

INTRODUCTION.

persecution under Decius (A. D. 249-251). "Count Aurelianus," we read, "ordered Pope Alexander to be brought before him, and said to him: 'I require you first to reveal to me all the mysteries of your sect, that I may know why you choose to be put to death for one Christ, I know not whom, rather than yield.' Saint Alexander replied: 'What you ask for is holy, and we are not permitted by Christ to give that which is holy unto dogs.'" Here we have an authoritative declaration by the head of the Church, the successor of Peter, that what are known as the mysteries were to be jealously guarded. Rather than reveal them he himself gave up his life. He became a martyr, though by no means the first, to the Discipline of the Secret. And it is especially worthy of note that he, not less than the Fathers of the third and fourth centuries, as we shall presently see, finds the reason and sanction of this Discipline in the precept of the Master.

Tertullian testifies to the stringency of this law of secrecy in the early Church. He takes it for granted that a Christian woman who