

bly of the people during the first three centuries. And with regard to the sick and the infirm, we find them served from the *public table* at the same time with the rest of the Church, by the hands of the deacons, and that, too, only under the idea that the ordinance itself has a saving virtue. In the middle of the fourth century, as we have seen, the Council of Laodicea throws back its light upon the early practice of the Church, condemning the recent innovation of consecrating the elements in private houses.

III. We come now to consider *modern usage and opinion* on the subject in question. We have not had it in our power to make as extended an enquiry as we could wish into the views that are actually prevalent at the present time in different branches of the Church. But we think it would be a sufficiently accurate general statement to say that, in proportion as our churches are purely Protestant, and thoroughly reformed, they discover a repugnance to private communion. In the Roman Catholic and semi-Popish Churches, and wheresoever high sacramentarian views are entertained (as in portions of the Episcopal Church), the private use of the sacred elements is very commonly practiced. But in churches the most thoroughly free from the old leaven of Romish superstition, there is, in most cases, a total avoidance of private communions.—This is true generally, if not universally, of Scotch Presbyterian Churches. There is in these churches either a specific interdict or a controlling usage that strictly forbids any other than a public administration of the sacrament in the ordinary assemblies of the people. Dr. Mason, it is well known, on this ground felt himself constrained to decline giving the sacrament to General Hamilton, who made in his dying moments a credible profession of his faith. Nor is there any doubt in regard to the leaning of the other Presbyterian Churches in this country. The Westminster Confession, which is the basis of their faith and practice, bears a testimony that is also adverse to private communions. It declares that private masses, or the receiving of the sacrament by the priest, or by any other alone, is contrary to the nature of the sacrament and to the institution of Christ. It declares, also, in another place, that the elements are not to be distributed to any *that are not then present in the congregation*, importing that the public and social character of the ordinance is to be carefully adhered to.

With regard to our own branch of the Church, there is no specific order or rule on the subject of private communions that we have been able to discover; nor is there anything, perhaps, that is very decisive in the public formularies of the Church. In the 35th Article, however, of our Confession of Faith there occurs this significant expression

that may demand attention. After dwelling at large upon the true import of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, in contrast with erroneous or inadequate views, it says: "Lastly, we receive this holy sacrament in the *assembly of the people of God*."

If this reception be regarded as exclusive of every other it would amount to an authoritative deliverance as to the method of its administration, and would be held to be a rejection and disallowance of all private uses of the Lord's Supper.

On the whole, the Committee are of the opinion that the Scriptures, early Church history, and the intelligent Protestant sentiment of the present day combine to exhibit the Lord's Supper in the light of a public ordinance appointed for the edification of the Church in its collective capacity, and not for individual or private use; and that they look with disfavor and suspicion on all departures from obvious and conspicuous design.

Our Foreign Missions.

MR. GEDDIE'S ANNUAL REPORT.

(Continued.)

You will no doubt be anxious for information about the neighbouring islands, and I am just as desirous to furnish it. The mission at Aneiteum has been more or less identified with the work in other parts of the group. It is long since we regarded this island as our only sphere of labour, and for years it has been our aim to extend the gospel to the dark regions beyond. And we have always found that our efforts to extend the cause of Christ, have been followed with the happiest results, in awakening increased attention to religion among ourselves. The first island which I shall notice is

FUTUNA.

I have twice visited this island during the year. The work there is in a measure stationary for the present. This island was happily exempt from the disease which swept so many of their neighbours into the grave. They have heard however of the great mortality on Aneiteum, Tana, Erromanga, and other islands, and have been stunned by it. No doubt many suppose that christianity had something to do with the calamities that have befallen them. The consequence has been that the people have been afraid, and comparatively few have risen so far above their superstitions as to attend on the religious instructions of the teachers. But we have reason to be thankful that there is no