

Pastor and People.

PARTING AND MEETING.

I cannot think that life is all,
And that when nipped by death's cold blast
We merely vanish in the past,
Or give to worms a festival.

I cannot think that hope and trust
And all high thoughts that Godward tend
Spring only from the earth, and end
When these poor frames of ours are dust.

If I could shrink so, standing here
By this small coffin, I should pray
God's lightning blast me ere the day
Breaks on the darkened mead and mere.

But no, 'tis false! Our foolish wise,
Though broad-browed, wander in the night
Of blindness, while the glorious light
Of heaven all about them lies.

There is a life when this life ends—
There is a city, angel-trod,
Whose Builder is the Eternal God,
And He will give us back our friends.

Or rather, 'neath its cloudless dome
We yet shall meet through Him who died,
And they will throng on every side
To give us eager welcome home.

—J. G. Ashworth.

GREAT THOUGHTS FROM THE ROMAN CATACOMBS.

There is always a great fascination for truly religious minds in approaching the birth of a new religion. It is curiosity tempered with reverence. Who of us, for instance, reading St. Paul's great epistle to the Romans, has not wondered what kind of people were they to whom he sends such personal and affectionate greetings? Who were Herodion his kinsman; Andronicus and Junia, his fellow-prisoners, kinsmen also, "who were in Christ before me;" Priscilla and Aquilla, "who for my life laid down their own necks;" "Urbane, our helper in Christ, and Stachys, my beloved?" What would not we all give to learn more of these immortal unknown ones—to catch a glimpse, as through a telescope, of the life of this early springtime of Roman Christianity?

Fourteen great consular roads led out of Rome to the provinces; a mile or two beyond the city walls, on most of these are situated the ancient catacombs. You descend into them, provided with a guide and lights, some twenty or twenty-five feet, entering by doorways in an old church, or by some crevice in the rocks outside. You find yourself in a dark narrow gallery cut out of the solid tufa rock, some seven or eight feet high, and three to six feet wide, and of interminable length and intricacy. On either hand are cut out countless square shelf-like graves, most now empty, but some still closed with slabs of marble or stone; some half-closed reveal crumbling bones and dust. The darkness is revealed rather than dispelled by the guides' torches; here and there are inscriptions.

These galleries are of a maze-like intricacy. If these turnings were stretched out in one line they would reach to more than two miles, and this is less than one eighth of this catacomb, which is one out of forty or fifty known to exist in the hills around Rome.

In many of the catacombs are several storeys or levels; in those of St. Callistus, for instance, there are five levels reached by a succession of staircases. Of course, it is perilous in the extreme to visit them without a guide; terrible stories are told of those who have lost their lives by so doing. One antiquary tells us of his horror, wandering for hours lost, without a clue, stumbling from exhaustion.

Here and there doorways open into small, square chambers, with tombs like the galleries, but often with seats hewn out of the rock all around the vault, which has an apse-shaped end with a stone-chair, evidently places of assembly. There are also arched tombs (latin *arcosolia*), with a table-like slab, which we now know to have been used for the celebration of the Christian sacrament in days of persecution. These chambers are often very beautifully decorated with painted vine branches, festoons and sacred pictures.

It is not possible to give here even an abridgment of the discoveries and conclusions made by devout students of these catacombs.

There is evidence that they were used for Christian burial before the end of the first century, and continued to be so used till the beginning of the fifth. Amongst the thousands of inscriptions one is of the year A.D. 72; others are of 107 and 110 down to 410; covering thus the periods of the great persecutions.

St. Jerome, writing about A.D. 350, tells how, as a school-boy, he used to go every Sunday to visit the tombs of the Apostles (*sic*) and martyrs in the dark bowels of the earth. The very silence, he says, fills the soul with dread.

After the fifth to the fifteenth centuries the catacombs seem to have been forgotten; and it is only in our own day that they have received careful exploration. The great Italian commendatore Rossi has measured and made plans of most of them. If his great book with its volumes of folio-coloured plates can be consulted, the student will be charmed.

But a very beautiful illustrated condensation of Rossi's book has been published by Canon J. Spencer Northcote, and will be found a valuable substitute. There has also been lately added to our British museum a case of early Christian antiquities which is very suggestively attractive.

We have said that the catacombs were not only places of sepulture, but also for worship on the Lord's Day—and still more for places of refuge in times of peril and persecution of the poor hunted Christians. Sometimes the Roman soldiers broke in upon their worship, and bishop and flock were led off to martyrdom in Cæsar's arena. In the year A.D. 256 a wealthy Greek family, consisting of a gentleman, his wife, his brother, and two children came to stay in Rome. Hippolytus, the brother, became a Christian. When in danger of losing his life, and hiding in the catacombs, his niece and nephew, aged nine and thirteen years, used to come to bring their uncle food. One day the uncle resolved to detain them, and so drew the father and mother to his hiding-place to seek their little ones. When there he plied them so with loving argument that they were converted and joined him.

These stupendous excavations were made by a devoted body of men called "Fossors." Theirs was a work of great danger and piety. In De Rossi there is a copy of a wall-painting of one of these men, named Diogenes, which we have reproduced in outline, showing him with his pickaxe, crowbar, lamp and compasses. These were the men who received the martyrs' and confessors' remains, who, having hewn the grave and reverently carved the inscription, preserved the records, and guided the devout in their visits to the graves.

Most of the inscriptions and many of the wall paintings remain *in situ*, but the most important are now placed in the galleries of the Vatican. The paintings are executed with every variety of style; as a rule the earlier show most freedom and skill. Trailing and festooned vines, garlands of flowers and fruits, bunches of corn, are most frequent. Of the figure subjects, Daniel in the lions' den, and the three Hebrew youths in Nebuchadnezzar's furnace are oftenest treated; it is easy to guess why. Jonah with the gourd, and the great fish drawn as a sea monster, emblem of Christ's resurrection; and Noah in the ark, often a mere chest, may be a symbol of the Church. The dove with olive branch, always the type of spiritual peace, is everywhere; but oftenest of all the Good Shepherd, seeking the wanderer or pasturing His flock.

The carved or scratched inscriptions on the stone panels of the tombs are the most interesting of all these relics. They breathe a spirit of affectionate piety, which still, after eighteen centuries, wins all hearts. They are in words and symbol. The Good Shepherd sometimes in the form of Orpheus playing to his sheep; a rudely scratched ship the type of salvation, and also of human life; when drawn anchored it seems to say the voyage is over—the haven is reached. The anchor is a constant figure of assurance. The dove with an olive branch hardly needing the word "Pax"—peace. Sometimes a fish, because the letters of the Greek word *Ixθys* are the initials—Jesus Christ, son of God, Saviour. The monogram "X" or "XR=chr." was a cross, and the contraction of Christus. Sometimes we find a case of parchments, signifying authorship; often the shield of faith and the palm branches of martyrdom. Often the friends of the deceased were poor and illiterate, and added a hieroglyph. Thus under "Leo" is drawn a lion, under "Onager" a wild ass. Porcella means a little pig, and a girl who had borne that pet name has a tiny outline of that animal scratched on her stone.

We close this hasty notice by a few translations of the engraved inscriptions themselves; the men who wrote them were no bitter cynics or pessimist-philosophers; their words are fresh and tender as spring flowers. Here are some:—

"To Adsertos, our dearest, sweetest, most innocent son."

"Maximius, who lived twenty-three years, friend of all men."

"To Domina, my sweetest and most innocent wife. I showed her my love as I felt it."

"Victorina sleeps, in Peace."

"Nicephorus, a sweet soul in refreshment."

"Zoticus, thou livest in the Lord. Be of good cheer."

Sometimes the name is withheld:—

"Thirty years in peace."

"Lannus, Christ's martyr, rests here. He suffered under Diocletian."

"Here lies Gordianus, deputy of Gaul, who was executed for the faith with all his family. They rest in peace. Theophila, a handmaid, set up this."

"Demetrius and Leontia, to their well-deserving daughter Lyrica. Remember our child, O Lord Jesus."

"Aurelius Agapetus and Aurelia Felicissima, to their most excellent foster-child, Felicitas, who lived thirty-six years. Pray for your husband, Celsinianus.—*Great Thoughts*."

WHEELS WITHIN WHEELS.

Societies within societies seem to be one of the growing ailments of our churches. One single church, and that not a strong one, will use up all the letters of the alphabet and exhaust every evening in the week with organizations of one sort or another. It is cheering to notice that this Egyptian plague is being exposed in many of the papers. For one thing, it wears a minister out. He is so busy at the retail

counter that he has no time for the wholesale business. The American pastor is weighted down by trifles, like Gulliver overrun by the Lilliputians. It is amusing to hear him struggling through the Sunday notices, which he is expected to give out, and to say a pleasant or pressing word about each one. Not even my feeling of gallantry prevents me from observing that the women, with their secretaries, boards and committees, are the hardest to satisfy. The pastor often wishes that he had the courage of the unjust judge, or else the persistency of the widow. This is what Professor T. Howard Pattison says in the *Freeman*.

Well and truly said Professor Pattison. The clatter of the little wheels is so loud that hardly any other sound can be heard. They are not all concentric. They do not revolve upon a common axis, hence, there is increased friction. From this follows a loss of power, a loss of power diminishes results.

Besides these "wheels within wheels," there are others without the driving-wheel, yet, they sustain an apparent relation to it, which seems to indicate that they belong to a common system. They are connected with it by means of worldly cogs and bands, but so badly adjusted that their motion is not only not uniform, but often reversed. Here is another cause of confusion, increase of friction and consequent waste of power.

To speak plainly, these "societies within societies" are, indeed, "growing ailments," "Egyptian plagues," that "weigh down pastors with trifles" and fritter away the energies of the Churches.

We are glad that many papers of all denominations are waking up to the evil of which Professor Pattison speaks. Let the Church claim, and diligently use, her own material, and refuse to allow any other organizations to lay their hands on what legitimately belongs to her. The world is stealthily creeping into the Church through these agencies, robbing her of her God-given power and dragging her down to its own low level.—*Christian Index*.

NEGLECT.

If we want to see what neglect will do we need only try it in our gardens. We need not kill the plants not cut nor blight them; it is only necessary to simply neglect them. If we let the garden alone for years, what is the result? The highly-cultivated roses have become the wild rose of the hedge, and the strawberries the small, wild berries of the wood. If we neglect our birds, or our animals, they degenerate into common, worthless forms, even man himself, if neglected, becoming the savage. There is no standstill anywhere in nature, nor is there in grace. Two forces are always striving for the mastery, one pulling downward, the other upward, and it is to be observed, as a point of vital importance, that the downward force is within, the upward force from without. All the tendencies of our life drag us downward. If we simply let our lives run we sink into deeper and deeper sin, without the least effort, and without intending it. We know that unless arrested and faced directly about, we should go on sinning to the end. It is exactly the case of a man who falls from a high place. We know that he is lost before he has fallen a foot, because the same force which made him fall a foot will make him fall a hundred feet; there is nothing to prevent it.

In our natural descent into evil there is something to prevent it, there is salvation offered to the sinner. It is like a strong hand offered to the man falling over the precipice; if he grasps it he is saved, but if he neglects it he is lost. He need not dash himself down nor plunge into the depths; he needs but to neglect the offered hand to accomplish his death. Just so it is with the sinner. The power of sin is dragging him down, and salvation is the strong hand held out to save him. To be saved, the sinner needs but take hold of that and hold on still stopped in his downward course. He needs but neglect it to be lost, for that amounts to cutting himself off from the only possible means of escape.

There must be action, the waking up of his whole nature to lay hold on the hope set before him. Salvation depends upon ourselves, for God has done His part in providing a way of escape. We need only neglect it to find that nothing can save us, and that neglect has as effectually shut the gate of heaven upon us as if we had closed it with our own hand. "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?"—*Christian-at-Work*.

MAKE HOME A SCHOOL.

Make home an institution of learning. Provide books for the centre-table, and for the library of the family. See that all the younger children attend the best schools, and interest yourself in their studies. If they have the taste for thorough cultivation, but not the means to pursue it, if possible provide for a higher education. Daniel Webster taught at the intervals of his college course, to aid an elder brother in the pursuit of a classical education, and a volume of his works is dedicated to the daughters of that brother, who early closed a brilliant career. Feel that an ignorant brother or sister will be a disgrace to your family, and trust not to the casual influence of the press, existing institutions and the kind offices of strangers. If the family becomes, as it may be, an institution of learning, the whole land will be educated.—*Exchange*.