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TEN LECTURES ON THE MARTYRS

BY
PAUL ALLARD

WITH A PREFACE BY MGR. PÉCHENARD
RECTOR OF THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF PARIS

AUTHORISED TRANSLATION

BY
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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

OUR translation of M. Allard's *Dix leçons sur le martyre* is made on the second French edition; the Author, however, kindly placed at our disposal the MS. of all the extra notes which have appeared in the third French edition just published. We also owe the Author our thanks for having read and approved our translation, and for having made several valuable suggestions.

We have added to the work a few footnotes, indicated by square brackets, and an index of names. The frequently recurring abbreviation *H. E.* stands for *Historia Ecclesiastica*, and the references to the *Church History* of Eusebius are given according to the Leipzig (1871) edition of his Greek text.

We may mention that the writer of the Preface, Mgr. Péchenard, has since been consecrated Bishop of Soissons.

PREFACE

THE book which we have undertaken to present to the public, *Ten Lectures on the Martyrs*, is among the number of those which stand in no need of recommendation, because, on the one hand, they have nothing to fear, even from the most searching criticism, and on the other, they are bound to please on account of their sincere and convincing tone. Hence we are compelled to believe that when the writer asked us to introduce his work to the reading public he was thinking more of us than of himself, and that his real motive was to serve the interests of our Catholic University. He had already done it good service in attracting thither, last winter, a numerous audience, which followed with rapt attention his course of ten lectures, and doubtless he wished to do it a still greater service by putting this printed memento of his Lectures under the protection (whatever that may be worth) of its Rector, and thus adding yet another work to the already long list of books which have been produced by this centre of studies in defence of our holy faith.

M. Paul Allard is too well known to the learned world for it to be necessary for us to sound his praises. His previous works have already gained him a place in the first rank of our contemporary apologists. Not only have his works on the persecutions brought him readers and admirers from

among the Catholics, but even the opponents of our faith have on several occasions acknowledged his high qualities, the breadth of his scholarship, the sureness of his criticism, the strength of his methods, the moderation of his conclusions, and the courtesy which has never failed him when dealing with an adversary.

To his earlier apologetic work these *Ten Lectures on the Martyrs* will make a happy addition.

Nothing certainly could be simpler than this work. It is an exposal under its many aspects of a great fact of history, the violent death of an innumerable multitude of Christians of every age and sex, and country, and condition, who have willingly given testimony to Christ—to His life, and death, and resurrection, and to the truth of His doctrine, and who preferred to lose their life rather than be false to their religious convictions.

Martyrdom, *i.e.* testimony given, by means of suffering and death, to the reality of a fact and the divinity of a doctrine, is an exclusive privilege of Christianity. There were no martyrs of philosophy, no martyrs of paganism, nor even of Judaism. Christians were alone in sacrificing their life, in the hope of asserting the reality of fundamental facts and the doctrines of their religion, of which they wished to be the witnesses and the respondents.

This testimony as a proof of Christianity, and of its reality and superiority, entered into the plans of the Founder. Sending His disciples into the world, Christ had commanded them to be witnesses to His person and mission: "You will be My witnesses . . . even to the ends of the earth."

The writer's task was then to show how the disciples of Christ gave this testimony which they

had been commanded to give, and also to show what demonstrative force attaches to this testimony in favour of the divinity of the Christian religion.

This task has been admirably performed. The writer has shown, with all the amplitude which such an important subject demands, the motives which occasioned the testimony, the situation in which it was given, the number of those who gave it, the proceedings taken against them, the tortures and sufferings which they endured, the impression made by their testimony on the minds of their contemporaries, the honours bestowed on their relics, and the inferences which we are entitled to draw from all this. All these questions are dealt with and suitably answered.

Martyrdom having followed the expansion of Christianity, it was only right that the author should begin with a brief consideration of the spread of the Christian faith during the first three centuries. This he has done with much learning.

If he does not leave us under the impression that Christianity became at once a universal religion, this is because he is too well acquainted with the facts, and can demonstrate by the study of texts that its diffusion took place by degrees, more rapidly in some localities than in others. He sketches the geographical growth of Christianity, at first in the Roman world, spreading gradually through Greece, Italy, Gaul, Great Britain, Germany, Sarmatia, and the Iberian peninsula, North Africa, Egypt, and the immense provinces of Western Asia, and he completes his map of the places about to become the scene of martyrdom by tracing the progress of Christian beliefs in the countries lying beyond the limits of the Roman Empire.

What historical fact could be more exceptional and inexplicable by ordinary means than the progressive conquests of a doctrine which spread amongst the most diverse and hostile surroundings, which seemed to thrive in every state of civilisation and to adapt itself to the highest and the simplest minds, which was accepted by corrupt natures, though it meant in their case the sacrifice of all that they had held dear, which surmounted all obstacles and all persecutions, though in itself it seemed to contain nothing but weakness and utter want of power?

Besides considering the rapid propagation of the Gospel, the author was also justified in seeking to find to what social classes the witnesses to Christ's divinity belonged, for knowing this we obtain a yet more accurate knowledge of the degree in which the different classes of society had been permeated by Christianity.

From the documents brought together by M. Allard it is evident that Christianity, far from having been, as some imagine, a democratic religion which at first was confined to the lower classes and only later on ascended to the higher ranks of society, was in reality from its very beginning, and by the Apostles themselves, preached to every one, poor and rich, scholars and ignorant men; scarcely had it made its first appearance in the world than it leaped the Jewish horizon and reached the highest quarters of the Roman world, finding adherents, and martyrs too, on every rung of the social ladder.

It made innumerable conquests among the poor despised slaves, preaching to them the feeling of duty and transforming their servile obedience into voluntary submission to the will of God; it lessened their hardships by persuading their masters that all men

are equal in the sight of God. The day will soon come when Christianity will burst asunder their bonds, but in the meantime it educates them in the school of freedom. These poor wretches, once mere pariahs, rapidly became real heroes, and from their ranks emerged some of the principal confessors of the faith.

Above the slaves Christianity afforded an abode to the lower classes, to the humble workmen and men of business who hastened to associate themselves with it, because they found that it satisfied their religious and moral aspirations, and even afforded them more material security.

Military men, too, early began to come over to the side of the new religion, and the armies of Rome were soon full of Christians. Even the aristocracy did not escape its invasion, and Christianity implanted itself strongly even in the palace of the Cæsars. Then came the turn of the men of study, who were converted slowly indeed, but surely; orators, grammarians, rhetors, philosophers, physicians, lawyers, all, in fact, who sought a doctrine to satisfy the yearnings of their soul, as soon as they had found the pearl of great price, threw away their previous superstitions and embraced the Christian faith, defended it by word and by pen against popular prejudices, against the arguments of lawyers and of philosophers, and against imperial tyranny, and so created an entirely new literature, which contains more than one masterpiece.

Thanks to this wonderful development of the faith, the life of the State gradually passed into the Church. In taking possession of the most important cities of the Empire, Christianity knew how to add to their peculiar character new elements, which soon

became their glory. The townships which were most renowned by their cult of letters and philosophy—Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, Cæsarea in Palestine, Cæsarea in Cappadocia, Carthage—soon discovered that they had acquired a new nobility, and that a new power was becoming manifest in their biblical schools, in the learning and literary activity of their bishops, and even in the councils which then began to be held. Everywhere Christianity manifested itself by brotherly love and mutual assistance; everywhere, by its missionaries and constant gatherings, it gives the impression of movement and life. “By its power and by its activity, ecclesiastical and intellectual,” says the famous De Rossi, “the Christian Rome of the first three centuries was a centre scarcely inferior to imperial and civil Rome.” According to St. Cyprian, the Emperor Decius knew this so well that he would have preferred to hear of a mutiny led by one of his rivals than to learn of the election of a successor to the See of Peter. “It was only at the Christian councils that new ideas were broached and serious discussion took place on legal and doctrinal questions of real interest. There alone it was that ideas were exchanged, points of doctrine settled, and laws drawn up which afterwards were enforced on the Christian millions who were also citizens.” Hence what the martyrs came from was not “a dead and stagnant slough of despond, but a spring overflowing with life and moral health and energy.”

How can we explain the large number of Christians who were found to seal their testimony to Christ with their blood? The causes of this phenomenon are many.

First of all, during two and a half centuries, from Nero to the edict of toleration, Christians were living

in a legal atmosphere which was hostile to their freedom of conscience, to their personal security and that of their goods.

The sources of the obnoxious legislation are not easy to determine. It seems that a breach was made, to the prejudice of Christianity, in the ordinarily broad toleration extended by the Romans to all religions, and that an edict was issued, of which we possess no longer the text, but of which the substance might be reduced to this simple formula: Let there be no more Christians.

Whatever may have been the first occasion of the persecutions, the actual crime with which the Christians were charged was one of religion, and of religion alone.

At the beginning, too, we often find traces of popular prejudice. The common people despised the Christians as an inferior race. They laid to their charge all manner of imaginary crimes, and attributed every scourge to their influence. This prejudice was shared by many magistrates, and by most writers, and even by the emperors, excepting those of the Antonine dynasty. Under the influence of these prejudices the populace often rose in arms against the Christians, denouncing them *en masse*, and so lighting anew the smouldering fires of local or even general persecutions.

Statecraft also, though only towards the end of the second century, began to take the side of the populace. By this time the old popular calumnies had gone out of fashion, Christians could no longer be charged with unheard-of crimes, but the magistrates and statesmen could still reproach them with not taking part in the worship of the national gods, and with their freedom of conscience, which was held

incompatible with imperial absolutism. Christians thus came to be considered as separatists, deserters of public order, as outlaws, and the Church as an *imperium in imperio*, and a standing menace to the security of the civil empire.

Other less noble motives were also present to goad on the persecutors. Sometimes the emperors obeyed their personal passions, or gave way before the foolish suggestions, the hatred or cupidity of their courtiers and advisers. We are astonished at the pettiness of their motives as revealed by the anecdotes and reminiscences concerning some of the emperors whom we had been accustomed to consider as judicious statesmen.

What was the number of the victims of all these causes? This is a question which confronts every student of this period of religious history, but it is a point on which it behoves us to be cautious; for, on the one hand, historians and critics are divided on the subject, and, on the other, accurate statistics are wanting. Our author has found the means of avoiding any exaggeration. If he has been careful not to follow those who imagine that the martyrs amounted to ten or twelve millions, yet neither has he subscribed to the opinion of those critics who would bring it down to a very minimum. With great prudence he discusses the value of the testimonies which still survive, and, though appealing only to documents of indisputable authority, he infers that "the opinion which maintains the existence of a great number of martyrs is the exact translation of historic truth," but with regard to the actual number it cannot even be guessed, and "God alone knows it."

The picture of the actual questionings to which

the confessors of the faith were subjected is well worth our attention. Happily early Christian literature has preserved a considerable number of historical documents, by means of which one who is at once a scholar and a lawyer may reconstruct the trials, though even with these advantages the work of collecting the scattered accounts must necessarily have been very laborious; our author, however, has succeeded so well that of his whole book this part is the most striking; he has put together the whole mechanism of the trial, and so allows us to follow the martyr from his arrest down to the sentence and its fulfilment.

The trial of the martyrs was a strange business. The proceedings were always exceptional in character. The Christian was accused of no crime except his religion. There were no witnesses, for what could they allege? The Christian had to bear witness against himself, and this he did with the utmost alacrity. No lawyer was allowed to intervene in his defence; if one dared to rise to defend the righteousness of the Christian's belief he was forthwith seized, summarily judged, and executed. The only ground of the sentence was the Christian's contumacy. When he consented to apostatise he was immediately released on his own recognisances, when he persisted in affirming himself to be a Christian he was condemned. Hence it was by his own free-will that he suffered a violent death, and his condemnation thus voluntarily incurred became a most striking proof of the moral freedom brought into the world by Christ.

Another remarkable point about these proceedings is, that as civil law became more lenient, they became more severe; under the influence of despotism the penal law became more and more hostile to the

liberty of the citizens, and in its application to the Christians it passed all measure, and was made to depend wholly on the whim of the magistrate or judge.

If the feeling of justice which lives in all of us is shocked at the iniquity of these proceedings, our sensitiveness, too, is outraged by the physical tortures which were inflicted on the confessors to compel them to deny Christ, and the sufferings by which their invincible faithfulness was punished.

When common criminals were tortured, this was to make them confess their crimes ; but as Christians began by freely declaring their belief, which was the only crime they were accused of, there was nothing more to extort from them, and consequently torture was useless. Nevertheless, by a reversal of all equity, they were subjected to it simply because they were Christians, and to force them to deny or abandon the belief of which they had made profession.

The horror of the darksome dungeons, their filthiness and promiscuity, the chains and the scourgings, the rack and the iron rakes, the flaming torch and the red-hot irons, hunger and thirst, all these cruelties were the amusement of the judges, and sometimes, too, that of a rabble already drunk with the sight of blood. Against women and girls the wickedness and depravity of the pagans had recourse to stratagems of a different nature, of which the ignominy stands as an everlasting reproach against decadent Rome.

And yet we should not be giving the martyrs their due if we considered only their physical tortures. There were moral tortures which were every whit as bad, and which served them as a schooling for the tortures of the body.

Among them many had, in order to embrace the religion of Christ, first to sacrifice their affections,

their career, and their fortune. Many others saw their goods confiscated before they themselves were exiled or put to death. Many a wealthy Christian was forced to retire into misery; worse still, he had often to choose between apostasy on the one hand and the total ruin of his family on the other. Nothing is more touching and heartrending than the natural love of the Christians for their relatives, and the efforts made by the latter to save the confessors at the expense of their faith. More than once in these calamitous times we find the Roman generals purifying their armies, and depriving Christian officers of their dignities, degrading them and compassing their civil death.

Religious life entered largely into civil life. There was no public functionary, senator, officer, *ædilis*, *duumvir*, who was not frequently called upon to worship the gods on occasions of public festivals. Hence those in high position had to endure much torture of conscience and to run many risks. It was only by means of elaborate precautions and tacit arrangements and a liberal use of "reflex principles" that Christians in high places could contrive to abstain from acts condemned by their religion, whilst continuing to occupy their positions in public life; this was the case until Diocletian, before himself becoming a persecutor, permitted the Christians to retain government posts without performing any acts which might hurt their religious scruples. It is easy to imagine how, in the midst of these moral trials which were felt most severely by the better classes, well-nigh insuperable difficulties often arose, nor can we be astonished at the frequency of apostasies. We also understand how it happened that though, speaking generally, male martyrs were the more numerous, the

women being less exposed by their position in the world, yet in the ranks of the nobility there were more women martyred than men; the latter, alas, frequently encountering too many obstacles to allow of their persevering in the faith.

By the help of God those who remained steadfast until they had been sentenced, men and women, old and young, were ever ready to cheerfully abide the carrying out of the sentence, in the meantime thanking God for the happy realisation of their desires.

And yet how dreadful were the sufferings which they had to undergo! Sometimes they died at the hand of the mob, but more usually it was the magistrates who inflicted the penalties of the law with a zeal none the less cruel for being more cold. They were condemned to die, according to the whim of the magistrate, either on the ignominious wood of the cross, a punishment at first reserved for slaves, or by beheading, or by being burnt, frozen to death, quartered, strangled, drowned, by being immersed in boiling oil or pitch, or molten lead, or quicklime, or by being roasted on a grill or red-hot iron bed; at other times they were thrown to the beasts, and so helped to provide for the populace some of that sanguinary fun which it expected on public holidays.

Those who escaped death departed into exile, or were transported to penal settlements; such punishment was sometimes worse than death, but to the torture of perpetual imprisonment at the bottom of the mines, to excessively hard labour and privations, the pagans contrived to add new sufferings, laming, blinding, and otherwise mutilating their captives.

It is impossible to read without a thrill of emotion of the agonies suffered by the confessors of Christ. The bald narration of the facts as recorded, not in

legendary stories, but by perfectly authentic documents, succeeded in drawing tears from the eyes of many who listened to this course of lectures.

The heroic victims of the persecutions had always at their service as a last resource the appeal to Cæsar, but not once did they make use of it, either because they could not trust the emperors, or more probably because they preferred to give testimony to Christ. In the very midst of the diabolical torments of the mines the Christians were still able to group themselves into little Churches, and thus sweeten the horrors of their imprisonment by the reading in common of the Scriptures, and sometimes by the reception of the Eucharist. So striking was their virtue that the very sight of it was often the cause of unexpected conversions; the jailors or soldiers, vanquished by their holiness, often threw themselves at the feet of the martyrs to ask for baptism, and not seldom accompanied their charges to martyrdom.

Favoured by the laws that then were, the Christians were allowed to give to the mortal remains of their slaughtered brethren all the honour due to their constancy. It indeed happened occasionally that the persecutors opposed the burial of the martyrs, either through rage or from motives of superstition, or again to suppress the worship which was given to them, and which contributed to further the new doctrine. But Christians were never wanting who were ready to expose themselves in order to save the precious relics, and give them decent burial in a place where they might be guarded as a treasure. They contended among themselves for the honour of interring their own relatives close to the spot hallowed by the remains of a martyr. Nothing pleased them more than to make their prayers to

God, whether on their own behalf or on behalf of their beloved departed, through the intermediary of the martyrs. Even in quite early times the tombs of the martyrs became the centres of frequent pious pilgrimages, and their relics were unceasingly venerated. Round about their sepulchres there clung a spirit of prayer which testifies to a very lively faith in a purification beyond the grave and in the efficaciousness of the intercession of the saints. Before some of the tombs there hung lamps of scented oil, others were adorned with pictures and mosaics, and in some of them, which had been enlarged into veritable oratories, crowds of faithful flocked together to listen to the sermons on the martyrs and to venerate their relics.

Even at that time the Church had a place for them in her liturgy, and was careful that the title of martyr should not be bestowed indiscriminately, but only on those whose claim had been proved well founded.

To hinder the spread of Christianity and to drown it in its own blood, its enemies adopted every possible device. Under Nero and Domitian the persecutions were simply explosions of fury; under Trajan the persecutors became more cautious, and confined themselves to proceeding against those who fell into their hands; under Septimius Severus the persecution assumed method, and began to discriminate between Christian common folk, on the one hand, and the preachers and new converts on the other, to the disadvantage of the two latter classes. Under Decius, a fanatic devotee of the old order of things, every one was threatened with death who should not be able to bring a certificate attesting that he had taken part at stated times in the national

worship. Under Valerian the persecutor sought before all to overthrow the corporate existence of the Church; he confiscated her goods and forbade the faithful to resort to the cemeteries or places of worship. Lastly, under Galerius, Diocletian, and Maximin Daia, the nether forces made their last furious assault. Their efforts were no longer to correct, but to exterminate; the Christians were expelled from the army and from their positions in the State, their holy books were burnt, and their sacred edifices destroyed, the clergy were outlawed, and the whole Empire ran with blood; every national interest had disappeared in the intensity of the war against the Church.

The power was in the hands of a party, and to safeguard itself this party had to strike its adversaries without pity. But its efforts were vain, and it had to betake itself to artifice. Maximin, setting an example which was to be followed by Julian and by other renegades in later times, procured petitions to be drawn up in the different towns of the Empire, asking him to abolish Christianity; he also had the Christians accused of infamous crimes, and he took care that the cases should be publicly notified by means of placards; to every village he dispatched stupidly calumnious pamphlets, which the local schoolmasters had to spread abroad and bring under the notice of their scholars. All the while the emperor was endeavouring to keep alive by artificial respiration paganism, which was all too evidently at the point of death. How true it is that history repeats itself; but its efforts and its tricks were thrown away; the Christians were already a majority in the Empire, and the party which still retained the reins of power was tottering to its fall.

It may be asked why the Christians, when they had become numerous and powerful, did not turn on their persecutors, why they did not use their own power to make themselves victorious. Doubtless nothing of this sort entered into the plans of Providence; Christ wished to vanquish the world by peaceful means, and it was by their faith, by their sweetness and patience, that the martyrs brought about the triumph of the Gospel. Moreover, anything in the nature of a conspiracy would have given ground to the impression, already widespread, that the Christians were enemies of the Empire, a prejudice which apologists never ceased fighting, and which they finally succeeded in uprooting by dint of their unswerving fidelity to the laws of their country.

The conduct of the real children of the Church was very different from that of the heretical sects who invariably showed themselves extremists, either seeking after or flying from martyrdom. The testimony given to the truth by the true faithful was always marked by constancy to principle and perfect moderation; there was in it no morbid longing, no excessive enthusiasm for martyrdom; the rule recommended by the Church to her children was to distrust themselves, never wantonly to provoke their adversaries, never to yield before the representatives of public power, never to deny their Master. Their testimony was a result at once of their faith, their reason, and their virtue, and this is why it had such great evidential value. The philosopher Justin, when still a pagan, had come to the conclusion that men who could endure suffering with such intrepidity, could not but be just men, and this caused him to look into their doctrine and finally to associate himself with them. This evidence worked so effectively on

the minds of attentive onlookers that it led to numerous conversions, so that Tertullian could say with good reason that the blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians.

Among the motives of credibility advanced by the Church in favour of the divinity of the Christian faith, the argument furnished by the martyrs' perseverance in suffering and death is one which appeals to minds of every calibre. As Pascal says, it is difficult to disbelieve a story of which the witnesses are willing to be slain. Christ Himself ratified beforehand the worth of the martyrs' testimony when He asked His disciples to be His witnesses throughout the world, and when He promised them the assistance of His Holy Spirit when they should be brought to judgment; the Apostles, too, seem to have believed its force, for their only answer to those who would have stopped their preaching was: We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard. This simple witness was in their eyes more powerful than any argument, and they continued to bear it even to the shedding of their blood.

The heathen, too, accepted its force when they enrolled themselves in their thousands under the banner of Christ, being drawn thereto by the mere sight of the death of the confessors of the faith.

Theologians, apologists, and the faithful of every age have appealed to it as a decisive proof, one which is as striking as it is simple.

To-day its position as an argument is as strong as ever. The violent death of so many martyrs still constitutes an irrefragable testimony in favour of the Gospel-fact, for it was to witness to this fact that the martyrs allowed themselves to be slaughtered. Some of them were of the first hour; they had lived

with our Saviour, and had personally verified the object of their attestation. The others, who came later, held their information from those who had preceded them, and of whose miracles they had been witnesses; they died for their testimony to the Catholic tradition, which they in turn passed on to others. St. John, his disciple St. Polycarp, and this latter's disciple, St. Irenæus, bring us down to the end of the second century, and yet in this chain of tradition there are only three links. Those who died gave testimony at one and the same time to the facts and to the doctrines of Christianity ever living in the bosom of the Church. If the last of the martyrs were already far removed in time from Christ and His Apostles, they were in close union with the Church, and it was for the sake of the traditional faith that they were so cheerfully lavish with their blood. The patience and perseverance amidst such sufferings shown by such multitudes, constitute a historical fact which is so extraordinary and so peculiar to Christianity that it can only be explained by assuming a special Divine assistance whereby the martyrs were sustained; as Felicitas said in her prison at Carthage, "It is I who now suffer, but then another will be in me who will suffer for me, because I shall be suffering for Him."

The demonstration is thus complete: "The edict of peace was the solemn avowal of the powerlessness of paganism to overcome Christianity. The history of the martyrs from the first to the fourth century is one complete whole, self-sufficing, and bearing with it its own inferences."

Such is the substance of the book which M. Paul Allard offers the educated public. The method by which he has marshalled his facts is excellent; it

would be difficult to find anywhere a book better stocked with facts and documents. It contains no fancies, no adventurous hypotheses or conjectures; the author builds exclusively on facts attested by the best possible sources, which are always referred to with commendable exactitude. A whole crowd of points relating to ancient history are touched upon in the course of this work; it was necessary to speak of the politics of the Roman Empire, of the organisation of Christian charity, of the emancipation of the slaves, of the Roman legislation in general and in its bearing on the Christians, of the constitution of ecclesiastical property, of the moral combinations tolerated by the Church, and, above all, of the high religious questions involved in martyrdom.

At every page comparisons suggest themselves between what happened in those remote ages and what is going on even now before our eyes, but our author is discreet and never ventures beyond the merest allusion. Yet the narrative of the sufferings inflicted on the early Christians, for no other reason than their faith, is curiously appropriate just now. If it was M. Allard's hope to choose a propitious moment for the publication of his book, then he has certainly succeeded in finding it, for he has depicted figures which, for all that they are eighteen centuries old, are still to be seen to-day.

P. L. PÉCHENARD,

Rector of the Catholic University of Paris.

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TEN LECTURES ON THE MARTYRS

LECTURE I

THE APOSTLES AND THE MARTYRS—THE SPREAD OF CHRISTIANITY IN THE ROMAN EMPIRE

I

EVEN if martyrdom were not one of the most important facts of religious history, it would still be one of the most peculiar and remarkable of historical phenomena.

Martyrdom, in its proper meaning, was unknown before the appearance of Christianity; there were no martyrs of philosophy. "Nobody," writes the apologist Justin Martyr, "had such great faith in Socrates as to die for his doctrines."¹ At no time were men to be found ready to bear witness by suffering cheerfully submitted to, and by violent death willingly undergone, to the truth of any of the heathen religions; such forms of worship did not demand of their adherents that absolute faith which is a part of life itself; they were all willing to compromise, if needs be to accept defeat, or to accommodate themselves as well as they could to all kinds of strange alliances. No Latin would have thought of throwing away his life to prevent the

¹ Justin, *II. Apol.*, 10.

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Greek gods from obtaining a footing in Italy, nor would it have entered into the head of a Celt to protest with his blood against Græco-Roman deities being worshipped in his regions, side by side with the old Gallic triads. Heathen religions produced an abundance of fanatics like those Galli¹ who disfigured their limbs and submitted to shocking mutilations in honour of Cybele, but whose frantic orgies nevertheless found a place even in the official calendar of Rome. Religious intoxication may occasionally have gone as far as suicide, as in the case of those Hindoo devotees who could throw themselves under the car of Juggernaut in order to be crushed to death by their idol; but such savage instances of self-immolation, such offerings of blood, or even of life itself, had no value as testimonies. Superstition, even when pushed to frenzy on the part of certain pagans, proves no more than the indifference or scepticism of others. There was nothing in it to bespeak a cool, deliberate, and unshakable determination to affirm a fact or doctrine.

I might go further and say that there were, strictly speaking, no Jewish martyrs. Doubtless the martyr-type is admirably seen in its infant stage under the old Law. The three young men in the furnace of Nabuchodonozor, Daniel in the lions' den, the Machabean mother and her seven sons are sublime instances of faithfulness to the true God and to His law. But if among these heroes of Jewish faith we find something unknown to the pagan world, viz., the will to die rather than sully their soul by strange worship, as yet we do not find that testimony which transforms the Christian martyr

¹ No satisfactory origin can be assigned to the name which was given to these eunuch priests of Cybele.—[*Trans.*]

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into an apostle of world-wide truth. Whereas the Jew allows himself to be slain to remain faithful to a religion which is a privilege of his race and the law of his people, the Christian martyr accepts death to prove the divinity of a religion which he believes is destined to become that of all men and of all nations.

This is what the word martyr means: *μάρτυς*, a witness even to certainty, that is, if the greatest sign of certainty be to sacrifice our life to prove the truth of what we affirm. The word in its fullest sense is unknown before the Gospel. It does not exist in the Old Testament, even in the books written in Greek, where we might expect to find it, for instance, in the books of the Machabees. To be accurate, it is found once and in circumstances which would be appropriate to its Christian meaning, yet it is there used in an entirely different sense: "Heaven and earth shall be *witnesses* (*μαρτυρεῖ*) for us, that you put us to death wrongfully."¹ The sacred writer has evidently no thought of attaching the meaning of a testimony to the heroic self-abnegation of these scrupulous Jews. We must wait till the time of Christ to find the intention, the declared wish, of making men the witnesses, and as it were the respondents of religion.

Such an injunction was given by Christ to His disciples when He was about to take His leave. "You are *witnesses* of these things."² He adds, "You will be my *witnesses* in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the ends of the earth."³ The Apostles accepted this mission with

¹ 1 Mach. ii. 37.

² Luke xxiv. 48.

³ Acts of the Apostles i. 8.

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all its consequences. When the need arose of filling the gap in their ranks caused by Judas's desertion, St. Peter addresses his companions as follows: "Wherefore of these men who have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus came in and went out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day wherein He was taken up from us, one of these must be made a *witness* with us of His resurrection."¹ A little later, at his very first discourse to the Jews after Pentecost, Peter himself appears in the shape of such a witness, "This Jesus hath God raised again, whereof we all are *witnesses*."² Again, in company with John, before the Chief Priest and all the heads of the Jewish religion, he exclaims, "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."³ And yet again, all the Apostles together when, after having escaped from prison in the night, they were brought a second time before the magistrates, proceed to address them thus: "We are *witnesses* of these things, and the Holy Ghost whom God hath given to all that obey Him."⁴ And when they had been scourged they quitted the hall of justice "rejoicing that they were accounted worthy to suffer reproach for the name of Jesus." At the very end of his ministry Peter still uses similar language. Writing from Rome to the Churches of Asia he speaks of himself as "an ancient, and a *witness* of the sufferings of Christ."⁵

¹ Μάρτυρα τῆς ἀναστάσεως αὐτοῦ σὺν ἡμῖν.—*Acts of the Apostles* i. 22.

² Ἐσμὲν μάρτυρες.—*Ibid.*, ii. 32.

³ *Acts of the Apostles* iv. 20.

⁴ Καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐσμὲν αὐτοῦ μάρτυρες τῶν ῥημάτων τούτων.—*Ibid.*, v. 32.

⁵ Ὁ συμπρεσβύτερος καὶ μάρτυς τῶν τοῦ Χριστοῦ παθημάτων.—

1 *Peter* v. 1.

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This was the primary meaning of the word martyr. It signified the ocular witnesses of the death and resurrection of Christ, who were to testify to them before the world. But even then the testimony was mostly given by a cheerful submission to tribulations and sufferings, and after these first trials came the sacrifice of life itself, that last and supreme testimony to the truth of the word. Jesus Christ had Himself predicted this last painful end of His witnesses: "They shall deliver you up to councils, and in the synagogues you shall be beaten, and you shall stand before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony unto them."¹ And He proceeds to give to His future martyrs the promise of His assistance: "And when they shall lead you and deliver you up, be not thoughtful beforehand what you shall speak; but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye, for it is not you that speak but the Holy Ghost."² He also predicted the cruel fissures, which would be caused by persecution, both in the home and in the State, and how death will follow close on the confession of His faithful ones: "'The brother shall betray his brother unto death, and the father his son, and children shall rise up against the parents and shall work their death, and you shall be hated by all men for my name's sake; but he that shall endure unto the end shall be saved."³ When events had taught Christians the full meaning of the words of their Master, the glorious death of His oldest and most faithful disciples, slaughtered as He had pre-

¹ Εἰς μαρτύριον αὐτοῖς.—*Mark* xiii. 9. Cp. *Matt.* x. 17, 18; *Luke* xxi. 12, 13.

² *Mark* xiii. 11. Cp. *Matt.* x. 19, 20; *Luke* xii. 11, 12.

³ *Mark* xiii. 12, 13. Cp. *Luke* xxi. 16, 17.

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dicted, through hatred of His name, came to be considered as the natural complement of their testimony, so much so that the two things were no longer kept distinct even in thought.

Thus you can see how, even before the end of the apostolic age, the word "martyr" had received its technical meaning. Henceforth it is applied to him who has confessed Christ, not only by word, but also by blood. But at the same time it is extended to those witnesses whom we might call witnesses in the second degree—to those blessed ones, who, as Christ Himself expressed it, believed without seeing,¹ and who, having so believed, poured out their blood in witnessing to their belief. This is shown by the last of the books of the New Testament. Writing at the very end of the first century, St. John uses, in two passages of the *Apocalypse*, the word "martyr," in the sense which it carries to-day. In the message to the Church of Pergamus, mention is made of Antipas, "my faithful witness,"² who was slain among you where Satan dwelleth." That is, of a Christian martyred under Nero by the heathens of the town for not having been willing to renounce his faith. Further on, in a vision, when the fifth seal of the mysterious book had been opened, the Apostle beholds, "Under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God and for the *testimony* which they held."³

Henceforth the word "martyr" has its definite meaning. It signifies those who witnessed by their blood to the reality of the Gospel-facts and the

¹ *John* xx. 29.

² 'Ο μάρτυς μου ὁ πιστός.—*Apoc.*, ii. 13.

³ Διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ διὰ τὴν μαρτυρίαν ἣν εἶχον.—*Ibid.*, vi. 9.

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constancy of Christian tradition. The last text also hints clearly enough that the first generation of believers will not be alone in giving such a testimony, that the history of martyrdom is only just beginning.

II

This history will continue during three centuries in the countries held in thrall by Rome. The time will come when an emperor will publish the first edict of religious peace; but even then the era of blood will only cease here to begin elsewhere, as new countries and other nations "seated in the shadow of death"¹ afford each day new fields for missionary effort. The *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith* will be the natural continuation of the *Acta Martyrum*. But at the time when these latter end, *i.e.* that of Constantine, Christianity will already have effected the peaceful conquest of the whole of those Mediterranean regions where the spirit of Greece and the laws of Rome held sway, and which were then the centre of civilisation, and which thus became the starting-point of the propaganda of the Gospel through the whole of the world. It will have accomplished this in spite of apparently unsurmountable difficulties, and simply because the blood of martyrs will have proved itself stronger than any resistance which heathendom was capable of offering, stronger, too, than the arguments of philosophers, the prejudices of statesmen, or the cruelty of executioners. Their blood will not have been spilt occasionally and as it were drop by drop, a whole series of methodical and ingeniously devised persecutions will have caused it to flow in abundant

¹ *Luke i. 79.*

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torrents. The edict of peace was the solemn avowal of the powerlessness of Paganism to overcome Christianity. The history of the martyrs from the first to the fourth century is thus one complete whole, self-sufficing, and bearing with it its own inferences. This it is that will form the object of our research ; but first of all we must discuss another question.

The number of the martyrs grew with the spread of Christianity. It was only in the track of missionaries that martyrs were found. Before describing the death undergone by Christians for their faith we must be able to say which countries contained Christians. Casting a superficial glance at the history of the primitive Church, we seem to find Christians well-nigh everywhere ; we find them in the countries bordering on the birthplace of the new religion and in the countries furthest removed from it. We see, too, that martyrs make their appearance in the remotest districts at the very beginning of the preaching of the Gospel, in the second, nay even in the first century. We might thus gather that Christianity leapt at once to the position of a universal religion. This impression may not be altogether false, but it requires some correcting. There were such things as degrees and inequalities in the rapid spread of Christianity. At a time when it had completed its invasion of some countries, in others it was still scarcely heard of. Hence some regions furnished candidates for martyrdom much sooner than others, though, speaking generally, persecution seems to have broken out at one and the same time in every part of the Roman Empire. To get a clear idea of the history of the martyrs of Christianity we must then follow the track of its

first missions, what might be called its geographical movement. Our Lord himself suggests this method, for in commencing the discourse, which I quoted a moment back, and in which He predicts the trials to come, He says, "Unto all nations the Gospel must first be preached;"¹—between preaching and martyrdom there is, in fact, a relation of cause and effect.

A glance, then, at the diffusion of the Christian faith in the ancient world during the first three centuries is a necessary preliminary to the study of our subject.

III

The Church began its work on the first Whit-Sunday. "Intoxicated" as it were with the Holy Ghost, the Apostles gave testimony in the presence of the vast crowd of pilgrims then in Jerusalem. In this crowd were people of all nations, who heard, each in his own language, the divine word. The writer of the *Acts* is careful to specify the countries from which the audience hailed. Some came from the East, from beyond the confines of the Roman Empire, Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and natives of Mesopotamia; others were Asiatics belonging to the Roman Empire, people from Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Proconsular Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia; others were Africans from Egypt and the parts of Lybia; there were Arabs, too, and visitors from the islands of the Mediterranean, and even pilgrims from Rome.² Doubtless many of these

¹ Καὶ εἰς πάντα τὰ ἔθνη δεῖ πρῶτον κηρυχθῆναι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον.—*Mark* xiii. 10.

² *Acts* ii. 5–11.

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strangers were amongst the three thousand men converted and baptized by St. Peter,¹ and when they returned to their respective countries they were no doubt the first harbingers of the new faith.

Another swarm of Christians departed from the old Jewish hive after the death of the first martyr St. Stephen. "At that time"—says the *Acts*—"there was raised a great persecution against the Church which was at Jerusalem;"² only the Apostles remained in the city, the faithful being dispersed through all the countries of Judea and Samaria.³ This was an occasion for the evangelisation of the sea-border, Phœnicea, and the ancient country of the Philistines; disciples carried the faith also to Damascus, and even to Antioch in the far north of Syria; others migrated to Cyprus.⁴

Yet notwithstanding the various inroads which Christianity had made into heathen lands, its exponents still addressed themselves exclusively to Jews and Jewish proselytes. But all of a sudden Christianity took a new direction and resolved on sowing the seed in heathendom as well as in Jewry. St. Peter had quitted Jerusalem to visit and establish the new Churches.⁵ During his journey, in obedience to a vision, he baptized numerous pagans.⁶ "Greeks," *i.e.* pagans, were simultaneously being instructed at Antioch by disciples from Cyprus and Cyrene.⁷ Soon after, drawn out of his retreat by Barnabas, the former persecutor and the great convert, St. Paul, came to the Syrian metropolis.

¹ *Acts* ii. 41.

³ *Acts* v. 31-37; ix. 32, 36, 40.

⁵ *Acts* ix. 32.

⁷ *Acts* xi. 20.

² *Acts* viii. 1.

⁴ *Acts* xi. 19.

⁶ *Acts* x. 9-28, 47-48.

There and then under his influence the cleavage was effected between Judaism and the new Faith, of which the adherents now received the name of Christians.¹

About the year 44 St. Paul began his apostolic travels which in fifteen years carried him through the whole of Western Asia Minor, Cilicia, Lycaonia, Pisidia, Isauria, Phrygia, Mysia, Proconsular Asia, Cyprus, Salamina, Paphos, Macedonia, and Achaia,² and possibly also Illyria.³ These travels were not entered on without thought. Paul's aim was to select convenient towns which might be, as it were, strategical points, or, to use his own expression, "great doors"⁴ opened to him; Ephesus, where he lived for two years and whence the faith spread over all the west of Asia Minor from Lycia to Propontis;⁵ Antioch, which put the new Church in communication both with the sea and with the East; Thessalonica, whence it spread to Macedonia;⁶ Corinth, which was to be the centre of Christian propaganda in Achaia.⁷

But St. Paul had brought the faith to only one-half of the Asiatic peninsula; there remained the eastern half with the great provinces between the Pontus Euxinus and the Taurus; Bithynia and

¹ *Acts* xi. 26.

² *Acts* xiii.—xxi.

³ See *Romans* xv. 19.

⁴ *1 Cor.* xvi. 9.

⁵ *Col.* i. 7–8; iv. 12–13; *Philem.* i. 2; *Acts* xix. 10, 26. A detail furnished by *Acts* (*ibid.*, 19) gives us an idea of the number of the conversions effected at Ephesus. When the converts, who had meddled with magic, brought together their books to be burnt, the books thus burnt were valued at "fifty thousand pieces of silver," or say, roughly, two thousand pounds sterling.

⁶ *1 Thess.* i. 7–8.

⁷ *2 Cor.* i. 1.

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Pontus, Galatia,¹ properly so called, and Cappadocia. St. Paul does not seem to have visited any of these places. The hypothesis which attributes their evangelisation to St. Peter is one which is well worth consideration.² The first epistle of the Prince of the Apostles, written from Rome after 64 to the Christians of "Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,"³ presupposes Churches already founded and provided with a clergy,⁴ which have suffered already, or are on the eve of suffering persecution.⁵ St. Peter speaks to these Churches in the tone of a man who is personally acquainted with them, and in point of fact he may well have tarried in Proconsular Asia on his way to the West.

We know nothing of the journey of St. Peter to Rome; on the other hand, the first voyage of St. Paul to the capital of the Roman world is known perfectly. Arrested at Jerusalem in 59, and retained for two years a prisoner in Judea, having appealed to Cæsar he began in the autumn of 61, in company with other prisoners, that adventurous and dangerous voyage of which the *Acts of the Apostles* gives us such a vivid picture.⁶ On arriving

¹ For a discussion of the question as to whether St. Paul's epistle to the Galatians was written to the inhabitants of the southern portion of the Galatian province, *i.e.* to the Lycaonians, Phrygians, and Pamphylians, or to the Galatians properly so-called, see Jacquier, *Hist. des Livres du Nouv. Test.*, i. pp. 171-185. [English translation by J. Duggan, publ. by Kegan Paul, 1907. —*Trans.*]

² Tillemont, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire ecclésiastique des six premiers siècles*, vol. i., art. xxviii., and also note 26, on St. Peter; Fouard, *Saint Pierre et les premières années du christianisme*, pp. 329-331. [English translation by Griffith, publ. by Longmans, 1892. —*Trans.*]

³ 1 Peter i. 1.

⁵ 1 Peter iv. 14-16.

⁴ 1 Peter v. 1-3.

⁶ Acts xxvii.-xxviii.

in the south of Italy he found on disembarking at Puteoli a Christian Community already existing, which took care of him during his stay.¹ On the Appian Way two deputations of Roman Christians came forth to greet him, one at the Forum of Appius, the other at the Three Taverns.²

The narrative of *Acts* closes with this last incident, and the remainder of St. Paul's travels must be gathered from other sources.³ I may remind you in a few words that he seems to have been set free after a couple of years in Rome, and to have resumed his missionary duties, visiting Spain,⁴ landing perhaps, on the outward or return journey, in the south of Gaul,⁵ visiting again Crete, Asia Minor, Macedonia, the Peloponnesus and Epirus, and returning finally to Rome.⁶ Several of his disciples who had accompanied him on this last journey to the East remained there; Crescens stayed to preach to the Galatians,⁷ and Titus, after having organised the Churches of Crete,⁸ went westward carrying on the work of his master in Dalmatia.⁹

We now come to one of the most salient points in the first century, the celebrated year 64, from which we may conveniently take a bird's-eye view of events. Christians were already then recognised as such by Rome, and Nero was about to inaugurate

¹ *Acts* xxviii. 13–14.

² *Ibid.*, 15.

³ Cp. Jacquier, *Hist. des Livres du Nouv. Test.*, vol. i. pp. 413–414; Fouard, *Saint Paul, ses dernières années*, pp. 263–296. [English translation by Griffith, publ. by Longmans, 1901.—*Trans.*]

⁴ *Romans* xv. 24; St. Clement, *Cor.*, 5; *Canon of Muratori*.

⁵ Renan, *l'Antéchrist*, p. 108.

⁶ 1 *Tim.* i. 3; 2 *Tim.* iv. 13, 20; *Titus* i. 5; iii. 12.

⁷ 2 *Tim.* iv. 10.

⁸ *Titus* i. 5.

⁹ 2 *Tim.* iv. 10.

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the first persecution in which Peter and Paul will water with their blood the foundations of the Roman Church. From this point we may easily measure how much way has been made by Christianity during the thirty years which have elapsed since the death of Christ.

All the Gospels were not yet written, but the Gospel had been preached throughout the Empire. It was known in all the provinces of Roman Asia, from the desert of Arabia to the Black Sea. Not only had it adherents in those regions, they also possessed numerous properly organised Churches. It had entered the African continent, having been brought to Egypt and Cyrene by the witnesses of Pentecost. It had entered Europe by Macedonia, Achaia, Epirus, Illyria, and Dalmatia. There were groups of believers in Southern Italy; its members and martyrs formed even at Rome, according to contemporaries, the Christian Clement, or the Pagan Tacitus, "a great multitude."¹ Lastly, as Clement says, it had been borne "to the extremities of the West,"² that is to say, even to the south of Spain where the ancients placed the columns of Hercules.³ In the short space of thirty years the new Faith had overrun not only Roman Asia but the whole of the Mediterranean basin. As Renan well expressed it: "A flash of lightning, with its starting-point in Syria, illuminating almost simultaneously the three great peninsulas of Asia Minor, Greece, and Italy, and followed quickly by a reflected flash

¹ Πολὺν πλῆθος ἐκλεκτῶν.—St. Clement, *Cor.*, 6. Multitudo ingens.—Tacitus, *Ann.*, xv. 44.

² Ἐπὶ τὸ τέρμα τῆς δύσεως.—St. Clement, *Cor.*, 5.

³ See Lightfoot's note on this passage: *St. Clement of Rome*, vol. ii. pp. 30–31.

which lit up nearly all the Mediterranean coasts, such was the first coming of Christianity.¹

IV

This "reflected flash of lightning," to use the rationalist historian's ingenious expression, did not come from the East, it was from Rome that in the following two centuries light spread every moment more rapidly along the shores of the Mediterranean.

Rome became from the second century the centre of Christian effort in the West.² No doubt in the primitive Church of Rome, Hellenism was an important factor. A large number of its faithful spoke Greek, and its earliest writings are in that tongue.³ In its cemeteries Greek epitaphs predominate until the third century;⁴ those of the Popes, even in the third century, are written in Greek,⁵ with the exception of one.⁶ Yet we should be wrong were we to think that the Roman Church only sloughed off by dint of effort these exoteric influences. As a matter of fact, she transformed them by impressing on them her own character. She used Greek because Greek

¹ Renan, *les Apôtres*, p. 284.

² Duchesne, *Origines du culte chrétien*, p. 81.

³ St. Clement's epistle, the *Shepherd* of Hermas, and the *Philosophumena* are written in Greek. The Greek titles of Hippolytus's works are inscribed on the throne on which his statue is seated. It is probable that the Muratorian fragment was originally in Greek (see Lightfoot, *St. Clement of Rome*, vol. ii. pp. 405-413). The edict of Pope Callixtus on penance, and the letters of the Popes down to Cornelius inclusively, were all of them in Greek (see Batiffol, *Anciennes littératures chrétiennes: La littérature grecque*, pp. 125-126).

⁴ De Rossi, *Inscriptiones Christianæ urbis Romæ*, vol. i. p. cx.; *Roma sotteranea*, vol. ii. pp. 250, 288, 308; vol. iii. pp. 96, 102, 106, 110, 123, 132, &c.

⁵ *Roma sotteranea*, vol. ii. plate i., ii., iii.; p. 115.

⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. i. pp. 277-279, and plate iv.

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was the universal language, and carried further than Latin.¹ Though her writings were in Greek, the very first is a pastoral letter in which she speaks as one having authority to a city of the East. All over Central and Southern Italy the Churches obey the signal of Rome. In the middle of the third century Pope Cornelius convoked in council sixty Italian bishops.² The Italian episcopate was so closely linked with its head that, even in the eyes of the pagan authorities, their union was the mark of orthodoxy. When in 272 the Emperor Aurelian had to decide a question of property between the Catholics and certain heretics in the city of Antioch, he gave the following judgment: "The disputed building will belong to those who are in communion with the Bishops of Italy and the Bishop of Rome."³ The importance and the cohesion of the Italian episcopate shows the deep roots which Christianity had taken in the peninsula. If we reflect on the difficulties of communication at the time, the sixty bishops assembled by Pope Cornelius seem to show that there must have been in Italy fully a hundred bishoprics.⁴ But, of course, they were not equally plentiful all over the country; there were many in the south, but there seem to have been very few between the Apennines and the Alps even at the end of the third century.⁵ Christianity spread much less

¹ Græca leguntur in omnibus fere gentibus, latina suis finibus, exiguis sane, continentur.—Cicero, *Pro Archia*, 10.

² Eusebius, *H. E.*, vi. 43, 8.

³ *Ibid.*, vii. 30, 19.

⁴ Harnack, *Die Mission und Ausbreitung des Christenthums in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten*, p. 501. The computation is a rough one, but it is probably not far off from the truth.

⁵ Duchesne, *Fastes épiscopaux de l'ancienne Gaule*, vol. i. pp. 33–35. Bologna and Imola possibly had martyrs before having bishops. Fedele Savio in *Revista di scienze storiche*; Pavia, 1904, p. 206; F. Lanzoni in *Revista storico-critica di scienze teologiche*, 1905, p. 496.

rapidly in Northern than in Central and Southern Italy.

We may now turn to another great Mediterranean country, Gaul. Here we find that Christianity followed a similar route. In the Narbonensis and in the south of the Lugdunensis—that is to say, the countries forming the basins of the Rhône and Saône—we find early traces of Christians, manifestly emigrants from Greece and Asia. The sea-borne trade, of which Marseilles—a Greek city in origin and character—was the port and Lyons the emporium, had sown these regions with colonies which kept up the spirit of the East. It also was the means of introducing Christianity. Christian Gaul enters suddenly on the stage of history with the admirable epistle written in 177 by the Churches of Lyons and Vienne to those of Asia and Phrygia,¹ a letter which testifies to the intimate relations which existed between these so widely separated Churches. Among the martyrs then slain at Lyons fully one-half bore Greek names;² of some it is said that they came from Asia;³ many answered the magistrates in Greek.⁴ The most ancient Christian epitaph found in Gaul, the celebrated inscription of Pectorius in the “polyandrium”⁵ of Autun, is not only Greek in

¹ Eusebius, *H. E.*, v. 1.

² De Rossi-Duchesne, *Martyrologium Hieronymianum*, pp. lxvii.–lxviii.

³ Eusebius, *H. E.*, v. 1.

⁴ The *Letter* records that one of the martyrs, who bore a Latin name, Sanctus, replied, τῇ Ῥωμαϊκῇ φωνῇ, which seems to show that most of the others replied in Greek (*ibid.*, 20). Further on (44) we are told that the Phrygian Attalus also answered, τῇ Ῥωμαϊκῇ φωνῇ; but this latter, though a Phrygian by birth, was a Roman citizen.

⁵ A *polyandrium* usually signified a tomb containing the remains of several martyrs; here, however, it is synonymous with “cemetery.”—[*Trans.*]

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language but utterly Eastern in its conception. In Christian epigraphy it ranks with that of Abercius in Hierapolis of Phrygia.¹ Nevertheless, with all this primitive element, the Roman influence, "the second reflection," is easily recognisable. The Bishop of Lyons, Irenæus, was born at Smyrna, but he twice visited Rome, and was in personal relations with the Popes. The council over which he presided in 196 testified that for the date of the celebration of Easter the Churches of Gaul followed the Roman custom, and not that of Asia.² This suffices to show that if the first groups of faithful came from the East, yet they soon assimilated Western traditions. The later evangelisation of Gaul was to be entirely Latin, in fact largely the result of the work of Roman emissaries.

As we leave the Greek zone to enter at the south-west, west, east, and north, into the lands of Celtic traditions, Aquitania, the rural portion of the vast province associated with the name of Lyons, Belgium, we find Christianity spreading much less rapidly, because cities are few and, as it were, smothered by the immense *pagi* where the national gods of paganism still reign supreme. Nevertheless, twenty years after the scenes enacted at Lyons, Tertullian is able to say that the "different tribes of Gaul" have heard of Christ.³ These words must be understood of the regions which I have just

¹ On the relationship between the epitaph of Pectorius, in the Autun *polyandrium*, and the inscription of Abercius, see De Rossi, *Inscript. Christ. urbis Romæ*, vol. ii. pp. xvii.--xxiv.

² Eusebius, *H. E.*, v. 23.

³ *Galliarum diversæ nationes*.—Tertullian, *Adv. Judæos*, 7. Mgr. Batiffol points out that these words must be more than a mere rhetorical embellishment, for the Carthaginians were well aware of the condition of Christianity in Gaul.—*L'extension géographique de l'Eglise*, in the *Revue Biblique*, April 1895, p. 139.

named. In effect, bishops begin to make their appearance at the end of the second century¹ and during the third.² In 314 we shall only find sixteen Gallic dioceses represented at the Council of Arles.³ Though this number is far from comprising all those which then existed in France,⁴ yet it shows that the bishops there were less numerous than they had been in Italy even a century before. But it is only right to say that in several towns in which there was as yet probably no bishop, there were martyrs in the last persecution, and even before.⁵ The faith was therefore spreading from place to place quicker than Churches could be organised.

Two facts show, moreover, that at the moment when the era of persecution was about to close, Christianity, without being uniformly distributed all over France, of which many parts were still withdrawn from its influence, had yet attained a position of eminence. One of these facts is the great number of faithful who belonged, at the end of the third century, to the court of the Emperor Constantius Chlorus;⁶ the other is Constantine's decision, arrived at whilst passing through Gaul on his way to Italy, to quit Paganism and embrace Christianity. This psychological fact, as Professor Harnack calls it,⁷

¹ Harnack, *Die Mission und Ausbreitung des Christenthums*, p. 508.

² Duchesne, *Fastes épiscopaux de l'ancienne Gaule*, vol. i. pp. 3–33.

³ Arles, Vaison, Nice, Orange, Marseilles, Apt, Lyons, Vienne, Rouen, Bordeaux, Eauze, Mende, Bourges, Rheims, Trèves.

⁴ Duchesne, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

⁵ Valence, Besançon, Auxerre, Troyes, Nantes, Amiens, Augusta Vermanduorum (Saint-Quentin), Beauvais, Tournai, Agen, Bâle. See our works, *Histoire des persécutions pendant les deux premiers siècles*, 3rd ed. p. 186; *Les dernières persécutions du troisième siècle*, 3rd ed., p. 253; *La persécution de Dioclétien*, 2nd ed., vol. i. pp. 40, 41, 42.

⁶ Eusebius, *De Vita Constantini*, i. 16, 17.

⁷ Harnack, *Die Mission und Ausbreitung des Christenthums*, p. 510.

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would probably not have occurred had Christianity in Gaul not been widely diffused and in a position of importance.

Spain, a country whose shores like those of Gaul are washed both by the Mediterranean and the ocean, seems to have depended even more directly on the Church of Rome. Apart from a short expedition to Bætica undertaken by St. Paul right at the end of his career, we do not find a trace of those Eastern influences which had been such powerful factors in the conversion of Southern Gaul. Christians seem to have never spoken Greek in this country, which was so strongly impregnated with Roman ideas that in the first and second centuries it gave to the Empire its most celebrated writers¹ and some of its best sovereigns.² Christianity here is completely Latin, and its history occupies only a few lines. At the end of the second century St. Irenæus mentions the Churches of Spain;³ a few years later Tertullian states that the Faith had spread over "all the frontiers" of this land.⁴ In the middle of the third century the persecution of Decius and Valerian broke out here, producing not a few martyrs⁵ and apostates.⁶ At the end of the same century a council held in a town of Bætica comprised the representatives of some fifty dioceses.⁷ These were unequally distributed through the land, there being many in the South and but few in the

¹ Seneca, Martial, Quintilian.

² Trajan, Adrian, Marcus Aurelius.

³ St. Irenæus, *Adv. Hæreses*, i. 10.

⁴ *Hispaniarum omnes termini*.—Tertullian, *Adv. Judæos*, 7.

⁵ *Acta SS. Fructuosi, Augurii, Eulogii*, in Ruinart, *Acta Martyrum sincera*, 1689, p. 220.

⁶ St. Cyprian, *Ep.* 67.

⁷ Duchesne, *Le concile d'Elvire et les flamines chrétiens*, in *Mélanges Renier*, 1886.

centre and North. All the bishops of Spain were certainly not present at the council; there were also communities which had no bishop but which were administered by deacons.¹ The persecution of Diocletian secured throughout the country, even in the smallest towns, a quantity of victims.² Yet in spite of the extent to which the Faith had spread over the Iberian peninsula, the resistance of idolatry continued long, owing to the attachment with which the pagan traditions of the Empire had inspired the so conservative and tenacious mind of the Spaniards.³

We may now cross the Mediterranean to its opposite shore. Here we are in Roman Africa, composed of three provinces of very unequal population: Proconsular Africa, corresponding with the modern province of Tunis; Numidia, corresponding with Algeria; and Mauritania, a region in part outside the Roman Empire, which is now represented by Morocco. All this vast portion of a continent enters suddenly into Christian history, fully grown and presupposing a long development. Yet it does not seem that this development can have begun in the first century, seeing that persecution broke out for the first time in Proconsular Africa and Numidia only in 180.⁴ But at that date the Church of Carthage, which is the best known, seemed to be in a perfect state of organisation and to comprise a large population of faithful, with a clergy, and

¹ See the 77th canon of this council.

² See Prudentius, *Peri Stephanon*, i., iii., iv., ix., and cp. *La persécution de Dioclétien*, 2nd ed., pp. 141-144, 459-469.

³ See the letter of Pope Siricius in Migne, *Patr. Lat.*, vol. xiii., col. 1136, and laws of 381, 392, 393, Theodosian Code XVI., vii. 1, 2, 3, 5.

⁴ Tertullian, *Ad Scapulam*, 3.

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with many ecclesiastical edifices and cemeteries.¹ At the end of the same century a council of seventy bishops of Proconsular Africa and Numidia was assembled at Carthage,² and, during the whole course of the third century, equally representative councils were frequent. This seems to show that the number of bishops at this time must have been about equal to that of Italy, viz., about a hundred.³ As a judicious historian has noted, with the development of Christianity there took place a concomitant desertion of the sanctuaries of Baal, the African Saturn; this is manifest from recent excavations, and it indicates that the heathens must have been converted *en masse*.⁴ Hence Christianity appeared suddenly in North Africa, without our knowing when or by whom it was introduced. It may have come from the East,⁵ with which Carthage as a dutiful daughter of Phœnicia never ceased to correspond and trade. At the same time it is highly probable that Rome played a great part in introducing it.⁶ This multiple origin of African Christianity is seen by, among other things, the co-existence of Greek and Latin in its earliest Christian literature, which fact betrays a mixed Asiatic and Roman influence.⁷ Yet the latter seems to have been the greater, for as De Rossi remarked in 1867—and subsequent epigraphical discoveries have brought no change to the

¹ Paul Monceaux, *Hist. littéraire de l'Afrique chrétienne*, vol. i. pp. 11–17.

² St. Cyprian, *Ep.* 71, 73.

³ See Paul Monceaux, vol. ii. pp. 7–9.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁵ St. Augustine, *Ep.* 52, 3.

⁶ Tertullian, *De Præscript*, 36; St. Augustine, *Ep.* 43, 7; 52, 2.

⁷ Paul Monceaux, vol. i. pp. 4–8.

state of the question—all the Christian inscriptions of Proconsular Africa and Numidia are in Latin.¹

V

In the Mediterranean hinterland another line of European provinces soon received the Gospel.

First we have the regions bordering on the Rhine, the two Germanies, which form as it were the bulwarks of Gaul, which they shield on the east along the whole length of the river, reaching from its source to its mouth, touching in the north the German Ocean, and at south almost reaching Lyons. They had Churches at the end of the second century,² but until the fourth these were rare and far apart.³ The same thing may be said of another province, Britain, the furthest north of the Roman Empire. In that country the Romans encamped indeed, but never firmly established themselves, and their civilisation there was that of their army merely. It was the advanced post set to keep behind the walls of Adrian and Antoninus the ferocious hordes of the North. In this large country, the present England, there were Christians at the end of the second century, if we may believe Tertullian, who also adds that the Faith had even penetrated further than the Romans, viz., into Caledonia.⁴ In the time of Diocletian martyrs are mentioned in a few towns of the South.⁵ Three

¹ De Rossi, *Bullettino di archeologia Cristiana*, 1867, p. 65.

² St. Irenæus, *Adv. Hæreses*, i. 10, 2.

³ Tongres, Cologne, Mainz, possibly Besançon (which was then in Higher Germany).—Harnack, *Die Mission*, &c., pp. 511–512.

⁴ Et Britannorum inaccessa Romanis loca.—Tertullian, *Adv. Judæos*, 7.

⁵ At Verulam (St. Albans), at Caerleon and Lichfield; see *La persécution de Dioclétien*, 2nd ed., vol. i. p. 43.

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bishops, those of London, Lincoln, and York, took part in the Council of Arles, and probably enough there were others besides them in Britain. Yet the almost complete absence of ancient Christian inscriptions seems to show that for long the faithful were few in number.¹ Origen in the middle of the third century reckons the Germans and Britons among the nations to whom the Christian faith is scarcely known.²

Origen has the same to say of the Goths, Sarmatians, and Scythians,³ *i.e.* of the inhabitants of the provinces which line the Danube and correspond with the present Balkan States. They were on the military confines of the Empire. Of these provinces, one, Dacia beyond the Danube, had in 274 been lost to it, but during the century and a half, from the time of Trajan to that of Aurelian, when it formed part of the Empire, it does not seem to have been evangelised. The monuments of the worship of Mithra are numerous there, and mark the places where the legions encamped, but as for vestiges of Christianity at the same epoch none are to be found.⁴ Perhaps it was only in the last quarter of the third century that missionaries, either from the East or from the West—probably from both sides at once—spread the Faith in the provinces yet retained by Rome on the right side of the Danube, Noricum, Pannonia, Dacia Riparia,

¹ See Hübner, *Inscript. Britann. Christ.* Cp. Northcote, *Epitaphs of the Catacombs*, p. 184.

² Origen, *Comment. series in Matt.*, 39; in Migne, *Patr. Græc.*, xiii.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ F. Cumont, *Textes et monuments figurés relatifs aux mystères de Mithra*, vol. i. p. 250. M. Cumont thinks that Tertullian is guilty of exaggeration in the passage (*Adv. Judæos*, 7) where he speaks of the Dacians and Scythians as having already heard the Gospel.

and Scythia, but the seed scattered quickly bore fruit; these "new-comers," as they were still considered in the fourth century,¹ numbered groups of faithful and even organised Churches by the time of the last persecution; bishops, clerics, soldiers, and laymen of all ranks shed their blood for Christ.² In the Eastern Martyrology of the fourth century we find frequent mention made of the towns and fortresses which fringed the lower reaches of the Danube.³

VI

Whilst Rome was sowing the Faith in the West, the Churches were continuing to grow in all the eastern countries of the Mediterranean, where they had been planted by the Apostles.

Christians were so numerous in the Archipelago in the middle of the second century as to have become a frequent occasion of public disturbance. The Emperor Antoninus Pius was obliged to intervene on several occasions to hinder the pagans from resorting to mob-law on their account. To this end he sent letters to the council of the province of Achaia, to the town of Larissa in Thessaly, and to that of Thessalonica in Macedonia.⁴ Documents of the second century mention the Churches of Epirus and Thracia.⁵ At Byzantium in this latter province the Christians were so powerful that the adversaries of the emperor Septimius Severus were

¹ Τῆς τοῦ Θεοῦ νεολαίας.—Eusebius, *De Vita Const.*, iv. 43.

² There were martyrs at Siscia, Sirmium, Cibalæ, Singidunum Dorostorum. See *La persécution de Dioclétien*, 2nd ed., vol. i. pp. 119, 122, 292, 295, 298; vol. ii. pp. 143, 299.

³ Cp. De Rossi-Duchesne, *Martyrologium Hieronymianum*, p. lvi.

⁴ Eusebius, *H. E.*, iv. 26, 10.

⁵ *Ibid.*, v. 16, 19.

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much angered at their political loyalty; when defeated in an insurrection they could only exclaim, "*Christiani gaudete.*"¹ Had they wished, the Christians might easily have formed a party and put a new and appreciable weight into the scales of the Empire. Byzantium, where, in the sudden flash of civil war, this external force of Christianity was perceived for the first time, was the point of juncture between Europe and the provinces of Asia Minor, in which the followers of the Gospel had already long since formed a compact society. On passing the Bosphorus we seem to enter a Christian country.

This was the impression made on Pliny the younger when he came, in 112, as imperial legate to Bithynia and Pontus. During an administrative journey across this immense province, of which the coasts extended over full one-half of the south side of the Black Sea, he was astonished to meet numerous Christians of every age and sex and rank.² He was still more surprised and shocked by the conditions into which Christian propaganda had caused paganism to lapse. The temples were almost forsaken, the sacrifices had long ceased, and the victims of the gods found but few buyers.³ This position of things was already old, as Pliny's expression shows, *diu intermissa*. He himself informs us that persecution had already done its work under Domitian in Bithynia and in Pontus.⁴ The

¹ Tertullian, *Ad Scapulam*, 3.

² Pliny, *Ep.*, x. 96.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ He speaks of people who had apostatised, "since more than twenty years," which carries us back to the time of Domitian, and clearly shows that the persecution commanded by that emperor, of which we have little information, was carried out even in the far eastern provinces.

word "contagion,"¹ which the Roman magistrate uses contemptuously to show the success of the Gospel in the province confided to his care, shows the manner in which the Faith spread from one to the other. As the letter which he wrote on the subject to the Emperor Trajan seems to have been despatched from Amisus in Pontus,² he must have already traversed the whole of this region before he made his statement.³ Although he is pleased to think that the measures taken by him will put an end to the disorders, later documents show that at the end of the century the situation had not changed.⁴ Under Marcus Aurelius, another pagan, the Paphlagonian impostor, Alexander Abonotichita, caused an oracle to state that Pontus is "all full of atheists and Christians," two words which then meant much the same thing.⁵

Even more striking, perhaps, is the picture afforded by a province south of Bithynia, the ancient Phrygia, which in the second century depended for its government on Proconsular Asia. At least in its southern extremity⁶ it was one of the first countries to be completely evangelised. It

¹ Superstitionis istius contagio.

² *Cp. Pliny, Ep.*, x. 93, 99.

³ The Bithynian province of Pontus seems to have extended only as far as the Iris. Pontus Polemiacus was a dependency of Cappadocia.

⁴ In 196 the Churches of Pontus gathered in council under the presidency of Palma (Eusebius, *H. E.*, v. 23, 3). With these Churches Dionysius of Corinth was in communication (*ibid.*, 23, 6), Marcion was the son of a Bishop of Sinope (see Epiphanius, *Hæreses*, xlii.).

⁵ Lucian, *Alexander*, 25.

⁶ In that part which is crossed by the road leading from Antioch of Pisidia to Ephesus and the neighbourhood of Iconium. In the north of the province Christianity spread less rapidly.

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provided some martyrs under Marcus Aurelius,¹ but afterwards the Christians found means to live there in almost unbroken peace until the great persecutions of the third century. Here they were not obliged, as elsewhere, to conceal their faith. The inscription of Abercius is well known;² it is the first of a whole series of epitaphs, confessedly Christian, which are to be met with in this country, not merely as in Rome amidst the darkness of subterranean passages, but on the surface of the earth, and in the full glare of day.³ In these epitaphs we have formulæ like the following: "A Christian has erected this to a fellow-Christian."⁴ In them we find greetings to the "Friends of God," and the violators of tombs

¹ Thrasesas, Bishop of Eumenia; Sagaris, Bishop of Laodicea. See the letter of Polycrates of Ephesus in Eusebius, *H. E.*, v. 24; *Cp.* iv. 26.

² It is impossible to give here a complete account of the inscription of Abercius. For its explanation see De Rossi, *Inscript. Christ. urbis Romæ*, vol. ii. pp. xii.-xxiv.; for a facsimile, see plates iii.-vii. in the *Nuovo Bullettino di archeologia Cristiana*, 1895. The arguments adduced by Ficker, Harnack, and Dietrich against the Christian origin of the inscription have been refuted by De Rossi, Duchesne, Schultze, Zahn, Wilpert, Batiffol, Grisar, Wehofer, and the writers of the *Analecta Bollandiana*. M. Cumont summed up the results of the discussion as follows: "Most of the arguments which were brought forward in support of this hypothesis (of the pagan origin of the inscription) fall to the ground as soon as we compare this inscription with other undoubtedly Christian inscriptions of the same period. The peculiarities of this remarkable epitaph may be explained by the persistence among the Phrygians of old customs and fashions of speaking."—*Les inscriptions chrétiennes d'Asie Mineure*, in the *Mélanges d'histoire et d'archéologie*, published by the École française at Rome, 1895, p. 290.

³ De Rossi, *Roma sotterranea*, vol. i. p. 107; Duchesne, *Saint Abercius*, in the *Revue des questions historiques*, July 1883, p. 31. F. Cumont says (*Mélanges d'histoire et d'archéologie*, p. 296): "Phrygia has preserved something which we are unable to find even at Rome, viz., a series of Christian sepulchres which, though constructed before Diocletian, are above the surface of the ground."

⁴ Χριστιανὸς χριστιανῷ ἐποίησεν.—See Le Bas and Waddington, *Voyage archéologique*, vol. iii., No. 783; Armanet, *Echos d'Orient*, vol. vii., 1904, p. 206; Mirbeau, *ibid.*, p. 329.

are threatened with "the vengeance of God";¹ we also find in them frequent allusions to the municipal offices filled by Christians;² they make no odds of asserting their attachment to their native city, nor of condemning in advance all those who shall lay sacrilegious hands on their sepulchres to being mulcted in fines, which shall go to the funds of the city or to the public treasure.³ They are at once good Romans and good Christians. In fact, writes Mgr. Duchesne, "in this far-off district of the Asiatic province Christianity is already free and dominant";⁴ and Renan, after having described the evangelisation of these regions, goes on to state that "Phrygia was even then, and remained for three hundred years, an essentially Christian land."⁵

Phrygia stood for about half of that province of Asia which comprised also, under the authority of the same proconsul, Mysia, Lydia, and Caria. These countries, washed by the Grecian waves of the Ægæan Sea, and full of classical reminiscences, were also filled with recollections of the earliest Christian efforts, the preaching of St. Paul and the rule of St. John. The population was more gifted and less given to credulous enthusiasm than that of

¹ Le Bas and Waddington, *Voyage archéologique*, vol. iii. No. 1703.

² Ramsay, *Cities and Bishoprics of Phrygia*, Nos. 359, 361, 364, 368, 391. Cp. Cumont, Nos. 137, 141, 146, 162.

³ See the Christian inscriptions of Phrygia, quoted by H. Leclercq in the *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*; art. *Amendes dans le droit funéraire*, pp. 1582-1583.

⁴ Duchesne, in the *Revue des questions historiques*, July 1883, p. 31. An epitaph, dated 216, bestows on Hierapolis the title of "elect," ἐκλεκτή; not improbably the word is here used in its Christian meaning, thereby implying that the town in question was already in the main converted.—Duchesne, *Mélanges d'histoire et d'archéologie*, 1895, p. 167, footnote.

⁵ Renan, *Saint Paul*, p. 363.

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rugged Phrygia, yet here Christianity was as widespread and almost as powerful. All those great cities with fine-sounding names, Ephesus, Smyrna, Sardis, Pergamus, Philadelphia, Thyatira, Troas, Magnesia, Tralles, Parium, were full of Christians. There was scarcely one which did not glory in some "great light," *i.e.* the recollection of some martyr or illustrious teacher.¹ The episcopate here goes back very far, and it was exceedingly powerful, though intimately united with both clergy and people.² Bishoprics were found close together, a fact which can only be accounted for by the presence of a dense Christian population. We find episcopal towns only fifteen or seventeen miles distant from each other.³ The consideration or even sympathy shown by "many"⁴ magistrates to the Christians, a policy of which we have evidence in the letter of Granianus, proconsul of Asia, to the Emperor Adrian, and in the latter's reply to the proconsul's successor,⁵ attest the power which even then was in the hands of the Christians of this region. At the end of the second century the bishops of Asia were so well aware of this power that one of them, the apologist, Melito of Sardis, writing to the Emperor Marcus Aurelius, offers him the co-operation of the Church, and suggests an alliance with it as the best means of perpetuating his dynasty.⁶ Even then the great number of Christians gave

¹ Polycrates of Ephesus, in Eusebius, *H. E.*, v. 24.

² See the letters of St. Ignatius.

³ Magnesia, where there was a bishop, was only fifteen miles distant from Ephesus and seventeen or eighteen from Tralles, both of which were episcopal cities.

⁴ Πολλοίς.—Melito, in Eusebius, *H. E.*, iv. 26, 10.

⁵ Melito, *loc. cit.*; Justin in the appendix to his first *Apologia*; Eusebius-Rufinus, *H. E.*, iv. 9.

⁶ Melito, in Eusebius, *H. E.*, iv. 26, 7-8.

pause to the persecutors. Under Commodus, the unworthy successor of Marcus Aurelius, in a town of which unfortunately the name has not come down to us, a proconsul of Asia was so frightened by the immense number of faithful who clamoured for martyrdom that he refused to pass sentence.¹

We have fewer details of the origin of Christianity in the important province of Cappadocia, which extended diagonally across Asia Minor from the Taurus to the Black Sea. Certain episodes, however, with which we are acquainted lead us to surmise that large Christian bodies existed here at a very early period. When the philosopher St. Justin was charged before the prefect of Rome under Marcus Aurelius with the crime of Christianity, several of his disciples were accused together with him. When questioned by the magistrate, one of them replied, "I attended Justin's lectures, but I learnt Christianity from my parents." "Where are thy parents?" "In Cappadocia."² There was therefore in Cappadocia in the second century more than one generation of Christians. Their standing was sufficiently high to enable them to convert, in the latter years of the century, the wife of the governor of the province.³ In his spite this latter avenged himself cruelly, and when he fell ill he seems to have feared the expression of their opinion, for he requested that his sufferings should be concealed from them; "I have no wish that Christian men should rejoice or that Christian women should find grounds for hope."⁴ His concern for what

¹ Tertullian, *Ad Scapulam*, 5.

² *Acta S. Justinī*, in Ruinart, p. 44.

³ Between 180 and 196. This is the view of Neumann, *Der Römische Staat und die Allgemeine Kirche*, vol. i. p. 70, note 7.

⁴ Tertullian, *Ad Scapulam*, 3.

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Christians might think shows the important place they occupied in the mind of their persecutor. In the middle of the third century they had become so numerous that the pagans attributed plagues and famines to their increase and to the more and more noticeable discredit of the gods, and in their anger they set fire to the sacred buildings which the Christians had been bold enough to construct openly.¹

But Cappadocia was far too vast for the Faith to have been preached over the whole of it at the same time. Thus its Pontine district on the shores of the Black Sea had only a handful of Christians² when Gregory Thaumaturgos evangelised it with such signal success in the middle of the third century; whereas another district, that of Lesser Armenia, contained, even in the second century, so many Christians that the 12th legion (*Fulminata*), which was recruited in this country, was nearly wholly composed of them.³ When, at the beginning of the fourth century, the last persecution was started, Melitene, the chief township of Lesser Armenia, was among the first to be singled out by Diocletian, because of its strong body of clergy.⁴

¹ Origen, *Comment. series in Matt.*; *Patr. Græc.*, xiii., col. 1654.

² Gregory of Nyssa, *Vita S. Gregorii Thaum.*; Migne, *Patr. Græc.*, xlv., col. 953.

³ Though the story of the rain obtained by the prayers of a company of the *legio Fulminata*, during the war waged by Marcus Aurelius against the Quadi, is very obscure, yet it is certain that this tradition mentioned by the contemporary apologist, Apollinaris (quoted by Eusebius, *H. E.*, v. 5, 4), has some foundation in history. See Lightfoot, *St. Ignatius and St. Polycarp*, vol. i. p. 492; Harnack, *Die Quelle der Berichte über das Regenthum im Feldzuge Marc Aurel's gegen die Quaden*, in the *Proceedings of the Academy of Sciences at Berlin*, July 19, 1894, pp. 835-882.

⁴ Eusebius, *H. E.*, viii. 6, 6.

VII

Stretching along the Mediterranean, from the frontiers of Asia Minor even to those of Arabia and Egypt, the great province of Syria seems to me the oddest of all the provinces into which the empire was divided. In the north it included Cœle-Syria with its capital, Antioch; towards the east it ended with the half-independent state of Palmyra; on the west it comprised the narrow land of the Phœnician coast, which lies strangled between Lebanon and the sea; and in the south, Palestine with open and fertile Galilee, rugged Judea, and the old Philistine coast-line. In it were spoken Greek, Latin, Syrian, Phœnician, and Hebrew, and worship was extended not only to the God of Israel but to those of the Greeks and to Astarte and Baal. Existing side by side with the most exalted religious feelings was to be found the commercial and industrial spirit, with its cool calculations and its enterprise, making the neighbouring seas to swarm with vessels and establishing all along their coasts marts and exchanges. In all these Syrian regions the Faith had been disseminated either by the Apostles or by their first disciples, but the soil proved unequally fertile and in parts less capable of good fruit than the virgin soil of Asia Minor. In Syria there were too many moribund civilisations, too many interests to divide souls.

It was in the north that, under the double push of the Greek spirit and that of Syria, Christianity spread the fastest. Cœle-Syria was soon as thickly populated with Christians as Bithynia and Pontus. From the day when St. Paul first visited it, to the

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middle of the fourth century when practically the whole population had been converted, Antioch never ceased to provide a refuge for Christianity. The sanctity and the learning of its bishops, of which fortunately the list has come down to us, contributed no doubt to this constant progress. All of them, the best and the less good, make a fine succession from St. Ignatius, whose unpolished Greek gives a magnificent display of thought and imagery, showing what Christian enthusiasm could effect in a Syrian soul, to the heresiarch Paul of Samosata, who, with his political manœuvres and the grandeur of his retinue, furnished even in the middle of the third century a picture of the ideal prince-bishop. By the time of the last persecution the neighbourhood of Antioch was totally Christian, and in nearly every town and hamlet of Cœle-Syria, the persecutors had only to stretch forth their hands to apprehend bishops, priests, deacons, and clerics of every order.¹

In Phœnicia matters were far otherwise. On the coast, indeed, there were many Christians, because there the Gospel had been preached from the beginning, and because in its trading centres the original inhabitants had been swamped by the Greek element. But in the interior of the country, which was in a way cut off from the rest of the world by the double range of Lebanon, the sensuality and the fanaticism of the older worships still held sway. Here the population remaining Phœnician, with scarcely any mingling of race, remained also firmly attached to its gods of blood and clay. At Emesa the bishop was not able to dwell in the town, but was compelled to govern his tiny flock from a point beyond its

¹ Eusebius, *H. E.*, viii. 6.

walls.¹ At Heliopolis, where the Venus of Lebanon was worshipped with infamous rites, there was no bishop before the reign of Constantine.² The town remained utterly pagan to the end of the fourth century,³ and two hundred years later the pagans were still in a majority. We may say that this obdurate town passed directly from paganism to the standard of Mahomed.⁴ In this strange quarter of the globe the old worships, only with difficulty kept in check by Constantine and then again let loose by Julian,⁵ defended themselves with an obstinacy of which we have no instance elsewhere. The only towns which allowed Christianity to leak into them were Damascus and Paneas, both of them half Greek and on the track of the caravans, being in communication with the Levant, through the cleft which divides Hermon from Anti-Lebanon.

Palestine itself was far less Christian than it might appear at first sight. The province in which Christianity was cradled was also one of the countries in which the Faith experienced the greatest difficulty in spreading. The bloody reprisals which followed the Jewish insurrections at the end of the first century and at the beginning of the second, had effectually destroyed the recollections of the Gospel with those of Judaism. This accounts for the com-

¹ Silvanus, who lived during the last persecution, is not called by Eusebius Bishop of Emesa, but Bishop of the Churches about Emesa: τῶν ἀμφὶ τὴν Ἐμυσαν ἐκκλησιῶν ἐπίσκοπος (*H. E.*, viii. 13).

² Eusebius, *De Vita Constantini*, iii. 58; *Cp.* Socrates, *H. E.*, i. 18.

³ Theodoretus, *H. E.*, iv. 19; Sozomen, *H. E.*, vii. 15.

⁴ *Cp.* Schultze, *Geschichte des Untergangs des griechisch-römischen Heidentums*, vol. ii. p. 251.

⁵ There were outbursts of fury on the part of the populace in 362 at Emesa, at Heliopolis, at Aphaca, at Arethusa. Gregory Nazianzen, *Orat.*, iv. 88: v. 29; Julian, *Misopogon* (ed. Hertlein, p. 401); Theodoretus, iii. 3; Sozomen, v. 9, 10.

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plete disappearance of all the fruits of the first evangelisation of the country. On the eve of the siege of Jerusalem, the Jewish Christians of the Holy City fled to Perea and to the south of Syria :¹ but the little Churches they founded never bore fruit, and the number of Jewish Christians steadily decreased.² Most of the Christian communities established in Palestine in the second century were composed of strangers, and they prospered only in towns where the Greek element predominated. In 136, in Jerusalem, now emptied of its Jewish population and transformed into a Roman colony, *Ælia Capitolina*, an uncircumcised bishop sat for the first time on the throne of James.³ But, in spite of the importance which the Church of Jerusalem assumed in the third century, the Christian flock in that city must have been very small and weak, seeing that until the time of Constantine it had made no effort to discover the tomb of Christ. Some regions of Palestine remained for long completely closed against Christians ; to the end of the second century practically the whole of Samaria worshipped Simon Magus, who had risen to the status of a kind of tribal god.⁴ In Galilee, Tiberias and the neighbourhood became the dwelling-place of a Jewish colony, with a strong rabbinical school ; their hostility was an effectual barrier against Christian incursions.⁵ On the southern coast Christians were kept back by a different kind of fanaticism. At Gaza, a thoroughly pagan city, where the most sensual worships of the East held sway in their worst

¹ Eusebius, *H. E.*, iii. 5 ; Epiphanius, *Hær.*, liii. 1.

² Justin, *I. Apol.*, 53, 3.

³ Eusebius, *H. E.*, iv. 6, 4 ; v. 12.

⁴ Justin, *I. Apol.*, 26, 3 ; Origen, *Contra Celsum*, i. 57.

⁵ Epiphanius, *Hær.*, xxx. 4, 21 ; Socrates, *H. E.*, ii. 3 ; Theodoretus, *H. E.*, iv. 19.

forms, the bishop did not dare to live in the city.¹ The first church here was built by Constantine,² and half a century later the pagans of that town and of the other coast cities, Ascalon and Anthedon, had not yet outgrown their intolerance:³ at Gaza they remained the strongest party for long after. Though Palestine furnished many martyrs in the last persecution,⁴ and though at that time the province contained many dioceses, yet, with the exception of Cæsarea, which since Origen and Pamphilus had become a centre of theology, no single one of these communities appears to have possessed any power worth speaking of until peace was proclaimed between the Church and the Empire.

VIII

The last great Mediterranean country, of which as yet we have said nothing, is Egypt.

Like Gaul and Africa, Christian Egypt does not make an appearance in history before the last quarter of the second century. Yet when it does enter the scene it is even more fully fledged than these latter, and its religious organisation evidently presupposes that the Gospel had been preached there long before. The tradition, mentioned by a writer⁵ of the fourth century, which claims St. Mark as the founder of the

¹ Silvanus, the bishop of this city, like his namesake of Emesa, is not called by Eusebius Bishop of Gaza, but bishop of the neighbourhood of Gaza: ἐπίσκοπος τῶν ἀμφὶ τὴν Γάζαν ἐκκλησιῶν.—*H. E.*, viii. 13, 5.

² This is inferred from the *Vita Porphyrii*, 20, in *Acta Sanctorum*, January, vol. iii. p. 648.

³ Sozomen, *H. E.*, v. 9; Theodoretus, *H. E.*, iii. 3.

⁴ In Eusebius's *De Martyribus Palestinæ* Greek names are more abundant than Jewish or Syrian names.

⁵ Eusebius, *H. E.*, ii. 16.

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Church of Alexandria, should not be lightly set aside. When this Church suddenly burst into the light during the long episcopate of Demetrius (188–231), with its high school of theology where Pantænus and Clement had taught and where Origen is destined to teach, it had already produced several heresiarchs,¹ which fact alone attests a long existence. At the end of the second century, or at the beginning of the third, Clement says that the Christian faith is “spread among the whole population of every place and town.”² About the same time, when the persecution of Septimius Severus broke out, it produced martyrs not in Alexandria alone, but also inland, and, according to the statement of Eusebius, throughout all the province of Thebes.³ At the middle of the third century we see, by the frequent allusions of the same historian,⁴ that Churches were numerous all over Egypt; a papyrus found recently mentions a Christian community which existed under Diocletian in the great Oasis, *i.e.* in the extreme south.⁵ Even the isle of Philæ, where Isis was worshipped until the sixth century, seems to have possessed Christian Churches at a very early date.⁶ *The Acts of St. Peter of Alexandria* relate that during his episcopate

¹ Basilides, Carpocrates, and perhaps Valentinus.—Eusebius, *H. E.*, iv. 22; Epiphanius, *Har.*, xxiv. 1 : xxxi. 2.

² Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.*, vi. 18.

³ Eusebius, *H. E.*, vi. 1.

⁴ *Ibid.*, vi. 11, 42; vii. 6, 24, 26; viii. 9.

⁵ *Nuovo Bull. di archeologia Cristiana*, 1902, pp. 15–26; Grenfell-Hunt, *Greek Papyri*, No. 73. A Christian woman of Alexandria was banished to the Great Oasis, and recommended to a priest of those parts. One text which, so far as I know, has not been adduced in support of this papyrus is the following: Est quoddam genus quasi in insulam relegationis in provincia Ægypto, in Oasin relegare (Ulpian, in the *Digest*, XLVIII., xxii. 1, 55).

⁶ Wilchen, *Heidnisches und Christliches in Egypt.*, in *Archiv für Papyrusforschung*, vol. i. pp. 396–436.

(300–311) he consecrated no less than fifty-five bishops in Lower Egypt.¹ The great number of bishoprics is a characteristic of Christian Egypt in the third and fourth centuries. There is another which is not less peculiar to this country; this is the growth of monasticism in the province of Thebes from the year 250, and its great success even amongst the most deeply indigenous portions of the population. We may add that in no other country did the last persecution bring forth more victims or treat the faithful with greater cruelty.² In remembrance of this time the Christians of Egypt adopted the custom of dating their era from the reign of Diocletian, which they called “the era of the martyrs.”

Egypt, together with the Roman provinces of Asia, formed a portion of the territory ruled by the last and most obstinate of the persecutors, Maximin Daia. He has left us an accurate statement of the religious situation of the countries which he turned red with Christian blood. When, in 313, he was constrained by his colleague, Constantine, to give peace to the faithful under his government, he sent to the prefect of the prætorium a rescript of which we have the text. This document is prefaced by a historical statement in which he explains that his predecessors, Diocletian and Maximian Hercules, at the end of the previous century had considered themselves successful in bringing back to the altars of the gods “nearly all those men who had fallen away and joined the mass of the Christian population.”³

¹ Migne, *P. G.*, vol. xviii., col. 455. These Acts, published by Mai, seemed to him authentic. They are quoted by C. de Smedt, *Organisation des Eglises chrétiennes au troisième siècle*, in the *Revue des questions historiques*, October 1891.

² Eusebius, *H. E.*, viii. 8–10.

³ *Ibid.*, ix. 9, 13.

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These latter words would not have been as yet true of the rest of the Empire, but the position and character of the writer guarantees their accuracy with respect to the oriental provinces. We may already say in a general way that, in the rest of the Roman world, Christian communities no longer formed, as it were, islands in the midst of a pagan sea; the positions are reversed, and now it is the districts which remain pagan which form so many black spots on the map of the *Orbis Christianus*.

LECTURE II

THE SPREAD OF CHRISTIANITY OUTSIDE THE ROMAN EMPIRE—THE STRENUOUS LIFE OF THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH.

I

WE have sketched the map of the diffusion of Christianity in the Roman world ; but a few more strokes are necessary to complete the picture of the scene which will soon be occupied by the Martyrs.

In Europe, Africa, and Asia, the Roman Empire comprised nations different both in race and in civilisation. The most widely divergent national characters existed together under the thin veil of political solidarity. There must have been almost as many divergences as points of contact between the Roman subjects of Spain, Gaul, and Africa and the Roman subjects of Egypt or Asia Minor. The official language was everywhere the same, but the languages in everyday use were everywhere different. Intelligence, morals, customs, and the whole philosophy of life were as different in the different parts of the Empire as were the languages. Nor was the religious bond less superficial than the political. All agreed in giving homage to the gods of Rome, which were those of the Empire, but each was free to honour his own country's gods in company with those of Rome. In the unwieldy conglomeration of nations and cities which constituted the Roman Empire, moral unity existed only between the

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upper classes. These were, and are still, everywhere the same ; literary and philosophical currents and the power of fashion being quite sufficient to draw them together. But the populace, except in the few towns which trade had made cosmopolitan, continued to cherish its customs, its traditions, and its local superstitions just as it retained its national dress and fashion of speaking. An Alexandrian doctor could hobnob with a poet or philosopher from Rome or Athens, but a Celtic peasant and a Phrygian mountaineer would soon have discovered that they had no thought in common, nor a word to express it.

The rapid spread of Christianity—which knew how to make itself acceptable amidst surroundings so different, and sometimes so hostile to one another, which adapted itself as easily to the most cultured as to the rudest intellects, enrolling now a Greek in sunny Ionia, now a native of mist-clad Britain, as if it knew no distinction of Greek and barbarian—belongs to a category of facts which cannot be explained by the ordinary laws of history, especially if we bear in mind the obstacles which had to be overcome and the persecutions which had to be undergone, and which, according to a phrase of Tertullian's, made every catechumen a candidate for martyrdom. But the history of the progress of Christianity in the first centuries would not be complete did we restrict our investigations within the confines of the Roman Empire.

In waging war on Christianity Rome was, all unknown to itself, helping on the cause of Christ. Imperial unity was a providential preparation for ecclesiastical unity. As Lacordaire said, the great military roads, which assured communications between the remotest districts, and of which the

granite foundations cut in all directions even the deserts of Syria and the forests of Gaul, were convenient highways for missionaries as well as for the legions of Rome. Christians were not unaware of the advantages which the *Pax Romana* secured to them. "By the Romans," writes St. Irenæus, "the world is in peace, and we may travel where we please by land or sea."¹ Fifty years later Origen waxes still more eloquent, and long before Bossuet he too perceives the hand of God in the reign of order in the Roman world. "Providence had united all nations in one single empire, even from the time of Augustus, that its peace and the freedom of trade might facilitate the preaching of the Gospel."² As soon as the exponents of the new faith passed beyond the frontiers, over which the Roman eagles kept their watch, to carry their message to independent or hostile states, they lost all these advantages. Nevertheless in the second and especially in the third century such attempts were frequently made, and in certain directions they were successful in extending the frontiers of Christianity.

Naturally enough missions to the outside world only departed from countries where the faith was already firmly established. Only those districts in which the Christian population was very thick, and where evangelisation inwards had become unnecessary, were able to furnish missionaries who would proceed outwards to seek new fields of work. This explains why in Europe the Gospel scarcely anywhere crossed the Roman frontier. When St. Irenæus speaks of the Churches of Germany³ he

¹ Irenæus, *Adv. Hær.*, iv. 30.

² Origen, *In Jos.*, *Hom.* iii. (Migne, *P. G.*, vol. xii.).

³ Irenæus, *Adv. Hær.*, i. 10.

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is alluding only to the two Roman provinces of Higher and Lower Germany; he does not mention any Churches as existing among the independent Germans. These latter had to come and seek Christianity in Roman territories, which they did either by peaceful or warlike invasions. Tertullian's allusion to the Gospel having penetrated in Britain even further than the Roman legions¹ is probably only a rhetorical embellishment, at least we can find no confirmation of what he states. The European border-provinces, both those of the Rhine and those of the Danube, only assimilated Christianity with difficulty, and their Churches remained, for long, less plentiful and less populous than elsewhere, hence, hindered as they were by internal difficulties, they were the last to furnish missionaries for outside work. In the West the limits of Roman power will long act as a wall in restraining Christian enterprise.

We must not forget that in these regions Christianity encountered another obstacle. A new superstition, which in the interior of the Empire was of trifling importance, had fixed its headquarters all along the frontiers, being brought thither by civilians, slaves, and soldiers. All along the military line of camps, in Germany along the Rhine, in Britain along Adrian's Wall, in Pannonia and Dacia along the Danube, the worship of Mithra established itself, building its monuments and excavating its caves as if its intentions were to protect Roman territory from the invasions of the barbarians, and at the same time to protect the barbarians from the benefits of Christianity. In every place held by the legions which watched over the safety of the Empire we

¹ Tertullian, *Adv. Judæos*, 7.

find a zone of superstitions imported from the East which have become the favourite worships of the soldiers, which were imposed by them on the populations amidst which they were quartered, to an extent of which we may form some idea by glancing at the map of the monuments of Mithra published by M. Franz Cumont.¹ This worship on the outlying parts of the Empire was, as it were, the last rampart of paganism, one which for a long time hindered the development of the few and but recently established Churches which existed in those garrison districts.

There were reasons of a different nature to prevent the African Churches from enlarging their borders towards the south. As we have seen, they were numerous and powerful in Proconsular Africa and in Numidia, round about Carthage and Lambesa, they had also conducted their warfare with indigenous superstitions far too successfully for Mithra-worship, which, moreover, was scarcely known in the country, to have proved a serious obstacle to them. But they encountered two natural barriers, that of the Atlas and that of the desert. They succeeded in making some headway among the Getuli, a semi-independent nation living in the Sahara to the west of the Atlas,² but towards the south they were unable to accomplish much among the nomad hordes, who were scarcely less difficult to catch than the dust raised by their horses' hoofs. The main task imposed on them, one which they never succeeded in accomplishing, was the evangelisa-

¹ *Textes et monuments figurés des mystères de Mithra*, vol. i. This map is also to be found in the abbreviated work published by M. Cumont in 1902.

² Tertullian, *Adv. Judæos*, 7.

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tion of Mauritania on the west, which, in spite of the presence of Roman armies and Christian bishops, never became completely affiliated either to Rome or to Christianity.

Egyptian Christianity was more successful in its conquests. Leaving behind it the Empire whose power stopped short at the first cataract of the Nile, it advanced by means of the river as far as Ethiopia, and by means of the Red Sea as far as the Straits of Aden. It was also Egypt, rather than Syria or the North Arabian Roman province, which brought Christianity to the towns of the Yemen in the south of the peninsula. The first impulse to missionary effort seems to have been given at the end of the second century by Pantænus, the founder of the Christian school of Alexandria. Eusebius relates of him that, being consumed with apostolic zeal, he left his chair and departed to carry the faith to the Indies,¹ *i.e.* probably, having regard to the fashion of speaking, to the south of Arabia, where numerous Jewish colonies were then in existence. Eusebius adds that when preaching Pantænus was wont to make homilies on the Gospel of St. Matthew, which as a matter of fact would have been most appropriate when addressing audiences consisting mainly of Jews and Jewish proselytes.

But to witness the greatest effects of Christianity on the nations outside Roman influence we must return to Asia Minor, a spring of Gospel propaganda which for three centuries never ceased to flow in every direction.

The provinces on the Asiatic coast of the Black Sea were, from the first century onwards, too densely populated with Christians not to be a centre from

¹ Eusebius, *H. E.*, v. 10, 3.

which the Gospel teaching would spread to the countries with which they were brought into contact either casually or by reason of their neighbourhood. Their missionaries, and even their hostages carried it to the barbarians. The half-savage tribes leading a wandering life in their chariots on the steppes of the Black Sea contained Christians at the end of the second century.¹ In 258 the Gothic inhabitants of the regions between the Danube and the Dniester were evangelised by prisoners whom they had seized in an incursion into Cappadocia; these Christians held their services in their masters' tents, converted many, and established a bond of union between these nascent Churches of independent Scythia and the ancient Church of Cappadocia.² We are less well informed as to the exact time when, coming from Bithynia and Pontus, the faith arrived in the Chersonesus Taurica (Crimea), in the north of the Black Sea, but we do know that before the end of the third century this country formed a Christian principality, and that its rulers had the cross stamped on their coins.³ A whole kingdom to the east of Cappadocia came over to Christianity about this time; this was Armenia Major, the mountains of which dominate the southern shores of the Pontus Euxinus. The first, or at least the best known apostle of Armenia was Gregory, surnamed the Light-bringer, who, having been forced to leave his native land during a Persian invasion, went to study at Cæsarea, in Cappadocia, Christian doctrine and Greek literature. On returning to Armenia he brought over to the faith Tiridata II., and per-

¹ Justin, *Dial. cum Tryph.*, 117.

² Philostorgius, *H. E.*, ii. 5.

³ De Rossi, *Bull. di archeol. Crist.*, 1864, pp. 5-6.

sued him that Christianity would form a better rallying-cry and defence against the Persians than the old Armenian beliefs which were more or less related to the Persian religion. The official conversion of the whole country followed on that of its prince, the temples of the gods were destroyed, and the new Armenian Church acknowledged its indebtedness to the Church of Cæsarea, from which Gregory had brought the faith, and accepted its bishop as their metropolitan. The fierce persecutor, Maximin Daia, refusing to see how much Roman interests would gain by this religious union, which definitively withdrew Armenia from the Persian sphere of influence and associated it with a portion of his own dominions, declared war on Armenia in 313 in order to punish it for having submitted to Christianity. This is the first religious war which history records; the fourth-century writer to whom we are indebted for our knowledge adds that in this instance and by God's grace the Cross and the national enthusiasm of the Armenians were victorious over pagan fanaticism.

Even more remarkable than these conquests of the Gospel in the north of Asia Minor was the onward march of Christianity towards Central Asia. Apart from a few attempts which are supposed to date back to Apostolic times, and which we are acquainted with only by vague and legendary traditions,¹ we have seen that during the first two centuries the Gospel tended in a westerly direction, being attracted by the facilities offered by the Mediterranean, and borne by the commercial currents which connected Asiatic ports with Rome and the principal nations of the West. But already in the

¹ Eusebius, *H. E.*, ix, 8.

second century we perceive a current setting in another direction, and in the following century it is strengthened; this current is towards the East across the oriental frontiers of the Empire. To begin with, Christianity had followed the highways of trade through that land-locked sea which links three continents together; now it is about to essay, in the opposite direction, the track of the caravans, to travel in an inverse sense along the road taken by the Magi when visiting the cradle of Christ.

Starting from Antioch the faith reached, in the first instance, the little kingdom of Osrhoena on the left bank of the Euphrates. Some of its towns remained even long afterwards refractory to the advances of Christianity; such was Carrhæ, which remained pagan down to the sixth century,¹ but Edessa, its capital, was soon filled with Christians. About the year 150 its religious life was active enough to have produced a Syriac version of the Old Testament,² and a few years later a similar version of the Gospels.³ The Gnostic Bardesanes, born in 154, wrote his books and hymns at Edessa.⁴ About 196 a council assembled in the same town reckoned not only representatives of the Church of Osrhoena, but even some from the neighbouring countries.⁵ The king himself, Abgar VIII. (or IX.) a contemporary of Septimius Severus, became a convert, and commenced drawing up a new code of

¹ Ammianus Marcellinus, xxiii. 3; Sozomen, *H. E.*, vi. 1; Theodoretus, *H. E.*, iv. 18; *Peregrinatio Silviæ*, in the *Studi e Documenti di Storia e Diritto*, 1888, p. 135; Procopius, *De Bello Pers.*, i. 13.

² The Peschito.—Rubens Duval, *Anciennes littératures chrétiennes : La littérature syriaque*, pp. 31–32.

³ Tatian's *Dialeptaron*.—*Ibid.*, pp. 44–47.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 241–248.

⁵ Eusebius, *H. E.*, v. 23, 4.

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laws which should be animated by the spirit of Christian morality.¹ Unfortunately this new Christian kingdom was not destined to be long-lived. At the beginning of the third century, Caracalla annexed it to the Roman Empire. But Edessa still remained a starting-point for Christian missionaries. Issuing both from Osrhoena and Armenia, even more than from Antioch, Christianity will spread itself through Mesopotamia and over the whole Persian Empire.

Had later events justified early promises, this might have been one of the greatest facts of religious history. A document dating from the commencement of the third century speaks of Christians living all over the enormous territories ruled by Persia, not only in the states bordering the Roman Empire, those between the Euphrates and the Tigris, but also in Persia proper, in Media and in Gelia,² that is to say, throughout the Iranian tableland lying between the Persian Gulf, the Caspian Sea, and the Indus.³ We have no precise information as to the importance of these Persian Churches. In Mesopotamia, which was always a bone of contention between Persia and Rome, there were in the middle of the third century Churches sufficiently powerful to stand side by side with those of Asia Minor⁴; being at the time subject to the Roman Empire, they produced quite a number of martyrs during the reign of Diocletian.⁵

¹ Bardesanes, in Eusebius, *Præp. evang.*, vi. 10; Epiphanius, *Hær.*, lvi. 1.

² Now the Persian province of Guilan, at the south-west of the Caspian Sea.

³ Οἱ ἐν Παρθία χριστιανοὶ . . . , οἱ ἐν Μηδία . . . , οἱ ἐν Περσίδι . . . , παρὰ Βάκτροις καὶ Γήλοις.—Bardesanes, quoted by Eusebius, *Præp. evang.*, vi. 10.

⁴ Eusebius, *H. E.*, vii. 5, 2.

⁵ *Ibid.*, viii. 12.

The historian Sozomen, who must have been well informed, says that one of the northern provinces of Persia, Adiabene, close to Christian Armenia, was, like this latter, nearly "wholly Christian."¹ The first results of the persecutions were fortunate for Persia, for many Christians flying from the Roman power there found a refuge with full facilities for preaching their faith; the Persian authorities at first tolerated the faith out of hatred of Rome, which had not only forbidden it, but also martyred several Persian subjects.² But all this changed when Rome passed over to the side of Christianity. The letter written by Constantine to the Persian King Sapor, commending to his protection "the innumerable Churches of God" and "the myriads of Christians" existing under his domination,³ probably did more harm than good, and the war which, at the end of Constantine's reign, was resumed between Rome and Persia, contributed to make the Persian authorities view with a suspicious eye the Christians established in their territories, in whom they saw allies and secret agents of Rome."⁴

This was the principal motive of the great Persian persecution, which lasted forty years, from 339 to 379, *i.e.* longer than any single Roman persecution, and which only ceased to begin again after a short respite and to last even to the middle of the fifth century.

¹ Κατὰ τὴν Διαβηνῶν χώραν κλίμα δὲ τοῦτο Περσικὸν, ὡς ἐπίπαν χριστιανίζον.—Sozomen, *H. E.*, ii. 12.

² Abdon and Sennen, Marius, Martha, Audifax and Abacuc, in the third century.

³ Quoted by Eusebius, *De Vita Constantini*, iv. 8.

⁴ Such was the charge already brought against the Christians by Sapor in 341.—*Actes de Saint Simon Barsabbæ*, in H. Leclercq, *Les Martyrs*, vol. iii. p. 151. The same accusation was renewed in 376.—*Actes des quarante martyrs de la province de Kaschkar*, *ibid.*, pp. 210, 211.

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But Christianity was so well grounded in Persia that the torrents of blood shed during nearly one hundred years were not sufficient to quench the spark of the faith. The first stage of the persecution resulted, according to Sozomen, in the death of sixteen thousand martyrs whose names were preserved, and besides these there was an immense number of unknown martyrs.¹ The "Passions" which have come down to us relate to martyrdoms which took place in Babylonia, Chaldea, Susiana, and Adiabene,² but they are too few to allow of our obtaining any clear notion of the countries which had been evangelised before this first persecution. A list which contains exclusively the names of the clergy, *i.e.* of the bishops, priests, and deacons martyred between 344 and 345, mentions a large number of bishoprics, several of which were no doubt ancient foundations.³

Deplorable events of another kind were destined to put a stop in Persia to the progress of Christianity, but its initial success in this important portion of the ancient world, this "other eye of the universe" as a Persian ambassador speaking to a Roman emperor picturesquely described it⁴—shows that Christian doctrines, institutions, and morals contained nothing to offend a nation, alike a stranger to Greek mental culture and to Roman social customs, such as was Persia. Here, then, we again find an instance of that adaptability of Christianity to all kinds of sur-

¹ Sozomen, *H. E.*, ii. 14.

² See J. Labourt, *Le Christianisme dans l'Empire perse sous la dynastie sassanide*, pp. 42–82.

³ Syriac martyrology of the fifth century.—De Rossi-Duchesne, *Martyrologium Hieronymianum*, pp. li., lxiii.–lxv.

⁴ A. de Broglie, *L'Église et l'Empire romain au quatrième siècle*, vol. ii. p. 307.

roundings, and degrees of civilisation, which we have already witnessed in the different parts of the Roman Empire. Had the Church of Persia not been weakened and split up by heresies in the fifth century, and had Persia not been invaded by the Moslems in the seventh, it is probable that the churches there would have played in the East a part similar to that played by the Roman Churches in the West; possibly they might have converted the whole of Asia, for as it was the Iranian missionaries succeeded in actually carrying the Gospel to the island of Socotora, to Ceylon, to the Malabar coast, and across Tartary into the very heart of China.¹

II

To console ourselves for possibilities which never came to pass, let us consider more closely the actual reality. The spread of Christianity, within the confines of the Roman Empire, where we know it best, presents still several points with which we must needs acquaint ourselves if we wish to gain a clear idea of the surroundings in the midst of which the martyrs of the first four centuries spent their lives. We must first say something about the Christian country-sides.

When Pliny, for the benefit of the Emperor Trajan, summed up the chief characteristics of the Gospel-propaganda in the province of Bithynia, he made much of the fact that its invasion had extended beyond the towns into thoroughly country districts, *neque civitates tantum, sed vicos etiam atque*

¹ Vide Cosmas's *Christian Topography* (sixth century), in Migne, P. G., vol. lxxxviii., col. 169; cp. Duchesne, *Eglises séparées*, p. 24; Labourt, *Le Christianisme dans l'Empire perse*, pp. 165, 166, 306, 327, 350.

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agros.¹ The importance of this fact did not escape the wisdom of the Roman legate; though as yet he had not entered into relations with the Christians—since his letter had for its object to inquire of the emperor how they should be treated—nevertheless he was perfectly aware that their religion had, in the first instance, made its way into the towns. Here there were invariably Jewish colonies which, when they were not the most hostile, were the most fruitful soil on which the Gospel could be sown. Among the town-dwelling pagans, too, it was easy to find open minds, people who were troubled with religious doubts and who disbelieved in the gods, and who consequently were well disposed to receive the Gospel. But for Christianity to extend beyond the town-walls into the country districts, for it to take possession of the rude and unpolished soul of the peasantry, for this it required a strength and adaptability amounting to a veritable empire. This it was that scared the Roman legate. He saw that the stamp of complete success was set on Christian endeavour by its conquest of the land. The impression of this second-century Roman is full of instruction for us, and suggests a discrimination between the Roman provinces in which Christianity had reached the rural districts, and those in which it was more or less confined to the towns; this will be a good way of confirming what we have already said concerning its relative power in the different Roman provinces at the time of the persecutions.

In several great western countries the faith was for long hemmed in by the walls of the larger towns. This was particularly the case with Gaul, where, even in the time of St. Martin, *i.e.* in the fourth

¹ Pliny, *Ep.*, x. 96.

century, we find paganism still rampant in the country districts of the centre, and where it was necessary to send missionaries in the fifth, sixth, and even seventh centuries to effectually uproot idolatry in the northern and eastern country-sides.¹ Even now we can find the traces of this long persistence of rural paganism. In what remains of the primitive forests, which in Roman times covered the larger part of France, on the hills which rear their heads above the river-side, there are still to be found the ruins of numerous little temples—*fana*—each with its little dwelling-place for the attendant priest; and the coins which lie scattered about show that their destruction took place at a comparatively recent date. The position of affairs was the same in Northern Italy, between the Alps and the Po; the fierce natives of the villages here will martyr many a Christian at the end of the fourth and the beginning of the fifth century.² At the same time, and in spite of the laws, statues of the gods still stood in Liguria, where, on wooden altars erected in front of the idols, rustic priests continue to sacrifice victims, whose entrails they inspect in the hope of discerning the future.³ All this agrees perfectly with what we have already said of the paucity of bishoprics and faithful in these provinces; it agrees, too, with the scarcity of towns, which in Gaul at least were much further apart than elsewhere, and so less able to exercise influence on the surrounding country.

¹ See Lecoy de la Marche, *Saint Martin*; Bulliot et Thollier, *La mission et le culte de S. Martin, essai sur le paganisme rural*; and the article of Abbé Vacandard, *L'Idolatrie en Gaule au VI^e et au VII^e siècle*, in the *Revue des questions historiques*, April 1899.

² Tillemont, *Mémoires*, vol. x. pp. 542, *seq.*, article on St. Vigilius.

³ St. Maximus of Turin, *Sermo*, 101.

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On the contrary, in Central and Southern Italy, where episcopal cities were many, the whole situation of Christianity is different; even in the third century we hear of humble villages containing bishops who from the description given must have been mere peasants.¹ The same is true of Northern Africa, where bishoprics were even more common than in Italy. The African country-sides were highly cultivated and very densely populated. In the fourth century we meet bishops here even in the little hamlets (*fundi, saltus*) inhabited by Christian farmers. An incident in the last persecution will suffice to bring one of these rural Churches very vividly before us. It happened in the *Possessio Cephalitana*, near Thuburbo, in Proconsular Africa. Its peasant-inhabitants were assembled by the proconsul, and the following conversation took place: "Are you Christians?" asked the proconsul. "We are," they replied in one voice. The proconsul resumed: "The pious and august emperors have ordered me to assemble all the Christians and to call on them to offer sacrifice; those who refuse or disobey will be punished by divers tortures." As a result the whole population, including also the priests and the deacons there resident, was weak enough to give way and offer sacrifice, only two maidens who had not formed part of the assembled crowd, but who had been denounced by a peasant woman, refused to yield, and bravely suffered mar-

¹ Ἀνθρώπους ἀγροίκους καὶ ἀπλουστάτους.—Letter of St. Cornelius, in Eusebius, *H. E.*, vi. 43, 8. See an article, *I vescovi di campagna nell' antichità cristiana*, pp. 212–217, in *Civiltà cattolica*, October 15, 1904. St. Alexander, Bishop of Baccano (*vicus Baccanensis*), who was martyred under Caracalla, was a country bishop.—*Bull. di arch. Crist.*, 1875, pp. 142–152.

tyrdom for their constancy.¹ We owe to a recently discovered document our acquaintance with this curious episode which throws so much light on the then state of Christianity in rural Africa.

The Egyptian country parts which, near the Mediterranean and round about the mouth of the Nile, were thickly populated, but of which the population decreased gradually towards the South because of the proximity of the desert, also contained many Christians; it was also one of the regions in which the faith was least confined to the towns. Even the peasants who were not Christians were favourably disposed to Christianity, and always happy to play little tricks on the persecutors. Hence the ease with which fugitive Christians were able to conceal themselves in Egypt. St. Dionysius of Alexandria relates in one of his interesting letters the amusing incident of his own flight, his arrest, and his subsequent rescue. A Christian finds the bishop's room empty, and on hearing that he had been captured, promptly takes to his heels; in his flight he meets a peasant on his way to a wake which was being held in preparation for a wedding, and who, being informed how matters stood, hastens to the place of meeting and tells the guests what has happened, whereupon they all jump up from table, run to the village to which the soldiers had led their captive, and having put the soldiers to flight, they effect the bishop's rescue. And when Dionysius naturally enough refuses to make use of a freedom thus illegally acquired, they take him by

¹ *Passio SS. Maximillæ, Donatillæ, et Secundæ*, in the *Analecta Bollandiana*, 1890, vol. ix. pp. 110-116. On the distinction between the authentic and suspected parts of this document, see Monceaux, *Histoire littéraire de l'Afrique chrétienne*, vol. iii. pp. 148-150.

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his feet and hands, march out again, put him on a donkey and hurry him off.¹ These peasants who so highly appreciated the opportunity of playing off a rough practical joke on the soldiery do not seem to have been Christians, but it must have been an easy thing to convert such as them to Christianity, and, in point of fact, there was a very active propaganda going on in all the Egyptian country districts. In the third century there were "priests and catechists" who instructed "the village brethren."² The persecution of Decius here gave many martyrs their crown.³ Two papyri recently found tell of the Christians being constrained to sacrifice in a village of Cyrene, and again in one of the Fayum.⁴ In the course of the last persecution the bishop Meletius, ignoring the rights of his captive brother bishops, held several ordinations in their dioceses, alleging as an excuse for this irregularity the fact that "the villages were bereft of their pastors." To this it was retorted that visiting priests (*circumeuntes*) had been appointed to see to the wants of the villagers until the return of more peaceful times.⁵ Egypt was emphatically the home of rural Christianity.

You will not be surprised to hear that in Asia Minor where, as we have seen, so many regions were impregnated with Christianity, the country districts were as full of Christians as the towns. A few moments back I called attention to Pliny's testimony

¹ Letter of Dionysius of Alexandria, in Eusebius, *H. E.*, vi. 40.

² Τοὺς πρεσβυτέρους καὶ διδασκάλους τῶν ἐν ταῖς κώμαις ἀδελφῶν. —Eusebius, *H. E.*, vii. 24, 6.

³ *Ibid.*, vi. 42.

⁴ Published by Krebs and by Wessely. See my book on *Le Christianisme et l'Empire romain*, 6th ed., pp. 296-297.

⁵ See the documents published and summarised by Hefele, *Hist. of the Councils*, French trans. by Delarc, vol. i. pp. 333 *seq.*

regarding Bithynia. With regard to Pontus a strange episode related by St. Hippolytus brings Christian peasants on the scene. A pseudo-prophet having predicted that the coming of the Lord was imminent, the people "forsook their fields and gardens," but after having waited awhile and found that nothing happened they again returned to their ordinary business and resumed the "cultivation of the soil."¹ In Phrygia many villages were possessed of Churches. It was above all in the country, in fact in its most rugged parts, that Montanism secured adherents. Pepuza and Thymion, two noted spots in the history of this heresy, were only moderate-sized villages.² Comana, whose bishop was one of the most zealous opponents of Montanism, was itself nothing more than a village.³ According to Renan, Phrygian Christianity was "a religion of villages and country parts;"⁴ this expression is true, though not wholly so, since the inscriptions found in this province have shown us that Christianity was professed also by "distinguished citizens" and by city magistrates.⁵ In Lesser Armenia the spiritual government of many villages was in the hands of priests or deacons.⁶ In Cappadocia, in Coele-Syria,⁷ in Cilicia, in Isauria, in Bithynia,⁸ in fact all over the East the third

¹ St. Hippolytus, *Comment. in Daniel*, ed. Bonwetsch, Leipzig, 1897, p. 232.

² Eusebius, *H. E.*, v. 18, 2.

³ κώμη.—*Ibid.*, 16, 17.

⁴ Renan, *Marc Aurèle*, p. 211.

⁵ See above, p. 28.

⁶ See the *Testament des quarante martyrs de Sébaste*, in H. Leclercq, *Les Martyrs*, vol. iii. p. 388. On the authenticity of this document, consult *Analecta Bollandiana*, vol. xviii., 1898, pp. 467-469.

⁷ In the synod of Antioch, in 296: ἐπίσκοποι τῶν ὁμόρων ἀγρῶν τε καὶ πόλεων.—Eusebius, *H. E.*, vii. 30.

⁸ Forty chorepiscopi of these five provinces recorded their names at the Council of Nicæa. There were martyred chorepiscopi in Cappadocia and in Syria.—*Martyrologium Hieronymianum*, pp. lxiii., 105, 115.

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century witnessed the introduction of *chorepiscopi*, literally country-bishops, whose business it was to act as representatives and vicegerents of the bishops in those districts where the dioceses were too large to allow of their performing their duties outside of the towns.¹

III

We may now return to the towns to see exactly what position the Christians had attained before the end of the persecutions.

One of the last victims of the great persecution, Lucian, who was the head of the biblical school of Alexandria, and one of whose disciples had been Arius, pronounced at Nicomedia in the presence of the Emperor Maximin an *apologia* for Christianity. Of this a fragment has been preserved by a fourth-century historian. "At the present moment"—said the martyr—"already nearly half of the world has embraced the truth; whole cities, *urbes integræ*, or if you cannot trust the urban districts, the crowds of rustics who are incapable of guile, are witnesses to this fact."² Hence there existed in Roman Asia in 311, not only Christian country-parts but cities of which the whole population had gone over to Christ.

Eusebius attests this of Edessa where "Christ

¹ The Eastern chorepiscopi, who were subject to the urban bishops, must not be confounded with the country-bishops of Italy and Africa, who were not thus subject. See *Civiltà cattolica*, October 15, 1904, pp. 205-206.

² Pars pæne mundi jam major huic veritati adstipulatur, urbes integræ; aut si in his aliquid suspectum videtur, contestatur de his etiam agresta manus, ignora pigmenti. Quoted by Rufinus, *H. E.*, ix. 6. Tillemont (*Mémoires*, vol. v., art. on *Lucian of Antioch*) suspects this *apologia* of being a composition of Rufinus himself. This is, however, not the view of Harnack, who admits the exactitude of the passage quoted (*Die Mission*, pp. 374, 436).

only was adored ;”¹ and probably the same is true of Apamea in Phrygia, of which the coins in the beginning of the third century bear a biblical symbol.² One of the intellectual adversaries of Christianity, the philosopher Porphyry, who wrote at the end of the third century, alludes in terms of sorrow and anger to another city from which the last pagan had long since been driven. This town having been afflicted by an epidemic, the philosopher sees in this a punishment sent by the forsaken gods. “People are actually astonished,” he says, “that a town where neither Æsculapius nor any other god has now access should be stricken by a plague! Ever since Jesus has been worshipped we have been deprived of all the public benefits conferred by the gods.”³

It is exceedingly unfortunate that with one or two notable exceptions we know the names of none of the Eastern cities which had been wholly converted to Christ before the end of the persecutions. But the fact is of importance not only in helping us to understand how independent Christianity was of the help afforded by Constantine, but also for understanding the history of the martyrs. In towns entirely converted to the new faith the persecutors were compelled either to beat a retreat before the passive resistance of the inhabitants, or to declare open war against the refractory citizens.⁴ This is what happened on an occasion mentioned by two

¹ Eusebius, *H. E.*, ii. 1, 7.

² Eckhel, *Doctrina nummorum veterum*, vol. iii. p. 137; François Lenormant, in the *Mélanges d'archéologie* of Fathers Cahier and Martin, vol. iii. p. 199.

³ Quoted by Theodoretus, *Græc. affect. curatio*, 13; Migne, *P. G.*, vol. lxxxiii., col. 1152.

⁴ *Τῶν οὐκέτι μὲν κοινῷ νόμῳ, πολέμου δὲ τρόπῳ πεπολιορκημένων.*—Eusebius, *H. E.*, viii. 10, 12.

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contemporaries, Eusebius and Lactantius. The place in question was a Phrygian town of which they do not give us the name. In the month of February 305 this town, of which all the inhabitants were Christians, was invested by a small army. To all those who desired to leave, a safe-conduct was promised, but none of the besieged consented to avail themselves of this permission, of which the accepting seemed to them tantamount to apostasy. The governor of the province accompanied by his soldiers was permitted to enter the town, but when the citizens were called upon to sacrifice to the gods they refused to a man. They were then shut up in the principal church, a vast building which in spite of the edicts had not been rased, and the edifice was set on fire. Thus the whole population, from the curator and magistrates and members of the municipal council down to the least of the citizens, perished in the flames, calling the while on the name of Christ.¹

We shall have to wait long before finding in the West a wholly Christian city,² but even from the beginning of the third century it is easy to see that Christianity is gaining strength in the towns. Christians are no longer swamped in the heathen population, they form large bodies, and their presence begins to make itself felt in the character, nay, even in the external aspect of the cities in which they dwell. Of course it would be difficult to tell their numbers;

¹ Eusebius, *H. E.*, viii. 11 ; Lactantius, *Div. Inst.*, v. 11.

² Prudentius (*Peri Stephanon*, iv. 65) mentions, towards the end of the fourth century, a Spanish town, Saragossa, of which the inhabitants were Christians. The Gallo-Roman Severus (*Carmen bucolicum*, Migne, *P. L.*, vol. xix., col. 800) says: "Solus qui colitur magnis in urbibus—Christus," thus showing that in the larger towns of Gaul at about the same time Christ alone was worshipped.

the ancients were not given to making statistics, or at least very few ancient statistics have survived to our day. Nevertheless, certain hints thrown out by Tertullian and Pope St. Cornelius allow us to form some estimate of the number of Christians in Carthage about the year 200, and in Rome about the year 250.

You are no doubt already acquainted with the well-known words with which Tertullian depicts the state of society in the African cities of his time, penetrated as they were with Christian elements. "We are but of yesterday, and yet we fill every place—your cities, your houses, your fortresses, your *municipia*, councils, camps, tribes, decurias, palace, senate, forum, we only leave you your temples."¹ And the apologist adds: "Were we to detach ourselves from you, you would be scared by your solitude and by the silence, which would be like unto that of a dead world."² The striking figure of the emptiness which the Christian population would have produced by its departure enables us to feel the large place which even then it occupied. No doubt we must allow for a little too much emphasis, for a slight rhetorical exaggeration, in the above words, but Tertullian, who is striving to bring public opinion to the side of the Christians, would hardly be likely to alienate it by parading facts which were manifestly false. Moreover, whether he be haranguing the mob or writing to a magistrate—that is, to a man fully aware of the facts, and who could not be deceived—his language remains identical. In a letter to Scapula, the proconsul of Africa, written to protest against a resumption of the persecution, he speaks in like terms of the "immense multitude" of Christians,

¹ Tertullian, *Apol.*, 37.

² *Ibid.*

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and points significantly to the "divine patience" of these men who, though "already constituting nearly the majority in every city," *pars pæne major civitatis cujusque*,¹ consent to live in darkness and silence, and are only known by their virtues.² Nevertheless, in another passage of the same letter he seems to correct an expression which might have appeared somewhat excessive. "What wilt thou do," he says to the proconsul, "with so many thousands, men and women of every age and condition, who will come to you offering their wrists to be manacled"?³ And, to be still more exact, he adds: "What deep feelings would not there be at Carthage were it known that the population was about to be decimated, when each one would recognise among the victims some relation or dweller under the same roof, maybe men and women of thy own rank, relatives and friends of thy friends."⁴ Taken literally, this sentence, which states that the condemnation of the Christians would "decimate" the population, would seem to show that in 212 the Christians at Carthage were to be reckoned as one-tenth of the total number of inhabitants. If we remembered the short time which had elapsed since the importation of Christianity into Africa, this result would already be striking enough. But we may question if the verb "to decimate" should be taken here in its narrow meaning, especially since we have already been told

¹ After having quoted these words, M. Boissier adds, "we must not forget that the writer was speaking to a pagan, to a high official who knew how matters really stood.—*La fin du Paganisme*, vol. i. p. 444.

² Tertullian, *Ad Scapulam*, 2.

³ Quid facies de tantis millibus hominum, tot viris ac feminis, omnis sexus, omnis ætatis, omnis dignitatis offerentibus se tibi?—*Ibid.*, 5.

⁴ Quid ipsa Carthago passura est, decimanda a te?—*Ibid.*

that the Christians form in every town nearly one-half of the population. Appearances would rather insinuate that it is in this latter sentence that we must seek Tertullian's thought. If this be really the case, then the number of the Christians at Carthage and elsewhere in the African cities must have far exceeded one-tenth of the population.

Rome at the same period was still far—further perhaps than Carthage—from being wholly peopled by Christians. But the urban ecclesiastical organisation was very perfect. The framework which will serve when it shall have been completely converted was already finished. There is good reason to believe that the twenty-five *tituli*, or parish churches, which are mentioned in later documents existed already in the third century.¹ In any case, it is to this time that we must refer the organisation of the charities and of the temporal resources. Under the reign of the tolerant Emperor Philip (between 245 and 249), Pope Pontian divided the fourteen civil districts of Rome into seven ecclesiastical regions, at the head of each of which he placed a deacon, to watch over the needs of the poor and to collect the revenues of the Church.² With this organisation was connected that of the burial-grounds. At least one of the cemeteries which had now become the common property of the Church was placed at the disposal of each of these districts.³ You know the size of these subterranean cemeteries, which occupy a radius of three miles, and extend in groups of three or four along the ten great highways which converge on the

¹ Duchesne, *Notes sur la topographie de Rome au moyen âge*, ii.—iii., in the *Mélanges d'histoire et d'archéologie publiés par l'École française de Rome*, 1887, pp. 17–33.

² De Rossi, *Roma sotterranea*, vol. iii. pp. 515–518.

³ *Ibid.*

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Eternal City. They encircle Rome with a labyrinth of galleries; of themselves they are sufficient to make us realise even better than any statistics the number and the power of the Christians, who, in order to bury their dead, found it necessary to excavate galleries hundreds of miles in length, who found a sufficiency of labourers to perform this gigantic undertaking, and also sufficiently clever engineers to superintend it. The immensity of this city of the dead, which is not only pierced with tombs, but is overlaid with marbles, adorned with pictures, and filled with memorial chapels and oratories, gives us a good idea of the grandeur and wealth of the city of the living.

The successor of Fabian, Pope Cornelius, speaks in a letter of the "great and uncountable" people which is formed by the Christians of Rome;¹ a definite number would be more acceptable from our point of view than such adjectives. But, on the other hand, he also gives us detailed statistics of the Roman clergy. There were in Rome, about the year 250, forty-six priests, seven deacons, seven sub-deacons, forty-two acolytes, fifty-two exorcists, lectors, and porters.² This presupposes an active religious life, numerous places of worship, and the administration of frequent baptisms. St. Cornelius adds a still more precious detail concerning the organisation of the Church's charity in the city of Rome. The offerings of the community helped to support fifteen hundred widows, infirm people, and paupers, all of them regularly matriculated to the Church.³ This latter number allows us to form some

¹ Μεγίστου καὶ ἀναριθμήτου λαοῦ. Quoted by Eusebius, *H. E.*, vi. 43.

² Eusebius, *H. E.*, vi. 43.

³ *Ibid.*

conjecture as to the total number of Christians in Rome. A century and a half later St. John Chrysostom tells us that at Antioch, among one hundred thousand Christians¹ there were three thousand poor.² The proportions remaining the same, the fifteen hundred poor of Rome would indicate a Christian population of fifty thousand.³ This would mean about one-twentieth of the whole population, a high number indeed, but nevertheless a much smaller one than we should obtain could we establish the comparative statistics of the Christians and the pagans in the towns of Africa, or especially in the towns of Asia Minor.

Fifty or sixty years later the Christian population of Rome had mightily increased. In 307, in one of the numerous quarrels of the Diocletian tetrachy, Maxentius, the son of the old Emperor Maximian Hercules, usurped the purple, and, having made himself master of Italy and Africa, he took up his residence in the capital where for a long period no emperor had sojourned. Eusebius relates that the new sovereign "made a pretence of sharing the Christian faith in order to flatter the Roman people."⁴ For the usurper to have conceived such a thought the Christians of Rome must needs have been very powerful, and for this to be true their numbers must have greatly increased. But it is possible that Eusebius's assertion should be taken *cum grano*.

This historian, who was so well acquainted with the East in which he lived, had only a second-hand knowledge of the events of the West. Generally

¹ Chrysostom, *In Matt.*, Hom. lxxxv.

² *Ibid.*, Hom. lxvi. 3.

³ See *Histoire des persécutions pendant la première moitié du troisième siècle*, 3rd ed., p. 303, note 1.

⁴ Eusebius, *H. E.*, viii. 14, 1.

speaking he makes but the fewest possible allusions to them, and when he does speak of them, he must usually be understood to be making use of private information which appeared to him good. Even supposing him to have exaggerated a little, he can scarcely have been completely deceived with respect to Maxentius. Of this we find a proof in this prince's conduct. As soon as he had made himself master of Rome he put an end to the persecution; he even officially acknowledged the existence and rights of the Roman Church and returned to it its confiscated belongings.¹ As we cannot attribute this act of grace to his humanity, seeing that he remained exceedingly cruel, nor to a conviction of the truth of Christianity, seeing that he still continued to play the part of a rude and licentious pagan, we are compelled to put it down to political prudence. He certainly found in Rome a Christian party strong enough to make him desirous of conciliating them. Professor Harnack calculates that between 250 and 307, in somewhat more than half a century, their number in Rome had been multiplied by two, possibly by four,² which would give a Christian population of a hundred thousand or possibly two hundred thousand souls. All that we assert is that it had notably increased, that only this increase can explain Maxentius's conduct. It also explains how, five years later, Constantine could enter the city with the sign of the Cross on his banners, and shortly afterwards could crown the public monuments with crosses without giving rise to any complaint. The more aristocratic pagans were too good courtiers to allow a murmur to escape

¹ Augustine, *Breviculus coll. cum Donat.*, iii. 34.

² Harnack, *Die Mission*, p. 541.

their lips, and the feelings of the populace were on the side of Christianity.

IV

We may note here as a curious coincidence a characteristic which always accompanied the conquest by Christianity of a large city of the Roman Empire. To the physiognomy peculiar to each one of them, to that conglomeration of traditions, customs, and institutions which go to form the personality of a town, it almost invariably added something new. The very pagans themselves were constrained to admit that the school in which Pantænus, Clement, and Origen taught put a new feather in the cap of Alexandria, already so renowned for its services to the cause of literature and philosophy. Antioch, that city given up to commerce, luxury, pleasure, and childish sophistry, gained more solid glory from its long succession of learned bishops, from its biblical school, and from the councils which met there. Jerusalem, which since the time of Adrian had seen nothing but loss of dignity and humiliation, now again became a resort of students, owing to the library founded in the third century by one of its bishops. Cæsarea in Palestine about the same time blossomed forth into an intellectual centre of Christianity second only to Alexandria, and Cæsarea in Cappadocia was nearly as active, nor will its activity reach its term until it shall have produced that little group of great Cappadocians who are destined to give so powerful an impetus to Christian thought. Carthage gained a quite extraordinary influence, extending far beyond the province of which it was the capital; after the time of St. Cyprian it became the

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Christian metropolis of the whole of Roman Africa. Lastly, Christian Rome, far from living shut up in the catacombs, far from being depressed by the weight of pagan Rome, sends its orders and its missions to the ends of the civilised world and even to the barbarians beyond.

The relations which Christian Rome maintained with the rest of Christendom enable us to realise the intensity of religious life. Its pastors were constantly sending messages to all countries. At every moment questions of doctrine or discipline are referred to them. From its very inception the Church of Rome became Catholic. In the first century Clement sent a letter to the Corinthian faithful:¹ in the second, Eleutherius was the recipient of a letter, from the martyrs of Lyons, dealing with Montanism.² Victor sent epistles to the principal Eastern Churches on the subject of the Paschal controversy.³ In the third century the Novatian schism, the quarrel about re-baptism, the Sabellian heresy, and the Paul of Samosata business, furnished so many reasons for correspondence between Cornelius, Stephen, Sixtus II., Dionysius, and Felix, and the Churches of Africa, Numidia, Lyons, Antioch, and Alexandria.⁴ Nor was Rome concerned only with the doctrinal and disciplinary matters of the whole world; she also responded to calls for material help sent by far-off Churches in distress, and in answer to such requests she was ever ready to dispense from her already abundant treasure such sums as might bring consolation. "You reign by love," Ignatius of Antioch

¹ Clement of Rome, *Ad Corinthios*.

² Eusebius, *H. E.*, v. 3.

³ *Ibid.*, v. 23, 24.

⁴ *Ibid.*, vi. 43; vii. 4, 5, 7, 9, 30. Cp. Cyprian, *Ep.*, 67-75.

writes enthusiastically to the Christians of Rome.¹ In his turn, Dionysius of Corinth writes: "From the beginning it has been your custom to bestow your goods on all your brethren, to send your alms to many churches in every city, thus assisting the poverty of those who are in need and bringing succour to the Christians condemned to labour in the mines. Your saintly Bishop Soter has not only kept up this ancient and traditional custom of the Romans, but he has added to it; not confining himself to the sending of material help, he has, like a kindly father, encouraged with words of blessing all those who approach him."² In the middle of the third century another Dionysius, he of Alexandria, in a letter to Pope Stephen, praises the generosity of the Romans and their Pontiff towards "the whole of Syria and Arabia," which regions, he adds, "you have ever helped, and to which you have even quite recently afforded assistance."³ About 260, Pope Dionysius sent a brief to the Church of Cæsarea in Cappadocia to console it for the injuries wrought by the Persians, and to announce that he is sending sufficient money to ransom the Cappadocians whom the Persians had led away captive.⁴ During the persecution under Diocletian the Roman Church despatched help to all the Eastern Churches.⁵ Being thus in constant communication with the whole Christian universe, the Roman Pontiff became so important a person that, in 251, according to a contemporary, the Emperor Decius would rather have learnt that one of his rivals had headed a revolt, than that a bishop

¹ Προκαθήμενῇ τῆς ἀγάπης.—Ignatius, *Rom.* i.

² Letter of Dionysius of Corinth, in Eusebius, *H. E.*, iv. 23.

³ *Ibid.*, vii. 5, 2.

⁴ Basil, *Ep.* 10.

⁵ Eusebius, *H. E.*, iv. 23, 9.

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had been chosen for Rome.¹ The presence of the Pope was already bringing an increase to Rome's power over the nations, giving a new meaning to the *tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento*, and putting a mark on the imperial city which could not escape the notice of such an intelligent pagan as Decius.

But Rome not only projected her light, she also exercised a strong attraction on all the countries in which the Gospel had been preached. Journeys undertaken with a religious object were frequent in the first three centuries. There were the missionary journeys of zealous Christians who sought to emulate St. Paul and St. Peter. Unfortunately we know but little of the oldest Christian missionaries, of those men, and women even, who, as St. Paul expressed it, had "laboured much for the Lord."² We see the results of their work without usually knowing who they were. Few workers have succeeded in effacing their memory more completely than these disinterested labourers in the Lord's vineyard. There must have been many who could say with a martyr of the third century: "In every town and district I have children in God,"³ but very few of them have left us their names. Those Christians of the first and second century with whose travels we are acquainted, almost without exception undertook their journeys with the object of visiting distant Churches or well-known teachers, and of so gaining a deeper insight into religious truth; and it is noticeable that it is towards Rome that most of these pilgrims direct their steps. The voyage from the

¹ Cyprian, *Ep.*, 52.

² St. Paul, *Rom.* xvi. 6, 12.

³ Ἐν πάσῃ ἐπαρχίᾳ καὶ πόλει εἰσὶν μου τέκνα κατὰ Θεόν.—*Acta SS. Carpi, Papyli et Agathonice*, 32.

East to Rome had no terrors for them. They resolutely faced the difficulties attendant on travelling at a period when as yet there existed no tourist-offices, nor any public means of conveyance by land or sea. Yet they never seem to have flinched. A Phrygian inscription relates of a merchant that he performed the journey, to and fro, to Italy no less than seventy-two times.¹ What could be performed for love of lucre was not of a nature to discourage the vigorous piety of the early Christians. Nearly all the men of those times, whose names are preserved in the annals of the Church, contrived to pay a visit to Rome.

St. Polycarp journeyed thither from Smyrna,² St. Irenæus visited it from Smyrna and again from Lyons.³ The Palestinian Hegesippus, "the father of Church history," spent some time in Rome and drew up the list of the early Popes.⁴ The Samaritan St. Justin came to Rome to act as catechist.⁵ The Phrygian Abercius came from Hierapolis, as he himself states in his figured language, "to behold royal Rome and its princess (the Church) dressed in vestments and sandals of gold."⁶ The apologist Tatian came from Assyria,⁷ and made himself a disciple of Justin; after the latter's martyrdom he in turn became a catechist.⁸ Another apologist, Rhodon,

¹ *Corpus inscr. Græc.*, No. 3920.

² Eusebius, *H. E.*, iv. 14; v. 24.

³ *Ibid.*, v. 1-4.

⁴ *Ibid.*, iv. 22.

⁵ *Acta S. Justin*, in Ruinart, p. 43.

⁶ De Rossi, *Inscript. Christ. urbis Romæ*, vol. ii. p. xvii.

⁷ Tatian, *Oratio ad Græcos*, 42.

⁸ Irenæus, *Adv. Hæc.*, i. 28; cp. Eusebius, *H. E.*, iv. 29. It has been suggested that the *Discourse to the Greeks* was either the opening lecture of Tatian's school, or a lecture which he gave in the course of his teaching. See Puech, *Recherches sur le Discours aux Grecs de Tatien*; cp. *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique de Louvain*, April 1905, pp. 357-358.

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came from Asia and attended Tatian's school;¹ whilst yet another, Tertullian, came from Carthage.² The chronicler Julius Africanus came from Emmaus.³ Origen came from Alexandria.⁴ At the same period heresiarchs, too, were arriving in crowds, in the vain hope of gaining to their views the unflinching faith of the Roman Church. From Egypt came Valentine,⁵ from Pontus, Marcion;⁶ from Syria, Cerdo;⁷ from Asia Minor, Praxeas;⁸ from Assyria, Prepon;⁹ from Smyrna or Ephesus, Noetus;¹⁰ from Africa or Egypt, Sabellius;¹¹ from Byzantium, Theodotus;¹² from Alexandria the female gnostic Marcellina.¹³ When we collect together all these facts and names we begin to see that De Rossi did not exaggerate when he said: "By its power and by its activity, ecclesiastical and intellectual, the Christian Rome of the first three centuries was a centre scarcely inferior to imperial and civil Rome."¹⁴

V

A like epistolary and charitable activity was manifest during the second and third centuries in the other Churches. Take, for instance, Ignatius on his way to martyrdom writing to the Ephesians, Magnesians, Trallians, Romans, Philadelphians, Smyrnians, and to Polycarp;¹⁵ or Polycarp writing

¹ Eusebius, *H. E.*, v. 13.

² Tertullian, *De cultu fem.*, i. 7; Eusebius, *H. E.*, ii. 2.

³ Eusebius, *Chron.*; Jerome, *De Viris Ill.*, 63.

⁴ Eusebius, *H. E.*, vi. 14.

⁵ Irenæus, *Adv. Hær.*, iii. 4, 8.

⁶ Epiphanius, *Hær.*, xlii. 1.

⁷ Irenæus, *Adv. Hær.*, i. 24.

⁸ Tertullian, *Adv. Praxeam*, 1.

⁹ *Philosophumena*, vii. 31.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, ix. 3-5.

¹¹ Theodoretus, *Hæret. fab.*, ii. 2.

¹² Epiphanius, *Hær.*, liv.

¹³ Irenæus, *Adv. Hær.*, i. 25.

¹⁴ *Bullettino di archeologia Cristiana*, 1868, p. 87.

¹⁵ Lightfoot, *St. Ignatius and St. Polycarp*, vol. ii. pp. 1-360.

to the Church of Philippi in Macedonia;¹ or the Smyrnians sending an epistle to the "Church of Philomelium and to all the brotherhoods in the Catholic Church"—a circular dealing with the martyrdom of their bishop Polycarp;² or the Churches of Lyons and Vienne sending an account of the martyrs of 177 to the Churches of Asia and Phrygia;³ or Dionysius of Corinth writing to the Lacedemonians, to the Athenians, to the Churches of Gortyna and Cnossus in Crete, to the Church of Amastris in Paphlagonia, and to Pope Soter;⁴ or St. Irenæus writing to Victor on the Paschal question;⁵ or Dionysius of Alexandria communicating with Fabius of Antioch, with Pope Cornelius, with Pope Stephen, with Pope Sixtus II., with Pope Dionysius, with Origen, Paul of Samosata, with the Church of Antioch and with that of Armenia.⁶ Origen, whose unceasing activity and the vicissitudes of whose life compelled him to change his abode so often, kept up a huge correspondence—now all but lost—with all the great personages of his time, civil as well as ecclesiastical.⁷ The correspondence of St. Cyprian has been more fortunate in escaping the ravages of time. It gives us a glimpse of his relations with the Roman clergy, with Pope Cornelius, Pope Stephen, Pope Sixtus, Bishop Firmilian of Cæsarea, the Churches of Gaul, Spain, and Africa. It also makes us aware of his administrative capacity and the ardour of his charity, for it not only

¹ Lightfoot, *St. Ignatius and St. Polycarp*, vol. iii. pp. 311–350.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 351–415.

³ Eusebius, *H. E.*, v. 1.

⁴ *Ibid.*, iv. 21, 23, 35.

⁵ *Ibid.*, v. 24; Jerome, *De Viris Ill.*, 35.

⁶ Eusebius, *H. E.*, vi. 41; vii. 4, 5, 7, 9, 11, 22, 26, 40, 45.

⁷ Of the whole of Origen's correspondence, which filled eleven books, only two letters have been preserved.

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shows his interest in all the grave concerns of the Church, but also shows him in the light of a consoler of the confessors of the faith, and of a collector of alms destined to ransom the captives from Numidia.¹

To understand fully how strenuous was the Christians' life during the persecution, we must add another fact to this constant interchange of letters, viz., the frequent assembling of councils.

In the second century councils were held in Asia to discuss Montanism; in Rome and Palestine, in Pontus, in Gaul, in Osrhoena, in Corinth, to discuss the question of the date of Easter; seventy bishops met at Carthage to deal with the question of baptism administered by heretics; in the third century two councils were held in Phrygia; about the year 231, two were held at Alexandria; a council held at Lambesa in Numidia united ninety bishops. In 251, sixty bishops assembled in Rome, and the same city witnessed another council in 260. Between 264 and 269 three councils were held at Antioch. About the year 300, in a moment's respite between two persecutions, more than forty bishops met together at Illiberis in Spain, and drew up a regular code of Christian discipline. And how many councils remain unknown, for we must bear in mind that, in the third century, both in the East and in Africa, the bishops of each province met at least

¹ Of St. Cyprian's correspondence there remains eighty-one letters, of which sixty-five were written by him and the others to him; but we find in his writings allusions to seventy other letters sent or received by him; of these letters seventy came from or were addressed to the Roman Church, a fact which, as Harnack rightly remarks, well shows the position even then held by Rome. Cp. Harnack, *Ueber verloren Briefe und aktenstücke die sich aus der Cyprianischen Briefsammlung ermitteln lassen*, in *Texte und Untersuchungen*, vol. viii., 1902, No. 2.

once a year.¹ We can form some idea of this conciliar activity by casting a glance at the list of the councils held at Carthage during the episcopate of St. Cyprian. There was a council in the spring of 251, possibly another in the autumn, a council of forty-two bishops in May, 252, another of sixty-six bishops at the end of 253, another of thirty-seven bishops at the end of 254, another of thirty-one bishops in 255, another of seventy-one bishops in the spring of 256, and the same year, in September, another consisting of eighty-six bishops.²

You must excuse these lists and these monotonous repetitions. It has been said that repetition is the most striking of all figures of rhetoric. Sometimes also, with all its apparent dryness, it is the best means of feeling the life pulsing in history. Unless I am much mistaken, the life into which we are endeavouring to enter was an extraordinarily strenuous one. How utterly at sea are those people who fancy that, in the centuries when the sword of persecution was ever hanging over the Church, the faithful constituted merely a frightened little flock whose only concern was to escape the threatened danger! The *latebrosa et lucifugax natio*,³ as the pagans sometimes contemptuously styled the Church, was a mere figment of their fancy. The truth is that it existed in the full light of day and never adopted the practices of a secret society; what I have just said of the councils is a sufficient proof.

¹ Firmilian, in St. Cyprian, *Ep.*, 75. Cp. Hergenröther, *Church History*, ed. Kirsch, Italian trans., vol. i. p. 334; Audollent, *Carthage romaine*, p. 493.

² Paul Monceaux, *Hist. littéraire de l'Afrique chrétienne*, vol. ii. pp. 41-48.

³ Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, 8.

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These frequent gatherings, which necessitated so much travelling, and brought so many people together to the places in which they were held, could not pass unperceived. In spite of all precautions, due whether to modesty or to prudence, they would be noticed at any time, and especially at the time of which we are speaking. Since the establishment of the Empire little room had been left for public discussion of politics. Citizens saw all their efforts of this nature confined to the petty deliberations of municipal councils, with occasionally a merely formal provincial assembly thrown in. It was only at the Christian councils that new ideas were broached and serious discussions in common took place on legal and doctrinal questions of real interest, *per quæ et altiora quæque in commune tractantur*.¹ There alone it was that ideas were exchanged, points of doctrine settled, and laws drawn up which afterwards were enforced on the Christian millions, who were also citizens. In fact we may say, without being suspected of paradox, that the councils alone dealt with politics. To use Tertullian's expression, they were the parliaments of Christianity, *ipsa representatio totius nominis Christiani*,² and they were this quite openly, making no effort to conceal either their existence or their character. Yet—and this is the most curious point—they appear to have never been molested by the Roman authorities; with all its animus against individual Christians, Rome hesitated to do anything which might appear at variance with the respect it professed, during imperial times, for the right of association.

I have been able only to sketch rapidly ideas which

¹ Tertullian, *De Jejuniis*, 13.

² *Ibid.*

would deserve a much more detailed discussion, but to say more I should have to go beyond the actual subject we are investigating, and of which we must not lose sight. However, our subject compelled me to give some idea of the intense activity of Church life during the era of the persecutions. The evidence we have adduced suffices to show that the martyrs emerged, not from a dead and stagnant slough of despond, but from a spring overflowing with life and moral health and energy.

LECTURE III

EARLY ANTI-CHRISTIAN LEGISLATION

I

BEFORE plunging into our subject, before considering the testimony of the martyrs, its scope and its value, we must first form some idea of the legal atmosphere in which the martyrs lived.

From the year 64, when Nero's first massacre of the Christians took place, until the year 313, when the final edict of toleration was issued, this atmosphere was hostile, not only to the Christians' freedom of conscience, but also to their personal security and that of their goods. This makes, not as is usually said three centuries of persecution, but two centuries and a half, or, to speak still more accurately, two hundred and forty-nine years. This long period, which began with the last of the Cæsars and witnessed the advent of the Flavian and Antonine dynasties, then the reign of independent emperors, and finally that of the federated sovereigns—who shared in common the title and dignity of emperor, each ruling supreme over his allotted provinces—was not one of uninterrupted persecution; there were lulls in the tempest, and the flag of truce was more than once displayed during the war. If my calculations are right, the Church endured in the first century six years of suffering; in the second, eighty-six; in the third, twenty-four; and thirteen years at the beginning of the fourth. She was thus

persecuted in all during one hundred and twenty-nine years, and was allowed only one hundred and twenty years of comparative peace, of which twenty-eight in the first century, fifteen in the second, and seventy-six in the third.¹ As in such matters too great exactitude is sometimes deceitful, it will be better to sum up our researches by stating that from Nero to Constantine the years of peace and the years of persecution were, roughly speaking, balanced.

But these years of peace, which enabled the Church to repair her losses, and sometimes too gave her children a false sense of future security, were at the best exceedingly precarious. In the first two centuries Christianity was *de jure* proscribed, though *de facto* the number of individual prosecutions depended on the circumstances of time and place. In the third century the fate of the Christians depended mostly on the whim of the emperors who, whilst hurling edicts against the Christians as a body, sometimes graciously consented to withhold the consequences; the emperors of this troubled century followed rather than succeeded each other, and thus it happened that with the political changes introduced by each new usurper, the edict of his predecessor became a dead letter. The fourth century was ushered in with a general persecution, but, owing to the multiple headship of the Roman Empire, the persecution soon became merely local, dwindling rapidly in the provinces of certain sovereigns, but elsewhere gaining strength and becoming more acute and cruel. In this lecture we shall therefore have to consider three different

¹ *Histoire des persécutions pendant les deux premiers siècles*, pp. iii.-iv.

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juridical situations, that which existed during the last thirty-six years of the first and the whole of the second century, that of the third century, and that of the early years of the fourth.

II

The persecutions of the first period, *i.e.* of the first two centuries, appear to me to have begun in this wise. At the beginning, when the Christians began to be distinguished from the Jews, and to be suspected by public opinion of being enemies to society, an exception was made to their prejudice in the universal tolerance which Rome usually extended to all religions, and an edict went out against them. The drift, if not the actual words of this edict may be expressed by a sentence, found in several documents contemporaneous with the prosecution: "Let there be no Christians"; *Christiani non sint*.¹ This first edict is generally ascribed to Nero;² Tertullian styles it *institutum Neronianum*.³ Its pretext seems to have been the burning of Rome, an act which Nero mendaciously attributed to the Christians, amongst whom he made a fearful slaughter in the August of 64.⁴ However some critics, who are disposed to think that Nero took no measures

¹ Boissier, *La lettre de Pline au sujet des chrétiens*, in the *Revue archéologique*, vol. xxxi., 1876, pp. 119, 120.

² Tertullian, *Apol.*, 5.

³ *Id.*, *Ad nat.*, i. 7.

⁴ Tacitus, *Annals.*, xv. 44. We may mention here M. Profumo's opinion (*Le Fonte ed i tempi dello incendio Neroniano*, 1905, pp. 197–357), according to which Nero's persecution broke out in 65, and was occasioned not by the burning of Rome, but by the conspiracy of Piso. In the face of the testimony of Tacitus we cannot consider this opinion probable. See *Revue des questions historiques*, July 1906, pp. 324–325.

against extra-urban Christianity,¹ locate the beginning of the legal persecution somewhat later. They do not think they can find, until the reign of Domitian, when the aristocracy itself began to furnish martyrs, a trace of the "obscure beginnings" (to use Mgr. Duchesne's expression) of the anti-Christian legislation.² But whether they be right or wrong, whether the first general persecution broke out in 95, or thirty years before, it certainly did commence before the end of the first century.

As we are not acquainted with the details of the martyrdoms which took place in this period, as we are indebted for our whole knowledge even of the illustrious victims slain by Domitian to two casual sentences, written one by Dion Cassius and the other by Suetonius³—though they have been confirmed by remarkable archæological discoveries⁴—we must necessarily remain in ignorance of the methods which regulated these first proceedings. But at the commencement of the next century we find a real legislation in force against the Christians. A new jurisprudence has come into being, which at once witnesses to the prior existence of a law and regulates its application.

The first trace of this jurisprudence is found in 112, when Pliny the Younger came as imperial legate to the coasts of the Black Sea, to that province of Bithynia which, as we have already seen, swarmed with Christians.⁵ As soon as he

¹ My opinion is that they are wrong. See *Histoire des persécutions pendant les deux premiers siècles*, 3rd ed., pp. 60–76.

² Duchesne, *Les Origines chrétiennes*, p. 115.

³ Dion Cassius, lxvii. 13; Suetonius, *Domit.*, 10.

⁴ De Rossi, *Bullettino di archeologia Crist.*, 1865, pp. 17–24, 33–47; 1888–1889, pp. 15–16, 103–133, and plates i. and ii.

⁵ See above, p. 26.

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entered this country, busybodies began denouncing Christians to him. In accordance with his usual custom, Pliny wrote to the emperor, who was then Trajan, to ask his advice;¹ the reply is contained in the celebrated rescript. Though it was not apparently Trajan's intention to lay down rules which should apply everywhere or which should govern all proceedings against Christians,² this is what it really came to. The measures recommended in the rescript of 112 formed the rule of both emperors and magistrates during an entire century. They may be summed up as follows: the rulers were not to make inquiries with the aim of discovering the Christians of the province, there was to be no inquisition, but those who were regularly delated as Christians, and refused to deny the impeachment, were to be condemned; those, on the other hand, who could make a declaration that they had never professed Christianity, or that they had severed their connection with it, and who were willing to give effect to their words by sacrificing to the gods, were to be acquitted.³ The first part of this rescript is in accordance with ancient Roman law, but its latter part marks a new departure. It is a fact of common knowledge that, apart from certain exceptional cases, a Roman subject could be prosecuted only when an accuser, at his own risk, saw fit to charge him before the competent tribunal. In the interests of public tranquillity, which would have been disturbed by any-

¹ Pliny, *Ep.*, x. 96.

² Neque enim in universum aliquid quod quasi certam formam habeat, constitui potest.—Trajan's rescript, in Pliny, *Ep.*, x. 96.

³ Conquirendi non sunt; si deferantur et arguantur, puniendi sunt, ita tamen ut qui negaverit se Christianum esse, idque re ipsa manifestum fecerit, id est supplicando diis nostris, quamvis suspectus in præteritum, veniam ex pœnitentia impetret.—*Ibid.*

mous denunciations and summary convictions,¹ the emperor ordains that the regular procedure should be observed with respect to Christians; this was to be their protection both from the prejudice of the populace and from the caprice of the governors. But the latter part of the rescript has quite a different trend, and it resulted in the creation of an entirely exceptional procedure for the examination of Christians; their acquittal or condemnation being made to depend on their reply alone.

The first portion of these rules, the part which concerns anonymous or irregular denunciations, was confirmed by the Emperor Adrian, in 124, in a rescript sent to the proconsul of Asia, Minucius Fundanus,² and also by the Emperor Antoninus, between 147 and 161, in rescripts which he despatched to various cities of Macedonia, Thessaly, and Greece.³ Their second portion was renewed in 177 by Marcus Aurelius in a rescript occasioned by an interview with the legate of the province of Lyons.⁴ It is also found quoted in the examination of a Roman, martyred in the reign of the same emperor.⁵ It was descanted on by St. Justin in

¹ Sine auctore vero propositi libelli, in nullo crimine locum habere debent.—*Ibid.*

² Justin, *I. Apol.*, in fine; Eusebius, *H. E.*, iv. 9; Rufinus, *H. E.*, iv. 9.

³ Melito, in Eusebius, *H. E.*, iv. 26.

⁴ . . . 'Επιστείλαντος γὰρ τοῦ Καίσαρος τοὺς μὲν ἀποτυμπανισθῆναι, εἰ δὲ τινες ἀρνοῖντο. τοὺς ἀπολυθῆναι.—Eus. *H. E.*, v. 1, 47.

⁵ Ignoras quia domini nostri invictissimi principes jusserunt ut qui non negaverint esse Christianos, puniantur; qui vero negaverint, dimittantur?—*Passio S. Cæciliæ*. On that part of St. Cecilia's interrogatory, which appears to be borrowed from an authentic account, see De Rossi, *Roma sotterranea*, vol. ii. pp. xxvi.–xxviii. and 150. Another sentence in the interrogatory seems to allude to the threats contained in Adrian's rescript against any who should launch unfounded accusations.

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his two Apologies, both dating from the same reign. It is presupposed in the trial, under Commodus, of the Roman martyr Apollonius, the authentic text of those Acts has now been fortunately recovered.¹ These instances show that in the second century a jurisprudence based on Trajan's reply to Pliny was in vogue simultaneously in Roman Asia, in the Archipelago, in Rome itself, and in the western provinces of the Empire; Tertullian's protests against it in 197 show that it was still in vogue in Africa at the end of the century. Its comparative humanity, taken conjointly with its regard for custom, quite agrees with the epoch of the Antonine dynasty, the spirit of that line of sovereigns who were as mild in their private character as they were severe in matters of politics.

Justin Martyr with much precision, and Tertullian with no little indignation, both pointed out how utterly illogical the conduct of the authorities was in refusing to hunt out the Christians, thus admitting their harmlessness, and yet punishing them when they were denounced as if they were harmful to the Empire; in punishing those who confessed their religion and yet in acquitting those who abjured it.² But in any case the fact is valuable as it proves that the Christians were prosecuted for their religion alone and not for any crime committed against common law. If Christianity had involved such a crime, had it been considered deleterious to the safety of the State, or emperor, or public morals, then mere renunciation on the part of a

¹ See Callewaert, *Questions de droit concernant le procès du martyr Apollonius*, in the *Revue des questions historiques*, April 1905, pp. 353-375.

² Justin, *I. Apol.*, 4, 7, 8; Tertullian, *Apol.*, 1-5.

Christian would never have been sufficient to justify acquittal; yet this is what constantly happened; did a Christian persevere in his faith he was adjudged guilty, did he abjure it he was pronounced innocent.

A Christian had but to repent of his profession and he entered at once into favour, nor did his former life stand against him: this is Trajan's express injunction. *Quamvis suspectus in præteritum, veniam ex pœnitentia impetret.* The rescript of 177 recalls this to the mind of the magistrates of Lyons, who had exceeded their power by keeping in prison, under the pretext that their former belief had led them to commit offences against morality, certain renegade Christians. As Christians could escape punishment by simply affirming that they had severed their connection with Christianity, it seems absolutely evident that they were prosecuted merely for adhering to Christianity, for the sake of the *nomen Christianum*, and not for any positive misdeeds to which Christianity may have been supposed to conduce. Hence there must have existed a law, more ancient than the rescripts of Marcus Aurelius, Adrian, or Trajan—an ἀρχαῖος νόμος, as Eusebius calls it¹—which forbade any Roman subject to be a Christian; a law of which the rescripts just alluded to merely explain and regulate the application.

I am inclined to believe that the views I have just expressed are in conformity with the truth of history, so far as the scarcity of documents allows us to apprehend it, and that the reasoning by which we have reconstructed the earliest anti-Christian law may do duty for its lost text. Nevertheless several scholars, following Mommsen, have in recent years proposed an entirely different system. In spite of

¹ Eusebius, *H. E.*, v. 21.

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my wish to avoid controversy, the high standing of those who maintain this new view forces me to speak of it.

According to them, the Christians who were put to death in the first two centuries were not condemned in virtue of a law forbidding the profession of Christianity. Christians were not prosecuted for a religious offence, nor for the quasi-religious offence of sacrilege which, according to Roman law, could only be committed by the actual violation of a sacred place. What they were prosecuted for was the crime of *lèse-majesté*. By professing Christianity and by refusing to the emperor the divine worship due to a god, Christians infringed the common law and laid themselves open to proceedings under the *lex majestatis*.

But they also point out that, in practice, proceedings were seldom taken under this law against Christians. In the Roman Empire, where our modern divisions of the judiciary were scarcely known, magistrates, whether Roman prefects or provincial governors, had the right not only of pronouncing condemnation according to the criminal code, their halls of justice were also police-courts, courts of summary jurisdiction, and in virtue of this power, of this *coercitio*, as it was called, a magistrate could summarily convict any seditious person whose acts, words, or opinions were adjudged pernicious. When acting by this "coercitive" power, the magistrate was no longer restrained by the ordinary rules of criminal procedure; he was even free to inflict punishments, unknown to real criminal law. Now it was by the *coercitio*, rather than by common law, that Christians in most cases were arrested and convicted.

This is the reason, it is contended, why no crime

other than that of Christianity was alleged against the Christians. In this, too, is to be found the explanation of the capriciousness and want of rule which is noticeable in the proceedings against the martyrs, and of the horrible variety of tortures to which they were subjected.¹

I hope I have exposed the two theories with sufficient accuracy for my hearers to be in position to make their choice. As for me, my decision was taken long since. To extend the *lex majestatis* to the martyrs seems to me inconsistent with the known text of the law on the subject, none of the cases with which this law deals having any bearing on religion or on the refusal of religious homage.² As to the *coercitio* being put in force against Christians, it seems to me that this is exactly what Trajan forbids when he ordains that governors shall not take the initiative in prosecuting Christians: *conquirendi non sunt*, nor sentence them except when they shall have been regularly delated: *si deferantur et arguantur*.³ But whatever system we choose to adopt, it will make little change in the history of the persecutions of the first two centuries; whether the martyrs were convicted in virtue of a law of Nero's or Domitian's, or whether they were convicted summarily in virtue of the *coercitio* of the

¹ See Mommsen, *Der Religionsfrevel nach römischen Recht*, in *Historische Zeitschrift*, 1890, vol. lxiv. pp. 389-429; *Christianity in the Roman Empire*, in *The Expositor*, 1890, vol. viii.; *Römischen Strafrecht*, Leipzig, 1899.

² See, in the *Digest*, the whole of tit. iv., Book xlviii.

³ For a defence of this view, see Guérin, *Étude sur le fondement juridique des persécutions dirigées contre les chrétiens pendant les deux premiers siècles*, in the *Nouvelle Revue historique de droit français et étranger*, 1895; also the interesting series of articles published between 1902 and 1905 by M. Callewaert in the *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* of Louvain, and in the *Revue des questions historiques*.

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magistrates; whether they were condemned for their belief, or for *lèse majesté*, it remains true that it was directly or indirectly for a religious matter. Hence the exceptional nature of the proceedings against Christians. No witnesses were called for the prosecution, nor did the judge make any effort to extort a confession: on the contrary, the object of the court was invariably to make the prisoner plead "not guilty." If he did so, he was released. Torture was only employed when he refused, but the object of the torture was not to force the prisoner to acknowledge his guilt, but to extort from him an avowal that he is no longer guilty of the crime of Christianity. As apologists remarked, this was a reversal of the common procedure against criminals. The judge, indeed, passes sentence at the termination of the proceedings, but this sentence had actually been dictated by the prisoner, since until the very last moment it rested with him to secure either his condemnation or his acquittal by either affirming or denying himself to be a Christian. In all the proceedings taken against Christians in the second century, and of which we possess an authentic account, in those in which Polycarp, the martyrs of Lyons, St. Justin, Ptolemæus, Apollonius, and the martyrs of Scillium were concerned, the method followed was that indicated above, and in all these instances the sentence on the martyr was made to depend absolutely on his own free-will.

III

This will be the case until the end of the persecutions, but apart from this point, which will never alter and which will continue to make the

martyr a very champion of freedom of conscience, there will remain, in the third century, very little of the jurisprudence established by Trajan's rescript.

Henceforth prosecutions will no longer be based on an ancient law lost in the dusky past ; henceforth each persecution will be proclaimed by an edict. The secret warfare of early times is about to give way to open war, preceded by a formal declaration which will hold good until the weariness of the assailant or a change in the dynasty counsels the policy of a truce. This new phase of the struggle will involve a change of procedure. Magistrates, far from being obliged as formerly to delay proceeding against a Christian until a private prosecutor should be found to undertake the risks of charging him according to the regulation formalities of Roman law, now see themselves called upon to hunt out the faithful, against whom they have to act as public prosecutors. *Conquirendi sunt et puniendi*, is the formula which has taken the place of the older one: *conquirendi non sunt*. The Christians who refuse to abandon their faith will be punished not for disobedience to an ancient law, but as contraveners of a recent edict. But as the aim of the persecutors is less to punish Christians than to lead them away from Christianity, those Christians only who are stubborn will be punished ; renegades, on the other hand, will still continue to enjoy the facilities for escape provided by the older jurisprudence.

The new régime came into force at the very beginning of the century under Septimius Severus, who, though at first friendly, soon became an enemy to the Christians. Being struck by the rapid spread of the Gospel and disquieted by the propaganda

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carried on by the Christians, he forbade—whether by an edict or by a rescript we know not—any pagan to become a convert to Christianity;¹ that is to say, whilst leaving for the time being the older Christians in comparative peace under the sway of the older legislation, he commands that two classes of the faithful should be sought after and punished, viz., the converters and the converts. We have some little knowledge of the results of the action taken by Septimius Severus; at Alexandria, Clement, the best-known instructor of the Christian school, was compelled to flee, and many of his converts were put to death;² at Carthage the little company, comprising Saturus, the catechist, and his disciples, Revocatus, Felicitas, Saturninus, Secundulus, and Vibia Perpetua, suffered a martyrdom of which the account has been preserved in one of the finest and most certain documents of ancient Christian literature.³

After Septimius Severus and his son Caracalla, under whom doubtless the law against conversions still held good, the Christians enjoyed a momentary peace. For different reasons the reigns of the vicious Elagabalus and of the virtuous Alexander Severus were both favourable. The barbarian adventurer, Maximin, who succeeded, recommenced hostilities by banishing the principal heads of the Churches and their most learned priests;⁴ thus a contemporaneous document⁵ tells us that Pope Pontian and Hip-

¹ *Judæos fieri sub gravi pœna vetuit, item etiam de Christianis sanxit.*—Spartian, *Vita Severi*, 17.

² Eusebius, *H. E.*, vi. 1–4.

³ *Passio SS. Perpetuæ et Felicitatis cum sociis earum*, in Ruinart, pp. 85–96.

⁴ Eusebius, *H. E.*, vi. 28.

⁵ The *Liberian Catalogue* of 354 is based on the *Chronicles* of Hippolytus.—Duchesne, *Liber Pontificalis*, vol. i. p. ix.

polytus,¹ a Church doctor, were both deported to Sardinia. But as is usually the case the legal limits were soon overstepped, and many Christians, who did not belong to the category against which Maximin's measures were directed, suffered either at the hand of the pagan mob,² or through the cruelty of certain governors.³ After hostile Maximin came kindly Philip, who may possibly have been a Christian himself. We must wait until the reign of Decius, and the year 250, for the first really universal persecution.

We may stop for a moment to consider this emperor, for his is a striking personality, and he may well serve as a type of the persecutor. Decius was an obstinate conservative, and as such he looked on Christians as reformers whose very existence was a danger to the ancient civilisation, to social as well as to religious order. Such people, he argued, would have to disappear either by intimidation, if they could be made to quail, or by extermination if they remained steadfast. Hence the edict which he issued, but with which we are only acquainted by its simultaneous application in all the provinces of the Empire. All Christians, men, women, and children, villagers as well as denizens of the town, were to be called upon to come on a date assigned and sacrifice to the gods; this was done either by drawing up a list of the Christians of each locality and then demanding their presence at public worship, or more probably by convoking the whole population to the sacrifice, and giving to all present a ticket certifying their attendance. Those who afterwards could not

¹ *Liberian Catalogue.*—*Ibid.*, p. 4.

² Origen, *Comm. series in Matt.*, 28.

³ Letter of St. Firmilian, *Ep.* 75, inter Cyprianicas.

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show such a ticket, signed by the local authorities and certifying that on such and such a day and in such and such a place the bearer¹ had offered a victim, or poured out a libation, or eaten of the meat of animals sacrificed to the gods,² were to be considered as pertinacious and to be charged on this head. Any one escaping by flight was to see his goods confiscated,³ and the punishments to be ordinarily applied were exile and loss of goods,⁴ or death.

The effect of this measure was that all the Christians who were brought up for judgment were veterans who had already carried a first victory; hence the peculiar character of the Decian martyrs. There was much glory to await a judge who could prevail over them, it would have been at any rate a sweet revenge; hence the efforts now made to overcome their constancy were even greater than they had been in the past. No doubt many an examination occupied but a single sitting. This is intelligible since such an examination involved the hearing of no witnesses and the proving of no fact. But often, too, we hear of the examination being adjourned for the prisoners to have time to reflect; in such cases it was renewed at intervals, the culprit being interrogated again and again, either in a court of justice before a magistrate using all his powers of persuasion and rhetoric, or in the torture-chamber

¹ Sometimes it was necessary to describe the bearer of this certificate, as even now in some countries a passport gives a description of its owner. "Aurelius Diogenes, son of Satabus, of the village in the island of Alexander, of about seventy-two years of age, with a scar on the right eyebrow."—Krebs Papyrus; see above, p. 58.

² Cyprian, *De Lapsis*, 2, 3, 8, 9, 10, 15, 24.

³ *Ibid.*, 3; *Ep.*, 69.

⁴ *Id.*, *Ep.*, 13, 18.

where recourse could be had to the most awful means of intimidation and constraint. The torture was applied not so much through morbid love of witnessing suffering, as in the hope of extorting from the poor creature a word which might be understood as signifying his willingness to apostatise. Thus protracted, the proceedings, consisting alternately of interrogatories and long remands spent in prison, extended to weeks or even to months. The length of time spent in these Roman prisons—of which we shall have to draw later on the repulsive picture—must have more than anything else tried the patience of the Christians. “Those who wish to die cannot by any means obtain their death,” wrote St. Cyprian.¹ The proceedings only ended when the judge, utterly weary and seeing the hopelessness of further effort, decided to pronounce sentence. Often he did so with evident regret. In this persecution we do not find, as we do elsewhere, the death penalty dealt broadcast; we find no massacres. Decius does not appear to have been a cruel man, he was a level-headed fanatic whose aim was to destroy Christianity rather than the Christians—to “destroy souls but not bodies,” as St. Jerome curtly phrases it.² His policy was to repair the forces of the State by pressing in the members of the Church. To him and to his like we may aptly apply that saying of Pascal, which no statesman should be able to read without trembling: “Evil is never done so completely and cheerfully as when it is the result of a false moral principle.”³

¹ Cyprian, *Ep.*, 53.

² Jerome, *Vita Pauli eremita*, 3.

³ Pascal, *Pensées* (ed. 1712, p. 178).

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Worked in this wise, the persecution resulted in a good crop of martyrs, but probably in an even larger number of renegades ; but most of these latter fell at the first trial, rather than before the judges, for those only were brought before the tribunals who had remained staunch in their refusal to sacrifice with the rest, and who had consequently been selected as ringleaders. Happily the persecution did not last long. When the storm had blown over, the Church had to busy herself repairing her losses, seeing to her discipline, and rehabilitating those Christians who, having lapsed into paganism, wished to be again admitted into her fold. This she succeeded in doing, though not without internal disruptions, and seven years after Decius's death she was already in condition to face the new persecution which broke out under Valerian.

This persecution differed from the previous one. Instructed by the example of Decius, whose measures had led to a good number of individual secessions, but had not succeeded in shaking the constitution of the Christian commonwealth, Valerian saw how hopeless it was to attempt to overcome the Church in a single conflict, or to catch all the Christians with one sweep of the net. He ventured on new tactics and went about his business piecemeal.

His first edict, published in 257, was directed against the spiritual heads of the Christian communities, their bishops and priests, and against the material substructure of these communities, viz., the legally constituted corporations and burial-societies of which the Church had adopted the form. The command went forth that bishops and priests should, under pain of exile, show homage to the gods, and at the same time the faithful were forbidden, under pain

of death, to resort to their cemeteries or hold meetings for worship. Of the application of this edict we have irrefragable evidence in the account of the first appearance of St. Cyprian before the proconsul of Africa,¹ and that of St. Dionysius of Alexandria before the prefect of Egypt.² The general effect of the edict was slight. Some of the clergy were banished, others were sent to penal servitude, a few were put to death. The Churches were inconvenienced by the closing of the cemeteries and places of assembly attached thereto, but generally speaking Christian life was not interrupted. As we shall see, at this time many rich and powerful folk belonged to the Church, and no doubt they contrived to place at the disposal of their brethren the means necessary to carry on the traditions of Christian worship. Valerian, dissatisfied with the results gained, and despising the common people, who, he foresaw, would be dispersed as soon as they were deprived of their guides and protectors, resolved on a new stroke at the heads of the Christian commonwealth.

A second edict, which was submitted to the Senate for approval, and which probably received the legal form of the *senatus-consultum*, was published in 258. It was aimed principally at the clergy. As the threat of banishment had left them unmoved, it was replaced by the threat of death; every bishop, priest, or deacon who should have refused to sacrifice was to be despatched there and then (*in continenti animadvertentur*). A second article of the edict concerned another class of persons, Christian senators, nobles,

¹ *Acta proconsularia S. Cypriani*, 1-2, in Ruinart, p. 296.

² Letter of St. Dionysius of Alexandria, in Eusebius, *H. E.*, vii. 11, 6-11.

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knights, and Christian ladies of the same rank. If they refuse to join in the worship of idols, their goods will be sequestered; thus degraded, *i.e.* deprived of the requisite census,¹ they will have lost rank and caste, and will be charged like mere plebeians; for men the sentence was to be one of death, for women one of banishment. It thus happened that the Senate found itself called upon to put outside the law several members of its own venerable assembly. When we remember the party spirit which unites noble families, in spite of different political and religious opinions, we begin to see how serious this measure was. In requesting the Senate's approval the emperor was asking for an entirely free hand, he was asking that the Christian nobles should be outlawed by the pagan nobility. It was probably to gain this object, and to avoid dangerous party recriminations, that he was so anxious to gain for his measure the form of the *senatus-consultum*. Yet a third class was aimed at in the latter portion of the edict. This was a class composed of the slaves and freedmen of the imperial household, a class of which the importance is revealed to us by the terms of the edict. These were not to be put to death, for they represented so much property which an economical monarch like Valerian would not willingly have destroyed; but if they refused to obey, their fortunes—sometimes very large—were to be confiscated, and they themselves were to be reduced to the lowest rank among the slaves, *i.e.* that of serfs of the land.²

¹ The word *census* signified the amount of a person's property, a certain minimum of which was requisite for nobility.—[*Trans.*]

² Cyprian, *Ep.*, 80.

The documents of the persecution which followed the promulgation of the edict of 258 inform us that among the higher clergy who were put to death there figured at Rome Pope Sixtus II. and his deacons, Fructuosus and his deacons at Tarragona, Cyprian at Carthage, and other bishops and clerics in Africa. Of the application of the second article of the edict we know less, but among the martyrs of Africa we find the name of a knight, Æmilian, who belonged to a class aimed at by this clause. With regard to the members of the Household we know still less, though it is possible that two Roman martyrs whose names, Hyacinthus and Protus, show their servile condition, may have belonged to this class, but they were put to death at the stake, and were not condemned to labour on the land.¹ We here find a striking instance of the great *lacunæ* which exist in the history of the persecutions. With the persecution of Decius we are fairly well acquainted, though the actual edict has been lost. On the other hand, we have the edicts of Valerian, if not in their original form at least in the detailed summaries which have been preserved by contemporary writers; we can see that the *senatus-consultum* of 258 was second to none in its precision and authoritativeness; we know that it was despatched to every province. And yet of the working of two of its clauses, which must have resulted in many deaths, in widespread destruction, in impoverishing many noble Christian families, and in enriching the public treasury at their expense, in a regular upheaval, and no doubt in many apostasies, of all this we know practically nothing.

¹ *Bull. di archeologia Crist.*, 1894, p. 28.

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In 260 Valerian fell a prisoner in the hands of the Persians, amongst whom he was to end his days with indescribable indignity. This was the end of the persecution, for it did not outlive its author. Like the previous persecutions it left the Church standing, nor had she been sensibly weakened by the blood so generously poured out. For the first time Roman power had attempted to undermine her corporate existence, had endeavoured to destroy the association by forbidding its meetings and confiscating its goods, but on this new ground, however tactfully chosen, Rome had again been foiled. No sooner had Valerian been taken, than his successor, Gallienus, cancelled his edict, and handed back to the bishops the cemeteries and meeting-rooms of which they had been despoiled.¹ This was at the least a semi-official acknowledgment of the Church's right to possess and consequently to exist. At no time did religious peace seem closer, but unfortunately Gallienus was not strong enough to conclude it. The Empire was beginning to fall to pieces, it was on the point of entering on that age of anarchy which history styles the "Age of the Thirty Tyrants." Hence all that the Church gained was a truce which did not even extend all over the Empire, and to which an end was made by a new edict of persecution published by Aurelian in 274.² However this edict did little damage, Aurelian dying a few months after its promulgation.

¹ Eusebius, *H. E.*, vii. 13.

² Lactantius, *De mort. pers.*, 6.

IV

At the beginning of the fourth century Christianity enjoyed such wide freedom that many magistrates and public functionaries openly professed it. Both in East and West churches were being built. The capital of Bithynia, Nicomedia, the residence of the head of the imperial tetrarchy, contained a cathedral of which the high walls commanded the whole city.¹ Diocletian, the elder of the four emperors, at first seemed kindly disposed towards the faithful, but all at once, under the influence brought to bear on him by one of the Cæsars, Maximian Galerius, his feelings changed and the blast of persecution began again. The prelude to the new measures was the expulsion of Christians from the army. At last, in 303, came a new edict ordering the churches to be rased and the Holy Scriptures to be burnt; noble Christians were to lose their titles, and the lesser folk who remained constant in their profession were to be deprived of their freedom.² This edict was to apply all over the Empire, and, as a matter of fact, it was acted upon immediately, though with variations of severity, in most of the provinces; in Nicomedia, an alleged Christian plot caused blood to flow freely. The penalty of death was not pronounced by the edict, but it often fell to the lot of those Christians who, when summoned to deliver up their copies of the Bible, refused to perform an act which they looked upon as sacrilegious.

The commencement of the last persecution was remarkable for a quite extraordinary number of

¹ Lactantius, *De mort. pers.*, 12.

² Eusebius, *H. E.*, iii. 2; *De martyribus Palestinæ*, i.

successive edicts. It seemed as if the authorities, now almost despairing of a final victory, found it necessary to multiply their blows. A second edict was published in 303 commanding that all the Churches' pastors should be cast into jail.¹ A third edict appeared in the same year and ordained that all the imprisoned clergy who should consent to sacrifice should be set at liberty, but that recusants should be punished by the most cruel tortures.² The consequence of this edict was a fresh crop of martyrs.

Three edicts a year seems a large number, and the Christians may have consoled themselves with the thought that they had suddenly become the uppermost preoccupation of imperial statesmen : is it not the same to-day, and may we not see even now partisan governments forgetting every national interest the better to concentrate their energies on a war against the Church ? . . . Nevertheless, the mass of the Christian population was as yet not touched. Only the clergy had been called upon to sully themselves by heathen sacrifice. In 304 a fourth edict was sent out commanding in general terms that "everybody in every place and town should publicly offer sacrifices and libations to the gods."³ This was a renewal of the edict of Decius, and as in that case so in this, persecution broke out everywhere. But henceforth it is a blind, brutal persecution ; we no longer hear of the calm and elaborate proceedings of the time of Decius, when by cunning cajolements a magistrate would strive to win over a single soul. With Diocletian there begins a regular war of extermination in which human blood is not spared. The impression had gained ground that the only way of

¹ Eusebius, *H. E.*, viii. 6, 8.

² *Ibid.*, 6, 10.

³ Eusebius, *De mart. Palestinæ*, 3.

destroying Christianity was to kill the Christians. The difference in the policy followed is the outcome of the altered situation. In the middle of the third century the persecutor still represented the might of the Empire and the majority of the citizens, but now when pagans and Christians are about equal in number, when in many Asiatic provinces it is the latter who are the stronger, paganism has been reduced to the position of a mere party. Now, as we know, the weaker the party in power, the less is its regard for its adversaries, because it feels in their presence a continued threat against its own existence. When fanaticism also enters into its desire to retain office, then its cruelty readily passes the bounds of reason. It was feelings such as these which bred the Reigns of Terror of every period.

However, with Diocletian's abdication and the new division of the Empire, persecution had subsided in the West. But it continued to rage in Eastern Europe, Roman Asia, and Egypt, where the reins of government were held by Galerius and Maximin Daia, two men admirably suited to act in conjunction. In 306 a fifth edict was published in this quarter of the globe, ordering all governors of towns to call upon all the inhabitants by name and compel them to sacrifice.¹ This seems to show that in spite of its explicitness, the edict of 303 had not been applied everywhere. The result was, to use Eusebius's expression, an "indescribable storm."² In some provinces the Christians had to undergo awful torments, but we must believe that even after the edict of 306 many Christians escaped the call to sacrifice, nor is this surprising, seeing that many towns in Asia were almost wholly Christian. In

¹ Eusebius, *De mart. Palestinæ*, 4, 8.

² *Ibid.*

308 a sixth edict was published in the states of Maximin Daia, and probably also in those of Galerius, renewing and even aggravating the previous one. To make idolatrous acts inevitable, it was ordained that all the foodstuffs exposed for sale in the markets should be sprinkled with the water used at the sacrifices; at the doors of the public baths sentinels were to stand to compel every bather to burn incense before the statues of the gods.¹ For such ordinances as these to be inscribed in an edict may seem mere childishness, but they gave rise to redoubled cruelty in both Asia and Egypt during the years 309 and 310.

V

But of a sudden the scene changes; the ink of the last edict was scarcely dry when a persecutor indited the first edict of toleration.

In 311 Galerius lay sick in his palace at Sardica; believing that he was feeling in his body, now already crumbling away, the heavy avenging hand of the God of the Christians, in his terror he commanded that all proceedings against them should cease, and even went so far as to publish in their favour an edict full of the strangest arguments, a document in which moral platitude intermingles with servile fear.² But the tardy remorse of the dying tyrant was unavailing to establish religious peace; the instrument was too unworthy of such a grand work. After having obeyed unwillingly, Maximin, as soon as he had become, by Galerius's death, master of the Asiatic states, recommenced the persecution.

¹ Eusebius, *De mart. Palestinæ*, 9, 2-3.

² Lactantius, *De mort. persecutorum*, 34.

He introduced a new type of persecution. Cunning now took the place of violence. If it be true that hypocrisy is vice's homage to virtue, it is equally true that it is sometimes the acknowledgment by an oppressor of the moral force of his victims. The final repentance of Galerius had led Maximin to realise the strength of the Church which no onslaught had been able to injure, and which had succeeded in gaining over to its side one of its most cruel enemies. Though far too anti-Christian to imitate Galerius in his repentance, Maximin was sufficiently clear-sighted to see the need of a change of tactics. His very hatred opened his eyes, and he began to realise two things. First, that already since many years, in Asia especially, public opinion was no longer on the side of the persecutors; the mass of the people had either become sceptical about the pretended danger which Christians constituted to the Empire, or weary and disgusted with so much useless slaughter; in many cases it had declared itself openly in favour of the persecuted. Secondly, that paganism with its want of unity and cohesion, with no hierarchy and no authority, was, in spite of the might with which it was armed, fighting an unequal fight with a hierarchical Church in which unity of discipline and belief radiated from town to town, and from province to province, from one common centre. Making use of a method which has found many modern imitators, he visited several of the principal towns of his provinces, and procured that addresses should be presented to him in which new measures were asked for against the Christians, to which he replied with suitable unction.¹ Then

¹ Eusebius, *H. E.*, ix. 2, 7, 9, 14, 15; Lactantius, *De mort. pers.*, 36. Aricanda inscription shown in *Le Christianisme et l'Empire romain*, p. 307.

he had recourse to calumny. The depositions of suborned or intimidated witnesses concerning the infamous practices which were indulged in at Christian meeting-places were, by his order, placarded in all the towns and even the villages.¹ He also made use of pamphlets and tracts containing clever libellous attacks on Christ, which he contrived to have distributed all over his provinces.² Perceiving also that much could be done by the schoolmasters, he ordered them to see that anti-Christian tracts were placed in the hands of their scholars, and that they should use them as texts for dictation and as exercises.³ He even went further, and started a reformation of paganism, endeavouring to bestow on it the form of a Church, with a hierarchy consisting of the high priest of each province as metropolitan, and of the high priests of each town as bishops;⁴ he also endeavoured to oblige the inferior pagan clergy to perform regular liturgical services, and to wear a dress by which they could be distinguished from ordinary laymen.⁵ Having thus prepared the way, Maximin quietly, almost stealthily, again began hostilities. First he terrified the faithful and forced them to take to flight, then he seized the most

¹ Eusebius, *H. E.*, ix. 5, 2.

² *Ibid.*, 5, 1.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Harnack (*Die Mission*, p. 348, note 2) points out the extent to which the positions had been reversed. The Church's organisation was modelled, in the second century, on that of Rome, and a hundred years later the State had to set itself to copy the organisation of the Church. But M. Beurlier (*Essai sur le culte rendu aux empereurs romains*, pp. 304–313) has shown that in spite of certain appearances, the administration of Church affairs was not copied from Roman civil government. Hence it is true that Maximin borrowed from the Church, but it is not true that a hundred years previously the Church had borrowed from the State.

⁵ Eusebius, *H. E.*, viii. 14 : ix. 4 ; Lactantius, *De mort. pers.*, 36.

influential bishops and Church doctors and again put them in the dilemma of choosing between conformity and death. These proceedings led to a few being martyred, and doubtless the number of martyrs would have been far greater had not the famine which laid waste the East in 312, Maximin's own inglorious expedition against the Christian kingdom of Armenia, and especially the events then being enacted in the West, come just in time to distract Maximin's attention and deaden his blows.

Though this last effort of paganism was of short duration, I have spoken of it with some detail because Maximin, barbarian though he was by origin and education, showed himself the cleverest, and certainly the most original, among the persecutors; fifty years later even such an eminently able man as Julian the Apostate will see no better method of compassing his ends than the servile imitation of the methods of Maximin. But Maximin's efforts were in vain; whilst he was striving to veer public opinion, and working at the impossible task of changing pagan worships into a religion, a new edict of toleration had been signed in Italy, this time not by a dying hand, but by that of a young and victorious emperor. In the month of March 313, Constantine, in company with his colleague and ally Licinius, published at Milan the famous chart of religious peace which at last gave the Christians the liberty they had all along demanded.¹ The chart was "granted" in appearance only, for had the Church been prostrate and overwhelmed, the emperors would have known better than to give it a helping hand; they turned to her only because she had proved

¹ Lactantius, *De mort. pers.*, 48; Eusebius, *H. E.*, x. 5, 2-15.

herself invincible in the last furious assault led by the pagans. The word "chart" hardly gives an idea of what the edict of Milan really was; in truth it was much more a *concordat*, a mutual understanding, than a mere chart. Though the Church did not figure as a contracting party, yet when Constantine drew up his edict it was of her that he was thinking. Without exceeding the limits of legitimate historical comparison we might compare it with the act of reparation performed by another victorious emperor at the beginning of the last century. In 1801 as in 313, the Church nearly everywhere at once developed new life as soon as she received that toleration postulated equally by her own needs and those of the State, and also demanded by the whole body of public opinion.

The edict of Milan was at first obeyed only in Europe and in the African provinces, but a frontier dispute giving rise almost immediately to a war between Licinius and Maximin, the latter was vanquished. In the month of May the edict was affixed to the walls of Nicomedia, and became law in the East. This was the end of the era of martyrs in the Roman Empire; it will be only momentarily that the fire of persecution will blaze up again ten years later in Licinius's Eastern province, and again after half a century in that last short flash of heathendom, which was the reign of Julian the Apostate.

LECTURE IV

THE CAUSES OF THE PERSECUTION—THE NUMBER OF THE MARTYRS

I

OUR picture of the persecutions would still be unfinished did we not seek to determine their causes. Of these I see three; the prejudice of the populace, that of the statesmen, and the petty jealousies of the sovereigns.

At the very beginning, through being confused with the Jews, the Christians came in for a fair share of the obloquy destined for the former. The common people of Rome and other large cities firmly believed that the Hebrews were atheists, because they worshipped no idols; they also detested the Jews for their refusal to take part in other worships, whether of the gods or of the emperors, for their misanthropy, for their peculiar code of morals, for their exclusiveness in refusing to intermarry with the Gentiles, and even for the very food they ate.¹ Although dispersed throughout the Empire the Jews formed a perfectly distinct nation, but as the very fact of their being dispersed prevented anything like common action, Roman law treated them indulgently, acknowledging their partial autonomy. For a long time the Christians

¹ "Ἀθεοί, μισάνθρωποι.—Apollonius Molon, in Josephus, *Contra Apionem*, ii. 14. Adversus omnes hostile odium, separati epulis, discreti cubilibus . . . alienarum concubitu abstinent.—Tacitus, *Hist.*, v. 5.

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seemed to be but a Jewish sect, but when the Gospel began to make converts in every class of Roman society it soon became evident that, notwithstanding some common ground, the Christians were distinct from the Jews. Christianity was indeed an offspring of Judaism, but it was now quite separate and self-supporting. No doubt the Jews themselves were the first to acquaint the pagans with this fact, for they were pardonably anxious to divert from themselves the too great attention of the populace.

This plan was partially successful, the Christians remained burdened with the unpopularity of the Jews, like them and even more, so they were constantly reproached with atheism¹ and misanthropy.² The same stupid tales which had done service against the Jews were now told against the Christians; both were accused of adoring an Ass's head.³ But the Christians were reckoned by the pagans as inferior even to the Jews, for the Jews at least had sacrifices, whilst the utter atheism of the Christians forbade such offerings.⁴ Hence three races of men came to be distinguished, the Greeks or Gentiles who were the highest, the Jews, and finally the Christians, that lowest caste of all, the *tertium genus*.⁵

In the course of time this lowest type was accused of every kind of crime, appearing in the eyes of the populace scarcely worthy of the title

¹ Justin, *I. Apol.*, 6; *II. Apol.*, 3; Athenagoras, *Legat. pro Christ.*, 3; Letter of the Church of Smyrna, in Eusebius, *H. E.*, iv. 15, 18; Lucian, *Alex.*, 25, 38; Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, 8, 10.

² Tacitus, *Ann.*, xv. 44; Tertullian, *Apol.*, 35, 37; Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, 8, 9, 10.

³ Tacitus, *Hist.*, v. 4; Tertullian, *Ad nat.*, i. 14: *Apol.*, 16; Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, 28.

⁴ Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, 8.

⁵ Tertullian, *Ad nat.*, i. 8, 20; *Scorpiac.*, 10.

of humanity. In a passage of his *Apologia*, Tertullian felt called upon to demonstrate that Christians share the physical constitution of other men, as if such a thing could ever have been questioned.¹ Horrible misdeeds, such as incest, murders, and ritual cannibalism were quite commonly imputed to them.² Dreadful stories went the rounds concerning the abominations which were committed at their places of meeting; under cover of the darkness the most awful mysteries of depravity and cruelty were supposed to be enacted.³ A Christian, too, seemed good for nothing; he was considered unfitted equally for public or private business.⁴ But, his unfitness notwithstanding, the Christian was quite commonly accredited with magic powers and the evil eye,⁵ surely a fearful reproach at a time when such powers were greatly dreaded.⁶ Hideous caricatures of this sort passed as truly representative of the Christians, not only among the rabble, but actually in educated circles, which are at times as credulous as the mob. By the middle of the third century these silly calumnies had seen their day; we may remember the vain efforts of Maximin Daia to bring them again into currency at the beginning of the fourth.⁷

¹ Licet extranei a turbis æstimemur.—Tertullian, *Apol.*, 16.

² Justin, *I. Apol.*, 26, 27; *II. Apol.*, 12; *Dialog. cum Tryph.*, 10; Athenagoras, *Legat. pro Christ.*, 3; Theophilus of Antioch, *Ad Autolyc.*, iii. 4; Letter of the Christians of Lyons and Vienne, in Eusebius, *H. E.*, v. 1; Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, 9, 31.

³ Minucius Felix, *loc. cit.*

⁴ Tacitus, *Ann.*, xiii. 30; *Hist.*, iii. 75; Suetonius, *Domit.*, 15; Tertullian, *Apol.*, 42.

⁵ Superstitio nova et malefica.—Suetonius, *Nero*, 16. Cp. Celsus, in Origen, *Contra Celsum*, i. 7. See Le Blant, *Recherches sur l'accusation de magie dirigée contre les premiers chrétiens*, in *Mémoires de la Société des antiquaires de France*, 1879, vol. xxxi.

⁶ Cp. The *Apologia* of Apuleius, also Paul, *Sentent.*, V. xxiii, 15–17.

⁷ See above, p. 105.

But in the time of Nero, and even in that of Marcus Aurelius and Sulpicius Severus, the common people, most writers, and not a few magistrates were convinced that the profession of Christianity carried all these misdeeds in its train: *per flagitia invisos . . . flagitia cohærentia nomini*.¹ It was on this hateful, stupid belief that Nero took his stand when he accused the Christians—those criminals capable of every crime—of having fired Rome, alleging this as an excuse for the first persecution.

Such savage outbursts, the wholesale denunciations to which they gave rise, and the riots which they sometimes caused, seemed so dangerous to public order that the enlightened emperors of the second century—Trajan by his rescript to the legate of Bithynia, Adrian by his rescript to the proconsul of Asia, Marcus Aurelius by his rescript to the legate of the Lugdunensis, and Antoninus by his rescripts to different towns of Greece—all did their best to restrain within the bounds of law, or to run off into the customary channels of legal procedure the too abundant energy of the anti-Christian zealots. When we seek out the circumstances which occasioned these several rescripts, we find that in each case it was the necessity of moderating a little some inopportune effervescence of ill-will on the part of the populace. In Bithynia it had given rise to wholesale delations;² in Asia and Greece it had resulted in riots;³ at Carthage it had issued in the grossest insults, in abominable caricatures being hawked about the streets, and it had even led to desecration of the sepulchres;⁴ at Lyons it was

¹ Tacitus, *Ann.*, xv., 44; Pliny, *Ep.*, x. 96. ² Pliny, *loc. cit.*

³ Melito, in Eusebius, *H. E.*, iv. 26, 10; Theophilus of Antioch, *Ad Autolycum*, 3.

⁴ Tertullian, *Ad nat.*, i. 14; *Apol.*, 16, 37; *Ad Scap.*, 3.

shown by execrable calumnies and shameless imputations of ritual murder and unnatural crimes;¹ at Rome and Alexandria it led superstitious folk to ascribe to the black art of the Christians all the evils which afflicted the land; if the Tiber overflowed its banks, or if the Nile failed in its annual flood, it was equally due to the machinations of the Christians. And so were all famines, wars, and pestilences;² at Smyrna and at Carthage popular feeling was apt to break loose on public holidays, when suddenly the amphitheatre would ring to the cries, "Down with the Atheists, throw the Christians to the lions."³ In spite of the restraining hand of wise emperors it could not but happen that in many places the magistrates, unable to withstand any longer the popular fury, were forced to commit acts of real persecution against the Christians, and in so doing often exceeded the limits of their authority. Tertullian has drawn a picture of Carthage during the latter years of the second century⁴—that is, before the commencement of the prosecutions by edict, when consequently inquisitions and general condemnations were still forbidden—which shows how easy it was to overstep the protecting hedge of the law, and how frail a rampart the imperial rescripts were against the might of the mob. It must have been an easy matter, too, to mislead the magistrates, at a time when we read of one of the most renowned rhetors of the second

¹ Letter of the Christians of Lyons and Vienne, Eusebius, *H. E.*, v. 1, 14.

² Tertullian, *Ad nat.*, i. 9: *Apol.*, 40; Cyprian, *Ad Demetrian.*, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7.

³ Letter of the Church of Smyrna, in Eusebius, *H. E.*, iv. 15, 26; Tertullian, *Ad nat.*, i. 9: *I. Apol.*, 40; Cyprian, *Ep.*, 55.

⁴ The tract *Ad martyres*, and the two books, *Ad nationes* and *Apologeticus*, date from the year 197 or soon after.

century, Fronto, the friend of Antoninus and tutor of Marcus Aurelius, delivering at Cirta a public discourse, and therein echoing the horrid calumnies against the Christians, in which the morbid fancy of the vulgar was accustomed to indulge.¹

We have thus ascertained the existence of this popular prejudice at the very inception of the persecutions, since it was on it that Nero relied for support when he decreed the first massacre of the Christians; we have witnessed it growing even stronger in the second century, so much so that it often overleaped the dykes which a prudent home government had built to keep it back. It would be interesting to know what the great princes of the Antonine dynasty, Trajan, Adrian, Antoninus, Marcus Aurelius—who extended some sort of protection to the Christians by energetically repressing any recourse to mob law on the part of the pagans—really thought of the Christians in their heart of hearts. We have not the slightest desire to enter into the minds of Nero and Domitian, the Church's enemies and persecutors in the first century; these hearkened to no conscientious scruple, but only to their petty interests and passions; their acts had no ulterior moral motives. But the emperors of the second century were honest and enlightened pagans, whose minds were above vulgar prejudice and above the superstitions of even the educated classes. It would be of great value to us could we discover their innermost opinions.

We already know that in their eyes the Christians, taken as a whole, appeared neither vicious nor dangerous. This is evident since they all upheld the principle that Christians were not to be sought out

¹ Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, 9, 31.

and punished by the magistrate in his quality of public prosecutor, as would have been the case with real criminals or enemies of public order. We know, too, that these emperors disbelieved the enormities which were commonly alleged against Christians, since, after having forbidden their being accused except in regulation form, they enjoined that those who consented to abjure should be incontinently set at liberty. But we also know that they ordained that all who refused to abjure and who persevered in their refusal should be condemned. Hence mere contumacy in such matters was considered a punishable offence. We find here again, even in minds so refined and so imbued with Grecian culture as those of several of the Antonines, the narrow formalism of Roman legality, the Roman supremacy of the letter over the spirit. There existed a law not yet abrogated which had been promulgated in the beginning against the "new superstition," and which forbade any one "to be a Christian." As this law was still in force, it had to be kept; the fact of being a Christian implied nothing particularly criminal, only disobedience, but such contumacy merited reprehension. It was for this that Pliny, with Trajan's approbation, punished the Bithynian Christians; for their "stubbornness and unshakable obstinacy"—*pertinaciam certe et inflexibilem obstinationem*.¹

In the only passage of his *Thoughts* in which he condescends to notice Christians, Marcus Aurelius expresses himself like Pliny. He declares that the Christians deserve to die for their "obstinacy," and that they actually invest death with a kind of "tragic glamour."² Apart from this we have unfor-

¹ Pliny, *Ep.*, x. 96.

² Marcus Aurelius, *Thoughts*, xi. 3.

tunately no record of the personal feelings of the emperors of the second century; we can only conjecture what they must have been from the wording of their rescripts. These documents allow us to infer two things: first, that they did not share the prevalent popular prejudices against the Christians; as to the political prejudice, which in the following century was to lead statesmen to conceive of the Church as a danger and menace to the Empire, it was as yet unknown.

II

This prejudice shows itself first in the efforts of the Emperor Septimius Severus to stop the conversions to Christianity which were becoming much too many for his peace of mind; Septimius Severus already sees a public danger in the unceasing growth of the Church. However, it was only in the middle of the third century, when this impression had gained in strength, that it issued in the cruel edicts of Decius and Valerian.

To explain how an old Roman like Decius, who, according to history, was by no means a wantonly cruel man, could have commanded all Christians to choose between conformity to heathendom and death, and taken such care that none of them should evade the choice; or to explain how Valerian, who at first was so favourable to the Christians that, according to a contemporary account, his palace seemed almost like a church,¹ could have suddenly turned against the Christian nobility, whom he denounced as the ringleaders of a dangerous conspiracy,

¹ Dionysius of Alexandria, letter to Hermammon, in Eusebius, *H. E.*, vii. 10, 3.

nefarie congregationis,¹ and against the Christian corporations, which he looked upon as an *imperium in imperio*, we must believe that in the eyes of these emperors and their counsellors the Church's existence seemed no longer compatible with the security or even with the existence of the Roman Empire.

It is now not easy to retrace the reasoning by which they arrived at this conclusion, but it is evident that in the third century there took place a sort of sifting of the old accusations with which it had been customary to overwhelm the Christians. The good sense of the public discarded the grosser calumnies, but the more subtle ones were retained by the suspicious minds of Roman statesmen and sometimes clothed in a new meaning. The Christians' "lack of energy" was seen exemplified by their shunning public offices, military service, popular festivities, and seeking to live a hidden life. Their "atheism" was demonstrated by their forswearing national worship and the gods, and also by their efforts to draw men away from a religion which was intimately linked with civil life and of which the emperor was at once the supreme pontiff and the visible god, and which, in the growing terror caused by the invasions of the barbarians, seemed more than ever bound up with the fortunes of the Roman Empire. These various reproaches were summed up in the old accusation against the Christians of "hating the human race."

We must explain this saying. If the Christians had been accused of *odium generis humani*, meaning that this inoffensive and charitable sect advocated misanthropy and the hatred of the whole human kind, then the accusation would have overshot its

¹ *Acta proconsularia S. Cypriani*, 4, in Ruinart, p. 218.

mark and would have encountered nothing but ridicule. But the *genus humanum*, in the political language of the Romans, really meant the sum total of their civilisation with all its traditions, customs, gods, and laws, all of which had to be either accepted or rejected. Now the Christians were apt to make distinctions; they would not accept all. Certainly none were more obedient to the laws, more respectful to the magistrates, more subject to the emperor than the Christians. But they were obstinate in refusing to bow before the State-gods, because they considered them false gods; they abstained from taking any part in the public festivals, because these consisted in sacrifices which in their eyes were idolatrous, in shows which they looked upon as licentious, and in sanguinary games which they considered murderous. The Christians formed an heterogeneous element which Roman politics never succeeded in assimilating. They represented the party of freedom in face of a despotic State. Politicians at once declared that the State could abide no such freedom, and as it seemed essentially bound up with the profession of Christianity, it came about that the very title of Christian was considered a crime. It was a purely speculative crime, and a slight one to boot, since it only led to negative results and abstentions on the part of the faithful. Yet it was punished by fearful torments, because, in the opinion of the third-century statesmen, to abstain meant to separate oneself, abstainers being little better than deserters.

At the bottom of all this there was a misunderstanding. But Rome will not see this for yet sixty years, and when she does it will be too late for her to save her fortunes and prosperity. When

we examine the matter at close quarters we see that the whole political side of the reproaches cast on Christians in the times of Decius and Valerian was quite unjust. Many people even among pagans in the third century withdrew themselves from the exercise of public functions; at that time, too, military service had ceased being compulsory. But the Christians had in principle no objection to so giving their services to the State, and often enough they showed this by their conduct. Whenever sufficiently tolerant emperors refrained from requiring of them the performance of any acts contrary to their religion, they were willing to accept the position of magistrates or to serve like others under the standards of the Empire; the few irreconcilables¹ who condemned such conduct were running counter to the teaching of the Church and the directions of its heads. It was only when pagan intolerance had so far its own way that it was impossible to be a magistrate without offering sacrifices, or a soldier without burning incense before the eagles, that the Christians found themselves obliged to retire from public life. The experiment of suppressing tests had been tried under the reigns of the well-disposed monarchs Alexander Severus and Philip, and again several times in the third century, and it always resulted in showing that Christians only abstained on account of those details of Roman customs which were calculated to wound their faith, or seemed to them at variance with morals, but that the Church had never imposed on them the

¹ Among whom must be numbered Tertullian (*De corona militis*; *De idolatria*, 19; *De pallio*, 9; *De resurrectione carnis*, 16), and even Lactantius (*Div. Inst.*, vi. 20). It will be noticed that both are Africans.

systematic desertion of the duties of public life. What the Christians desired was not a solitary life in which they should have no share of the burdens of the community, but simply the freedom of worshipping God according to their conscience, without being obliged to sacrifice to the gods of paganism. As Tertullian said, in his striking language, they were not "Brahmans or Hindoo gymnosophists" wholly given up to contemplation; they were good subjects, nay, good soldiers of Rome.¹

Hence their existence was no menace to the Empire. They did not adore the emperors, but at least they prayed for them. Their dreams were not of a differently constituted Empire; they were not capable of such high flights. Their only hope was to be able to purify and ameliorate the Empire in which they lived by communicating to it some of their own virtue and sweetness.² It is absolutely certain that they never attacked the foundation on which it rested, neither the rights of authority, nor of property, nor of the family. Those many modern historians who consider that Christianity was bound to act as a disintegrant of Roman society are being deceived by what Montaigne calls the "fallacy of words." Their view would indeed be true had Roman society been a theocracy liable to be dissolved by the least religious dissension. It was, no doubt, the view taken by the statesmen of the third century, but there is nothing in history to justify it; it was a prejudice of theorists rather than the

¹ Non sumus Brachmanæ aut Indorum gymnosophistæ . . . Militamus vobiscum.—Tertullian, *Apol.*, 37.

² Compare what Seneca says of the wise man who is driven by circumstances from public life (*De otio*, 3, 4, 5, 32; *De tranquillitate animi*, 5) with the words of Origen concerning the Christians (*Contra Celsum*, viii. 73, 75).

mature judgment of politicians careful to keep in touch with reality.

Moreover, their concern for the purity of Roman religious custom was rather one-sided, for all the while they were persecuting Christianity, they were conniving at the propaganda within the Empire of Eastern forms of worship, such as the cultus of Mithra and that of Cybele, both of which enrolled their adherents with the help of strange rites and mystic initiations reminding us of those of the free-masons;¹ yet the fact that these new-comers were slowly but surely ousting the old gods of Rome seems not to have troubled the rulers one whit; they were quite content with external marks of regard. Apparently they were not able to see that from the point of view of Roman morals and the spirit of Rome, which were really endangered by such exoteric religious systems, there would have been far less peril in tolerating, or even encouraging the spread of Christianity, of which the reasonableness at any rate did not disagree with the genius of the Latin race. The worst offender in this respect was Aurelian. As he died so soon after commencing his persecution, he can scarcely be reckoned as a persecutor, but his deeds and intentions were as stupid and impolitic as they well could be. He had just secured the material unity of the Empire by overcoming the two independent States which had arisen to the East and to the West, and in the hope of re-establishing what modern politicians would term its "moral unity" he promulgated against the Christians an ordinance which an ancient historian could only describe as bloody.²

¹ The expression is Renan's, *Marc Aurèle*, p. 577.

² Lactantius, *De mort. pers.*, 6.

But whilst Aurelian, himself the son of a priestess of Mithra, was combating the enemies of the State religion, he was conspiring against the same religion and superseding it by the Eastern worship of the Sun, whom he proclaimed "Lord of the Roman Empire," and in whose honour he instituted a new pontifical hierarchy.¹ Such a theocracy as this, half-intolerant, half-conciliatory, and in any case so very short-sighted, might conceivably serve as a specious frontage to the ancient religious traditions of Rome, and to the social constitution of the Empire, but as a rampart it was utterly useless.

There is nothing to prove that the Roman Empire could not have subsisted with freedom of conscience; everything points in the contrary direction. The many years in the third century during which the persecution abated sufficiently to allow the Church to take breath—without thereby causing any harm to the Empire—show that it would have been easy to arrive at a *modus vivendi* between the two. In fact these years of peace may be said to have been the normal condition since they comprised three-fourths of the century; the other quarter, formed by the total period of persecution in the third century, represents rather an exceptional phase, a passing reign of disorder. This is forgotten or ignored by modern historians, who repeat one after the other the common sayings about the incompatibility of Christianity with the Roman Empire. The ease with which in 260 Valerian's son, making amends for his father's deeds, restored to the Church her

¹ Eckhel, *Doctr. numm. vet.*, vol. vii. p. 483; Marquardt, *Römische Staatsverwaltung*, vol. iii. pp. 82, 236; *Boll. della commissione archeologica comunale di Roma*, 1887, p. 225.

liberty and her goods, are sufficient evidence that the reasons which led to her spoliation are not to be sought in serious political apprehensions, but merely in sectarian prejudice.

III

But the persecutions had other causes besides prejudice, popular or political, and we should be showing ourselves very ignorant of the history of the Roman emperors, did we assign exclusively to general and impersonal reasons of this sort all the wars which were declared by them against the Church. Moderns are fond of bringing into the light the main lines of history, whilst leaving in the shadow the apparently less important details; but it sometimes happens that in following this artificial method of presenting and explaining events they have to neglect the real truth for the sake of probability. On the contrary, the ancients delighted in details and cherished an especial fondness of ascribing great events to little causes. Among them philosophical historians were scarce; their best historians never quite outgrew a liking for anecdote. However, anecdotes have their use and serve to explain many things by exposing the sometimes very trivial motives which underlie events of great magnitude. Had not Tacitus related the hypocritical tale by which Nero sought to ascribe to the Christians the fire of Rome, we should not know that there was a lie at the very beginning of the persecutions, and that the whole legislation against the Church proceeded from that impure source.

Scarcely less unworthy were the feelings that

dictated the policy of other persecutors. Maximin outlawed the Christians simply through hatred of his predecessor, Alexander Severus, who had protected them.¹ Decius, too, seems to have added to the motives of a higher order which inspired his edict a similar personal aversion for the more tolerant Philip whose throne he had usurped.² Valerian, like Decius, saw an enemy of the State in every member of the Church, but we learn from a contemporary that Valerian was also an occultist, and that superstition, magic arts, and the malignant reports of soothsayers, had much to do with the transformation which made a new persecutor out of an old friend of the Christians.³ Certain incidents of his persecution show that love of lucre had some part in dictating the measures which he took against the Christian corporations, whose fortune he seems to have much exaggerated and whose spoils he greatly desired.⁴

As in the case of Valerian so in that of Diocletian; the last persecution seems to have been determined on by Diocletian only when he was compelled by the replies of the aruspices and the directions of the oracles.⁵ His imperial colleague, Galerius, under

¹ Eusebius, *H. E.*, vi. 28.

² *Ibid.*, 39.

³ Dionysius of Alexandria, letter to Hermammon, in Eusebius, *H. E.*, vii. 10.

⁴ Whatever may be the real value of the *Passion of the Greek Martyrs*, published by De Rossi in vol. iii. of *Roma sotterranea*, pp. 202 and following, the insistence of the emperor when questioning them about their fortune is very characteristic, especially if we compare it with the traditions preserved by St. Ambrose and by Prudentius on the circumstances attending the trial of St. Lawrence, the archdeacon and administrator of the temporalities of the Roman Church. (Ambrose, *Offic.*, ii. 28; Prudentius, *Peri Stephanon*, ii.)

⁵ Lactantius, *De mort. pers.*, 11; Eusebius, *De Vita Const.*, ii. 50, 51.

whose influence he stood, derived his animus against the Christians from his mother, a fanatical old peasant woman, who had once been a priestess.¹

No doubt these details—which were collected by contemporaries and which afford us a glimpse at the stories current at the epoch when the persecutions broke out—are calculated to rob several of the Church's enemies in the third and fourth centuries of some of our esteem for their statesmanship; yet it may be that in giving us a smaller idea of their worth, they give us a better insight into the motives of the persecutors and into the feelings by which they were animated.

IV

When you study the history of the persecutions, one of the questions which occurs immediately is: What was the number of the martyrs?

It is evidently impossible to give the actual, or even an approximately right number, in the utter absence of any statistical documents by which such a number could be calculated. At this fact there is no reason to be surprised, seeing that we are unable to compute the number of the victims of the Reign of Terror, though it lasted but a single year, though only a century separates it from us, though it affected only one country in Europe, and though there are abundant documents concerning it; the names of the most illustrious among those who perished have come down to us, but the immense crowd of people of whom no record has survived cannot be numbered. The same is still more true of the martyrs who spilt their blood in every part of the civilised world, and who continued to do so

¹ Lactantius, *De mort. pers.*, 12.

for two centuries and a half, and who are separated from us by so many hundred years.

The lists kept by the Churches, and concerning which we have testimonies dating from the second and third centuries,¹ were anything but complete; they only commemorated those martyrs whose anniversaries were kept, *i.e.* a comparatively small number of martyrs. What remains of these primitive lists, though incorporated in that vast sixth-century compilation which bears the name of the *Martyrology of St. Jerome*,² is still recognisable, and stands to attest the traditions current in the fourth century both in the East and in the West.³ But it is evident that the names of many even among the most illustrious of those who perished in the earlier persecutions had already then been forgotten. For instance, neither in the *Martyrology of St. Jerome* nor in either text of the *Depositiones* of 354⁴ do we find the name of Pope Telesphorus, to whose martyrdom St. Irenæus testifies,⁵ nor those of St. Justin and his companions, of whose martyrdom we have the authentic *Acts*, nor those of the nobles put to death by Domitian: Clement, Domitilla, Acilius Glabrio,⁶ nor that of Liberalis, another consul, whose rank and martyrdom were attested by an inscription now lost, but of which

¹ Eusebius, *H. E.*, v. 4, 3; Tertullian, *De corona militis*, 13; Cyprian, *Ep.*, 34, 37.

² De Rossi-Duchesne, *Martyrologium Hier.*, extracted from vol. iii. of the *Acta Sanctorum* for November.

³ *Martyr. Hier.*, pp. l, li.; Duchesne, *Les Sources du martyrologe hiéronymien*, pp. 17, 23, 30, 33; De Rossi, *Bullettino di archeologia Crist.*, 1888-1889, pp. 32-39.

⁴ *Kalendarium Romanum: Depositio episcoporum, depositio martyrum*, in Ruinart, pp. 692-693.

⁵ Irenæus, *Adv. hæc.*, ii. 31. Cp. Eusebius, *H. E.*, v. 6.

⁶ See below, p. 159.

a copy made in the seventh century by a pilgrim still survives.¹ Such omissions as these make us realise how quickly the traces were lost even of those whose position must have made their death a matter of public interest and sympathy;² we also understand better how the darkness of the past has swallowed up whole crowds whose names are known to God alone, *quorum nomina Deus scit*, as an old Christian saying runs.

The only ancient writer who has anything to say of the number of the martyrs is Origen. Taken literally, the words used by the Alexandrine Doctor hint that their number was not great: "Those," he says, "who were put to death for the Christian faith were few, and might easily be counted, for God had no wish that the Christian nation should be destroyed."³ However, we cannot infer much from these words. They are found in Origen's work against Celsus, which was written about 249,⁴ in the reign of the tolerant Emperor Philip; the first great persecution proclaimed by edict, that of Decius, did not begin before the following year. Hence Origen alludes only to the results of the earlier persecutions in which the Christians were not publicly persecuted, but were only tried when individually charged before a competent court by a private person ready to bear the costs in the event

¹ De Rossi, *Inscript. Christ. urbis Romæ*, vol. ii. p. 202.

² In the same way the inscriptions brought to light in Africa often deal with martyrs who are not named in the martyrologies, or in the documents on which the martyrologies were based.—Duchesne, *Les Sources du martyrologe hiéronymien*, pp. 36–37.

³ Ὀλίγοι κατὰ χαιροὺς καὶ σφόδρα εὐαρίθμητοι ὑπὲρ τῆς Χριστιανῶν θεοσεβείας τεθνήκασιν, κωλύοντος Θεοῦ τὸ πᾶν ἐκπολεμηθῆναι αὐτῶν ἔθνος.—Origen, *Contra Celsum*, iii. 8.

⁴ Neumann, *Der Römische Staat und die allgemeine Kirche bis auf Diocletian*, pp. 232, 365–373.

of the prisoner's discharge. Under this régime the number of martyrs was naturally far smaller than under the régime which followed. Again, Origen's words must not be pressed, for their sense is manifestly relative. In another passage of the same book, he says that the Christians are very few (*πάνν ὀλίγοι*) in comparison with the total population of the Roman Empire.¹ And yet in several other passages he lays stress on their great number.² Again, in the passage concerning the martyrs, Origen may very well mean that they were few in comparison with the total number of Christians. That this was the case is evident, for had it been otherwise the Christian people would have been in danger of being wiped out, which, as Origen remarks, was a contingency God wished to obviate.

To infer from Origen's words, as Professor Harnack does, that there were few martyrs in the first part of the history of the persecutions, seems to me quite wrong. "Glancing, with the help of Tertullian's works, at Carthage and North Africa," writes the learned German critic, "we see that before the year 180 there had been no martyr in these parts, and that afterwards up to the date of Tertullian's death (after 220) the number of the martyrs, even if we include Numidia and Mauritania, can scarcely have exceeded two dozen."³ Tertullian does indeed state that before 180 "the sword had not been drawn" against the Christians in Roman Africa, where, moreover, the Gospel had as yet not long been preached;⁴ between 180 and the time

¹ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, viii. 69.

² *Ibid.*, i. 57; iii. 9, 15; viii. 68.

³ Harnack, *Die Mission*, p. 345.

⁴ Tertullian (*Ad Scapulam*, 3) says of Vigellius Saturninus, a proconsul of Africa in 180: "Primus hic gladium in nos egit."

when Tertullian ceases to appear (the exact date of his death is unknown), we have only two *Passions* of African martyrs, that of the martyrs of Scillium and that of Perpetua, Felicitas and their companions, and besides these a few isolated names; these added together form the two dozen Africans of whom Professor Harnack speaks. But he forgets that Tertullian, in his *Exhortation to the Martyrs*, in his *Ad Nationes*, and in the *Apologia*, all of 197, speaks of the numerous Christians who are awaiting in prison the hour of their death,¹ of others who have been stoned or burnt by the pagan mob,² of many others who have perished by the sword, by fire, by wild beasts, by scourging,³ and that he instances the case of a Christian woman against whom a certain shameful sentence had been pronounced;⁴ he also forgets that the *Passion of Perpetua*, after having named several Christians who had been burnt alive, or had perished in prison shortly before, refers, without, however, naming them, to "many other martyred brethren"—*multos fratres martyres*.⁵ This shows that Africa at the end of the second century had already produced considerably more than "two dozen" martyrs.

For the first two hundred years of the history of the persecutions, *i.e.* from 64 to 250, from Nero to Decius, we have to bewail a great scarcity of

¹ Tertullian, *Ad Martyres*, 1.

² *Id.*, *Apol.*, 37.

³ *Id.*, *Apol.*, 11, 12, 31, 50. Cp. *Scorp.*, 1; *De fuga in persec.*, 1, 11, 12, 13; *Ad Scapulam*, 4.

⁴ *Id.*, *Apol.*, 50. Cp. *De pudicitia*, i. 1.

⁵ Et cœpimus illic multos fratres cognoscere, sed et martyres.—*Passio S. Perpetuæ*, 13; Ruinart, p. 92. In Perpetua's vision (*ibid.*, 4) mention is made of the "candidati millia multa," who accompany the Shepherd to paradise; by comparing this with the *Apocalypse* (vii. 9) we can see that the "candidati" are martyrs.

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documents; but a few notices borrowed from absolutely certain sources allow us to infer that the number of the martyrs was large. This we have already seen with respect to the African provinces, where we do not find Christians until the latter half of the second century. In the other parts of the Roman world, parts which had been evangelised previous to Africa, a like inference is comparatively easy even for far more remote times. You are acquainted with the passages in the works of Tacitus and Clement, in which they speak of the “great multitude”—*multitudo ingens* (πολὺ πλῆθος)—of Christians who in 64 fell in Nero’s massacre at Rome.¹ With regard to Domitian’s persecution, no memory of similar massacres survives; the word “many” (πολλοί) used by Dion Cassius, when speaking of the Christian members of the nobility who were then put to death,² may not mean very much; on the other hand, the language of the Apostle St. John, whose *Apocalypse* dates from the end of this persecution,³ would be inexplicable unless many Christians had recently shed their blood in Asia. “I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held; and they cried with a loud voice, saying: How long, O Lord (holy and wise), dost Thou not judge and revenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were

¹ Tacitus, *Ann.*, xv. 44; Clement, *Cor.*, 6. There is some probability that the number of Christians slaughtered in August 64 was nine hundred and seventy-eight, this being the number of the martyrs commemorated together with St. Peter and St. Paul on June 29th. One of the manuscripts of the *Martyrology of St. Jerome* connects them with the Via Aurelia, which started at the Vatican, where was Nero’s circus.—*Martyr. Hier.*, p. lxxxiv.

² Dion Cassius, lxxvii. 13.

³ Irenæus, *Adv. hæc.*, v. 30.

given, to every one of them one, and it was said to them that they should rest for a little time, till their fellow-servants and their brethren, who are to be slain, even as they, should be filled up.”¹

There must also have been many martyrs in Asia under the reign of Adrian, for St. Justin, then a student of philosophy, was led to embrace Christianity by the sight of the courage with which they faced death for the sake of Christ.² The letters sent to the same emperor by “numerous” provincial governors, giving expression to their unwillingness to shed so much Christian blood at the bidding of the mob,³ also witness to the great number of the instances in which capital punishment was administered for the crime of Christianity. “Jews and pagans persecute us on every side, they deprive us of our goods, and only spare our life when it is impossible to take it. They behead us, they crucify us, they cast us to the beasts, they fasten us with chains and afflict us with fire and the most horrible tortures. But the more we are afflicted the greater grows the number of the faithful.” So writes St. Justin, a few years later, under the reign of Antoninus Pius.⁴ At Smyrna, in 155, whilst St. Polycarp was awaiting martyrdom, twelve Christians together were exposed to the wild beasts.⁵ St. Justin’s second *Apologia* allows us to see how easy it was under Marcus Aurelius to obtain the death of a Christian. During the trial of the catechist Ptolemæus, who

¹ *Apoc.*, vi. 9–11.

² Justin, *II. Apol.* 12.

³ Melito, in Eusebius, *H. E.*, iv. 26, 10; Eusebius, *Chron. Olymp.*, 226.

⁴ Justin, *Dialog. cum Tryph.*, 110.

⁵ *Martyrium Polycarpi*, 19 (Lightfoot, *St. Ignatius and St. Polycarp*, vol. ii. p. 397; also note 17 on this passage of the letter of the Church of Smyrna).

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had been delated by a man whose wife he had converted, some one in the court who happened to protest against the sentence of death was immediately condemned to the same penalty.¹ It was seldom the case that a Christian was tried alone. When Justin was accused of Christianity by the philosopher Crescens, he made his appearance in the prefect's court in company with six others. The polemist Celsus describes the Christians under Marcus Aurelius as stricken with fear and "hiding themselves because every one is hunting for them to bring them to book."² In Gaul, where Christians were scarce, forty-eight were put to death at the conclusion of the festivals in August 177.³ Either at the end of the second century or at the beginning of the third, that refined apologist, Minucius Felix, alludes, as to a matter of common occurrence, to the martyrdom of women and children.⁴ "Each day," writes Clement of Alexandria—probably at the beginning of the reign of Septimius Severus—"our eyes behold the blood flowing in torrents from the martyrs who are being burnt alive, crucified, or beheaded."⁵

It would be easy to multiply such quotations, but these are sufficient to show that the first two centuries of the persecution were sanguinary enough; they also make us realise how precarious was the position of Christians in those times. Their position was well stated by Renan when he said: "From Nero to Commodus, saving a few short pauses, the Christian may be said to have lived with the

¹ Justin, *II. Apol.*, 2.

² Origen, *Contra Celsum*, viii. 69.

³ De Rossi-Duchesne, *Martyr. Hier.*, pp. lxvii.-lxviii.

⁴ Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, 37.

⁵ Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.*, ii. 125.

prospect of torture ever before him.”¹ Professor Harnack, though he allows far too few victims to the first persecutions, says likewise: “Over every Christian there hung the sword of Damocles; he was conscious of being ever under the sword, even though it fell seldom.”² Their position was similar to that of a suspected person during the Reign of Terror, liable at any time to be discovered or betrayed. There is, however, this difference, that whilst in the latter case condemnation was inevitable, in the case of the ancient Christians a word or a sign would have sufficed to set them free. Hence it required great moral courage, and sometimes true heroism to become or to remain a Christian.³ This is a matter which must not be forgotten by the student of the history of the early persecutions. It may be thus stated: In spite of many unavoidable

¹ Renan, *L'Eglise chrétienne*, p. 316.

² Harnack, *Die Mission*, p. 345.

³ This is admitted by Harnack: “We may thus, in spite of the small number of martyrs, give them their due for the courage which they showed in becoming Christians and living as such. Above all, we must praise the martyr’s conviction who, whilst able to secure his release by a word or sign, preferred death to impunity.”—*Ibid.* But the learned critic adds something with which I cannot agree: “The position of being ever under the sword was one attended by considerable moral dangers. The Christians could complain of being constantly ill-treated, though this was not the case usually; they could consider themselves as models of heroism, yet they were seldom put to the test; they could esteem themselves higher than the powers of the world, and, as a matter of fact, they sometimes put themselves at variance with these powers. Christian literature shows that this curious position of affairs had some evil results.” Christian literature certainly does inform us that there were periods of laxity, but these periods coincided precisely with periods of comparative peace, more especially during the long intervals between the persecutions of the third century. The texts I have brought forward prove that such intervals were rarer and shorter during the preceding century, and that, as Renan puts it, the Christians “from Nero to Commodus had always before them the vision of torture.”

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defections, the number of which cannot be exactly computed, there were many real martyrs, and besides these a still greater number of martyrs by desire, of men who would have been ready to renounce their life rather than their faith.

As you have seen, all do not agree on the number of the martyrs of the first two centuries, but nobody now ventures to deny that the persecutions of the latter half of the third century issued in a large number of victims.

No doubt these persecutions were of short duration, since Decius died a year and a half after having published the edict of 250, and Valerian was captured two years and a half after having signed that of 257. But whilst they lasted they were very violent, and if they resulted in many apostasies, they also produced many martyrs. The often well-authenticated *Passions* which have survived from that period describe martyrdoms taking place all over the Empire. In one of his valuable Epistles, St. Dionysius of Alexandria instances many martyrs who suffered under Decius in the Egyptian metropolis; he also adds that "others in great numbers¹ were slain by the pagans in the towns and villages."² In another epistle he writes: "I will not mention by name those of ours who perished; but know this, men and women, young men and old, old women and girls, soldiers and civilians, people of every class and age, some of them by scourgings, some of them by fire, and others by the sword, have emerged victorious from the conflict and earned the crown of martyrdom."³ A detail will allow us a

¹ ἄλλοι πλείστοι.

² Letter of Dionysius of Alexandria to Fabius of Antioch, in Eusebius, *H. E.*, vi. 42.

³ *Id.*, letter to Demetrius and to Didymus; *ibid.*, vii. 11, 20.

glimpse of the expeditious methods which were sometimes adopted. The *Passion of James and Marianus*, of which the authenticity is not questioned, tells how, in the spring of 259, under Valerian, the executions of the Christians at Cirta continued for several days.¹ On the last day, as many still remained to be despatched, the executioner made them kneel in files on the bank of a river, down which the blood could flow; he then passed between the ranks, cutting off all their heads.² Although he does not mention anything quite so characteristic, St. Cyprian in his letters throws much light on the ferocity of the persecutions in Rome and Africa under Decius and Valerian. The same witness tells us that in the short reign of Gallus, who succeeded Decius, the smouldering fire of persecution burst into flame for a few months, and that this short persecution accounted for many Christians being "despoiled of their possessions, loaded with chains, thrown into prison, and slain by the sword, by fire, or by wild beasts."³ St. Cyprian describes the prefects of the city and of the prætorium of Rome, in 258, as being busy "every day condemning the faithful and seizing their goods."⁴ Another African martyr of the same period, who knew how great was the number of Christians slaughtered for their

¹ Per dies plurimos effusione sanguinis transmittabatur ad Deum numerosa fraternitas.—*Passio SS. Mariani et Jacobi*, 10, in Ruinart, p. 230. See Pio Franchi de' Cavalieri's essay on the authenticity of this *Passion*, in *Studi e Testi*, 3, pp. 15–26.

² *Passio*, 12; Ruinart, p. 231.

³ Cyprian, *Ad Demetrianum*, 12.

⁴ Sed et huic persecutioni quotidie instant præfecti in Urbe, ut si qui sibi oblati fuerint, animadvertantur, et bona eorum fisco vindicentur.—Cyprian, *Ep.*, 80. An inscription speaks of a group of twenty-three martyrs, all buried in the crypt of Lucina, near the tomb of St. Cornelius: *Scs Cerealis et Sallustia cum xxi.* (De Rossi, *Roma sotterranea*, vol. i. p. 276, and plate iv.).

faith, was Montanus. Addressing the people when about to be beheaded, he said, alluding to the heretics, "Let the multitude of the martyrs teach you which is the true Church."¹

With respect to the final persecution, which lasted, with interruptions depending on the districts and on the rulers, from 303 to 313, but which knew no pause whatever in Eastern Europe, Roman Asia, and Egypt, we are well informed, being fortunate enough to possess a narrative written by a contemporary who was also a witness, Eusebius of Cæsarea. Though his narrative deals only with the East, it enables us to gauge the enormous quantity of Christian blood spilt in those ten years of horror. Eusebius occasionally even gives figures; they are indeed too scarce to furnish the elements of general statistics, but they do serve as a very striking testimony to the extent of the massacres.

It is not only true, he says, that the witnesses of Christ may be numbered by thousands,² but human language is unavailing to describe how many martyrs there have been in towns and in the provinces.³ In March 303, at Nicomedia, "a dense crowd"⁴ of Christians were beheaded; others were burnt; "another crowd,"⁵ as the same chronicler expresses it, was thrown into the sea. "Who can judge," continues Eusebius, "how great was the number of martyrs in all the provinces, but par-

¹ Contestans eos ut vel de copia martyrum intelligerent Ecclesiæ veritatem.—*Passio SS. Montani, Lucii*, 14, in Ruinart, p. 238. This *Passion* is authentic and contemporary. See Franchi de' Cavalieri, *Studi e Testi*, 3, pp. 7–14; Harnack, *Chronologie der altchristlichen Litteratur bis Eusebius*, vol. ii. p. 471.

² Μυρίους.—Eusebius, *H. E.*, viii. 4.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Πλήθος ἄθροον μαρτύρων.—Eusebius, *H. E.*, viii. 6, 6.

⁵ Ἄλλο τι πλήθος.—*Ibid.*

ticularly in Africa, in Mauritania, in Thebes, and Egypt?"¹ Entering into detail, he reckons that in Egypt "ten thousand men, not counting women and children," perished in this epoch of the persecution.² In the province of Thebes regular massacres took place: "Sometimes there were ten victims or more, sometimes twenty, sometimes thirty, sometimes sixty, often even a hundred men, women, and children in a single day. . . . I myself, being in the neighbourhood, have seen a great number perish on one and the same day, some by the sword and some by fire; the swords became blunt and lost their edge, some were broken, and the executioners being tired to death were obliged to work by turns."³ Such executions in batches were characteristic of the last persecution. Lactantius, who also lived at the same period, tells us that when many were sentenced together, they were not burnt separately but in companies.⁴ Among those who have attained to fame were the forty soldiers slain together at Sebaste during a short return of persecution under Licinius.⁵ You will recollect the

¹ Eusebius, *H. E.*, viii. 6, 10.

² Μυρίοι τὸν ἀριθμὸν.—*Ibid.*, 8. This expression shows that *μυρίοι* does not mean vaguely "many," "thousands," but "myriad," i.e. ten thousand. Eusebius uses this formula when he wishes to give an exact figure; in another passage, speaking of the execution of thirty-nine martyrs, he says: ἑτέροις ἑνὸς δέουσι τὸν ἀριθμὸν τεσσαράκοντα.—*Ibid.*, viii. 13, 5.

³ *Ibid.*, 9, 3-4. Eusebius elsewhere speaks of forty men beheaded on the same day, in 310, by command of Maximin Daia; *De mart. Pal.*, 13.

⁴ Lactantius, *De mort. pers.*, 15.

⁵ Gregory of Nyssa, *Orat. II. in XL. martyres*. We cannot help mentioning here the massacre of the *legio Thebaea* (see Ruinart, p. 290), which probably took place at the end of the third century. Whatever the number of the soldiers comprised by this division (probably only a *vexillatio*), it must have numbered several hundreds. In spite of the objections which have been made against St.

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case of the Phrygian town, of which the inhabitants were all shut up in the principal church, and perished together in the conflagration.¹

For the West, where the persecution did not last so long, we have less information, but it is difficult to doubt that in Rome many Christians were martyred together.² In the underground cemeteries tombs were to be found bearing a numeral instead of a name, the number given being that of the martyrs whose mingled remains it contained. The poet Prudentius, who paid a visit to the Eternal City at the end of the fourth century, when the tombs of the martyrs were still untouched, and when the meaning of the inscriptions was still understood, writes as follows to one of his friends in Spain: "I saw in the city of Romulus numberless tombs of the saints. No doubt you would like to learn the names inscribed on each, but the nation of the just, slain by wicked fury, when Trojan Rome still worshipped its national gods, was so numerous that I should be hard put to satisfy you. Many of the tombs are eloquent, and tell the name and praises of the martyr, but there are also silent tombs, cased in cold marble and inscribed only with a numeral. By its means we know the number of the nameless bodies which lie there in heaps. I remember hearing that under

Eucherius's narrative, I think that it is substantially correct, though many of its details are inventions. See *La persécution de Dioclétien*, 2nd ed., vol. i. p. 27, and vol. ii. pp. 313-319.

¹ See above, p. 62. Let it not be said that such cruelty is incredible; it was, on the contrary, quite in keeping with Roman usages. In 399, relates the pagan historian Zosimus (v.), seven thousand barbarians, who had taken refuge in a church at Constantinople, were burnt together with the edifice.

² See the traditions assembled by De Rossi, *Roma sotterranea*, vol. ii. pp. 155-161, 176-179, 231.

one stone lay buried the relics of no less than sixty men whose names are known to Christ alone, whose love has made them one.”¹ The martyrs who were thus buried together without it having been possible to preserve their names, had probably been slain in flocks, *gregatim*, as Lactantius says. In the poetic epitaphs with which he adorned the catacombs, Pope Damasus speaks of certain sepulchres as being crammed with martyrs, *Hic congesta jacent* ;² in the cemetery of Thraso he sings the praises of seventy-two Christians slain on the same day.³ Similar groups of anonymous martyrs were found by the pilgrims who came to Rome in the seventh century and inspected the catacombs of which the tombs were as yet unopened and the inscriptions as yet intact ; there was one such group of sixty-two martyrs and another of three hundred and sixty-two in the cemeteries on the new Via Salara ;⁴ there was one of four, another of thirty, and yet another of forty in the cemetery of the Via Labicana ;⁵ one of eighty in the cemetery on the Appian Way.⁶ These figures stand for Rome alone, but we must not forget that Rome was by no means the town most noted for Christian massacres ; especially in the last persecution they were far more numerous in the East.

If we add to the number of the martyrs who died for their testimony that of the confessors of the faith who underwent condemnations, such as

¹ Prudentius, *Peri Stephanon*, xi. 1–16.

² De Rossi, *Roma sotterranea*, vol. ii. pp. 22–24, and plates i., ia., ii.

³ De Rossi, *Inscr. Christ. urbis Romæ*, vol. ii. pp. 84, 87, 101, 121.

⁴ *Epitome de locis SS. martyrum*, in De Rossi, *Roma sotterranea*, vol. i. p. 176.

⁵ *Itinerarium ex unico codice Salisburgensi*, *ibid.*, p. 178.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 180 ; the *Epitome* has 800.

banishment or penal servitude, without however being put to death, *martyres sine sanguine*,¹ then we shall get some idea of the immensity of the multitude of the witnesses of Christ. Of this latter class I shall say nothing to-day; we shall meet it again when we come to study the sufferings of the martyrs. In the early centuries such was the importance of the prisoners, of the exiles, and of the convicts labouring in penal settlements that the whole Church both in the East and in the West prayed for them. A fragment of this liturgical tradition has survived in the Milanese ritual, which even now contains a prayer *pro fratribus in carceribus, in vinculis, in metallis, in exilio constitutis*; ² this is a recollection of the persecutions.

I have deliberately excluded from my summary every legendary or doubtful text, though documents of this kind sometimes contain reminiscences of real tradition. I purposely chose to use only documents whose truth and authenticity are above suspicion. If I am not mistaken they are quite sufficient to show that the opinion which maintains the existence of a great number of martyrs is the exact translation of historic truth.

¹ Ansaldi, *De martyribus sine sanguine*; Venice, 1757.

² Quoted by De Rossi, *Bull. di archeol. Crist.*, 1868, p. 22.

LECTURE V

THE SOCIAL POSITION OF THE MARTYRS

I

To seek the various positions which the martyrs occupied is equivalent to seeking how far Christianity had permeated the different classes of society.

We should have expected that Christianity, like other religions, would have quietly settled down in the land of its birth, or else have gradually gained ground, spreading little by little to neighbouring lands; at any rate, it ought to have remained the property of one nation, of one race united by colour, language, tradition, and modes of thought. But, as a matter of fact, this was not the case, and history teaches us that Christianity spread, almost at once, over every part of the ancient world. We should also have expected it to have propagated itself, after the fashion of political views, among people of like social condition, with similar aspirations, similar jealousies, and similar grievances. There are still nowadays a good many people who believe that such was the actual course taken by events. They fancy that the Gospel at first appealed only to the minor folk, and that it was only much later that, by dint of perseverance, it succeeded in reaching the higher strata of society. Following a tendency innate in all of us, they bring to the study of distant times their own modern ways of looking at things, and conceiving of primitive Christianity as a demo-

cratic religion, they imagine that it was only when it became unfaithful to its origin and to its principles that it proceeded to seek adherents among the rich and powerful, and among those whom various considerations impelled to desire the stability of a regular and well-ordered society. But nothing could be less true to fact than such an idea. Scarcely had it been born than Christianity knocked over the barriers formed by race, language, and education. It likewise found disciples and martyrs on every rung of the social ladder, a prodigy scarcely less remarkable than its geographical expansion. All this was visibly occurring even in the time of the Apostles, who preached to all men without distinction of person, and whose doctrine was embraced by converts in every position.

The Apostles were men of low estate, who lived by the work of their hands. It would have been natural enough had their sympathy gone out, in the first instance, to those who shared their habits and language, and whose occupations resembled theirs. Yet you would be mistaken did you suppose that they sought, or at any rate found, their first disciples only among the poor and the uneducated. The little communistic experiment tried by the Christians of Jerusalem is sufficient to prove the contrary,¹ for an association, some of whose members could put into a common fund the value of their lands and houses so that their brethren's poverty might be relieved, could not be exclusively formed of poor. The truth is that though among the Jews, as everywhere else, there were rich and poor, and also the pride of wealth and the reproach of poverty, yet social differences were less acute than elsewhere. On

¹ *Acts of the Apostles* iv. 34; v. 1-10.

the one hand, manual labour had retained among the Hebrews a place of honour which it reached scarcely anywhere else ; on the other, common interest in religious matters united without distinction all worshippers of the Lord. Hence it was that a simple working man, a carpenter, a fisherman, or a weaver, was free to preach in the synagogue provided that he could expound the Scriptures and discourse on God and the expectations of Israel. The feeling of brotherhood, that only bond of a vanquished and scattered nation, compensated for the isolation of the Jews living in the midst of pagans, and also served to level still more their ranks. We can explain thus how, in spite of their low extraction, the first missionaries of the Gospel, being Jews themselves, and seeking in the first place the conversion of their fellow-countrymen, were able to speak unabashed to people of every condition, and were not obliged to seek their converts in the lowest classes of society.

But this explanation is not sufficient to explain the whole course taken by the Gospel. The Gospel, no doubt, began by following the roads prepared by emigrant Jews ; the Jewish colonies existing in every city proved convenient ground in which to sow the seed of the Word of God. The missionaries from Judea lived, like St. Paul, in the homes of their countrymen ; they frequented the workmen's quarters in which the Jews resided ; they preached in the synagogues, where sometimes they were kindly received, but from which they were occasionally violently ejected. The Romans, looking on, at first discerned nothing more in the Christian movement than a Jewish dispute, a quarrel about words and views, a schism in which the magistrates had no right to interfere so

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long as it did not disturb the public peace.¹ But they soon perceived that under the surface something deeper was going on, something utterly transcending the ordinary religious consciousness of the Jews and the social constitution of the communities of the Dispersion. The universalism of Christianity soon made itself felt, and extended its influence over souls of every class. Neither Jewish equality, nor Jewish brotherhood, nor the common feeling which unites the lower classes, can explain the brilliant victories achieved among the pagan nobility by an old fisherman like St. Peter or by a poor weaver like St. Paul. The first convert made by Peter, and whose name is known, was an officer of the Roman army.² When Paul and Barnabas were preaching through Cyprus, the Proconsul Sergius Paulus "sending for Barnabas and Saul, desired to hear the Word of God."³ The same chronicler also tells us that "the proconsul, when he had seen what was done, believed."⁴ At Thessalonica, Paul converted "of noble women not a few."⁵ At Berea, also, he brought to the faith many women of like rank.⁶ At Corinth, he gained over Erastus, the treasurer of the city.⁷ At Athens, Paul preached on the hill of the Areopagus, and among the Athenians who attached themselves to him there was a member of that famous tribunal.⁸ At Ephesus, he struck up a friendship with highly placed citizens, who either were then, or had been, "Asiarchs," *i.e.* high-priests in the province of Asia.⁹ At its first bound the Gospel has passed beyond the Jewish horizon and reached the summits of ancient

¹ *Acts* xviii. 14, 15; xxiv. 1-29; xxv. 18, 19.

² *Acts* x.

³ *Acts* xiii. 7.

⁴ *Acts* xiii. 12.

⁵ *Acts* xvii. 4.

⁶ *Acts* xvii. 12.

⁷ St. Paul, *Romans* xvi. 23.

⁸ *Acts* xvii. 34.

⁹ *Acts* xix. 31.

society. What we know of the history of the Apostles, and what remains of their letters, show that every kind of element, Gentile and Jew, poor and wealthy, had already been garnered into the Christian Church.

It is these social elements that we shall now consider, in detail, one after the other.

II

Let us begin with the lower class, that class of which the evangelisation was alleged by Christ as one of the most striking proofs of His divinity, as a moral miracle equal to the greatest miracles in the physical order: *pauperes evangelizantur*.¹ These poor were of two kinds, slaves and the humbler sort of freemen.

Slaves formed a very considerable portion of the population of the ancient world, and particularly of the Roman world. In the absence of statistical documents we cannot give their actual number, but everything points to its having been very great. It was much larger than that of our modern domestic servants, since besides attending to the duties of the home, which in a period of such great luxury and self-indulgence must have required many hands, the slaves had to perform most of the industrial work now done by labourers. It must never be lost to sight that the slave had not the status of a servant. He was primarily a piece of goods, a productive capital, which was expected to yield interest, and from which value was extracted by a system of overwork which had no limits other than the conscience or the prudence

¹ Luke vii. 22.

of the master. In the inventories of ancient fortunes the slaves sometimes occupied an important place. A single person might possess hundreds or even thousands.¹ We can well imagine the immense multitude of slaves who lived in the country districts, in which they performed the work of farm-labourers, and in the towns, in which they had to do not only the work of servants but also most of what is now done by the working-man.

It was a very mixed population, which to a certain extent increased by births, but much more by importation. It comprised people from every country, mostly prisoners of war bought wholesale in the markets of the frontiers, and then retailed in the more central cities of the Empire. The slaves thus violently uprooted and transported to foreign climes, brought with them the vices of their native land, and in that servile promiscuity, which according to Homer deprives man of half his value, they soon lost whatever virtue they once possessed. In the pagan world, in which the goddess of Pity had an altar at Athens, but nowhere found worshippers, nobody concerned himself with these wretches. Some masters were humane, many were not; some philosophers even went as far as to declare slavery contrary to the natural law,² but certainly it never occurred to any of them to preach courage and consolation to the slaves. These latter would have remained in utter moral neglect had Christianity not come to their rescue.

Slaves were to be found among the very earliest

¹ See my work on *Les esclaves chrétiens*, 4th ed., p. 8.

² See Wallon, *Hist. de l'esclavage dans l'antiquité*, vol. III. iii., for the mild nature of these remonstrances on the part of philosophers. See also in my *Études d'histoire et d'archéologie*, the chapter, *La Philosophie antique et l'esclavage*.

Christians. In the Churches founded by St. Paul they were already numerous. In several of his Epistles he instructs and exhorts them. He is particularly anxious to replace their servile fear by a sense of duty hitherto unheard of. He admonishes them to elevate their obedience and to transform it into an act of reasonable submission to the Will of God.¹ He implants in them the sense of Christian honour, asking them so to conduct themselves that their example may cause their pagan masters to respect the name and the doctrine of the Lord.² At the same time he does his best to ameliorate their condition, requesting those Christians who own slaves to treat them as their brethren.³ He especially labours to teach both one and the other the great lesson of Christian equality, declaring that they are really all brothers, equal in the sight of God and members of one body which is Christ.⁴

It is easy to understand how attractive such doctrines must have appeared to these despised and suffering creatures. They joined the Church in crowds. Amidst their novel surroundings they learnt, says Origen, "to take on the soul of freemen."⁵ In other words, the Church not having then the means of setting free the slaves, laboured to free them from the vices attaching to their position, cleansing their soiled souls, guaranteeing them in the society of the faithful that equality which was denied them by civil society, and making them partakers of all the benefits of evangelical brotherhood. This equality and this brotherhood

¹ St. Paul, *Eph.* vi. 5-8; *Col.* iii. 22; *Titus* ii. 9.

² 1 *Tim.* vi. 1.

³ *Eph.* vi. 9; *Col.* iv. 1.

⁴ *Eph.* vi. 9; *Col.* iv. 1; *Gal.* iii. 28.

⁵ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, iii. 24.

were not merely promises, events to be realised in the future; in the measure allowed by human frailty they were already practised. The Christian slaves partook of the sacraments just like Christian free-men, they had an equal place in public worship, they were married according to the law of God. Pagan slaves were gently drawn by the faith. "The faithful"—wrote a second-century apologist—"by kindness, persuade their slaves, both men and women, to become Christians together with their children, and when they succeed they call all of them, without distinction, brethren."¹ It was sometimes necessary to admonish slaves, whom this unwonted kind treatment had rendered haughty or obstreperous. "They that have believing masters," says St. Paul, "let them not despise them, because they are brethren, but serve them the rather, because they are faithful and beloved, who are partakers of the benefit."² And St. Ignatius on the road to martyrdom, writing to St. Polycarp, says: "Despise not the slaves, but neither let them be puffed up with pride."³ We thus see how, while the Church was striving to better the condition of these pariahs of the ancient world, and preparing them for their future liberation, she had to keep a watchful eye on the change which she was abetting. Had she been less vigilant, pride and the spirit of revolt might easily have taken the place of the vices she was striving to heal.

This motherly care on the part of the Church was well repaid. Among the slaves were to be found admirable Christians; many of them carried on a real apostolate in the houses to which they

¹ Aristides, *Apol.*, 15.

² 1 *Tim.* vi. 2.

³ Ignatius, *Ad Polyc.*, 4.

were attached, even converting their masters to Christianity.¹ Celsus, the polemist, was very sore about it.² But this was not all, some slaves actually mounted to the first rank in the Church's hierarchy. If it be true that Hermas, the well-known author of the *Shepherd*, was a slave by birth, then his brother Pius,³ who sat in the chair of Peter, in the middle of the second century, must also have been originally a slave. What is probable of Pius is certain of Callixtus, who, first a banker's slave, became, at the beginning of the third century, archdeacon of Rome, and finally succeeded Pope Zephyrinus.⁴ A still more striking triumph of Christian equality, which is at the same time a testimony to her wonderful influence over souls, is the fact that many convert slaves became martyrs. When men and women who had been accustomed to obey every command and every whim of their masters, living constantly in fear of stripes, refused to deny Christ and cheerfully submitted to the most cruel tortures⁵ rather than relinquish the religion they had chosen, there was there an assertion of moral freedom which astounded the pagans. A girl was accused before the judge of being a Christian. "What is thy name?" he asked. "Why seek my name? I am a Christian," she replied. "Is this man thy master?" "He is master of my body indeed, but the Master of my soul is God." "Why dost thou not adore

¹ See in my work, *Les esclaves chrétiens*, the chapter headed, *L'apostolat domestique* (4th ed., pp. 300-320).

² Origen, *Contra Celsum*, iii. 44, 55.

³ Canon of Muratori.

⁴ *Philosophumena*, ix. 21.

⁵ Not only to those ordained by the magistrates, but also to the more or less arbitrary domestic punishments. Quod ab dominis se servi cruciatibus adfici quibus statuerint malunt . . . quam fidem rumpere Christianam.—Arnobius, *Adv. nat.*, ii. 5.

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the gods which thy master adores?" "Because I am a Christian; I do not adore mute idols, I adore the living, true, and eternal God." Such replies as these upset all the old notions of morality. The fragment we have just listened to comes from the *Acts of St. Ariadne*, a martyr of Phrygia;¹ but other slaves, such as Blandina at Lyons,² Evelpistus at Rome,³ Potamiana at Alexandria,⁴ Felicitas at Carthage,⁵ Sabina at Smyrna,⁶ Vitalis at Bologna,⁷ Porphyrius at Cæsarea,⁸ and many others, in different words, but with a like consciousness of moral freedom, ventured to withstand their persecutors to the face. "Who art thou?" Evelpistus was asked by the prefect of Rome. "Cæsar's slave, but also a Christian, having received Christ's freedom, and by His grace a like hope with other Christians."⁹ Men who could speak in this wise, wore the livery of servitude, but in reality they had long ceased being slaves.

The martyr whose reply we have just heard was "Cæsar's slave." He was one of that category of slaves and freedmen who were immediately attached to the service of the emperor. This category comprised people of all ranks: some were menials engaged in domestic duty or in the hard work of the labourers; others acted as agents, bailiffs, or stewards of the crown-lands, or of the emperor's

¹ Pio Franchi de' Cavalieri, *Note agiografiche*, in *Studi e Testi*, 8, p. 18.

² Letter of the Christians of Lyons and Vienne, in Eusebius, *H. E.*, v. 1.

³ *Acta S. Justinii*.

⁴ Eusebius, *H. E.*, vi. 5.

⁵ *Passio SS. Perpetuæ et Felicitatis*.

⁶ *Passio S. Pionii et sociorum ejus*.

⁷ St. Ambrose, *De exhortatione virginitatis*, 1-2.

⁸ Eusebius, *De mart. Palestina*, 11, 19.

⁹ *Acta S. Justinii*, 4, in Ruinart, p. 44.

personal possessions; others were employed as clerks in the various government offices, or even held official posts in the provincial magistracy.¹ Thus, whilst some were exceedingly wretched, others were extremely rich. Josephus tells us that of one of Tiberius's freedmen Herod Agrippa borrowed "a million of drachmæ."² But even when gilded, slavery remained a vile servitude; the slave of Cæsar was subject to every whim of the despot he served; the freedman still remained bound to him by stringent obligations. From earliest times Christians were to be found on these different floors of the imperial Household. St. Paul, in an Epistle written at Rome between 62 and 64, sends to the faithful of a town of Macedonia the greetings of the saints "that are of Cæsar's household,"³ *i.e.* of the Christian slaves of the palace.

It is probable that the internal arrangements of the imperial Household changed but little with the accession of new Cæsars; each sovereign, finding that the various duties in the palace were already being efficiently performed, retained the old slaves, whilst adding a few of his own choice. Thus it came about that the torch of truth, having once been lighted in the time of Nero, was never afterwards extinguished, being handed down from reign to reign, and from dynasty to dynasty, by a kind of hereditary tradition. In spite of the efforts occasionally made to wipe them out by slaughter, there were always some Christians in the Household.

¹ A case is known in Phrygia where an imperial slave was entrusted by the proconsul with the duties of an irenarch.—Chapot, *La province romaine proconsulaire d'Asie*, p. 261.

² Josephus, *Antiq.*, xviii. 6.

³ Ἀσπάζονται ὑμᾶς πάντες οἱ ἅγιοι, μάλιστα δὲ οἱ ἐκ τῆς Καίσαρος οἰκίας.—*Phil.* iv. 22.

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They were sometimes numerous and occasionally enjoyed great favours. There were some in the time of Marcus Aurelius,¹ and many more in that of Commodus;² there were some under Septimius Severus,³ whose son Caracalla was attended by a Christian nurse, *lacte Christiano educatus*.⁴ About this time St. Irenæus speaks of those faithful who have charge, at the court, of the emperor's furniture.⁵ Probably this, too, was the time of that page-boy, Alexamenos, the faithful one, whom a rough sketch on the walls of the Palatine *pædagogium* depicts worshipping a crucifix with the Ass's head.⁶ Such slaves were also plentiful in the palace of Alexander Severus, who much favoured the Christians,⁷ and in that of the Emperor Philip. About this time a singular abuse in Africa met the condemnation of St. Cyprian. It consisted in bishops acting as agents on the imperial domains.⁸ At the commencement of Valerian's reign, the imperial palace was so full of Christians that it seemed like a church.⁹ In the first year of Diocletian the Christian slaves of the Household were very numerous and influential; they were put to death in crowds at the beginning of the persecution.¹⁰ Some of these slaves had vast fortunes; but whatever the esteem in which they were held, they remained ever liable to be degraded

¹ *Acta S. Justini*, 4.

² *Philosophumena*, ix. 11; De Rossi, *Inscr. Christ. urbis Romæ*, vol. i. No. 5, p. 9.

³ *Bull. di archeologia Cristiana*, 1863, p. 83.

⁴ Tertullian, *Ad Scapulam*, 4.

⁵ Irenæus, *Hær.*, iv. 30.

⁶ *Bull. di archeologia Cristiana*, 1863, p. 72; 1867, p. 75.

⁷ Eusebius, *H. E.*, vi. 28.

⁸ Cyprian, *De lapsis*, 6.

⁹ Dionysius of Alexandria, letter to Hermammon, in Eusebius, *H. E.*, vii. 10.

¹⁰ Eusebius, *H. E.*, viii. 6; Lactantius, *De mort. pers.*, 15.

on account of their belief. You will remember that an edict of 258 laid it down that every one of them who made profession of Christianity was to have his goods seized and be sent to till the soil in the imperial farms.¹

III

The position of the humbler classes of freemen and artisans was scarcely better than that of the slaves. They were not reckoned "respectable people," *honestiores*, an expression applied only to the aristocracy, and to the higher classes; by lawyers they were termed *humiliores*, *tenuiores*,² and when it became a question of punishing them for some crime, the difference in the social position was instantly shown by a difference in the punishment.³ Their only compensation for all this inequality was their participation in the gifts of food periodically doled out by the State to make up what would otherwise have been insufficient to enable them to keep body and soul together, seeing how scanty the earnings were which they secured from their trades. Many of them did no work at all, and subsisted entirely on this pittance of the State; for their benefit and amusement free shows were instituted. For the honour of our human nature it must be said that the Roman plebeians were not all of this type. Some there were who felt only

¹ Cyprian, *Ep.*, 80. See above, p. 98.

² Duruy, *Formation historique des deux classes de citoyens romains désignés dans les Pandectes sous les noms d' "honestiores" et d' "humiliores,"* in *Histoire des Romains*, vol. vi., Appendix I. p. 629; Camille Jullian, art. *Honestiores*, in *Dict. des antiquités*, fasc. xxiii. p. 235.

³ *Digest*, XLVIII., xix. 9, § 11; 28, § 2; 11; 38, § 8; Paul, *Sentent.*, V., xx. 2, 5; xxii. 2; xxiii. 1, 4, 13, 14, 16, 18, 19; xxv. 1, 2, 7, 8, 10, 12; xxvi. 1, 3; xxix. 1; xxx. 1.

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disgust for these mere animal pleasures, who were dissatisfied with this false and wicked order of things ; such men were ready to embrace the message brought by the Church. In the new commonwealth they found all the needs of their soul abundantly provided for ; they also found the Church willing to co-operate in assuring them means of material sustenance, for condemning, as she did, all forms of idleness,¹ she tried to find work for her children.²

When St. Paul, about the year 58, wrote to the faithful of Rome, he concluded his Epistle with a string of greetings to his old acquaintances. "They that are of Aristobulus's household," and they of "Narcissus's household" were slaves converted to the faith. Judging by their names, most of the others were either slaves or people of low estate.³ Tacitus's well-known account of the martyrs of 64 shows that it was this class which then formed the larger part of the Christian population of Rome. You know that in the summer of 64 when, of the fourteen districts which composed Rome, ten were destroyed in a conflagration, ascribed by Tacitus either to accident or to Nero's malice,⁴ Nero made an effort to escape the suspicions of the people by accusing the Christians of incendiarism. I shall not now relate again that story so full of pathos in which the great historian describes the agony of the Christians made the sport of the crowd, some being dressed in the skins of beasts and chased by packs of hounds, others being swathed in tarred bandages and fixed to stakes to serve as torches in the night.⁵ But

¹ St. Paul, 1 *Thess.* iv. 11 ; 2 *Thess.* iii. 10, 11, 12.

² See *Didache*, 12 ; *Const. Apost.*, iv. 9.

³ St. Paul, *Rom.* xvi.

⁴ Tacitus, *Ann.*, xv. 38-40.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 44.

I will ask you to observe that Tacitus's account implies that only Christians of the lower orders were so punished. The tortures used were "such as added insult to cruelty" *pereuntibus addita ludibria*; they bear no resemblance to the manner of death reserved for people of the higher classes. One punishment which, according to Pope St. Clement, was at that time occasionally administered to Christian women—it consisted in their being called upon to play an outrageous part in a mythological comedy, in the last act of which their throats were cut¹—could only have been inflicted on people who, according to the contemptuous phrase of the Roman lawyer, were of no account, *nullum caput habent*, i.e. slaves or plebeians of the lowest description. There is everything to show that the first martyrs, whose blood and ashes have hallowed for ever the Vatican hill, were Christians of low standing, and that it was these principally who formed at Rome the "immense multitude" spoken of by Tacitus.

There are also many other witnesses to the great number of humble people in the primitive Church. The various Acts of the Martyrs have treasured the names of many such: the shepherds Themistocles² and Mamas,³ the innkeeper Theodotus,⁴ the gardener Sineros,⁵ the four stone-masons of Pannonia,⁶ Phile-

¹ Clement, *Cor.* 6. See the explanation of this passage in my *Histoire des persécutions pendant les deux premiers siècles*, 3rd edition, pp. 52-53.

² *Menæa magna Græcorum*, 1528, December, p. 358.

³ St. Basil, *Hom.*, xxiii.; St. Gregory Nazianzen, *Oratio* lxiv.

⁴ *Passio S. Theodoti Ancyranæ*, in Ruinart, p. 354. On this *Passion* consult the observations of Father Delehaye, *Analecta Bollandiana*, vol. xxii., 1903, pp. 320-328, and those of Pio Franchi de' Cavalieri, in *Nuovo Bull. di archeol. Crist.*, 1904, pp. 27-37.

⁵ *Passio S. Sereni*, in Ruinart, p. 546.

⁶ *Passio SS. Quatuor coronatorum*. Cp. *Bull. di archeol. Crist.*, 1879, pp. 45-70.

mon, the flute-player;¹ Alexander, the charcoal-burner, who afterwards became a bishop;² and how many others whose profession is not mentioned might have answered as a martyr of Ephesus answered the judge, who asked him what he was, "A common fellow, living by my work."³ But it is the cemeteries which teach us, better than any other witness, how soon the Church was invaded by the poor and lowly.

We do not mean to say that on the tombs of the Catacombs it was usual to describe the worldly position of the owner; this was very seldom the case.⁴ The usage in the Catacombs was the contrary of what might have been expected. In one place the tombstone of a patrician covers a simple hole scooped out of the sand, in another a richly adorned chapel contains the burial-place of a Christian of servile birth,⁵ in another a wall-painting under the arch of a tomb commemorates an ancient Christian green-grocer.⁶ Nowhere was Christian equality and brotherhood more visible than in those abodes of the dead. Indirect evidence of the multitude of lower class people buried here is to be found at every step; for instance, in the large number of incorrect epitaphs, faulty in spelling, shaky in syntax, and full of solecisms and barbarisms. They are conceived in low Latin, and afford, by the way, some striking ex-

¹ Rufinus, *De vitis Patrum*, 19.

² Greg. Nyss., *Vita S. Greg. Thaum.*, in Migne, *P. G.*, vol. xlv.

³ *Acta S. Maximi*, in Ruinart, p. 144.

⁴ On some of the tombs high birth is shown by the letters C. V. (*clarissimus vir*), C. P., or C. F. (*clarissimus puer, clarissima puella, or femina*). See *Bull. di archeol. Crist.* (1888-1889, p. 21); but the servile condition of the occupants of the tombs is scarcely ever noticed in a Christian inscription.—*Bull. di archeol. Crist.*, 1866, p. 24; 1877, p. 38; *Roma sotterranea*, vol. iii. pp. 139, 318.

⁵ De Rossi, *Bull. di archeol. Crist.*, 1881, pp. 57-74, and plates iii.-iv.

⁶ De Rossi, *Roma sotterranea*, vol. iii., plate xii.

amples of the fashion in which modern languages grew out of Latin.¹ As we read some of the Christian epitaphs of the third century, we seem to be listening to the talk of the common folk of Rome. We can almost behold them as they were, "rude, uncultured, simple souls, chatting in the street or market-place, or in the workshop."²

IV

The study of the Catacombs does not merely give us some idea of the number of lesser folk who belonged to the Church's fold, it also shows us that at the same time the Church had gained over some of the nobility. This fact is clear, since the earliest Christian cemeteries were excavated on the property of rich and noble families who offered their brethren of all conditions the hospitality of the tomb.

Tacitus relates that a high-placed Roman lady, Pomponia Græcina, the wife of Aulus Plautus, who vanquished the Britons in the reign of Claudius, was charged in 58—the very year in which Paul wrote to the Romans—before a sort of family council, with professing a "strange religion."³ As there exists an inscription which tells of a Christian grandchild of hers,⁴ it may well be that the "strange superstition," for which, moreover, she was pardoned by her relatives, was none other than Christianity. What Tacitus says of her would lead us to suppose that she had embraced the "superstition" long before it was laid to her charge, so that it is possible

¹ M. Edmond Le Blant deals with this matter in his *Inscr. chrét. de la Gaule*, vol. i. pp. cvi.—cxix.

² Tertullian, *De testimonio animæ*, 1.

³ Tacitus, *Ann.*, xiii. 32.

⁴ De Rossi, *Roma sotterranea*, vol. ii. p. 363.

that this lady of rank was one of the first Romans to be converted to the Gospel. De Rossi believed that it is to her that the construction of the crypt of Lucina, now united with the catacomb of St. Callixtus, should be attributed. At any rate the paintings and inscriptions in this crypt carry it back almost to the time of the Apostles.¹

Another cemetery of the same period had an even more highly placed lady for its foundress; this is the catacomb of Domitilla on the Via Ardeatina.² Flavia Domitilla was the grand-daughter of the Emperor Vespasian, and the niece of the Emperors Titus and Domitian; she married her cousin, Flavius Clemens. As both professed Christianity, they were among the first to fall at the hand of Domitian. Flavius Clemens was beheaded in 95 during his term of office as consul; Domitilla was banished to an island.³ Had it not been for this sudden outburst of persecution the Church's fortunes might have been very different; for Domitian had adopted as his heirs and successors the two sons of Clemens and Domitilla.⁴ As these were doubtless Christians, Rome only narrowly escaped seeing Christianity ascending the imperial throne two hundred years before Constantine. But the two youths, after appearing once in history, disappear for ever and we are left in ignorance as to whether they shared the fate of their parents, or whether they simply fell into obscurity when Domitian had been slain

¹ *Roma sotterranea*, vol. i. p. 319. Pomponia Græcina was very old when she died, "longa huic Pomponiæ ætas"; for forty years she mourned for Julia, who had been killed in the reign of Claudius, in 43; hence Pomponia herself must have died in 83 (Tacitus, *Ann.*, xiii. 32).

² *Bull. di archeol. Crist.*, 1865, pp. 17-24, 33-47.

³ Dion Cassius, lxxvii. 13.

⁴ Quintillian, *Inst. orat.*, iv. proœm.

by the revolution that brought the Flavian dynasty to an end.

The martyrs of Domitian's persecution were not confined to the Flavian family. Among the members of the Roman aristocracy who fell victims to that tyrant's jealousy and distrust there were others who suffered for being "guilty of novelties," *molitores novarum rerum*, the "novelties" in question being the practice of Christianity.¹ One of these was the consul of 91, Acilius Glabrio. In the very ancient catacomb of St. Priscilla on the Via Salaria, an excavation which goes back to Apostolic times and was perhaps visited by St. Peter,² there has been found a family vault in which from the first to the third century the dead of the Christian line of the Acilii were interred.³

A hundred years later, in the neighbourhood of the crypt of Lucina, another similar chamber, excavated beneath the property of the patrician family of the Cæcili, received the body of a martyr who did more for the glory of her family than all the prefects and consuls it produced. The crypt of St. Cecilia afterwards became one of the principal centres of the great catacomb of St. Callixtus; in it were buried the popes of the third century, and scattered round the galleries of the huge necropolis which gradually came into being, we find the epitaphs of some of the greatest of the Roman families: Cæcili, Corneli, Æmilii, Bassi, Annii, Iallii, Pomponii, Aurelii.⁴ With the help of these

¹ Suetonius, *Domitian*, 10.

² Marucchi, in the *Nuovo Bull. di archeol. Crist.*, 1901, pp. 71-111, 277-290; 1903, pp. 169-273.

³ De Rossi, *Bull. di archeol. Crist.*, 1888-1889, pp. 15-66, 103-133, and plates i.-ii., v.

⁴ De Rossi, *Roma sotterranea*, vol. ii. pp. 137-147.

inscriptions we might almost compose a Roman peerage covering the first three centuries of our era. There is good reason to believe that Pope Cornelius—whose inscription is in Latin, whereas those of the other popes of the period are in Greek, and who was buried apart from his brethren in the aristocratic crypt of Lucina—belonged to the patrician family of the Corneli, and was connected by his ancestors with Sylla the Dictator.¹

Had I time to deal not merely with the Christian cemeteries of Rome, but also with those in the provinces, I could show that most of them had their origin in the generosity of some rich Christian who gave his family grave or his garden for the burial of a martyr, or generally for the burial of all his brethren in the faith. That this was the case is shown by the old appellation given to the cemeteries, which were long called after the names of their donors: thus *area Macrobiani*, *area Vindiciani*, *hortus Justi*, *hortus Theonis*, *hortus Philippi*, &c.² Besides the great names I mentioned a while ago, there must have been many rich and kindly Christians who were only too pleased to perform such an act of mercy. It is to this disposition that a second-century apologist alludes in the following: "When one of their poor departs this life, any Christian who knows him arranges for the funeral according to his means."³ It must have required many persons of wealth thus to insure Christian burial to all the Church's poor.

From the second century onwards, mention of rich and noble Christians constantly recurs. You

¹ *Roma sotterranea*, vol. i. p. 312.

² See *Histoire des persécutions pendant la première moitié du troisième siècle*, 3rd ed., pp. 504–506.

³ Aristides, *Apol.*, 15.

recollect that in 112 Pliny stated that in Bithynia people of every rank (*omnis ordinis*) had embraced the Christian faith.¹ Just now I alluded to the *Shepherd*, that book which attained such vogue in the early Church, and which was written between 140 and 150; in it Hermas reproaches the Christians of Rome with being “devoted to business and the pursuit of wealth,” and for making themselves “famous in the eyes of the pagans by their riches.”² In the reign of Commodus we are told that “many Romans remarkable both for their birth and their wealth” were converted to the Gospel.³ In 197 Tertullian states that “the Palace and the Senate” are full of Christians, and exclaims, “Every dignity comes to us.”⁴ This was just at the time when the Emperor Septimius Severus, in a momentary impulse of justice, took the side of certain patrician Christians, *clarissimas feminas et clarissimos viros*, defending them from the mob and publicly praising them.⁵ Fifty years later Origen was obliged to answer the calumnies of those who insinuated that the motive of many of the converts was the desire of entering the society “of the wealthy, of the high-class folk, of the noble and high-bred dames” who had already joined the Church.⁶

In spite of the barriers which certain emperors—notably Valerian in 258⁷—endeavoured to erect against this invasion of Christianity, the tide never ceased rising. Even whilst violent persecutions were proceeding the Church continued to enrol recruits in the families of provincial governors, sometimes even

¹ Pliny, *Ep.*, x. 96.

² Hermas, *Shepherd*, *Mandata*, x. 1; *Simil.*, viii. 9.

³ Eusebius, *H. E.*, v. 21, 1.

⁴ Tertullian, *Apol.*, 2, 37.

⁵ Tertullian, *Ad Scapulam*, 4.

⁶ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, iii. 9.

⁷ See above, p. 98.

in the homes of the most cruel enemies of the faith,¹ and whenever there was a lull in the storm Christian action proceeded apace in its work of converting the great ones of the Roman Empire. We find Origen, in the guise of a catechist or even in that of a director of conscience, corresponding with the Empress Mammæa,² with the Emperor Philip and his wife Otacilia Severa.³ Again we find the faith establishing itself in the imperial family; Sabina, the wife of Gallienus, may have been a Christian;⁴ Prisca and Valeria, respectively the wife and the daughter of Diocletian, were Christians or at least catechumens, since they were weak enough to apostatise when the persecution broke out.⁵ In the intervals between the persecutions we find Christians of high rank taking their place in public life; some of them became provincial governors, others magistrates in towns.⁶ At the beginning of the fourth century there were cities in Roman Asia in which all the members of the executive were Christians.⁷ Even in those places where the population was divided in worship the Christians reached high positions; an episode from the latter half of the third century forms an instance. The Christian rhetor, Anatole, well-known in Alexandria for his wisdom, was president of the senate of this town at the time when it rose against the Emperor Gallienus, and with the help of Eusebius, another Christian, he offered to mediate between his insurgent fellow-citizens and the Roman army. At

¹ Tertullian, *Ad Scapulam*, 3; Hippolytus, *Comm. in Daniel*, iv. 18.

² Lampridius, *Heliogab.*, 3.

³ Eusebius, *H. E.*, vi. 36.

⁴ See *Les dernières persécutions du troisième siècle*, 2nd ed., pp. 170-171.

⁵ Lactantius, *De mort. pers.*, 15.

⁶ Eusebius, *H. E.*, viii. 1, 9, 11.

⁷ See above, p. 62.

his instance, the general commanding the army outside the walls granted a safe-conduct to the women, children, and old men who might wish to leave the besieged city. Disguised in women's dress, all the Christians and many pagans quitted the city without being molested by the Roman soldiery, who probably shut their eyes to the strangeness of the disguise. Little by little, by the influence of Anatole and Eusebius, the defence was weakened, the instigator of the insurrection took to flight, and finally the Egyptian metropolis honourably capitulated, thus escaping famine and possible destruction. Both the men to whom the city owed her safety ended by becoming bishops.¹

Such was the importance assumed by the Christian aristocracy, not only at Rome, but also in the provinces, even long before the persecutions had reached their term.

V

In ancient, equally with modern, society it is difficult to draw a hard-and-fast line between the middle classes and the aristocracy. The difficulty is especially great when we are concerned with Roman society, where business was wholly in the hands of wealthy merchants, who by means of their slaves managed nearly all the trade and commerce, leaving little room for the small trader or artificer. The middle class was represented only by men devoted to the liberal arts or to commerce, men of wealth inherited or acquired, who were capable of presiding over the destinies of their respective towns. Of the lower middle class we hear little or nothing, in fact it was quite undistinguishable from the mass of the

¹ Eusebius, *H. E.*, vii. 32.

proletariat. Among the members of the upper middle class, men comfortably off and much given to work, the Church was particularly successful.

This appears to have been the case even in the time of the Apostles. It was to people of this class that St. Paul preached the duty of almsgiving¹ and the manner of demeaning themselves towards their slaves;² he was thinking of them when he told Timothy to "charge the rich of the world not to be high-minded nor to trust in the uncertainty of riches."³ Also when speaking of bishops he sketches the ideal type of the good man of the house.⁴ St. James speaks of the "man with a gold ring and in fine apparel" who, in the Christian place of meeting, sits side by side with the "poor man in mean attire."⁵ Even in those times, when early fervour had not yet slackened, vigilance was necessary to prevent feminine vanity. St. Paul asks women to dress "in decent apparel, adorning themselves with modesty and sobriety; not with plaited hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly attire."⁶ Similar advice was given by St. Peter to the Christian women of the Asiatic provinces "whose adorning let it not be the outward plaiting of the hair, or the wearing of gold, or the putting on of apparel."⁷ Such advice as this would have been ridiculous had the Church contained poor women exclusively. Even the personal friends of St. Paul, Aquila and his wife Prisca, who like Paul were tent-makers,⁸ cannot have been so very poorly off, since they were able to invite, either to their home or to their workshops on the Aventine,⁹ a small crowd of convert workmen

¹ St. Paul, 2 *Cor.* ix. 5-13; 1 *Tim.* vi. 17-19.

² *Eph.* vi. 9; *Col.* iv. 1. ³ 1 *Tim.* vi. 17.

⁴ 1 *Tim.* iii. 2-5.

⁵ St. James, *Ep.* ii. 2-3.

⁶ 1 *Tim.* ii. 9.

⁷ St. Peter, 1 *Ep.* iii. 3.

⁸ *Acts* xviii. 2, 3.

⁹ *Bull. di archeol. Crist.*, 1867, p. 41.

and slaves, to which St. Paul alludes as "the church which is in their house."¹

In the second and third centuries there were many rich people in the Church; we can tell this by the amount of alms then given. One of the martyrs of Lyons in 177, Attalus, a native of Pergamus, who probably came to Gaul for purposes of trade, was called by his co-religionists "the column and support of our community,"² meaning that he had helped it by his alms and good works. Thus there were wealthy Christians who imitated with respect to their poor the generosity of the pagans with respect to their towns or temples, or the clubs to which they belonged. The Church of Rome once received from a single Christian two hundred thousand sestericii (£2000).³ At Carthage donations to the Church funds were common,⁴ and on the occasion of an unexpected calamity we read that subscriptions were especially generous.⁵ The writings of Tertullian, Cyprian, and of the author of *De Aleatoribus*, give the impression of having been written in a place where money abounded, where alms were not difficult to obtain, and where gambling and luxury were common sins among the faithful. Tertullian tells us that many of the *curiales* professed Christianity⁶; he also tells us that Christians were numer-

¹ St. Paul, *Rom.* xvi. 3, 5.

² Στῦλον καὶ ἑδραίωμα τῶν ἐνταῦθα αἰεί γεγονότα.—Letter of the Christians of Lyons and Vienne, in Eusebius, *H. E.*, v. 1, 17.

³ Tertullian, *De præscr.*, 30. The Christian in question was Marcion; when he fell into heresy and had been excommunicated, the money which he had given to the Church was returned to him.

⁴ See St. Cyprian's tract, *De opere et eleemosynis*.

⁵ St. Cyprian, *Ep.*, 69.

⁶ Tertullian, *Apol.*, 37. The "curiales" looked after the taxes. In a recently unearthed *Passion*, the prefect of Egypt offered one of these to excuse him for all the money he owed the treasury, if he would only renounce the faith. The martyr answered that he

ous "in the forum," *i.e.* in the Courts of Justice. It may be that Tertullian himself was an example in point; he was the son of a Roman officer garrisoned at Carthage and seems to have been a lawyer by profession.¹ Another apologist of the same period,² who was also born in Africa, but who migrated to Rome, was the distinguished lawyer, Minucius Felix; he tells us that it was whilst walking out at Ostia during the recess with two companions, one a Christian and the other a pagan, that he listened to the conversation which he reports in his dialogue *Octavius*.³ The ease with which this is written, the purity of its style, the lack of anything approaching fanaticism, and the very crudeness of its theology all betray the man of the world. A Christian thinker of a very different calibre was Cyprian, but he too belonged to the same class; at the time when he became a convert he was uniting the functions of a lawyer and of a rhetor. In his first book we find him during the vacations chatting in his villa-garden with a less-zealous Christian friend, a colleague at the courts.⁴ Gregory, the Wonder-worker, also came from one of those respectable provincial families which preferred the forensic profession; his brother-in-law was assessor to the procurator of Judea, and he himself was on the point of studying for the law at the faculty of Berytus

was prepared to remain firm, and that, moreover, he had no debts on his conscience.—*Passio S. Dioscori*, in *Analecta Bolland.*, vol. xxiv., 1905, pp. 329–330. There were numerous "bouleutes" (municipal senators) among the Christians of Asia. See above, p. 28.

¹ Eusebius, *H. E.*, ii. 4.

² Whether Minucius Felix wrote before or after Tertullian is a moot point.

³ Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, 2.

⁴ Cyprian, *Ad Donatum*.

when Origen, whom he met, persuaded him to alter his intentions and turned his mind towards the study of Christian philosophy.¹

The men whom I have just mentioned are types of a new category of the middle classes—the scholars and the men of letters. At first Christianity was not very successful with this class. The Epicureans and Stoics to whom St. Paul preached at Athens refused to believe.² There is nothing to substantiate the hypothesis that St. Paul corresponded with and succeeded in half converting the philosopher Seneca.³ St. Paul's saying that there are among us "not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble,"⁴ soon ceased to be correct with respect to the "mighty" and "noble," but, so far as it concerned the "wise," scholars and philosophers, it long remained true. Only in the second century did they begin to enter the Church. At first sight this seems odd. What could have made them voluntarily abandon paganism and the esteem of princes

¹ Greg, Thaum., *Oratio de Origene*, 5; Migne, *P. G.*, vol. x. Concerning the large number of Christians who, during the time of persecution, followed the legal profession, see De Rossi, in *Studi e Documenti di storia e Diritto*, 1880, pp. 14–15, and in *Bull. di archeol. Crist.*, 1884–1885, pp. 36–37.

² *Acts* xvii. 18.

³ Aubertin, *Sénèque et Saint Paul*. It is, however, not impossible that a branch of the family Annæa, to which Seneca belonged (his brother, Annæus Gallion, was proconsul of Achaia), was Christian. A stone, found in 1867 at Ostia, was erected in honour of M. Annæus Paulus Petrus by his father, M. Annæus Paulus. The name Petrus was unknown among the pagans, and the union of the two names, Paulus and Petrus, is still more curious. Though this epitaph bears a pagan monograph, D. M. (probably a mistake, of which other instances are known), yet it is manifestly an inscription erected by a Christian father to a Christian son. It is either the epitaph of a Christian descendant of the Annæi, or of a freedman of that family. See De Rossi, *Boll. di archeol. Crist.*, 1867, pp. 6–8, and 13.

⁴ St. Paul, 1 *Cor.* i. 26.

at a time when they were in the highest favour at court? Under the Antonine dynasty nothing was more enviable than the position of the sophist or philosopher; everywhere they were received with honour and overwhelmed with marks of favour, and yet "many of them," as Clement of Alexandria wrote at the end of the second century, actually chose this time to make their submission to Christianity.¹ Among this class the Gospel worked more slowly than elsewhere, because here it had to deal with independent minds, but it also bore its fruit at the very time when their conversion should, humanly speaking, have been most difficult, and was manifestly most disinterested.

It seldom happens that men of learning embrace new ideas without endeavouring to defend by their pen the views to which they have become converts. This it is that explains the growing number of apologists who make their appearance in the second and third centuries, with the declared wish of defending the Christian faith against popular prejudice, and against the arguments of philosophers and lawyers. They originated an entirely new kind of literature: amidst their appeals and discourses, their essays, dialogues, and satires, we find many a masterpiece. Nearly all the apologists whose names have come down to us were well-educated men, in comfortable circumstances, who, being free from political entanglements and in no need of gaining their daily bread, had plenty of leisure in which to perform their labour of love. Some, like Tertullian, Minucius Felix, and Cyprian, had been lawyers or professors; others, like Aristides, Justin, Athenagoras, Pan-

¹ αὐτῶν γε τῶν φιλοσόφων οὐκ ὀλίγους.—Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.*, vi. 16.

tænus, and Clement, had been philosophers. The last apologist to write before the end of the persecution was Arnobius, a convert rhetor, who thus speaks of those who, like himself, had come from the study to the Church: "Orators of talent, grammarians, rhetors, lawyers, physicians, and philosophers have sought the Church, quitting contemptuously the doctrines in which they had formerly put their trust."¹

VI

One word in conclusion concerning a class of the population of which we have as yet said nothing: the soldiers.

At first sight it would seem that Christianity ought to have encountered great difficulties among the military. Between barrack-life and the Christian life there is a great gulf. Some rigorists, among them even such eminent men as Tertullian and Lactantius,² were of this opinion, but, generally speaking, the Church's mind was broader than theirs. Moreover, she had good precedents to work on: there was John the Baptist, who had baptized soldiers, his only condition being that they should

¹ Tam magnis ingeniis præditi oratores, grammatici, rhetores, consulti juris ac medici, philosophiæ etiam secreta rimantes magisteria, hæc expetunt, spretis quibus paulo ante fidebant.—Arnobius, *Adv. gent.*, ii. 55. Among convert physicians was to be found at Lyons, in 177, Alexander, a native of Phrygia, and a martyr.—Eusebius, *H. E.*, v. 1, 49. In Phrygia there was a Christian at once "bouleute" and physician.—F. Cumont, *Les inscriptions chrétiennes d'Asie Mineure*, No. 162.

² See above, p. 119. The passages in the works of Origen (*Contra Celsum*, viii. 71) and Clement of Alexandria (*Pædag.*, iii. 11), which led to their being considered as out-and-out opponents of the military profession, have been shown to bear another interpretation. See *Revista storico-critica delle Scienze teologiche*, 1905, pp. 542-543.

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“do violence to no man, neither calumniate any man, and be content with their pay;”¹ then there was Jesus, who had answered the prayer of the centurion of Capharnaum;² and Peter, too, who had baptized the centurion of Cæsarea.³ In so lax and dissolute a society as that of Rome, the military qualities, courage, self-denial, disdain for death, seemed the nearest approach to Christian virtue; we may notice that the earliest Christian writers, St. Paul, St. Clement of Rome, St. Ignatius of Antioch, often borrowed from the military state their comparisons and their allegories.⁴ We soon find Christians among the soldiery: St. Paul, when at Rome, preached in the camp of the pretorian cohorts;⁵ some of these guardsmen were Christians at the time of Nero.⁶ Tertullian was obliged to admit that, at the beginning of the third century, Christians filled even the camps, *castra ipsa*,⁷ and, forgetful of his own antipathy to the military life, he exclaims in one passage, “We fight side by side with you.”⁸ In certain countries, where the faith had been victorious from the beginning, we find whole regiments composed of Christians.⁹ If we bear in mind the proportion in which the soldiers stood to the rest of the population of the Empire, the number of martyrs who came out of their ranks is very remarkable.

No doubt this was a consequence of the many religious practices involved in military life. When

¹ *St. Luke* iii. 14.

² *St. Luke* vii. 1–10.

³ *Acts* x.

⁴ 2 *Tim.* ii. 3–5; Clement, *Cor.*, 37; Ignatius, *Polyc.*, 6.

⁵ St. Paul, *Philip.* i. 13.

⁶ See Damasus's panegyric of the martyrs Nereus and Achilleus; *Bull. di archeol. Crist.*, 1874, pp. 19–21.

⁷ Tertullian, *Apol.*, 37.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁹ See above, p. 32.

the State demanded that all should join in pagan rites, Christian soldiers were obliged in conscience to disobey, and for their disobedience they often paid the penalty of death. Hence it is no wonder that we hear of soldier-martyrs in every province held by the legions, in Italy,¹ Numidia, Mauritania,² Spain,³ Asia,⁴ Egypt,⁵ and on the bank of the Danube.⁶ Christianity was spreading so fast among the legionaries that the last persecution began with their being called upon either to sacrifice or to retire from the service.⁷ Almost the last scene of the great drama we are beholding was the martyrdom, in 323, of forty soldiers in Armenia by order of Licinius.⁸

Probably no other profession gave heaven so many martyrs—and these so remarkable for their meekness and restraint—as the army.

VII

Another question now claims its answer. You are no doubt wondering how it came about, supposing Christianity to have been so powerful

¹ See *Histoire des persécutions pendant les deux premiers siècles*, 3rd ed., pp. 175–177, 224; *Les dernières persécutions du troisième siècle*, 2nd ed., pp. 209, 261, 328; *La persécution de Dioclétien*, 2nd ed., vol. i. pp. 131, 132, 133, 375.

² *Histoire des persécutions pendant la première moitié du troisième siècle*, 3rd ed., p. 31; *La persécution de Dioclétien*, vol. i. pp. 103, 134, 139, 448, 451.

³ *La persécution de Dioclétien*, vol. i. p. 141.

⁴ *Histoire des persécutions pendant la première moitié du troisième siècle*, p. 439; *Les dernières persécutions du troisième siècle*, p. 185; *La persécution de Dioclétien*, vol. i. pp. 114, 200; vol. ii. pp. 39, 42, 46, 139; *Julien l'Apostat*, vol. iii. pp. 153, 154.

⁵ *Histoire des persécutions pendant la première moitié du troisième siècle*, p. 386.

⁶ *La persécution de Dioclétien*, vol. i. pp. 119, 124, 299.

⁷ Eusebius, *H. E.*, viii. 4: *Chron.*; Lactantius, *De mort. pers.*, 10.

⁸ See above, p. 137.

and widespread in the Empire, that Christians allowed themselves to be so cruelly treated by the pagans. It is only in some of the Acts of Martyrs of the fourth century that we begin to perceive a tone of remonstrance and indignation. The persecutors seem to have realised their weakness long before the persecuted discovered their strength; a slight motion of the accused sometimes struck terror into the judges.¹ Among the Christians there were politicians and statesmen, working men gifted with strength and skill, slaves habituated to suffering, and soldiers inured to war; they had also writers of great merit who could move public opinion, and, if needs be, stir up the spirit of rebellion. At a time when the Roman Empire was enfeebled by dissensions and civil war the Christians might easily have grouped themselves into a formidable party and dictated terms to the persecutors.² Why did they not do so?

It was because Christ who had sent them "as sheep into the midst of wolves"³ wished their conquest of the world to be effected by peaceful means. They were to teach men by their example the unknown or forgotten virtues of charity, meekness, resignation, patience, the love of enemies, and the forgiveness of injury. They were to teach them the meaning of the entirely new virtue introduced by the Gospel, the virtue of faith, *i.e.* that intimate and deeply rooted persuasion of the truth, which

¹ Eusebius, *H. E.*, vi. 41, 23.

² To the best of my knowledge only one *Passion* speaks of the Christians wreaking vengeance on the pagans. This is the *Acts of St. Apollinaris* of Ravenna, an utterly untrustworthy fabrication of the seventh century. See Zattoni, *Il valore storico della Passio di S. Apollinare*, in *Revista storico-critica delle Scienze teologiche*, 1905, p. 675.

³ *Matt.* x. 16; *Luke* x. 3.

the Christian would rather die than relinquish. They were to prove by undergoing a three-century-long martyrdom the power of a doctrine, which was to triumph meekly over every obstacle and bring every power of the world to its feet. Had they used earthly weapons, had they asserted their right of self-defence, they would perhaps have conquered by human means, but then they would have lost the very character which endears them to us and rendered them admirable even in the eyes of the pagans; they would no longer be the *martyrum candidatus exercitus* whose praise the Church now sings, and we should lose one of the best evidences in favour of the Gospel.

I may also add that, quite apart from the designs of Providence, the wise tactics followed by the leaders of religious thought would have led them to forbid any show of violence or any attempt at revolution. You remember how false was the idea which statesmen had conceived of the Church. They supposed it to be the antithesis of Roman civilisation; the two things were in their eyes incompatible; it was impossible to be at once a Roman and a Christian. The apologists had to bring all their efforts to bear against this silly prejudice. They are ever striving to prove that the Christians are, of all the Empire's subjects, the most faithful; that the more they seek to conform their lives to the prescriptions of the Gospel the more obedient they are to the laws and respectful to the sovereign; that they pray for the safety of the emperor and for that of the Empire; that they make no distinction between the Roman Empire and the world, both of which will end together; in a word, that their loyalty is beyond reproach. But such proofs

would have had little value had the Christians' conduct been other than it was. The slightest attempt at resistance would have spoilt the argument of those who spoke in their name. Such attempt would have resulted in the gates of Rome being irrevocably closed against Christians, and in the impossibility of a reconciliation. Had the Christians ever acted as foes of Rome, it would not have been possible for an emperor to have set the term to the age of persecution by declaring himself a Christian. The martyrs' patience is alone accountable for the action of Constantine.

LECTURE VI

THE MORAL AFFLICTIONS OF THE MARTYRS

I

BEFORE suffering bodily torture, the martyrs had to undergo moral trials which in many cases were very severe. Our study of the different social conditions of the martyrs will enable us to understand this, for the sacrifice which they had to make depended largely on the rank and worldly position which they were suddenly called upon to vacate in order to retain their conscientious beliefs. Hence some martyrs had to undergo a more difficult initial trial than others, though none, whatever may have been their position, no matter how small may have been their worldly possessions, can have completely escaped this moral pang which preceded the torments of the body. As in the case of the Master, the Chalice was presented to each before the Cross.

But the bitterness of regret differed in different cases; of this the contemporaries of the martyrs were perfectly aware. Writing to a friend of his who, after having filled a high position and owned much property, had just been arrested as a Christian, Origen says: "How I should enjoy (supposing I had to die a martyr's death) having to leave houses and lands to receive the hundredfold promised by our Saviour. Those who have not suffered torture must yield place to those who have triumphed

over their torments; so likewise we who are poor, even though we be martyrs, must make room for you, for you have voluntarily abandoned your great possessions and rejected the deceitful glory of the world by which so many have been led astray.”¹ These are words of marvellous humility, slightly exaggerated perhaps—for after all the poor too had their trials, not the least being the prospect of far more horrible tortures—but which nevertheless must have been verified in many cases, and which depict eloquently the painful nature of the temptation over which Christians of high birth and great wealth had generally to triumph.

People sometimes cherish their fortune even more than their life; though such attachment at first sight may seem wrong, yet it has a grandeur of its own. When a fortune is an heirloom of many generations, it becomes part and parcel of the family, so that in the eyes of its possessor it appears as something of which he has only the administration, something which he has received only to pass it on intact to his next-of-kin, something partaking of the sacredness of the home; this is probably the reason why confiscation is repugnant to us. But among the Romans much was made of it; confiscation of goods followed, as a matter of course, any sentence which deprived a citizen of his rights, such as the sentence of death, of penal servitude, or of banishment; it was, however, considered the proper thing for the emperor graciously to assign to the children a part, or even the whole, of the property seized; the kind-hearted rulers of the second century were especially punctilious about this matter.² At

¹ Origen, *Exhort. ad martyres*, 14, 15.

² Callistratus, in the *Digest*, LXVIII., xx. 1; Paul, *ibid.*, 7, § 3.

the beginning of the third century a broad-minded lawyer even went so far as to acknowledge that there was an obligation in the natural law of restoring to the children at least a part of the condemned man's fortune.¹ There were, however, cases in which this act of grace was forbidden, for instance, in case of *lèse-majesté* or witchcraft;² and probably also for Christianity. At any rate this was the case after the middle of the third century; at that time, the exchequer being in a state of chronic depression, the emperors seized every opportunity for replenishing it; and the money-question began to loom large in the history of the persecutions.³ During the reign of Decius, the Christian's goods were regularly confiscated whether he was sentenced to death, to penal servitude, or to exile, or even when he simply took to flight.⁴ Proclamations were issued putting up their goods to auction, and calling on people who might be detaining articles of theirs, to put them into the hands of the public liquidator.⁵ Contemporary documents enable us to see to what a plight those were reduced who had fled or otherwise survived the persecution; it was necessary to help them out of the funds at the disposal of the Church.⁶ The burden of Valerian's edict of 258 was to confiscate the goods of a whole class of Christians,⁷ no regard being paid to the children; and with

¹ Paul, in the *Digest*, LXVIII., xx. 7.

² *Theodosian Code*, IX., xlvii. 2. This constitution belongs to 356, but it is based on more ancient laws, which have not been preserved: "Etiam si liberos damnatus habeat vel parentes, non condentes pœnam sed relinquentes antiquam, fisco fieri locum præcepimus."

³ See above, p. 124.

⁴ Cyprian, *Ep.*, 13, 18, 36, 69; *De lapsis*, 3; *Ad Demetrianum*, 12; Dionysius of Alexandria, in Eusebius, *H. E.*, vii. 11, 18.

⁵ Cyprian, *Ep.*, 69.

⁶ *Ibid.*, *Ep.*, 5.

⁷ *Ibid.*, *Ep.*, 80.

Diocletian matters became still worse, for he actually laid down the principle that children should receive no share of their condemned parents' goods, no matter the crime for which they had been sentenced.¹

This spelt ruin for the family of the Christian, *rei familiaris damna*, as Cyprian puts it; for many it meant the fall from a state of affluence into one of abject poverty; for many it meant loss of caste—*dignitate amissa* is the expression used by Valerian's edict—for, with the disappearance of the revenue needed for a given rank—*census equestris*, *census senatorius*—the descendants of a nobleman whose goods had been sequestered found themselves degraded to plebeian rank; they were not even poor noblemen, they were simply poor without any qualification. You will easily imagine the state of mind of the head of a Christian family, a man of wealth and noble lineage, when suddenly brought face to face, not only with death, but also the disgrace and ruin of his house.

One of the most curious instances of a Christian being bidden to choose between apostasy and total loss of fortune is recorded by St. Basil. In one of his homilies he has much to say concerning the martyrdom of the widow Julitta, a fellow-citizen of his at Cæsarea. Once very rich, she had been brought almost to the verge of bankruptcy by the intrigues and wicked cunning of a dweller in the same city, who, taking advantage of her inexperience in business, had succeeded in obtaining possession of her lands, houses, and slaves (you already know that at this time the slaves formed an important part of the wealth of the rich). Julitta, unwilling to be entirely despoiled of her goods, finally resolved to

¹ *Cod. Justin.*, V., xlix. 6.

bring an action against the usurer. As she was about to explain her grievance to the judges, the defendant lodged an exception which would annul the whole proceedings. This exception was based on a clause of the edict of February 303, which deprived all pertinacious Christians of the right of suing in a court of justice. The rest was easy; all that was necessary was to put the plaintiff's faith to the test. The president had an altar placed before the tribunal, and requested both parties to offer incense to the gods and utter a blasphemy against the religion of Christ. The defendant, at whose request this had been done, naturally made no odds about conforming, but the widow indignantly refused to do anything of the kind: "Perish my life, perish my fortune, perish my body rather than I should utter a word against God my Creator." Of course she lost her case, and this first sentence was soon followed by another condemning her to die at the stake.¹

I am not able to say whether this brave woman had any children. Most probably she had not, for she seems to have attended the court alone, and St. Basil, when relating the heroic words with which when on her way to death she replied to the consolations of her friends, does not mention any relations of hers being present among those who came to bid her adieu. The trial was worst when the martyr was pressed to sacrifice his faith in the interests of those he held dear, when friendly voices endeavoured to persuade him to bethink himself of his wife and children.² Under such a trial we cannot wonder if occasionally there dropped before the

¹ Basil, *Hom.*, v. 1-2.

² Solvi conjuges matrimoniiis.—Arnobius, *Adv. nat.* ii. 5.

husband's eyes that thick veil which blinds for a while even the most resolute, and hinders them from seeing the real path of duty. Sometimes it was his pagan friends who said to him, "If thou obey not the judge thou wilt not only suffer the most dreadful tortures, but thou wilt bring ruin on thy whole family; thy goods will go to the exchequer and thy house will come to an end."¹ Sometimes it was the judge himself who, full of pity, entreated the sufferer: "Consider thy own safety and forget not thy children."² Or again, "Thou art wealthy, thy goods would suffice to maintain a whole province . . . Thy poor wife looks to thee."³ Sometimes it was the lawyers present at court, the judge himself, and the prisoner's relatives who, embracing him and kissing his feet, tearfully implored him "to have some regard for his wife and children."⁴ Some martyrs were less fortunate in their relatives than the father of Origen. Origen was still a child when his father was condemned to die, but in the name of himself and his six brothers he wrote to him: "Be steadfast, and alter not thy mind on our account." It is probable that, with less external assistance and with bad advice from the quarters to which they naturally looked for help, many Christians who underwent this trial—far worse than any torture—did not come forth victorious. Those who conquered gave proof of a strength which seems almost to transcend mere human nature.

¹ *Passio S. Theodoti*, 8, in Ruinart, p. 357.

² *Passio S. Philippi*, 9; *ibid.*, p. 449.

³ *Acta SS. Phileæ et Philoromæ*, 2; *ibid.*, p. 580.

⁴ Eusebius, *H. E.*, vi. 2, 6.

II

Another trial bearing some similarity to the one just spoken of awaited the martyrs of high rank.

In the Roman Empire, where State and worship were so closely bound together, scarcely any act of public life was without some taint of religion. Magistrates of every degree, sceptics and freethinkers though they were in private life, were in their public capacity under obligation of almost continually worshipping the gods of the State. A provincial governor was not allowed to absent himself from the worship of the gods on certain anniversaries and public holidays. A senator would have been a marked man had he abstained from taking part in the sacrifice annually offered on the Capitol in the name of the Senate, and he could scarcely have escaped burning incense on the altar of Victory each time that he attended a debate. When a consul took up his duties he had to celebrate the event by offering sacrifice; he had moreover to give, in honour of the gods, certain shows and public games, of which the latter were nothing short of murderous, whilst the former were often utterly immoral. The superintendence of these games was part of the business of the *prætor* and *quæstor*. In the colonies and towns in which the public life was a small replica of the life of Rome, the upkeep of the temples, the supervision of the public sacrifices, religious feasts, shows, and gladiatorial games, were reckoned among the duties of the *Ædiles* and *Duumviri*.

All this combined to make the position of a Christian, whose birth or wealth called him to public

life, one of great difficulty. If the world had been governed by abstract principles, then he would have had to choose between two courses; either to avow his Christianity by refusing any public office—thus exposing himself to the reproach of being “lacking in energy” and of “hating the human race”—or to ride roughshod over his scruples and to put himself outside the Christian pale. The choice should have been between self-denunciation and self-excommunication. Some of the ancient Christians do appear to have looked at the matter in this light. To a gainsayer of Christianity, who twitted the Church on the poverty of her members, an apologist thus replied about the end of the second century: “We are not all of us of low degree since we despise your titles and your purple,”¹ words which show not only that there were men of noble birth in the Church, but also that there were some who of set purpose avoided titles and public offices. But had such feelings ever prevailed in the Church they would have been detrimental both to the faith and to the State, for the Church could not be indifferent to the fact that some of the best and noblest of her sons were either doing nothing or leaving her in despair; the State in general and the towns in detail were anxious not to lose the services of such men, by making their service impossible; people so scrupulous as the Christians—no matter how erroneous their “superstitions”—could not but be upright. Hence, during the three centuries with which we deal, abstract principles often had to go to the wall and were replaced by compromise. Except at those

¹ Nec de ultima statim plebe consistimus, si honores vestros et purpuras recusamus.—Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, 8. See the explanation of this passage, in De Rossi, *Bull. di archeol. Crist.* 1888–1889, p. 61.

moments in which the conflict became acute it was found possible to establish in practice a *modus vivendi*.

The least conciliatory of all the Fathers was obliged to acknowledge its lawfulness. "It has been asked," writes Tertullian, "whether one who serves God may be invested with a State dignity or office conditionally on evading, either by favour or by craft, all acts of idolatry. As examples in point we have Joseph and Daniel, who, adorned with the insignia of power and clad in purple, governed, without suspicion of idolatry, Egypt and the land of Babylon. If any one wishes to take part in public life, but without sacrificing, without by his authority countenancing the sacrifices, without presenting victims, without contributing directly or otherwise to the support of the temples, without giving shows, either at his own or at the public cost, and without presiding at them, then, if such a thing be possible, I would place no hindrance in his way."¹ That such a thing was possible Tertullian himself admits indirectly, for he instances without a word of blame—on the contrary making use of them as an example to show the power and adaptability of Christianity—the faithful who took part in the debates of the Senate and town councils.² Hence a little goodwill on the part of certain emperors—whether more far-seeing, or more tolerant, or more indifferent than the others, or less narrowly Roman in their ideas, or disgusted with the functions of the persecutor—was all that was required to set the Christians' consciences free to perform their duties as citizens, whilst remaining true to the principles of their religion.

¹ Tertullian, *De Idolatria*, 17.

² *Apol.*, 37. See above, p. 165.

The exact manner in which they made up their consciences is now no longer known. There probably existed a special kind of casuistics for the direction of the faithful in those remote ages. Acts apparently pagan were tolerated or reprehended according as they were regarded as merely civil or as religious. The decorations of the Catacombs are instructive; paintings of Eros and Psyche, of Ulysses with the Sirens, of Orpheus charming the beasts, of the Seasons, the Ocean and the Rivers personified are to be met with in close proximity to the tombs of the martyrs, and mingled with symbols of the most august Christian mysteries. They were either used as simple ornaments or as noble allegories; in any case they had lost their pagan character. A practical application of the same idea is to be found in the rules imposed on Christian artists and workmen; they were allowed to design or carve pictures or figures of the gods for the decoration of furniture or of public buildings, but they were not allowed to make idols for the temple:¹ hence it must often have happened that where the pagan saw gods the Christian saw only ornaments and symbols. This was especially the case in the army; whereas the more simple-minded idolaters really worshipped the eagles of the legions, the Christian soldier merely honoured them as the emblems of his country, saluting them as to-day the soldier salutes the colours of his regiment. What we have said of the soldier will apply also to the consul, the senator, or the town-magistrate; much of the ceremonial which they had to observe was capable of a benign interpre-

¹ *Canones S. Hippolyti arabice*, canon xi.; Tertullian, *Adv. Marcionem*, ii. 2. See De Rossi, *Roma sotterranea*, vol. ii. p. 352; vol. iii. pp. 578-579; *Bull. di archeol. Crist.*, 1879, p. 49.

tation. The question at issue in their time was similar to the one which was mooted in the seventeenth and eighteenth century in connection with certain rites of China and Malabar; at any rate the sound good sense of the Roman dignitaries was well able to make the necessary distinctions, and there was little risk of their external conformity to the national usages of their country leading them back into idolatry.

A certain number of these public acts took place in the temples and were accompanied by the offering of sacrifices, but not even the most austere of Christian moralists could bring themselves to forbid the faithful to be present at such ceremonies as the assumption of the *toga virilis*, the naming of a child, espousals, and marriages, all of which were the occasion of quasi-religious rites. Even when a sacrifice was offered the Christian's merely passive presence was not condemned. Says Tertullian: "If I be invited, provided my duty forces me to take no part in the sacrifice, I may accept the invitation. Would to God that we were never obliged to witness deeds which we may not ourselves perform, but since the evil spirit has so involved the world in idolatry, it is permissible to attend certain ceremonies provided we go for man's sake and not for the idol."¹ Tertullian elsewhere is even more explicit: "Were I to be present at a sacrifice to which I had been specially invited, I should be joining in an act of idolatry; but if I accept the invitation from a different motive, then I cease to be more than a mere onlooker."² These maxims of the narrowest of the Patristic casuists applied even better to the case of a magistrate than to that of a guest invited to a wedding; in this wise

¹ Tertullian, *De Idolatria*, 16.

² *Ibid.*

it was easy to justify the passive presence of officials at public feasts even when the feast ended with pagan rites. Their abstaining from any personal part in the sacrifice was, in the indulgent eyes of the State, atoned for by their presence, and in the eyes of the Church their presence at the ceremony was excused by their taking no active part in it. The canons of the council of Illiberis show how careful the Church was to prevent Christian magistrates from overstepping the always rather uncertain bounds of these concessions.¹

But the permission was widely used and for many years ; in the first century it was in force during nearly the whole Flavian dynasty, as Domitian did not show himself intolerant before the fourteenth year of his reign ; in the second century it was utilised at least during the reign of Commodus, who was not unkindly disposed towards the Christians ; in the third century it was made use of whenever the persecution abated, for instance, during the whole reigns of Alexander Severus and Philip, during the early years of Valerian, during the reign of Gallienus and the beginning of that of Diocletian. Under the latter emperor, who before becoming one of the greatest enemies of the Church had been her friend, a new situation arose which for a time did away with the necessity of anything like dissimulation or mental reservation. Diocletian accorded Christian magistrates the same special treatment as his predecessors had bestowed on the Jews. "The divine Severus and Antoninus (Caracalla)"—we read in a proclamation of the beginning of the third century—"have

¹ Council of Illiberis, canons 3, 4, 55, 56. See Hefele, *Hist. of the Councils*, French trans., by Delarc, vol. i. p. 158 ; Duchesne, *Le Concile d'Elvire et les flamines chrétiens*, in *Mélanges Renier*, p. 171.

allowed all who follow the Jewish superstition to accept public offices whilst remaining exempt from the performance of any act which wounds their religious feelings."¹ A similar exemption was made by Diocletian in favour of the Christians; of this we know by the contemporary historian Eusebius, who writes: "So high was the regard of the emperors for our people that they appointed several of them provincial governors, at the same time dispensing them from the sacrificial duties to which they conscientiously objected."²

But their situation was anything but secure. No sooner had the magistrates grown accustomed to the régime and begun to consider it permanent than persecution would break out anew, sudden and unexpected like a bolt from the blue. This must have been a severe trial to those who hitherto had experienced no difficulty in holding their own, side by side with their pagan colleagues. To be suddenly called upon to fulfil all the pagan acts bound up with their duties, to be suddenly flung into the "sacrificial death-struggle"³ (as Eusebius curiously puts it), and in case of refusal to see expulsion, degradation, ruin, and martyrdom staring them in the face, such was usually the fate of the Christians of high rank. It was the fate, as you will remember, of Flavius Clemens, put to death during his consulate under Domitian; it was the fate of that little company of Christian nobles who tasted death at the same time as he, after having for several years combined their religious profession with the duties of their rank; it was the fate of Apollonius who,

¹ *Digest*, L. ii. 2, § 3.

² Eusebius, *H. E.*, viii. 1, 2.

³ τῆς περὶ τὸ θύειν ἀγωνίας.—*Ibid.*

under Commodus, was denounced according to law and condemned by his peers. One sentence uttered in the course of the trial of this last martyr is very touching. The prefect of the prætorium, after having heard the accused man's defence and pointed out that an unrepealed law forbade the profession of Christianity, concluded with a personal appeal to the distinguished prisoner, "Do abide with us."¹ To resist such an appeal made on behalf of the whole Senate, and to prefer disgrace and death, must assuredly have demanded great courage.

When they were not called upon to face death they had to face something even worse. Diocletian began his persecution with measures designed to strike at once at the lawful pride and the interests of the nobler sort of Christians. He started by expelling them from the army; casting prudence to the winds he undertook, in conjunction with Maximian Hercules and Galerius, the task of depriving the Roman legions of their Christian officers. Inspectors were sent to parade the troops and degrade and expel every officer who refused to sacrifice. A few officers who ventured to protest audibly were promptly condemned to death, "losing," as Eusebius says, "in the defence of their faith, not only their dignity but also their life";² many others, according to the same witness, "esteemed the confession of Christ as worth more than the glory and the profits of this world."³ They were not put to death, but they had to endure a silent martyrdom, the shame of beholding their sword broken before their eyes.

¹ Ζῆν σε μεθ' ἡμῶν.—*Acta S. Apollonii*, in *Analecta Bollandiana*, vol. xiv., 1895, p. 290.

² Eusebius, *H. E.*, viii. 4.

³ *Ibid.*

Diocletian, who was not altogether devoid of humanity, was long in making up his mind to pronounce the death of the Christians. There was no express allusion to such a sentence in the first edict by which, in 303, he decreed the proscription of every member of the Church, but he had no such scruple about treating civilians as he had already treated the military. Eusebius in a few words sums up the clause of the edict which bears upon this punishment: "Those who hold high rank shall lose their position";¹ and another contemporary, Lactantius, gives it thus: "Having been deprived of their honours and offices they shall become liable to torture, however noble they may have been and whatever offices they may have held."² It had been the ancient privilege of the nobles and of the better classes in general to be exempt from torture or any shameful form of death, but by this edict the Christian of every rank definitively lost this privilege; he was outlawed, and had no longer even the right of bringing an action in the courts. The case of Julitta has shown us the hardship of this state of things. It is easier to imagine than to describe the state of mind of a patrician or Roman magistrate when suddenly called upon either to relinquish his faith or to lose his status, and see himself condemned to legal nothingness.

III

The temptation to apostasy was great, and many fell. During the Decian persecution the Roman clergy, writing to the clergy of Carthage, speak of the trials

¹ Eusebius, *H. E.*, viii. 4.

² Lactantius, *De mort. pers.*, 13.

through which the Roman Christians had just passed ; they tell of many who have left the Church, instancing among them “ people of high rank ” (*insignes personæ*).¹ A poem ascribed to Tertullian, but which really belongs to the fourth century, is dedicated “ to a senator and ex-consul, who, quitting Christianity, returned to the servitude of idols ” (*ad senatorem, ex consule, a Christiana religione ad idolorum servitutem reversum*).² “ After having crossed the threshold of the law of truth,” says the poet to the renegade nobleman, “ after having known God for several years, how hast thou kept that which thou shouldst have left, and left that which thou shouldst have kept ? ” He goes on to express a wish that, when age puts an end to ambition, the apostate will return to the faith of his youth. “ Chastened by advancing years, sated with thy errors, perhaps thou wilt return to us. Be obedient to the counsels of old age and learn to be faithful to God.”

Of these comings and goings, of these falls succeeded by repentance, so common in families already hereditarily, though secretly, attached to the Church, we may single out one case mentioned by De Rossi. We have already seen how the patrician and consular family of Acilius Glabrio suddenly made its appearance in the Church with the martyrdom of its head under Domitian. Christianity had a place in it before the end of the first century, and was handed down in it from generation to generation from the time of the Apostles to that of Constantine. Its monuments, in the catacomb of St. Priscilla which belonged to it, carry us from the beginning of the persecutions to their very end. Nevertheless the

¹ *Epist. cleri Romani ad clerum Carthag.*, inter Cyprianicas, 2.

² Migne, *P. L.*, vol. ii. col. 1106.

profane inscriptions also show that during these three centuries the Acilii never ceased occupying high posts. The comparison of the two series of inscriptions results, says De Rossi, in our meeting "this quasi-paradox that in one line of the Acilii, in which the faith was never extinguished, we yet find not only consuls and magistrates of the highest order, but also priests and priestesses, and even children who were members of those idolatrous colleges to which only patricians and their sons were privileged to belong."¹

It was to Christians of this type that the words of Tertullian applied: "Thy birth and thy wealth are a poor defence against idolatry."² It was of such people, whose life in spite of their abundant alms was a public scandal to the faithful, that Origen was thinking when he mooted a discussion on a question of casuistics of a kind which must have been frequent enough in the periods of persecution. The great Christian teacher asks himself the question, "Whether the Church has the right to pray for the salvation of the sinner, in order to obtain his delivery from eternal punishment, who, whilst committing during life many sins worthy of damnation, nevertheless did his best to be of service to the Church." Origen adds: "There are amongst the men in power many such sinners, who yet do all they can to help the Christian cause."³ De Rossi concludes: "I apply this testimony to what I have had occasion to say concerning the family of Acilius Glabrio and the position of several of its members

¹ De Rossi, *Bull. di archeol. Crist.*, 1888-1889, pp. 57-58.

² *Nativitas et substantia tua molestæ tibi sunt adversus idololatram.*—Tertullian, *De idolat.*, 18.

³ Origen, *In Matt. comment. series*, in Migne, *P. G.*, vol. xiii. col. 1772.

with regard to Christianity during the first three centuries.”¹

I should apply it to others as well; for instance, to those spoken of in the *Life of St. Cyprian*. Valerian’s persecution was at its height; his second edict was being everywhere strictly carried out, and the martyrdom of the Bishop of Carthage could not long be delayed. “Many *egregii* and *clarissimi*,” says the contemporary author of the *Life*, “old friends of Cyprian’s, counselled him to take to flight, and offered to conceal him at their homes.”² As the edict which was then being acted on began by proscribing the Christian nobility—commanding them to abjure under the pain of seeing their goods confiscated and themselves condemned to death—it seems probable that these old friends of St. Cyprian were among those who had yielded to threats, and that they were trying to make amends for their weakness by helping their saintly bishop.

The faithful of the higher classes who managed to persevere were among the first to acknowledge the magnitude of the difficulties which had discouraged so many of their brethren; their own courage they attributed to the grace of God; nor did they hesitate, when asked, to tell the pagans what they thought. This is shown by a beautiful extract from the Acts of the Martyrs, of which the hero is one of the victims of Valerian’s edict against the Christian nobility. This extract being derived from an authentic *Passion*, I may be permitted to quote it at length:—

“One of the brethren imprisoned in the jail (of Lambesa) was Æmilianus, who among the pagans

¹ *Bull. di archeol. Crist.*, 1894, p. 103.

² Pontius, *Vita et Passio S. Cæciliæ Cypriani*, 14.

held the rank of knight ; for fifty years he had lived like a hermit, and even in prison he continued his fastings and prayers, refreshing his soul, and in such wise hoping for the sacrament of the Lord. Once about midday he dozed off to sleep, and on awaking he told us the vision he had seen : I found myself out of prison and coming towards me was a pagan, my brother in the flesh. Desirous of discovering our secret, he asked me in a scoffing tone how long we were going to remain in painful darkness and in the distress of captivity. I replied : The soldiers of Christ have in their darkness a brilliant light and in fasting a delicious food, even the word of God. After hearing me out he again spoke, saying . Know ye this, that all of you who are in prison, if you persist in your stubbornness, will undergo capital punishment. I, fearing that he might be deceiving me with a lie, endeavoured to get from him some confirmation of this my desire. Is it really true, I asked ; shall we all suffer ? And again he said : The sword is even now hanging over your heads and your blood is about to flow ; but tell me, for I would much like to know, whether to all of you who despise this world, similar and equal rewards are given ? I replied : I am not able to express an opinion on so grave a matter, but lift thy eyes to heaven and thou wilt see an uncountable host of shining stars ; do all of them project the same fire ? Yet all of them partake of the same light. Still inquisitive, he asked again : If there be any difference, who will be those whom your God will prefer ? I replied : There are two whose names I cannot tell you, for they are known to God alone. And as he pressed me still more for an explanation I said : Those whose victory was

obtained at the cost of more difficulty and more pain will receive a more glorious crown, for of them it was written, 'It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven.'"¹

IV

The same causes which brought about the fall of so many Christian noblemen kept outside of the fold many of the same rank who in less difficult times would willingly have entered it. Only quite exceptional men were capable of renouncing all advantages of birth and fortune, or even of resigning themselves to retaining them merely on sufferance. We have only to remember that even in the latter part of the fourth century—at a time when Christianity was everywhere triumphant—there were still many people of high birth who, though inwardly converts, delayed their baptism until old age in order to remain more free in public and private life,² to understand why, whilst the persecutions were actually proceeding, a large number of people shrank from a conversion which would have necessitated either their retiring from public life or their remaining in a situation which they were liable to forfeit any moment.

Difficulties of this nature were not equally present in the case of ladies; for them it was not so difficult to live as Christians whilst retaining their rank. All they required was gravity and virtue; outwardly there was little difference between

¹ *Passio SS. Mariani et Jacobi*, in Ruinart, p. 229.

² See *Julien l'Apostat*, vol. i. pp. 167–169.

a pagan matron and a Christian lady of the same status. Abstention from the worship of gods and from attendance at the shows would scarcely have been noticed, since ladies were under no obligation, official or fashionable, of taking part in such things. Notwithstanding this, a few of the weaker sex may have been so far led astray by circumstances as to live that half-Christian, half-pagan life of which we have evidence in a curious epitaph.¹ But it seems that most of them were able to practise their religion without recourse to dissimulation. This view is strengthened by the fact that a large number of ladies of rank became converts in the first three centuries. It is quite evident that at that time, among the higher classes of Roman society, the number of Christian ladies was out of all proportion to the number of the men.

Though we know but little of the noble families of that period, we do know that in some of the very highest in the land the husband was a pagan and the wife a Christian. This was the case with Herminianus, the legate of Cappadocia, of whom Tertullian speaks; it was also the case with a governor of Syria, mentioned by St. Hippolytus,² and likewise that of a prefect of Rome at the beginning of the fourth century, whose wife, like a Christian Lucretia, stabbed herself to escape the

¹ *Filia mea inter fideles fidelis fuit, inter paganos pagana fuit*, a mutilated epitaph found at Rome, near the Flaminian gate.—*Bull. di archeol. Crist.*, 1877, pp. 118–124, and plate ix., No. 1. De Rossi thinks that this woman's father had placed on her tomb an inscription forbidding any sacrifice or idolatrous rite being offered thereon. The sentence discovered is supposed to be the conclusion of the inscription, and gives the reason of the prohibition, viz., that the woman had been a Christian, though she had been obliged to bear herself outwardly like a pagan.

² Hippolytus, *Comment. in Daniel*, iv. 18.

criminal designs of the Emperor Maxentius.¹ The same lack of proportion between men and women is noticeable amidst the higher middle classes in which the men were eligible for municipal posts. The matron Perpetua of Thuburbo was a Christian, and so were her mother, her aunt, and her brothers; but her father, and probably her husband too, were not. Another eminently respectable African, Victoria, fled from her home to avoid marrying a pagan, and refused to go to her brother, a lawyer at Abitene, and an ardent opponent of Christianity.² The somewhat high number of well-born ladies who were tried alone for being Christians is sufficient to show that many families were thus divided, either because the husband or father was sincerely attached to his ancient gods, or because of his ambition and worldly prudence. Sometimes the division was so deep, and the cowardice of the man so great, that we read of a Macedonian martyr thus answering the judge on her own and her two sisters' behalf: "We considered our husbands as our worst enemies, and we feared to be denounced by them."³ This was the case at Antioch during the last persecution; the pagan husband of the rich and noble Domnina actually volunteering to show the way to the soldiers who were pursuing her in her flight.⁴

Hence there arose a question, which became more and more pressing as the persecutions grew, that, namely, of mixed marriages. Tertullian was very much against them,⁵ and it was with the

¹ Eusebius, *H. E.*, viii. 14, 11; *De Vita Const.*, i. 34.

² *Acta SS. Saturnini, Dativi, &c.*, 7, in Ruinart, p. 412.

³ *Acta SS. Agapes, Chioniae, Irenes*, 5, in Ruinart, p. 424.

⁴ Eusebius, *De mart. Pal.*, viii. 12; Chrysostom, *Hom.*, li.

⁵ Tertullian, *Ad uxorem*, ii. 1, 3.

object of forewarning his own wife against such a union, in the case of his dying before her, that he wrote his treatise *Ad uxorem*. In it the position of the Christian wife of a pagan is depicted in the gloomiest colours, and probably we could find nowhere else such an eloquent description of the joys of Christian marriage. Even more energetically and with still greater authority were mixed marriages denounced by St. Cyprian;¹ fifty years later the Council of Illiberis pronounced a canonical sentence against any Christian who should be weak enough to give his daughter in marriage to a pagan.² But what is more to our point is, that the council itself takes cognisance of the excuse given by such Christian fathers, viz., the great number of Christian girls, *copiam puellarum*. If this means anything it means that in the Church at that time females were far more numerous than males, a disproportion which rendered Christian matches a matter of great difficulty; of this fact I have already given the reasons so far as the better middle classes were concerned, and it was for those classes that the council seems to have been legislating. The same was also true in the very highest class, and this is the fact which was responsible for a curious decision of Pope Callixtus respecting certain patrician marriages.

At the time of his pontificate, *i.e.* in the first quarter of the third century, there were in Rome many Christian ladies belonging to families of hereditary senatorial dignity. They had, therefore, a right to the title of *clarissimæ*, then reserved to the highest nobility of Rome. Some of these grand dames, having been unable to find Christian gentlemen of

¹ Cyprian, *De lapsis*, 6.

² Council of Illiberis, can. 15.

high rank, had, in order to keep within the law of the Church regarding mixed marriages, been obliged to remain unmarried. Doubtless they could have found Christian freemen of a lower rank, but to marry such would have been considered improper, and they would, moreover, have lost the title to which they clung.¹ The remaining alternative was not to marry at all, but unfortunately the idea of perpetual celibacy did not commend itself to all. Hence they thought of a stratagem which would consist in secretly espousing people with whom, according to civil law, their marriage would be invalid. In this fashion they would retain their title of nobility, since they would, in the eyes of the law, be still spinsters. Their idea was to marry a slave or a freed-man, for, on the one hand, the common law did not acknowledge the marriage of a slave,² and, on the other, the law governing the nobility declared null and void any marriage contracted by a *clarissima* with a slave or freed-man.³ But these artful ladies were at the same time devout and scrupulous Christians, and as such they naturally consulted the Church as to the validity of such unions. Pope Callixtus, who had been a slave himself, replied in the affirmative.⁴ His decision, merciful though risky, was vehemently attacked by a contemporary, who maintained (and possibly he was not altogether wrong) that such unions always turned out bad.⁵ Our concern in Callixtus's action is that it proves the independence of the Church with regard to the civil law in the

¹ Ulpian, *Digest*, I., ix. 8.

² Ulpian, *Regul.*, v. 5; Paul, *Sentent.*, ii. 19, 6.

³ Modestinus, *Digest*, XXII., ii. 42; Paul, *ibid.*, XII., ii. 47; XXIII., ii. 16; Ulpian, *ibid.*, XXIV., i. 3, 1.

⁴ *Philosophumena*, ix. 11.

⁵ *Ibid.*

matter of marriages, and that it shows the disproportion between the number of Christian ladies and Christian men of high rank.

This was my chief reason for quoting the episode related by the author of the *Philosophumena*. It may be that the patrician ladies who, in the anxiety of their conscience, asked for a decision from Callixtus were not among the most heroic of the Christians. Happily, many women of the aristocracy gave proof in other ways of their attachment to their religion. The number of their martyrs is greater than the number of male martyrs of equal rank. At Rome this fact is evident at a glance, and in the provinces, too, the martyrs, whose great fortune and high rank are mentioned in their Acts, are more often women than men. This is all the more remarkable because, speaking generally, *i.e.* taking the totality of all the martyrs, the proportions are reversed, the number of the men being far greater than that of the women: these latter, living a hidden life at home and holding in the Church only an obscure position, were naturally less noticed by the persecutors. Hence, to conclude: Generally speaking, there were among the martyrs more men than women, exceptionally among the martyrs belonging to the richer and nobler classes there were more women than men, the reason being that men of this rank required extraordinary courage to embrace Christianity or to persevere in it in periods of persecution.

V

But the women who were called upon to make confession of their faith before the courts had also their trials—sometimes exceedingly cruel ones.

200 TEN LECTURES ON THE MARTYRS

When we study the Acts of the Martyrs we are able to see that, whatever may have been their situation in the world, their weakness was a poor protection against the caprice and brutality of some of the judges. Even among the highest, best educated, and most refined classes of the Romans there was a shocking lack of any sense of decency and moral delicacy. Was it that the habit of ordering slaves about had deprived them of respect for the weak? Was it that, being accustomed to brutal shows, they had lost the sentiment of pity? Or was it the pagan immorality which had petrified their hearts and made of many of them the men *sine affectione* whom St. Paul upbraids?¹ It may well be so, and in this case it is Christianity which may claim the glory of having sown in men's hearts the twin virtues of compassion and modesty, which have borne such good fruit in all the civilisations which have had their source in the Gospel. What makes us think that it really is so, is the fact that in the measure that societies and nations seek to separate themselves from the Gospel, the two virtues languish, and the old pagan harshness again becomes the rule in private and public life. Among the pagans of Rome we see it manifested in many ways in their treatment of the Christian women, first and foremost by an utter forgetfulness of the consideration due to extreme youth, of that *maxima reverentia* which a Roman poet claimed for the *puer* and of which the *puella* was not less worthy.

As according to Roman law the twelfth year had been fixed as the age at which a girl became

¹ St. Paul, *Rom.* i. 31.

marriageable,¹ the judges and executioners felt themselves authorised thereby to treat children of that age with as much severity and cruelty as if they had been women in full possession of their moral and physical strength. It never occurred to a Roman magistrate to discharge, as having acted unwittingly, a little girl of twelve who had blasphemed against the gods or had given herself up as a Christian. The only concession they made to youth was that they do not seem to have hunted out these young martyrs; but as soon as they came under their observation, as soon as they were denounced, or surrendered themselves, they were treated as pitilessly as their seniors. This was the case with Agnes, the celebrated Roman martyr, who, when twelve years of age, escaped from her governess² and ran to the courts to deliver herself up as a Christian; this was the case with Eulalia, another child of twelve, who ran away from her father's house and defied the persecutor at Merida, in Spain; this was the case, in the African town of Thuburbo, of Secunda, yet another maid of twelve, who, according to somewhat previous Roman usages, had already been asked in marriage, her parents being wealthy. Witnessing the arrest of two young Christian country girls, of whom one was fourteen years of age, she joined herself to them and persisted in accompanying them to the court where she shared

¹ Justinian, *Inst.*, I., xxii., præem. For an instance of a Christian girl married in 330 before she was fifteen, see De Rossi, *Inscr. Christ. urbis Romæ*, vol. i., No. 37, p. 36. When St. Melania the younger, in 397, married the senator Pinianus, she was hardly fourteen, whilst he was only seventeen; see her Greek and Latin biographies, in Cardinal Rampolla's work, *S. Melania giuniore senatrice Romana*, 1905, pp. 5, 43.

² *Inscr. Christ. urbis Romæ*, vol. ii. p. 45.

their sentence. The pagan judge showed no pity, but what of that! Only a hundred years ago there were plenty of equally cruel proconsuls in France, and who could reckon the number of the children of equally tender age massacred by the Revolution, or even executed according to law?¹ Their names have perished, as doubtless have the names of many other young victims slaughtered during the three centuries of the persecutions. Fortunately, the recollection of a few has been stored up in the memory of Christian tradition. Agnes became, in course of time, the national saint of the Romans, and a Pope of the fourth century wrote her panegyric, into which he introduced the meagre details of her martyrdom which had been preserved by tradition;² the greatest of the lyrical poets of Christian antiquity put into wonderful verse the legends which already were forming about her.³ Eulalia, too, inspired the same poet, Prudentius, to commit to writing an exquisite piece of song.⁴ With regard to Secunda, the little African girl, popular feeling found vent in a curiously naïve inscription. On the monument erected near the place of her martyrdom was engraved, "Three saints, Maxima, Donatilla, and Secunda the good girl"—*Sanctæ tres, Maxima, Donatilla et Secunda bona puella*.⁵ A judge had had the heart to condemn this "good girl" of twelve to be publicly shown in the amphitheatre and then beheaded! The history of the persecutions has also treasured the memory of two boys, also martyred,

¹ Taine, *La Révolution*, vol. iii. pp. 287, 288.

² *Inscr. Christ. urbis Romæ*, vol. ii. p. 45.

³ Prudentius, *Peri Stephanon*, xiv.

⁴ *Ibid.*, iii.

⁵ *Corp. Inscr. Lat.*, vol. viii. 1392.

Ponticus¹ and Pancras,² but at least they were somewhat older, being respectively fourteen and fifteen years of age. Another Christian of fifteen, Dioscorus, was acquitted. Quoth the judge, "I shall give this boy time to repent."³ They were actually harsher with girls than with boys!

But the rapidity of the condemnation will seem a real mercy if we remember another trial, far worse than death, which many others suffered, and which, did we forget it, would deprive martyrdom of one of its worst stings and leave us with but an incomplete idea of the horrors Christian women had to undergo. In effect they had to fear not only pagan harshness but also pagan lewdness. The *Passions* of the martyrs often mention the dilemma in which a girl was sometimes placed by the judge; of two things she had to choose one, either abjuration or the brothel. One such narrative, that of Didymus and Theodora, forms a regular drama which Corneille attempted indeed, but of which his chaste muse could not depict the truth in all its horror. It may be that all the *Passions* in which such incidents are related are not equally historical, and that in some of them the fancy of

¹ Ποντικῶ παιδαρίον ὡς πεντεκαίδεκα ἔτων.—Letter of the Christians of Lyons and Vienne, in Eusebius, *H. E.*, v. 1, 53.

² Erat autem Pancratius quasi annorum quatuordecim.—*Acta S. Pancratii*, in *Acta SS.*, May, vol. iii. p. 21; cp. *Analecta Bollandiana*, vol. x., 1891, p. 53.

³ Eusebius, *H. E.*, vi. 41, 19. We do not know the exact age of other martyrs, such as Cyril, in Cappadocia, who is sometimes described as *puer*, at others as *juvenis* (*Hom.* attributed to St. Firmilian, in Ruinart, p. 253); the twins slaughtered with their mother at Lambesa (*Passio SS. Jacobi, Mariani*, 11; *ibid.*, p. 230); the two girls, *puellæ*, Tertulla and Antonia, adopted children of Agapius, who were put to death with him (*ibid.*); Maurus, buried at Rome in the cemetery of St. Callixtus; *insontem puerum cui poena nulla defecit*, as wrote on his tomb Pope Damasus.

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a later narrator has invented the tale to make the story of his heroine more touching. But the considerable number of the Acts which contain such episodes, and the real value of some among them, will not allow us to believe that such stories were always fabrications.¹ Moreover, outside of the Acts of the Martyrs there are unquestionably authentic documents which allow of no doubt as to the existence of this moral torture of which the threat entered into the proceedings of the court of justice, and which when carried out, to the shame of ancient civilisation, sometimes actually took the place of the beasts, the stake, or the sword. Thus we find Tertullian, in 197, telling of a Christian woman handed over to the whoremaster instead of being given to the lions: *Ad lenonem potius quam ad leonem*.² Twenty years after we find him again alluding to this hateful practice, and this time it is not merely of one person that he speaks: "The world itself," he exclaims, "witnesses to the virtue which, of all, is in our eyes the first, when it endeavours to punish our women-folk by defilement rather than by torment."³ Forty years later St. Cyprian consoles the Christians for the desolation caused by the pestilence of 262: "Now the Christian virgins depart in peace, and in all their glory, having ceased to dread the threats of Antichrist, and prostitution and the house of infamy."⁴ In the fourth century Eusebius, who is not a maker of tales but a sober historian and a witness, states that in the East, in

¹ Cp. F. Augar, *Die Frau im Römischen Christenprocess*, in *Texte und Untersuchungen*, vol. xiii., 1904.

² Tertullian, *Apol.*, 56.

³ Tertullian, *De pudicitia*, i. 2.

⁴ Cyprian, *De mortalitate*, 15.

his own time, the virtue of Christian women was made the sport of the persecutors, that some were condemned to a life of shame, which many others were fortunate enough to escape by a sentence of death, but from which others were only able to save themselves by suicide.¹ The same fact is testified to by St. Ambrose,² St. John Chrysostom,³ and St. Augustine.⁴

We should hurry over such a subject did we not find in it a new occasion for admiring in the midst of the sorest trials the faith and pride and resignation of the martyred women. For, firstly, the infamous threat held over these poor creatures contained an implicit acknowledgment of their virtue; the persecutors knew that every Christian woman worthy of the name placed her chastity above all else, and they hoped to take advantage of this to make her sacrifice her religion. Moreover, they had so lofty an idea of Christianity that they were convinced that a woman when once dishonoured would be for ever excluded from the flock of Christ: "Thou canst not belong to the God of the Christians," said a judge to Afra, an unfortunate but repentant woman.⁵ The persecutors argued in this fashion: Christian women will either abjure through hatred of the sin, or they will passively submit to shamelessness; in either case they will no longer belong to the Church. But the heroic good sense of the Christian women spoilt the plans of the judges. On the brink of the abyss they still looked with confidence to God: "Whatever

¹ Eusebius, *H. E.*, viii. 12, 14.

² Ambrose, *De virginitate*, iv. 7; *Ep.*, 37.

³ Chrysostom, *Hom.* XL., LI.

⁴ St. Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, i. 26.

⁵ *Passio S. Afræ*, 2, in Ruinart, p. 501.

God wills," said the slave Sabina to the neocorus¹ Polemon.² "I believe," said Theodora to the prefect of Egypt, "that thou art not ignorant of this: God sees our hearts, and one thing only He considers in us, the firm will of remaining chaste. Hence, if thou constrainest me to be outraged, I will suffer that it be so. I am ready to deliver up my body over which power is given thee; but God alone has power over my soul."³

But whenever they saw a loophole for escape these Christian women hastened to take advantage of it. Occasionally they endeavoured by a taunt to enkindle the judge's wrath, hoping that in revenge he would condemn them to immediate death. Such was the story of the slave Potamiana, which was abbreviated by Eusebius from the ancient Acts of her martyrdom. After having cruelly tortured her, the prefect of Egypt threatened her with a life of ignominy. The martyr reflected an instant, and then suddenly burst into such blasphemies against the gods that the horrified magistrate condemned her to be plunged there and then into a cauldron of boiling pitch."⁴ A hundred years later, at Gaza, another Christian woman was being condemned to the life of a strumpet by the prefect Firmilian, one of the most infamous tools of Maximin Daia; whilst the sentence was being read, the woman interrupted him and began to bewail in shrill tones the wickedness of the tyrant who had confided the government of the province to such an unworthy prefect. The magistrate, boiling over with fury, had her whipped

¹ *Neocorus*, meaning originally a "temple cleaner," came in later times to signify a species of city magistrate.—[*Trans.*]

² *Passio S. Pionii*, 7; *ibid.*, p. 128.

³ *Passio SS. Didymi et Theodore*, 2; *ibid.*, p. 427.

⁴ Eusebius, *H. E.*, vi. 5.

and then torn with iron nails; she was finally burnt alive in company with another woman who had ventured to protest at the sight of her sufferings.¹

VI

It is now high time to turn over this page of the tale of the persecutions,² for it is smirched with filth as well as with blood. We have not yet done with the moral trials of the martyrs.

There was one which all without distinction had to suffer, men and women, nobles and plebeians,

¹ Eusebius, *De mart. Pal.*, 8.

² But there are several other questions which we must note here. The first is whether these indignities were expressly ordered by the edicts of persecution. This is improbable, at least so far as the edicts of the first three centuries are concerned; but the magistrates had a choice of punishments, and, many of the martyrs being of low rank, abuse was inevitable. (Cp. Ulpian, *Digest*, XXV., vii. 1, art. 1; Marcianus, *ibid.*, 3; Paul, *Sententie*, II., xxvi., 11, 16.) Even in pagan history there were precedents, or, at least, instances on record of such punishment being meted out to women of good condition; *v.g.* the punishment inflicted on the daughters of Sejanus (Tacitus, *Ann.*, v. 9; Suetonius, *Tiberius*, 61; Dion Cassius, lvi. 11). At the commencement of the fourth century the edicts began to order this punishment to be administered to the Christians, that is, if we may trust the statement of the *Passion of Didymus and Theodora* (1, in Ruinart, p. 427). Another question is whether at first virgins alone, or also married women, were called upon to choose between apostasy and shame. Probably only virgins were thus threatened; Tertullian's language is ambiguous (*Apol.*, 56; *De pudic.*, 1, 2), but St. Cyprian clearly distinguishes between the Christian virgins, whom the plague delivered from the fear of dishonour, and the Christian matrons, whom it preserved only from torture (*De mortalitate*, 15). But under Diocletian, and especially in the East, this distinction soon disappeared; see, for instance, the conduct of the sophist Hierocles, prefect of Egypt, in Eusebius, *De martyribus Pal.*, 5, 3. Lastly, it may be asked whether this punishment was ever actually carried out. Some of the *Passions* tell of the martyrs being preserved inviolate by the respect they inspired, or by an act of Divine intervention (*Passio SS. Sabinae et Serapiae*, in *Acta SS.*, August, vol. iv. p. 500; *Acta SS. Petri, Andreae, Pauli et Dionysiae virginis*,

rich and poor. How many must have hesitated in their confession, not so much on account of the disgrace and ruin and torture, as at the thought of their having to leave their loved ones. We, who all of us have to suffer the loss of friends by death, can realise something of the feelings of a Christian on whom it entirely depended to utter the word which was to snap once for all the links connecting him with his family. In this case we admire the merit of the martyr's free choice, because the bitterness of our own experience, lacking though it is in the element of freedom, teaches us the magnitude of the sacrifice made by him.

There are few autobiographies to approach in beauty the narrative which the renowned martyr of Carthage, St. Perpetua, has left of her imprisonment and trial. A scholar who has made a special study of it is quite right in saying that the narrative is "marked by extreme simplicity; it is eloquent indeed, but with no touch of conscious art or rhetoric."¹ This is especially the case with those passages in which she describes her meeting in prison with the different members of her family. Soon after being seized she received a visit from her father.

3, in Ruinart, p. 148; Vincent of Beauvais, *Speculum historiale*, xii. 104 (*Passion of St. Columba*); *Acta SS. Didymi et Theodoræ*, 4, 5, in Ruinart, pp. 426, 430; *Passio SS. Theodoti Ancyranæ et septem virginum*, 13; *ibid.*, p. 360; Prudentius, *Peri Stephanon*, xiv. 43-51). But there are historical grounds for believing that the maidens were not equally fortunate in all cases. The book, *De vera virginis integritate*, wrongly ascribed to St. Basil, but which appears to date from the fourth century, and should possibly be ascribed to his namesake, the homeousian Basil, of Ancyra (cp. *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique*, Louvain, January 1905), says (52) that some were saved because the heavenly spouse to whom they had sacrificed all, took charge of them, but that there were also some who were violated, and who yet remained dear to Him to whom their soul was faithful (Migne, *P. G.*, vol. xxx., col. 670).

¹ Robinson, *The Passion of Perpetua*, p. 44.

“He endeavoured to change my resolution out of love for me. ‘Father,’ I said to him, ‘dost thou see that vase on the ground?’ ‘I do,’ he replied. ‘Canst thou call it anything but a vase?’ ‘No, I cannot.’ ‘So I too cannot call myself anything but a Christian.’ My father was angry at my words and threw himself on me to put out my eyes, but he only succeeded in hurting me, and went his way.” Perpetua and her companions were led to the prison of Carthage; there their relatives were occasionally allowed to see them. “I was then suckling my baby, who was half dead for want of food,” relates Perpetua, “and being anxious I spoke of him to my mother, exhorted my brother, and commended to all of them my little boy. I continued in anxiety for several days until I obtained that my baby should be left in my charge whilst I remained in prison. No sooner was this done than I regained my strength and ceased from fretting, and the jail became an abode of happiness which I preferred to any other.”¹

Several days passed in this fashion. “Then came a rumour that we were to be questioned. My father hurried from the town, overwhelmed with grief, and he came up to me hoping to persuade me. ‘My daughter,’ said he, ‘have some pity for my grey hair, have some pity for thy father, if I am still worthy of the name. Remember that my hands brought thee up, that it was through my care that thou hast attained the flower of thy youth, that I loved thee above all thy brothers; do not shame me before all men; remember thy brothers, thy mother, thy aunt, and also thy baby, who without thee will not survive. Put away the resolution which will be our

¹ *Passio SS. Perpetuæ, Felicitatis*, 3.

undoing. No one of us could ever lift up his voice again wert thou condemned to die.' Thus spake my father in his love for me; he threw himself at my feet, weeping, and calling me no longer daughter but lady. I took pity on the grey hair of my father, who, alone of all my family, did not rejoice in my suffering, and I reassured him, saying, 'When I am in the dock, that which God wills will come to pass, for we do not belong to ourselves but to God.' He then departed full of sorrow."¹

At last came the day assigned for the trial. "When my turn came," says Perpetua, "my father suddenly appeared in court carrying my baby; he pulled me over to him and whispered tearfully, 'Take pity on thy child.' And the procurator, Hilarianus, also, who had the right of the sword on account of the death of the proconsul Minutius Timinianus, said to me, 'Pity the grey hairs of thy father, and pity the youth of thy child; come now, offer a sacrifice for the health of the emperors.' I replied, 'I do not offer sacrifices.' 'Art thou a Christian?' then asked Hilarianus. I answered, 'I am a Christian.' And as my father was still by my side tempting me, Hilarianus gave orders for his expulsion, and when he was struck with a rod I felt the blow as if I had been struck myself, so much did I compassionate the unhappy old age of my father. Then the judge pronounced sentence condemning all of us to be thrown to the beasts, and we returned to the prison rejoicing. As my baby was accustomed to suckle me and to live with me in prison, I immediately sent the deacon Pomponius to request the child of my father. But my father refused to yield it, and it pleased God that the child no longer cried for his mother, nor was I

¹ *Passio SS. Perpetue, Felicitatis*, 5.

inconvenienced by my milk, so that I had to bear neither anxiety nor suffering.”¹

This was not Perpetua’s last interview with her family. “When the day of the show was approaching,” she relates, “my father, bowed down with sorrow, came to see me. He began to pluck out his beard, writhing on the ground, rubbing his forehead in the dust, and cursing the age which he had reached; the words he used were fit to move any creature, and I was quite grieved to see an old man in such great affliction.”²

The last words of Perpetua were for her family. She was standing in the amphitheatre waiting for death. She had asked to see her brother, who came to her with another Christian. “Remain steadfast in the faith,” she said to them, “love one another, and be not scandalised by my sufferings.”³ This was her adieu to the world and to her people.

Is it possible that this wonderful woman, so human and tender and full of pity for her people, at once so good a daughter and so good a mother, could have been called an unfeeling fanatic? M. Duruy writes: “As a historian of human facts, I am compelled to see in this saint a woman who publicly defies the laws of her country, to point to the mother who abandons the child she was feeding with her milk, and the daughter exposing her old father to every outrage.”⁴ But it is no crime to defy wicked laws; and as to her father we already know Perpetua’s tenderness for him; nor did she abandon her child, since she left the baby—whose presence had made the prison seem a palace

¹ *Passio SS. Perpetue, Felicitatis*, 6.

² *Ibid.*, 9.

³ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁴ Duruy, *Hist. des Romains*, vol. vi. p. 226.

—in the care of a grandmother, an aunt, and an uncle, who were to bring it up as a Christian. This martyr had strong feelings of love, but they were well ordered, going out to God in the first instance and to her family in the second. To say that she “walked to death trampling on the hearts of her friends”¹ is to speak as one ignorant of the passages which I have just translated, if it is not, moreover, to utter a real blasphemy against heroism.

“When the hour struck to confess Christ, how many faithful,” writes St. Augustine, “were troubled in mind by the embraces of their relatives!”² Some few—though possibly they were not the least moved—hardened themselves against showing any emotion, but somehow we feel their effort. Such a sight is afforded by the *Passion* of the martyr of Sirmium, St. Irenæus.

He was brought a first time before Probus, the governor of Pannonia. In the hope of forcing him to abjure, the magistrate had him tortured. “His relations seeing his sufferings begged of him; his children kissing his feet implored him, saying, ‘Father, have pity on thyself and on us.’ His wife, too, in tears besought him. All about him there was nothing but the weeping of relatives, the sighs of slaves, the wailing of neighbours, and the lamentations of friends—a universal hubbub all crying together, ‘Pity thy youth.’ But he, relying on a better love, and having before him the words of the Lord, ‘If any one shall deny Me before men, I shall deny him before My Father who is in heaven,’ withstood them all and said never a word, for he was desirous of encompassing his sublime vocation.

¹ Duruy, *Hist. des Romains*, vol. vi. p. 227.

² Augustin, *Sermo* cclxxxiv.

The prefect Probus addressed him thus: ‘Reflect, be dissuaded from thy folly by the groans of so many people, think of thy wife; come now, offer a sacrifice.’ But he replied: ‘My resolve is unshakable, I offer no sacrifice;’ and he was carried back to prison.”¹ Later on—this time in the night—the case again came before the court. Probus, after having Irenæus scourged, again questioned him, trying to touch the martyr in his deepest and tenderest affections: “Hast thou a spouse?—I have not. Hast thou children?—I have none. Hast thou any relatives?—None whatever. Who were then the people who surrounded thee when thou wast last questioned?—My Lord Jesus Christ has said, He who loves his father, or his mother, or his wife, or his children, or his brothers, or his relatives more than Me, is not worthy of Me.”² And with his eyes fixed on heaven, rehearsing within him the promises of God and despising all else, he seemed no longer to recognise those present. Probus again broke in: “Offer a sacrifice for their sake at least.—My children, replied the martyr, adore the same God as I. He can save them.” And in silence he awaited the sentence of death.

At first sight, in the attitude and words of Irenæus, there seems lacking that affection and feeling for human pain which made Perpetua’s sacrifice so touching. But if we look closer, if we consider his eyes obstinately fixed on heaven so as not to see those about him, if we listen to the tone of his replies, given curtly and in the words of Scripture, as if the martyr feared to trust himself; if we consider his “haste to encompass

¹ *Passio S. Irenæi*, 3, in Ruinart, p. 433.

² *Ibid.*, 4, p. 434.

his end," we shall then perceive that he was of set purpose avoiding any occasion of weakness. No doubt to some extent the thought of the duty, incumbent on him more than on any one else, of setting a good example—in a country so recently claimed by the Gospel as Pannonia, over which this young husband had been placed as bishop—was the reason of his attitude of extreme detachment. But it is difficult to explain the silence which he never broke to speak to his friends, otherwise than by supposing that he was afraid of breaking down. He had not the strength to say to them, like Polyeuctus to Paulina, "I love thee, much less than my God, but far more than myself." His sternness was on the surface, and his nonchalance was but a mask to cover the pent-up feelings within. At any rate, this is how I look at the case.

LECTURE VII

THE TRIAL OF THE MARTYRS

I

HAD I the time, and were I otherwise sufficiently able, I should like to say something of the evolution of the criminal law at the time of the persecutions.

At first blush it appears that this law should have followed the manifest trend of public feeling in the time of the Empire and become milder than before; for in spite of the many abuses still retained and sanctioned by Roman custom, there can be no manner of doubt that public morals were losing their previous rude and primitive character, and that this change in public feeling was reflected in a corresponding change in the civil law. We had better state at once that it is scarcely probable that the Gospel had anything to do with this alteration, though this has been maintained.¹ The influence of the Gospel is clearly discernible in Constantine's reforms,² but it is difficult to find any trace of it either in the work of legislation, or in the judicial decisions of the time of the pagan Empire. The humaner laws and interpretations which between the first and the third centuries

¹ See Troplong, *De l'influence du Christianisme sur le droit civil des Romains*, 2nd ed., 1855.

² *Theodosian Code*, II., viii. 1 : xxv. ; III., v. 3 ; IX., iii. 1 : xl. 2 ; XI., xxvii. 1, 2 ; XVI., ii. 4 ; *Justinian Code*, I., xiii. 1, 2 ; II., xv. 3 ; V., xxvi. 1 : xxvii. 1, 5 ; VII., xvi. 1 ; Eusebius, *De Vita Const.*, iv. 26 ; Aurelius Victor, *De Cæsaribus*, 41 ; Augustin, *Sermo lxxxviii.* 9.

displaced much of the hard letter of olden civil legislation, seem to have been a result of that stoical philosophy which found favour among most of the lawyers and not a few of the emperors. But whatever may have been the cause of this progress effected in civil law, we are surprised to find that it was not accompanied by a similar change in the criminal law; the path of the two in their development was not—as might have been expected—parallel, but actually divergent. The explanation of this apparent anomaly is, I think, not difficult to find.

It is because the progress of criminal law was governed not by philosophy or by judicial science, which each day under the influence of philosophy was becoming more subtle and delicate, but by politics alone, of which the tendency was towards imperialism, that is, was set in the direction of despotism and the eradication of individual freedom. The protection afforded by the laws of the Republic¹ had been replaced by caprice, which abolished all the guarantees formerly established by the law in favour of the accused. This retrograde movement becomes manifest in the third century. It was then that Rome witnessed the abolition of the *quæstiones perpetuæ*, i.e. the jury for criminal cases, and the ascription of criminal trials to the prefect. Caracalla's pretence of extending Roman citizenship to every subject of the Empire resulted, not in securing to all provincials the privileges of the Roman citizen, but in assimilating Roman citizens to the inhabitants of the provinces, thus making all the subjects of the Empire, whatever their quality, justiceable to the governors, and in suppressing the appeal to Cæsar of which St. Paul had made use in the first century,

¹ "Lenitate legum munita," says Cicero, *Pro Rabirio*, 3.

but which no longer appears after the beginning of the third. At the same time torture, formerly reserved for slaves alone, began to be used on plebeians of free condition. Modes of punishment until then unheard of began to find a place in the code: *postea id genus pœnæ adinventum est*,¹ says the jurist Callistratus, speaking of death by burning, which did not exist before the Empire. Livy, speaking of the Roman Empire, had said that of all nations it was the most lenient in punishing crime, but his words were every day becoming less true.²

But of all those amenable to the law, the Christians were the worst off for this juridical change. You already know how it affected them generally by making of their religion a new crime, or, if you prefer, by re-establishing, with new sanctions, the old law against strange religions which had long since fallen into disuse. But it also affected them in detail by aggravating the criminal procedure whenever they were concerned. It even seems that the imperial law, already burdensome enough in all conscience, was made even more grievous to suit their case; of this we shall find evidence when we follow the martyrs to their prison and before their judges.

II

The preliminary of the martyr's trial was his arrest. Two classes of pursuivants shared this duty. According to circumstances, it was the office either of officers appointed by the townships, or of agents of the central government.

At Smyrna it was the irenarch, a sort of justice

¹ *Digest*, XLVIII., xix. 28.

² Livy, iv. 9.

of the peace, or superintendent of the town police, who came with his posse of soldiers, on horse and foot, to seize St. Polycarp.¹ At Lyons the martyrs of the year 177 were taken to prison by the city magistrates, helped by the tribunes of the urban cohort which was then garrisoned in Gaul.² During the Decian persecution St. Pionius was arrested at Smyrna by Polemon, an officer of the temple, invested also with some secular authority.³ At Apamea, in Phrygia, Tryphon and Respicius were taken by the irenarch, who brought with him the prefect's ushers.⁴ At Ægæa, in Lycia, it was the curiales of the town who brought the Christians to the governor.⁵ In an African town, during the reign of Diocletian, we read that the curator (then a municipal officer) of the town captured Felix, the bishop, together with his priests.⁶ In the same way, at Abitene, the faithful were surprised during a Sunday service by the magistrates of the colony.⁷

At other times the arrest was effected by imperial agents, by the military police, or even by soldiers of the regular army. At Rome, under Antoninus Pius, a centurion (either of the urban cohorts or of the watch) apprehended Ptolemæus.⁸ The martyrs of Scillium, in 180, were brought to the court by ushers.⁹ In Egypt it was the *frumentarius*, a sort of military police-officer in the employ of the governor, who was sent to seek for Dionysius of Alexandria.¹⁰

¹ *Martyrium Polycarpi*, 6.

² Letter of the Christians of Lyons, in Eusebius, *H. E.*, v. 1, 8.

³ *Passio S. Pionii*, 3.

⁴ *Acta SS. Tryphonis et Respicii*, 1.

⁵ *Acta SS. Claudii, Asterii*, 1.

⁶ *Acta SS. Felicis*, 1, 2.

⁷ *Acta SS. Saturnini, Dativi, &c.*, 2.

⁸ Justin, *II. Apol.*, 2.

⁹ *Acta martyrum Scillitanorum*, 1.

¹⁰ Eusebius, *H. E.*, vi. 40.

At Carthage St. Cyprian was arrested by two agents of the proconsul, the *strator* and the *equistrator*.¹ From the *Acts of James and Marianus* we gather that in Numidia, a province wholly under martial law, it was not the police, but legionaries headed by their centurion who scoured the country for Christians.² In Spain it was the *beneficarii*, picked men who formed the bodyguard of the prefect, who came to apprehend St. Fructuosus and his deacons.³ At Thessalonica it was a soldier of the watch (*stationarius miles*) who took in charge Agape, Chionia, and Irene.⁴ At Pompeiopolis, in Cilicia, the Christians, Tarachus, Probus, and Andronicus, were arrested by two *speculatores*.⁵ In each legion these *speculatores* acted as messengers and executioners.⁶

Christians thus arrested were sometimes interrogated immediately, but usually they were first clapped into jail, and then brought out when their case came up for consideration.

In what did this imprisonment of the, as yet uncondemned, Christian consist? Though sometimes it did not imply much, it usually involved great hardships. It occasionally happened that the accused were able to obtain, for business or other reasons, a remand in custody of a soldier or of some public officer, or even of some simple citizen who, under the severest penalties, was held responsible for the prisoner.⁷ This was called in legal Latin

¹ Pontius, *Vita S. Cypriani*, 15.

² *Passio SS. Mariani et Jacobi*, 2, 4.

³ *Acta SS. Fructuosi, Augurii, Eulogii*, 1.

⁴ *Passio SS. Agapes, Chioniae, Irenes*, 3.

⁵ *Acta SS. Tarachi, Probi, Andronici*, 1.

⁶ See Marquardt, *Römische Staatsverwaltung*, vol. ii, p. 530.

⁷ *Digest*, XIII., iii. 12, 14. Sallust (*Catilina*, 47) gives the names of the citizens who received Catilina's accomplices in *liberis custodiis*.

custodia militaris, custodia libera, and even sometimes *custodia delicata*.

Its most ancient instance recorded in religious history is that of St. Paul. "When we were come to Rome," writes the author of the Acts, "Paul was suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him."¹ In this state he was able, during the two years which elapsed before his appeal to Cæsar came up for judgment, to receive the visits of Jews and Christians, and preach the Gospel. The irons which he wore, and which were attached to the soldier whenever they went for a walk together, was the only sign of his captivity.

In a wonderful autobiography, of which I have already quoted some fragments, the African martyr Perpetua speaks first of what happened between her arrest and her imprisonment. This part of the narrative begins with these words: "Whilst we were still with the persecutors," and ends as follows: "Some days after, we were put in jail." Hence several days passed between the two events, days which she spent in *libera custodia* either in her own house or in that of her relatives, or in that of some magistrate or citizen, but always in the company of a warder, *cum persecutoribus*.²

In the same way St. Cyprian, in the interval between his apprehension and his trial, was kept at Carthage in the house of one of the pursuivants who had arrested him. He spent a night at this place, and had the pleasure of meeting at table his usual friends. The author of his *Life* calls this detention of his, *custodia delicata*, and indeed his

¹ Acts xxviii. 16.

² *Passio SS. Perpetuæ, Felicitatis*, 3.

guardian seems to have been full of consideration for his illustrious prisoner.¹

Other instances of this might be quoted,² but the usual thing was to detain the accused in the public jail, *custodia publica*, in which custom we find a case in point of that amplification of the letter of the law where Christians were concerned, of which we spoke a moment ago. One striking difference between the Roman penal law and our own was that in the former there was no such thing as punitive imprisonment. The prison was only preventive, *i.e.* preliminary to the trial; its object, says the jurist Ulpian, is to restrain men not to punish them, *ad continendos homines, non ad puniendos*.³ Hence the time spent in prison was not to exceed the period necessary for drawing up the charge. We find that this was generally the case with the martyrs of the first two centuries; their imprisonment lasted but a little while, and the trial, as a rule, ended quickly. But in the latter persecutions—when the war against the Church assumed a methodical character, and when it was no longer a question of repressing a pretended crime,

¹ Pontius, *Vita S. Cypriani*, 15.

² *Passio SS. Montani, Lucii*, 2; *Passio S. Philippi*, 7.

³ *Digest*, XLVIII., xix. 8, art. 9. The only known instance of perpetual imprisonment is mentioned by Valerius Maximus (vi. 3, 3); the Senate sentenced to be imprisoned for life a Roman who had amputated the fingers of his left hand to escape military service; *publicatis enim bonis ejus, ipsum æternis vinculis puniendum censuit*. The same punishment was suggested by Julius Cæsar for the accomplices of Catilina (Sallust, *Catilina*, 51); he also added that this punishment should be inflicted in one of the provincial towns, *publicandas eorum pecunias, ipsos in vinculis habendos per municipia*. But these were political expedients, and not regular legal punishments. Again, imprisonment for a time, a punishment often inflicted on the slaves, sometimes even by a judicial sentence, was more a domestic than a civil penalty.

but of constraining the Christians to apostatise—then we find them languishing in jail, not merely for months, but even for years. The prison thus became by itself a punishment, or a means of torture, under both of which aspects it was equally illegal.

“One sole confession suffices to make a martyr,” writes St. Cyprian to some courageous prisoners “but you, you confess Christ every time, when invited to leave your dungeon you prefer to freedom the prison with all its horror, and the hunger and thirst that prevails there.”¹ In the third and fourth centuries the length of the imprisonment depended entirely on the will either of the sovereign or of the provincial magistrate. Under Septimius Severus, Alexander, bishop of Jerusalem, remained in prison for nine long years.² Under Decius, the priest Moses was in prison at Rome for eleven months and eleven days.³ Under Valerian, Lucius, Montanus, and their companions spent several months in the prisons of Carthage.⁴ Under Diocletian, the Christian was often kept prisoner until he apostatised or had come to be regarded as utterly hopeless. “I once saw in Bithynia,” writes Lactantius, “a governor rejoicing as if he had vanquished a nation of the barbarians. Yet the only cause of his joy was that a Christian, who had gloriously resisted for two years, now at last appeared to have yielded.”⁵ Two years was also the amount of time spent by the exegetist Pamphilus on remand in the prison of Cæsarea.⁶

¹ Cyprian, *Ep.*, 16.

² Eusebius, *H. E.*, vi. 12.

³ *Liberian Catalogue*, in Duchesne, *Liber Pontificalis*, vol. i. p. 4.

⁴ *Passio SS. Montani, Lucii*, 12, in Ruinart, p. 237.

⁵ Lactantius, *Div. Inst.*, v. 30.

⁶ Eusebius, *De mart. Pal.*, i. 11.

III

Let us now cast a glance at these prisons to see what kind of life was led in them by the Christians.

St. Perpetua has described the horror of these Roman jails in words which are eloquent of the instinctive repugnance experienced by a woman, and of the disgust which they must have excited in any person of decent breeding: "I was afraid; never before had I seen such darkness. Oh the day of horror! The overpowering heat caused by the crowd of prisoners! The brutality of the soldiers!"¹ Even strong men, such as Lucius, Montanus, Flavian, were not proof against this first shock. "When we had been led by the soldiers into the prison, we were not alarmed by the fetid darkness. Yet the days and nights which we passed therein baffle all description. To one who has never gone through them, it is impossible to describe the atrocious tortures of the prison."²

Among these tortures there were three especially: the irons, the stocks, and hunger and thirst. Most of our old hagiographical documents mention the irons (*ferrum, vincula*) with which Christian prisoners were loaded. The African martyrs sang their praises in words not lacking true poetic inspiration. They were taken out of prison, and thinking that the time had come for their martyrdom they exclaimed: "Oh day of joy, oh glorious bonds. Oh iron more precious than gold! Oh the joyous sound of the chains clanking on the stones!"³ But their wish

¹ *Passio SS. Perpetuæ, Felicitatis*, 4.

² *Passio SS. Montani, Lucii*, 4.

³ *Ibid.*, 6.

was not yet to be fulfilled. "The hour of our passion had not yet struck. Having overcome the demon, we were sent back to prison to be tempted by hunger and thirst."¹ Such was the cruelty of the jailers that even in that torrid African climate they refused to give their prisoners a little cold water.² In the prison, Christians not only suffered from hunger and thirst, they often died. In that of Lyons many of the martyrs perished for want of food and air.³ At Carthage, during the Decian persecution, thirteen Christians died of hunger in prison: "We, too, shall soon follow them," writes a survivor, "for we are now in the dungeon since already a week; before that we were given, every five days, a little bread and as much water as we liked."⁴ From which it appears that for a week past they had eaten nothing!

Matters might have been somewhat more tolerable had these poor unfortunates been able to move. But the persecutors took good care that this should not be the case. Not only did they weigh them down with irons, they sometimes also gripped the Christian's neck in a sort of cange, or pillory,⁵ or else put their prisoner in the stocks. This latter punishment was inflicted on Paul and Silas in the prison at Philippi.⁶ After the first examination of the martyrs of Scillium the proconsul, being wroth with their replies, gave his command: "Let them be taken back to prison, and be put in the stocks

¹ *Passio SS. Montani, Lucii*, 6.

² *Ibid.*

³ Letter of the Christians of Lyons, in Eusebius, *H. E.*, v. 1, 27.

⁴ Letter of Lucian to Celerinus, *Ep.*, 21, *inter Cyprianicas*. At Tyre, during the last persecution, some of the martyrs died of hunger: *λιμῶ διαφθαρέντες*.—Eusebius, *H. E.*, viii. 8.

⁵ Eusebius, *H. E.*, vi. 30.

⁶ *Acts* xvi. 24.

(*in ligno*) until to-morrow.”¹ Even women had to submit to this punishment. “One day when we were in the stocks,” writes St. Perpetua.² This torture was especially cruel when the prisoner’s legs were drawn asunder by bullocks’ sinews (whence the term *nervus* by which the stocks were often designated)³ until his feet could be forced into holes far apart from one another. Origen, when sixty-seven years of age, remained a long time in his prison, with his ankles stretched to the fourth hole.⁴ The martyrs of Lyons, in 177, and the martyr Romanus, in 303, were put in the stocks to the fifth hole,⁵ which seems to have been the furthest possible; a further strain would have resulted in death by rupture.⁶

But in spite of the darkness, the heat, the promiscuity (before the advent of the Christian emperors the sexes were not kept separate in the prisons),⁷ in spite of the sufferings, both physical and

¹ *Acta martyrum Scill.*, 2.

² *Passio SS. Perpetuæ, Felicitatis*, 8.

³ In the Greek texts this torture is called that of the “wood,” ξύλον. In Latin it was called either *nervus* or *lignum*.

⁴ Eusebius, *H. E.*, vi. 39.

⁵ Eusebius, *H. E.*, v. 1, 41; *De marty. Pal.*, 2, 4.

⁶ See in Edmond Le Blant’s *Les persécuteurs et les martyrs*, p. 283, the picture of the iron stocks unearthed at Pompeii in the barracks of the gladiators.

⁷ The sufferings of the Christians were not in vain. As soon as the persecutions were over, Constantine saw that a stop was put to these abuses. By a constitution of the year 320 (*Theodosian Code*, IX., iii. 1) he ordered the trials to be expedited, and forbade the accused to be too closely chained, or to be manacled. He also forbade their being shut up in dungeons, and ordered that, whilst awaiting judgment, they should live in the gate-houses, or, at least, in healthy parts of the prisons; he also forbade the warders to deprive them of food, or to ill-treat them. This reform was followed by another in 340, by which Constantius ordered the sexes to be kept apart in the prisons (*Theodosian Code*, IX., iii. 3). Other edicts, in 380 and 409, completed the work of reformation, by

moral, inflicted on the prisoners, the common prison could not approach in horror the dungeon to which one of the texts just quoted alludes. The dungeon was the "lower prison," *interior pars carceris, inferior carcer, imus carcer*. The poet Prudentius, who, as a former provincial governor, was well acquainted with Roman jails, thus describes it: "On the lowest floor of the prison there is a place darker than darkness itself, enclosed and smothered by a low vault. Here there lurks an eternal night, never visited by the orb of day; here is the very hell of the awful prison"¹—lines which would be worthy of Dante were not the description one of fact instead of fancy. His description aptly fits the *Tullianum Romanum*, the lowest vault in the Mamertine prison, which every tourist and pilgrim visits at Rome; the poet seems to have merely put into verse the well-known account given by Sallust.² In all the state prisons, in Roman times, there was an underground chamber of this sort into which the condemned were cast, and in which they were sometimes executed.³ This cellar was known as the "Force," a name which originated in the cages built of oak (*robur*) which it contained and in which the captives were sometimes kept.⁴ There were no steps leading down to this lowest dungeon, the condemned man being thrown in or let down into it by ropes through a hole in the floor above.⁵ The horror of death was increased by the darkness: *in*

establishing for the protection of the captives, a system of inspection, which was to be made by the magistrates and was to be supervised by the bishops (*Theodosian Code*, IX., iii. 6; *Justinian Code*, IX., iv. 4, 5).

¹ Prudentius, *Peri Stephanon*, v. 241–257.

² Sallust, *De bello Catil.*, 35.

⁴ Festus, s. v.

³ Livy, xxxiv. 44.

⁵ *Ibid.*

robore et tenebris exspirare.¹ Christians were cast into these dungeons whenever it pleased the judge, or even the jailer, to inflict on them a punishment worse than that of the common prison. The martyrs of Lyons, in 177, occupied "the darkest and worst part of the prison."² In this "inner part, devoid of light, dark and fetid," St. Pionius was placed, at Smyrna.³ These "depths" closed for many months over Origen at Cæsarea.⁴ Andronicus was shut up "in the lowest part of the prison so as to be seen by no one," *in imo carcere, ut a nullo videatur*.⁵ Vincent, too, was incarcerated in the "Force" at the prison of Valentia,⁶ and not only was he put into the stocks,⁷ but to make matters worse the floor was strewn with bits of crockery,⁸ so that even when lying on the ground the prisoner was not able to sleep.⁹

The *Acts of St. Vincent* relate that the corks on which he was lying were miraculously changed into flowers, that a dazzling light lit up the blindness of the dungeon, *carceralis cæcitas*,¹⁰ that unknown sweetness took the place of the former stench, and that angels came to sing melodious songs. Be it truth or legend, this story illustrates the graces by which God strengthened and consoled the souls of His saints suffering for Him in their prisons. Those who could no longer receive a human visitor were favoured in their dungeons with heavenly visitants, whose coming dispelled both their loneliness and

¹ Livy, xxxviii. 59.

² Letter of the Christians of Lyons, in Eusebius, *H. E.*, v. 1, 27.

³ *Passio S. Pionii*, 7.

⁴ Eusebius, *H. E.*, v. 39.

⁵ *Acta SS. Tarachi, Probi, Andronici*, 8.

⁶ *Passio S. Vincentii*, 8.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Cp. St. Paulinus of Nola, Natale S. Felicis*, 1; Damasus, *De Eutychio martyre*.

⁹ *Passio S. Vincentii*, 8.

¹⁰ Prudentius, *Peri Stephanon*, v. 289.

their pain. This is affirmed by a contemporary: "The leg fixed in the stocks feels no longer any pain when the soul is lifted up to heaven"—*Nil crus sentit in nervo, cum anima in cælo est.*¹

But the greater number of the confessors were not thus kept in secret; they lived in the public prison, where it was possible to keep up communications with the outside world. Entry into the Roman jails was an easy matter to whosoever was prepared to pay,² for the jailers were always open to bribes, doubtless pacifying their conscience by recollecting that the people in their charge were supposed to be undergoing nothing worse than preventive imprisonment. Hence we have many accounts in pagan as well as in Christian writings, in Lucian's *Peregrinus* as well as in the Acts of the Martyrs, of Christians who had remained free, performing the "work of mercy" of visiting their captive brethren.

They brought with them food, clothing, and ointments, for the use of the half-starved prisoners, who were often naked and not seldom broken by torture. St. Perpetua and her companions in durance were visited by many of the faithful, who took advantage of the kindness of the soldier who was custodian of the jail.³ At Carthage, during the Decian persecution, St. Cyprian was obliged to request the Christians not to come in such great numbers to the prison for fear of arousing suspicion.⁴

Nor was the succour of the prisoners left wholly to private enterprise; the funds of the Church were placed at their disposal, the suffering faithful

¹ Tertullian, *Ad martyres*, 2.

² Cp. Lucian, *De morte Peregrini*, 2.

³ *Passio SS. Perpetuæ, Felicitatis*, 9.

⁴ Cyprian, *Ep.*, 3, 4.

becoming, according to an expression of Tertullian's, "nurslings of their confession"—*alumni confessionis suæ*.¹ In another passage the same writer, comparing the prisoners destined to martyrdom to the magistrates destined to the consulate, *consules designati*, exclaims: "Oh blessed martyrs designate, the Church, our mother and our mistress, supports you with the milk of her charity, whilst the devotion of your brethren brings to you, in prison, what is needful to support the life of the body."²

Full of care as the Church was for the life of the body, she was not less careful for the life of the soul. "It was the custom of our predecessors," writes St. Cyprian, "to send to the prisons deacons who saw to the needs of the martyrs and read to them from Holy Scripture."³ Two deacons thus attended St. Perpetua and her companions.⁴ In the time of Decius, priests and deacons visited the prisons at regular intervals to celebrate the sacred mysteries and distribute to the captives the Bread of Heaven.⁵ Some African martyrs to whom neither material nor spiritual food had been brought were languishing in their prison, when one of them had a vision. A young man of immense size appeared carrying in each hand a cup of milk. "Be of good courage," he said, "Almighty God has remembered you," and he gave the prisoners to drink of the cups, of which the contents never diminished. He then placed these, one on his right, and one on his left side, and continued: "You are now filled, and yet they are still full; behold yet a third will be brought to you." The next day the priest Lucian sent the sub-

¹ Tertullian, *Apol.*, 39.

² Tertullian, *Ad martyres*, 1.

³ Cyprian, *Ep.*, 15.

⁴ *Passio SS. Perpetuæ, Felicitatis*, 3.

⁵ Cyprian, *Ep.*, 4.

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deacon Herennianus and the catechumen Januarius to bring to each "the food which never diminishes" (*alimentum indeficiens*), i.e. the Eucharist, and soon afterwards the brethren were allowed to visit the prisoners and bring them some consolation.¹

Nor did the martyrs depend entirely on outside help for their consolation; even in their chains they were able to be charitable. The Christians in prison at Lyons, in the time of Marcus Aurelius, corrected one another's defects and the excesses to which ill-advised austerity had brought some of them.² At the same time they asked with many tears for God's mercy on the renegades who were in prison with them, and when these had repented they set about preparing them for their second examination at the courts.³ Not content with the work within the prison, these heroic confessors of Christ kept their eyes open to what was going on outside; they viewed with concern the growth of Montanism, and wrote on this subject to Asia and Phrygia, and likewise sent an address to Pope Eleutherius.⁴ Others, like Perpetua, like Lucius, or one of his comrades, committed to writing the story of their trials, not seeking thereby to glorify themselves, but to edify the Church and to give thanks to God. Then, again, their hearts could not help being moved by the sight of the pagans who surrounded them. They spoke to them, and by their sufferings preached Christ even more eloquently than by their words; hence arose the many conversions which occurred in the prisons, where we hear of jailers submitting to be baptized by their captives. The most ancient

¹ *Passio SS. Montani, Lucii*, 4, 8, 9.

² Eusebius, *H. E.*, v. 3.

⁴ *Ibid.*, v. 3.

³ *Ibid.*, v. 1, 45.

episode of this kind goes back to the very dawn of Christianity when the keeper of the prison at Philippi was baptized, together with his family, by Paul and Silas.¹

But the glory of the Christian captives was sometimes darkened by the shadows of unavoidable human weakness, of which the impartial historian is bound to take cognisance. It was not an unheard-of thing for wicked men to allow themselves to be imprisoned in order to share in the gifts which charitable Christians showered on the martyrs.² Sometimes too (if we are to believe a statement made by Tertullian when a Montanist) their charity was otherwise indiscreet, and they gave to wavering martyrs (*martyres incerti*) potions which might cause them to become drunk.³ Still more dangerous was the vain pride which took possession of some captives detained at Carthage during the Decian persecution. Instead of following the illustrious examples of the martyrs of Lyons, who even in their dreadful dungeon would not allow themselves to be styled martyrs,⁴ these Carthaginian prisoners put on airs of superiority and, disregarding the clergy and the injunctions of Cyprian, took it on them to reconcile on their own authority those who, having lapsed into paganism, now wished to return.⁵

But what are these minor blots in comparison with so many examples of patience, penance, charity, humility, and submissiveness given in every part of the Empire, during three whole centuries, by

¹ Acts xvi. 33.

² Lucian, *De morte Peregrini*, 12, 13.

³ Tertullian, *De jejuniis*, 12.

⁴ Eusebius, *H. E.*, v. 3.

⁵ Cyprian, *Ep.*, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 14, 16, 19, 22, 25, 31, 40.

thousands of captives? "You live in a dark abode," writes Tertullian to these true confessors, "but you are a light by yourselves; you are bound with chains, but you are free for God; you inhale a fetid atmosphere, but you are an odour of sweetness; you await the sentence of a judge, but you yourselves shall judge the judges of this earth."¹

IV

The time for being judged—or, to use the expression of the apologist, the time for judging the judges of this earth—came sooner or later. But before being tried by the emperor's representative, the martyrs were often examined a first time before the municipal magistrates, by whose orders, as we have seen, they were usually arrested. Such magistrates could not sentence them to capital punishment, but they were entitled to use torture. Having once taken cognisance of the case, they sent, or personally conducted, the accused to the governor of the province, with a record of their proceedings, *elogium*, destined to serve as a basis for the trial.

Plentiful information of the preliminary proceedings is to be found in authentic Acts. The martyrs of Lyons were first questioned by the Duumvirs and then sent to await in prison the arrival of the imperial legate.² Pionius was publicly interrogated by Polemon, and when the latter was pressed to put him to death, he replied: "We have not the *fasces* nor the right to condemn." *Fasces et ligna non ad nos, et habere non possumus potestatem.*³ James and

¹ Tertullian, *Ad martyres*, 2.

² Letter of the Christians of Lyons, in Eusebius, *H. E.*, v. 1, 8.

³ *Passio S. Pionii*, 10.

Marianus were tortured by order of the magistrates of Cirta; they were afterwards questioned in public, and subsequently sent to Lambesa, the legate's residence, with a report, *elogium*.¹ Dativus, Saturninus, and several others were interrogated in the forum by the magistrates of Abitene; they were then taken to Carthage. In their case, too, an *elogium* was drawn up.² At Antioch in Pisidia, Trophymus and Sabbatius were examined by the magistrate of the town; whilst undergoing torture Trophymus expired. Sabbatius was sent to the prefect in charge of the irenarch, who was the bearer of the report on the case.³

An exceedingly curious example of these initial proceedings is found in the *Acts of St. Nestor*.⁴ He was bishop of Magydos, in Pamphylia.⁵ On the publication of the edict of Decius he advised his people to flee, but he himself remained quietly at home. Some of the pagans came to fetch him, saying: "The irenarch and the whole council are desirous of seeing thee." Nestor thereupon proceeded to the agora; there he found the senators, who at his entrance all stood up and greeted him. Taken by surprise, he asked them the wherefore of their greeting. "Thy life is worthy of all praise," they all replied. Nestor was then conducted to one of the houses surrounding the agora; here the members of the senate of Magydos took their seat, and a richly caparisoned chair was brought for the

¹ *Passio SS. Mariani et Jacobi*, 4, 5, 9.

² *Acta SS. Saturnini, Dativi*, 3, 4.

³ *Acta SS. Trophymi, Sabbatii, Dorymedonis*, in *Acta SS.*, September, vol. vii. p. 9.

⁴ In the *Acta SS.*, February, vol. iii. p. 628.

⁵ At least according to the Latin Acts; the Greek version of these Acts (published by Aubé, *L'Eglise et l'Etat dans la seconde moitié du iii^e siècle*, pp. 507-517) say that he was Bishop of Sida, another town of Pamphylia.

bishop. "You have done me great honour in calling me to your presence," said Nestor, "tell me now what was your reason." "Thou knowest, master, the decree of the emperor," said the irenarch. "I know the command of God Almighty, but I am ignorant of that of the emperor." "Now, Nestor, be reasonable, and give thy consent lest thou be charged." "To what shall I consent?" "To the ordinances of the prince." "I consent and submit to the commandments of the King of Heaven."

At this the irenarch forgot all the politeness innate in the Asiatic Greeks; in presence of what seemed to him an act of disobedience to the imperial commands all his old pagan fanaticism came surging up to the surface. "Thou art possessed by a devil," he cried. "I should much desire," replied Nestor, "that you were not possessed by demons nor give them worship." "How darest thou call the gods demons?" "Reason compels me to style them thus, and those who have been exorcised have frequently acknowledged it: be sure that it is demons that you adore." "I shall make thee confess in the midst of torments and in the presence of the governor that they are gods." "What is the good of threatening me with torments? I fear God's torments, but I have no care for thine or for thy judge's. Amid the torments I shall continue to confess Christ the Son of the living God." Nestor's contumacy having been thus established, the irenarch with two soldiers brought him to Perga, where the legate of Pamphylia then was.

The rest of the story of St. Nestor will serve as a transition between the formal proceedings before the town magistrates, and the real trial before the provincial governor who alone had the right of the sword.

The irenarch and his prisoner arrived at Perga by night. The next morning the irenarch proceeded to the legate, before whom he laid his report. The legate thereupon entered the court of justice and ordered the accused to be brought in. An officer of the court then read aloud the report. "This document on which the proceedings were based, and which may be compared to the indictment which is read to the prisoner at the bar, had to be listened to attentively by the judge. The irenarch who had drawn it up was to be complimented when his task had been well performed, but he was to be censured when the report was incomplete, or not in due form; there were imperial rescripts¹ ordaining that he should be punished if the document betrayed any passion or bad faith on the part of its writer."² By a fortunate chance the report drawn up by the irenarch in the name of the senate of Magydos has been preserved. If, as I think,³ it is authentic, it is a valuable document for the history of criminal procedure:—

"Eupator, Socrates and the whole council to the most excellent Lord President, health.

"When thy Excellency received the divine epistles of our Lord the Emperor whereby he ordained that all Christians should sacrifice, and that they should be made to renounce the ideas with which they are imbued, thy humanity willed that these orders should be carried out without violence, without harshness,

¹ Marcian, *Digest*, XLVIII., iii. 6. See Mommsen, *Römisches Strafrecht*, pp. 307 seq.

² *Hist. des persécutions pendant la première moitié du troisième siècle*, 3rd ed., p. 452.

³ Such is also the opinion of Franchi de' Cavalieri, *Nuovo Bull. di archeol. Crist.*, 1904, p. 12.

but with mercy. But this kindness has been thrown away; these men are obstinate in despising the imperial edict. Nestor, when requested by us and by the whole council, not only refused to take our advice, but all those who are under his direction, following his example, have refused also. We insisted that he should come to the temple of Jupiter according to the orders of the most victorious emperor; but he replied by heaping abuse on the immortal gods. He spared not the emperor, neither did he spare thee. For which reason the council has considered it advisable to refer him to thy Excellency."

Imperial rescripts forbade a governor to pronounce judgment merely on the strength of a report; they obliged him to start the proceedings anew, and to question the accused. Unfortunately the interrogatory of St. Nestor by the legate of Pamphylia is too open to the suspicion of being spurious¹ to allow of my quoting it as an example. However other *Passions*, which are historically sure, contain the accounts of several examinations which we have reason to suppose may have been copied from the official chronicles of the courts.

¹ See Tillemont, *Mémoires*, vol. iii., note xx., on the Decian persecution. Franchi de' Cavalieri very justly observes that the authenticity of the report of the irenarch does not render the rest of the story authentic, any more than the authenticity of the inscription of Abercius necessitates our believing the extraordinary details of the narrative which frames it, or the authenticity of the *Apologia* of Aristides compels us to admit the legend of Barlaam.—*Nuovo Bull. di archeol. Crist.*, 1904, p. 13, note 1.

V

Sometimes the trial took place in the magistrate's private room, *secretarium*, of which the doors remained open,¹ but more usually in a public hall and in the presence of the people. The hall chosen was more often the audience-chamber of the *prætorium*, but occasionally an even vaster building or enclosure was needed to contain the public; the *Passions* of the martyrs, and profane history too, mention trials which took place in the circus or on the racecourse or in the public baths.² We may note that when the trial was thus held in the open air in order that the proceedings should be heard by all, Roman custom required that the question of the judge should be repeated by the herald, *præco*, who probably also repeated the answers of the accused.³ Occasionally the martyr was interrogated on several occasions; that is, he was remanded in prison, and then again brought before the court a second, and sometimes a third time. Instances are not unknown in which the martyrs were taken about with the governor during his administrative expeditions and brought before him anew at each of the towns through which he passed.⁴

Before describing the last interview between the Christian and the representative of the emperor I

¹ *Acta S. Cypriani*, 1. Cp. *Theodosian Code*, I. xvi. 1.

² See *La persécution de Dioclétien*, 2nd ed., vol. i. p. 325, note.

³ Cp. Edmond Le Blant, *Les Actes des martyrs*, sect. 36, pp. 91-94.

⁴ *Acta SS. Tarachi, Probi, et Andronici*, 1, 4, 7. (On the other hand, see also *Nuovo Bull. di archeol. Crist.*, 1904, p. 18, note.) Cp. Chrysostom, *Hom. in Titum*, vi. 4; in *S. Julianum martyrem*, 2; Augustin, *Sermo II. in Psalm ci.*, 2.

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must give you some idea of the general appearance of the court. It would be easy to reconstruct it by borrowing here and there the necessary details, but an ancient writer of the end of the fourth century has spared us even this trouble. Asterius, bishop of Amasea, has described the pictures which adorned the tomb of St. Euphemia at Chalcedonia, and which depicted certain scenes of her trial and martyrdom. Having been painted at a time when the criminal procedure was yet the same as at the time of the persecutions,¹ these pictures have the value of a historical document: "The judge is seated in an elevated position, his countenance is threatening, and with a stern eye he watches the virgin. Near him are his ushers and other officers of the court, together with many soldiers; the clerks too are there with their styles and tablets; one of them is holding his hand above his tablet, staring meanwhile at her, as if to command her to speak louder in order that he may not wrongly report her answers. But she is clad in a dark dress and is wearing the philosopher's cloak; the grace of her features bespeaks the beauty of her soul. She is led by soldiers to the president, one seems to be pulling her, the other pushes her from behind. The whole attitude of the virgin shows a mixture of modesty and perseverance. She drops her eyes as though she feared to encounter the looks of men, but she stands erect without any sign of terror."²

¹ Even if the description were simply imaginary, an invention in the style of Philostrates, as some are inclined to believe (see Muñoz, *Alcune fonti litterarie per la storia dell' arte bizantina*, in the *Nuovo Bull.*, 1904, p. 222), it would nevertheless have the value of a historical document, as it was penned by Asterius at the end of the fourth century.

² St. Asterius, *Enarratio in martyrium præclarissimæ martyris Euphemiæ*, 3, in Ruinart, p. 544.

At once courageous and modest, such was the attitude of the martyr when before his judge. According to the latter's whim, or according to the standing of the accused, or according to the period when the trial took place, torture was, or was not, applied. This abominable method was seldom used on Christians of free condition before the latter years of the second century; at least the authentic narratives of these times, those of the martyrdom of Polycarp, of Justin and his companions, of Apollonius, of the Christians of Scillium contain no allusion to the use of torture. True it is that it is mentioned in the letter of the martyrs of Lyons, but we must not forget that by a mistake of procedure, which was corrected by a rescript of Marcus Aurelius, they had been at first accused of various crimes against common law.¹ For the purpose of describing a trial unaccompanied by torture I select a document of the year 180, the record of the trial of six Christians of the town of Scillium: Speratus, Nartallus, Cittinus, Donata, Secunda, and Vestia, before the proconsul of Africa, Saturninus.²

Proconsul: You can obtain the pardon of the emperor, if only you return to wisdom and sacrifice to the almighty gods.

Speratus: We have neither said nor done anything evil, but we are thankful for the ill that is done us and we respect, adore, and fear our Lord, to whom every day we offer a sacrifice of praise.

Proconsul: We too are religious men and our religion is simple. We swear by the happiness of

¹ Letter of the Christians of Lyons, in Eusebius, *H. E.*, v. 1, 14.

² *Acta Martyrum Scillitanorum*, in Ruinart, pp. 77-78; see *Analecta Bollandiana*, vol. viii., 1889, pp. 6-8; J. Armitage Robinson, appendix to *The Passion of Perpetua*, p. 112-121.

our lord the emperor, and we pray for his health. You must do the same.

Speratus: It thou wilt lend me a listening ear I will expound to thee the mystery of true simplicity.

Proconsul: I shall not hearken to the abuse which thou intendest for our religion. Just swear by the genius of the emperor.

Speratus: I know not the royalty of the present world, but I praise and adore my God, whom no man hath seen, and whom mortal eyes cannot see, but whose true light is known to every believing heart. I have committed no theft, and if I have done business I have at least paid the taxes, for I know our Lord the King of kings and the Master of all nations.

Proconsul: Cast aside this vain belief.

Speratus: No belief is dangerous saving that which tolerates murder and false-witness.

Proconsul (to the other prisoners): Cease being, or appearing to be, partners in such folly.

Cittinus: We have and we fear one only Lord, He who is in heaven. He it is that we seek to honour with all our heart and soul.

Donata: We give to Cæsar the honour that is due to Cæsar, but we fear God alone.

Proconsul (to one of the prisoners): And thou, Vestia, what sayest thou?

Vestia: I am a Christian and wish to be nothing else.

Proconsul (to a third): What sayest thou, Secunda?

Secunda: What I am I wish to remain.

Proconsul (to Speratus): Thou too remainest a Christian?

Speratus and the rest together: I am a Christian.

Proconsul: Maybe you wish for a remand to have time to think?

Speratus: In a matter so clear, everything is already thought of, and freely chosen.

Proconsul: Which are the books you keep in your lockers?

Speratus: Our sacred Books, and, besides, the epistles of Paul, a just man.

Proconsul: Take a remand of thirty days for reflection.

Speratus: I am a Christian, and I shall adore for ever the Lord my God who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all which they contain.

And all concurred, repeating the same words.

Then the proconsul took his tablets, and pronounced sentence: "Whereas Speratus, Nartallus, Cittinus, Donata, Vestia, Secunda have affirmed that they live after the fashion of the Christians, and when offered a remand to return to the manner of life of the Romans, persisted in their contumacy, we sentence them to perish by the sword."

VI

As you can see, a trial in 180 retains something of the old Roman gravity. We find in the judge neither a trace of personal animosity against the Christians, nor any desire to triumph over them by all the means at his disposal. He punishes what he considers their obstinacy, but he endeavours neither to convince them nor force them. A few years later the judges, by their use of torture, showed that they were becoming less insensible. Towards the end of the second century we find that torture enters habitually, or at least very frequently, into

the trials of the martyrs. Sometimes the magistrates were still scrupulous in abiding by the law which made senators, decurions, and soldiers exempt,¹ but often they rode roughshod over these laws, treating the privileged classes like common people. The documents of the third and fourth centuries describe, as an event of common occurrence, the scourging of the martyrs, the stretching of their bodies on the rack, the raking of their limbs with iron nails, and their cauterisation with hot irons or torches, which formed the four degrees of torture. Already, in 197, Tertullian raised his voice in protest: "You put others to the question when they deny, to make them avow, the Christians alone to make them deny. . . . I avow, and you begin to torture me. . . . We are tortured when we confess."²

Tertullian's logic is irreproachable. The magistrates should not have put to the question, *i.e.* to the torture, people who openly confessed their crime, *i.e.* their religion. Not only was torture useless when applied to them, it was also illegal. Here, then, we have another of those twists wilfully given to the law in order to make it more intolerable for Christians. "Shall be exempt from torture," says one of the constitutions of Antoninus Pius, "he who shall have made a complete confession."³ This was exactly the situation of the martyrs. But we are now approaching the era of the systematic persecutions, when the magistrates will seek less the condemnation than the abjuration of the Christians. Then we shall find torture used on them in the hope of squeezing out of them, not a confession which

¹ *Justinian Code*, IX., xli. 8, 11, 16.

² Tertullian, *Apol.*, 2.

³ *Digest*, XLVIII., xviii. 16.

shall lead to punishment, but a disavowal which may lead to their acquittal; a method which a third-century writer describes as a “more cruel mercy,” *miseriordia crudelior*.¹

Without going so far as to say that the magistrate was prompted thus to act by motives of humanity, we may allow that he sometimes excused himself for his cruelty on the ground that he was really seeking the prisoner's acquittal. But sometimes, too, when the Christian preserved an obstinate silence, or only broke it by such interjections as “Christ help me! Lord save me! Give me strength to suffer!”² then the magistrate felt hurt in his own esteem; he became angry with his want of success. Was a representative of the world-wide Roman Empire to be publicly defied or disregarded by a common fellow?—the very thought was intolerable; and to vanquish the will of the Christian, and to avenge the affront, he accordingly had recourse to every device which his indignation could suggest.

A fourth-century writer, who himself died a martyr—Phileas, Bishop of Thmuis—has left an account of the tortures undergone by the Christians of Alexandria whose captivity he shared in 306. In spite of my wish to make an end of this mournful subject, I think it necessary to quote it, for it is the testimony of an eye-witness:—

“The blessed martyrs who lived with us . . . suffered for Christ's sake every pain, every torment which could be devised, and some not once but several times.³ . . . They were beaten with rods, and

¹ *Passio SS. Montani, Lucii*, 20.

² See some fine instances of such prayers in the *Acta SS. Saturnini, Dativi, &c.*, in Ruinart, pp. 409 *seq.*

³ This repetition was sanctioned by a constitution of Marcus Aurelius and Verus: “Repeti posse quæstionem divi fratres re-

with whips, and with straps, and with ropes. . . . Some with their hands tied behind were placed on the rack, whilst by a contrivance all their limbs were stretched. Then, on the order of the judge, the executioners tore with iron rakes not only their sides, as is done with murderers, but also their belly, their legs, and even their faces. Some were hung in the portico by one hand, in such sort that the straining of the joints was more cruel than any torture. Some were bound to pillars, one facing the other, and without their feet touching the floor, thus causing the weight of their bodies to tighten more and more their bonds. They stood this torture not only whilst the judge was speaking to and questioning them, but nearly the whole day. As the judge passed on to another, he left some of his satellites to watch the first, that they might see whether the excess of their suffering was beginning to shake their resolution. He ordered that their bonds should be tightened without pity, and that those who were dying should be dragged about the room. For, said he, we deserved no regard, and every one should look on us and treat us as if we were no longer men.”¹

We learn from this testimony of the Bishop of Thmuis that the Christians sometimes died under the torture. He repeats the statement in another part of his narrative.² St. Cyprian's letters give similar instances from the Decian persecution.³ Such an

scripserunt.”—Modestinus, *Digest*, XLVIII., xviii, 16. *Cp.* Paul, *Sentent.*, V., xiv. 2. This was to be the case, says Paul, especially when the accused showed great power of endurance: “Maxime si in tormenta animum corpusque duraverit.” At Carthage, Gudenius was four times put to the question (*Mart. Adonis*, xv. Kal. Aug.).

¹ Phileas, in Eusebius, *H. E.*, viii. 10, 2-7. ² *Ibid.*, 10, 9.

³ Cyprian, *Ep.*, 8; Lucian's letter to Celerinus, 21, *inter Cyprianicas*.

event was not then considered extraordinary ; Roman jurists speak of it as a fact of common occurrence and of little importance.¹ Women, even more than men, were exposed to thus dying ; their outraged modesty made the torture far worse in their case. In order the better to apply to them the whip, the iron, or the fire, they were first stripped. Of one woman it is recorded that she expired suddenly on hearing the judge sentence her to be flogged.² Another exposed naked to the public gaze upbraided the judge for his unmanliness : “ Hast thou no shame, thus to treat a woman of free condition and a stranger ? God sees thy deed . . . not me alone, but thy mother and thy wife hast thou covered with confusion in my person.”³ We almost fancy we hear the sublime cry of Marie Antoinette : “ I appeal to every mother.” But the Roman judge was as inexorable as the judge of the Revolution. The martyr to whose protests we have just listened, Theonilla, was threatened with such atrocious tortures that she fell dead in the court of justice.⁴ The same happened to others ; a quite young Spanish girl, Eulalia, gave up the ghost whilst the executioner was applying the lighted torch to her breast, and sides, and face, and hair.⁵ In this case the illegal nature of the proceedings was as flagrant as their barbarity ; it was perhaps not unlawful to put women to the torture, but a rescript of Antoninus Pius forbade the torture of any child under fourteen years of age ;⁶ Eulalia was only twelve.⁷

¹ Plerique, dum torquentur, deficere solent.—Ulpian, *Digest*, XLVIII., xix. 8, § 3.

² *Acta SS. Claudii, Asterii et aliorum*, 4.

³ *Acta SS. Claudii, Asterii*, 5.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Prudentius, *Peri Stephanon*, iii, 141–160.

⁶ De minore quatuordecim annis quæstio habenda non est, ut et Divus Pius Cæcilio Jubentiano rescripsit.—*Digest*, XLVIII., xviii. 10.

⁷ *Peri Stephanon*, iii. 11–12.

VII

A few words will suffice to complete what we have to say on the trial of the martyrs.

You have perhaps noticed that two categories of people who usually appear in criminal cases are absent. In the first instance we find no witnesses. They would have been useful had the Christians been prosecuted for an infringement of common law, but they were useless when these were tried for the sole crime of being Christians, since they could acquit themselves by a simple disavowal. Hence there was no reason why the prosecutor should prove their guilt, nor why the prisoners should bring witnesses to establish their innocence. In no *Passion* of the martyrs do we find mention made of witnesses; in each case the only person questioned was the accused.

More remarkable still is the absence of counsel. Nowhere do we find any pleading. "Others," writes Tertullian, "buy the service of advocates to demonstrate their innocence. They have a right to reply and to cross-examine; it is not allowed to condemn those who have been neither defended nor heard. To Christians alone is the right of justifying themselves denied."¹ The task would perhaps have been a difficult one for the defending counsel who shared the faith of his client. A young Christian of high rank and virtue, Vettius Epagathus, was present at the trial of the martyrs of Lyons. Indignant at the sight of the tortures which the accused were being made to undergo, he went up to the magistrate: "I demand," said he, "that I be permitted to plead

¹ *I. Apol.*, 2.

the cause of my brethren; I can show clear proof that we are neither atheists nor wicked men." This interruption caused a sensation in the court. Vettius Epagathus was known to all, and his intervention made a great impression. The legate, however, refused to grant his petition, just and legal though it was, but simply asked him if he were a Christian. "Yes," he replied in a loud voice. He was then put into the dock with the martyrs. "Behold the counsel for the Christians," was the judge's sneering comment.¹

Before giving judgment the magistrate usually caused the clerk to read the report of the whole trial, including the questioning and any incidents which may have occurred during the torture.² He then read the sentence, of which he probably had a draft on his tablets.³ This sentence was very short, for the accused having pleaded guilty there was no need of labouring to establish his guilt.⁴ The judge, therefore, confined himself to recalling the refusal of the Christian to apostatise, to deploring his contumacy, and to expressing the punishment which the accused was to undergo. Just now I quoted the sentence on the Christians of Scillium; it will serve as a type of the usual sentence pronounced on the Christians.⁵

¹ Letter of the Christians of Lyons, in Eusebius, *H. E.*, v. 1, 10.

² *Acta S. Crispinæ*, 2.

³ Edmond Le Blant, *Les persécuteurs et les martyrs*, p. 220.

⁴ See, nevertheless, the sentence on St. Cyprian, which was preceded by a summing up in which the religious and political importance of this great man was dwelt on.—*Acta proconsularia S. Cypriani*, 4.

⁵ The legal formula seems to have been *Gladio animadverti placet*, which is used here, and also in the case of St. Cyprian, *Thascium Cyprianum gladio animadverti placet*. The same formula was used in sentencing the conscript Maximilian (*Acta S. Maximiliani*, 3) and the centurion Marcellus (*Acta S. Marcelli*, 5).

At times the herald repeated the sentence in a loud voice so that it might be heard by the crowd.¹

Was the judgment ever reversed on appeal? Never, and this is a remarkable feature of the martyrs' trial. Caracalla's edict, of which I spoke in beginning this lecture, had suppressed the appeal to Cæsar, *i.e.* the right of recusation, but it had not done away with the right of appealing to Rome against the sentences pronounced by provincial governors. This appeal was still legal,² and in fact its exercise was even better safeguarded than by our modern laws. Not only could every condemned person appeal against his sentence, but it was also forbidden to hinder his appeal. Even whilst on his way to the scaffold the condemned man had still the right of appeal, and his death had then to be postponed. Nor was he the only one to possess this right; any third person, even without the condemned man's consent, could appeal on his behalf.³

But not once did the Christians make use of this right. This may have been through eagerness to receive the crown of martyrdom, but it may also have been the result of their belief that their appeal would not be allowed; if so, we have come into contact with yet another breach of the common law where Christians were concerned.

Tertullian in his *Ad nationes*, ii. 3, thus sums up the sentences pronounced against the Christians, *Illum duci, suffigi, ad bestias dari placet.*

¹ See the texts quoted by Le Blant, *Les Actes des martyrs*, 49, pp. 120-121.

² See in the *Digest*, tit. i. of Book XLIX., *De appellationibus et relationibus.*

³ *Non tantum ei, qui ad supplicium ducitur, provocare permittitur; verum alii quoque nomine ejus, non tantum si ille mandaverit, verum quisquis alius provocare voluerit; neque distinguitur, utrum necessarius ejus sit, necne: credo enim humanitatis ratione omnem provocantem audiri debere.*—Ulpian, *Digest*, XLIX., i. 6.

The resignation, or rather the joy, with which the Christians received their sentence shows that, of the two explanations, the first is correct. We might easily write a chapter on the cheerfulness of the martyrs. Perpetua was cheerful in her prison;¹ to the astonishment of the pagans, Sabina was taken with a fit of laughter on her way to the court;² the onlookers were amazed to see Carpos smiling during his trial and even at the stake;³ Theodosia likewise smiled even under her torture;⁴ Hermes joked pleasantly on his way to death,⁵ his humour reminding us of that of Sir Thomas More on the scaffold.⁶ Various Acts speak of the cheerful and smiling faces of the condemned.⁷ "With joy we confess Christ and with joy we die," writes the philosopher St. Justin.⁸ When an arrest of judgment was offered them the Christians always refused it,⁹ and they listened to the sentence with joy: "Having been, all of us, condemned to the beasts, we returned to the prison rejoicing," writes Perpetua.¹⁰ "We are not able to give sufficient thanks to God," exclaimed one of the martyrs of Scillium, and another added: "We have to-day merited a place among the

¹ Quomodo in carne hilaris fui, hilarior sum et hic modo.—*Passio SS. Perpetuæ, Felicitatis*, 12.

² *Passio S. Pionii*, 6.

³ *Martyrium SS. Carpi, Papyli et Agathonices*, in Aubé, *L'Église et l'État dans la seconde moitié du III^e siècle*, Appendix, pp. 500–504.

⁴ Eusebius, *De mart. Pal.*, 7, 2.

⁵ *Acta S. Philippi*, 13.

⁶ See Bremond, *Le bienheureux Thomas More*, pp. 184–187.

⁷ *Passio S. Pionii*, 21; *Passio SS. Saturnini, Dativi*, 4.

⁸ *I. Apol.*, 39.

⁹ *Acta S. Apollonii*, 10; *Acta SS. Martyrum Scill.*, 3; *Passio S. Pionii*, 20; *Acta SS. Didymi et Theodoræ*, 2; Eusebius, *De mart. Pal.*, 8.

¹⁰ Tunc nos universos pronuntiat. et damnat ad bestias, et hilares descendimus ad carcerem.—*Passio SS. Perpetuæ*, 6.

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martyrs in heaven. We give thanks to God.”¹ “God be praised for thy sentence,” said Apollonius to the prefect of the prætorium.² “God bless thee,” was Marcellus the centurion’s farewell to his judge.³ “Thanks be to God,” exclaimed Cyprian.⁴ “I give thanks to Jesus Christ my God,” said Crispina of Tagara.⁵ “Thanks be to God” was likewise the comment of three African peasant women.⁶ The Acts of the martyrs are full of similar expressions. Certainly people who could speak thus could never have thought of appealing from their sentence.

On one occasion a third person attempted to use his right in favour of a Christian. This was the pagan brother of the Bishop of Thmuis, whose letter I have already quoted. This brother, who was a lawyer, as soon as sentence had been pronounced, exclaimed: “Phileas demands the annulment of the sentence.”⁷ The prefect thereupon had the condemned man brought forward. “Hast thou appealed?” he asked. “I have not appealed; give no heed to that unhappy man,” replied Phileas. “On the contrary, I thank the emperors and my judge who are giving me my part of the inheritance of Jesus Christ.”⁸ Thus did

¹ *Acta SS. martyrum Scill.*, 5.

² *Acta S. Apollonii*, in fine.

³ *Acta S. Marcelli*, 5.

⁴ *Acta S. Cypriani*, 4.

⁵ *Acta S. Crispinæ*, in Pio Franchi de’ Cavalieri, *Studi e Testi*, 9, p. 35. This reading of the Autun MS., which had already been given by Ruinart in a note (p. 496), is preferable to that of the Rheims MS., which he followed in his text, “Christo laudes ago,” which may be a Donatist interpolation. Cp. *Analecta Bollandiana*, vol. xxiv., 1904, p. 133.

⁶ *Passio SS. Maximæ, Donatillæ et Secundæ*, in *Analecta Bollandiana*, vol. ix. pp. 117 and 122.

⁷ *Frater Phileæ, qui erat unus ex advocatis, exclamavit dicens: Phileas abolitionem petit.—Acta SS. Phileæ et Philoromi*, 3.

⁸ *Ibid.*

the martyr proudly refuse the hope which was held out. Nevertheless, in strict law, the judge should have granted the appeal. "What happens," says the jurist Ulpian, "supposing the condemned man disavows the appeal? supposing he refuses to ratify it and wishes to die? I consider that this notwithstanding the execution should be deferred."¹ The case as laid down by the greatest of Roman lawyers fits exactly that of Phileas. But as a Christian was here concerned, the judge forgot all his law, refusing to allow the appeal demanded, in spite of the constitution which recognised as valid such an appeal by a third person, and gave the martyr his wish, by sending him there and then to his death.

¹ Quid ergo si resistat, qui damnatus est, adversus provocationem? nec velit admitti ejus appellationem, perire festinans? Adhuc putem differendum supplicium.—Ulpian, *Digest*, XLIX., i. 6.

LECTURE VIII

THE DEATH OF THE MARTYRS

I

WE have already considered the trial of the martyrs, of which I endeavoured to reconstruct the whole scene, from the arrest to the sentence; we may now continue our investigations, taking them up at the point where we quitted them. As in Roman law punitive imprisonment was non-existent, the martyrs could only be sentenced to one of the following punishments: banishment, transportation, penal servitude, or death. We shall consider in detail these different penalties and how they were applied to Christians. We begin with those in which no blood was spilt.

The penalty involving the least hardship was that of banishment, which was considered comparatively lenient, as, in principle at least, it neither deprived the exile of his civil rights nor of his goods. Many Christians from the first century to the fourth underwent this punishment, which was even specially alluded to in some of the edicts against the Christians. This sentence was carried out in Domitian's reign on St. John, who was sent to Patmos,¹ and on the two Flavia Domitillas, who were sent to the islands of Pandataria and Pontia;² in the reign of Gallus it was pronounced against Pope St. Cornelius, who

¹ Irenæus, *Ad hæc.*, v. 30, 3.

² Dion Cassius, lxxvii. 13; Eusebius, *H. E.*, iii. 18.

died in exile at Centumcellæ (Civita Vecchia)¹ and against his successor Lucius;² in the reign of Valerian, in 257, St. Cyprian was sent to Curubis,³ and St. Dionysius of Alexandria to Kephro and afterwards to Mareotis.⁴ These exiles were, comparatively speaking, kindly treated. St. Cyprian's biographer speaks of the regard shown for the illustrious confessor by the natives of Curubis;⁵ St. Dionysius of Alexandria used the time he spent away from home in preaching the Gospel to the Libyans.⁶ Nevertheless, the Christians appear to have been worse off than ordinary exiles, for, contrary to common law, the edicts—at least that of Decius—had ordained that those banished should lose their goods.⁷

A more severe punishment was that of transportation. This was reckoned a capital punishment, since it involved civil death. Those condemned to transportation were treated as convicts, and were kept in islands where the climate was unhealthy and severe. That the life of the transported be made so hard as to be scarcely better than death, was the rule laid down by an eminent jurist.⁸ When necessary, privation and the whip or the rod of the slave-driver were made to hasten the coming of the end. This was the case with Pope Pontian. Having been deported in 235 to the unhealthy island, *insula*

¹ *Liberian Catalogue*, Duchesne, *Liber Pontificalis*, vol. i. p. 5.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Acta S. Cypriani*, 1, 2.

⁴ Eusebius, *H. E.*, vii. 11, 10.

⁵ Pontius, *Vita S. Cypriani*, 12.

⁶ Eusebius, *H. E.*, vii. 11, 13.

⁷ Extorres, ex patria pulsi et bonis omnibus spoliati.—Cyprian, *Ep.*, 16. Cp. *Ep.*, 18.

⁸ Deportatis vero hæ solent insulæ assignari, quæ sunt asperimæ, quæque sunt paulo minus summo supplicio comparandæ.—Modestinus, 2, in Huschke, *Jurispr. antejustin.*, p. 644. Cp. Tacitus, *Ann.*, ii. 85.

nociva, of Sardinia,¹ his ill-treatment and privations quickly brought him to his end; *afflictus, maceratus fustibus defunctus est*, says the *Liber Pontificalis*.²

Still worse was the sentence to penal servitude. This punishment was carried out in the quarries, whence stone, and marble, and porphyry were extracted, or in the gold, silver, lead, or copper mines which were worked by the State in the different parts of the Roman world. This was the penalty paid by many Christians for their faith.³

From its very inception the life of the convicts condemned to the mines was one of torment. Before being lowered to the depths they were scourged,⁴ to show them that they were henceforth "penal slaves"; they were then branded on the forehead,⁵ thus definitely taking their place among the miners. This latter custom survived until Constantine abolished it, "out of respect for the divine beauty, of which the likeness is seen in the human countenance."⁶ That the convicts might be still more readily recognised in case of escape, one side of their head was shaved.⁷ But escape must have been difficult, for rings joined by a short chain had been riveted on their feet in such wise as to make of walking a difficult matter and of running an utter impossibility.⁸

¹ *Liberian Catalogue*, Duchesne, *Liber Pontificalis*, vol. i. p. 5.

² *Liber Pontificalis*, Pontianus; *ibid.*, p. 145.

³ Others who were sentenced to penal servitude spent their time in the salt, chalk, or sulphur pits; *in salinas in calcariam quoque vel sulphurariam*. These two latter punishments were considered worse than the mines; *hæ pænæ metallis majis sunt*.—Ulpian, *Digest*, XLVIII., xix. 8, art. 8, and 10. I have not spoken of them because, so far as I know, no historical document tells of Christians having been subjected to this punishment.

⁴ Cyprian, *Ep.*, 67.

⁵ Pontius, *Vita S. Cypriani*, 7.

⁶ *Theodosian Code*, IX., xl. 2.

⁷ Cyprian, *Ep.*, 77.

⁸ *Ibid.*

We find here and there mention made of the Christians condemned to the mines. In the reign of Marcus Aurelius there were some in Greece,¹ either in the silver mines of Laurium, if they were then being worked, or in some other of the numerous veins of metal to be found both on the mainland and in the surrounding islands. In the reign of Commodus there were some in the lead mines of Sardinia,² but most of our information concerning the Christian convicts is derived from a third-century document, the correspondence between St. Cyprian and the confessors of the faith in the mines of Sigus in Numidia.

These convict miners were divided into three groups, though it is not clear whether each worked in a separate mine or in three shafts of the same mine. Among them there were bishops, priests, deacons, and lay men and women, and even boys and girls. The latter being too weak to wield a pick, were used to carry the mineral in baskets; they had all been sentenced *in opus metallicorum*, the only form of penal servitude to which women were liable.³ These convicts passed their lives in the mine in the midst of darkness which, as St. Cyprian says, was rendered all the more palpable by the smoke of the flaring torches. They were ill-fed, half naked, and ever shivering in their rags under the icy draughts of the underground galleries. They were allowed no bed, not even a mattress, but were obliged to sleep on the ground; their being forbidden the use of baths was also a source of great annoyance. The priests among them were never permitted to offer the Holy Sacrifice.

¹ Letter of Dionysius of Corinth, Eusebius, *H. E.*, iv. 23, 10.

² *Philosophumena*, ix. 11.

³ Ulpian, *Digest*, XLVIII., xix. 8, art. 8.

Such was, says St. Cyprian, the ugliness and the blackness of the life which pagan hatred had imposed on these innocents; he endeavoured to console them by leading them to think of the dazzling glory of the future life which would one day take the place of their darkness.¹

Harder still was the situation of the Christians confined in the mines of the East at the end of the last persecution. This portion of the Empire, then ruled by Maximin Daia, was not so rich in mineral deposits as Europe and North Africa. In Egypt, however, there were quarries of porphyry, one near Syene and the other on the coast of the Red Sea, and in Syria there were marble quarries and iron and copper mines. In 307 the governor of Palestine commanded that every Christian sent to the copper mines of Phænos should have the tendons of one of his legs burned with a red-hot poker. His cruelty was as useless as it was illegal, for, on the one hand, no convict, loaded as each was with chains, branded and shaved, could possibly escape, and, on the other, he had no authority to aggravate by such mutilations the great hardships which the convict miners had already to bear. But even worse was to come in 308 and 309, when the overflow from the Egyptian mines was drafted to those of Palestine; every Christian convict, man, woman, or child, was, on passing through Cæsarea, not only hamstringed, but blinded in one eye; in each case the right eye was pierced with a dagger and the cavity cauterised with red-hot irons.²

Yet so great was the power of resistance of these wonderful men that they actually contrived to

¹ Cyprian, *Ep.*, 77.

² Eusebius, *De mart. Pal.*, 7, 3, 4; 8, 1-3, 13; 10, 1.

establish Churches in the mines. At Phænos, for instance, in 309, the vigilance of the guardians being somewhat relaxed, the convicts assembled in improvised oratories at the mouth of the pits. The Holy Sacrifice was offered and the Eucharist distributed to the sorry crowd of halt and blind. Then a convict who was blind from birth, but whose right eye notwithstanding had been put out like the rest, made up for their lack of books by reciting the Holy Scriptures which he knew by heart.¹

It will scarcely be believed, but prying eyes perceived the movement in progress at Phænos; the governor and emperor were warned of it, and an inspector accordingly visited the locality. On his advice the convicts were dispersed, some being sent to Cyprus, others to the Lebanon, and those who through old age were unable to work were beheaded. Two bishops, a priest, and a charitable layman were burnt alive. This was the end of the little Church in the mines, and of one of the most touching episodes in the history of the persecution.²

II

The last episode will serve as a stepping-stone to the consideration of the more sanguinary forms of death provided by the law. We have still to witness the martyrs of Christ making the sacrifice of their life amidst sufferings which, crammed into a few hours, seemed to exceed all measure.

I need scarcely say that I will gather the elements of my picture of the martyrs' death from exclusively

¹ Origen's *Apologia*, which was written in prison at Cæsarea by the martyr Pamphilus, is dedicated *Ad confessores ad metalla Pales-tinæ damnatos*, i.e. to the Christian convicts of Phænos.

² Eusebius, *De mart. Pal.*, 11, 20-23; 13, 1-3, 4, 9, 10.

authentic documents, leaving aside all legends or writings of uncertain value. I give you this assurance to begin with, lest you should feel tempted to treat as an exaggeration what will really be a sober representation of the horrible reality.

I must also hasten to add that I have no intention of emulating the descriptions given by the paintings of San Stefano Rotondo, or in the engravings in Galloni's *De Cruciatus martirum*. I will paint in as quiet colours as possible the picture of the *città dolente*, in which so many Christians were tormented for three centuries, but on the threshold of which, otherwise than in that of Dante, were to be read words of unfailing hope.

We must first explain the legal aspect of the execution of the martyrs. Among the ancients capital punishment was not, as with us, always inflicted in the same manner; the mode of its infliction depended on the gravity of the crime and on the condition of the condemned. Jurists classified these modes as follows: The most cruel and ignominious death they reckoned to be that of the cross. The second place in their estimation was occupied by the stake and the beasts; the third and least degrading form of capital punishment was death by beheading.¹ The intermediate forms of punishment, that of being burnt at the stake or flung to the beasts, were comparatively recent innovations, and belong to the penal law of the Empire.² Before the time of the Empire there were but two ways of putting evil-doers to death: slaves and people of vile condition were crucified, the others were slain by the headsman. In imperial times the cross re-

¹ Callistratus, *Digest*, XLVIII., xix. 28; Caius, *ibid.*, 29; Modestinus, *ibid.*, 31.

² Callistratus, *loc. cit.*

tained its old position, beheading was reserved for citizens, whilst the stake and the beasts served to punish criminals who had not the rights of Roman citizenship.

However, these distinctions soon disappeared, at least so far as Christians were concerned. We see them wilfully ignored for the first time in 177. "After they had been questioned," says the narrative of the martyrs of Lyons, "all those who were Roman citizens were sentenced to be beheaded, the others were condemned to the beasts."¹ But the narrative goes on to state that one of the martyrs, Attalus, though his citizenship had been acknowledged, was, on the demand of the populace, exposed to the beasts.² Hence the distinction of penalties was first dropped as a result of the clamours of the crowd and the weakness of the magistrates. The apologists of the end of the second century and of the beginning of the third, when they enumerate the martyrs' penalties, make no distinction between them, and seem to hint that in practice no such distinction existed: "We are beheaded," says St. Justin, "we are crucified, we are exposed to the beasts, we are tortured with chains and by fire and by the most dreadful torments."³ "We hang on crosses," writes Tertullian, "we are licked by the flames, the sword lays open our throats, the wild beasts spring upon us."⁴ "Every day," says Clement of Alexandria, "we behold with our eyes the blood flowing in streams from the martyrs who are burnt alive, crucified, or beheaded."⁵

¹ Letter of the Christians of Lyons, Eusebius, *H. E.*, v. 1, 47.

² *Ibid.*, 50. ³ Justin, *Dialog. cum Tryph.*, 110.

⁴ Tertullian, *Apol.*, 31; *cp.* 12, 50.

⁵ Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.*, ii.

The extension of Roman citizenship to every inhabitant of the Empire had the result I have already mentioned. It did not extend the privileges of the citizens, but it despoiled the citizens of what had formerly served to distinguish them from the provincials; henceforth any penalty could be applied to any Roman subject. The only privilege remaining was that of the *honestiores*, i.e. of the nobles and officials, from senators down to the decurions and their sons, who remained exempted from degrading penalties, and in many cases escaped death altogether. But among the Christians even this privilege seems to have been absent; we know of no case in which it saved their life, and as several edicts pronounced the degradation of all Christians, there was no legal hindrance in the way to prevent even the *honestiores* from being punished like mere plebeians. To sum up, from the end of the second century the choice of the penalty to be inflicted on a martyr depended entirely on the will of the judge.

III

At first sight it may seem useless to describe death by beheading. Nevertheless it was not exactly what a modern might expect.

At Rome, where the agony of the condemned was so often turned into a show for the idle, in order to make, according to a poet's expression, "of the pain of one the happiness of all,"¹ death by the sword was about the only penalty to maintain a different character. The scourging which occasion-

¹ Nullus in urbe cadat, cujus sit pœna voluptas.—Prudentius, *Contra Symm.*, ii. 1126.

ally, according to ancient custom,¹ preceded it² was administered away from the public gaze,³ and the execution, though it took place publicly, was performed without solemnity or display. No scaffold was erected on which the condemned man might be seen by the crowd. He awaited the death-stroke, either kneeling on the ground⁴ or leaning against a post.⁵ His head was struck off by the sword, an honourable weapon, the substitution of an axe or other instrument being forbidden by the law;⁶ the hideous block, recalling the butcher's shop, is not found on any of the ancient monuments on which a beheading is depicted,⁷ nor is it anywhere mentioned in authentic narratives. In a word, the whole scene shows that the penalty is one reserved for respectable people who have a right to a decent death. We shall illustrate it further by the account of the execution of St. Cyprian.

"Cyprian," says the contemporary chronicler, "was led to the field of Sextus; there he took off

¹ *Acta S. Justini*, 4.

² More majorum. Cp. Suetonius, *Claudius*, 24; *Nero*, 49; Tacitus, *Ann.*, xvi. 11.

³ The historical accounts of the martyrdoms never describe it; probably in the third century the custom of flogging those condemned to be beheaded fell into desuetude.

⁴ See, besides the *Passions* of St. Cyprian, SS. James and Marianus, SS. Montanus and Lucius, the fourth-century fresco depicting the beheading of three martyrs, which was discovered by Father Germano on the Coelian hill.—Germano di S. Stanislao, *La casa celimontana dei SS. martiri Giovanni e Paolo*, fig. 44, p. 326.

⁵ Beheading of St. Achilleus, a fourth or fifth century bas-relief in the basilica of St. Petronilla, at the cemetery of Domitilla.—*Bull. di archeol. Crist.*, 1875, pp. 7-10, and plate iv.

⁶ Ulpian, *Digest*, XLVIII., xix. 8.

⁷ A fresco at Pompeii, which seems to represent Solomon's judgment, includes, indeed, the picture of a block. But the executioner has in his hand a hatchet, and the act for which he is preparing has nothing to do with the legal punishment of beheading. See the fresco in Le Blant, *Les persécuteurs et les martyrs*.

his cloak, bent his knees, and prostrated himself before God, in prayer. Then he took off his dalmatic and gave it to his deacons, and vested in his linen tunic he awaited the executioner. As soon as the latter came, Cyprian ordered his people to count out for him twenty-five pieces of gold.¹ Sheets and napkins were then spread out in front of him by the brethren, and meanwhile blessed Cyprian himself bound his eyes.² As he could not bind his own hands, a priest and a subdeacon, both of the name of Julian, did this for him. In such wise was blessed Cyprian executed.”³

Instances of this penalty are frequent enough in the first two centuries; St. Paul, Flavius Clemens and others of the nobility, during Domitian's persecution;⁴ the philosopher Justin and his disciples,

¹ Cp. this account with the story of the death of Sir Thomas More, as recounted by his grandson, Cresacre More: “Sir Thomas as one that had bene invited to a sollemne bankett, changed himselfe into his best apparrell, and putt on his silke Chamlett gowne, which his intire friend Mr. Antonie Bonnise (a noble Citizen of the State of Luca in Italie, to whome he wrote the letter as is late spoken of before), gave him, when he was in the Tower. Mr. Lieutenant, seeing him prepare himselfe so to his death, counselled him, for his owne benefitt to putt them of againe, saying, that he who should have them, was but a Jauill. What, Mr. Lieutenant, sayd Sir Thomas, shall I accounte him a Jauill who will doe me this day so singular a benefitt? Nay, I assure you, were it cloath of golde I would think it well bestowed on him. For St. Cyprian, that famous Bishop of Carthage, gave his executioner thirtie pieces of golde, because he knewe he should procure unto him an unspeakable good turne. Yet for all this Mr. Lieutenant so pressed him that at last being loath for friendshipp's sake to denye him so small a matter, he altered his gowne and putt on a gowne of Friese; but yet he sent of that little mony which was left him, an Angell of golde to the hangman in token that he maliced him nothing, but rather loved him exceedingly for it.”

² Sir Thomas More also covered his own eyes.—Cresacre More's *Life of Sir Thomas*, p. 355. ³ *Acta proconsularia S. Cypriani*, 5.

⁴ Dion Cassius (lxvii. 13) uses the expression *κατέσφαξεν*, which implies the “cutting of the throat.” When the *Apocalypse* (vi. 9)

several of the martyrs of Lyons, the martyrs of Scillium, the senator Apollonius. Sometimes a Christian of lower rank owed the privilege of dying by this death to some connection between his own case and that of a martyr of high condition; thus the slave Evelpistus was beheaded like his teacher Justin. In the third century many of the faithful were beheaded; the soldier Besa, the women Ammonarium, Mercuria, and Dionysia at Alexandria; Pope Sixtus II. and his deacons at Rome; the bishop Cyprian, Montanus, Lucius, and Flavian at Carthage; James, Marianus, and their many companions at Lambesa.

But we already begin to perceive a sort of haste replacing the older Roman gravity, and the executions become more and more like massacres. Sixtus was not even judged. He was surprised when preaching in the cemetery of Prætextatus and beheaded there and then as he sat; four of his deacons were also slaughtered in the underground galleries;¹ you remember, too, how at Lambesa, after the executions had already lasted several days, the survivors were made to kneel in files and the executioner passing between the ranks struck off all their heads.²

In the course of the last persecution this penalty was frequently administered; soldiers, bishops, priests, deacons, magistrates, matrons, and common folk came under the sword. But the usual reason why the magistrates of the fourth century preferred this penalty was due to no desire of keeping within

alludes to the "souls of them that were slain (*τῶν ἐσφαγμένων* = beheaded) for the word of God and for the testimony which they held," it is probably alluding to these martyrs of the higher classes.

¹ Xystum autem in cimiterio animadversum sciatis octavo iduum Augustarum die, et cum eo diaconos quatuor.—St. Cyprian, *Ep.*, 80.

² See above, p. 135.

rules laid down by law; it was selected as the most convenient and quickest means of exterminating the Christians. When narrating the trial of three Christians of Cæsarea, Eusebius says: "The governor, Firmilian, could not restrain his anger; and anxious not to delay their death by lengthy torments he forthwith had them beheaded."¹

IV

In the first two centuries few martyrs were sentenced to be burnt. The horrible exploit of Nero, who used the Christians as living torches, was nothing more than a piece of mischief of his own invention, and had no relation to any legal penalty. The red-hot metal stool on which some of the martyrs of 177 were made to sit in the amphitheatre of Lyons, was at that time used merely as an instrument of torture.² Fire as a regular penalty was late in making its appearance in Roman legislation.³ It was used for the first time on a martyr at Smyrna in 155.⁴ By the third century, deaths by burning had become frequent; during the Decian persecution there were many at Alexandria.⁵ We again find it used at Smyrna in the martyrdom of Pionius,⁶ and then at Nicomedia in that of Saints Lucian and Marcian,⁷ at Pergamus in that of Carpos, Papylos, and Agathonice.⁸ In Valerian's reign, Bishop Fructuosus and

¹ Eusebius, *De mart. Pal.*, 9.

² Letter of the Christians of Vienna, Eusebius, *H. E.*, v. 1, 52, 56.

³ See above, p. 258.

⁴ *Martyrium Polycarpi*.

⁵ Eusebius, *H. E.*, vi. 41, 15, 17.

⁶ *Passio S. Pionii*.

⁷ *Acta SS. Luciani et Marciani*, in Ruinart, p. 151.

⁸ *Martyrium SS. Carpi, Papyli et Agathonices*.

the deacons Augurius and Eulogius were burnt at Tarragona,¹ and the deacon Lawrence at Rome.² During the last persecution, death by fire was one of the most frequently administered. It would take us too long to give a list of the martyrs then burnt, especially in the East; the Church History of Eusebius, who was an actual witness of many such martyrdoms, is full of them.³

Being—in principle at least—a punishment fit only for low-class people,⁴ an execution by fire was usually made the occasion of a public show. The faggots were stacked in the middle of the *stadium*, or circus, or amphitheatre, as the case might be. The condemned, being stripped of his clothing,⁵ was attached to the stake which rose above the faggots. Usually his hands were nailed to it;⁶ sometimes, however, they were simply tied;⁷ in the latter case, as soon as the bonds were burned through, the martyr recovered freedom of motion. Fructuosus and his deacons when thus loosened fell on their knees, and in an attitude of prayer, with their arms stretched out in the form of a cross, they awaited the coming of death.⁸ In nearly every case death was quick in

¹ *Acta SS. Fructuosi, Augurii, Eulogii.*

² St. Ambrose, *De officiis ministrorum*, i. 41 : ii. 28 ; Prudentius, *Peri Stephanon*, ii.

³ Eusebius, *H. E.*, viii. 6, 8, 9, 11, 12, 14 ; *De mart. Pal.*, 2, 3, 4, 8, 10, 12, 13.

⁴ *Igni cremantur plerumque servi, qui saluti dominorum suorum insidiaverint : nonnunquam etiam liberi plebei et humiles personæ.*—Callistratus, *Digest*, XLVIII., xix. 28, 11.

⁵ *Martyrium Polycarpi*, 13 ; *Martyrium Carpi, Papyli et Agathones*. The clothes of the condemned, *pannicularia*, belonged to the executioners ; see Adrian's rescript and Ulpian's commentary (*Digest*, XLVIII., xx. 6). Cp. *Matt.* xxvii. 35 ; *Mark* xv. 24 ; *Luke* xxiii. 34 ; *John* xix. 23, 24.

⁶ *Martyrium Polycarpi*, 14 ; *Martyrium Carpi, &c.* ; *Passio S. Pionii*, 21.

⁷ *Martyrium Polycarpi*, 13.

⁸ *Acta SS. Fructuosi, Augurii, Eulogii*, 4.

coming. During the first three centuries, efforts were never made to prolong the agony ; occasionally even the death-blow was given to the martyr as he stood on the pile : this was the fate of Polycarp.¹

But towards the end of the second century this punishment assumed another form : “ We are called *Sarmentitii* and *Semaxii* because, when attached to the stake, we are half surrounded by flaming faggots ” (*Sarmentum* = the prunings from the vine with which the faggots were made).² In this case the condemned was not placed on the top of the stack, he was placed on the ground, and at times, in order to ensure his being surrounded by the flames, he was buried up to the knees.³ This latter fashion, which came into vogue in the last persecution, was preferred because it expedited matters, and because people, being already sated with such sights, no longer showed the same desire of witnessing the Christians’ sufferings. This was the manner of death at Heraclea of the bishop Philip and the priest Hermes ;⁴ at Cæsarea of the slave-philosopher, Porphyrius.⁵ It was also that of many other Christians, notably in the East, who, according to Eusebius’s way of speaking, were cast into the flames, *i.e.* were made to enter small enclosures of burning hurdles and faggots, in which, according to Lactantius, whole groups perished together.⁶

The two methods of *Vivicomburium* just described were regular, but many irregular and fantastic variations, to which fire lent itself better than any

¹ *Martyrium Polycarpi*, 16.

² Tertullian, *Apol.*, 50.

³ *Passio S. Philippi*, 13.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Eusebius, *De mart. Pal.*, 11, 19.

⁶ Lactantius, *De mort. pers.*, 15.

other capital penalty, were soon invented by the cruelty of certain magistrates.

There was the cauldron of boiling oil into which St. John was plunged, in circumstances of which, however, little is known;¹ there was the cauldron of burning pitch in which Potamiana was done to death;² there was the pit of quicklime into which, during the Decian persecution, Epimachus and Alexander were thrown;³ there was the red-hot iron stool or gridiron which, though at first designed merely for torture, became after the middle of the third century instruments of death. Every one knows the traditional story about St. Lawrence.⁴ A better⁵ authenticated narrative, one vouched for in contemporary documents, is that of the martyrdom of Diocletian's chamberlain, Peter, who was roasted alive on a grill, one part of his body after another being presented to the action of the flames.⁶ Other martyrs of the last persecution were similarly roasted at Antioch.⁷ At Gaza, Timothy was "burnt on a slow fire."⁸ The Emperor Galerius, in 309, invented a new fashion of slowly burning the Christians to death. Water was dashed in their faces, and poured down their throats, so as to lengthen their agony; and so successful were the executioners that the torture occasionally lasted a whole day.⁹

¹ Tertullian, *De præscr.*, 36.

² Eusebius, *H. E.*, vi. 5.

³ Περὶ ἀσβέστω καὶ οὔτοι διεχύθησαν.—Letter of St. Dionysius of Alexandria, in Eusebius, *H. E.*, vi. 41, 17.

⁴ Prudentius, *Peri Stephanon*, ii.

⁵ Cp. Pio Franchi de' Cavalieri, *S. Lorenzo e il supplicio della graticola*, in *Römische Quartalschrift*, vol. xiv., 1900, pp. 159–176.

⁶ Eusebius, *H. E.*, viii. 6.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁸ Eusebius, *De mart. Pal.*, 3.

⁹ Lactantius, *De mort. pers.*, 21.

The persecutors of this period were drawn between two: on the one hand, they wished to slay quickly so as to slay many; on the other, they wished to kill slowly so as to cause excruciating suffering. Death by fire fulfilled both conditions.

V

The most dramatic of all the modes of death which Christians had to undergo was being exposed to the beasts.

This was considered a capital show, and usually took place in the arena on a public holiday. St. Ignatius was given to the beasts on the 20th December, *i.e.* during the *Venationes* or celebration of the *Saturnalia*, which in 107 were kept with special solemnity in thanksgiving for Trajan's triumph over the Dacians.¹ Germanicus and ten other Christians of Philadelphia were exposed to the beasts, at the games ordered by the asiarch for the delectation of the people of Smyrna.² The martyrs of Lyons were exposed in the amphitheatre during the festivities which started with the great fair in the month of August.³ Perpetua, Felicitas, and their companions made their appearance in the amphitheatre of Carthage to grace the quinquennial celebrations of Cæsar Geta.⁴ Thecla and Agapius were given to beasts which had been brought to Cæsarea from India and Ethiopia to grace a festival in honour of

¹ See *Hist. des persécutions pendant les deux premiers siècles*, 3rd ed., pp. 206–207.

² *Martyrium Polycarpi*, 2, 3, 12.

³ Πανηγύρις.—Letter of the Christians of Lyons, Eusebius, *H. E.*, v. 1, 47.

⁴ Munere enim castrensi eramus pugnaturi. Natale tunc Getæ Cæsaris.—*Passio SS. Perpetuæ*, 7.

the Emperor Maximin.¹ Adrian was given to the lions at the same town on the festival-day of Fortune.²

No doubt the fact that such a festival was near at hand often induced the judge to condemn Christians to the beasts rather than to any other punishment. Sometimes the populace, itching to behold the spectacle of blood, would cry, "Christians to the lion."³ Sometimes, too, the fame of the accused or their physical strength guided the judge in his decision; the people, he argued, would be pleased to see well-known men in the arena, or a grand struggle between man and beast. Sometimes a provincial governor would send such Christians to be exhibited at Rome;⁴ they were considered as so many loyal gifts to the emperors. Possibly this may have been the reason of St. Ignatius's long journey from Syria to Rome, though possibly it may have been simply due to the difficulty of finding nearer at hand a sufficient number of captives to grace the one hundred and twenty-three days long solemnisation of Trajan's triumph over the Dacians.⁵ At these festivals eleven thousand wild beasts were slain, but how many men had they first torn to pieces?

The penalty of being given to the beasts was administered amidst much theatrical glamour. Just as it was customary before a race for the charioteers, jockeys, and all their train together, *pompa circensis*, to gallop past the spectators, just as the gladiatorial fights began by the *morituri* marching past and saluting the emperor, so likewise the condemned

¹ Eusebius, *De mart. Pal.*, 6.

² *Ibid.*, 11.

³ See above, p. 113.

⁴ Modest., *Digest*, XLVIII., xix. 31.

⁵ Dion Cassius, lxxviii. 15.

were first formally introduced to the spectators, and then, to keep them engaged whilst awaiting the end, a cruel variety of entertainments was arranged.¹ Sometimes, as at Lyons, they were whipped or made to sit on red-hot stools ; more usually, as at Carthage, they were scourged round the arena by the keepers of the dens. To make the whole as much like a carnival as possible, the condemned were often disguised. When Perpetua and her companions were martyred, the tribune who was leading them endeavoured to dress them at the door of the amphitheatre, the men in the parti-coloured dress of priests of Saturn, and the women in that of the priestesses of Ceres—just as, a hundred and forty years before, the Christian women exposed in the circus by Nero had been arrayed in the tinselled frippery of the wenches of Danaus and Dirce.² But the African martyrs resolutely refused, and an extraordinary discussion then took place, on the very threshold of the amphitheatre, in which the Christians gained the day. “We have come here,” said the Christians, “of our own free will, in fact in order not to be deprived of our freedom. It was for this reason that we delivered up our lives to you ; there is thus a covenant between us and you.” This curiously legal protest of people on the point of dying, who would not consent to submit on a trifling matter of dress—which, however, they considered to cover a larger moral question—was understood by the Roman officer. “Injustice,” says the narrator, “acknowledged its justice,” the martyrs’ feelings

¹ Letter of the Christians of Lyons, Eusebius, *H. E.*, v. 1, 38, 52.

² Clement, *Cor.*, 6. See the explanation of this passage in *Hist. des persécutions pendant les deux premiers siècles*, 3rd ed., pp. 50–53.

were spared, and they were not obliged to don a disguise which was offensive to their faith.¹ Having got their way, they recked little the blows showered on them as they passed by the attendants of the circus.²

As was the case with those condemned to be burnt, those exposed to the beasts were so placed that they might be seen by all. For the occasion a platform was erected on which was a stake; inclined planes allowed of the beasts mounting comfortably to attack the condemned; the latter stood naked, attached by his hands to the stake; lamps and earthenware medallions have been found which depict men and women in this attitude.³

Though so long as the persecutions lasted, the Christians of the Catacombs were not accustomed to depict, either in the pictures or in the bas-reliefs, the sufferings of the martyrs, nevertheless a close examination of the pictures reveals allusions to the then manner of exposing Christians to the beasts. One of the favourite themes of the artists of the Catacombs was Daniel in the Lions' Den. Usually the artist shows himself desirous of representing that episode as correctly as possible; the prophet is usually found standing on a level with the lions, or even in a sort of depression intended to represent the "den" or pit—*lacus leonum*—of the Vulgate.⁴ But in one painting, a fresco of the catacomb of St. Domitilla, and belonging to the end of the first century or to

¹ *Passio SS. Perpetuæ, Felicitatis*, 18.

² *Flagellis eos vexari pro ordine venatorum.*—*Ibid.*

³ *Bull. di archeol. Crist.*, 1879, plate iii.; *Mélanges De Rossi*, p. 243; *Mélanges d'histoire et d'archéologie de l'École française de Rome*, 1890, p. 59; *Mémoires de la Société des antiquaires de France*, 1892, p. 114; *Bulletin de la Société des antiquaires de France*, May 21, 1893.

⁴ *Dan.* vi. 16; xiv. 30.

the beginning of the third, Daniel is represented standing on a hillock, up which two lions are scrambling.¹ There is here an anachronism which must be intentional. The substitution of a hillock for a pit must be wilful, and its reason is that the artist wished to depict the Christian martyrs in the shape of Daniel; casting the biblical account to the winds, he has represented the latter as exposed to the beasts, not in the lions' pit at Babylon, but on the artificial mound on which it was usual to place the former.² If this ancient fresco was executed after the martyrdom of St. Ignatius, who perished at Rome in 107, it seems likely enough that his martyrdom was the real motive of the picture.³ Still clearer is the allusion on an engraved glass of the fourth century, found at Rome in 1884. Though it is only a fragment, it is easy to see that it depicts Daniel exposed to the lions; but this time the prophet is standing on a little square platform.⁴ There can be no doubt that the engraver when he designed the figure was thinking more of the martyrs of Rome, Lyons, and Carthage than of Daniel.

Once exposed on their platform, the condemned were at the mercy of the beasts. Sometimes they were torn to pieces where they stood, at other times they were pulled away from the stake and dragged about the arena by the beasts. It frequently happened that the animals, being already gorged with human flesh, were slow in attacking. Thus, at Carthage, Saturus, who was exposed on a *pulpitum* at the same time as Saturninus, was first attacked by a leopard,

¹ *Bull. di archeol. Crist.*, 1865, p. 42.

² *Cp. Bull. di archeol. Crist.*, 1884-1885, p. 91.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

⁴ *Ibid.*, plates v.-vi. and pp. 86-94; *Bull. della commissione archeologica comunale di Roma*, 1885, plates vii.-viii. and pp. 54-62.

then by a bear, then was dragged about by a wild boar, but only at the very end of the games received from a leopard the fatal bite which covered him with blood.¹ Sometimes the martyr, being desirous of quickly reaching Paradise, incited the beasts to attack him. This was the case of Germanicus at Smyrna; disregarding the entreaties of the proconsul, who pitied the youth of the martyr, Germanicus ran up to the beast, and by striking it set it in a rage, and so compelled it to devour him.² St. Ignatius feared lest the beasts should spare him. In his letter to the Romans, where he so eloquently expressed his wish to be ground by the teeth of the beasts as the wheat of God, he exclaimed: "I hope they will be ready for business; I shall stroke them, so that they may devour me immediately, and not treat me as they have treated some whom they feared to touch. If they are unwilling I shall force them."³ Most often the beasts wounded the martyrs without killing them; it was then necessary to finish them off. This was the case at Carthage of Perpetua, Felicitas, and Saturus. Perpetua herself pressed her neck on the dagger of an inexperienced gladiator whose hand was shaking.⁴ At Cæsarea it was also necessary to give the finishing stroke to Adrian, Eubulus, and Agapius, who had been torn either by a bear or a lion. The two former were stabbed, the third was cast into the sea.⁵

It sometimes happened that the martyrs who were thus put an end to, had received no injury whatever from the beasts; the beasts had refused to

¹ *Passio SS. Perpetuæ, Felicitatis*, 21.

² *Martyrium Polycarpi*, 3.

³ Ignatius, *Rom.*, 5.

⁴ *Passio SS. Perpetuæ, Felicitatis*, 21.

⁵ Eusebius, *De mart. Pal.*, 11.

touch them. It is to such cases that St. Ignatius alludes in the passage of his epistle to the Romans, quoted above,¹ nor does his language insinuate that he considered this miraculous. On the contrary Eusebius, who witnessed a phenomenon of this sort, saw in the respect shown by savage beasts for the witnesses of Christ, and in the lesson of kindness thus given by brutes to men, a striking proof of God's power. The passage in which he describes his impressions of a day passed in the amphitheatre of Tyre is well worth quoting in full:—

“I was present at this show, and I saw visible and manifest signs of the help afforded by the Lord Jesus, to whom the martyrs were bearing witness. Ferocious animals for a long while did not dare to touch nor even to approach the bodies of the saints. They turned their rage on the pagans who were goading them, and remained as far off as possible from the holy athletes, who, naked and defenceless, were beckoning to them as they had been told to do. Sometimes the beasts rushed towards them, and then, as if held back by divine power, they quailed and withdrew. This lasted a long time, to the great wonder of the spectators, who saw a first, a second, and a third beast uselessly let loose against a single martyr. Every one admired the constancy and courage of the saints, and the strength of soul shown by their feeble bodies. You might have beheld a young man of scarcely twenty, left unbound, praying calmly with his arms extended in the form of a cross, and never flinching at the approach of bear or leopard. At first the beasts seemed to breathe only death and carnage, they seemed prepared to devour the Christians, and then they de-

¹ Ignatius, *Rom.*, 5.

parted as if some higher force had closed their jaws. All this happened even as I have narrated it. You might have seen others (for there were five) exposed to a mad bull; the creature had already tossed several pagans, who had been carried away unconscious, but when he turned to rush at the holy martyrs, he could no longer make any progress. He stamped the ground and shook his horns, still smarting under the hot irons with which he had been prodded,¹ then he wheeled round as if he had been pushed back by the hand of God. Other beasts were then let loose, but with no better success. Finally, the martyrs having come safely through so many trials were beheaded and their bodies were cast into the sea.”²

The bull which had tossed several persons (probably malefactors), but which refused to touch the martyrs, held an important post in the *Venationes*. In order to whet his appetite for slaughter and make him sufficiently wild, before beginning the actual bull-fight, dummies were placed on the ground and on these the bull began his work by tossing them high into the air.³ But the “dummies” were not always men of straw, live men were occasionally used for the purpose;⁴ this is what happened at Tyre, likewise at Lyons in 177, when a bull played pitch and toss with St. Blandina,⁵ and again at Carthage, where this time not a bull but a savage cow tossed into the air Perpetua and Felicitas.

¹ Cp. “*flammis stimulatus*.”—Martial, *De spectaculis*, xix. 1.

² Eusebius, *H. E.*, viii. 7, 4–6.

³ *Bulletin de la Société des antiquaires de France*, 1893, p. 180.

⁴ See Beurlier, *Les combats de taureaux chez les Grecs et chez les Romains*, in *Mémoires de la Société des antiquaires de France*, 1887, pp. 80–83.

⁵ Letter of the Christians of Lyons, Eusebius, *H. E.*, v. 1, 56.

To prevent the people thus used from dodging the animal, and to make them as much as possible like dummies, they were stripped and then enmeshed in a net; in this fashion was Blandina treated and likewise the two African martyrs, but in the latter case the Carthaginian spectators were so touched by Perpetua's beauty, and by the evidently weak state of Felicitas, who had recently had a child, that they demanded that the two women should be given back their clothes. This instance of popular compassion gave rise to a curious and touching episode. Perpetua was tossed by the animal and fell heavily; in falling her tunic was rent, thus uncovering her legs. "Forgetful of pain, and only mindful of modesty," as the contemporary biographer puts it, she promptly joined the two ends of the torn garment, and then pinned up her hair which had been loosened, "because," says the narrator, "it was not right that one on the point of entering into glory should look like a mourner." Having thus adjusted herself, St. Perpetua walked over to Felicitas, who was lying crushed on the ground, and helped her to rise.¹ Thus, side by side, they awaited the *coup de grâce*.²

¹ *Passio SS. Perpetuæ, Felicitatis*, 20.

² There is no known instance where the Christians endeavoured to resist the onslaught of the beasts; they never defended themselves. Another similar punishment is mentioned, that of being made one of a troop of gladiators. The *Passion of St. Pionius* (18) mentions that Asclepiades was threatened with this. Only one actual condemnation is known; three Christians were condemned to act as professional fighters, but upon their refusing to eat the food offered, or to undergo the necessary training, they were sent to the mines (*De mart. Pal.*, 8). See also Tertullian, *Apol.*, 44; *De spectaculis*, 19; Ulpian, *Digest*, XLVIII., xix. 8, art. 11 and 12.

VI

Crucifixion, a mode of punishment which Christ's death had for ever hallowed, but which by the Romans was considered an ignominious penalty, was often inflicted on the martyrs.

The most celebrated case, after that of Christ, of the use of the cross was the crucifixion of St. Peter. In the first and second centuries Clement of Rome and Dionysius of Corinth speak of Peter's martyrdom at Rome but not of its mode.¹ Tertullian is the first to state that St. Peter "underwent a passion similar to that of the Saviour," and that he "was crucified."² Origen adds that "he was crucified head downwards."³ However strange this may appear, such a manner of crucifying was not unknown in the time of Nero. "I see," says Seneca, "crosses of different types, some are crucified head downwards."⁴ Origen, however, ascribes this reversal of the ordinary manner of proceeding to a reason other than the cruelty of the executioner: "Peter," he writes, "out of humility, requested to be thus crucified."⁵

In the first century other Christians met a like death. Many were crucified at the awful festival in Nero's gardens.⁶ At the beginning of the second century, under Trajan, St. Simeon, Bishop of Jerusalem, was crucified.⁷ A hundred years later, the pagan whose conversation was put on record by

¹ Clement, *Cor.*, 5, 6; Dionysius, in Eusebius, *H. E.*, ii. 25.

² Tertullian, *De præscr.*, 36; *Scorpiac.*, 15.

³ Origen, in Eusebius, *H. E.*, iii. 1.

⁴ Seneca, *Consol. ad Marciam*, 20.

⁵ Origen, *loc. cit.*

⁶ Tacitus, *Ann.*, xv. 44.

⁷ Hegesippus, in Eusebius, *H. E.*, iii. 32.

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Minucius Felix, said triumphantly to the Christian with whom he was holding a friendly discussion: "This is no longer the time to adore crosses, but to ascend them"—*Jam non sunt adorandæ cruces, sed subeundæ*.¹ In some of the passages I quoted from Justin, Tertullian, and Clement of Alexandria, mention is made of the crucifixion of Christians.² The names of a few who perished by this means in the last persecution have been preserved. Claudius, Asterius, Neon,³ Calliopius,⁴ Theodulus,⁵ Agricola,⁶ Timothy, Maura;⁷ Eusebius also tells us that many of the Egyptian Christians, whose names were lost, died on the cross.⁸

Some of the latter were crucified as St. Peter had been. "The others," says Eusebius, "had been nailed to the cross after the usual manner with malefactors; but some were, with exquisite cruelty, nailed head downwards."⁹ The fourth-century historian adds, that "they remained alive until they died of hunger on their gibbets."¹⁰ Instead of giving the crucified the *coup de grâce*, the Romans usually left them to perish slowly on the cross.¹¹ One *Passion* tells of two martyrs, man and wife, who were crucified face to face, and who lived for nine days struggling against unconsciousness and burning with thirst, in

¹ Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, 12.

² See above, p. 259.

³ *Acta SS. Claudii, Asterii, &c.*, 3, in Ruinart, p. 281.

⁴ *Passio SS. Calliopii*, in *Acta SS.*, April, vol. i. p. 662.

⁵ Eusebius, *De mart. Pal.*, 11. Theodulus was a slave.

⁶ St. Ambrose, *De exhort. virgin.*, 2.

⁷ *Passio SS. Timothei et Mauræ*, in *Acta SS.*, May, vol. i. p. 376.

⁸ Eusebius, *H. E.*, viii. 8.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Finishing off the crucified by the *crurifragium* (*John* xix. 31-33; Cicero, *Philipp.*, xiii. 12) was a rare occurrence.

their last dreams being pursued as by diabolical temptations with visions of cooling drinks.¹

VII

Another mode of death by which many Christians perished in the last persecution was death by drowning, a cowardly penalty which in the Reign of Terror was used anew in France.

In 303, soon after Diocletian's first edict, "innumerable" Christians, so Eusebius testifies, were bound and carried out to the open sea, where they were thrown overboard.² At Rome, in 304, two martyrs were cast into the Tiber from a bridge below the isle of Æsculapius.³ In Egypt others were thrown into the sea.⁴ At Cæsarea a girl of eighteen years was similarly treated.⁵ In Pannonia, Quirinus, Bishop of Siscia, was thrown with a millstone round his neck into the Savus.⁶

In Palestine, Ulpian, sewn up in a bullock's skin with a dog and an asp, and in Cilicia, Julian, tied up in a sack filled with earth and reptiles, were drowned.⁷ Drowning was not a regular penalty, though parricides, according to the law, were to be sewn up in sacks with noxious animals and then drowned.⁸

¹ *Passio SS. Timothei et Mauræ*, p. 376. Several details of this *Passion* show that it was written before the physiological effects of crucifixion (which had been abolished at the beginning of Constantine's reign) had been forgotten. Cp. *La persécution de Dioclétien*, 2nd ed., vol. i. pp. 365-366.

² Eusebius, *H. E.*, viii. 6.

³ *Acta SS. Beatricis, Simplicii, Faustini*, in *Acta SS.*, July, vol. vii. p. 47.

⁴ Eusebius, *H. E.*, viii. 8.

⁵ Eusebius, *De mart. Pal.*, 7.

⁶ *Passio S. Quirini*, 5.

⁷ Eusebius, *De mart. Pal.*, 5; Chrysostom, *Hom. de mart. S. Juliani*.

⁸ Modest., *Digest*, XLVIII., ix. 9. Cp. *Justinian Code*, IX., xvii. 1. Even parricides, under the Empire, were not usually drowned; Paul, *Sentent.*, V., xxv

However, as no law or edict had prescribed its use for Christians, its application to them was utterly illegal, but we should be hard put to find any respect for law at a period when the Emperor Galerius, if we may believe Lactantius, had abolished beggary in his states by drowning all the beggars.¹

VIII

It is weary work enumerating the modes of death which pagan hatred never wearied inflicting on the Christians.

Sometimes the latter fell victims to riots; at Carthage the mob attacked Numidicus, his wife, and a group of faithful; some were burnt and others stoned;² at Alexandria, in like manner, St. Meta and St. Quinta were stoned,³ whilst Serapion was thrown from the top of a house;⁴ at Rome a band of pagans walled up the opening of a subterranean passage, leaving the Christians within to perish.⁵

But the frigid cruelty of magistrates was much worse than the blind anger of the populace. "Thy ferocity, thy inhumanity," writes St. Cyprian to an African magistrate, "is not content with the usual tortures; thou art wickedly ingenious; thou inventest new penalties."⁶ Eusebius, too, speaking of the magistrates of the East during the fourth century, says that they invent for the sake of the Christians sufferings until then unknown, each one striving to outdo in cruelty his colleagues.⁷

¹ Lactantius, *De mort. pers.*, 23.

² Cyprian, *Ep.*, 35.

³ Eusebius, *H. E.*, vi. 41.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Passio SS. Chrysanthi et Darie*, in *Acta SS.*, vol. x. pp. 483, 487; Gregory of Tours, *De gloria martyrum*, i. 38.

⁶ Cyprian, *Ad Demetrianum*, 12.

⁷ Eusebius, *H. E.*, viii. 12.

At Antioch the deacon Romanus's tongue was first cut out—"a new torture," Eusebius remarks—and then he was strangled.¹ At Nicomedia, Dorothea, Gorgonius, and others were also strangled.² In Arabia the faithful were slaughtered with axes,³ a form of punishment forbidden by the law.⁴ In Cappadocia their legs were broken.⁵ In Mesopotamia they were hung head downwards over a slow fire.⁶ At Alexandria their nose, ears, and hands were cut off.⁷ In Pontus reeds were forced beneath their nails, molten lead was poured on their backs, and their entrails were torn out.⁸ In the province of Thebes they were scratched with broken crockery,⁹ women deprived of their clothes were slung up head downwards by the aid of machinery;¹⁰ men had their legs tied to stout bent branches which, when allowed to spring back, tore the bodies in twain.¹¹ In Roman Armenia forty Christian soldiers were made to spend the night naked on a frozen lake, and were then cast into the fire.¹² About the same time, about the year 320, *i.e.* at the very end of the persecutions, and under

¹ Eusebius, *De mart. Pal.*, 11, 4. Strangling was one of the most ancient of the punishments used by Rome (Sallust, *Catilina*, 55; Valerius Maximus, v. 4; vi. 3); but it had fallen into disuse, and is never spoken of in the laws of the Empire. However it again reappeared in the fifth century, when the Senate in 409 condemned Serena, the widow of Stilico, to be strangled (Zosimus, v.).

² Eusebius, *H. E.*, viii. 6, 5.

³ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁴ See above, p. 261.

⁵ Eusebius, *H. E.*, viii. 12.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.* To cut off the hands was not out of order as a punishment; in the first century it was inflicted on deserters (Valerius Maximus, II., vii. 11), and in the fifth a Novella of Majorian (iv. 6) decrees that it shall be inflicted on any official who destroys ancient monuments.

⁸ Eusebius, *H. E.*, viii. 12.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² See above, p. 137.

Licinius, Christians were cut in slices with swords and thrown piecemeal to the fishes.¹

There was no contrivance which at some period or other was not applied to the martyrs. Possibly the law permitted the use of such expedients; capital punishment, according to the comprehensive formula of a third-century jurist, "consists in being thrown to the beasts, or undergoing other similar sufferings, or in being beheaded."² Those "other similar sufferings" meant for the Christians every suffering which human cruelty could invent when inspired by hell.³

I shall add nothing more to this picture which I have just drawn for you. Can the fact of such sufferings, so various in their horror, and undergone not merely during a short period of enthusiasm and by a few, but during nearly three centuries, and by thousands of men, women, and even children, belonging to every country of the Roman world—each one of whom could have by a word or sign escaped all this pain—can such a fact be humanly explained? I do not feel myself in a position to answer this question. But the witnesses of the martyrdoms, and the martyrs themselves, have long since furnished the answer. The Christians of Smyrna describe to us several martyrs in the amphitheatre of the town "so torn by whips that their veins, their arteries, all the inner parts of their bodies were laid bare, and who yet remained so constant that the onlookers were

¹ Eusebius, *H. E.*, x. 8, 17; *De vita Const.*, ii. 2. Eusebius calls this a new mode of death: *καινοτέραν τελευτήν*.

² Marcian, *Digest*, XLVIII., xix. 11, § 3.

³ Possibly the magistrates excused themselves for their cruelty on the strength of this rule of the jurist Claudius Saturninus: "Nounnunquam evenit ut aliquorum malefactorum supplicia exacerbentur, quoties nimirum multis personis grassantibus exemplo opus sit."—*Digest*, XLVIII., xix. 16, § 9.

touched with pity and wept, though the martyrs themselves allowed never a plaint or murmur to escape their lips." "It was manifest," adds the writers, "that at that very hour when they were being tortured, the witnesses of Christ were rapt out of their body, or rather that the Lord was near them and speaking with them."¹ When Felicitas whilst yet in prison was seized with the pains of childbirth, she could not restrain her cries, but on one of those present saying to her: "If thou canst not endure pain now, what wilt thou do when attacked by the beasts?" she replied: "It is I who now suffer, but then another will be in me who will suffer for me, because I shall be suffering for Him."² A commentary on such words would be useless. This much, however, we may say: the historical fact of the long, cruel sufferings willingly undergone by the martyrs is an extraordinary fact, a unique fact, which cannot be matched by anything similar in the annals of any other religion or people. Beyond this I will draw no inference from the data which I have placed before you to-day.³

¹ *Martyrium Polycarpi*, 2.

² *Passio SS. Perpetuæ, Felicitatis*, 15.

³ It would be interesting to compare the procedure adopted against the martyrs in the Roman Empire and in that of Persia. Though I have no intention of instituting such a comparison, I may briefly point out the resemblances, and, at the same time, a notable distinction. In Persia, as in the Roman world, the denunciation of the Christians was frequently the work of Jews; in Persia, too, the Christians had often to undergo long remands; we hear of some who for months, or even years, had to follow their judge on his circuit, or were left to languish in prison. Often the bodies of the martyrs were left exposed to the beasts, any attempt to bury them being frustrated by the soldiers mounting guard. But one piece of refined cruelty, of which we have no instance among the Romans, was habitually practised in Persia; this was to condemn apostates to act as executioners to the martyrs. See Labourt, *Le christianisme dans l'Empire perse*, pp. 59, 62, 69, 74, 75, 77, 81.

LECTURE IX

THE MARTYRS' TESTIMONY AND ITS WORTH

I

WE have already seen amidst what atrocities martyrs of every condition, and country, and sex, and age gave their testimony to the faith. What is the real value of such a testimony? This is the question we shall set about seeking out to-day. Pascal may appear to have made this search useless by that saying of his which has so often been repeated since: "I willingly believe those stories of which the witnesses allow themselves to be slain."¹ But this saying needs some explanation, if it is not to be misunderstood.

The question of the value of the martyrs' testimony has been already treated, though rather too briefly and perfunctorily, by M. Boissier in his work *La fin du Paganisme*. As it would not do to disregard the inferences of so impartial and prudent a critic, you must allow me to quote his words in full:—

"The question," he says, "is not strictly speaking a religious one. It would be this, if we could venture to lay it down that the truth of a doctrine is tested by the constancy of its defenders. Some apologists have taken this for granted; they have alleged the death of the martyrs as an unanswerable proof that the opinions for which they laid down their lives

¹ *Pensées*, ed. of 1712, p. 179.

are true; they contend that no one allows himself to be slain for a false religion. But in itself this inference is incorrect, and moreover the Church has utterly spoilt it by treating her enemies as her own children had been treated. She herself has put people to death, and consequently she cannot claim for her own martyrs what she refuses to others. When she recollects the brave death of the Waldenses, of the Hussites, and of the Protestants whom she burnt or hanged without succeeding in extorting from them a disavowal of their faith, then she will see that she is logically bound to abandon her contention that no one dies save for truth."¹

There are several points deserving of reprehension in the above extract, which lacks the precision which we have learnt to expect from M. Boissier. In the first instance, I do not think that the Church ever maintained "that no one could die save for truth." The contrary is true, and whatever views we may hold concerning the execution of the heretics, who in the above are lumped together,² at least we are bound to allow that several of them showed both courage and sincerity in dying for erroneous doctrines.³ I consider that the question should be set in a different manner.

Whatever confusion modern modes of speech may have introduced into the use of words, we have no

¹ Boissier, *La fin du Paganisme*, vol. i. p. 400.

² For this subject see the seventh of the series of lectures by Father Baudrillart, on *L'Eglise, la Renaissance, le Protestantisme*, pp. 238 seq. [English translation by E. Hine. London: Kegan Paul. 1907.]

³ It was, no doubt, for this reason that Pascal wrote elsewhere, "Were there but one religion God would be too manifest, and, likewise, were there martyrs in our religion alone."—*Pensées*, p. 97. But "martyrs" in this passage has the vague sense it has in ordinary language; Pascal does not use here, as before, the word "witness."

right to term every man a martyr who dies for an opinion. Etymologically a martyr is a witness; now we cannot be witnesses of our own views, but only of facts. This was what Christ meant when he said to His disciples, "You will be My witnesses," and it was likewise the meaning of the words used by Peter and John: "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."¹

The martyrs were witnesses, not of an opinion, but of a fact, the Christian fact. Some had witnessed its beginning, and were acquainted with its Founder; their hands, as St. John expresses it, had "handled" the Word of Life.² The others knew the same fact by a living and uninterrupted tradition, of which the links were as yet few and easily verifiable. Between the death of the martyrs in testimony to a fact, and the death of the heretics who refused to renounce a new opinion not seldom destructive of the ancient fact, no comparison is possible. Even though sincerity and courage were equal on both sides, the value of the testimony would be altogether different; the former alone would have the right to be styled witnesses. Thus Pascal's dictum remains correct. He does not say, "I believe every man who is slain for a doctrine," but with his usual, almost mathematical, attention to detail, he says, "I believe those stories of which the witnesses allow themselves to be slain."

We may now examine these witnesses.

¹ See above, p. 4.

² *John*, 1st epist., i. 1.

II

Some were of the first hour; they had lived with Christ and witnessed His death and resurrection. Such were His Apostles, and His immediate disciples who listened to His preaching in Galilee, or saw Him die at Jerusalem, or were present at His appearances after His death. It is difficult to disbelieve the testimony of these men who faced every danger, underwent every privation and fatigue, to attest the wonderful deeds which had been enacted before their eyes, who gave up the rest of their lives to preaching the love and worship of the Master they had known, and who finally sealed their testimony with their blood. This testimony was understood by the generation of the Apostolic Fathers, and even then its worth was fully acknowledged. The martyr Ignatius, writing to the Christians of Smyrna, says: "I know and I believe that He was in the flesh, even after His Resurrection; and when He came to Peter and his companions and said to them: Hold Me and touch Me, and see that I am not a disembodied spirit.¹ And forthwith they touched Him and believed, being united in His flesh and in His blood. That is why they despised death, or rather rose superior to death."² In other words, they gave their lives as a proof of a fact, because it had been seen and verified by them.

After these first witnesses came those who had believed on their word, who had heard them narrate what they had seen, and beheld the wonders which they had wrought, and who from their conversation with Christ's immediate disciples had acquired so

¹ Cp. *Luke* xxiv. 39.

² Ignatius, *Smyrn.*, 3.

strong a conviction as to be ready in their turn to lay down their lives for Christ. These witnesses in the second degree are like the sands of the sea. Some had seen the episode of Pentecost, and had been converted by St. Peter's preaching at Jerusalem; others had received the faith from the Apostles and disciples, who immediately proceeded to carry their message throughout the Roman world, succeeding, as you know already, in sowing the faith on all the coasts of the Mediterranean. When these disciples of Christ's disciples in their turn willed to die rather than abandon their faith, their martyrdom too was truly a witness; they had indeed never seen Christ on the cross, but their acquaintance with His life was as good as would have been the case with an inhabitant of some remote French province who, not having been present at Paris in January 1793 when Louis XVI. perished, had heard all the details of that monarch's death from one who had been present in the court and by the scaffold.

A few great names culled from the earliest annals of Christianity will enable you to understand how the torch of tradition was passed from hand to hand. I will mention only three, by means of which we step from the first to the third century.

Here, in the first instance, we have Ignatius. He was the second bishop of Antioch and a hearer of the Apostles, or, to use the ancient expression, an "Apostolic man." He was martyred under Trajan about the year 107; in his youth he probably knew St. Peter and St. Paul, who founded the Church of Antioch, and in his maturer years he may have held intercourse with St. John. Lightfoot, whose splendid work has thrown so much light on the life and writings of Ignatius, would place his birth about the year

40.¹ The passage I quoted from his Epistle to the Smyrneans shows the deep impression made on him by the teaching and martyrdom of the Apostles. Another passage from another epistle will show how objectively real this teaching seemed to him. "Be ye deaf," he writes to the Christians of Tralles, "to whosoever speaks to you, except Christ Jesus, who was of the race of David, who was the son of Mary, who was really born, who ate and drank, was really persecuted under Pontius Pilate, was really crucified and died in the presence of all in heaven, on earth and under the earth, and who, moreover, was really raised up by His Father, even by the Father who will raise up all of us who believe in Him."² After having read these lines we understand the hunger and thirst for martyrdom experienced by Ignatius, his eagerness to bear witness, his haste to be united in suffering with Christ, "his crucified love," of which we hear so much in his Epistle to the Romans.

Still better known than the life of Ignatius is that of another disciple of the Apostles, Polycarp, who was put to death under Antoninus Pius. His testimony forms a link between the Apostles and the middle of the second century. When in 155 the proconsul of Smyrna pressed him to apostatise,³ saying: "Swear, and I will send thee away free; abuse Christ!" the old bishop made reply: "For eighty-six years I have served Christ and He has

¹ Lightfoot, *St. Ignatius and St. Polycarp*, vol. i. p. 30.

² Ignatius, *Trall.*, 9.

³ 155, the date determined by Waddington, is almost universally accepted as that of Polycarp's martyrdom. Lightfoot and Harnack look upon this as established. Schmidt proposed 166, but the more recent work of Ramsey and Father Power supports strongly 155. See *Analecta Bollandiana*, 1903, pp. 336-337; 1904, p. 479.

never wronged me; how can I insult my King and my Saviour?" If, as is probable, Polycarp was born of Christian parents, then his age at his death would require his having been born in the year 69. Proconsular Asia, where he lived, was at that time one of the main centres of Christianity. "Here St. John lived and taught for more than a quarter of a century after the destruction of Jerusalem, dying at length in extreme old age in the early years of Trajan's reign (c. 100 A.D.). The other Apostles and personal disciples of Christ, who had migrated to these parts, were carried off first one and then another by death, until at length (it would appear) he was left alone. Here he gathered disciples about him, ordained bishops and presbyters, founded new Churches, making Ephesus his headquarters, but visiting the neighbouring districts as occasion required. Of this circle of disciples Polycarp was the most famous. Long years afterwards it was his delight in old age to relate to his younger friends what he had heard from eye-witnesses of the Lord's earthly life, and more especially to dwell on his intercourse with the Apostle St. John. His own disciple Irenæus speaks of his master as having 'not only been taught by the Apostles and lived in familiar intercourse with many that had seen Christ, but also' as having 'received his appointment in Asia as bishop of the Church of Smyrna from the Apostles,'¹ *i.e.* probably from St. John. Polycarp was thirty years old, or possibly more, before the death of this last surviving Apostle."² Can this same Polycarp, who fifty years later allowed himself to be burnt alive rather than deny the God whose love had been instilled into him

¹ Irenæus, *Adv. Hær.*, iii. 3, 4.

² Lightfoot, *St. Ignatius and St. Polycarp*, vol. i. pp. 440-441.

by that Apostle who at the last supper had rested his head on Christ's shoulder—can such a martyr be described otherwise than as a witness?

Thirdly, Irenæus himself came from Asia to Lyons. In this city he witnessed the martyrdom of the Christians put to death under Marcus Aurelius, and succeeded to Bishop Pothinus, who died in prison during the persecution. He himself died at the beginning of the third century in the reign of Septimius Severus.¹ He had retained a very vivid recollection of the lessons which he had received at Smyrna from his master Polycarp. "These lessons," he writes, in a letter to one of his former fellow-disciples, "grew with the growth of my soul, and form a part of it, so much so that I could now point out the very place where blessed Polycarp used to sit when he spoke to us, describe his comings in and goings out, his manner of life, his personal appearance, repeat the sermons which he preached to the people, how he himself described his intercourse with John and the others who had seen the Lord, and how he quoted their words. And all which he had learnt from them concerning the Lord, and concerning His miracles and concerning His teaching, Polycarp, as one having received it from ocular witnesses of the life of the Word, narrated it all agreeably to the Scriptures. By God's grace I was accustomed to listen attentively to the matters which were thus put before me, not taking notes on paper, but on my heart, and even now by the grace of God I rehearse them faithfully within myself."² It

¹ I shall not enter here into the controverted question as to whether Irenæus was or was not a martyr. The reasons for and against will be found in my *Hist. des persécutions pendant la première moitié du troisième siècle*, 3rd ed., pp. 167–170.

² Irenæus, letter to Florinus, Eusebius, *H. E.*, v. 20.

seems to me impossible to express more strikingly how lively this oral tradition was which was thus implanted by old men in young souls who assimilated it so well that, to use Irenæus's expression, it actually grew up with them, *i.e.* became clearer and clearer as their age permitted them to realise its sense and bearing more fully. But we must not forget that with Irenæus we reach the third century; that the echo of the lakes of Galilee, already once repeated along the coasts of Smyrna by the voice of Polycarp, is now ringing in the valley of the Rhône; nor must we forget that the Christians of Lyons are separated from Christ by only three degrees; the actual Apostles of Christ, their hearers like Ignatius and Polycarp, and the disciples of these latter like Irenæus.

We have, therefore, the right to consider as real witnesses not only the martyrs of the first century—who died for Christ under Nero and Domitian—but also those of the second, slain under Trajan, Adrian, Antoninus, and Marcus Aurelius. Some of those who confessed their faith at the beginning of the second century, belong, as a contemporary of the first persecution put it, to “the generation” of the Apostles; some of them had known our Saviour; such was the case with Simeon the bishop of Jerusalem and a cousin of Jesus, who in the first years of Trajan's reign, after having been tortured in vain for several days, was, in spite of his extreme old age, crucified by order of the legate Claudius Atticus.¹ The others had been taught by the Apostles or by the hearers of the Apostles, and hence they too derived their beliefs either directly or mediately from the same truthful source. Among

¹ Hegesippus, Eusebius, *H. E.*, iii. 32.

these martyrs in the second degree some lived in the very locality in which our Lord's life had been passed, and they lived there before the terrible reprisals for the Jewish insurrection at the time of Adrian had turned Palestine into a waste and destroyed all the local traditions. To this class belonged those, of whom the apologist St. Justin speaks in the second century, who were slaughtered in 131 by Barcochebas, the leader of the Jewish rebellion, for refusing to deny and blaspheme Christ.¹ Other lands which had not been sanctified by the footsteps of Christ had been at least travelled over by His disciples, since before the end of the first century a considerable part of the Roman Empire had been evangelised by them. Hence the martyrs of the second century, no matter where their lot was cast, lived in an atmosphere saturated with the Gospel, nor must we forget that it was then an easier matter than now to retrace and verify the path by which the Gospel had come to them. They knew which apostle, or which disciple, or which "apostolic man" had brought the "good news" to their country, so that they could, St. Ignatius says, fit their feet into the footprints left by the earliest missionaries.² When they refused to give up a religion which, in most cases, they had embraced when already mature in body and mind, it was because they knew from whom they had received it, and were fully aware of the answers to those historical questions which it is now our laborious duty to seek, but only seldom our joy to discover.

These martyrs and their successors the saying of Pascal most aptly fits; these "witnesses who allow themselves to be slain" testify less to doctrine than to a "story," or rather they witness at one and the

¹ Justin, *I. Apol.*, 31.

² Ignatius, *Ephes.*, 12.

same time to a story and a doctrine, and show by their death that the "story" and the doctrine are inseparably linked together. It is precisely this identity of the two facts, doctrinal and historical, making the former in some sense verifiable by the latter, which forms the originality of Christianity, and distinguishes it from myths and merely metaphysical constructions which hang between earth and heaven without any foundation in reality. Christianity holds its head in heaven, but it keeps its feet on the solid earth and never ceases to remain a fact. This is the reason why at every epoch it may produce witnesses. Those who are too far removed in time from the original Gospel fact for their testimony to add anything to its credibility, are still near enough to the Christian fact, *i.e.* to the Gospel as organised and living in the Church, to be able usefully to bear it testimony by word or if needs be by blood. After the third century the beginnings of Christianity began to recede more completely, though material monuments remained in plenty to commemorate the planting of the Gospel. At the commencement of the century Caius could still show at Rome the trophies, *i.e.* the tombs of the Apostles.¹ Nevertheless, the memory of these Christians, unlike that of a previous generation, could no longer carry them back to the very men by whose word the faith had first been preached to the world. But the Church is a live thing of which Christians are the members; hence the Church became, in the estimation both of the martyrs and of their opponents, the Christian fact; a fact involving a doctrine and a mode of life which as occasion arose was heroically witnessed to by the Christians. The faith for which they yielded up

¹ Caius, Eusebius, *H. E.*, ii. 25, 7.

their lives was at once the traditional and their personal faith, the two being so united as to form but one; it was to this faith that they testified during the persecutions of Decius, Valerian, and Diocletian, and so great was the force of their testimony that in the end it shook the sword from the hand of the persecutor. To a like faith has testimony been given in modern times, whether on the scaffolds of the Terror or in the plains of the Far East, for the source of the Church's testimony has not yet run dry, and her veins are still swollen with generous blood waiting to be drawn.¹

III

One of the characteristics of the testimony given by the Christian martyrs was its moderation and the constancy of the principles by which it was upheld.

The heretics of the first centuries professed various views concerning martyrdom. Some would have nothing to do with it; this was the case with many of the Gnostics, especially those of the Basilidean and Valentinian sects. These dreamers were all *docetes*, who believed all to be mere appearance. As Christ had not really suffered, why suffer for Him? These men, in the empty pride of their hearts, scorned the duties of practical life. In the estimation of these "overmen" morality did not count, they were above its precepts; "gold," said they, "can pass through filth unsmirched."² They held that the "best

¹ [For different appreciations of the argument contained in this section, see Laberthonnière's article in *Annales de philosophie chrétienne* (Oct. 1906), and the author's rejoinder in the same periodical (Dec. 1906). Also *The Testimony of Martyrdom*, in *The Month* (Dec. 1906). It may be well to state that the latter article is not from the pen of the present translator.—*Trans.*]

² Irenæus, *Adv. Hær.*, i. 6, 2.

testimony to give to God is to know Him as He is," and that "to confess God by death is suicide."¹ Some heretics went as far as to say that it was permissible to deny with the lips provided that the heart abided faithful.² The Valentinians argued that martyrdom could not enter into the providential plans of God, who is too good to rejoice in the death of His just ones.³ The Basilideans taught that the sufferings undergone by Christians in their martyrdom were most often the just punishment of sins committed in a previous existence.⁴ Other Gnostics, followers of Marcion, held entirely different views; they exalted the martyrs and boasted of having produced many.⁵ In another heresy, which from Phrygia migrated to the West snapping up on its way that brilliant genius Tertullian, enthusiasm for martyrdom was carried beyond all reasonable bounds. Sombre and inflexible, Montanism required of its adherents that they should seek martyrdom. It condemned as a want of confidence in the Holy Ghost every effort to escape persecution; flight was as bad as apostasy.⁶ Among the Montanist fanatics the desire of martyrdom became, as Renan rightly says, "a fever beyond control."⁷ The last form of

¹ Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.*, iv. 4; Irenæus, *Hær.*, iii. 18, 5; iv. 33, 9.

² Origen, quoted by Eusebius, *H. E.*, viii. 32.

³ Tertullian, *Scorpiac.*, 1.

⁴ See the texts quoted by Hort, art. *Basilides*, in the *Dictionary of Christian Biography*, vol. i. pp. 274-275.

⁵ Eusebius, *H. E.*, iii. 12; iv. 15; v. 16; *De mart. Pal.*, 10. Cp. Tertullian, *Adv. Marc.*, i. 27. It would, however, be useless to seek an historical foundation for an assertion recently made by Lavertujon (*Petits essais de religion et d'histoire*, 1899, p. 71), viz. that the Marcionites furnished, in the first two centuries, a proportionally larger number of martyrs than the other Christian bodies.

⁶ Tertullian, *De fuga in persecutione*.

⁷ Renan, *Marc Aurèle*, p. 243.

this fever was seen in the *circumcelliones* of the fourth century, men who ran about seeking their death and imploring of the passers-by to knock out their brains or cut their throats that they might reach heaven more speedily.¹

The heresies of the first centuries, lacking, like all heresies, the solid ground of traditional authority and firm Church discipline, oscillated between two extremes; they either condemned and avoided martyrdom, or sought it intemperately.

On the contrary, the Church's attitude towards martyrdom was always reasonable and prudent. Both in the East and in the West her language was always one of faith joined with common sense. She indulged in no sophism, she was not presumptuous, still less was she pusillanimous. She never hesitated to assert the duty of enduring martyrdom; under no pretext would she allow her children to deny Christ before the representatives of power. Apostates were excommunicated by their very deed, and they were looked upon as spiritually dead until, by a firm and sincere repentance, they had been born again to life.² But though the Church required that her children should be courageous, yet she ever counselled prudence during the time of persecution. One of her motives for so doing was her knowledge of the instability and cowardice of the human heart. "The spirit is ready, but the flesh is weak." Often the most presumptuous was proved to be the weakest; several of the apostates, whose loss the Church mourned, had delivered themselves of their own

¹ St. Augustin, *Ep.*, 185: *Contra Cresconium*, iii. 6; Theodoretus, *Hæret. fab.*, iv. 6, and the other texts quoted by F. Martroye, *Une tentative de révolution sociale en Afrique*, in the *Revue des questions historiques*, October 1904, pp. 406-407.

² Letter of the Christians of Lyons, Eusebius, *H. E.*, v. 1, 45.

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accord to the magistrates.¹ Another motive was her charity; she considered it wrong to tempt any one to do evil, hence she looked on it as wrong for any one to give the persecutors an occasion for acting wickedly.² Her rules may be thus summed up: Never to flinch, to be ever diffident of one's own force, never to provoke or defy the pagan authority.

Of course, these rules were not always observed; like all rules they involved exceptions. Sometimes the enthusiasm of a Christian crowd would throw them to the background; you recollect the incident which happened in a town of Asia where all the Christian inhabitants proceeded to parade before the proconsul's judgment-seat, so terrifying the Roman official that he refused to sentence any of them.³ At other times the transgression of these rules was pardoned on the score of the youth of the martyrs; such was the case with those two little girls, Eulalia in Spain and Agnes in Italy, who ran away from home to give themselves up to the persecutors.⁴ At other times a like disregard for rules may be accounted for by the innate pride of some good old soldier; for instance, take the case of the centurion Gordius. For several years he had been living as a hermit in the mountains of Cappadocia, but when there came the trumpet-call of persecution he immediately returned to Cæsarea, hastened to the circus, and there confessed Christ and abused the governor; marching proudly to his doom, he said

¹ *Martyrium Polycarpi*, 4.

² Origen, *Comm. in Joann.*, xi. 54.

³ Tertullian, *Ad Scapulam*, 5.

⁴ Prudentius, *Peri Stephanon*, iii. 36-65. Nutricis gremium subito liquisse puellam, &c.—St. Damasus, in the epitaph of St. Agnes (*Inscript. Christ. urbis Romæ*, vol. ii. p. 45).

to the people: "Think you that a centurion cannot be a religious man, and that a soldier has no right to salvation?"¹ Such episodes are too touching and human for us to wish them absent; they are, in their manner, sublime, and the sublime cannot be bound by rule, but the regulation remains in spite of its having been disregarded.

One of the most formal of these rules was that which forbade the Christians to denounce themselves. "We do not praise," says a second-century document, "those Christians who go of their own accord to offer themselves; the Gospel teaches nothing of this sort."² St. Cyprian likewise writes: "Each one must be ready to confess his faith, but nobody must seek martyrdom."³ In the fourth century the disciplinary canons published by St. Peter of Alexandria censure the laity and punish the clergy who had denounced themselves to the judges.⁴

Another rule was not to irritate the pagans by outraging the objects of their worship. Origen states that it is wrong to insult and box the ears of the idols;⁵ stronger still was the prohibition of breaking them.⁶ A canon of the Council of Illiberis, held before Diocletian's persecution, lays it down that "if a Christian has broken an idol and in so doing lost his life, he shall not be reckoned among the martyrs."⁷ The Council gives its reason as follows:

¹ St. Basil, *Hom.* xviii.

² *Martyrium Polycarpi*, 4.

³ St. Cyprian, *Ep.*, 81.

⁴ St. Peter of Alexandria, canons 9 and 10, in Migne, *P. G.*, xviii., col. 488.

⁵ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, viii. 38.

⁶ There were exceptions, for instance the case of the martyr Valentina who, when forcibly brought before a pagan altar, overthrew it with all its apparatus.—Eusebius, *De mart. Pal.*, 8, 7.

⁷ Council of Illiberis, canon 60 (Hefele, *Hist. of the Councils*, French trans., vol. i. p. 160).

"Such an act is not counselled by the Gospel, and we are under the impression that it never occurred in the time of the Apostles."¹ Still more reprehensible was any attempt to destroy a pagan temple. A historian of the fifth century, the bishop Theodoretus, after having set on record the act of an over-zealous Persian bishop, who had destroyed a temple in his own country, adds: "St. Paul, when he came to Athens, and found the city given over to the worship of false gods, did not forthwith throw down the Athenians' venerated altars, but he spoke to them, and by his preaching dispelled their ignorance and taught them the truth."²

The Church even went so far on the path of prudence as to tolerate bribery and corruption being used to close the eyes of the officials, which act of grace was vehemently attacked by Tertullian, who derides with indignant sarcasm this timid conduct,³ though, on the other hand, it was upheld by the more kindly spirit, St. Peter of Alexandria, who argued that those who acted thus had at least shown that they clung more to Christ than to their money, since they had made use of the latter to save them from the peril of apostasy.⁴ But above all other means of evading the effects of the edicts the Church approved and even counselled flight in time of danger. At the beginning of the third century this was the main ground of debate between the high-minded Montanists and more practically minded Christians. Tertullian, speaking for the Montanists, says, "I should prefer to be obliged to pity you than to have to

¹ Council of Illiberis, canon 60 (Hefele, *Hist. of the Councils*, French trans., vol. i. p. 160).

² Theodoretus, *H. E.*, v. 19.

³ Tertullian, *De fuga in persecutione*, 12, 13.

⁴ St. Peter of Alexandria, canon 12.

blush for you. A soldier struck down on the battle-field presents a goodlier sight than a soldier saved by flight"—*Pulchrior est miles in pugna pilo transmissus, quam fuga salvus*.¹ But the paradox is too evident to be harmful; apostasy is not comparable to the death of a soldier, but rather to desertion and betrayal. The feeling of the Church as a body was very different; she bore in mind before all else the words of Christ: "When they shall persecute you in this city, flee into another."² When Polycarp was proscribed he went into hiding in the country; but when once he had been arrested he never concealed his love for Christ; he expressed it with noble pride to the judge and afterwards went cheerfully to the stake; the writers of his *Martyrium*, alluding to this, style his "a martyrdom according to the mind of the Gospel."³ Many of the best-known men in the Church of the third century, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Dionysius of Alexandria, Cyprian, Gregory Thaumaturgos, Peter of Alexandria, counselled flight, and were themselves the first to set this example of Christian humility; but this did not hinder them, when afterwards arrested, from bravely confessing Christ, either, like Origen, by undergoing long months of imprisonment and torture, or, like Cyprian and Peter of Alexandria, by dying for their faith by the hand of the headsman. Cyprian calls this voluntary flight—which implied not only a resolution not to apostatise, but usually the loss of all worldly goods—the second degree of martyrdom,⁴ and indeed it not infrequently

¹ Tertullian, *De fuga in persecutione*, 10.

² *Matt.* x. 23.

³ Τὸ κατὰ τὸ Εὐαγγέλιον μαρτύριον.—*Martyrium Polycarpi*, 19.

⁴ Cyprian, *De Lapsis*, 3.

happened that those, who by means of it had established their fidelity, afterwards were found worthy to be initiated to its first and highest degree.

I have dwelt in some detail on the above facts, because they explain the nature of the witness borne by the martyrs. There was in it no morbid, unhealthy enthusiasm. In the Church there was none of that seeking after death which was sometimes found among those outside her fold, who were compared by Clement of Alexandria to the Indian gymnosophists who cast themselves into the fire.¹ Nor was there among the Church's children anything to remind us of that docility shown by crowds, when under the sway of agitators. Their determination was that of reflecting men, who do not expose themselves willingly to danger, who distrust themselves, who obey the rules laid down by religious authority, but who when faced by perils they have not sought, show no weakness, but are all the more courageous, because their resolution had been already taken long before. Witness, for instance, the words with which St. Justin relates the confession of the martyr Ptolemæus. "Ptolemæus, who had always been straightforward, and who abhorred duplicity and lying, avowed himself a Christian. The centurion had him placed in irons and kept him long in prison. At last he came before Urbicus (the prefect) and was asked, as he had been before, whether he was a Christian. Again, conscious of the blessings he owed to the teaching of Christ, he confessed the school of divine virtue; for he who denies anything, either does so from condemning it, or knowing himself to be unworthy of, and alien to it, avoids the

¹ Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.*, iv. 4; Migne, *P. G.*, vol. viii., col. 1231.

confession of it, none of which conditions apply to the true Christian."¹ How calm and deliberate all this looks! But their resolution once taken the Christians immediately felt the joy of having performed their duty; says the same St. Justin: "In order not to dissimulate or deceive the judges, we joyfully confess Christ, and die."²

IV

St. Justin could well speak thus, for it was in witnessing the trials of the martyrs that he had rid himself of the last prejudices which stood between him and Christianity.

When in the reign of Aurelius his own turn came to stand before the prefect of Rome, the latter, who knew him to be a man of learning, questioned him: "What sciences and what studies claim thy time?" "I have done my best," replied Justin, "to study one by one all the sciences and to try them all; I finally halted at the doctrine of the Christians, though it is displeasing to those who are led by the error of a mistaken thought."³ He himself, in his *Dialogue with Trypho*, relates how he had sought rest for his mind in the doctrines of Aristotle, then in those of Pythagoras, then in those of Plato, and how he had found it at last in Christianity.⁴ But in another work he describes the experiment which, when he was nearing the end of his intellectual travels, had finally dispelled the prejudices which hid the end from his sight. "I myself," he writes in his second *Apologia*, "when I was a disciple of Plato, hearing the accusations

¹ Justin, *II. Apol.*, 2.

³ *Acta S. Justin*, 1.

² *I. Apol.*, 40. See above, p. 249.

⁴ *Dialog. cum Tryph.*, 18.

brought against the Christians, and seeing them so bold when facing death and those things from which all men shrink, I said to myself that it was impossible that they could have lived in wickedness and sensuality; for what sensualist or licentious man, whose only thought is to feed his flesh, would welcome death, that he might be deprived of his enjoyments, and not endeavour by every means always to continue his present life, and to dodge the persecution; not to speak of denouncing himself unto death?"¹ He thus inferred that the calumnies launched against the Christians was only a trick of their enemies, intended to veil the truth of their religion. The bravery of the martyrs proved to him the innocence of their co-religionists, and this proof, coupled with the negative results he had secured from a comparison of other doctrines, completed the work which had so long been going on in his mind.

St. Justin's conversion was not the only one due to the influence of the martyrs whose sufferings were more eloquent and persuasive than sermons. Tertullian, during the persecution of Septimius Severus, witnessed the conversion of many pagans drawn to Christ by the extraordinary things they saw: "Many men," he says, "struck by our courageous constancy, sought the motives of so admirable a patience; as soon as they had found the truth they became ours and walked with us."² Arnobius too gives as a reason for believing, the heroism of the Christians and the growth of their numbers in spite of persecution.³

¹ Justin, *II. Apol.*, 12.

² Tertullian, *Ad Scapulam*, 5. Already, at the end of his *Apologia*, he had written: "The same obstinacy with which you reproach us is a teaching in itself. Who can witness it without being moved, and without seeking its cause? And who, having found it, can help coming over to us?"

³ Arnobius, *Adv. Nat.*, ii. 5.

In our times it is customary to condemn as demoralising the practice of executing publicly; in ancient times it was even worse, for then the executions were intended to serve as public shows. However, exceptionally, the execution of the Christians often brought the onlookers to better trains of thought. Until his very last breath the martyr had the power to prevent his death; one word of disavowal escaping his lips would have stayed the hand of the executioner. Hence the interest of the crowd grew as the end drew nearer. They began to take a personal interest in the proceedings; they were no longer merely onlookers, they were themselves actors in the drama they were witnessing. The crowd was like the choir in ancient tragedy; it spoke aloud its feelings, and not seldom it perceived and voiced correctly the different moral phases of the scene being enacted under its eyes.

Sometimes it expressed compassion. We might have seen in the court or in the amphitheatre, pagans weeping whilst a martyr was being sentenced or tortured.¹ Sometimes it gave voice to its astonishment that a man or a woman should bear such agonies,² an astonishment which was all the more remarkable among people who were accustomed to sights of blood. But sometimes too the pagans were otherwise moved, and would ask themselves how any one could thus willingly suffer. A contemporary of the Decian persecution—the unknown author of *De laude martyrum*—has put into writing the conversations of the pagans who were watching a martyr on the rack; he describes the work within, which went on in the better souls when watching

¹ *Martyrium Polycarpi*, 4; Eusebius, *De mart. Pal.*, 8, 12.

² Letter of the Christians of Lyons, Eusebius, *H. E.*, v. 1, 56.

the martyr's tortures. "I understood it completely one day when cruel hands were lacerating the body of a Christian, and the executioner was tracing bloody furrows down his torn limbs. I listened to the conversation of those present. Some said: 'There is something very grand in this power of not yielding to pain and of bearing agonies.' Others added: 'I suppose he has children, and no doubt he has a wife at home, and yet no love either paternal or conjugal shakes his will. There is here something to study; his courage is something which should be thoroughly investigated. We must set some store on a belief for which a man suffers and willingly dies.'" ¹ Those who spoke thus were already half converted; many, too, doubtless followed their new train of thought to its end, and departed from the scene of blood as the centurion had come down from Calvary, striking his breast and confessing Christ. Even those who did not take this step retained the impression of what they had seen. "The people realised with surprise," says the letter of the Church of Smyrna on the martyrdom of Polycarp, "the difference there is between the faithless and the elect."² Thus it was that, as Tertullian eloquently puts it, the more the Christians were mown down the more they grew, because the blood of martyrs is the seed whence new Christians spring: *plures efficimur quoties metimur a vobis; semen est sanguis Christianorum*.³

No doubt all the pagans did not allow such salutary thoughts to take possession of their minds. Some there were who, with shorter sight, exclaimed, "Where is their God?" and, "Of what use to them is their religion for which they have sacrificed their

¹ *De laude martyrum*, 5.

² *Martyrium Polycarpi*, 16.

³ Tertullian, *Apol.*, 50.

lives?"¹ Even among the educated, impressions varied. Some, like Justin in the second century and Arnobius in the fourth, owed in part their conversion to the sight of the martyrs. Others, like Seneca, were at least struck with pity and admiration at the sights of the sufferings undergone by the Christians—for to whom but to the Christians can the following passage apply: "How much more severe (than any illness) is it to be burnt alive, to be torn to pieces on the rack, to have red-hot irons laid on the body, and a pressure made upon the swollen wounds to renew the pain and make it pierce the deeper? And yet there have been those who have endured all this without a groan, nay, more, they asked for no remission; and more, not a word could be extorted from them, yet more they laughed and this right heartily."² But in the self-centred world of the intellectual classes—which are often less able to reason well than the simpler minded—there were many who steeled their hearts even against a feeling of pity for the Christians. The worst opponent of Christianity in the second century, Celsus, the author of the *Sermo Verus*, had at least the honesty to admit the Christians' courage. "In the defence of their views they manifest a wonderful persistence and show a firmness against which I cannot complain; truth is well worth the risk of our lives, and I will not say that a man must abjure the faith he has adopted, or make pretence of abjuring it, just to escape the dangers which it may lead him to encounter among men."³ Many pagans showed

¹ Letter of the Christians of Lyons, Eusebius, *H. E.*, v. 1, 60.

² Seneca, *Ep.*, 78. See also *Hist. des persécutions pendant les deux premiers siècles*, 3rd ed., p. 56, note 2.

³ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, i. 6.

themselves far less ready than Celsus to give the Christians their due. You recollect how Marcus Aurelius reproached the martyrs for their obstinacy;¹ the Stoic Epictetus also considers them as obstinate fanatics;² the Rhetor Ælius Aristides uses similar language;³ the satirist Lucian caricatures the death of a martyr.⁴ Contrasted with these proud souls—who were so taken up with the contemplation of their own moral life that they could not perceive heroism in others—how touching is the example of those simpler minds who understood the lesson given by the martyrs in their sufferings! The history of the persecutions is full of such instances, one or two of which I will now quote.

Among the martyrs slain at the beginning of the third century, in the reign of Septimius, was St. Potamiana, of whom I spoke in connection with the threats occasionally used by magistrates to scare Christian women. When she had evaded successfully all the snares set both for her faith and her virtue, she was, together with her mother Marcella, condemned by the prefect of Egypt to be burnt. She was led to the place of execution by Basilides, a soldier of the prefect's bodyguard; he was a pagan indeed, but kindly disposed to Christianity, having occasionally attended Origen's public lectures. Basilides did his duty kindly and respectfully. Some ill-bred pagans who ventured to indulge in remarks of which the obscenity caused the virgin to blush, he promptly sent about their business. When they had come to the place assigned, Potamiana thanked

¹ Marcus Aurelius, *Thoughts*, xi. 3. See above, p. 115.

² Arrienus, *Dissert.*, iv. 7.

³ Ælius Aristides, *Orat.* xlvi. (ed. Dindorf, p. 402).

⁴ Lucian, *De morte Peregrini*.

him and promised that she would not forget his compassion, and that she would obtain him a reward from God. He remained to witness the execution, and saw the martyr immersed little by little into a cauldron of boiling pitch, in which, when she had been plunged as far as her neck, she expired. After that he never forgot her; one night he thought he saw Potamiana putting a crown on his head, and telling him that the reward she had asked for him from God was at last granted. A while after Basilides was chatting with some of his comrades, who pressed him to confirm a statement by an oath; he replied: "I may not swear, for I am a Christian." At first his friends thought that he was joking, but when he persisted they led him to the prefect, before whom Basilides again confessed his faith. He was put in prison, and whilst there was visited by Christians who were anxious to learn the reason of his sudden change; in answer he related his conversation with Potamiana and the vision he had received. Yet once again he was called upon to confess his faith before the prefect, after which he was sentenced to be beheaded. The virgin's martyrdom had made a martyr of the soldier.¹

At other times the foundation of new conversions was laid in the prisons or in the courts. The people who by their profession were most accustomed to deal with prisoners, were the first to be struck by the difference between Christians and common criminals. One case is known of a clerk of the court who threw down his tablets and style, refusing to take note of the condemnation of a martyr, and, in his indignation at the miscarriage of justice, declaring himself a

¹ Eusebius, *H. E.*, vi. 5.

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Christian.¹ We are also acquainted with instances of jailors being converted by the courage and meekness of their prisoners and actually receiving baptism at the hands of their charges.² The soldiers, too, who by nature and training were simple and straightforward, often felt their hearts melt in presence of their Christian captives. This happened in the military prison of Carthage, where Perpetua, Felicitas, Saturus and their companions were placed for a short time to await the day of their appearance in the arena. The sergeant Pudens, who had charge of this prison, "began," so Perpetua writes, "by taking great care of us, knowing that there was in us a great and divine virtue."³ Another writer adds that soon after "he believed completely."⁴ It fell to this soldier to accompany the martyrs to the amphitheatre. Here Saturus, with extraordinary courage, continued the work he had begun in Pudens. The former had already been once struck down by the beasts, which had however done him no harm, and he now stood against one of the gates of the amphitheatre, chatting with Pudens through the bars: "Here I am, and, as I foretold thee, I have as yet not felt the teeth of the beasts. But make haste and believe with thy whole heart, for I am about to depart—a leopard is even now approaching to put an end to me." The leopard's bite made him bleed profusely, but he still had the strength to say to the soldier, "Good-bye, do not forget my faith; may this sight not scare thee but confirm thee." Then he asked for the soldier's ring, and smearing it

¹ *Passio S. Cassiani*, in Ruinart, p. 345.

² See above, p. 230.

³ *Passio SS. Perpetuæ, Felicitatis, &c.*, 9.

⁴ Jam et ipso optione carceris credente.—*Ibid.*, 16.

with his blood he returned it to him.¹ The blood here again was fruitful, for Pudens now has a place in the Carthaginian martyrology.²

Nor is this fruitfulness exhausted; even now, when persecution breaks out, each martyrdom is always a signal for new conversions. A missionary writing to the *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith*, in 1888, after the dreadful persecution which played havoc with so many of the Churches in Eastern Cochin-China, stated that at the time when the persecution was at its height a pagan had come to him asking for baptism. "Why," asked the missionary, "do you wish to become a convert?" "Because I have seen the Christians die, and wish to die like them; I saw some of them cast into the rivers and into wells, others burnt alive and pierced by spears; but all of them died so contentedly, repeating their prayers and encouraging one another, that I could not help being struck. Only Christians die thus, and this is the reason why I wish to become a convert."³ With this we may bring the lecture to a close. That faith which after so many centuries and in such different countries produces similar episodes, arouses the same feelings, engenders like deeds of heroism, and in the onlookers a like wish to imitate them, must be indeed a living faith.

¹ *Passio SS. Perpetuae, Felicitatis*, 21.

² Ruinart, p. 693. In Persia, too, the heroism of the martyrs often proved contagious. Whilst Barsabia was being led to martyrdom a *magus* slipped into the ranks of the condemned, and requested to be allowed to die with the martyr. Pusaik, another man of some position, having exhorted to perseverance a martyr who seemed on the point of yielding, was immediately put to death.—Labourt, *Le christianisme dans l'Empire perse*, p. 62.

³ *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith*, January 1889.

LECTURE X

HOW THE MARTYRS WERE HONOURED

I

THE tragedy is over; the people are leaving the theatre, each carrying away with him a different impression of the scene he has just witnessed. Some whose fanaticism is still unquenched are glad to know that the blood of a Christian has just atoned for his insults against the gods. Others go home sad, their mind divided between admiration and compassion. All have now left the enclosure with the exception of a few relatives, friends, or co-religionists of the martyred man. These have stayed behind to render the last honours to his body.

As a general rule the law put no hindrance in the way of a decent funeral being provided for the martyr. "The bodies of those executed," says a jurist of the third century, "must be handed over to whoever demands them for burial."¹ Another jurist, who in his time had been a prefect of the *prætorium*, says likewise: "The corpses of those who have been beheaded must not be withheld from their relatives. They are also allowed to collect the ashes and bones of those who have been sentenced to be burnt, and to consign them to the tomb."² Joseph of Arimathæa had not feared to ask of Pilate the body of our Saviour.³ Following his example, the

¹ Paul, *Digest*, XLVIII., xxiv. 3.

² Ulpian, *ibid.*, 1.

³ *Matt.* xxvii. 57-58; *Mark* xv. 43-46; *Luke* xxiii. 51-52; *John* xix. 38.

Christians usually conformed to the custom of asking of the magistrates the permission to gather up and bury the bodies of their martyred brethren.

The martyrs, even when persecution was in full swing, were occasionally buried with great solemnity. When St. Cyprian had been beheaded at Carthage, his friends first laid his body in a temporary resting-place near the field of Sextus, where the sentence had been carried out; this they did to hide him from the prying eyes of the pagan crowd. But that same evening the clergy and faithful came to fetch him and bore him in procession with tapers and torches, chanting meanwhile, until they reached the burying-place of the convert procurator, Macrobius Candidianus. Here they buried him by the side of the road to Mappala, where was the city of the dead of the African metropolis; *cum cereis et scolacibus, cum voto et triumpho*, says the contemporary biographer.¹ To the very same place, towards the end of the third century, the matron Pompeiana brought on a litter the body of the martyred conscript, Maximilian, having previously obtained permission from the prefect to bury it beside St. Cyprian.²

Nevertheless, though history and the various *Passions* show us that, as a rule, permission to bury the martyrs was readily granted, yet this permission was occasionally refused: *nonnunquam non permittitur*,³ says Ulpian.

Such instances of refusal occurred even as far back as the time of Marcus Aurelius. After the martyrdom of the Christians of Lyons, the remains of those who had died in prison, likewise whatever had been spared by the fire or the beasts, and also the

¹ *Acta Proconsularia S. Cypriani*, 5.

² *Acta S. Maximiliani*, 3.

³ *Digest*, XLVIII., xxiv. 1.

heads and bodies of those who had been beheaded were all thrown to the dogs. They remained thus exposed for six days, watched in the meantime by soldiers, and then they were all burnt and the ashes were cast into the Rhône. "The pagans," says the letter of the two Churches, "fancied that they had thus brought to nought the will of the Almighty, and deprived the martyrs of all hope of a resurrection. Every hope of rising again will be withdrawn, they argued, from these perverse men who build upon this hope, who disseminate throughout the Empire a strange religion, who despise torture and joyfully meet death. We shall see now whether they can rise again, whether their God will help them and snatch them from our hands."¹ This notion of the vulgar, which is also attested by other documents, was one of the motives which led the pagans to forbid the martyrs being buried, to drown them, and to choose modes of martyrdom which utterly did away with the bodies, such as death by the beasts and by fire.² Believing that bodies deprived of burial could never rise again, they thought to carry their vengeance beyond the limits of this world and to punish their victims not only for time but also for all eternity.

But their efforts were useless, and were only laughed at by the more spiritually minded Christians. "When I shall have disappeared," wrote Ignatius before being flung to the beasts, "then I shall be truly a disciple of Christ."³ Pionius, when ascending the stack of faggots which was to consume him, made

¹ Letter of the Christians of Lyons, Eusebius, *H. E.*, v. 1, 57-63.

² See Edmond Le Blant, *Les persécuteurs et les martyrs*, pp. 235-250.

³ Ignatius, *Rom.*, 4.

this solemn declaration: "What above all things makes me desire death, what impels me to accept it, is that I must convince the people that it is a resurrection."¹ But such sayings, perfectly understood though they were by the faithful, were not sufficient to overcome pagan prejudice. The idea which had gained entry into the pagans' heads remained there till the very end of the persecutions, and to this superstition we must ascribe the treatment which during Diocletian's reign was inflicted on many of the martyrs, who after having been beheaded, or burnt, or torn by the beasts, had their remains tossed into the river or left to bleach on the ground. Eusebius has left the record of one such act of barbarity which was followed by a strange though well-authenticated phenomenon which much astonished his contemporaries. "The governor of Cæsarea," says the historian, "was so enraged against the servants of God that, doing violence to the very laws of nature, he forbade the burial of the corpses of the saints. By his orders they were guarded in the open air, night and day, that the beasts might tear them to pieces. Each day a numerous company of soldiers saw to the carrying out of these infamous orders. They prevented any bodies being taken away, as if the matter had been one of urgent importance. In the meanwhile, dogs, wild animals, and the vultures were dropping everywhere pieces of human flesh, and filling the neighbourhood of the city with human bones and *viscera*. Some state that they found bits of the corpses even in the streets. When these horrors had lasted already several days there occurred a wondrous thing. The air was calm and the sky was serene, when all of a sudden, down the columns which support the porticos, came flowing

¹ *Passio S. Pionii*, 21.

drops of water ; the pavement of the open spaces was moistened although neither rain nor dew had fallen. The people exclaimed that the earth itself had shed tears, being no longer able to view with unconcern the wicked deeds which were being committed, and that the stones and things without intelligence had wept, that the savage hearts of men might be touched.”¹ Eusebius adduces as his witnesses all those who had seen these “tears of things” (*lachrymæ rerum*).

But sometimes the persecutors had, for forbidding burial to the martyrs, other reasons than mere savagery and superstition. They were annoyed by the honour given to the martyrs, and saw in the worship which the Church extended to their relics a dangerous encouragement of Christian malpractices. Even as early as the second century the father and brother of the irenarch of Smyrna requested the proconsul of Asia not to yield to the Christians the body of St. Polycarp, “lest,” said they in their ignorance, “they set aside the crucified and worship this one.”² Nevertheless, the faithful managed to get hold of the bones which the flames had spared and which they considered, says the old account, “more valuable than gold and precious stones.”³ When Diocletian’s persecution began, the Christian slaves of the palace were buried as soon as they were martyred, but the emperors afterwards ordered their remains to

¹ Eusebius, *De mart. Pal.*, 9, 12–13.

² *Martyrium Polycarpi*, 17. Answering these stupid calumnies of the pagans and Jews, the Smyrneans, in their letter, really answered the objections levelled by modern heretics against the worship of the saints. “They are unaware that it would be impossible for us ever to forget Christ, who suffered for the world’s salvation, who suffered innocent for the guilty, and to adore another.”

³ *Martyrium Polycarpi*, 18.

be exhumed and cast into the sea, "because if they remained in their sepulchres they would soon be worshipped like gods."¹ The body of the deacon St. Vincent, who, in the same persecution, had been put to death at Valentia, was exposed to the beasts and then thrown into the sea by order of Datianus the governor, "who feared," said the Acts, "lest the Christians might honour his relics as those of a martyr."²

This fear, so frequently expressed by pagans and which survived down to the time of the last of the persecutors, the Emperor Julian,³ shows the esteem with which the Church treated those of her people who had been slain for the faith. We not seldom hear of Christians who exposed their lives to secure burial for the martyrs. They set at defiance the orders of the magistrates, and used both bribery and strategy to recover the saints' relics. In the reign of Marcus Aurelius the remains of St. Justin and his companions at Rome,⁴ and of Epipodius and Alexander at Lyons,⁵ were thus "stolen" by the faithful. In the reign of Decius the faithful of Pergamus "stole, in order to put them in safe deposit," the charred bones of Carpos, Papylos, and Agathonice.⁶ In Valerian's persecution the Christians of Tarragona broke into the amphitheatre in the darkness of the evening to remove the still smoking remains of Fructuosus and his deacons.⁷ Under Diocletian,

¹ Eusebius, *H. E.*, viii. 6.

² *Passio S. Vincentii*, 10.

³ Libanius, *Epitaphios Juliani* (ed. Reiske, vol. i. p. 562); Gregory of Nazianzen, *Oratio*, iv. 58 : vii. 11 ; Chrysostom, *In SS. Juventinum et Maximinum*, 2.

⁴ *Acta S. Justinii*, 5.

⁵ *Passio SS. Epipodii et Alexandri*, 12.

⁶ *Martyrium Carpi, Papyli et Agathonices*, in fine.

⁷ *Acta SS. Fructuosi, Augurii, Eulogii*, 6.

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when permission to bury was so frequently refused, there were many such cases of self-devotion. In Macedonia the Christians disguised themselves as sailors and set out in ships to fish with their nets for the bodies of Philip and Hermes, who had been cast into the Ebrus.¹ At Rome the bodies of the martyrs Simplicius and Faustinus, both rescued from the Tiber, were buried in a sepulchre hastily built of rubble in the catacomb of Generosa.²

Such then was the zeal of the Christians to see that nothing was lost, not only of the spiritual treasure which was the martyrs' example, but also of the material treasure constituted by their relics. The smallest particle of a martyr's body was held sacred. In order to prevent the loss of a drop of Cyprian's blood, the Carthaginian faithful spread sheets and napkins on the ground before him.³ When the tomb of St. Cecilia was opened, near the martyr, whose graceful position has been immortalised by Maderno's chisel, were found kerchiefs stained with her blood and which had been buried together with her.⁴ A painting which was inspected by the poet Prudentius in the catacomb of St. Hippolytus depicted the faithful in the act of soaking up with sponges the blood of this martyr which had covered the ground and spattered the bushes.⁵ A homily belonging to the end of the fourth or beginning of the following century, and delivered in honour of the martyr Polyeuctus, says that "Nearchus gathered his pre-

¹ *Passio S. Philippi*, 15.

² *Acta SS. Beatricis, Simplicii, Faustini*, in *Acta SS.*, July, vol. vii. p. 47.

³ *Linteamina vero et manualia*.—*Acta proconsularia S. Cypriani*, 5. See above, p. 261.

⁴ De Rossi, *Roma sotterranea*, vol. ii. pp. 122–131.

⁵ Prudentius, *Peri Stephanon*, xi. 141–144.

cious and sacred blood, and having wrapped it up in splendid stuff, carried it to the town of the Comaneoti.”¹ When in the last persecution the Christians found it impossible to secure the body of a martyr, in its default they solemnly buried his blood. It is probably to an event of this kind that the following Numidian inscription alludes: “The burial of the blood of the holy martyrs, who suffered in the city of Milevis, under Florus the president, in the days of the trial by incense,” *i.e.* in the days when the Christians, being called upon to offer incense to the gods, refused and died:—

. DEPOSI

TIO CRVORIS SANCTORVM MARTVRVM

QVI SVNT PASSI SVB PRESIDE FLORO IN CIV

ITATE MILEVITANA IN DIEBVS TVRIFI

CATIONIS²

II

The refusal of burial, a refusal which the Christians used every means in their power to nullify, was a characteristic of that period of the persecutions when the policy of the persecutors had become one of extermination, *i.e.* of the first years of the fourth century. In previous centuries there had been instances where the rulers had refused to grant the permission to bury, but such refusals were then rare. During the first three centuries, certain exceptional cases apart, the martyrs were buried without difficulty.³

¹ Vide *Hist. des persécutions pendant la première moitié du troisième siècle*, 3rd ed., p. 545.

² *Bull. di archeol. Crist.*, 1876, plate iii., No. 2.

³ Their burial was sometimes really magnificent, their bodies being wrapped in cloth of gold (*St. Cæcilia*, *St. Hyacinth*; *Hist.*

When once they had been confided to the earth the bodies of the Christians, even of the condemned, were sheltered, if not from popular outbreaks, at least from anything like legal profanation. "Let corpses which have been rightly entombed," *i.e.* which have been buried, "never be troubled in their rest," says a rescript of Marcus Aurelius which applies to all without distinction.¹

As in law the burial of a dead body imparted to the burial-place a "religious," *i.e.* a sacred character, and prevented its being sold or otherwise alienated,² it was a matter of importance that the bounds of the burial-place should be strictly defined. Hence in many ancient epitaphs we find the measurements of the grave; so many feet of frontage (on the high-road), so many feet deep (into the field behind), *in fronte pedes . . . in agro pedes . . .* These measurements vary much; some of the sepulchres seem to have been very extensive, forming regular parks, others were of the size of our present-day graves. There are ancient Christian documents which show that the faithful conformed to the common customs when choosing a tomb for a martyr. When Alexander, Bishop of Baccano—a Tuscan village, some twenty miles from Rome—was put to death by order of Caracalla, one of his friends bought of a landlord near by a piece of ground of three hundred square feet.³ The poet Prudentius, when relating the story of St. Hippolytus's martyrdom, says that after

des persécutions pendant les deux premiers siècles, 3rd ed., p. 448; *Les dernières persécutions du troisième siècle*, 3rd ed., p. 384); sometimes they were embalmed with spices (*Acta S. Eupli*, 3; Ruinart, p. 440).

¹ Marcian, *Digest*, XI., vii. 39.

² Caius, *Inst.*, ii. 4, 6, 9.

³ *Passio S. Alexandri*, in *Acta SS.*, September, vol. vi. p. 235.

they had collected together his limbs the Christians "measured out the land which they had chosen for his tomb," *metando eligitur tumulo locus*.¹

As these sepulchres were usually situated on the grounds of some rich and generous Christian, many of them in course of time became the centre of real cemeteries. Most of the smaller catacombs of Rome and many of the crypts, which by coalescing have formed the largest catacombs, originated in this fashion. We know that the tombs of the most ancient martyrs were in no way hidden. The Flavians, those illustrious confessors of the faith in the first century, had their crypt on the *Via Ardeatina* near Rome; it was entered by a monumental doorway which is still intact.² At the beginning of the third century the Roman priest Caius wrote as follows: "I can show you the trophies of the Apostles; if you go either to the Vatican, or by the Ostian Way, you will perceive the trophies of those who founded the Church of Rome,"³ *i.e.* the tombs of St. Peter and St. Paul, which were still to be identified by means of some inscription or monument even a century and a half after their martyrdom.

Hence, as a rule, no obstacle was placed in the way of the Christians when they wished to bury their martyrs. They were free to bury the body either in a fresh tomb (*monumentum novum*), to which the Acts frequently allude, and then mark out the ground in due legal form, or they could inter it in one of the cemeteries administered by ecclesiastical authority in the name of the Christian community. The law even permitted their bringing back from the place of their

¹ Prudentius, *Peri Stephanon*, xi. 151.

² *Bull. di archeol. Crist.*, 1865, pp. 35, 96.

³ Caius, in Eusebius, *H. E.*, ii. 25, 7.

exile the remains of the martyrs who had died—this, however, subject to the approval of the emperor.¹ Thus it was that the body of Pope Pontian, whose epitaph has been found in the cemetery of St. Callixtus, was brought back from Sardinia, whither he had been banished. His successor, Fabian, having obtained the necessary permit, fitted out a ship, and accompanied by his clergy went to fetch out of exile the relics of the martyred Pope.²

III

How were the martyrs' sepulchres distinguished from those of the rest of the faithful? The most visible sign was the title of martyr engraved on the tombstone; and the sepulchres distinguished by this word immediately became an object of the Christians' worship. This the pagans knew, and as they knew too that these tombs formed so many rallying-places for the Christians, they sometimes so far broke down legal barriers as to pursue the martyrs even into their last resting-places. "I shall now destroy his very bones," said the persecutor, "so that they may not erect a tomb which shall be visited by the crowd, nor engrave on it the title of martyr."

"Jam nunc et ossa extinxero,
Ne sit sepulchrum funeris
Quod plebs gregalis excolat,
Titulumque figat martyris."³

Notwithstanding the ravages committed by ages, several of these old *tituli* survive on which we may read the word martyr, either in full or abbreviated,

¹ Marcian, *Digest*, XLVIII., xxiv. 2. Cp. Tacitus, *Ann.*, xiv. 12.

² *Liber Pontificalis*, *Pontianus*, ed. Duchesne, vol. i. p. 145.

³ Prudentius, *Peri Stephanon*, v. 389–392.

as it was written by the contemporaries of the persecutions. On several of the *loculi* or graves which belonged to the primitive portion of the cemetery of St. Priscilla, and which may originally have enclosed the remains of contemporaries of Marcus Aurelius, the title of martyr seems to have been represented by the letter M.¹ The soil which drifted into the crypt of the cemetery of St. Hermes, in which Hyacinthus and Protus were buried, safeguarded the stone on which was inscribed the name of the first of these martyrs with the date of his burial: "Buried on the 3rd of the Ides of September, Hyacinthus, a martyr."

DP. III. IDVS SEPTEBR YACINTHVS MARTYR.²

In 1849 and in 1852, De Rossi discovered in Lucina's crypt the two pieces of the primitive epitaph of Pope Cornelius:—

CORNELIVS MARTYR
EP (*iscopus*).³

In the crypt of the popes of the third century, in the catacomb of St. Callixtus, the *loculus*, in which were placed the remains of Fabian, martyred under Decius, is closed by a stone, on which are the following words in Greek:—

ΦΑΒΙΑΝΟC, ΕΠΙ (σκοπος),

followed by the letters ΜΡ (martyr),⁴ but these letters are certainly a later addition, a fact which suggests a new train of thought.

¹ *Bull. di archeol. Crist.*, 1886, pp. 101–111, and plate xii.

² *Ibid.*, 1894, p. 29.

³ De Rossi, *Roma sotterranea*, vol. i. pp. 277–279, and plate iv.

⁴ *Roma sotterranea*, vol. ii. plate iii., No. 3.

Of course, in early times the formality of canonisation in its modern sense did not exist. Usually it was by popular acclamation that the heroes of Christ were enrolled among the saints. They had given testimony to the faith, and the Christian people in its turn gave testimony to them. However, the Church authorities were there to see that the title of martyr was not bestowed without good reason. Even in quite remote times a list was kept of those who had died for Christ, and whose anniversary was celebrated.¹ St. Cyprian mentions several who had died before the middle of the third century, and who were publicly commemorated in the Church of Carthage on the anniversary day of their entrance into paradise. His record is, as it were, a sheet torn out of the primitive martyrology of Carthage, and probably a similar list was kept in each Church. Hence the need of inquiry into the death of each martyr, lest unworthy people should be comprised together with the just.

For we must not forget that there were martyrs who had not the requisite qualifications, and whose worship the Church never countenanced.² During Diocletian's persecution a matron of Carthage was censured for having, before approaching communion, kissed the relics of a pretended martyr whose worship had not been sanctioned by the Church, *nescio cujus hominis mortui, et si martyris, sed necdum vindicati*.³ Hence the official recognition of a martyr was called his *vindicatio*.⁴ Now, possibly we meet a trace of

¹ Cyprian, *Ep.*, 34.

² For instance, those who had been put to death for having destroyed idols; see above, p. 299.

³ Optatus, *De schism. Donat.*, i. 16.

⁴ For details concerning this *vindicatio*, or *probatio martyrum*, as practised in Africa, see Monceaux, *Hist. littéraire de l'Afrique chrétienne*, vol. iii. pp. 107–108.

this custom on the tombstone of Pope Fabian, which is still *in situ* in the papal crypt. When we inspect this stone, which closes vertically the oblong cavity scooped out of the sandstone wall, we can clearly see that the abbreviation MP has not been chiselled out by the same engraver, or at least that the work was not performed at the time when the previous words were written. The two letters have been cut less deeply into the slab, no doubt because the stone being then already in its place, and with nothing behind to support it, might have split had the chisel been pressed too hard.¹ As during the Decian persecution an interregnum of eighteen months elapsed between Fabian's martyrdom and the accession of Cornelius, it is probable that they waited for the election of a new bishop before inscribing Fabian in the official list of martyrs, and consequently before adding this new title on his epitaph.

If this view is correct, and everything seems to show that it is, then we obtain some idea of the severity of ancient Christian discipline and of the watchfulness of the Church authorities.

IV

This severity and this watchfulness were all the more necessary because of the intense devotion of the first Christians towards the tombs of the martyrs.

This devotion was especially shown in the desire of the Christians to be buried near them.² They seemed to think that the protection of the martyrs

¹ See *Roma sotterranea*, vol. ii., plate ia.

² On this matter, see De Rossi, in the *Bull. di archeol. Crist.*, 1895, pp. 17-32.

would open to them the gates of heaven. A fresco in the catacomb of St. Domitilla depicts a female saint of venerable aspect who is welcoming to paradise a young woman who had been interred near by.¹ The epitaphs frequently speak of people who had been buried with the saints, *ad sanctos, ad martyres, inter limina martyrum, inter sanctos*.² Sometimes they mention the martyr whose neighbourhood and protection was sought: *ad sanctum Cornelium, ad Ippolitum, ad dominum Gaium, ad sanctam Felicitatem Ante domnam Emeritam*.³ One inscription records that many request this favour, but that few obtain it—*quod multi cupiunt et rari accipiunt*.⁴ Sometimes the anxiety of the faithful to obtain for their dead a place near the martyrs led them to regrettable deeds of barbarism; we have instances where walls covered with paintings have been broken into for the purpose of making a tomb.⁵ This devotion was not confined to the lower classes; St. Gregory Nazianzen, St. Ambrose, St. Paulinus of Nola, all of them had their relatives buried near the martyrs, and all three met in a like thought, expressed by one in Greek verse and by the other two in Latin, congratulating themselves on having found a place where the remains of their dear ones might be quickened by the blood of the martyrs.⁶

But this poetic figure must not be taken too literally and grossly. I have already stated that

¹ *Bull. di archeol. Crist.*, 1895, plates i. and ii., and pp. 17–18, 32–39.

² See the texts gathered together by Dom Leclercq, art. *Ad sanctos*, in the *Dict. d'archéologie chrétienne*, fasc. i.

³ Cp. Northcote, *Epitaphs of the Catacombs*, p. 106; *Nuovo Bull. di archeol. Crist.*, 1905, p. 34.

⁴ De Rossi, *Inscript. Christ. urbis Romæ*, vol. i. p. 142, No. 319.

⁵ *Bull. di archeol. Crist.*, 1863, p. 3.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 1875, pp. 22–23.

nothing was more spiritual than the examples of the martyrs themselves and the devotion shown by the faithful for their relics. Those who viewed with equanimity the destruction of their bodies that their souls might be free, and those who honoured the men who had died in witnessing to the most spiritual thing in the world, their faith, were both one and the other free from gross superstition. Had the Christian faithful ever been inclined to make this devotion too material, the wiser among them would soon have shown them their error. On the tomb of a Roman archdeacon, buried near the martyrs, is inscribed the following: "It is not useful, rather is it dangerous to be buried near the tombs of the saints. A good life is the best way to share their merits. It is not by bodily touch, but by the soul that we shall be united to them."¹ Less harshly, but in the same spirit, did St. Augustine, answering a question of St. Paulinus of Nola, write: "There is this advantage in being buried near sepulchres of the saints—he who comes to pray for the dead man will be moved by the presence of the martyrs, and being full of faith in their intercession, will pray with redoubled fervour."² Pope Damasus set a good example of discretion when he wrote on the walls of a sanctuary made illustrious by the martyrs' remains which it contained: "I also should have wished my body to rest in this spot, but I feared to disturb the ashes of the saints."³

¹ *Bull. di archeol. Crist.*, 1864, p. 33.

² Augustine, *De cura pro mortuis*, in fine.

³ De Rossi, *Roma sotterranea*, vol. ii. p. 23, and plates i., ia, ii.

V

To pray through the intercession of the martyrs, to call on the dead asking them to pray for the living, such was the principal motive of the worship given by the early Christians to those who, by the manner of their death, had become precious in the sight of God.

The martyrs themselves seem to have been conscious, even before their death, of this power and duty which devolved on them. Many of the martyrs, when preparing for their doom, felt themselves moved to intercede on behalf of their brethren and the Christian "brotherhood." St. Polycarp, before his arrest, passed—so we are told—whole days and nights praying for the Church. When apprehended, he begged for still one more hour of prayer, and then proceeded to speak to God with such fervour that the very pagans were astonished. When he had been bound to the stake he again lifted up his voice to offer a solemn and sublime prayer, which has been preserved in the account of his martyrdom.¹ When the bishop Fructuosus was on the point of entering the amphitheatre at Tarragona, where he was to be burnt, a Christian implored him for his prayers. The martyr replied in a loud voice: "It behoves me to think of the Catholic Church, which extends from the West even to the East."² Whilst waiting for the headsman to do his work, the Bishop of Sirmium, Irenæus, prayed as follows: "Lord Jesus Christ, who hast deigned to suffer for the

¹ *Martyrium Polycarpi*, 7, 14.

² In mente me habere necesse est Ecclesiam catholicam, ab Oriente usque in Occidentem diffusam.—*Acta SS. Fructuosi, Augurii, Eulogii*, 3.

salvation of the world, may the heavens open and the angels receive the soul of Thy servant Irenæus, who to-day suffers for Thy name, and for the people of Sirmium. I beseech Thy mercy that Thou mayest receive me and confirm these in the faith.”¹

A Palestinian martyr obtained from the executioner a short respite for prayer, and then recited a series of orisons which seem to echo the Syrian liturgy of the fourth century.² First, he prayed for the whole Christian people that it might return to peace and security; then for the Jews, that they might believe in Christ; then, “according to order,” as Eusebius says,³ for the Samaritans and for the pagans. Then casting a glance at the weeping crowd of people who surrounded him, he prayed for them also. He prayed for the judge who had sentenced him, and for the emperors, and, finally, also for the executioner who was about to strike him, asking of God that no one might be held responsible for his death. Many of the Acts represent the martyrs thus acting as intercessors, and commending to God the Christians they were leaving behind. The Christians, confident that their interest was sustained beyond the bounds of the present world, and relying on their merits, never wearied asking them to continue in heaven the prayer which they had begun on earth.

The spirit of prayer hovered round their sepulchres; we feel its influence when we study the catacombs of Rome, which are all scored over with traces of primitive piety. The long galleries which led to the martyrs’ tomb retain their old echoes, echoes which we not merely hear but see on the

¹ *Passio S. Irenæi*, 5.

² See Duchesne, *Origines du culte chrétien*, pp. 58, 61.

³ Ἐξῆς κατέβαινε τῷ λόγῳ.—Eusebius, *De mart. Pal.*, 8, 9–12.

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walls: "May the souls of all the saints receive thee," were the words written by the fond parents on the gravestone of their three-year-old child.¹ "Basilla," wrote a mother mourning her child, "I commend to thee the innocence of Gemellus."² Still more naïve is another inscription: "Lady Basilla, we commend to thee Crescentinus and Micina our daughter."³ Another epitaph reads: "St. Lawrence receive his soul."⁴ Other mourners, showing by their invocations their belief in the power of the saints and the existence of purgatory,⁵ wrote: "May the lord Hippolytus obtain thee refreshment,"⁶ or "May the martyrs, Januarius, Agatopus, Felicissimus refresh thee."⁷

To testify to the faith of the pilgrims and the invocation of the martyrs, we have not only the inscriptions engraved on marble, but also the hasty notes scribbled on the wall with the point of a style or pencil. Wherever the martyrs' remains had rested we find these little signs of popular respect.⁸ Near the Papal Crypt in the cemetery of St. Callixtus, the whole wall is covered with writing. Whilst waiting for the opening of the door, visitors here noted down their hopes and their requests. The *graffiti* scrawled with charcoal or pencil on the walls of the barracks and theatres and houses of Pompeii, in the prisons and barracks of Rome, or in the ruined buildings of the Palatine, afford us a glimpse of the tastes, ambitions, and, above all, of

¹ *Bull. di archeol. Crist.*, 1875, p. 19.

² *Inscriptions of the Lateran Museum*, viii. 16.

³ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁴ Mommsen, *Inscript. regni Neap.*, 6736.

⁵ *Bull. di archeol. Crist.*, 1875, pp. 20–21, 27.

⁶ Bosio, *Roma sotterranea*, p. 409.

⁷ *Bull. di archeol. Crist.*, 1863, pp. 2–4.

⁸ Marucchi, *Les catacombes romaines*, pp. 192, 214.

the vices of ancient Rome ; so, likewise, the *graffiti* of the Catacombs throw a most interesting light on the soul of the early Christians. These *graffiti*, written mostly in kitchen-Latin, badly spelt and one overlapping the other, at first presented a problem fit to disconcert even the trained archæologist. However, the patience of De Rossi succeeded in unravelling the tangled mass and in restoring to the wall its eloquence. The result is truly marvellous. "Here," writes a pilgrim, is "the true Jerusalem, adorned with the martyrs of the Lord." "Live in Christ," "Live in God," "Live in the Eternal," "Rest in peace," wrote others, thinking of their dear departed. Pope Sixtus seems to have been an object of special devotion. He had been beheaded in the cemetery of Prætextatus, on the other side of the Appian Way ; but his remains had been transferred to the Papal Crypt, where his throne, dyed with his blood, was also on view. "Remember us in thy prayers"—*In mente habeas in orationibus*—is a formula used by many pilgrims who, under it, inscribed their names or those of their friends. "Pray for Marcian, my adopted child," asks one. Another requests the martyr to obtain for his father and his brothers eternal rest and union with the supreme good. Another asks that Verecundus and his family may have a happy voyage. Many similar invocations are unfinished, or have become unreadable, like so many prayers, which human lips cannot express, but which God hears in silence.¹

Though fifteen centuries separate us from those times, we may still follow the track of one of the visitors in the galleries of the cemetery of St. Callixtus.

¹ De Rossi, *Roma sotterranea*, vol. ii. pp. 13–20, and plates xxix.–xxxiv.

He had apparently come to pray for a certain Sophronia, either his wife, his daughter, or his mother. Before entering the porch of the main sanctuary he wrote: *Sofronia . . . vibas cum tuis*—"Sophronia, mayest thou live with thine." A few paces farther on, at the door of another chapel, he repeats his formula with a slight addition: *Sofronia (vivas), in Domino*—"Sophronia, mayest thou live in the Lord." Farther on, near the *arcosolium* of yet another chapel, he has written in large letters these words: *Sofronia dulcis, semper vives Deo*—"Sweet Sophronia, thou wilt always live to God;" and just below he has again scribbled: *Sofronia vives*—"Sophronia, thou shalt live." It would seem as if this pilgrim, as he progressed farther and farther down this subterranean gallery, which was sanctified by the presence of the bodies of St. Sixtus, St. Cecilia, St. Fabian, St. Pontian, and so many martyrs unknown to fame, experienced different feelings. He had come full of anxiety for the salvation of one he loved, but little by little this feeling changed to hope, then to confidence, and finally to certainty, and he returned from his pilgrimage convinced that his prayer had been granted.¹

VI

When once peace had been restored to the Church, during the whole of the fourth century, pilgrims were in constant attendance at the tombs of the martyrs. They came to venerate the remains of martyrs who had perished in the ancient persecutions and in the more recent ones, and also the relics of those martyrs which, after having been concealed with care

¹ De Rossi, *Roma sotterranea*, vol. i. p. 259; vol. ii p. 15, and plate xxxi. 2, 4, 7.

to prevent profanation,¹ had been discovered by the labours of those eminent Fathers of the Church, Ambrose at Milan,² and Damasus at Rome.³

Everywhere the mortuary chapels of the martyrs were being embellished, lined with marble and paintings and mosaics and precious metals. Occasionally souvenirs of their martyrdom were kept there.⁴ On many of the tombs commemorative inscriptions were placed, some of them in verse, which have often been the means of preserving from loss traditions of great value. Before the tombs, which had now been turned into altars, lamps full of scented oils were burning night and day. At the corners of the galleries which gave access to the chapels, lights were set to dispel the darkness. Down the widened staircases and the galleries, now light as day, came the Christians in their thousands to make their pilgrimage to the tombs of the heroes who, at the price of their blood, had bought religious freedom.⁵

But the mortuary chapels, even when enlarged, were soon found too small to contain all those who wished to kneel before the sepulchre, to kiss its stone, or to carry away in a handkerchief a little of its dust, or in a phial a little of the oil from its lamp, the only relics which were obtainable at a

¹ De Rossi, *Roma sotterranea*, vol. i. p. 213.

² Ambrose, *Ep.*, 22; *De exhortatione virgin.*, 1, 2.

³ "Quæritur, inventus colitur."—*Inscr. Christ. urbis Romæ*, vol. ii. pp. 66, 105, 441. "Extremo tumulus latuit sub aggere montis," says another inscription of Damasus, which he placed in the crypt of Protus and Hyacinthus; yet another inscription adds: "Sanctorum monumenta vides patefacta."—*Ibid.*, pp. 30, 104, 108.

⁴ Near the tomb of St. Sixtus, in the cemetery of St. Callixtus, was placed the throne on which he had been beheaded in the neighbouring cemetery of Prætextatus.—De Rossi, *Roma sotterranea*, vol. ii. pp. 88–92.

⁵ De Rossi, *Roma sotterranea*, vol. iii. p. 477.

time when as yet it was not the custom to divide the bodies of the martyrs.¹ Hence there soon arose, above or in the vicinity of these crypts, the lofty columns and gilded roofs of basilicas large enough to accommodate the multitude of the pilgrims.² Here it was that the anniversaries of the martyrs were kept with a fervour which time did not diminish. The fixing of these anniversaries, or feast-days, of the saints had been one of the first concerns of the Churches as soon as they emerged from the persecutions. In the new sanctuaries of the martyrs their panegyrics were preached by some of the finest orators of early Christianity—Basil, Gregory Nazianzen, Gregory of Nyssa, and John Chrysostom in the East, Augustine in Africa, Ambrose at Milan, Gregory the Great at Rome. We can still see in the apse of the partially underground basilica of Saints Nereus and Achilleus in the cemetery of St. Domitilla,³ the place where this great Pope, whose thirteenth centenary was kept a few years ago by the Catholic world, sat when he delivered that homily in which he said: “The saints before whose tombs we are seated despised the world”—*Sancti isti ad quorum tumbam consistimus, spreverunt mundum*.⁴

At the time when this pontiff—called by his contemporaries “God’s consul”⁵—and who seems set

¹ Gregory the Great, *Ep.*, iii. 30. See the list of oils taken from the tombs of the Roman martyrs, and preserved in the cathedral of Monza.—*Roma sotterranea*, vol. i. pp. 175–182. (Cp. *Archivio storico Lombardo*, 1903, pp. 241–262.)

² Prudentius, *Peri Stephanon*, xi. 213–216; iii. 191–200. Cp. *Roma sotterranea*, vol. iii. p. 493; *Bull. di archeol. Crist.*, 1864, pp. 42–43; 1878, p. 129, 130; 1880, p. 111.

³ *Bull. di archeol. Crist.*, 1874, plate iii.

⁴ Gregory the Great, *Hom. XVIII. in Evang.*, (Migne, *P. L.*, vol. lxxvi., col. 1210).

⁵ *Inscr. Christ. urbis Romæ*, vol. ii. p. 52.

as a landmark on the frontier between antiquity and mediæval times—thus spoke, the martyrs of Rome still remained at rest in their tombs. From the beginning of the fifth century, when the Catacombs ceased to serve as burial-grounds, until the beginning of the ninth, when the Popes had removed to the churches all the martyrs' remains, to preserve them from the profanation to which they were exposed by Lombard invasions and the unsettled state of the country, the cemeteries surrounding the Eternal City were places of pilgrimage. Nor were they visited only by Romans or Italians;¹ they attracted people from all over the West, from Gaul, Germany, England, and naturally enough the pilgrims, who had come so long and arduous a journey, made a point of paying a visit to the tomb of every martyr. For such pilgrims were composed, between the sixth and the eighth century, those guide-books or "itineraries," of which some have survived, and which point out on each of the Roman Ways the position of the cemeteries, and in each cemetery the position of the saints' tombs.² The value of these documents may be estimated when we recollect that they furnished De Rossi the needed key for reopening what had hitherto been a closed field, those Roman catacombs, by aid of which we can reconstruct the psychology of the early Christians together with their history.

VII

I have now reached the end of my lectures, with a painful consciousness of their insufficiency.

The fact is that the subject is inexhaustible. The

¹ See how Prudentius describes a fourth-century Italian pilgrimage.—*Peri Stephanon*, xi. 199–216.

² *Roma sotterranea*, vol. i. pp. 128–183.

story of the martyrs everywhere impinges on the history of antiquity; they cannot be treated separately as independent series of facts; hence the more we consider our subject the more it grows. The persecutions were really a part of the politics of imperial Rome; the laws dealing with the Church occupy an important place in the legislation of the Roman Empire; the most remarkable event in the social economy of the first three centuries of our era was the organisation of Christian charity and of the Church funds, both of which took shape and form during the ages of persecution. Again, we have to take into account the influence of the persecutions on the emancipation of the slaves; the slaves, through martyrdom, were made equal to their masters, both fighting for the same rights of conscience, a fact which made even the great freethinker Renan to marvel.¹ The practical working arrangements which the Church tolerated and sometimes advised, whereby the faithful were enabled to accept public offices and yet remain good Christians, are interesting as instances of that science of casuistics which, from Cicero onwards, was the especial delight of the practical minds of the Romans. Above all, like the mountain range, which is seen from every point, because it stands above all, rise those important moral and religious questions which are implicit in martyrdom and which thrust themselves not only on the simple Christian but also on the consideration of the unbiassed philosopher.

All this forms a vast field of study for one who does not wish to rest content with a glance, but who wishes to investigate it throughout, or even to cultivate one corner of it. I should feel that my

¹ Renan, *L'Antéchrist*, p. 173; *Marc Aurèle*, p. 610.

efforts had been in some measure successful if I have been able to inspire some of my hearers with a desire to explore on their own account one or two points of the immense programme which I have sketched.

To conclude, we may sum up those of our inferences which are undeniable. One is the marvellous rapidity of the spread of the Gospel, which so soon after its first appearance had invaded the whole Empire and overflowed beyond. Concurrently with the work of the preachers of the Gospel went that of the Gospel's martyrs, and in many countries the victory, so far as numbers were concerned, was already with the Gospel long before the end of the persecutions.

Not only had Christianity extended to every country, it had entered every class. It was to be found among civilised and uncivilised, among learned and unlearned, among slaves and freemen, among rich and poor, among common folk and aristocrats, everywhere adapting itself to the variety of minds and lives.

Moreover, we must not forget that when the pagans embraced Christianity they were well aware that their conversion would expose them to be treated as enemies of the state and of the gods, to the foulest calumnies, to ruin and to death. There must have been a great power in the Church to permit of its having diffused itself so rapidly and so largely, and penetrated so deeply into society, in spite of the dangers it entailed and in spite of the sword ever hanging over the head of the believer.

For we must also bear in mind that martyrdom was not the privilege of a few ; martyrs were numerous not only in the third and fourth century—a fact admitted by all conscientious historians—but also in

the first and second century; we can gauge their number by consulting contemporary documents, though unfortunately none of these afford such details as might enable us to give their numbers in figures.

The large number of the martyrs will seem all the more remarkable when we recollect that they all of them freely and willingly accepted their fate. The martyrs were not simply people who were condemned to die for having broken the law, or for having left the religion of the State; they were not simple criminals, for they had only to say a word and they could be neither executed, sentenced, nor even accused. Yet they withheld the word which would have secured their freedom, and they withheld it because to have spoken it would have been to deny Christ. Thus their death was a real victory for moral freedom, a victory which is peculiar to Christianity, and which of itself would be sufficient to prove what abbé de Broglie has so aptly called its “transcendence”; no other religious system, no school of philosophy has ever produced a martyr.

The magnitude of the victory may be appreciated by considering the moral sufferings of the martyrs—by seeing how they had to renounce their worldly prospects, to ruin their families and tread on all their fondest affections;—and their bodily sufferings, the atrocious punishments provided by the law, and the still worse punishments invented on the spur of the moment by human malignity. We then find ourselves faced by the question whether the perseverance of so many thousands of every sex and age who willingly bore for the space of three centuries such sufferings, can be explained by merely human strength.

Such were the concomitants of the martyrs’ testi-

mony ; but what is the value of the testimony itself ? Many of the martyrs may be considered as witnesses in the first degree, for either they had themselves been in contact with the facts recorded in the Gospels or had learnt them from those who had actually seen them, or from the disciples of these at a time when it would have been still possible to correct, by reference to surviving eye-witnesses, any mistakes which might have crept into their message. The other martyrs are indeed only martyrs in the second degree, but they are witnesses for the Christian tradition which had been kept and taught by the Church, and of which, at the time of the persecutions, it was less difficult than it is now to verify the different connecting links.

The results of our study, results which it would be difficult to dispute, allow of our saluting the martyrs as history's greatest heroes ; for this reason it was that they received an honour vouchsafed to no other heroes. Not only were monuments erected, and inscriptions and literary works in prose and poetry composed in their praise, but they remained bound to the Church militant by a far more intimate bond, being considered as the intercessors and protectors of the faithful. Of the fervour of contemporary prayers to them we have evidence on the walls of the Catacombs, and still, even now, we seek their help with undiminished confidence. Like their contemporaries, we still venerate their relics and offer our sacrifice on the altars formed by their tombs—

“ Ossibus altar est impositum,”¹

¹ Prudentius, *Peri Stephanon*, iii. 242.

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and we, too, behold in spirit God descending on their bones—

“Illa Dei sita sub pedibus.”¹

By honouring them, by speaking of them, by studying their history and prudently criticising the documents which preserve the memory of their deeds, we soon come to know that we are not dealing with dust alone, that the winding-sheet stained with purple, which we reverently unfold, encloses not dead, but living and immortal beings, abiding for ever in the keeping of that Church whose foundations are laid in their blood.

¹ Prudentius, *Peri Stephanon*, iii. 213. *Cp.* xi. 169–176.

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