



SUNDAY READING

THE CATACOMBS OF ROME.

Constructed for Burying Places, Not for Refuges from Persecution.

The Catacombs, says an English paper, owe their origin to Roman toleration. The imperial government protected by law the burial clubs, composed mostly of poor people who, by regular contributions, secured decent interment for their relatives and friends.

The Catacombs were excavated by the early Christians for the express and sole purpose of burying their dead. The hope of the resurrection of the body made them aver to the custom of cremation then prevailing among the Greeks and the Romans. They adhered to the older Jewish custom of burying the dead in rock-hewn tombs and galleries. Hence the close resemblance of Jewish and Christian cemeteries in Rome. After Constantine, when the Christians could afford to buy and hold land and could bury their dead without fear of disturbance, they located their cemeteries above ground around their churches and chapels.

The Roman Catacombs are long and narrow passages or cross-galleries, excavated in the bowels of the earth in the hill outside and around the city, for the burial of the dead. They are dark and gloomy, with only occasional ray of light from above. The galleries have two or more stories, all filled with tombs, and form an intricate network of subterranean labyrinth. Small compartments for the reception of the dead were cut out like shelves in the perpendicular walls and rectangular chambers for families of distinguished martyrs. They were closed with a slab of marble or tile. The more wealthy were laid in sarcophagi. The ceiling is flat, sometimes slightly arched. Space was economised so as to leave room usually only for a single person, the average width of the passages being 2 1/2 and 3 feet. This economy may be traced to the poverty of the early Christians, and also to their strong sense of community in life and in death. The little oratories with altars and episcopal choirs cut in the tufa are probably of later construction, and could accommodate only a few persons at a time. They were suited for funeral services and private devotion, but not for public worship.

The furniture of the Catacombs is instructive and interesting, but most of it has been removed to churches and museums, and must be studied outside. Articles of ornament, rings, seals, bracelets, necklaces, mirrors, tooth-picks, ear-picks, buckles, brooches, rare coins, innumerable lamps of clay (terra cotta) or of bronze (even of silver and amber), all sorts of tools, and, in the case of children a variety of playthings were enclosed with the dead. Many of these articles are carved with the monogram of Christ, or with other christian symbols.

The instruments of torture which the fertile imagination of credulous people had discovered, and which were made to prove that almost every christian buried in the Catacombs was a martyr, are simply implements of handicraft. The instinct of nature prompts the bereaved to deposit in the graves of their kindred and friends those things which were constantly used by them. The idea prevailed also, to a large extent, that the future life was a continuation of the occupations and amusements of the present, but free from sin and imperfection.

On opening the graves the skeleton frequently appears even now very well preserved, sometimes in dazzling whiteness, as covered with a glistening glory, but falls into dust at the touch.

The following symbols, borrowed from the Scriptures, were frequently represented in the Catacombs, and relate to the virtues and duties of the christian life; the dove, with or without the olive branch, the type of simplicity and innocence; the ship, representing sometimes the Church as safely sailing through the flood of corruption, with reference to Noah's Ark, sometimes the individual soul on its voyage to the heavenly home under the conduct of the storm-controlling Saviour; the palm-branch which the seer of the Apocalypse puts into the hands of the elect as the sign of victory; the anchor, the figure of hope; the lyre, denoting festal joy, sweet harmony; the cock, an admonition to watchfulness, with reference to Peter's fall; the hart, which points to the fresh-water brooks; and the vine, which, with its branches and clusters, illustrates the union of the Christians with Christ according to the parable (John xv. 1-6) and the richness and fulness of christian life. "What the early Christians felt," says Dean Stanley, "was a new moral influence, a new life stealing through their veins, a new health imparted to their frames, a new courage breathing in their faces, like wine to a weary laborer, like sap in the hundred branches of a spreading tree like juice in the thousand clusters of a spreading vine."

The most favourite symbol in the Catacombs is the fish. This can only be properly understood from the Greek word for fish, which is *ichthys*. This is a pregnant anagram containing the initial letters of the words—Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour. The fish, therefore, was an allegorical designation of Christ in his character (the Son of God) and his mission (the salvation of the world.)

At the same time, the fish was also the symbol of the christian saved by the Great Fisher of Men from the sea of the world. It thus combined the ideas of the Redeemer and the redeemed. It reminded the christian also of the water of baptism, Tertullian says, quaintly enough: "We little fishes (*pisiculi*) are born by our fish (*secundum Ickthyn nostrum*), Jesus Christ, in water, and can thrive only by continuing in water" (that is, if we are faithful to our baptismal vows.)

In some pictures the mysterious fish is

swimming in the water with a plate of bread and a cup of wine on his back, with evident allusion to the Lord's Supper.

The oldest Ichthys monument, as far as known, was discovered in 1865, in the cemetery of Domitilla, a hitherto inaccessible part of the Roman Catacombs, and is traced by De' Rossi to the first century.

The symbol of the fish continued to be used till the middle of the fourth century. After this date it occurs occasionally, as a reminiscence of olden times.

IN THE ANGLICAN CALENDAR.

Second Sunday in Advent.—Who Santa Claus Was.—A Festival of the B. V. M.

To-morrow will be the second Sunday in Advent, and the liturgical colors of violet in the Western and red in the Sarum use, with two altar lights, belong to it and the other days of the week, except Tuesday and Thursday, as noted below.

Thursday will be the feast of St. Nicholas, bishop and confessor, and the proper colors for the day are white or yellow, according to the use, with two lights.

So much is to be told of this dearly beloved saint, whose name is loved and honored wherever the cross has been set up and children are found, that the brief space permissible in this column is to little avail to recount his good works to the little children, friendless maidens, the oppressed and the stranger. He is the patron saint of Russia and of many classes of people in other christian lands. He is the Santa Claus of whom every child has heard, because it was his labor of love to bring joy to the little ones in his life on earth, and he is always inseparable from the thought of the birth of Him who was the light of the world, and who said, "Suffer little children to come unto me and forbid them not, for such is the kingdom of God."

St. Nicholas was born early in the fourth century, and died in 342. He is believed to have been persecuted, imprisoned and tortured under Diocletian and Maximian, but he survived to be one of those glorious confessors who were at the council of Nicea, when that great creed of the catholic church, "Credo in unum Deum," was formulated by the fathers in 325. At this council it is related that his usual gentle nature was so indignant at the denials of the divinity of Christ by Arius, the original and notorious heretic, that he dealt him a heavy blow on the jaw. It is related of him that as soon as he was born he at once stood upright turning eastward and looking upward, joined his baby hands in prayer. He knew how to fast as soon as he knew how to feed, and kept the fasts Wednesday and Friday. His parents died when he was but a boy, leaving him a fortune which he distributed to the poor where the needs were greatest. As for himself, after his ordination as a priest, he never tasted wine or flesh, but went barefoot, and slept on the bare earth or a plank. Almost numberless are the stories of the good deeds he did in protecting the innocent and succoring the friendless, of which some account may be given at another time. He was archbishop of Myra, where he was buried but when Mahomedanism prevailed in Asia a band of sailors translated his body to Bari in the Neapolitan territory, that it might rest in a christian land.

Thursday will be the feast of the Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a festival introduced into England by the great St. Ansel in the year 1150. The color for the day is white in both uses, with four altar lights. The collect for the day in the Sarum Missal is: "O God, mercifully hear the supplication of Thy servants; that we, who are assembled together on the Conception of the Virgin Mother of God, may at her intercession be delivered by Thee from the dangers which beset us, through," etc.

This festival has always been held in honor by the catholic church, and not the less by many in the Anglican communion who may feel that while there may be a possibility of an excess of devotion to the B. V. M. in the cultus of the church of Rome, too little reverence is paid her by those who day after day repeat her prophecy that "from henceforth, all generations shall call me Blessed."

Up to the year 1854, the question of the Immaculate Conception of the B. V. M. had been a matter in which all catholics were free to have a pious belief, but on the 8th of December in that year Pope Pius IX, speaking *ex cathedra*, solemnly defined it as an article of faith, binding on all in the communion of the church of Rome. The subject is one on which there has been a vast amount of learned controversy, some of which has had a special interest for the people of St. John, within the last few years.

Professor Blackie once remarked that when he had more leisure he did read novels, and those of Dickens and Walter Scott made most impression upon him, because they were full of the gospel of humanity and Jesus Christ, and left him with more of the milk of human kindness.

Men are not determined among themselves on the definition of avarice. The prodigal sees it even in the generous man; and the avaricious one calls generosity extravagance.

NEWS AND NOTABILLIA.

The churches built in America in 1891 numbered 8,508.

This life is but a gasp compared with the eternity that has preceded and will follow it.

The first christian building in Tokio was erected twenty-five years ago. There are now ninety-two christian churches and chapels there.

According to Scandinavian legends the swallow hovered over the cross, singing: "Sval! Sval!" (Cheer up! Cheer up!) and hence it receives the name of svaia, or swallow, "the bird of consolation."

A Bible meeting was recently held in Madagascar, at which 1,246 persons were present, many of whom had come from 10 to 25 miles, some on foot, some in canoes. 11 different churches were represented.

Archdeacon Denison, who is two years older than Mr. Gladstone, has sent to the press a sequel to his "Notes of my Life," published in 1879, in which he will give a summary of the later period of his eventful career.

A revised version of the Apocrypha, from the same hands that revised the Old and New Testament, will soon come from the university presses of Oxford and Cambridge. This was a part of the original plan entered on in 1872 for the revision of the Bible. THE BIBLE SOCIETY.

The Rev. Dr. David Greer, rector of St. Bartholomew's Episcopal church, New York, having a sufficient private income for his own needs, turns over his entire salary for the relief of the poor, and as his salary is \$15,000 a year the relief is a substantial one.

An inmate of an Armenian convent in Jerusalem died a short time ago at the age of 115 years. The official announcement of her death includes the remarkable statement that she entered the convent at the age of 17, and from that time until her decease, a period of 98 years, was never outside the convent walls.

Archdeacon Farrar, chaplain of the British house of commons, does not leave Westminster immediately after offering his regular prayer, but sits in the gallery often and studies the members and proceedings. One result of this observation is a critical article in the current Contemporary Review on parliamentary oratory.

It is said that to few men was the bible more familiar than to the late E. A. Freeman, the historian. He had evidently studied it diligently as a child, and it has become so completely part of himself that its words and phrases continually appear, perhaps unconsciously to himself, in his conversation and in his writings.

How careful should parents be of their language in the presence of their children. You cannot impose upon them. You can change your clothes, and go with them reverently to church; but at home you show what you are. If a married pair have the testimony of their children that they live in the right way before God, it is worth more than the most costly diploma.

An English writer says that there are preachers who dramatise the Scriptures, who introduce into their discourses imaginary dialogues, who aim at saying smart things to raise a laugh, and who deal glibly in scenic paintings in which the colors are bold. He cannot too strongly reprobate a practice like this; it is degrading the pulpit; it is bringing into it the wretched artifices of the mob-orator.

After the murder of Missionary Williams by the natives of Erramanga, Bishop Selwyn, with a Samoan teacher, was the first to visit the island. When they came to the scene of the tragedy they knelt reverently and prayed that the blood of the martyrs might open a path for the spread of the Gospel. That their prayers have been answered has been abundantly verified. This island, chiefly remarkable as the grave of five martyred missionaries, has now become christian. It is said that there are now 2,555 converts.

It is said that the number of workers enrolled under the banner of the Salvation Army in the United States is 14,000. During the year these have labored among 13,199,898 persons, and made 32,433 conversions. They have occupied 462 cities and towns, established 555 outposts, recruited 1,500 officers and 13,000 soldiers. The slum officers of New York, Boston, Philadelphia and Chicago have visited 35,534 families, given away 5,967 meals, cared for 6,384 children, and performed much other necessary work as well. The Shelter Brigade has found employment for 654 persons, provided beds for 14,966 meals for 23,000 and effected 571 conversions.

Three years ago there were three English cardinals—Newman, Manning and Howard. Today there is not one, remarks a Catholic weekly. The late Cardinal Howard had been in a poor condition, physically and mentally, for some years. He failed to remember his oldest friends, and sometimes would not take meals for days together. For years past it would have been difficult to recognize in the pinched and emaciated frame of the cardinal the gay young life guardman who was chosen for his good looks and fine physique, to lead the procession at the Duke of Wellington's funeral. In those days young Howard looked every inch a soldier, and it was greatly to his friends' surprise that they learned of his going to Rome and entering the ecclesiastical state.

One noteworthy feature of the recent general convention of episcopals at Baltimore was that the most of the bishops present possess the size and stature that usually characterize members of the episcopate, says Harper's Weekly. This fact recalled to one of the delegates the story of the embarrassing position in which an English lecturer once found himself. He was discussing, before a Yorkshire audience, on American characteristics, and dilated on the small physique of Americans. It happened that Bishop Phillips Brooks, Mr. Robinson of Boston and Rev. Dr. McVicker of Philadelphia were present, and each of these gentlemen rose and exhibited himself as an American whose stature did not excite remark among his countrymen. As the shortest of them—Mr. Robinson—was six feet tall, and Dr. McVicker nearly a foot taller, this visible proof of the inaccuracy of his remarks disconcerted the speaker, and he left the platform in confusion.

Where Faith is Satisfied.

Nature is certainly as much the voice of God as is Revelation. We might misunderstand that voice either in Nature or Revelation; but the voice itself must be true, and our faith is to be shown by our simple acceptance of it, without any regard to consequences. When two such voices seem to contradict each other, faith is not startled or uneasy. She does not look about for some reconciling theory, still less does she suppress any fact because it does not fit into her system. She remains calm, self-sustained, and satisfied that there is an agreement, and that the seeming disagreement is altogether the fault of the present ignorance of man.

Renan took the typical French view when he said: "I prefer an immoral people to a fanatical people; for immoral masses are not vexatious, while fanatical masses stupidly the world, and a stupid world ceases to interest me; I prefer to see it die."

For Bronchitis

"I never realized the good of a medicine so much as I have in the last few months, during which time I have suffered intensely from pneumonia, followed by bronchitis. After trying various remedies without benefit, I began to use Ayer's Cherry Pectoral, and the effect has been marvelous, a single dose relieving me of choking, and securing a good night's rest."—T. A. Higginbotham, Gen. Store, Long Mountain, Va.

La Grippe

"Last Spring I was taken down with la grippe. At times I was completely prostrated, and so difficult was my breathing that my breath seemed as if confined in an iron cage. I procured a bottle of Ayer's Cherry Pectoral, and no sooner had I begun taking it than relief followed. I could not believe that the effect would be so rapid."—W. H. Williams, Cook City, S. Dak.

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"For more than twenty-five years, I was a sufferer from lung trouble, attended with coughing so severe at times as to cause hemorrhage, the paroxysms frequently lasting three or four hours. I was induced to try Ayer's Cherry Pectoral, and after taking four bottles, was thoroughly cured. I can confidently recommend this medicine."—Franz Hoffmann, Clay Centre, Kans.

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