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Men Thousands Worshippers of the Sun in American



Diana, Goddess of the Moon, to whom they burn incense

Apollo, who is worshipped in the Maritimes

SUNRISE, in Chicago, is the daily precursor of ancient rites and ceremonies. In the early morning, when the glowing orb begins to show his golden rim over Lake Michigan, thousands of persons bow the knee and do obeisance to Apollo, the sun god of mythology. And when the sun is set and the mellow moon follows in his path, an equal number swing smoking censers, burning incense, in honor of Diana, the mythological deity of that orb.

Astonishing as such a statement may seem, in this day of the Christian faith, it is true. How many others there may be who have reverted to paganism in America no one is able to say.

The extent of sun worship in Chicago was revealed through the recent tragic death of Mrs. Conetta Rizz, said to have been a priestess of the faith, who was fatally burned in what appears to have been the sacrifice of herself to the sun.

the others of her belief—she had simply reverted to the worship practiced by her ancestors, the ancient Romans. She held that the sun god was great and mighty before the conquest of Rome by the forces of militant Christianity; that it carried the mind back even to the days before idols were worshiped in the temples.

Her country was great and powerful when its inhabitants rendered homage to Apollo's shrine, poured libations to Jupiter and Juno, in the hope of placating the wrath of those divinities, and consulted the omens and auguries in sacrifice of bird and beast, with a view to ascertaining the will of the deities that ruled over the Capitoline hill.

In the belief that "the eldest gods are the best gods," especially if the old gods were the gods of her ancestors, Mrs. Rizz was largely instrumental in arousing so extensive a revival of the sun worship of her forebears of the long-gone past.

Notaries of the faith point out, in defense of their belief, that adoration of the sun is the oldest of all forms of worship; that it was virtually universal in the pagan world before the advent of Christianity, and that it was the primal faith of all the Caucasian races, if, indeed, it was not at one time the actuating religion of all men.

The fatal result of Mrs. Rizz's sacrificial offering to the orb of day called public attention to the existence of a numerous body of sun worshippers in Chicago. Every one was surprised to learn that the city held 10,000 of that faith.

Nor was curiosity regarding them allayed when it was stated that these modern followers of the prehistoric religion even now believe in all the gods and goddesses of the ancient Romans and Greeks.

They follow the customs of worship of those old nations as nearly as possible, and use the rites of incense and libations to their deities.

Not only was Mrs. Rizz one of the leaders of

the faith, but her son and daughter are priest and priestess in the revived religion.

"We are pagans," said young George Rizz, "and we worship the gods of ancient Rome and Greece."

"In our religion Apollo is still god of the sun and Diana goddess of the moon. As the gods are most manifest to us in these orbs of fire, we worship them the most."

"Morning and evening we pray to the sun god. When the moon shines, we pray to Diana and propitiate her with prayers and incense."

"How is it that you, in the midst of civilization, worship the ancient deities?" he was asked.

"We are Italians," he replied, "and have studied the history of our country."

"When our ancestors ruled Rome and the Italians ruled the world, the gods favored our people until they deserted professed Christianity."

"Since then Italia's glory has waned, and now her power is nothing—she rules nobody."

"The ancient gods are wrathful, and they are punishing their erring children. The ancient gods admire courage, and they gave their blessings to the brave."

About two years ago another tragedy drew attention to sun worshippers in Chicago. Miss Eloise Reusse, of St. Paul, Minn., became insane, it was alleged, under the teachings and incantations of Ottoman Zar Adusht Hanish. She undertook a prolonged fast that ended in death.

At that time the number of persons in the city holding to the ancient faith was estimated at from 5000 to 8000. These, as a rule, it is said, had nothing to do with the missionary efforts of Hanish, who appeared in Chicago after a campaign of attempted proselyting in New York.

Headquarters for the wealthy and more cultured members of the sect appear to have been the Rizz home, in Windsor Park. The strange rites and ceremonies of the sun worshippers caused considerable comment among the neighbors.

By observing what was done there, they gained an idea of the methods of worship practiced by the other members of the faith.

At times, when the sun shines brightly, Mrs. Rizz, it is said, would sit bareheaded, either at a window or in the open air, and murmur incantations to Apollo.

In these incantations, uttered rhythmically, as in a sort of chant or stanza, the listeners often heard the following lines repeated like a chorus:

Hail, god of all the myriad gods, thou life of all the universe—
The sun god, great and glorious, now deigns to show his face!

As she muttered the weird chant, she would sway her body and arms, bow down before the sun until her forehead touched the floor or ground, and then would arise and pace solemnly to and fro for hours, arranging her steps in a way that she did not lose sight for an instant of the great luminary.

Should a cloud chance to obscure, even temporarily, the face of the sun, the worshipping woman would look disconsolate. She seemed decidedly unhappy when Old Sol remained for several days at a time behind the clouds.

When in the ecstasy of the ceremonial, Mrs. Rizz would genuflect in fervent obeisance. She would drop upon her knees, wherever she happened to be—whether indoors, upon her porch, or in her garden.

She would mutter softly the prayers and hymns from the book of rubrics of the sun worshippers' cult; would pray long and ardently on bended knees there by the lake, the great inland sea which thunders on, indifferent to sect or creed.

As the faith includes the worship of Diana, or the moon, in its ritual, there were ceremonials at midnight, when the moon was full. The woman would appear in her garden and hold aloft an offering of sweet-smelling incense, and at the same time murmur fervent prayers to Diana.

At times the incense was placed in a crude censer and lighted. As the vessel was swung in midair the heavy fumes arose and filled the premises with the aromatic odors of the Orient. Then there were more incantations, and so on, to the end of the liturgy.

"Why should we not worship the sun?" asked George Rizz, the young priest of the sect, turning questioner as he was questioned regarding the belief of his mother, himself and his fellow-religionists. Then, replying to his own question, he continued:

"We have all history and tradition with us. It was the sun that the people of ancient Rome and Greece worshipped under the name of Apollo. It was the same sun that the Egyptians worshipped under the name of Osiris."

"In ancient Babylon, whose civilization was not less wonderful than that of Egypt or Greece or Rome, it was the sun that was worshipped, under the name of Baal, at the superb temple of Baalbec."

"Throughout India, China, Peru and Mexico are to be found galaxies of altars and temples erected to the sun, and some of which are in excellent preservation to this day. But that is not all."

"In the frozen northland the Scandinavian peoples worshipped the snow-melting, zephyr-bringing sun."

"And in the groves and forests of the ancient Celts and Gauls and Teutons—that is to say, in England and Ireland, France and Germany—the shrines erected under oak trees, with the mistletoe intertwined, were raised in every case to the sun god, the deity to whom all authorities agree the Druids or priestesses of those pagan times paid homage with sacrifices that Julius Caesar, probably in error, has declared were often human beings."

The number of sun worshippers in Chicago is all the more remarkable from the fact that, despite the mysterious and apparent fascinations of the faith, the history of religious movements in Orient and Occident shows that in nearly every instance attempts to revive it upon a large scale have proved unsuccessful.

Wherever sun worship exists it usually exists in secret and as an esoteric belief. Its recent history presents the curious paradox that it has not been able to thrive in its own light, the daylight of the sun, which is the centre of the worship.

More than once, it is stated, that the shrines have been erected in various parts of the world, but none have survived.