

The Two Babylons Chapter V. Section II

– Relic Worship



Catholic Relics For Sale

This is the continuation of [Chapter V. Section I – Idol Processions](#)

Nothing is more characteristic of Rome than the worship of relics. Wherever a chapel is opened, or a temple consecrated, it cannot be thoroughly complete without some relic or other of he-saint or she-saint to give sanctity to it. The relics of the saints and rotten bones of the martyrs form a great part of the wealth of the Church. The grossest impostures have been practised in regard to such relics; and the most drivelling tales have been told of their wonder-working powers, and that too by Fathers of high name in the records of Christendom. Even Augustine, with all his philosophical acuteness and zeal against some forms of false doctrine, was deeply infected with the grovelling spirit that led to relic worship. Let any one read the stuff with which he concludes his famous “City of God,” and he will in no wise wonder that Rome has made a saint of him, and set him up for the worship of her devotees.

Take only a specimen or two of the stories with which he bolsters up the prevalent delusions of his day: “When the Bishop Projectius brought the relics of St. Stephen to the town called Aquae Tibiltinae, the people came in great crowds to honour them. Amongst these was a blind woman, who entreated the people to lead her to the bishop who had the HOLY RELICS. They did so, and the bishop gave her some flowers which he had in his hand. She took them, and put them to her eyes, and immediately her sight was restored, so that she passed speedily on before all the others, no longer requiring to be guided.” In Augustine’s day, the formal “worship” of the relics was not yet established; but the martyrs to whom they were supposed to have belonged were already invoked with prayers and supplications, and that with the high approval of the Bishop of Hippo, as the following story will abundantly show: Here, in Hippo, says he, there was a poor and holy old man, by name Florentius, who obtained a living by tailoring. This man once lost his coat, and not being able to purchase another to replace it, he came to the shrine of the Twenty Martyrs, in this city, and prayed aloud to them, beseeching that they would enable him to get another garment. A crowd of silly boys who overheard him, followed him at his departure, scoffing at him, and asking him whether he had begged fifty pence from the martyrs to buy a coat. The poor man went silently on towards home, and as he passed near the sea, he saw a large fish which had been cast up on the sand, and was still panting. The other persons who were present allowed him to take up this fish, which he

brought to one Catosus, a cook, and a good Christian, who bought it from him for three hundred pence. With this he meant to purchase wool, which his wife might spin, and make into a garment for him. When the cook cut up the fish, he found within its belly a ring of gold, which his conscience persuaded him to give to the poor man from whom he bought the fish. He did so, saying, at the same time, "Behold how the Twenty Martyrs have clothed you!" *

* *De Civitate*. The story of the fish and the ring is an old Egyptian story. (WILKINSON) Catosus, "the good Christian," was evidently a tool of the priests, who could *afford* to give him a ring to put into the fish's belly. The miracle would draw worshippers to the shrine of the Twenty Martyrs, and thus bring grist to their mill, and amply repay them.

Thus did the great Augustine inculcate the worship of dead men, and the honouring of their wonder-working relics. The "silly children" who "scoffed" at the tailor's prayer seem to have had more sense than either the "holy old tailor" or the bishop. Now, if men professing Christianity were thus, in the fifth century, paving the way for the worship of all manner of rags and rotten bones; in the realms of Heathendom the same worship had flourished for ages before Christian saints or martyrs had appeared in the world. In Greece, the superstitious regard to relics, and especially to the bones of the deified heroes, was a conspicuous part of the popular idolatry. The work of Pausanias, the learned Grecian antiquary, is full of reference to this superstition. Thus, of the shoulder-blade of Pelops, we read that, after passing through divers adventures, being appointed by the oracle of Delphi, as a divine means of delivering the Eleans from a pestilence under which they suffered, it "was committed," as a sacred relic, "to the custody" of the man who had fished it out of the sea, and of his posterity after him. The bones of the Trojan Hector were preserved as a precious deposit at Thebes. "They" [the Thebans], says Pausanias, "say that his [Hector's] bones were brought hither from Troy, in consequence of the following oracle: 'Thebans, who inhabit the city of Cadmus, if you wish to reside in your country, blest with the possession of blameless wealth, bring the bones of Hector, the son of Priam, into your dominions from Asia, and reverence the hero agreeably to the mandate of Jupiter.'" Many other similar instances from the same author might be adduced. The bones thus carefully kept and revered were all believed to be miracle-working bones.

From the earliest periods, the system of Buddhism has been propped up by relics, that have wrought miracles at least as well vouched as those wrought by the relics of St. Stephen, or by the "Twenty Martyrs." In the "Mahawanso," one of the great standards of the Buddhist faith, reference is thus made to the enshrining of the relics of Buddha: "The vanquisher of foes having perfected the works to be executed within the relic receptacle, convening an assembly of the priesthood, thus addressed them: 'The works that were to be executed by me, in the relic receptacle, are completed. Tomorrow, I shall enshrine the relics. Lords, bear in mind the relics.'" Who has not heard of the Holy Coat of Treves, and its *exhibition* to the people? From the following, the reader will see that there was an exactly similar exhibition

of the Holy Coat of Buddha: "Thereupon (the nephew of the Naga Rajah) by his supernatural gift, springing up into the air to the height of seven palmyra trees, and stretching out his arm brought to the spot where he was poised, the Dupathupo (or shrine) in which the DRESS laid aside by Buddho, as Prince Siddhatto, on his entering the priesthood, was enshrined...and EXHIBITED IT TO THE PEOPLE." This "Holy Coat" of Buddha was no doubt as genuine, and as well entitled to worship, as the "Holy Coat" of Treves. The resemblance does not stop here. It is only a year or two ago since the Pope presented to his beloved son, Francis Joseph of Austria, a "TOOTH" of "St. Peter," as a mark of his special favour and regard. The *teeth* of Buddha are in equal request among his worshippers. "King of Devas," said a Buddhist missionary, who was sent to one of the principal courts of Ceylon to demand a relic or two from the Rajah, "King of Devas, thou possessest the right canine *tooth relic* (of Buddha), as well as the right collar bone of the divine teacher. Lord of Devas, demur not in matter involving the salvation of the land of Lanka." Then the miraculous efficacy of these relics is shown in the following: "The Saviour of the world (Buddha) even after he had attained to Parinibanan or final emancipation (i.e., after his death), by means of a corporeal relic, performed *infinite acts to the utmost perfection*, for the spiritual comfort and mundane prosperity of mankind. While the Vanquisher (Jeyus) yet lived, what must he not have done?"

Now, in the *Asiatic Researches*, a statement is made in regard to these relics of Buddha, which marvellously reveals to us the real origin of this Buddhist relic worship. The statement is this: "The bones or limbs of Buddha were scattered all over the world, like those of Osiris and Jupiter Zagreus. To collect them was the first duty of his descendants and followers, and then to entomb them. Out of filial piety, the remembrance of this mournful search was yearly kept up by a fictitious one, with all possible marks of grief and sorrow till a priest announced that the sacred relics were at last found. This is practised to this day by several Tartarian tribes of the religion of Buddha; and the expression of the bones of the Son of the Spirit of heaven is peculiar to the Chinese and some tribes in Tartary." Here, then, it is evident that the worship of relics is just a part of those ceremonies instituted to commemorate the tragic death of Osiris or Nimrod, who, as the reader may remember, was divided into fourteen pieces, which were sent into so many different regions infected by his apostacy and false worship, to operate *in terrorem* upon all who might seek to follow his example. When the apostates regained their power, the very first thing they did was to seek for these dismembered *relics* of the great ringleader in idolatry, and to entomb them with every mark of devotion. Thus does Plutarch describe the search: "Being acquainted with this even [viz., the dismemberment of Osiris], Isis set out once more in search of the scattered members of her husband's body, using a boat made of the papyrus rush in order more easily to pass through the lower and fenny parts of the country...And one reason assigned for the different sepulchres of Osiris shown in Egypt is, that wherever any one of his scattered limbs was discovered she buried it on the spot; though others suppose that it was owing to an artifice of the queen, who presented each of those cities with an image of her husband, in order that, if Typho should overcome Horus in the approaching contest, he might be unable to find the real sepulchre. Isis succeeded in recovering all the different members, with

the exception of one, which had been devoured by the *Lepidotus*, the *Phagrus*, and the *Oxyrhynchus*, for which reason these fish are held in abhorrence by the Egyptians. To make amends, she consecrated the Phallus, and instituted a solemn festival to its memory." Not only does this show the real origin of relic worship it shows also that the *multiplication* of relics can pretend to the most venerable antiquity.

If, therefore, Rome can boast that she has sixteen or twenty holy coats, seven or eight arms of St. Matthew, two or three heads of St. Peter, this is nothing more than Egypt could do in regard to the relics of Osiris. Egypt was covered with sepulchres of its martyred god; and many a leg and arm and skull, all vouched to be genuine, were exhibited in the rival burying-places for the adoration of the Egyptian faithful. Nay, not only were these Egyptian relics sacred themselves, they CONSECRATED THE VERY GROUND in which they were entombed. This fact is brought out by Wilkinson, from a statement of Plutarch: "The Temple of this deity at Abydos," says he, "was also particularly honoured, and so holy was the place considered by the Egyptians, that persons living at some distance from it sought, and perhaps with difficulty obtained, permission to possess a sepulchre within its Necropolis, in order that, after death, *they might repose* in GROUND HALLOWED BY THE TOMB of this great and mysterious deity." If the places where the relics of Osiris were buried were accounted peculiarly holy, it is easy to see how naturally this would give rise to the *pilgrimages* so frequent among the heathen. The reader does not need to be told what merit Rome attaches to such *pilgrimages* to the tombs of saints, and how, in the Middle Ages, one of the most favourite ways of washing away sin was to undertake a pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Jago di Compostella in Spain, or the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.

Now, in the Scripture there is not the slightest trace of any such thing as a *pilgrimage* to the tomb of saint, martyr, prophet, or apostle. The very way in which the Lord saw fit to dispose of the body of Moses in burying it Himself in the plains of Moab, so that no man should ever know where his sepulchre was, was evidently designed to rebuke every such feeling as that from which such *pilgrimages* arise. And considering *whence* Israel had come, the Egyptian ideas with which they were infected, as shown in the matter of the golden calf, and the high reverence they must have entertained for Moses, the wisdom of God in so disposing of his body must be apparent. In the land where Israel had so long sojourned, there were great and pompous *pilgrimages* at certain season of the year, and these often attended with gross excesses. Herodotus tells us, that in his time the multitude who went annually on pilgrimage to Bubastis amounted to 700,000 individuals, and that then more wine was drunk than at any other time in the year. Wilkinson thus refers to a similar pilgrimage to Philae: "Besides the celebration of the great mysteries which took place at Philae, a grand ceremony was performed at a particular time, when the priests, in solemn procession, visited his tomb, and crowned it with flowers. Plutarch even pretends that all access to the island was forbidden at every other period, and that no bird would fly over it, or fish swim near this CONSECRATED GROUND." This seems not to have been a procession merely of the priests in the immediate neighbourhood of the tomb, but a truly national *pilgrimage*; for, says Diodorus, "the sepulchre of Osiris at Philae is revered

by all the priests throughout Egypt.” We have not the same minute information about the relic worship in Assyria or Babylon; but we have enough to show that, as it was the Babylonian god that was worshipped in Egypt under the name of Osiris, so in his own country there was the same superstitious reverence paid to his relics.

We have seen already, that when the Babylonian Zoroaster died, he was said voluntarily to have given his life as a sacrifice, and to have “charged his countrymen to *preserve his remains*,” assuring them that on the observance or neglect of this dying command, the fate of their empire would hinge. And, accordingly, we learn from Ovid, that the “Busta Nini,” or “Tomb of Ninus,” long ages thereafter, was one of the monuments of Babylon. Now, in comparing the death and fabled resurrection of the false Messiah with the death and resurrection of the true, when he actually appeared, it will be found that there is a very remarkable contrast. When the false Messiah died, limb was severed from limb, and his bones were scattered over the country. When the death of the true Messiah took place, Providence so arranged it that the body should be kept entire, and that the prophetic word should be exactly fulfilled—**“a bone of Him shall not be broken.”** When, again, the false Messiah was pretended to have had a resurrection, that resurrection was in a *new* body, while the old body, with all its members, was left behind, thereby showing that the resurrection was nothing but a pretence and a sham. When, however, the true Messiah was **“declared to be the Son of God with power, by the resurrection from the dead,”** the tomb, though jealously watched by the armed unbelieving soldiery of Rome, was found to be absolutely empty, and no dead body of the Lord was ever afterwards found, or even pretended to have been found. The resurrection of Christ, therefore, stands on a very different footing from the resurrection of Osiris. Of the body of Christ, of course, in the nature of the case, there could be no relics. Rome, however to carry out the Babylonian system, has supplied the deficiency by means of the relics of the saints; and now the relics of St. Peter and St. Paul, of St. Thomas A’Beckett and St. Lawrence O’Toole, occupy the very same place in the worship of the Papacy as the relics of Osiris in Egypt, or of Zoroaster in Babylon.

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