

The Open Court

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Devoted to the Science of Religion, the Religion of Science, and the
Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea

Editor: DR. PAUL CARUS.
Assistant Editor: T. J. McCORMACK.

Associates: { E. C. HEGELER.
MARY CARUS.

VOL. XVI. (NO. 2)

FEBRUARY, 1902.

NO. 549

CONTENTS:

<i>Frontispiece.</i> GOTTFRIED WILHELM LEIBNITZ.	
<i>The Mysteries of Mithras.</i> Introductory. PROF. FRANZ CUMONT, of the University of Ghent	65
<i>An Instance of Conversion.</i> A Study of Tolstoi. PROF. OSCAR L. TRIGGS, of the University of Chicago	69
<i>Whence and Whither.</i> In Reply to My Critics. EDITOR	74
<i>Concerning Indian Burial Customs.</i> Illustrated. DR. WILLIAM THORNTON PARKER	86
<i>Om and the Gâyatri.</i> The COUNTESS EVELYN MARTINENGO-CESARESCO, Salò, Lago de Garda, Italy	97
<i>Gottfried Wilhelm Leibnitz (1646-1716).</i> New Translation of Some of His Works. With Photograph of the Leibnitz Monument in Leipsic	104
<i>Sir John Maundeville on the Circumnavigation of the Globe.</i> EDWARD LINDSEY.	107
<i>Peter Rijnhart in Thibet</i>	109
<i>The Religion of Science Library Excluded by the Postal Authorities from the Privileges of Second-Class Matter</i>	113
<i>The Significance of the Gâyatri</i>	115
<i>The First Christians According to F. J. Gould</i>	116
<i>Consolation.</i> To a Friend on the Death of His Wife. Poem. CHARLES CARROLL BONNEY	120
<i>Book Reviews and Notes</i>	121

CHICAGO

The Open Court Publishing Company

LONDON: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Ltd.

Per copy, 10 cents (sixpence). Yearly, \$1.00 (in the U. P. U., 5s. 6d.).

INTERESTING BOOK ON EGYPT

THE

BOOK OF THE DEAD

An English Translation of the Chapters, Hymns, etc., of the Theban Recension, with Introduction, Notes, etc. By E. A. WALLIS BUDGE, M. A., Litt. D., D. Lit., Keeper of the Egyptian and Assyrian Antiquities in the British Museum. With four hundred and twenty vignettes, which do not appear in the larger edition published in 1897. Three vols. Crown 8vo. Price, \$3.75 net. Just Published.

The Open Court Publishing Company, Chicago
Monon Building - - 324 Dearborn Street.

A UNIQUE MATHEMATICAL WORK

Geometric Exercises in Paper-Folding

By T. SUNDARA ROW. Edited and revised by W. W. BEMAN and D. E. SMITH. With many half-tone engravings from photographs of actual exercises, and a package of papers for folding. Pages, x, 148. Price, cloth, \$1.00 net (4s. 6d. net.).

"I have sought not only to aid the teaching of geometry in schools and colleges, but also to afford mathematical recreation to young and old, in an attractive and cheap form. 'Old boys' like myself may find the book useful to revive their old lessons, and to have a peep into modern developments which, although very interesting and instructive, have been ignored by university teachers."—From the author's *Preface*.

THE OPEN COURT PUBLISHING CO., CHICAGO,
324 Dearborn St.

LONDON: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co.

MORRIS LIBRARY--SILC



3 1911 00285 3787



GOTTFRIED WILHELM LEIBNITZ.

(1646-1716.)

Frontispiece to The Open Court.

THE OPEN COURT

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Devoted to the Science of Religion, the Religion of Science, and
the Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea.

VOL. XVI. (NO. 2.)

FEBRUARY, 1902.

NO. 549

Copyright by The Open Court Publishing Co., 1901.

THE MYSTERIES OF MITHRAS.¹

BY PROFESSOR FRANZ CUMONT.

INTRODUCTORY.

THE present series of articles, in which we propose to treat of the origin and history of the Mithraistic religion, does not pretend to offer a picture of the downfall of paganism. We shall not attempt, even in a general way, to seek for the causes which explain the establishment of the Oriental religions in Italy; nor shall we endeavor to show how their doctrines, which were far more active as fermenting agents than the theories of the philosophers, decomposed the national beliefs on which the Roman state and the entire life of antiquity rested, and how the destruction of the edifice which they had disintegrated was ultimately consummated by Christianity. We shall not undertake to trace here the various phases of the battle waged between idolatry and the growing Church; this vast subject, which we cherish the hope of attacking some day in the future, does not lie within the scope of the present series of articles. We are concerned here with one epoch merely of this decisive revolution: it shall be our purpose, namely, to exhibit with all the distinctness in our power how and why a sect of Mazdaism failed under the Cæsars to become the dominant religion of the empire.

The civilisation of the Greeks had never succeeded in establishing itself among the Persians, and the Romans were no more successful in subjecting the Parthians to their sway. The grand fact which dominates the entire history of Hither Asia is that the Iranian world and the Greco-Latin world remained forever un-

¹ Extracted by the author from his *Textes et Monuments figurés relatifs aux mystères de Mithra* (Brussels: H. Lamertin). Translated by T. J. McCormack.

amenable to reciprocal assimilation, forever sundered by a mutual repulsion, deep and instinctive, just as much as by a hereditary hostility.

Nevertheless, the religion of the Magi, which was the highest blossom of the genius of Iran, exercised a deep influence on Occidental culture on three different occasions. In the first place, Parseeism had made a very distinct impression on Judaism in its stage of formation, and several of its cardinal doctrines were disseminated by Jewish colonists throughout the entire basin of the Mediterranean Sea, and subsequently forced their acceptance upon orthodox Catholicism.

The influence of Mazdaism on European thought was still more direct, when Asia Minor was conquered by the Romans. Here, from time immemorial, colonies of Magi, who had migrated from Babylon, lived in obscurity, and, welding together their traditional beliefs with the concepts of the Grecian thinkers, had elaborated little by little in these barbaric regions a religion original despite its complexity. At the beginning of our era, we see this religion suddenly emerging from the darkness, and rapidly and simultaneously pressing forward into the valleys of the Danube and the Rhine, and even into the heart of Italy. The nations of the Occident felt vividly the superiority of the Mazdean faith over their ancient national creeds, and the populace thronged to the altars of the exotic god. But the progress of the conquering religion was checked when it came in contact with Christianity. The two adversaries discovered with amazement, but with no inkling of their origin, the similarities which united them; and they severally accused the Spirit of Deception of having endeavored to caricature the sacredness of their religious rites. The conflict between the two was inevitable,—a ferocious and implacable duel; for the stake was dominion over the world. No one has told the tale of its changing fortunes, and our imagination alone is left to picture the forgotten dramas that agitated the souls of the multitudes when they were called upon to choose between Ormuzd and the Trinity. We know the result of the battle only: Mithraism was vanquished, as without doubt it should have been. The defeat which it suffered was not due entirely to the superiority of the evangelical ethics, nor to that of the apostolic doctrine regarding the teaching of the Mysteries; it perished, not only because it was encumbered by the onerous heritage of a superannuated past, but also because its liturgy and its theology had retained too much of its Asiatic coloring to be accepted by the Latin spirit without repugnance. For a contrary

reason, the same battle, waged in the same epoch in Persia between these same two rivals, was without success, if not without honor, for the Christians; and in the realms of the Sassanids, Zoroastrianism never once was in serious danger of being overthrown.

The defeat of Mithraism did not, however, utterly annihilate its power. It had prepared the minds of the Occident for the reception of a new faith, which, like itself, had come from the banks of the Euphrates, and which resumed hostilities with entirely different tactics. Manicheism appeared as its successor and continuator. This was the final assault made by Persia on the Occident,—an assault more sanguinary than the preceding one, but which was ultimately destined to be repulsed by the powerful resistance offered to it by the Christian empire.

* * *

The foregoing rapid sketch will, I hope, give some idea of the great importance which the history of Mithraism possesses. A branch torn from the ancient Mazdean trunk, it has preserved in many respects the characteristics of the ancient worship of the Iranian tribes; and it will enable us by comparison to understand the extent, which has been so much disputed, of the Avestan reformation. Again, if it has not inspired, it has at least contributed to give precise form to, certain doctrines of the Church, like the ideas relative to the powers of hell and to the end of the world. And thus both its rise and its decadence combine in explaining to us the formation of two great religions. In the heyday of its vigor, it exercised no less remarkable an influence on the society and government of Rome. Never, perhaps, not even in the epoch of the Mussulman invasion, was Europe in greater danger of being Asiaticised than in the third century of our era, and there was a moment in this period when Cæsarism was apparently on the point of being transformed into a Caliphate. The resemblances which the court of Diocletian bore to that of Chosroes have been frequently emphasised. It was the worship of the sun, and in particular the Mazdean theories, that disseminated the ideas upon which the deified sovereigns of the West endeavored to rear their monarchical absolutism. The rapid spread of the Persian Mysteries in all classes of the population served admirably the political ambitions of the emperors. A sudden inundation of Iranian and Semitic conceptions swept over the Occident which threatened to submerge everything that the genius of Greece and Rome had so laboriously erected, and when the flood subsided it left behind in

the conscience of the people a deep sediment of Oriental beliefs which have never been completely obliterated.

I believe I have said sufficient to show that the subject of which I am about to treat is deserving of exhaustive and profound study. Although my investigations have carried me, in all directions, much farther than at the outset I had intended to go, I still do not regret the years of labor and of travel which they have caused me. The work which I have undertaken cannot have been otherwise than difficult. On the one hand, we do not know to what precise degree the Avesta and the other sacred books of the Parsees represent the ideas of the Mazdeans of the Occident; on the other, these constitute the sole material in our possession for interpreting the great mass of figured monuments which have little by little been collected. The inscriptions by themselves are always a sure guide, but their contents are upon the whole very meager. Our predicament is somewhat similar to that in which we should find ourselves if we were called upon to write the history of the Church of the Middle Ages with no other sources at our command than the Hebrew Bible and the sculptured *débris* of Roman and Gothic portals. For this reason, our explanations of Mithraistic representations will frequently possess nothing more than a greater or less degree of probability. I make no pretension to having reached in all cases a rigorously exact decipherment of these hieroglyphics, and I am anxious to ascribe to my opinions nothing but the value of the arguments which support them. I hope nevertheless to have established with certainty the general signification of the sacred images which adorned the Mithraistic crypts. On the details of their recondite symbolism it is difficult to throw much light. We are frequently forced to take refuge here in the *ars nesciendi*.

The following series of articles will reproduce the conclusions summarised at the end of the first volume of my large work. Stripped of the notes and references which there served to establish them, it will be restricted to epitomising and co-ordinating all the knowledge we possess concerning the origins and characteristic features of the Mithraistic religion. It will furnish, in fact, all the material necessary for readers desirous of general information on this subject.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]