

'GREAT IS DIANA OF THE EPHESIANS' - (1911)

The ancient Greek city of Ephesus in Asia Minor, for the exploration of whose ruins, incidentally, our Austrian archaeology has to be thanked, was especially celebrated in antiquity for its splendid temple dedicated to Artemis (Diana). Ionic invaders - perhaps in the eighth century before Christ - conquered the city, which had long been inhabited by people of Asiatic race, and found in it the cult of an ancient mother goddess who possibly bore the name of Oupis, and identified her with Artemis, a deity of their home land. The evidence of excavations shows that in the course of centuries several temples were erected on the same site in honour of the goddess. It was the fourth of these temples that was destroyed by a fire started by the crazy Herostratus in the year 356, during the night in which Alexander the Great was born. It was rebuilt, more magnificent than ever. With its concourse of priests, magicians and pilgrims, and with its shops in which amulets, mementoes and oblations were offered for sale, the commercial metropolis of Ephesus might be compared to a modern Lourdes.

In about A.D. 54, the apostle Paul spent several years at Ephesus. He preached, performed miracles, and found a large following among the people. He was persecuted and accused by the Jews; and he separated from them and founded an independent Christian community. In consequence of the spread of his doctrine, there was a falling-off in the trade of the goldsmiths, who used to make mementoes of the holy place - small figures of Artemis and models of the temple - for the faithful and the pilgrims who came from all over the world.¹ Paul was much too strict a Jew to allow the old deity to survive under another name, to re-baptize her, as the Ionic conquerors had done with the goddess Oupis. So it was that the pious artisans and artists of the city became uneasy about their goddess as well as about their earnings. They revolted, and, with endlessly repeated cries of 'Great is Diana of the Ephesians', streamed through the main street, called 'Arcadian', to the theatre, where their leader, Demetrius, delivered an incendiary speech against the Jews and against Paul. The authorities succeeded with difficulty in quelling the tumult by the assurance that the majesty of the goddess was unassailable and out of reach of any attack.²

¹ See also Goethe's poem (Sophienausgabe, 2, 195).

² Acts, xix.4

The church founded by Paul at Ephesus did not long remain faithful to him. It came under the influence of a man named John, whose personality has set the critics some hard problems. He may have been the author of the Apocalypse, which teems with invectives against the apostle Paul. Tradition identifies him with the apostle John, to whom the fourth gospel is attributed. According to that gospel, when Jesus was on the cross he called out to his favourite disciple, pointing to Mary: 'Behold thy mother!' And from that moment John took Mary to him. So when John went to Ephesus, Mary accompanied him. Accordingly, alongside of the church of the apostle in Ephesus, there was built the first basilica in honour of the new mother-goddess of the Christians. Its existence is attested as early as in the

fourth century. Now once again the city had its great goddess, and, apart from her name, there was little change. The goldsmiths, too, recovered their work of making models of the temple and images of the goddess for the new pilgrims. The function of Artemis expressed by the attribute of ἄρτεμιόφιλος,¹ however, was handed over to a St. Artemidorus, who took on the care of women in labour.

Then came the conquest of the city by Islam, and finally its ruin and abandonment owing to the river on which it stood becoming choked with sand. But even then the great goddess of Ephesus had not abandoned her claims. In our own days she appeared as a saintly virgin to a pious German girl, Katharina Emmerich, at Dülmen. She described to her her journey to Ephesus, the furnishings of the house in which she had lived there and in which she had died, the shape of her bed, and so on. And both the house and the bed were in fact found exactly as the virgin had described them, and they are once more the goal of the pilgrimages of the faithful.

¹ ['Rearer of boys.']⁵