THE SACRED CIPHERS. BY CARYL COLEMAN.

All students of ornament, sooner or later, ask themselves if the sole object of ornamentation is to gratify mankind's love for the beautiful. The more profound their study, the greater their research, the oftener will the question come into their minds, until they are forced to admit that there may be some other object, some other aim: that underneath the form a truth may be hidden of far more importance than mere beauty: in other words, that all, or almost all, ornamentation is primarily symbolical, and that in all probability the true object of the original designer was to teach a given truth, or what he believed to be a truth, and that the ornament he created was only an instrument with which to gain the attention of men: an appeal to their spiritual nature through a material form.

One of the proofs of the above supposition is the persistency and universality of certain ornaments, which are admittedly symbols. Not that they always stand for the same thought, but simply they suggest to the mind something else than the object they actually represent. For the purpose of studying this proof take some ornament which is widely distributed over the world, such as the gammadion, and no better choice could be made, as it is to be seen upon the dress of the Hittite kings, upon the archaic pottery of Greece and Cyprus, upon the coins of Magna Graecia, upon the gold jewelry of the Etruscans, upon the sword-hilts, belts and sepulchral monuments of the Celts and Anglo-Saxons, upon the vases of China and Japan, in fact, it has been a decorative motif from the earliest time, and is found upon all kinds of objects, among all the nations of the earth, except the Egyptians, Chaldeans and Assyrians. Moreover, it has been used indifferently by pagan, Brahmin, Buddhist and Christian.

The ornamental value of the gammadion is self-evident, but not its significance, for its esoteric meaning depends upon the people employing it. Hence it has various symbolic values: at one time it is a symbol of fecundity, at another of prosperity, and at another of salvation; often, it is a mere sign of talismanic import, standing as an exponent of a truth, or a falsehood, or a superstition, as the case may be. It seems to belong peculiarly to the Aryan division of the human family, the property alike of the semi-civilized and the civilized, coming to a race by migration, or by spontaneous creation; for the gammadion, like all other ornament, comes under the universal law of
consequence, viz.: that like conditions produce like results. In the first instance, it represented the sun and solar movement, and in the last Christ, the Corner-stone, and the Apostles, the foundation stones of the Heavenly Jerusalem.

Just as the gammadion has both a decorative and a symbolic side, so have all, or almost all, other ornaments; just as the gammadion existed before the advent of Christianity, so did the Sacred Ciphers; just as the gammadion had one or more significations under paganism and another among the Christians, so had the Sacred Ciphers; the later meaning having nothing whatever to do with the previous ones; it was not the outcome of a migration or a development, or a paganizing of Christianity, but simply the borrowing of a form and the gift to it of an absolutely new symbolic value.

In the Sacred Ciphers the Christians found something ready, at hand, which they could use as monogramatized abbreviations of the two names of the Master, and they wisely employed them; moreover, they believed that the use of the Sacred Cipher, the Chrisma, was sanctioned by Heaven itself.

The first cipher used by the early Christian was practically a six-pointed star, familiar to the pagan world as a symbolic thunderbolt, and when confined within a circle, as a symbol of the sun: the amulet par excellence of the Gauls, but in it the Christian found a compendious form of writing the Sacred Names; for when they reduced it to its component parts, they found it was a combination of I and X, the initial letters in Greek of the two words Jesus Christ (Ἰησοῦς Χριστός). Just the time it was first employed in this way is not known; it occurs, however, on inscriptions as early as the year 268, and forms an integral part of the same, even when the inscription was written in Latin, as the following epitaph from the Cemetery of Thraso demonstrates:

Prima vivis in gloria Dei et in pace Domini Nostri.

"Prima, thou livest in the glory of God, and in the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ."

This cipher was of great value to the primitive Christians, as they were compelled when giving public expression to their dogmas, to use symbols, in order to guard their more sacred doctrine from the profanation of their pagan contemporaries.

To change this cipher into the Chrisma of Constantine was an easy matter. All that was necessary was to add a loop to the top of the I (iota), the middle spoke of the solar-wheel, and in this way create an abbreviation of the official name of the Holy One of Israel, a monogram of the word ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ (Christos), formed by a union of the first two letters: the X and the P. This monogram, however, was in use long before the days of Constantine, even prior to the Christian era, for it is found upon the coins of Ptolemy I, 323 B.C., and upon those of the Bactrian king Hipposstratos, 130 B.C., and it also appears upon a coin struck at Maconia in Lydia by Decius, the great persecutor of the Christians. It stood in all these cases for the Greek word Χρίσω, to anoint. It was first used by the Christians after it became a part of the labarum of Constantine, who placed it upon his standard because of a vision and dream. It is said that when Constantine was about to attack the forces of Maxentius, there ap-
Sacred Ciphers

appeared in the sky, at midday, in sight of his army, the Christma with the words: “By this Conquer.” Subsequently he had a dream concerning it, as related by Eusebius, Socrates and Lactantius; the latter writer says in the De Mortibus Persecutorum that “Constantine was admonished in sleep to mark the heavenly sign of God on the shields, and so to engage the enemy. He did as he was bidden, and marked the name of Christ on the shields, by the letter X drawn across them, with the top circumflexed.” Whether or not this vision and dream are myths is of no moment, for the fact remains that Constantine caused a cavalry standard (vexillum) to be surmounted with a golden garland, set with precious stones, in the center of which was placed the Christma, and further, that he adopted it as the imperial ensign, and ordered it to be carried at the head of his army, appointing fifty-two selected soldiers to act as the body guard. This standard was known as the labarum, not a new word, but of foreign origin, and probably derived from the Basque word for standard: labarva. Constantine not only made the labarum the imperial ensign, but he also commanded it to be used as the insignia of the military order of the Labari, an organization instituted for the defense of Christianity.

In post-Constantinian times the Sacred Cipher was often accompanied by the Alpha and Omega, in allusion to the two words: I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, and in that way setting forth the eternity of the Word and the equality of the Son with the Father: The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was made nothing that was made. Sometimes the cipher was also combined with the letter N (nu), the initial of the word Nika (conquer). Both ciphers are often found in union with this word in decorations, inscriptions and upon various objects.

In addition to the above described ciphers there is a third one, which is far more familiar, as it is employed to-day extensively in church decorations, in ecclesiastical embroidery and upon all kinds of church
THE CRAFTSMAN

writing with small letters, and often they changed the uncial form of the sigma from C to that of the Latin S, its proper sound; moreover, the presence of the letter h in this lower-case abbreviation led English writers of the Middle Ages to spell the Sacred Name *Ihesus*. The use of the forms ihc and ihs was by no means confined to Latin manu-

furniture, viz.: the monogram formed with the letters I H S. This cipher is sup-

posed by the ignorant to stand for the English sentence: “I have suffered,” or: “I have saved,” and, among the more intelligent, for the Latin sentence: “Jesus Hominum Salvator” (Jesus, the Saviour of men), while in truth it is an abbreviation of the name Jesus in Greek, the first three letters of the word.

Among the early Christians the name

Jesus was not written in this way Ἰησοῦς, but with uncials, large letters, something between capitals and small letters: IHCOVC, hence the contraction was IHC, the Greek sigma taking the form of the Latin C. In time, this abbreviation with its monograms became so fixed in the Christian mind, and was so universally used, it took its place as a symbol; so much so that scribes, in their Latin manuscripts, employed it, even when

scripts, but was employed in many ways: in England, at Parham in Sussex, there is a leaden font of 1351 which bears the following legend: “Ihc Nazar” (Jesus Nazarenus); at Cheam, in Surrey, there is a memorial brass of 1420 on which is engraved a heart with the inscription: *Ihc est amor me*, and on its four corners are the abbreviations: “Ihc Mcy” (Jesus Mercy); at St. John’s College, Cam-
bridge, there is an English prayer-book of 1400 in which the name Jesus is often written in letters of gold, and, at the same time, distributing among the people small tablets or cards bearing the same device.

It is not denied that the I H S may in some cases stand for the words Jesus Hominum Salvator, but when so intended, usually each of the first two letters is followed by a period sign: I. H. S., or the H is surmounted by a cross, and beneath a representation of the three nails of the crucifixion, as may be seen in the well known arms or seal of the Company of Jesus.

The foregoing has conclusively demonstrated the Greek origin of the Sacred Ciphers; and that, as soon as their symbolic value was recognized by the early Christians, they were employed extensively by epitaphists and decorators; until in the
course of time, by constant use throughout the world, it was forgotten that they were a contraction of Greek words, and they became mere symbols, which conveyed one and the same meaning to Christians of every nation and language.

The Sacred Ciphers were so pleasing to the subtle minds of the Oriental Christians that they are seldom absent from Byzantine ecclesiastical ornamental sculpture, mosaics, illuminations, embroidery and metal work; moreover, they led to the monogramatizing of many secular names, such as those of the Emperor Justinian and his wife Theodora, carved upon the capitals of the great columns of the nave of the church of Sancta Sophia at Constantinople.

This custom of using secular monograms, as well as the Sacred Ciphers, in architectural decorations passed from the East to the West, and became a common usage at an early date all over Europe. The one best known of these Western secular ciphers is that of Charlemagne.

To-day the use of the Sacred Ciphers is very much in vogue in all the various departments of ecclesiastical art, but too often they are wrongly used, and all because many architects, designers and decorators are deeply ignorant of the first principles of ecclesiology, hence do not fear to walk “where angels fear to tread.”

SERMONS IN SUN DRIED BRICKS. FROM THE OLD SPANISH MISSIONS. BY HARVEY ELLIS.

When the earnest and God-fearing missionaries from Spain came among the Indians, in what was then Mexico, the least expected result of their embassy was that their building of the places of worship known as the “Missions” would in the far future make a lasting impression on modern architecture and give a simple, straightforward solution of an architectural problem not any too easy.

These Fathers, while remembering the intricate embroideries of the Plateresque