heaped into the picture.* but in this case, as in every other instance of similar overstretched symbolism, there is omitted one distinctive mark of divinity with which the most enthusiastic artistic devotee has never ventured to invest the object of his veneration.

When the Deity is represented in mediæval art, under the likeness of humanity, the head is usually surrounded by a nimbus similar in form to those which crown the heads of apostles and saints, but with the addition of certain lines or figures so disposed as to suggest the idea of a cross within its circumference. This is known to archæologists as the cruciform, cruciferous, or crossed nimbus; names which are adopted by almost all modern writers on Christian symbolism, and by many, if not all, of the antiquarian and archæological societies of the present time. This distinguishing nimbus is invariably confined to representations of the three divine personages of the Holy Trinity, whether they

* Picture of St. Francis by Sassetta, engraved in Rossini's "Storia della Pittura," plate 50. See also Mrs. Jameson's "Legends of the Monastic orders," page 50.

are figured as human beings or symbolically indicated, as a Hand in act of blessing, as a Lamb, or as a Dove.

The arrangement is thus described by M. Didron, who has devoted much skill, energy, and learning, to the elucidation of the subject. "When the nimbus is circular, and belongs to one of the persons of the Holy Trinity, it is always, unless the omission arises from the ignorance of the artist, divided by two lines drawn from the outer edges, and intersecting each other at right angles in the centre, these lines form four rays, but one of them, the lowest, is concealed by the head."* The intention of the arrangement is further described by the same author; "The supreme head of all, God the Father, or the Son, or the Holy Ghost, had a circular nimbus, a disk precisely resembling that of the saints; but the nimbus of the divine persons was, as a mark of special distinction, divided diagonally by two intersecting lines in the form of a cross."† It would thus appear that the cross, the well-known emblem of Christianity, was adopted by ancient religious artists to indicate the representations of the Deity, and this idea is undoubtedly accepted at the present time by the all but universal use of the term "cruciform nimbus" whenever it is referred to. It is one object of this brief paper to suggest that an entirely different meaning was intended by the ancient artist in painting the divine nimbus, and that the modern name is objectionable, as conveying an erroneous idea.

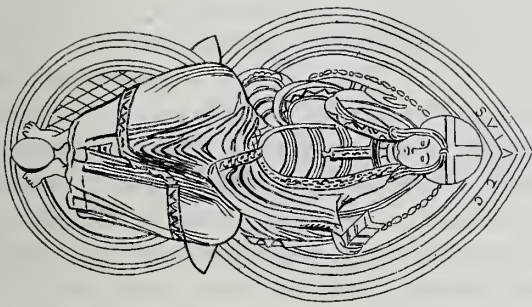
Though always a divine, this, so called cruciform nimbus, is not an exclusively Christian emblem. Like the nimbi of the saints it was used by, and probably originated with, the eastern pagans. The Hindoo goddess Maya, fig. 6, is figured with a large circular nimbus of beams radiating

* Didron's Christian Iconography, page 32.

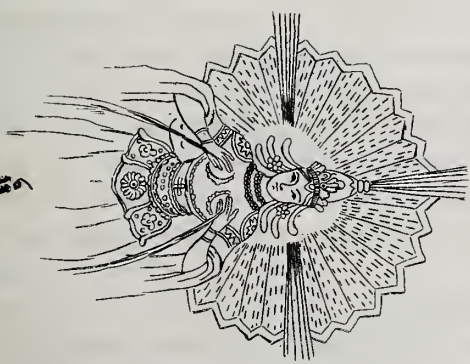
† Do. do. page 99.

6. Traced from the engraving of the Hindoo Goddess Maya, in Didron's Christian Iconography, page 41.

52 a



52 b





from the head, among which are distinctly marked three rays of greater brilliancy or importance, corresponding in character and form with those which we find similarly placed on the heads of the persons of the Holy Trinity. Whatever therefore its purpose, or its origin, this peculiarly marked nimbus appears to be common to pagan as well as to Christian religion; and also in both cases distinctive of, and peculiar to, the divinity.

The idea usually conveyed to the mind by the appearance of the nimbus on the heads of pagan deities, is that of fire, each flame like emanation for the most part converging to a point, but on the heads of the Christian Trinity the rays more frequently diverge from the head to the edge of the nimbus, and thus present the appearance and effect of light rather than of fire. The nimbus of the Hindoo goddess Maya, fig. 6, is however an exception to this rule, which, although generally applicable, is by no means universal; it is however worth notice, as it appears to distinguish the worship of paganism with its confined objects, and material sacrifices, accompanied by, and accomplished through, the medium of *fire*, from the expanding influences of revealed religion, which have diffused the blessings of impalpable *light* and knowledge over humanity, and thus become truthful images of its spiritual sacrifice and worship.

Allusion has already been made to the reverence and adoration with which many ancient nations regarded the sun; human eyes cannot look upon the unmitigated splendour of its rays with impunity, therefore to prostrate himself upon the earth, or to veil his head when worshipping, was a practice, under the circumstances, most natural to man.

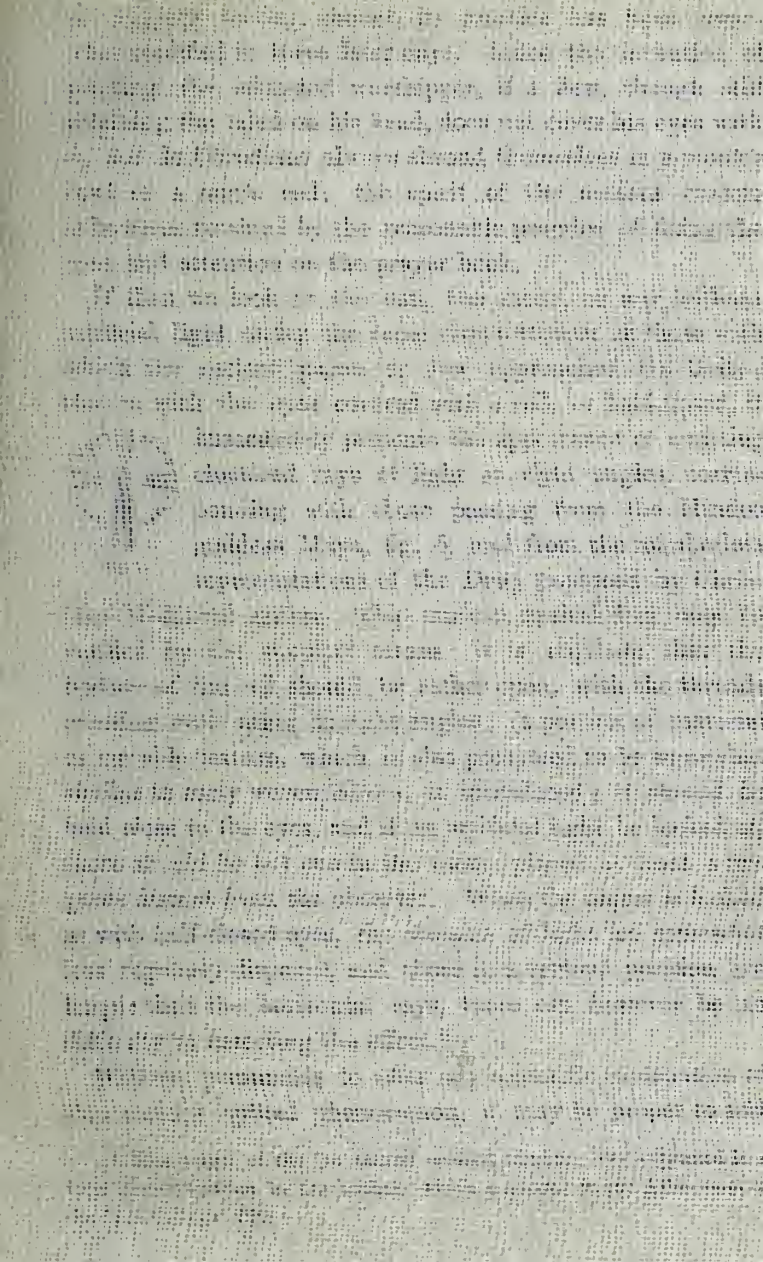
It is also entirely consonant with scripture to associate the idea of intense light with the presence of God. In this way He revealed Himself to Moses and the Israelites. To St. Paul He manifested Himself as "a great light shining from heaven," so great that the Apostle "could not see for

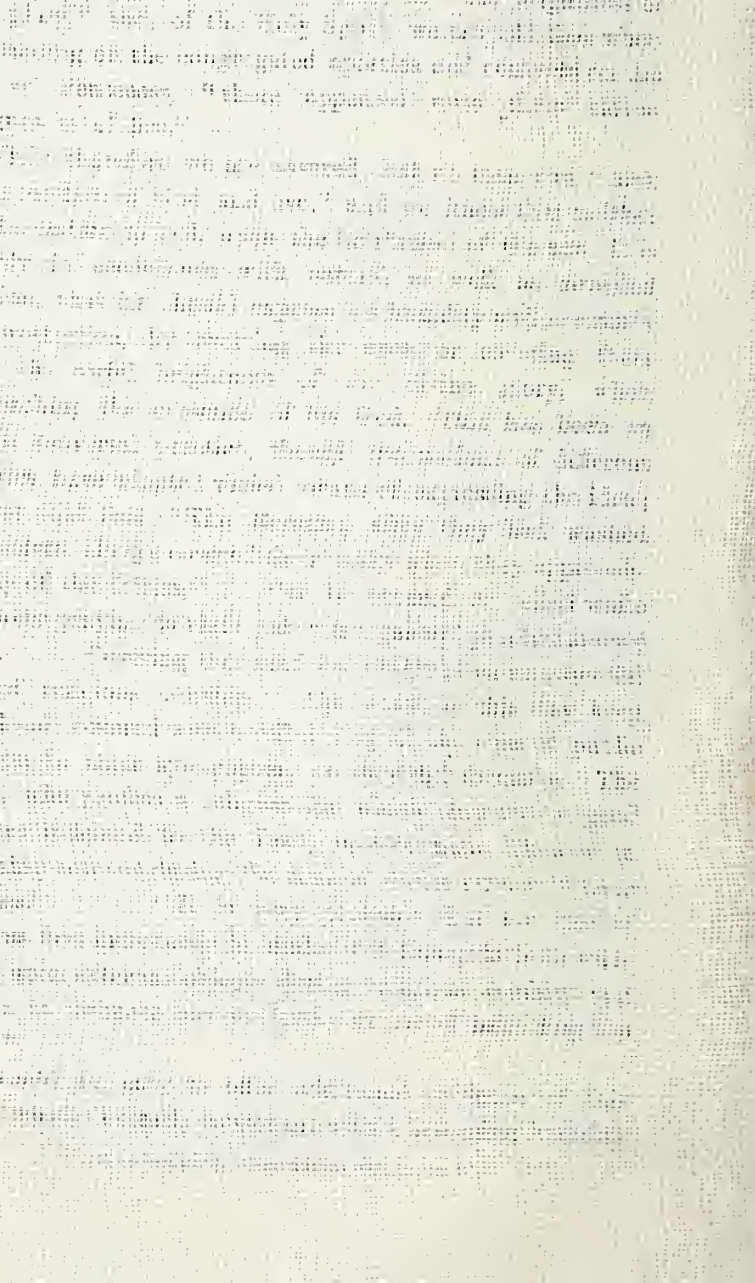
the glory of that light." The Saviour is described in scripture, with reference to the Father, as "the brightness of His glory," and, of the Holy Spirit, we are told that when descending on the congregated apostles and converts on the day of Pentecost, "there appeared unto them cloven tongues as of fire."

While therefore we are assured that no man can "look upon the face of God and live," and we know that neither can he endure to look upon the brightness of the sun, it is strictly in accordance with natural as well as revealed religion, that he should express his humility and reverence by prostration, by averting the eyes, or covering them from the awful brightness of the divine glory, when approaching the presence of his God. This has been an almost universal practice, though the nations of different climates have adopted varied means of expressing the idea; we are told that "The Romans, after they had washed themselves, always covered their heads when they approached any of the deities," . . . "to be covered or veiled while they were praying to their gods was a general practice among them. . . . Covering the head was observed as an essential part of religious worship. The Jews to this day keep their heads covered with a veil during all the time of public devotion in their synagogues, as they did formerly. The Turks, who profess a religion for which they are in good measure indebted to the Jews, imitate them likewise in remaining covered during the time of divine service in their mosques." . . . "It is very probable that the use of veils was first introduced to hinder our thoughts from wandering upon external objects during religious worship, and perhaps to intimate how unworthy we are of beholding the deity."*

It would be easy to offer additional evidence of this custom which is clearly consonant with a becoming humility

* Picart's Religious Ceremonies, vol. i., p. 12.





of religious feeling, though its practice has been somewhat modified in these later days. Since the invention of printing, the educated worshipper, if a Jew, though still retaining the taled on his head, does not cover his eyes with it, nor do Christians always shroud themselves in a monk's cowl or a nun's veil; the spirit of the ancient custom is however retained by the reasonable practice of fixing the eyes and attention on the prayer book.

If then we look at the sun, the moon, or any brilliant artificial light under the same circumstances as those with which the ancient pagan or Jew approached his Deity; that is with the eyes covered with a veil, or half-closed, it



Fig. 7.

immediately presents the appearance of emitting clustered rays of light at right angles, corresponding with those passing from the Hindoo goddess Maya, fig. 6, and from the numberless representations of the Deity produced by Christian

Mediaeval artists. This curious optical fact may be verified by the simplest means: it is requisite that the texture of the veil should be rather open, with the threads crossing each other at right angles; (a portion of material of suitable texture, which is also presumed to be somewhat similar to early woven fabrics, is introduced,) it should be held close to the eyes, and if an artificial light be looked at, there should be but one in the room, placed at least a few yards distant from the observer. When the object is looked at with half-closed eyes, the streams of light are somewhat less regularly disposed, and those in a vertical position are longer than the horizontal rays, there can however be no difficulty in detecting the effect.*

Without presuming to offer any scientific explanation of this curious optical phenomenon, it may be proper to add

* This origin of the (so called) crossed nimbus, was suggested in a brief communication by the author, which appeared in the Athenæum of the 11th October, 1845.

that rays of light transmitted through certain natural crystals, gums, and liquids, arrange themselves in singular figures of varied form, but very generally corresponding with the rays found within the divine nimbus: the limbs

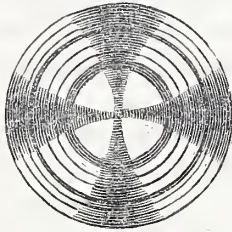


Fig. 8.

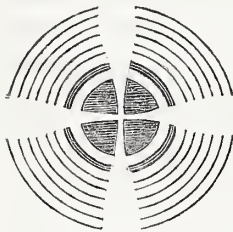


Fig. 9.

however are always four in number, thus forming a true cross: of these two examples are given, figs. 8 and 9, one shows a black rectangular cross, with the arms meeting in the centre; the other shows the cross formed by the absence of colour in a portion of the circles. This is a comparatively recent discovery in optics, and does not bear any analogy—beyond a curious coincidence—with the rays in the divine nimbus; the origin of which, may, it is presumed, be reasonably attributed to the sun seen through the veils, or with the half-closed eyes of humble worshippers.

We venture, though with some diffidence, to hazard the opinion, that with occasional, but very rare exceptions, the mediæval Christian artist when painting the nimbus of the Deity, did not intend to represent, or at all refer to the cross: but that his purpose was to demonstrate, by three rays of light proceeding from the divine head, that the one person represented was invested with the power, and the glory, as well as the identity, of the other persons forming the Holy Trinity.

However appropriate as an emblem of the Son of God, the Saviour of the world, who for men's sins suffered death upon it, the cross has not the same apt and significant meaning with reference to the Father and to the Holy Spirit: to them it would be quite as inappropriate as to the Buddhist

and Hindoo divinities, whose heads are invested with an ornament similar to that which the Christian artist placed upon the persons of the Holy Trinity, when represented together under the semblance of humanity. Of this two

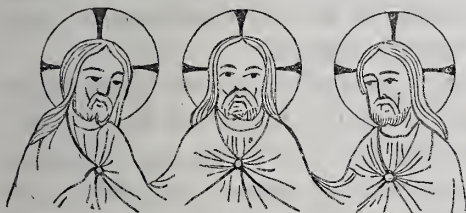


Fig. 10.

examples are given, figs. 10 and 11, which sufficiently show that whatever the symbolical meaning of the three rayed orna-



Fig. 11.

ments, it must be one alike applicable to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, because they are each invested with it, and that too without the slightest distinguishing difference. It would be easy to adduce numerous additional examples of the same kind,*

and to support this part of the argument, by figuring the gross representations of the Holy Trinity which disgraced the latter days of mediæval religious art, such, as three heads on one body, and three faces on one head, surrounded by one nimbus, encompassing three rays; or, by the no less objectionable pictures of the Supreme Father clothed as an ancient Pope, supporting on his knees the figure of the Son the Saviour, extended upon a cross in the agony of death, while the Holy Spirit, as a dove, passes between them; the heads being all similarly nimbed and

Fig. 10. The Holy Trinity. From a French M.S. in the Royal Library. Engraved in Didron's *Christian Iconography*, page 435.

Fig. 11. The Holy Trinity. From a French miniature of the 14th century. Engraved in Didron's *Christian Iconography*, page 471.

* Numerous engravings of this kind may be met with in M. Didron's *Christian Iconography*, under the head of the nimbus of the Trinity. They must be looked for however in the French edition of the work, as they are omitted from the translation published by Mr. Bohn.

marked with the divine rays; but I decline for obvious reasons to reproduce such monstrous and irreverent illustrations. An example is however given of the Holy Father bearing the nimbus in the very demonstrative form of a triangle. Fig. 12.



Fig. 12.

In one of the ancient "mysteries" or "miracle plays," once so popular in England, called "A Council of the Trinity, and the Incarnation," there is a note, or stage direction which elucidates this subject, by shewing that three, and not four, beams of light were employed to demonstrate the presence of God. The arch-angel Gabriel has announced to the Virgin Mary the intended incarnation, and received her assent, when the following sentence occurs within a parenthesis.

("Her' the holy gost descendit, with ~~FFF~~ beamp, to o' lady; the sone of the Godhed, next with ~~FFF~~ beamp, to the holy gost; the staddyr godly with ~~FFF~~ beamp, to the sone; And so entre all thre, to her bosom, . . .")*

A fourth limb or ray in the nimbus of the Saviour, is very rare, and of doubtful authority. M. Didron figures only one example, No. 13, taken from the stalls in the Cathedral of Amiens, erected in the 16th century, at which time the spirit of Christian symbolism had greatly degenerated from its early purity and simplicity. The Saviour is represented as seen from behind, a position very unusual, if not unique, and the nimbus,



Fig. 13.

Fig. 12. The Almighty Father. From an early Italian painting on wood. Engraved in Agincourt's History of Art, vol. iii., plate cxi.

* Hone's "Ancient Mysteries described" from Cotton M. S. pageant xi. page 38.

Fig. 13. Head of our Lord, from the Stalls of the Cathedral at Amiens. From an engraving in Didron's Christian Iconography, p. 102.

if such be intended, is placed upon the head like a cap, the top of which is ornamented with a braided or embroidered device, in some degree resembling a cross, but which may be easily mistaken for a merely fanciful arrangement of pattern.

In representations of the Veronica, there is an opportunity of displaying a fourth limb, and every inducement to indicate a cross, fig. 14, were such intended, but three rays only are found in the examples of this subject.

The head of our Lord was often engraved in the centre of the Patens of old Church Plate, but here, also, as in the Veronica, it is unusual to meet with more than three limbs; there is an instance of a fourth limb on the Paten still in use at Pilton Church, Somersetshire, but it is of comparatively recent date, and so poorly executed, that it may well be supposed the result of a mistake in the hands of some illiterate artist. Many other examples have no fourth limb, though offering equal facilities for its display.*

Italian artists sometimes placed the capital letters R.E.X. expressive of the royal dignity of the Saviour, one on each of the three rays in the nimbus. In the same way the Byzantine artists were accustomed to use the three Greek letters, Omeron, Omega, and Nu, fig. 15, signifying, when united, the words "I, AM," by which the Lord revealed Himself to Moses from the burning bush. In each case, the sense of the inscription is completed by the use of three letters; had a fourth ray been intended, even though concealed, it appears at least probable that it would have been supplied by some understood letter, in an appropriate inscription; by the ordinary arrangement,



Fig. 15.

Fig. 14. Veronica. From the Nuremberg Chronicle.

Fig. 15. Jesus Christ, with a Greek nimbus. Engraved in Didron's Christian Iconography, p. 43.

* Vide specimens of ancient Church plate, published by J. H. Parker, Oxford.

however, three letters and three rays are sufficient to make the subject complete and perfect.

In the example, fig. 15, it will be observed that a fourth ray might have been indicated by continuing one of the vertical lines under the beard, had the artist desired to represent a cross. Lest this should be thought a rare and exceptional instance, several examples of a similar kind are given, in which



Fig. 16.



Fig. 17.



Fig. 18.



Fig. 19.

the omission of any indication of a fourth limb is evidently intentional. The position of the head is indeed rarely such as to allow any space whatever for the display of a fourth ray, and in most of the



Fig. 20.

examples engraved, that space is extremely small. Yet, when we remember the importance of the cross in the eyes of the mediæval artists, we cannot suppose that they systematically omitted its representation when they could by any means carry it out, and we are constrained to believe that they did

Fig. 16. From a French Miniature of the 13th century. Engraved in Didron's *Christian Iconography*, p. 214.

Fig. 17. From an Italian Miniature of the 14th century. Engraved in Didron's *Christian Iconography*, p. 304.

Fig. 18. From a Fresco of the Basilica of St. Paul, of the 12th century. Engraved in Agincourt's *History of Art*, vol. iii., plate 96.

Fig. 19. Head of the Saviour. From a MS. of the 11th century, in the British Museum. Engraved in Twining's "*Symbols of Mediæval Art.*"

Fig. 20. Head of the Infant Saviour. From a wall painting in St. John's Church, Winchester. Engraved in the *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, vol. ix., plate 6.

not, as a rule, desire to display that symbol within the nimbus of the Deity, since we do not find ancient examples with a fourth ray, either in number or importance, at all to be compared with the numerous instances in which it is intentionally absent.



Fig. 21.

That the ancient artists purposely omitted to represent a fourth ray in the divine nimbus in the examples, admitting of its indication which have been figured above, may be assumed from fig. 39, in which the position of the head is such as to allow a mere indication only, of the third ray, but even in this most unfavourable arrangement that third ray is very carefully introduced.

Fig. 21. Head of the Infant Saviour. From an ancient Greek painting. Agincourt, plate 87. Said to be "carefully traced from the original."

Fig. 39. From a wall painting in St. John's Church, Winchester. Engraved in the Journal of the Archaeological Association, vol. ix.

The Almighty Father is frequently represented symbolically by a hand proceeding from clouds, in the act of blessing. This symbol is usually surrounded by a nimbus, containing the three divine rays, a fourth ray is of very rare occurrence; the place it would occupy is indeed usually covered by the wrist, but in the example, fig. 29, it may be seen that there is space sufficient for its indication on each side of the hand, and it is presumed that had a cross been intended, that space would have been occupied by the fourth limb. The wood-cut is taken from a miniature of the ninth century,



Fig. 29.

representing the martyrdom of St. Stephen, who appears to be gazing into the opening heaven, from which the hand of God is extended towards him. The blessing and support afforded to St. Stephen, at the time of his extreme suffering, by the appearance of the hand of the Almighty emitting three beams of light, expressive of the presence and interest of the Holy Trinity, has an evident completeness and propriety, which is certainly wanting if we can suppose the subject to represent merely the hand of the Father resting upon the cross of the Son, without any indication of the presence of the Holy Spirit.

That the mediæval artist had no difficulty in representing the cross in connection with the hand when he desired to do so, may be seen from the example, fig. 30, in which the wounded hand of the Saviour is shown to emit *four* rays, forming that symbol. In such a situation, a cross is entirely appropriate. Three rays so placed would be altogether incongruous, since the wounds and the cross are alike

Fig. 29. The Divine Hand, with a (so-called) cruciform nimbus. Engraved in Didron's *Christian Iconography*, p. 55, from a miniature of the ninth century.

peculiar to the Son of God, while a cross on any representation of the Father or of the Holy Spirit, must for the same reason be equally objectionable.

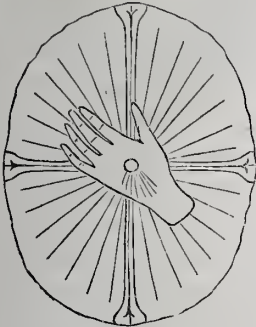


Fig. 30.

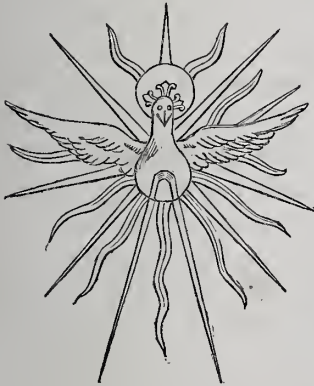


Fig. 31.

The Dove, symbolical of the Holy Spirit, is usually figured in old illuminations and stained glass, with the circular nimbus containing either two or three, but never four rays; the bill of the bird often occupies the place of the third ray; the fourth, if we can suppose such to be intended, would

in most cases be covered by the neck. The trine arrangement is well indicated by an example from the Chaise Dieu tapestry, fig. 31, where the Dove has the head surrounded by a nimbus containing three fleur-de-lis, all pointing upwards, while three flame-like rays proceed in the same direction, from the boundary of the nimbus, neither of these groups at all resembling a cross.

In another example, from a Saxon MS. of the eleventh century, fig. 32, three rays pass beyond the boundary of the circular nimbus; a fourth, had such been desired, could have been easily indicated in the same line with that which proceeds from the bill, its absence under the circumstances shows that the artist did not intend to represent a cross.

Fig. 30. The hand of Christ, symbolical of his passion. Engraved in Twining's "Symbols and Emblems of Mediæval Christian Art," plate 19. From a MS. book of hours of the 15th century, in the British Museum.

Fig. 31. The Holy Spirit descending on the Virgin and Apostles. From an engraving of the "Tapisseries de la Chaise Dieu."

The Holy Spirit, as well as the Almighty Father, was sometimes, though rarely, represented with a triangular nimbus, fig. 33, sufficiently expressive of its reference to the Trinity.



Fig. 32.



Fig. 33.



Fig. 34.

The same allusion is indicated by the trine arrangement of three groups of rays proceeding from the descending dove, fig. 34, in a wood carving of the fourteenth century, representing the baptism of our Lord: and by the three beams upon which the Holy Spirit descends from heaven, to the tri-nimbed head of the Saviour, in another representation, fig. 35, of the same subject. These exam-

ples are all indications of the same idea: the actual presence of the Holy Trinity in the one person represented or symbolized, without any reference whatever to the Cross of our Lord's passion.

St. John the Baptist announced the presence of the Saviour in the words "Behold the Lamb of God," and the Lamb has been accepted as the symbol of Jesus from the earliest period of Christian art to the present time. Very early representations of the Lamb have been met with, bearing on its forehead the passion cross, without any nimbus, and also with the Greek Monogram, of Christ between the letters Alpha and Omega, surrounded by a nimbus. A staff

Fig. 32. Engraved in Twining's "Symbols and Emblems of Mediæval Christian Art," plate 35, page 72. Explained to be "The Holy Spirit with the crossed nimbus." From a Saxon MS. of the eleventh century, in the British Museum.

Fig. 33. From a Mosaic in the Cathedral of Capua. Engraved in Twining's "Symbols and Emblems of Mediæval Christian Art," plate 24.

Fig. 34. Engraved in the French edition (only) of Didron's Christian Iconography, p. 545.

surmounted by a cross is frequently placed beside, or supported by the Lamb. All these attributes, however, are peculiar to the Second Person of the Trinity, and have a significant meaning altogether different from, and independent of, the three rayed nimbus. This emblem of the Triune Deity is found on the head of the Agnus Dei as on the other divine symbols without any indication of a fourth limb or ray, necessary to form the cross. Examples are given, figs. 36, 37, 38, in which that fourth limb might

have been indicated, had the representation of a cross been intended.

The Saviour is sometimes represented bearing His cross,



Fig. 36.



Fig. 37.



Fig. 38.

Fig. 35. Engraved in Agincourt's History of Art, vol. iii., plate 39.

Fig. 36. Lamb, with nimbus, containing a cross in each division, from a sculpture in the catacombs of Rome. Engraved in Twining's symbols of early Christian Art, plate 10.

Fig. 37. Agnus Dei. Engraved in Twining's symbols of early Christian Art, plate 10.

Fig. 38. Engraved in Twining's "Symbols and Emblems of Mediæval Christian Art," plate 10. From painted glass of the thirteenth century, in the Cathedral of Bourges.

an action which appears sufficient to identify His person. He is nevertheless still invested with a divine nimbus, which if it referred to the cross only, would in such circumstances be superfluous. In the example, fig. 40, the arms of the cross are curiously indicated by lines nearly parallel with the rays in the nimbus: the symbol, and the subject symbolized, would scarcely be pictured in such close proximity. The three-rayed nimbus, however, demonstrates the divinity of the Saviour, and also the doctrine of the Trinity.

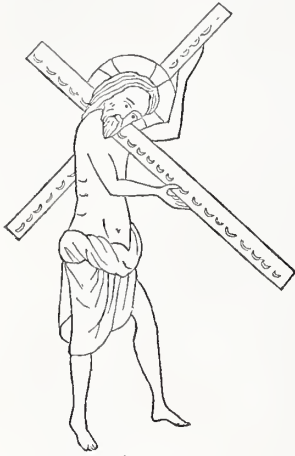


Fig. 40.

In examples of the Divine nimbus from French authorities, the rays very often assume the form of the fleur-de-lis, a well-known national emblem, which is probably itself a symbol of the Trinity.



Fig. 41.

Fig. 41 presents an instance in which the rays do not appear as being behind the head of our Lord, but as absolutely passing from, amidst the hair, this is most clearly marked in the upper ray.

Sometimes the three rays of the Divine nimbus, all point, more or less, upwards, fig. 42. This arrangement is somewhat in favour of the idea that, with the addition

Fig. 40. Christ bearing his cross. From a window of the thirteenth century. Engraved in Twining's "Emblems and Symbols of Mediæval Christian Art," plate 20.

Fig. 41. The head of our Lord, with rays of fleur-de-lis. From an engraving of the "Tapisseries de la Chaise Dieu," plate 3.

Fig. 42. Bas-relief on a silver reliquary. Engraved in Agineourt's History of Art, vol. ii., plate 21.



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of a fourth limb, a cross was intended to be represented, because such a form would be available for the purpose of crucifixion, and is in fact a kind of cross often found in old pictures, but we also meet with instances in which the rays are so expressly indicative of light, fig. 43, that we can scarcely doubt that the artists intended to convey that idea rather than the figure of a material cross.

Instances also occur in which the two rays usually placed in a horizontal direction, are made to point downwards, fig. 44, this arrangement, with the addition of a fourth limb, would not form an instrument practicable for crucifixion, nor would it correspond with any known form of the cross, including the numerous fanciful varieties into which this emblem has been tortured by the ingenuity of heraldic painters. The late Mr. Pugin suggests this arrangement as a proper nimbus for the head of the Eternal Father, but, as has been already explained, there is in mediæval examples a perfect identity in the nimbi of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The depressed nimbus, is rarely met with, but it occurs on the head of the Son, fig. 45, as well as the Father.

Fig. 23. From an early painting of the interment of our Lord. Engraved in Agincourt's History of Art, vol. iii. plate 105.

Fig. 24. From a Mosaic by Gaddo Gaddi. Engraved in Agincourt's History of Art, vol. iii., plate 18.

Fig. 25. From a painting of the Infant Saviour presented to Simeon. Engraved in Agincourt's History of Art, vol. iii., page 201.

Fig. 26. From a drawing of the Crucifixion, thirteenth century. Engraved in Agincourt's History of Art, vol. iii., plate 105.

Fig. 27. From a miniature of the eleventh century. Engraved in Agincourt's History of Art, vol. iii., plate 53.

Fig. 28. From a painting on wood, attributed to St. Luke. Engraved in Agincourt's History of Art, vol. ii., plate 105.

Fig. 43. Infant Saviour. From a picture of the Milanese School. Engraved in Mrs. Jameson's Legends of the Madonna, p. 268.

Fig. 44. From Cædmon's Scripture History, a MS. of the tenth century, in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. Engraved in the Archæology, vol. 24.

Fig. 45. Do. do. do.

In addition to the peculiar arrangement of the horizontal rays, the last illustration is another instance of space for a fourth limb, without any indication of an intention to figure a cross.

There are numerous instances, of which some examples are given, figs. 46, 47, 48, 49, in which the centre of the



Fig. 46.



Fig. 47.



Fig. 48.



Fig. 49.

nimbus does not coincide with the point from which the rays proceed, that point being placed so low, that a fourth limb, if intended, would be much shorter than the three rays indicated, and if thus completed, would not accord with any known variety of the cross. Fig. 50 displays this peculiarity on the head of the infant Saviour, and in addition the star of the nativity, resting upon three rays of light, passing from heaven to Bethlehem.

In other examples, the point from which the rays proceed is placed above the centre of the nimbus, fig. 51, by this arrangement a fourth limb, if supplied, would form a Latin cross, the fourth limb being longer than the others, it is however, of very rare occurrence. M. Didron gives an example of an elevated nimbus on a figure of our Lord sitting in judgment, from a fresco of the eleventh century, in the transept of the church of Montoire, near Vendome,

Fig. 46. Head of our Lord, from an early Black Letter Life of Christ.

Fig. 48. From an early Black Letter Life of Christ.

Fig. 49. Head of the Infant Saviour. Do. do.

in which the centre of the circular nimbus is placed above the apex of the head; the three rays are seen to meet at this point, and present an appearance exactly similar to the



Fig. 50.



Fig. 51.

bands upon the orb so often represented in the hands of the Eternal Father, and of Jesus Christ, and to the similar mound placed in the hands of Christian sovereigns at their coronation. M. Didron assumes that the orb, and not a nimbus, is in this instance intended, and remarks that "Christ would thus appear to support the world on his head; and this circled sphere carries us back immediately to Egyptian Iconography, in which we meet with numerous personages bearing the world upon their heads in a similar manner."* A reference to the engraving, which has been carefully reproduced, fig. 52, will show, that this ingenuous theory is altogether untenable. So far from our Lord supporting the world upon His head, He in fact rests His feet upon the earth as

Fig. 50. Engraved in Agincourt's *History of Art*, vol. iii., plate 59. From a Greek MS. of the Evangelists, of the twelfth century, in the Library of the Vatican.

Fig. 51. Engraved in Agincourt's *History of Art*, vol. iii., plate 39. From a Latin MS. of the ninth century, in the Library of Minerva, at Rome.

* Didron's *Christian Iconography*, p. 45.

“His footstool;” an arrangement far from uncommon in Mediæval illustrations of the last judgment. The rays upon the nimbus indeed exactly correspond with the bands upon the imperial orb, and very properly so when it is remembered that they symbolize the same fact. That the bands encircling the earth express the presence and protecting power of the Holy Trinity over the world, is clearly implied by the words and Rubric of the ancient coronation services, where the archbishop on delivering the orb to the king, says, “Receive this imperial orb, and remember that the whole world is subject to the power and empire of God.” It is to be regretted that the modern orb, used at the coronations of British sovereigns, has been so made as in some degree to obscure the old symbolical meaning of the bands or rays;* they are indicated by rows of rich jewels, the horizontal band being continued on both sides along its entire length, fig. 53, while in most ancient examples, fig. 54, the vertical and horizontal bands are connected, or run into each other, without obstruction.

The royal and imperial crowns of Christian sovereigns are almost invariably surmounted with a golden orb, thus banded or rayed, and bearing a cross on its apex.† In the eleventh century the orb borne in the hands of British sovereigns was frequently surmounted by a dove, and sometimes the

Fig. 53. Orb used at the coronation of George IV., from Sir George Naylor’s account of the ceremony.

Fig. 54. Orb from the Great Seal of Henry VIII.

* This is, however, a trifling error in comparison with the mistake made by the parties who prepared the regalia for the coronation of William and Mary. A separate orb was made for and delivered to each, and this duplicate world is, I believe, still preserved among the British Regalia. On their Great Seal, however—as in that of Philip and Mary—the orb is placed between them, and each rests a hand upon it.

† Forty-seven out of the forty-nine European Christian crowns are thus decorated, the exceptions being Sicily, which has a large cross *Botoneé* without orb; and Portugal, which is surmounted by a trefoil ornament, *Vide Wappen Almanach—der souverainen Regenten Europa’s.*

dove rested on a cross; symbols which sufficiently indicate the religious idea to which the orb refers.

Durandus, Bishop of Mende, writing upon the symbolism of churches and church ornaments in the thirteenth century, gives two accounts of the crown or nimbus of the Saviour, which in some degree contradict each other, but both of which we quote. "The crown of Christ is represented under the figure of a cross; and is thereby distinguished from that of the saints: because by the Banner of His cross He gained for Himself the glorification of His Humanity, and for us freedom from our captivity, and the enjoyment of everlasting life;"* and again, "Christ was *triply* crowned. First, by His Mother, on the day of His conception, with Crown of Pity; which was a double crown; on account of what He had by nature, and what was given Him; therefore also it is called a diadem, which is a double crown. Secondly, by His Step-mother, in the day of His passion, with the Crown of Misery. Thirdly, by His Father, in the day of His Resurrection, with the Crown of Glory." Durandus is more remarkable for the amplitude than the accuracy of his explanations of Church symbolism, and in this case appears desirous to give a double explanation to the same subject, without being very explicit in either.

The Greek letter **T**, called in the language of heraldry the cross tau, but which is really no cross, since the lines by which it is formed merely meet and join each other without crossing, bears some analogy to the appearance of the rays in the divine nimbus, and to those on the orb, indeed, if we could suppose the tau to be used in an inverted position, the coincidence in form would be exact. On some examples of the orb the rays are placed exactly in the shape of that letter, fig. 55. It is not improbable that it may

* Durandus on Symbolism. Edited by the Rev. J. M. Neale and the Rev. Benjamin Webb, pp. 61 and 65.

be directly referred to, or represented. Much mysterious significance has always been attributed to the letter tau, and it enters largely into the religious symbolism of the biblical antiquaries, which may probably have arisen from the fact of its being formed of three limbs, frequently, though not always, of equal length, and thus, like the Delta, an appropriate symbol of the Holy Trinity.



Fig. 55.

The nimbi on the heads of archangels and angels are frequently distinguished by a significant ornament, which is never found except in those of the heavenly host. When it is remembered that these glorious beings are the special ministers and messengers of the Deity, and admitted into His awful presence, we may expect to meet with some indication of their peculiar office, and a reflection from His glory. In Greek examples, therefore, we meet with a Delta placed on the forehead within the nimbus, fig. 56. The same very obvious idea is expressed in other figures, by three circles joined together, fig. 57, or by a tongue of flame in the same situation, fig. 58.



Fig. 58.



Fig. 56.



Fig. 57.

Fig. 55. Orb, in the hand of the Deity, from a French miniature. Engraved in Didron's *Christian Iconography*, p. 42.

Fig. 56. Archangel, from a Greek picture. Engraved in Mrs. Jameson's *"Sacred and Legendary Art,"* vol. i., p. 59.

Fig. 57. Archangel, from a painting by Cimabue, in Mrs. Jameson's *"Sacred and Legendary Art,"* vol. i., p. 52.

Fig. 58. Angel, from a picture by Lorenzo Monaco, in the Florence Gallery. Engraved in Mrs. Jameson's *"Sacred and Legendary Art,"* vol. i., p. 86.

Moses was admitted to the presence of God, and allowed, while yet upon earth, to witness the mitigated glory of the Almighty. Like the angels and archangels, he is distinguished by a particular nimbus, directly reflecting the divine glory, expressed however, in the case of the prophet, by *two* beams of light only. Figs. 59 and 60. His face, we



Fig. 59.



Fig. 60.

are told by scripture, shone with so bright a light that he covered it with a veil when conversing with the Jews.

We do not venture to offer any decided opinion as to the reasons which induced mediæval artists to adopt this curious arrangement, or to substitute for rays of light the two horns so often met with on the head of the Prophet. They could not represent *three* rays without confounding the representations of Moses with those of the Deity. It may be suggested that as the Almighty did not reveal Himself to Moses in *all* His glory, and delivered to him only that portion of the divine law peculiar and applicable to the Jews, the old artists may have refrained for these reasons from expressing in the nimbus of the Prophet, allusion to that Person of the Godhead whose

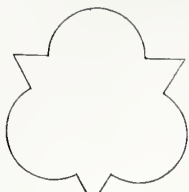
advent on earth, though foretold, was not at that time accomplished. It is presumed that horns were represented instead of beams of light, because (as we are informed) the word employed in the original Hebrew admits of being interpreted in either sense; or it may have been suggested to them from the horns of the crescent moon, whose light is a

Fig. 59. Head of Moses, with two groups of rays, from an old Black Letter Bible.

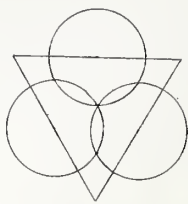
Fig. 60. Figure of Moses, with two beams or horns within the nimbus, from painted glass of the 12th century, in Chartres Cathedral. Engraved in Didron's *Christian Iconography*, p. 117.

reflection from that of the sun, as the glory of Moses was derived from that of the Almighty. Most probably, however, it was caused by the practical difficulty which the early sculptors would meet with in any attempt to represent rays of light on the head of a stone image, and that therefore they availed themselves of the expedient permitted by the literal interpretation of the Hebrew text. How magnificently this was accomplished by Michael Angelo, in his majestic and super-human statue of the great Prophet of the Israelites, is well known to all lovers of art.

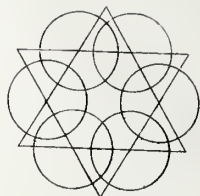
The Evangelists are always crowned with nimbi, whether they are figured in their own persons, or symbolically represented as a man, an ox, and a lion with wings, for St. Matthew, St. Luke, and St. Mark, or as an eagle for St. John. There is no peculiarity to distinguish their nimbi from those of other saints, and no indication of a cross or of three rays is to be met with in ancient examples. It might be expected that figures of St. Peter and St. Andrew would have in their nimbi indications of the instruments of their martyrdom, which were in each case crosses, but of such peculiar forms as to distinguish them at all times from pictures of the Saviour; as however, no such emblems ever appear in their nimbi, it may be inferred that neither does the ornamentation in the nimbi of our Lord refer to the instrument of His passion.



61



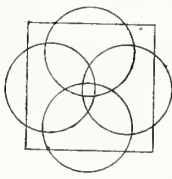
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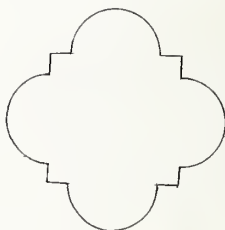
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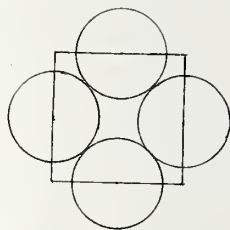
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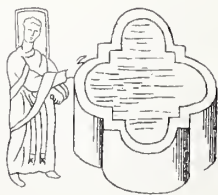
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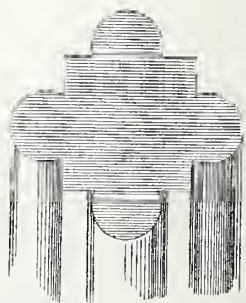
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68

Architectural Nimbi.

THE ornamental panels and the open tracery of windows adopted by the ecclesiastical architects of the middle ages, had almost invariably something besides mere beauty of form to recommend them, they were often indeed so deeply symbolical that we can now scarcely hope to discover the subjects to which many of them refer. We venture to suggest an explanation of two graceful panels which frequently occur among ancient embellishments, and which are often adopted by modern decorators, though, we presume to think, without any just feeling of their true meaning and significant origin.

The first, fig. 61, consists of three acute angles, and three semi-circular arches; it occurs in ancient decoration and church windows, as a frame-work for the sacred name, the Cross, Agnus Dei, Dove, and similar subjects having direct reference to the Deity.

The propriety of this arrangement will be at once understood, when the lines forming the panel are united and carried *home*, the figure then develops itself, fig. 62, into the well-known Delta, the most frequently used of all emblems of the Trinity, the three equal limbs, having each a circular nimbus or glory. Thus understood, the outline becomes a most fitting frame for the subjects already mentioned; but it is obviously inappropriate for emblems of inferior importance as those of the Evangelists, still more so for armorial bearings, crests, cyphers, and other heraldic ornaments, to all which purposes it is abundantly applied in modern art. There is a curious example of this ornament, arranged in

duplicate, among the carved oak panels, probably of the time of Henry VII., in Smithills Hall, Lancashire, fig. 63, it is on one of a series of panels, all representing religious emblems, and occurs next to one bearing a beautiful and elaborate carving of the monogram of Jesus, the form of which is probably unique. Sometimes this nimbed Delta contains a heraldic shield, which is, however, always charged with some appropriate religious bearing, such as the cross, in fig. 64; The symbolism of this example is heightened by the trefoiled cusps in each semi-circle, or half-nimbus. In some instances, and particularly in church windows, the figure is inverted, one of the angles being placed at the top.

The second of these ornaments, though less important, is still very interesting. It consists of four right angles, and four semi-circular arches, fig. 65. When the lines are completed, as in the previous example, the figure becomes a square, having on each side a circular nimbus, fig. 66. We presume, that for this reason, it has been adopted by Christian artists as an appropriate frame for the symbolical representations of the Evangelists, of which numerous examples may be found in sepulchral brasses, where they form the corners of the border containing the inscription.

It is also often used to enclose pictured or sculptured representations of the Saviour, particularly when figured under the symbol of a lamb, and was a frequent form for the fonts of an early date, of which an example is given, fig. 67, from a Latin MS. of the ninth century, in the Library of Minerva, at Rome.* It still forms the outline of many a noble pillar in the ancient churches of Christendom, fig. 68,

Fig. 67. Font. Engraved in Agincourt's History of Art, vol. iii., plate 39, from a Latin MS. of the ninth century, in the Library of Minerva, at Rome.

* This form of Font admits of another very appropriate meaning, it may have reference to the four rivers of Paradise.

Fig. 68. Pillar from the Church of St. Etienne, Nevers. Engraved in the Glossary of Architecture, vol. ii., plate 105.

and had, no doubt, in all these cases, the same significant meaning.

The circles on the lines were sometimes formed from a point within the square, fig. 69, in which case they intersect each other. In other instances, two-thirds of each circle is represented outside of the square; such a framework was adopted by Giotto, for some of his famous religious paintings, particularly those representing St. Francis receiving the stigmata, and his ascent to heaven in a fiery car, in which other recognized emblems, peculiar to the Deity, as well as a symbolical guard of the Evangelistic glory, are misapplied to honor this popular saint of the Church of Rome.

This figure of a square with circles is, in ancient examples, often placed diagonally, with an angle of the square upwards, by which arrangement the elegance of the device is considerably enhanced.

Raped Banners.

DURING the first six centuries of the Christian Church, her peace was disturbed by nearly one hundred heresies, most of them impugning, in one way or other, the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. These doubtless led the way to the rapid progress of the Moslem faith, of which a belief in the "Unity of God" was the very corner stone, and to the success of the Arab arms, which from the seventh century to the tenth, nearly swept Christianity from Africa and Asia, threatening also its existence even in Europe. To oppose the pernicious doctrines of Mahomet, the clergy and laity of the Christian Church appear at this time to have largely adopted emblems and symbols bearing marked reference to the Trinity. The cross was indeed the acknowledged emblem of Christianity, but when it is remembered that the Moslems held our Saviour in high reverence, as the greatest of all inspired prophets before the time of Mahomet, that they incorporated many of His benign precepts into their Koran, and were well acquainted with the events of His life, and the manner of His death; it may be assumed that the cross, the instrument of His martyrdom, would be a symbol much less objectionable and obnoxious to them than those other Christian emblems which, demonstrating the orthodox doctrine of the Holy Trinity, struck directly at the very foundation of the Moslem faith. It would be beside the purpose of this essay even to enumerate the many devices which the Christians adopted for this purpose. We confine ourselves to a description of one very peculiar custom through which the soldiers of the cross and the

Holy Trinity demonstrated their own creed, and their opposition to that of Mahomet.

The use of military banners bearing religious emblems must have been of very early date, as frequent reference is made to the custom in the pages of the Old Testament. For their appearance we can only refer to representations on Coins and Medals, their fragile material precluding the preservation of any specimens of great age. On a Medallion of the Emperor Constantine the Great, fig. 70, struck in the

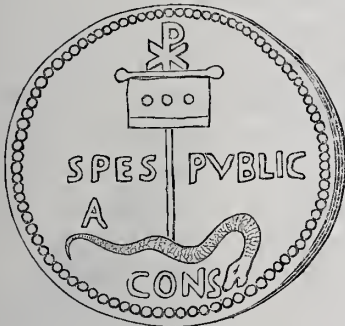


Fig. 70.

fourth century, are represented the religious emblems which gave to that epoch its distinctive character. The banner of the cross piercing the body of the serpent, and surmounted with the monogram of Christ, together with the motto "Spes publica," expressed the hope of the civilized world from the

conversion of the Emperor to the Christian religion. On the banner three circles (symbols of eternity and heaven) of uniform size and appearance, may, it is presumed, (in the absence of any other explanation) be intended as an illustration of the Holy Trinity, though this is an interpretation of the device which we should not have ventured to offer were it not strengthened, if not confirmed, by farther evidence to be afterwards adduced. It was probably in emulation of, and in opposition to, this Christian banner, the Laburum of the eastern empire, that the Arab followers of Mahomed so early as the seventh century displayed the black flag of their prophet, inscribed with the Mahomedan confession of faith. "There is but one God. Mahomed is

Fig. 70. Reverse of a Medallion of Constantine the Great. Engraved in Agincourt's History of Art, vol. ii., plate 48.

the Apostle of God."* This practice, of mustering their soldiers under religious banners, was followed by western nations. Some of the Danish-Norwegian coins, minted in England, in the tenth century, figs. 71 and 72, have upon them the device of a triangular banner, enclosing a cross, and bordered on one side—the only one on which they could be displayed—with certain tags or indefinitely marked ornaments, to which, without further help, it would be difficult to

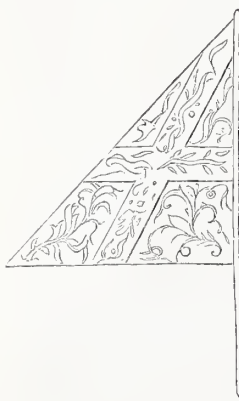


Fig. 73.

attach any meaning; we are, however, assisted to this by other flags of a somewhat similar character, to be afterwards described. A later example of a triangular banner, with the cross fig. 73, and another with the Holy Spirit descending from heaven to earth, fig. 74, confirm the religious symbolism of, and coincide in form with, the early Anglo-Danish examples.

The Bayeux Tapestry supplies curious

attach any meaning; we are, however, assisted to this by other flags of a somewhat similar character, to be afterwards described. A later example of a triangular banner, with the cross fig. 73, and another with the Holy Spirit

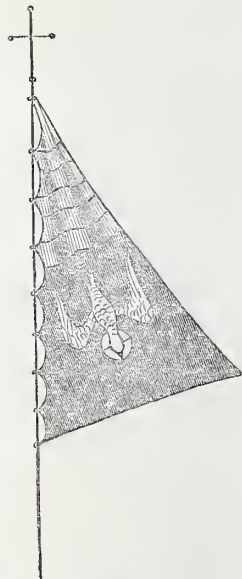


Fig. 74.

* Oekley's History of the Saracens, p. 241.

Fig. 71. Reverse of a coin of Anlaf (or Olaf). Engraved in Worsaae's Danes in England, p. 53. This very curious coin is also engraved in Speed's History of England, p. 53.

Fig. 72. Coin of the Anglo-Danish King Cnut (or Canute), minted in London. Engraved in Worsaae's Danes in England, p. 53.

Fig. 73. Triangular banner, from a mural painting, formerly existing in the Chapel of St. Stephen, Westminster.

Fig. 74. The Holy Ghost, as a Dove, on a Standard, descending from the clouds. From a French Miniature of the fifteenth century. Engraved in Didron's Christian Iconography, p. 450.

and valuable examples of the banners of the eleventh century, to which we venture to call attention, believing that they possess a religious and heraldic interest, not hitherto attributed to them. One banner, fig. 75, is

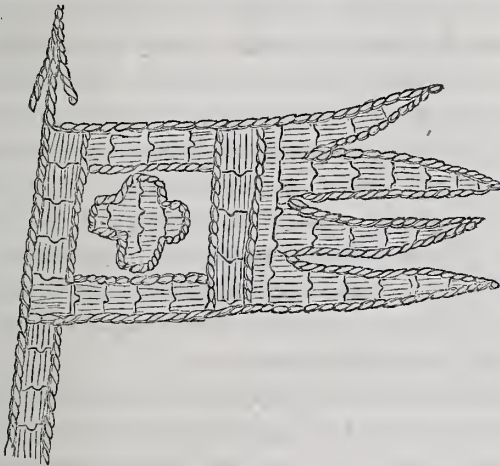


Fig. 75.

repeatedly represented, and always in the hand of, or near to, a figure supposed to be that of Duke William of Normandy, it is presumed to be the flag said to have been presented to him by Pope Alexander, before the invasion of England, in testimony of his assent to William's claim upon the English throne. This banner is charged with a cross within a border, and is terminated by being cut into four flame-like points, very similar to the oriflamme, fig. 76, represented in the stained glass of Chartres Cathedral; and

Fig. 75. Banner in the hands of William, Duke of Normandy; from the Bayeux Tapestry. This illustration is traced from the drawing by C. A. Stothard, engraved by Busine, and published by the Society of Antiquaries.

Fig. 76. From the painted windows in Chartres Cathedral, representing "Henry, Lord of Mez, Mareschal of France, receiving the oriflamme from the hands of St. Dennis." Engraved and described in Montfaucon's *Antiquities of France*, vol. i., plate 88, p. 41.

to another oriflamme, fig. 77, from a Mosaic of the eighth century, represented as being presented by St. Peter to Charles the Great. The former of these has five, the latter three, flame-like points. The name *oriflamme*, we presume to be derived from the golden ornaments embroidered on the banner, or from its texture being cloth of gold, and also from these flame-like terminations. Later illustrations of this banner represent it as being square, and Dallaway, an authority entitled to the highest respect, probably refers to such late examples when he says, "It was of a square form, of a red or flaming colour, from whence it was called the oriflamme."* It probably underwent a mutation common to the war banners of the period which will be afterwards described, retaining, however, its original, though subsequently, less appropriate name.

All the banners represented in the Bayeux Tapestry, with the exception of two, are figured with the same flame-like ends, exactly resembling the fiery emanations pictured on the tapestry, as proceeding from the flaming star, fig. 78, recorded to have created great alarm in England, just before the Norman invasion. The banners borne by the knights are distinguished from that of their leader, by having a nimbus of *three* points, corresponding with the arrangement of the earliest oriflamme, fig. 77, and like it, probably intended to testify to, and demonstrate, the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. A similar arrangement of banners, also for the most part with three terminations, was formerly found in the stained glass of the Church of St. Dennis,

Fig. 77. From a Mosaic of the eighth century, representing "Charlemagne receiving from St. Peter an Oriflamme or Standard." Engraved and described in Montfaucon's *Antiquities of France*," vol. i., plate 22, p. 12.

* Dallaway's "Enquiry into the origin and progress of the Science of Heraldry in England," p. 19.

Fig. 78. Comet or flaming star, from the Bayeux Tapestry.

figs. 79, 80, 81, 82, executed about 1140, during the progress of the second crusade, by orders of Abbot Segur, and representing the principal events of the first of these religious wars.

It may be objected that the Bayeux Tapestry represented events which were known to have occurred thirty years antecedent to the first crusade, and therefore could have no allusion to the circumstances of that war, it is, however, acknowledged by antiquaries of much skill and learning, that the work was probably executed at the earliest not less than fifty years after the occurrence of the events which it illustrates, and consequently, during the time of the greatest excitement in the prosecution of the crusades. This would be sufficient reason to induce the artists of the tapestry to invest the persons they represented,—all Christian knights and valiant warriors,—with the characteristic attributes of the crusade, so popular at that time with every class of persons in Christendom.

It has been already noticed that the nimbi proceeding from the heads of Pagan deities usually resembled flames of fire, while the rays emanating from the persons of the Holy Trinity, more frequently assumed the appearance of light; but as the pennons of the Christian knights, the early oriflamme banners, and that presented by the Pope to William, Duke of Normandy, have all flaming ends, they present an apparent inconsistency, which, however, is easily reconciled, when it is remembered that the banners were intended to symbolize the divine anger against the enemies of Christianity, and particularly against the Saracens, who not only denied the divinity of Christ, but held the doctrine of the Trinity in the utmost abhorrence, as an outrage on the chief dogma of their own religion, the “Unity of God;”

Figs. 79, 80, 81, 82. Banners, from the stained glass, formerly in the Church of St. Dennis. Engraved in Montfaucon's *Antiquities of France*, vol. i.

the banners and pennons therefore appropriately represented the consuming fire of God's wrath sent against the unbelievers. The flame-like terminations acquire an additional significance when we examine the religious heraldry embroidered on the body of the banners. The oriflamme of Charlemagne, fig. 77, has six rose-like ornaments, and the oriflamme of St. Dennis, fig. 76, is entirely plain, to neither of these can we attribute any religious character, except from the fact that they are represented as being delivered into the hands of living warriors by departed saints: but an examination of the banners of the first crusade, taken from the windows of the Church of St. Dennis, figs. 79, 80, 81, and 82, will show that they are each marked with one or with three crosses; the banner of William, Duke of Normandy, fig. 75, and the pennons of several of the knights in the Bayeux Tapestry, have very distinctly marked crosses, figs. 83 to 87. Others are distinguished by *three fesses*, fig. 88; by *three pales*, figs. 89 and 90; and by *three circles*, 91, 92, 93, 94, corresponding with each other in size, and so singularly resembling the same objects on the banner of Constantine the Great,

Fig. 83. Banner, with cross, from the Bayeux Tapestry.

Fig. 84. Do. do. do. the cross formed
by four eireles.

Fig. 85. Banner with cross, three pales, three points, and three loops or rings, probably to pass the lance through.

Fig. 86. Banner surmounted by a cross on the mast head of William's ship.

Fig. 87. Banner, with cross and three long ends.

Fig. 88. Banner, with three fesses, and three points.

Fig. 89. Banner, with three pales.

Fig. 90. Do. do.

Figs. 91, 92, 93, 94. Banners with three eireles.

Figs. 95, 96. Banners with three points.

All the above are copied from C. A. Stothard's drawing of the Bayeux Tapestry, published by the Society of Antiquaries.

(fig. 70, ante,) that we venture to suggest their intended symbolism of the Holy Trinity.

Numerous examples of pennons, terminating in three points, may be met with among the illuminated MSS. and church decorations of the Anglo-Norman and early English period, not only borne by warriors, but on the crossed staff represented beside the Agnus Dei, or carried by our Lord, particularly in early pictures of His resurrection or of His descent into hell.

When Henry V., with his peers and men-at-arms, undertook the expedition against France, in which was fought the famous battle of Agincourt, it is recorded by a poet of the time that

“The wynde was goode, and blew but softe,
And fourth they went in the name of the trynyte.”

and we are further informed that the king “had for his person five (?) banners, that is to say, the banner of the Trinity, the banner of St. George, the banner of St. Edward, and the banner of his own arms.”* The first of these banners, is conjectured to have been embroidered with a geometrical demonstration of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, fig. 97, though most probably the inscription upon it would be in Latin.

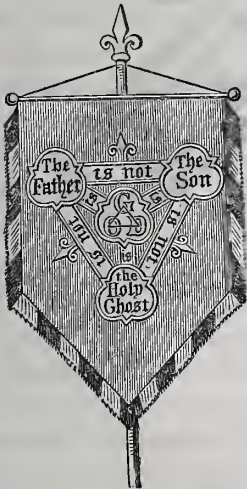


Fig. 97.

Three circular ornaments, under the various heraldic names of Orles, Annulcts, Roundels, Bezants, Plates, Pomeés, Hurts, Pellets, Golps, Oranges, Guzes, Ogresses, Torteauxes, or Wastals, are borne by upwards of sixty English families, and figured in Guillem,

* “The History of the Battle of Agincourt,” by Sir Harris Nicolas, p. 248, and appendix, 71.

they vary from each other in position, metal, or tincture, but are probably all derived from similar ornaments on the banners of erusaders, or the still earlier symbols on that of Constantine the Great.

It is well known that the religious heraldry, peeuliar to the time of the earlier erusades, was gradually merged into heraldry of a personal eharacter, and this appears to have been effected chiefly by the addition of bearings allusive to the Eastern war, without, however, displaing the crosses, fesses, bars, or eircles which distinguished such banners as are figured on the Bayeux Tapestry. These religious bearings are still retained on the arms of many English and French families, whose ancestors are known to have partieipated in the honours of the earlier erusades, and are exemplified by the shields of Wake, fig. A ; Dawney, fig. B ; and Amand, fig. C.

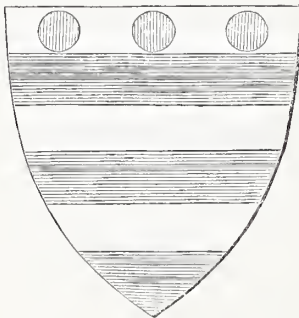


Fig. A.

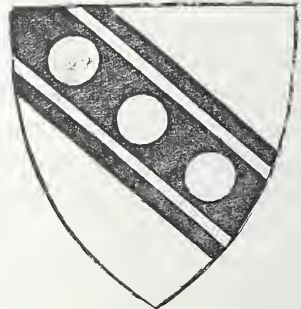


Fig B.

Having ventured to elaim for these rayed banners the

Fig. A. Baldwin de Wake was a crusader, buried at Market Deeping. "English Crusaders," by J. C. Dansey. The arms of Wake are "Or, two bars, Gu : in chief, three torteaux." "Burke' General Armory."

Fig. B. William Dawney, was at the siege of Acre. Viscount Down is the representative and direct descendant of this crusader. "English Crusaders," by J. C. Dansey. The arms of Viscount Down are "Or, on a bend cotised sa, three annulets of the field." Burke's Peerage. The arms engraved are from Dansey's English Crusaders.

character of religious nimbi, we next endeavour to show in what manner, and for what reason, the use of the rays



Fig. C.

was discontinued. Assuming that they were adopted by Christian knights, as a badge of their engagement to undertake the crusade, it may reasonably be supposed that on their return, after the accomplishment of their vows, they would detach from their banners the particular mark of that obligation. The visible

demonstration of their creed, which they had elevated in opposition to the banner of their Mahomedan enemies, being on their return to a Christian land, and when opposed to Christian adversaries, no longer appropriate, was for that reason removed. The probability of such a practice is supported by a well known custom of chivalry which has obtained in this country during many centuries.

When for any valiant exploit in war, a knight was advanced to the higher and more honourable rank of banneret, the ceremony of his elevation was this. The king, on the field of battle, caused to be cut from the knight's pennon or guidon its pointed or forked ends, thus making it into a square banner. Now the heraldic guidon always had, and retains to the present day, two peculiarities, which, besides its greater length and forked terminations, distinguish it from the square banner. It is not charged with armorial bearings, but merely with the crest, badges, war cry, motto, or other cognizances of the knight or his family; and a cross (or in modern British examples, the union crosses) is always

Fig. C. Hugh de St. Armand, a Norman Knight, joined the first crusade. "English Crusaders," by J. C. Dansey. The name still bears "Or, fretty sable on a chief of the first, three bezants." Burke's General Armory.

placed next the staff. The assumption of the square banner then with its personal heraldic distinctions, granted at the time by the monarch, is quite consonant with the presumed practice of the returned crusader, who cut from his banner its symbol of hostility to the Saracens, now no longer appropriate, and added to the religious emblems, still embroidered upon the remaining square portion, such other distinctive marks as may have been adopted by, or conferred upon him.

Edward Crouchback, Earl of Lancaster, was interred in Westminster Abbey, having returned from the crusade of 1270. A tomb was erected over his body by his brother, King Edward I., upon which was painted the figures of ten knights who had accompanied him to the east and returned with him to England. The tomb remains to this day, but the figures are now defaced. They were however carefully copied in the year 1783, with the colours restored from vestiges then existing, by the accurate antiquarian artist, John Carter, and published in his "Specimens of Ancient Sculpture and Painting in England," with an interesting description of the monument, from the pen of J. S. Hawkins, Esq. Each knight holds his banner in his hand, and several of these, figs. 97, 98, 99, have a curiously close resemblance to banners carried by knights in the Bayeux Tapestry; if we can suppose them to be deprived of their three rayed terminations, in accordance with the custom suggested.

Another remarkable banner in the Bayeux Tapestry bears a bird, within a segment of a circle, surrounded by a border of gold colour, from which issues a nimbus or glory, formed of nineflame-like tongues, fig. 100. This very peculiar banner has been called the Danish Standard, or danbrog, and it is

Figs. 97, 98, 99. Banners of knights painted on the tomb of Edward Crouchback, Earl of Lancaster, in Westminster Abbey, from Carter's *Specimens of Ancient Sculpture and Painting in England*, p. 76.

supposed that the bird is the Raven, sacred to Odin, the principal god of the Scandinavian nations before their conversion to Christianity. The flaming glory surrounding the bird does not at all militate against this idea, as it was an attribute of idolatrous as well as of Christian religion; very similar banners, with rays of the same character,

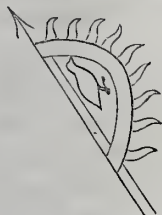


Fig. 100.

were used by the Chinese, figs. 101, 102, apparently bearing religious symbols, or representations of eastern deities, under some of their numerous incarnations. We claim however, for this banner, another name, and a very different meaning.

The Danes had long before adopted Christian insignia on their banners, as demonstrated by the coins of Anlaf and Cnut, (figs. 71, 72, ante) it is therefore improbable that they would display as a national banner, any emblem of their former idolatry, particularly in the eminently Christian army of Duke William,* still less that such banner would be permitted to take precedence of that with the cross, presented to the Duke by the Pope himself, which on the tapestry immediately follows that with the bird.

Speed,† who appears to have consulted the best available authorities, informs us that William “with three hundred

Fig. 100. From the Bayeux Tapestry.

Fig. 101. From a plate of the funeral procession of the King of Tunquin. Engraved in Picart's Religious Customs and Ceremonies, vol. iv., p. 116.

Fig. 102. Ibid. vol. iii., p. 471. The figure in the flag is probably Maxautar, the third incarnation of the Supreme Being; vide “Explication of the Ten Incarnations, extracted from Father Kircher's China Illustrated,” with a curious engraving, in which the Deity, in each incarnation, wears a crown with three points.

* The army of William, before the battle of Hastings, “passed the whole night in confessing their sins, and received the sacrament in the morning.” William of Malmsbury.

† Speed's History of England, p. 406.

ships, fraught full of his Normans, Flemings, Frenchmen, and Britaignes, weighed anehor." In this list there is no mention of Danes or Norwegians, and we have reason to believe that no soldiers of the Scandinavian nations were present in the army of the conqueror, since we know that the strength of these nations had just before invaded the north of England, under the Danish King, Harold Halfager, and Earl Tosti. Harold, King of England, defeated them in a sanguinary and decisive battle, in which both these leaders were slain, only four days before the Duke of Normandy landed at Hastings. The probability then is, that under such circumstances, neither Dane nor Danish banner would take part in the southern invasion.

Mr. Worsaae, who adopts the opinion that the banner with the bird, in the Bayeux Tapestry, was the danbrog, or war flag, of the Scandinavian Vikings, states, that "an old ehroniele (Emma's Eneomiast) relates, that in the time of peace, no image whatever was seen in the flag (or mark) of the Danes; but in the time of war, there waved a raven in it, from whose movements the Danes took auguries of victory or defeat; if it fluttered its wings, Odin gave them a sign of conquest, but if the wings hung slaekly down, victory would certainly desert them."* The bird upon the tapestry, however, is represented with wings perfectly elosed, and in an attitude as completely peaceful, and dove like, as can well be imagined. Mr. Worsaae, referring to the ancient national war banners of the Danes, adds, "what eolours were used can now hardly be decided, . . . there can be no doubt that the ground was often red, . . . It is, perhaps therefore most probable that the banners (or marks) of the ancient Danes were, in times of peace, of a light eolour, but in war time, of a blood eolour, with a blaek raven on a red ground."† This opinion, which is entitled to the highest

* Worsaae's "The Danes in England," p. 57.

† Worsaae's "The Danes in England," p. 61.

respect, is entirely against the supposition that the flag of the tapestry represents the Raven of Denmark, as, after the lapse of six hundred years, the bird is still found to be of a pale blue colour, upon a field of what appears to have been white, or some other very light tint. We venture to express a belief that this very singular and interesting banner bears a dove, the symbol of the Holy Spirit, with a fiery nimbus proceeding from it.

The curious tags which appear to be appended to one side of the triangular banner, or the coins of Anlaf and Cnut, and figs. 71, 72 ante, are probably intended to represent rays, but they are too rudely figured to admit of this being established with certainty.

Though in this paper we have claimed for the nimbus of the Deity, as represented in Christian art, an origin and signification different to those generally attributed to it, and have extended the application of the nimbus to the banners used in the early wars against the Saracens, an adaptation of the ornament which we apprehend to have been hitherto overlooked—we do not assume to have determined any of these points. We present these notes to the notice of antiquaries in the hope that they may induce inquiry into the subject, by those who have better opportunity of investigating it, and more extended means of observation than fall to the lot of the writer.

