

ST. MICHAEL OF THE CHRISTIANS AND MITHRA OF THE ZOROASTRIANS—A COMPARISON.^{1*†}

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President—MR. KHARSETJI RUSTAMJI CAMA.

The Zoroastrain Scriptures speak of seven Amesha-Spentas¹ or Archangels. 1 Ahura-Mazda, 2 Vohumana, 3 Asha-vahishta, 4 Khshathra-vairya, 5 Spenta-ârmaiti, 6 Haurvatât, and 7 Ameretât. If Ahura-Mazda, which is the name of the Almighty Lord, is not counted in the list, the number of Archangels is six.² Similarly, the Jews have seven Shadim or Archangels. 1 Michael, 2 Gabriel, 3 Raphael, 4 Uriel, 5 Chamuel, 6 Japhiel and 7 Zadkiel. Dr. Kohut says on this subject: "It is worth observing that the fluctuation between the number six or seven of the Amesha-Çpentas, indeed, according to as Ahuromazdao is counted or not in the class of the Amesha-Çpentas of yst. I, 36³; 2, 1-6 recurs also in the Jewish Scriptures. Thus the so-called Jerusalem. Targum to Deuter. 34, 6 and the book of Enoch C. 20, where the list of "watching Angels" is counted up—gives only six; the Book of Toby 12, 15 and of Enoch c. 90, 21 give seven as the number of the Archangels. The latter is probably the more correct assumption, which then corresponds even to the Christian seven Archangels."⁴ As pointed out above,

* Journal Vol. VI, No 5, pp. 237-53.

† This Paper was prepared for the Oriental Congress, which met at Hamburg in September 1902. A summary of it appears in the official report of the Congress. It was reprinted in an issue of the Calcutta Review of 1904.

¹ Hapta Amesha-Spenta, Yasht II., 13.

² Yasht I., 25.

³ Spiegel, Yasht I., 37. Westergaard, Yasht I., 25.

⁴ "The Jewish Angelology and Demonology, based upon Parsism," translated from the German of Dr. Alexander Kohut, by K. B. Cama, p. 4 n.

by Dr. Kohut, the Christian Scriptures also speak of seven Archangels or the seven spirits of God.¹ Similarly we find that the "Divine Powers" of the Neo-Paltonic Philosophy of Philo Judæus corresponded to the Amesha Spentas of the Zoroastrians. These "Divine Powers" stood "closest to the Self-existent."² They were six in number. Including the self-existent, their number was seven. The Gnostics also "taught that the universe was created by the Seven Great Angels."

Among these seven Archangels of the Hebrews and the Christians, Michael is the First. The object of this paper is to compare or identify this Archangel with the Mithra of the Avesta, or the Meher of the later Persian Books.

As Dr. Kohut says, "The belief in the existence of superior beings, endowed with a perfect spiritual disposition, was in ancient times a commonly prevalent one. In reality, even the great progressive range of existence, that rises up from the inanimate stone to human beings, leads to the assumption, that over these there must be existing again a class of beings, with intellectual endowments superior to those of mankind—an assumption, against which, even from the standpoint of modern thought, there is nothing to object."³

¹ "And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth." Revelation V. 6.

"And I saw another sign in heaven great and marvellous, seven angels having the seven last plagues." *Ibid.* XV, 1, also 6 to 7; VIII, 2; XVI, 1; Zechariah IV. 10.

"The seven holy angels which go in and out before the glory of the Holy One." The Apocryphal Book Tobit ch. XII, 15.

Cf. Milton.—

"The seven, who in God's presence nearest to his throne
Stand ready at command."

"Philo Judæus or the Jewish Alexandrian Philosophy," by J. Drummond Vol. II, pp. 82-83.

³ "The Jewish Angelology and Demonology, based upon Parsiism," by Dr. Kohut, translated by K. R. Cama, p. 1.

Thus, then, there is no wonder, if we see the belief in the existence of Angels common among the ancient Zoroastrians, Hebrews and Christians. What strikes one is the similarity of the ideas about these Angels in the scriptures, in the later books and in the sacred and legendary art of these nations.

It has been pointed out by several eminent scholars, like Revd. Dr. Mills, Revd. Dr. Cheyn, Dr. Kohut and others, that the ancient Zoroastrian ideas had influenced, to a certain extent, the religious ideas of the Hebrews. Dr. Kohut says: "all these local and chronological data agree with the assertion that we suppose to be the result of our researches, that the exiles in their domiciles in Persia and Media, adopted and made current among themselves, much from the Zoroastrian religion, for example the inner economy of heaven and hell, pre-eminently however, the ideas touching the genii."¹ So, the Jewish Angelology, and from that, the Christian Angelology was replete with Persian influences. Of the seven Archangels of the Jews, Michael, the very first, is identified by Dr. Kohut with the Vohumana or Bahaman of the Zoroastrians.

Dr. Kohut thinks that the Jewish people took their ideas of the "Angel princes", not from the Amesha Spentas or Archangels of the Persians, but from their later Zoroastrian Yazatas or Angels. He thinks that the very "appellation Malak-i Hushrat (used in Jewish books), as the collective designation of Angels, is borrowed from the Parsee Yazatas."² On the question of this borrowing, he says "It is therefore quite a natural proceeding, if the Jewish people and their organs, which are the Haggadists, depended for the characterisation of the "Angel prince," not on the already blasted Amesha-Çpentas but on the later Zarathushtrian genii. . . . Only with Michael it seems to have an especial condition."³ I think that in the case of Michael also, it is no exception, and there is no "especial condition." His characteristics also are not taken from any Persian

¹ *Ibid*, "The Jewish Angelology and Demonology based upon Parsiism," by Dr. Kohut, translated by K. R. Cama p. 8. ² *Ibid*, p. 29. ³ *Ibid*. p. 37.

Archangel—from Vohumana or Bahaman, as Dr. Kohut suggests—but from an Yazata or Angel; and that Yazata is Mithra.

Dr. Kohut advances the following points of identification to show, that Michael of the Jews is the same as the Vohumana or Bahaman of the Zoroastrians.¹

1. As Vohumana is first of the Archangels, so is Michael, the highest prince.

2. Vohumana has to see, that good thought, peace and friendship are preserved among men (Yasht III). So “In Michael is symbolized goodness and merciful disposition His chief attributes are therefore mercy, goodness, and peace.

3. “An altar is raised in heaven, upon which Michael, the great prince, offers ‘the souls of the pious’ that ascend high to the heavens, similarly as Vohumana, according to Persian tradition, in the Garonemana encounters the ascending souls and makes them sit down on their thrones of peace.”

These three seem to be the only points of identification, on which Dr. Kohut bases his theory of identifying Vohumana with Michael.

The only strongest and most important point in this identification seems to me to be the first, *viz.*, that as Vohumana was an Archangel and the first of the Archangels among the Persians, so was Michael an Archangel, and the first of the Archangels or “the highest prince” among the Jews. The other two points of identification, *viz.*, (a) that Michael showed mercy and brought about peace like Vohumana and (b) that Michael “encounters the ascending soul” like Vohumana, apply as well, or rather more forcibly, as will be seen later on, in the case of the identification of Michael with Mithra. But the subject of my paper is not the identification of the Michael of the Jews with the Mithra of the Persians, but the identification of the St. Michael of the Christians with the Mithra of the

¹ “The Jewish Angelology and Demonology, based upon Parsiism”, by Dr. Kohut, translated by K. R. Cama pp. 1-7.

ancient Persians. Though it is true that the Christian Books are indebted to the Jewish scriptures for their original ideas about St. Michael, still some of the views about St. Michael in all the phases of his representation—both in the later Christian Books and in the Christian Sacred and legendary art,—had to look to some other sources. So, I beg to show in this paper, that St. Michael in all the phases of his character, as presented by the books and by the Sacred and legendary art, can be identified with the Mithra of the Parsee Books.

A perusal of Mrs. Jameson's Sacred and Legendary Art has suggested to me this identification. Before going into the details of this identification, I will give here a picture of St. Michael's attributes and works.

According to the Bible, St. Michael was a prince and one of the chief princes and he helped Daniel against the Prince of Persia (Daniel X. 13, 21). The general Epistle of Jude speaks of him as an Archangel (Jude 9). He is the deliverer of the Israel from their troubles (Daniel XII, 1). In the New Testament, he is represented as fighting against the dragon in heaven (Revelation, XII, 7). That dragon is the "Old serpent called the Devil and Satan" (*Ibid* XII. 9).

Mrs. Jameson in her "Sacred and Legendary Art" thus sums up the attributes of Michael as represented both in the Scriptures and in the Sacred Art.

"It is difficult to clothe in adequate language the divine attributes with which painting and poetry have invested this illustrious archangel. Jews and Christians are agreed in giving him the pre-eminence over all created spirits. All the might, the majesty, the radiance, of Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Virtues, Powers, are centred in him. In him God put forth His strength when he exalted him chief over the celestial host, when angels warred with angels in heaven; and in him God showed forth His glory, when he made him conquer over the power of sin and 'over the great dragon that deceived the world.'
 . . . The legends which have grown out of a few mystical

texts of Scriptures, amplified by the fanciful disquisitions of the theological writers, place St. Michael before us in three great characters:—(1) As captain of the heavenly host, and conqueror of the powers of hell. (2) As lord of souls, conductor and guardian of the spirits of the dead. (3) As patron, saint and prince of the Church Militant.

“When Lucifer, possessed by the spirit of pride and ingratitude, refused to fall down and worship the Son of man, Michael was deputed to punish his insolence, and to cast him out from heaven. To him it was given
to bid sound th’ archangel trumpet

and exalt the banner of the Cross in the day of judgment; and to him likewise was assigned the reception of the immortal spirits when released by death. It was his task to weigh them in a balance: ¹ those whose good works exceeded their demerits, he presented before the throne of God; but those who were found wanting, he gave up to be tortured in purgatory, until their souls, from being ‘as crimson, should become as white as snow’ Lastly when it pleased the Almighty to select from among the nations of the earth one people to become pecuniary his own, He appointed St. Michael to be president and leader over that chosen people.” ²

I will now give a short outline of the attributes of the Zoroastrian Mithra in the words of Dr. Geiger.³

“Mithra has his physical and his moral sides. The latter is founded on the former and proceeds from it. The two should be distinctly distinguished. Physically, Mithra, is the *Yazata* of the rising sun, or more accurately probably the *Yazata* of the light radiating from the sun. On the *Hara barzati*, the mountain over which the sun rises, Ahura Mazada has created for Mithra a

¹ “Thou art weighed in the balances and art found wanting.” Daniel V., 27.

² Mrs. Jameson’s *Sacred and Legendary Art* (4th edition 1863), Vol. I, pp. 94-96.

³ “Civilization of the Ancient Iranians,” by Dr. Geiger. Translated by Dastur Darab Peshotan Sanjana, Vol. I. Introduction, pp. LV-LVIII.

Secondly.—St. Michael is spoken of in the Bible ¹ as prince. So is Mithra spoken of in the Avesta as “the King² of all countries.”

Thirdly.—According to the Jewish Scriptures, “Michael speaks before God ‘I am thy priest’ (Jalk. ch. s. 171)”³ According to the Meher Yasht, Ahura Mazda appointed Mithra his priest.⁴

Fourthly.—One of the chief attributes of Michael is peace.⁵ So does Mithra bring about peace and friendship. There are different grades of friendship between different parties standing in different relations with one another.⁶ The very word Mithra is the same as Sanskrit मित्र friend. It comes from the root मृ॑दि “to love, to be kind, to be friendly.” So Mithra acts as a mediator, a peace-maker. His attributes as a mediator or as a peace-maker have given him his peculiar position in the Parsee calendar. The Parsee months and days bear the same names which are borne by some of the angels. So Mithra, being the angel, who acts, as it were, as a middleman or mediator, and presides over the attributes of friendship or peace, gives its name to the 16th day, which falls in the middle of the month, and to the 7th month which falls in the middle of the year.

Fifthly.—One of the attributes of Michael is kindness or mercy.⁷ So is kindness also Mithra’s attribute. He is a strict disciplinarian. He punishes those who commit ‘Mithra-druji’, *i.e.*, those who break their faith or promise and

¹ “One of the chief princes.” Daniel X, 13. “The great prince.” Daniel XII, 1.

ਸ੍ਰੀਮਦਮੇਹਰਯਾਸ਼ਤਿ ਸ੍ਰੀਮਦਮੇਹਰਯਾਸ਼ਤਿ ਸ੍ਰੀਮਦਮੇਹਰਯਾਸ਼ਤਿ ਸ੍ਰੀਮਦਮੇਹਰਯਾਸ਼ਤਿ ਸ੍ਰੀਮਦਮੇਹਰਯਾਸ਼ਤਿ

Meher Nyaish, 12.

³ Dr. Kohut’s Jewish Angelology and Demonology.

ਸ੍ਰੀਮਦਮੇਹਰਯਾਸ਼ਤਿ ਸ੍ਰੀਮਦਮੇਹਰਯਾਸ਼ਤਿ ਸ੍ਰੀਮਦਮੇਹਰਯਾਸ਼ਤਿ ਸ੍ਰੀਮਦਮੇਹਰਯਾਸ਼ਤਿ ਸ੍ਰੀਮਦਮੇਹਰਯਾਸ਼ਤਿ

⁵ Kohut, Part II, p. 4.

⁶ Meher Yasht, X, 116.

Kohut, Part II, p. 4.

who speak untruth; but to those who do not do so, and, on the contrary, are truthful and true to their faith and promise, he is very kind and helpful.¹ The very word مهر *meher* which is used in modern Persian for kindness, and from which come the words مهریان (kind) and مهریانی (kindness), is the later form of Mithra.

Sixthly.—In his first characteristic “as captain of the heavenly host and conqueror of the powers of hell,” St. Michael is represented in the Bible as fighting in heaven with Satan and his evil powers. We read:² “7. And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.”

So in the Avesta, Mithra is represented as slaying the demons.³ By him “are frightened all the invisible demons (of the heaven) and the visible demons of the country of Ghilân (on this earth).⁴ He always holds “a well aimed club on the heads of the demons”.⁵

Seventhly.—In his second character “as lord of souls, conductor and guardian of the spirits of the dead,” St. Michael is represented, especially in the sacred and legendary art of the Christians, as weighing the works of man in a balance. “Those, whose good works exceeded their demerits, he presented before the throne of God; but those, who were found wanting, he gave up to be tortured in purgatory, until

¹ Meher Yasht, 137.

² Revelation XII, 7-9.

³ Just as Satan is spoken of as the dragon in the Bible, so is Ahriman spoken of as a mairya (mâr) or serpent in the Avesta. Vendidad XXII, 2,9.

⁴ Meher Yasht, 69.

⁵ Khorshed Nyaish, 15.

their souls from being 'as crimson should become as white as snow.'" (Mrs. Jameson's Sacred and Legendary Art, I., p. 96.)

Now compare with this the Zoroastrian picture of Mithra.

(a) Mithra judges the actions of men by weighing them and decides whether they are to go to heaven or hell. He is assisted by other angels in this task. So, it is not he personally who holds the balance. It is Rashna, who standing by his side, holds the balance. "Every one whose good works are three Srôshô-Charanâm¹ more than his sins, goes to heaven; they whose sin is more, go to hell; they in whom both are equal remain among these Hamastagan till the future body."²

(b) In the sacred pictures of St. Michael with the balance in his hand, we see a demon "grasping at the descending scale."³ "He (Michael) holds the balance; the scale with the good rests on earth, but that with the souls which are found wanting, mounts into air. A demon stands ready to receive them, and towards this scale St. Michael points with the end of a black staff which he holds in his right hand."⁴ Similarly, we find demons standing before the Zoroastrian Mithra, when he judges the actions of men in the balance. We read in the Mino Kherad, "And many opponents have watched there, with the desire of evil of Aeshm, the impetuous assailant, and of Astô Vidâd, who devours creatures of every kind and knows no satiety."⁵

(c) In the case of Christian Michael, he is clothed in golden armour.⁶ In the case of the Zoroastrian Mithra, it is the balance that is golden.⁷

¹ The name of a small weight.

² Ardai Viraf Nameh. Haug, p. 157, ch. VI, 9-11.

³ Mrs. Jameson's Sacred and Legendary Art Vol. I., p. 112, Fig. 40.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 113-114.

⁵ Ch. II, 116-17. S. B. E. XXIV, p. 18 West.

⁶ Mrs. Jameson's Sacred and Legendary Art, Vol. I., p. 113.

⁷ Viraf-Nameh, Ch. V., 5.

Eighthly.—In some representations of the last judgment St. Michael is accompanied by several angels. Four hover over his head and three are below him.¹ In Zoroastrian books, Mithra is represented as accompanied by other angels, especially Rashna, the good angel of justice and Srosh, the angel of obedience.²

Let us note in passing, that there is a good deal common among the ancient Egyptians and the ancient Persians in the matter of the belief about the future of the soul. So, we find among the ancient Egyptians also several angels judging and weighing the actions of men after death.³

Ninthly.—In his third character, “As patron Saint and prince of the Church Militant,” St. Michael is represented as being appointed by God, the president and leader of the chosen people, the Hebrews. “At that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people” (Daniel XII, 1). “When the power of the Synagogue was supposed to cease, and to be replaced by the power of the Church, so that the Christians became the people of God, then Michael, who had been the great prince of the Hebrew people, became the prince and leader of the Church Militant in Christendom, and the guardian of redeemed souls, against his old adversary of the Prince of Hell. (Revelation XII, 6-7).” (Mrs. Jameson I, p. 96.)

Now, just as Michael, as an archangel, is the guardian of the Hebrews, and as a Saint, is the guardian of the Christians, so is Mithra the protector of the Irânians. He is invoked for granting them all pleasure and happiness (Meher Nyaish 13). He is the protector, not only of the Irânians, but of the whole world. We read in the Meher Yasht that God appointed him the protector of the whole world.⁴

¹ Mrs. Jameson's Sacred and Legendary Art, Vol. 1., p. 113.

² Meher Yasht, 41. Viraf-Nameh Ch. V.

³ Vide my paper before the Bombay Branch Royal Asiatic Society on

“The Belief about the Future of the Soul among the ancient Egyptians and Irânians.” (Journal Vol. XIX., No. 53.)

⁴ Meher Yasht, 103.

It must be noted, that Michael is represented in the old Testament, as helping Daniel against the prince of that very kingdom of Persia, where Mithra was held in esteem for helping the Persians in war against their enemies. (Daniel X., 13.)

Tenthly.—Michael is represented as a warrior. "In all representations of St. Michael, the leading idea, well or ill expressed, is the same. He is young and beautiful, but 'severe in youthful beauty,' as one who carries on a perpetual contest with the powers of evil. In the earlier works of art he is robed in white, with ample many-coloured wings, and bears merely the sceptre or the lance surmounted by a cross, as one who conquered by spiritual might alone. But in the later representations, those coloured by the spirit of chivalry, he is the angelic Paladin, armed in a dazzling coat of mail, with sword, and spear, and shield."¹

Mithra is also represented as a warrior (*rathaêshtâr*) with silver helmet, golden armour and a dagger.² Bows and arrows, lances, hurling wheels, swords, sticks, and clubs are his weapons of war.³ Like Michael he is represented to be as beautiful and as resplendent as the Sun.⁴

Eleventhly.—As a warrior, St. Michael is specially represented as fighting with the dragon or Satan. "He stands armed, setting his foot on Lucifer, either in the half-human or the dragon form, and is about to transfix him with his lance, or to chain him down in the infernal abyss. . . . It is the visible palpable reflection of that great truth stamped into our very souls, and shadowed forth in every form of ancient belief—the final triumph of the spiritual over the animal and earthly part of our nature. We have always the leading *motif* distinct and true, the winged virtue is always victorious above, and the bestial vice is always prostrate below."⁵

¹ Mrs. Jameson's Sacred and Legendary Art, Vol. I., p. 100, fig. 37, p. 106.

² Meher Yasht, 112.

³ *Ibid.*, 129-132.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 143.

⁵ Mrs. Jameson's Sacred and Legendary Art, Vol. I., pp. 100-100.

Now, we have the same idea in the Avesta, in the fight of Mithra and other angels against Angra-Mainyu and his accomplices—the idea that in the end Spenta-mainyu will be successful and Angra-Mainyu defeated, that virtue will win and vice will be crushed. In that very story, which explains the foundation of the Jashan-i-Meherangan, *i. e.*, the Feast of Mithra, it is the young warrior Feridun, who typifies all the virtuous attributes of Mithra, that defeats and subdues Azi-dahâka or the serpent Dahâka. It is virtue triumphing over vice.

It is said that “St. Michael owes his widespread popularity in the middle ages to three famous visions.”¹ I will describe here, in the words of Mrs. Jameson,² one of these three visions, because it presents several points of similarity between the Christian ideas about St. Michael and the Zoroastrian ideas about Mithra.

“In the fifth century, in the city of Siponte, in Apulia (now Manfredonia), dwelt a man named Galgano or Garganus, very rich in cattle, sheep and beasts; and as they pastured on the sides of the mountain, it happened that a bull strayed and came not home: then the rich man took a multitude of servants and sought the bull, and found him at the entrance of a cave on the very summit of the mountain, and, being wroth with the bull, the master ordered him to be slain; but when the arrow was sent from the bow it returned to the bosom of him who sent it, and he fell dead on the ground: then the master and his servants were troubled, and they sent to inquire of the bishop what should be done. The bishop having fasted and prayed three days, beheld in a vision the glorious Archangel Michael, who descended on the mountain, and told him that the servant had been slain because he had violated a spot peculiarly sacred to him, and he commanded that a church should be erected and sanctified there to his honour. And when they entered the cavern they found there three altars

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 97-98.

already erected, one of them covered with a rich embroidered altar-cloth of crimson and gold, and a stream of limpid water springing from the rock, which healed all diseases. So the church was built.”

Now in this story of this vision, there are several ideas which are common both to St. Michael and to Mithra.

1. From the story of this vision and other two visions, we find that the summit of a mountain is the favourite place of St. Michael. We find the same in the case of Mithra. The Meher Yasht (50) says that “God created the mansion of Mithra on the mountain Hara-berezaiti, *i. e.*, Elbourz.”

2. We see in the story of the vision that St. Michael was the protector of the bull that had lost his way and strayed. Mithra is similarly the protector of the cattle, that have lost their way and strayed. In the Meher Yasht (86) the cow that has lost her way and is looking for her stables, invokes the help of Mithra, in the following words:—

“When will the brave Mithra, the lord of broad pastures put us into our right track and make us reach our folds?” Again it is said that the cattle of those people, who offend Mithra by committing Mithra-druji, *i. e.*, by saying untruths, breaking their promises and making a breach of trust, generally go astray.¹

We said above, that in the artistic representations of St. Michael, what is intended to be shown as an emblem, is the final victory of good over evil. In the Meher Yasht, in the picture of Mithra protecting the cattle that have gone astray, the same idea is allegorically conceived. This appears from the very next passage where the reader prays: “When will he (Mithra, the angel of truth) take us back to the path of Righteousness from the mistaken path of the demon.”² It is worth noting here that in the Vedas also, Mithra, who corresponds, to a certain extent, to Mithra, is the protector of the cattle. So also among the Romans, who had taken their Mithraic worship

¹ Meher Yasht, 38.

² Meher Yasht 86.

from the East, Mithra was the protector of cows (*abactorem boum*).

3. The third point which strikes us in the above-mentioned vision of St. Michael is that the arrow aimed against the bull was rejected, and killed the very man who aimed it, because Michael was displeased with his conduct.

We find the same thing in the case of Mithra. When he is displeased against those, who commit Mithra-druji, *i.e.*, who break their promises and make breaches of trust, he makes their instruments, miss their aim. He rejects their arrows. We read in the Meher Yasht (20) "That arrow, which the man, who lies unto Mithra, throws, turns back."¹

4. The altar of St. Michael is represented in the story of the vision to be in a cave of the mountain. We know that the Mithraic rites among the Romans, borrowed from the Persians, were performed secretly in the hidden chambers of the cave.

We find one or two points of striking resemblance in the second vision of St. Michael which spread his popularity in the West. Mrs. Jameson thus describes the vision² :—

"When Rome was nearly depopulated by a pestilence in the sixth century, St. Gregory, afterwards Pope, advised that a procession should be made through the streets of the city, singing the service since called the Great Litanies. He placed himself at the head of the faithful, and during three days they perambulated the city; and on the third day, when they had arrived opposite to the mole of Hadrian, Gregory beheld the Archangel Michael alight on the summit of that monument and sheath his sword bedropped with blood. Then Gregory knew that the plague was stayed, and a church was there dedicated to the honour of the Archangel; and the tomb of Hadrian has since been called the castle of St. Angelo³ to this day."

¹ Meher Yasht, 20.

² Mrs. Jameson's Sacred and Legendary Art, Vol. I, p. 98.

³ I had the pleasure of seeing this Castle of St. Angelo on the 2nd of August 1889. I was then told this story of the vision of St. Michael and was told that the pestilence was that of cholera.

We find from the above story that St. Michael had a hand in arresting the course of a pestilence. He alighted in the place and the pestilence stopped. We learn from the Meher Yasht, that Mithra had similarly the power of preventing plague. There, where the mansion of Mithra is situated, we find no plague.¹

There was another legend about St. Michael: In the Gulf of Avranches, in Normandy, stands a lofty isolated rock, inaccessible from the land at high water, and for ages past celebrated as one of the strongest fortresses and state prisons in France. In the reign of Childebert II., St. Aubert, Bishop of Avranches, had a vision, in which the Archangel Michael commanded him to repair to this rock, then the terror of mariners, and erect a church to his honour on the highest point, where a bull would be found concealed, and it was to cover as much space as the bull had trampled with his hoofs; he also discovered to the Bishop a well-spring of pure water, which had before been unknown. As the bishop treated this command as a dream, the Archangel appeared to him a second and a third time; and at length, to impress it on his working memory, he touched his head with his thumb, and made a mark or hole in his skull, which he carried to the grave. This time the Bishop obeyed, and a small church was built on the spot indicated; afterwards replaced by the magnificent Abbey Church, which was begun by Richard, Duke of Normandy, in 966, and finished by William the Conqueror.²

In this legend, as in the first, we find that the bull plays a prominent part. This fact can be easily explained, if one were to trace the origin of the worship of St. Michael to ancient Persia through the intermediary of Mithraic rites, that had spread in Rome and other western regions. In the bas-reliefs, sculptures, monuments, &c., which have been discovered in some of the caverns at Rome, and which refer to the ancient

¹ Meher Yasht, 50.

² Mr. Jameson's Sacred and Legendary Art, Vol. I., p. 99.

rites used at the celebration of Mithraic mysteries, figures of bulls with Mithra have been found and have been variously explained.¹

It is worth noting here that the word "Mitre" by which the head-dress which the Christian Bishops put on, in their religious services, is known, is derived by Maurice from Mithra. He says, "possibly the name of *Mitre* may be primarily derived from this high conical cap worn in the rites of Mithra, which was also covered with rays and painted with various devices."²

We find that in all the above three legends of St. Michael, the number three plays a prominent part. In the first legend, the Bishop fasted and prayed for three days, before he beheld St. Michael in a vision. In the second, St. Gregory perambulated in the city of Rome for three days before he saw the Archangel descend on the summit of the hill. In the third legend the Archangel appeared to Bishop St. Aubert three times before he could make the Bishop properly understand his message.

The number three plays a prominent part in the ritual of the Zoroastrians. The fire-temple, where the sacred religious rites are performed, is called the *Dar-i-Meher*, i.e., the door or the gateway of Meher or Mithra. The ceremonies for the consecration of these temples or the Gateways of Mithra are performed for three days. Again the departed souls have to remain in this world for three days before being judged by Mithra.

We have so far seen, that there are many points of similarity between St. Michael of the Christians and Mithra of the Zoroastrians. As said in the beginning, it is not very difficult to account for this similarity. The Iranian Angelology had some influence over the Jewish and Christian Angelology. It was more so in the case of Mithra. There was direct as well as indirect influence; direct from the Persians themselves

¹ Vide K. R. Cama's "A Discourse on the Mithric Worship."

² *Indian Antiquities or Dissections*, Vol. V., p. 994.

and indirect from the Mithraic rites and worship that had at one time spread in Rome and in other adjoining countries.

Mrs. Jameson says on this point:—¹

“To the origin of the worship paid to this great Archangel I dare not do more than allude, lest I stray wide from my subject, and lose myself, and my readers too, in labyrinths of Orientalism. But, in considering the artistic representations, it is interesting to call to mind that the glorification of St. Michael may be traced back to that primitive Eastern dogma, the perpetual antagonism between the Spirit of Good and the Spirit of Evil, mixed up with the Chaldaic belief in angels and their influence over the destinies of man. It was subsequent to the Captivity that the active Spirit of Good, under the name of Michael, came to be regarded as the special protector of the Hebrew nation: the veneration paid to him by the Jews was adopted, or rather retained, by the Oriental Christians, and, though suppressed for a time, was revived and spread over the West, where we find it popular and almost universal from the eighth century.”

The Good Spirit referred to above is the Spentâ-Mainyu of the Avesta as opposed to the Evil-Spirit, the Angra-Mainyu of the Avesta. He had, as it were, a celestial council of Seven on his side. These seven were the Ameshâ-Spentas corresponding to the seven Archangels of the Hebrews and Christians, the seven Immortal Powers of the Neo-Platonists and the seven Great Angels of the Gnostics. Besides the Ameshâ-Spentas he had several other Yazatas or angels on his side. Mithra was one of the foremost of these.

Now Michael as originally conceived by the Hebrews and the early Christians may be one of the Seven Archangels, but as represented in the later Christian writings and in the Sacred Art, he seems to have been conceived rather in the picture of Mithra, as presented directly by the Zoroastrian books and indirectly by the Mithraic rites and worship of the Romans and of the other adjoining nations.

¹ Mrs. Jameson's Sacred and Legendary Art, Vol. 1., p. 94.