

## GENERAL LITERATURE.

## PUBLIC WORSHIP IN THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH.

We now present some facts in the fourth century. Frequent references are made to places of worship, in the history of the persecution under Diocletian and Maximian. But before Constantine, houses of worship were very simple, both in their structure and their ornaments. They were called temples, or the Lord's house, or oratories, *i. e.*, houses of prayer. Sometimes also, the word Basilica was applied to them. This was first the name for city halls, used for courts and for public meeting of all kinds. These halls in many instances had been appropriated for Christian worship, and the term passed into use for Christian temples. The term martyrion was also applied to churches after the time of Constantine, when many meeting houses were built in particular places, in honour of martyrs. A church was built at Jerusalem, in "the place of a skull," about the 30th year of the reign of Constantine, and was called the great martyrion.

But if Christians were not allowed to assemble in churches, by reason of existing persecutions, or any other hindrance, they were wont to convene in burying grounds, or other places without the walls of cities. In the persecution under Valens, the Christians of Antioch held their assemblies at the foot of the mountains. So the Christians of Alexandria, in another persecution, assembled for prayer in their burying ground. Constantine, in the marches of his army, had a large tent made in the form of a temple, which he carried about with him as a house of worship. Sozom., lib. i., c. 8.

After the churches enjoyed the patronage of Constantine, they were wont to build their houses of worship both within and without the walls of cities. They gave them names sometimes from the apostles, sometimes from martyrs, and sometimes from some remarkable event. Here originated a custom which has since stood connected with many superstitions and popish and prelatical churches. Constantine built a church at Jerusalem, in honor of the Saviour. And there was another there by the name of Theopania. This, and still another at Jerusalem, were built by the mother of Constantine. One was built in Bethlehem in memory of the Virgin; and one was built in memory of Christ's ascension. At Alexandria there were churches bearing the name of Dionysius and Theonas. There was a magnificent one at Constantinople, in honour of Athanasius. Theodosius built another there, without the city, and named it from John the Baptist. There were also in that city a church of Paul, one of the Apostles, one of Peace, and one of Wisdom, or Sophia.

About this time also, a new sacredness and importance began to attach to the dedication and consecration of temples. Athanasius relates that the converted Jews at Berytus had their greatest synagogues converted to Christ the Saviour, by the minister (Antistes) of that place. And from that time the custom of building or consecrating to the Saviour most Christian churches extended through the world. In this work there seems to have been in the Church a wicked rivalry with heathenism. For ostentatious ends they often built churches far beyond any use which they had for them.

The ceremonies by which Constantine's church in Jerusalem was dedicated, are given by Eusebius and others. And they had in them more of superstition than would be profitable to relate. The dedication of churches soon came to be regarded as indispensable;

and Christians would not worship in them, if they had not been dedicated.

The superstitious practice of having altars in churches, had now become universal. And the habit of speaking of the Lord's Supper as a sacrifice, though evidently in a figurative sense, was very common. In this century also, we find traces of the introduction of images into the churches, which was the origin of Popish idolatry. Julian had ejected from a church in Casarea Philippi, an image of Christ, and after his death the Christians restored it. Images representing the suffering of martyrs were also erected in churches.

Eusebius, in his Life of Constantine, shows that wax candles and lamps were sometimes burnt in places of public worship. Prudentius says, that throughout all the oriental churches, candles were burnt, though the sun was shining, and not because of any darkness, but to express their joy. This superstitious custom seems to have originated in the necessities of preceding ages, when Christians were compelled to hold their meetings by night, and to use candles of course. The custom established thus by necessity was afterwards preserved by superstition. Another circumstance perhaps contributed to introduce it. The custom was very prevalent in the oriental churches of holding assemblies before light in the morning. Here would be another occasion for lighting candles. After the practice of dedicating churches came in, the ceremony was often performed at midnight. In many places churches were kept open every day and all day, for any to come and receive Christian instruction.

The exercises of public worship in this century embraced those of prayer, singing of psalms, partaking of sacraments, and giving of thanks. The worship began by singing, then followed a prayer, then the assembly rose and heard the sermon while standing, on the ground that it was not proper to hear the word of God in an easy and slothful position. As to the origin of Christian psalmody, Theodoret suggests that Flavianus and Diodorus began the practice of singing the Psalms of David, at the tombs of the martyrs, and in the churches. And thence the custom spread through the world. But it is evident from Paul's epistles, that the custom existed in his day. And Theodoret says that Ephrem, a minister of the church at Edessa, took some tunes that had been used for impious purposes, and set to them the words of sacred songs. And Ephrem says, we honour our festivities with psalms and hymns, and spiritual songs. In seasons of some signal rejoicing, they had entertainments, connected with singing and dancing, both in the church and by the tombs of the martyrs.

It appears from Basil, that the usual length of a sermon was one hour. The subject of the sermon was often taken from the psalm that was sung. In the church at Alexandria psalms were sometimes read to the people, and prayers offered afterwards. Sermons were preached in the vulgar tongue, and in the most simple manner, and without the least affectation of elegance. And after the sermon the hearers recited a prayer. A canon of the third council of Carthage shows that none besides the canonical scriptures were permitted to be read in the church at this time. The history of martyrs might be read at their festivals.

But perhaps we have extended this sketch as far as it is profitable. Though it is well on many accounts to know the facts, touching the practice of the primitive church, we are far from citing the example of primitive Christians as a rule of duty for us. Those

read the fathers very unwisely, who read them for the indiscriminate adoption of whatever practices are found to have been in vogue among them. Milton well characterizes this kind of patristical reading, when he says—"Whatsoever time, or the heedless hand of blind chance, hath drawn down from of old to this present, in her huge drag-net, whether fish or sea weed, shells or shrubs, unpicked, unchosen, those are the fathers." But he well characterizes and commends a judicious use of the fathers, as follows—"He that thinks it the part of a well-learned man to have read diligently the ancient stories of the Church, and to be no stranger in the volumes of the fathers, shall have all judicious men consenting with him; not hereby to controul and new-fangle the Scriptures, God forbid! but to mark how corruption and apostacy crept in by degrees, and to gather up wherever we find the remaining sparks of original truth, wherewith to stop the mouths of our adversaries, and to bridle them with their own curb, who willingly pass by that which is orthodox in them, and studiously cull out that which is commentitious, and best for their turns, not weighing the fathers in the balance of Scripture, but Scripture in the balance of the fathers." Our times require that we should study the fathers for the purposes so well pointed out in this passage; and while we abjure their authority, an acquaintance with them will arm us the better for the conflict to which Providence is evidently calling us.—*N. E. Puritan.*

## SELF-CULTIVATION.

## THE PROCESS.

1. Continually add to your stock of knowledge.

It is good and wholesome to make sure of any great fact in philosophy, history, morals, or religion, and then trace the relations which connect it with others. As the fields of inquiry spread before us are boundless, we may advance, perpetually adding important acquisitions. A determination to know what is to be known, and to add something continually to what is already attained, will be an element and a pledge of constant improvement.

2. Let no day pass without some new attainment.

In this I write to all alike, both to those who have many advantages, and to those who have but few; to such as have considerable leisure, and to such as are pressed hard with the necessity of labour; to all equally I say, make as much progress in the acquisition of knowledge as you possibly can, but by all means let every day bear witness that you have made some. Close not your eyes in sleep unless you are certain that you have become master of some new fact, or obtained some new conception of truth and duty. This rule has made many a man great and useful.—Thus one of our most valuable writers, who, amidst great professional labours, has done much for the public, informed me that he attained it by suffering no day to pass in which one line at least was not made ready for the press. Thus that remarkable statesman, John Quincy Adams, acquired his prodigious stores of knowledge by daily extending the range of his reading and reflection. Thus that distinguished mechanic, Mr. Burrit, was enabled while labouring for his living at the forge, to outrun the student in the classic halls. In order to make your progress sure, and be able to mark it, lay hold of some one important branch of knowledge, with a determination to master it; or always keep close at hand some noble standard work, and daily peruse it until it is finished. He who carries