

## THORNDON LIONS AND OTHER SYMBOLS.

That the King of Beasts did not acquire his title on personal merit is evidenced by naturalists and sportsmen, as neither his conduct nor tastes answer to the accepted interpretation of "Regal." Appearances are proverbially deceptive, and upon them lies (in two senses) his claim. He represents the sun, the sun in mid-day splendour with its rays. The discernment of the people of old is well illustrated by the selection of this happy emblem, for where could a more fitting symbol for the sun be found than in the lion's head with encircling mane to represent the rays?

Those who have seen a lion's head boldly embossed on the Roman "As" coinage, will recognise its aptness on the brilliant bronze. But how is it that the lion was one of the commonest forms of ornament in English art and architecture? This animal was never indigenous to the country. The memory of the cave lion would have long merged into more formidable prehistoric monsters. Yet Thorndon Church contains several lions, as do also many of the remotest country villages, villages where not one parishioner in a hundred had ever seen a living or dead lion. References in Scripture were not so strikingly prominent as to bring an unknown animal into such conspicuous evidence without some powerful backing, a backing which may in part be found in Masons' Marks. I do not refer to those so-called Masons' Marks often found on stones in buildings, and which are not peculiar to masons, but common to all ranks below those entitled to a seal and arms, and are the origin of trade marks,

used by those who could not write as "his mark," and constantly come across in old attested papers, churchwardens' accounts, bankers' books and the like.

The oldest Masonic Guild was probably that of the Comacines, coeval with, and belonging to, the same family as the Pelasgoi, Etruscans and Hittites, who built those grand buildings of ancient Greece and Rome. For Roma is an Etruscan word, and Rome existed long before the mythical day of Romulus and Remus. The Hittites are also credited with building the Temple of Solomon, the three-fold sun, for the name Solomon contains that of the sun in three languages, viz., Sol, Om and On. Their mark was a lion, and that well known three-fold knot or pattern, endless and intricate, often found on ancient English stone work, and would be the net work described on the pillars of Solomon's temple.

Through the agency of the Comacines, the lion became a traditional mark and ornament among Masons, a conservative and jealous brotherhood, privileged to travel without passport freely to foreign lands as Free Masons, and thus making the lion a world wide symbol, indelibly carved in stone, and around which legend and myth wove many a story.

Another link connecting England with the lion may be found in our earliest aboriginal ancestors. These were evidently of an Hamitic or African race, which I might roughly generalize as Iberians. How they got over to our shores is not so difficult to understand if we recall the fact that the now submerged land of Atlantis lay between us and Africa, spanning in great part the gulf between and rendering a tribal migration across this chain of islands quite comprehensible.

Atlantis, with her high state of civilization and large population, may herself have been the cradle from which issued tribes to occupy lands on either side of her in Africa and England, and which would account for those mysterious touches of art and civilization which we find in our land prior to the first Goidel or Celtic immigration. For those swarthy, long-skulled Iberians were never conquered by Goidel or Brython (Britons), but became merged in the former, and they would retain at least a traditional knowledge of the lion and accept and understand it as a symbol.

When reading and writing were unknown, symbols were the only mode of expressing ideas other than by word of mouth, and these were not sufficiently elastic to convey other than comprehensive ideas such as the attributes, functions and powers of god and man.

Carving and ornament were originally not to beautify but instruct; it was sign-writing by symbols, perverted later on into decorative scrolls, flourishes, figures and letters. These it is the business of the symbologist to trace back to their original formation and meaning. This is a study often neglected by antiquaries, much to their loss.

The numismatist possesses in his coin cabinet a wealth of ancient history, yet to him it is often but "writing on the wall," a coin and nothing more. He delineates, perhaps, upon one of his treasures some such device as the name of a town together with Jupiter and an Eagle killing a snake, and is content. The symbologist reads deeper and knows the coin was struck to commemorate the deliverance of that town or state from a terrible drought. The snake represents the sun, so symbolised from his sinuous course through the constellations, it is the symbol we have

borrowed for our letter S, even retaining the sibilant snake sound. It represents the sun in burning noon-tide intensity as destroyer of vegetation and life, and causing drought. The eagle is a cloud, in this case the rain cloud of Jupiter, which kills the work of the destroyer with fertilising showers.

Our own penny—what does it tell us? We see Britannia, emblematic of England, seated safely on water, which is “mother of all,” whose tender arms encircle and protect her shores, and upon whose bosom floats the “Barque of Isis,” whose real name was Ish-Ish, and which means Light-Light, or Light from Light, whilst overlooking and protecting all stands the lighthouse which represents the earliest known symbol for God, and which I will explain later on. A sovereign sometimes finds its way to Thorndon Church collections, and therefore may be mentioned among its symbols. The legend of St. George and the Dragon is well known, but not perhaps its symbology. George is the Greek Ge-orgos, the earth-worker or earth-creator, who with his spear slays the dragon or snake which we know typifies drought, whilst the spear symbolises the power of God as giver of life. The legend states that the dragon first devoured every green thing, then the flocks and herds were given to it, and after that the children, until even the king’s daughter was to be devoured.

True, for drought first kills the vegetation, and this causes the cattle to perish, then naturally follows the starvation of the children and weak until even the king’s daughter is at the point of death but at the auspicious moment the Earth Lord appears, rescues his earth from its enemy and recreates its life and fertility.

Symbols show us that in the earliest ages man did

not believe in that multiplicity of gods that in later years crowded the Pantheon. Their belief was in a duality, god was androgynous, a super man-woman, double sexed, combining the attributes and functions of both in one dual personality, and therefore their symbol was also dual and consisted of a straight line and a circle, and this IO was the earliest written name of god, and we find it incorporated in many of the names of early divinities such as IOVE, IUNO, IONA. Also we must not be dismayed to find it in IOVAH as God reveals Himself not through what He knows, but through what we know and are capable of understanding, if but in part.

Thus any straight line or any circle or part of a circle symbolised god, or rather the power or attributes of the dual god. And through the magic of imitative analogy, anything resembling these, such as trees, pillars, obelisks, staves, spears, rods and the like, together with rings, crescents, cups, chests, caves, or anything of the sort were representative of power.

The tree was the best known form of this symbol, being a circular line when docked of its boughs. And tree worship lingered long and was a power even in civilized days, finding adherents at the present day in England herself, for when we "touch wood" to avert evil we appeal to the power of god under its earliest symbol of I, and represented by the tree-wood, and again when we hang up a horse shoe for luck, it is the power of the circle we invoke as represented by its segment.

In later years, this belief in a super man-woman androgynous deity yielded place to a separation of sex and symbol, and gods and goddesses multiply, the symbol IO becomes IOpater or Jupiter, the father of

IO, that is the creator of the Gods. This explains the puzzle why Jupiter is the nominative case of Jove.

We are accustomed to blindly accept the pragmatic belief in evolution as necessitating the "ascent of Man," but ancient belief was in the "descent of Man," that man was originally "spirit," and that he descended lower and lower towards earth, becoming Adam, the Red One or Blood, thus gradually materialising and developing into incarnate androgynous form. The Bible does not forbid this theory, for we read "male and female created He them," which applies equally well to the individual as to the race.

This is the first account of the creation of Man, the second states that God formed man out of dust, breathed into him the breath of life, and man became a living soul. This is quite consistent, as any period of time or evolution between the forming, breathing and complete man is left open to discussion. That there was a considerable interval is implied by the later creation of Eve, this being the androgynous period which the dual symbol marks.

Strikingly also does the symbol endorse the Divine utterance that "it is not good that the man should be alone." In solitary state he is but a line, and a line extended and still further extended only lengthens and wastes itself in space, but if a line is turned upon itself and formed into a circle, its energy is retained within itself, it is everlasting, without beginning and without end. Thus the circle is formed from or taken out of the line, or, as the Bible tells us, Woman was taken out of Man. Some, misunderstanding the mystical teaching of the Bible, scoff at the account of the creation of Eve, and suggest that the rib was selected as being the most crooked bone in man's body:

They are right. It is the most crooked, and therefore is a symbol of the half-circle, and moreover lies nearest to the centre of the microcosm, which is the omphalos or navel, this being supposed to be the seat of life wherein reside those faculties that guard and guide the somnambulist, direct the clairvoyant, act as recorder and transmitter to the medium, and are the subconscious ego. A truly excellent symbol for man's complement. The very word "woman" proves this. She is the Oman, and if we give the initial letter the pronunciation of "O" as in one or in once, or consider how Odin became Woden and Wednesday, we see clearly an origin we may have overlooked.

The "I" symbol is now our God letter, the personal pronoun I, and also the first of our figures, and represents "Number One," which, however, as a figure is the least in value, but when united with its complement "O," becomes the greatest. Solar worship gradually absorbed these and elaborated the symbols of Nature worship, but did not destroy them. The circle was transferred to symbolise the orb of the Sun, the line its rays. The dual symbol now, instead of being a circle with a line on one side or above or below it, becomes a circle with lines all around it, representing the sun surrounded with rays in full noontide intensity and power. The sun was a three-fold god: in the morning, gentle and benign; at noon, terrible and a destroyer; in the evening, weak, impotent, even contemptible.

At noon, the lion's head was a fitting emblem, for with mane erect around, it became (through the power of etheric doubles) as the sun with rays. The setting sun of evening was, however, represented by a maneless lion without hair or rays. From this we trace the magical properties of hair in charms, magic and

symbology. Hair symbolised the rays or power of the sun, the powerless setting sun being bald.

All Solar heroes are strong and dominant until their hair is shorn, and then they become weak as the setting sun, and are impotent until their hair grows again with the rising sun. Native hunters cut off the whiskers of savage beasts they kill, for thus by imitative rites they perform the process of the setting sun upon his evil life. For a similar reason it is unmanly and effeminate to be shaven and shorn, as it was a sign of weakness. Hair in magic and charms was a method of conveying "Power."

Our childhood years are saturated with solar worship, nearly all nursery stories, rhymes, fairy tales, legends and many proverbs being elaborations of solar and lunar myths. Jack is the sun who mounts his bean-stalk in the morning, rising up and up in the heavens, and there performing marvellous deeds. Jack is the giant killing sun who, at his rising, destroys the ogres of night and puts to flight the stars and constellations which pale and vanish before him. The cruel uncles and step-mothers are the hard and bitter months of winter that persecute and well nigh destroy the hero, the sun. Red Riding Hood, Robin Hood, Robin Goodfellow and Red-Cap are all solar, with local modifications and colouring. Red Riding Hood is really red rising sun. A Riding is a "clearing," and Hood is a correct interpretation of the name of an elf-spirit common to all Aryan races. The red rising sun visits old Mother Earth bringing her fruit and flowers, and in the evening is swallowed by the Wolf of Night, but is cut out of her dark prison by the hunters or morning clouds, that tear a passage through the darkness for the again red rising sun.

Another symbol is the Frog ; and in story the Frog

Prince is the sun squatting on the sea as it sets, conquered and transformed by the powers of darkness, but regaining its form as prince in the morning when wooed by the Virgin Dawn. The sun is also symbolised in the Golden Fleece, the one-eyed Cyclops, King Arthur and his Round Table, this table being the year and his twelve Knights the months. Hercules is the sun and his twelve labours its monthly duties. Here also we find a solution why thirteen is so unlucky. In every year there are twelve moonths or months, and one deformed, mutilated, unlucky thirteenth, because the twelve revolutions of the moon round the earth do not quite coincide with one revolution of the earth round the sun. Unlucky also because there are always one or more traitors in this band of twelve, viz., the cold, killing months of winter which bring to death or its door their Lord, the Sun.

Nor is it only in the nursery and school that we are educated in sun lore, for we pass the decanter with the sun, the soldier marches left foot first because the pivot of that foot swings with the sun, but not of the right one. The scythe is therefore the symbol of death because you cannot use it other than against the sun or widershins. The servant girl lays the poker across the top bar of the grate when the fire refuses to burn, and thus makes the "Sign of the Cross" over the fire to dispel the evil spirit, the fire being the sun's representative on earth. The sun or fire is usually symbolised by a triangle with the apex upward, this being the shape of a flame, whilst water was a triangle with the apex downward, this being the form of a hanging drop of water.

There is a popular delusion that Galileo, who died 1642, discovered the sun, and not the earth, to be the centre of the Solar System, but this fact was known

thousands of years before his time, and science and art continually discover (?) other facts once well known but now forgotten.

We find the influence of the sun cult in the orientation of our churches towards the rising sun, as was the custom with Sun Temples. In Egypt, temples are sometimes inclined towards the rising of the star or constellation that represents the deity to whom the temple is dedicated. We may notice in some Christian churches a much more marked Orientation than in others, as certain churches are inclined to that point in the East where the sun rises on the Festival of the Saint to whom the church is dedicated. Our word "Church" is also borrowed from sun worship, as Church or Kirk is derived from the same root as circle or Kirkle, pointing to the early circles of stone, such as Stonehenge, which formed the temples of the sun in this land.

Naturally we find many vestiges of Sun and Fire worship in our own land, as from its prominence sprang its ancient name, Bel-Ynis. The Romans never stamped it out. It was the Druids they objected to—their rule not their religion. This latter went under because it lacked love, it touched the head and hand but not the heart. Historians vaunt the honesty of those under their rule, that one might hang a golden crown on a tree by the wayside and no man would touch it. True, but this was fear, not honesty. The tree was still a symbol of the deity, and offerings hung on the tree were taboo. Tree worship had Sun worship grafted upon it, not vice versa. Zeus, in Sanscrit. Dyus, in Latin Deus, is the Bright One, or Sun. In the nether world he is Hades, i.e., Ai-deus, and in the sea he is Poseidon. i.e., Potei-deus. His residence was an oak in the Grove of Dodona, whose whispering leaves conveyed his word and will

The mistletoe was sacred as being the sweat of the oak, a word build upon the word "Mist," or vapour. It was cut off the oak with the dual sun symbol sickle, golden and circular, and caught on its fall in a white sheet, for if it fell to earth it lost its power as "All-heal," and like the sun it symbolised (who loses power when he touches earth and sets) would also lose power.

The mistletoe is not often employed in architectural symbol except, perhaps, as the Golden Bough which Virgil tells us grew on the oak, and which is employed in many ways, especially in art. The mistletoe is therefore used by treasure seekers as divining rod, and Aeneas took a sprig to Hades to protect and light him there. Church art has borrowed a well known Druidic sun symbol in the interlaced triangles which separately represent Fire and Water. In this figure the apex of each is intersected by the base of the other, symbolising the rising and setting sun, for in rising from the sea, the sun or fire triumphs over the water, but in setting, the water is triumphant.

The halo from around the Arch-Druids head now rests upon saints, and is the same as the Wheel symbol of the sun, representing both his orb and journeyings. Saints in legends constantly acquire solar attributes when they perform sun miracles by drainage and cultivating waste country, or by sanitary means curing and healing pests and plagues, as, for instance, St. Romain of Rouen, St. Martha of Aix-le-Chapelle, St. Keyne of Cornwall, and several others. An amusing mistake converted a Festival of the Sun god, Dionysius into three saints. His festival on October 9th read thus:—"Festum Dionysii Eleutherei Rusticum." This became in the Calendar—St. Dionysius and his companions, St. Eleutherus and St. Rustic, martyrs. This recalls the origin of the Saint San Espedito.

Some French nuns received a consignment of martyrs' bones from Italy with the words "e spedito" on the address. Thinking this was the martyr's name, he became Saint Espedito, and many altars were dedicated to him and still exist.

In Church art we sometimes come across impossible medleys and jumbles of signs, symbols and letters that defy interpretation or convey any sense, sometimes taking the form of the alphabet, or letters from various alphabets.

These, I believe, have never been explained, but a custom of the early Christians may explain their origin. A common form of prayer was to repeat the alphabet, and thus lay before God the embryo or rudimentary principles of prayer that He might arrange the letters Himself to His glory and the petitioners' edification, all prayers being comprised in the alphabet. Many have wrestled manfully with these strings and jumbles of letters, trying to interpret them as initials, charms, or ignorant attempts to copy other inscriptions, but to them a hint may be found in Hebrews v., 12, "When . . . ye ought to be teachers ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles (Greek, "first letters") of the oracles of God."

The symbology of animals, birds, hybrid creatures and the like, so plentiful in Church art, are a much later blending of symbol and myth, combining personal traits and attributed powers from which "moral" must be drawn. These may usually be traced to the Physiologus and allied Bestiaries which are full of animal lore, in which lore, according to Luther, lay the wisdom of the Magi.

The lion which roars so loudly in them finds a corresponding echo in Church art. Even Thorndon

Church, poor as it is in ornament, has ten lions. It has four lions on the pedestal of the font, and in this position is adapted by Church architects from an earlier symbol associated with water. It was at that time in which the sun housed in Leo that the yearly inundation of the Nile occurred. Thus the lion became an emblem of anything that conveyed water, and if you look at our London and other street drinking water supplies you will find that there also the water usually proceeds through the mouth of a lion's head.

The water of the Nile fertilised and gave new life to the land, and the lion thus became also a symbol of regeneration and resurrection, and was aptly transferred to fonts as typifying the New Birth in Baptism. This symbolism was unknown to the early Christians, so they had to invent a legend to explain the symbol and taught that the lioness brought forth dead whelps, and that on the third day the lion came and by roaring over them awakened them to life, as the Father called His Son to life and resurrection on the third day. The lion often figures on helmets with the faith that though the knight be slain he will rise again.

The lion was supposed to sleep with his eyes open and to be ever vigilant, and therefore became a type of watchfulness, and was placed on the steps of thrones, the prows of ships, and especially at gates and doors as a guardian. For this reason we find one on either side the west door of Thorndon Church. The lions on the lectern being comparatively modern, are aptly placed there if used merely as conventional ornament, but are probably based on those stereotyped designs that were the common property of the Guilds, and accessible to the master operatives.

The lion's tail, with brush attached to the tip, was

supposed to be for the purpose of wiping out the traces of his footsteps and thus enabling him to elude pursuit. By very far fetched reasoning he was for this reason looked upon as a type of Christ who erased all traces of His passage from heaven to earth when He became incarnate, and of His Godhead when He appeared as man. The lions on Thorndon lectern are flourishing their tails over their backs to convey this idea. This lectern has four lions, but usually the four supporters are the ox, lion, angel and eagle, representing the modulation of the Gospel, leading from earth to heaven, through body, mind, and soul to spirit, being the four divisions of man's nature; the ox representing the lower physical plane, the lion the intellectual and astral, the angel the plane of the soul, the eagle the mystic and heavenly. The lioness was supposed to bring forth young but once in her life-time, and on this account became the emblem of a woman who had an only child and that child a LION.

The forging of mighty lions by mightier blacksmiths, and also of legendary swords, now for demons, now for gods, is solar, the forge being the glow of dawn and eve. Hybrid monsters, such as half lion, half goat, typify the sun half rising or setting, the lion half being the part above the horizon, the other half being the goat of the grotto in the nether world. The Sphinx, half woman, half lion, represents the conjunction of the constellations Leo and Virgo, the most critical and momentous time, and on which the fate of the land of Egypt balanced, for it was the time of the inundation of the Nile.

We may perhaps wonder why Christianity permits so many heathen symbols to find a place in her sacred buildings. It is because they are symbols. Do not

imagine that the highly educated races of old, in many cases so far in advance of modern civilization, worshipped blindly the thing symbolised, if so it would be no longer a symbol. It was always but a "feeling after God if haply they might find" the power that lay behind. The sun was in Egypt Ra, but the God they appealed to was Amen-Ra, Amen being the "Hidden One," whom we still invoke after every prayer, whose name was always a substituted one and might only be approached through a mediator which often took the form of a symbol.

In olden days the walls of our churches were covered with stencils and paintings illustrating legends, myths and folk lore, intended to interpret Holy Writ, over which the artist's fancy ran riot in his efforts to adorn his tale. They abounded in obscene humour, would-be wit, unblushing indecency and symbols galore, together with much that was excellent, beautiful and holy. We blame William Dowsing for his wanton destruction of church decoration and ornament in Suffolk during 1643 and 1644, but these were evidently the "superstitious pictures, Popish inscriptions and images" that he "broke down." Some of these "Popish inscriptions" are still misunderstood, such as Ave Maria which is a play upon words. Ave is Eva or Eve reversed, and the curse of Eva is reversed in Mary.

Much of Dowsing's iconoclasm was unpardonable excess, but the sanctuary of God's House did require purging by drastic agencies, and the Saints perished because they were in company with the ungodly. Does the Church lose by neglecting to explain the teaching of symbols and ancient religions? Is it not a fact that however much the custom of preaching sermons is grumbled at, criticised and tolerated, yet a service

without a sermon is considered only half a service?—that strange preachers “draw”?—that the Church is primarily looked upon as for Sunday use and preaching, and has no voice of her own until man’s voice fills it?

If such is the popular view, no wonder churches are empty and dumb during the week, dumb, that is, to those that are deaf: for every portion of the church building, her form, fittings and fashioning, represents the accumulated selection from all ages of those means through which God has revealed Himself to man. There is neither speech nor language but their voices are heard. They are books in the running brooks, sermons in stone and good in everything. Too often we quarrel over candles, colours and ceremonies without considering their origin or what they really symbolise, straining out many a gnat and swallowing many a camel.

A knowledge of symbolism fills our church with voices, memories and ideas that no tongue can fully express, penetrating into those hidden depths of our secret being which are known but to God and ourselves and never preached from the pulpit.

In English Churches we preserve the symbol of the Cross but remove the figure of the Crucified One, for we say, “He is not here, He is risen.” And as at this day we can find comfort and hope in the symbol of an empty cross, so at other times, in other climes, did other races regard other symbols.

H. A. HARRIS.



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