

The Church of the Catacombs.

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For the Review.

NO. II.

In the catacombs there are thousands of inscriptions on tombs and pictorial representations that are most highly significant. One feature that is prominent is that of hope and joy. There was the absence of crosses and crucifixes. There is said not to be a single representation of crucifixion. Christ is never represented in a repulsive aspect, but with a mild and winning expression of face. Dean Stanley writes: "The mournful emblems which belong to nearly all the later ages of Christianity are wanting in almost all the catacombs. There is neither the cross of the fifth or sixth century, nor the crucifix or crucifixion of the twelfth or thirteenth, nor the tortures or martyrdoms of the seventeenth nor the skeletons of the fifteenth, nor the death's heads of the eighteenth. There are instead wreaths of roses, winged genii, children playing. This is the general ornamentation. It is a variation not noticed in ordinary ecclesiastical history, but it is there." The artistic representation of Scripture scenes was very prominent. The good shepherd was a favorite figure. That is the primitive conception of the Founder of Christianity. It is the very reverse of that desponding, foreboding, wailing cry that we have often heard in later days, as if His religion were going to die out of the world, as if He were some dethroned prince, whose cause was to be cherished only by the reactionary, losing, vanquished parties of the world or church. The popular conception of Him in the early Church was the strong, the joyous youth, of eternal growth, of immortal grace. The vine was another prominent figure. There was one idea that this was adapted to suggest, which was the joyous and festive character of the Christian life. The Feast of Tabernacles in the Jewish Church, was the most festive occasion of the year, when they gathered in the fruit of the vineyard, which was such an important article of food. It reminded the people of Christ the source of spiritual life and fruit, according to the beautiful parable spoken by Himself.

The epitaphs abounded with beautiful and simple expressions of Christian feeling and life. I give a few examples. "Faithful servant of God," "A holy worshipper of God," "An amiable and holy person," "Sweet and innocent soul," "Friend of men," "Friend of all and enemy of none," "My most sweet child," "My most sweet wife," "My most dear husband," "My innocent dove," "Lived together without any complaint or quarrel, without taking or giving offence," "A lover of the poor," "A man worthy to be remembered with honor."

The distinctive features of Romanism find no support in the catacombs. There its claims to antiquity fall to the ground. There is no purgatory there. "He rests," "He went to God," "In peace," are common words on the tombs. There is no representation of the Virgin Mary in the popish sense. Mr. Wharton Marriott thoroughly examined all the specimens of early art in the catacombs in which a Madonna might be found if such existed, but did not find one. He writes "Of all the pictures in the catacombs, the date of which can be referred to the first four centuries of our era, there is not one in which the Virgin is represented which is not purely Scriptural in its character." There is no worship of saints or dead men there. This accords with the avowed repudiation of the primitive fathers of the worship of the dead. The elders of Smyrna wrote, "We worship the Son of God, but the Martyrs we only love." Says Augustine, "We sacrifice not to martyrs, both theirs and ours; nor is our religion the worship of dead men." Chrysostom says, "It is the devil who has introduced this homage of angels." There is no recognition of the Romish mass in the catacombs. In a word, Rome underground in the catacombs and above ground as it now appears are two distinct worlds.

The catacombs furnish a powerful argument against popery. These are historical and furnish a striking light from their dark recesses on the doctrine,

worship, organization, and Christian life in general of the early church. Dean Stanley truly writes: "What insight into the familiar feelings and thoughts of the primitive ages of the church can be compared with that afforded by the Roman catacombs? Hardly noticed by Gibbon or Mosheim, they yet give a likeness of those early times beyond that derived from any written authority on which Gibbon and Mosheim repose. The subjects of the painting and sculpture place before us the exact ideas with which the first Christians were familiar; they remind us, by what they do not contain, of the ideas with which the first Christians were not familiar. He who is thoroughly steeped in the imagery of the catacombs will be nearer the thought of the early church than he who has learned by heart the most elaborate treatise even of Tertullian or of Origen."

Thus we are having restored a lost chapter in church history. This throws a flood of light on primitive Christianity. It shows how many features of paganism have been introduced under the Christian name. The historian and ecclesiastic, have generally lost sight of the important department of history. Gibbon, Mosheim, Giesler, Neander, and Milman, scarcely allude to this. Dr. Scaff in his church history is a marked exception, as he gives a large chapter on the subject. At the present time when there is such a tendency to ritualism, the subject should be studied, and great pains taken to spread knowledge relating to it through the religious press and otherwise. All ministers should give much attention to it.

Reminiscences of a Scottish Country Parish.

BY AN OCTOGENARIAN.

NO. XVIII.—STATE OF INTELLIGENCE.

For the Review.

At the time to which we refer general intelligence on subjects beyond their own immediate calling could hardly be said to have characterized the people of the parish. As a body they were not a reading people, and books of general information were not common. Later on an attempt was made to form a parish library to which we contributed several volumes from our limited store; but at the period we are describing there was no such institution. A weekly newspaper, published in the county town, was almost the only one that came to the parish, and that in limited numbers, one copy serving a number of readers. It was the practice for a number within a certain district to club together, and get a paper among them, each having his own day, and paying his share of the cost. In that way, one paper served a country side. News at that time travelled slowly, railways, and telegraphs, had not been dreamed of and the record of events taking place in different parts of the world one day, could not then be read at the breakfast table next morning. What changes these seventy years have brought about! To hear from London would take a month, and it cost about fifteen cents to get a letter from the city not thirty miles distant. The newspaper itself was taxed, every copy sent out, had to pay a tax of one penny to the revenue, and it was considered a boon when the weekly paper could be had for ten dollars a year.

When knowledge was taxed it need not be wondered that general intelligence was not a characteristic of the times. Neither were the books that were to be seen in the *doules* and on the window *sills* of the farm kitchens of a kind to improve the mind. "Simple John, and his twelve misfortunes," "The wise men of Gotham," "Thrummy Cap," "Jamie Fleming the Laird of Udny's feel," were the usual supply, in addition to books of songs and ballads, purchased from travelling chapmen or bought at the yearly markets, such were the literary stores of many a household. Nor did the conversation round the fire in the long winter *forenights*, tend to the mental improvement of the hearers, for these largely partook of the supernatural and marvellous, and the belief in *witches faries* and *helfies* had not entirely disappeared. To doubt the existence of such would have been regarded by some of the old people with whom we