THE SWASTIKA.*

THE HISTORY OF A POPULAR SYMBOL.

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TO ARCHEOLOGISTS and students of religion and art, the Swastika has been for many years a fascinating but tantalizing study. It is the theme of a no mean literature, its bibliography bearing the names of some of the world's best known scholars. The name and symbol are now becoming generally familiar because of the introduction everywhere for sale of all sorts of Swastika jewelry, and even table wear. One of the oldest symbols, its beginnings reaching to an antiquity long preceding history, its use continued to some degree through the ages, it has suddenly been given new life by this amulet-wearing fad.

The name Swastika, given this unique form of cross, may be called modern, since it is not the original name, and might be applied to any amulet. This name can be traced to about the fourth century B. C. There is general agreement that the word is Sanscrit, from *SU*, equal to the Greek *eu*, "well," and *AS*, "to be," form *asti*, "it is," with suffix *ka*, the whole popularly meaning "good luck."

This name is now accepted practically in all countries, though its use has been objected to as implying too strongly that India was the original home of the symbol. Doubtless the sign itself was in existence before the Sanskrit language. It is to be noticed that the name Swastika gives no light as to the original meaning of the symbol, but is only a designation appropriate to a late stage of its history. Swastika is given in a modern Sanskrit dictionary as "a mystical mark made on persons or things to denote good luck."

The wide distribution of the Swastika symbol, including almost every country, is a remarkable fact. As an antiquity it has been found in Japan, China, and Tibet, probably having been adopted in these countries with Buddhism from India, where it is quite frequent, especially associated with Buddhist objects. Persia affords examples, though it is said to be wanting among the more ancient remains. Dr. Henry Schliemann's discoveries of the Swastika at Old Troy, in the Third City, the city he considered the Homeric Troy, place it, at that point, at a period 1,200 or 1,300 years B. C. Most of the objects bearing the symbol were small whorls. The Swastika is found in the Caucasus, in Greece, and the adjacent islands as a mint mark, on vases and various sorts of prehistoric pottery, and in decorative work. In Italy it is believed that some of the earliest examples of the Swastika have been found on the hut-urns or pre-Etruscan cinerary urns. Early Etruscan vases, for which a date is claimed of from the twelfth century B. C. to 540 A. D., bear Swastikas. Hundreds of examples are found on Christian tombs in the Catacombs of Rome. In Austria, Germany, Switzerland, Scandinavia, in ancient mounds, on early art work, bronzespear points, and other objects of bronze and iron, the same symbol appears. France affords examples. In Great Britain it has been found on Celtic funeral urns, Roman votive altars, Christian sepulchers, and other objects. In Iceland, Coomassie, Africa (but only on some bronze ingots), in Central America, Mexico, and South America examples appear. In North America there are many interesting specimens found among the remains of the aboriginal Indians. Prof. Clarence B. Moore, of the Philadelphia Academy of Sciences, found them in the pre-Columbian mounds at Moundville, Ala., as recently as the spring of 1905. These mounds, belonging to the copper age, contained, among many other objects of value, sheet copper ornaments on which the Swastika occurs, with skeletons which have almost disappeared through age; a gorget with three circular lines surrounding a Swastika; also a pendant 6 inches long, bearing a Swastika with a triangle below it, and other ornaments. It is an interesting fact that thus far the Swastika has not been found in Babylonia, Assyria, Phœnicia, or Egypt as native objects, but only as introduced, for example, on vases from Cyprus and Greece.

The theory of the independent origin of the Swastika quite breaks down in the presence of the facts stated, and the interesting question of the relations and migrations of nations or persons comes to the front. A Tennessee shell mound ornament, bearing a Swastika, is said to duplicate another found in Sweden. It may be added that the very form itself of the cross, not easily made, is not one likely to have been invented by many and widely separated peoples. There is also what might be called the modern use of the Swastika, a survival representing another and

possibly a degenerate stage in its history. It becomes an inheritance used in ignorance. In Turkey and Persia the design has been and is worked in rugs, and can be seen in many such in our own homes and shops. Mr. Perceval Landon, in his story of the recent English expedition, "The Opening of Tibet," says that the envoys from Lhasa to the English camp had saddle cloths of Swastika-patterned stuffs. "Invariably there will be found outside a house four things, among them the white and blue Swastika, surmounted by a rudely-drawn symbol of the sun and moon. This sign marks every main doorway in the country." It is used by some Buddhists as a sign of benediction. The Jains, an offshoot, claim to use it as a symbol of resignation, contentment under all circumstances, in keeping with the strict meaning of the name. The Navajo, Piña, Sac, and Apache Indians weave the sign in rugs and baskets, and some of them hammer it out of silver for the trade, as is also done in Mexico. The Kansas and Osage Indians are said to introduce the symbol on charts in mourning ceremonies. Work baskets made for women in Japan sometimes show the same. The appeal to its mystery, novelty, and to superstition is made to minister to its sale in many forms.

The question as to where the Swastika first originated is one impossible to answer at present. There are advocates of many places and times. It has been associated with the bronze age, making its way east and west with that age. Of course the Orient, and India especially, was formerly claimed as its birthplace. But many inconclusive arguments have been penned, advancing claims for the origin in many different parts of the world.

When we seek for the primitive meaning of this cross we are on even more debatable ground. Theory after theory confronts us, the advocates of widely differing views arguing at times with astonishing positiveness, and adding assertion to evidence. All may agree, however, that the Swastika was made at the first with a definite intention and meaning, passing from tribe to tribe. Madame Blavatsky said that "it is at one and the same time an alchemical, cosmogonical, anthropological, and magical sign, with seven keys to its inner meaning." Well argued claims have been presented that the device was first suggested by forked lightning, and so became a representation of the weapon of the air-god, and the emblem of Zeus or Jupiter as supreme. In Scandinavia it was the hammer of Thor, and some assert found its beginnings in that country. Again it is held that the process of "churning" the sacred fire with crossed sticks led to the use of the form as a sacred symbol representative of the act or of the "vital flame" itself. Again, by a series of evolutions, it has come from the representations of that "fetish of immemorial antiquity," the lotus. Again, it represents the four cardinal points, and is the supreme symbol for the cult of the cardinal points. By it the four winds of heaven are indicated. It was suggested by the arrangement of stars at certain seasons of the year. In some parts of the world it was evidently a symbol of the earth. It is said to represent in its short arms Time, in its long ones Eternity. One other theory seems to be so well supported by various lines of evidence as to warrant some elaboration. Suggested by a number of independent scholars, it has received an able presentation by Mr. William Simpson. The sun in the earliest times must have been an object of wonder and worship. From it came light, heat, health, wealth. It appeared as a circle in the heavens, and by its turning movement the succession of the seasons were insured. The wheel or circle, one of the oldest symbols, common to Brahmanism and Buddhism, but antedating them, and almost universal in use, would naturally be a symbol of this benevolent object or deity. It would come naturally to represent the idea of dominion, power. From the presentation of the merely physical aspect it would be natural to attribute to the wheel the additional idea of the right, true way, the beneficial path, and so the law. Whatever was according to the path of the sun was of the good way, and that not so was false, of decay, and death.

The Swastika also is one of the oldest of symbols, and well nigh universal. Mr. Edward Thomas, one of the first authorities on Indian coins, wrote: "So far as I have been able to trace or connect the various manifestations of this emblem, they one and all resolve themselves into the primitive conception of the solar motion, which was intuitively associated with

the rolling wheel-like projection of the sun through the upper or visible arc of the heavens as understood and accepted in the crude astronomy of the ancients." Prof. Max Müller speaks of this explanation as decisive, saying: "The emblem of the sun in motion, a wheel with spokes, was actually replaced by what we now call the Swastika; that the Swastika is, in fact, an abbreviated emblem of the solar wheel with spokes in it, the tire and the movement being indicated by the crampons." In further support of this claim the form of the Swastika is urged, rays in motion, and also that the objects most frequently associated with it are representations of the sun and solar divinities. In some combinations the symbol alternates with signs of the sun. An antique represents Apollo in a car with a Swastika on his breast. A water bottle, discovered at Moundville by Prof. Moore, bears an incised decoration of a winged sun and solar ray emblems, and another bottle a Swastika in a circle. The Empress Wu of China, about 704 A. D., invented an emblem of a Swastika inclosed in a circle, the sign for sun. A Greek geometric vase in the British Museum shows the symbol between two solar geese. Many other examples might be quoted.

This explanation of the genesis of the Swastika and its early associations does not require the giving up of other symbolisms which may have been attached to it. Advocates of the sacred fire, the "Lucifer" of primitive man, of the four cardinal points, and the four winds, may still read their favorite meaning in the cross.

As regards the two forms of the emblem there is, of course, a diversity of opinion. The one which "kicks to the left," connects with death, and refers to the circlings at funerals, which are against the sun, the way of evil, decay. Still we find many examples of the left Swastika used like the other. Mr. Landon, relating his observations in Tibet, says: "It is said that the Swastika which revolves to the right is consecrated to the use of orthodox Buddhists of whatever school, and that the Swastika which kicks in the other direction is used only by the Bönpa, the original devil worshippers, whose faith was ousted by the adoption of Buddhism. This is not borne out by the relative frequency of the position of the two Swastikas in Tibet. The left-handed Swastika (i. e., the one which turns to the dexter), is, if anything, the commoner of the two, and the commonest use of this symbol is in the opposition of the two kinds; thus the two halves of a doorway, or the pattern of a rug, will generally offer an example of the two kinds confronted." Col. Waddell, an authority on Buddhism, ascribes this, however, to the ignorance of the Lamas. More to the point than the modern use in Tibet is the fact that on objects found by Dr. Schliemann, right and left Swastikas occur together. Prof. Müller insists that the Sanscrit name refers properly only to the cross with arms pointing to the right, and that the name of the other is Sauwastika. But without reference to the name, we may agree that general use indicates that the direction of the arms is of secondary importance to the symbolism.

It was probably an easy transition for the Swastika cross, beginning with whatever signification, to take on the nature of an amulet or good-luck sign, and finally to be used as the horseshoe is so largely in our day, with purely superstitious idea. In parts of Italy the traveler sees large rudely-formed Roman crosses marked on the doors and sides of the houses of the peasants, showing the degradation of the Christian symbol to a similar use. Bibles have been put against doors to keep out the evil spirit. The Swastika use, carried to far distant lands by migrating peoples, would thus be the more likely to lose its original meaning. But the charms now sold in our jewelry stores may, after all, really carry us back, however ignorant the wearer be of it, to the days of the worship of the sun, to the time of the sacred fire.

LIABILITY OF VARIOUS TREES TO LIGHTNING STROKE.

Of 1,100 trees which are known to have been struck by lightning in Belgium in the twenty-three years beginning with 1884 and ending with 1906, says Prometheus, more than 55 per cent were poplars, and nearly 14 per cent were oaks. Elms make up 7 per cent of the casualties and conifers of all kinds another 7 per cent. All experience teaches that isolated trees are most injured by lightning. The frequency of lightning strokes in trees increases

* Abstracted from Records of the Past.