

# Likeness of Christ.

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HERE is a very rare and remarkable book, the original plates, sketches and MSS., of which are preserved in the British Museum, which possesses unusual interest at this season. It is by Thomas Heaphy, an Englishman, who spent his life and a large fortune in searching for likenesses of Christ and the result of his investigations is probably one of the most remarkable works ever published. The plates are lithographed in colors and are perfect facsimiles of the original pictures. All of the important plates are reproduced in this article. The volume, which represents the life-work of Mr. Heaphy, is an exhaustive inquiry into the authenticity and verisimilitude of the "received likeness" of Jesus Christ, and in text and

illustrations embodies the results of many years of patient, conscientious, personal research into a subject of deep interest not only to the artist and the antiquary, but to the entire Christian world. Inspired when a mere child by the sight of an old antique portrait, the original of which was said to be deposited in the sacristy of St. Peter's at Rome, Mr. Heaphy's first visit to the Eternal City was the occasion of a most diligent though baffling quest for the picture; a search which ended finally in a boyish attempt to bribe the bishop with a silver piece, for a sight of a relic held by the church in such veneration that no one was allowed to inspect it; excepting indeed the Holy Father himself, and two of the Sacred Conclave; and they on but one day in the year, and that after communion and absolution. Some years afterward Mr. Heaphy again visited Italy, still seeking tangible proofs in support of his pre-conceived theory of the genuine nature of the likeness; and afterward made a journey to the south of France; where, in the old Christian cemetery, church and museum his perseverance was rewarded by the discovery



I—Mosaic from the Church of St. Pudenziana.

of a wealth of materials; from which he was enabled to deduce much satisfactory evidence in regard to the origin and character of the Divine portrait. Here, on every hand, were to be found sculptured sarcophagi, glass vases, jewelry, cups, lamps; all affording unmistakable evidence of early Christian origin, together with many undoubted instances of the sacred Likeness. Everywhere confronted, hampered and barred by ecclesiastical red tape, (the supply of which proved only less inexhaustible than Mr. Heaphy's fund of patience), that indefatigable enthusiast pursued his investigations. Access to private collections and cabinets; entrance to crypts and sacristies, he asked and received. The doors of the Vatican and the Lateran were opened, through reluctantly, in response to his tireless knocking; and at midnight, alone in the stifling galleries of the Roman Catacombs, he still sought, and found, until sufficient material was at last accumulated to establish an almost unbroken chain of evidence in substantiation of his cherished theory: that the "received likeness" of Christ is a true, authentic and approximately accurate, rather

than an ideal portrait; that, as occurring upon the sacramental cups or paterae, buried with the early Christians, the Likeness had frequently been executed at a time when it would have certainly come under the notice of those persons who had seen the Saviour face to face; if it were not indeed the actual work of the artists contemporary with Him. And that it is this Likeness which, handed down from the earliest Christian time, has furnished the type and model for all the subsequent work which has proved at all satisfactory. Mr. Heaphy's classification of works of art of a high antiquity, among



II—Unique piece of metal work, exhumed from beneath the pavement in the Church of St. Maria, in Trastevere, in the year 120; now in the museum of the Roman College; this picture is formed of thin strips of gold or bronze placed upright in different divisions through the figure, which is in relief, about one inch in thickness and two feet in height; colored molten glass is poured between the divisions and the face and ornaments subsequently delineated by other bits of glass affixed by fusion or cement.

which may be found early instances of the Likeness, is as follows:

Mosaics, executed at ascertained periods between the second and the seventh centuries.

Pictures on unprepared linen cloth, executed in a material similar to transparent water-color; to be ascribed to a period probably antecedent to the third century, and generally purporting to be the handkerchief of St. Veronica, and the image depicted to have been caused by direct application of the cloth to the face of Christ.

Pictures, evidently of high antiquity, executed in tempera on wood, of Eastern or Byzantine origin and traditionally ascribed to St. Luke.

Metal work, executed during the Ostro-Gothic occupation of Italy, when other kinds of art were almost impracticable. Sculptures, frescoes and designs worked upon glass and other materials, taken from the Christian cemeteries and executed during the first four centuries.

Of these five classes of works the latter is considered by Mr. Heaphy as by far the most important, not only owing to the unquestionable antiquity of the objects it includes; but on account of the general excellence of their preservation. As the exposed portion of the glass vessels found in the old tombs and catacombs are usually so corroded by time as to fall to fragments at the slightest touch, the causes which conspired to preserve these works require special mention; at the bottom of these glass cups or paterae, was a projecting edge such as is usually seen on similar shaped vessels at the present time, and it was within this rim, on the outside of the cup,

that the likeness was customarily depicted. Immediately before an interment a thick bed of mortar was laid down, and as the cup, placed beside the body, rested upon this layer

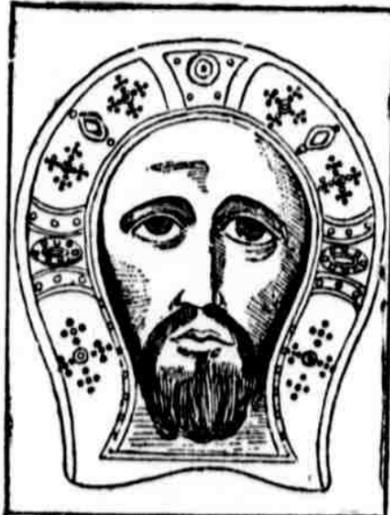


III—Painting on cloth from the sacristy of St. Bartolomeo, Genoa; said to have been made from life by St. Luke; mentioned by Eusebius as having existed in the second century, being then considered a relic of the apostolic age.

of mortar it slightly sank into the yielding mass, which afterward, hardening to the consistency of stone, preserved intact for centuries the image thus imbedded.

That these enamelled pictures were unquestionably among the first examples of Christian art admits of no doubt; Tertullian, who wrote A. D. 150 or 160, refers to them as productions that had once been common but had ceased to be made before his period, on account of the use of glass having been superseded by that of metal for the formation of sacramental vessels.

To comprehend the full value of these ancient works of art, a detailed account of the places whence they were taken would seem to be requisite; as our space is limited, however, we can only give, in Mr. Heaphy's own words, a somewhat fragmentary description of one of the most interesting of these, the Roman Catacombs: "A first entry into one of these subterranean cemeteries, where the mortal furniture and decorations remain undisturbed, is singularly impressive. An opening in the ground small enough to be easily hidden by brambles and tall grass; a steep flight of steps cut in the loose crumbling rock, descending to a depth of forty, sixty or perhaps eighty feet; a massive door, strongly barred, but the material so rotten as to give way to a very slight touch; a few more steps and then a long, narrow passage just wide enough to pass along without much inconvenience. In utter darkness and eternal stillness the long passage goes on and on; the occasional openings into other passages—dark and silent, and apparently as interminable as the first—only adding a deeper gloom. The first feeling of bewilderment and awe at the strangeness of the scene, having passed away, we observe the sides of the passage thickly covered with white marble slabs—upon which are engraved characters clear and sharp as when fresh from the mason's chisel—memorials of the dead that for fourteen, fifteen, perhaps eighteen centuries have lain behind. A few inches within the walls of this dark, narrow passage lie in tiers, one above the other, and so close that not another



IV—Painting, in tempera, on a panel of cypress wood, from Bibliotheca of Vatican, now much decayed—mounted with gold and jewels—attributed to the third century.

could be placed between, the bones, or in some instances the mere concave shape in a mass of dust, of the first converts to our Faith. Still the long, narrow passage goes

on and on and still continually branches off into others, repetitions of itself. Frequently interspersed among the white tablets are small recesses—scarcely large enough to thrust the hand into—inside which have been found small bottles, apparently of silver or of mother-of-pearl, but really of decayed glass: they fall into the finest flakes on the slightest touch. These are lachrymatories, or tear bottles, dry enough now beyond all question, however, full they may have been once.

The portion of the cemetery we have just passed through is that which was first excavated and in all probability contains the remains of the earliest Christian converts. A Church must have existed in Rome from a period almost immediately succeeding the resurrection of our Lord, as St. Paul wrote his epistle to the Romans in the year 58, when the Church was already numerous, and their faith spoken of throughout the world. That these were the earliest interments is also evidenced by the fact of some Pagan usages having been still retained. The Christian anagram is certainly on the tablet, but human affection under such circumstances is loth to part with its old modes of expressing itself and the lachrymatory and the paterae are no less certainly found below.

Lachrymatories, containing what appears to be dried blood, are invariably to be found



V—Painting on cloth; from Church of St. Silvestro, at Rome; attributed to the time of Christ.

in the graves of martyrs. The passages, the chapels, the pictures, and many of the tablets are still undisturbed. Some of the tablets, however, are now in the museums of the Vatican and the Lateran, where also are the sarcophagi, with notes referring to the places whence they were taken. The cups, paterae and lachrymatories are for the most part in the same museums, but portions of some these



VI—Painting on cloth from the sacristy of St. Peter's well authenticated as belonging to the second century.

may still be seen, imbedded in the mortar, in the positions they originally occupied.

Closed as their cemeteries have been for centuries to all access, and their very existence forgotten, their contents have escaped alike the corrosive effects of light and air, alteration by the restorer and dispersion by the collector. There is historic evidence that these cemeteries were closed during the pontificate of Damasus the first; which fact, taken in connection with the testimony of Tertullian and Eusebius limits the time during which these works of art could have been deposited here to the period included between the years 60 and 130.

The author of the book says that the truth of the tradition of our Lord's Likeness appears to have been accepted by the first Christian communities without the shadow of a doubt. The result shows that the popular belief that the likeness originated in the artistic imagination of the sixth century is erroneous. In pursuing the investigation, certain facts presented themselves that were not heretofore noticed. The connection of the Veronica or early Greek pictures, with a coherent and unbroken chain of evidence in support of their being the productions of the first age of the church, had not before been attempted. The enamelled pictures of Christ and of the apostles on the paterae buried with the earliest Christians; the evidence unintentionally afforded by the profane and