

HISTORY OF OUR SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST.

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(Translated from the French for the 'New Zealand Tablet'.)

10. PURIFICATION OF MARY IN THE TEMPLE OF JERUSALEM. THE OLD MAN SIMEON. ANNA THE PROPHETESS.

"AND after the days of her purification, according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they carried the child to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord, as it is written in the law of the Lord: 'Every male opening the womb shall be called holy to the Lord; and to offer a sacrifice according to the law of the Lord, a pair of turtle doves, or two young pigeons. And behold there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Ghost was in him. And he had received an answer from the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Christ of the Lord. And he came by the Spirit into the Temple, and when his parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the law, Simeon took the child into his arms, and blessed God, and said: Now thou dost dismiss thy servant, O Lord, according to thy word in peace. Because my eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples: A light to the revelation of the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel! Joseph and Mary were wondering at those things which were spoken concerning him. And Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary his mother: Behold, this child is set for the fall and for the resurrection of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be contradicted. And thy own soul a sword shall pierce, that out of many hearts thoughts may be revealed. And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser. She was far advanced in years, and had lived with her husband seven years from her virginity. And she was a widow until fourscore and four years; who departed not from the Temple, by fastings and prayers serving night and day. Now she at the same hour coming in, confessed to the Lord, and spoke of him to all that looked for the redemption of Israel." (1)

11. RITUAL CEREMONIES OF THE PURIFICATION.

The intrinsic signs of authenticity, which we have already noticed, as existing in the evangelical text, are manifested here with a like obviousness. The rationalistic hypothesis, which attributes this page of St. Luke to an apocryphal writer of the second or third century, becomes more and more untenable. What was this legal purification? How many days were supposed to elapse, for the young mother, between the joys of maternity and the pious duty of the presentation in the Temple of the first-born? None knew this—neither Greek nor Roman—among whom the supposed falsifier would have written. Yet, the author is at no pains to solve these problems. He pursues his narrative absolutely as if he were speaking to a generation already instructed in all the ceremonies and observances of the Jewish law. Unless the falsifier had avowedly taken upon himself the mission of writing a succession of enigmas, unintelligible to his readers, he could not have adopted such a method of proceeding. It is manifest, from the tone of moderation prevailing throughout the Gospel, in the details of this circumstance, that at the time it was written, the customs it alludes to were of public notoriety in Judea, and that they entered into the life and social practices of the Hebrews. Bring in the ruin of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jewish people, previous to the date in which this page of the Gospel was written, and orthodoxy you place the author, if he will be intelligible, under the necessity of explaining a thousand details, which it would have been sufficient for a contemporary writer to note in a cursory way. This general remark is of immense import, in order to a just appreciation of the truth of the evangelical text: all the sophisms of unbelief fall to pieces in the face of this law of history. But, if we study the facts in detail, the demonstration appears still more striking. Thus, each word of the narrative of the purification evokes a whole class of ideas, foreign to the genius of the Greeks and Romans, and bearing relation only to the Mosaic law. The Lord had said to Moses: "The woman who shall bear a man-child, she shall be unclean seven days; and she shall remain three-and-thirty days in her uncleanness. She shall touch no holy thing, neither shall she enter into the sanctuary, until the days of her purification be fulfilled. But if she shall bear a maid-child, she shall be unclean two weeks, and she shall remain under interdiction sixty-six days. And when the days of her purification are expired, she shall bring to the door of the tabernacle of the testimony a lamb of a year old for a holocaust, and a young pigeon or a turtle for sin, and shall deliver them to the priest, who shall offer them to the Lord, and shall pray for her. So shall she be cleansed. This is the law for her that beareth a man-child or a maid-child. And if her hand find not sufficiency, and she is not able to offer a lamb, she shall take two turtles, or two young pigeons, one for a holocaust, and another for sin, and the priest shall pray for her, and so she shall be cleansed." (2) Placed side by side with the Gospel narrative, these texts of the law enable us to understand all that is unexpressed in the sacred oracles. The Old Testament sheds its last rays of light over the cradle of Jesus, just as the expiring flame of the torch, blending its ray with the splendours of the rising sun, is confounded and lost.

CHRISTIAN BURIAL IN CHINA.

THE following account of "Christian Obsequies" in China is taken from a letter addressed by the Rev. P. Desjardes, S.J., Missionary in Kiang-nan, to 'Les Missions Catholiques,' July, 1872:—

We know that the Chinese have a custom of religiously preserving in their houses the mortal remains of their friends, before confiding them to the tomb. Now, here is a fact which shows us to what an extent they carry this singular devotion.

In the prefecture of Song-kiang live an ancient Christian family named Tao, formerly one of the wealthiest in the town of Kuo-diao, at

present much beneath their former rank. It was in this family that on the eighth of April, 1872, the solemn interment of twenty-five coffins, many of which had been treasured in the house for upwards of fifty years, took place.

To defray the considerable expenses which this last act of religion towards the dead would incur, the family previously sold, at 3000fr., a house worth 12,000fr., and the construction of which had cost not less than 20,000fr. It had been formerly a pawn-office. A mandarin purchased it, to serve as his residence and tribunal.

More than a month beforehand all the relatives who lived within ten miles' distance were invited, and the Missionary promised to attend.

The twenty-two coffins taken from the dust where they had been, are cleaned, oiled, and arranged in lines in the reception hall of this great mansion, which now harbours as many dead as living.

The site of the tomb is in the midst of a cornfield. A thatched hut is erected to afford shelter to the workmen; bricks are piled all round, and the lime prepared for the construction of as many arched vaults as there are coffins; a special grave is constructed for the old mother of the family, whom the scythe of time had not yet cut down. A place beside her husband is reserved for her, and according to the custom of the country, a sort of communication is carefully arranged between the two vaults, so that the faithful couple may exchange the first salutations of the Resurrection Day.

Two days before this solemn feast the guests commence to assemble. Each one presents an offering. A secretary, installed in the porter's lodge, inscribes on a registry the name of the visitor. The most distinguished hosts are received by a triple discharge of cannons and the sound of music. The eve of the day the Missionary in black mantle, assisted by seven catechists in surplices, approaches the coffins and prays for the souls of their dear departed, while the Christians sing in choir the Office for the Dead.

At nightfall the women weep and chant their lamentations for half an hour. The same ceremony is observed the following morning at daybreak, again when the coffins are being taken from the house, and finally when lowered into the tombs. As to the rest, everything seems to breathe an air of joy; one would say it was a feast day.

At sunrise the masons and workmen are invited to an entertainment where there is no lack of wine; after which they set themselves diligently to work. At the first dawn the morning prayers are commenced in the chapel; the Office for the Dead is chanted in Chinese, and then the Holy Mass followed by a general absolution.

After these first devotions a copious breakfast is served, of which over three hundred guests partake. Where have all these people been lodged? This is a mystery. It is true our Chinese are not fastidious; they lie down to rest in the first place which offers itself, in their clothes, and frequently three or four under the same bed-covering.

A little before noon a procession is organised. At the head are two tamtams, then two enormous lanterns mounted on long poles. Then follow various triangular flags with numerous inscriptions on varnished tablets; then music, the processional cross, thirty of the Christians in surplices, reciting the Office for the Dead, and the Missionary in palanquin; lastly the biers, each one borne by eight men. The first, that of the grandfather, is covered with a red tapestry; the others with blue. Near each bier follow the nearest relatives in deep mourning, wearing mitres of coarse linen, corded cinctures, and straw shoes. A file of men wind off behind each corpse, then a row of women in white, reciting prayers.

At the first movement of the procession the fireworks, music, psalmody, tears, lamentations, the cries of the porters, the tamtam—all contribute to produce a stunning noise. But as soon as they cross the mortuary dwelling calm is restored, and the general procession wears a truly religious aspect; from each side of the narrow pathway on which the funeral cortege passes, the curious press in crowds to the great detriment of the harvest which covers the neighbouring fields. As soon as they reach the place of sepulchre, a profound silence ensues—a very extraordinary thing among the Chinese—passionate lovers of noise, and not less friends of the unceremonious. This silence, it is true, only lasts while the priest recites the last prayers. But scarce have these prayers been ended, the Missionary with his train of catechists withdrawn, than the uproar recommences louder than ever, to be renewed at the descent of each coffin into the vault destined for it.

At sunset all was terminated, and a feast enlivened by music crowned this family festival. A great mound is now raised over this row of tombs. At the next change of the dynasty it will be levelled, according to the Chinese custom, in order to restore to culture the precious piece of ground which it occupies. Nevertheless this custom was not observed since the accession of the present dynasty, and the land at present occupied by the tombs comes to be so considerable that they have become a great encumbrance to the living.

THE people of Kingstown were early one morning thrown into consternation by the sight of a large ship, all on fire, drifting before the wind into the harbour. She proved to be the *Nangpore*, from Calcutta to Liverpool, 1521 tons, laden with cotton, jute, saltpetre, and manilla. It appears that she took fire three or four days before, and the captain endeavoured to make for Holyhead, but was obliged to stand for Kingstown. The crew, exhausted at the pumps, were unable to take in sail. When within the harbour piers her two anchors were let go; but she broke from them, and came into collision with three of the vessels in the harbour, all of which foundered—one of them a schooner from Wicklow, is a total wreck. In the collision her captain, Thomas Ellis, was flung overboard and drowned. The crew abandoned the burning ship, which continued drifting in the harbour, a source of extreme danger. At nine o'clock the fire brigade went down from Dublin; but their efforts to extinguish the flames were futile. It was then resolved to try the extreme expedient of firing into her so as to sink her. The *Victoria*, acting guardship, discharged several shots at the *Nangpore*, sinking her in twenty-eight feet of water. Her cargo is said to be worth £10,000.

(1) Luc. ii. 22-28,

(2) Levit. xii. 2 ad finem.