

### The Private Manners of the Early Christians.

**DRET.**—In this point they were frugal and sparing—never indulging in those luxuries of the table which were so commonly in use among the pagans. And the manner in which they partook of their meals was characterised by that piety and spirituality of mind, which may well lead the Christians of our age to blush and be ashamed.

When dinner had been served, and the family had had taken their seats at the table, the master of the household, with a grave and solemn voice, and in a prayer of considerable length, acknowledged their dependence on the care of their common Father, expressed their gratitude for the past tokens of his bounty, and invoked him to bless, for their health and comfort, the provisions of which they were about to partake. During the progress of the meal, some member of the family in houses of the lower class, or some hired reader in those of the richer orders, entertained the company with select portions of the Scriptures; for so strong and insatiable was their appetite for spiritual food, that they could not rest satisfied and happy without providing suitable refreshment for the soul at the same time that they were enjoying the comforts of the body. The viands being removed, the family circle was drawn more closely together,—for now were unfolded, and put into the hands of all, the precious scrolls in which, in those days, the Scriptures were written. Previous to this, however, each was expected to put himself in an attitude of becoming reverence; the hands were carefully washed, that not a stain might fall on the sacred volume, and while the men remained with their heads bare, the women covered themselves with a veil, as a token of respect for the Book of God. The head of the family then read aloud a few passages, both from the old and new Testament, accompanying them with some plain and simple admonitions of his own, or recalling to the memory of his audience the public exhortations which, on the preceding Sabbath, had been founded on them in the Church; or he taught the younger branches of the house to repeat after him the beautiful prayer which was dictated by the lips of the Saviour; and which told them, in simple phrase, of the love which God bears to the young; and of the blessedness of remembering their Creator in the days of their youth. These readings and exhortations were always short, and diversified, at intervals by sacred music,—of which the primitive Christians were passionately fond. Sometimes one, distinguished by a taste or talent for spiritual songs, sung some favorite piece of sacred melody; at other times, the shrill voices of the women and the children were blended in full chorus with the deeper tones of the men—till, as the hour set apart for refreshment drew towards a close, the venerable parent, whose look and attitude called for momentary silence, gave thanks to the Giver of all good, for the enjoyment of their natural and spiritual comforts, and prayed that his presence and his blessing might be with them during the succeeding period of labor and duty.

And not only at meals, but at other times, the early Christians employed themselves in reading the Scriptures and in prayer. This leads us to advert to a most important point in their private manners—their regular and devout observance of

#### FAMILY WORSHIP.

It may easily be supposed that at a time when men were not contented with a "form of godliness," but sought earnestly to feel its power, an ordinance so refreshing and elevating to the soul as the worship of God in the family was not likely to be neglected. Accordingly, we find Mr. Jamieson thus describing their regular and devout attention to this duty.

At an early hour in the morning the family was assembled, when a portion of Scripture was read from the Old Testament, which was followed by a hymn and a prayer, in which thanks were offered up to the Almighty for preserving them through the silent watches of the night, and for his goodness in permitting them to meet in health of body and soundness of mind: and, and at the same time his grace was implored to defend them amid the dangers and temptations of the day, to make them faithful to every duty, and enable them in all respects, to walk worthy of their Christian vocation. During the day, they had, like the Jews, stated seasons, at the third, sixth, and ninth hours, (corresponding respectively to nine, twelve, and three o'clock, according to our computation,) when those who had command of their time, were wont to retire for a little to engage in the exercises of devotion. In the evening, before going to rest, the family again assembled, when the same form of worship was observed as in the morning; with this difference, that the service was considerably protracted beyond the period which could be conveniently allotted to it in the commencement of the day. Besides all these frequent observances, they were in

the habit of rising at midnight to engage in prayer and the singing of Psalms; a practice of venerable antiquity; and which, as Dr. Cave justly supposes, "took its origin from the first times of persecution, when, not daring to meet together in the day, they were forced to keep their religious assemblies in the night.

But it must not be imagined that the Christians of the primitive ages observed only stated seasons of devotion. Prayer was the element in which they lived and breathed, and every occupation in which they engaged was habitually sanctified by prayer. They "prayed without ceasing;" and not only so, but they were diligent, nay, unwearied, in their perusal of the Word of God. It was, in fact, a marked peculiarity of their private manners, that they abounded in

#### READING THE SCRIPTURES.

At a period when the Bible was only to be found in manuscript, and at a very high price, it is no slight evidence of the importance which was attached to the Sacred Volume, that it was so extensively and minutely known. On this topic we quote the following observations:—

Those of the men who could read, never went without carrying a Bible in their pockets, and many wore it hanging around their necks, frequently refreshing their memories by private perusal, and drawing little groups of anxious listeners around them, they acquired so familiar an acquaintance with the lively oracles, that there were few who could not repeat those passages that contained any thing remarkable respecting the doctrines of their faith, or the precepts of their duty. Nay, there were many who had made the rare and enviable attainment of being able to say the entire Scriptures by heart! One person is mentioned, among the martyrs in Palestine, so well instructed in the Sacred Writings, that, when occasion offered, he could, from memory, repeat passages in any part of the Scripture as exactly as if he had unfolded the book and read them; a second, being unacquainted with letters, used to invite his friends and Christian strangers to his house to read to him, by which means he acquired an extensive knowledge of the Sacred Oracles; and another may be mentioned, of whom the description is so extraordinary, that we shall give it in the words of the historian Eusebius, who knew him. "Whenever he willed, he brought forth, as from a repository of science, and rehearsed either the law of Moses, or the prophets, or the historical, evangelical, and apostolical parts of Scripture. Indeed, I was struck with admiration when I first beheld him standing amidst a considerable multitude, and reciting certain portions of Holy Writ. As long as I could only hear his voice, I supposed that he was reading; but when I came close to him, I discovered that, employing only the eyes of his mind, he uttered the Divine Oracles like some prophet."

And again, in reference to the habit of storing the mind with divine truth, Mr. Jamieson tells us—

Every day it was the practice for each individual to commit a portion of Scripture to memory, and for the members of a family to repeat it to each other in the evening. So much was this custom regarded as a part of the business of the day, that they had a set time appointed for conning the daily lesson, an hour which, though each individual fixed it as suited his private convenience, was held so precious and sacred, that no secular duties, however urgent, were allowed to infringe upon it; and while some, who had their time at their own disposal, laid their memories under larger contributions, and never relaxed their efforts, till they had completed the daily task they had imposed on themselves, others were obliged to content themselves with such shorter passages as they could learn during the intervals of labor, and amid the distraction of other cares. By all classes, however, it was considered so great an advantage, so desirable an attainment, to have the mind richly stored with the records of salvation, that while in the lapse of time, many ancient practices became obsolete, and others more suited to the tastes of succeeding ages were adopted into the Church, this excellent custom still maintained its place among the venerable observances inherited from primitive times; and the pious Christians of the first centuries would have regarded it as a sin of omission, for which they had occasion expressly to supplicate pardon in their evening devotions if they were conscious of having allowed a day to pass without having added some new pearls from the Scriptures, to the sacred treasures their memories had previously amassed.

It were easy to enlarge on so fruitful a theme as the manners of the first Christians, but we have said enough, surely, to convince every reader that, among ourselves, there is a lamentable degeneracy in many points connected with vital godliness. It becomes us to humble ourselves, therefore, before

God, and to seek to imitate those devout and holy men who, "through faith and patience, are now inheriting the promises.—*Scottish Christian Herald.*

Rev. J. LEIGHTON WILSON, returned from the Gaboon Mission in Africa, addressed the audience giving a cursory sketch of Western Africa, its appearance, population, and prospects. He estimated the population of Africa at not less than 150,000,000, not one million of whom have ever heard the name of Jesus Christ.

Of the character of the scenery of Africa, there was a general misconception in the civilized world. It would hardly be expected, from what is known of Africa, to find there some of the most beautiful and sublime scenery the world affords. The scenery is remarkably variegated, and presents every species that can attract the eye of taste, or impress the imagination. The architecture of the natives, in their villages and towns, adds also much to the picturesqueness of scenery.

As to the social, civil, and moral condition of Africa, Mr. Wilson said, there is but little that can be called Government among that people.—There is usually either the worst species of despotism, or of democracy or anarchy. In neither form of government is there any security of life, honour, or property. They live usually without law, without courts of justice, without protection. The African, as he lies down at night, has no security that before morning his house will not be wrapped in flames, his property destroyed, his body seized and sold into slavery. All is insecurity and suspense. The blessings of good government are among the benefits the African has yet to experience. The social and moral condition of the country is that which might be expected of a people left to their own resources without light and without God. The African race are naturally the most religious people, perhaps in the world. Yet having lost all knowledge of God, they have become debased to the lowest superstitions. Witchcraft is universally believed in; and as a security from its power, they are accustomed to resort to their fetiches. These fetiches are strewed along every high way. Every village has its gates fortified with them. Every door is guarded by them and the most prominent place in every house is devoted to the fetich. His body is never left unprotected by them. He never goes abroad without them. The poor victim is under this tyranny of an omnipresent, all-crushing superstition, from his cradle to his grave. He cannot walk, or sit, lie down or rise up, or eat or drink without his charm. And from the hand of wife or daughter he would not dare to take a cup of water without first the performance of his charm to assure him it contained no poison or witchcraft.

There has been but little done as yet for the moral improvement of the African. There are but ten or twelve missions on the entire Western coast. Though these are supposed to have accomplished but little, yet they have been as successful as could have been expected. The Gaboon Mission commenced some five years ago. The people did not know the meaning of the word missionary. They are humane, very cordial in their reception of the missionaries, and they have treated them ever since with more kindness and respect than could have been expected. They have acquired the habit of attending church with regularity, and with decorum, and exhibit becoming docility of disposition.—The number of converts has not been very considerable. Political difficulties have interposed to prevent the effects of the gospel. Yet there are many evidences, in outward reformation, of the progress of the gospel. They keep the Sabbath; they are free from intemperance and vice, and are very much interested in spreading the gospel to others. Mr. W. believed in the capabilities of the African race. In this country we have not a fair opportunity of judging of the capacities of that race. They are much more capable of improvement than we have any idea of. He stated some interesting facts bearing on this point.

Mr. W. is of the opinion that it is quite possible for white men to live in Africa. The climate is a trying one, and those who go thither, must go expecting self-denial. Yet missionaries and men of the world do live, and accomplish their purposes. There are more than 3000 whites residing on the Western coast and Islands; and the floating population taken into the account, the aggregate cannot fall much short of 10,000.

The exigencies of commerce or of the State can always find men who can live there. It would be a shame indeed, if the Church could not find men equally willing to submit to self-denial.

Mr. W. also alluded to the preparedness of the country for the gospel. The character of the people, the absence of established religion; the high estimate in which white men are held, the rapid increase of commerce, the decline of the slave trade, and above all, the almost universal and intense desire of the people for missionaries. He narrated some very striking and affecting facts illustrative of this desire. From these it would seem that there is hardly a limit to the field now open to the missionary, and in some places the desire amounts to an open call for the bread of life. Mr. Wilson is a fluent, impressive speaker, and his statements and reflections produced a strong sensation in the audience.

From the N. Y. Recorder.

#### The Sunday School.

The 24th Report of the American Sunday School Union will be ready for distribution in a few days. From a proof sheet we take the following:

The Sunday school is the nearest approach to the family that human wit has yet devised. It separates groups of children into small companies, and gives to each of them one who, it is supposed, will act the part of a faithful, intelligent, Christian parent or elder brother or sister. The instruction drawn from this fountain of light is for the most part elementary, but embodies the sum and substance of what God has revealed as his holy will, and what duties and obligations man owes to God and to his fellow-men. It brings each child into such relations with others, that the power and influence of every well taught lesson may be tested at once. It subjects every mind and breast to wholesome but not irksome restraint, and environs it with moral and religious habits, which will be as its shield and buckler when assailed by foes without and within. And wherever this humble supplementary agency has been employed, faithfully, according to the revealed will of God, his word assures us, and the history of his dealings with us and our children makes the assurance doubly sure, that his blessing shall crown the work of his servants—and that a great multitude of souls shall thereby be converted from sin to holiness, and introduced into his eternal kingdom.

This then is the grand object of the *Sunday School*—to supply oral religious instruction gratuitously to children and youth on the Lord's day—having chiefly in view those who would otherwise be without such instruction. For it is obvious that where the institutions of religion have been long established and have exerted their mighty influence on successive generations of parents and children, the absence of such an auxiliary to parental duty would scarcely be noticed; yet where, even in the old States, shall we find a community who would think it safe or wise to dispense with a Sunday school?

How extreme then must be the need of some such help, to imbue the minds of ignorant and neglected children with truth, and inure them to religious and moral habits, in those vast sections of our country, where not only are the institutions of the gospel unknown or in their infancy, but where society itself is scarcely organized, and the whole tendency of the social relations is to relax extraordinary restraints, and to give unusual activity and prominence to the baser elements of our nature.

It is on such communities that the eyes and sympathies of your Board are turned continually. It is for them that we ask our fellow Christians and fellow citizens to enable us to provide. It is to them we send our missionaries, to acquaint them with at least one simple, cheap and practicable way of obtaining good for their children's children; to open among them a Sunday-school and supply it with the means of instruction, improvement and self-perpetuity; to lead them to understand and appreciate the great truths of the Bible, and to feel their obligation to live for a higher and better end than the pursuit of pleasure or the acquisition of wealth.

**ECONOMY.**—A man who chews \$14 worth of tobacco annually, and stops his newspaper because he cannot afford to take it.