

parables of the tares and the wheat, and of the net which gathered of every kind, were recognized by the Church as foretelling in some sort the presence of lax and even bad members within the Church. This Tertullian could not brook, and he joined the sect of the Montanists and thus forfeited the title of Saint, which he would otherwise have borne; though his error has ever been looked upon with a lenient and sorrowing eye.

His writings are grand in their vigorous and impassioned utterances. His scorn of the heathen idols and worship is uttered with the highest irony. His ridicule of their folly and immorality is scathing: and all help us to realize the heathen surrounding with which Christians were annoyed and offended.

Persecution burst on the Church in Africa with great violence when it began. The Christians there towards the end of the second century were to be numbered by thousands, aye millions. He says in his apology: "We are but of yesterday, and we have filled every place among you, cities, islands, castles, towns, court houses, camps, tribes, wards, palace, Senate, forum; we leave you the Temples only. For what war are we not fit (though we are not anxious for it), though unequal in forces, for we are willing to be put to death, if it were not more lawful with us to be slain than to slay. Why, unarmed and not rebellious, but only at variance with you, we could fight against you by the ill-will of secession and nothing more. For if we should in such a body of men break away from you to some remote corner of the world, the loss of so many excellent citizens would shame your government, aye, and bring punishment upon it. Why, you would be frightened at your loneliness, at the silence of the streets, and the numbness about you as if the world were dead." This is doubtless the exaggeration of rhetoric; but still it shows that their numbers must have been recognized as very great. Against them the heathen, put to shame by their quietude and virtuous behaviour, rose, and endeavoured to stir themselves and others to attack the Christians by uttering false accusations of ridiculous and abominable practices. First, they were accused of not worshipping the heathen gods. Tertullian says: This is quite true. Yet what do you worship? What respect do you pay to your gods? If you are short of ready money you take one to the pawnshop. If another is broken you melt him down into a saucepan or a ladle. Why, you put your national gods into a sale catalogue and sell them off by auction. Don't be surprised, therefore, if we think nothing of them.

Then they accused them of worshipping a figure with an ass's head. Here we have a sadly interest-

ing picture to present to our readers. Tertullian tells us they paraded through the streets ridiculous and blasphemous pictures of what they called the GOD of the Christians. One such was paraded at Rome. Now, on November 11, 1857, there was discovered in the ruins of the Palatine Palace at Rome a scribbled picture on the wall which must be referred to the commencement of the third century, and will illustrate this allusion of Tertullian.



WALL SCRIBBLE AT ROME cir. A. D. 200.

A figure in a tunic is making the customary gesture of adoration; the man has just kissed his hand in act of worship. This is referred to by the Patriarch Job, who professes his freedom from idolatry. He says, speaking of the worship of sun and moon: "If I beheld the sun when it shined, or the moon walking in brightness and my heart hath been secretly enticed, or *my mouth hath kissed my hand*: this were iniquity to be punished by the judge."* The inscription is in Greek and means "Alexamenos is worshipping his God." Tertullian traces the error to a historian who said that the Jews worshipped an ass's head because in the wilderness wild asses had led them to water springs. But the same writer acknowledged that when the victorious Romans burst into the Holy of Holies there was nothing at all there.

Then they were accused of worshipping the Cross, because they revered the Cross as the "sign of the Son of Man." The early Christians constantly used the sign of the Cross to remind themselves of their Lord, but they never could worship any one or anything but God. Many persons nowadays are stirred up to bring a similar accusation against Christians who reverence the Cross, as, the homilies say, "the wood whereby righteousness cometh." When we are baptized

*Job xxxi., 26, 27.