

AMUSEMENTS OF THE PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANS.

Every man has certain customary means of enjoyment in those little intervals of leisure which occur in the busiest life. Every community offers some method of entertainment and recreation according to the prevailing tastes and habits of their society; and these amusements of men and of society indicate, no less than their serious occupations, their character. The primitive Christians, when occupied neither with labors nor with the duties of religion, had, no doubt, like other men, their amusements. But neither their principles nor their social habits would allow them to join in many of the fashionable amusements of their day. Primitive Christianity was indeed exempt from that "sullenness against nature" and nature's God which characterized the stoical philosophy of antiquity, and which subsequently lead to the follies of monkery. But its principles inculcate great strictness in regard to the pleasures of the world; and these principles of Christianity contrasted with the degeneracy of the age, threw over its professors the air of great seriousness.

As a persecuted and despised people, they sought retirement and seclusion. Conscious that bonds, imprisonment, and death awaited them, sorrowing for those who were languishing in prison or had died a martyr's death, the vanities of the world and the gaieties of convivial life had for them no charms.

Most of the amusements of the age were in some way connected with idolatrous ideas and ceremonies, or else were tainted with impurities and immoralities inconsistent with their religion. We who live at a period when the tone of public sentiment is in favor of the principles and practices of Christianity, cannot readily enter into the feelings of those who moved in a state of society where every element of nature was consecrated to the service of Paganism, and the simple and most innocent amusements could not be enjoyed without offence to all that is pure and holy.

These circumstances should be taken into account along with the religious seriousness and conscientiousness of Christians, to form our estimate of their apparent austerity.

Minucius Felix, a Roman lawyer, a convert to Christianity, who died A.D. 208, makes Cæcilius, sustaining the Heathen part of his dialogue, give the following graphic portraiture of the manners and life of Christians; "Fearful and anxious, you abstain from pleasures in which there is nothing indecorous; you visit no shows; you attend no pageants; you are seen at no public banquets;