IV. *On some Roman Bronzes discovered in the bed of the Thames, in January 1837 ; Communicated by CHARLES ROACH SMITH, Esq. F.S.A. in a Letter to NICHOLAS CARLISLE, Esq. K.H., F.R.S., Secretary.*

Read May 4, 1837.

SIR,

Lothbury, April 4, 1837.

IN conjunction with John Newman, Esq. F.S.A., I am enabled to exhibit to the Society of Antiquaries some fine and interesting bronzes, which were found in the bed of the river Thames, near London Bridge, in January last, by men employed in ballast heaving. They are five in number, and consist of a Priest, or devotee, of Cybele; a Mercury; an Apollo; an Atys; and the fragment of a Mercury, or, in the opinion of Sir Richard Westmacott, of a Jupiter. A pedestal of bronze was also found in the same spot.

The first of these figures (Plate IV.) is five inches high, and in perfect preservation: except the head, the figure is naked, and decidedly of the hermaphroditic character. In the right hand, and partly resting on the arm, are, as I presume, cymbals,^a evidently placed in that peculiar and temporary position to admit of the left hand being at liberty to adjust the sacred bandage or veil, which, it is to be inferred, has, during the celebration of the rites of the goddess, been loosened by dancing. These cymbals, however, appear of a rather unusual form; they are not separated by the artist, but whether by design or oversight, I am not prepared to say. Usually they are represented as being carried in either hand, and clashed against each other: these under examination may be a variety of the “*æra rotunda*,”^b but if the connexion

^a By some antiquaries a doubt has been suggested, whether the object may not be a speculum.

^b Propertius, iv. 7.

between the two brass-plates be intentional on the part of the artist, then this instrument must have been used with hinges, as a clapper, or in the manner of our modern castanets. It is not improbable that this image might have formed one of a group, of which the principal figures may have been the goddess Cybele and the Atys, hereafter to be described. This bronze is in the collection of Mr. Newman.

The Mercury (which, together with the Apollo and presumed Jupiter, are in my own possession,) is also about five inches in height, (Plate V.) and of the best and chastest design, and most finished workmanship. The correct proportions of the figure, the easy and graceful position, the attributory wings (emblems of thought) interwoven with the rich and clustering curls, which adorn the placid repose of a countenance worthy a god, the light and elegant fall of the mantle from the left shoulder, combine to stamp it one of the master-pieces of ancient art. The right hand, which most probably held the emblematic purse, is wanting; but, with this exception, the figure is well preserved.

The fragment, which I had at first also assigned to Mercury, is, in the opinion of Sir Richard Westmacott, more applicable, from its muscular developement, to Jupiter, (Plate VI.) and from its correct anatomical proportions, of equal interest to or greater than its less mutilated companion. Indeed its beautiful workmanship cannot but make us regret its imperfect condition; still I do not despair of obtaining at some future time the remainder of the figure. It stands about eight inches high.

But the gem of the collection, perhaps, is the Apollo; which, however, is not preserved entire. (Plate VII.) The left hand and the lower parts of the legs are wanting. The god is naked, and adorned with all the perfections of youth and beauty. The countenance, pensive and downcast, exhibits that unity of manly grace and feminine loveliness, which the artists of the Grecian school so well understood, and embodied in the numerous and incomparable proofs of their genius that have been happily preserved to delight and instruct us. The long and flowing hair (which gained for him the titles of *Χρυσόχαιτος*, Pulchricomus, Crinitus, &c.) is arranged in coiffure towards the front, while the luxuriant tresses, flowing down the back, are tied with the strophium.

Two ringlets, straying conspicuously over either shoulder, complete the picture of this superb, if not unique head-dress.

Intonsi crines longa cervice fluebant,
Stillabat Syrio myrtea rore coma.^c

It is difficult to give the execution of these relics to any precise epoch, but we cannot err in asserting their claims to an age not later than that of the Antonines or of Hadrian, when the arts were at their highest pitch of excellence. Sir Richard Westmacott, whose distinguished taste and matured judgment make it unsafe to appeal against his decision, gives them to the Augustan era, and confirms my opinion of the work being that of Greek artists in the employ of the Romans.

The Atys, (Plate VIII.) which was found at Barnes among the gravel taken from the same spot where the other bronzes were discovered, is well executed, though not so exquisitely modelled and finished as the Mercury and Apollo.

This deity wears the Phrygian bonnet, illustrative of his origin; and in either arm, symbolical of his prolific power, he carries boughs heavily laden with fruit. He is attired in a dress, composed of a short tunic and a loose garment or trowsers (the braccæ or anaxyrides) purposely thrown open at the waist, and buttoned up in front from the ankle to the knee over a sandal.

In Montfaucon are several representations of Atys. In one of these, the god holds the pastoral flute of unequal tubes in one hand, and in the other a pine branch.^d The dress corresponds in many respects with that just described.

In a second example, the flute or pipe is suspended from the sacred pine, the shepherd's crook is beside him, while, as officiating priest of Cybele, he is depicted playing on the tympanum before that goddess.

Another variety also resembles the specimen before us, except that

^c Tibullus, III. iv. 27.

^d Atys fistulâ et virgâ ornatus est. Fistula ordinem spiritus inæqualis ostendit, quia venti, in quibus nulla æqualitas est, propriam sumunt de Sole substantiam. Virga Solis potestatem asserit qui membra moderatur."—Elias Schedius de Diis Germanis, Amsterdam, 1648, 8vo. p. 77.

Montfaucon's bears the fruit in his lap, a peculiarity which has induced some to think it intended for Vertumnus.

The mythological accounts of Atys, as given by various writers, are replete with apparent contradictions and discrepancies: they concur, however, in making him a beautiful youth, a Phrygian or Lydian shepherd with whom the Mater Magna, the goddess Cybele, was enamoured, and who created him her high-priest; but, the young devotee failing in keeping sacred his vows of allegiance, the goddess displaced him from his high office with punishment and disgrace. Atys then wore the habiliments and adopted the manners of the female sex.

In the capacity of high-priest of Cybele or Rhæa, Atys is made the institutor of religious ceremonies and observances in honour of the Great Mother, and is described as travelling through the world, teaching the nature and worship of the gods, of which people had hitherto been ignorant. In the course of time, from being the *means*, Atys became the *object* of worship, and was adored with rites in common with those peculiar to the Sun, to Mythras, Serapis, Dis, and Typhon.

It is quite unnecessary to make more than a passing allusion to these popular fables; Pausanias, Lucian, and others, can be consulted for the curious details. It may, however, be remarked, that the investigation will be most profitably advanced by keeping in view the leading features or characteristics which identify his worship throughout so many ages and countries, and which will assist us in distinguishing between the literal signification of the fable or allegory, and the important truths founded on principles or natural facts concealed beneath its veil.

A few observations naturally arise from contemplating the figure before us.

Atys partook of both sexes:

Quod enim genus figuræ est, ego non quod habuerim?

Ego mulier, ego adolescens, ego ephebus, ego puer.—CATULLUS, Car. lxi. l. 63.

and Ovid:

Deque viro fias nec Vir, nec Fœmina, ut Attys.^e

^e Libellus in Ibin, l. 457.

This androgynous character appears to have originated in a very remote period, and to have been suggested by the obvious fact, that either of the two sexes taken alone would fail to convey a correct idea of the object aimed at, namely, a personification of the generative power of nature; but that a combination of the two would render an unequivocal explanation, and effect the end proposed.

This unity of persons in the mythological system is not confined to Atys. Proclus, in one of the Orphic hymns, describes Jupiter as male and female.

Priapus of the Etruscans was hermaphroditic. ^f

Apuleius makes the Mother of the Gods masculine. ^g

Plutarch says the Egyptians called Isis or the Moon, the mother of the world, both male and female; and that Osiris, in his character of the Sun, the giver of heat and life, was represented with attributes similar to those assigned to Atys in our specimen.

In the wanderings of Atys and his sufferings, an analogy to Adonis is observable. "Nec Atys quem Berecynthia mater amavit, alius est quem Sol; qui corrupto nomine *pro Adoni*, Atys vel Attines dictus est."

The Phrygians imagined that God slept all the winter and awoke in the summer.

Atys, according to Porphyry, is one and the same with Vesta (the Persian At-is means fire), Rhæa, Ceres, Themis, Priapus, Proserpine, Adonis, Silenus, and the Satyrs. Diodorus Siculus makes the same assertion. ⁱ

The hermaphroditic nature of Atys and of others, and the various changes to which the deities of the ancients were subject, cannot be rationally explained in any other way, than by recognising in the whole group an allegorical representation of certain determined and accredited facts. To believe that the more learned assented to the literal reading of the tales of their deities, is contrary not only to reason, but to their own assertions.

The progress of science in former ages was retarded by obstacles as uncongenial to its advancement as plagues, deluges, and earthquakes are to the physical prosperity of the world. The peaceful and enlightened must often have fallen before the fire and sword of uncivilised adventurers, who

^f Table lviii. of Gorius.

^g Met. liii. p. 241.

^h Schedius, De Diis Germanis, ut supr.

ⁱ 1. 23.

crushed the spreading influence of the arts and sciences, and confounded the records of history with their own rude and barbarous traditions. To this cause alone, the origin of many of the incongruous and conflicting relations of mythology may be traced. The learned Jacob Bryant, after spending a life in laborious and unwearied research on the mythology of the ancients, came to the conclusion that a strong analogy exists between all the deities, and that they may each and all be referred to the grand luminary of nature—the Sun.

Thus, it requires no great straining of the imagination to identify Atys, or the God Papas, the first principle from whose agency all things were supposed to proceed, with all and each of the ancient deities; with Jupiter the father, with Apollo the bestower of heat and light, with Osiris, with Bacchus, and Ceres, all personifications of the fructifying power of Nature. Atys is connected with Cybele, as Adonis is with Venus, Endymion with Diana, Osiris with Isis, &c. As the universal father, he is supposed to generate all things by means of the twofold sex inherent in him. He is beloved by Cybele, or the Earth, because every thing seems to be engendered and produced by her and Atys, or the Sun's heat.

The God of Lampsacus seems derived from the same source, but is probably of a later invention, and may be emblematical of the generative power in a more restricted and grosser sense. Priapus also is depicted old, the autumn of the year; while Atys stands forth in the prime of youth and beauty, in the springtime of life, alluding to the eternal juvenility of man, the species.

The worship of the personified creative power appears to have originated in the East, and to have spread far and wide. The stone of conical shape brought by Elagabalus from Syria, as the god of his idolatry, may not without argument be conjectured to be the Phallus, and strong traces of this worship remain in the East to the present day. A Phallus in freestone, which seems, from its construction, to have been adapted for a place among the household gods of some Roman colonist, was lately found in digging the foundation for the houses in Moorgate Street.

That the Mercury, the Apollo, and Atys, were the Penates of a Roman of some distinction residing in the metropolis of the province of Britain there

can be but little doubt. From the many fragments found on the sites of Roman towns, the common people seem to have been content with clay or earthen images ; while the beauty and execution of the bronzes exhibited are of a very superior character to what belongs to the generality of the figures found in metal.

The Romans were not an exterminating, and most decidedly not a bigoted people. They seem always to have been ready to admit to a share of religious homage, the deities of foreign and of conquered nations.

The gods of the countries into which their hostile arms were carried, were always propitiated with sacrifices to favour their cause.

Thus Virgil makes Æneas, who carried with him the gods of his own country, immediately and cordially to reverence the tutelar deities of a strange land :

“ — hesternumque Larem, parvosque Penates
Lætus adit.”^k

Tacitus, in his treatise on Germany, states that Mercury was the god most worshipped, and also (especially among the Suevi) Isis or Herthum, that is, the mother Earth, or Cybele, and the ceremonies there accorded with those used long before in Syria ; and in the priest *apparelled like a woman* is an additional evidence of the connexion and derivation described. This worship, with modifications, seems to have been common in the German States. The Æstyan nation, Tacitus further states, “ using the same customs, worship the *Mother* of the Gods ; their language, however, resembles that of the Britons.”

From the connexion of language and intercourse there is good reason for supposing the forms of worship in the two countries to have been not widely different. The policy of the Romans would induce that people to bring over such of their deities as were ostensibly related to those used by the natives, and could, without wounding their prejudices, be used by both in common. For this reason, Cybele and Atys would be among the first to be selected.

Apollo, also, was among the gods worshipped in Britain according to

^k Æn. VIII. l. 543.

Cæsar, who, moreover, states that he also found many images of Mercury, in his manifold capacities.

It now remains for me to attempt to give some conjecture why these Penates were deposited in such a peculiar situation as the bed of the river Thames; where also, it will be remembered, was found the colossal bronze head of Hadrian, in the possession of, and exhibited to the Society some short time since, by Mr. Newman.

The Roman ships, Virgil tells us, when on an expedition, were under the protection of the guardian deities of the empire, whose images were arranged around the poop. The head of Hadrian, just referred to, would seem better adapted for such a purpose: our images, had they been used (which seems improbable) under such circumstances, and been displaced from their situation by accident, would have been found unmutilated and perfect; for the water, when the air is excluded, preserves metals, and their weight would have sunk them in the bed of the river, out of the reach of injury.

I conceive these elegant relics to have been intentionally disfigured, and then thrown into the river.

The image of the Apollo bears on both sides of the legs, just above the point where they are sundered, marks of some sharp instrument, such as a hatchet would leave if struck with moderate force, and this could not have been done while the image lay buried in the bottom of the river. Both legs of the Atys seem to have been purposely broken, and the mutilations of the Jupiter and Mercury also appear to have been effected intentionally.

We know that the destruction of the idols of the Pagans was a duty prescribed the early Christians. The Venerable Bede testifies to this fact in numerous passages in his Ecclesiastical History.¹

Fire was often the grand agent of destruction; but the proximity of the

¹ Vide cap. xii. lib. ii. commencing: "Adjecit autem Coifi," and ending with "ac destruxit eas quas ipse sacraverat aras."

In the epistle of Pope Gregory to Æthelbert, A. D. 601, occur these commands: "Idolarum cultus insequere, fanorum ædificia evertē," &c. Cap. xxxii. lib. i.

In another letter (to Mellitus), the same Pope says: "ipsa quæ in eis sunt idola destruantur."

Thames suggested to the mistaken zeal of the spoilers of Roman London an easier mode of removing the evidences of paganism, and these very objects of our admiration, after being defaced, as we now see them, were consigned to what was intended for an eternal grave. But the water, faithful to science, has conserved these interesting specimens of ancient art for the use and admiration of a posterity, it is to be hoped, less intolerant and destructive.

I am, Sir,

Your obedient servant,

CHARLES ROACH SMITH.

NICHOLAS CARLISLE, Esq. K.H., F.R.S.
Sec. S.A. &c.

Bronze Figure of a Priest, or devotee of Cybele found in the bed of the Tivames. 1837.

Bronze Figure of Mercury found in the bed of the Thames. 1837.

Bronze, supposed to represent Jupiter: found in the bed of the Thames. 1837.

Fragment of a Bronze of Apollo found in the bed of the Thames. 1837.

Bronze Figure of Atyr, found at Barnes among gravel taken from the same spot where the preceding Bronzes were discovered.