

“MESSENGER SERIES,” No. 3.

THE ACTS

OF THE

EARLY MARTYRS

BY

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P R E F A C E .



BY STUDYING the Lives and the Acts of the Martyrs, the sincere Christian can most easily learn to appreciate the living and life-giving influence, which the Sacred Heart of Jesus exercises on His Church. What else, save His continued abiding in her, could have bestowed upon her children that heroic fortitude amidst the dangers, the hardships, the tortures of persecution which the combined malice of the world and of hell has never ceased to stir up against them? He, who said, "You shall be witnesses unto Me. . . even to the uttermost part of the earth," (Acts i, 8,) had before said, "When they shall deliver you up, take no thought how or what to speak: for it shall be given you in that hour what to speak." (Matt. x, 19.) Hence

the faithful followers of the Man of Sorrows were filled with consolation, and abounded with joy amidst all their tribulations. And why? because the more they were hated by the world, the more they became conformed to the image of the Son of God: the more closely were they united to the true source of all comfort, the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Herein, then, lay the principle of the super-human strength and courage of the Martyrs. And, whether we view them looming up before us, grand and majestic forms, in the distant ages of early Christianity, or study them amidst the trials of modern times, the same Spirit animates their generous souls, and makes them spurn alike the transitory joys of earth, and the cruel persecutions of its rulers, for the sake of Him who loved them first. In every age the Church has had her Martyrs, and so it shall, doubtless, continue to be; that at no time she may cease to exhibit the vitality infused into her by her divine Founder, and that her children, inspired by the noble example of their Brethren, may ever

be ready, if God so wills it, to bear witness, in like manner, to the Faith that is in them.

Although, in compiling these Acts, the "Acta Martyrum" of Dom. Ruinart have chiefly been followed, much has also been drawn from various other sources. They were first published in the "Messenger of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, *A Monthly Bulletin of the Apostleship of Prayer,*" a periodical which every Catholic family should endeavor to patronize, if the interests of the Heart of Jesus, the well-being of the members of one's household are, as they should be, an object of anxious solicitude to parents or to guardians.

May the reading of these pages continue to be, as it has already been in the past, a source of edification, and an incentive to spiritual fervor and Christian heroism.

ST. XAVIER COLLEGE, Cincinnati, Ohio.





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THE MARTYRS.

I.

ST. IGNATIUS.

IF the true spirit of early Christianity were to be looked for, where should we sooner expect to find its working, than in the chief and representative of the great City, which gloried in having been the first to give the name of Christians to the followers of the God-man? With Ignatius, therefore, we begin these acts of the Martyrs.

Ignatius, surnamed Theophorus, had been trained in the school of virtue and Christian knowledge at Ephesus. The words of the Apostle, who had reclined on the Saviour's bosom at the last Supper, had inspired him with so great a zeal for the salvation of mankind, and so longing a desire of laying

down his life for the testimony of the truths which he was commissioned to preach, that his whole career seems to have been a kind of continued martyrdom. Raised to the episcopal dignity by the apostles themselves, he governed the Church of Antioch during the fearful storms of persecution excited by the Emperor Domitian. Fasting and prayer were the weapons he employed to avert the dangers which threatened his flock; the light of his teaching served as a guiding star to those who were exposed to suffer the loss of their faith; the example of his own unfaltering courage awakened the confidence of the most faint-hearted. The Pagans themselves, struck with wonder at the sight of the self-sacrificing charity of the Bishop, confessed the supernatural power of a religion that could make heroes of men, who, by their modest demeanor, appeared to dread even the gaze of their fellow-beings. Great was the number of them who, with their blood, sealed the profession of their faith. But the storm had passed away. Ignatius devoted himself to the instruction of those intrusted to his pastoral care. He put them on their guard against the insidious wiles of heresy and schism; he taught them the advantage and necessity of harmony of minds and wills; in short, he impressed on all the faithful the practical importance of the maxim,

which he had heard so frequently repeated by his beloved master: "My little children, love ye one another."

And thus for forty years did this holy man, amidst the alternations of storm and sunshine, continue the father and guardian of his children; while but one regret seemed occasionally to cast a gloom over his happiness. Many of his children had gained the crown of martyrdom; himself had not been deemed worthy of so blissful an honor. "Alas!" he uttered with a sigh, "it is a sign that I have not yet attained to that perfect charity, which characterizes the true disciple of Jesus crucified." The moment, however, arrived at last, when Heaven decreed that this glory should be no longer withheld from this good and faithful servant.

Trajan had waged a successful war against the Dacians, the Scythians, and the neighboring nations. Flushed with victory, and glorying in his power, he fancied that one wreath was wanting in his crown, so long as the God of the Christians remained unsubdued. Wherefore, he resolved to compel all the followers of Christ, either to sacrifice to his own idols, or to pay with their lives their fidelity to religion. In the execution of this design, he aimed chiefly at the Bishops and other prominent men, because, he imagined, it would not be difficult to

destroy the army, when deprived of its leaders—to scatter the flock, when the shepherd was either slain or beguiled in his snares.

Having set out from Rome, Trajan arrived at Antioch, the metropolis of Syria. Here he continued for some time to make the necessary preparations for the war, which he was about to undertake against the Parthians. Ignatius, who knew that the Emperor enjoyed the reputation of being naturally of a humane disposition, was unwilling to abandon his flock. He had reason to hope, that the sacrifice of his own life would be sufficient to appease the wrath of the prince, and that, by offering himself as a victim, the lives of his people might be spared.

Trajan gave orders to summon the holy Bishop before him. Ignatius appeared. On seeing him, the Emperor exclaimed :

“Who art thou, evil spirit, who darest disobey our commands ; nay, who even persuadest others to do the same, and thus to perish miserably ?”

“No one did ever call Theophorus an evil spirit,” answered Ignatius ; “but, if you give me that name because I am hateful to evil spirits and dreaded by them, I glory in the name. For Christ, the King of Heaven, has given me power to destroy their snares.”

“And who is Theophorus?” said Trajan.

“He that bears Christ in his breast,” said the holy Bishop.

“Thinkest thou, that we do not also bear in our breasts the gods, who enable us to defeat our enemies?”

“You err when you call the demons of the Gentiles gods. There is only one God, who created the heavens, the earth, and the sea, and whatsoever is contained therein. And there is only one Christ Jesus, the only-begotten Son of God; and oh! how I long to be received into His kingdom.”

“Speakest thou of him who was crucified under Pontius Pilate?” asked the Emperor.

“I speak of the same, who, by His death, crucified sin and its author, and who places beneath the feet of them that bear Him in their breasts all the deceit and wickedness of demons.”

“And dost thou bear the crucified within thee?”

“Yes; for it is written: ‘*I will dwell in them and walk in their midst.*’”

Trajan, sorely annoyed by the fearless replies of the holy old man, pronounced this sentence: “*We order, that Ignatius, who says that he bears within him the Crucified, be bound in chains and led by soldiers to great Rome, there to become the prey of wild beasts for the amusement of the people.*”

When the Martyr heard this sentence, he was unable to contain his joy, and exclaimed: "I thank thee, O Lord! because thou didst deign to honor me with a perfect love for Thee, since Thou sufferest me to be bound with chains, even as Paul, Thy apostle." Afterwards, he cheerfully put on his chains, and, with many tears, commended his beloved flock to the keeping of the Heavenly Shepherd, and delivered himself to the soldiers, who had been ordered to take him to Rome.

The intention of Trajan in sending the condemned Bishops far away from their own cities was, doubtless, to wear out their powers of endurance by the hardships of long and wearisome journies; that thus he might extinguish the fervor of their charity, and triumph at last over their unwavering constancy. But Providence frustrated his plans. The journey of Ignatius from the East to the West was like that of the sun, who sheds everywhere floods of light, as he advances in his course; for thus it was that the martyr made the light of his doctrine shine upon all, whilst he filled their hearts with courage and cheerfulness. Nay more, the evening of his career was destined to be the beginning of a more resplendent glory than aught of earth could ever have secured to him.

Inflamed with a burning desire for suffering, he

set out with a joyful eagerness for Seleucia, where he embarked with two of his disciples, Philo, a deacon of Cilicia, and Agathopodus: the same, probably, that have recorded the acts of his martyrdom. After a long and tedious voyage, they landed at Smyrna, a celebrated city of Ionia. Here Ignatius went to visit Polycarp, his friend and former companion, who, like himself, was a disciple of St. John the Evangelist. We can better imagine than describe the joyous meeting of two such personages. How great a consolation must it have been for the one to present himself to the other, as a captive in chains for the sake of Christ; how affectionately must Polycarp have kissed those chains, the brightest ornaments that could embellish the limbs of the true follower of the Man of Sorrows!

“If thou lovest me in every deed,” said Ignatius to his friend, “beg of the great Master of us all, that He may deign to accomplish in me the great work He has so gloriously begun. Do not ask Him to deprive me of this glorious livery of His servants.”

“Nay, brother,” said Polycarp, “although I envy thee so great a blessing, I will not entreat for thy freedom. And do thou in return pray for me, that I too may, hereafter, be found worthy to suffer for His sake.”

In this manner did these holy men give comfort to one another.

No sooner did the Churches of Asia hear, that the Martyr had come to Smyrna, than they hastened, by their deputies, to testify to him their love and veneration. The Ephesians sent to him their Bishop Onesimus, a man of wonderful charity; the Magnesians sent Damas, their Bishop, a man of God; the Trallians deputed Polybius, their Bishop, who, in his own name and in that of his flock, congratulated Ignatius on the happiness of being in chains for the sake of Christ. Nor were these the only persons gathered together for the same purpose: they were accompanied by many of the most distinguished members of their respective Churches, priests and deacons, as well as laymen. They all united in admiring the constancy, the fervor and piety of the illustrious prisoner; they listened with eagerness to his instructions; they wept and rejoiced together; they partook together of the Eucharistic Sacrifice, that sweetest bond of union and heavenly charity.

Although Ignatius longed to consummate the sacrifice of himself, he was not insensible to these marks of genuine affection. He hastened, therefore, to express his appreciation of the tenderness and solicitude which they had manifested towards

him. To the Ephesians he writes: "It is for Jesus Christ I wear these chains; may your prayers obtain that they be to me the pledge of a glorious resurrection. I know who I am and to whom I write: I am a condemned captive, and you are full of kindness; I am in danger, and you are established in grace. I would gladly give my life for you and for those whom ye have sent to me. Remember me. Pray for the Church of Syria, whence they are taking me a prisoner, in chains, to Rome, although I am the least of that Church. I salute you in God the Father and in Jesus Christ our common hope."

To the Trallians: "I know that the purity of your sentiments and the union of your hearts, amidst all the hardships which you suffer, are not merely transient virtues, but are, as it were, natural in you; for this I learn from your Bishop Polybius, who has come to congratulate me in the chains which I wear for Christ Jesus. . . . I know many things in God, but I judge myself according to my weakness, lest I perish through vainglory. I have more reason to be in dread now than heretofore, and I ought not to hearken to those that speak well of me. They who praise me, instead of bringing comfort to my heart, grieve me. In truth, I long for sufferings, but yet, I know not whether I am

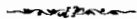
worthy of them. Although I am in chains, and understand heavenly things, the ranks of the Angels and Principalities, things visible and invisible, am I therefore a true disciple?"

In a similar manner he wrote to the Magnesians, exhorting them to union and charity, and cautioning them against the influence of heresy and schism. But his most remarkable letter is the one which he sent to the Romans. Many of the Christians of Asia were desirous of accompanying the holy Martyr, but, unable to obtain so great a favor, they took a shorter route, so as to reach Rome long before the arrival of Ignatius. He, however, availed himself of this opportunity, and wrote by them the following epistle :

“To the beloved and enlightened Church, which presides in the country of the Romans. . . . I prayed to God that I might behold you face to face—you, so worthy of God—and I obtained more than I asked; since, in chains as I am for Christ Jesus, I hope to embrace you, if it be God's will that I deserve to reach the goal. For the beginning is fairly arranged, if I do but receive the grace of attaining my destiny without hindrance. I fear lest your charity may prove hurtful to me. It is easy for you to do what you please, but it will be difficult for me to attain unto God, if you spare me. If you

do not speak of me, I shall be united to God; but if you love my body, I shall again have to run my course. You cannot give me a better proof of your affections than by allowing me to immolate myself to God, while the altar is prepared. United, therefore, in charity, sing ye a hymn to the Father in Christ Jesus, because He deemed the Bishop of Syria worthy of coming from the East to the West, that thence he might, as it were, go down to rise again unto Him. You have never envied any one; you have taught others; I desire that you may firmly adhere to your teachings. Ask of God both inward and outward strength for me, that I may add example to my words; that I may not only be called a Christian, but be so in very deed. . . .

“I am writing to the Churches, and I mention to them all, that I willingly and gladly die for God, provided you put no obstacle to my desires. I beseech you, therefore, not to manifest any ill-timed kindness for me. Suffer me to become the food of wild beasts, that I may thereby attain unto God. I am God's wheat, and I must be ground by the teeth of lions, that I may be the pure bread of Christ. Do you rather invite the wild beasts to become my sepulchre, and to leave nothing of my body, that, when I am fallen asleep, I may be to none a cause of trouble. Then shall I be truly a disciple of



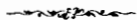
Christ, when the world does not even behold my body. Ask our Lord for me, that by this means I may become a sacrifice to Him. I do not, as Peter and Paul, give you a command: they were Apostles—I am a condemned person; they were free—I am still a bondsman; but if I suffer, I shall become the freedman of Christ, and I shall arise a freeman in Him. Now that I am in chains, I learn to covet naught that is worldly or transitory.

“ During my journey from Syria to Rome, by sea and by land, both night and day, I am fighting with wild beasts, chained as I am to ten leopards; that is, to a band of soldiers, who become the more wicked, the more kindness is shown to them. Although I gather instruction from their unjust behavior, *yet I am not hereby justified.* Oh! how I long for the wild beasts, which are kept prepared for me! I hope to find them in readiness for me; I shall even caress them to devour me quickly, lest they might treat me as they did some others, whom they were afraid to touch. If they be unwilling, I shall compel them by force. Pardon me; I know what is expedient for me. Now I begin to be a disciple. Naught of all that is visible and invisible affects me, provided I attain to Jesus Christ. Let fire and the cross, the throngs of wild beasts, the tearing, the shattering, the dislocating, the cutting



of limbs, the bruising of the whole body, the frightful tortures of the devil—let them all come upon me, if I may but enjoy Jesus Christ. The pleasures of this life—the kingdoms of this world, are of no use to me. To die for Christ is better for me than to rule, even to the uttermost bounds of the earth. “*For what doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul?*” Him do I seek, who died for us; for Him do I long, who rose again for us. This, my gain, is near at hand. Pardon me, my brethren; hinder me not from attaining unto life. Desire me now to die, since I desire to belong to God. Do not rejoice with the world; suffer me to possess the pure light. When there, I shall be a man of God. Grant me to be an imitator of the Passion of my God. If any one bears Him in his heart, he may understand what I mean; and knowing how I am straitened, he will have pity on me.

“The prince of this world is anxious to carry me off, and to pervert my longing for God. Let none, therefore, of you who are present, take part with him: do ye rather support my course, which is God’s. Do not have Jesus Christ on your lips, whilst at the same time you have the world in your hearts. Let envy have no dwelling within you. Were I even to entreat you to act differently when



I shall be present, believe me not; but do ye rather believe that which I write to you now, for I write to you full of life, yet eager to die. My love is fastened to the Cross. There is not within me a fire, which loves matter, but a living water that whispers to my heart—“*Come to the Father!*” I find no delight in the food of corruption, nor in the pleasures of this life. I long for the bread of God, the heavenly bread, the bread of life, which is the Body of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who in these later times was born of the seed of David and Abraham; I long for the drink of God, His Blood, which is incorruptible charity and ever-enduring life. I desire to live no longer according to men. This I shall obtain, if ye are willing; will it, therefore, that ye also may be pleasing to God. In a few words I ask you again, do believe me. Jesus Christ will make it known to you that I speak the truth; that mouth is doubly truthful by which the Father Himself hath spoken the truth. Beg ye for me, that I may obtain. I have not written these things to you according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit of God. If I suffer, it will be a sign that ye were willing. If I am rejected, ye have hated me.

“Remember in your prayers the Church of Syria, which now has God for its Shepherd in my stead.

Jesus Christ alone will govern the same, as its Bishop, as well as your charity. For myself, I am ashamed to be called one of their number, for I am unworthy; since I am the least of them, and one born out of time. But I have obtained mercy to be something, if I attain unto God. My spirit salutes you, and so does also the charity of the Churches that have received me in the name of Jesus Christ, not as one merely passing by; for they, who were naught to me, according to the flesh, have conducted me from city to city.

“These things I write to you from Smyrna, by some Ephesians worthy of all praise. Crocus, a name very dear to me, is also with me, together with several others. As to those who have preceded me from Syria to Rome, for the glory of God, I believe that they are known to you; please inform them that I am near. Since they are all worthy of God and of you, it is proper that ye entertain them in all things. Written the 9th of the Kalends of September, that is, the 24th of August. Farewell unto the end in the patience of Jesus Christ. Amen.”

While the Saint remained at Smyrna, he wrote several other letters to the different Churches of Asia Minor. All these writings breathe the same spirit of meekness, lowliness, patience and charity,

and contain the most precious instructions in regard to the faith and discipline of the early Christians. Taught by the Apostles themselves, he was the legitimate interpreter of their doctrines, and a faithful channel of the Apostolic traditions. We need not wonder, then, at the anxiety which he manifests concerning the whole Church; for the workers of evil had, even at that period, begun to disturb its harmony, especially in Asia.

From Smyrna he was taken to Troas. Here the Lord granted him the sweet consolation of learning that peace had been restored to the Church of Antioch. He hastened to communicate the happy tidings to his friend Polycarp. Far from attributing this gratifying result to his own merits and unceasing prayers, he thanks God, because He has deigned to hearken to the united supplications of all the Churches. Henceforth the greatest burthen of uneasiness is lifted from his shoulders; now he has only to struggle against the fear, that the affection of the Christians at Rome may hinder him from consummating his martyrdom.

He was not permitted to tarry long at Troas, but was hurried on to Neapolis, a city on the confines of Thrace. Hence he was to continue his journey by land, through Macedonia. From Neapolis he proceeded to Philippi, a leading city of that country.



Here the Martyr drew fresh strength and courage from the remembrance of the sufferings which St. Paul had undergone at that place. For the Apostle, because he had cast out a divining spirit from a female slave, who thereby brought much gain to her master, was, together with Silas, his companion, scourged, and then thrown into prison. But the doors of the prison were miraculously opened, and the bands of all were loosed. Paul, however, after he had baptized the keeper of the prison and all his household, refused to leave his place of confinement, until he had been honorably discharged by the magistrates themselves. (Acts xvi.) This he did for the honor of the Gospel, and to impress upon the minds of the officers of the law the injustice of the act which they had committed, by condemning and punishing him without a previous trial.

When Ignatius recalled all these circumstances, and compared his own situation with that of the great Apostle, doubtless his mind was filled with new thoughts of his own unworthiness. He kissed the chains which he wore for the sake of Christ, and resolved to show himself a servant worthy of so good a Master. His journey through the rough, mountainous country which he now traversed; the cruel and spiteful behavior of the ten soldiers who



guarded him night and day and caused him every annoyance; his advanced age and weakness of body—all these combined to make his journey truly a sorrowful way. Yet, amidst all these hardships, his greatest suffering arose from his Christian companions, who, unwilling to be separated from him, followed him everywhere in his travels. His charity was much more concerned about them than about himself. The joys of the spirit, the near approach of his final struggle, were to him a source of unspeakable comfort; but the affection of these faithful friends, who loved him with so generous a devotedness, was an ever-bleeding wound in his heart.

At last, however, they arrived at Epidamnus, now called Durazzo, a town on the Adriatic. Here they embarked, and, descending the Gulf, passed through the Straits of Sicily, and entered the Tuscan Sea. When they came within sight of Puteoli, the Saint would gladly have landed there, that thus he might follow in the footsteps of St. Paul, who, when bound in chains for the faith, even as himself, had gone thence by land to Rome. But contrary winds did not permit them to effect a landing. Wherefore, continuing their voyage, after one day and a night of favorable weather, they reached Porto, at the mouth of the Tiber.

The public games, during which Ignatius was to be exposed to the wild beasts, were fast drawing to a close. The soldiers were anxious not to disappoint the people. The Martyr himself became the more eager, the nearer his struggle was at hand. His companions were in the utmost distress; they gazed upon the countenance of the just. A beam of radiant joy overspread its every feature. They wept in silence—they knew that their approaching separation was to him the beginning of endless bliss.

The news of their arrival soon reached Rome. The Christians came in crowds to meet him. Grief and joy were in every breast; they rejoiced to meet and embrace the servant of God, the reputation of whose sanctity had gone before him; they grieved at the thought of losing him so soon—and forever. Some of the most influential hoped to appease the clamors of the people, and to persuade them not to demand his death during the present games; after that, they thought it would not be difficult, at least not impossible, to obtain a pardon from the Emperor. The Spirit of God revealed to Ignatius their compassionate designs. Forthwith he begins to entreat them, with many tears, not to envy his happiness. He reminds them of what he had said in the letter addressed to them. He appeals to their charity,

which they can now exercise by allowing him to win the crown of Martyrs. Then they all kneel down together; he beseeches the Son of God to look down in mercy upon His Church, to put an end to persecution, and to preserve true charity among all Christians.

It was now the twentieth of December. During several days, Rome had been revelling amidst the wild freedom and unrestrained merriment of the *Saturnalia*. This, the last day, was devoted to the *Sigillaria*, or festival of the images. The whole city was in commotion. A more exciting drama, not unusual in the days of persecution, was to be performed for the amusement of the people. Persons of every rank, age, and condition were thronging into the amphitheatre. The Roman senators took their places in the range of seats assigned to them. The matrons and sacred Virgins did not disdain to witness—yea, to encourage by their presence the bloody spectacle. Loud clamors arise from the vast multitude thirsting for the blood of the innocent victim. The roar of the lions in their den re-echoes the savage howl of the mob. Ignatius, undismayed, hears the harsh, grating chorus.

“I am the wheat of the Lord—I must be ground by the teeth of wild beasts, that I may become the

pure bread of Christ," he says, and advances into the arena.

"The Christian to the lions!" shouts the impatient multitude.

The Martyr lifts up his eyes to Heaven. "Father," he says, "I thank Thee, for that the long wished-for hour is come at last. Bid me come to Thee."

For a moment the silence of death reigns among the spectators. All eyes are fixed upon the champion of Christ. The strong grates which secure the wild beasts in their den are thrown open.

Two hungry lions come bounding into the arena. They rush upon their victim—they tear him to pieces—devour the body, leaving only the larger bones.

Ignatius had found repose in the bosom of God.

The Martyr received his crown on the 20th of December, in the year of our Lord 107, under the consulship of Sura and Senecius. The Acts of his Martyrdom were written by eye-witnesses of his glorious struggle. They say:

"After witnessing this inhuman spectacle, we returned to our dwelling, and there falling on our knees, we besought the Lord, with many tears, to make known to us the result of the combat. Afterwards, having fallen into a light slumber, some of us beheld Ignatius standing near, and



embracing us; others saw him in prayer and blessing us. Some others, again, observed him covered with perspiration, as after a severe labor, presenting himself before the Lord. When, on awaking, we related these visions to one another, we thanked God, the Giver of all good things; we celebrated the praises of the Saint, and we resolved to make known to you the time of his Martyrdom, that, assembling together on that day, we may hold communion with the generous athlete who conquered the devil and finished his course, as he had desired, in Christ Jesus our Lord; through whom, and with whom, be glory and power to the Father and the Holy Spirit, forever and ever. Amen."

The Church celebrates the festival of the Saint on the first of February—the Greeks celebrate it on the twentieth of December, the day of his Martyrdom. His relics were first taken to Antioch, whence they were, A.D. 637, translated to Rome, where they now rest in the Church of St. Clement, Pope and Martyr.





II.

ST. POLYCARP.

ST. POLYCARP, like the blessed Martyr Ignatius, was a disciple of St. John the Apostle. At a very early age he embraced the Christian religion, and, during a life of unusual length, he was ever its zealous defender. Before his banishment to the Island of Patmos, St. John confided to his care the episcopal see of Smyrna, one of the most important of Asia. How well Polycarp acquitted himself of this charge may be gathered from the testimony of our Lord Himself, who thus speaks of him: "To the angel of the Church of Smyrna write: 'These things saith the First and the Last, who was dead and is alive. I know thy tribulation and thy poverty, but thou art rich, and art slandered by those who say that they are Jews, and they are not, but they are a synagogue of Satan. Fear none of these things which

thou shalt suffer. Behold the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried: and ye will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful unto death and I will give thee the crown of life.'"—Apoc. ii, 8, 9, 10.

The familiar terms on which this holy prelate had lived with several of the Apostles, and of the Disciples, who had seen our Lord when He dwelt among men, gave a wonderful authority to his words and writings. The purity of the sacred doctrine which fell from his lips, was never called in question. The example, above all, of his innocent life was the best proof of the truthfulness of his teachings. His numerous disciples looked upon him with deepest reverence, and endeavored to realize in their own conduct the practical lessons of the illustrious model thus placed before them. This we see more especially in the great Irenæus, the most distinguished of all the disciples of Polycarp. A certain Florinus had fallen into several heresies; Irenæus thought it sufficient to quote against him the opinion of his Master—the purest source of apostolical traditions—in order to condemn him. He says:—

“When I was a boy, I saw thee in Lower Asia with Polycarp; thou wast then living in splendor at the court of the Emperor, yet thou didst use thy

best endeavors to gain his esteem. I remember more distinctly the things which then occurred, than those which have happened more recently. For what we learn in our childhood grows with our mind, and becomes in some manner blended therewith; so that I could tell the very place where blessed Polycarp was seated whilst discoursing, his gait, his manner of life, his outward appearance, the words he addressed to the people; how he was wont to speak of the familiar intercourse he had held with John, as also with those who had seen the Lord; and how he remembered their conversations, and whatsoever else he had heard from them concerning the Lord, His miracles and His doctrine. All this Polycarp related exactly as we find it in the Scriptures, since he learned it from those who themselves had gazed upon the Word of life. To all these things, by the mercy of God, I listened at that time with the greatest attention, and I wrote them down, not on paper but in my heart; and, by God's grace, I do diligently repeat and revolve them in my own mind. Now, I can affirm before God, that, if that blessed and apostolic pontiff had heard aught of the kind, he would have stopped his ears, and exclaimed, as was his custom: 'Good God! unto what time hast Thou reserved me, that I should endure these things!' And he would have

fled from the place wherein, whilst standing or seated, he had heard such discourses."

This abhorrence of heresy the holy man had inherited from his Master St. John, of whom it is said that, one day, having entered the public baths at Ephesus, he was informed that the heresiarch Cerinthus was within the place. On hearing this, the Apostle fled immediately, and exclaimed: "Let us flee, lest the bath fall in whilst Cerinthus, the enemy of truth, is within."

Meanwhile the religion of the Saviour continued to be assailed by the powers of darkness. The passions and prejudices of Paganism attacked it from without; the secret machinations of heretics attempted to undermine it from within. These latter, under the leadership of Marcion, were now pursuing a far different plan from that which the teachers of error had hitherto followed. They assumed the mask of piety, they professed to practice the greatest austerities; they forbade the use of wine and of animal food; they obliged their dupes to offer themselves, of their own accord, to suffer Martyrdom. Yet the proud Marcion himself had been cut off from the communion of the Church, on account of a scandalous sin, for which he refused to perform the prescribed penance. His hypocrisy, therefore, could not deceive the wakefulness of the

guardians of the Faith. As, however, his antecedents were too well known in his own country, he went to Rome. But here also his duplicity did not long remain concealed.

A decree issued by Antoninus Pius forbade the persecution of the Christians on account of their religious belief. The Church, consequently, enjoyed a short interval of peace. Polycarp thought that Providence had now prepared for him the way to realize a desire which he had long entertained; he resolved to visit the Supreme Pontiff, that with him he might confer on several subjects regarding the interests of religion. He set out for Rome, and arrived there under the pontificate of St. Anicetus. It was a precious time for the metropolis of the Empire, and of the Faith. The most illustrious Bishop of the East had come to consult the successor of the Prince of the Apostles. It was, doubtless, a source of the greatest comfort to the Faithful to be enabled, not only to behold a personage who had conversed with the Disciples of the Lord, but to ask his opinion concerning the teachings of such men as Valentinus and Marcion. The Saint, although he detested heresy, was moved with pity at the sight of the poor and simple individuals who had been misled by the sowers of cockle. He applied himself, with his accustomed zeal, to the

Christian duty of bringing them back to the true fold. Thousands of them, moved by his authority, and still more by the holiness of his life and conversation, returned again to the bosom of Catholic unity.

During his stay at Rome, he met one day the heretic Marcion, who, going up to him, said: "Polycarp, dost thou not know me?" "Yes," replied the holy Bishop, "I know thee, the first born of Satan." Such is the name which he was wont to give to the obstinate broachers of heresy.

Shortly after his return to Smyrna, the Church became again the object of a new persecution. Marcus Aurelius had succeeded Antoninus Pius. The new Emperor was a pagan philosopher, that is to say, like the rest of this class of men, he professed a great regard for his own opinion, and despised that of all others. Unlike his predecessor in the Empire, he detested the Christians, whose wisdom and virtue, whose contempt of earthly things, whose fortitude in the midst of suffering, put to the blush his own boasted stoicism. Hence it may truly be said, that his philosophy, instead of improving the heart and mind of this Emperor, served rather to destroy in him the naturally good disposition of his character. Whether from real, or merely pretended, superstition, he was scrupulously

devoted to the practices of idolatry; and how could a religion, which condemned as abominable those very practices, find favor in his eyes? Add to this, the incessant appeals of the priests of the idols, to root out the very name of Christianity. The blood of Martyrs was again made to flow in Rome; and soon the persecution was extended to the provinces of Asia.

When St. Ignatius, on his way to Rome, stopped at Smyrna, Polycarp kissed the chains of the Martyr, and begged him to ask our Lord, that he too might have one day the happiness of being a captive for Christ. This pious wish was now to have its fulfilment, and Polycarp was to bear witness to the truth, by sealing with his blood the doctrines which he had preached. The circumstances of his glorious Martyrdom cannot be better described than by quoting in the main the account, which the church of Smyrna sent to the various Churches in Christendom.

“The Church of God at Smyrna, to the Church of God at Philomelium, and to all the holy Catholic Churches everywhere: may the mercy, the peace, and the love of God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ abound with you all. -

“We write to you, brethren, an account of the death of some Martyrs, especially of the holy

Polycarp, who by the seal of faith has put a stop to the persecution of the enemy. For whatsoever has taken place, has happened according to that which the Lord himself has foretold in His Gospel, wherein He shows us what we ought to expect. He suffered Himself to be delivered up and to be fastened to the cross, that we might be made free. He willed, therefore, that we should be His imitators. He the Just, endowed with heavenly power, was the first to obey the commands of the wicked. As a kind master, He gave himself as a model to his servants; and, lest they who follow His footsteps, might think Him a harsh teacher, He underwent whatever hardship He recommended others to endure; that we all, being formed and taught by him, might not only secure our own salvation, but also the salvation of our brethren.

The sufferings of this life, borne for Christ's sake, merit for us a heavenly kingdom. It is indeed deserving of a great reward, to trample under foot the things of earth; to despise riches and honors; to forsake one's parents, and those dear to us; but that which crowns all is Martyrdom. For, what greater homage can servants render to so good a Master, especially when they consider that He has suffered much more for them, than they can possibly endure for Him? Wherefore, it is our

duty, since we have been edified and instructed by their example, to narrate with reverential fear the facts as they occurred, and to place before you the triumphs of those devoted soldiers of Christ, that you may understand how great was their love of God, how great their fortitude in the midst of the fiercest torments. And who is not filled with admiration, when he sees that they appeared to find a certain sweetness in the blows of the scourges, in the tortures of the rack? when the sword that smote them seemed lovely? when the flames that burned them were cool and refreshing? The crowds of people, that witnessed the inhuman spectacle, were struck with amazement, nor could they check the unbidden tears of commiseration, when they saw those lacerated limbs, those streams of blood, and the very bowels of the heroic sufferers exposed to view. Yet no groan was uttered by the Martyrs; no cry of agony could the violence of the pain draw from them; for, as they willingly accepted these tortures, so they bore them courageously when inflicted. The Lord, who from on high beheld the struggles of His servants, cheered them on with the hope of soon possessing that crown, for which they were combating. They called to mind that everlasting fire, which they escaped by enduring the present. They longed to be freed from the chains of their

earthly tabernacle, that they might enter the bright and joyous dwelling of their heavenly Father. They preferred truth to falsehood, heaven to earth, eternity to time.

Meanwhile the devil was not slow in the use of every artful device, that might enable him to overcome the generous resolves of the Martyrs. But the grace of God attended them in their trials, and warded off the poisonous shafts of the infernal enemy. Hence it happened that the struggle of the noble athlete Germanicus, instead of adding to the fears of those who began to waver in their fidelity, did, on the contrary, animate them to a holy emulation of his constancy. This valiant confessor, together with several others, had been brought to Smyrna. At the sight of the youth, the Proconsul was moved with pity, and said to him:—

“Germanicus, how canst thou disregard the riches, the honors, the enjoyments of life, so dear to the hearts of men?”

“I despise them all,” replied the Martyr.

“Thou art still so young: many years of happiness are in store for thee. Obey the orders of the Emperor; have pity on thyself, and on thy youth; sacrifice to the gods.”

“Never!”

“Consult thy own interests, or I will have thee thrown to the beasts.”

“Better far is it for me,” answered Germanicus, “to lose my life in this world, than to surrender my hopes of the hereafter.”

Thus speaking, he advanced boldly towards the lion let loose against him. Forthwith the ferocious beast devours the heroic youth. The multitude stands amazed at the courage of the Martyr; but astonishment soon yields to hatred and revenge, a universal shout arises from the assemblage: ‘Away with the guilty wretches; let Polycarp be sought.’”

This outcry of the people produced the greatest excitement throughout the city. Quadratus, the Proconsul, gave orders to have the holy Bishop arrested. Polycarp was resolved not to abandon his flock, although he knew that the blow of persecution was chiefly aimed at himself. The faithful, however, by their entreaties, prevailed upon him so far as to induce him, almost in spite of himself, to withdraw,—at least until the violence of the storm should pass away,—to a country-seat not far from Smyrna.

In the meantime a Christian, Quintus by name, who had but just arrived from Phrygia, his native country, heard what had taken place. Moved by an imprudent desire of confessing the faith, and

relying on his own strength, he presented himself, of his own accord, before the Proconsul. But his weakness was greater than his resolution. For no sooner did he see the wild beasts that were to be let loose against him, than he began to tremble with fear. He repented that he had shown so much forwardness, and finished by cowardly approving that which he had come to destroy. The Proconsul found it not difficult to persuade him to sacrifice to the idols. This shameful conduct teaches us, not rashly to commend the indiscreet zeal of those who willingly expose themselves to so great a trial, and, full of self-reliance, go in search of the danger which it is glorious enough to brave, with God's grace, when brought upon us by the persecutors.

Wherefore the blessed Polycarp, a man of consummate prudence and highest wisdom, hearing that the enemies of Christ were in search of him, betook himself to a place of concealment; not indeed because he feared death, but because he deemed it proper to delay its hour by a becoming modesty. Even when thus withdrawn from the presence of his people, he did not neglect his fatherly care of them. Night and day, by fervent prayer, he commended them to God, and besought the Giver of all comfort to grant peace to His Church. Moreover, he implored the special help

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of the God of the strong, that he might himself be enabled to fight manfully the good fight, wherein he was soon to engage for His glory. For he knew, by a vision, that the hour of the struggle was at hand. Three days before he was seized, he saw in a dream, whilst reposing, the pillow under his head surrounded with fire. When he awoke out of his sleep, the holy man said to them that were near: "My brethren, God hath given me a sign; I shall be burned alive."

Meanwhile, they who were in search for him had been successful in finding his hiding-place. But his friends, by the most affectionate entreaties, once more persuaded him to go away to another part of the country. Thither the pursuers followed him. No sooner had the Saint reached the house wherein he had to stay, than the soldiers also arrived in the neighborhood. For a long time they sought him in vain. At last they seized two little boys, and beat one of them so cruelly, that they forced him, overcome by the pain, to point out the house where the holy Bishop was hidden. It was late in the evening, on a Friday, when they came to the place. They found Polycarp resting in an upper room, whence he could easily have made his escape to another house, but he said: "I fled as long as I was ordered so to do; as long as God willed it, I

foiled the efforts of my enemies ; now too, O Lord, Thy will be done." Hereupon he came down from his room, and presenting himself to his captors, he addressed them in the kindest manner.

The soldiers were filled with wonder, when they beheld the venerable old man whom they had been sent to capture ; some felt indignant at the zeal displayed in pursuing a person whose every feature bespoke the candor and innocence of his life. The aged prelate saw their astonishment, and said to them with a cheerful smile : " I doubt not, my friends, but you feel somewhat disappointed ; for, as you yourselves perceive, the game was hardly worth the trouble. Nevertheless, you have done your duty, and may God's will be done. I have, however, one request to make, which I hope you will not refuse."

Pleased with his words and appearance, they readily consented to grant whatever it was in their power to allow.

Then he said to them : " I know that you are wayworn and hungry ; grant me then a short time to offer my prayers to God, whilst you rest and refresh yourselves." At this they were pleased still more, and gladly accepted his proposal.

Immediately the Saint ordered a plentiful repast to be spread before them, thus literally fulfilling



what we are commanded in the Scriptures: "If thy enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him to drink." After this, Polycarp, standing up and raising his eyes toward heaven, begged of God to bestow upon himself His holy grace, that he might in all things fulfil His good pleasure even unto the end of life. He besought Him to be mindful of His holy Catholic Church throughout the whole world. He recommended to His mercy and favor all persons, great and small, the rich and the poor, friends and enemies. His prayer lasted for nearly two hours; and with so great a fervor did he pray, that the soldiers, who heard him, were filled with admiration, and most of them were sorry that so pious and venerable an old man should be put to death.

When his prayer was concluded, and the time had come for them to go, they placed him upon a beast of burden, and returned to Smyrna. It was now the great Sabbath day, which precedes the Pasch. Not far from the city they came up with a vehicle, in which were Nicetes and Herod, his son, the Irenarch, or imperial Justice of the Peace. Although the Irenarch was before anxious to have Polycarp arrested, yet now, when he saw him a prisoner, he was moved with pity, and invited him to take a seat with them. They doubted not but that, with words of kindness and fine promises,

they should be able to overcome the constancy of the venerable old man, whom neither threats nor ill-treatment had been able to subdue. Wherefore, considering his religious principles as merely a matter of opinion, they used the most artful persuasions to win him over so far as to feign, at least, to offer sacrifice.

“Tell us,” they said, “O Polycarp, what harm is there in saying Lord Cæsar, and in offering sacrifice, that thou mayest save thy life?”

“I shall never do what you advise me,” answered the Saint. For he knew that to the word “Lord,” as used in this connection, they gave a meaning which belongs only to the Supreme Being. It was not simply a title of respect, which subjects, Christians as well as Pagans, were wont to give to their rulers.

The Irenarch, however, insisted, urging him to comply with his request. The blessed Martyr listened for some moments in silence, until he could endure their impious proposals no longer. Then, summoning up all his strength, he said:—

“No; nothing shall ever induce me to change my sentiments; neither fire nor the sword, neither prison nor exile; no tortures shall make me consent to offer incense to a mortal man, much less to demons.”

Thereupon, growing very angry, and uttering the most dreadful language, they thrust the Saint out of the carriage, although they were driving very fast at the time. His leg was severely bruised by the fall; yet, as if nothing had happened, he continued cheerfully on his way. As soon as they entered Smyrna, the guards conducted him to the amphitheatre. The people of Smyrna were assembled in the stadium. They had witnessed the combat of the gladiators—men fighting one another unto death; they had been amused by the struggles of the *bestiarii*, or beast-fighters—some of whom were hired, and supplied with arms, to exhibit their skill against the wild beasts let loose into the arena; others, criminals condemned to death, were exposed unarmed and bound, to become the prey of the maddened tigers and lions. The arena was crimsoned with the blood of human sufferers, sacrificed to the pitiless barbarity of the unfeeling thousands. The groans of the dying were unheard, the bleeding wounds of the defeated combatants were unheeded. Loud and savage yells arose ever and anon from all parts of the vast assemblage, still thirsting for more victims to sate their ferocious appetite. It was into the presence of this savage multitude that the Martyr was led by his captors. When they saw him, the rage of hell seemed to

burst from their bosoms, with so terrific a shout did they cry out, "Polycarp to the lions!"

The meek and lowly servant of God stood before them, modest and timid in appearance, his frame bowed down by the weight of years; but with a heart unconscious of fear. For, as he entered the arena, the cheering accents of a superhuman voice—heard also by the brethren, who were present,—came floating over the din and confusion of the vociferous crowd: "Be strong, O Polycarp, and contend manfully."

He was now led to the tribunal, where the Proconsul was seated. Quadratus, seeing him, was no less struck than the Irenarch had been, with the dignified and venerable looks of the Saint, and felt anxious to spare his life. Wherefore he said to him:

"Art thou Polycarp, the great chief of the Christians?"

"I am Polycarp," answered the Saint.

"Have a regard for thy old age," added the Proconsul; "do not imagine that thou shalt be able to endure torments, the very sight of which made the strongest youths tremble with fear."

"I can do all things in Him that strengtheneth me," replied the Martyr.

"Why shouldst thou refuse," asked Quadratus,

“to swear by the genius of Cæsar? Follow my advice before it is too late: renounce thy superstitions. It is honorable to repent of one’s error, when the Emperor and the gods demand it.”

“I am a Christian,” said Polycarp.

“Say,” continued the Proconsul, “with all this people: Away with those that deny the gods.”

Hereupon Polycarp, looking around, and fixing his eyes for some moments upon the throng of people that filled the benches of the amphitheatre, and then raising them toward heaven, said with a sigh: “Away with the godless.”

The Proconsul, concealing his disappointment, said:—

“Swear by the genius of Cæsar, and I will set thee free. Blaspheme Christ.”

Polycarp replied:

“It is now eighty-six years since I began to serve Him. He hath never done me any harm, but on the contrary much good. How should I revile Him, whom I love and revere, my King and Saviour, who punishes the wicked and rewards the good?”

Quadratus insisted, and said again:

“Swear at least by the genius of Cæsar.”

The holy Confessor answered:—

“Why do you press me to swear by the genius

of Cæsar? Do you pretend not to know who I am? If so, understand me well: I am a Christian. And if you wish to learn what is the teaching of Christianity, name the day; I will be ready to instruct you, as soon as you will be ready to listen to me."

"Address thyself to the people," said the Proconsul; "give an account of thy belief to them."

"I deem it most proper," replied Polycarp, "to give my reasons to yourself, provided you do not oblige me to do anything unjust. We are taught, to give to the powers appointed by God the honor which is due to them. But the people I do not consider the proper persons to whom I should give an account. I stand here before you—not before the people—as my judge."

The Proconsul was so sorely annoyed, when he heard these answers—so full of a holy freedom blended with a fearless dignity of manner—that he appeared at a loss how to act. After a few moments, however, he began to use threats.

"I have wild beasts at hand," he said; "I will have thee thrown to them to be torn to pieces, unless thou changest thy mind."

"Let them loose against me," said Polycarp, "and whatsoever else your cruelty may invent; I will glory in my sufferings, I will rejoice in my

wounds; my merits will be increased by the greatness of my torments; for these will be the measure of the rewards I shall receive. My mind is prepared for the worst; the rage of lions causes me no dread."

"If thou thinkest so lightly of the wild beasts," rejoined Quadratus, "I will have thee consumed by fire, unless thou changest thy mind."

"Do you threaten me with fire, which burns for a few moments and is then extinguished? Alas! you know nothing of the judgment to come, and of the everlasting fire, which shall torment the wicked hereafter. But why delay by my words the execution of your design? Do with me as you please: bring forward whatsoever torments you wish."

Whilst the Martyr uttered these last words, a halo of heavenly light overspread his countenance, filling his heart with confidence and joy. The Proconsul was struck with astonishment at the sight; he could not understand how an aged man could display so great a vigor and so unyielding a firmness. Nevertheless, he ordered a herald to advance into the middle of the arena, and to cry aloud three times, "Polycarp perseveres in calling himself a Christian." No sooner had the herald proclaimed these words, than the whole multitude,

Gentiles and Jews, who dwelt at Smyrna, began to clamor for the death of the Saint.

“He is the teacher of Asia, the father of the Christians, the enemy of our gods, the destroyer of their temples: it is he who taught multitudes not to sacrifice, not to worship. He has, at last, found what he sought; let him die.”

Then they called upon Philip the Asiarch, or officer who superintended the public games, to let loose a lion upon Polycarp. But that officer replied, that the games of wild beasts in the amphitheatre were ended for that day. Hereupon they all shouted: “Let him be burned alive.”

The Saint hearing this, turned to some of his brethren, who had followed him, and said: “You see now, brethren, the truth of that vision whereof I spoke to you.”

Meanwhile the crowd ran to the shops and the public baths, and soon gathered a large quantity of straw and dry wood to raise a funeral pile. The Jews, especially, distinguished themselves, as was their custom on such occasions, and showed more eagerness than all the rest. The pyre was now ready for the victim, and the Martyr loosed his girdle, laid aside his garments, and attempted to take off his shoes—which last he had never been in the habit of doing himself, for the faithful felt

so great a veneration for him, that they always vied with one another in rendering him this service. The executioners were about to chain him to the stake, but he said:—

“Suffer me to remain as I am. He that gives me the will to suffer for Him, will also give me strength to endure the violence of the flames.”

Wherefore, they merely tied his hands behind him. Then he mounted the funeral pyre—a victim chosen from the great flock of the Lord, to be a burnt-offering to Him for an odor of sweetness. Afterwards, raising his eyes towards heaven, he offered this prayer:—

“God of the Angels, God of the Archangels, O Thou, who destroyest sin and restorest us to life; O Thou, the supreme Ruler of the universe, Who guardest the race of all the righteous, who live in Thy sight: I, Thy servant, bless Thee, Who deemest me worthy of this suffering, that I may have a share in the crown of Martyrdom and in its chalice, through Jesus Christ in the oneness of the Holy Spirit. Grant that, when the sacrifice of this day is complete, I may receive the promises of Thy truth. Therefore, I bless and glorify Thee in all things, through Jesus Christ, the Almighty and Everlasting High-priest, through Whom, and

with Whom, and with the Holy Spirit, be glory to Thee, now and forever. Amen.”

So soon as he finishes this prayer, the fire is kindled. The flames shoot up toward heaven in circling eddies. But behold! God wishes to honor before men the holiness of His servant. Suddenly the flames are parted, and, like the sails of a ship swelling with the wind, arise around the Martyr, forming an arch above his head. Within this marvellous enclosure is seen the blessed Polycarp: his body does not resemble burning flesh, but glows like silver or gold, when purified in the furnace. A sweet odor, as it were of incense and aromatic spices, perfumes the air all around. The Pagans themselves are filled with wonder; they confess that the body of a Christian is spared by the fury of the flames. Nevertheless, after waiting for some time, and seeing that the body remains unconsumed, they order the executioner to draw near, and to pierce it with his sword. This is done: forthwith so great a quantity of blood gushes forth, that the fire is extinguished. The body is seen still standing erect and lifelike, but the immortal spirit has winged its flight to heaven, there to receive the crown of glory from Him who had enabled the generous champion of the Cross to triumph over the powers of darkness.

Such was the Martyrdom of the admirable Polycarp, the Catholic and Apostolic Bishop of Smyrna. He suffered on the 7th of the Kalends of May, A. D. 166, under Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus, Statius Quadratus being Proconsul of Asia.

The Christians immediately endeavored to secure the precious remains of their beloved Bishop. But Nicetas, the father of Herod the Irenarch, at the instigation of the Jews, prevailed on the Proconsul to refuse them this consolation. The ostensible ground on which he based this interference was his fear lest the Christians might abandon the worship of the Crucified to adore the Martyr. "Senseless man," say the writers of the Acts of his Martyrdom, "who knew not that we could never abandon the worship of Jesus Christ—who died for the salvation of the whole world—to adore any other. For we adore Jesus, because He is the Son of God; but the Martyrs we honor and revere on account of their true and fearless love for their divine Master—they being His genuine disciples and imitators." The centurion, therefore, who was sent by the Proconsul to settle the difficulty between the Christians and the Jews, ordered the body to be burned, according to the custom of the Greeks and Romans. Some of the bones, however, were

rescued from destruction by the pious zeal of the Faithful and deposited—as richest treasures, far more precious than gold or jewels—in the Church of Smyrna. There they assembled, especially on the day of his immortal birth, to celebrate the sacred mysteries, and to thank God, for that He had glorified His blessed servant, and strengthened the faith of the children of the Church by the noble example of their teacher and father, St. Polycarp.





III.

ST. JUSTIN.

JT. JUSTIN was born, at the beginning of the second Century, in Palestine, in the ancient town of Sichem, which at that time was a Roman colony, and, under the name of Neapolis, possessed the rights of Roman citizenship. His parents were of Greek origin, and followed the religion and practices of the land of their forefathers. In his early youth he began to devote himself to the study of philosophy, which meant in those days to seek after wisdom—that is, after general truths within the scope of human reason—in order to learn to know God and to attain to the knowledge of the supreme good. As we learn from Justin himself, his first master was a Stoic philosopher. After attending his school for some time, Justin concluded that it would be impossible ever to acquire, under the guidance of this perso-

nage, the knowledge which was the object of his pursuit; because his master himself was not only ignorant of the Supreme Creator of all things, but appeared to make little account of this kind of study. Wherefore, he attached himself to a Peripatetic. This individual soon disgusted the generous sentiments of the young philosopher, by giving him to understand, in unmistakable terms, that the sordid love of gain was his sole object in communicating knowledge to others—a disposition which Justin deemed wholly unworthy of one who was, by profession, a sage. He next betook himself to a disciple of Pythagoras, who stood very high in the estimation of all his admirers, but still more so in his own. Here the youthful philosopher was required to apply himself to the study of astronomy, music, and geometry, as a preparation to dispose the mind to the contemplation of the supremely good and beautiful. This roundabout way was by no means satisfactory to the anxious mind of Justin; he soon grew tired, and began to look out for some method more congenial to his desires. He had not to seek long. A follower of the Platonic school had recently established himself at Neapolis. Justin placed himself among his disciples. He took the greatest delight in the teachings of this new master, and felt satisfied that he made rapid

progress in the science, to which he had so earnestly devoted himself. It seemed to him, that the understanding of incorporeal things lifted him up from the things of earth, and that the contemplation of the Platonic ideas, gave wings to his mind. He rejoiced at having become wise in so short a time, and, in his vanity, fancied that he was now on the point of beholding the Deity Himself—for this he understood to be the object of Plato's system of philosophy.

Thus, full of himself, and vainly puffed up with the knowledge he had acquired, he was wont to withdraw into the most lonely places, that, undisturbed and left to himself, he might give his mind wholly to the attractions of sublime meditations. One day, he directed his steps toward the seashore. As he drew nigh to a charming spot, where he thought himself beyond the reach of intrusion, he was surprised, on turning himself, that he was followed by an old man of mild and venerable aspect. Justin, in his astonishment, stood still, and gazed in silence at the mysterious stranger.

“Do you, perhaps, know me?” said the old man to the wondering youth.

“I know you not,” replied Justin.

“Why thus stare at me with such a look of surprise?”

“I wonder that you should follow me into a solitary place like this, where I hoped to find the solitude I am seeking.”

“Several of my friends are on a journey; their long absence fills me with anxiety; I wander everywhere in hopes of hearing some tidings from them. But yourself,” continued the stranger, “you appear to be ill at ease. The mind that seeks for rest in solitude must needs have some hidden cause to shun the society of men.”

Hereupon, captivated by the engaging manners of the stranger, Justin said:—

“I come hither to give myself to philosophical meditation; for I consider that, among the various pursuits of the sons of earth, none is nobler, none more worthy of man than the love of wisdom, the search after truth.”

“Doubtless,” said the old man, “this is an aspiration worthy of man; but even herein he is frequently misled, both by himself and by others; for to attain to the knowledge of true wisdom, we need an experienced guide to keep us from mistaking falsehood for truth, our own vanity for wisdom.”

“But,” replied Justin, “I am not without guides. I have Pythagoras, Aristotle, the god-like Plato. Who shall say that these are no safe teachers?”

“Those great men do certainly represent, in a sublime degree, the noblest efforts of the human mind, kept within the limits of mere natural reason; but all their teachings cannot satisfy the cravings of the heart. You shall find, after you have mastered all they taught, that a great void is left within your soul, that they have indeed opened for you a boundless abyss, the immensity whereof they were wholly unable to fill.”

“If this be so,” said Justin, “do tell me, then, where I may find the masters who can satisfy the longings of the mind and the heart; for, if the great men of whom I spoke have not known the truth, I am willing to seek it wheresoever it may be found.”

“In days long since gone by,” answered the venerable stranger, “ere yet the name of those whom you call philosophers was known to men, there were personages distinguished for their virtues, upright, holy, and beloved of God. These, inspired by the divine Spirit, foretold the things which at present are taking place in the world. They are called Prophets. They alone knew the truth; they alone proclaimed it to men without fear or favor, without pride or vanity. They announced what they heard and saw by the Holy Spirit that spoke in them. Their writings are still extant. When read in the

spirit of faith, they unfold before the mind new but everlasting principles, an object, an aim, worthy of the true philosopher. They do not employ demonstration to inculcate the truth of their doctrine; the testimony which they give to the truth is far above every demonstration. Their oracles, which are either already accomplished or which are now daily seeing their fulfilment before our eyes, exact from us, almost in spite of ourselves, the fullest belief. Add to this, that they wrought real miracles, whilst they made known to men the name of the one only God, the Creator and Father of all things, and His Son, Jesus Christ—teachings and wonders which false and pretended prophets, under the inspiration of an unclean and deceitful spirit, never can equal. These do indeed attempt prodigies to mislead the simple and unwary, but the work of demons turns at last to their own confusion. As for you, pray that the veil of error may be withdrawn from your eyes, that you may behold the light; for none can see and understand these things, unless God and His Christ enlighten the intellect.”

These and similar words did the venerable stranger address to Justin. Above all, he insisted on prayer and meditation as a means of coming to the knowledge of the truth. The young philosopher promised a faithful compliance with all the recom-

mendations of his aged friend; after which he departed, and he never saw him again.

This conversation had filled the heart of Justin with a boundless desire of studying the books of the Prophets, and of the other sacred writers, the friends of God. He felt persuaded, that in them alone he could find the true philosophy of life.

But there was another motive which powerfully attracted him to Christianity, and soon induced him to embrace its doctrines—this was the constancy of the Martyrs. To him the fearlessness shown by the Confessors of the Faith at the sight of death, even in the midst of torments; their contempt of what is most abhorrent to human nature, appeared an irresistible proof of the truthfulness of the religion which they professed, and of the falsity of the accusations which were brought forward against them by the malice of their enemies.

So soon as Justin had become initiated in the sacred doctrines and mysteries of the Faith, he began to devote his time to the study of the Holy Scriptures. At first these readings filled him with awe; he felt the majesty of God overwhelming him at every page; but yet a sweet repose seemed to steal over his senses, as he found himself con-

stantly in the presence of the great Teacher, who spoke to his heart and illumined his understanding. He was not satisfied with a merely speculative knowledge of religion; he endeavored practically to realize in his mode of life the lessons of true wisdom, gathered from the Sacred Writings. He gave himself up to all the exercises of Christian piety and devotion. Like many of the most distinguished among the early Christians, he led the life of an ascetic—selling all he possessed, and distributing the price among the poor—leading a life of celibacy, a stranger to the customary pursuits of the world.

However, to show that, by becoming a follower of Christ, he had not forsaken the life of a philosopher, but had rather begun to apply himself to the study and practice of a philosophy more holy and more sublime—even the wisdom of God—he continued to wear the philosopher's cloak. This garment, which among the Pagans, denoted those who devoted themselves to the study of moral and intellectual science, was worn, among the Christians, by those who made profession of a more austere manner of life. But it was not so much the outward appearance of our Saint as his inward ardor and zeal to spread the truths of the Gospel, that made him conspicuous among the men of his time.

Knowing that "unto whomsoever much is given, of him much shall be required," he was the ever-ready and fearless champion of the truth. All his actions were animated by the spirit of the Gospel; he seemed to breathe naught, save the glory of Him who had so graciously enlightened him from above; he longed to establish the kingdom of Christ in the hearts of all his fellow-men. With this object in view, he travelled through many countries of the East, sowing everywhere the good seed of the Word, and diffusing, by the example of his holy and innocent life, the "sweet odor of Christ unto God."

To secure a more extensive field for the exercise of his burning charity, he resolved to establish himself at Rome. Here he opened a school, which, in a short time, became a nursery of Religion. All were welcome here: he received without distinction the Jew and the Gentile. Unlike the greater number of the philosophers of Paganism—who held truth captive and durst not proclaim it aloud, lest they might expose themselves to some danger—without fear of men, Justin withheld naught of the truth. Nor was he satisfied with teaching by word of mouth; his writings were no less effective in bringing vast multitudes to the knowledge of the doctrines of Christianity. His Apology, addressed

to the Emperor, the Senate, and the Roman people—whilst establishing in the most solid manner the truths of Religion, and refuting the calumnies heaped upon the Christians—induced Antoninus to put a stop to persecution.

It was during this time of freedom from outward annoyance that Justin made a journey to Asia. Whilst at Ephesus, the Saint was one day accosted by a stranger, accompanied by six others.

“By the garments you wear,” said the stranger to him, “I see that you are a philosopher. If it be not displeasing, I fain would confer with you on the object of our mutual pursuit.”

“I am willing to gratify your praiseworthy desire,” replied Justin; “but who does me the honor of making this request?”

“My name is Tryphon; I am by nation a Hebrew. The last civil war drove me from the land of my birth. I retired into Greece, and took up my abode in Corinth. There I began to give myself to the study of philosophy; hence I love the conversation of those who, like myself, are seekers after truth.”

“It is rather a cause of wonder to me,” said Justin, “that you, belonging to the Jewish people, as you do, should devote yourself to the reading and study of heathen sages, instead of applying your-



self to the books of Moses and the Prophets. For, although the former have spoken of God, and have known His oneness, and have even written dissertations on His Providence, yet they have generally written and spoken, as if there were, in reality, many gods; they have limited His Providence to universal things, to genus, to species, and denied it with regard to individuals or particular persons. And why? To enjoy a full freedom of saying and doing whatsoever came into their heads, as if they had naught to hope or to fear from the divine Justice."

Then he related how he, desirous of attaining to the knowledge of the one true God, had disciplined his mind in various schools of philosophy, until, as it were by chance, having met a real sage, he was persuaded to go to the very fountain-head of all true Wisdom, Jesus Christ, foretold in past ages by men inspired of God. "These men," he added, "have made me a true philosopher; for this is the only sure and saving philosophy." And, as he wished that all might enjoy the same peace and happiness, he said to Tryphon:—

"If, then, you have any care of your salvation, and trust in God, it will not be difficult for you, who are far better acquainted with this doctrine, than I was at that time, to attain to true wisdom and

happiness, through Christ, the long-promised, and long-expected Messiah.”

After this they entered on a discussion which lasted two whole days. Justin divides his arguments into three parts. In the first, he shows that the law of Moses was abolished by the substitution of the New Law; in the second, he proves the Divinity of Christ; in the third, he demonstrates the call of the Gentiles and the establishment of the Church.

The reasoning of the Saint was unanswerable. Tryphon and his companions were forced to own their defeat; and it might have been reasonably expected, that the result of this conference would have been their conversion to the Faith. But, although man may plant the seed of the Word in the hearts of his fellow-men, and water the same with the dew of fervent prayer, still it belongs to God alone to give the increase. Tryphon and his friends left Justin, filled with admiration for his zeal and wisdom, but human considerations overruled their better knowledge, and held them enslaved to their errors.

On his return to Rome, Justin found, that the persecution against the Christians had been renewed by Marcus Aurelius, the successor to Antoninus Pius. At that time, there lived in Rome a Cynic

philosopher, Crescens by name. This individual had won for himself great notoriety by his hatred of Christianity, but still more by the infamy of his vices. He was a friend of the Emperor, who had a strange weakness for philosophers of this sort. Justin challenged him to a public disputation, during which he convicted him, either of an entire and wilful ignorance of the teachings of the Christians, or of being one of the most wicked of men. This discussion was several times renewed with the same results.

The Saint now addressed a second Apology to the Emperor. In this discourse he shows, that he was fully aware of having, by his fearless struggles in the cause of truth, incurred the enmity of the Sophists, and that he was soon to feel the effects of their vengeance. Nor was the blow, which he had foreseen, long delayed. He was denounced and arrested, together with several Christians, who were his disciples or fellow-laborers.

Rusticus, at that time Prefect of Rome, summoned them before his tribunal. He commanded them to yield to the orders of the Emperor, and to sacrifice to the gods. Addressing his words to Justin, he said :

“Come now, be obedient to the gods, and comply with the orders of the Emperor.”

“Whoever obeys the precepts of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, shall never be blamed or condemned,” answered Justin.

“What profession dost thou follow?” asked Rusticus; “to what art or science dost thou apply thyself?”

“Hitherto,” said the Saint, “I have busied myself with almost every sort of learning; of late, however, I have exclusively devoted myself to the teachings of the Christians, a doctrine which is by no means to the liking of them that suffer themselves to be deceived by the error of false opinions.”

“What! dost thou, miserable wretch, find delight in a doctrine like that?”

“Undoubtedly I do,” replied Justin, “because that doctrine enables me to walk with the Christians in the ways of truth and justice.”

“What sort of a doctrine is that of the Christians?”

“The doctrine, which we profess, consists in believing that there is one only God, the Creator of all things visible and invisible; that Jesus Christ, our Lord, is the Son of God, foretold by the Prophets; that He is the Herald of Salvation, who teaches those that are his true disciples; and that at the end of time, He shall come to judge the whole human race. For myself, who am but a weak and

ignorant mortal, I can in nowise speak of that infinite Deity in a manner worthy of Him. This is an office assigned to the Prophets, who, inspired from above, foretold many ages ago the coming upon earth of the Son of God."

Rusticus then asked him, in what place the Christians were wont to assemble. "They meet," answered Justin, "wherever they choose or can. Do you imagine, that with us it is the custom for all to assemble in the same place? It is not so. The God of the Christians is not restrained within limits: He is boundless as well as unseen; He fills the heavens and the earth: everywhere the faithful adore Him, everywhere they celebrate His glory."

"But," insisted the Prefect, "I order thee to tell me, where the assemblies are held, and where thou thyself hast thy school."

"As regards myself," answered the Saint, "hitherto I have dwelled near the Timotinian baths, close to the residence of a certain Martinus. This is the second time that I am come to Rome, yet I am unacquainted with any other places. Whosoever any person has chosen to call upon me at my dwelling, I have freely instructed him in the doctrine of the truth."

"Thou art, then, a Christian?" said Rusticus.

"Most assuredly," replied Justin, "I am a Chris-

tian." After this the Prefect, turning himself to the companions of the Martyr, first said to Chariton :

"Art thou also a Christian?"

"Yes, by the grace of God, I am a Christian."

Then he asked of a woman, named Charitana, whether she too followed the Faith of Christ. She answered that, by God's blessing, she was a Christian. Next, addressing Evelopistus, he said :

"And thou, who art thou?"

"I am a slave of Cæsar, but, as a Christian made free by Christ Himself, I am, through His grace and blessing, made a partaker of the same hopes, that animate them whom you see here before you."

Afterward Hierax was asked whether he also was a Christian. He replied :

"Most undoubtedly : because I serve and adore the same God."

"But," inquired Rusticus, "is it Justin, who has made you all Christians?"

"For myself," replied Hierax, "I have always been, and will continue to be a Christian."

On this Pæon, arising, said : "I also am a Christian."

"And who has taught thee to be a Christian?" asked the Prefect.

“My parents instructed me in this holy law.”

Then Evelpistus said :

“I have ever hearkened with the greatest delight to the discourses of Justin, yet it was from my parents that I learned the Christian Religion.”

On being asked by the Prefect, where his parents resided, he answered :

“In Cappadocia.”

“And where in the world,” said Rusticus to Hierax, “are thy parents?”

“Our true Father,” answered he, “is Christ : our true mother is the Faith, whereby we believe in Him. As to my earthly parents, they are dead : I myself have been brought hither from Lycaonia, in Phrygia.”

The Prefect then said to Liberianus :

“And what hast thou to say for thyself? art thou also a Christian, and a despiser of the gods?”

“Yes,” said the Martyr; “I too am a Christian, for I worship and adore the only true God.”

Rusticus now again addressed Justin : “Hearken thou,” he said, “thou who art deemed eloquent; and who sayest, that thou professest the true philosophy : when thou art torn with scourges from head to foot, thinkest thou to ascend into heaven?”

“Yes,” answered Justin, “if I endure what you mention, I hope to receive that which is even now possessed by those who have kept the precepts of Christ. For I know, that the grace of God is reserved unto the end of time for them that live in this holy manner.”

“Dost thou imagine, then, that thou shalt go up into heaven, there to receive some reward?”

“I do not imagine this: I know it, and I am so certain thereof, that I do not entertain the least doubt.”

“To end all this,” said the Prefect, “let us come to the point. Go ye all together, and, with one accord, sacrifice to the gods.”

“No one who possesses good sense,” replied Justin, “abandons his pious duty to throw himself into error and impiety.”

“Unless ye be willing to obey our commands,” added Rusticus, “ye shall all be tortured without mercy.”

“We long for nothing more ardently,” said the holy Martyr, “than for torments undergone for the sake of Christ Jesus, our Lord. This will give us confidence to stand before His dread tribunal, where the whole world must one day appear to be judged.”

The other Martyrs spoke in like manner, and

added: "Do speedily whatever you choose. We are Christians: we sacrifice not to idols."

The Prefect hearing this, pronounced the sentence: let them, who were unwilling to sacrifice to the gods, and to obey the edict of the Emperor, be first scourged, and then led to the place of execution; there to be beheaded according to the laws." Thus the Martyrs were led forth, thanking and praising God for the grace bestowed upon them. After their Martyrdom, the Christians secretly took away their bodies, and gave them a decent burial.

Such was the end of St. Justin, deservedly surnamed the Martyr or Witness; for he bore witness to the truth, not only by shedding his blood for the Faith, like very many others, but also by his words and writings. In him the title of Philosopher became truly a name of honor; he was a sage in very deed, in that he consecrated his talents to the noblest of causes—the service of the Giver of every excellent gift, and the everlasting happiness of his fellow-men.

He suffered in the reign of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus, most probably in the year 167 of the Christian Era.



IV.

THE MARTYRS OF LYONS AND VIENNE.

IN THE thirteenth year of his reign, Marcus Aurelius obtained, by the prayers of the Christian soldiers, his celebrated victory over the Quadi. In consequence he showed himself, for some time, more favorable to Christianity. But toleration was not one of his characteristic qualities, unless, indeed, his countenancing the most absurd superstitions and the most enormous profligacy may deserve that name. Hypocrisy and bare-faced crime appeared not objectionable to this imperial philosopher, but virtue and innocency of life seemed not to be endured. Wherefore, persecution, with all its terrors, was soon renewed against his Christian subjects. The blood of Martyrs flowed again in streams, especially in the more distant provinces of the Empire. And now, for the first time on record, Gaul was heard of in

the Annals of the Church: her faith, her charity were a fresh garland to deck the blood-stained brow of the spotless Bride of the Lamb.

Commercial intercourse between Massilia and the Greek colonies of Asia Minor had, at an early period, introduced the Christian Religion among the Celtic tribes of Gaul. Hence it happened, that most of the early prelates, who, by their virtues, adorned the Church of Gaul, were of Greek origin; hence, too, the intimate relation kept up between these countries. When, therefore, the sword of persecution was unsheathed among the Gallic nations, we need not wonder that they should recount the history of their struggle and triumph to them, from whom they had received their knowledge of Christianity. Lyons and Vienne, two cities on the Rhone, were the first to send forth their children as champions of the Faith. The recital of the sufferings which they underwent, forms one of the brightest pages in the history of the Church: it is the testimony of eye-witnesses, who themselves had been partakers of the tribulations of their brethren.

“The servants of Christ, who dwell in Vienne and Lyons of Gaul, to our brethren of Asia and Phrygia, who cherish with us the same faith and hope

of Redemption: peace and grace and glory from God the Father and Christ Jesus, our Lord.

“No language can express, nor can pen describe, the severity of the persecution, the rage of the heathen against the Saints, and the cruelty of the torments which our blessed Martyrs underwent, with the most wonderful constancy. The enemy of mankind seemed to display against us his whole strength, as if he were desirous of showing, beforehand, how great shall be his fury at the end of time, when he shall be allowed to exercise his power against the servants of God. He left nothing untried. We were not only forbidden to enter public buildings, the baths, the forum, but we were not even allowed to make our appearance in any public place whatsoever.

“The grace of God, however, struggled for us against the powers of hell. He, in His mercy, protected the weak, and permitted that the strong alone should stand forth, like immovable columns, against which the fierceness of the enemy was spent in vain. When these heroes came in close conflict, they bore every kind of reproach and insult; yet all this they esteemed light, and joyously they ran their race, hastening on toward Christ, teaching us, by their example, that the sufferings

of this life are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, which shall be revealed in us."

They began by generously enduring, for the love of their divine Master, whatsoever a barbarous multitude can inflict upon them, whom they view as the fit objects of their vengeance: insolent speeches, the plundering of their property, imprisonment, blows, and the throwing of stones. Afterward, being dragged into the forum, they were publicly interrogated by the military tribune and the magistrates of the city, and, having made a bold confession of their faith, they were cast into prison until the arrival of the Governor of the Province. So soon as this officer had come, they were summoned before his tribunal. Without examining the truthfulness of the accusations brought against them, he ordered them to be tortured in the most cruel manner.

On this occasion, Vettius Epagathus gave a beautiful example of Christian freedom and charity. He was a youth of illustrious birth, but still more distinguished for his many virtues. They that knew him, hesitated not to bestow upon him the praises given to the aged Zachary, that "he was just before God, and walked in all the commandments and justifications of the Lord without blame."

With the rest of the multitude he had come to be present at the public trial of the Christians.

When he beheld the unjust manner in which his Brethren were treated, he was unable to contain the indignation of his noble nature.

“Suffer me,” he said, addressing the Governor, “to speak in the defense of these innocent persons. I am ready to prove, that they are falsely accused of atheism and impiety; that they are guilty of none of the accusations brought forward against them.”

The crowd that surrounded the tribunal were astonished on hearing this speech; they began to cry out against him. The Governor was surprised at so unexpected a request; he began to waver in mind, not knowing whether he should grant or refuse so just a demand. He reflected for a few moments, and then addressing the youth, said: “Tell me, Epagathus, art thou a Christian?”

“I am a Christian, and glory in the name,” said Epagathus, in a loud and clear voice.

“Then,” said the Governor, “thou shalt not speak in their defense. Take thy stand among them who are accused: their sentence shall be thy own.”

His Brethren joyfully received him in their

midst; with one voice they bestowed on him the title of "Advocate of the Christians!"—glorious name, which he did fairly merit, because, more than Zachary, he possessed within him the Holy Spirit, the Advocate and Comforter. He gave a new impulse to the strength and fervor of the holy Confessors: his burning charity cheered them on with greater courage and alacrity to shed their blood for the sake of the Lamb, whose true follower he proved himself by this glorious example.

These first trials showed also the difference that existed between the Christians, who had prepared themselves beforehand for the great struggle, and those who had not used the same foresight. The former did not hesitate to declare boldly, that the object of their most ardent longing was to seal with their blood the profession of their faith; the latter, on the contrary, shrunk from the duty they owed to God and to their conscience. Of these, about ten fell away. This apostasy filled the hearts of the Brethren with the greatest sorrow, and cooled, to a considerable extent, the zeal of those who had not yet been arrested, and who had hitherto vied with each other in ministering to the Martyrs in their sufferings. A new species of torment seemed now

to have been added to their pains: it was not a dread of the rack, but a distressing anxiety concerning the final issue of the combat. Where one had yielded to fear, others might be misled to imitate the fatal weakness.

Meanwhile, every day some of the most distinguished members of the two Churches of Vienne and Lyons were added to the number of the prisoners. It was, doubtless, because Providence deigned in this manner to fill up the ranks of the faithful, thinned by the cowardly desertion of the few who, for the apparent enjoyment of the things of time, gave up the abiding possessions of eternity. The Governor had given peremptory orders, that all, who were in any manner connected with the Christians, should be seized; hence it happened, that many Pagans in the service of the Brethren were taken with their masters. At the sight of the tortures endured by the Saints, and instigated by the malice of Satan and of the soldiers, these wretches at once began to accuse the Christians of every crime and abomination capable of arousing the wrath of the persecutors. Now even they, who, by a common feeling of humanity, or on account of the relationship that existed between them and some of the Brethren, had hitherto restrained their raging passions, seemed no longer

to set any bounds to their spirit of revenge. Then indeed appeared to be fulfilled that saying of our divine Master: "The hour will come, that whosoever killeth you, will think that he doeth a service to God."

Then the holy Martyrs suffered torments beyond description; Satan seemed to use every exertion to force them to utter some blasphemy. But more especially was the fury of the Governor and of the mob displayed against Sanctus, the holy Deacon of Vienne, against Maturus, who, although but a recent convert, showed himself an intrepid champion of our holy Faith.

Next to these, they assailed Attalus, a native of Pergamus, who had been long known as a pillar and firm support of the Church. But the Martyr, whose heroic fortitude excited the admiration of the Pagans themselves, was a young bond-woman, named Blandina. In her, God, in His wisdom and for the consolation of His servants, vouchsafed to show forth the wonders which His all-powerful grace can effect. For she, whose age, whose sex and condition, according to human views, expressed whatsoever there is weak and lowly among men, was seen to triumph, after a manner wholly unusual even among the noblest and bravest heroes of Religion. All the brethren, who knew her, were full

of uneasiness about this tender maiden. Her mistress, who also was of the number of the holy Martyrs, though aware of her devoted attachment to the principles of her faith, was full of anxiety lest the natural delicacy of her constitution should give way before the inhuman treatment of the executioners. But the sequel was, in very deed, to all the faithful an agreeable and a most consoling disappointment. The torturers appeared resolved, to exhaust upon her whatsoever cruelties their fiendish malice could suggest: they put her to every torment which their ferocity could invent. From morning until night, they pierced and tore asunder her virginal body. Yet, although they relieved and succeeded each other constantly, they were at last forced to confess, that grace from on high had enabled the feeble and timid maiden to baffle all their endeavors; that they were themselves at a loss to devise new means, whereby to overcome her miraculous perseverance.

Blandina, like a generous athlete, seemed to draw new strength from every effort used against her; in the midst of all her sufferings her soul appeared absorbed in the contemplation of her Lord, for whom she was willingly and cheerfully enduring this great agony. She uttered not a word of com-

plaint, nor did she threaten her executioners with the wrath of heaven:—

“I am a Christian. No evil is committed amongst us.” These few words were a sweet refreshment to her heart.

The fortitude of Sanctus, the Deacon, was not less marvelous than that of the humble Blandina. The executioners put together all their skill in their endeavor to invent new torments. They would have been satisfied had they been able to force from him some word or expression, which they might interpret as disrespectful to the Religion for which he suffered. All their attempts proved futile. So great was his constancy, that he did not even mention his name, his birth-place, nor whether he was bond or free. To every question put to him, he replied, with unwavering firmness, in the Latin tongue:—

“I am a Christian.”

This was to him his name, his country, his condition, his all; he needed no other title. This steadfast conduct of the Martyr so irritated the Governor, that he ordered the executioners, while they were apparently at a loss to discover new instruments of torture, to apply red-hot plates of brass to the most tender parts of his body. But the Saint remained unsubdued and unshaken, firm

in the confession of his faith. For Christ, the Fountain of living water, poured over his servant a celestial dew, which refreshed and strengthened him. And, although his body, mangled and shriveled, was but one continued wound—so as to have lost the appearance of a human form—yet the Christian hero glorified God by his calm and peaceful resignation, and put to shame all the machinations of the enemy of mankind. Who is not filled with admiration on beholding so grand, and, at the same time, so terrific a display of the power of heavenly grace in a weak mortal?

A few days thereafter, the inhuman tormentors resolved to put once more to the trial the constancy of this blessed Martyr. They imagined that, even if they did not subdue him, his death, in the midst of such sufferings, would strike terror into the other Christians. His wounds were now so swollen and inflamed, that the least touch caused him an excruciating agony. It was a harrowing spectacle to behold this innocent victim again led forth to the rack. All felt persuaded that the renewal of torments would speedily end his sufferings forever. But how great was their astonishment when they saw, that this trial, instead of producing immediate death, gave, on the contrary, new life and vigor to the Martyr. His limbs, disfigured

and dislocated before, resumed their former shape: he stood firm and erect in the midst of his tormentors; and, through the grace of Christ, these second wounds became the healing of the first.

The evil one, being thus foiled in his attempts, now assailed those whom, he thought, it would not be so difficult to overcome.

Among the few who, terrified at the greatness of the torments inflicted, had renounced the faith, there was a woman, Biblis by name. The demon, aware of the bodily weakness of this person, felt assured that it would be easy to secure her for his prey. Wherefore he suggested to the executioners to have her placed upon the rack, that thus she might be induced to revile Christianity. This trial was to her wholly unexpected. But, suddenly, the thought of the everlasting punishments of the life to come recalled her to better sentiments. She remembered that, after all, the sufferings of this world, how great soever they may be, are transitory. Her heart was changed, and turned in penitence to the Father of mercies. Her tormentors said to her:—

“Biblis, confess that the Christians commit every kind of crime, that they even devour their own children, and we will set thee free.”

“How could I give utterance to such a false-

hood," she replied, "when, so far from eating their own children, they even abstain from the blood of animals?"

"So then," they said, "thou art still a follower of that odious religion?"

"I am indeed unworthy," she answered, "on account of my sins, to be reckoned among its true followers; but yet I am a Christian."

"Now," they said again, "renounce forthwith that profession, and thou art free."

"Do ye with me," she made answer, "as ye think fit. As for me, whether living or dying, I am a Christian: nothing shall ever prevail upon me to forsake my faith."

Surprised at her wonderful courage, and altogether disappointed in their expectations, they ordered her to be replaced among the other Martyrs.

Meanwhile, the grace of our Lord having enabled the holy Confessors to triumph over all the tortures which had been inflicted upon them, the demon devised a new plan to subdue their constancy. He suggested that they should be cast into a dismal and loathsome dungeon. Here they were confined in the stocks, and their feet most cruelly stretched even to the fifth hole. Here, too, they were forced to undergo all those other torments, which the

ministers of Satan could invent against the unfortunate victims of their hatred. Many of them perished by being suffocated in this noisome place—God permitting that it should be so for His glory. The others,—although they had been so inhumanly tortured, that it seemed impossible for them to survive their wounds, even had every care been bestowed upon them—continued for a long time to drag out a life of intense suffering, destitute of all human help and comfort. Nor was this sufficient for their zeal: so strengthened were they from above, that, not only by the example of their resignation, but also by their words and cheerful conduct, they imparted consolation to those who had been recently imprisoned, and whose bodies were not yet used to the hardships and privations of this barbarous treatment.

But one of the most illustrious victims of this dreadful persecution was the blessed Pothinus, the venerable Bishop of Lyons. He was now past the ninetieth year of his age, his body bowed down beneath the weight of years and of infirmities. Yet, although the flesh was weak, the spirit was ready. He longed with an eager desire for the glory of Martyrdom. He was arrested. But so great was the weakness of his body, that he was unable to walk; the soldiers dragged him before the tribunal.

The magistrates of the city, and the people in crowds, followed him: they uttered shouts of derision and insult, even as the Jews of old had followed the Redeemer on His sorrowful journey to Calvary. But nothing could shake the constancy of the holy old man. When asked by the Governor, who he was, and what profession he followed, the Martyr replied:—

“I am a Bishop in the Church of God.”

The Governor sneeringly said:—

“Who is this God, in whose Church thou art a Bishop?”

“You shall know it,” answered Pothinus, “if you are worthy of so great a blessing.”

No sooner had he uttered these words than they who stood near him, without regard for his gray hairs and venerable appearance, began to heap upon him every sort of indignity. They struck and kicked him, they dragged him from one place to another; whilst those who were at a distance pelted him with stones, and with whatsoever missile they found at hand. All seemed to act as if they would have thought themselves guilty of a great crime, had they not, in some measure, contributed to avenge the honor of their gods. Worn down by this cruel treatment, and almost lifeless, the holy Martyr was thrown into prison, where, after

two days, he yielded up his spirit to his Maker, for whose glory he had so generously combated.

Then was seen a wonderful effect of the interposition of divine Providence. They who had denied their Religion were imprisoned in the same dungeon with them who had continued faithful, and were made to share all their sufferings. But how great was the difference between them! The apostates were confined as murderers and infamous criminals. They had looked for freedom, and found the most degrading slavery; they thought to gain the good will and favor of the persecutors; they met everywhere the scorn and contempt of the populace. Worried with remorse of conscience, their look of dejection, whensoever they appeared in public, bespoke the anguish of soul they were enduring. Despised as vile and effeminate cowards, they suffered all the harrowing tortures of despair. On the other hand, the champions of the Faith were accused of nought, save of being Christians. Hence, the expectation of Martyrdom, the hope of the promises, the love of Christ, the Spirit of the Father filled their hearts with unspeakable joy. Whensoever they came forth, cheerfulness and majesty were depicted on their countenances; their chains were to them a graceful ornament; their wounds ex-

haled so sweet a fragrance, that many imagined they had been anointed with the most exquisite perfumes. All this left so consoling an impression upon the minds of the Faithful, and so strengthened them in their religious belief, that, so soon as any of them were seized and dragged before the tribunal, they forthwith made a bold confession of their Faith, without listening even for a moment, to the evil suggestions of the prince of darkness.

A few days later, the Governor decided to finish the Martyrdom of the holy Confessors by various sorts of torments. Divine Providence, doubtless, permitted this, that the heroic sufferers might in this manner present to their heavenly King a crown composed of a variety of flowers of virtue, and that the sweet blending of colors might render their offering more agreeable to Him. Besides, it was befitting that these courageous athletes, who had bravely conquered in so many and varied struggles, should receive an immortal crown, which bore witness to the multitudinous victories they had won. For this purpose Maturus, Sanctus, Blandina, and Attalus were condemned to be exposed to the beasts in the amphitheatre, and a special day was appointed to satisfy the barbarous curiosity of the people.

Maturus and Sanctus were again made to undergo

all the torments they had suffered before. No account was taken of the past. They were like peerless champions who, after they have overthrown all their antagonists, are made to exhibit the last trial of their skill and courage. Their wounds, but partially healed, were opened again by the customary scourging; they were torn to pieces by the fangs of wild beasts; in short, whatever torture the people called for in their madness, was inflicted upon them. At last, they were placed upon an iron chair made red hot; being thus, in very deed, roasted alive, the fumes of their own burning flesh almost suffocated them to death. Yet, no feeling of mercy or sympathy was shown by the spectators; on the contrary, their raving madness seemed to increase with the horrible sufferings of their victims. All the multitude appeared resolved to subdue the patience of the Martyrs, even at the sacrifice of every sentiment of humanity. The rage of hell, however, proved powerless. No word of complaint was uttered by the sufferers; but ever and anon Sanctus would say, as he had done before:—

“Everlasting thanks to God: I am a Christian.”

Then, during a whole day, did these servants of God present to the barbarous crowd the saddest of spectacles; and, when the frightful con-

flict was over at last, as life was not yet extinct, they were dispatched with the sword of the executioner.

And now again were orders given to torture the maiden Blandina. Forthwith she was bound to the stake, her arms extended in the form of a cross; thus, in this helpless state, to become an easy prey to the wild beasts of the amphitheatre, let loose against her. Whilst in this position, her spirit held communion with her Heavenly Bridegroom, and she prayed aloud:—

“I thank Thee, O my sweet Redeemer, for that Thou deemest Thy servant worthy of suffering for Thy dear sake. Grant us to persevere in Thy holy service. Our tribulations here below are light and short-lived, and not to be compared to the immense weight of glory Thou hast prepared for us. Give us strength and courage to confess Thy name before men, that we may be made partakers of Thy joys forever.”

When the other Martyrs heard this fervent prayer of their youthful companion, their hearts were cheered up, and new vigor was infused into their frames. However, in spite of the efforts made by the executioners, they were unable to excite the wild beasts so as to make them even touch the body of the Virgin Martyr. Less fierce than the savage

persecutors, they laid themselves calmly down at her feet. Hence, frustrated in their design, the executioners unbound Blandina and cast her again into prison, that thus, in the providence of God, she might still continue a model for her Brethren, and encourage them in their struggles.

After this, the multitude began with loud vociferations to call for Attalus. This holy Confessor was well known to all the people. He was a man of distinguished birth, of irreproachable character, and well-versed in the principles of Religion. As he had ever been foremost in the profession of his Faith, he now exhibited the greatest readiness to bear witness to the truth. So soon as he entered the arena, he was led round the amphitheatre. Before him was carried a tablet with a Latin inscription: "*This is Attalus, the Christian.*" The mob shouted at the sight: opprobrious epithets of every sort were heaped upon him. All clamored for the blood of the Martyr. The Governor, however, was told that Attalus was a Roman citizen. As it was unlawful to punish a Roman citizen in this ignominious manner, it was found necessary to write first to the Emperor, to learn his pleasure. Wherefore, Attalus was again imprisoned with the other Christians.

This postponement of the final struggle was by

no means useless to them: the Saviour of men made it an occasion of displaying the wonders of His infinite mercy. The unhappy individuals who, at the first trial, had been frightened at the sight of the tortures prepared for them, were still deprived of their freedom. Now, when they beheld the Confessors of the Faith returning in triumph from the arena, they were filled with self-reproach at their own cowardly behavior. This first working of divine grace made them enter into themselves: they saw the evil they had brought upon their souls, the glory they had forsaken, and the wretched future that awaited them. With tears of repentance they began to entreat the Martyrs to intercede for them, and to obtain the pardon of their disgraceful apostasy. With a charity that ever characterizes the true Christian hero, they received their repentant brethren again into fellowship, and thus was the grief they had felt before turned once more into joy. Nor was it long before the new converts were enabled to prove by deeds the sincerity of their return to God. An order came from the Emperor, directing that they who confessed their Faith should be put to death, and they that denied Christianity should be set free.

In consequence of this order, the Governor fixed the first of August, as the time for the execution of

the sentence. On that day, a public fair was held in the city of Lyons, which attracted many strangers from all the neighboring towns and provinces. When the appointed day came, the Governor seated himself on his tribunal, and commanded the Martyrs to be brought before him, to undergo a second public interrogatory. This he did, both to gratify the curiosity of the numerous visitors, and to strike with terror those who might feel kindly disposed toward the Christians. First he interrogated those that had remained steadfast in the Faith. They who were Roman citizens were condemned to be beheaded; the others were sentenced to be torn to pieces by the wild beasts of the amphitheatre. When came the turn of those who had before apostatized, the Governor gave orders that they should be questioned in private, through mere formality, and then restored to liberty. But great was the astonishment of the Pagans, when those men, who had shown so great a weakness heretofore, now boldly confessed their Faith, and declared themselves ready to suffer every torture, rather than again forsake that Religion, into which they had been born again. Wherefore, they were condemned to undergo the same sentence as the other Christians.

Meanwhile, many of the Faithful were present at

these interrogatories to encourage their heroic brethren. Among them was a certain Alexander, a Phrygian by birth, a physician by profession. During the many years which he spent in Gaul, he had ever distinguished himself by his many virtues, his love of God, and the apostolical freedom where-with he proclaimed the truths of the Gospel. This holy man, standing near the tribunal, by signs and gestures cheered on the Martyrs to a bold and generous confession of their Faith. This did not long escape the notice of the people. Sorely annoyed at seeing those constant in their Faith, who had formerly renounced it, they began forth-with to cry out :

“There is Alexander: he it is who causes these men to return to their old superstition. Away with him !”

The Governor, addressing Alexander, said to him :

“Who art thou ?”

“I am a Christian,” answered Alexander.

“What is thy profession ?”

“I am a Christian,” again replied Alexander.

“Away with him, then,” said the Governor, “to the beasts of the amphitheatre.”

Wherefore, on the following day, Alexander was led into the arena, together with Attalus, whom the Governor had also condemned to this kind of punish-

ment, in spite of his being a Roman citizen. Here they were made to endure all the torments which were usually inflicted in the amphitheatre, till at last they were beheaded. Whilst he was tortured, Alexander uttered neither groan nor complaint, but his soul, in sweet communion with God, seemed unconscious of the sufferings of the body. But when Attalus was placed in the red-hot iron chair, and when the fumes of his roasting limbs were almost suffocating him, he said to the people, in Latin :

“Behold what you are now doing ; this is what may be called to devour men. As for us we neither eat men, nor do we commit any other crimes.”

Some of the multitude said to him :

“Tell us, what is the name of thy God?”

“God,” replied Attalus, “hath no name like we mortals have.”

On the last day of the gladiatorial games, when all the other Martyrs had gone to receive their crown, the Virgin Blandina was again brought into the amphitheatre. She was accompanied by a youth of about fifteen years of age, Ponticus by name. During the struggle of the other Confessors, they had daily been forced to witness the cruelties endured by their Brethren, that this inhuman sight might induce them to forsake their Religion.

“Swear by the immortal gods of the Empire, and offer incense to them,” was the order unceasingly repeated.

“We adore the one, true God; we despise your idols,” was the ever ready reply of the faithful followers of Christ.

The Pagans were enraged when they saw how useless were their attempts to overcome the constancy of the youthful Christians. At first, indeed, they seemed to feel some commiseration for them, on account of the child-like appearance of the one, and the sex of the other. But when they perceived that the fortitude of these champions of the Faith was far beyond the years, sex, and condition of ordinary mortals, their fury knew no longer any bounds. Whatever new torments could be devised, were immediately heaped upon them. When Blandina beheld her companion writhing with agony, forgetful of her own sufferings, she exclaimed:

“Courage, Ponticus, a few moments more: joys never ending are awaiting thee.”

Thus comforted by the cheering words of his heroic sister, Ponticus generously underwent every torture, until his body presented but a bleeding mass of torn flesh, and his spirit went to join the glorious company of his martyred Brethren.

Last of all, Blandina,—as a noble mother that had animated her children to the combat, and sent them crowned with victory to the heavenly King,—now passing again through the same trials, hastened joyfully after them. After she had been scourged, she was thrown to the wild beasts, and her bleeding limbs were roasted in the iron chair. Then, being put into a net, she was cast before a mad bull, that tossed and gored her for a long time, till, apparently insensible to all sufferings, her throat was cut—thus becoming in very deed a victim immolated at the altar. The Pagans themselves, struck with astonishment at the extraordinary power of endurance displayed by this Christian maiden, candidly acknowledged, that they did not think it possible to suffer so long, so much, and so heroically, unless some supernatural aid had been vouchsafed.

However, the blood of the Martyrs did not satisfy the hatred and fury of the wicked. The demon, who had instigated them to their crime, prompted them also to rage against the lifeless bodies of the Servants of God. Reason and every feeling of humanity seemed to have forsaken both the people and the Governor. The remains of those who had died in prison were thrown to the dogs, and a strict guard was kept, both night and day, lest the Christians might carry them off and give them a decent

burial. The heads and mangled limbs of those who had suffered Martyrdom in the amphitheatre, were put together, and a band of soldiers prevented the Brethren from approaching them. Some of the more malevolent gnashed their teeth, at the sight of these holy relics, and sought an occasion to heap still greater outrages upon them: others scoffed at them, praising the idols, to whose vengeance they attributed the death of the Martyrs. Even they who had been more moderate, and they who seemed to exhibit some sympathy for the sufferings of the innocent victims, now gave utterance to their malignant feelings, and said :

“Where is now their God? what hath this religion, which they preferred to life itself, profited them?” Such were the sentiments and expressions of the Gentiles. The Brethren, meanwhile, felt the deepest concern, because they were unable to gain possession of the sacred remains.

The consequence of this anxiety of the Christians to bestow the last rites of a dutiful affection upon their departed friends, was a continual struggle between themselves and the soldiers. Again and again, in the dark of the night, did they watch for an opportunity to carry off the venerated remains; but in vain. Neither entreaties, nor the power of gold had any effect upon the guards: they preferred

to all this the barbarous pleasure of seeing the bodies of them, whom they hated without cause, mouldering into dust, without the honors of sepulture. Hence, during six days, the bodies of the Martyrs lay exposed to the insults of the mob; after this they were burnt, and the ashes cast into the Rhone—so that no relic might remain of them. The Pagans did this, because they knew that the Christians believed in the resurrection of the body, and they saw that this belief made them quite regardless of the transitory things of the present life, causing them to centre all their hopes on the everlasting one to come. “Now,” they said, “let us see, whether they will ever return to life again; or whether their God can snatch them out of our hands.”

These Martyrs suffered in the beginning of the pontificate of St. Eleutherius, A. D. 177. They were forty-eight in number. Some of their relics were afterwards miraculously recovered, and were deposited under the altar of the Church, which was anciently called the Church of the Apostles of Lyons.





V.

ALEXANDER AND EPIPODIUS.

AT the time when the persecution was raging at Lyons, very many of the Christians followed the counsel given us by our Lord: "When they shall persecute you in this city, flee ye into another." They who dwelt in the city thought it proper to avoid appearing in public, until the excitement had to a great extent abated. Hence it happened, that the Pagans, seeing the result of their inhuman proceedings against the followers of Christ, boasted that they had exterminated not only the Christians, but the very name of their Religion. However, the Gentiles may rage, and the people devise vain things; the kings of the earth may rise up, and princes meet together against the Lord and His Anointed: all their attempts shall at last prove useless.

At that time, there lived in Lyons two youthful

friends, Epipodius and Alexander by name. The former was a native of the city, the latter was, by birth, a Greek. Both of illustrious families, they were even more distinguished by their virtues and innocency of life. From their tenderest years the ties of genuine friendship had bound them together. The same studies and literary pursuits had united them still more closely. As they advanced in years and knowledge, their intimacy grew also stronger, because they learned to encourage each other in the practice of the greatest virtues and the highest perfection. Nor was their success less than the zeal with which they applied themselves to holiness of life. Temperance, poverty, chastity, faith, every work of mercy, made them beforehand victims worthy to be immolated one day on the altar of Religion: yea, by anticipation, they appeared to enjoy all the merit of Martyrdom before wearing its crown. Free from all worldly ties, as their hearts so their outward behavior had ever continued wholly unsullied. So simple and unobtrusive had been their manner of living, that none of the Pagans seemed to suspect that they were professors of a Religion which the malice of Satan had rendered odious in their eyes. For, it was nothing unusual, even in those days, that young persons of wealth and distinction should not engage in public

affairs, but devote themselves to science and philosophy. Yet, when the hour of trial came, the two youths were betrayed to the authorities by those to whom they had ever shown the greatest kindness—their own domestics.

The Governor of the Province, indignant because two persons so well known had been enabled to elude his grasp, ordered them to be seized without delay. But Alexander and Epipodius, aware of their danger, succeeded in making their escape. They concealed themselves near the city, in the cottage of a Christian widow of great piety and fidelity. Here they lived for some time in perfect security; for none suspected that a dwelling of so lowly an appearance could be the hiding-place of the two young men. Here they served God with thankfulness for His present protection, and, by prayer and penitential exercises, prepared themselves for whatsoever destiny His providence might have reserved for them thereafter. At last, however, a spy discovered their place of concealment, and soon returned with a band of the Governor's guards to arrest them. They endeavored once more to make their escape, and in his flight Epipodius lost one of his shoes, which was afterwards found by their kind hostess, who preserved it as a most precious treasure—and so, indeed, it proved to be.

No sooner were they arrested, than, contrary to the Roman laws, without a previous interrogatory, they were thrown into prison; because the very name of Christian seemed a crime sufficiently great to warrant such a treatment.

Three days after, the noble youths were led as prisoners before the tribunal of the Governor. A vast multitude of people filled the *Pretorium*, all eager to hear the condemnation of the two Confessors of the Faith, and to see them put to the torture. The magistrate, assuming a look of the utmost severity, and with a voice that betrayed his inward wrath, asked them :

“Who are ye, young men? what is your name and your profession?”

They, without exhibiting the least emotion of fear, answered :

“Our names are Alexander and Epipodius; by profession we are Christians.”

“What!” said the Governor, foaming with rage, “know ye not, that I have sworn to exterminate the very name of that odious Religion?”

“We know not what you have sworn,” they modestly replied, “but this we know, that we are Christians, and faithful subjects of the Empire.”

“Faithful subjects, indeed,” he exclaimed with a sneer. “Impudent young men, who dare to insult

the immortal gods themselves! who set at naught the sacred ordinances of our princes! Is it then to no purpose that I have used the rack, the cross, the sword, the wild beasts of the amphitheatre, the torments of fire—protracted even beyond death? Whence such rashness? whence such insolence?"

"We are neither rash nor insolent," they said; "we are dutiful to our rulers, in whatever things wherein they have a right to command. But as Christians, we know that the Supreme Ruler of all things has the first claim on our obedience."

"Dare ye still utter that hated name of Christian! Unless ye do forthwith renounce your unholy profession, and adore the gods of Cæsar, ye shall suffer the severest penalties of the laws."

"We are willing to undergo our torments," they answered, "but we cannot do that which is contrary to the dictates of our reason and conscience."

Thereupon the Governor gave orders, that the two friends should be separated, lest by words and signs they might encourage each other to fight bravely for the Faith. Wherefore, Alexander, who was the eldest, was hurried away to a dungeon, and Epipodius left alone to face the struggle.

The Governor, imagining that it would not be difficult to overcome the opposition of the youth, now that he had not the presence and example of

his more experienced friend to cheer him on, resolved to try the effect of blandishment. Using the artful cunning of the serpent of old, he endeavored to instil into his mind the secret poison by means of soft words—which are so frequently effective where harshness is wont to fail.

“I see,” said he, “that thou art a youth of good sense, and of an amiable disposition. What a pity it would be, wert thou to persevere and perish in defense of so wretched a cause. I know, that the virtues of piety and religion animate thy heart; but thou needest not forsake these. Thinkest thou that we, and our august Emperors, are devoid of similar sentiments? Have we not a religion and temples and gods? All nations worship our deities, and herein do but follow the example of our pious sovereigns. It is true, our gods love to see their worshippers happy and joyful: we honor them amidst banquets, and songs, and games, and pleasures of every sort that can delight the senses. Man is born for happiness, and, faithful to our destiny, we endeavor to realize it whilst we live. But the Christians follow a Religion of pain and cheerlessness. They adore a man who was nailed to a cross, who condemns all men that enjoy the good things of this life, who commands his worshippers to pass their days in fasting and penance,

who counsels a chastity which is selfish and profitless. And, after all, of what assistance to any one can that God be, who was unable to defend Himself against the persecution of the vilest of wretches? Be then reasonable; follow my advice; worship the mighty gods of the Empire. Prompted by the kindest feelings, and through sympathy for thy youth and inexperience, I say these things. If thou art wise, do not rush headlong to destruction, but seize the opportunity now offered thee of enjoying the life of a prudent and noble youth."

To this insidious speech of the Governor, Epipodius answered:

"The grace of Jesus Christ, and the teaching of the Catholic Faith, have not left me so unguarded and inexperienced as to be moved by your pretended kindness toward me. Your apparent compassion is real cruelty. The life which you hold out to me, as an inducement to forsake the Religion which I profess, would be for me a certain pledge of everlasting death: the destruction wherewith you threaten me, is a transition from danger and misery to a bliss that knows no ending. To perish by your hands, accustomed to shed the blood of the innocent, and to seal the truth with my blood, is the object of my highest aspirations. Moreover, this God, whom you mention, and whom we adore

as the true and only Sovereign Lord of the universe, do you know, that by His own power, He rose again from among the dead? For, being both God and man, by an unutterable mystery, He opened for His servants the way to immortality, and prepared for them thrones of glory in the everlasting kingdom of His Father. But I perceive that these sublime truths are altogether beyond the reach of your unenlightened understanding: I will, for your sake, make use of the ordinary language of men. Is your mind so blind as not to know, that man consists of a two fold substance—spirit and matter—a body and a soul? Among us Christians the soul commands; the body obeys. The infamous pleasures wherein ye indulge, to serve your gods—as you say—may perhaps delight the body, but they kill the soul. What sort of a life, then, can that be which gratifies the meaner part and brings destruction to that which is the nobler? We Christians, we wage an unceasing war, for the sake of the soul, against the evil inclinations of the body: her we defend against every assault, whencesoever it may come, that would sully her purity. Do not boast to me of your piety and religion. I know, that your God is your belly: to that one ye offer your sacrifices. Your life is like that of the irrational animals; and with your death you im-

agine there is an end of all things. But we, when we die by your torments and persecutions, are certain that, from a temporary and transitory existence, we pass into a life of unending blissfulness."

The Governor could not withhold an expression of astonishment, when he heard so youthful a person discoursing in this manner. His admiration, however, did not continue long.

"Tell me," he said to Epipodius, "dost thou really believe all these pretty fables, whereon thy hopes of the hereafter are founded?"

"The things which I have uttered," replied the youth, "are not fables but truths, which I do not only believe, but of which I am certain."

"Men of sense, however, deem them absurd and ridiculous," said the Governor.

"All men of good sense," replied Epipodius, "your own philosophers included, have ever, at least substantially, believed and taught the same things."

"Ah! I see. Thou art not only well-taught thyself, but art able to teach even us."

"What we know well," said Epipodius, "it is not difficult to communicate to others: neither is it unbecoming in youth to make known the truth to the aged, who are ignorant thereof."

"Such freedom and insolence," said the Governor,

growing angry, "must not be tolerated. Young man, if reason cannot subdue thee, I will see what blows can effect." Whereupon he ordered him to be struck on the mouth. The pain caused by this blow did by no means depress the spirits of the holy youth. As he spit from his mouth the blood and several of his teeth, he said :

"I confess, that Jesus Christ is one God, together with the Father and the Holy Ghost. I deem it meet that I should restore to Him my soul, which He not only gave me, but also ransomed with His own Sacred Blood. For I know, that, by dying, life is not taken away from me, but my present existence is changed into one immeasurably better. Then, it matters little in what manner this earthly dwelling of my soul is destroyed, provided my spirit freed from this body, be admitted into the everlasting joys of heaven."

No sooner had the youthful Confessor uttered these words than the Governor, unable to contain his anger at the holy freedom of the servant of Christ, ordered him to be stretched upon the rack. Whilst he was thus placed in a helpless position, the executioners tore his sides with iron hooks. However, this cruel torture did not satisfy the savage brutality of the mob. They cried out, that the Martyr should be delivered up to them. "If he

can endure your torments," they said to the Governor, "let us see whether he will not yield to the punishment which we know how to inflict."

On this they began to pick up stones to hurl them at the bleeding victim of their fury: others begged to be allowed to tear him to pieces.

Meanwhile, Epipodius, calm and resigned, and apparently unconscious of the excitement of which he was the innocent cause, held inward communion with his Saviour, the meditation on whose sufferings gave him strength and courage to suffer all things. The Governor, perceiving the evil disposition of the people, and fearing lest he himself might become the object of their hatred, ordered the Martyr to be taken from the rack. Then he had him secretly conveyed to a distance, and, before the mob seemed aware of what was going on, Epipodius was beheaded. Thus, by the providence of God, what promised to be the beginning of a long series of torments was, in reality, a sudden ending of the young Martyr's suffering.

Two days after the Martyrdom of his companion, the blessed Alexander was summoned before the tribunal. The Governor thought by this delay to gratify his own malice against the prisoner, and to satisfy the desire of the people, who continued to show signs of sedition, on account of their previous

disappointment. Yet, in spite of his inclination to proceed at once to extreme measures, when Alexander was brought before him, he pretended to be animated with the kindest feelings. Wherefore, addressing the young champion of the Faith, he said to him :

“Alexander, that which thou hast already endured, and the example of thy brethren, ought to be a sufficient warning to thee, not to despise our threats.”

“He that fears God,” replied the youth, “needs not fear the threats of man.”

“Remember,” continued the Governor, “that thy destiny is in thy own hands. Thou mayest yet secure for thyself a life of happiness. Do not by thy obstinacy bring upon thyself the greatest miseries.”

“I have no other desire,” said Alexander, “than to secure for myself the greatest happiness. This I can obtain by confessing the name of Christ before men—even as my brethren have done. If I am judged worthy to do this, I shall soon enjoy the blessed companionship of my friends, who now rejoice in a blissful immortality.”

“As to thy friends, I know that they have perished like miserable wretches. We have waged such a war against them, that, I dare say, thou art



the only one who canst boast of having escaped. Be wise, therefore, forsake thy impiety ; offer incense to the immortal gods, that they may protect thee against the fate of thy late companion."

Then the blessed Martyr lifted up his eyes toward heaven, and said :

"I return thanks to my God, who gives me grace to rejoice, when I hear of the torments which my brethren have undergone before me. I thank Him, because He enabled them to triumph for His glory over the powers of darkness. Do not imagine that your threats affright me ; I long to suffer even as they have suffered. Do you think that those souls, whom, by your cruelty, you have set free from their bodies, are not now living ? Be not mistaken : they possess the glory of heaven ; but their persecutors have drawn destruction upon themselves. How I pity your blindness ! The Christian name, which you flatter yourself to extinguish amidst streams of blood, is one that is imperishable : God himself is its author. The life of those who bear it guards and adorns it ; their death makes it known everywhere. Our God dwells in the heavens, which Himself hath created ; the earth is His possession ; by His justice He reigns even in hell. Remember that the souls, whom you think to destroy, together with the bodies, are taken up by Him into the

kingdom of heaven. But yourselves, together with your gods, who are demons, shall go down to hell. By putting to death my beloved brother, you have secured for him that supreme bliss which I am anxious to share with him. I am a Christian, such I have always been, and I am resolved to persevere in my Faith. You may torment my body, which, formed as it is out of the earth, is subject to the infirmities of earthly things; but my soul, which is beyond the reach of your power, will be preserved and received by Him who gave the same unto me."

The words of the generous youth enraged the Governor to such a degree that, unable to contain his pent-up feelings, he burst forth into the most violent expressions. Then, as it were ashamed of owning his defeat, he said:

"What is the use of bandying words? Young man, prepare thyself to submit at once to the law of the Empire, or suffer its vengeance."

"If I am required to do what my God forbids, I repeat it, I can never consent to defile my soul, for the sake of pleasing men."

"Thinkest thou, that this God of thine can save thee from our hands?"

"If it so pleases Him, He can and He will. But this I do not ask. I rather beg, that He give me strength and grace to confess His holy name before