

Observations on the Roman Station of Housesteads, and on some Mithraic Antiquities discovered there, in a Letter from the REV. JOHN HODGSON, Secretary, to the REV. A. HEDLEY, of Newcastle upon Tyne.

Read December 3, 1822.

MY DEAR SIR,

Upper Heworth, Nov. 22, 1822.

SINCE I had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Gibson, Mr. Hodgson, and yourself, at Housesteads, on the 23d of July last, my professional engagements, and a long series of domestic afflictions, have, from day to day, put it out of my power to arrange the notes I have taken at different times among the ruins of that station, and to offer my promised observations on the Mithraic antiquities lately discovered there.

The study of Antiquities seems to have been little cultivated among the English prior to the time of Henry the Eighth. The Greeks, who had fled before the Turks, with the lamp of learning, from their own country into Italy, and the almost contemporaneous invention of the Art of Printing, spread all over Europe that spirit of enquiry, and that intense application to letters, which contributed to produce the Reformation, and to bring out that constellation of talent, which began to shine in Henry's reign, and continued into those of his children. In this, Leland was not one of the least of the luminaries. He obtained from Henry the title of "Antiquary to the King," and travelled six years all over the kingdom, making notes and collecting materials for extensive works on the History and Antiquities of the kingdom.

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His observations on the Roman Wall and the stations upon it are, however, of a general nature, and contain internal evidence, that he never visited the neighbourhood of the place to which our present enquiries are directed. His information, he tells us, was derived chiefly from Dr. Delaval, the Master of St. Mary's Hospital, in the Westgate, in Newcastle; and from the Vicar of Corbridge: and from the former of these sources he learnt, that "betwyxt Thyrlwall and North Tyne, yn the wast ground stondeth yet notable peaces of the wall, the which was made *ex lapide quadrato*, as yt there appeereth yet."

Camden's account of the Roman antiquities in Northumberland, from the first edition of his *Britannia* to that in 1594, is also very slight. In the edition of 1590, he says, that "the Wall after leaving Cumberland and passing the Irthing, shows, in the first place, he carcase of a castle, which they now call Caervorran;" and tells us that "at Carraw and Waltonne, there are manifest remains of old fortifications." This is all the information he gives us of the state of the Wall between the North Tyne and the Tippal. In 1600, he, however, came into the North with his friend Mr. Cotton, and saw some parts of the Wall near Caervorran, from which place, he says, it "goes on more winding by Iverton, Forsten, and *Chester-in-the-Wall* near Busy-Gap, infamous for robbers, where I was told there were castles, for it was not safe to visit them for the moss-troopers on the borders. They told us that *Chester was a very great place*. Here," he says, "is the inscription "PRO SALUTE DESEDIANI, &c." and at Melkrig* they procured the altar "DEÆ SYRIÆ," which they took away with them. This Chester, or Chester-in-the-Wall, is, I have no doubt, the same as Housesteads, which is only about half a mile west of Busy-Gap.

Dr. Hunter, in a letter, dated May 15, 1702, respecting some antiquities found here, says, that Housesteads is "a place *so called from the abundance* of ruins" at it, and amongst which he "found several

* "Where women beat their bucks (*i. e.* washings) upon it."—*Holland*, p. 219.

pedestals, two or three pillars, two images, but somewhat defaced,"* and several inscriptions.

The strong impressions, which this remarkable place produced on the minds of other antiquaries, who visited it in the beginning of last century, may be conceived from the descriptions they have left of it. Gordon, whose *Itinerary* was published in 1727, says, it "is unquestionably the most remarkable and magnificent Roman Station in the whole island." "It is hardly credible what a number of *august remains of Roman grandeur* is to be seen here to this day, seeing in every place, where one casts his eye, there is some curious antiquity to be seen, either the marks of streets, and temples in ruins, or inscriptions, broken pillars, statues, and other pieces of sculpture scattered all over the ground."—"We caused the place to be dug where we were sitting amidst the ruinous streets of this famous oppidum."

Horsley died in 1732, in which year his *Britannia* was published. His cool and accurate style is never brightened up with the least attempt at colouring; yet he calls the place *the famous Station of Housesteads*; and adds:—"There may be two or three other stations in Britain, as Burdoswald, Elenborough, and Lanchester, that exceed this in the number of inscriptions; but none, I think, equal it as to the extent of the ruins of the town, or the number, variety, and curiory of the sculptures, which yet remain here."†—"The vast ruins of the Roman station and town are truly wonderful."§

Gale and Stukely visited it in August, 1725, and "had reason to be surprised with such a scene of Roman British antiquities as they had never beheld." They "transcribed and drew an incredible number of the finest altars, inscriptions, and noble sculptures, in large letters and excellent work; all of which Dr. Stukely, when he wrote his *Carausius*, had by him unpublished. "Many of them," says he, "are engraven by Gordon and Horsley, but they have not done them justice."

* Phil. Trans. vol. xxiii. p. 1131.

† Horsley, p. 219.

§ Ib. p. 148.

And, finally, Mr. Brand, who was here in 1779, tells us that Dr. Stukely, with great propriety, calls this place "*the Tadmor of Britain*;" and that an "immense quantity of ruins denote the site of this once famous station."*

By the concurrent testimony of the *Notitia Imperii*, and of numerous inscriptions found in and near it, it is clear that the Roman name of this place was BORCOVICUS, and that it was garrisoned by the First Cohort of the Tungrians, a people, who inhabited both sides of the Maese, in Belgic Gaul.

It is seated opposite to the thirtieth mile stone from Newcastle, and on the ridge of the line of basaltic rocks, along which the Wall runs from Sewenshiels to Caervorran. It measures within the walls "from north to south about five chains, and from east to west about seven."† Severus's wall forms its north rampart.

The southern part of it is upon a very quick descent, and the foundations, both of its walls and all its buildings, rest immediately upon the basalt, which appears in many places rugged and bare, and especially in the street, which leads north from the southern gateway.

The interior still consists of vast masses of grass-grown ruins. One heap in the south west compartment, and near the south wall, has, I think, been a sudatory, or adapted to some purpose for which a hypocaust was necessary, as the pillars and the cement, composed of brick, pebbles, limestone, and calx of lime, which are usually found in such buildings, may be seen, where the ruins are not covered with weeds and moss.

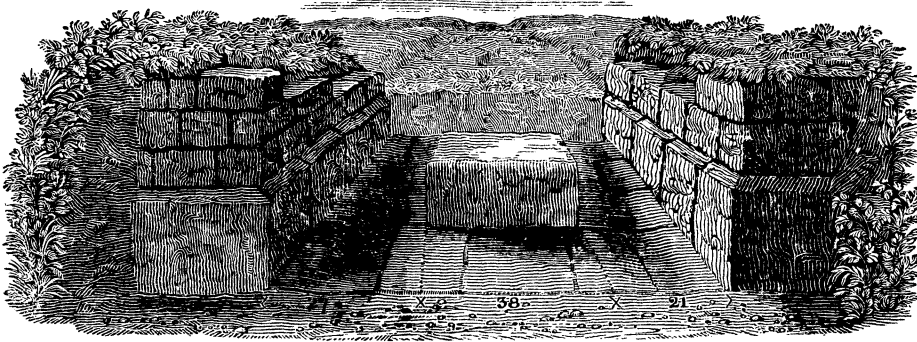
I found on the spot a traditionary belief that there were subterraneous chambers near the middle of it; and employed some workmen to clear away the ruins and rubbish near the remains of a flight of steps, which were supposed to lead downwards. They, however, soon came to the face of the whin-stone rock, presenting the same weather-beaten appearance, which it unquestionably had before a Roman hammer

* Hist. of Newcastle, vol. i. p. 610.

† Horsley, p. 148.

sounded upon it, and seeming to bear very defying features of resistance to the art of the miner. At the foot of these steps we found a heap of decayed mineral coals, and a quantity of such ashes and scoria as are produced in smitheries in which mineral coal is used. The place in the form of an inverted cone, a little to the east of the steps, is of modern construction, and has probably been intended for a kiln for drying malt, or for some such purpose.

In the short intervals between the showers, which fell on the 22d of July, I also employed two workmen to clear away the rubbish from the southern gateway, the corner-stone of which on the west side has a rude scarcement upon it, and is somewhat of a Cyclopæan size. From the outer wall-line inwards, as far as the rubbish was removed, the passage-way, which measured seven feet two inches, was laid with large freestone flagging, pretty well squared and jointed, but obstructed by a stone three feet two inches long, standing about one foot high above the flagging, and placed nearly two feet within the outer wall-line thus :—



The lower bed of this stone was hewn, and laid on the same level as the under surface of the flagging, which was closely jointed to it. Its

upper surface was somewhat uneven, as if it had been worn by treading. The flagging, too, on each side was much hollowed and worn down by treading, as if the persons passing in and out had had some obstruction put in their way, which caused them to turn sideways, and always step in the same place.

From the threshold outwards the way was made of small pieces of rounded basalt, cones of ill-burnt limestone, and gravel, amongst which I picked up a piece of very solid glass of a paleish green colour, which had been cast in a mould, and was of the same kind as some larger specimens, which Mr. Adamson and myself, in 1817, found within the area of the station at Caervorran.

The width, as here given, is from actual admeasurement; but the height of the side wall, the arrangement of the masonry, and the perspective, are drawn, I hope pretty faithfully, from memory.

The stone used in the inside of the walls, and for other ordinary purposes, has been quarried out of the cliffs in the sandstone ridge, along which the present military road passes. The altars, columns, coins, and much of the ashlar work, have been taken from a stratum of freestone on the north side of the Wall, and similar to that in which the recesses, called the *King* and *Queen's Caves*,* on the south side of Bromley Lough, are formed.

The only Well, which I saw near the station, is in front of the house, and at present in use. It affords, through the whole of the year, a plentiful supply of water, and is sunk through two yards of soil and three of very compact whinstone. The hind at Housesteads told me that in dry weather in summer, when it is "ebbest" of water, "they

* In 1817, I examined the faces of all the remarkable rocks near the Wall from Caervorran to Sewenshiels for inscriptions; but found nothing of the kind, excepting a very rude representation of a human being, with something like an ensign in its right hand, apparently executed with a pick, in one of these caves; and five yards from this figure, there is a rude cross, very legible and deep; but whether formed by design, or furrowed by the hand of time, I could not venture to decide.

lave it out," for the purpose of cleaning it. If there be any well within the station, it is probable that it is formed in the basalt, to the depth at least of the boggy ground, immediately to the north of the Wall.

The ruins of the Bath are on the east side of the brook, which divides the Kennell and Housesteads estates. Mr. Dryden, the proprietor of Kennell, told me, that a quantity of stones were "won" out of it about forty-three years since, when a fine inscribed altar was found in it, and taken away by Mr. Bullock, then steward to Mr. Errington of Beaufront. The flues of the hypocaust were full of soot, and there was an iron grating in the front of it, and in other parts much iron soldered into the stone with lead. Nearly all its walls to the foundation have been taken up, and the stones of them used in the field walls to the south east of it. Much of its interior, in a sadly ruined state, is still remaining. In 1810, the floors of its basins appeared on the edge of the brook, composed of the usual cement found in Roman baths, and laid alternately with two layers of thin freestone slates, the under surface of the lower of which was black with fire. A great flood, occasioned by the rain that fell in a thunder storm in the hot weather, in June, 1817, broke up the foundations of this building, both in the channel of the brook, and in Mr. Gibson's side of the wall, and swept them away into the inges below. These foundations were of very large ashlar laid on fine clay. The whin rock had been quarried away to a plain surface, to make room for the area of the bath, and for the sake of commencing all its walls on the same level. At its lower corner the rock under it has the appearance of baked schist.* The tyles found in it are red, and intimately mixed with coarse sand. Amongst the common mortar of its walls I found a part of the shell of

* This appearance I have found through the whole range of the basaltic cliffs from Glenwhelt to Thockrington, that species of rock passing through every variety of stratum, either exposed to day in the ravines, or found in the mines in its course. Near Cock-Play and Swinburne Mill the schist is nearly as hard as Welch roofing slate. The coal beds on the south side of the basalt are charred close to it, out of which state they pass into a soft sooty

Venus Islandica. There are also found in it (as in the neighbourhood of almost all the Roman stations which I have visited) considerable quantities of limestone, having partly the character of stalagmite, and partly that of such celular stone as forms about the mouths of petrifying wells.* Some of it is in amorphous lumps; but the greater part of it has been either sawn into rectangular pieces, or formed in a fluid state in moulds.

Where a flat stone is set up in a meadow called Gros poolhole, on the north side of the station, there is a circle of nine yards in diameter, the verge of which is hemmed with a mound, that produces grass of richer green than the ground about it. Has it the custody of the ashes of some Roman soldier? The people say, that a chorus of fairies, who live in caves in the neighbouring rock, give it the deepness of its verdure in their moon-light dances. A little farther to the east, close under the north side of the Wall, there is a basin thirty yards across, and ten feet deep next to the Wall, and six at its entrance, apparently made by human labour; but whether it was used by the Tungrian cavalry as an amphitheatre, or is merely the alveus of an ancient quarry, it is vain to conjecture.

Knagg-burn, which runs past the bath out of the mosses of the forest of Lowes, the brook from the neighbourhood of Bradley, and indeed all the water which falls within the extensive basin, which the eye overlooks towards Kennel, runs into Grinden Lough, from the west end of

substance, and then gradually again into the coal common to each stratum. This is particularly the case in the Blenkinsop and Haltwhistle-Common coal mines; in the latter of which, a little to the east of Caervorran, the coal is, as I have been told, in a solid and compact form, having in some respects obtained the character of graphite and become incombustible. It is said to be in a similar state in one part of the Town-moor of Newcastle.

* There is a very curious stratum of tufaceous limestone, in the parish of Kirkhaugh, near Alstone Moor, which resembles this in the character of being porous; but differs from it in being much lighter, and not having the same decided appearance of having been formed by incrustation and stalagmitical deposition.

which it finds its way, by subterraneous passages, a mile and three-quarters in length, through a stratum of limestone into Bardon-burn. In winter, when the swallow-holes are too small to admit the water as it falls, the lake overflows its summer boundaries, and extends itself over the meadows and pastures as far as the military way near Kennel.

The prospect from the station from the south-east to the south-west is very extensive, taking in, in its range, the high land about St. Oswald's chapel, the plantations of Minsteracres, Langley Castle, Gelston Moor, and the hills on each side of Knaresdale. Behind it, to the north, is the vast and almost pathless solitude of the forest of Lowes, here and there studded with a few enclosures, a farm house, or a shepherd's shield; and, in places, enlivened with grassy, limestone gairs, edged about with beds of deep ling, or impassable peat-mosses.

The ridge, on which the station stands, as far as Bradley to the west, is covered with a fine soil, which rests on limestone, and is thrown into long lines of regular terraces, a mode of culture, which, I think it probable, was introduced here by the Romans, and is very suitable to the sloping position of the ground.

Immediately to the south and south-west, the brow of the hill is covered with the ruins of very extensive suburbs, amongst which are lying fragments of massy columns and carved stones; but, in general, the streets and the heaps of decayed buildings are overgrown with nettles, "hemlock, and rank fumitory."

The inges, or moist meadows, which occupy the valley from Kennel bridge to Housesteads, may perhaps at some period be found to contain the common burial ground of the station. I infer this from the frequent discovery of urns and sepulchral remains in similar grounds near to Rochester, in Redesdale; and in your estate at the Bowers, as well as from the ruins of temples and other buidings, which lie along their southern margin.

These inges, in ancient times, have been covered with birch, willow, and hazel trees, as appears by the great quantities of the two former

kinds of wood, and of the nuts of the latter, which have been met with in cutting drains through them. Indeed, in Mr. Wallis's time, they were over-run with brush-wood, and particularly with the sweet-scented willow. Forty years since they were ridded of bushes, and since that time have been gradually assuming a firmer consistence and thicker sward, by the improvements made in them by draining.

On the west side of Knagg-burn, where it enters the inges, the ground is irregular, with the remains of considerable buildings. Here, close to a hedge, Horsley saw three female figures (NORTH. L.) seated each in a separate chair, and a broken altar of the largest size, but no visible letters upon it; and there is at present lying here a broken column, about four feet long and seven feet in circumference.

At the head of these inges, and opposite to the station, is a gentle ridge caused by the protuberance of a freestone rock, and which bears the name of *The Chapel-hill*. At present it is pretty thickly covered with soil and grass, and is still a little unequal with the remains of buildings; but the plough has gone over it, and the materials of the buildings have been removed, probably to make the adjoining wall, which, according to Dr. Stukely, was in 1728, "composed of dry Roman stones and fragments of carved work, thrown one upon another in the rudest manner, in order to make a sorry fence to a meadow."

On this hill, in 1702, Dr. Hunter found the altar dedicated to Jupiter by Q. Verius Superstes; that by Q. Jul. Maximus, which wants the superscription I. O. M. on its capital; and the base of the altar numbered XLIV. in Horsley's Northumberland, which he says, had been torn up by the plough before he was there, and of which he was in hopes of recovering the remaining part as soon as the harvest of that year was over. The people on the spot told him that "within the memory of their fathers they used to bury their dead here," but he adds,—“I dare not determine this point.”

Horsley says, that the "altars" and other antiquities, numbered from XXXVI. to XLVIII. in his work, "were dug up at a place called the

Chapel-hill, supposed to be the ruins of a considerable temple;" and Wallis tells us that "it was of the Doric Order, a large fragment of a Doric capital lying prostrate by it some years ago, consisting of two toruses plain, also many columns;" but this is an inference drawn, and, I think, very unjustly, from Stukely's account, which evidently places this Doric temple on the slope of the hill, and either in or very near the station.

Immediately to the west of Chapel-hill, where a plot of gently swelling ground begins to slope off into the angle formed by one runnel from the north and another from the west, the antiquities represented in the annexed plate were discovered in June last; together with some uninscribed altars, and other articles of little antiquarian value. Some workmen, who were employed by Mr. Gibson to build a dry stone fence at a short distance to the west of this place, and had permission from him to dig up for that purpose any loose stones or old walls, on condition that they neither used nor destroyed any that were inscribed or curiously carved, after removing a few loose stones near the surface, struck upon the top of the altar, No. 7. The perfect state of its finely carved horns and incense basin induced them to remove away the soil and rubbish around it with great caution; and in the progress of this curious and careful investigation, they found the spot in which they were working, bounded by four walls of common masonry. These walls faced the four chief points of the winds, and formed a rectangular area twelve feet eight inches from north to south, by ten feet from east to west, and having in the west end a recess thirty inches deep and seven feet long. The east wall to the level of the floor, which was between four and five feet below the surface, was faced on both sides; but the other three, and especially the west one, did not appear to have ever been so on their outsides, which were rough and irregular, as if they had originally been built below the level of the adjoining ground. The floor was paved with thick sandstone slates of irregular sizes and shapes. The two large

inscribed altars, and the stone bearing the zodiac, were still standing in their first situation, their backs being nearly in a line with the outside of the recess. No. 3. also appeared to occupy its original place; but No. 1. *a*, was lying on its face before the zodiac, and No. 2. on one side immediately behind it, and on a sort of pedestal of hewn stone, thirty-inches square, but very slightly raised above the level of the floor. The fragments, No. 1. *b*, *c*, *d*, and *e*, were near No. 1. *a*. The rubbish cleared out consisted of fine mould, slightly intermixed with peat moss, decayed roots of small trees, and such unhewn stones as the side walls were made of.

The head of the largest altar appears to have been slightly affected by the weather; that of No. 6. considerably so, the words DEO SOLI being almost wholly eaten out of it; but the base and the body of each of them are still as fresh and perfect, as on the day in which they were turned off the bench of the workman who hewed them.

Though there had been a long continuance of dry weather till the day before I met you there, yet you will remember, that the sides and floor of the place I have been describing, were still oozy and wet; and upon enquiry I found, that a considerable feeder of water used to rise on this spot, till about the year 1809, when a drain (*x. x.*) was made to its north-east corner, where the spring burst off, and from whence it has continued to run ever since, under cover, into the letch fed by the springs in the field immediately to the north.

At the time this drain was made, great quantities of stones were also dug out of the foundations of very extensive walls to the east of the room containing the altars, and employed in making the drain *x. x.* and a field wall to the west of Housesteads. From the information I procured on the spot, from the hind at Housesteads and his sons, I was well satisfied, that the door-way in the east wall of this room communicated with the inside of some of the apartments, which these extensive foundations enclosed.

This was an artificial cave, dedicated to the worship of Mithras, and

in itself and the antiquities found in it, affords one of the finest and most copious illustrations of the nature of that worship, of any that has been hitherto discovered. Concerning Mithras much curious information may still be derived from the religious books, the histories, traditions, and antiquities of the Persians, and out of the writings of the Greek and Roman authors; but most of all out of Porphyry, who, in a critique upon the following description in Homer's *Odyssy*, of the Cave of the Nymphs in the island of Ithica, shows an accurate acquaintance with the Mithraic ceremonies, as practised in his time, in the Roman Empire.

“ A broad-leaved olive decks the haven's head,
 “ Near to a cave, how lovely ! but how dark !
 “ The holy place of Nymphs, the Naïds called,
 “ There goblets are, and jars of marble made,
 “ Wherein the honey-bee constructs its cells :
 “ There, too, long looms of stone, on which the nymphs
 “ Sea-purple garments weave, a wond'rous sight.
 “ Fountains it has eternal, and two gates,
 “ The northern one to men admittance gives,
 “ That to the south is more divine—a way
 “ Untrod by men—t' immortals only known.”

This he takes to be an allegorical sketch of the rites and doctrines of a religion, which prevailed in Homer's time, and in the course of his explanation of the symbols contained in this passage, he observes that, “ the ancients consecrated caves and grottoes* very appositely to the world, making a part of it stand for the whole. For they made the earth the symbol of the matter out of which the world was formed. For the world, when contemplated as a mass of matter, is gloomy and dark ; but when

* "Αντρα και σπήλαια. Ammonius censet, ἄντρα esse cavernas sponte ortas ; σπήλαια vero manufactas.—Vossius, *sub voce*, antrum.

viewed in connection with the contrivance that is seen in it, and with that admirable order from which it has derived the name of *Cosmos*, it is full of beauty and cheerfulness. Hence it may be aptly enough called a cave, delightful to one just stepping into it, on account of the share he has in the beauty of its parts; but dark to him who would explore its depths, and penetrate it with his mind. So that the things, which are exterior and superficial, are delightful; those, that are internal and profound, are obscure. Thus the Persians typified the descent of souls into inferior regions, and their return from them by initiating a priest in a place, which they called a Cave.* For, according to Eubulus, Zoroaster first of all, in mountains, which bordered upon Persia, consecrated a natural cave to Mithras, the Father and Creator of all things. This cave was adorned with flowers, and pervaded with running waters, and furnished with representations of the cavern of the world, of which Mithras was the architect. This internal furniture was disposed in such a methodical manner, as to afford symbols of the elements and climates of the world. Moreover, after the time of Zoroaster, it continued a custom to perform sacred rites in caves and grottoes, either in such as were natural or artificial. For as men had founded temples, and shrines, and altars to the Olympic Gods; but hearths to the terrestrial gods and the heroes; and pits and μέγαρα to the infernal gods; so they set apart caverns and grottoes to the world, which were also sacred to the Nymphs, on account of the water which dropped and flowed in them, and over which they preside. And they not only made a cave the symbol of the natural and sensible world, but also received it as the symbol of all invisible virtues. For as caves are dark, so the essence of the virtues is obscure. And hence Saturn built a cave in the ocean, in which he hid his children. So likewise Ceres educated Proserpine in a cave with the Nymphs. Numerous examples of this kind are to be met with in reading the works of the Theologians. And on these accounts it was, I think, that the Pythagoreans, and after them Plato,

* See also Justin. Dial. cum Tryphone, p. 294. Reins. Syntag. p. 94.

were induced to call the world a cave and a grotto. For in Empedocles we hear the Virtues, which are the guides of souls, saying:—

‘ This roofed cavern we have reached at length.’

And in the seventh book of Plato’s Republic it is said:—‘ Behold the men are, as it were, in a subterranean cave, and in a dwelling formed like a grotto, having its entrance opening widely out to the light through the whole of the cave. For the seat, which is visible, is to be compared to lodgings in a prison, but the light of the fire in it to the power of the sun.’ Why the theologians have, therefore, made caverns to be the symbol of the world, and of the powers of the world, is manifestly obvious from these observations.”

In another place, the same author observes, that the ancients, even before temples were thought of, consecrated cells and caverns to the gods: as was done by the Curetes, in Crete, to Jupiter; in Arcadia, to the Moon and the Lycian Pan; in Naxos, to Bacchus; and in every place where Mithras was known, he was propitiated in cells.* Justin Martyr also says, that they, who are addicted to the worship of Mithras, affirm, that he was born from a rock, and call the place a cave.† Statius also advances a similar opinion in the following passage in his Thebaid:‡—

“ Or in a cave, in rocks of Persia hewn,

“ Mithras, who writhes, th’ indignant horns, t’ adore.”

“ The infant Jupiter, the children of Saturn, and the ark-exposed Anias and Bacchus, are all said to have been born and nursed in a sacred cave.”|| Bacchus was surnamed *Dythyrambus*, from being brought up in a cave called *Dythyrytes*, because it had *two gates*;§

* De Ant. Nymph. p. 263.

† Lib. I. 720.

§ Notes to the Delphin Ovid. Met. iii. 314.

† Dialog. cum Tryphone, p. 296.

|| Faber’s Origin of Idol. iii. p. 135.

and in Montfaucon* we have Mithras, in the character of Bacchus, rising out of a cave, and holding up a cluster of grapes, which he seems to admire. On the side of the rock out of which he rises, the word NAMA is inscribed, which is, perhaps, explained in the sculpture immediately below it, in which the words NAMA SĒBESIO, *the fountain to Bacchus*, are written on the neck of the bull. For Porphyry says, that caverns are sacred to the Naïds, who have their name from *ναμα*, *a fountain*; and Macrobius tells us, that in Thrace the Sun and Bacchus are the same, whom they call *Sebadius*, which name, Meursius says, ought to be written *Sabazius*, and quotes Eustatius as his authority, who affirms, that the Sabæ, a people of Thrace, call Bacchus *Sabazius*.† The symbols and the inscriptions mutually explain each other. The wound in the neck of the bull is the fountain; the blood issuing out of it, is wine; the dog licking the blood, is *Sirius*; all which may be intended to signify the gratefulness of wine during the influence of the Dog Star.

In clearing the rubbish out of the Mithraic cell at Housesteads, some fragments of præfêricula of red terra-cotta, ornamented with black figures, were found, and were lying amongst the other antiquities by the side of the cell on the 22d of July; but carried off by some of the country people, who were led to the spot on that day by the enquiries and search I was then making. A few observations, connected with these and the spring that rises on the site of the cell, will show that both of them were necessary to make up the series of symbols required to complete a Mithraic cavern.

We have already seen that in the opinion of the Greeks, Mithras and Bacchus were the same Deity; and Porphyry tells us, that “goblets and jars of stone were symbols of the Naïds; and vessels of terra-cotta, of Bacchus; for these are gifts grateful and acceptable to the God of

* Vol. I. p. 233, pl. 96, No. 7 and 10.

† Macro. Sat. lib. 1, cap. 18; also Cicero de Nat. Deor. lib. iii. c. 23.

the Vine, since its fruit is ripened by celestial heat; but goblets and jars of stone are proper types of the nymphs, who preside over water which flows out of rocks." "Hence in the rites of Mithras a goblet is the symbol of a fountain."*

Sir R. K. Porter visited "a Mithraic cavern" not far from the ruins of Pasargadæ, called the *Cave of the Forty Daughters*, which he describes as "deep, and containing two or three interior caves, whence issues a particularly translucent spring. The natives told us that it was formerly inhabited by a succession of holy persons. Innumerable old lamps, still left in the place, testify something of the story."†

These testimonies of ancient authors to the mysteries of Mithras being performed in caverns, is corroborated by inscriptions in Gruter and other authors, where we find one person appropriating a cell, *spelium*, DEO SOLI INVICTO MITHRÆ; another dedicating a cell "CUM SIGNIS ET CETERISQUE" to the same deity; and a third, an altar, "ARAM CUM SUIS ORNAMENTIS ET . . . BELA DOMINI INSIGNIA HABENTES N. III VT VOVERAT."‡

Let us now see how these accounts are borne out and agree with

* De Antro Nymph, p. 258, 261. The classic authors abound with descriptions of caves sacred to the Gods and the resort of Nymphs. Ovid, for instance, speaks of caves bedewed with fountains, where Diana and her Nymphs resorted. Met. lib. iii. l. 177; and in lib. xiv. l. 514, he says, that

Venulus the realms
Of Calydonia, and the Apulean bay,
And fields Mesapian leaves; in which are caves
With thick wood dark, and oozing waters light,
Where lives old Pan the semi-goat; but erst
The dwelling of the Nymphs.

Pan and the Sun were considered as the same by the Arcadians, who called him Innus and Lord of Matter, τὸν τῆς ὕλης κύριον Mac. Statur. I. xxii. p. 331. There was a cave sacred to Pan and the Moon in Arcadia.—*Porph. de Ant. Nymph.* 262.

† Travels in Georgia, Persia, &c. vol. i. p. 510.

‡ Vide Gruter, p. xxxiv. no. 5, 7, 9. Beyer's Addit. ad Seld. de Dis Syris, 53.

the several inscriptions and sculptures, to the illustration of which our present enquiries are directed. In entering upon the subject, it will, however, serve the purpose of clearness, to give some brief sketch of the history of the Mithraic worship.

The Sun in different nations and times has been worshipped under different names. In Egypt, he was named Osiris; in Phœnicia, Baal; in Thrace, Sebazius, or Bacchus; amongst the Greeks, Apollo; and in Persia, he was called Mithras; a word which, according to Vossius,* is derived from the Persian MITHER, *a Lord*. Hyde says,† that in Persia the Sun, in religious matters, was specially called *Mêhr*, a word which, in its primary signification, means *love, commiseration, pity*, which name it has, because it cherishes and renews, and, as it were, embraces the whole world with the tender affection of love. But Plutarch, in his treatise on Isis and Osiris, after some reasoning on the origin of good and evil, tells us, that Zoroaster, who is said to have flourished 5000 years before the Trojan war, called the good god, Oromazes, and the other, Arhimanius; that Oromazes resembled light more than any other sensible thing; Arhimanius, ignorance and darkness; and that there was one between them, named Mithras, for which reason the Persians call a *mediator*, Mithras. It is, however clear, from the same author, that by Mithras they meant the sun; for, in his life of Alexander he says, that Darius invoked Tiræus, one of his Eunuchs, “as he honoured *the mighty light* of Mithras, and the right hand of the king, to tell him if the death of his wife Statira, was not the least of the misfortunes which he had to bewail.”‡ Herodotus, in

* De Orig. et Prog. Idol. lib. ii. c. 9.

† Hist. Relig. Vet. Pers. p. 105. The word *Mithra* is common in Persian names, as in Mithradates, Mithrobarzanes, Mithropaustes, Mithracenes, &c.

‡ Zenophon says, that Cyrus used to swear by Mithras; Plutarch also makes Artaxerxes swear by him—Νύ τόν Μίθραν, &c.; and Curtius, (as quoted by Montf. Antiq. Exp. vol. ii. 252,) speaking of the march of Darius against Alexander, says, “he invoked the Sun, Mithras, and the Sacred Fire.”

his account of the Religion of the Persians says, "they worship the sun, the moon, earth, fire, water, and the winds; which may be termed their original deities. In after times "they borrowed from the Assyrians and the Arabians the worship of Urania (or the celestial Venus), whom the Assyrians call Mylitta, the Arabians Alytta, and the Persians Mithra."* Indeed, it is plain from antiquity, that this divinity was considered to exist not only in the several characters of a male and a female, but also in that of an hermaphrodite; and this opinion has the support of the best modern authors on the subject. The Chevalier Ramsay says, that "the Persians adored but one supreme deity, called Oromazes; but they considered the God Mythras, and the Goddess Mithra, sometimes as two emanations from the substance of Oromazes, and at others as the first production of his power;"—that "Mithra was the living image of his beauty, the original mother, and the immortal virgin; that she presented to Oromazes the ideas of all things, who gave them to Mythras to form a world resembling those ideas." And again, "in the spaces of the Empyreum, a pure and divine fire extends itself, by means of which not only bodies but spirits become visible. In the midst of this immensity is the great Oromazes, first principle of all things. He diffuses himself everywhere; but it is there that he is manifested in a more glorious manner. Near him is seated the god Mithras, or the second spirit; and under him Psyche, or the goddess Mithra."† Faber says, "like Siva, Osiris, Bacchus, Adonis, Venus, and Minerva, Mithras was an hermaphrodite, and was venerated at once as the sun and the moon; that is to say, as the god both of the solar and the lunar gate. That he was the sun is well known; but Herodotus informs us that he was called the moon, and the same as Mylitta, the Assyrian Venus, or female principle of generation. Or if we suppose *Mithra* to be rather the feminine of *Mithras*,

* See Encyclop. Methodiq.—Antiq. under Mihir. Beloe's Herod. Clio, 131, vol. i. p. 135. Also Strabo, lib. ii. and Justin, lib. i.

† Travels of Cyrus, book ii.

as *Jana* is of *Janus*, and *Maia* of *Maius*, the position will be virtually the same.”* In this hermaphrodite capacity he is not difficult to be recognised in the following passage :—“There is amongst the Brachmins, in India,” says Bardisanes, as quoted by Porphyry, “a natural cave of great magnitude in a very lofty mountain, near the middle of the earth; and in it a statue of ten or twelve cubits in height, having its hands crossed, the right side exhibiting all the parts of a man, and the left those of a woman. In the right breast the figure of the sun is sculptured, on the left that of the moon. In the two arms the artist has carved a great number of angels; and of other things which the world contains, as mountains, the sea, a river, the ocean, plants and animals, and every individual creature.†

Without entering into the controversy about the era in which Zoroaster flourished, or the still more dubious questions,—who was the founder of the Mithraic worship, and when it commenced,—we can with great certainty affirm, that it prevailed in Persia before the time of Herodotus, who wrote 440 years before Christ; but it does not appear to have been known to the Romans till about 350 years after that time; for Plutarch tells us that the pirates against whom Pompey was sent into Cilicia, A. U. C. 685, after plundering and destroying many temples, which till then had been held sacred and inviolable, “celebrated foreign sacrifices, those for instance of the town of Olympus, and performed certain hidden rites, of which those of Mithras are kept up even until now, and which first began with them.” From the time of their being introduced to the knowledge of the Romans by the pirates, to the year A. D. 101, I have met with no notice of them: in that year a dedication occurs‡ to Mithras; and Pallas, in Porphyry,§ mentions the Mithraic mysteries in connection with the abolition of human sacrifices, by the Emperor Hadrian, who reigned from A. D. 117

* Faber Orig. of Pag. Idol, vol. iii. p. 182. † De Styge, p. 283. Ed. Cantab. 1655.

‡ Gruter, p. xxxv. 2.

§ De Abstin. lib. ii. sec. 56, p. 94.

to 137. Plutarch, we have just seen, says, they were kept up in his time and he died in A. D. 140. During the reign of Commodus they are frequently mentioned: * also in A. D. 197; † and about this time they had extended all over the western Empire; and from their prevalence and the openness with which they were professed, appear not only to have been tolerated, but to have been the favourite and fashionable religion of the Romans. A taurine tablet of Mithras was found at York in 1747, ten feet below the surface of the earth. Dr. Stukely saw an image of him at Chester, which is given by Horsley, ‡ who also has an inscription that mentions him, found at Cambeck-fort, in Cumberland. We shall presently see that he continued to be worshipped at Housesteads in A. D. 253.

No. 1. *a*. This sculpture is in very high relief, and, with the fragment of it represented by the wood-cut at page 287, measures nearly six feet in height. It was found, lying on its face, immediately in front of the zodiac. By comparing that which remains of it with the delineations of similar, but more perfect, sculptures in Montfaucon and other authors, it will be seen, that it is only part of a very large table. That of the same kind which was found at York, in 1747, is described by Dr. Stukely in the Philosophical Transactions, § and figured in Gough's edition of Camden's Britannia. When perfect, we suppose this to have represented Mithras, habited in a candys and Persian tiara, kneeling in a spirited posture on the back of a prostrate bull, the head of which he pulls back, by a horn or its muzzle, with his left hand, while, with his right, he plunges a dagger into its neck. One fore leg of the bull is usually bent under its body; the other stretched out. In seven of the sculptures in Montfaucon, || Mithras is also attended with two

* Gruter, p. xxxv. 1. Lampridius in the Life of Commodus. Reinesii Syntag. Vet. Insc. p. 89.

† Reines. Syntag. p. 89.

‡ Gent. Mag. 1751, p. 102. and Horsley's Brit. Rom. Cheshire, no. V.

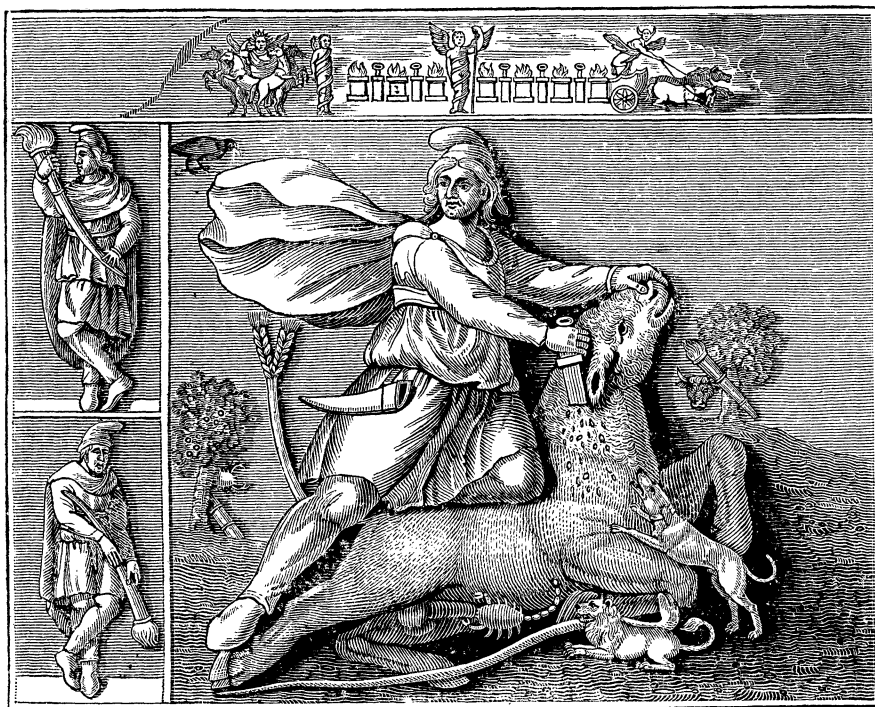
§ No. 493, p. 214.

|| Antiq. Explained vol. i. p. 233, pl. 96. Hyde's Hist. Relig. Vet. Pers. p. iii. tab. 1.

torchbearers, clad like himself, and with the figures of a lion, crow, scorpion, serpent, crab, dog, or other signs, either of the zodiac, or some planet or constellation.

Montfaucon thinks these two attendants are also Mithrases ; and that he, who is before, represents the rising sun ; he, on the bull, the sun at noonday ; and the one, to the right hand of the spectator, the setting sun. And he is further confirmed in this opinion by a marble, which Gruter describes, in which these young men have each a star over their heads, one of which he says is the star of the east, the other of the west. If, however, under the silence of antiquity on the subject, we be allowed to hazard a conjecture as to the meaning of these symbols, I see no objection against the supposition, that, with the centre figure, they were intended to represent Mithras or the sun, in a triple state ; and that in the capacity, in which they are here placed, they are the genii, or guides of souls, passing through the two gates mentioned by Homer in his description of the cave of the nymphs. On these gates Porphyry is very diffuse. In the theology of the ancients he says, they represent the tropics of Cancer and Capricorn. That Cancer being in the north, and the sign of the summer solstice, is the way, by which souls descend *εἰς γέενναι* ; and that the way to the abode of the gods is by Capricorn, which is in the south, and the sign of the winter solstice. "The gates," he adds, "which look towards the north, are rightly said to be open to the descent of men ; but the southern quarter is not merely the way of the gods, but of those going up to the gods. For which cause Homer does not say, the way of the gods, but of immortals."* Indeed this, in a measure, seems to be the view, which M. De-puis has taken of the matter, in his account of the sculpture represented by the following wood-cut :—

* De Antro Nympharum, p. 264.



“The points of the equinoxes,” he says, “are represented on one side by a bull, or by the head of a bull, suspended in a tree covered with leaves, in which also hangs a lighted torch; on the other side is a tree loaden with fruit, to which a reversed and extinguished torch is attached, and at its foot is a scorpion. All this is designed for nothing more than the two signs of the equinoxes, the state of light, and the departure of the sun; the birth and death of nature, the limits of the empire of light and darkness, of good and evil, of the reign of Oro-mazes and of that of Arhiman. So likewise are the two genii on the right, which are habited nearly like Mithras, one of which bears a lighted flambeau pointing upwards, the other, one extinguished. The

one is the genius of Taurus, or of the animal, whose blood fecundates the earth; the other, that of the Scorpion, or of the sign of Autumn, which we find placed by a tree loaden with fruit and a torch reversed."*

But it may be objected to all this, that, however plausible it appears, it is nothing but conjecture; that the Mithraic signs were symbols of mysteries which were never divulged, and concerning which antiquity is silent. It cannot, we allow, be asserted that any regular treatise on the subject has descended to these times; but, I think, that very satisfactory evidence may be found to prove, that the two attendants on Mithras were the guides, or guardians, of souls in their passage into and out of life. No one disputes that the caduceus, which we find in the left hand of the figure under illustration, was one of the symbols of Mercury, who is constantly represented as the guide of souls from the higher to the lower regions.† The Egyptians, according to Macrobius, asserted, that it was an emblem of the generation of men, *- quæ genesis appellatur*.‡ Indeed, the author of one of the Mithraic sculptures in Hyde has not left this office of the genius of the northern gate to be explained by the unambiguous symbol, the unfolding leaf of the lotos, which he places behind him; but confirms the Egyptian exposition of the meaning of the caduceus, by an exhibition which cannot be misunderstood; while, in the palm-branch, with the skull in the middle of it, he strengthens our hypothesis, that the figure on the right side of the Mithraic tables, is the genius of Homer's southern gate; for, among the Abraxas gems,§ we find Anubis (the Mercury of the Egyptians) represented with the caduceus in his left hand, and a palm-branch in his right; and Apuleius tells us, "that this errand-goer both of the heavenly and infernal gods was carried aloft in the processions of Isis, having his face sometimes black, at others gilded, stretching

* Encycl. Methodique. Antiq. art. *Mithras*.

† Phornuti de Natur. Deor. Specul. ed. Lugd. 1608, fol. 6. Macrobi. Sat. lib. 1. cap. xvii.

‡ Sat. lib. i. c. xix.

§ Montfaucon ii. 230, pl. 50.

forth his long dog's neck, and bearing the caduceus in his left hand, and shaking a green palm branch in his right."* Now Porphyry, speaking of the rigid severities practised among the Egyptians, previous to the observance of any great religious festival, says, "they slept upon beds made of the boughs of the palm or date tree, which they call, '*baïs*,'" a word, which, according to Pignoriust†, signifies in the language of Hierapolis, *the soul*. Apuleius calls‡ it, *palma victrix*; and says, that the sandals of the moon were made of its leaves. I would, therefore, infer, that the hieroglyphic of the palm-branch and the skull was meant to convey the idea of the soul triumphing over death, and in this sense it appears to be placed with great propriety behind the genius of the gate, which leads to the abode of the immortals.

That this exposition is entitled to some consideration, it will be further apparent from an enquiry into the meaning of the lunette, a symbol in the Mithraic mysteries. On our table, only a fragment of it is



left, as in the annexed wood cut. What accompaniments it had, when perfect, it would be idle to conjecture. In two of the sculptures in Montfaucon, and in two others in Hyde, the bust of the moon is placed over the genius of descending souls, with a crescent either on her forehead, or behind her shoulders: and in each sculpture the bust of the sun occupies a corresponding situation over the genius of ascending souls. Now Macrobius says, "there can be no doubt that the moon is the author and framer of mortal bodies:"§ and Porphyry tells us,

* Metamorph. lib. xi. vol. ii. p. 693. ed. Basil, 1560.

† Mensæ Isiacæ Expos. fol. 10. a, ed. Venet. 1605. ‡ De Asin. Aureo l. xi. vol. ii. p. 643.

§ In Somn. Scip. lib. i. cap. xi.

that the moon is the "queen of generation;" and elsewhere that "Plato mentions two doors, one of which is open to such as are ascending to heaven; the other, to those coming down to the earth. And thus the theologians make the sun and moon the gates of souls, and say, that they ascend by the sun, and descend by the moon"* But I forbear to load my letter with further quotations from the works of the ancients, in illustration of this part of my subject; many of whom, and Porphyry especially, contain curious notices, mixed with much unintelligible jargon, respecting the various views in which the Mithraic gates were taken. There is, however, some reasoning in Macrobius, which seems to throw considerable light on the meaning of the principal figures on these tablets, and with it I shall conclude this part of my enquiry. Mercury, he says, and the sun were the same deity, and among the Egyptians the former was painted with his lower wing of an azure colour, by which the sun's course through the winter signs was represented: the upper wing was clear, and showed his progress through the summer part of the zodiac. In the fable of Argus being slain, and his eyes put out by Mercury, Argus is the heavens, lighted up by stars, and watching over the earth, which the Egyptians, in their hieroglyphics, represent by an ox. The starry vault of heaven is, therefore, then said to be killed by Mercury, when the sun, as it were, subdues the stars by obscuring them in the day time, and by hiding them from our eyes in the brightness of his own light.†

The fragments of this table, represented by figures 1. *b*, *c*, *d*, and *e*, were found near the middle of the cave; and, by the cleanness and freshness of their fractures, appeared as if they had been very recently broken off. This, however, might be owing to their having been buried at a depth in the earth, where the uniform consistence and temperature, imparted to the soil by the springs about the cave, would preserve them for many years in the same state. It was plain that

* De Antro Nymph. p. 268.

† Sat. lib. i. cap. xix.

they had been stricken off with a hammer and by design—I would say, to give the stone on which they were formed a flatter bed, and thus make it useful for building purposes, or as a cover for a drain, not with any view of destroying a carving, which was viewed in the light of a pagan idol, and on that account abominated.

Figure 1. *b*, is the shoulder knot of the *candys*, as Lucian calls it, of “Mithras the Mede, who also wore a tiara; but could neither speak Greek, nor know when people drank his health.”

Figure 1. *c*. is the right hand of Mithras, grasping the dagger, with which he stabs the bull.

Figure 1. *e*, is broken in two. I suppose it to be the figure of a dog in a rampant posture, having its fore feet upon the neck of the bull, for the convenience of licking its blood. In an astrological sense it might represent the constellation Canis, or rather Sirius, which is the principal star in Canis; for, according to Plutarch, when Oromazes had amplified himself three times, and removed himself as far from the sun as the sun is from the earth, he embellished the heavens with stars, one of which he made superior to all the rest, and as it were, the guide and guardian of them all, namely, Sirius, or the dog-star. Porphyry, however, endeavours to show, that the doctrine of the transmigration of souls was intended to be shadowed out by these symbols. For, in speaking of the religion of the Persians, he tells us, that “the highest order of the Magi neither ate nor killed any animal; that the second order slaughtered no tame ones; and that the third sort did not lay hands indiscriminately upon all kinds: for their fundamental dogma is, that souls undergo transmigration, which they seem to point out in the mysteries of Mithras; for, in noticing our conformability to animals, they are wont to call us by their names. Thus the priests, who officiate at their orgies, they call lions; the women, *hyænas*;^{*} and the servants, crows. So likewise those, whom they call *Patres*, or fathers,

* This should probably be lionesses, the text having *ύαινας* instead of *λειαινας*. See notes to the Cambridge ed. of Porphyry.

are denominated eagles and hawks. But he, who is initiated into those rites, of which the lion is the symbol, assumes the forms of various animals. Concerning which Pallas gives us a reason in the treatises which he wrote respecting Mithras. For the people, he says, imagine this to have reference to the circle of the zodiac; but the opinion is founded in truth, which makes them allude to the mystery of human souls, which they say are destined to inhabit different kinds of bodies.”*

Figure 2. consists of two fragments of a neatly executed statue in sandstone, three feet high, in the usual Mithraic dress, and bearing something like a torch pointing upwards. When found, it was lying on one of its sides on the square flag-stone immediately behind the zodiac. It was broken in two at the middle of its legs, and wanted its head. Its left arm and the upper part of the torch are also much mutilated. A similar figure, already alluded to as having been seen by Dr. Stukely at Chester, is described by Pennant as dressed in “a Phrygian bonnet, with a little mantle across his shoulders, and a short jacket on his body. He is placed standing with a torch in his hands declining.”†

From the situation in which this statue was found, I suppose it to have stood at the outlet of the cave, representing Mithras as the Genius of the winter solstice and of the mystical gate, which led to the happy mansions of the celestial god Oromazes. Too much of the western wall of the recess had been taken up to enable me to form any correct notion how this symbolical gate was formed, but I could have no doubt that the large, well-hewn stone, upon which the statue was lying, was intended as the first step of the initiated out of “the valley of the shadow of death,” into day-light and scenes of cheerfulness and joy.

* Porph. de Abstin. lib. iv. cap. xvi. p. 165, 166. See also concerning the dog-star, under the name Sothis, in the treatise De Ant. Nymph. and in Plutarch de Is. and Osiride; but especially Macrobius In. Som. Scip. lib. i. cap. xvii.

† Tour in Wales, I. 159.

Figure 3. was found at the north-east corner of the cave. It was standing with its back to the wall. The bust of the sun on its capital has seven radii round its head, and is in very rude and low relief. Indeed the whole altar, which is twenty inches high, is a very poor specimen of masonry. The inscription, which is also rude and inaccurately cut, may be englished thus:—

Hieronymus, performing a vow, freely and duly dedicates this to the Sun.

The number 4. near the plan of the Mithraic cave, marks the spot where a plain altar, seventeen inches high, and bearing an illegible inscription, was found. It has the patera on its right side, and the præfericulum on its left.

No. 5. This stone, when perfect, has been four feet high, and two feet and a half broad. The upper part of it has been thinned away, probably for the purpose of making it less top-heavy, by which it has been made more liable to be broken. At present it is in several pieces, and the arms of the figure in the centre, and the signs Cancer and Libra, in the zodiac, are wanting, as well as something on each side of the plane of the lower hemisphere, as fractures in the stone, in these places, plainly show, that the tablet is mutilated there. Enough, however, of this very remarkable, and (as far as I have been able to learn) unique relic, remains to show both its original form, and for what purpose it was constructed: and while we cannot, I think, be wrong in supposing, that it was intended, in common with the “signs and ornaments” of caves similar to that in which it was found, to convey some dogma or precepts of the Mithraic religion, in a dark and enigmatical manner, I would still ask this meed of praise to it, that, in its solution, there is a more learned, more connected, and more philosophical development and discovery of the doctrines which it symbolizes, than can be conceded to the taurine tablets. For, while all these bear strong features of resemblance to each other, as well as proofs, that their origin was in some system of Sabianism, there is in the number, variety,

and arrangement of their symbols, a sort of indication, not only that they were not constructed according to any known canon, calculated to teach a stated and uniform system of doctrines, and consequently to offer an equal portion of knowledge to the mind of every aspirant; but that most of them were the mere common-place productions of very ordinary ministers at the altars of Mithras,—of mystics, who had neither enlightened their minds by any extensive reading, nor methodised their knowledge by any system of reasoning. The caduceus and the crescent on our tablet of this kind, do indeed bespeak, for that which is wanting of it, considerable exemption to this remark, and by thus furnishing us with a sort of argument, that it originated in the same skilful theologian, that designed the zodiacal tablet, excite an unavailing regret that so little should have been left of it. But the sculpture before us, like the Caervorran inscription to Ceres, excites no such feelings. They connect us with men of genius, learning, and piety, who inhabited the bleak mountain-ridges on the line of the Roman wall, in Northumberland, sixteen centuries ago. Marcus Cecilius in his elegant lines to Ceres, gives a masterly and a beautiful example of his skill in Pagan theology. And here we have a table of symbols, disposed in such methodical order (*κατὰ συμμετρικὰ ἀποστάσεις*) to borrow an expression of Porphyry respecting the arrangements of the symbols in the Mithraic caverns, that, on comparing them, it might be supposed, that either that philosopher's exposition of some of the doctrines of the Persian Magi had been derived from this tablet, or the tablet designed from his exposition,

The figure in the centre I take to be that of Mithras, placed between the two hemispheres of the earth, holding a sword in his right hand, and a spiral object in his left. The greater part of which I conceive is either explained, or not obscurely hinted at, in the following passage in Porphyry:—"Now," says he, "since a cave is the image and symbol of the world, Numenius and his friend Cronius say, that there are two extremities in the heavens, of which the southern one is

the winter tropic, and at Capricorn; the northern one, that of summer, and at Cancer: and, because Cancer is the nearest to us, it is very properly assigned to the moon, which is the nearest planet to the earth; but as the southern pole is invisible, therefore Capricorn is given to Saturn, the highest and most distant of the planets. And the signs of the zodiac have their respective situations in the following order, namely:—

From Capricorn to Cancer [upwards].	In the House of the Sun.	From Cancer to Capricorn [downwards].
Cancer, Gemini, Taurus, Aries, Pisces, Aquarius.	The Moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn.	Leo, Virgo, Libra, Scorpio, Sagittarius, Capricorn.

“ Therefore, the theologians have placed these two gates at Cancer and Capricorn. Plato calls them the two doors, *δυο εἰσόδους*. Of these Cancer is the one by which souls come down, and Capricorn that by which they again go up.* Both the Romans and Egyptians had some tradition concerning them. But neither of them make these gates in the east or the west, nor at the equinoxes, that is, at Aries and Libra, but in the south and the north, and the most humid ones in the south; because this cave is sacred to souls and to the river nymphs;† and to souls they are the proper places of production and reproduction. Hence they have assigned to Mithras an appropriate seat at the equinoxes,

* See also a similar and very curious account of the gates of the sun in Macrobius' Commentary on the Dream of Scipio, lib. i. cap. xiii.

† See Ovid's Met. lib. i. 576.

and hence he bears the sword of the Ram, which is the zodiacal sign of Mars, and is carried on the Bull, which is the sign of Venus; for Mithras as well as Taurus is the operative cause of all things, and the lord of generation."

The names, *globe*, *orb*, and *sphere*, which the ancients gave to the earth; Ovid's account of its being at equipoise in the air by its own weights;* of its being turned at the creation into the form of a great orb, or ball;† his and Cicero's account of the gravitating nature of its component parts, which makes them tend every way to a centre;‡ Macrobius's description of a method of measuring its diameter;§ and numerous other hints, as well as plain assertions, sufficiently testify that the learned amongst them considered its form to be that of a globe. This opinion is also well supported by Proclus, who describes with great accuracy the five zones of the earth; the cold occasioned at the poles by want of light; and the heat on each side of the equator, by the sun's constant course being between the tropics of Capricorn and Cancer: as well as the division of the our planet into hemispheres at the equator: and, if we be right in supposing that the symbols, between which the figure of Mithras is here placed, are hemispheres, the proof of their being acquainted with the spherical form of the earth becomes irrefragable. This truth was indeed perpetually exemplified to them by the shadows of the earth upon the moon; and analogically by the form of the sun, moon, and planets.

There can, I think, be no doubt that this peculiar seat of Mithras at the equator and between the hemispheres of our globe, was intended to symbolize the sun's entrance into the vernal and autumnal equinoxes; when the sun entered into the summer signs, and the days began to be longer than the nights, he was welcomed with every demonstration of joy. Hence the uplifted sword in his right hand may be intended to show that he is coming forth as a conqueror,

* Met. i. 12. Lucan, v. 94.

† Id. 35. Fasti, vi. 269.

‡ Met. i. 26—369. Cic. de Nat. Deor. ii. 45.

§ In Som. Scip. l. i. c. 20.

at that season, to subdue the earth, or Taurus, which, in the language of astrology, is the house of Venus. For as Macrobius remarks, "the Assyrians affect to believe, that Adonis is returning to Venus, when the sun, having passed the six lower signs of the zodiac, begins his march through our hemisphere with increase of light and day." And, "when the sun emerges from the lower parts of the earth, and passes the bounds of the vernal equinox, encreasing the day, then it is that Ventus is glad and beautiful, the fields green with corn, the meadows with grass, the trees with leaves; and hence our ancestors dedicated the month of April to Venus" "The principal matter to be attended to in these ceremonies of the Sun may be collected from hence—that the time of its descent being completed, and the feigned grief performed after their manner, the commencement of the season of fruitfulness is celebrated on the 25th of March, which day they call *Hillaria*, because the Sun then makes the day longer than the night."*

At the autumnal equinox, when the nights began to be longer than the days, when the Sun had perfected the productions of the year, and nature was beginning to sicken and to fall into its annual grave, the mournful period had arrived, when the ceremonies of valediction to the great demiurgic power were to be performed. What the symbol is, which Mithras holds in his left hand, I have been unable to determine. At first sight I supposed it to be a torch; but the part which should represent the flame is much too long, too formally twisted, and too

* Sat. lib. i. c. xxi. "The ancient Persians particularly venerated the bull, from the lessons they had learnt of the Chaldean astronomers, of its association with the sun, when that genial luminary enters the constellation of Taurus, an event which filled the whole nation with joy, as proclaiming the approaching renovation of nature; and the Magi, more clearly to impress upon the people the regenerating power of this celestial conjunction between the divine Mithra and the planetary emblem of the animal most useful in replenishing the earth, ordered that, on great occasions, the bull should be slain in sacrifice to that creative god."—*Porter's Travels in Georgia, Persia, &c. vol. i. p. 588.*

near the hand for any thing of that kind, and the drawing of the whole very unlike the torches on the other Mithraic antiquities. From its place, opposite Virgo, it might be supposed to be the *sibulla*, or handful of corn, respecting which Hyde has drawn together much curious information,* and from which the Celestial Virgin had the appellation *Spicifera* :† but its spiral form and single stalk forbid that conjecture.‡ Is it a rock or distaff? and thus explanatory of the “ sea-purple garments,” which Homer mentions in his description of the cave of the nymphs. For Porphyry would have it, that these purple webs were nothing more than human bodies, which are elaborated from blood : and says, that “ *Proserpine* presides over every thing that springs from seeds, and is represented by Orpheus as employed in weaving a web ; and that men in old time called the heaven, *peplum*, as if it was the veil of the celestial Gods.”§ These dark hints will be rendered somewhat clearer by a passage in Macrobius, who says, that “ no one, who has looked into the religion of the Assyrians, will doubt that Adonis is the Sun ; and among them there was formerly the greatest veneration for Venus Architis, and for Adonis, which worship is still preserved among the Phœnicians. For the natural philosophers worshipped the upper hemisphere, which we inhabit, by the name of Venus ; but they called the lower hemisphere of the earth Proserpine. Hence, amongst the Assyrians and Phœnicians the goddess is brought forth weeping, because the sun, in his progress through the twelve signs, enters the part of the lower hemisphere ; for of these twelve signs of the zodiac, six are

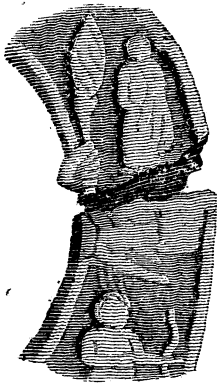
* Relig. Vet. Pers. p. 393.

† See before, at p. 107. Diod. Sic. lib. i. cap. ii. Mac. Sat. lib. i. cap. xxi.

‡ Macrobius relates that the Sun, under the name of Attis, was portrayed with a pipe and a rod ; that the pipe was the symbol of the winds, which derived their essence from the sun ; and that the rod signified the power of the sun, which governs all things.—*Sat. lib. i. cap. xxi.* In great numbers of the Abraxas gems, that god holds a whip in one hand as driver of the chariot of the sun. In one of them in the library of the Dean and Chapter of Durham, he is in a triune capacity, and holds a sword, a whip, and a torch, on each side.

§ De Ant. Nymf. p. 259.

superior, and six inferior; and when he is in the lower, and the days on that account grow shorter, the goddess is supposed to weep, as if the sun were taken off by a temporary death, and lost and detained by Proserpine, whom we call the deity of the lower circle, and of the antipodes." *



If it should be thought, that the part, which is wanting or mutilated between Virgo and Sagittarius, is too small to admit both Libra and Scorpio in a size any way corresponding with that of the other signs, the difficulty may be explained by supposing that they were represented here after the Chaldæan manner, in which there were only eleven signs, the claws of Scorpio occupying the place of Libra. Hence the astronomical work, attributed to Hyginus, calls the fore part of Scorpio, *Chelé*, *i. e.* the pincers, and represents Scorpio, as on the Farnese globe, holding a balance in its extended claws. Hence also these expressions in Macrobius:—"The whole of Scorpio,

* Sat. lib. i. c. xxi. According to Hyde, the Persian year begins in March, and their seventh month, which is the same as our September, they call *Mîhr-month*, or *Love-month*, "because the sun embraces the whole world with love, and makes it cheerful with his light, cherishes it with his warmth, and renders it fruitful." The 16th day of this month was also called *Mîhr-rus*, because on it the greatest of all the religious festivals of the Magi and ancient Persians, except Nauruz, or New-years-day, commenced. It continued six days, in which the *Mihraghân*, or *Mithralia*, were celebrated. What these *Mithralia* were is very doubtful, and the Persian authors are much at variance respecting the origin of this festival; but Golius, out of Nuveirus, an Arabian writer, says, that the Persians used to anoint their kings with the oil of Bân. The king also put on a light and party-coloured robe, and wore the *cidaris* upon which was the image of the sun, begirt with the circle of the universe. The first, who approached him was the chief of the Magi, bearing a dish, on which was placed citrons, a piece of sugar, grains of the lotus, quinces, *sysipha*, apples, a cluster of white grapes, and seven myrtle berries, over which he muttered certain words. After him, in like manner, the people approached their monarch, according to their rank. Some authors say, that on the festivals of *Mihraghân* and Nauruz, all kinds of clothing

in which is the Balance, shadows out the nature of the sun :” and, “ presently after we see the Balance arising, which is the pincers of Scorpio.” The Romans probably imitated the Egyptians in reckoning twelve signs, though it would seem from the compliment, which Virgil pays to Augustus, that the claws of the scorpion were scarcely accounted a sign among them in the Augustan age, and that Libra, till then, had not been thought of as a separate sign :—

“ Or new star in the slow months add thyself,
 “ Where, twixt the Virgin and the Pincers, wide
 “ A place expands ; and burning Scorpio now
 “ His arms draws in, and ample sky-room gives.”

I refrain from entering upon any minute explanation of the circle of the zodiac, as it is connected with the Mithraic rites. Much curious information on this subject may be found in Porphyry. At present it may suffice generally to observe, that in this as well as in other tables of Mithraic symbols, all the devices, being in some manner connected either with the heavens or the seasons, clearly enough point out their origin in some system of astrological theology ; that, in their first and simplest state, they consisted of a mixture of natural religion, and notes for the direction of the husbandman in his affairs ; but that, in the lapse of ages, they became perplexed with nice and allegorical subtleties, referring to the generation, the moral renovation, and the future condition of man. As they lost the character of the calendar of the year, they assumed that of a series of mythological symbols.

and coverlets were brought out of the magazines and distributed to the people according to their rank. But little reliance is to be put upon these accounts. For this one thing is plain, that the Mithraic rites were instituted in honour of the sun, according to the custom of the ancient Persians, in March, at the approach of the sun ; but, by the moderns, in September, when he was returning, celebrating, as it were, a feast of valediction to the sun, when he entered the tropic of Capricorn.—*Hyd. Hist. Relig. Vet. Pers.* p. 244.—247.

But the egg-like shape of the interior margin of the zodiac, is too particular to pass unnoticed. Is it intended here for that general symbol of the world, which has received the well-known and appropriate appellation of the *Mundane Egg*? It is clear from ancient authors, and from monuments, customs, and traditions, still existing in pagan countries, that there was a general opinion in former ages, that the world, under omnipotent influence, rose out of its chaotic form, in a manner something similar to the oviparous process, by which it has been ordained, that animal reproduction should be carried on,—a process not obscurely intimated in the Mosaic history of the creation, where it is said, that “the Spirit of God brooded upon the face of the deep.” On this subject I refer the curious for further information to Mr. Faber’s learned work on “*The Origin of Pagan Idolatry*,”* contenting myself with adding the opinion of a friend of Plutarch, who, on the question being proposed for discussion,—“Whether the hen or the egg were first?” told the company, “that on deliberating on that short problem, they, as it were with a machine, shook the great and ponderous matter respecting the generation of the universe.”†

The altar, No. 6. is three feet seven inches high. The injury it has sustained from the weather has been already noticed. Its sides are plain. In the inscription (besides the words DEO SOLI, on its capital, being nearly obliterated) there is an I wanting in INVICTO, as well as in MITHRÆ; though these apparent omissions may be owing to the weather having eaten out a small I in the first of these words, as in FIL in the fifth line of this inscription; and the top of a Y formed on the last stroke of the M in the latter, as in the third line of the altar, No. 7.

* Vol. i. p. 175.

† Sympos. lib. ii. quest. 3. Where it is said, that “in the mysteries of Bacchus, an egg was consecrated and accounted holy, because it was a model (*μῦσμα*) of that principle, which produces and comprehends all things in itself.” Oromazes made twenty-four gods and enclosed them in an egg, which a like number of the gods of Arihmanius eventually succeeded in breaking. Since that time good and evil have been blended together.—*Plutarch, de Iside et Osiride*.

Imperfections and omissions being supplied, the inscription and its reading at length may stand thus:—

DEO SOLI
INVICTO MYT
RÆ SÆCVLARI
PVBL PRŌCVLI
NVS· Ɔ· PRO SE
ET PROCVLO FIL
SVO· V S L M
DD NN GALLO ET
VOLVSINO COS.

*Deo Soli
Invicto Myt-
ræ Sæculari
Publius Proculi-
nus, Centurio, pro se
et Proculo filio
suo, votum solvit libens merito ;
Dominis nostris Gallo et
Volusino consulibus.*

And in English thus:—

Publius Proculinus, a centurion, performing a vow, for himself and his son Proculus, cheerfully and duly dedicates this to the invincible God, the Sun, and to Mithras, Lord of ages ; their highnesses Gallus and Volusinus being consuls.

The attributes of the Sun, as a deity, were very variously designated by the ancients. He is described as “*the eye of the world,*” as “*over-seeing all things, and hearing all things.*”* Apuleius calls him, “*that Sun the seeing God.*”† In conjunction with the Moon, he is frequently styled “*ETERNAL.*”‡. In the character of Mithras, “*unconquerable*” is one of his commonest titles ; and under the same character he is called

* Homer’s *Odys.* λ. 108. μ. 323. Pliny, lib. ii. cap. vi. Plutarch says the sun is the most beautiful image of God.—*Morals*, p. 1399. *H. Stephen’s ed.* 8vo. 1572. *Jul. Firmic. de Error. prof. Relig.* p. 27. The Egyptians depict Osiris holding a sceptre, in the head of which is an eye, by which they mean, that this god is the Sun, and with regal authority surveys all things from on high ; for antiquity calls the Sun, *the eye of Jupiter.*—*Mac. Sat. lib. i. cap. xxi.* See also other quotations to the same effect in Pontanus’s notes to the above passage ; Pignorius, *de Testibus oculatis Osiridis* ; in his Explanation of the Isaic Tables, fol. 16 ; and Weston on a Mithraic sculpture, *Archæologia*, vol. xix. p. 100.

† *Metamorph.* lib. 1. p. 47.

‡ Gruter, p. xxxiii. Reines. 239, &c.

“*Lord*,” “*omnipotent*,” and “*most holy* ;” * but the epithet “*SECULARIS*,” on this and the following altar, is, as far as I have observed, no where else applied to him. In translating it *Lord of ages*, I suppose it to have nearly the same meaning here, that it has in *Carmen seculare* in Horace, and that αἰώνιος some times has in Greek ; for we know, that their games, which recurred once in some stated number of years, were called αἰώνιος by the Greeks, and *Seculares* by the Latins, as may be seen in Herodotus and Suetonius.† They were games, which, in the phraseology of the times in which they commenced, were instituted *for ever*. Similar expressions are to be found in title deeds and foundation charters in our own country. If, indeed, I could bring sufficient reasons for deriving the Latin word *SECULUM*, *an age*, from the Greek κύκλος,‡ *a circle*, I should be furnished with a still stronger argument for this meaning of *secularis* ; as *seculum* brought from that origin, would derive its meaning from the fact of the several periods of time being performed in cycles ; and in this sense, Mithras, seated at the equinoxial line, and surrounded by the circle of the

* Gruter, p. xxxiii. § xxxv. Reinesius, 89—97. &c. Beyer ad Seld. Addit 52, 53.

† See also Vossius’ Etymologicon, under *seculum*.

‡ The Latins wrote κύκλος, *cyclus* ; and we have instances of the Greek κ being changed into the Roman s, as in *æstimare*, from ἐστιμᾶν ; and the Roman c into the Roman s in *mulsum*, from *mulceo*, &c. &c. See Vos. Etym. p. 7, and the Tables to Gruter and Reinesius, on things relating to grammar. There can, I think, be no doubt, that περιλάω, *to surround*, and κόχλω, *to turn round*, are only various spellings of the same verb ; and that κούχλιος and κόχλος, *a shell* ; κόχλαξ, *a pebble* ; κυκλίαις, *a circle* ; and several other Greek words, all owe their origin to one root, as they all stand for modifications of the idea of some thing circular or orbicular, or of girding or turning round. To which it may not be out of the way to add that the French *siècle*, and our word *secle*, which seems to be derived immediately from *seculum*, when they mean *a century*, have a strong affinity in signification to κύκλος, in Greek, and *cycle* in English ; and that Virgil, in his Pollio, writes *sæclum* twice, and Ovid has,

“ Dii te submoveant, ò nostri infamia sæci,

“ Orbe suo!”—*Met.*viii. 97.

Instances which shew, that *sæclum* for *seculum*, even taking the poetic licence of Synæresis into account, was not offensive to the Roman ear.

zodiac, might with great propriety be stiled *Secularis*, or *Lord of ages*; as well in respect to the life or generations of men, as to the periods in which the planets perform their various revolutions.

Vibius Trebonianus Gallus, and his son C. Vibius Volutianus, were Emperors of Rome for two years and eight months, and joint Consuls in A. D. 253,* in which year they were slain.

The altar, No. 7. is still in very beautiful preservation, and four feet seven inches high. Its capital is twenty inches broad, and is ornamented with a deep moulding of various members, and of which a hollow and a bead form the principal part. The mouldings of the base consist of two narrow fillets and a pigeon-breasted ogee. Its right side bears a *præfericulum*, and its left a *patera*, in bold relief. The mouldings, as well as the scrawls, formed by the ends of the horns on each side of the incense basin, are continued round its back. The back of the capital is also figured with seven semicircular lines, the diameters of which are formed by a groove immediately under the horns. The inscription upon it should be read thus:—

DEO
SOLI INVI
CTO MYTRÆ
SAECVLARI
LITORIVS
PACATIANVS
BF COS PRO
SE ET SVIS V S
L M

Deo
*Soli Invi-
cto Mytræ
Saeculari
Litorius
Pacatianus,
Beneficiarius Consulis, pro
se et suis, votum solvit
libens merito.*

Which in English is:—

Litorius Pacatianus, a Consular Beneficiary, for himself and his family, cheerfully and duly dedicates this altar to the unconquerable God, the Sun, and to Mithras, the Lord of ages.

* Helvici Theat. Historicum, p. 94.

I would gladly have concluded my letter with these cursory remarks; but as you impose upon me the task of answering the very natural question, which the country people put to me, while we were digging in the ruins of the penetralia of the temple of Mithras, at Housesteads—"What were the ceremonies that were performed, and the doctrines that were taught in this place?"—I will endeavour to explain them in the best manner that my leisure, and my residence in a country village will permit.

There can be no doubt, that all the mysteries of paganism had one common origin: that the secrets, to which the aspirants were admitted in the orgies of Isis and Osiris, in Egypt; of Ceres, at Eleusis; of Adonis, in Phœnicia; of Bacchus, in Samothrace; of Hu, in Britain; and of Mithras, in Persia, all emanated from one common fountain. Though in their progress through different countries and ages, numerous causes, such as vice, a fondness for novelty, the schemes and animosities of politics, national aversions, were incessantly employed, not only in perverting and debasing them, but increasing their numbers, by setting them up in one place in opposition to their establishment in another; yet still, such was the power with which the pageant, which they exhibited, preserved its ascendancy over men's minds, and kept alive the fear of departing from their forms and injunctions, that they seemed only to differ from one another, as the produce of the seeds of the same plant differs, from being stunted or luxuriant in its growth, in different soils and altitudes, and under different modes of treatment. Under all their moral austerities and licentious impurities, they kept a common likeness to each other. Bishop Warburton, in the last age, did much to recover and to unfold correct notions of the scene, that was exhibited at their initiations: and Mr. Faber has still more clearly and more satisfactorily traced them to their origin and developed their meaning. Porphyry, we have seen, contended, that the description of the cave of the Nymphs related wholly to the doctrines that were delivered to the initiated; the tale of Aristæus, of his bees and his bulls,

in the *Georgics* of Virgil; and that of the descent of Æneas into Hades, in the *Æneid*, are poetical representations of the prodigies that were performed in the temples of Egypt and Greece, and in the grottoes of Mithras. The poetry, theology, and philosophy of the ancients indeed abound with allusions to them; and Apuleius, in the beautiful episode of Cupid and Physche, and of the progress of Lucius from the human into the bestial form, his restoration by Isis to his original likeness, and initiation into her mysteries, and into those of Osiris—unfolds, as far as it was lawful, all the captivating scenery, and the curious and high promising doctrines of the penetralia of the pagan temples.

For a long lapse of centuries the heathen nations had taught their dogmas, and practised their most favourite rites in the depth of midnight secresy; but the intrepid spirit of enquiry after truth, which attended the fathers of the Christian church, brought both their doctrines and their rites sufficiently into daylight for us to discern, that it was amongst the first articles of their creed to believe, “that at the close of every mundane revolution, the whole universe, together with both mortals and hero-gods, was absorbed in the essence of the one great hermaphrodite parent; that, during the intermediate period of desolation, he remained in solitary majesty, contemplating, with intense abstraction, his own physical properties; and that, when the appointed time of renovation arrived, he produced afresh, from his own essence, the frame of another world, with all its subordinate hero-gods and mortal inhabitants:”* that, in passing through the caves and chambers of the mysteries, while the moral renovation of the aspirant was the object principally intended, he was surrounded with the terrific imagery, which, at every step, called to mind the transition from this world, through the regions of the dead, into the cloudless light and happiness of the celestial paradise. In M. Belzoni’s drawings and description of the tomb of Psammis, and of the scenery exhibited on its walls, we have a striking and most interesting illustration of many parts of the mysteries of Isis,

* Faber’s *Origin*, &c. vol. iii. p. 139.

in passing through which, every thing that was terrible in nature, or dreaded in futurity, would appear to have been brought together to appal and over-awe the minds of the initiated.

The tale of the Golden Ass seems, indeed, to have been written expressly for the purpose of illustrating the doctrines, and supporting the falling interests, of paganism. The spread of Christianity had brought into the field of controversial theology a great host of talent. Hence, in the contention for truth, between the champions of the new religion and of paganism, while the Fathers laboured to expose the licentious impurities that were openly practised in the heathen temples, heathenism began to develope resources, which, in the days of her undisputed power, had been carefully kept from the vulgar eye. In her dying struggles she made confessions respecting her system, which consisted of truths half suppressed, and half unfolded. When she found her commands unavailing, she attempted to stand upon her merits; but the comparisons, which she drew between herself and her adversary, the discussions she entered into, and the illustrations she advanced, only served to expose her weakness. That invisible armour, in which she had gone about for so many hundred years, awing kingdoms and working magical delusions, began to fall off. The Mithraic rites, however, seem to claim some exception from this remark. They do not appear to have become extensively popular in the western parts of the Roman dominions, till the systems of paganism, which had formerly flourished in Italy, Gaul, and Britain, began to be withdrawn from, or neglected or abolished. I will endeavour to account for this preference that was given to them. It has been shown out of Porphyry, that Mithraism had its origin from Zoroaster, in Persia: and from Plutarch, that the orgies of Mithras began to be known to the Romans about the time when Pompey was sent against the pirates in Cilicia. From that time to A. D. 101, we hear no account of them. It is, however, I think, pretty evident, that they continued to be practised during all the intermediate time, though, perhaps, with

some restrictions. Pliny tells us, that “ it was held amongst authors as an undoubted fact, that magic, which is the most fraudulent of all the arts, sprang from Zoroaster, in Persia; and no one will wonder, that its authority has been so very great, when it is considered, that it is the only science, which has reduced into one, and united with itself, the three others, which sway the most powerfully over the human mind. For who has doubted, that she was the eldest daughter of medicine, and that, under the pretence of healing, she insinuated herself into society, as one that was higher and holier than her mother? that to the most delightful and long-longed-for promises, she added the influences of religion, which, even to this day, have contributed greatly to keep mankind in darkness? and, as a further auxiliary, that she employed the mathematical sciences, every one being anxious to know the plans of futurity respecting himself, and believing them to be the most authentically derived from heaven? The minds of men being thus enthralled in this triple bond, magic grew into such authority, that even till now it prevails over a great part of the world, and in the east rules over kings of kings.” “ However, in the 657th year of Rome, when Cn. Cornelius Lentulus and P. Licinius Crassus were Consuls, a decree of the Senate was passed, forbidding the immolation of man; for till that time monstrous solemnities (*sacra prodigiosa*) were openly celebrated. It is certain, that magic continued to hold possession of Gaul even within our own memory. For it was not till the reign of Tiberius Cæsar, that the Druids and all the herd of prophets and physicians were put down in that country. But why should I relate these things respecting an art, which passed over the ocean and advanced into the deserts of nature? Britain, to this day, so devotedly honours it with such ceremonies, that she might seem to have given it to the Persians: so consentient in this matter is all the world, however different or unknown to each other. It cannot be sufficiently estimated how much society is indebted to the Romans for putting down these horrid rites, which made it not only a most indispensable act

of religion to take men's lives, but even essential to health to eat their flesh."*

Now I take these "*sacra prodigiosa*" of the Magi to have been the very same as the mysteries of Mithras, which we find expressly accused of the horrible practice of offering human sacrifices. Porphyry says, that "according to Pallas, who was the best author on these mysteries, offerings of men as sacrifices were almost wholly abolished under the Emperor Hadrian."† Lampridius, however, accuses Commodus "with violating the *sacra Mithraica* with homicide, since, in them, it was a rule, either to say, or to exhibit, something, which had the resemblance of fear;" and Photius, in his life of Athanasius, asserts, "that there was a Greek temple in Alexandria, in which, in ancient times, the Greeks performed sacred rites to Mithras, sacrificing men, women, and children, and auguring from their entrails."‡

The success of Mithraism in Gaul and Britain, must not, therefore, be attributed to novelty; but to the obstinacy of ancient habits. In the cell at Housesteads many of the same rites were performed, as in the groves of the Druids. The Gauls and the Britains finding the open profession of their ancient creed denounced by the Roman law, and that law enforced by the sword of the Roman armies, willingly deserted the temples of Hu for a cognate worship in the cells of Mithras. Or, if it should be said, that we have no authority for asserting, that the native population of Britain, ever joined in these rites, but that they were confined to the stations and soldiers of the Romans, it is still, I think, manifest, that they owed their extensive influence over the human mind to their connection with magic—to the open profession and practice of the demoniacal arts of sorcery and witchcraft, at a time when Apuleius and other pagan authors, were endeavouring to disclaim all knowledge of them, and to defend the mysteries of Isis and other deities against the charge of using them.

* Nat. Hist. lib. xxx. cap. i.

† De Abst. lib. ii. cap. 56. p. 202. ed. Iac. de Rhoer, 1767.

‡ P. 1446.

The little glimmerings of light, which continue to shine on the religion of Mithras, have fallen on no part more distinctly than upon the severities, which it enjoined upon the candidates for admission to its mysteries. But even this distinctness is comparative. It is brighter than those "glimpses of the moon," which "made night hideous" in his caverns; but it is only a twilight. It is, however, strong enough to enable us to perceive, that among the many apparent contradictions and real difficulties, which accompany them, the primary object of these severities was to prepare the mind and bodies of the aspirants, by a long course of rigorous discipline, to undergo every species of self denial, and by an exhibition of that part of the pagan creed, which relates to the passage of the soul from life to immortality, to impress upon them the necessity of that great moral regeneration, which was to fit the soul for entering upon a new, happy, and eternal existence. The following extracts comprise nearly the whole of the direct information, which I have been able to collect on this part of my subject.

Origen, endeavouring to refute some positions of Celsus respecting the seven heavens, or the seven planets of the Greeks, by which, according to Plato, the souls of men went up into heaven, quotes this passage from the work which that author wrote against Christianity:—"The doctrines of the Persians and the mysteries of Mithras enigmatically explain this; for there is in them a symbol of the two celestial periods, that of the fixed stars and that of the planets, and also of the passage of the soul through them. This is a ladder from one gate to another as far as the eighth. The first of the gates is lead, the second of tin, the third of bronze, the fourth of iron, the fifth of the mixture for money (*χρυσῶ νομισματος*), the sixth of silver, the seventh of gold. The first they attribute to Saturn, as lead represents the slowness of that star; the second to Venus, comparing her to the softness and splendour of tin; the third, from the firmness and solidity of bronze, to Jupiter; the fourth to Mercury, because iron and Mercury stand all sorts of work, and are useful in business, and especially in mecha-

nics; the fifth to Mars, on account of its anomalous and various mixture; the sixth of silver, to the Moon, and the seventh of gold, to the Sun, because of their similarity in colour to these metals.”* Now all this is clearly enough of a piece with the dubious and enigmatic cant of magic and astrology; and might fall under the merited censure, which the same Celsus, in another part of his work against the Christians, passes upon Mithraism; for, says he, “they, who are irrationally credulous, are no better than those, who delight in charlatans, jugglers, Mithraic and Bacchic mysteries, or in certain phantasms of Hecate and other demons.”†

Gregory Nazianzen, who was born A. D. 324, and died in 390, in his first oration against Julian, says:—“You not only have no reverence for, but despise, the heroism and the bravery of the Christian martyrs, while you admire those of the *Phrygians*, who are soothed with the sweetness of the lute, and after the air is over, suffer reproach, and maiming, and the merited and mysterious burnings, practised in the Mithraic rites:”‡ and “they, who deservedly undergo the torments of the Mithraic rites, inflicted all sorts of cruelties and indignities on Marcus Arethusius.”§

In the 39th oration, which is a panygeric “on the holy light,” after speaking of the excellency of the rites of the Christian religion, he charges the Gentiles with hiding and folding up in fable the doctrines which they believe to be true: but, says he, “ours are not the orgies of the Thracians, nor the merited severities of Mithras on those, who can bear to be initiated into his mysteries, nor the manglings of Osiris, nor the misfortunes of Isis.”||

On these passages, Elias of Crete, has the following commentary:—“Some say, that Mithras is the sun, in honour of whom festivals were

* Orig. cont. Cels. lib. vi. p. 280. Ed. Spenceri Cantab. 1677.

† Id. lib. i. p. 8.

‡ Oratio iii. adv. Jul. vol. i. p. 29. latin. Antverp. 1612.

§ Id. p. 33.

|| Id. p. 236.

celebrated, and especially amongst the Chaldeans. And it is certain that they, who had to be initiated into his mysteries, underwent twelve torments, namely, fire and frost, hunger and thirst, the scourge, the hardships of travelling, and other such severities." "Our author calls torments of this kind *just*, because they are worthy of them, who undergo them; and *mysterious*, because they esteem them as such."* And Nonnus, on these passages observes:—"This Mithras is thought to be the sun amongst the Persians: and they sacrifice victims to him, and perform certain rites to his honour. No one can be admitted into his mysteries, unless he has previously undergone all the punishments, the number of which they say is eighty, some of them of the gentler sort, others more severe. The milder are undergone first, then the severer: and after the whole course are gone through, they are initiated. Fire and water are the sort of punishments which they endure†. These torments are said to be inflicted to produce examples of piety and greatness of mind under sufferings. After they have been many days in water, they cast themselves into fire; then live in desert places, and there subdue the cravings of hunger; and thus, as we have said, the aspirant goes through the whole course of eighty torments: which, if he survive, then he is initiated into the mysteries of Mithras."‡ On the words, "*if he survive*," ἐὰν ζήσῃ, Salamasius observes, that the instances of aspirants passing all these ordeals and trials without danger of their lives, were few.

The following quotation is from St. Jerome's letter to Leta on the education of a daughter:—"Conversion is never too late. The thief passed from the cross into paradise. Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, after his brutalized state of body and mind were subdued in the desert, received a human disposition. And, that I may omit examples belonging to ancient times, lest to the incredulous they may appear too like fiction.—Did not your relation, Gracchus, a name of patrician dignity,

* Æliæ Cret. Comment. in S. Greg. Naz. Orat. iii. p. 156. 168.

† Id. p. 240.

‡ Id. 245.

within these few years, when he bore the office of præfect, overturn, and break, and stamp to powder, the cave of Mithras and all the portentous images [*simulachra*] to which Corax, Niphus, Miles, Leo, Perses, Helios, Bromius, Pater, are initiated, and, sending these before him, as it were for hostages, beg the baptism of Christ.”*

These images I suppose to have been the tutelary divinities of the several degrees or classes of the disciples of Mithras. I will endeavour, as briefly as I can, to mention the substance of the notes I have collected respecting them; premising, however, that, according to Pallas, the common opinion was, that they referred to the circle of the zodiac; but the true one, that certain secrets connected with the human soul, and its tenanting different kinds of bodies, was intended. And Porphyry adds, that the Latins called some wild boars, and scorpions, and bears, and thrushes. While Diana was a wolf; the Sun a lizard, a lion, dragon, or hawk; Hecate a horse, bull, lioness, or dog; and Proserpine a dove:† As these several fraternities of the followers of Mithras had each their peculiar rites, I think it very probable, that the hierophant, or father of each, was called by the name which designated his class; that is, that the priest who superintended the *Coracica*, was called *Corax*, and so of the rest. Indeed, nothing was more common in the various branches of heathen worship, than for the priests and priestesses to take the names, and arrogate to themselves the characters and attributes, either of the divinities at whose altars they officiated, or else of some cognate god or goddess. Thus Apuleius calls the chief priest of the Isiac mysteries, *Mithras*,‡ in allusion, no doubt, to the Sun, which was the same as the Osiris and Serapis of the Egyptians.

Concerning CORAX, we have seen from Porphyry, that one of the classes of those, who were admitted to the orgies of Mithras, were a

* Opera S. Hieron. p. 50. col. 2. E. ed. Lut. Par. 1624.

† Porph. de Abstin. lib. iv. cap. 16.

‡ Metamorph. vol. ii. lib. xi. p. 735, “ipsumque Mithram illum suum sacerdotem præcipuum,” and p. 755, “complexus Mithram sacerdotem, et meum jam parentem,” &c.

sort of servitors, and were called *Córacai*, or *Crows*. Is there in this some allusion to the “loquacious crow,” which forms part of the constellation, Hydra? * for astrology was no inconsiderable part of the religion of Zoroaster. This bird was sacred to the sun. † An old commentator (supposed to be St. Ambrose) on the Epistle to the Romans, mentions the *Coracica sacra* of the pagans; and there are inscriptions on which certain Mithraic solemnities, called *Hierocoracica* ‡ occur, and *Pater et Hierocorax Dei Solis invicti Mithræ*, i. e. the father and sacred-crow of the God the Sun, the unconquerable Mithras. §

NIPHUS, to me is full of difficulty. Reinesius and others copy from editions of Jerome, which have *Griphus*, and he thinks the word comes from *κρυφίος*, *hidden*, because the rites of Mithras were performed in darkness and secrecy. Another interpretation of Griphus is taken from a passage in Apuleius, where he says, that one part of the ceremony of admission into the rites of Isis, consists in putting on a long flowing garment, on which animals were represented in various colours, such as the dragons of India, and the hyperborean griffins: this garment they called the *Olympic Stole*. || Instead of Olympic in this place, Reinesius proposes to read *Leontic*. In the Paris edition of Jerome, in 1624, Niphus is explained by *Nisus—accipitris*, a hawk. And Porphyry, we have seen, says, that those, who were admitted into the class called Patres, were termed eagles and hawks. He also says, that this bird was sacred to the sun, and held in great veneration by the Egyptians. ¶ It also occurs very frequently among the hieroglyphics on the walls of their temples and on their mummies. Their Arueris is drawn with a hawk's head. Were not masks used in these mysteries, and the doctrines of the regeneration of the human mind, and of metamorphosis

* Ovid. Metam. lib. ii. 535. † Fulgentius lib. i. fol. 131, a. Arati Phænomen. fol. 196, b.

‡ Gruter, 2. ccciii.

§ Reins. Syntag. 48, I.

|| Met. lib. xi. vol. ii. p. 748.

¶ De Abstin. lib. iv. cap. 9. See also Diod. Sicul. lib. i. p. 38. Latin, Basil. 1578. Virg. Georg. I. 404.

intended to be symbolized by the aspirant passing through the cave under a bestial form, in skins of wild beasts, to the southern gate, where he again assumed the human likeness; and by which the pantomime of metempsychosis was represented?

MILES, or *the Soldier*, as connected with Mithras, occurs twice in Tertullian. At the conclusion of his book, entitled *the Soldier's Crown*, he bids the soldier of Christ blush at being outrivalled by, and therefore having to be judged by, some soldier of Mithras; and in the same place, as well as in his Pleadings against the Heretics, he enters into a description of the ceremonies used at the initiations into the rites of *Miles*.*

LEO, *the Lion*, was the divinity that presided over the rites called *Leontica*. As it was one of the doctrines inculcated by the Persian Magi, that there were certain things common both to animals and to men, they used to designate men by the names of animals. Thus, those, who were partakers of the mysteries of Mithras, they called *lions*; and he, who took upon himself the *Leontics*, invested himself in the forms of all sorts of animals. It was also peculiar to this fraternity, to have honey poured upon their hands instead of water, at their initiation; by which it was implied, that they ought to preserve their hands undefiled by any thing that was offensive, or hurtful, or abominable. Hence the purifying qualities of fire were resorted to at the initiation of a mystic, for they were averse to water on account of its

* "Erubescite Romani commilitones ejus, jam non ab ipso judicandi, sed *ab aliquo Mithræ milite*, qui quum initiatur in spelæo, in castris verè tenebrarum, coronam interposito gladio sibi oblatam, quasi mimum martyrii, dehinc capiti suo accommodatam, monetur obvia manu capite depellere, et in humerum si forte transferre, dicens, Mithram esse coronam suam. Atque exinde nunquam coronatur: id quod in signum habet ad probationem sui, sicubi tentatus fuerit de Sacramento: *statimque creditur Mithræ miles*, si dejecerit coronam, si eam in deo suo esse dixerit. Vol. I. p. 294. Ed. Pari. 1616.—Tinguit et ipse [diabolus] quosdam utique credentes et fideles suos; expiationem delictorum de lavacro repromittit et sic *adhuc* initiat Mithræ: signat illic in frontibus *milites* suos; celebrat et panis oblationem, et imaginem resurrectionis inducit; et sub gladio redimit coronam.—Id. p. 339.

enmity to fire. They also used honey to purify the tongue from all evil.* Tertullian says, that the pagans, who attempted to reduce the reveries of their religion into any thing like reason, thought that the lions of Mithras referred to the mystery of dry and burning nature.† The symbol, which in Montfaucon is called *the Mithraic Lion*, is sometimes a lion with a bee in its mouth, and surrounded with stars, a lunette, or magic characters; or it is a man, or a serpent, with a lion's head, with similar accompaniments, and generally with Abraxas as a legend, with Mithras rarely.‡

When honey was offered to PERSES, in the character of a guardian of fruit, it was made the symbol of preservation.§ The rites called *Persica*, were known at Alexandria, as appears from a quotation out of Damascius by Suidas.¶ Perseus is the name of one of the ancient constellations, and a very ancient god of the Egyptians, Babylonians, and Persians.¶ He was habited like Mercury, and was considered to be the same as Mithras, or the sun, in Persia; and as Osiris in Egypt.**

HELIOS, is the Greek name of the sun; but I have met with no mention of *Heliaca*, or of any rites under this name, in connection with Mithraism.

BROMIUS is one of the names of Bacchus.

“Hail Bacchus, Bromius, and Lycæus, hail!

“Twin bred, twice born, alone of mothers two.”††

I have found no mention of any *Bromica*, or Mithraic orgies under

* Porp. de Abstin. iv. 16. De Ant. p. 260. Reines. Syntag. p. 95.

† Aridæ et ardentis naturæ sacramenta, Leones Mithræ philosophantur.—*Advers. Marcionem*, lib. i. p. 624.

‡ Antiq. Expl. vol. i. p. 227, plates, 48, 49. § Porp. De Ant. Nymph. p. 260.

¶ Sub voce, *επιφάν*. ¶ Herodotus, lib. ii. cap. 91. lib. vi. cap. 54.

** Albricius Philos. de Deor. Imag. c. 6. Tzetz. in Lyc. ver. 17. Notes to Jerome, p. 56, col. 2. ed. Par. 1624. Faber's Origin, &c. ii. 437, &c.

†† Ovid's Metamorph. lib. iv. l. 11.

this name. But as *Liber Pater* was a common epithet of Bacchus, we perhaps ought in this place to read *Bromius Pater*, and in that case the list of the "*portentuousa simulachra*" of Jerome would end here.

Porphyry, however, expressly affirms, that those who were admitted into the *Patrica*, were called eagles or hawks. And we have "PATER PATRUM SOLIS MERITI MITHRÆ" and other inscriptions in Gruter and Reinesius,* which not only show that there was a sort of Mithraic lodge or guild, which called themselves FATHERS, but that the priest who presided over it was called *Pater*, or *Father*. We find one Marcus Aurelius dedicating an altar to Mithras, when Bictorinus, *the Father*, and Calpurnius Januarius were presidents of their fraternity, in A. D. 184; and in 197, the same Aurelius and his children making another dedication, "NUMINI INVICTO SOLI MITHRÆ," when the same Calpurnius Januarius was *Priest*.†

Now I think it probable, that the eight gates of Celsus and the eight "*portentuousa simulachra*" of Jerome, were symbols and shadows of the eight gradations through which the devotees of Mithraism had to pass, till they became eye-witnesses of all, that their religion had to unfold to them, in the scenic revelations that were exhibited in its holy grottoes. The stages from the first to the seventh were all rugged and wild; the threshold of the eighth was the entrance into Paradise. Hence, in Celsus, we have only seven metals. The *Patrica* of Jerome, over which the mitred abbot, the Father of Fathers, presided, were, I apprehend, the *Teleutè* of Mithraism—the last act exhibited in the pantomime of the mysteries—the final vision and revelation presented to the extatic eyes and ravished minds of the *Epoptès*; while the *Coracica*, the orgies of the servants, were the first. The seven simulachra of the grottoes, were symbols of the seven gradations, through which the aspirants had to grope their darkling way in the mysteries, till, in stepping into the light of the sun and the glories of surrounding

* Gruter, 2. xxvii, MCII. &c. Reines. Syntag. p. 89.

† Reines. Syntag. 55. I.

nature, they were figuratively initiated into the enjoyment of beatific rest in the mansions of Oromazes. The metallic gates of Celsus, and the ladders which connected them, represented the arduous ascent into these mansions; and, as symbols, might have had their origin in the connection which Mithraism had with magic, metallurgy, and medicine. The seven planets clearly enough were the introduction of astrology, and while they were supposed to refer to the seven probationary states of the aspirants, they were believed to preside over the birth and future fortunes of all mankind: and I submit to the opinion of the learned, whether "the seven times," in which Nebuchadnezzar was driven from men, and had his dwelling with the beasts of the field, were not the seven periods of that figurative metamorphosis, which the religion of his country enjoined upon every one, who was admitted into its mysteries, and in which Daniel, at that time, was "master of the magicians." But I dare not venture to suppose that the "den" or vault "of the lions" into which Daniel was cast, was the artificial grotto of the fraternity of Mithraic lions; though some critics have thought they have seen a resemblance between the "*stone hewn without hands out of a mountain*,"* and the cave of Mithras; and that a passage in Isaiah referred both to it, and to the terrific rites that were practised in it.†

This is the substance of the greater part of the information I have been able to collect, and of the reflections that have occurred to me,

* Cap. ii. v. 34 and 45. Justin Martyr. dialog. cum Tryphone, p. 296, 297. Jul. Firmicus de Er. Prof. Relig. p. 42.

† Cap. xxxiii. v. 13—19. See notes to Tertullian de Cor. Mil. Paris ed. 1616. p. 307. As the heathen mysteries were of exceeding high antiquity, and very widely diffused, we cannot wonder that allusions to them are very frequent in the scriptures. Mr. Faber very ingeniously supposes that the plague of darkness, (Exod. x. 21—23.) was intended to punish the Egyptians in express allusion to their gloomy, nocturnal celebration of the Isiac Orgies: so that they, who were accustomed to sit in mimic artificial darkness, during three days, in honour of their defunct god, were suddenly plunged by the true God into a horrible preternatural darkness of the very same continuance." And he also thinks that "the

respecting the nature of the worship performed in the Mithraic grotto lately discovered at Housesteads. I have omitted several interesting particulars connected with the subject.* But from an unwillingness to extend my letter to a greater length, shall now close this inquiry with the following general, though mutilated account of the religion of Mithras, by Julius Firmicus,† and with some short notices on its connection with Abraxism.

“The Persians and all the Magi of their country had fire, and indeed all the elements in great esteem. Jupiter, by them was considered in author of the apocryphal wisdom of Solomon (chap. xvii.) has preserved a most curious Jewish tradition, relating to the specific nature of this plague, which intimates, that the Egyptian votaries of Osiris were not only wrapped in palpable darkness, but that they heard the identical noises, and beheld through the horrid gloom, the identical spectres, which so eminently distinguished the first, or mournful part of the mysteries.”—*Orig. of Pag. Idol. vol. ii. p. 157.*

* Much interesting information respecting Mithras is contained in Mr. Faber’s learned work “on the Origin of Pagan Idolatry:” besides which, I have met with the following references to treatises and criticisms upon it, but have had no opportunity of consulting them :—

Gyraldus Synt. viii. Hist. Deor.

Salmasius ad Hist. Aug. fol. 117, 349, 367, 382, 383.

Joh. Quintinus, Heduus, c. 40. schol. in Tertul. l. de Præscrip. adv. Hæret.

Julius Cæs. Capacius, l. 1. Hist. Neap. c. 14. which is upon the ancient religion of the Neapolitans.

Guther. l. 1. de vet. Jure Pontif. c. 25.

Jul. Cæs. Bulenger. lib. i. de Magiâ lic. et vet. c. 4, 5, 6.

Grotius, Annotat. ad Levit. xxvi. 30.

The above list is chiefly from Reinesius : the following references are from Cudworth’s Intellectual System, book I, cap. 4. :—

Anton: Van Dale Dissert. ix. ad Antiquit. et Marmora, p. 16.

Scaliger de Emendat. Temporum, lib. vi. cap. de Hebdom. Dan. p. 588.

Maximus Tyrius Dissertat xxxviii. p. 371.

Plato in Alcibiade, tom. I. Oper. p. 32.

Dionys. Areop. Epistol vii. ad Polycarpum p. 91. tom ii. Oper.

† De Errore Profan. Relig. p. 10—12.

the twofold light of a male and a female;* and the substance of fire as having the attributes of man and woman; the latter of whom they represented with a triple countenance, and entwined with monstrous serpents. The male part they worship under the character of *a stealer of cattle*, and refer his rites to the energies of fire; as one of his own poets tells us:—

“ Priests of the lowing ox, O celebrate

“ The holy father’s feast, Bouclopia.†

“ They call him Mithras, and perform his mysteries in secret caverns, that out of the thick gloom in which they are involved, they may not perceive the blessing of clear and serene day-light. O blind consecration of a deity. O hateful contrivance of a wicked law. You believe him to be a God, and you acknowledge him to be wicked. You, therefore, who say that sacrifice is not duly performed after the Persian mode of the Magi, why do you praise the Persian mysteries? But let the injunctions of the Persians be advanced. * * * * *

* In addition to the account of the hermaphroditic character of the Indian God, in the quotation at page 282, from Bordesanes, Porphyry has preserved the following curious description by the same author, of the ceremonies performed in the cave in which his statue was placed:—“ Behind this statue, the interior of the cave is dark to a considerable distance. Such as have a mind to enter it proceed with lamps, till they find a certain door, through which water flows, and forms a lake at the end of the cave. This door is to be passed by such as submit themselves to be tested. Those who are free from the defilements of life pass unhindered, the doors opening widely, and they find a very large fountain of the most limpid and delicious water, which forms the stream I have mentioned before.—But those who have been guilty of any crime, strive in vain to obtain admission, the doors closing themselves against them.”—*De Styge*, p. 284.

† That is, *the Ox-stealing Festival*. Porphyry says, that one of the names of the moon is Taurus: and taurus is the exaltation (ἰσχυμα) of the moon, and bees sprang from an ox. Hence souls coming into existence at generation are called ox-born, and the god who hears generation privately, *Ox-thief*.”—*De Antro*, p. 262. See also *Mac. Sat. lib. i. cap. xix. Ovid. Met. lib. ii. l. 680, &c. &c.*

that he is consecrated, armed with a shield, cuirass, sword, and spear.

* * * The third part has its dominion allotted in rugged and lonely places, among woods and dens of wild beasts. The last of this tripartite division has reference to the habits of libidinous desires; which point out depraved lusts, and the allurements of absurd appetites. Therefore they assign one part to the head, as it seems in some manner to denote the anger of man. Another they place in the heart, as it may seem to occupy the variety of the various thoughts, which, like woods, we entertain with manifold intensity. The third part is placed in the liver, where lust is bred and voluptuousness; for there the collected fecundity of the seeds of generation excite the appetite of lust with natural incentives," &c. &c.

Basilides, of Alexandria, flourished in the second century. He was a great corrupter of Christianity, against which he published twenty-four books. His own divinity was "a rhapsody of monstrous notions and magical schemes."* His doctrines are mentioned by Irenæus and Tertullian; but, in reference to our present subject, most pertinently by St. Jerome, in the following passage in his *Commentary on the Prophet Amos*:—"Basilides gives the Almighty the monstrous name of Abraxas, and pretends that, according to the import of the Greek letters, and the number of the days of the sun's course, Abraxas is found in the circle of the sun, in like manner as he is by the gentiles called Mithras, from the same number contained in other letters." This passage is explained by others in Irenæus and St. Austin, who assert, that the Basilidians held, that there were 365 heavens, the number of days contained in a year; and, therefore, they looked upon the name Abraxas, by which they meant the sun, as holy and venerable. The following table will serve to illustrate this subject:—

* Agrippa Castor, quoted by Parker, p. 79.

ABRAXAS.				MEITHRAS.			
A	-	-	1	M	-	-	40
B	-	-	2	E	-	-	5
P	-	-	100	I	-	-	10
A	-	-	1	Θ	-	-	9
Z	-	-	60	P	-	-	100
A	-	-	1	A	-	-	1
Σ	-	-	200	Σ	-	-	200
<hr/>				<hr/>			
Abraxas 365				Meithras 365			

Mithras makes only 360, and *Mithras*, as Macarius wrote it, only 364; but *Mithras*, which, as Mountfaucon observes, is a common reading, contains the true number. One of the gems given in Mountfaucon,† has Mithras inscribed on one side, and Abraxas on the other, and several of them have the Mithraic lion, accompanied with the bee, stars, a lunette, or other devices, all of which evidently prove, that, in the monstrous mixtures of religion, which prevailed in the second century, Mithraism, as well as the rest, was infected with the heresy of Basilides.

In submitting this rude and immethodical dissertation to your perusal, and to be read before the Society, I am sensible that its imperfections require many apologies. For though much greater portion of time has been spent over it, than the subject of it deserves, and I have done my best to it that my leisure and opportunities would afford, yet I am sensible that it still stands much in need of lenity and indulgence from yourself and my fellow Antiquaries.

Believe me to be always, and

with the most sincere friendship and regard, your's

JOHN HODGSON.

* Vol. ii. p. 228. pl. 48. no. 15. also plate 49, fig 2, &c.