

in silence to pray towards Mecca, when suddenly he recognized in the holy keeper of the tomb his old servant Mohammed. "Salam alaykoom," said Skeikh Ali. "Alaykoom es Salam," replied Mohammed. When he asked him how he came here, and how he found this tomb, Mohammed replied, "This tomb is a great 'sirr,' or mystery, and I am forbidden to utter the secret." "But you *must* tell me," said Sheikh Ali, "for I am a father to you." Mohammed refused, and Ali insisted, until at length Mohammed said, "My honored Sheikh, you remember having given me a donkey. It was a faithful donkey, and when it died I buried it. This is the tomb of that donkey!" "Mashallah! Mashallah!" said Sheikh Ali, "the will of Allah be done!" Then they ate and drank together, and renewed the memory of their former life, and then Sheikh Mohammed said to Sheikh Ali, "My master, as I have told you the 'sirr' of my prophet's tomb, I wish to know the secret of yours." "Impossible," said Ali, "for that is one of the ancient mysteries, too sacred to be mentioned by mortal lips." "But you *must* tell me, even as I have told you." At length the old Sheikh Ali stroked his snowy beard, adjusted his white turban, and whispered to Mohammed, "And my holy place is the *tomb of that donkey's father!*" "Mashallah," said Mohammed, "may Allah bless the beard of the holy donkeys!"

inimitable beauty. In the apocalyptic visions of St. John the language of imagery is exhausted to represent the overthrow of Satan, the triumph of Christ, and the glories of the New Jerusalem.

The primitive Christians, therefore, naturally adopted a similar mode of art expression for conveying religious instruction. They also, as a necessary precaution in times of persecution, concealed from the profane gaze of their enemies the mysteries of the faith under a veil of symbolism, which yet revealed their profoundest truths to the hearts of the initiated. That such disguise was not superfluous is shown by the recent discovery of a pagan caricature of the Crucifixion on a wall beneath the Palatine, and the recorded desecration of the eucharistic vessels by the Apostate Julian. To those who possessed the key to the "Christian hieroglyphs," as Raoul-Rochette has called them, they spoke a language that the most unlettered as well as the learned could understand. What to the haughty heathen was an unmeaning scrawl, to the lowly believer was eloquent of loftiest truths and tenderest consolation.

Although occasionally fantastic and far-fetched, this symbolism is generally of a profoundly religious significance, and often of extreme poetic beauty. In perpetual canticle of love it finds resemblances of the Divine object of its devotion throughout all nature. It beholds beyond the shadows of time the eternal verities of the world to come. It is not of the earth earthy, but is entirely supersensual in its character, and employs material forms only as suggestions of the unseen and spiritual. It addresses the inner vision of the soul, and not the mere outer sense. Its merit consists, therefore, not in artistic beauty of execution, but in appositeness of religious significance—a test lying far too deep for the apprehension of the uninitiate. It is perhaps also influenced, as Kugler remarks, in the avoidance of realistic representation, by the fear which pervaded the primitive Church of the least approach to idolatry.

Great care must be observed, however, in the interpretation of this religious symbolism, not to strain it beyond its capacity or intention. It should be withdrawn from the sphere of theological controversy, too often the battleground of religious rancor and bitterness, and relegated to that of scientific archæology and dispassionate criticism. An allegorizing mind, if it has any theological dogma to maintain, will discover symbolical evidence in its support where it can be detected by no one else.

THE CATACOMBS OF ROME. By Rev. W. H. Withrow.

We give below a passage which we had marked for insertion under our notice of this volume last month, but which was unfortunately crowded out. The subject is

#### THE SYMBOLISM OF THE CATACOMBS.

Primitive Christianity was eminently congenial to religious symbolism. Born in the East, and in the bosom of Judaism, which had long been familiar with this universal oriental language, it adopted types and figures as its natural mode of expression. These formed the warp and woof of the symbolic drapery of the tabernacle and temple service, prefiguring the great truths of the Gospel. The Old Testament sparkles with mysterious imagery. In the sublime visions of Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel, move strange creatures of wondrous form and prophetic significance. In the New Testament the Divine Teacher conveys the loftiest lessons in parables of