

## THE PORTRAYAL OF CHRIST.

BY THE EDITOR.

[CONTINUED FROM THE JANUARY NUMBER.]

THE oldest Christian artist whose name has come down to us is Hermogenes, and he was reproached with having been influenced strongly by pagan ideas. This accusation was probably founded on fact, for there is no doubt that Christian art developed from pagan art, and there is no harm in recognizing that Christianity owes more to ancient paganism than the early Christians themselves were aware.



EROS AND PSYCHE TOGETHER WITH THE GOOD SHEPHERD.  
Relief on a sarcophagus.

Paganism was in a state of decay. The common people knew little about Plato and Aristotle, and the better educated classes disappeared in the general deluge that swept away the classical civilization and gradually doomed it to oblivion. But some of the most beautiful ideas, such as forgiveness of evil-doers and the Logos conception, were saved from the shipwreck of Greek thought.

That in certain circles Christianity was adopted without any

antagonism to pagan traditions can be seen from the combination of pagan and Christian symbols which now and then occurs, the most interesting one being the representation of the Christian good shepherd placed side by side with Eros and Psyche, for this latter group is purely pagan and has never been adopted by Christianity. We must grant however that the good shepherd need not be Christian and has often served as a purely pagan picture. The most extreme syncretism appears in a box (possibly a wedding gift) ornamented with a portrait of Venus and the exhortation of the donor inscribed on the rim to enjoy wedded life in Christ.

We must not think that Christians were from the beginning Christians pure and simple, or that they thought alike, or that all of

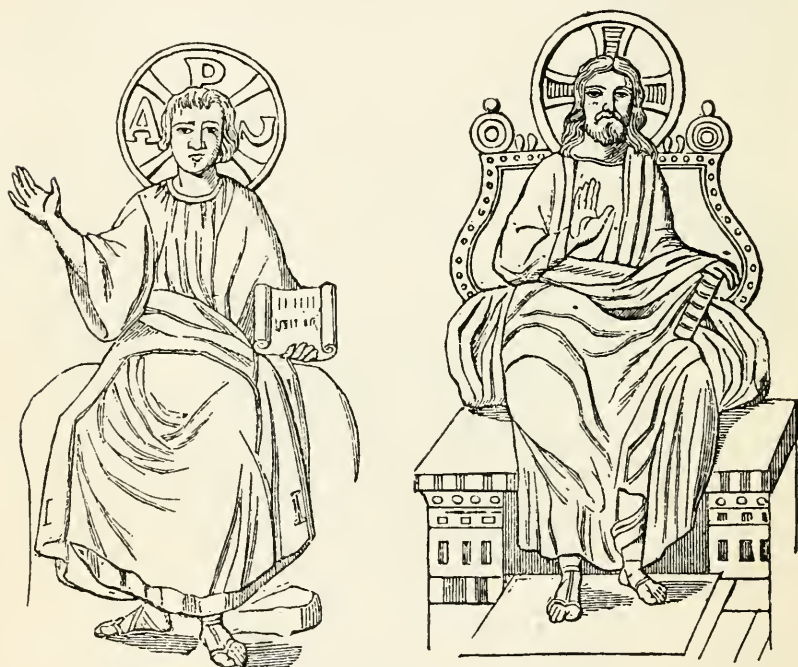


JEWEL CASKET IN THE DUKE OF BLACA'S COLLECTION.

Now in the British Museum. Showing syncretism between the old and new faiths.

them hated paganism. We believe that on the contrary with the exception of a very active minority, there were all shades of syncretism constituting all kinds of heresies and sects, mixtures with Egyptian, Syrian and Babylonian lores, with Mandaism, with Mithraism, with the baptizers, the creed of the disciples of St. John, with Sethites, with worshipers of Serapis and Isis, etc. It must have been an age of unrest, of a general fermentation, and few really knew what the outcome would be, but all this confusion was dominated by definite tendencies towards a belief in individual immortality, a dualistic world-conception, a rigorous monotheism, ethical views verging on asceticism, a purified worship without bloody sacrifice, and a hatred of polytheism. The old conceptions lingered with the people. Often the gods were not rejected but were regarded as

wicked demons; and in the same way many superstitions continued in a less virulent form. When the fear of idolatry began to abate and there came a general demand for a representation of Christ, Christian artists were for some time doubtful how to picture the features of Jesus. It was natural that they would not intentionally follow pagan prototypes, yet unconsciously they fashioned the Christ type after the traditional figures of pagan saviours, either by picturing representatives of light or eternal youth such as Apollo and Dionysos, or of vigorous manhood, such as Æsculapius or Zeus, and



THE TWO CHRIST TYPES CONTRASTED.

The one on the left from St. Aquilinus in Milan, on the right from St. Agatha of Ravenna.

the latter type proved the predetermined outcome. Nevertheless, the Christ type finally resulted in something entirely new, and had to be new in order to meet the demand, for there was a strong prejudice against pagan gods, which is evident from the story told by Theophanes<sup>8</sup> that in the year 454 the hand of an artist withered while using the head of a Zeus as a model for a picture of Christ. No doubt the Christians succeeded in creating a new and independent

<sup>8</sup> *Chron.*, I, ed. Bonn, 174.

type. While we need not deny this obvious truth, we may grant that they could not help utilizing their pagan traditions. The struggle lasted long, and at first wherever they produced an original type it possessed morbid features, the face of a consumptive or of a pathologically affected man.

It would seem as if the bearded type of Christ, as the lord, the king, the judge, which finally prevailed, was not formed after a classical prototype, but should be considered original and typically Christian. In the main this is quite true but not absolutely so, for even here we can trace the influence of classic art, or possibly a



JUPITER SERAPIS ON AN ETRUSCAN MIRROR.

return to it. Not only is there a similarity of this Christ type to the healer Æsculapius, but we find also a portrait of Jupiter Serapis on an Etruscan mirror in which the similarity to the bearded Christ type is quite apparent. Here in the face of Serapis there is even a slight suggestion of the pathological so common in Christ pictures. But we need not for the sake of a mere similarity insist on the theory that this Serapis type actually furnished Christian artists with the model for their Christ pictures, although this has been claimed even by some orthodox archeologists.<sup>9</sup> The similarity is rather an

<sup>9</sup> See Roscher, *s. v.* "Serapis," col. 380.



instance of the truth that everywhere the same or similar factors produce the same or similar results.

It is characteristic of the ancient paganism of Greece that it humanized its gods. The Christians, however, believed in a supernatural ideal, and so they attempted to produce a supernatural conception of Christ which in their opinion could be attained by exaggerating those traits of the human face and figure that showed symptoms of unearthliness and so appeared to them to be divinely significant. They elongated the features of the face, especially the nose, and the hands and in fact the whole figure; they enlarged the eyes, raised the eyebrows, let the hair fall down in long strands over the shoulders, took out every possible indication of gladness or



CHRIST HEAD IN ST. CALLISTUS.

After De Rossi.



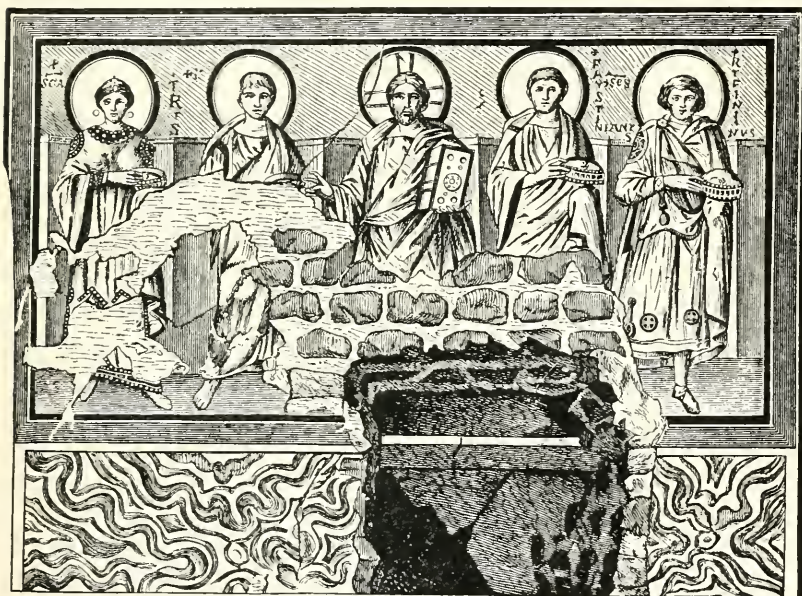
CHRIST HEAD IN ST. GAUDIOSUS.

Naples.

human joy, and endowed this intendedly supernatural ideal with a disdain of worldliness and an awe-inspiring sternness, so as to deprive it of all sympathy. They intended to make Christ grand. However, what was meant to be supernatural degenerated into a morose expression and so the superhuman became morbid.

The head of Christ in the catacomb of St. Callistus discovered by De Rossi is a pronounced instance of this type. It found a parallel development in the Veronica portrayals, and was cultivated mainly in Byzantine art, the style of which did not find much favor in the Occidental church. The Christ head in St. Gaudiosus in Naples is of a similar character.

De Rossi discovered in his excavations between 1866 and 1869 a little chapel connected with the catacomb of St. Generosa ad Sextum Philippi which had lain concealed for centuries, and there he found a fresco of the bearded Christ seated with four saints. The age of the painting is difficult to determine, and for lovers of Christian art the temptation is strong to claim it as very old. The cemetery of St. Generosa contains the tombs of the brothers Simplicius and Faustinus, who were martyred under Diocletian (245-313). Might we not be justified in assuming that the fresco was made soon after the death of the martyred brothers? It is almost a pity that all the data of the history of the development of the Christ



MURAL PAINTING IN THE CATACOMBS OF ST. GENEROSA.

picture militate against the supposition that it is older than the fifth century.

After Constantine Christ came more and more to be regarded as the conqueror and ruler of the world, and thus it was natural that in this period a new Christ type began to be developed in which the pathological feature became more and more subdued, and he appeared as a stern bearded man in the prime of life.

While symbolic representations of Christ and imaginary scenes of his life abound in the catacombs, we do not find portraits of Christ dating back much earlier than the fourth century, and then they show at once the later type. The oldest among them is prob-

ably the one in the catacomb of St. Callistus, and in various chapels of the catacombs we find types which show not so much the majestic



A HEAD OF CHRIST IN ST. PONTIANUS.

After Carucci, Plate 136.

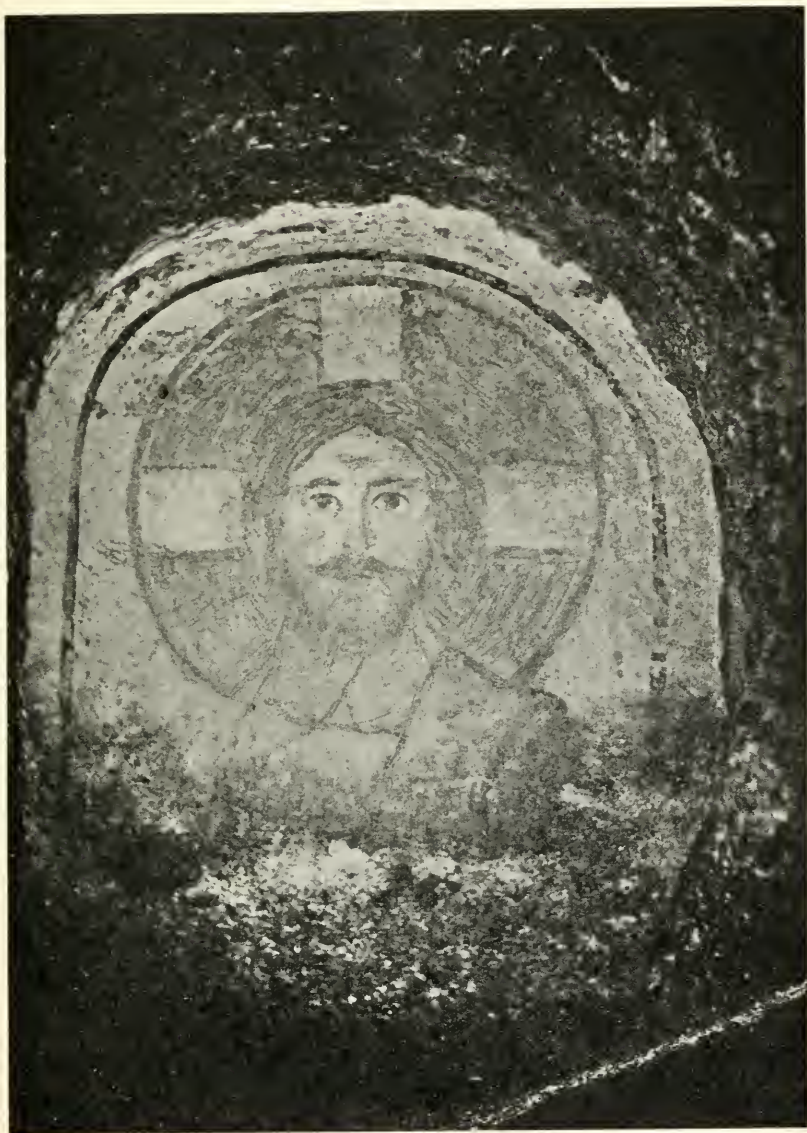
king as the aweinspiring judge of the world, as, e. g., the two portraits in the Chapel of St. Pontianus.



MOSAIC IN THE CHURCH OF SS. COSMAS AND DAMIAN.

In a mosaic in the church of SS. Cosmas and Damian and in the apse and above the arch of St. Paul Outside the Walls (both churches in Rome) Christ is represented as a full-grown man of





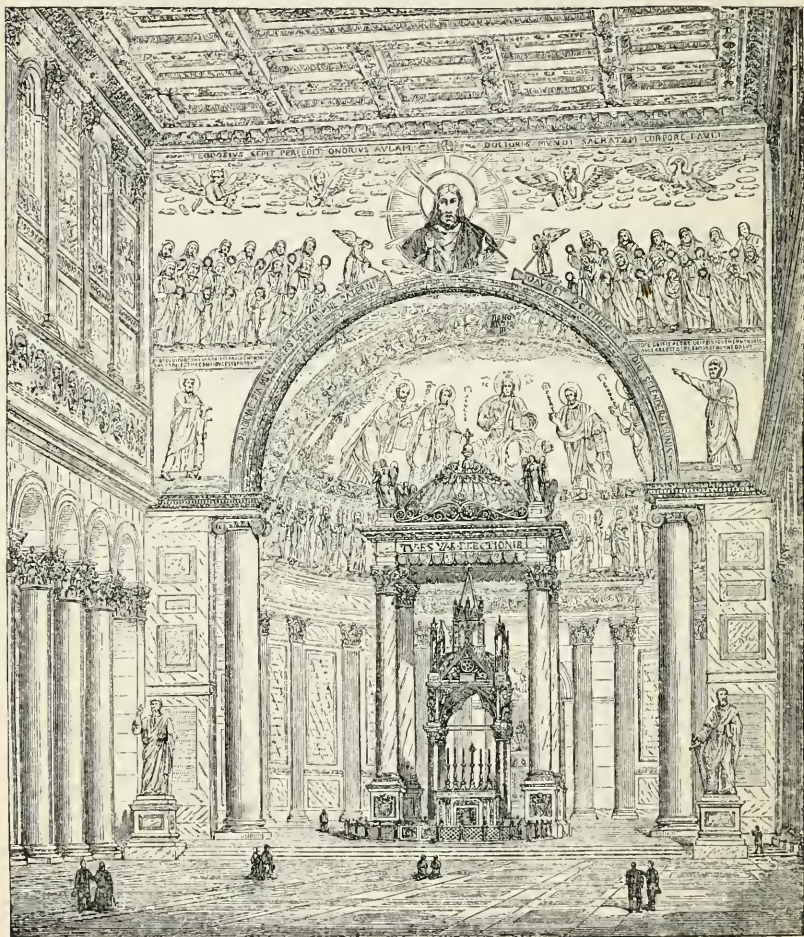
A NINTH CENTURY FRESCO IN ST. PONTIANUS.

From a photo.



majestic appearance and, especially in St. Paul's, he is the stern judge and not the gentle saviour.

The same church of St. Paul Outside the Walls contains another picture of Christ enthroned between saints which is most

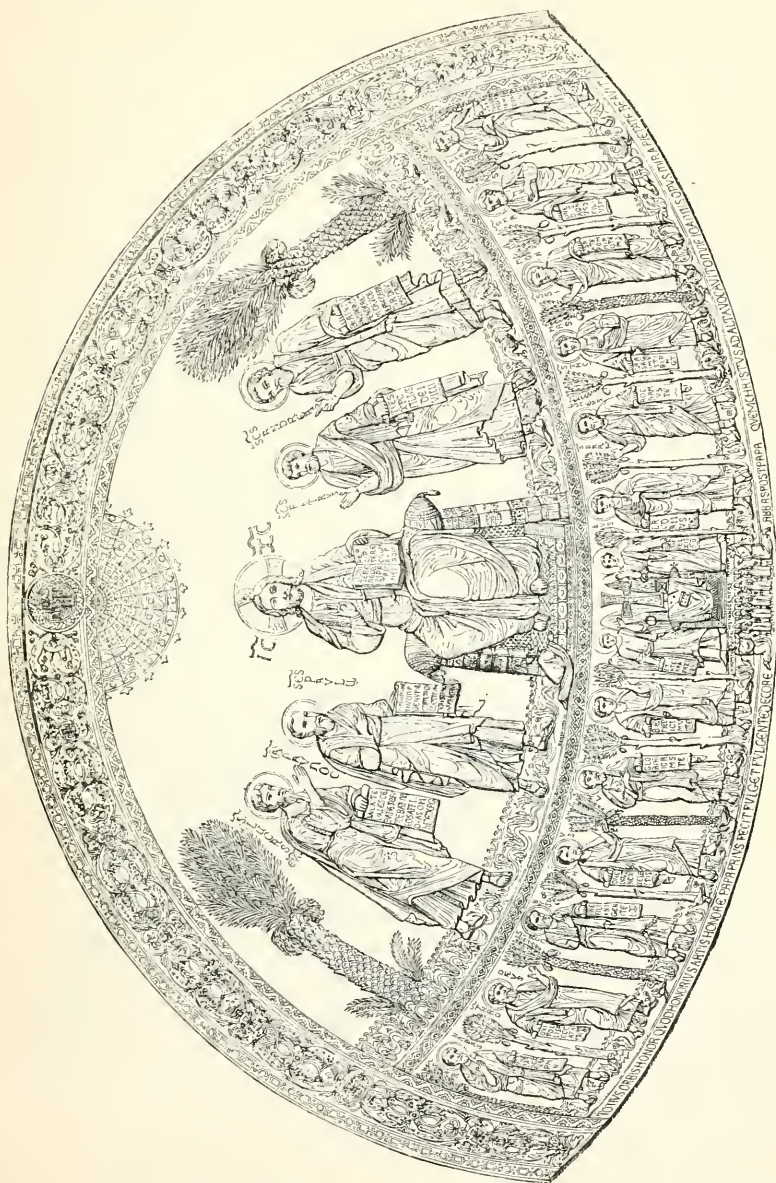


INTERIOR OF THE CHURCH OF ST. PAUL OUTSIDE THE WALLS.  
Showing the apse with the Christ picture in the center and another one above the arch.

artistically developed and possesses a dignity not often attained.

Among other pictures of the bearded Christ we will mention first the oldest representation of the last supper, picturing Christ with the eleven disciples, Judas having left, lying around a table

set with two fishes. The drawing here represented is made after an old mosaic in the new St. Apollinaris at Ravenna.



CHRIST ENTHRONED.  
Mosaic in St. Paul Outside the Walls.

From the Christ pictures of the Greek church, we choose as one of the best and worthiest the mosaic on the portico of the church of St. Sophia, in Constantinople, one of the few remnants which for



a long time escaped Turkish iconoclasm and which were copied by Salzenberg.<sup>10</sup> Christ is seated on a highly decorated throne in the



THE OLDEST PICTURE OF THE LAST SUPPER.  
Mosaic in the "New" St. Apollinaris at Ravenna.



MOSAIC FROM ST. SOPHIA.

usual attitude as a teacher with three fingers raised. At each side of him a medallion is inserted, one of Mary on his right, and one

<sup>10</sup> Salzenberg, *Altchristliche Baudenkmäler von Constantinopel vom 5. bis 12. Jahrhundert*, Berlin, 1854.





AN IVORY MEDALLION OF THE FOURTH CENTURY.



HEAD OF CHRIST FROM GEORGIA.

of the archangel Michael on his left. Before him kneels an emperor distinguished by a halo.

How generally this type has been imitated in the Greek church appears from a Christ picture, reproduced after Kondakoff from an original in Grusia (Georgia).

An interesting medallion carved in ivory is now preserved in the Museo Cristiano, which shows the bearded Christ with a round



MOSAIC IN THE NEW CHURCH OF ST. APOLLINARIS AT RAVENNA.

halo and a christogram on his head, the latter in an unusual form, a cross with a loop on top representing the Greek XP (i. e., Chr.). Boldetti was the first one to call attention to it, and De Rossi has determined its date to be near the end of the fourth century. Its place of provenience is supposed to be the catacombs of St. Domitilla.

Among other ivory reliefs which represent Christ personally without any attempt at symbolization is the carving on a piece of



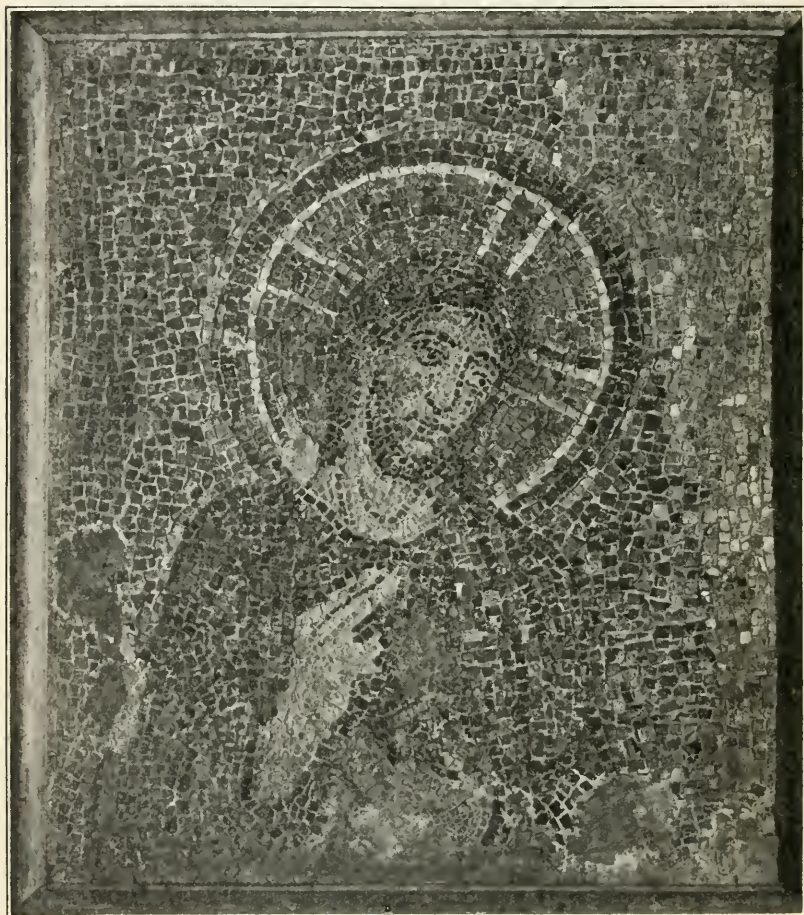


AN IVORY RELIEF IN THE BERLIN MUSEUM.



ivory now preserved in Berlin. It shows Christ as a well-grown boy among the doctors in the temple. In the right corner we see Abraham warned by the angel not to sacrifice Isaac.

The bearded type remained the favorite Christ-conception in the eighth and ninth centuries, instances of which can be offered



MOSAIC OF THE BLESSING CHRIST.

Preserved in the Lateran.

in many of the best Christ portrayals although in many cases the morbidity of the features is not entirely absent. One of the most artistic and imposing among these Christ pictures is probably a mosaic in the new St. Apollinaris in Ravenna.

A more sympathetic mosaic is preserved in the Lateran. It

portrays the saviour in an attitude of benediction and characterizes him as gentle and benevolent.

More morose, yet of much later date, is the Christ picture in a mosaic on the tomb of Emperor Otto II. Christ holds up his hand in benediction. St. Peter on the right side grasps three keys, an unusual number, while St. Paul holds in his right hand a burning candle and in his left a scroll.

The details of the Christ-conception were naturally subject to change according as the notions of the age changed with regard to

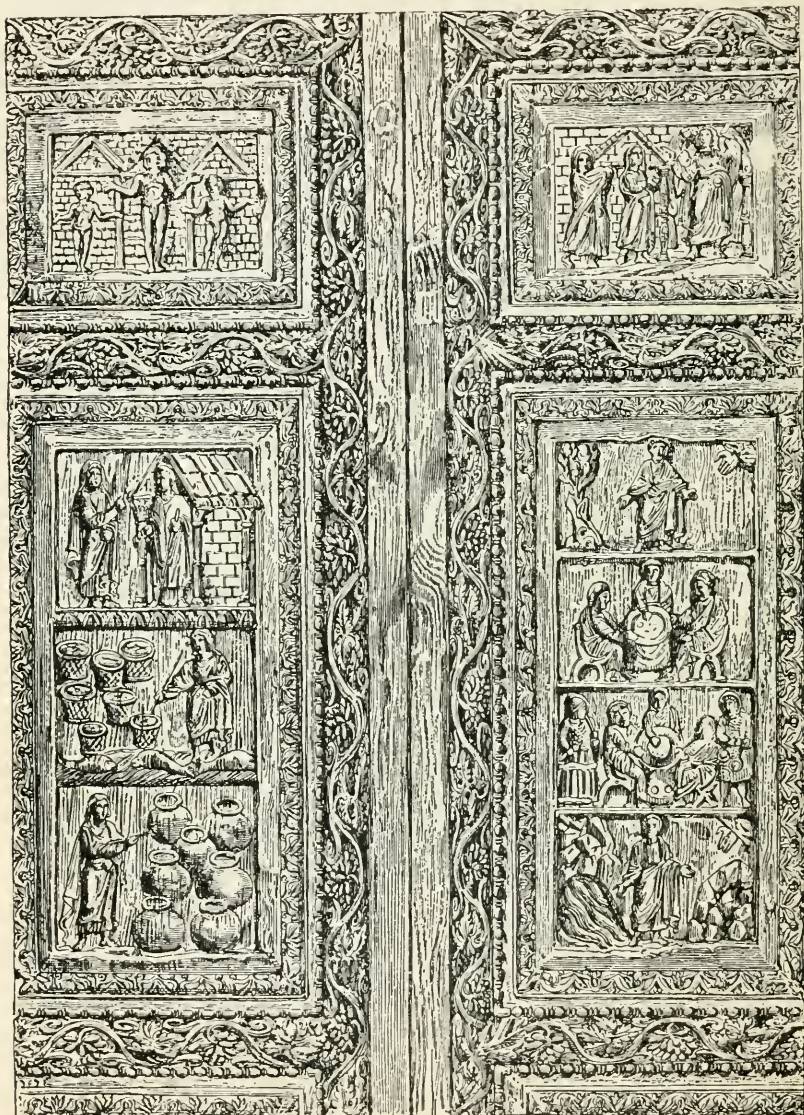


MOSAIC OF THE TOMB OF EMPEROR OTTO II.

the ideal type of mankind. Thus when the Teutonic race became predominant, when the powerful Goths and Lombards were still remembered and when German kings of the Frankish, the Saxon and the Swabian houses had been crowned emperors in Rome, Nicephorus Callistus (about 1333) described Jesus as having been seven feet high with golden yellow waving hair, dark eyebrows and an oval face of a delicately pink complexion. This description strongly resembles the Ravenna mosaics and kindred types of Christ for which the mighty northern conquerors may have furnished the models.



One phase in the development of the Christ type appears in a series of Biblical scenes on the doors of St. Sabina on the Aventine.



SOME DETAILS OF THE DOORS OF ST. SABINA.

Twenty-six of these represent the life of Jesus, thirteen portray his passion, and it should be noticed that the former ones show Christ



beardless as a youth with large eyes and a simple-minded face, with thick hair surrounding his forehead, but the Christ of the passion is a man of superhuman size with a thick beard and long hair falling down upon his shoulders.

Before Constantine Christian art had still been reluctant in the portrayal of Christ, but as soon as Christianity had become state religion of the empire all doubt disappeared. Henceforth the progress was rapid. Christ was not only represented freely in portraits but also in scenes of his life. Such illustrations may be dated from the end of the third century, and the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus in the middle of the fourth is the best known example extant.

A peculiar inversion of the general rule that the glorified Christ is represented by the bearded type while during life he is pictured



CRUCIFIXION ON THE DOORS OF ST. SABINA.

as a youth, is to be noted on a Dalmatica (about the year 800) which belonged to Charlemagne, the king of the Franks, and the first emperor of the restored Roman empire. The glorified Christ is seated surrounded by angels and saints, having the evangelists placed in the four quarters. Here he is represented as a youth of about twenty years or less, whereas in other scenes he appears as a bearded man. On either shoulder is found a picture of the Lord's Supper, which however is not an attempt at reconstructing history, but shows the ritual being administered after the fashion customary in the eighth and ninth centuries. On one shoulder Christ is seen handing out the wafers, while on the other shoulder he hands the cup to the communicants. On another place the scene of the children coming to Christ is represented.

The conception of Christ as a supernatural personality appears incidentally in the attribute of a magician's wand by which Christ

works his miracles. He does not carry the wand as a special distinction like a scepter or with any ostentation, but in raising Lazarus, in multiplying the loaves, in changing the water into wine, he performs the deed with a wand as a matter of course, and this wand never appears otherwise than incidental, because the



A DALMATICA OF CHARLEMAGNE.

main attribute by which he is distinguished is, as we have seen, the scroll.

This view of conceiving Christ as a magician constitutes only a transient phase, and so the wand disappears in later centuries and Christian archeologists therefore avoid calling attention to this peculiar phase so characteristic of the low grade of culture down

to the fifth century of the Christian era. Franz Xaver Kraus, for instance, never speaks of a wand but calls it the staff of omnipotence.



CHRIST RAISING LAZARUS.



THE WAND USED IN PERFORMING MIRACLES.

Christian ideas and traditions found their most religious and best interpreter in Fra Giovanni Beato Angelico da Fiesole, who because of his piety and religious devotion was most fit to produce



a portrait of Christ, and his art naturally appeared to his contemporaries as a true revelation of God. This artist was unique in the whole history of art because he lived only for religion, and his religion was an artistic presentation of the thoughts that moved him. He believed in the inspiration of himself. He never painted any other than religious subjects; he never took money for a picture, and never interrupted himself in a work that he had begun. He had no experience in worldly life but remained limited to the religious surroundings of his monkish habits, and thus we may regard as his chief defect an absence of certain realities of life with which he never became acquainted, as for instance the real pains of the suffering Christ or the individual features of his portrait as possessing a definite character. But his devotion is unsurpassed, and has not even been excelled by the divine genius of his greater successors, Michelangelo, Raphael, Leonardo da Vinci or Titian, and the reason is that while the latter were artists, he was first of all and all through a devout believer, a simple and naive Christian. He knew nothing but his faith and had no other interest in life.

The worldly name of "Fra Angelico," as in an abbreviated form he was commonly called, was Guido da Pietro. He was born in 1387 at Vicchio in the district of Mugello. Together with his brother he joined the Dominican order at Fiesole. In his technique he was greatly influenced by the school of Siena, the religious character of which he deepened in a remarkable degree. In 1234 he took up his abode in the monastery of San Marco at Florence which had been donated to the Dominicans by the Medicis, and there he developed an unusual activity. In modern times the monastery has been changed into a museum, which is interesting to the traveler on account of the reminiscences preserved there not only of Fra Angelico but also of Savonarola. Here is the cell, still in its old condition, where the latter passed his last night before he was led to the fagots, and here the former has left most beautiful traces of his spirit in innumerable frescoes and oil paintings. Perhaps his most delicate works are his madonnas, but his Christ pictures too exhibit a remarkable depth of devotion, and we here reproduce two of them which deserve special attention. One shows Christ rising out of the tomb; the other, Christ as a pilgrim received by two friars of the Dominican order, which has made it one of its special duties to receive and entertain strangers in remembrance of Christ's saying, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

We reproduce this picture as frontispiece to the present number of *The Open Court*.

It was characteristic of Fra Angelico that when the pope de-



CHRIST RISING FROM THE TOMB.  
By Fra Angelico.

sired to make him archbishop of Florence he refused the honor and recommended a brother of his order, Fra Antonio, for the office. The pope accepted his advice, and history reports that Antonio justified Fra Angelico's recommendation and the pope's



THE MARBLE STATUE OF CHRIST.  
By Michelangelo.



confidence in his judgment. Fra Angelico died in Rome in 1455. The Catholic church has honored him with beatification, hence he is frequently called *Beato Angelico*, or even more simply, *Il Beato*.

Quite unique among the representations of Christ is a marble statue by Michelangelo which illustrates the now much neglected doctrine of Christ's descent to hell, so very important in the times of early Christianity. The ancient gods, among them the Babylonian Marduk, had gone down to the underworld to release the dead from their prison. There is reason to assume that in the dramatic performances which were customary in the days of paganism, the scene of the descent to the realm of death constituted the climax of the god's triumph. The gospel story echoes the same ideas. It still tells us that after the death of Jesus the saints left their graves and walked among the living. In this phase of his struggle Christ passed through the ordeal of death and like the gods of pre-Christian times he had to submit to the rules of the infernal regions. As Istar was deprived of all her ornaments and clothes in order to gain admittance to the realm of Allatu, Queen of the Land-of-no-return, so Christ was absolutely unclad, and Michelangelo did not shrink from the task of sculpturing him according to the traditional doctrine. Naturally Michelangelo's statue gave offence to later generations who no longer understood the artist's intention, and so the statue bears now a loin cloth made of thin sheet-iron.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]