

though occasionally fantastic, yet is generally of a profoundly religious significance and often of extreme poetic beauty. It is not of the earth, earthy, but employs material forms as suggestions of the unseen and spiritual. It addresses continually the inner sense of the soul. Its merit therefore consists not so much in artistic beauty as in appositeness of religious significance."

Before the third century we find few inscriptions. After that date epitaphs and religious formulæ and emblems are frequent. Here and there emblems recall the trade of the deceased—the grave digger's spade, the carpenter's saw and axe, a woman's weaving loom. All the instruments of a surgeon's case have been found engraved upon a stone. The beautiful allusion of St. Paul to the Christian's hope as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, is represented in the catacombs by an anchor often rudely drawn, but eloquent with profoundest meaning. The symbolical ship again may refer to the soul seeking a far country. The crown speaks of final victory and reward, the palm of the white-robed multitude whom no man can number; the dove tells of gentleness and affection and peace, or typifies the Holy Spirit, as at the Baptism of our Lord. The vine, the fountain, the lyre, the lamp, and the lighthouse have each a spiritual import. Most of the symbols, however, refer to the person and work of Christ. One of the most beautiful represent Christ as the Good Shepherd. No wonder that this symbol, drawn from one of the most beautiful of the parables of our Lord, should be repeated under every possible variety of treatment, from the rude scratching of the funeral slab to the elaborate carving of the sarcophagi.

Few symbols were so common in the catacombs as that of the fish. Its probable origin lies in the circum-

stance that the letters of *ἰχθυσ*, the Greek for fish, are the initial letters of the names and titles of our Saviour, viz: *Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς Θεοῦ Υἱὸς Σωτὴρ*—Jesus Christ the Son of God, Saviour. Hidden from their persecutors under this emblem, the Christians could proclaim the object of their faith.

Most common of all symbols is the so-called Constantinian monogram, formed by the combination of the Greek letters X and P, the first and second letters of *Χριστός*. This monogram was constantly used after the middle of the fourth century. So completely universal was its use that we find it employed as a mark of punctuation.

Carved and painted, sometimes rudely, sometimes with a certain æsthetic finish, we find frequent pictures from the historical parts of the Old Testament, as well as scenes from the life of Christ. Adam and Eve with their fig aprons, the sacrifice of Isaac, various scenes in the life of Moses, the three Hebrew children in the furnace, from the Old Testament, the story of the Samaritan woman, the miracle of the loaves and the fishes, and the blessing of the children, from the life of Jesus, may serve as examples. Indeed, these storied crypts must have been a grand illustrated Gospel.

We shall now trace the causes which led to the gradual disuse and abandonment of the catacombs. We love to visit and decorate the places where lie the remains of our dear departed ones. Especially were the early Christians drawn to the tomb of their fathers, whose saintly life or martyr's death hallowed their memory. The dust of the martyrs was regarded with especial sanctity. At first this reverence led to the adornment of the sepulchres, but quickly afterward to their partial destruction and abandonment. Many