

CHRISTIAN ICONOGRAPHY IN IRELAND.

By MARGARET STOKES.

THE ZODIAC.

The place of the sun in the Zodiac served among the ancients to regulate the seasons of the year, and the representations of the figures associated with the groups of stars in its circle were almost constant ornaments of religious edifices.

Mr. Fowler has shown in an eloquent passage at the conclusion of his essay "On Mediæval Representations of the Months and Seasons,"¹ that such subjects in ancient Christian ecclesiastical architecture had a mystic or symbolic import. The churches were to be the books of the unlearned, as St. John Damascene has said of sculptured images:—

The learned have them as a kind of book which is for the use of the unlearned and ignorant.

And the Abbe Suger inscribed these words on the façade of St. Denis:—

Mens hebes ad verum per materialia surgit
Et, demersa prius, hac visa luce resurgit.

"The slow mind rises to the truth through material objects, and though it has been sunk, rises when it sees this light."

The intense love of nature and religious feeling of the Gothic mind was reflected in the encyclopædias or *specula*, written in stone or mosaic or fresco. The *Speculum Naturale*, beginning with the creation of the world and of man, includes the subject of these Zodiacal representations, which is one of those which manifest the enthusiasm and love of nature, the delight in God's works, that forms a most important moral element in the Gothic mind.

¹ *Archæologia*, XLIV, 137—183, "On Mediæval Representations of the Months and Seasons," James Fowler, F.S.A.

These signs were as naturally associated with the actions of the every-day life of our forefathers as the months and days of the month are with our own and as clearly suggested to the devout the duties and obligations of the seasons. When that, for instance,

“The yonge sonne
Hath in the Ram his halfe course i-ronne,”

it also represented the course of the Sun of Righteousness through the festivals of the church. This idea is embodied in some verses preserved by Vincent de Beauvais (*Spec. Nat.*, XV, 64) and by Durandus.

Festum Clementis hyemis caput est orientis,
Cedit hyems retro, cathedrato Simone Petro,
Ver fugat Urbanus, æstatem Symphorianus.¹

(The Feast of Clement marks winter's rising,
When Simon Peter is throned winter turns back,
Urban puts spring to flight, Symphorian summer.)

Thus the Christian Year formed a kind of Zodiacus Vitæ:—

Quia vita per ipsum
Ducta nitet, ceu sol per sua signa
(Because life so guided shines,
Like the sun wandering through his constellations.)

The mystic Honorius of Autun held that the year, with its four seasons and twelve months, is a figure of Christ with His four evangelists and twelve apostles. Our subject is included in the *Speculum Naturale* of Vincent de Beauvais, which was the text-book with the sculptors and architects of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, but it must be remembered that in dealing with Irish Christian art we have to seek the origins of our types at a date preceding this by two or three hundred years.

In the first volume of the *Ancient Laws of Ireland* we have a poem, showing how the King of Heaven ordained the procession of the Sun through the twelve signs, from the Cain Patraic, which is termed the *Senchus Mor* or Great Book, and was first known under the name Cain Patrick, *i.e.* Law of Patrick, all that was really attributed to Patrick being a compilation of pre-existing laws. In

¹ Durandus, *Rationale Divinorum Officiorum*, fol. 1486 (?), VIII, 192, col. 1.

this work the division of the firmament from chaos into twelve parts recalls the 28th canto of the *Paradiso* of Dante.

This same King also formed and measured the space from the earth to the firmament, and it is by this the thickness of the earth is measured.

He fixed after this the seven divisions from the firmament to the earth—Saturn, Jupiter, Mercury, Mars, Sol, Luna, Venus.

The distance which he measured from the moon to the sun is two hundred and forty-four miles; the name of this is the nether-heaven without wind.

The measurement of the space which he left between the sun and the firmament is three times the above, as it has been measured by calculators; and this is the immovable Olympus, which is called the third heaven.

The measurement of the space between the firmament and the earth is one thousand five hundred and twelve miles, and the distance from the earth to the firmament is equal to that from the firmament to the *celestial* palace, three thousand and twenty-four miles, besides the *thickness* of the firmament. And the distance from the earth to the latter is equal to the distance from the earth down to the depth of hell.

It was this King—that is, the King of Heaven and Earth—who separated the firmament from the great formless mass; and he ordained five zones in it, viz. a fiery zone (*i.e.* between the two temperate zones), two temperate zones, and two frigid zones, viz. one to the south and another to the north.

And the first form of the firmament was ordained thus:—As the shell is about the egg, so is the firmament around the earth in fixed suspension; and in circumference its measurement is taken, and it is not in diameter that it is measured.

And the heavenly King after this ordered it to be divided into twice six parts, and corresponding to them twice six months, each part to make a month, so that it is at the end of a year the circuit is complete. There are six windows in each part of them through the firmament to shed light through, so that there are sixty-six windows in it, and a glass shutter for each window; so

that the firmament is a mighty sheet of crystal and a protecting bulwark round the earth with three heavens, and three heavens around it, and the seventh was arranged in three heavens. This last, however, is not the habitation of the angels, but is like a wheel revolving round, and the firmament is thus revolving, and also the seven planets, since the time they were created.

The same King divided it into twelve divisions, and gave a name to each division respectively; and the figures of the divisions are set each in its own place around the firmament, and it is from these figures they are named, Aquarius, Pisces, Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Cancer, Leo, Virgo, Libra, Scorpio, Sagittarius, Capricornus. And these are the twelve divisions through which the sun and moon run; and the sun is thirty days ten hours and a half in each division of these, and on the fifteenth it enters each division.

In the month of January, the sun is in Aquarius; in the month of February the sun is in Pisces; in the month of March the sun is in Aries; in the month of April in Taurus; in the month of May it is in Gemini; in the month of June it is in Cancer; in the month of July it is in Leo; in the month of August it is in Virgo; in the month of September it is in Libra; in the month of October it is in Scorpio; in the month of November it is in Sagittarius; in the month of December it is in Capricornus.

These are the twelve divisions through which the sun runs.

There are five things that should be known every day to every intelligent person who has ecclesiastical orders, viz. the day of the solar month, the age of the moon, the flow of the tide, the day of the week, and the festivals of saints. *Finit.*¹

Four centuries later we find our subject introduced in a manner that closely resembles the method of Vincent de Beauvais. It is the early Irish notice of the procession of the sun through the Zodiac in the first poem of the *Saltair na Rann* ("Psalter of the Staves or Quatrains") a collection of early Irish poems attributed

¹ *Extract from Ancient Laws of Ireland (Senchus Mór)*, I, 29, 31. Cain Patraic—Patrick's Law.

to Oengus, the Culdee, who flourished in the beginning of the ninth century.¹ This poem deals with the subject of the signs of the Zodiac (205-220); the time—30 days 10½ hours—that the sun is in each; the day of the month on which it enters each; the month in which it is in each sign (233-256); the division of the firmament into twelve parts; the five things which every intelligent man should know, namely, the day of the solar month, the age of the moon, the height of the tide, the day of the week, saints' festivals.

A third notice occurs in an astronomical tract in the Royal Irish Academy Library marked Stowe B. 2, 1, Ashburnham Collection, the approximate date of which is not given.

We now pass on to the first appearance in early Christian art of illustration of the passage of the sun through the circle of the Zodiac.

In the *Byzantine Painters' Guide* are a series of allegories and moralities which were to form part of the subjects illustrated in sacred buildings, among which we have "How to Represent the Illusive Seasons of this Life."

Although the date of this Greek manuscript is uncertain, yet we have many other authorities for proving that the custom of ornamenting churches with a calendar in stone was not only established from the earliest period of the Christian era, but was practised in pre-Christian temples. Pavements of churches and primitive basilicas in early times were decorated with symbolic images of the seasons such as we find in the mosaic of the church of Tyre, brought to the Louvre by the missionary Renan; and in the churches of Aosta, Ainay, Lyon, and St. Remi, early examples either still exist, or were to be found at a recent date. These mosaic pavements recall not only the cycle of seasons and their labours, but also a cycle of prayers and liturgical festivals. Mr. Fowler² enumerates various foreign and British representations of these signs in manuscripts before the fourteenth century, but he does not appear to have heard of one drawn by an Irish illuminator and scribe in a manuscript now to be seen

¹ *Anecdota Oxoniensia*, I, Pt. III, Oxford, 1882.

² *Op. cit.*, 138-132.

in the Library of Basle, which is of greater antiquity than any of his list. This manuscript is marked FF. iii, 15a, and is entitled *Liber S. Isidori Hispalensis de Natura Rerum*. It has been published by Dr. Ferdinand Keller.

In this Zodiacal Circle we find indicated, not only the signs, a rude drawing of each of which is given, but also the names of the guardians of the signs, Pagan, Jewish, and Christian. These drawings and inscriptions are found within each one of the twelve panels between the outer and the inner circle, and the number of the month is also added, September being marked as the beginning of this calendar.

With three exceptions, the names of the Jewish and Christian guardians, that is, the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles, are outside the panel, and the number of the month and the sign are within it. The following table will illustrate the arrangement—

| | | Sign. | Pagan. | Jewish. | Christian. |
|---------------|----------------|------------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|
| September | No. i. | Libra | Orcus | Simeon ... | |
| October | No. ii. | Scorpio | Chronos ... | Reuben ... | Peter. |
| November | No. iii. | Sagittarius | | Benjamin ... | Paul. |
| December | No. iv. | Capricornus | Iperion | Joseph ... | Matthew. |
| January | No. v. | Aquarius | | Asher | Matthias. |
| February | No. vi. | Pisces | | Gad | Thaddeus. |
| March | No. vii. | Aries | Oceanus | Naphtali ... | |
| April | No. viii. | Taurus | Mereurius ... | Dan | James. |
| May | No. ix. | Gemini | Saturn | Zebulon ... | Thomas. |
| June | No. x. | Cancer | Jupiter | Issachar ... | Bartholomew. |
| July | No. xi. | Leo | Pluto | Judah | Philip. |
| August | No. xii ... | Virgo | Neptunus ... | Levi | James. |

It is curious that the month of September (Libra) should be counted as the first month; but although the Zodiac and seasons were generally arranged so as to remind us of the course of the sun, yet these calendars elsewhere do not always commence at the same sign. For instance, at the church of St. Savin in Poitou, Aries (March) is counted as the first month, while in the cathedrals of Amiens and Nôtre Dame, Paris, the year opens at Capricornus (December), and at Chartres at Aquarius.

Sagittarius is, as we know, generally represented

as a centaur, *i.e.* a composite being with a human head, bust and arms, but with the legs and lower parts of a horse. But in the sign in this drawing only the head is human, and that is covered by a long hood, pointed behind, and instead of the bow and arrow he usually holds, some implement is represented bending from his neck and passing along the ground beneath his feet. Can the occupation of threshing be here intended? For Vincent de Beauvais tells us in the *Speculum Naturale* that this is the most natural time for threshing wheat. Tusser attributes this occupation to November—

November take flaile
Let skep no more faile.

This is the sign also given in the cathedral at Rheims. Sagittarius is also represented as beating oaks for feeding swine on the thirteenth century font at Brookland, in Kent.

The sign of Aquarius for January in this manuscript is unusual. He is generally shown as a water carrier, pouring water from a pitcher, and is also occasionally represented as a wood-cutter carrying a tree or branch; but in this manuscript he is shown kneeling on one knee, while on the other he supports some kind of stringed instrument on which he plays with his right hand. The idea of festivity connected with January may explain the introduction of the musical instrument here. On the font at Brookland, in Kent, we find Aquarius as a two-faced figure sitting feasting; he is also represented as a figure drinking or feasting at Cremona, at Rheims, and at Amiens. At St. Alban's, in England, the symbol for January was a man and woman feasting. Among the Irish any festive scene seems to have been generally symbolised by musicians.

Coming to the sign for February (Pisces) it should be observed that only one fish is given here, instead of two. This also happens in the Cologne Bede, and in the Runic calendar illustrated by Cahier.¹

The attribute of the sign for August (Virgo) is also difficult to decipher. It may possibly be meant to represent a sheaf of corn. This is given in the zodiac on

¹ *Caractéristiques des Saints*, Le P. Ch. Cahier, i, 160.

the Brookland font in Kent, on the porch of St. Margaret's Church in York, in the wood-carvings of Worcester and St. Alban's, as also on the west door of Rheims Cathedral.

The Pagan guardians of the months in this Irish drawing must represent divinities of the constellations so named, but their order does not correspond with that of any other instance we have found. In the museum of the Louvre there is a very ancient mosaic which seems to have come from some hall of a Roman villa, and M. Ménard publishes in his work on mythology in art an illustration of a fine monument called the Table of the Twelve Gods,¹ each of the divinities being supposed to dwell within the constellation that bears its attributes.

Four of the Pagan deities enumerated here also occur in the Irish Zodiac, but they are not associated with the same Zodiacal sign. Thus, Apollo is associated with Pisces in the Table of the Gods, and with Capricornus in the Irish manuscript; Jupiter with Taurus in the Pagan, and with Cancer in the Irish; Mercury with Scorpio in the Pagan, and with Taurus in the Irish; Neptune with Capricornus in the Pagan, and with Virgo in the Irish. A cornaline gem is to be seen in the museum of the Louvre, where Jupiter is represented as seated on a throne resting on a veil inflated with the wind, suggestive of the Spirit of God moving on the waters. The heaven that Jupiter represents is characterised by the signs of the Zodiac round the composition, and he is attended by two divinities, Mars and Mercury.

In the association of the twelve signs of the Zodiac with the twelve tribes of Israel, the Irish table seems to stand alone. In the great mass of illustration collected by Mr. Fowler, there is no instance of the tribes of Israel being reckoned among the guardians of the month. The association of Judah with Leo may be suggested by the verse, "The lion of the tribe of Judah." The association of Levi with Virgo and Neptune may point to the celibacy of the priesthood, and to the fact that the Levites had no territorial possessions; but how to trace any association between the remaining signs and months and the tribes of Israel I cannot as yet discover.

¹ Ménard, *Mythologie dans l'Art*, Introd., xiii.

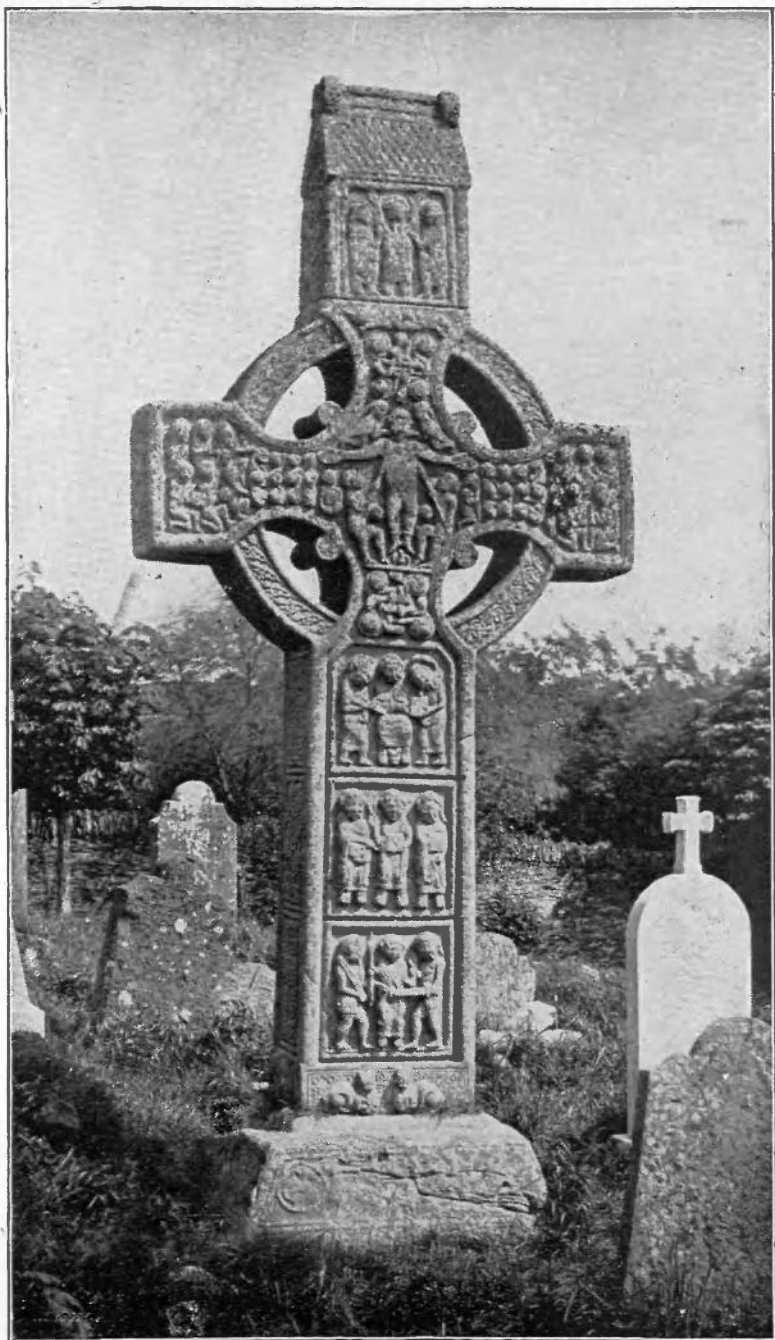
The idea of the guardianship of the apostles over the months seems to have been more generally entertained than that of the tribes of Israel. But we question whether any illustration of this idea has been found of older date in Christian art than that which appears in this Irish manuscript. The significance of the course of the sun through the Zodiac has been already dealt with, and Mr. Fowler points to the paintings of Giotto in the Arena Chapel at Padua as illustrating the parallelism in mediæval art of the natural and mystic zodiacs. In the work of Giotto, each apostle here originally presided over the sign of the Zodiac and the labour of the month during which his festival fell. (See *Ann. Arch.*, XIX, 242.)

At Veozelay, Christ is sculptured in company with twelve apostles; and at Malmesbury, in the tympanum over one of the doorways of the south porch, our Lord and two angels and the twelve apostles and labours of the months are sculptured. As the natural sun is replaced in these examples by the Sun of Righteousness, so are the signs of the Zodiac by the apostles, the first to reflect the light from our Lord, and to be the pathway of His grace; and as the stars of the Zodiac possessed an interest to the ancient astronomer which no other stars possessed, so the apostles here shine forth as a kind of synecdoche of that greater company of saints which are as the stars in multitude.¹

The date of the manuscript at Basle in which this curious illustration of the Zodiac is found has not been determined, but it is unlikely that it is later than the eighth century. And the next example that we have found in Irish art is probably a century and a half later, of the time when Muredach, Bishop of Monasterboice, carved the bas-reliefs on the base of the high cross which bears his name, now standing in the cemetery of that church.

Hitherto no effort has been made to decipher the figures on this frieze. It was only some months ago that I recognised in the rubbing I had made of the panel on the east side the outlines of three forms, which are unmistakably those of Aries, Taurus, and Gemini, the

¹ Fowler, *op. cit.*, 185.



MONASTERBOICE CROSS.

Zodiacal signs for March, April, and May. Perceiving that the signs of these three spring months were appropriately placed facing the east, I at once turned to the north side, and there I recognised the signs of the three winter months—Sagittarius, Capricornus, and Aquarius. I then turned to the west side, but here the task at first seemed hopeless, so utterly destroyed did the surface of the stone appear to be. However, with the help of comparative study of other early representations of the Zodiac (western side), some of which representations bore inscriptions giving the name of the sign, I was able to identify the traces of figures still left, and I now hope to establish that the subject of this frieze on the base of Monasterboice cross is the procession of the four seasons and the sun through the Zodiac.

Commencing at the east corner of the south side immediately after Leo, the Zodiacal sign for July, we have the two-horsed chariot of the sun, preceded by riders on horseback; these I am inclined to interpret as the four seasons—summer, autumn, spring, and winter.¹

In a German manuscript described by Mr. R. Brown,² there is an old treatise on the signs of the Zodiac, where the heavens are described, and it is said that under the circle of the fixed stars there is another circle, that of the Zodiac. The writer goes on to enumerate the seven ancient planets, each of which is accompanied by that Zodiacal sign in which the particular planetary exaltation occurs. Here Leo is to accompany Sol; the wheel is a solar emblem; the car and horses resemble that of Auriga. In ancient art it occasionally occurs that two horses alone form a symbol of the sun, and Phaethon is drawn by two-horses on a gem in the museum of Florence. All these images correspond with the sculptures on our frieze, where we have Leo for July, the driver in the two-horsed chariot for summer, and the three horsemen for the other three seasons. In Milton we read—

“The sun

Was bid turn reins from the equinoctial road,”

and in this instance the reins are strikingly visible

¹ See *Archæologia*, XII, 209; XVIII, 205; XLIV, 137.

² *Archæologia*, XLVII, 337.

twisted into the form of 8. Horsemen are often seen to figure as symbols of some one month. In five Anglo-Saxon manuscripts enumerated by Mr. Fowler, a horseman is the symbol of the month of May, as also in Giotto's fresco in the Arena Chapel at Padua, and in the pavement at Aosta in Italy; also in France, in the pavement of St. Denis, and the doorway of Chartres, and in England at St. Alban's and Gloucester Cathedral.

There can be little doubt about the identification of Leo, Taurus, Aries, Gemini on the east, Capricornus and Sagittarius on the north; but it would be quite justifiable to question the accuracy of that of the other six, and the appearance of the goat and the kid and moon, between Cancer and Libra on the west, also requires explanation.

To begin with Aquarius, it may be asked how this Irish image of a centaur carrying a tree or a branch of a tree can be meant for the sign of January, which is usually symbolised by a water-carrier. However, further research will show that a tree, or the branch of a tree, held in his right hand or over his right shoulder, instead of a pitcher or leathern pouch for water, is no uncommon symbol for Aquarius. And this, indeed, is one of those instances in which the mere sign for the month is combined with the symbol for the occupation of the month. Now it was considered by writers before the date of Vincent de Beauvais that the occupation for January was the felling of wood. Palladius, describing winter months, says, "One can almost hear the resounding axe of the woodman in the frosty air, see the bright golden-coloured chips and piles of brown shells of bark upon the ground, and smell the fresh sylvan odour of the scattered boughs. Pine, elm, ash, cypress, fir, poplar, these are best felled for timber in winter."¹ And Pliny further says, "As for the timber that is squared with the axe and by that means rid from the bark, it should be fallen or cut downe between mid-winter and the time that the wind Favonius bloweth."²

At Padua, Giotto has painted January as a youth richly clothed, carrying a tree in each hand; while

¹ *De re Rustica*, Nov. xv, 1; Dec. i, 1; Jan. xxii.

² Pliny, Holland's Translation, XVIII, 30.

Ruskin, describing the Zodiac on the great porch of St. Mark's in Venice, which is held by Lazari to date from 1205, remarks—

"The months are personified as follows. JANUARY. *Carrying home a noble tree on his shoulders, the leafage of which nods forward, and falls nearly to his feet.* Superbly cut. This is a rare representation of him." Spenser gives the same symbol as that on St. Mark's.

"Then came old January, wrapped well
In many weeds to keep the cold away;
Yet did he quake and quiver like to quell,
And blow his nails to warm them if he may;
For they were numbed with holding all the day
An hatchet keen, *with which he felled wood,*
And from the trees did lop the needless spray:
Upon a huge great earthpot steane he stood,
From whose wide mouth there flowed forth the Roman flood."¹

However, though some instances may occur of Aquarius carrying a tree, I have not yet found any example in Christian art of Aquarius being represented as a centaur, as well as Sagittarius. A centaur holding a branch is described by Dennis² as appearing on the storied urns of Volterra; but what the signification of this image was I have no means of discovering.

However, looking into Inghirami's Etruscan monuments, I find that the centaur has been treated as an emblem signifying water because he was born of Nepheli, signifying Cloud. In a restoration this writer gives of a celestial planisphere as conceived by the Etruscans, we have (only better executed) the same image as we see here—a centaur holding a branch of a leafy tree.

But I could find no way of connecting this image, which occurs when the sun is between Libra and Scorpio, with Aquarius. I had to seek help from some other more learned than I, and I hope no gentleman present will feel jealous if I say that I turned in the first instance to two women astronomers whose names should be as household words among us, Miss Clarke and Lady Huggins, sending them proofs of the phototype from my drawings. I now ask permission to

¹ *Mutabilitie*, Canto VII, 42.

² *Cities and Cemeteries of Etruria*, II, 174.

read some of the remarks of that most sweet and gentle Lady Huggins.

She begins, "You have marked Aquarius as doubtful. I incline strongly to believe this figure is meant for Aquarius. The Arabians represented the sign by a saddled mule carrying two water barrels.

"As you mention Etruscan matters, I quite agree that the object in the hand of Aquarius is very like a tree branch treated Etruscanly. And I dare say you have noticed that the very peculiar way in which the legs of the horsemen are carried forward on their steeds is an attitude that occurs in Etruscan art."

I suppose the instance Lady Huggins refers to is that on the tomb of the Tarquinii, of which I have a tracing; but if you will observe any barelegged Irish boy riding a barebacked horse up a steep hill you will see that he leans back and thrusts his legs forward exactly in the position of those old Etruscan Kings, and it is possible that the idea of ascension is meant to be conveyed.

Turning to the west side of this frieze, we find traces of a figure throwing up its arms, which we believe to be all that remains of the sign of Libra. Ruskin describes such a figure for September on the fifth side of the twenty-fifth capital of the Ducal Palace in Venice as a woman standing in a wine tub. In the fragment on the cross, only the head and arms are visible; the stone has been so broken that the outline of the tub has disappeared. The labours of the vintage were held to be the occupation for September. In the classical representations of the months enumerated by Mr. Fowler we find symbols of the vintage in an illuminated calendar dated 354. Also in the Bede woodcuts, in Cot. MSS. Julius A. vi, and Tiberius B. v, and in the cathedral of Aosta a man standing in a vat treading grapes is inscribed "September." On a doorway at Sens in France the signs of the Zodiac occur in company with a series of symbols of the months, and here the vintage is the occupation for September. In the projecting porch of the central doorway in the cathedral at Cremona, and also on the projecting porch of San Zeno at Verona, and in the baptistry of the cathedral at Parma and

the archivolt of the west doorway of the cathedral of St. Mark at Venice.

Although owing to the ruined condition of the western side of the base of this monument at Monasterboice the attempt at interpretation of these figures may be considered as mere guesswork, yet the fact that the three signs for spring and the three for winter are still recognisable on the eastern and northern sides confirms the belief that the remaining six of the Zodiacal signs completed the frieze, and the discovery of this subject on a monument of Irish ecclesiastical art of this early date, the close of the ninth and beginning of the tenth century, is of much importance in the history of the development of Christian art. We have here a survival from paganism three hundred years before we find it taking its place in the divine comedy of Dante, in Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespere, and Milton, and with regard to the literature of the subject it is curious to observe that the most striking quotations here given are from poems that first saw the light in Ireland, the "Law of Patrick," and the verses of Spenser on "Mutability."

We must dwell on the poetic aspect of the subject if we would understand why the course of the sun as conceived by the ancients was such a favourite subject in Christian art.

The attitude of the human mind in contemplation of the works of the Creator as revealed in the Zodiac from the earliest Christian period to the middle ages forms an interesting chapter in the history of Christian art and poetry. In the first instance the "Cain" Law of Patrick tells us that the Creator, the great King, who separated the firmament from chaos, made seven divisions between the earth and the firmament, naming them after the seven planets, while between the sun and the firmament came the third heaven, that named the immovable Olympus. The earth is mid-distance between the firmament and the depth of hell, the firmament surrounding the earth as a shell surrounds an egg. And the heavenly King divided the firmament into twelve parts corresponding to the twelve months in the year. This firmament is said to be a mighty sheet of crystal, and it and the planets have been revolving ever since

creation like a wheel, and the names given to the divisions of this wheel are those of the Zodiac.

Then Oengus the Culdee in the eighth century writes in the *Saltair na Rann*:—"The Creator named every constellation after the shapes of those stars that surround the firmament, even as he disposed the mountains in their ranges above the plains, so did he ordain the stars in their vast masses. And these are the twice six constellations that the white God has created."

Then the writer of the Irish *Treatise on Astronomy* continues:—"The Creator, having created Man, whose end was His glory, shows that by the passage of the sun through the successive signs of the Zodiac we enjoy the blessed influences of the four seasons."

The ethical idea which we find in embryo here is developed throughout the periods we term the dark ages and the middle ages in the works of Dante and Chaucer, and exquisitely versified by Spenser, though with more of classical than Christian devotional feeling. Dante makes Beatrice bid the poet enter that part of heaven in which, according to his astronomical system, the equinoctial circle and the Zodiac intersect. The wonders of the mighty Architect are revealed; we are bid to see

"How thence oblique
Brancheth the circle where the planets roll
To pour their wished influence on the world,"

and to consider that if the Zodiac circle did not thus bend, much power would be lost to the earth. There must be no departure here from the universal order. The sun is described as

"The great Minister
Of nature (that upon the world imprints
The virtue of the heaven and doles out
Time for us with his beam) went circling on."

Then we have the wonderful picture of spring with which Chaucer introduces the *Canterbury Tales*, telling of its freshness and revivifying power, and how the melody of birds and all the quickening energies of Nature are awakened when

"The yonge sonne
Hath in the Ram his halfe course i-ronne,"

and Shakespere in his few lines at the opening of the second act of *Titus Andronicus* gives us a picture splendid in colour as the Aurora of the Italian painter—

“As when the golden sun salutes the morn
And having gilt the ocean with his beams
Gallops the Zodiac in his glistering coach
And overlooks the highest peering hills.”

Spenser in his beautiful poem on “Mutability” describes order, bidding the times and seasons of the year pass in procession before the throne of Nature in her majesty—

“Still moving yet unmoved from her sted.”

Here the four seasons are followed by personifications of the twelve signs of the Zodiac, who come riding by. In seven instances out of the twelve, Spenser gives an entirely new poetry and symbolism to the old-world, time-worn signs. The first rider, Mars, is borne by Aries, the Ram, who, in his verse, becomes transformed to that golden ram that bore the flying Helle through the air—

“The same which over Hellespontus swam.”

In February, Taurus becomes the bull all garlanded with spring flowers that bore Europa

“’Mid waves through which he waded for his love’s delight.”

In the Gemini of May he shows the twin sons of Jupiter and Leda, Castor and Pollux, who bear upon their shoulders “the fayrest mayd on ground.” Leo is transformed to the lion once conquered in the Nemean forest by Hercules the Amphytrionide.

The sign for October in Spenser’s hands, combining the tales of Homer and Ovid, becomes that dreadful scorpion—

“The same which by Diana’s doom unjust
Slew great Orion.”

As Ovid tells us, Orion died by a scorpion’s bite, and Homer says, “Even so when rosy-fingered dawn took Orion for her lover, ye gods that live at ease were jealous thereof, till chaste Artemis of the golden throne slew him in Ortygia.”

Sagittarius is identified with Chiron, son of Saturn and fair Nais, one of the Oceanides, and mother of Glaucus, although Chiron was the son of Saturn and Phyllyra, the most righteous of the centaurs and teacher

of Achilles in the arts of music and of war; till finally December rides forth, forgetful of the cold, "his Saviour's birth his mind did so much glad." And Capricornus becomes the shaggy-bearded goat who nursed the infant Jupiter upon Mount Ida.

The longer we dwell upon these successive images, the more we feel the exquisite imaginative power of the poet by which he revivifies and transfigures the stereotyped forms of ancient classical iconography.

Milton recalls us to the religious aspect of the subject, and he seems to develop the thought of the third Irish writer here quoted, as also of Dante, on the blessed influences of the Zodiac, whose path, says Dante,

" . . . Not bending thus in Heaven above,
Much virtue would be lost."

Milton goes on to show the ruin that would ensue without this annual progress of the sun—

"Else how had the world
Avoided pinching cold and scorching heat."

Before concluding this subject, it may be well to observe that it was not only poets and saintly writers of old who gave the Zodiac so prominent a part in their works. The architects of those great cathedrals of Gothic art on the Continent, following the same religious and poetic instinct, were wont to place these signs in the most prominent parts of their buildings. It was upon the archivolt of a great porch, on a doorway, or a portion of the interior pavement nearest to the door that they were generally found. Symbols of the passage of time and the chances and changes of this life, they were also to convey some special message to the worshipper on his first entrance into the temple. It will be remembered in connection with the particular instance which forms the subject of our paper that the class of monument—that is, the high cross—on which this Zodiac is carved is, if not a doorway or porch to a sanctuary, at all events a sign set up to mark its limits, and is the first point at which the sacred precincts might be entered; and the thought suggested by this coincidence is that the fitting prelude to all religious service should be the contemplation of the order of God in creation and the glory of God in the heavens.