

GENERAL LITERATURE.

THE PRIVATE MANNERS OF THE EARLY CHRISTIANS.

In the first ages of the Christian Church, when the followers of the crucified Redeemer were few in numbers, and exposed to frequent and severe persecutions, the circumstances in which they felt themselves placed were such as to lead to a marked separation, both in habits and principles, from the ungodly world around them. They were, in the most emphatic sense of the expression, "a peculiar people," and that peculiarity was evinced not merely on great and important occasions, but in the minute details of every-day life. Such an obvious distinction from the idolaters among whom they lived, was not more in accordance with the high and holy doctrines which they professed to believe, than it was useful in preserving them from an unwarranted conformity to the maxims and modes of life prevalent among the heathen. Not that they were called upon to stand so completely aloof from worldly men, as to refrain from the ordinary charities of social life. No. If there is one principle which the gospel inculcates more earnestly than another, it is that of universal benevolence and kindness, commanding Christians to do good to all as they have opportunity. But among the primitive Christians, while this duty was observed with the most exemplary strictness, the dread of being too much conformed to the world was ever present to their minds. The animating and purifying motives of Christianity operated upon their hearts with an intensity which can scarcely be understood in the present day. The doctrines of their holy religion they adopted as ruling principles, influencing their whole deportment. They were, in the great majority of instances, men who had been formerly sunk in the degradation of a barbarous heathenism, and now that they emerged as it were into the light of day, they gladly cast away from them every remnant of their former habits, and entered with the utmost ardour into all the peculiarities of the new system which they had embraced.

And, besides, the Christians felt, to their own sad experience, that they were viewed with no favourable eye by the votaries of paganism; cold suspicion, rankling jealousy and hatred, burst forth at length into the most cruel and long-continued persecution. In this state of matters, it would have been wonderful indeed, if a striking distinction in manners had not characterized a people so situated. The profession of Christianity in a country and age such as ours, scarcely affords any test whatever of the sincerity of an individual's principles and views. It is unfashionable, nay it would be discreditable, and might seriously injure any man's secular interests, to avow himself an unbeliever. An outward adherence to the Christian profession is almost universally prevalent in the community. The infidel is compelled either to be silent, or at all events to assume an apparent respect for religion. He cannot do otherwise unless he has made up his mind to become an outcast from society. And the nominal professor too, feels the same overwhelming pressure from without. He has no true regard at heart for the interests of religion. He would gladly cast away from him the restraints which Christianity imposes. But to part with the profession and name of believer, he dare not; such a step would ruin his character and reputation in the eyes of his fellows; and, though he has "no fear of God," he has some little regard for the esteem of man. He plays his part with the utmost dexterity, he becomes a hypocrite—a mere nominal Christian, "in

words professing to know Christ, while in works he denies him."

Such characters as we have now referred to are comparatively unknown in an age of persecution. The chaff is then most effectually separated from the wheat. When the ungodly world begins to frown, when the clouds of adversity and trouble gather, and blacken, and burst over the Church of God, then it is that her winning time is come. The love of man, who in the days of prosperity were loudest in their professions of attachment to the cause of Christ, suddenly seems to wax cold. They quit the ranks of his followers; "they walk no longer with him." It is most edifying to turn to the early ages of the Christian Church, and see the effects of persecution on the minds of true believers. They remain steadfast and unmoved. Their courage is unshaken by the most earnest solicitations of friends, or the most bitter reproaches of enemies. They love Christ and his salvation, and nothing can avail to wrench from them this precious treasure. They feel that they are bound to one another by a firmer tie than before; and now that they are not merely believers of one common faith, but objects also of one common hatred, they stand out in bolder relief than ever, from their ruthless persecutors. Is it wonderful that in these circumstances the Christians of early times should cautiously avoid every, even the slightest tendency to conform to the customs of the heathen around them, and perhaps rush into the opposite extreme; thus exhibiting a marked singularity in their manners and deportment? In the minute details, however, of their ordinary conduct there is a beautiful simplicity which we cannot but admire. And we are all the more anxious to call the attention of our readers to the habits of the primitive Christians, that there are few who have carefully studied the subject, who are not aware of the value of Mr. Jamieson's recent work, entitled "The Manners and Trials of the Primitive Christians," we are not aware of any modern volume to which we can refer our readers; and as the book to which we have now alluded abounds in interesting and authentic information on the topics of which we are treating in this article, we still avail ourselves of it for the purpose of illustration.

The first point to which we shall advert, in speaking of the manners of the early Christians, is their

DRESS.

It may to many appear a matter of indifference what colour or mode of dress is worn. Nothing, in fact, is more subject to caprice; and we may almost wonder how any one should attach the slightest importance to a thing so trivial. Viewed in the light of Christianity, however, nothing is destitute of the degree of interest, which either affects or is indicative of the spiritual condition of man. The primitive Christians felt this, and accordingly we find that they were not altogether inattentive to the style of clothing in which they appeared. On this subject Mr. Jamieson, after admitting that they gradually adopted a dress peculiar to themselves, thus vindicates them:

Not that they affected any singularity in their personal appearance—for their billiments were worn in the ordinary fash of the time and place;—and Christians whether they were found in the high, the middle, or the lower ranks, were accustomed to equip themselves in a manner suitable to the exigencies of the state or profession to which they belonged. But, looking to the moral influence of dress, desirous of avoiding every thing that might minister to vanity, or lead the way to

ornaments of a meek and quiet spirit, they studiously rejected all finery, as unbecoming the humility of their character, and confined themselves to a suit of apparel, remarkable not so much for the plainness of the material, as for the absence of all superfluous ornaments. Every thing gaudy or sumptuous, that partook of the costly stuffs, or the crimsoned dyes that suited the luxuries or taste of the times, was discountenanced by the spiritually-minded followers of Christ; and though many of them were entitled, by birth or otherwise, to appear in the flowing robes of the graceful toga, yet, even that favourite garb, while it was retained for the valuable privileges it conferred, was looked upon as too gay and splendid for ordinary use, and was by most, if not by all the Christians, laid aside for the common pillium or cloak, to which the preference was given on account of the air of greater modesty and gravity that was supposed to belong to it. Moreover, among the Christians of the East, the custom early prevailed of wearing garments of no other colour than white,—in order that they might carry about with them a perpetual memorial of the purity of character that became their profession; and there were others, in various parts of the world, who thought it their duty to carry the imitation of Christ to wearing the meanest and most common attire of one in the form of a servant. But neither of these extravagances met with very general countenance; and the greater part contented themselves with a dress free from all approach to gaudiness and pomp, betraying no symptoms of an anxious and elaborate decoration of the person, and conspicuous only for its neat and cleanly appearance.

From these remarks it must be apparent that though in some cases there might be an excessive attention to their dress, the great mass of believers contented themselves with the observance of such a plainness and simplicity, in this particular, as became men whose minds were engrossed with far higher objects than mere outward decoration. And not merely in the article of dress were the early Christians thus simple and unostentatious; in the internal arrangements of their houses the same spirit was maintained. Thus Mr. Jamieson remarks in speaking of their

FURNITURE:

The same simplicity and plainness reigned throughout the domestic establishment of the Christians. Most of the primitive disciples, indeed, were in circumstances that offered no temptations to indulge in the splendour or variety of ornamental furniture. Their inventory of goods embraced only a few simple articles of use, which their personal and family wants required; and it may be supposed therefore that there was nothing remarkable in the absence from their homes of all traces of pomp and elegance, which they neither possessed the means nor entertained the hope of acquiring. But even those of their number, who were persons of rank and opulence, amply provided with resources to gratify a taste for ornament, contented themselves with such things as were recommended by their utility rather than their elegance, and calculated to answer the purposes of necessity and comfort, rather than to gratify the lust of the eye and the pride of life. Seats and cabinets, finished with the costly veneering of tortoise-shell, and couches ornamented with the rich embroideries of Babylon; vessels of gold and silver, the numberless statues and other graceful accompaniments, of all sizes and forms, which adorn the chambers and porticoes, and gardens of the rich, and indicated the epicurean taste that distinguished the age, disappeared from the house of the Christian, as inconsistent with