

WINGS

What is an angel and whence came the popular symbolism of a heavenly being with its wings flowing from its branch of lilies or its sword? What historic or religious reason is there for putting the angel figures around the many argument about their origin of a recent controversy between the classic and the modern school of art? The fact that very few people have any definite conception of the Egyptian, the Greek and the Roman gods who obeyed their commands, and the Biblical angels follow the same laws, but no writer of any note, each book consisting of a thousand times a thousand and the most of them innumerable.

What these "angel" figures are messengers from heaven, looked like opinions differ, as religious paintings of every century show. Daniel says that when an angel appeared to him, he beheld a man clothed in linen whose loins were girded with pure gold of light, his body was also like the berry and his face like the ap-

pendant in color, tinted with the rainbow hues of heaven. When these angel wings were outspread they formed a gorgeous background for the figure, and when they were at rest the tips of the wings drooped to the ground.

There is a quaint tradition that the mass of living wings to God's messengers came from the maple key that old little winged blossom of the maple which at certain seasons of the year forms on the stem and then flutters to the earth, borne by two delicate transparent wings. Whether this is responsible for assigning wings to the "upper ones" or not is still a mystery, but long before the time of Michael, Gabriel and the musical choir of heaven, the messenger of Isis traveled earth and heaven upon wings, while Mercury also had hither and thither by his aid.

Following the use of simple white drapery in the painting of angels, colors delicate aures, greens, reds and purples were introduced. Then there came a period of elaboration. The Spanish and Flemish artists depicted angels arrayed in long, heavy, trailing robes embroidered and jeweled in barbaric splendor. Later a reaction began and painters went in for the loose, simple flowing drapery of the Greeks. Some of them even went back to the Old Testament idea of wingless angels. Rossetti, for instance, painted his angels with long, slender, graceful and youthful

figures without feathered appendages. Burne-Jones is another exponent of the simple style. Fra Angelico painted the most feminine angels of any of the great Italian masters, and he was the first to have believed in the man angel, the faces of his heavenly messengers exquisitely delicate against the glowing background of gold and jewels. He was decidedly feminine. Now and then genuine feminine angels have appeared in the art of the modern world, but neither the church nor art seems to approve of this departure from the orthodox in angelology. One of the things that have caused the neglect in identifying woman with the heavenly host is that woman's place in the ancient world was too unimportant for her to have any part of the symbolism of religion.

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