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THE ACTS

OF THE

EARLY MARTYRS

BY

J. A. M. FASTRÉ, S. J.

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THE MARTYRS.

I.

ST. PONTIUS.

THIS glorious Martyr is one of those favored servants of God of whom it may be well said, that they seem especially chosen to manifest to men the mysterious ways of Providence in the choice of the elect. His father, Marcus, was a distinguished Roman Senator,—a man of great influence with all classes of people in the Imperial City, on account of his immense possessions, and still more on account of his generous character and dignified deportment; and Julia, his mother, likewise belonged to one of the most ancient and illustrious families of Rome. They were both pagans, and obstinately addicted to all the practices and superstitions of idolatrous worship. For many years they had lived together without having children; and when, at last, a son was born to them, instead

of rejoicing, Julia wished that the child should be destroyed, because a priest of the idols had assured her that if she gave birth to a son, he should one day overthrow the temples and the altars of the gods. Marcus, however, seeing the exceeding beauty of the child, was unwilling to give heed to the reasonings and imaginary fears of his wife, and said:

“If the great Jupiter is afraid, let him kill this little one; but let us not be guilty of so enormous a crime. We will train him up in such a manner that he may be an honor to the family and an ornament to the State.”

Thus the child was saved from destruction, and the father gave him the name of Pontius,—from the Pontian family, of which he was himself at the time the chief representative.

As the youthful Pontius grew up, he became daily more and more endeared to his father, who chose for him the best instructors in every branch of learning. The extraordinary talents of the son, his amiable disposition and ingenuous conduct, convinced the aged Senator that his future heir would more than realize his fondest hopes. Having, however, his misgivings, lest, after all, there might be some truth in the unpleasant forebodings of his wife, he gave strict orders to the attendants that, under no

pretense whatsoever, they should at any time permit young Pontius to enter the temples of the gods. These orders did not appear to the youth a restraint on his freedom, since the zeal wherewith he devoted himself to his studies left him but little time to indulge in idle curiosity; for, like most of the Roman youths of his rank in those days, he considered these visits to the temples as an unmeaning ceremony, kept up merely for outward display—rather as a civil than a religious custom.

Besides having their own private tutors, the children of patricians were wont to attend the lectures of some celebrated public instructor, to whose school they repaired, accompanied by a numerous train of servants. One day, having arisen very early, it happened that Pontius, thus accompanied, was going through the streets on his way to school; as he passed by a certain dwelling, his attention was attracted by the sweet melody of many voices wafted through the morning air. He drew near, and stopped to listen to the words of the chant, so solemn and simple, and to him so strange, that came from the upper room, and the words he heard were these:

“But our God is in heaven: He hath done all things whatsoever he would. The idols of the Gentiles are silver and gold, the works of the hands

of men. They have mouths and speak not: they have eyes and see not.

“They have ears and hear not: they have noses and smell not: they have hands and feel not: they have feet and walk not: neither shall they cry out through their throat.

“Let them that make them become like unto them: and all such as trust in them.”

Pontius appeared carried away with emotion whilst the singing continued; and, as soon as it ceased, turning to Valerius, his foster-brother, he said:

“Who can they be that sing so early the praises of their God?—and so great a God!”

“I know not,” replied Valerius, “unless they be the Christians, who, it is said, are ever engaged in praying, and assemble even during the night to offer sacrifice to their God.”

Pontius stood for some moments absorbed in thought, then heaved a deep sigh, and, as his eyes filled with tears, raised his hands toward heaven, and said aloud: “O God, whose praises these persons are singing, grant me also to know Thee.”

Thereupon, bidding his attendants to await his return, he said to Valerius:

Let us try whether, perhaps, we may not gain admittance into the place: if so, we will accept it as a good omen.”

And immediately going forward, they began to knock at the door. Soon one of the assembled faithful, looking down from a window and having seen what was going on below, went up to the Pontiff, who presided in the assembly, and said :

“Holy Father, a noble youth and his companion are standing at the door, and ask to be admitted.”

“Go quickly,” replied the Pontiff, enlightened by the Spirit of God, “open the door and suffer them to come unto us, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.”

The door-keeper who let them in, gave them to understand that, no doubt unknowingly, they had asked to be present at a meeting of Christians, who were celebrating the Sacred Mysteries, when only the initiated could be admitted ; but yet that this privilege was extended to them by a special permission, granted by the venerable Pontianus, the chief Pastor of the Christians. Pontius expressed his thanks for so great a favor, and, with his companion, withdrew to a retired part of the room, where they could witness the ceremonies of the sacred liturgy.

As soon as the assembly was dismissed, the Pontiff invited the two youths to come to him. Pontius was struck with reverent awe at the sight of the aged Bishop, and, humbly kneeling before him, said :

"I beseech you, most holy Father, pardon my bold intrusion. It is not through a vain curiosity, but from a sincere desire of acquiring knowledge that I am here. Whilst passing through the street, my attention was drawn to the words of a hymn sung in this place; I am exceedingly anxious to learn the meaning of them: 'Our God is in heaven: the idols of the Gentiles are dumb and blind and deaf: they neither feel with their hands, nor do they walk with their feet;' and, above all, what mean these words: 'Let all them that trust in them, become like unto them?'"

The venerable Bishop replied:

"I know, my beloved son, that the God of truth has so far enlightened thy mind as to make thee seek Him in sincerity. Does it not seem to thee, that all images made of metal, whether of iron, silver or gold, are taken out of the earth? Who does not know that statues of stone and marble are taken from quarries, put upon wagons, then drawn by oxen, and, finally, exposed in public places? These things, put into shape by the hands of men, are no gods; they are taken out of the earth, and, after a time, return again to earth. But the true God, in whom we trust, reigns in the heavens: He is not seen with the eyes of the body; He is known with the eyes of the mind, and loved with the affec-

tions of the heart. Besides, my son, why should any one seek after and long for that which he can see before him?"

"My lord and venerated father," answered the youth, "I know that all those objects of which you speak are without life and motion. I see them along the streets and in the forum, and, I am told, they are in the Capitol and in the temples in such multitudes that we could not count them, and in every variety of form which the fancy of sculptors has been able to invent; but what are they after all? They must be fastened with lead and iron upon their pedestals, lest a puff of wind overturn them. I have also heard that they are sometimes stolen by thieves, and broken to pieces. How then, I say, can they be gods and protectors of men, when they are unable to take care of themselves, and must be watched over by poor mortals, lest some harm befall them?"

The blessed Pontianus, while listening to these reasonings of the unknown youth, was filled with joy and wonder. He blessed God in his heart for bringing him into his presence in a manner so providential, and, taking him by the hand and raising him up—for the modest Pontius was still kneeling before the Pontiff—he said:

"Sit here by me, my child, that we may both be

more at ease to converse with each other on the important matters which thou desirest to know."

"Pardon me, holy Father," said the young patrician, "if I refuse your kind invitation; for, if we dare not be seated in the presence of those who teach us common and often useless things, how could I forget myself so far as to do this in the presence of one who is willing to point out to me the way of truth, and lead me from darkness into light?"

"Our Master and Teacher, Jesus Christ," replied Pontianus, "has made us understand that we should all be one in Him, and that we should freely and willingly communicate to one another the knowledge we have received. Now, my son, permit me to ask thee first of all, hast thou still a father and mother?"

"It is now well-nigh two years since my mother died," answered Pontius. "My father, however, is still living, but he is stricken in years and quite infirm, and I am his only son."

"Is he a Christian, or is he a Pagan?" inquired the Pontiff.

"Alas! most holy Father," replied the youth, "he is a worshipper of idols; and, what is worse, I do not think that there is in the city a man more blindly devoted to what he calls his gods."

"The God of mercy," said Pontianus, "who, without the intervention of any man, has opened thy

eyes to the light of truth, is also able to take away the blindness of thy father. Nay more; I feel persuaded that it is by means of thee, my son, that He will call unto the life of immortality him who gave unto thee this mortal life. Meanwhile, my beloved son, hearken to my words: believe in Christ our Lord, whose teachings I will make known to thee. Begin from this day to lead the life of a true follower of Him who came down upon earth to point out to the children of men the way which leads to life everlasting, that thus, being made worthy of being born again by Baptism, the Sacrament of regeneration, thou mayest escape those endless torments which are the portion of them that refuse to avail themselves of the mercies of our Father who is in heaven."

After this he continued, during three hours, to explain to the youth and his companion the doctrines of the Christian Faith; and, blessing them, he said that he received them among the catechumens. When the youths left the presence of the holy Bishop, and returned again to their dwelling, they were so cheerful and light-hearted that the attendants wondered exceedingly, unable as they were to account for the mysterious change which had come over their young master. Day after day they saw him faithfully return to the same place,

and his behavior toward them, which had hitherto been one of dignified superiority, now became so kind and charitable, that they were lost in admiration. For they knew not yet that in him was being verified that saying of the Apostle, "where sin abounded, there grace did much more abound."

Meanwhile, at the request of the blessed Pontianus, the prayers of the Christians were constantly offered up for the conversion of the Senator Marcus, and, after a time, the holy Bishop said to the young catechumen, that he should avail himself of the first opportunity to speak to his aged father about a matter so important to his soul's salvation; and that he ought to look upon himself as God's chosen instrument to bestow upon one so dear to him this great blessing. Pontius had not long to wait. One day, on his return from school, as well as from the visit to his Christian teacher, Marcus said to him:

"Art thou making progress in thy studies, my son? Have thy learned preceptors taught thee any thing new of late?"

"At no time before this, father," answered Pontius, "have I learnt so many, and such wonderful things."

"It gives me pleasure to hear it," said Marcus. "I trust that, by thy scholarly attainments, thou wilt one day be an honor to our family; but what

I desire still more is that, by thy noble and virtuous deportment, thou wilt strive to deserve the commendation of every true Roman, and, above all, gain the favor of the immortal gods, the protectors of the Empire."

"But, beloved father," replied the youth, "I hear that many great and learned men say that the gods we worship are no gods at all, that they possess neither dignity nor life; and, indeed, this seems to me true, so far as I can see and judge; they have the features and members of human bodies, yet these are of no use to them. Moreover, I know that, whenever any one wishes to do so, he calls in some skilful workman, and, according as it suits his humor, and his wealth permits, he bids him make gods of gold, of silver, of brass, or some other material. Now, please tell me, dear father, did you ever see or hear that the gods you have in your own dwelling here, did, at any time, do anything to show that they have life or possess any power?"

"No, never," replied the Senator, sternly.

"Why, then," asked Pontius, "do you offer sacrifices and burn incense in their honor?"

At this question Marcus grew very wroth, and, drawing his sword, seemed ready to slay his son.

"What!" cried he, "darest thou, in my presence, offer this insult to my gods?"

The youth stood calm and fearless before him. At this sight, the anger of the father was at once subdued, and, after a few moments of silence, he said, in a voice which betrayed no longer the least excitement :

“So then, my son, we alone, in this immense city, shall live without having either gods or sacrifices?”

“It need not be so, father,” replied Pontius.

“How then, tell me, thinkest thou to repair the loss; we must either have gods or no gods?” asked Marcus.

“There are in this city many persons who offer a true sacrifice to the One true God.”

“How can there be many such persons? I know none of them. Perchance they are some poor ignorant fellows, whom no one cares for; they may be satisfied with one god, because their poverty does not allow them to honor many.”

“Do not hastily make so unfair a supposition, sir,” said Pontius. “They are neither poor nor ignorant: there are among them men of every rank in society, and their wisdom far surpasses that of our greatest philosophers.”

“If this be so, my son, pray where shall we find them?” asked the Senator, whose curiosity was now thoroughly awakened.

“Give me your permission, father,” answered

Pontius, "and I will soon make you acquainted with a man worthy of your fullest confidence. He will gladly clear up whatever doubts you may have respecting this important matter."

"Go at once, my son," said Marcus.

Immediately the youth, attended by his faithful companion, Valerius, repaired to the abode of the venerable Pontianus, and related to him all that had occurred at his home. When the holy Bishop received this happy intelligence, his heart was filled with joy. He gave thanks to the Father of mercies, and exclaimed: "Truly this is the change of the right hand of the Most High." He instantly accompanied the two catechumens to the mansion of the Senator. Pontius introduced him to his father as the chief Bishop of the Christians. This announcement did not startle the aged Marcus; for the very appearance of the servant of God inspired him with full confidence, as the son had foretold. During several hours they conversed together. Pontianus explained the doctrines of the Christian religion, and the Spirit of God so moved the willing and earnest seeker after truth, that, before the holy Father returned to his dwelling, Marcus requested him not to depart until he had seen every idol, and every vestige of idol-worship in the house overthrown and utterly destroyed. Great and inex-

pressible was the delight of young Pontius and that of his companion, as they helped one another in converting the haunt of demons into a pleasant abode for zealous Christians.

After some days, when the Senator had been sufficiently instructed, the blessed Pontianus baptized him, together with all the members of his household. From that day, Marcus became a pattern of every Christian virtue; for he was resolved to make amends for his past folly by his devotion to the cause of truth. His conversion did not fail to produce the happiest results; many of the Romans, following his example, embraced Christianity, and, laying aside all the pride of birth and position, gloried in being the companions—even the servants—of the lowliest among the Faithful. Thus did Divine Providence reward the purity of heart and the blameless conversation of the youthful Pontius, and cheer him on in his career of holiness.

When Pontius had attained his twenty-second year, his father, Marcus, departed this life, full of years and merits. The affectionate son thanked God unceasingly for all the mercies granted to his noble parent, and resolved to devote himself still more strenuously to all the duties of religion. It was, therefore, not without regret that, six months after the death of his father, he was, by order of the

Emperor, obliged to take his place among the Senators of Rome. This position, however, if it did not permit him to give himself wholly to the service of his brethren, enabled him afterwards to do much good, which, in an inferior station, he might not have effected.

During several years, that is, since the death of Severus, in A. D. 211, the Christians had remained unmolested; the Emperor Alexander had even favored them in many ways. But after the assassination of this generous prince, no sooner had the barbarian Maximinus seized the Roman purple, than he commenced a general persecution against the Church. The venerable Pontianus was, by his order, sent to the Island of Sardinia and there beaten to death. His successor, Anterus, was crowned with martyrdom, a little more than a month after he had been raised to the Pontifical Chair. St. Fabian, who succeeded him, had so great a regard for the blessed Pontius, that he always treated him as an affectionate son. Pontius, that he might more closely follow his Divine Master, sold his vast possessions, and, by the hand of the holy Pontiff, distributed the amount among the poor of Christ. At no time could this charity of the servant of God have been more opportune. The unsettled state of the Empire, the constantly recurring change of rulers, war and persecu-

tion, had spread want and suffering among the Faithful. After these trials, however, God granted them again a short interval, if not of repose, at least of temporary relief.

When the Emperor Philip had gained possession of the supreme power, he raised his son Philip to the dignity of Cæsar. Although they had acquired their authority by very unfair means, yet, when once secure in its possession, they endeavored to atone in a great measure for this fault, by the evenhanded justice of their administration of public affairs. In spite of their devotedness to the superstitions of paganism, they treated their Christian subjects with great forbearance, and even kindness. Pontius, especially, was held by them in the highest esteem, and it was not long before they both received the reward of their generous conduct.

In the third year of the reign of Philip occurred the one thousandth anniversary of the building of Rome. On the twentieth of April, the festivals to celebrate this great event were begun with extraordinary splendor. As Pontius enjoyed the intimate friendship of both the Emperor and the Cæsar, and happened to be at the palace on that day, they said to him :

“Come with us, Pontius. We are going to the Capitol to render propitious the great gods of the

Empire, who have granted us the happiness of seeing this day,—so glorious for Rome and for the whole world. It is proper that we all should show our thankfulness to them.”

“You know,” replied Pontius, “that I am a Christian, and can by no means take part in your worship. You will hold me excused, as I mean to commemorate the occasion in a manner suited to the dictates of my conscience and of my religion.”

“Come with us as a friend,” they said; “it is not necessary to join us in the sacrifices offered to the gods.”

“It would render me guilty in the sight of the true God,” answered the Christian, “were I to give so evil an example to men.” Then, thinking that Providence had given him an opportunity of doing good which he ought not to neglect, he added:

“But, O most kind Princes, since the God of heaven and earth has given you power and command over men, why not give Him honor, and acknowledge His goodness? He has honored you, and thankfulness in return is due to Him from you.”

“I know that very well, my dear Pontius,” said Philip, the Emperor; “and that is the very reason for which I am so anxious to return thanks to Jove, the greatest of all the gods: he only could have

given me success, and power to rule the Roman Empire."

Pontius smiled, and said: "Do not mistake, my beloved Sovereign; there is a God in the heavens, who, by His Word, has given existence to all that is, and, by His Spirit, has animated everything that has life."

"What is the reason," asked both the Emperor and his son, "of thy speaking to us in this manner, especially on this day?"

"Because the occasion is so favorable," answered the Senator. "Please answer me this: Did Jupiter exist from the very beginning of things?"

"Not at all," replied the Emperor. "His father, Saturn, who, during the Golden Age, ruled over Italy, existed before him."

"And previous to that time—while Saturn reigned in Crete, before he was driven thence by his son, Jupiter,—were there no people in Italy? Do not your histories say, that, after his expulsion, he was hospitably received by them? Do not, O most gracious Princes, suffer yourselves to be misled by the foolish inventions of poets. There is but One true God, the Father of all, who, with His Son, and the Holy Spirit, did, in the beginning, create all things out of nothing, and preserves and governs them by His omnipotent power."

“If there is but one God,” said the Emperor, “who reigns in the heavens, why sayest thou that He also has a Son?”

“Assuredly, there is and can be but one God, as I said, the Creator and Supreme Ruler of the universe. He also created man immortal, in his own image and likeness, and gave him command over all things placed upon earth. The devil, however, who had been cast out of heaven for his disobedience, seeing man so greatly honored, was moved by envy, and persuaded the father of the human race to transgress the command of the Creator. In consequence of this sin, our first parent was despoiled of immortality, and, together with all his descendants, became subject to death. The evil one was not satisfied with having once deceived man, but resolved to draw him altogether, if possible, from the knowledge and service of his Maker. For this purpose he invented idols, and induced deluded men to worship them: such is the origin of your false gods. But the merciful Creator, unwilling that poor man, whom He had made in His own image, should utterly perish, sent His only Word, by whom He had created all things that have being, from heaven upon earth. This Word, the only-begotten Son of the Eternal Father, took upon Himself our human nature, was born of a stainless Virgin, and, appearing among

men, showed them the way to regain what they had lost by the fall—the way of salvation. It was in Judea that the Redeemer appeared, as had been foretold ages before by the inspired Prophets. He manifested His divine power by the countless wonders which He worked: He healed the sick, cleansed the lepers, gave sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf, and, in the sight of great multitudes, He restored the dead to life. His countrymen according to the flesh, received Him not, but, hard-hearted and envious as they were, they delivered Him up to Pilate, the Roman Governor, to be put to death. It was through love for man that He chose to suffer and die for them, that by His death He might conquer death itself; wherefore also, on the third day, He arose from among the dead, and during forty days conversed again with men, instructing them in the doctrines of salvation and commanding them to go forth all over the world to proclaim the glad tidings of Redemption. After which, in the presence of the assembled brethren, He returned in triumph to the bosom of His Eternal Father. Thus He taught, by word and example, all them that would be willing to follow Him, what they must believe and practice, that, after this short and transitory life upon earth, they may enjoy everlasting bliss with Him. But they who refuse to believe in Christ, the

Saviour of men, shall be lost forever and punished with the devil and his wicked followers.”

The Emperor and his son were so struck with the words of the noble Christian, that they continued for a long time to discuss the doctrines of Christianity. They refused to assist at the sacrifices offered in the Capitol, and contented themselves, during the days of the festivities, with being present at the public games.

Meanwhile, Pontius went to the holy Pontiff, Fabian, and related to him all he had said and done. The Pope was filled with joy, and immediately kneeling down, returned thanks to God, who, by means of his servant Pontius, had brought the rulers of the Empire to a knowledge of His holy name. A few days afterwards, the holy Father, with Pontius, repaired to the imperial palace, and, when the two Princes were sufficiently instructed, he baptized them. During the remainder of his reign, Philip enacted many wise and beneficial laws to repress the excess of paganism and its superstitious practices.

After two years, however, the Emperor and the Cæsar being slain, Decius took possession of the Empire. During his short reign, he inaugurated a most bloody persecution against the Church, which was continued by Gallus, his successor. During all

this time the blessed Pontius was able to conceal himself in the city. But when those fierce persecutors, Valerian and Gallienus, decreed that whosoever should give shelter to a Christian, or refuse to betray him, should be put to the torture and to death, knowing that, under these circumstances, he could no longer find a hiding-place in Rome, he thought it his duty to follow the advice of our Lord, "If they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another." Wherefore, withdrawing beyond the confines of Italy, he took up his abode in Cimela, a small city at the foot of the Alps. Nevertheless, he was not long in safety even in this town, upon which he had looked as a secure asylum. The masters of the Empire, having determined to root out the very name of Christian, sent their ministers into every Province. Claudius, the newly appointed Governor of that part of Gaul, accompanied by his assessor, Anabius, spent some days in Cimela. Having, upon inquiry, discovered that there were several Christians in the town, he set up his tribunal in the forum, and gave orders to have them brought before him. When the Governor learnt that Pontius was among them, he rejoiced exceedingly, and summoned him before all the others. The Confessor, seeing that it was the will of God that he should remain no longer unknown, boldly presented himself

before Claudius. Hardly able to conceal the satisfaction he felt at having before him so noble a prisoner, the Governor said:

“Art thou that Pontius who some time ago created so much confusion in the city of Rome, and estranged the minds of her princes from the worship of the gods?”

“I am Pontius,” answered the Saint. “At no time have I anywhere caused confusion. I have, however, to the best of my ability, endeavored to lead others from the slavery of demons to the knowledge and service of Christ the Lord.”

“Our glorious Princes, Valerian and Gallienus,” resumed Claudius, “having heard of thy doings, have commissioned me to see to it that thou offer sacrifice to the gods. Shouldst thou refuse, I have orders to punish thee, in spite of thy noble birth and high rank, as disgracefully as the vilest of evil-doers.”

“Christ our Lord is my Comforter,” replied Pontius. “If for his sake I lose the things of time, I shall gain those of eternity: if I am deprived of earthly dignities, I shall inherit heavenly glory with the saints and angels.”

“Of what use is all that foolish nonsense?” said the Governor. “Sacrifice according to my bidding, or I will have thy body torn to pieces.”

“I am a Christian, as you know very well,” said Pontius. “I despise and detest your demons.”

Claudius, thereupon, sent him to prison, for, although he had boastfully spoken of his powers, he was too wary to make use of them without first consulting his imperial masters when there was question of a person of distinction. Wherefore, he sent a message to the Emperors to the effect that, on his arrival in Gaul, he had met with the Senator Pontius, who at one time had produced a great excitement in Rome by destroying several temples of the gods, and afterwards refusing to obey the imperial mandates. Soon the answer was received: “If the Senator Pontius be unwilling to comply at once with our command, full power is hereby given to Claudius, the Governor, to punish him or put him to death, in whatsoever manner he may think fit.”

Forthwith the Martyr being sent for, the Governor said to him:

“The peremptory orders, which I have just received from our most gracious Sovereigns, tell me, that thou must at once be made to offer sacrifice to the great gods of the Empire, or else be subject to torture as the vilest of criminals.”

“The Lord and Master whose sovereignty I acknowledge,” replied Pontius, “is Jesus Christ. He

can free me, if it is His holy will, from the torments wherewith you are pleased to threaten me."

"I am astonished," resumed Claudius, "that thou, who art a man of rank and distinction, shouldst debase thyself so much as to acknowledge as thy Master a poor and despised person, whom Pilate, a man of my own rank and power, put to death. Why dost thou not call thy lords and masters those mighty Princes who rule the Empire with so much wisdom and moderation?"

"I am still more astonished," answered Pontius, "that you, who seem to be a man of good common sense, can so far forget your better judgment as not to confess Him, who, although He is Sovereign Lord of heaven and earth, disdained not for your salvation to become poor and despised. Do you call Him without honor, who, in heaven, is praised and adored by the angels? If He suffered himself to be falsely accused by the Jews, and put to death by Pilate, it was His own free choice—that He might the better manifest His exceeding love for men. O, if you would humble yourself before so great and merciful a God, and raise your mind to heaven, how clearly you would see, that with your gods—who are nothing but wicked devils—you are groping in an abyss of utter darkness! As to your Princes, who, you say, govern the Empire with so much

wisdom, if they continue to worship idols of wood and stone, they will go to everlasting destruction, and drag along with them the unfortunate people who are their subjects. Hence, it is good for you to know it, if you persevere in this your blindness, you shall soon be forced to bid farewell to the things of this world, and receive in the day of judgment the disgraceful sentence of endless damnation—together with your senseless idols.”

This noble answer so aroused the wrath of the Governor, that he forthwith shouted to his attendants:

“Be ready with all the instruments of torture: the rack, the iron claws, the torches, the fetters. We must bring this madman to his senses.”

When the executioners reported that every thing was ready, Claudius added:

“Now, stretch him upon the rack; give him the full weight of the instrument, and let us see whether his God has power to free him from our hands.”

As they placed him upon the horrid instrument, Pontius said:

“Though your unbelief makes you say and think that there are things impossible for my Lord and Master, I feel confident that, in the Name of Jesus Christ, all your torturing will amount to nothing, and will leave me without the least pain.”

No sooner did the executioners begin to turn the

cranks, than the engine snapped asunder with a loud crash, striking those that stood near lifeless to the ground. The Martyr remained unharmed and unfettered, and, smiling, said to Claudius :

“Confess now, at least, O unbelieving wretch, that my Master is able to protect his servants ; and remember also what I said, that He can and will condemn the wicked to everlasting punishments.”

The Governor was so overcome with fear and astonishment that he appeared unconscious of what was going on. Anabius, however, his assessor, seeing how matters stood, went up to him, and rousing him from his ill-timed absence of mind, said :

“Most excellent Governor, allow me to remind you that, on our arrival in this place, there were brought two enormous bears from the mountains of Dalmatia. If you order them to be taken to the Amphitheatre, and make this man stand in their presence, they will devour him flesh and bones, so that, in an instant, there will remain not a particle of him for burial.”

By command of the Governor the Martyr was without delay taken to the Amphitheatre. When he stood in the middle of the arena, two hunters, according to the custom, made their appearance, and with their heavy whips goaded the beasts into madness. As soon as the cages were opened, the infu-

riated bears rushed upon their tormentors, and suddenly seizing them, crushed and tore them to pieces. Then perceiving the Martyr, they seemed at once to forget their rage, and, advancing towards him, they quietly lay down at a little distance, as if they offered him their protection. When the people witnessed this marvellous interposition of Providence in favor of the Saint, they cried out unanimously:

“Great and true is the God whom Pontius adores!”

This clamor of the spectators enraged the proud and obstinate Governor, and he cried out to his attendants:

“Bring dry wood, and whatsoever combustible materials you can find; pile them up around him; for, though his magic arts may give him safety against other torments, they cannot be of any avail against the power of fire.”

“Of what crime am I proved guilty, or even accused,” said Pontius, “that you should order me to be burnt alive? Beware of what you do, O miserable man. The God whom I serve can easily preserve me from these flames; but the fire which you are preparing for yourself hereafter, shall not be quenched forever.”

¹Before the wood was heaped around him, the hands and feet of the Martyr had been bound with

iron chains, so that he was unable to move. When all was completed, the huge pile was set on fire. As the flames and smoke rose up high into the air, the Saint, for a while, was hidden from view. Soon, however, the fire subsided, and he was seen standing calm and serene amidst the dying embers;—not even his garments had been singed.

Overwhelmed with confusion, and hardly knowing what he said or did, the Governor addressed the Martyr :

“Thinkest thou that thou hast already overcome all our means of torturing? or dost thou flatter thyself that we are unable to do anything more against thee? See, here close by stands a venerable temple of the great Apollo. Go thither, and offer sacrifice to him.”

“I am ready,” replied Pontius, “to offer my body as a sacrifice to my Lord and God, Jesus Christ,—this body of mine, which has never yet been defiled by entering a temple of your demons. But remember what I tell you now: the vengeance of God will soon overtake you, as well as your masters, because you wickedly persecute His servants. Christ our Lord has not given you power to bring defilement upon my body. As to your torments, I welcome them: apply them as much as it suits your good pleasure.”

"Perhaps," said Claudius sneeringly, "we ought to be judged by thee; and thy Excellency has condescended to be tried by us. Belonging to the highest rank of Roman Senators, thou dost not choose to take advantage of thy wealth and influence; thou preferrest to rely upon some invisible power to us unknown?"

"The honors and riches of this world," answered the Martyr, "are like the mist of the morning, which to the eyes of men seems to cover the valleys and mountains, or even the sea: at the first blast of the wind it disappears, and leaves no vestige of its existence; but the honors and riches which I covet endure forever."

"Whilst he was thus speaking, some of the Jews who had come to the Amphitheatre, began to shout:

"Kill him; kill the wicked sorcerer!"

Pontius hearing this, and seeing the persons who uttered the cry, raised his hand toward heaven, and said:

"I thank Thee, O Lord, because even as their fathers formerly cried out against Thee, 'Crucify Him, crucify Him!' so these men are now permitted to clamor against me."

The Governor, thereupon, said:

"It is time to put a stop to all this; for, unless I

punish him effectually, he will never cease to insult me, as well as our invincible princes."

Then addressing the executioners, he added: "Away with him; take him up to yonder cliff, which overhangs the river. There behead him, and cast his body into the depths below."

This sentence was immediately executed, and the blessed Pontius received the crown for which he had so nobly fought.

Not long after, the words which he had spoken saw their fulfilment. The Emperor Valerian, made a prisoner by Sapor, king of Persia, was for a long time subjected to the lowest degradation, and at length flayed alive. Gallienus was slain by his own soldiers, near Milan. Claudius, at the moment when the Martyr was beheaded, was seized by evil spirits, and so tormented that he bit off his tongue before he expired. Anabius, likewise, became roaring mad, and, after tearing out his eyes, died a miserable death. These events filled with terror both the Jews and the pagans of the city; in consequence, they gladly united with the Christians in honoring the sacred remains of the Martyr by erecting over them a splendid monument. Lastly, Valerius bought from the clerks acts of the martyrdom of his beloved foster-brother, and, in order to avoid the rage of further persecution, retired into the desert of Lybia.



ST. AQUILINA.

THIS holy Virgin was born at Byblos, an ancient city of Phœnicia. As she was an only child, her parents, who were fervent Christians, instructed her from her earliest years in all the duties of a Christian maiden. Their unremitting care was rewarded with the happiest results. Aquilina, faithful to the advice, and especially to the good example given her, consecrated her youthful heart to the service of her Divine Master, and by the innocence of her life and blameless conversation, as well as by her zeal for religion, persuaded many children of her own age to devote themselves to a life of prayer and retirement. Although the Gospel had been preached in her native city by the Apostles themselves, most of its inhabitants were still addicted to the worship of idols, or continued, with the obstinacy of their race, to adhere to the doctrines and practices of the Jews. This wilful blindness of

her townsmen was a sad affliction for the loving heart of the little girl; and she strove, by every means which charity suggested, to soften their obdurate hearts and open their eyes to the truth. When her companions came to visit her, they would bring along with them their pagan playmates, that they might receive instruction from Aquilina. She received them with the greatest kindness, and, after gaining their good-will and confidence, she would say:

“Tell me, what good ever came to you from worshipping idols? Do you not know that they who put their trust in them find themselves always disappointed? By praying or offering sacrifices to them, you cannot obtain any favors for yourselves, because they do not hear or see you, for they have no life. They cannot even take care of themselves; how can it be expected they should help you? Oh, how blind must people be, when they allow the Evil One to deceive them by means of senseless idols!”

In this manner did the zealous maiden gradually enlighten the tender minds of her companions, and lead them to the knowledge and love of their Redeemer. The devil, however, did not suffer his power to be diminished without opposition; but he stirred up his friends against the youthful Christian,

making them watch her words and actions, so as to find a pretext to do away with her.

It was not difficult to entrap the open-hearted Aquilina. She had now attained her twelfth year, and could not suspect that in all the world there was any one who wished her harm, being herself full of charity towards all.

At that time, Volusianus, the newly appointed Proconsul of Palestine, came to Byblos. He was a proud and cruel man, and a sworn enemy of the Christians. By means of his spies and informers, he soon ascertained the religious belief, as well as the wealth of the principal inhabitants. His avarice and fanaticism were at once aroused. He waited only for a favorable opportunity to begin his work of persecution and spoliation. He had not to wait long.

The pagan mothers of the companions of Aquilina from time to time accompanied their children in their visits to their young friend and instructress. On one of these occasions, after hearing Aquilina discoursing on the vanity and wickedness of idol-worship, they said to her:

“Thou deniest our gods; and, indeed, thou showest that they are no gods at all; but, tell us, what god dost thou worship?”

“I adore the true God,” answered Aquilina, “who,

in the beginning, made all things out of nothing, and who, in all ages, blessed and protected them who believed and hoped in Him; who ceases not to watch with more than fatherly care over the welfare of all His children that invoke His holy name."

"And how does it happen," said they, "that He whom thou callest God, was killed by the Jews,—as we are told?"

"My God," she replied, "came to redeem men from everlasting death; and death had no power over Him. When He beheld man, whom He had created, led astray by every error and crime, He chose to take upon Himself our human nature, in order to lead us back to the truth, and restore among us grace united with justice."

"And who then is 'He,'" they asked, "whom they call *the Crucified*?"

"He is the Saviour of men," she answered, "who, pitying them, when He saw them in their fallen condition, chose by His own free will to become like unto them, that for their sake He might endure the infamy of the Cross, and, by this humiliation, wash away the stain of sin, by which pride and disobedience had defiled their souls. Nevertheless, He was not satisfied with undergoing the pangs of death for men's sake, but, to show that it was His love for them, and not necessity which made Him

suffer and die, He arose again on the third day. By this we are also taught, that we all shall one day rise again, and appear before Him, to receive judgment in the sight of men and angels according to our works,—whether they be good or evil.”

“If this is so,” they said, “and if He did so much for the everlasting happiness of mankind, why do not the Jews, among whom He lived and taught, honor Him as God?”

“The nation of the Jews,” answered Aquilina, “has ever been prone to stray from the way of truth. They are a stiff-necked and hard-hearted people, unwilling to learn from others what is right and just. Of old, they persecuted or put to death their prophets and teachers; and when Jesus, the Saviour, appeared among them, they received Him not, nor were they willing to acknowledge the wonders which He worked for their conversion. Instead of being grateful, they delivered Him up to Pilate to be crucified; yet, they should not have been able to do this, unless He had beforehand chosen to undergo the sufferings which He endured for the salvation of mankind.”

Whilst they were thus talking with each other, it happened that a certain man, Nicodemus by name, a follower of the Proconsul, overheard their conversation. Without saying a word to them, he imme-

diately hastened to the dwelling of Volusianus, and said to him :

“My lord, you do, perhaps, imagine that in this peaceful city every one obeys the commands of our august rulers ; yet it is time that you were undeceived. Would you suppose that our gods have here an enemy in the person of a young girl ? I myself have heard her call them wicked demons, and proclaim aloud, that the Crucified is the true God. Nor is she satisfied with this, but, in contempt of the imperial edicts, she induces other women to follow her example, and disregard the worship of the gods of the Empire.”

Volusianus was quite rejoiced at the chance he had now of showing forth his power and indulging his cruel propensity. Forthwith he sent a band of soldiers to seize Aquilina and bring her before his tribunal. As soon as she stood before him, he said to her :

“Art thou the person who hast the boldness to disobey the imperial will, and teach other women to give up the worship of our gods, and adore a man who was crucified ?”

“I am that person,” answered Aquilina.

“Knowest thou not that the very name of the Crucified excites the anger of our Emperors, and that they have given orders that those who worship

Him should be tortured and put to death? Now then, say that thou renouncest that worship and superstition, and that thou art ready to offer, in a becoming manner, whatever sacrifice is due to our great gods; if not, we shall be forced to punish thee for the insults thou hast heaped upon them."

"If you torture me for what I have done," replied the maiden, "I feel confident that I shall receive an imperishable crown from Christ, my Saviour; for I am resolved, by His help, to be ever faithful to Him. If you are determined to execute your threats, do not delay. I am ready to confess my faith in Jesus Christ, who died for the salvation of men; and I am not afraid of your torments, whatever they may be."

"It were a pity to torture one so young," said the Proconsul, "and to tear to pieces a form so fair and graceful. Indeed, I would feel ashamed of myself were I to destroy upon the rack a beauty so noble and so bewitching. Tell me, Aquilina, how old art thou?"

"I am twelve years of age," replied the maiden, "and old enough, assuredly, to know what I owe to Him who died for me."

"But thou shouldst reflect," resumed Volusianus, "that, if I order my men to take hold of thee, they will not regard thy tender age nor delicate person;

they will tear thee limb from limb; nor shall the God, upon whom thou reliest, be able to save thee from their hands."

"Do not flatter yourself," said Aquilina, "that you can frighten me with such words. You imagine, no doubt, that you are showing yourself kind and merciful towards me by inviting me to deny my Saviour, and secure for myself a few days of happiness in this world. By so doing, you not only injure me, but you insult my better knowledge. You are free to use against me whatever cruelty your malice may suggest, for I am persuaded that Christ, my Lord and God, will not suffer me to be overcome by the power of his enemies."

The Proconsul, hearing this answer, commanded the executioners to strike her several blows on the face with their fists. Whilst they were doing this, he said:

"Tell me now, Aquilina, is not this treatment sweet and pleasant? That is the beginning of what thou art to expect."

"Are you not ashamed, O cruel tyrant," she answered, "to beat in this manner one who was created in the image and likeness of God? But remember, the God of justice, whose image you thus profane, will not spare you in the day when you shall be judged by Him."

"Give thyself no trouble about that," said he; "I am of opinion that, as our great gods dispose of all things in this world, so they will be able to take care of their own in the other world."

When he had said this, he ordered her to be stripped down to the waist and brutally scourged. Whilst the executioners were complying with this command, Volusianus sneeringly said to her:

"Didst thou not say, Aquilina, that thy God would not spare me in the day of his judgment? Where is He now, that He should spare me at present? If He have any power, why does He not free thee from my hands? No, no; listen to my advice: give up thy faith in the false teachings of the Christians." He then gave a sign to the executioners to discontinue the scourging, and added: "Tell me now, Oh wretched girl, when didst thou ever see or hear that any one, who put his trust in that Crucified Man, could escape our hands? When did our Emperors suffer any one to live if he professed to believe in Him? Come then, give up thy foolish belief; hearken to me, that it may be well with thee."

"Do you imagine, Oh most inhuman tyrant," replied the maiden, "that I care for all your torments, or that they have given me the least bodily pain? Know then, that whatever tortures your father, the devil, may suggest you to employ against me, my

God and Saviour supplies me with a ready remedy against them all."

"We have been taught by the wise and good men, who lived before us," resumed the Proconsul, "to offer sacrifices to the immortal gods. I will, therefore, allow thee some days to consider this matter, in the hope that better sentiments will prevail, when thou understandest fully that it is for thy advantage to give honor to our gods, and secure for thyself a happy life—together with the good-will of our great and glorious sovereigns."

"How many days will you allow me for this deliberation?" asked the Martyr.

"As many as thou art desirous to have, or willing to ask of me," he answered.

"If that is so," she said, "you will have to allow me a great number of days for the purpose, since, from my earliest childhood, I have been thinking on this subject; yet, the more I thought, the more I have been convinced that the God whom I serve is the friend, the guardian and father of all those who put their trust in Him."

"I perceive," said Volusianus, "that my advice is thrown away."

"Not at all," replied Aquilina; "yet it is so wicked and so absurd that no person of good sense can follow it, but must needs do just the contrary. Where-

fore, I pray you, do not annoy me with your foolish suggestions, but either let me go or else bring forward your engines of torture, that, weak and poor servant of my Divine Master though I am, I may show you that, by His help, I can defy all your cruelties."

"Do not boast beforehand," said the Proconsul, "of what thou art able to endure. I flatter myself that I have some means at my disposal which will induce thee to call upon our gods for mercy." He then ordered the executioners to take sharp awl-shaped iron instruments, and, after making them glowing hot, to thrust them through the ears into her head. As, under the infliction of this dreadful punishment, the smoke was seen to issue from her nostrils, the courageous maiden betrayed not the least sign of the intensity of her sufferings, but prayed aloud:

"Lord Jesus, who, from my infancy, didst instruct and direct me to keep Thy holy law; who didst enable me to resist the enemies of Thy holy Name; grant me strength faithfully to run my race. Keep me pure and undefiled in Thy sight, that, with the five prudent Virgins, I may be admitted into the bridal chamber, there to sing Thy praises for ever."

No sooner had she uttered this prayer than she sank into a fainting fit, and fell apparently lifeless to the ground: the executioners pronounced her dead.

When Volusianus saw his brutal work thus suddenly brought to an end, he said to his men :

“Take the body, throw it on the highway, beyond the walls of the city ; there let it lie until devoured by the dogs. It will serve as a warning to those who think that our gods may be denied and our Emperors disobeyed with impunity.”

The body, therefore, of the blessed Martyr lay exposed upon the road during the remainder of the day ; and no one ventured to approach for fear of being seized by the soldiers who stood watching at a distance. During the night, however, a brilliant light appeared near the body, and a person of angelic aspect stood beside the lifeless maiden ; touching her on the shoulder, he said :

“Arise, Aquilina, thy wounds are healed. Return to the city ; tell the Proconsul that he has no power against the servants of Christ, unless it be granted him from above.”

Immediately she arose, and perceiving that her strength was perfectly restored, she exclaimed : “Thanks to Thee, O Lord, who protectest Thy servants against the devices of the wicked. Grant me Thine aid, that I may at last secure the prize for which I am contending, and enjoy, in the company of Martyrs, the promises made to them that continue faithful unto the end.”

“Go, beloved of Christ,” said the voice of the Angel, “the desire of thy heart is granted.”

Upon this, she hastened to the city, the gate of which she found open, and went to the palace of the Proconsul. When the guards saw her, and recognized the young lady who had been tortured to death on the preceding day, they were filled with terror, and arousing Volusianus from his sleep, besought him to confront the dread apparition that asked for him. Volusianus, more frightened even than his attendants, immediately ordered the presence of several of his officers, and, in their company, repaired to the place where the young Christian awaited him. When he saw her standing before him without the least scar of the wounds which she had received on the previous day, he was struck with utter astonishment, and exclaimed :

“Art thou the Aquilina whom we ordered yesterday to be chastised for despising our gods?”

“I am the same Aquilina,” she replied. “You, Oh most wicked tyrant, in the blindness of your heart, condemned my body to become the food of dogs; but neither you, nor your father the devil, can have any power over me, unless the God of heaven, for His own wise purposes, grants it to you. Do now against me whatsoever your cruelty may suggest.”

These bold and defiant words were by no means pleasing to the Proconsul; for he seemed wavering between a superstitious fear and an anxious desire to uphold the extravagant opinion which the vulgar entertained of his power. At last he said to his officers:

“If, by burning out the very brains of that Christian girl, we were unable to cause her death, I do not know what amount of torture could overcome her obstinacy.”

After saying this he withdrew for some moments, and then brought out this written sentence:

“We have found a certain girl, named Aquilina, guilty of defending and teaching the wicked Religion of the Christians, and of disregarding the edicts of our Emperors, by insulting our great and immortal gods. We have endeavored in vain to show her the absurdity of worshipping the Crucified Man, and to bring her to acknowledge the majesty of the gods of the Empire. Her skill in sorcery and other evil arts has set at naught our duty and our power of punishing. Wherefore, we order her to be beheaded outside the city, lest our worship and piety may be still further insulted.”

As soon as this sentence had been read, Aquilina was led out of the city. When arrived at the place of execution, she asked and obtained a few moments

of delay. Whereupon, kneeling down and looking up to heaven, she prayed :

“Lord God Omnipotent, I thank Thee for this favor Thou grantest me, in spite of my unworthiness. I praise Thee for this glorious ending of my short career upon earth. I bless Thee, Oh Creator of all things, for enabling Thy poor servant to resist the snares of the enemy, and to obtain a Martyr’s crown. Receive my spirit in peace, and make me a partaker of the everlasting joys of Thine elect.”

Saying this, she extended her arms toward heaven, and, at the same time, her pure and noble spirit left her youthful body. The executioner, seeing that she still continued in the same posture, although she was certainly dead, hesitated what to do. After a while, however, reflecting that it was his duty to comply to the letter with the command of the Proconsul, he struck off the head, and went his way.

The Christians, who were present, immediately took possession of the precious remains of the martyred Virgin, and after embalming them, deposited them in a tomb which they had prepared near the city.

She suffered under Diocletian, on the thirteenth of June, A. D., 293.



III.

ST. GLYCERIA.

DURING the reign of the Emperor Antoninus Pius the Christians were not generally molested on account of their religion. His successor, Marcus Aurelius, surnamed the Philosopher, might have been equally well disposed toward them, had he not suffered himself to be influenced by the fanaticism of the priests of the idols, and by the absurdities of the false philosophy to which he was so obstinately addicted. Although fair and unprejudiced in other matters, he seemed at once to lose his better judgment whenever his superstitious feelings and wrongful notions were appealed to; and thus he was frequently led to adopt a line of policy which, in spite of his natural good qualities, has caused him to be numbered among the persecutors of God's Church. On a certain occasion, as he was offering sacrifices to the idols, it was suggested to him by his attendants, that he would give a good example to his people if

he commanded them all, on a day appointed, to offer incense to the great Jupiter. He immediately ordered an imperial edict to this effect to be published throughout all the provinces of the Empire. As soon as this became known in Thrace, Sabinus, the Governor of that country, forthwith repaired to Trajanople, the chief city, and issued this order: "In accordance with the decree of the divine Emperor, all our people are commanded, after three days of purification, to assemble in the temple of Jupiter, and there, on the birthday of our illustrious sovereign, to offer sacrifice. Let all obey with one mind and heart, and, holding a lighted torch in their hands, let them joyfully comply with this order; should any one disregard our will, let him understand that he incurs our displeasure, and shall be punished with tortures and death."

At that time the Christians at Trajanople were but few in number. When, therefore, they read this order, they were filled with anxiety, well knowing that the Governor would be all the more ready to enforce his command the less fear there was of meeting with strong opposition. Seeing that they had nothing to hope from men, they put their whole trust in God, for whose sake they were subjected to this trial. They assembled in a small edifice, and there, night and day, besought heaven to avert this

blow, or grant them strength and courage to confess fearlessly the name of Christ. It was then they were comforted and animated by the words and example of Glyceria, a young Roman lady, whose father was a man of consulate dignity. She was sojourning at Trajanople, and was still a stranger among them—if Christians can be strangers to one another. She said to them :

“My beloved friends and brethren, there is no reason why any one of us should have the least fear. Remember your character as Christians! call to mind the mark that was imprinted on your forehead when you received holy baptism. Are we not enlisted among the followers of the noblest and greatest of Sovereigns? Let us endeavor to render ourselves worthy of this surpassing dignity, by keeping the commandments of this immortal Emperor: He will not suffer us to be tried above our strength. Moreover do not forget that earthly trials are transitory, and that the reward which awaits you is everlasting.”

“We all desire to become partakers of that reward,” they answered unanimously.

“Pray, then,” she added, “that God may grant you grace to be faithful to Him.”

On the fourth day there was a great stir among the inhabitants of the city. All were seen bearing

lighted torches and hastening towards the temple of Jupiter. Glyceria, after strengthening her spirit by fasting and praying, had marked on her forehead the sign of salvation, and, feeling herself inspired from on high, joined the multitude. When arrived at the temple, she made her way through the throng until she stood before the Governor, and addressing him, said :

“My Lord, I am Glyceria, a Roman matron. My father has thrice held the consulship : in accordance with my rank. I claim the privilege of being the first to offer sacrifice to the Supreme God.”

“Very well,” said Sabinus ; “but where is thy lighted torch ?”

“I have my light marked upon my forehead, as well as in my mind and in my heart,” she answered. “This is the true light which illumines the sacrifices which we offer to the Eternal Ruler of the universe.”

The Governor did not understand the meaning of her words, nevertheless he said :

“Draw near, then, and offer thy sacrifices.”

“In offering sacrifice to the Supreme God,” resumed Glyceria, “there is no need of the light and smoke of torches. I pray, therefore, order them to be extinguished, that I may the more quietly proceed with my sacrifice.”

Sabinus granted her request. When all the lights

were put out, she raised her eyes toward heaven, and, pointing to her forehead, she said in a loud voice, addressing the vast assembly:

“See you this light which marks my forehead?”—and all beheld there the sign of the Cross shining with dazzling splendor—“this is the sign of salvation,” she continued, “let all follow its guidance.” Then, changing her voice to the tone of supplication, she prayed: “Oh Lord God Omnipotent, who art glorified through the Cross of Christ, Thy Son; who didst of old free the three youths from the burning furnace; who didst stop the mouths of the lions to save thy servant Daniel, and who by his hands didst destroy Baal and the dragon, hear Thou me; Lord Jesus Christ, regard Thy humble handmaid, and crush this demon, set up by the hands of men, that all may know that unto Thee alone honor and sacrifice are due.”

Hardly did she cease speaking when the whole edifice trembled, as if shaken by an earthquake, and the marble statue of Jupiter fell to the ground shattered to pieces. The people, struck with fear, fled precipitately from the temple.

No sooner did Sabinus recover from his astonishment and terror, than, at the instigation of the priests of the broken Jupiter, he gave orders that Glyceria should be stoned to death. When this was

made known to the crowd that remained lingering around the temple, they showed themselves ready to avenge the insult offered to their god, and began at once to hurl a volley of stones at the noble Christian. Great was their amazement when after awhile they saw that, in spite of all their efforts, not one of the missiles could be made to touch the victim of their fanatical hatred. Upon this they all cried out:

“She is an enchantress! stones have **no** power against her!”

“Call me an enchantress, if you will,” replied Glyceria; “but know that it is the power of Christ which rebukes your blindness and the wickedness of your hearts.”

The Governor then said: “Take her to prison, there guard her well until to-morrow, lest by means of her arts she escape our hands and say that her God has set her free, and thus deceive still more our good people.”

“Oh foolish man!” exclaimed the Martyr, “do you not perceive that I am bound by the laws of God? These laws bind me to what is right and just; but the chains of the proud and of those who attempt to frustrate the designs of heaven cannot bind me.”

When she was in prison, a holy priest, named Philocrates, went to visit her. As he entered, Glyceria knelt before him and said:

“Sign me, Oh father, with the sign of Christ, and adorn me with the chrism of truth ; commend me to the Lord and Master, in whose livery you are clad, that I also, distinguished by that mark, may overcome the malice of the Evil One.”

“May the sign of Christ,” replied Philocrates, “be unto thee a token that He hears thy vows, and enables thee to obtain the fulfilment of all thy desires.” He then exhorted her to patience and perseverance, consoling her with the assurance of certain victory.

The following day she was brought before the Governor. Sabinus said to her :

“Tell me, Glyceria, art thou resolved, after due reflection, to offer incense to the great god Jupiter, to whom the Emperor himself sacrifices?”

“How is this?” she answered, “do you ask me to sacrifice to that god who was yesterday broken to pieces? If he could not help himself, think you that he can give any assistance to me? No, no ; I worship the one true God, who has created all things. He is my helper ; He will reduce to naught all your machinations ; to Him it is my duty to be grateful ; Him I bless and adore with all the powers of my soul.”

“Sacrifice, Glyceria,” said the Governor, “before I put thee to the torture.”

"Were I to obey you," she replied, "the God whom I serve would punish me."

"Dost thou then desire to die?" he asked.

"I desire by the sufferings of my body to heal the wounds of my soul," she answered.

Sabinus, thereupon, ordered her to be hung up by the hair. While she was thus hanging, the Martyr prayed: "Glory to Thee, Oh Almighty Father, who sufferest this senseless man to employ as an instrument of torture that which was given me as a covering and ornament of the body; grant that it may now serve as a means to put to confusion the enemy of all good."

He then commanded the executioners to tear her body with iron hooks. When they had for some time been torturing her in this manner, she said to Sabinus:

"Oh, wicked minister of Satan, do you think to overcome me in this manner? My Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, is my Protector: I do not even feel your torments. Prepare some greater ones, if you can, for these are worth nothing."

The executioners becoming tired of their cruel work, the Governor ordered them to take her down and beat her face. As she was undergoing this torment, she again prayed aloud: "Oh Lord Jesus, who art my light and my strength, enlighten my

eyes, and render me yet more ready to endure these blows. Strengthen me in patience, as Thou art wont to strengthen them that desire fearlessly to confess Thy name before men."

Sabinus now again addressed her: "Tell me, Glyceria, why dost thou not obey our sovereign?"

"What sovereign do you wish me to obey?" asked the Martyr.

"Him, to be sure, who holds the supreme power, and has made the law which I am now enforcing."

"I obey the law of God, who is the Master of all sovereigns," replied Glyceria.

"Yet, I command thee to offer sacrifice to the gods," resumed the Governor.

"That I will not do," she said, "for it is a wicked act; but I sacrifice freely to my God, by offering to Him my grateful obedience."

"Do as I bid thee," he said, "lest, like a deluded woman, thou perish by a miserable death."

"Christ, our Divine Leader," she replied, "does not only crown men who fight under His standard, but He also bestows a magnificent reward upon women who fight successfully against your father, the devil."

Seeing that he was unable to overcome her unshaken constancy, Sabinus ordered her again to be taken to prison, strictly enjoining the keeper that he

should permit no one to bring her any food. Glyceria joyfully entered the prison, and there spent her time unceasingly praying, and singing the praises of God. The keeper grew very uneasy, when he perceived that, after three days, she was not only alive, but well and cheerful. He accordingly sent word to the Governor, who deputed one of his attendants to seal the prison door with his official seal. Several days having elapsed, as Sabinus was about to set out for Heraclea, he went himself to ascertain whether the great enchantress, as he called her, was still living. Finding the seal safe and untouched, he entered the apartment, and, to his utter astonishment, beheld the Martyr kneeling and engaged in prayer. He wondered not less when he saw placed near her a plate, on which there was a loaf of bread, and close to it two cups, the one full of milk, the other of water. He, thereupon, resolved to take her with him to Heraclea, for the purpose of having her in his own keeping, and of exhibiting her as a prodigy to the inhabitants of that city. When she was again left alone, Glyceria, raising her voice, said: "Oh God, who formerly wast mindful of Thy servants Elias and Daniel, and didst in a marvellous manner supply them with food, thanks be to Thee, for that Thou didst not cast me off on account of my unworthiness. Be still my Protector; guide me

with the light of Thy grace, strengthen me with Thy power, that all may know that Thou teachest us the truth, and shieldest us with Thy fatherly care."

The next day Sabinus set out for Heraclea, having first given the Martyr in charge to some of his followers. The report of all she had suffered and of the wonderful interposition of Divine Providence in her favor, had preceded her. In consequence, many of the Christians, with Dometius, their Bishop, at their head, came to meet her. The venerable man of God, after encouraging her with words full of sympathy, exclaimed : " Lord Jesus Christ, Oh Thou Sun of justice and Light of the world, who guidest them that are wandering through the darksome paths of this life, be Thou the guide of this Thy faithful servant on her sorrowful journey for the confession of Thy name."

The day after her arrival in the city, the Governor sent for her and asked :

" Glyceria, hast thou at last concluded to do our bidding ?"

" It is written," she answered, "' thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God ;' and again, let your speech be, ' Yea, yea ; no, no.' I have already told you that I cleave to Christ, my Lord and Master, and that I have renounced the devil, the master whom you serve. How could I, united to Christ, separate

myself from Him, and choose death rather than life? Do against me whatever you like; my choice is made."

Sabinus now ordered his men to prepare a fiery furnace and cast her into it. Whilst they were making it ready, Glyceria gave thanks to God, saying: "I bless Thee, Oh Almighty Father, and extol Thy glory, because Thou givest me this favorable opportunity of securing an endless rejoicing. Grant that this my confession be recorded before men and angels: fulfil the longings of my soul, and show to all that Thou art my helper."

Then she made the sign of the cross, and was cast into the furnace. At the same moment the fire was extinguished, a refreshing dew pervaded the place; the Martyr was heard to sing: "Thou art holy, Oh Lord God, who sendest Thine aid to Thy lowly handmaid; let all confess that everything is subject to Thee."

After awhile she came out of the furnace wholly uninjured. The Governor, notwithstanding all he had just witnessed, was unwilling to acknowledge the power of God. He said to Glyceria:

"On whom dost thou rely, that thou still refusest to do our bidding?"

"Upon the Lord my God and His Christ," she answered.

"Have done with those evasive words," he cried out, "whereby thou deceivest every one."

"There is no deceit in my words," she replied, "neither is there in my actions, as all can testify."

When he heard this answer, Sabinus ordered the executioners to tear the skin from her head from the crown to the forehead. While undergoing this torment, she said: "Oh God, who art pleased to manifest Thy power and justice by these sufferings of mine, show to that wicked man that they who trust in Thee desire through many tribulations to obtain the crown promised to them. Grant that all within me may be unveiled and illumined with the brightness of Thy light. Open Thou my eyes, and I will behold the wonderful things of Thy law."

Vexed by disappointment, the Governor sent her again to prison, after ordering that, with her hands and feet tied, she should be laid upon sharp stones. During the night, however, she was miraculously freed from her bonds, and restored to perfect soundness by an angel sent from heaven.

On the following morning she was again summoned before the relentless Sabinus. When Laodicius, the keeper, opened the prison door and saw her standing unfettered, and without a scar to indicate what she had undergone the day before, he did not recognize her. Knowing what he had to expect

from the cruelty of the Governor, he gave himself up to despair. The Martyr understood at once the cause of his perplexity, and said :

“Be not uneasy, my good friend, I am the one for whom thou art looking.”

Laodicius gazed at her for some moments awe-struck, and unable to utter a word. At last he exclaimed :

“Have pity on me lest I die ; I believe in the God who protects you.”

“Then believe in Christ,” replied Glyceria, “and follow Him. He can and will give thee salvation.”

Laodicius immediately took up the chains wherewith the Martyr had been bound, and putting them on himself, requested her to accompany him to the Governor. When Sabinus saw them he was so taken by surprise that he did not trust his eyes, and exclaimed :

“What is this I see ? Do my eyes deceive me ? Laodicius what hast thou done ? Where is the lady I put in chains and intrusted to thy keeping ?”

“She stands before your Excellency,” replied Laodicius. “Last night a messenger from heaven restored her to her former vigor and beauty, as you behold her now : He also freed her from her chains. A witness to the wonderful protection extended to her by the Almighty God whom she adores, I have

charged myself, though unworthy, with these chains. I confess the power and mercy of her God; I believe even as she believes, and am ready to share her sufferings and her death for my belief."

Sabinus was exceedingly exasperated; he shouted to his attendants: "Go," he said, "this very instant, strike off the head of that miserable wretch. We shall see whether his Christ, upon whom he relies, will give him any help."

Laodicius hearing this sentence, cried out in a loud voice: "Lord God of the Christians, receive me this hour among them who adore Thee, who proclaim and confess Thy power and mercy, even as Thy servant Glyceria."

She immediately continued his prayer, saying: "Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who didst destroy the sorrows of death, and set free those who were held in the bonds of sin, free, I beseech Thee, Thy servant Laodicius; grant that he be made perfect by this confession of Christ, Thy Son, and take unto Thyself his spirit in peace."

"Amen," exclaimed Laodicius, and at the same moment his head was struck off. Some of the Christians, who were present, took away the body of the Martyr, and buried it reverently.

The Governor now again addressed the Martyr: "Thou knowest," he said, "Oh Glyceria, that thy

father was a person greatly honored in Rome, and that thy mother was equally distinguished for the nobility of her birth ; why wouldst thou bring disgrace upon their memory ? Who is there that can save thee from our hands, if thou still refusest to do our bidding ?”

“Christ, the Saviour of the world,” boldly answered the Martyr. “He did not forsake me in prison ; He restored me to health ; He will not cease to be my Protector.”

Sabinus, perceiving that her constancy was in nowise shaken, ordered her to be taken to the amphitheatre, that there she might be exposed to the wild beasts and torn to pieces. She heard this sentence with great joy, and forthwith accompanied the men who led her to the place of her final struggle. The Governor, followed by his attendants and a vast multitude of people, repaired to the amphitheatre. When all was ready, and Glyceria stood in the middle of the arena, the keeper of the beasts opened one of the cages, and a lioness rushed forth toward the Martyr ; but, instead of doing her any harm, quietly lay down by her side. When she saw this, she looked up toward heaven and prayed aloud :

“I thank Thee, Oh Eternal Father, who makest even the wild beasts harmless, to manifest Thy power. Thy mercy and love have until now smoothea

my paths and sweetened whatever was bitter or distasteful in the race I have run. Hear my prayer, and put to confusion the attempts of Thine enemies. If it is Thy holy will, grant that this hour, after doing whatsoever is pleasing to Thee, I may receive the blissful reward of Thine elect."

Another lioness being then let out against her, bit her in the side, without leaving any mark of the wound. The Martyr sank down upon her knees, and yielded up her noble spirit to her Maker.

Sabinus, when returning from the amphitheatre, suddenly dropped down in the street, and expired before any assistance could be given; a fearful warning for all the horror-stricken people who had witnessed his repeated cruelties against the Christians.

The Holy Bishop Dometius, attended by the faithful of Heraclea, took away the precious remains of the Virgin-Martyr, and deposited them in a monument near the city, where her memory is held in benediction even to this day.

She suffered on the thirteenth of May, A. D., 177.





IV.

ST. AGAPITUS.

THIS blessed Martyr was born of a noble Roman family. When yet a child he was placed, at Præneste, under the care and direction of a very holy man, Porphyrius by name, who, whilst teaching him the elements of human learning, took special pains to initiate him in the science of the Saints. In consequence of this training, Agapitus, at a very early age, gave up all his prospects of worldly distinction, and, forsaking wealth and honors, embraced the life of a solitary, that thus he might devote himself to the practice of those virtues which our Lord taught us during his own hidden life. When, however, he learnt that the Emperor Aurelian had begun to persecute the Christians, he felt himself inspired with a longing desire for martyrdom, and said to his master: "Since we profess to be soldiers of Christ, why should we avoid the combat? Let us go forth and meet the enemies of the

Faith, and prove to them that we fear them not, by our readiness to give testimony to the truth." "It is proper to foster within thy breast the inspirations of Christ our Lord," replied the prudent Porphyrius. "Whensoever He says, Come, or go; then it is time to be ready in obedience to His voice." In this manner did the holy man repress, for a time, the youthful ardor of his pupil, and teach him to avoid the dangerous snare of presumption. Although Agapitus was then only fifteen years of age, he fully appreciated the wisdom of his master's advice, and cheerfully agreed to follow it. Meanwhile, by prayer and penitential austerities, he sought to obtain the favor he so anxiously desired; and begged of God that the time might be shortened when his holy ambition should be satisfied, by being enabled to glorify Him by a fearless confession of the Faith in the sight of men. It was not long before his hopes were realized.

The Prefect Antiochus, who, by his cruelties at Rome, had made himself the dread of the Pagans as well as of the Christians, came at that time to Præneste. Immediately upon his arrival, he was told by one of his informers that there was a young Christian in the city who had again and again reviled the gods of the Empire, and openly proclaimed his contempt for them. The Prefect forth-

with ordered the arrest of Agapitus, and had him brought before his tribunal. He said to him :

“ Assuredly, thou art a very madman, since, even before being interrogated, thou bringest condemnation upon thyself.”

“ I am by no means a madman,” replied the youth ; “ but he, undoubtedly, must be insane who persecutes and torments God’s friends, who cease not to pray for the prosperity of the Empire and its rulers.”

“ By what authority, then,” asked Antiochus, “ darest thou disobey the laws made by our rulers, and despise the officers who represent the majesty of the commonwealth ?”

“ By the authority of God,” answered Agapitus, “ whose power is for me an impregnable wall and an armor of safety.”

“ Hast thou any other God than those whom we revere, and whom all the dignitaries of the State worship ?”

“ Do you imagine that there is anything divine in Jove or Saturn, and those other demons whom you worship instead of the true God ? Or do you forget that you give the honor, which is due to Him alone, to representations of men who were guilty of the most infamous crimes ?”

The Prefect appeared astonished at the boldness

of the youth, and, after reflecting awhile, said again :

“I want to know of what family thou art, and how it happens that I find thee here?”

“If you desire to know my family,” replied Agapitus, “I will tell you that I am a Roman by birth, of a noble family; that I am a Christian, instructed from my childhood in the discipline of the Church, which is the mother of all Catholics.”

“I see,” said Antiochus, “that the Christians have trained thee so well, that thou neither respectest our princes, nor worshipest our deities, whom all good citizens adore.”

“Call them not deities, but devils,” said the youth, “for it is they who, through your idols, lead astray their miserable dupes, until at last they drag them into everlasting perdition.”

“My philosophy,” said the Prefect, lowering his voice, “enables me to put up with rough language when used against myself, but I must not suffer any one to speak slightly of our gods.”

Agapitus hearing this, asked: “Tell me, most excellent Prefect, who is more powerful, yourself or your gods? If they depend upon you for their protection and safety, do you not clearly prove that, of themselves they are poor and helpless wretches?”

Meanwhile, one of the attendants approached the Prefect, and said :

“My Lord, if you continue to listen patiently to what this impudent and sacrilegious boy has to say, do not imagine that, with all your wisdom and learning, your Excellency can silence him. If you desire to put a stop to his impudence, ask him why he left Rome, what he has done with his rich patrimony, which ought to belong to the public treasury.” This suggestion was made very opportunely for the disconcerted Prefect. Accordingly, he asked the youth :

“For what purpose didst thou come to Præneste?”

“Christ, our Lord,” answered Agapitus, “sent me hither that I might bear witness to His teaching, and call upon you and all those who, like you, are held captive in the chains of the devil, to abandon your evil ways, to do penance for your sins, and to embrace the doctrine of salvation, lest you perish with the demons whom you are now serving.”

“How happens it,” said Antiochus, “that, when Christ taught those vain superstitions, he was seized by the men of his own nation and put to death by being crucified.”

“Hold your peace, you wicked man,” replied the youth, “these are things which you do not understand. The death which He suffered for love of us, restored us to life, and freed us from the slavery

into which the Evil One had ensnared our race. That which you deem to have been a disgrace, was not the punishment of any wrong-doing, but the salvation of the world."

"Whatever thou utterest with that wicked tongue of thine," resumed the Prefect, "will have to be atoned for by condign punishment. However, before we come to tortures, tell me, where are the treasures which, after disposing of thy patrimony, thou hast brought hither?"

"The funds of my patrimony," answered Agapitus, "which you seem to covet so much, are safely kept in the treasury of Christ our Lord, where thieves can neither reach nor steal them."

"Thou art not yet of an age to judge properly of matters of the highest importance; no wonder, therefore, that thou shouldst be pleased with all that foolish nonsense, and misled thereby; but listen to me: follow my advice, and secure for thyself those things which may hereafter be to thy advantage."

"It were better for yourself, most excellent Prefect, if you would follow your own advice. You seem not to know, or to forget, that there is another life after this brief existence upon earth. Your present career of cruelty, greed and unrest, may be followed by torments which endure forever. As for myself, I have learnt, even from my childhood, true

wisdom, which is that of Christ, and no assaults of men, nor of evil spirits, can tear its teachings from my breast. Wherefore, I fear not your threats of tortures; for the more fiercely they shall be employed against me, the more easily shall they vanish if my God grants me his powerful help."

"Too long do I tolerate this insolent madness," cried Antiochus. "I warn thee, choose at once and without further reply; either show us where are the treasures which we know thou hast hidden, and go thy way in peace; or offer sacrifice to the immortal gods, and come with us to enjoy a pleasant life among the friends of the Emperor."

"Foolish and obstinate man!" exclaimed the youth; "the treasures which you so unjustly demand of me, I have safely placed once for all in the treasury of Christ, my Lord and Master; to Him also I offer, without ceasing, a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and to none other. But you, if you continue to worship your senseless idols, will be condemned with them to everlasting fire. Hearken, then, to me: repent and do penance for your crimes,—remembering the blood of the Saints which you have shed,—that thus you may escape the awful doom which awaits the wicked."

Thereupon, the Prefect, no longer able to contain his anger, commanded his attendants to whip him

with scorpions and scourges, to which leaden balls were attached, and to repeat at the same time, "Sacrifice to the gods whom all the powers of earth worship."

But Agapitus, without giving heed to the words of his tormentors, prayed aloud :

"I thank Thee, Oh Eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for giving me Thine aid amidst my sufferings; grant, I beseech Thee, that my faith and hope in Thy mercy may be strengthened yet more, and that some of these who now witness my confession, moved by Thy grace, may be converted to Thee, and deemed worthy of sealing the sincerity of their faith with their blood."

The Martyr's prayer was heard. Hardly had he finished speaking when several of the spectators, admiring the heroic patience and cheerfulness of the youthful sufferer, cried out that they believed even as he believed, and confessed Jesus Christ, the Saviour of men, who so visibly protected His servant. This so enraged the bloodthirsty Antiochus, that he ordered them to be seized on the spot. He commanded them to retract at once the words they had spoken; but they courageously refused, and proclaimed still more loudly their faith in Christ, the Son of God. Whereupon they were all instantly beheaded

The Prefect then sent Agapitus to a loathsome dungeon, that, deprived of light and food and all intercourse with men, he might there perish. But, when thus debarred from all human consolation, heavenly comforts were showered down upon him. During the night his lonely prison was suddenly illumined with a dazzling light, and he beheld standing before him a youth of exceeding beauty, who said: "Act manfully, Oh Agapitus! thou hast still to suffer great distress for the name of Christ, but fear not; assisted by power from on high, thou shalt overcome all the torments used against thee." As the vision vanished, the Martyr felt all his strength renewed, and he joyfully returned thanks to God for being mindful of His unworthy servant. The soldiers, who guarded the prison, and had seen the wonderful light, were filled with awe, and said to one another: "Truly, the God of the Christians is a mighty God; what power can prevail against them whom He protects?"

On the following morning, Antiochus again summoned the Martyr before him, and, with an assumed kindness in his voice, asked:

"What hast thou resolved upon, Oh Agapitus, to secure thy safety?"

"Christ, our Lord, is my hope and safety," answered the youth.

“Put away that unyielding stubbornness,” said the Prefect, “and adore the living gods, whom their superhuman power has proved to be true gods.”

“They whom you call true gods,” replied Agapitus, “are nothing but idols, without life or feeling; they never could speak or make use of their limbs. I cannot understand for what reason you call them gods. Your own books tell you that they, whose image they are, were men defiled by the most inhuman crimes, insomuch that some of them devoured their own children. If you worship such monsters as gods, you will receive hereafter the punishments which they themselves so justly deserved by their wickedness.”

One of the chief officers now went up to the Prefect, and, with a voice so loud that he could be heard by the spectators, said:

“Why does your Excellency not punish that headstrong Christian? How can you permit him to insult our gods with impunity? Will you suffer him to threaten yourself with everlasting torments, and make no reply?”

These words seemed to arouse the savage nature of Antiochus; his eyes flashed with rage as he turned toward the Martyr, and cried out:

“Dost thou still imagine, miserable wretch, that, with all the magical arts which the Christians have

taught thee, thou canst escape our vengeance? Deny this moment thy Christ, and offer sacrifice as thou art bidden, or, I swear by all the gods, I will make thee an example which will strike terror into the heart of every despiser of our worship."

"Since your power is only temporary," calmly replied Agapitus, "your violent threats do not amount to much. You may begin to carry them out as soon as it suits your good pleasure."

The Prefect, thereupon, ordered him to be stripped and most cruelly scourged. After which he commanded the executioners to stretch him upon the rack and tear his body to pieces with iron combs, whilst at the same time they continued to repeat, "Sacrifice to the gods." But Agapitus, without heeding their words, and apparently insensible to their brutal treatment, prayed without ceasing:

"Be Thou my Helper, Oh God, my Saviour; forsake me not; deliver me out of the hands of Thine enemies."

Meanwhile, by order of Antiochus, a tribunal had been erected in the forum, and the Martyr, bruised and bleeding, was conveyed thither. When this became known, a great multitude of people hastened to the place. This flattered the vanity of the tyrant, for he felt assured that, in his exhausted and almost lifeless condition, the youth would yield

him an easy victory. But in this also he was disappointed.

No sooner had the Prefect seated himself than he made the Martyr stand up before him, and said :

“Tell us now, Agapitus, art thou, at last, willing to offer sacrifice according to our commands ; or dost thou still persevere in thy obstinate folly?”

“I never cease to offer sacrifice,” answered the Martyr, “to Jesus Christ, my God and Saviour, who gave me a body and a soul, that I might preserve both undefiled and pleasing in His sight. Moreover, it ill befits you to charge me with obstinacy and folly. You might, indeed, do so with reason and truth, if you heard me deny the Creator who has given me existence, or if you saw me turn worshipfully to some deaf and dumb idol, and say: thou hast drawn me out of nothingness.”

The Prefect understood the rebuke contained in these words and grew exceedingly angry. Calling some of his attendants, he said to them :

“Take that young man, drag him to the temple of Apollo, and force him to offer sacrifice. If he still refuses, do not spare him. I am determined to make him submit, or see him atone for his stubborn resistance by whatever new torment I am able to invent.”

The attendants, immediately seizing the Martyr, hurried him to the temple of Apollo. While drag-

ging him through the streets, they heaped upon him every kind of indignity; they struck him with their fists, they pulled him by the hair, they pushed and kicked him, insomuch that the Pagans themselves, who followed in crowds, ashamed and horrified at the sight, cried out against the barbarous treatment. When they arrived at the temple, Agapitus was so exhausted that he was hardly able to move. Nevertheless, without giving him time to recover, they pressed him forward until he stood before the idol. Here they summoned him to comply, without making further resistance, with the command of Antiochus. But the heroic youth, turning away with loathing from the statue, exclaimed:

“I offer no sacrifice to demons, for it is written, ‘All the gods of the gentiles are devils.’ But I will freely sacrifice to Him who created all that exists.”

They said: “Obey the commands of the Prefect, or we will show thee what power of punishing the gods whom you revile have given us.”

“If they had any power to give,” replied Agapitus, “they might have used it to better advantage; therefore, I say again, let all those be confounded who adore the work of their own hands, and glory in their idols.”

Upon this they endeavored again, by forcing incense into his hands, to make him comply, at

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least in appearance; but the holy youth was endowed with so superhuman a strength, that all their efforts proved unavailing. When the base wretches found themselves at a loss what else to attempt, they resolved, finally, to return with their unconquered victim to the tyrant, who had obliged them to undertake that which he himself could not accomplish. Whilst going back, however, they did not fail to give full scope to their revengeful feeling by tormenting the innocent cause of their ill-humor.

When the Prefect learnt that they had failed in their undertaking, in spite of all the brutal violence they had employed against the youthful Martyr, he resolved once more to try his own skill. Wherefore, concealing, as best he could, his feelings of resentment, he said to Agapitus:

“Why dost thou attempt to pervert the people? By thy false teaching thou dost not only act in defiance of imperial authority, but thou stirrest up sedition among our citizens.”

“All that your Excellency has hitherto said,” answered the youth, “betrays not only the grossest ignorance, but an absurd inclination to falsehood. You know well enough, that the religion of the Christians, so far from teaching sedition, does, on the contrary, enjoin sincere obedience to all lawful authority. We strive to foster peace and harmony

among all men, and we abhor strife and contention ; knowing, as we do, that these vices derive their origin from the devil, the enemy of man."

This was enough to arouse once more the fiercest passions of the Prefect. Beside himself with rage, he shouted to his attendants :

"Put him again upon the rack, and so tear his body with your hooks, that you leave not a sound spot to cover his bones."

Whilst this order was being executed, Antiochus raved with such frantic madness, that it became plain to all the spectators that an evil spirit had taken possession of him. Thinking that he was about to expire, his men removed him to the palace. When, after a while, he recovered from his fit, he did not forget the victim of his fury, but straightway commanded him to be brought to his own apartment. As the Martyr stood before him, the Prefect looked at him for some time in silence, and then said :

"Didst thou notice, Agapitus, how incensed our gods are against me ? It is because I suffered thee so long to utter thy blasphemies against them.

"There is no agreement between Christ and Belial," replied the Martyr, "neither has light any fellowship with darkness : therefore, the power of demons cannot harm the servants of God, unless

they first defile themselves with sin. Yet the devil has power over those who deny God, their Creator, and give themselves to the service of deaf and dumb idols; for, by means of sensual pleasures he gains possession of their souls. When thus he has become their master, he may afflict their bodies with various sufferings, if he chooses, as he has this day fully shown in the case of your Excellency. But this is only the beginning of the evils which are to come hereafter. I would, therefore, advise you, Oh miserable man, to repent of your wickedness, and do penance whilst you have time, and not to begin to think of this when it is too late. Now is your time to sow good seed, that it may produce fruit at the favorable season; if you delay, your harvest will be one of sorrow and misery, and of useless regrets forever."

"If what thou sayest be true," said the Prefect, "it would appear that thy religion has no promises of happiness in our present existence, and that its rewards, as well as its punishments, are all to be realized in the future, about which we know nothing. This too is sufficiently proved by the fact, that, ever since the superstition, which thou defendest with so much zeal, has been made known to our people, and since they began to abandon and even despise our great gods, the Roman Empire has suffered all

kinds of misfortune, and its influence has been everywhere diminished."

"What you say is by no means founded on truth," replied Agapitus, "for, even if the supposed facts which you state were true, the cause of them, which you assign, is altogether false. Do not your ancient histories relate that when, on a certain day, incense was burnt before a statue of Olympian Jupiter, more than five hundred young persons suddenly dropped to the ground and died? Does not Trogus Pompey say, in his history, that three hundred men, whilst uselessly presenting their votive offerings to Mars, perished by the poisonous breath of a dragon? But since the Christian religion taught men to adore the true God, a great change has taken place over all the earth; the peace of Christ has taken possession of the hearts of men; and mankind, so long exiled from the abode of happiness, has found the way to reach the heavenly kingdom. If your Excellency is willing to listen to me, I will, in a few words, show you why it is that you are so blindly bent on persecuting the Christians."

"Go on," said Antiochus, "let us hear what thou hast to say."

"Ever since God, in His mercy, vouchsafed to visit fallen man, by sending His Divine Son into this world, the devil has not ceased to stir up his

own worshippers against the Elect, lest they, whom he had held so long captive on account of their guilt, might escape his power through the confession of the Holy Name of Christ. For, even as the tempest agitates the waves of the sea, and causes destruction far and wide, so does the persecution, which the devil excites, hinder the people from calmly listening to the teaching of the glad tidings of salvation, and embracing the truths announced to them by word and example. And, lest the faithful might become discouraged when they witness these troubles and hardships, all this was foretold to them years ago by the mouth of the Prophets of the Lord. Hence, one of them says: ‘The Lord hath reigned; let the people be angry;’ for you grow angry when the Lord sends his servants among you, and you are unwilling to receive their doctrine; but, meanwhile, you suffer the Evil One to drag you into everlasting destruction.”

“Whether Christ, or any one else,” said the Prefect scoffingly, “has foretold all this or not, I neither know nor do I care; but of this I can assure thee, that the whole race of Christians shall always be punished and put down, since they cause trouble everywhere. So long as they are suffered to live, neither princes nor people can enjoy peace, but must find themselves unceasingly disturbed and annoyed.”

"If they who are ill of a fever are out of their mind and frantic with delirium," asked Agapitus, "will you say that the physician is the cause thereof? or do you ascribe this excitement to the disease itself?"

"What does thy impudence mean to illustrate by that comparison?" exclaimed Antiochus.

"I intended to show how foolish and conceited you are in your boasting," answered the Martyr, "when you refuse to embrace the Christian Religion and reject the warnings of its teachers. Is it not absurd to blame our Lord Jesus Christ, because He came to save the world from misery and destruction? Ought you not to blame yourselves for your ignorance and troubles, when you wickedly refuse to listen to Him, who alone can heal your diseases, and give perfect health to your bodies as well as to your souls?"

These answers of the youth excited the admiration of all those who were present. Many became convinced that his wisdom was more than human, and that the God of the Christians, who bestowed such strength and knowledge upon one so young, was indeed the true God. In consequence, they began to clamor for his release. Others, however, blinded by their prejudices, cried out that he was an enemy of the gods, a rebel and a magician, and

called upon the Prefect to put him to death, lest he might mislead the people. Antiochus, perceiving what was going on, and knowing by experience that he was unable to overcome the constancy of the Martyr, was anxious to save himself from further trouble. Therefore, under pretence of having to make a journey into the province of Liguria, where his presence was immediately desired, he committed Agapitus to the care of his Lieutenant, Amas by name, with orders that, unless he could force him to worship the gods, he should torture him to death. No sooner had the Prefect left, than his deputy, addressing the Martyr, said :

“Tell me, thou miserable madman, how long wilt thou covet torments and refuse to sacrifice to the gods, according to the commands of our rulers?”

“Tell me, you foolish man,” answered Agapitus, “why do you not fear the wrath of the Eternal Judge? Why do you require me to do that which is contrary to the laws of my God?”

Amas, taken by surprise at this bold answer, and not knowing what to reply, gave orders to his men to take him back to the dungeon, that there, forgotten and uncared for, he might perish with hunger.

After a few days, however, Amas changed his mind, and resolved to put the constancy of the Martyr once more to the test. Wherefore, having

ordered him to be brought before his tribunal, he said, with seeming kindness:

“Tell me, Agapitus, how does it happen that thou, who art still far from manhood’s years, canst speak with so great a display of power and wisdom that all the people are filled with wonder, nay more, fascinated, I may say, by the ingeniousness of thy replies?”

“Although our Divine Master,” answered the youth, “has said, ‘Give not that which is holy to dogs; neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest perhaps they trample them under their feet, and, turning upon you, they tear you;’ yet, since circumstances seem to require it, I will answer your question. After our Lord had chosen His disciples, and before He Himself returned to the bosom of His heavenly Father, when he sent them to train the minds and hearts of them that were to believe in Him, He foretold that they should have to endure many tribulations; that, for His Name’s sake, they should be brought before kings and magistrates to give testimony to the truth. But, at the same time, He assured them, that they need not fear what answers they should make, as it would be suggested to them from on high how to reply. He promised also, that He would send upon them the Divine Spirit to fill them with more than human wisdom,

and to guide them whilst teaching the nations of the earth. This Holy Spirit, whom, according to His promise, He sent upon His disciples, is to this day poured down upon those who are become sons of adoption; hence their teaching, hence their wisdom. Therefore, when we Christians suffer persecution for Christ's sake, we are directed and supported by that Holy Spirit; and neither are we at a loss what to say, nor are we afraid of the torments which the wickedness of men employs against us."

"We have heard of all those things before now," said Amas, "but we find them too difficult to believe. Wherefore, it is our opinion that it would be better for thee to listen to our advice, that so thou mayest escape the dreadful sufferings which await thee. All thou didst just now say will avail thee nothing when we come to punishments; hence, as I said, it is better for thee to consent at once to offer sacrifice to our gods, who alone can save thee."

"I worship and adore the One true God," replied Agapitus. "Your deaf and dumb and senseless idols are no gods at all; they are neither able to give aid to others, nor even to help themselves; therefore, they are of no use to any one."

When Amas found himself at a loss for words, he resolved to come to deeds. He commanded his men to heap a quantity of live coals upon the head

of the Martyr. But Agapitus remained unhurt by them. Seeing this, the tyrant cried out to his men: "What is this? are you complying with my orders?" The Martyr replied:

"Be not uneasy, Oh wicked man; your poor men are doing the best they can, but they labor in vain."

The indignant Lieutenant then ordered the executioners to beat the youth with cudgels until he seemed completely exhausted; after which he made them hang him up by the feet over a thick smoke. When the Martyr gave no longer any sign of life, Amas said: "Take him down, and cast him again into his dungeon; let us hope that he is at last placed beyond the possibility of annoying us."

Several days, however, having elapsed, the Lieutenant became curious to know what had become of his prisoner. Wherefore, he sent his assistant, Attalus, to ascertain how matters stood. When the keeper led the assistant to the dungeon, they beheld the youth freed from his chains and standing with his arms uplifted, and heard him sing: "Let God arise, and let His enemies be scattered; and let them that hate Him flee from before His face. As smoke vanisheth, so let them vanish away: as wax melteth before the fire, so let the wicked perish at the presence of God. Let the just feast and rejoice

before God. I shall not die, but live; and shall declare the works of the Lord."

Filled with wonder at the sight, Attalus immediately returned to the Lieutenant and related to him what he had witnessed. Amas, who was not prepared for this, was both troubled and astonished, and said to his assistant:

"I did not suspect that all our efforts could come to this. What now remains to be done, for I am fairly at a loss?"

"If you approve of it," replied Attalus, "I will take the matter in hand. I feel confident that I can persuade him to obey your commands."

"Go," said the Lieutenant, "go without delay. If you succeed, your fortune is secured; the imperial favor will raise you to a rank to which, in your brightest dreams, you never ventured to aspire."

Thus encouraged, Attalus instantly went back to the prison, and, with an expression of great kindness in the tone of his voice as well as in his looks, he addressed the Martyr:

"Believe me, my dear young friend, I take the greatest interest in thy well-being; but I cannot understand what advantage thou hopest to derive from this obstinate resistance to the will of our rulers. Is it not a pity, that one of thy age should give up all the bright prospects of the future and the

delights of the present, and for what?—to live in misery and to die in torments? Is it not madness? I too was once a Christian, even as thyself; but time and reflection brought about a change. I confessed the power of the gods of the Empire, and behold, now I am an imperial officer and a lord.”

“Stop ‘here, it is enough,” exclaimed the youth, full of indignation. “You have bought eternal perdition at the price of heavenly bliss; you have forsaken the glorious service of Christ to become a despised slave of the devil. Although I am still young, as you say, yea, almost a child, do you think that I am not old and wise enough to abhor the very thought of following your disgraceful example? Depart from me, Satan. Run after your deaf and dumb idols, if they are your masters.”

“Be not offended, Agapitus,” resumed Attalus. “I can listen patiently to all thou hast to say. I came hither to make thee understand what is for thy good. Take my advice, and secure for thyself lasting happiness.”

“Depart from me,” said the Martyr. “I will not hear you. Return to those who sent you. Say that Agapitus clings to his faith in Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of men; that neither threats, nor promises, nor torments can shake his fidelity.”

Seeing that he had failed in his undertaking, Attalus withdrew, meditating on what he had heard and seen. When he presented himself before the Lieutenant, Amas at once perceived that something extraordinary had happened. The grave and down-cast looks of his assistant provoked him to mirth, and, laughingly, he said :

"It is not necessary to tell us that you have failed ; nevertheless, you might let us know what has taken place."

"This is no time for jesting," replied Attalus. "I have this day witnessed the wonders of God made manifest in His servant Agapitus. No human tongue has power to express what I have seen. The angels of heaven hover around and protect the youth : no attempts of the wicked can overcome the fortitude of one whom Christ supports. Therefore shall they be accursed who refuse to believe in God, for the confession of whose holy name the generous Agapitus is now a prisoner. He is the One true God : the gods of the Empire are wicked demons."

"So then, Attalus also," exclaimed Amas, "has been seized with this madness ! Wherein have the gods offended you that you should abandon their worship to believe in the teaching of a boy condemned to die ? Go on, Attalus, the Emperor shall soon hear of this."

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"I am ready," replied Attalus, "when the proper time arrives, to give testimony to the truth."

Thereupon they parted. His former experience having taught him the dangers of rashness and presumption, Attalus forthwith left the country, and, by works of penance and charity, prepared himself for the martyrdom which, some time after, he generously suffered.

When the blessed Agapitus learnt what had been done by Attalus, he rejoiced exceedingly, and thanked our Lord for having made him instrumental in bringing back to the true fold the wandering sheep, whose everlasting destruction had appeared almost certain.

Amas, the Lieutenant, now again ordered the Martyr to be subjected to the torture. He made the executioners pour boiling water upon his body, while repeating to him the usual words, "Sacrifice to the gods." During this punishment, Agapitus remained silent for a time, and then said to the executioners: "Brethren, were you not ordered to pour boiling water upon me? Why this stream of cool and refreshing water? Truly, our Lord Jesus Christ is good and merciful to His youthful servants: He suffers us to pass through fire and through water, and brings us into a place of refreshment." After saying this, he was again silent for a while,

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and then addressing the Lieutenant, he said : "Your tortures, instead of giving me pain, are rather a source of pleasure to me, for Christ the Lord is my Comforter. But you, Oh wicked man, who have so long been the persecutor of the innocent, you shall full soon experience what it is to have been at all times an enemy of the truth, and a friend of the father of lies. Believe me, now at last, when I tell you, that the end of your inglorious career is near at hand."

Hardly had the Martyr uttered those words when Amas was seen to turn deadly pale; the next instant he fell lifeless to the ground. The attendants carried him to his dwelling, where every known remedy was applied to bring him again to consciousness; but no restoratives availed to resuscitate the wretch, whom the just judgment of Heaven had struck down in the pride of his power.

Meanwhile, Antiochus, the Prefect, had returned from his excursion. When he was informed of all that had taken place during his absence, he was very angry, and immediately determined to bring the trials of the young Christian to a close. Wherefore he ordered his attendants to take him to the temple of Jupiter, in Præneste, and there force him to burn incense before the god. But all their efforts proving unsuccessful, they were directed to drag the

Martyr to the amphitheatre and expose him to the lions. The beasts, however, although goaded and rendered furious by their keepers, could not be induced to do the least harm to the servant of God ; on the contrary, no sooner did Agapitus give them a sign with his hand, than they instantly obeyed his command and returned to their cages. At this sight, the spectators clapped their hands and cried out, "There is no other God than the one whom the blessed Agapitus adores." The Martyr, thereupon, raising his voice, exclaimed :

"Believe ye also in that God, my beloved brethren, that your souls may be saved. Whatever you see in this world must soon pass away. Forsake the worship of the idols, and seek everlasting bliss in the Christian Faith."

The Prefect, convinced at last that it was useless to make any further attempts to overcome the constancy of the youth, pronounced this sentence : "Agapitus reviles our gods, and disobeys the will of our Princes : I command that his head be struck off with the sword."

The executioners immediately seized the heroic athlete, and led him out of the city until they came to a place called "the Two Columns." Here the Martyr was allowed a few moments to pray. Kneeling down and raising his hands to heaven, he said :

“Lord Jesus, into Thy hands I commend my spirit ; receive me this day among the number of Thine elect.” No sooner had he spoken these words than one of the executioners with one blow severed the head from his body. The Christians were permitted to take possession of the precious remains. They came in crowds, and, amidst canticles of joy and triumph, deposited them in a new tomb made of stone, about a mile from the city, where God glorifies His servant by many miracles even to this day.

He suffered on the eighteenth of August, under the Emperor Aurelian.





V.

ST. FORTUNATA.

CÆSAREA, in Palestine, was the birthplace of the blessed Fortunata. Her parents were persons of the highest rank in the city; but, unhappily, they were obstinately given to the errors and superstitions of Paganism. She had, however, three brothers—Carponius, Evaristus, and Priscianus—who, in their youth, had been called to the knowledge of Christianity, and, with admirable zeal and singleness of heart, continued ever faithful to all its principles and practices. In spite of the opposition of her worldly-minded mother, the young maiden resolved to follow the example of her excellent brothers. Nor was she satisfied with becoming a Christian, but, aspiring with noble generosity of soul to whatever is most perfect and beautiful in religion, she freely consecrated her pure and youthful heart to God, that thus she might obtain one day the blessed privilege, as a bride of Christ, to follow

the Lamb whithersoever He goeth." While thus leading a life of peaceful seclusion from the danger and turmoil of the world, she strove to sanctify herself, without neglecting any of the duties of her station, or forgetting that "to every one God has given a commandment concerning the neighbor." Hence, by works of charity, by prayer and exhortation, she brought many to a knowledge of the truth and guided them in the way of salvation. But the enemy of all good soon began to show how displeasing to him was the quiet progress of Christianity.

At the instigation of his wicked colleague Maximian, the Emperor Diocletian issued an edict of persecution against the Christians throughout the Empire. This announcement was hailed with great joy by Urban, the bloodthirsty Governor of Cæsarea, who had long waited with eager impatience for a chance to gratify his avarice and cruelty. He began his part in the bloody drama by arresting thirty-seven of the principal Christians of the city, and throwing them into loathsome dungeons. The three brothers of Fortunata were of the number. The hour of trial had now come for the noble maiden. She commended herself to her heavenly Bridegroom, begging of Him to shield her with His protection, and to direct her steps, that in all things she might fulfil His holy will. Feeling herself supported from

on high, she lost all fear of danger, and, accompanied by one of her handmaids, she went to visit her brothers in their prison. She was at first refused admittance, but, by perseverance, and especially by the small presents she made, her sisterly affection soon overcame the objections raised by the keepers. In this manner she enjoyed the pleasure of being in the society of those whom she loved most upon earth; whilst, by her zeal and devotedness, she cheered them on to endure not only patiently, but even joyfully, the hardships of their imprisonment.

One day, as she was leaving the dungeon, she was told that at the next session, now near at hand, the Confessors of the Faith were to be tried by the Governor. When she heard this, her bosom swelled with a longing desire for her heavenly country, and she said:

“Who will grant me that I may become a partaker of the struggles of God’s Martyrs, that thus I may the more speedily behold the countenance of Jesus, my Lord and sweet Bridegroom!”

One of the officials, who was standing near, hearing this, forthwith reported the words to the Governor’s assessor, adding, besides, how the same young lady had come, day after day, to visit and encourage the prisoners. The assessor ordered the immediate arrest of Fortunata while he himself

went to give an account to Urban of what had occurred. As might be expected, the Governor was very angry. He commanded her at once to be brought before him. When, however, he saw that the accused was a young and delicate child in appearance, he seemed greatly disappointed. He shook his head to express his displeasure, and seemed at a loss what to say. Nevertheless, after he had looked at her for some time in silence, he said :

“ Since thou standest now before my tribunal, tell me, what is thy name ? ”

“ As regards my earthly existence,” answered the maiden, “ they call me Fortunata ; but inasmuch as I hope to enjoy everlasting bliss hereafter, I am called a Christian.”

“ Renounce that name of Christian,” said Urban, “ and, unless thou art prepared to undergo every kind of torture, say that thou art ready to offer sacrifice to our great gods.”

“ Did you but know,” replied Fortunata, “ how sweet it is to serve the One true God, you would not advise me to worship false gods. Do you not know that no one can serve two masters, because he will hold to the one and despise the other ? If reason tells us that we cannot render ourselves pleasing to the one without giving offence to the other, how

much more must this happen when there is question of serving many?"

"That does not hold good," objected the Governor, "when we speak of the gods; they are not jealous of one another."

"That there is more than one God," said the maiden, "is an error introduced among men by the devils. The idols are nothing in the world; they have no power, neither for good nor for evil. There is but one God, of whom are all things, and to whom we also belong. Why do you not believe in Him, and endeavor to save your soul by observing His laws?"

"As thou feelest so great an interest in our well-being, it is proper that we should be equally well-inclined toward thyself," said Urban. "We advise thee, therefore, to have a regard for thy future happiness, and, by taking advantage of thy youth and beauty, to secure for thyself a suitable settlement in life. As for religion, trouble not thyself about that; do as everybody in this world does, and sacrifice not for an opinion the flower of youth. In short, I have an only son: be thou to me a daughter; I offer thee his hand. If thou accept him for a husband, thou shalt be dearer to me than all that this world contains. What sayest thou to that?"

"Your son," answered Fortunata, "is no more

than any other mortal ; but my Bridegroom is God as well as Man : your son is the owner of a small spot of ground, which he cannot long possess ; my Bridegroom owns the heavens and the earth, and is the everlasting possessor of all that exists : your son, alive this day, cannot be certain that he shall be so on the morrow, and must return to the dust whence he came ; my Bridegroom lives forever, unchangeable, imperishable, glorious. How can you think me so silly as to suppose that I could even think of exchanging the one for the other ?”

“Who can doubt,” said the Governor, “that all this prating of thine proceeds from an unsound mind ? Tell me, who is that happy bridegroom of whom thou boastest with so much extravagance ?”

“Jesus Christ, our Lord,” replied the maiden, “of whose greatness and power you are wholly ignorant.”

“That is enough,” he said, “we can wait ; a short time given thee for reflection will not be amiss.”

Thereupon, he ordered her to be shut up in prison.

Meanwhile, the mother of Fortunata, not knowing what had become of her daughter, was full of anxiety, and sent her servants in every direction. She passed the night in weeping and lamenting, and would receive no consolation from friends or domestics. In

the morning, however, a messenger from the Governor appeared and said to her :

“Your daughter is kept in prison on account of her obstinate adherence to the religion of the Christians.”

Hearing this, she at once seemed to give up all hope : she struck her breast and tore her hair, and, uttering loud complaints, she hastened to the prison. There, casting herself at the feet of her daughter, amidst sobs and tears, she exclaimed :

“Alas ! my beloved, my darling child, what sudden madness has taken possession of thee ? Why wilt thou forego the joys of this life, and expose thyself to the torments of criminals ? Cannot the affection of thy loving mother recall thee to sentiments more worthy of thee ? That thy brothers should forget a mother’s love, I can understand ; but that thou, my only love and comfort, wouldst treat me thus, is too much for me to bear. Oh, Fortunata, return with me ; say that thou hast nothing in common with the foolish superstitions of thy brothers ; be again the joy of our home, now become desolate.”

To these entreaties of her unhappy and deluded parent, the noble maiden replied :

“Whatever there is in me that belongs to this earth, exists for a time and then perishes, that I

have received from you, Oh mother ; but my soul, which makes me akin to the angels of heaven, I have received from on high. The hour has come for me to forget my earthly kindred, that I may live with the elect of God. My affection for you is not lessened on this account. My Saviour knows how greatly I desire your happiness ; therefore, I entreat you, believe in Christ as I do, and nothing shall separate us forever, for we shall live with Him in endless bliss. You once thought yourself happy in having me for a daughter upon earth : if, through me, you believe in Christ, the Redeemer of men, you will rejoice at the thought of having a martyred daughter in heaven."

To this the wretched mother made no reply. Wholly devoted to the pleasures and vanities of this world, she seemed incapable of making a sacrifice of its allurements, or of following the generous aspirations which her daughter had endeavored to awaken in her breast. Seeing that her words and example could not move the callous heart of her proud and worldly-minded parent, Fortunata gave some money to the keeper of the prison, and besought him to allow her to visit her brothers in their dungeon. The jailer readily granted the request. As soon as she appeared in their presence, she threw herself at their feet, and said :

“I beg of you, beloved servants of Christ, to whom you are hastening, ask of Him, by the love He has for you, to permit me to be a companion in your sufferings and death. He will not refuse your petition if you demand this favor for me, your unworthy servant.”

Immediately, the three brothers, kneeling down, and raising their hands towards heaven, began to entreat their Divine Master to grant the desires of their loving sister. Hardly had they begun their prayer, when they heard a voice from heaven: “Peace be with you: your prayer is heard. Be it known, however, that she will come to Me through many struggles, but you by the lighter pains of martyrdom.”

Meanwhile, Urban, after thinking by what means he might be able to induce the maiden to yield to his proposals, summoned her before him. When she stood in his presence, he said to her:

“Let us hear now, Fortunata, to what conclusion thou hast come during the time we have allowed thee to consider our offer. Art thou prepared to accept our conditions, and thus secure for thyself safety under our special protection?”

“My safety and protection is Christ our Lord,” answered Fortunata.

This reply aroused the wrath of the Governor, and he cried out:

“Wretched and obstinate girl, deny that Christ of thine, and pronounce not again His name. Say at once that thou art ready to worship our mighty gods, that thus thou mayest hereafter enjoy their company with us, their friend. But if thou still darest persist in thy folly, I will crush thee by the weight of tortures.”

“I am not so foolish,” replied Fortunata, “as to place my protection in the powerlessness of idols; nor am I so timid as to dread your torments, because I despise your gods.”

Urban, hearing this answer, grew furious, and felt convinced that his plans could not succeed. Whereupon, he ordered her to be stripped, and in this condition dragged through the streets of the city. The blessed Martyr, while suffering this disgraceful treatment, conversed in spirit with her heavenly Bridegroom, who, for the salvation of men, had not disdained to undergo a similar ignominy. But the Governor was not satisfied with this punishment. Hardly knowing what torments more cruel to think of, he sent the executioners with orders to saw her in two, with as rough an instrument as they were able to procure. Whilst the men were preparing to comply with this command, Fortunata prayed aloud:

“I will fear no evil because Thou art with me, Oh Lord.” After a few moments, she added: “Lord

Jesus Christ, Oh Thou, the strength and life of Thy servants, I besecch Thee suffer Thou not that this kind of torment succeed, according to the desire of Thine enemies. I make not this request because I am unwilling to endure whatsoever Thou permittest to befall me, but that the marvellous greatness of Thy protection may be made manifest in Thy weak and unworthy handmaid, for the confusion of the wicked unbelievers."

The executioners began their inhuman work, but they labored in vain. The saw did not even seem to touch the body of the virgin Martyr. Again and again they resumed their task, but without avail. Soon, wearied and amazed, they looked at one another in utter astonishment; then seized with a sudden fear, they hurried off to Urban, and said:

"Your Excellency has placed upon us a hopeless task. We have exerted ourselves to the utmost; but the body of that young lady is harder than marble. With all our persistent efforts, we have not been able to make so much as a mark upon it."

At this announcement, Urban was beside himself with rage, and shouted: "What! shall it be said that we cannot crush the rebellious spirit of a foolish young girl! Shall it be thought that our princes—and even our gods—cannot triumph over the obstinacy of a miserable Christian! Yet, if all this were

unavailing, we can still show what the ferocity of wild beasts has power to effect."

After which he sent the Martyr to prison, and gave orders that on the following day she should be exposed to the beasts. In the meantime, he did not fail to charge some of his friends to use their best endeavors to bring her over to his views; but it was in vain that they employed promises and threats; the heroic maiden was equally insensible to both. Early the next morning a great multitude of spectators filled the amphitheatre. Fortunata was placed in the middle of the arena. When the Governor had taken his seat, he gave a sign to the keepers, and instantly a lion, a bear, and a leopard were seen rushing toward her. Not one of the animals, however, ventured to approach her. The Martyr, after uttering a short prayer, turning with a calm and cheerful countenance to the vast assembly, said:

"This day, Oh beloved citizens of Cæsarea, you are eye-witnesses of the great goodness and power of the God of the Christians. You see that He who created all things, keeps them also subject to His will. These creatures, though ferocious by nature, become meek and harmless when they hear the name of Christ. Less insensible, alas! than their rational fellow-beings, they are obedient to the command of their Maker."

Thereupon, she made a sign to the animals, and forthwith they drew near and began to lick her hands; but seeing some of the keepers entering the arena, as if they suspected some harm might be intended to the Martyr, they suddenly rose up and would have rushed upon them, had not Fortunata commanded them to remain quiet. At the sight of this wonderful spectacle, the crowd of spectators shouted so vociferously, that Urban hurried away from the amphitheatre, fearing lest the people, in their sympathy for the innocent victim, might wreak vengeance upon him. No sooner, however, had he placed himself beyond the reach of danger, than he sent a large body of soldiers to bring the Martyr to the palace. There, no longer afraid of any interference on the part of the people, he ordered her feet to be pierced with large iron spikes, and subjected her to every other species of torture which his ingenious cruelty could devise. But, in spite of all his wicked attempts, he was at last forced to confess that the fortitude of the heroic maiden was greater than his own power and desire of punishing. Wherefore, he condemned her to be beheaded. When the Martyr heard this sentence, she was filled with joy, and raising her eyes toward heaven, she said:

“Lord Jesus Christ, I thank Thee with all the

powers of my soul for thy exceeding mercy. Thou didst teach me, from my tenderest years, to keep my body chaste and undefiled in Thy sight. When I was surrounded with dangers, Thou didst preserve me. When temptations beset me, Thou didst draw my heart from the love and vanities of this world. Thou gavest me chaste and holy counsel, filling my soul with rapturous love for Thee. Receive me now among Thine own, Oh divine Bridegroom, that I may bless and thank Thee for evermore."

The Governor, meanwhile, considering what troubles he had brought upon himself by this first trial, foresaw still greater difficulties if he should publicly examine and pass sentence on the brothers of the maiden. He therefore condemned them to suffer death together with their sister. When Fortunata was led to the place of execution and learnt that her brothers were to be her companions, she said to the chief executioner:

"I will give thee twenty gold pieces, if thou promise me faithfully to perform what I am about to ask."

The man readily consented to do whatever she might desire of him.

She then asked him to see to it that her own body, and those of her brothers, should not be left exposed nor burnt after death, but that they

might be decently buried. To this request he willingly agreed.

When they arrived at the appointed place, they perceived that her three brothers had already received the crown of martyrdom. Whereupon, having obtained permission to say a short prayer, Fortunata said aloud :

“Lord Jesus Christ, King of ages, who hitherto didst not forsake me, remember me at this hour. Render me victorious over Thine enemies, that thus Thy unworthy handmaid may courageously finish what she has so happily begun under Thy protection. Grant that my soul, weary of this body of sorrows, may at last, according to Thy promise, come unto Thee.”

Then, addressing the executioner, she added : “Come, friend, do thy duty.” The man approached, and, raising his sword, was about to strike the fatal blow, but, at the same instant, his arm became so stiff that he was unable to move it. Trembling in every limb and deadly pale, he fell on his knees and exclaimed : “Pardon me, my Lady ; either my eyes deceive me, or I see around thee a throng of maidens clad in white garments.”

The Martyr, raising her hands to heaven, said : “Lord God, chaste Lover of chaste souls, suffer me no longer to linger in this place of exile. My heart

panteth after Thee, Oh Lord; grant me to appear before Thy face." At these words, bowing down her head, she expired.

The executioner, according to his promise, entrusted the remains of the four Martyrs to the care of the Christians, who gladly received them as a precious treasure confided to their pious keeping.

They suffered on the fourteenth of October, A. D. 303.





VI.

SS. VICTOR AND CORONA

IN the reign of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius, Upper Egypt was governed by a wicked and cruel man, called Sebastian. Even when his master did not persecute the Christians, this Governor, like many others in different provinces of the empire, thought he might display his power and gratify his evil disposition by making himself the upholder of the worship of the idols. Wherefore, he resolved to force the Christians either to abandon their Faith or to submit to his punishments. Among his soldiers there was a noble Christian, Victor by name, a native of Cilicia, a man who feared God, and endeared himself to all by his virtues and exemplary conduct. Him the Governor selected as the first object of his persecution. He summoned him to appear before his tribunal. and said.

“Victor, I have just received a rescript from the Emperor, whereby he commands that all the Chris-

tians must be made to offer sacrifice to the gods. They who are unwilling to obey this order, will expose themselves to the imperial displeasure and its consequences. So then, I advise thee to sacrifice and save thyself from further molestation."

"I am a soldier of the great and immortal King, Jesus Christ," replied Victor; "the power of the Emperor is limited by time and place: the power of my Lord and Master is permanent; it extends to every place; eternity itself shall not see the end of its duration."

"Yet, for the present thou belongest to our sovereign," said the Governor. "As a faithful subject, thou shouldst do his bidding, and honor the gods whom he worships."

"As a soldier, I have been ever most ready to fulfil a soldier's duty; now, when, at the instigation of the Evil One, I am required to disobey the God whom I adore, and to transgress the law of conscience, know that I will not suffer myself to be conquered by the devil. You indeed have power over my body, but my soul you cannot hurt. God alone has power of life and death; to Him be glory and praise forever."

"Thou displayest, no doubt, a wonderful wisdom in thy words," said Sebastian.

"If you think so," rejoined Victor, "you should

consider that this wisdom is not mine, but belongs to Him who gives it to whomsoever He thinks proper."

"If thou wert to make use of that wisdom to save thyself from the torments which await thee, thou wouldst assuredly induce me also to admire thy prudence."

"There is nothing which can give me greater consolation than the thought of being tortured for the confession of my Faith; this will enable me to prove that I am sincerely and firmly devoted to the service of the Eternal King."

"Thou speakest well," said the Governor; "art thou perhaps a deacon or some officer in the Church?"

"I am not worthy of so great a distinction," answered Victor. "The grace of Christ has taught me what I know. He gives wisdom and prudence from His abundance to them that are of a right heart, and willing to obey his commandments. For, as the husbandman who carefully cultivates his field—which in due season is visited by the rains from heaven—gathers in a rich harvest; so also the wisdom of God quickens them that hope in Him, and wards off the enemy until they bring forth fruits of salvation, and deserve to be garnered by Himself."

“So, then, at present it is thy desire to die rather than to live?” asked Sebastian.

“There is no question of dying,” answered Victor, “but of living forever, if I endure with perseverance whatever torments you may inflict upon me.”

“Is this thy firm resolution?” asked the Governor.

“It is,” replied Victor.

“Then we will begin by trying whether a little torturing cannot shake it,” said Sebastian; and immediately he gave orders to the executioners to break the first joints of the Martyr’s fingers. While Victor went through this painful operation, he looked up to heaven and said.

“I thank thee, O my God, because thou bestowest upon me this favor for the sake of Christ Jesus our Lord.”

“Obey our commands,” said the Governor, interrupting him, “and worship our gods, lest thou be made to suffer a most disgraceful death.”

“That I will never do,” replied the soldier; “I sacrifice to the living God, the Creator of all things; your miserable idols, the work of men’s hands, I utterly despise.”

The Governor, although very angry, seemed not disposed to proceed at once to extremes, wherefore he sent the Martyr to prison, in the hope that time and reflection might shake his constancy.

On the following day, when Victor was again brought before Sebastian, the Governor said:

“I understand that thou art unwilling to take food; what is the reason?”

“I will neither take nor taste,” answered the Martyr, “that which is placed before me whilst I am treated with injustice and violence. Besides, I have a spiritual food; so long as I partake thereof, I cannot hunger forever.”

“If we cannot overcome thy obstinacy by kind treatment,” said the Governor, “we must try the effects of severity.”

Whereupon, he ordered him to be cast into a furnace made glowing hot. As the executioners were taking the Martyr to the place where he was to undergo this punishment, he exclaimed:

“God of our fathers, hear me a sinner. Because I love Thee, I joyfully endure this torment. Grant that I may persevere undefiled in Thy sight. If it be Thy holy will, suffer not that this fire have power over Thy servant, that they who know Thee not may see and confess that all things are obedient to Thy command.”

After saying this he signed himself with the sign of the cross, and, as the executioners cast him into the furnace, he prayed again:

“Oh God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who

didst of old save Thy three servants from the burning furnace, do not forsake me this day, but show Thy mercy unto me a sinner; for Thou alone art my hope and my salvation."

The furnace was shut upon him. He, however, in whom he had put his trust did not abandon him. For, after three days, when the Governor sent his men to see whether anything remained of Victor, it was found that he had in no manner been injured by the flames. Filled with wonder at the sight of this miracle, the men led him to Sebastian, and related how they had found the Martyr singing the praises of God. But the wicked tyrant remained unmoved, and said to Victor:

"How wast thou enabled by thy magic skill to extinguish those fires, and prevent them from injuring thee?"

"I thank my God," simply replied the Martyr, "that I am no magician, as you seem to suppose; but a Christian, who confides in the power of Him whom I serve."

The Governor then requested a magician to prepare a poisonous mixture, and put it in the food to be given to Victor. When the food was presented to the Martyr, he said:

"I would not touch this food, did I not rely upon the power of my Lord and Master, Jesus Christ.

But, to prove that, under His protection, I can defy your wicked attempts against me, I will take what is offered to me."

Thereupon, he said a short prayer, and boldly eat of the poisoned meats, without feeling the least evil effect. When the magician saw the wonderful power of the Christian's prayer, he immediately resolved to put it once more to the test, in order to convince himself more fully that it was some supernatural agency which rendered his drugs ineffective. Wherefore, he prepared a much more powerful mixture, and said to Victor:

"If thou take this draught without suffering any harm therefrom, I will give up my belief in the power of magic, and acknowledge the God whom thou servest as the Author and Master of nature."

Without hesitating for a moment, the Martyr took the proffered cup, and, after making the sign of the cross upon it, drank the poisonous mixture. The magician looked on for some time in anxious expectation of witnessing the fatal effect of the draught; but he waited in vain—the prayer of faith had destroyed the power of the deadly poison. Seeing this, he yielded to the motion of divine Grace, and exclaimed:

"I wish thee joy, Oh Victor! thou hast conquered. By overcoming my wicked arts, thou givest life and

salvation to my soul. For even as a brazen statue becomes soiled by age, and is, as it were, made new again by being cleansed, so am I—a man long steeped in every wickedness—washed and purified by the grace and mercy of the God whom thou servest so fearlessly.”

After this he cast all his magical books and writings into the fire, and renouncing forever his unholy occupation, begged the Martyr to instruct him in the doctrines and practices of the Christian religion. Victor joyfully complied with his earnest request, and, when he knew him to be sufficiently instructed, purified him in the waters of baptism.

A few days after the conversion of the magician, the Governor sent again for Victor, and said to him:

“Victor, be wise at last, and offer sacrifice to the great gods.”

“I have always been sufficiently wise,” replied the Martyr, “to know and to do what is right.”

“But now,” said Sebastian, “thou art become a very fool.”

“God hath chosen the foolish things of this world to confound the wise,” said Victor.

“Where is that written?” asked the Governor.

“In the Epistles of blessed Paul, the Apostle,” answered the Martyr.

“Is that Paul a god?” inquired Sebastian.

"The blessed Paul is not a god," replied Victor, "but an Apostle of God. Like a wise architect in the temple of God, he laid the foundation of his teachings upon Christ. Whence also he received from God the fulness of knowledge and wisdom, that he might point out the way of salvation to them that are willing to be saved."

"Let us have no more of that nonsense," said the Governor, interrupting him. "Obey our command and worship the gods; for all thy foolishness will avail Thee nothing."

"I am not foolish," replied the Martyr, "since I love and cherish true wisdom. But they are foolish, as well as wicked, who, obeying your commands, worship your senseless idols, and refuse to acknowledge and serve the true God. Even as your father, the devil, from the beginning, denied the truth, so you, in the blindness of your heart, are unwilling to accept the knowledge of the Faith."

This reply so excited the anger of Sebastian that he immediately ordered the executioners to disable the servant of God by cutting the tendons of his body. Undaunted by the execution of this cruel order, the generous soldier of Christ said:

"Through the power of the name of Jesus, I am enabled to be in no dread of your torments. Do not spare my body; your cruelties can cause me no

pain. For, as when a thorn is taken out of one's foot, the sufferer finds immediate relief, even so do I find rest by reason of my faith in Christ our Lord, now that you have cut the sinews in my body."

Upon this, when the Governor ordered boiling oil to be poured all over his naked body, the Martyr said:

"Oh wretched man, are you not ashamed? How dare you refuse to confess the power of Christ? This burning is to me a pledge of soothing refreshment in a better life; but you are preparing for yourself a place of endless torments. Even now, that which you consider my punishment, is to me like draughts of cooling water presented to the way-worn traveller; because the name of Jesus cheers and strengthens my heart

Then Sebastian commanded the executioners to stretch him upon the rack, and to burn his sides with lighted torches, whilst they continually repeated to him:

"Obey the order of the Emperor, and offer incense to the gods."

But Victor, addressing the Governor, said:

"Do not leave off torturing me; nor think that you can frighten me with all your threats. Jesus Christ is my Comforter, and I willingly endure every torment to secure the good things which are pro-

mitted to them that seek Him. I bless Thee, Oh Lord Jesus, because my abiding trust in Thee hath removed all suffering from my body."

After this, Sebastian ordered his men to put a mixture of lime and vinegar into the mouth of the Martyr, and said:

"Wilt thou at last offer sacrifice, and cease to be an annoyance to us?"

"Never will I obey you," answered Victor, "for I am desirous of offering myself as a willing and undefiled sacrifice to my God, who has my soul and body in His power."

Thereupon, the Governor commanded his men to pluck out the Martyr's eyes. Victor said to him:

"Oh, senseless wretch, think you, by depriving me of sight, to tear out of my heart my burning love for my God and Saviour? The loss of my bodily sight renders more intense the light of my spirit, and makes me see more clearly and love more ardently Him for whom I undergo all these sufferings."

Sebastian, seeing that all his attempts to subdue the constancy of the valiant champion were of no avail, gave orders that he should be hung up with his head downward. In this position the Martyr was left for three days; yet when, after that time, some soldiers sent by the Governor came to take

him away, they were greatly astonished to find him still alive. They immediately sent word to Sebastian, and asked what was to be done. The impious tyrant, instead of acknowledging the power of God in the wonderful preservation of the Martyr's life, commanded the executioners to flay him alive. Whilst he was undergoing this barbarous punishment, he said:

"Although you take away the covering of my flesh and bones, you cannot despoil my soul of her garment—a firm faith in my God, and a loving gratitude for all the mercies He has shown me." Then raising his voice, he exclaimed:

"Lord God Almighty, my soul is placed in anguish; have pity and strengthen me. Visit me with Thy mercy, even as Thou didst visit them that were pleasing to Thee from the beginning. Hide not Thy countenance from me on account of my unworthiness, nor abandon me in this time of my affliction. Lord Jesus, Son of God, I thank Thee for Thy goodness to me, a sinner. Help me in this my great struggle; suffer not that Thine enemies prevail over me; Thou knowest that I am in suffering, for the glory of Thy holy Name."

Whilst the Martyr prayed thus, a young woman who was standing in the crowd of spectators, suddenly drew near to him and cried out:

“Blessed art thou, Oh Victor, and blessed are thy works. God hath accepted thy sacrifice, even as of old He received the sacrifice of Abel; because in singleness of heart thou didst offer thyself, thou art pleasing in His sight, even as Enoch; thy faith has been tried, even as the faith of Abraham; thou hast persevered with patient endurance, even as Job; they have persecuted thee, even as they persecuted Isaiah, who was sawed in two; thy sacrifice is finished, thy triumph begins; behold, I see angels bringing down from heaven two crowns; the more brilliant one is thine, the other, mine; for, although I am poor and weak, yet I fear and serve the King of kings, and, together with the strong and the brave, I shall be a partaker of the promised inheritance.”

The Governor hearing these impassioned words, and seeing the youthful appearance of the person who had uttered them, wondered exceedingly. No sooner, however, had he reflected on the meaning of what she had said, than he felt convinced that she must be a Christian. Wherefore, he ordered his men to bring her before him, and said to her:

“What is thy name?”

“My name is Corona,” she replied.

“Thy age?” he asked.

“I am sixteen years old,” she answered.

“Art thou married, and how long?” he inquired.

"I am married one year and four months; my husband is a soldier."

"Go, then," said Sebastian, "and like a true wife of a good soldier, offer incense to the immortal gods, the protectors of the empire."

"I am a Christian, and my name is Corona," she said. "Do you suppose I would dishonor my name and lose my crown?" So saying, she began to take off the ornaments she wore. Sebastian asked:

"Why art thou in so great a hurry to take off those ornaments?"

"It is but proper," she answered, "that I should cast away this worldly adornment which I wore to please my husband—who himself must pass away with time—that I may meet the Heavenly Bridegroom of my soul, Jesus Christ, who lives forever, and who, in His mercy, invites me to come and share His own immortal bliss."

"Let us hear no more of that foolish talk," said the Governor; "go and sacrifice to our great gods."

"Did I not tell you that I wish to secure an imperishable crown? How could I be so foolish as to sacrifice to your vile and powerless gods?"

The Governor, thereupon, commanded his soldiers to bend two palm-trees, and after binding one of her hands and feet to each, to let them suddenly loose again. This was done, and the Martyr's body being

torn to pieces, she went to receive her promised crown.

The blessed Victor, hearing what had happened, gave thanks to God. Sebastian then gave orders that he should be beheaded. The Martyr, on receiving his sentence, raised his hands towards heaven, and exclaimed :

“Thanks to Thee, Oh Lord Jesus, who didst comfort me in my weakness, and didst not suffer my soul to perish. Grant that the power of Thy grace may be manifested in me even unto the end. Now, Oh Lord, receive my spirit in peace.”

He had no sooner uttered these words than the executioner struck off his head.

These Martyrs suffered on the fourteenth of May, A. D. 177.





VII.

ST. ISIDORE.

IHIOS, an island on the coast of Ionia, was the place where the blessed Isidore proved himself a true Christian and a valiant soldier of Christ. In the first year of the Emperor Decius, a great number of soldiers, under the command of Numerius, their General, were sent to the island. As Isidore, at the time, held there the office of Quartermaster, his occupation became one of great labor and responsibility; but his exactness and fidelity, as well as his unvarying kindness in the performance of his duties, so endeared him to the soldiers that he soon became a general favorite. The Evil One, however, could not endure that a Christian should be thus honored and esteemed, whilst he remained at the same time an enemy and a despiser of the idols. Wherefore, he stirred up the spirit of envy in the breast of a Centurion, called Julius, and suggested to him the thought of securing

the charge and its emoluments for himself. Hence, avarice also, at all times a powerful incentive to evil, stimulated this ungenerous officer to find out a pretext for supplanting his brother soldier. Nevertheless, for many a day his efforts proved unsuccessful; for the conduct of the Quartermaster was so just and exemplary in all things, that none could find the least fault with him. But, at last, the Centurion learnt that Isidore was a Christian. This discovery fully answered his evil purpose. Knowing that the edict of Decius against the Christians—which had been temporarily suspended during the levying of troops—had not been repealed, he resolved to have it enforced against Isidore. Whereupon he forthwith repaired to Numerius, his commander, and, with great display of zeal for the common good, he said:

“My revered commander, you know that it is the will of our sovereign master, the Emperor, that no one should refuse to comply readily with all his orders; yet, in spite of this, and to the prejudice of your own authority, there are some amongst us, in this very place, who disregard the imperial will and say that they will not obey his edicts.”

“Art thou not a Centurion under our command?” said Numerius. “What vague and unpleasant accusation dost thou bring before us? Who is he that

would venture to expose himself so boldly to condign punishment? Tell us, Julius, how didst thou discover that there are some who dare oppose the Emperor's edicts?"

"It will, no doubt, astonish you to hear that, among them that disobey our Sovereign, there is a military officer under your own command; yea, no less a person than your Quartermaster, Isidore. He does not even disguise his sentiments, but openly avows himself a Christian. He has publicly asserted that he will, under no circumstances, offer sacrifice to our gods. Thus he defies the power of the Emperor and your own authority. Can you permit such an infraction of military discipline? Is it not your duty to see to it, that so bad an example receives its proper correction?"

Numerius could not but suspect that the zeal of the Centurion had been aroused by some other motive than his love for the public good, and endeavored to pacify him, saying:

"As the edict of the Emperor was issued chiefly with a view to recruit the army, and as there is now no longer any necessity for its enforcement, would it not be better to let this matter rest? Knowing as we do that our Sovereign is a just and humane prince, have we no reason to think that this persecution of a faithful and worthy officer will be attri-

buted to jealousy or some private enmity? The fact that Isidore has freely and cheerfully enlisted in the army is a sufficient proof that he has complied with all the requirements of the law."

"A person in your position, sir," said the Centurion, "ought not to treat this matter so lightly. It might have the appearance of an excessive kindness—nay of a willingness to betray the interests of the Emperor. If it be true, as you seem to think, that all your men readily obey the regulations of the army, you have only to express your desire that all should join you in returning thanks to the gods for this happy state of affairs."

"There is reason to fear," replied the General, "that your zeal may lead us into trouble. - As to Isidore, the Quartermaster, we all know that he does not worship our gods, but he adores a great and mighty God. If in all other things he is dutiful and praiseworthy, why should we cause him any annoyance on this account?"

"Yet the law requires that all should sacrifice to the gods of Olympus. No one can refuse to do this without incurring the displeasure of the Emperor; for Decius himself claims to derive his origin and power from them. It does not belong to us to inquire why the law was made; it is our duty to suffer no one, under our orders, to disregard it,

without receiving the punishment in that case provided."

Numerius, in spite of his good-natured disposition, saw no way of extricating himself from the difficulty into which the officiousness of the Centurion had drawn him, except by yielding to his suggestion, hoping, no doubt, that some favorable opportunity might occur to prevent him from enforcing the law against Isidore. Wherefore he said to the Centurion :

"The gods have been so favorable to me that I look for no greater honors than those which they have already bestowed upon me. My worship for them has brought its reward. I consider your advice well-timed ; if Isidore knows what is for his own interest, he will surely employ it to his advantage. Go, therefore, call him hither ; we will endeavor to use our influence in such a manner as to give satisfaction to all."

Immediately Julius took with him three soldiers, and, mounting a chariot, repaired to the dwelling of the Quartermaster, whom he made a prisoner, and said :

"Justice, the avenger of our gods, sends me to remove the darkness which shrouds thy understanding. Thou knowest not that it is a duty to be obedient and thankful to them ; follow me, and

prove thy fidelity to the Emperor by doing his bidding."

Isidore seemed at first astonished at this strange proceeding, but as he was conscious that he had done nothing wrong, he did not suspect that any harm could be intended. Wherefore he cheerfully accompanied the Centurion, without inquiring into the cause of his arrest, and commended himself to the protection of his Divine Master. He was not long left in suspense; for when he was summoned into the presence of Numerius, he saw that officer seated on a tribunal and ready to begin a formal interrogatory. Without allowing him time to recover from his surprise, Numerius at once addressed the accused:

"What is thy name?"

The Quartermaster thought it a strange question to put to one who was so well known to all his brother officers, yet, seeing that the General was in earnest, he replied boldly:

"My name is Isidore."

"Art thou the person," asked Numerius, "who refusest to obey the imperial edicts? Is it true that thou art unwilling to offer sacrifice to the gods of the Empire?"

"Of what use would it be to me if I were to sacrifice to those vain and senseless things which

you call gods? What power or influence can they possess, if they nowhere exist?" answered Isidore.

"Oh, hardened wickedness of an obstinate mind!" exclaimed the General, "what horrible words thou darest utter against our gods! Doubtless their wrath is this very moment aroused against thee; their vengeance will soon overtake thee. Nay, I fear much lest thy impious language may incite them to punish us also for permitting such irreverence."

"I am nowise afraid of their vengeance," said the Christian, "for I know how powerless they are. But Christ, the God whom I serve, who holds in His hands the destiny of all men, whom He created, may, if He chooses, destroy with one word, not only you and my accuser, but even your mighty Emperor himself."

"There may be occasion for thy God to display His power, and to show in what manner He is able to protect thee," said Numerius, "if thou perseverest in thy resolution of not worshipping our gods."

"You may rely upon that," replied Isidore; "for I intend to keep in view the heavenly crown held out to me by the Son of God, until I receive it from His hand, after triumphing over His visible and invisible enemies."

"It is not my wish to cause thee any trouble,

Isidore," resumed the Commander, "much less to subject thee to the torture. Yet, I beg thee, yield to my advice; obey the imperial edict, sacrifice to our gods. For, unless thou art willing to do this, I see not in what manner thou canst escape the wrath of the Emperor."

"Nevertheless, there is a simple way of escaping it," replied the soldier, "and that is, to disregard it altogether. The threat of the Emperor's displeasure would be terrible indeed, if it could affect my whole being. But his power is limited; he may order my body to be tormented and destroyed, but upon my soul he cannot pronounce sentence. If you remember this, you will understand, that no power of earth is to be feared by him who is ready cheerfully to sacrifice his body, that his soul may the sooner attain to a life of endless bliss. Hence, you must not expect that I would be so cowardly, or so forgetful of my own true interests, as to forego an everlasting reward for the sake of pleasing a man, who must soon lose his power both of punishing and rewarding. Whatsoever, therefore, you are desirous of doing against my body, do not delay it, in the hope of changing my fixed resolution. My heart and soul are devoted to Christ, my Lord; Him I serve with a loving fear. I have no other fear."

Numerius, however, was in no haste to gratify

the longing desire of the Confessor of the Faith. On the contrary, acquainted as he was with the probity which he had shown in the discharge of his office, he appeared anxious to save his life. Wherefore, he addressed him again in the kindest terms.

“Would that I could persuade thee, Oh Isidore,” said he, “to comply with the will of the Emperor; nothing could then hinder thee from attaining the highest honors. Thy youthful vigor, thy manly beauty, thy sound judgment, all combine to awaken my sympathy; thy noble birth, thy influence among persons of the highest rank, have prepared for thee the sure way to distinction. How canst thou overlook all these advantages? Thou art beloved by thy brother officers; the soldiers regard thee as their friend; we all consider thee as one specially favored by the gods. Consider, then, if it is the part of wisdom to despise all this as nothing, and to choose disgrace, when wealth and honor and glory await thee.”

To these well-meant expressions of the General, Isidore replied:

“I never cease to implore the most merciful God, Oh Numerius, to dispel the darkness of error from the minds of all, that, enlightened from above, they may see the truth, and worship Him, the One true God, the Father and Creator of all things. The

ignorance of this truth is the cause of all the wickedness which we see around us."

"Thou inspirest me with a desire to know the God of whom thou speakest," said Numerius. "For if I know Him, I make no doubt, in many things I should escape troubles and vexations which now press me down, as it were, by an unavoidable necessity."

"If you are really desirous of knowing the truth, I will not withhold it from you. The God whom the Christians adore, is He who, in the beginning, created the heavens and the earth, and the seas, and whatsoever is therein contained. He also made man in His own image, gave him command over all creatures upon earth, and placed him in a garden of delights. But the devil, by means of the woman, induced him to disobey the command of his Maker; in consequence, they were expelled from their happy abode. Two sons were born to them: the one grew envious of the other, at the instigation of the devil, and, led on by this evil spirit, the elder treacherously slew the younger. And here permit me to call your attention to the fact, that the same wicked demon has ever since continued to stir up passion and strife among men, and to lead them into every kind of misfortune. He too does, this very moment, by means of my accuser, urge you on to transgress

the law of the true God; he endeavors to prevail upon you to force me, contrary to reason and justice, to defile myself by an impious worship, that thus I may forfeit the crown, which is to be the reward of that faith which I embraced some years ago. But God, who rules over all, will give me courage and strength to resist the attempts of His enemies, and to continue faithful to His holy law."

These words of the Confessor, so far from inducing Numerius to follow his better judgment, produced quite a different effect: instead of calmly yielding to the voice of reason and conscience, he became greatly agitated, and listened to the evil suggestions of the tempter. He paused for a while, and then said:

"Thou canst not gain me over to thy side by such talk. By relating those ancient fables thou thinkest to make known the will and commands of thy God, but we are not prepared to look upon them otherwise than as silly stories, which may amuse children. No, Isidore; give heed to our safe counsel, prove thyself a good soldier by obeying the command of our illustrious ruler. If thou suffer thyself to be persuaded by me, and show thyself ready to secure the imperial favor by sacrificing to the gods, thou shalt obtain great riches and still greater honors, and, what is better, thou shalt become the friend of

the deities, who preside over the affairs of this world. If, however, thou persevere in thy obstinate resistance, prepare thyself for the scourge and the sword, for these will send thee out of this life."

"I humbly adore Christ, the Lord and Master of the universe," replied Isidore. "He can and will save me from the hands of the wicked, if it is His good pleasure to manifest His power in the sight of the unbelievers. As to your gods, they are but lifeless images of metal and stone, the workmanship of craftsmen; being without life or motion, they are unable to give aid to any one, nor can they even help themselves."

"Well, if such is thy opinion," said the General, "then let us see what is the power of Christ, whereof thou boastest so much. For my part, I believe that, so far from being the Creator of all things, He does not even exist; for if He did exist, He would not fail to protect thee, and would deliver thee out of my hands."

"Oh wicked, impious blasphemer," said Isidore, "how dare you despise the God of mercy? You foolishly deny that Providence which watches over every being; despite the voice of your reason and conscience, you desire to ignore the justice of the Divine Being, to whom you have to give an account of all your doings at the close of your existence

upon earth. I pity your blindness, which induces you to fear the judgments of mortal men and disregard the unerring condemnation which an all-seeing Judge will pronounce against you. Unhappy man! what advantage can you hope to derive from suffering yourself to be led by that unfortunate wretch, Julius, my treacherous accuser? Does not your own good sense tell you, that it is absurd to provoke the wrath of the true and living God by offering sacrifice to the memory of dead men, who when living were a cause of ruin and a curse to their race? Why not rely upon the God of might and truth, and reject with abhorrence those false and cruel deceivers of man? But I perceive I am wasting my words to no purpose. If you are resolved to seek your own everlasting destruction, do not, at least, induce me to follow your example: spare your threats, for they cannot move me to forget the supreme duty I owe to my Maker. By my faith in Christ, the Redeemer of men, I defy all your power; if He calls me to everlasting life through the rough way of suffering, I am ready to do His holy will."

Numerius had grown exceedingly angry whilst the fearless Christian was speaking. No sooner did Isidore stop than he cried out:

"There is no doubt, thou hast a very eloquent tongue, when the reviling of our gods is the subject

of thy harangue. I, however, am determined to put an end to all further display of the kind. I will order that vile tongue of thine to be cut out."

"If you cut out my tongue," answered Isidore, "it will be the more easy for me to refuse, when I am tempted to taste of your abominable sacrifices. Wherefore, hear me once more: I adore Jesus Christ, who, for our sake, was crucified under Pontius Pilate, who rose again from the dead, and ascended into heaven. This is the profession of my Faith; you have no power to make me change my unshaken belief."

Whereupon, the Commander, forgetful of all the esteem he had formerly entertained for his Quarter-master, and yielding to the wicked demon of blind fanaticism, ordered the executioners to tear out the tongue of the Martyr. Isidore, who was prepared to undergo every inhuman cruelty rather than swerve from the allegiance which he owed to his Divine Master, cheerfully submitted to the barbarous torment. At the same moment the power of God was made manifest to all. No sooner had the executioners complied with the command of Nume-rius, than, struck down by a divine visitation, he himself fell prostrate to the ground. Filled with terror at the sight, his officers immediately rushed to his aid and raised him up. Finding him appa-

rently lifeless, they used all the means in their power to restore him to consciousness; and when, at last, they brought him to his senses, they were utterly horrified to perceive that he was deprived of the faculty of speech. This sudden punishment produced so wonderful an effect upon the minds of the spectators, that they proclaimed not only the power of the God whom Isidore worshipped, and the vanity of their idols, but most of them declared their readiness to embrace and confess the Faith of the Christians.

Nevertheless, the heart of Numerius was not moved to repentance by the misfortune which had befallen him. Instead of acknowledging the justice of his punishment, and looking for mercy where alone it could be found, he grew more angry and revengeful. He gave a sign that writing-tablets should be brought to him, and wrote upon them this sentence: "Isidore, who is unwilling to obey the laws and sacrifice to the gods, is hereby ordered, according to the command of the Emperor Decius, to perish by the sword."

The tablets were, thereupon, handed to Isidore. Having read his own sentence, he was filled with an exceeding joy, and, suddenly feeling that his power of speech had been miraculously restored, he exclaimed:

"I thank Thee, Oh Lord Jesus Christ, for the great favor Thou showest me this day. I praise Thee, Oh Lord, because Thou art my hope and my life. I bless Thee, because Thou givest strength to my body and light to my mind."

The executioners then led him to a place called the *Valley of the Reeds*. When arrived there, he knelt down, and made the sign of the cross upon every part of his body, after which he said :

"I bless Thee, Oh Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, because this day Thy holy will is accomplished in me, and, under Thy fatherly guidance, I behold the end of my course upon earth. I beseech Thee, Oh Lord Jesus, my loving Redeemer, grant me a share among Thy Saints in Thine everlasting kingdom."

Having finished this prayer, he bowed down his head, and the sword of the executioner freed his spirit from its earthly dwelling.

Ammonius, the friend and companion of the blessed Isidore, took possession of the sacred body of the Martyr, and, with the assistance of many of the brethren, buried it reverently near the place of execution, where God has continued to glorify His servant by many miracles.

St. Isidore suffered on the fifteenth of May, A. D.



VIII.

ST. ALEXANDER.

AT the time when the Emperor Maximian was persecuting the Christians, a body of soldiers, under the command of the Tribune Tiberian, was ordered to set out for the East. Before their departure from Rome, all were required to go to a temple of Jupiter, outside the city, and there, according to custom, offer sacrifice to that idol. As Maximian himself was to take part in the ceremony, a great multitude of people immediately hastened to the place appointed. When, however, the Tribune made known this order to his men, several of whom were Christians, one of them, called Alexander—a noble youth, who from his early childhood had been trained up in all the practices of his religion—boldly stepped forward, and, addressing Tiberian, said:

“If you had summoned us to offer our supplications to Him who is the true God of the universe, you would have done what is just and proper; but

the idols, which you call gods, are no gods at all, but only devils."

"We do not ask you at present," said Tiberian, "to offer sacrifice to all the gods whom we and the Emperor worship, but only to the great and mighty god Jupiter."

"Do you call Jupiter himself a god?" asked the youth. "He is not a whit better than the rest, and they are very wicked demons. Do they not all conspire to mislead and destroy their deluded worshippers? Do not you yourselves assert that your gods have rendered themselves guilty of the grossest indecencies? How can you give divine honors to a being that delights in sensual pleasures and every species of crime? Who but deceitful devils could ever have introduced so vile a worship among men? But the God whom we adore is a pure Spirit, the Creator of heaven and earth: He cannot be seen with the eyes of the body. Nor does He demand such sacrifices as you are wont to offer to impure demons: He asks of us an undefiled and unbloody sacrifice."

Tiberian listened with the greatest astonishment to the words of the young soldier, and said:

"Let alone all that extravagant talk, Alexander, and despise not our gods, the bestowers of so many blessings, lest, perhaps, the wrath of the Emperor

be aroused against me, who suffer thee to speak out so freely."

After saying this, he hastened to join the imperial train. During the ceremonies, however, he began to reflect on what had occurred, and, fearing lest his conduct in the matter might be misrepresented to Maximian, he resolved to avail himself of the first opportunity to justify himself before the Emperor. Wherefore he went to him and said:

"My Lord, all the soldiers over whom your Highness has placed me in command, have readily complied with the imperial order, and united with us in offering sacrifice to Jupiter, the protector of Rome. Yet there is one of them, a deluded youth, who not only has refused to obey, but has so far forgotten himself as to speak insultingly of our great gods, calling them wicked and impure demons. Can it be that he does not know that I am ready to slay with my own hand whomsoever I find disobedient to your imperial will?"

Hearing this, Maximian grew very angry and exclaimed:

"Where is the impudent wretch of whom I hear such things? Go, bring him before us; we are anxious to see the base traitor."

"He has even refused to make his appearance among us, my Lord," replied Tiberian

Immediately three soldiers were sent in search of him, with orders to bring him, laden with chains, before the Emperor.

Meanwhile, Alexander, after refusing to be present at the idolatrous worship, had returned home; and, while thinking on what had taken place, had fallen into a gentle slumber. It was about the middle of the day. As he was sleeping he had this vision: an Angel appeared to him and said: "Be brave, Alexander; thou art about to undergo many and great sufferings for the name of Christ the Crucified. Behold, the soldiers of the Emperor are coming to seize thee; but fear not, for I am sent to strengthen thee against all the torments which are prepared for thee. Arise, commend thyself to God: I will be with thee until thou finish thy course."

When the blessed youth had heard these words, he awoke, and forthwith arising, he began to pray: "He that dwelleth in the aid of the Most High, shall abide under the protection of the God of Jacob. He shall say to the Lord: Thou art my protector and my refuge: my God, in Him will I trust."

As soon as he had finished this prayer, he left the house and went to meet the soldiers. When they saw him, they did not recognize their former companion; for they beheld his countenance beaming with a supernatural brightness. Struck with

awe at the sight, they fell prostrate to the ground. Alexander himself was filled with wonder at their strange behavior, and said to them :

“ Arise, brothers ; what do you fear ? ”

“ We beheld thee surrounded with the power of God,” they replied ; “ the sight of thee filled us with terror.”

“ Listen, brothers,” said the youth ; “ the God of heaven will have His servant in His holy keeping. Do against me what you have been ordered ; put me in chains and lead me away a prisoner.”

“ We were resolved to say nothing of the unpleasant duty we have to perform,” said the men ; “ how has it become known to thee ? ”

“ There is no need of wasting words,” answered Alexander. “ I am hastening to the combat proposed to me by my heavenly King. My journey will be very long—from Rome even to Byzantium.” Then kneeling down, he prayed again, saying : “ Lord Jesus Christ, God of our fathers, Thou art worthy to be praised and glorified forever ; blessed and exalted be Thy Holy Name in all ages. And now, Oh Lord, I beseech Thee, separate me not from the number of Thine Elect, nor cast me off when I come to Thee. Thou hast made known to me Thy dread and Holy Name ; for Thou art my helper and protector. I am weak and slow of speech,

Oh Lord: send, I pray Thee, Thy holy Angel to mine aid, that, when I shall stand before the rulers of this world, I may not be put to confusion."

The soldiers then bound him in chains and led him away. As they passed through the streets, crowds of people followed them, and expressed their astonishment that one so young should dare to defy the wrath of the terrible Maximian, for Alexander had little more than attained his eighteenth year. As soon as Tiberian learned that the soldiers had arrived with their prisoner, he hastened to notify the Emperor. Maximian immediately ordered the youth to appear before him, and said:

"Is it true, Alexander, that thou didst despise our commands, by refusing to accompany the Tribune and thy companions in arms, when they were ordered to attend us, as we were going to offer sacrifice to the great god, Jupiter?"

"I adore my God, who is in heaven," answered Alexander, "and His Son Jesus Christ, our Lord, and the Holy Spirit. I neither know nor acknowledge any other god, since He is the only true God, whom I worship. Do not speak to me of other gods, for there is no other. As to your will and authority, I respect them in all things that are just; your threats and torments to induce me to do what is wrong, I fear them not."

Maximian was very angry when he heard this bold answer, and said :

“Tell me, what power has that God of whom thou speakest?”

“The true God,” replied the youth, “is not seen with the eye of the body, but He can do all things : nor is there anything in the universe which is not subject to His power.”

Is he the God who was fastened to a cross and put to death by men?” asked the Emperor.

“Hold your peace, Satan,” said Alexander, “you are not worthy to name Christ the Crucified. It is strange, that you should have heard that He was crucified and put to death, and that you should not know that He rose again from the dead, and restored many men to life.”

“I pity thee on account of thy youth,” said Maximian ; “for thou appearest to have attained neither the strength nor the wisdom of manhood.”

“Keep your pity for yourself,” boldly replied the young soldier, “and show your wisdom by extricating yourself from the snares of the devil.”

“Come forward, young wretch,” cried the Emperor, highly excited ; “offer sacrifice to the god Jupiter, lest thou die a most miserable death.”

“You should call yourself the most unfortunate of wretches,” said the unterrified champion, “since

you are so blind and foolish as to worship impure demons. As for myself, I care not for your blustering threats, since the true God will be my helper."

Maximian, disguising his wrath and assuming a bland and cheerful countenance, said :

"I pity thee, Alexander, on account of thy age, as I said before. Come now, offer incense to the gods. If thou comply with my will and desire in this respect, I promise to give thee a place among the highest officers of the imperial household."

"And who is the god to whom you wish me to offer sacrifice?" asked Alexander.

"To the great and mighty god, Jupiter."

Then, raising his hands towards heaven, the youth prayed aloud, saying : "Lord Jesus Christ, do not forsake Thy lowly and unworthy servant ; hasten to help me, for the powers of darkness beset me on every side."

At that very moment he felt himself endowed with new strength and courage, and, turning to the Emperor, said :

"To whom did you desire me to offer incense?"

"To the great Jupiter," he answered.

"Do you not know," asked Alexander, "that that god of yours is an unclean and deceitful devil? Do not your historians affirm, that, under the form of a stupid animal, he carried off a poor woman?"

"That very fact," replied Maximian, bursting out into a fit of loud and prolonged laughter, "that very fact proves the power of our gods. They can show themselves to men in any and every shape they choose."

"I understand what you mean," said the soldier: "you approve and praise their most wicked and infamous doings, because these agree with your own. Meanwhile, you neither thank nor acknowledge the One true God, from whom you have received your own power and imperial dignity."

"There thou mistakest again," said the Emperor; "for it is from our own immortal gods that I hold all the power and dignity I possess."

"You hate the truth and love falsehood, and, therefore, you deny the true God. It is a wonder to me that a person of so much skill and prudence in other matters, can so far forget himself as to prepare his own everlasting ruin, by putting his trust in demons."

"Thou seest now that I really pity thee; for I suffer thee not only to address me as an equal, but even to insult me to my face."

"I have no intention of insulting you," said Alexander, "but I despise the conduct of a man who possesses reason and good sense, and, nevertheless, worships deaf and dumb idols. What can

there be more foolish than to deny the true and ever-living God, and serve the devil, the father of lies and of every wickedness? If you desire to prove yourself truly great and wise, abandon the darkness which surrounds you, and come into the light, lest hereafter you be condemned to endless torments."

At this, Maximian could no longer contain his anger. Wherefore, addressing Tiberian, his Tribune, he said:

"Take this young man; I put him into your hands. It is my will and command that you take him along with you to Byzantium, and use every means in your power to induce him to worship our gods. Should you meet with any persons holding the same opinions as Alexander, spare them not; but make all Christians feel that we have the power to punish and destroy them, and that none shall escape our hands, so long as they resist our command."

When the blessed Alexander heard this order, he said to the Emperor:

"I thank you, my Lord, for giving me so fair an opportunity of confessing my faith in many lands."

"By Jove," said Maximian, "thank me not before thou learnest by experience that thou hast fallen

into better hands than mine. A few days of trial will teach thee that the Tribune Tiberian is not so soft-hearted as the good-natured Maximian."

"For this even will I return thanks to my God," replied the youth; "for then I shall know that He deems me worthy to suffer hardships and tribulations for the sake of Christ, His Son."

Thereupon the Emperor ordered the Tribune to take him away. Tiberian sent him to prison until the following day, when he summoned him to appear before his tribunal. As the soldiers were leading him to their chief, Alexander smiled and said: "Behold, Satan has again drawn up his myrmidons in battle array against me; but I am ready for the conflict." When he stood before the Tribune, Tiberian said to him:

"How now, Alexander, dost thou still continue in thy rash and obstinate resolve? Follow my advice; offer incense to the gods, and free thyself from further molestations."

"I see everlasting glory prepared for me," answered the soldier. "Have I no reason to be satisfied, yea, to rejoice exceedingly?"

"Wert thou to do what the Emperor commands, thou shouldst have greater reason for rejoicing. If, however, thou perseverest in thy foolish obstinacy, I swear to thee, by all the powers of Olympus, I

will crush thee and scatter thy bones through every province and city of the empire."

"I obey the commands of my God and Sovereign Lord," replied Alexander. "All your threats I consider mere boasting; your tortures cannot frighten me so long as I continue faithful to the great Master whom I serve."

Tiberian then ordered him to be hung up, and his body to be torn to pieces with iron hooks. While undergoing this cruel treatment, Alexander uttered not a word, but, looking up to heaven, he communed with Him for whose sake he suffered. The Tribune, seeing that, with all his efforts, he could not force his victim to give even the least sign of pain or uneasiness, directed the soldiers to take him down, and lead him bound in chains outside the city, there to await the day of their setting out for the East.

This day soon came, and the noble youth, treated as if he were the vilest of criminals, began that long and painful journey, which, as he had hoped, was to render his name illustrious in many lands. Crossing the Adriatic, they landed in Illyria. Immediately on their arrival, Tiberian, mindful of the orders he had received from Maximian, resolved to make a new attempt to subdue the heroic spirit of his prisoner. To give the people of the town in which they now were a high opinion of his power, he

caused his tribunal to be erected in a conspicuous place, and invited the inhabitants to witness the trial of a Christian, whose obstinate resistance the Emperor himself had been unable to overcome. In consequence, the tribunal was soon surrounded by a large crowd of eager spectators, among whom there were several Christians. These sent up their silent prayers to the God of all strength, begging that He would deign this hour to comfort the youthful confessor of the Faith, and make him victorious over the powers of darkness.

During nearly all this time Pæmenia, the mother of Alexander, was ignorant of what had befallen her son. For she was residing in the country, at a considerable distance from Rome; and none of her friends had ventured to give her an account of occurrences which must naturally prove very distressing to a mother's heart. However, an Angel of the Lord appeared to her in sleep and said: "Arise, Pæmenia; as speedily as possible, order thy servants to make ready their beast of burden, and follow thou thy son, who is this very hour led away into a far off country. Be not disheartened, but rather rejoice at his good fortune; for Christ the Lord has selected him to suffer martyrdom for the confession of His name."

The pious matron immediately arose. Happy in

the thought that her beloved child had been deemed worthy of so great a blessing, she returned fervent thanks to God. Her domestics were soon ready, and she hastened to the city. Having there ascertained in what direction the soldiers were travelling, she followed them without delay. Favored by Providence, she came up with them at the very time that Tiberian was beginning to interrogate Alexander. Regardless of every obstacle and danger, the fond and courageous mother made her way through the crowd until she was enabled to have a sight of her son; then she cried out in a loud voice:

“May the Omnipotent God, the Good Shepherd, in whom thou trustest, be thy helper, Oh my son!” The Tribune was very angry when he heard that there was some one bold enough to cheer on the Martyr, and commanded the person that had uttered the words to be arrested on the spot. But, to his still greater vexation, no one in that vast assembly of people of every age and condition, seemed either able or willing to point out the brave sympathizer. This incident did not serve to soothe the excited feelings of Tiberian; wherefore, addressing Alexander, he said very snappishly:

“Come now, wretch, be ready at once to sacrifice to our gods.”

I offer a sacrifice of praise to my God, who reigns in heaven," replied Alexander.

"Didst thou not say heretofore, that thy God had no need of sacrifices?" asked the Tribune.

"I said that the true God did not need such sacrifices as you offer to your demons," answered the youth; "but He demands of us a sacrifice of justice and holiness, because our God is just and holy."

"Let us see now what thy God will do for thee," said Tiberian; "and whether He will free thee from our hands."

He then ordered his men to burn the cheeks of the Martyr with lighted torches. Alexander, looking up toward heaven, exclaimed

"Glory to Thee, Oh Lord Jesus Christ, who didst send Thine Angel to Babylon to free the three youths from the burning furnace. Deliver me also from my present distress, and compel this wicked man to submit to Thy power, that I may be able to sing with Thy Prophet: 'I passed through fire and water, and Thou broughtest me out into a place of refreshment.'"

When Tiberian saw that the fire did in nowise injure the Martyr, he was so much confused that he immediately withdrew from the place, saying to his attendants: "Put the prisoner again in chains and

proceed with him on your journey; I will follow after a while."

Pæmenia, availing herself of this circumstance, asked the soldiers to permit her to speak with her son. They readily consented, and the devoted mother soon had the happiness of embracing the generous Confessor of the Faith. Alexander was equally rejoiced at meeting one so dear to him, and said: "I had not hoped, Oh my beloved mother, that this consolation would have been granted to me, and I thank God for this new favor. He will give you strength to follow me until we arrive at the place where Christ, our Lord, will crown at last His unworthy servant." Some of the soldiers, likewise, encouraged the Martyr, and said: "Thou art indeed happy, Oh Alexander, to have such a mother, whose devotedness must strengthen thy faith, no less than the wonders which God works in thy behalf."

While on their journey, they came one day to a place, not far from a town, where there was a spring, the cool and plentiful waters whereof invited the soldiers to refresh themselves after their long and weary march. The men to whose keeping the youth had been committed, as they sat down to take their food, pressed him to join them; for they knew that during several days he had not broken

his fast. Alexander, however, thanking them kindly, asked them to permit him to go a short distance apart, that he might be more at liberty to pray. This being granted, he withdrew, and kneeling down, he prayed aloud: "I have lifted up my eyes to the mountains whence help shall come unto me. My help is from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. Lord Jesus save me, and keep me sinless in Thy sight, even if I am but a poor sheep of Thy flock, lest thine enemies triumph over Thee; for I confess Thy dread and holy Name. Stretch forth Thy hand, and send Thy holy Angel to guard me against the wiles of the tempter; for I trust in Thee, my Guide and Protector." Whilst he was thus praying, a voice was heard saying to him: "Fear not, Alexander; thy prayer is heard; I am with thee." The soldiers also, hearing the voice and seeing no one, were struck with terror and fell prostrate to the ground; for they were all convinced that their former companion in arms was a friend of God. When Alexander returned and beheld them trembling with fear, he said:

"What are you doing, brothers? why are you so cheerless and ill at ease?"

"Friend of Christ," they answered, "we heard the voice of God conversing with thee, and great fear came upon us." The youth assured them that they

had no cause for fear, as they were only doing their duty.

During this time the Tribune had caught up with his men. Many of the inhabitants of the town, prompted by curiosity, had also come to the encampment. Tiberian asked them the name of the place. They answered that it was known by the name of *The Judgment*.

"It is a very appropriate name," said the Tribune, "and we will avail ourselves of the circumstance."

Whereupon he invited them to be present at a trial; and ordering his attendants to erect a tribunal, he said:

"Now, bring that Christian before me, that I may see whether he has changed his mind, and is at last ready to do our bidding."

As soon as Alexander stood before him, Tiberian said:

"Dost thou still persevere in thy reckless obstinacy and refuse to sacrifice to our gods? But, I see, thou art too full of strength and vigor to yield to our wishes; we must weaken thee a little. Yet, believe me, Alexander, I feel a great interest in thy well-being; on this account I am most anxious to make thee a friend of our gods."

"You blind and deceitful son of Satan!" fearlessly replied the youth, "you who have delivered your-

self up to the devil, how dare you say that you have an interest in my welfare? What fellowship hath light with darkness? What can there be in common between Christ and Belial? Assuredly, your lord and master, the devil, shows himself very kind and merciful to men, when he labors so assiduously to drag them all into everlasting perdition."

This aroused the wrath of the Tribune. "What!" he cried out, "vile rebellious wretch, darest thou address such language to thy commander? Darest thou defy me, because I have shown myself too good-natured and condescending? But what else could I expect from an enemy of the gods, except ingratitude and insults?"

"Did I not tell you," answered the unterrified Alexander, "that you are very like your father, the devil? You are as hard as a rock to understand reason, and as impenetrable to every humane feeling. Do you forget that this place is called *The Judgment*? This ought to warn you that the judgment of God will soon overtake you. He will come to judge all, both the living and the dead, and reward every one according to his works. Then you shall know whether or not I have spoken the truth. God sees what mercy you show to His servant: He sees what torments you are preparing for me; but in that day these will be my glory and your condemnation."

This so enraged Tiberian that he immediately commanded his men to strew a great quantity of thorns and briers on the ground, and roll the Martyr upon them. While undergoing this torture, Alexander spoke not a word.

The Tribune perceiving it, at once concluded that his victim felt no bodily pain. Wherefore he ordered him to be scourged with heavy rods of green wood. The youth bore this disgraceful punishment with unflinching firmness, and said to his tormentor:

“Are these the cruelties wherewith you think to overcome me? If you have any that are more stinging, do not forbear to inflict them. I knew that the God whom I serve would be my helper, and, thanks to His sweet protection, all this ruthless display of your malice does nowise hurt me. While you have my body in your power, do with it what you like; but my spirit neither you nor Satan, your master, can subdue.”

“If such is thy trust in thy God, I will now cast thee into the fire; then we shall see whether He is able to save thee from my power. For thou shouldst know, that I have made up my mind to scatter thy flesh and bones throughout the countries which we have to pass. Thy very ashes I will throw into the streams, so that not even a vestige of thy existence shall remain.”

Then the Martyr, casting upon him a look of bold defiance, which filled all the spectators with awe, said to the tyrant:

“Christ Himself will destroy you, Oh worker of iniquity, and so scatter your flesh and bones in every direction, that the very remembrance of you shall speedily perish. And I foretell you now, that you shall never again return to Rome, nor see the face of your wicked master, the Emperor. This shall come upon you, because you refuse to acknowledge and honor God, who has given you power among men. Had you confessed His name, He would have rewarded you hereafter with life everlasting; but as you deny Him, and love and serve the devil, your master, you shall receive hell-fire as your portion forever. But I,—through the mercy and grace of Jesus Christ, my Divine Master,—I shall continue to praise and bless Him, in spite of all your tortures, and exalt His glorious Name, even should He suffer this poor and perishable body to be torn to pieces.”

Tiberian, while listening to this solemn declaration, turned deadly pale, and, trembling with fear and anger, stood speechless. The spectators, struck with awe by what they had heard and seen, returned to the town. The attendants themselves, becoming impatient, began to manifest their discontent. The

Tribune, at last, awakened from his stupor, signified that he wished his men to proceed no further that day, as darkness was fast approaching. Whereupon, the soldiers pitched their tents in the place; and the Martyr, with the soldiers who guarded him, sought shelter beneath the wide-spreading branches of a large tree.

During the night, as Tiberian lay sleepless on his couch, and was recalling to mind the occurrences of the preceding day, he suddenly beheld standing before him a spectre of terrible aspect, holding a drawn sword over the head of the terrified Tribune :

“Tiberian,” said the apparition, “it is against thee I am sent. How darest thou oppress that servant of God? Remember, thou art hurrying to thy own destruction. Arise quickly, proceed on thy journey: the time of Alexander is nigh.”

Tiberian remained for a time stupefied with horror; then he arose, and, calling his officers, related to them what he had seen and heard. They were equally astonished, and said to him:

“We had ere now resolved to dissuade you from treating the friend of God so cruelly; but we did not like to incur your displeasure. We had heard and are now convinced that the God of the Christians is all-powerful, and that, sooner or later, He punishes most severely all those who ill-treat His servants.”

This expression of their sentiments did not serve to reassure the Tribune. Wherefore he ordered his men at once to resume their march,—he himself bringing up the rear, as usual, and Alexander, with the men who guarded him, going in advance of the main body. For several days, they continued on their journey, almost without interruption; for, although they passed many towns and villages, Tiberian, remembering the warning he had received, was unwilling that his men should rest themselves. Neither did he, during all this time, molest the youthful Martyr, whose courage remained unshaken, and whose bodily strength seemed not weakened in the least, in spite of his abstemious life. At last they came to the neighborhood of Sardica, a city of some distinction. All the soldiers seemed anxious to enter it, and take some rest after the fatigues of their long travels; but the Tribune turned a deaf ear to their request. The chief men of the city, however, accompanied by a great number of attendants, came to pay their respects to Tiberian, inviting him to accept of their proffered hospitality. But he remained unwilling. As there were many Christians in the place, they had no sooner learned that there was a Confessor of the Faith with the troops than they hastened to meet him. Finding him apart from the rest, they cast themselves at his feet,

and said: "Servant of the Most High, pray for us, that we may continue faithful to Him." "Pray also for me, brethren," replied Alexander, "that I may happily finish my course, and receive the reward which our Lord has promised me."

After again resuming their march, they came to a town, Bonamasium by name, about forty miles above Philippopolis; here the Tribune ordered his men to halt. Several weeks had now elapsed since he had been frightened by the apparition, and, as no harm had befallen him, he resolved to try once more whether no change had taken place in the sentiments of his prisoner. Wherefore he had him brought before him, and said:

"Alexander, dost thou still persevere in thy rashness and refuse to propitiate our great and amiable gods,—Jupiter, I mean, and Æsculapius, the great rulers of the world?"

"Blind and foolish son of Satan," answered the Martyr, indignantly, "must I tell you again, that I will not sacrifice to demons? Did I not say from the first, that I am a Christian, that I adore the One true God, the Creator and Ruler of all that exists, and that I despise the worship of your impure devils, who are of a piece with yourself?"

"The gods forbid that I should ask thee to worship demons," said the Tribune, "but I command

thee to honor Jupiter and Æsculapius, those good and mighty deities."

"Hush, and do no longer annoy me with your stupidities," replied the youth.

"If thou art willing to offer sacrifice," persisted Tiberian, "say so at once; if not, thou impudent wretch, how darest thou insult me and our gods? Reflect on what thou art about, and have pity on thyself; for, I declare most solemnly, I will punish thee so severely that the whole Empire will shudder at its recital."

"I desire nothing more than that," said the fearless soldier, "and I pray with all my heart to our Lord Jesus Christ, that all the inhabitants of the earth may learn to give glory to His holy Name, and praise Him for the manifestation of His power in the sufferings of His humble and unworthy servant."

The Tribune, no longer able to contain his rage, shouted to his attendants:

"Take away that worthless wretch; remove him from my presence; the very sight of him irritates me beyond endurance. Take him to Philippopolis; there cast him into a dungeon; I will soon follow you."

Thereupon they all set out again. When the inhabitants of the city heard that the Tribune was

approaching, the principal men went out to meet him; for they had received word that he intended to visit the place and there sacrifice to Jupiter and Æsculapius. The Christians soon learned that a Confessor of the Faith was imprisoned in the city. Immediately a great number of them repaired to the prison, and besought the keeper to allow them to see and console the Martyr of Christ. The jailor, who was a kind-hearted man, willingly granted their request. When they entered and saw the noble youth seated in the stocks and bound in chains, they all wept aloud, and kissing his feet and his bonds, they said :

“ Happy is the day that brought thee among us, Oh servant of God ! Our city and our country have reason to thank heaven for so great a blessing. Be patient and cheerful, beloved of Christ ! soon thou wilt finish thy course, and receive the promised reward. Do not forget us when thou art in bliss ; for, on account of our Faith, we live in constant fear and trembling. The Governor of the city is a great enemy of the Christians, and almost daily sends out his men to arrest some of our brethren, whom he punishes with fines and other penalties. But, thanks be to God ! with all his threats and display of power, he is unable to make us abandon our Religion. Our numbers, instead of diminishing by reason of

these ceaseless vexations, are still increasing, and many persons of the highest rank have embraced Christianity. We hope and pray that many others may soon perceive their errors, and, renouncing them, join our little flock. Be patient, therefore, beloved brother; He who has chosen thee to be His champion, will enable thee to triumph over all the torments which the wickedness of men may invent."

Alexander was much comforted by these words, and the other tokens of brotherly affection which marked their intercourse with him. Tiberian, however, did not long suffer him to remain undisturbed; for, a day or two after his arrival, he said to the Governor and magistrates of the city:

You must know that I have with me a young Christian, whom the Emperor, at my departure from Rome, gave me in charge, with orders to bring him over to the worship of our gods. Yet, I confess, I have made but little progress. He is still as high-spirited and impudent as ever, although he has had some experience of my skill in punishing. If you desire it, I will try him again in your presence; the sight of so many distinguished personages may, perhaps, render him more pliant."

The Martyr was accordingly sent for and brought before the Tribune and his friends. Tiberian said:

“I trust, Alexander, that now, at last, I shall hear thee say that thou art ready to obey the imperial command. All the Christians of this city are good and loyal men; together with their fellow-citizens, they offer sacrifices to the immortal gods. It would not be to thy credit to be the only one who obstinately refuses to perform an action which must prove so beneficial to thyself. Come, then, accompany me and his Excellency, the Governor, to the temple. Let us propitiate the great gods.”

“Why, Oh blind follower of Satan, who inspires you,” replied Alexander, “why do you again tempt me with your lying tongue? How often must I repeat, that a Christian sacrifices not to unclean devils? Now, therefore, let all here present bear witness that I serve and adore God, the Creator and Ruler of the universe; and glory in suffering for the holy Name of Jesus, His only Son, our Lord. This is my answer to all your threats and deceitful proposals.”

As Tiberian knew very well that all further attempts to overcome his constancy would, for the present, at least, prove ineffectual, he ordered the guard to lead their prisoner, laden with chains, through the streets of the city, and afterwards pursue their journey towards Beræa. Although the Tribune, by thus exposing the Martyr to public

view, intended to bring disgrace upon him, he unwittingly did just the contrary. For the Christians were strengthened in their Faith by seeing their noble champion defying the powers of darkness, even in his chains; and the Pagans were filled with admiration when they beheld the youthful soldier so faithful to his Religion. After setting out, therefore, in compliance with the orders received, they came to a stream called Sermius, which flows into the Hebrus. Here Alexander was permitted to rest for a while and wash his face and hands. Finding himself greatly refreshed by this washing, he gave thanks aloud, saying: "Lord Jesus Christ, I bless and praise Thy glorious Name for all the favors Thou dost unceasingly bestow upon me; especially do I thank Thee for having enabled me to make a good confession of Thy holy Name before the people of Philippopolis."

After this they arrived at a town wherein there was a large market-place called *the camp*. Here the Tribune and his men overtook them. As soon as Tiberian drew near to him he said to the prisoner:

"Remember, Alexander, that thou hast not yet honored our gods as I commanded thee to do."

"Do you want me to tell you again that I am a Christian?" replied the youth; "or have you forgotten how I abhor your devils?"

Upon hearing this answer, the Tribune flew into a violent passion; and he immediately ordered his attendants to bind him to four stakes, and give him two hundred lashes with heavy whips. The Martyr bore his sufferings with the greatest fortitude, and uttered not a word; so that the spectators, exceedingly astonished, could not refrain from loudly expressing their sympathy for the generous youth. Tiberian, fearing that his barbarous conduct might bring him into trouble with the people, forthwith gave orders to his troops to resume their march.

They next came to a town, Carasura by name, about eighteen miles from Beræa. As it was late in the day, Tiberian, with his attendants, took lodgings in the place, but the troops were directed to pitch their tents in the neighborhood. Alexander, with his guard, encamped as usual apart from the rest. The spot which they had selected was very beautiful, elevated, and covered with trees, but lacking water. In consequence of his sufferings and hardships of the journey, the Martyr was parched with thirst, and said to the soldiers:

“Brothers, give me a little water, for I am very thirsty.”

They immediately began to look around and examine every place to find a spring; they sought

in vain. Greatly disappointed they said to the youth :

“What shall we do? there is no water to be had.”

“Brothers,” he answered, “do not say so. God is the Master of nature: He hath a care of His children who call upon Him.” Thereupon, kneeling down he prayed aloud: “Lord Jesus Christ, who formerly didst bring forth water out of the rock, lest Thy people might perish in the wilderness, look down in mercy upon Thy unworthy servant, and hear his prayer. Grant him water in this place, that, cheered up and refreshed, he may give glory to Thy holy Name.”

No sooner had he finished this prayer, than a copious stream of cool and limpid water was seen to issue from the ground near the very spot where he was kneeling. Before tasting the water or rising from his kneeling position, the Martyr with a grateful heart returned thanks to God for this new manifestation of His power and goodness. The soldiers were equally transported with pleasure by what they witnessed, and exclaimed unanimously: “Great and good is the God of the Christians! Glory to Him who so readily hears the petitions of His servants!”

Tiberian was soon informed of what had occurred, and although he was not a little alarmed by what he heard, he affected to make light of the matter,

and said to his officers: "Why did those faithless wretches, to whom I gave the prisoner in charge, allow him to pray, and minister to his own and their comfort? We must make an end of all this, before our troops become infatuated with this nonsense and lose their confidence in our gods."

Whereupon, he ordered the signal to be given to set out at once for Beræa.

When they approached the city, they were again met by a deputation of the leading citizens, who came to welcome the Tribune. Several of these men were Christians, but fearing lest they might incur the displeasure of the imperial officer, they yielded to circumstances, and outwardly gave honor to one whom in their hearts they despised. Others of the brethren, however, without regard to what might be the consequence, went forth boldly and received the fearless soldier of Christ with undisguised approbation of his noble conduct. They cheered him up by every means which Christian charity and their admiration of his heroic fortitude could devise. Thus the Martyr's entrance into Beræa had all the appearance of a real triumph. But when Tiberian became aware of what had been done, he was sorely annoyed; and to show how much the doings of the Christians were displeasing to him, he forthwith commanded that

Alexander should appear before him. Seeing the great multitude of people that thronged around him, and the interest they evidently took in his prisoner, he was afraid to treat him with his accustomed harshness, and said :

“Come now, Alexander, listen to me as thou wouldst to thy father. Let us go together and worship the glorious gods who protect the Empire. If thou do this, I promise, in the presence of all this vast assemblage, that I will set thee free at once ; and if thou be willing to remain with us, thou shalt have the highest rank in the army that I am able to confer ; but shouldst thou prefer to leave us, thou shalt be at liberty to go whithersoever thou choolest.”

“It is a sad and bitter comfort you offer me,” answered the youth. “This alternative which you propose, only proves that all I have said and suffered hitherto has not convinced you of my conscientious sincerity. God forbid that I should follow your counsel ! When will you believe me ? Did I not say again and again, that idol-worship is an abomination to a Christian ? This is my answer ; do not expect to receive another from me.”

The Tribune thereupon set out again, ordering the guards to bring up their prisoner after him. Many of the Christians of Beræa, taking advantage of

this circumstance, accompanied the Martyr. After continuing their journey for some forty miles, they came to a spot where there was a fording-place in the river Sermius. Here Tiberian awaited them. Alexander, suspecting that the Tribune intended to subject him to another trial, requested the guard to grant him a few moments, that he might offer his prayer to God without being disturbed. No objection being made, he withdrew a little aside, and kneeling down under a large nut-tree, prayed aloud :

“Lord Jesus Christ, if it be Thy good pleasure, send down Thy holy Angel that he may receive my soul in peace. I am weary of the burden of this life, Oh Lord ; yet not my will but Thine be done.”

When Tiberian saw him thus engaged in prayer, he said to his attendants : “The young man is again busy with his magical arts. I wonder where and how he has learnt them. I had him in training for many a year, but all that nonsense was never a part of the discipline I taught him.” So saying, he called upon the youth :

“Come, Alexander, after that preparation, it is time to sacrifice to our gods.”

“Truly,” replied the Martyr, “it cannot be denied that your mind seems encompassed with utter darkness. Why will you force me to repeat again what I have said so often before ?”

This aroused the anger of the Tribune. Immediately he ordered his men to prepare a vessel of boiling oil, and pour its contents upon the back of the Martyr. When all was ready, and they were about to obey the command, the vessel suddenly fell to pieces, the boiling fluid severely injuring several of the men. This incident incensed Tiberian still more. After chiding the men for their awkwardness, he made them stretch the prisoner upon the ground under the tree where he had prayed, and beat him most cruelly with heavy clubs. Soon, however, perceiving that the torturers were unable to force their victim to utter the least complaint, he ordered them to desist and to resume their march. The Martyr arose, and after putting on his garment, lifted up his hands to heaven, saying: "Lord God, bless, I beseech Thee, this tree, because beneath its branches Thou didst this day give me grace to confess Thy holy Name." Then the Christians who had hitherto accompanied their heroic brother, embraced him, and after again commending themselves to his prayers, returned to Beræa.

The soldiers who had the Martyr in charge, continued their journey until they came to a town called Bortia, where they were joined by the Tribune and his troops. As Tiberian knew that the Christians

were very numerous in Adrianople, he did not think it safe to pass through that city. Wherefore, having learnt upon inquiry that, by following a cut across the mountains, he could reach in a shorter time the province of European Thrace, he left Adrianople to the right, and soon entering the plains, came to a town, Burtodexion by name. Here the blessed Martyr was met by his devoted mother, who, during his long and painful journey, had in some way contrived to keep all the while at no great distance from him. Without regard to any opposition that might be made, the noble matron, prompted by a mother's love, rushed through the ranks of soldiers and cast herself at the feet of her Martyr son. Then, rising, she fell upon his neck, embraced him again and again, and unable to utter a word, she kissed his chains affectionately as the most precious adornings of the Christian athlete. Alexander comforted her, saying:

“Weep not, my beloved mother: the triumph of thy son is near at hand. Before to-morrow's sun shall set, I trust and know, by the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ our loving Master, I shall have finished my course.”

After which he embraced her with the greatest affection, and begged her to withdraw, lest she might be exposed to the rudeness of the Tribune.

In the early part of that night Tiberian left the town, and ordered the guards to follow him with their prisoner. After marching all night, they came in the morning to a river called Ergina. This they crossed and found themselves in a town, Drusipara by name. Here the Tribune ordered his soldiers to halt, and recruit themselves for some days after their wearisome journey. This indulgence, he did not, however, extend to his prisoner; for he had no sooner established himself in the town, than he sent for him and said:

“Alexander, hearken to me. Do no longer persist in thy stubborn refusal, but propitiate our beneficent gods, who have preserved thee so long.”

“Impious man,” replied the youth, “how dare you persist in calling impure devils gods? Trouble me no more with your wicked proposals; I am utterly disgusted with them.”

“I have done all I was able,” said Tiberian, “to induce thee to consult thy own interest. I have spared neither kind nor harsh means to open thy eyes, and make thee a friend of the gods and a favorite of fortune. But I have labored in vain. Know, then, that unless thou yield at once to the imperial will, this day shall be the last of thy life. I will have thy head struck off, and cast thy body into the river to be devoured by the fishes.”

“I will thank you, Tiberian,” returned Alexander, cheerfully, “if you do really execute your threat; and I will praise the mercy of my God, who delivers me at last from the hands of the wicked.”

This calm reply did not fail to irritate the Tribune. Wherefore, without delay, he pronounced against the Martyr a sentence of death in accordance with the threat he had uttered, and commanded four soldiers to carry it promptly into effect. The soldiers, forthwith, led him out of the town along the bank of the river Ergina, until they came to a little eminence. Alexander, seeing the crowds of people that had followed him, was greatly moved; for he well knew that there were among them many Christians, anxious to express their sympathy for him. The presence of the troops, however, deterred them from doing so openly. The Martyr then requested his executioners to allow him a few minutes for prayer. This being granted, he besought them to give him some water. Immediately one of the spectators, who had with him a small pitcher, quickly ran to the river, and filling it, brought it to the servant of God. Alexander washed his hands and his face, and, after thanking the kind man, signed himself three times with the sign of the cross, and, turning to the East, prayed aloud:

“Glory be to Thee, O God of our Fathers: all

things that exist praise and adore Thee, the Creator and Lord of the universe. The angelic hosts, trembling, worship Thee, and cry out unceasingly: 'Holy, Holy, Holy: the heavens and earth are filled with Thy glory.' The vast expanse of the sky, that glorious sun shedding his rays and heat all around us, proclaim Thy almighty power. The earth and the seas, and all creatures therein contained, bless and glorify Thee, who art the one true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Be mindful, O Lord, of all them that fear Thee, and thankfully sing praises to Thy holy name. And now, Oh Lord, hear my voice with which I have cried unto Thee: have mercy on me, and turn not away Thy face from me, a poor sinner; graciously pardon me, and take me unto Thee, that I may bless Thee forever."

Then he stood up, and, addressing the people, said:

"I beseech you, brethren and friends, and, in the name of my God, I exhort you, not to forget the hardships which I have endured, nor the struggles through which I have passed; for I have not been slothful in suffering for the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that He might be merciful to me and to our people. I know He is willing to accept this my sacrifice, because He is ever gracious and ready to forgive. You are aware, brethren, how long a jour-

ney I have made with the wicked Tiberian: he did not spare me during all that time. However, with the help of Jesus our Lord, I fought manfully, well knowing that the conflict was not so much with a man as with the devil, who was the instigator and helper of the Tribune. But, thanks be to God! my course is finished, and the enemy has not prevailed against me."

Perceiving that the executioners were apparently growing restless, he said:

"Forbear yet a little while, brothers; let me say a short prayer." And, kneeling down, he prayed:

"Lord Jesus Christ, graciously hear Thy unworthy servant, and grant me this favor, that wherever it may please Thee to give rest to my body, they who shall, near it, call upon Thy name, may receive the reward of their faith and confidence in Thee."

At the very instant, all they who were present heard a voice saying: "Thy petition is granted, Oh Alexander, beloved, victorious! come, thy crown awaits thee."

Forthwith the Martyr arose, and said to the soldiers:

"Now, brothers, do speedily what you have been commanded."

One of the four soldiers, who was called Caelstinus, said to him:

"Martyr of Christ, I am the one to whom this unwelcome task has been assigned by lot. Pray for me to God, that it may not be set as a sin to my account."

"Take courage, brother," replied the youth; "there is no sin in thus doing thy duty."

Thereupon Caestinus, taking a linen cloth, tied it before the eyes of the Martyr, and, seizing his sword, was about to strike the fatal blow, when he hesitated and turned deadly pale. Alexander, perceiving that the stroke was delayed, said:

"Fear not, brother, do thy duty."

"Servant of God," said the frightened man, "I cannot; I see around thee a vision, as it were of men who threaten me with angry looks."

The Martyr raising his hands toward heaven, said:

"Lord Jesus, grant that I may, at last, finish my course; take me even now unto Thyself."

The soldier, at once recovering his self-command, struck the blow, and Alexander went to receive in heaven the glorious crown of Martyrs.

In accordance with the Tribune's command, which they dared not disobey—though contrary to the feelings of humanity which they still entertained toward their late companion in arms—the soldiers cast the body of the saint into the river, and went their way.

Meanwhile the Lady Pæmenia arrived at Drusipara, and was informed that on that very day her son had been put to death. Full of anxiety, yet quite determined to recover, if possible, his precious remains, she hastened, without delay, accompanied by her servants, to the place where the cruel sentence had been executed. When they came to the spot, they soon perceived, to their unspeakable grief, that the rapid current had carried away the body. Following for some time the course of the river, they saw, at a distance before them, four large dogs quietly seated together, and, to all appearance, intently watching some object lying between them. As they drew nearer, they were consoled by discovering that the object, which the faithful animals were guarding so carefully, was none other than the Martyr's body, which, manifestly under the direction of a kind Providence, they had drawn out of the water. Pæmonia, kneeling down by the remains of her martyred child, gave thanks to God for having enabled him to confess His holy Name so fearlessly, and devoutly commended herself to the intercession of the now triumphant hero of the Faith. Then, with the aid of her servants, she embalmed the body, and, wrapping it in fine linen, had it removed beyond the river Ergina. There she caused a splendid monument to be erected, wherein she deposited her priceless treasure.

During many days and nights she lingered, watching and praying with a mother's enduring affection, near the hallowed spot, until her beloved Alexander, appearing to her in a vision, consoled her with these words :

“Thou hast labored long and well, beloved mother; thou hast shown more than a mother's love, by following thy son to distant lands. May Jesus, whom from my earliest years thou taughtest me to love and serve, reward thee with that bliss which I enjoy even now in His glorious Kingdom. Grieve no more. Return, with thy servants, to the home forsaken for love of me. Our separation shall not be long; I wait for thee in the happy abode where sorrowing is not known.”

Comforted by this vision, Pæmonia gave thanks to God for all his blessings, and returned in peace to Rome.





IX.

SS. NEREUS AND ACHILLEUS, AND THEIR COMPANIONS.

THESE blessed Martyrs were brothers who, having been instructed in the Faith and baptized by Saint Peter, the Apostle, proved, by their edifying lives and their zeal for Religion, that they were worthy disciples of so great a master. As they were chamberlains of Flavia Domitilla, the younger, this position brought them in contact with many persons of the highest rank in society. They did not neglect to avail themselves of this circumstance to promote the glory of God. By word and example they endeavored, whensoever an opportunity presented itself, to lead others to a knowledge of the truth, or, if they were already Christians, to the faithful practice of all the duties of their holy Religion. By this means they became saints themselves, and were chosen of God as fit instruments to induce their mistress, as well as several members of her household, not only to the strict fulfilment of

His holy Law, but also to the love and observance of the Evangelical counsels.

The Lady Domitilla, being a member of the imperial family, and surrounded as she was with all that is wont to flatter the vanity of persons of her station, appeared, at first, but little inclined to listen to the pious exhortations of her devoted attendants. For she loved, with all a girl's fondness, to see herself richly and showily adorned, and to attract the admiration of others. She tried to persuade herself, as has been foolishly done by many others in every age, that there was a way of effecting a compromise between the spirit of the world and the Spirit of the Gospel,—although the voice of her conscience spoke to her a different language, reminding her of the saying of her Divine Master, "that His true followers were not of the world, even as Himself was not of the world," and of the words of the Apostle: "They that are Christ's have crucified their flesh, with the vices and concupiscences."

When, however, the two brothers learnt that their mistress was about to be betrothed to Aurelian, the son of the Consul Fulvius, and saw her almost exclusively devoted to the vanities of dress and worldly pleasures, they thought that the time had arrived to impress more earnestly upon her mind the responsibility which she was going to assume,

and the splendor of a virgin's crown, which she would forego forever. For they were more anxious to see one whom they loved and esteemed so much adorned with a special glory in heaven, rather than exalted and flattered here below, during the brief span of years which might be allotted her upon earth. Wherefore, after entreating our Lord, with fervent prayer and many tears, to give power and efficacy to their words for His greater glory, they said to Domitilla:

"How great a trouble you take to adorn your body, that you may render yourself pleasing to a poor mortal who must soon die. Were you to make the same exertion in adorning your soul with the beauty of virtue, you would win the affection of a heavenly Bridegroom—even of Christ Himself. He would love you with an everlasting love; He would bestow upon you His own immortal life; and, while embellishing your person with unfading ornaments, would fill your heart with celestial joys."

"What can there be better," replied Domitilla, "than to be suitably married? Is it not a fine thing to have the care of a family, and to bring up children, who will uphold, in after times, the renown and dignity of our race? Besides, is it not too hard to despise all pleasures and amusements, and not to enjoy the sweetness of the present life? We might

as well not have been born, if we cannot love the things which are so pleasing to the senses."

"You, my lady," said Nereus, "see only the bright side of the subject,—the enjoyments which may accompany the married state; but you overlook the trials and sorrows which will be your portion, when it is too late to escape them. First of all, by becoming a wife, you lose your freedom,—of which you have always been so fond, that you could scarcely endure it when your own parents did in any manner interfere therewith. A man, who was hitherto a stranger to you, becomes your master; he may use his authority over you in such a way that you cannot even converse with another, without the risk of incurring his displeasure. Your relatives, your waiting-maids, your attendants, to whose familiar intercourse you have been accustomed from your childhood, become distant, afraid of addressing you; you find there is danger in speaking, danger also in listening; the most innocent actions are open to suspicion and misrepresented."

"There is truth in that," said Domitilla, "for I know how much and how long my mother had to suffer, on account of the jealous disposition of my father; but does it follow that I, too, shall have a jealous husband?"

“That is not easy to determine,” answered Achilles; “for we know that all suitors, before marriage, are meek and fair-spoken; but, when once they have become masters, they generally show themselves far different from what they professed to be. If they are of a gay and fickle turn of mind, instead of loving their wives, as they had promised to do, they give their attention to their maid-servants, making them saucy and disobedient, and taking their part against their mistresses. Nay, more, when men of such a disposition are expostulated with or reproved on account of the impropriety of their conduct, they resent it not only with injurious words, but not rarely with blows. What must be the feelings, under these circumstances, of a high-minded young lady, who so often pouted and fretted when she received the gentle reproof of an affectionate mother?” And then he told her of the trouble, the anxieties, the dangers and sufferings to which a mother is exposed; and of the disappointment of her hopes and plans for the future, when, after all the pangs and pains she has endured, she finds that her children are neither so fair, nor good, nor talented as she had been led to expect.

Seeing that the words of his brother had produced a deep impression on the mind of Domitilla, Nereus added:

“ But, on the other hand, how happy is the state of a virgin, free from all these annoyances! A virgin is beloved of God, and dear to the angels. Whoso lives as a virgin, becomes associated with the inhabitants of heaven. Alas! how great a folly it is, when one can preserve this blissful condition—to the joy of men and angels—to disregard its surpassing excellence! Other virtues and noble qualities, when lost through our fault or negligence, may again be recovered by penance and amendment, but virginity once lost cannot again be restored. As a queen exceeds in dignity all the noble ladies of her court, so this virtue takes the lead of all other virtues, and is second only to martyrdom. All other virtues serve and obey her, being, as it were, ladies of honor in her palace; Faith caresses her, Hope cherishes her, Charity embraces her. The virtues that surround the throne of the heavenly King—patience, perseverance, contempt of the world, watchfulness, hospitality, mercy, knowledge, truth, probity, fortitude and the rest—all look upon her as their beloved mistress. All the joys and delights of the celestial Paradise are refreshed by the sweet perfume diffused by her presence; and pain and sorrow disappear, and the blessed spirits exult forever anew at her approach.” m

When Nereus had thus spoken, Achilleus said:

“What my brother has said is but little; for no human language can express, no human mind can conceive the bliss which crowns this beautiful virtue in heaven. Yet, we must remember that, even in this life, virginity has its advantages and rewards. The virgin preserves her freedom and independence; she disdains to become the slave of man. She rejoices in the company of God’s holy angel, who watches over the purity of her mind and body. He whispers to her holy thoughts. He reminds her that, since she has chosen to become the bride of Christ, she must strive to render herself in all things worthy of her heavenly Bridegroom; that, even as the Church, the mystical Bride of the Son of God, does not cease to bring numberless children to her Lord, so she must endeavor, by prayer and every good work, to present to Him spiritual children as her crown and her glory here and hereafter. Oh, noble and blessed Virginity! while dwelling upon earth among sinful men, thou enjoyest already the happiness of heaven! How much more precious art thou than the richest gems—how much more desirable than tottering thrones! Choose now, dear lady; see whether it is better for you to keep this priceless jewel, that you present it bright and spotless to your Saviour, or whether you will lose it forever to please a poor mortal who, after a few days, will not

so much as thank you for the immense sacrifice you have made for his sake."

These, and many other things, did the brothers say to induce their beloved mistress to choose the better part. Domitilla was greatly moved by what she had heard, and began seriously to consider all the arguments which had been brought forward. For some time she felt a great struggle within her; the spirit of the world contending for the mastery in her heart with the grace of God, calling upon her to devote herself exclusively to His service. At last, however, the contest was decided, and she said:

"Would to God that I had thought of all this sooner, and had never given any hope of marriage to mortal man; then I might have followed this higher calling without causing the least trouble to myself or to others; for even as I renounced the worship of idols at my baptism, so I could now readily have bidden farewell to this whole business. Yet, I trust, that since God has inspired you with words of wisdom to win my heart and soul to Him, He will also, through you, point out to me in what way I may accomplish what I so earnestly desire."

Nereus and Achilleus, after thanking God for the happy change wrought in the mind of their mistress, encouraged her to persevere in the resolution she had made; assuring her that He who was the

author of so unselfish an inspiration, would not abandon her in the conflict which would, doubtless, be excited within her by the enemy of mankind. Domitilla declared that, now that her mind was made up, no power of earth or of hell should be able to shake her firm resolve, relying as she did upon the aid of her heavenly Bridegroom, to whom she desired to belong exclusively for time and eternity. After which, at her request, the brothers repaired to the Pope, St. Clement, and said to him :

“Though the mind of your Holiness is wholly taken up with the cares of your office, we come to beg a favor which, we hope, will not be refused, even should it somewhat trespass on your precious time. We know that your father was the brother of the Consul Flavius Clemens, whose sister Platilla had the kindness to take us into her service. When this noble lady heard the word of life from the lips of the blessed Apostle Peter, she believed, and was baptized by him; and we, as well as her daughter Domitilla, enjoyed the privilege of sharing her happiness. In the same year that the holy Apostle received the Martyr’s crown, Platilla also passed to a better life. Domitilla was solicited in marriage by the son of the Consul Fulvius, and she seemed inclined to favor his suit. When, however, we told her of what we had heard from the mouth of the

Apostle himself, that a virgin who, for the love of our Lord, should preserve her virginity pure and unsullied, would have Christ for her heavenly Bridegroom, and enjoy forever his blissful company hereafter, her mind was evidently filled with a light from above, and she became determined to follow at any cost its guidance. Wherefore, we beg your Holiness in her name, to condescend to visit her in her dwelling, that you may there receive her vow, and give her the sacred veil."

The holy Bishop was filled with joy when he heard that a young lady of so high a rank as Domitilla had chosen to consecrate herself to our Lord, at a time too when persecution was threatening the Christians of Rome, and said to the brothers:

"I foresee that the day is not far distant when you, and I, and the Lady Domitilla herself, may be called upon to struggle for the crown of Martyrs; but since it is a command of our Lord Jesus Christ, not to fear them that kill the body but cannot hurt the soul, let us disregard the wrath of an earthly prince, and obey, with our whole heart and with all our strength, the will of the King of eternal life."

Thereupon, the blessed Clement repaired to the house of Domitilla, and after hearing from her own lips, that she freely and deliberately desired to consecrate herself to God, he gave her the holy veil.

Aurelian was soon informed of what had taken place. At first he was unwilling to believe that the young lady was really in earnest, and he endeavored by every means in his power to induce her to reconsider the decision to which she had come. But, when he found that all his efforts proved unavailing, his former sentiments were changed into feelings of hatred and revenge. Instigated by these wicked passions, he sought the interference of the Emperor himself. Yet the authority of Domitian was powerless against the constancy of the virgin; she regarded neither his promises nor his threats. At last he gave her the choice either of sacrificing to the gods, or of being banished to the island of Pontia. The choice was made at once, and Domitilla was sent into exile.

When thus disgraced in the eyes of the world, the noble maiden enjoyed a peace and happiness which she had not known when surrounded by the splendor and comfort which wealth commands. Her faithful attendants, Nereus and Achilleus, had been allowed to follow her; their company and holy conversation cheered her on in the practice of every Christian virtue. As they had been instruments in God's hand to turn her from the ways and pursuits of the world, so now their knowledge and experience served to guide and direct her in the higher path of religious perfection.

It happened that, when they arrived in Pontia, they found there two disciples of Simon Magus, Furius and Priscus by name, who had also been banished from Rome. These men, by their skill in magic and by the cunning tricks which they performed, had deluded well-nigh all the inhabitants of the island into the belief that Simon Magus was a god, and that the Apostle Peter had been his unjust persecutor. Nereus and Achilleus were determined to spare no pains in order to undeceive the poor people. For this purpose, they challenged the two magicians to a public discussion. On the day appointed, a great multitude assembled to hear the disputants. The two brothers soon perceived that the prejudices of the people against them were so strong, that no arguments, however conclusive, would be able to remove them. Upon this, they asked the crowd:

“Are you acquainted with Marcellus, the son of Marcus, Governor of Rome?”

“Who is there among us that does not know him?” they all replied.

“Would you receive as true his testimony concerning Simon and Peter?” said the brothers.

“He must be a great fool who would not believe so good a man,” they all cried out.

“Well then,” said Nereus, “keep your word; we

will write to Marcellus. While we await his answer, we beg you to take care of yourselves, and to avoid the company of Furius and Priscus. As soon as our letter is finished we will read it to you, that you may all know its contents, namely, what kind of information we desire about the Apostle Peter and Simon Magus; then you will choose some one from among you to carry the letter to Marcellus and bring back the answer. On the return of the messenger, the letter will be opened and read in the presence of you all."

This proposition received the hearty approval of the whole assembly. A messenger was accordingly chosen and sent to Rome with the following letter

"Nereus and Achilleus, servants of Jesus Christ, to their brother and fellow disciple Marcellus, greeting:

"Sent into exile to the island of Pontia, we have reason to be thankful and rejoice, because we are made to undergo this trial for the Name of Jesus Christ; but our joy is marred, and our abode in this place is rendered unpleasant by the presence of Furius and Priscus, two followers of Simon Magus, who, on account of their magical deceptions, which they practised at Rome, were banished to this island. During their stay here, they have again begun their old tricks, misleading the simple-minded inhabitants,

and making them believe that Simon was not an impostor, but a good and holy personage, who for this very reason was hated and persecuted by Peter, the Apostle. Whilst endeavoring to persuade the people to give no credit to the words of these two men, and to place no confidence in their arts, we took the liberty of appealing to yourself, as to a man of stern integrity and worthy of all belief, who might write us a brief account of what kind of life was led by Simon. Since formerly you were yourself one of his followers, and fully acquainted with all his ways and doings, be so kind as to grant our request, if possible without delay, that thus the truth may be known, and the innocent and unsuspecting may be freed from the artifices of designing impostors. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you."

The messenger returned with this answer:

"Marcellus, a servant of Christ, to the blessed Confessors of the Faith, Nereus and Achilleus, greeting:

"The reading of your letter filled me with the greatest joy; for I learned from it that you are steadfast in the Faith and in good works, and that you are fearlessly fighting for the truth. Since it was objected to you, as you mention, that Simon the magician was a worthy and inoffensive sort of a

person, I will expose to view some part of his life, that from the little I say you may form an opinion as to all the rest. It is true that for some time I was one of his followers; but when I found out that he was a wicked and abominable child-murderer, I immediately left his company, and became a disciple to my blessed master Peter, the Apostle. Now it happened that one day, as Simon was addressing the Roman people, and was trying to incite them against Peter, calling him even a sorcerer, there passed through the place a great crowd of persons, friends and mourners, who were accompanying to the tomb the only son of a widow. Peter, being present, said to the people who stood listening to Simon: ‘Invite those persons to stop and set down the bier. Whosoever shall restore the dead youth to life shall be acknowledged as a preacher of the truth, and all will believe the words of his doctrine.’ All the people agreed to this. Simon, nowise abashed, assumed an air of defiance and cried out to the multitude:

“‘Tell me, if I restore the dead man to life, will you kill Peter?’

“‘We will burn him alive,’ they all exclaimed.

“Upon this they gathered around the bier, and the magician began his incantations, calling upon all the demons to come to his aid, until the body

of the young man was seen to move, as if life was returning. No sooner did the people perceive this, than they gave a great shout in praise of Simon, and uttered groans of disapprobation against Peter. The Apostle, however, stood calm and fearless, and beckoning with his hand for silence, said to the multitude:

“‘If the youth is alive, let him speak, walk, take food, and return to his home. If he cannot do this, then it is evident that Simon is but deluding you with his tricks.’

“The clamor of the people was now turned against the magician, and they cried out to him:

“‘Do as thou art challenged by Peter, or know that the punishment which thou just now didst appoint for him, shall be inflicted upon thyself.’

“Simon, pretending that this doubt respecting his power made him very angry, was trying to slip away unperceived; but the people, aware of his intention, laid hold of him, and forced him to be a witness of what was about to happen. Then Peter, approaching the bier, raised his hands towards heaven and prayed:

“‘Lord Jesus Christ, who didst say to Thy disciples: “Go ye, in My name cast out devils, heal the sick, raise the dead,” restore this youth to life, that all this multitude may know that Thou alone art

God, who with the Father and Holy Spirit livest and reignest forever and ever.'

"Immediately the young man arose, and, falling down before the Apostle, exclaimed:

"'I beheld the Lord Jesus Christ, who commanded His Angels and said: "At the prayer of My friend Peter, let the orphan be restored to his mother."'

"When the people heard this, they were filled with wonder, and cried out: 'He alone is the true God whom Peter announces!'

"Simon, now exceedingly frightened, by means of his art changed his look into that of a dog, and began to make his escape; but the crowd held him fast, and, dragging him along, were going to burn him alive, when Peter rushed into their midst, and freeing the wicked impostor, said:

"'Our divine Master did not teach us to use violence, but to return good for evil.'

"After being thus delivered from danger for the present, Simon came to my house, and, imagining that I knew nothing of what had occurred, bound with a large iron chain a dog of enormous size—whencesoever he had him or what he was I leave you to conjecture—near the entrance of my dwelling, and said to me:

"Let us see whether Peter, who of late is accustomed to visit thee, will be able to come in.'

“About an hour after, Peter came, and seeing the dog, he blessed himself with the sign of the Cross, and going up to the brute, let him loose, saying: ‘Go, contradict what Simon has said; and, henceforward, leave off acting as a slave of devils in order to deceive the people for whom Christ the Lord shed His sacred Blood.’

“When I heard and saw this, I was so much astonished that I immediately ran up to the blessed Apostle, and, falling upon my knees before him, I besought him to enter my dwelling; and straightway I gave positive orders to the magician to leave my house at once—forbidding him ever to enter it again. The dog, however, though he showed himself gentle and obedient to others, seemed enraged against Simon, and pursued him in every direction, until at last he threw him to the ground. But Peter, seeing it, ran forward and said to the savage beast: ‘I command thee, in the name of Christ, not to bite him; and forbid thee to injure any part of his body.’ The animal so far obeyed this command as not to bite the miserable man, but continued to pursue him until he had torn to shreds all his garments, and, amidst the shouts and jeers of the populace, especially of the children, had driven him, as if he were some prowling wolf, beyond the walls of the city.

“After this disgraceful treatment, Simon was ashamed of showing himself anywhere in public, during the space of a whole year. Nevertheless, about that time, contrary to the expectation of every person of good sense, he found some individual through whose instrumentality he succeeded in ingratiating himself with the Emperor Nero; and so it came to pass that a bad man became united in friendship with one even worse than himself. It was then that our Lord appeared in a vision to the blessed Apostle, and said to him:

“‘Nero and Simon, at the instigation of the demons, are devising evil against thee. Fear them not, I am with thee: Paul, my apostle, will comfort thee by his presence; to-morrow he will enter Rome. After seven months you shall together have your final struggle against Simon, and when you have overcome and expelled him, I will give you both the crown of victory.’

“All which came to pass as it had been foretold; for, on the following day, Paul entered the city. But since you yourselves have seen with your own eyes how the Apostles met, and how they defeated the magician, it is not necessary for me to relate what was done; the more so as the blessed Linus has written, in Greek, an account of all those events for the instruction and edification of the churches in the East.

“As, however, you requested me, some time ago, to give you some particulars concerning Petronilla, the spiritual daughter of my master Peter, especially as regards the manner of her death, I will add them here as briefly as possible. You remember that it was by the will of the blessed Apostle that she remained affected with palsy. For it occurs to my mind that you were present when, on a certain occasion, as several of his disciples were taking some refreshment at his house, Titus said to the Apostle:

“‘How comes it that, while everywhere you are restoring the sick to health, you suffer Petronilla to remain sick of the palsy?’

“‘Because it is advantageous for her,’ answered Peter. ‘Yet, lest you might infer from my words that her restoration to health is impossible,’ he added, turning towards her, ‘Arise, Petronilla, and minister to us.’

“Immediately she arose perfectly cured. After she had waited upon us, he told her to recline again on her couch. But when now she was made perfect in the fear of God, she not only recovered her health, but by her prayers obtained the same blessing for many others. As she was exceedingly beautiful, Flaccus, one of the imperial officers, attended by several soldiers, came to see her, and desired to make her his wife. Finding it difficult to rid herself of his importunities, she at last said to him:

“‘You have come with a band of armed men to a defenceless girl; if you honestly desire to have me for your wife, send some noble matrons and virtuous maidens to my house when three days have elapsed; then I may, perhaps, accompany them to your dwelling.’

“Upon this Flaccus withdrew. Petronilla spent the three days in fasting and praying, attended only by her companion and foster-sister, the virgin Felicula, a person of great holiness of life. On the third day, early in the morning, the venerable priest Nicomedes came to the house and celebrated the Sacred Mysteries. Petronilla received the blessed body of our Lord, and after a while laid herself down upon her bed and departed this life. And so it came to pass, that the matrons and maidens, who had been invited by Flaccus, instead of celebrating the marriage-feast, attended the funeral procession of the beloved servant of God.

“Flaccus, however, was not satisfied with what had happened, and began to turn over in his mind what he should do next. The consequence was that he resolved to make proposals of marriage to the virgin Felicula. Wherefore, after some time, he went to her house and said:

“‘Choose one of two things; either consent to become my wife, or offer sacrifice to the gods.’

“‘I will not be thy wife,’ answered the virgin indignantly, ‘for I am consecrated to Christ; nor will I sacrifice to thy idols, because I am a Christian.’

“Thereupon Flaccus gave her in charge to one of his lieutenants, ordering her to be shut up in a dark chamber. In this place she remained for seven days without receiving any food, and continually annoyed by some women, who said to her: ‘What folly to refuse for thy husband a nobleman so rich, so handsome as this Flaccus, an officer and friend to the Emperor!’ To all which Felicula made no other reply than this: ‘I am a virgin of Christ; Him only can I love.’ When Flaccus learnt that he gained nothing by this sort of treatment, he ordered her to be put under the care of the Vestal virgins, in the hope that they would prevail upon her to make no further resistance to his wishes. But they promised and threatened in vain, and could not even persuade her to receive food from their hands. Thus another week elapsed. Then the rejected suitor accused her of being an enemy of the gods, and delivered her over to be tortured. The executioners stretched her upon the rack. When she felt the first twinge of the torture, she exclaimed:

“‘Now I begin to see my Beloved, who draws my heart still more closely to Him.’

“The executioners and some of the spectators said to her:

“‘Deny that thou art a Christian, and thou shalt at once be released.’

“‘How can I deny my Beloved,’ she replied, ‘who tasted gall and drank vinegar, who was crowned with thorns and fastened to the Cross, for love of me?’

“She had no sooner uttered these words than her pure spirit went to enjoy the company of her heavenly Bridegroom. The executioners took her body from the rack and cast it into the common sewer. But the holy priest, Nicomedes, was on the watch, according to his custom. He obtained possession of the sacred remains and took them secretly to his little cottage, whence he conveyed them, during the night, to some distance outside the city, on the road to Ardea, where he reverently buried them.

“It was not long before the wicked Flaccus was informed of what had been done by Nicomedes. He was so incensed against the brave and charitable priest, that he ordered him to be arrested and dragged before the idols. But he who had cheered on so many of the Martyrs in their struggles for the Faith, did not avoid the contest, when, at last, he had an opportunity of showing by his own example what he had so often taught by his words. When

commanded to sacrifice to the gods, he promptly replied :

“ ‘ I am a priest, and offer sacrifice to the omnipotent and eternal God, who reigns in the heavens ; but I despise your powerless idols, imprisoned like evil-doers as they are, in your temples.’ ”

“ Whereupon he was beaten with scourges having leaden balls attached, until he expired. His body was thrown into the Tiber ; but Justus, a servant of God, rescued it from the waters and buried it near the walls of the city, on the road which leads to Nomentum, where our Lord glorifies the sanctity of the Martyr by numberless favors bestowed through his intercession.”

Such was the answer sent by Marcellus to Nereus and Achilleus. The two brothers, however, had not the pleasure of reading the letter. For, a short time after their messenger had set out for Rome, Aurelian, the rejected suitor of Domitilla, arrived in the island of Pontia, determined, somehow or other, to overcome her resistance. With this intention, aware of the influence which they had with her, he tried to gain their good-will by gifts and fair promises. But the faithful attendants of the noble lady declined his gifts with utter abhorrence, and continued to encourage their mistress to persevere in her firm resolve. This so enraged Aurelian, that he ordered them to be

cruelly scourged. Yet torments endured for the Faith and for the performance of their conscientious duty, caused no dread to the Martyrs. Seeing this, Aurelian had them sent to Terracina, and requested Memmius Rufus, the Prefect of the place, to punish them in whatever manner he thought fit, as they were obstinate Christians. Rufus, who was naturally a bloodthirsty and pitiless tyrant, desired nothing better than to have an opportunity of indulging his cruel propensity. He placed the Saints upon the rack, and burnt their bodies with red-hot plates of iron, calling upon them to renounce Christ and offer sacrifice to the gods. But the Martyrs gave no other answer than this :

“We were baptized by the blessed Peter. No human power can force us to sacrifice to demons, or to abandon the Faith we were taught by the great Apostle.”

At last the Prefect gave up the contest, and ordered them to be beheaded. Auspicius, who was one of their disciples, took away the bodies of the Martyrs, and conveying them to an estate belonging to Domitilla—about a mile and a half from Rome—there buried them in a grotto, near the tomb of the holy virgin Petronilla.

Meanwhile, Aurelian, not daring openly to attack the lady Domitilla, continued secretly to annoy her,

by directing his spiteful persecutions against all persons who were in any way connected with her household. To console and encourage these Confessors of the Faith, Marcellus, at their request, sent his brother to the island of Pontia. This faithful servant of God, while cheering them on, made also a record of the sufferings which they underwent during the year which he passed in their midst.

Aurelian, having been told by some meddling persons that, though he had freed himself from the interference of Nereus and Achilleus, he need not flatter himself that his prospects of success were brightening, since Domitilla was now encouraged by three of her old domestics—Eutyches, Victorinus and Maro—immediately determined to get also rid of them. Wherefore, he brought against them an accusation of being Christians and enemies of the Empire, and asked as a favor of the Emperor, that if they were unwilling to offer sacrifice to the gods, they might be delivered up to him to be punished as he should think proper. This being granted, he commanded them to deny Christ; but they resolutely refused. Thereupon he had them put to the torture; this they cheerfully underwent. Seeing at last that he gained nothing by that kind of violence, he condemned them to slavery, and sent them away from the island to work on his estates. Their

heavenly Master, however, for whose sake they gladly endured this ignominious treatment, rewarded their constancy by bestowing upon them many spiritual blessings, as well as the gift of miracles. By this means they not only won the regard and confidence of the superintendents, but obtained permission to instruct the people in the doctrines of the Christian Faith. Thus they had the happiness of saving many souls from destruction, and of securing for themselves a more glorious reward hereafter. But the spirit of darkness, whose declared enemies they were, soon stirred up the wicked Aurelian. Hearing that what he had intended for their disgrace had in reality become for them an honor, he was so enraged that he forthwith sent some of his attendants to put to death the servants of God. Eutyches was beaten with clubs until he expired. Victorinus was suspended with his head downward over a spring of sulphurous waters at Cutilial, in the country of the Sabines. This torment he was made to undergo during three days, for three hours at a time, until he went to his reward. Lastly, Maro was crushed to death beneath a huge stone. And although Aurelian, to give vent to his revengeful feelings, had ordered that the bodies of the Martyrs should be left unburied, the Christians of the surrounding country took possession of them, and

with every demonstration of love and respect, deposited them in places where they might conveniently assemble to ask their intercession.

When Aurelian, by pursuing this dishonorable course of action, had succeeded in removing from the household of the lady Domitilla all the persons who enjoyed her full confidence, he was not yet satisfied. He wished to lay this time his plans so securely that there could be no fears of failure. For this purpose, he invited to his house two young noblemen, named Sulpitius and Servilian, and said to them:

“I understand that you are betrothed to the noble ladies Euphrosyna and Theodora, the foster-sisters of Flavia Domitilla. Their mistress is gone to reside at Terracina. You will put me under great obligations if you advise the young ladies to follow her thither and make use of their influence to awaken once more her former affection for me. If they succeed herein, we will celebrate our nuptial festivities on the same day.”

To this proposition the two young men cordially agreed; for being both Pagans, they knew nothing of the wicked conduct of Aurelian. Accordingly they entreated the young ladies to use their best endeavors to persuade their mistress to think favorably of him. After a few days they went to Terra-

cina. Domitilla being very glad to see them, ordered a banquet to be prepared in honor of their arrival. As she, however, did not join them at the table, but remained fasting and praying in her own apartment, they said to her:

“How is this, my lady? While we are feasting and rejoicing, and in a few days are going to be married, is it becoming that you should shun all social intercourse and spend your time in weeping and in praying to your God?”

“You have reason to rejoice,” answered Domitilla, “because you have for your affianced husbands two noblemen of merit and distinction. But what would you do if some persons of inferior birth and of vulgar manners should try to alienate your hearts from the affection of your chosen bridegrooms, and claim for themselves the right of making you their wives?”

“May heaven avert from us so great a misfortune!” they both exclaimed.

“And in like manner from me,” said Domitilla; “for I have a most noble Bridegroom—even the Son of God—who came down from heaven. He promises to them who for love of Him cherish and preserve their virginity, that He will be their Guardian and Beloved, rewarding them with everlasting life; so that when their spirits are released from these mortal bodies, He leads them into His heaven-

ly bride-chamber, there to rejoice forever with the angels, amidst the delights and the never-ending joys of Paradise. When the Son of God made these hitherto unheard-of promises, the people were unwilling to believe them; but He proved that He had the power to make them good, by giving sight to the blind, by cleansing the lepers, by healing the sick, and restoring the dead to life. The people witnessing this manifestation of almighty power, acknowledged His Divinity and believed in Him."

The young ladies, hearing their mistress speaking in this manner, were exceedingly astonished, and Theodora said to her:

"I have a young brother whom you know, my lady. It is now more than a year since he was struck with total blindness. If what you say is true, I would beg of you to heal him, in the Name of your God."

"Thy brother," said Euphrosyna to her companion, "is not here at present; but I have here in this very house the little daughter of my nurse. Some time ago, during a severe attack of illness, she became completely dumb; her hearing is indeed sound, but she is wholly destitute of the power of speech."

Saying this, she sent at once for the little girl. After ascertaining that the child was really deprived

of the faculty of speech, Domitilla, kneeling down, prayed for a while in silence. Then she arose, and, raising her hands toward heaven, said:

“Lord Jesus Christ, who didst say to Thy disciples: ‘Behold, I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world;’ show to all them that are here present that my testimony is true.”

And making the sign of the cross upon the mouth of the dumb girl, she said:

“In the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, be the power of speech restored to thee.”

Instantly she recovered the power of speech, and exclaimed in a loud voice:

“Your God, Domitilla, is the only true God; and true are the words which you have spoken.”

Thereupon her foster-sisters fell prostrate at the feet of the servant of God, and begged to be instructed in the doctrines of the Christian Faith. The blind brother of Theodora being also brought to Domitilla, received through her prayers the grace of being healed of both bodily and spiritual blindness. These wonders produced so great an effect on all those who witnessed them, that many of the pagans believed in Christ, and asked to be baptized.

Meanwhile, Aurelian had not given up the intention of making Domitilla his wife. Wherefore, he went to Terracina resolved to use force to accom-

plish his purpose. He was accompanied by Sulpitius and Servilian and a large number of attendants, among whom there were several musicians, to take part in the merry-making at the triple wedding. When, however, the betrothed husbands of Euphrosyna and Theodora heard of the miracles that had been wrought, they yielded to the grace which moved their hearts, and believed in Christ. And when, moreover, they learnt that their affianced brides were desirous of imitating the example of their noble mistress by consecrating themselves to God, they willingly released them from the promise made to them. Then they went to Aurelian, and said to him :

“Give glory to God, by whose almighty power we see sight restored to the blind and speech to the dumb.”

But the wicked Aurelian did not care for what they said. He caused the Lady Domitilla to be locked up in her chamber, and placed a guard near it, so that she might not make her escape. Then he sat down to table, and being now sure that his well-laid plans were at last crowned with success, he began to feast and carouse with his companions. Afterwards, continuing their merriment, they laughed and danced, singing the praises of the heathen deities and blaspheming the God of the Christians.

But suddenly, in the midst of their mirth, the hand of God was on Aurelian; he fell prostrate to the ground and expired. The scene was now changed. Terror and confusion took the place of joy and laughter, and all acknowledged, in this awful visitation, the judgment of God.

When Luxorius, the brother of Aurelian, was informed of the sad end of that unfortunate man, he determined to wreak vengeance on the Christians, as if they were the cause of all his troubles and misfortunes. Accordingly, he obtained from the Emperor, Trajan, a rescript empowering him to arrest whomsoever he chose, and if he could not force them to sacrifice to the idols, to inflict punishment without restriction. Immediately he caused Sulpitius and Servilian to be seized and delivered up, for trial, to Anian, Governor of Rome. As the two friends freely confessed that they had lately become Christians, and that neither violence nor flattery could induce them to worship again the false gods of Paganism, they were beheaded by order of Anian. Their brethren took away the bodies and buried them on an estate belonging to the Martyrs, two miles from the city, on the Latin road.

After this, Luxorius hastened to Terracina, where Domitilla and her foster-sisters, Euphrosyna and Theodora, were still residing. Summoning them

before him, he commanded them, in the name of the Emperor, without delay to deny their Faith, and to return to the worship of the idols. They resolutely refused to give heed to the absurd command. Whereupon he condemned them all three to be locked up in the same room wherein they had for some time lived and prayed together, and ordered it to be set on fire. And thus the three virgins, through fire and many tribulations, went to receive the crown prepared for them by their heavenly Bridegroom.

The next day, the holy deacon Cæsarius, going to the chamber, found the bodies of the Martyrs, lying with their faces on the floor, as they had prostrated themselves in prayer. Carefully removing them, he deposited the precious remains together in a new sepulchre built of stone.

Their Festival is kept on the 12th of May.





ST. LEONTIUS.

LEONTIUS was by birth a Greek, but he spent the greater part of his time in Phœnicia, whither he was sent, in his early youth, to receive an education worthy of his rank in society. As he was very tall, robust, and of a noble appearance, he did not fail to improve these natural advantages by manly exercises suited to his age. At the same time, he devoted himself with unrelenting ardor to acquire stores of all useful knowledge, which might enable him to gain distinction among men. When he was of the proper age, he chose for his future career the profession of a soldier. This choice, which under ordinary circumstances would have been attended with numberless dangers of soul and body, became for him the source of many blessings; for, while he had constantly applied himself to cultivate his mind, he had yet more earnestly studied to foster in his heart all the virtues which

adorn the life of the Christian upon earth, and prepare him for a happier existence hereafter. Accordingly, God blessed him with success in all his undertakings. He soon distinguished himself by his military exploits, and won promotion by his bravery and prudence, until he obtained the grade of a general officer, with command over the Roman legions stationed in Phœnicia. As he had been a favorite among his companions in arms when he held an inferior position, he was now loved and regarded by them more as a father than a commander. By word and example he encouraged his men to fidelity in the discharge of their duty. He was slow to punish and ever ready to reward; he was tender to the sick and disabled, merciful to the erring, kind and affable to all. Hence it happened that, being himself a model of every Christian virtue, he had the happiness of opening the eyes of very many to the truths and saving promises of the Gospel, and of withdrawing them from the degrading worship of the idols. The prince of darkness could not long endure that all these things should take place without opposition from himself.

Wherefore, he stirred up the base passions of the Senator Adrian, who had recently obtained the Governorship of Phœnicia. This wicked man and zealous upholder of idolatry, before setting out from

Rome to enter upon his office, had heard of the great popularity enjoyed by Leontius. His jealous disposition at once took the alarm. Having obtained an audience of the Emperor Vespasian, he represented to him that in the province assigned to his care there were some men, enemies of the gods of the Empire, who were using all their power and influence to pervert the minds of the soldiers by persuading them to worship but one God. The Emperor, not doubting that the persons spoken of were some of the Jews, whom he had lately subdued, gave full power to the new Governor to seize, and punish at pleasure, whomsoever he should find unwilling to offer sacrifice to the gods of Rome. Thus empowered, Adrian had no sooner reached the shores of Phœnicia than he sent the Tribune Hypatius and two soldiers, one of whom was called Theodulus, to arrest Leontius, who was at that time in the neighborhood of Tripolis. As they were leaving the city, it so happened that the Tribune was suddenly seized with a violent fever. Being very superstitious, and greatly addicted to the worship of the gods, he said to his companions:

“I know why this evil has befallen me. The anger of the gods is aroused against me: before setting out upon this business, I neglected to offer sacrifice to render them propitious.”

He was now too ill to proceed farther on his journey. Accordingly, he repaired to the nearest military encampment, where he might receive proper attendance. During three days the fever continued with unabating violence. The companions of the Tribune lost all hope of his recovery. On the third night, however, Hypatius saw standing before him a youth arrayed in white garments, his countenance so radiant that he could not fix his gaze upon him, who said :

“Hypatius, if thou desirest to enjoy true health, repeat three times in a loud voice : ‘Oh God, whom Leontius adores, come to mine aid.’ ”

“I am sent with my men,” replied the Tribune, “to seize Leontius and bring him as a prisoner to the Governor, and sayest thou that I must call upon his God to heal me?” But before he had finished these words, the youth had vanished from his sight. Struck with astonishment, yet fully persuaded that what he had heard and seen was not the effect of his disordered imagination, he called for his companion Theodulus, and related to him what had occurred. Theodulus, who was an upright and open-hearted man, after reflecting for a while on the meaning of the words uttered by the mysterious messenger, advised the Tribune to do as he had been bidden, and even joined him in the exclama-

tions thrice repeated: "Oh God, whom Leontius adores, come to mine aid." No sooner had they pronounced the words, than Hypatius was entirely freed from his illness. Hardly knowing whom to thank for so unexpected a favor granted to his friend, Theodulus spent the remainder of the night in his company, meditating on the nature of this strange incident. In the morning, when the officers of the camp invited him to share their meal, he kindly refused their offer, and, withdrawing to a little distance from their company, prostrated himself upon the ground, calling upon the God of Leontius to make known to him what he should do. Then, going to the officers, he said:

"Adrian, the Governor, who sent us out, has, probably, by this time established himself in Tripolis, and Leontius is not yet found. With your permission, the Tribune and myself will now go in search of him, and when we discover his whereabouts, we will take the proper steps to secure his arrest."

When they learnt that Hypatius was perfectly restored to health, all agreed that under the circumstances no better plan could be pursued. Thereupon, the Tribune and Theodulus set out in the direction of Tripolis. As they were drawing near to the city, they met a person of majestic mien,

apparently absorbed in deep thought. Perceiving the two soldiers, he walked up to them and said:

"God save you, brothers."

"The same blessing to you, friend," they replied.

"For what or for whom are you looking?" he said, "if you will excuse the liberty I take of asking the question."

"We are sent in search of a military officer, named Leontius," answered the Tribune, "who has his dwelling somewhere in this neighborhood. Adrian, the new Governor of Tripolis, desires to see him, as he considers him a man of the highest distinction in these parts, a favorite of the people and much beloved by the gods."

"I perceive that you are strangers in this country," said the person addressed, "and, probably, not well acquainted with its inhabitants. However, that does not matter. I am sure that you both need some rest after your weary journey; and, if you do me the honor of accompanying me to my dwelling, I promise you that I will make you acquainted with Leontius, who, you say, is much beloved by the gods. But about this, I dare say, you must have been misinformed; for I know for certain that Leontius, far from being a friend of what you call the gods, is, on the contrary, a Christian and a despiser of idols."

When the two soldiers heard this, they looked surprised and said to one another: "Who can this personage be, who asserts so positively that Leontius is a Christian? Is he, perhaps, some one of his relatives?"

Theodulus, considering the courteous and friendly manner in which their unknown companion had before addressed them, said to him:

"And what, pray, honored sir, may be your own name? Pardon me, if I use too much freedom in asking the question."

"My name is not without meaning—even in the Sacred Writings, since there it is said of it: 'Thou shalt walk upon the asp and the basilisk; and thou shalt trample under foot the lion and the dragon.' That lion I understand to signify the infernal foe, who cannot be seen with the eyes of the body; and the dragon," he added with a smile, "perhaps, means the Governor and his advisers, whom I must trample under foot."

This answer seemed a mystery to the soldiers. Charmed with the affable manners of their kind friend, they had been on the point of making known to him the real object of their mission; but now, convinced that he must be some relative of Leontius, they began to debate between themselves what was to be done. Unwilling to cause anxiety to one

who showed himself so frank and generous towards them, they were inclined to return to the city, and report to Adrian that they had been unable to carry into effect the errand on which they had been sent; but, knowing the brutal character of the Governor, they were afraid of incurring his displeasure. So they concluded to say nothing for the present, and allow themselves to be guided by circumstances.

Meanwhile, they had reached the dwelling of their obliging friend. Here they were entertained with the most generous hospitality, insomuch that they could not help expressing their astonishment at the rich abundance of the good things set before them. How they now regretted that they could not announce themselves as bearers of happy tidings to their excellent host and his relatives! But they remembered that, although they had an unpleasant duty to fulfil, none would more readily lend them a helping hand herein than he upon whom they had ere this begun to look with a decided feeling of love and admiration. Wherefore, the Tribune, after thanking their entertainer for his free-hearted hospitality, said:

“Permit me, most excellent sir, to remind you of the promise you made, when we had the good fortune of first meeting you. Tell us where we can find Leontius, that he may accompany us to the

Governor, who, we trust, will treat him as he deserves, and add new honors to those which he already enjoys."

"If it is Leontius," replied their host, "the commander of the Roman Legions, whom you seek, I am he. I am that Roman soldier,—but a soldier of Christ as well. I am the very man whom, by order of the Governor, you are sent to arrest."

At these words they were both so amazed that they fell to the ground and exclaimed:

"Servant of the Most High, pardon our sin; implore for us the mercy of your God. Save us from the wrath of the cruel Adrian. Purify us from the defilements of idolatry; let your God be our God. We confess Christ, even as you confess Him."

Filled with rapturous joy at what he heard and saw, Leontius knelt down, and, shedding many tears the while, prayed aloud:

"O Lord God, whose will it is that all men should come to a knowledge of the truth, and find salvation, look upon us in this hour, and have mercy. They that had come against the poor sheep of Thy fold now desire to be Thine; receive them, O Lord, and enlighten their minds by pouring Thy holy Spirit upon them; that, strengthened and purified by Thee, they may become valiant soldiers, ready to fight against the wicked foe. Arm them with

faith and hope, that they may trample under foot the dragon, that will seek to devour them. O Thou, who knowest the secrets of all hearts, mercifully guide the erring, that, illumined by the splendors of Thy light, they may come unto Thee and glorify thy holy Name forever. Lord Jesus, hear the prayer of Thy poor and unworthy servant Leontius, that this day Thy power and mercy may be made known to them for whom he prays. Amen."

When Leontius uttered the word "Amen," suddenly a cloud, as it were, overshadowing the soldiers, as they lay prostrate on the ground, poured upon them a stream of water, and vanished as suddenly in the shape of a column of dazzling light. At the sight of this wonder, Leontius exclaimed :

"Glory to Thee, O my God, who disregardest not the desires of them that seek Thee in singleness of heart."

And forthwith, as he considered them truly baptized, he put upon them the mystical white garment.

What had taken place at the house of the general soon became known to the pagans who dwelt in the neighborhood. Immediately they began to raise an outcry against him and his guests. Leontius, knowing that the hour had come when he was to give testimony to the truth, said to his companions:

“My beloved brothers, let us put our trust in God, and advance to the combat. We must not give to the Governor the advantage of having a right to accuse you of failing in your duty. Let us go to meet him.”

Thereupon they set out at once. It so happened that, at that very moment, Adrian was making his entry into the city. When he saw the crowd that accompanied the three friends, and heard the shouts raised by the pagans, he became very uneasy, and inquired into the cause of the tumult. Being informed that Leontius, the commander of the Legions, was a Christian, and that he had persuaded the Tribune and his companion to abandon the worship of the gods, he forthwith ordered some of his soldiers to seize the three and cast them into prison. Leontius, after thanking God for giving him this opportunity of more fully instructing the new converts, said to them :

“Take courage, brothers, and remember that the sufferings of this life last only for a moment ; when endured for Christ’s sake, they prepare for you a reward of bliss that knows no ending. Now, indeed, the wicked may torment us, but these short-lived sufferings shall be followed by an everlasting repose. To the God whom we serve belong the heavens and the earth; nothing is done therein

without His permission. His ever-watchful eye is upon us. He will gird us with strength unto battle. He will subdue the enemies that rise up against us."

On the following morning, the Governor, having ordered Leontius to be brought before his tribunal, said to him :

"Art thou Leontius?"

"I am Leontius," answered the commander.

"How darest thou be so bold as to withdraw, by means of wicked magical arts, from the service of the Emperor, soldiers who have been most faithful to him. Not only this, but thou hast beguiled them so far as to make them abandon the worship of the gods of the Empire, and persuade them to worship a God whom we do not know."

"My answer to what you say," replied Leontius, "is simply this: If I am a soldier faithful to the Emperor in all things proper, I am also a soldier of Christ, the heavenly King. He is the true Light that enlighteneth every man who cometh into this world. Whoever follows the guidance of that light stumbleth not. Hypatius and Theodulus beheld this light. They followed its leading, and forsook the foolish worship of idols, that have neither life nor sense."

"Thou seemest to us free-spoken enough," said the Governor; "let us now see whether we have no arguments that will reduce thee to silence."

He then ordered Leontius to be beaten with clubs. The noble soldier underwent the disgraceful punishment without giving the least sign of bodily pain, and said to Adrian :

“You perhaps imagine that you are now tormenting me. Be not deceived; I feel convinced that you are only torturing your own self.”

Seeing that the Martyr’s constancy could not be shaken, Adrian sent him again to prison, and summoning the two soldiers before him, said to them :

“Why did you disobey our orders, when commanded to arrest that impostor? Is it thus you prove your fidelity to the Emperor? If you have any regard for your own safety, or any fear of the gods, you will at once confess that it was your unsuspecting and natural silliness which has led you into this mistake; then I may yet save you from the consequences of your rashness.”

To this Hypatius and Theodulus made answer :

“We are not unfaithful to the Emperor in things wherein he has a right to command our obedience; neither can you prove us guilty of disobeying your orders, since you have, this very moment, the noble Leontius in your power. As to what you are pleased to call our silliness, we have this to say: We were in darkness and in ignorance of the truth; by the mercy of God our eyes were opened, and we

were enabled to behold the light. We learnt to understand the folly of worshipping idols, and the wisdom of embracing the truth, as it is in Christ, our Lord. From Him neither your threats nor your promises are able to draw us away; but, if you are wise, you will follow our example and acknowledge that Christ is the Saviour of men; that thus you may secure for yourself the bliss which awaits them that serve the true God, Creator of the universe."

"It is the wretch Leontius," said Adrian, "who has put these words into your mouth. It will be to your advantage to renounce all further fellowship with him, and to avail yourselves of the kind offers of the Emperor, who is willing to forget the past, and to bestow honors upon all who are faithful worshippers of the gods. Follow my advice, or prepare yourselves for a shameful death."

"What will it profit us," replied the Confessors, "to have enjoyed honors and imperial favors, if, after a few days, when we appear before the Judge of the living and the dead, He condemns us to everlasting sufferings, because we were unfaithful to Him? No, Adrian, we will not abandon the service of the King of kings; He has chosen us to be His soldiers in spite of our unworthiness; we remain true to Him. As for yourself, we advise you to follow our example, and to renounce the worship of

demons, who, after a short time, will reward your blind trust in them with a share of their own everlasting misery."

This answer so exasperated the Governor that he exclaimed:

"I have no time to waste with these foolish and impious men." And forthwith he commanded his attendants to hang up the Tribune and tear his body with iron hooks; at the same time ordering Theodulus to be stretched upon the ground and to be beaten with clubs. The Martyrs, while undergoing these torments, cried out from time to time:

"Save us, Oh Lord Jesus! strengthen us, for the flesh is weak."

Seeing that they could not be overcome by these tortures, Adrian ordered the executioners to strike off their heads. Thus Hypatius and Theodulus went to receive the reward of their faith and constancy.

After this the Governor sent for Leontius, and said to him:

"Leontius, the two soldiers who were led astray by thee have suffered an ignominious death; this moment thy fate is in thy own hands. At my recommendation thou mayest secure for thyself the good will of the Senate and the favor of the Emperor. They have heard of thy exploits in these parts, and of the good name thou hast among the people,

and, above all, among our soldiers. Choose for thyself: offer sacrifice to the gods of Rome, and be the friend of Vespasian,—or persevere in thy folly, and prepare thyself for torments more cruel than those undergone by the Tribune and his companion.”

“God forbid,” replied Leontius, “that I should desire to be the friend of any one who is an enemy of Christ, our God! But Oh, Adrian, if you are willing to listen to my words, I will show you what lasting treasures and what endless happiness you may secure for yourself by embracing the doctrines which the Saviour of men came to teach upon earth.”

“I suppose,” cried the Governor, interrupting him, “thou wouldst fain teach me to attain to the same happiness that has but just now fallen to the lot of Hypatius and Theodulus. Dost thou forget, most wretched man, that they perished like the vilest of traitors?”

“Think you that they perished, Oh Adrian?” said the soldier. “No, no; they have entered into life; the true life of peace and bliss. Their struggles here below were soon over—now they rejoice in the company of the angels and friends of God; and this, their happiness, they cannot lose forever.”

“Listen, Leontius, to what I have to say to thee,” said the Governor. “When has it ever been heard

that a person of sound mind chose to bid farewell to the sweet light of day, and to abandon the worship of Jupiter, Apollo, and the other great gods, that he might suffer a miserable death? No one has ever been guilty of so foolish an extravagance—unless, like thy late companions, he had first lost his senses.”

“Your idols are the inventions of your imagination,” fearlessly answered the Confessor, “and the work of your own hands. What will you say of the soundness of mind of them that, knowing what I say is true, still worship those powerless and inanimate objects, and call upon them for help and guidance?”

Adrian, aware that he was unable to make a suitable reply to this objection of the Martyr, ordered him to be stretched upon the ground, and, with his hands and feet bound to four stakes, to be beaten with clubs; a herald crying out the while: “Thus are they treated who vilify our gods and disobey our commands.” Seeing, however, that Leontius bore this punishment without giving any sign of pain, he commanded that he should be hung up by the hands and his body torn to pieces with iron hooks. When thus suspended the Martyr, raising his eyes toward heaven, exclaimed.

“Turn not away Thy face from me, Oh Lord: in Thee I put my trust.”

The Governor, hearing this, said to the executioners :

“Take him down ; for I know that, when he looks up to heaven, he is praying to the gods that they may grant him relief.”

“Perish your impure and abominable gods!” exclaimed Leontius. “What help could they give that are themselves utterly helpless?”

Adrian then gave orders that he should be hung up by the feet, with a heavy stone tied to his neck. When in this position the Martyr prayed aloud :

“Lord Jesus Christ, who didst enable Thy servants Hypatius and Theodulus generously to confess Thy holy name, strengthen me also, Thy unworthy and sinful servant, that, after overcoming the enemy, I may be admitted to their blessed companionship.”

Unwilling to acknowledge that he was powerless against the fortitude of the heroic sufferer, the Governor said to him :

“I know, Oh Leontius, that, after mature deliberation, so brave a man, as thou hast proved thyself this day, will yet become a friend of the gods.”

Be you the servant of your demons,” replied the Martyr, “and prepare yourself to become a partaker of their everlasting misery : it is not in my power to withdraw you from your folly. But, as I have

lived a servant of the Most High, so, with His help, I am resolved to die."

Convinced that, for the present, he could do no more to subdue the brave champion, Adrian sent him to prison, with orders that on the following day he should be again brought before him. The servant of God, without allowing himself any rest or refreshment, spent the whole night in praying and in singing the praises of Him who had granted him strength and courage to defy the powers of darkness. Early in the morning he stood again before the Governor, who said to him :

"Didst thou reflect, Oh Leontius, on what thou shouldst do to promote thy greatest good?"

"I have always endeavored," replied the Martyr, "to do what I knew to be my duty ; therefore, also, I have refused to listen to your proposals. Now, I repeat again, that neither by the fairest promises nor by the direst threats, can you induce me to renounce the service of Christ, the Son of God, who died for my salvation. Were it proposed to me that I might live and continue in a condition of bringing others to a knowledge of Him, I would not reject the offer ; but no manner of death, how cruel soever, shall cause me to waver for an instant in the loving allegiance which I owe to Him."

This answer so incensed Adrian, that he forth-

with ordered the Martyr to be most cruelly scourged. Whilst the executioners were obeying his orders, the Governor cried out :

Do, Oh Leontius, what I desire of thee ; sacrifice to the gods ; for, I swear by them all, if thou obey me in this, the highest honors and boundless wealth shall be thy reward."

"Do you imagine," said Leontius, "that all the riches of this earth have power to make me a traitor to my God ? or do you think that all the honors of this world can equal the honor of being loved by Christ, my Saviour ? No, Adrian, you are mad ; you know not what you say."

The Governor, finding it impossible to conquer the fearless spirit of the Martyr, pronounced this sentence : "Leontius, the Christian, who obstinately refuses to sacrifice to the gods, disobeys our commands. It is our will, that he be fastened to four stakes and beaten with clubs unto death." This sentence was at once carried into effect, and the noble athlete went to receive his crown. The Christians took possession of the Martyr's remains and placed them in a monument built near the harbor of Tripolis.

He suffered on the eighteenth of June.



XI.

ST. APOLLINARIS.

WHEN, in the reign of the Emperor Claudius, St. Peter removed his see from Antioch to Rome, he was followed thither by many disciples. Among these was the blessed Apollinaris, a man distinguished for his great virtue, as well as for his knowledge of all the teachings of the Christian faith, which he had acquired by his long-continued intercourse with the Prince of the Apostles. As soon as Christianity was sufficiently established in the capital of the Roman Empire, Peter made his disciple a bishop, and directing him to go to the city of Ravenna, said to him :

“May our Lord Jesus Christ send His holy angel before thee to prepare the way ; may He bless thy labors, and grant thee whatever thou shalt ask in His holy Name.”

Thus armed with power, and cheered on by his master, the disciple went forth to announce the glad

tidings of salvation to a people greatly addicted to all the superstitions of Paganism, and wholly unprepared to receive a doctrine altogether opposed to their notions and wicked practices. When he arrived in the neighborhood of Ravenna, he met a certain soldier, Irenæus by name, with whom he engaged in conversation. Learning that the man was a native of Asia, Apollinaris began at once to explain to him the purpose of his journey, and the saving doctrines which he had come to announce to the inhabitants. The soldier listened attentively to all that was said, and appeared deeply impressed with the truths of the Gospel as they were made known to him. After a while, addressing the man of God, he said to him :

“Venerable stranger, the words you speak are no doubt wise and truthful; and I am willing to believe them. But you tell me that they, who proclaim this new manifestation of the greatness and mercy of the Creator of all things, prove their mission by the wonders which they work. This encourages me to ask of you a favor; if you can grant me this, I will not only acknowledge the power of your God, but I will exert myself to persuade others to confess that you are His servant. I have a son who is blind from his birth; in the name of the great God whom you proclaim, bestow upon him the blessing of

sight, and convince the people that you are sent among them as a messenger of truth."

Apollinaris straightway accompanied the soldier to his dwelling. Hearing that a stranger had come among them, who announced himself as a messenger of the God of heaven, a great number of people gathered together to see him. As soon as the blind boy was brought before him, the holy man, raising his voice, prayed:

"Oh Lord God, who fillest all places with Thy holy presence, send the knowledge of Thy Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, into the minds and hearts of the people of this city, and, by opening the bodily eyes of this child, enlighten their understanding that they may know and confess the greatness and power of His holy Name. Hear the prayer of Thy servant, Oh Lord, and sanction my mission, that they who are seated in darkness and in the shadow of death, being converted, may behold Thy marvellous light, and learn to walk in the newness of life."

Then he made the sign of the Cross upon the eyes of the boy, and immediately they were opened. Convinced by this miracle that the servant of God had spoken to them the words of salvation, the parents and many of the spectators fell down before the Bishop, and besought him to teach them what they should do to be saved. The Saint, seeing their

good dispositions, taking up his abode among them, began to instruct all who were willing, until they were ready to receive baptism. He had not to wait long before he had another proof that heaven blessed his ministry. For, while he was thus occupied in explaining the doctrines of Christianity, it happened that his kind entertainer, the soldier Irenæus, had occasion to go to Ravenna, and visit the military Tribune, the commander of the place. The wife of this officer had been for many years bedridden, and no skill of physicians had availed to afford her relief. Irenæus, knowing this, said to his commander :

“There is at present a venerable stranger staying at my house, who, without the use of any medicine whatever, has given sight to my son, who was blind from his birth ; I have no doubt, should you be willing to see him and listen to his words, he will at once restore the lady Tecla to perfect health.”

“Whence comes this stranger?” asked the Tribune.

“From the city of Rome,” answered the soldier.

“Is he a Roman by birth?” inquired the officer.

“That I know not,” replied Irenæus, “I would rather say he is a Greek.”

“Then invite him to my dwelling, but do it secretly ; for I wish personally to judge what reliance may be placed on the man, and what truth there is in the wonderful things which are related of him.”

Irenæus instantly returned home and reported to the servant of God the words of the Tribune. Apollinaris joyfully received the welcome tidings, and without delay hastened to the city. As he entered Ravenna, he signed himself with the Sign of the Cross, and said :

“ Oh God, who bestowest Thy blessings upon the labors of Thy servant my master, the blessed Peter, vouchsafe, in like manner, to bless this my undertaking, that Thy Name may be glorified, and Thy holy will be done.”

When he came to the residence of the Tribune, he was very kindly received by him with the words :

“ You are most welcome, worthy physician ; your presence is to us as pleasant as the refreshing dews of the morning.”

“ May the peace of our Lord and God, Jesus Christ, rest upon all who dwell in this house,” answered Apollinaris.

This new manner of pronouncing a blessing somewhat surprised the Tribune, and he said to the Bishop :

“ Who is that God of whom you speak, noble stranger ?”

“ He is the Son of the living God, who came down from heaven to redeem men from their sins,” replied the man of God.

"As I perceive, you are a Galilean," said the commander.

"I am."

"Are you skilled in the art of healing?" he inquired.

"I have no skill, except in the Name of Jesus."

"What power is there in the Name of Jesus?"

"Call together your friends," said Apollinaris, "that, in the sight of all, you may learn the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, and confess that He is the living God, and that there is no other God besides Him."

The Tribune thereupon invited several of the principal officers in the city, and, when they were come, said to them:

"I have sent for you, brothers, that this day you may all bear witness to the power of Jesus Christ, whom this venerable stranger announces as the Saviour of men. You all know that, for several years, my wife has been confined to bed by infirmity, and that no skill of physicians has been able to afford her any relief. This venerated man now promises to restore her to health by the power of the God whose servant he is."

Apollinaris, addressing the persons who had gathered around him, said:

"May God open the eyes of your hearts that,

seeing His wonderful works, you may believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord."

Then approaching the couch whereon the lady Tecla was reclining, he took her by the hand, saying :

"In the Name of our Lord and God, Jesus of Nazareth, arise, and, believing in Him, confess that He is the One true God."

Forthwith the lady arose, perfectly healed, and exclaimed :

"There is no other God besides Jesus, whom Apollinaris announces to us."

All they that stood by were filled with wonder, and, acknowledging the almighty power of Christ, said to one another :

"He is truly God who does such things. If we honor and love Him. He will no doubt also protect us in our undertakings."

This miracle opened the eyes of the Tribune. After thanking the servant of God for the great blessing he had bestowed upon him, he expressed his desire to be instructed in the doctrines which he taught ; and all the members of his family, with one mind, joined him in this request. Many also of the officers showed themselves equally well disposed. In consequence, the holy Bishop agreed to take up his abode among them. But, as he well knew that

the people of Ravenna were greatly addicted to all the superstitions of Paganism, and that the priests of the idols would use every exertion to oppose him, he desired that, for the present, they who wished to receive his instructions should come to him privately, and avoid, as much as possible, the danger of arousing the opposition of the enemies of the truth. In this manner Apollinaris was enabled to continue his ministrations for a long time without exciting the least suspicion; and very many of the citizens, of every age and condition, had the happiness of being regenerated in the saving waters of Baptism. The house of the Tribune was the principal place where the Faithful came together to celebrate the Sacred Mysteries; and here the Bishop ordained two priests, Adheretus and Calocerus, whom he appointed his assistants, whilst he raised Mercian, a man of the highest standing in society, and the philosopher Leocadius, equally distinguished for his great virtue, to the order of deacons. Moreover, he designated six clerics to chant night and day the praises of God.

After a while, however, the multitude of believers had become so very great that it was no longer possible that their meetings should remain unknown to the public; the priests of the idols took the alarm, and brought their complaint before the judge, Satur-

ninus, accusing Apollinarus of turning away the inhabitants of Ravenna from the worship of the gods. The Judge, thereupon, summoned the Bishop before him, and, in presence of the priests, his accusers, said to him :

“Who art thou, whom they accuse before us?”

“I am a Christian, that is to say, a follower of Christ,” said Apollinaris.

“And who is Christ?” asked the Judge.

“He is the Son of God, from whom all things that exist in the universe have their being,” answered the Bishop, in a loud voice.

“And did He send thee among us to make empty the temples of our gods? Art thou unacquainted with the name of the great Jupiter, who dwells in the Capitol of this city, before whom thou shouldst prostrate thyself?”

“Who dwells in your Capitol I know not,” replied Apollinaris; “nor do I care to be informed what sort of a temple it is.”

This answer aroused the indignation of the idolaters. Without awaiting the decision of the Judge, they seized the Saint, and dragged him to the Capitol, crying out as they went: “Let him come and see our temple, and admire the image of the mighty and unconquerable Jove.” Amidst all this tumult and vociferation, Apollinaris remained calm and self-

collected, uttering not a word until he stood in the rich temple of the idol, when, looking around him he said:

“All these ornaments of gold and silver would have been put to better use, had they been employed in relieving the sick and needy, instead of being devoted to the worship of vile devils.”

On hearing this, they seized him again; they reviled and abused him, and, dragging him out of the city, left him bruised and exhausted for dead on the sea-shore. As soon, however, as the infuriate mob had returned to Ravenna, some of the Faithful went to the place where the servant of God was lying, and, seeing that he was still alive, took him to the house of a Christian widow living in the neighborhood. Here they dressed his wounds and nursed him with tender care, until he was restored to perfect health. Meanwhile, it happened that a certain nobleman, named Boniface, who resided at Classis,—a town on the sea-coast, not far distant from the place where Apollinaris lay concealed,—was suddenly deprived of the power of speech. No skill of physicians was able to afford any relief to the unfortunate sufferer. But, by chance, his wife learnt that the great teacher of the Christians was still alive and staying at the house of the widow. Immediately sending a messenger, she besought the ser-

vant of God to have pity on her and to visit her afflicted husband. The holy man was moved, and, in spite of the danger to which he thus exposed himself, at once set out upon his work of charity. As he was coming near the dwelling of the nobleman, there came out of the house a girl having an unclean spirit. Seeing the Bishop, she became greatly excited, and began to cry out:

“Get thee hence, servant of the living God; for I will have thee bound hand and foot, and dragged out of this town.”

“Be silent, wicked spirit,” said Apollinaris; “go out of her, and do not again presume to speak in men.”

The unclean demon forthwith left the girl, and never troubled her again. Then the saint entered the house of Boniface, and when he had ascertained that the man was really dumb, he knelt down and prayed:

“Lord Jesus Christ, who didst shut the mouth of this man that he might no longer call for aid upon vain and powerless idols, now loosen his tongue, that he may invoke Thy ever blessed Name, and believe that Thou art the true God, who livest forever and ever.” The Christians who were present answered, “Amen.” Straightway the nobleman recovered the use of his speech, and leaping for joy, he exclaimed:

“There is no other God besides Him whom the blessed Apollinaris announces to us.”

This wonderful cure had so great an effect upon all them that were present, and upon the friends and acquaintances of Boniface who heard of it, that more than five hundred of them believed in Christ, and desired to be instructed in the doctrines of the Faith. This happy disposition of the people filled the heart of the servant of God with much consolation in the midst of his trials, and he cheerfully sowed the good seed in the rich soil so ready to receive it. But the enemy of mankind did not long permit him to pursue his labors without molestation. For, after a time, some of the people of Classis, at the instigation of the priests of the idols, waylaid him, and, after beating him with clubs, forbade him to speak again or to teach in the Name of Jesus. But Apollinaris replied :

“There is no power on earth that can hinder me from proclaiming that Jesus is the true God, who came down from heaven and assumed our human nature, that He might suffer for the salvation of man.”

Then, seizing him again, they made him stand upon burning coals. Yet, in spite of all their efforts, they were unable to silence him ; and he continued fearlessly to announce to them the truths of the gos-

pel. Seeing that they could not overcome his fortitude by threats of further violence, they said:

“We know very well that thou hast the power of working wonderful cures, but promise us that thou wilt not enter our town, and we will let thee live.”

But as he would not satisfy them herein, and boldly asserted that he would go whithersoever the Spirit of his Divine Master directed him, they dragged him to a great distance from the walls, where they left him almost lifeless, and destitute of all human assistance. He, however, for whose sake he underwent all these hardships did not abandon him. For no sooner did the Christians learn how cruelly he had been outraged by the Pagans, than, hastening to his assistance, they ministered to him with filial affection, until they had the happiness of seeing him again restored to perfect soundness.

Not far from the walls of the city, there stood a little hut belonging to one of the brethren. This they fitted up, so that it might be used by the Bishop as a chapel, where he might celebrate the Sacred Mysteries, as well as instruct and baptize all those who desired to embrace the Faith. Here he continued to reside for a long time; and hence also he made frequent excursions into various parts of *Æmilia*, proclaiming everywhere, though in secret, the glad tidings of salvation, and adding great

numbers of persons of every rank and condition to the fold of Christ.

During all this time the holy priest, Calocerus, was governing the Church at Ravenna. God had blessed his labors. Very many of the inhabitants, moved by his burning eloquence, but still more by the holiness of his life and the miracles which he wrought, had yielded to the inspirations of grace and embraced Christianity. The news of these spiritual triumphs filled the heart of Apollinaris with unspeakable joy, and made him unceasingly thank God for the blessings bestowed upon his ministry. At last, at the urgent request of the Faithful, he consented to visit once more the scene of his early labors and to return to Ravenna. His coming among them cheered the hearts of the Christians, and awakened in them new zeal and fervor. Their Divine Master strengthened their good dispositions by manifesting anew the sanctity of His servant.

It so happened that, at this time, the Governor of Ravenna was a certain nobleman named Rufus, who had an only daughter. While the Christians were rejoicing on account of the presence of their chief pastor among them, the house of the Governor was filled with mourning because his child lay at the point of death. Some of his friends having told him of the marvellous healing powers possessed by

the chief of the Christians, Rufus forthwith sent for Apollinaris, begging him to come and save his daughter. The servant of God, well knowing that this visit would tend to promote the glory of his Master, did not delay to comply with the Governor's request. As he entered the house and heard the loud cries and lamentations of the servants, he knew at once that she, for whose sake he was coming, had passed away.

Nevertheless, he did not withdraw, but asked to see the father of the maiden. The Governor, frantic with grief, and hardly knowing what he said or did, soon presented himself before the Saint, and, accosting him in a rude and surly manner, exclaimed:

"Begone! Oh wretched man; leave my dwelling. Oh! that it had never been suggested to me that I should send for thee! This act of folly has aroused the anger of our great and immortal gods, and now my beloved and only one is no more. What couldst thou have done to save her? Alas! that I should thus incur the wrath of the masters of life!"

Apollinaris, calm and patient, uttered not a word, but listened meekly to all the reproaches of the grief-stricken father; and, when Rufus had poured forth all his complaints, he said to him:

"You should have had greater confidence, my Lord, in the goodness and power of the true God,

whose poor and unworthy servant I am; for He alone is the Master of life and death. Promise me solemnly that you will permit your daughter to follow her Saviour, and you shall see the power of our Lord Jesus Christ."

"I know that my child is dead," replied the Governor, "and lost to me forever; yet should she live again and make me hear once more her beloved voice, I will not only proclaim the wondrous power of thy God, but permit her to follow and obey her Saviour, without the least interference from any one."

Thereupon the attendants, weeping and mourning, led the Saint into the apartment where lay the inanimate body of their young mistress. Apollinaris blessed himself with the sign of the Cross, and kneeling down, prayed aloud:

"Lord Jesus Christ, my God, who didst grant to my master, the blessed Peter, Thy Apostle, that which he asked of Thee, restore this child to life that all may know that Thou art the Creator, and that there is no other God besides Thee."

Then, turning to the girl and taking her by the hand, he said:

"Why sleepest thou? Maiden, arise, and confess the power of thy Creator."

And straightway the girl arose, and cried out with a loud voice:

“Great is the God whom Apollinaris, His servant, announces to us, and there is none other but He.”

At once the cries and lamentations of the Governor's household were changed into shouts of joy and thankfulness. The Christians, especially, gave glory to God, because the Name of Christ had been that day so wonderfully exalted before the Pagans. In consequence of this miracle, the Saint had the happiness of instructing and baptizing not only the daughter and her mother, but more than three hundred persons belonging to the household of the Governor. Rufus, nevertheless, though he continued to show great kindness to the servant of God, did not for some time make public profession of Christianity, lest he might give offence to the Emperor. With his consent, however, his daughter was permitted to consecrate herself to Christ, and take the sacred veil of virgins.

These things did not take place without causing considerable excitement among the people of Ravenna. The priests of the idols, seeing that their power was fast declining, began again to bestir themselves, and did not relent until their complaints had reached the ears of the Emperor himself. To him they represented that there had come among them a crafty magician, a native of Antioch, who by his wily arts was leading away the inhabitants from the

worship of the gods, and had even persuaded Rufus, the Governor, to become his friend and protector. When the Emperor heard these reports, he was very angry. Without making further inquiries, he immediately suspended the Governor from his office, and sent orders to his deputy, Messalinus, to act as Prefect; commanding him, at the same time, to force the so-called magician to offer sacrifice to the gods of Rome, or to send him far away into exile. No sooner had Messalinus received these orders than he summoned the blessed Apollinaris before his tribunal. The enemies of the servant of God, apprised of the Prefect's intention, assembled together in great numbers in the judgment-hall; for they meant to encourage the Prefect by their presence, as well as by their words, to avenge the insults heaped upon the gods by the Christians. As the holy Bishop stood before him, Messalinus said:

“What is thy name?”

“My name is Apollinaris,” answered the servant of God.

“Whence didst thou come hither?” asked the Prefect.

“From Antioch, in Syria,” replied Apollinaris.

“What profession dost thou follow?”

“I am a Christian, and a disciple of the Apostles of Christ.”

“And who is Christ?” inquired Messalinus.

“The Son of the living God; who created out of nothing all things that exist, whether visible or invisible.”

“Speakest thou of that Christ, who, some years ago, was put to death by the Jews, because He called Himself the Son of God? Assuredly, if He was God, he could not have died, nor could He have been made to undergo all the sufferings which the people made Him endure. It was, no doubt, on account of His pride that He became an object of hatred to them, and was finally put to death. How thou canst have the impudence of assigning to such a person a place among the gods, surpasses our comprehension.”

“Nevertheless, Christ, of whom I speak,” boldly replied the holy man, “is the eternal God. By sin man had become the slave of the devil; the Son of God, pitying our wretched condition, resolved to free us from this degrading yoke. Hiding the splendors of His everlasting glory, He took upon Himself our human nature, and was born of a pure Virgin, without the intervention of man, that He might be enabled to raise us again to that high state whence we had fallen.”

“We have heard of all that before now,” said the Prefect, “but it is hard to believe.”

“Then listen to my words like a man, Oh Messalinus,” said the Bishop. “While dwelling in the flesh, Christ did not cease to be God, doing wonders in the universe. When He was seized and crucified by the Jews, He suffered in the body which He had assumed of the Virgin; for as God, He could not suffer nor die. This same body He raised again from the dead on the third day; and, after appearing to many, He returned, in the sight of the multitude, to the heavens whence he had come. So great a power did He bestow upon them that believe in Him, that, in His Name, they cast out devils, heal the sick, and even restore the dead to life.”

“In spite of all those arguments,” resumed Messalinus, “thou canst not persuade me to follow unknown gods, that are not approved as such by the Senate; wherefore, laying aside all these matters, go with me to the Capitol, and there offer incense to great Jove, the Thunderer, that thus thou mayest save thy life; for, unless thou obey me herein, I swear to thee by the health of Cæsar, I will have thee scourged and punished in many other ways, and then driven from the city.”

“There is no need of taking me to the Capitol,” replied Apollinaris; “consider this already done, and that, under no circumstances, will I defile my hands by burning incense to your demons; but I

will offer to my Lord Jesus Christ a sacrifice of praise for an odor of sweetness."

The Prefect, being at fault what answer to make to these bold words of the servant of God, remained silent. The priests of the idols, perceiving his perplexity, cried out :

"Do you not know, Oh Messalinus, that this man lays claim to the name of a high-priest, and that, by assuming this name, he misleads the people? Examine him about his arrogant pretensions, and you shall soon know how to deal with him."

This taunting remark seemed to arouse the wrath of the Prefect, for he suddenly turned to his attendants, and said :

"Strip the man of his garments, and scourge him; and say to him at the same time: Come to thy senses, and offer sacrifice to our gods."

The holy Confessor, while undergoing the punishment, from time to time, raising his voice, said: I am a Christian. Do with my body whatever you like."

When, however, it appeared that the cruel scourging caused him no pain, but rather pleasure, the chief of the priests said to the Prefect :

"It were better that he should be stretched on the rack: that thus greater satisfaction may be given to the immortal gods."

This was now accordingly done. Yet, in spite of all the torments they made him endure, he continued constantly to repeat in a loud voice: "Jesus Christ is the one and living God: Him I confess, for there is none other.

The Prefect wondered that a person of apparently so weak a constitution should be able to bear his sufferings with so much fortitude, and said to the Martyr:

"Tell me, Oh wretched man, what reward dost thou expect for all these torments?"

"It is written," answered Apollinaris, "that 'he that shall persevere unto the end, he shall be saved;' and again: 'If we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live together with Him;' such is the reward which awaits the faithful Christians."

Some of the Christians, who were present, hearing these words of their chief Pastor, could no longer restrain their feelings, and began in a loud voice to give glory to God, who had enabled His servant to put to confusion all the efforts of the wicked tormentors. This outburst of zeal and indignation excited the wrath of Messalinus. He immediately commanded the executioners to scourge the venerable servant of God as he lay stretched upon the rack, and to pour boiling water into his wounds. Then, seeing that these additional cruelties did not shake in the least the firmness of his victim, he ordered a

herald to proclaim that Apollinaris, the leader of the Christians, was condemned to be put in chains, and to be forthwith sent into exile beyond the country of Illyria. When the Saint heard this sentence, he said to the Prefect :

“ Impious man, what evil have I done that you should condemn me thus ? It were better for you to give up the worship of devils and believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, that you may escape the everlasting torments of the future life, which shall be the portion of all the wicked.”

Upon hearing this, Messalinus got into a great passion, and commanded his attendants to strike the Martyr on the mouth with a large stone, and then to cast him into a dark dungeon, there to wait until a ship should be ready to take him beyond the sea. During this time no one was permitted to visit the servant of God or to bring him food ; for the Prefect had said that, if the stubborn Christian were to die in his prison, it would be all the more convenient for those who were to take him in charge. But he was much disappointed when, four days after, sending some of his men to see whether Apollinaris was still alive, word was brought back that he was not only living but quite sound in body—without bearing the least mark of the torments to which he had been subjected. As, however, there

was now a ship ready to set sail, Messalinus ordered that the holy Bishop should be secretly put on board. This was accordingly done. Yet, in spite of all the precautions that had been taken, three members of the clergy of Ravenna contrived to elude the vigilance of the Prefect's officers, and embarked with their beloved Pastor. After a long and tedious voyage, they entered the Gulf of Corinth. Here they were overtaken by a violent storm, which, after shattering their vessel to pieces, cast ashore the Saint and his clerical companions, together with two of the soldiers who had been appointed to guard him. All the rest of the company belonging to the ship perished in the waves. The soldiers were in utter hopelessness after this sad accident, and unable to decide what was to be done. In this perplexing situation they had recourse to the servant of God, and said to him :

“Holy Father, help us in our troubles. What is to be done? whither shall we go?”

“My children,” answered Apollinaris, “if you believe and be baptized in the Name of Jesus Christ, you shall live, and all will be well. Then we will pursue our journey in whatever manner we are able until we reach the place of our destination.”

The favorable opinion which they had heretofore formed of the holiness of the man of God needed

only these kind words to make them anxious to be instructed in the doctrines of Christianity, and to desire baptism. Thus they found hope and comfort, as well as a new life, where death and desolation seemed to stare them in the face.

After this, they began their wearisome march, travelling from place to place, exposed to the inclemency of the weather, and constantly harassed by the evil-minded inhabitants of the countries through which they had to pass. The Saint, however, in spite of the opposition which he everywhere encountered, did not fail to sow the good seed of the Word in a soil apparently so ill-suited to make it bring forth fruit. When, at last, after many months of toilsome journeying, they reached Lower Mœsia, the condition of the exiled Bishop was not improved. For the inhabitants, still seated in the darkness of Paganism, and obstinately addicted to all its vilest practices, were unwilling to receive among them one who was looked upon as an inflexible enemy of the idols. Hence he lived in continual danger, and had to endure many hardships, as his very presence was avoided by the ignorant and deluded people. But He for whose sake the Saint suffered all these things with meek and patient resignation, while cheering His servant with inward consolation, honored him also in the sight of men.

One of the principal citizens of the country had a brother who was affected with leprosy. When this man heard that, at the time, there was abiding in his neighborhood a Christian who had wrought many wonderful cures, he became very anxious to see him. Wherefore, having discovered the place where the holy Bishop lay concealed, he at once repaired thither, and besought him to have pity on his sad condition. Apollinaris, seeing him, had compassion, and said:

“Dost thou earnestly desire to be restored to soundness?”

“I do desire it with all my heart,” answered the man.

“Then believe in Jesus Christ, our Lord, and thou shalt be made clean.”

“Whosoever shall cleanse me from my loathsome disease,” said the leper, “Him I will confess as my God and Saviour.”

Thereupon, the servant of God, touching the man, said:

“In the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, be thou made clean.”

At the very instant the man was made perfectly sound, so that no mark of his leprosy remained. Faithful to his word, he immediately renounced the worship of the idols, and begged to be instructed

and baptized. During many days Apollinaris continued to reside with the new convert, and, after receiving many others into the Church, he went as far as the banks of the Danube, preaching everywhere the glad tidings of salvation. But no extent of country could secure for the persecuted exile a permanent resting-place. For no sooner did it become known that he was an enemy of idolatry and superstition, than the hatred of the Pagans was forthwith stirred up against him. Hence, seeing that there was no longer any safety for him in any part of Mœsia, he was obliged to flee for refuge into Thrace. Here he remained for many months free from annoyance. But, at last, the powers of darkness aroused the inhabitants against him.

In the neighborhood of the place where the Saint was staying, there was a famous temple of Serapis. Thither great multitudes of worshippers constantly resorted to consult the oracle. But, notwithstanding all their invocations and sacrifices, for a long time no answers were obtained. At length, however, the demon said:

“Know ye not that a disciple of Peter, the Apostle of Christ, is come hither from Rome? He has bound us by preaching Jesus. Unless ye first drive him away from this neighborhood, we can give you no answers.”

Thereupon, the people immediately set out in search of the Saint; and, when they had found him, they asked how and why he had dared to come into their country.

"I am a Christian," frankly answered Apollinaris; "for proclaiming the Name of Christ, I was sent into exile by the Prefect of Ravenna."

Then, instigated by the priests of Serapis, the fanatical mob, stripping him of his garments, beat him with clubs until he was nearly exhausted. After which, taking him to the sea-coast, they obtained leave from the Governor of the Province to send him back to Italy, by the first vessel that would sail for that country.

"For," they said, "it is better that he should dwell in the country whence he came, and pervert by his teachings the people thereof, than that we should suffer him to overthrow among us the worship of our gods."

Wherefore, after an absence of more than three years, the holy Bishop had the happiness of beholding again the city wherein he had first begun his apostolical labors. The Christians of Ravenna received him with the greatest joy, and thanked God for His goodness in restoring to them their beloved father and teacher; for they had never ceased to pray that this blessing might be granted

to them. While he was away the number of the Faithful had much increased, owing to the zeal and holiness of the priests whom he had left in charge of the Church. In consequence, for a long time, the Pagans were afraid of molesting the servant of God. They, however, continued to look upon him as the most formidable enemy of their idols, and only watched for a favorable opportunity of wreaking vengeance on him.

One day, Apollinaris had gone to celebrate the Sacred Mysteries, at the country-seat of the Senator Cyreneus, not far from the city. Some of the Pagans being aware of the fact, resolved to seize him on his return. Accordingly, they waited his coming, and suddenly falling upon him, they bound him with cords, and dragged him to the temple of Jupiter, there to force him to offer incense to that idol. But the priests of the Capitol, remembering what had formerly taken place on a similar occasion, would not allow him to be taken into their temple, and said :

“This man is not worthy of being presented before the great Jupiter, for he has more than once made sport of him. Take him to the temple of Apollo, and let him there learn the power of our immortal gods.”

Whereupon, the Saint was led thither surrounded

by a great multitude of Pagans, desirous of seeing the chief of the Christians sacrificing to their favorite deity. Many of the Faithful, also, followed at a distance, praying that God might that day be glorified by means of His servant. When he stood before the temple and saw within it the statue of Apollo, he said to the Pagans who held him a prisoner :

“Is that the god who foretells the future for you?”

“Yes,” they answered, “he is the greatest of all our gods in that respect; for that reason, also, he is the chosen guardian of this our fair city.”

“May it never go well with that wicked demon,” said the Saint; “and when he is utterly annihilated, may our Lord Jesus Christ, the God of truth and justice, be the protector of all the inhabitants of this place.”

Then, raising his eyes toward heaven, he prayed in silence, and immediately the statue of Apollo fell to pieces, and the temple of the idol was destroyed. The Pagans, seeing what had happened, instead of acknowledging the powerlessness of the gods they worshipped, raised a great outcry against Apollinaris, saying :

“Let that old man be put to death at once, lest he kill us all as well as our gods; for no one can withstand the power of his magical arts.”

Instantly they laid hold on him, and dragging

him before one of the imperial judges, named Taurus, insisted with loud vociferations that he should be forthwith condemned to death. Taurus, however, who understood the injustice of sacrificing a man to popular excitement, was unwilling to grant their request before he had a distinct knowledge of the nature of the accusations brought forward against the prisoner. Wherefore, he sent for several of the principal citizens of Ravenna, that in their presence he might judge the cause of the accused. As soon as they were assembled in the prætorium, he said to Apollinaris :

“Be pleased, sir, to tell us by what power you do all these strange things; where you hold your assemblies; and why is it that so great a multitude follows you?”

“I possess no other power than that which I have received from our Lord Jesus Christ,” answered the Saint; “the place where we meet most frequently, and hold communion with one another and with God, is in our own hearts. If, however, you speak of a material building, the house is not far from here, where we are accustomed to explain the divine commandments to the Christians.”

“Have you any assistants?” inquired the Judge, interrupting him.

“Yes, very many,” replied Apollinaris.

"And where are they at present?" said Taurus.

"In this very city of Ravenna."

The Judge seemed surprised at the straightforward answers of the holy old man, and after consulting for a while with the Patricians, said to the Bishop:

"Do you possess any power of a divine nature?"

"As I said before," replied Apollinaris, "whatever supernal power I possess is given me by our Lord Jesus Christ."

"I have a son who was born blind," said Taurus; "if, by calling on the Name of Him who, as you yourselves assert, was crucified by the Jews, you enable him to see, we will believe and confess that He is the true God; but if you cannot do this, we will take it for granted that the accusations brought against you are true, and we will condemn you to be burned alive."

"Then let the child be brought before us," said the Saint, "and may Christ, our Lord, grant you grace to know and confess the truth."

Immediately the youth was sent for. As soon as he stood before the servant of God, Apollinaris made the sign of the Cross upon the eyes of the blind boy, and said:

"In the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, open thy eyes and receive thy sight."

Straightway the youth opened his eyes, and saw

clearly. The Judge and all the noblemen with him, filled with wonder at the sight of this miracle, exclaimed :

“Verily, He is the true God who can do such marvellous things.”

From that moment all these men believed in Christ, and desired to be fully instructed in the doctrines of the Faith. Taurus dismissed the people, saying, that they need give themselves no further uneasiness, because he himself would watch over the future conduct of the chief the Christians. On the following night he secretly sent Apollinaris to a villa about six miles from the city. There the Saint continued to reside during four years, the place of his concealment being known only to some of the Faithful. In this manner he was enabled to teach and govern the Church of Ravenna, and extend the kingdom of Christ without molestation from the Pagans.

When the priests of the idols perceived that the number of Christians was constantly increasing, and that, in spite of their own fanatical zeal, the influence which they formerly possessed with the people was daily diminishing, they resolved to make a stronger effort, by sending a deputation to Rome to enlist the authority of the Emperor in their cause.

These men being admitted to an audience, repre-

sented to Vespasian that Apollinaris was leading astray the people of Ravenna, and, while turning them away from the worship of the gods, withdrew them also from the allegiance which they owed to the Emperor; that unless he were promptly put down, the sacred rites of Rome would be swept away, and the very temples destroyed; for, as it was, a great multitude had lost all respect for an ancient order of things, and openly reviled the gods and their ministers. "But," they said, "put to death Apollinaris, who is now an old man, and the name and religion of mighty Rome will live again and flourish."

Vespasian, after listening to these statements, gave a rescript to the following effect: "If any one speak insultingly of the gods, let him be required to make reparation to them for the insult offered; and if he refuses, let him be banished from the city. For the rest, we do not deem it proper to constitute ourself the avenger of the gods; for, if they become angry, they themselves ought to take vengeance on their enemies."

With this document the deputies returned to Ravenna, and handing it to one of the imperial judges, called Demosthenes, requested him to have it carried into execution. Demosthenes was a bitter enemy of the Christians. Without delay, he issued

a warrant for the arrest of Apollinaris. It was not difficult to find him, for the place where he resided was now well known. When the holy Bishop, broken down by old age, and by the many sufferings which he had undergone for the sake of his Divine Master, stood before the tribunal of the Judge, the Pagans cried out:

“Ask him no questions: we all know that he is a Christian, and a destroyer of our temples. Either condemn him to death, or drive him so far from the city that he can never again do us any harm.”

Demosthenes, however, would not listen to them; but to escape the censure of the authorities, determined to observe the semblance at least of justice. Wherefore, he cried out in a loud voice, addressing Apollinaris:

“Tell me, old villain, what religious belief dost thou profess?”

“I will not deceive your honor,” replied the holy man, in a calm and dignified manner, “but I will simply tell you the truth. I am a Christian; I was taught by the blessed Apostle Peter, and sent by him to this flourishing city, that its inhabitants, by believing in Jesus Christ, our Lord, might obtain everlasting salvation.”

“There is no need of saying more,” cried the Judge, interrupting him. “It is time for thee to

abandon all that nonsense, and to make amends to our gods by sacrificing to them."

"I am ready," said Apollinaris, "to offer myself as a sacrifice to the true God, for the present and future happiness of all the children who were born to me in this city. Every one that does not forsake the worship of false and wicked demons, and adore the One eternal God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, shall be condemned to everlasting fire; but he that believeth and is baptized, shall find rest and bliss forever."

Demosthenes, hearing this, became so enraged that, unable to decide what punishment he should inflict on the Saint in order to satisfy his own revengeful feelings, he gave him, for the present, in charge to a Centurion, with orders to deliver him up whensoever requested. The Centurion immediately hastened away with the servant of God, lest he might be exposed to the insults of the mob. Taking him to his own dwelling not far from the town of Classis, he there treated him with the greatest care and affection; for he himself was a Christian, although in secret, on account of his military office. After some days had elapsed, and no requisition had been made for the surrender of his prisoner, the Centurion said to Apollinaris:

"My Lord and venerable Father, do not suffer

yourself to be put to death so soon; you cannot yet be spared by your children. To-night, when the road is safe, go, I entreat you, to the hamlet where the lepers dwell; there you can remain in safety, until this excitement of the Pagans subsides."

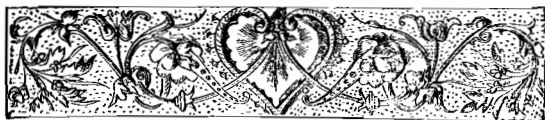
Accordingly, at midnight, the Saint fled toward the hamlet. But his flight having in some way become known to the Pagans, they went in pursuit of him. As, on account of his age, he could travel but slowly, he was easily overtaken before he reached the place.

Wherefore laying hold on him, they ill-used and beat the venerable man, until, thinking him dead, they left him lying bruised and bleeding on the road. There he was found very early in the morning by some Christians, who carried him secretly to the village of the lepers. There he lingered in great pain for seven days, all the while exhorting his devoted children to continue steadfast in the Faith, and assuring them that, after many and cruel persecutions, the Church would triumph at last over her enemies, and the very rulers of the Empire would submit to the sweet yoke of Christ.

Thus the blessed Martyr went to receive the crown which he had merited by a life of ceaseless labors and sufferings. His precious death occurred on the twenty-third of July, in the reign of Vespasian, after

he had governed the Church of Ravenna during more than twenty-eight years. His disciples placed the remains of their beloved master in a tomb of stone, near the walls of Classis, where they continued to invoke his intercession, and received the reward of their Faith and confidence by obtaining all kinds of spiritual and temporal favors.





XII.

ST. PLATO.

ANCYRA, in Galatia, was the birthplace of the blessed Martyr Plato. Descended from a very ancient and illustrious family, he was yet a youth when, by the death of his parents, he became the possessor of immense wealth. His pleasing manners, his elegant form, his vast acquirements, and, above all, the great popularity which his family had always enjoyed in his native country, gave promise to him of a brilliant career in after life. But all these bright prospects of worldly greatness were dimmed suddenly and forever by the fierce persecution against the Christians of Asia Minor, under the Emperor Galerius Maximian. It might have been a great trial to the faith of the youthful Plato to see himself all at once deprived of every hope of future distinction, for which he was so well fitted by his rank in society, and by the careful training which he had received, had he not been taught that there is nothing upon earth more glorious for

a true Christian, than to be faithful to his holy Religion and to his God. So great a terror and confusion reigned at the time among the people, and so powerful were the inducements held out by the enemies of Christianity, that no one dared trust his neighbors, or even his relations, not knowing whether the ties of friendship or of kindred would be strong enough to withstand the tempting bribes that were offered.

In this state of affairs, the noble youth gave proof that he had not listened in vain to the counsels of his divine Master. He saw that now had arrived for him the hour to lay up treasures in heaven, and to follow more closely the footsteps of Him who, when dwelling among the children of men, had not where to lay His head. Accordingly, he began forthwith to distribute all his possessions among the poor, and, by word and example, to encourage his brethren to continue steadfast in the Faith, teaching them to look for strength amidst their trials to Him alone, from whom every good gift proceeds. This generous conduct of the fervent Christian did not long remain concealed from the watchful eyes of the ministers of Satan, who hoped to carry off rich booty, if they could ensnare him in their toils. Wherefore, they caused him to be arrested and put into prison; after which they went before Agrip-

pinus, the Governor, and accused him of exciting the people to resist the laws and to revile the worship of the gods.

The Governor immediately gave orders that the young Christian should be despoiled of the insignia of his rank, and brought before his tribunal, which was erected near the temple of Jupiter. When Plato stood before him, he said :

“The whole world is rejoicing over the peace and prosperity of the Empire. How comes it that thou sufferest thyself to be involved in so great and fatal an error as to disregard the commands of our Princes, and whilst abandoning the worship of our great gods, to follow the Religion of the Crucified?”

“You yourselves are involved in the darkness of error,” answered Plato; “for you have abandoned the service of the One God, the Creator of the universe, and worship wood and stones, the work of your own hands.”

“Thy youth inclines thee to be rather saucy,” said Agrippinus. “Take care, and let us know thy birthplace, thy name and thy religious belief.”

“I was born in this city,” replied the youth; “my name is Plato, my Religion is that of Christ; for I have been a Christian from my infancy.”

“Knowest thou not that our master, the Emperor, commands that all who persevere in the profession

of that Religion are to be punished with every kind of torture?"

"I have heard of it," answered Plato, "and cannot but laugh at the foolish command of the Prince."

"So, then, thou callest this order of our Prince foolish!" exclaimed the Governor.

"Yes, and its author as well," said the brave youth.

"It will not prove to thy advantage," resumed Agrippinus, "to laugh at the commands of our rulers, or to despise our gods. All they who attempt such things must perish miserably. Hence, as we pity thee on account of thy noble birth and the gracefulness of thy person, we advise thee to lay aside all this foolishness, and to go with us, in obedience to the Emperor's will, to the temples of our gods."

"I have kept faithfully, from the days of my childhood, the commandments of my King, who is the King of kings and the Lord of lords, and I will keep them to the end of my life; therefore, I am ever ready, by day and by night, to sing praises to His holy Name. As to your gods, I know them to be devils; I despise them as much as I pity their blind and deluded worshippers."

"If our words cannot persuade thee to obey," said the Governor, "let us see what power there is in blows." He then ordered four soldiers to strip the youth, and scourge him with heavy rods. When

they were tired out, twelve others, successively, took their places. But they labored in vain; for after they had during several hours done their utmost to overcome the constancy of the Martyr, they were not only obliged to confess themselves powerless against him, but were utterly amazed at seeing the wounds they had made so completely healed that not even a scar remained on the body of the sufferer. The spectators, equally astonished, gave expression to their feelings by loud exclamations of approval. Agrippinus felt so embarrassed that for some time he knew not what to do. At last, however, perceiving his awkward situation, he said to the Martyr:

“The beauty of youth still adorns thee, Oh Plato; thou hast shown thyself worthy of thy noble race. Why desirest thou, without reason, to bid farewell to the charms of life? Listen to my words, as if they were spoken by thy own father. Do not rashly run to death; think of securing for thyself a happy life.”

“I thank you for the good advice, Oh Agrippinus,” replied Plato, “and I mean to follow it. I am resolved to shun everlasting death, that I may attain to everlasting life.”

“Tell me, miserable boy,” exclaimed the Governor, “how many deaths are there?”

“There is one which is temporal,” answered the youth, “there is another which is eternal. The one

lasts for a time only, the other has no end, and is prepared for yourself and for your father the devil, as well as for all them that obey your unjust commands: this is a death of endless torture, of weeping and gnashing of teeth."

"It is of no use to waste words in trying to make thee listen to reason," cried Agrippinus. "Either sacrifice to the immortal gods, or hold thyself ready to undergo whatever tortures we can invent."

"Do speedily whatever you think proper," said Plato. "Never will I sacrifice to your idols, nor bow my head to your senseless works of wood and stone. I long to be forever united to Him who died for us upon the Cross, who rose again from the dead, who ascended into heaven, and is now seated in glory at the right hand of His Father."

The Governor, not being prepared to go to extremes in his endeavor to subdue the noble-hearted youth, sent him to prison. As he was passing through the streets, a great multitude of Christians and Pagans accompanied him, and loudly commended the Martyr for the brave spirit he had shown in the presence of his tormentors. The blessed Plato thanked them for their sympathy, and added:

"My Christian brethren, and all ye good people who hear me, the bodily pain which the wicked Agrippinus has made me suffer this day ought not

to alarm you. I did not enter upon this struggle for a trifling cause, but for the love of Him who created all things that exist. We must remember, that the afflictions of the righteous are many; but the Lord delivereth them out of them all. Let us all, therefore, hasten to that haven of safety, Christ our Lord, patiently enduring whatsoever sufferings we may have to undergo for His sake; for we know that the sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, that shall be revealed in us."

Saying this, he joyfully entered his dungeon. Then, kneeling down, he prayed aloud:

"Lord Jesus Christ, who knowest all my deeds and countest all my steps, stand by Thy servant, and strengthen me, that I may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil and his servants. Grant that all men may see and understand the vanity of the idols they worship, and confess that Thou art the true God, who, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, livest and reignest forever and ever. Amen."

Seven days thereafter the Martyr was again summoned before the Governor. This time the trial was to be carried on with even greater display than on the former occasion. As soon as the youth appeared, Viventius, the officer of the Court, said to Agrippinus:

“Plato, who refuses to obey the imperial edicts, and disregards your kind counsel, stands before you; he still perseveres in his wicked obstinacy. What is the will of your Excellency?”

“Place before him the various instruments of torture which are used to subdue refractory culprits,” said the Governor. “Let him see what awaits him if he persists in his blind wilfulness.”

Thereupon, a great variety of instruments and engines of torture—caldrons, gridirons, iron hooks, catapults, sharp obelisks, and the like—were brought in, and placed in grim display before the Martyr. Agrippinus had no doubt that these fearful objects would strike terror into the heart of the youthful servant of God, and make him yield at once to his commands. He said to Plato:

“Thou seest what has been prepared for thee. Now, then, before making a trial of the quality of these objects, consider whether it were not better for thyself, and for the honor of thy illustrious race, to have pity on thy youth. Say that thou art ready to sacrifice to the great Apollo, and save thy kindred from the everlasting disgrace of being pointed at with the finger of scorn, because thou hast perished like a base outlaw.”

“Agrippinus,” replied Plato, “I am not inclined to talk much with you; because all your thoughts

and words seem to be inspired by the devil. Do not flatter yourself with the belief that the sight of all these instruments of torture frightens me, and that, on this account, I will abandon my religion. Are you so dull as not to understand that these torments prepared by you, a weak and mortal man, are mere trifles, and not to be compared with the future punishments of the wicked, which shall endure forever?"

The Governor, disguising his real sentiments and assuming a tone of unusual kindness, said :

"Most excellent youth, if thou wert but willing to listen to me, as if I were thy own father, who have set my heart on promoting thy interests—even in spite of thyself—thou wouldst gladly consent to taste a little of the meats offered to our gods, and I would at once set thee free. Not only this; but I will give thee in marriage the only daughter of my brother, and bestow upon thee such honors and riches as will cause thee to be envied and admired by all men."

The youth smiled, and replied: "Most wicked and deceitful of tempters, had I been inclined to earthly nuptials, I might have chosen a bride far better and more noble than the daughter of your brother."

This answer so aroused the wrath of Agrippinus

that, without any further concealment of his intentions, he ordered his men to stretch the Martyr upon a brazen couch, and kindle under it a raging fire. Then he made them pour oil, rosin and melted wax upon the naked body of the sufferer, so that in a few moments the flesh was consumed, and the bones were laid bare. Sophronius, the registrar, struck with horror at the sight, said to Plato :

“Oh most miserable of men, why do you refuse to obey the command of the Governor? Do you not see how many more torments are still in store for you?”

“Get thee behind me, minister of Satan,” answered the Martyr; “thou shalt not prevail against me. I gladly deliver up my whole body to be tortured for the sake of Christ.”

“Thinkest thou that Christ can free thee from our hands?” cried the Governor. “Unless thou offer incense to the mighty Apollo, thou shalt not escape a single one of the torments that are prepared for thee.”

“I neither sacrifice to Apollo nor to any other of your demons,” said Plato; “for your Apollo is a destroyer, and all his worshippers will perish with him. But I offer now and ever a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving to God, who reigns in the heavens.”

“Wretch!” exclaimed Agrippinus, “I see very

well that thou lovest death, and hatest the sweet delight of this life."

"Blind hater of the truth," replied the youth, "did I not tell you before, that if I persevere in the confession of my Lord and Master Jesus Christ, I shall not die, but enter into everlasting life? If you were worthy to understand this, and to believe in Him, you would with your own hands break to pieces the abominable idols you worship, and adore with me the true God, who holds in his hands the very breath of your life."

"Oh thou reckless enemy of our gods and our princes," vociferated the excited Governor, "art thou not ashamed of thy own madness? How darest thou think of persuading us to embrace a Religion which is condemned by our imperial rulers?"

"I know full well the pride of your heart," calmly answered the Martyr, "and that Divine wisdom will not enter into a malicious soul, nor dwell in a body subject to sins. Yet remember my words: the day will come, when with weeping and groaning you shall call to mind what I now say; then you will regret in vain that you refused to believe me; but that tardy repentance shall be useless, because it will only prove your present wickedness."

The Governor, as if he wished the spectators to believe that these solemn words of the Martyr

caused him no uneasiness of mind, ordered the executioners to apply several instruments of torture to the bleeding limbs of the generous champion of Christ. In this manner three hours were spent; after which he was taken from the brazen couch. As soon as the servant of God was released from his bed of torture, the executioners, as well as the spectators, perceived that his ghastly wounds exhaled a fragrant odor. But how great was their astonishment when, a few moments later, they saw that his whole body was again restored to perfect soundness. Agrippinus himself was so confused that he knew not what to do; for he could not disbelieve the testimony of his own senses, although he was too proud to acknowledge himself defeated. At last, however, aware that he must somehow or other get out of his false position, he said to the Martyr:

“Accept, even now, Oh Plato, our proposals; or, if thou art absolutely resolved not to sacrifice to our gods, renounce, at least, the Crucified, and we will set thee free.”

“Oh, most cruel deceiver, and falsifier of the truth,” answered the youth, “how dare you advise me to deny Jesus Christ, my God and Redeemer, who stood by me in my torments, and suffered not that even a vestige should remain of all I have endured for love of Him—whereunto you yourself

can bear witness? Depart from me, you worker of iniquity; put a stop to the wicked endeavors you use to mislead the unwary and innocent. My Lord and Master will not allow my soul to perish; neither will He permit His servant to see corruption."

Because I began to show some pity for thee," cried the Governor, "thou becomest again foolish and insolent. Know then, that I will so crush thee with tortures that, of thy own accord, thou wilt cry out: I am ready to sacrifice to the gods."

"All the torments you have hitherto inflicted, and those which you may still have in reserve, are as welcome to me as if they were an invitation to a pleasant banquet. I joyfully resign my body to pains and wounds; they prepare me the better to become an heir of the life everlasting."

Agrippinus hearing this answer, and seeing the calmness of the speaker, became so enraged that, rising from his seat, he rent his garment, and shouted to the executioners to pierce the sides of the Martyr with red-hot iron spits. This was done with so much barbarity that the instruments penetrated the very bowels of the sufferer, and the smoke issued from his mouth and nostrils. The spectators, disgusted at the sight, cried out: "At last the victim of the merciless tyrant is dying." But Plato, addressing the Governor, said:

"Bloodthirsty monster, your tortures cannot conquer me. Christ is my defender; His presence is to me a strong wall, which you cannot overthrow."

One of the Governor's attendants then approached the Martyr, and said:

"Yield at last, Oh Plato, to the commands of our rulers and offer incense to the gods. We all entreat you to relent; for we can no longer endure the sight of these horrible things."

"And art thou also become a defender of demons," said Plato, "thou who hardly knowest how to distinguish between thy right hand and thy left? If thou puttest thyself forward as a teacher, then let Agrippinus hold his peace."

Then raising his eyes toward heaven, he said: "Lord Jesus, for the glory of Thy holy Name, I have delivered up my body to the scourges of Thine enemies. Trouble is near at hand, and there is none to help me except Thyself. Wicked dogs surround me on every side; grant that they may howl in vain. Depart thou not from me, lest they that know Thee not may say: 'Where is his God?'" To this prayer all the Christians who were present answered, Amen.

Agrippinus, meanwhile, remained as cold-hearted as ever, and in a tone of voice that expressed his spiteful feelings, addressed the Martyr:

"With all this useless talk, Oh Plato, thou still

perseverest in thy folly. It is not now the first time that we hear similar boasts uttered by those who profess that religion of thine; but not one of them all hath ever escaped our hands alive, unless he did our bidding and offered sacrifice to our great gods. So, prepare thyself to do in like manner, or have another taste of the torture."

"Impious tyrant and inventor of evils," replied the youth, "why will you prolong my sufferings by repeating again and again your useless talk, like a dog returning to his vomit? Our Lord Jesus Christ shed His Sacred Blood for the salvation of the world; why then should not I joyfully suffer for His sake a transitory death, which will open for me the gates of a blissful immortality."

Then the Governor commanded the executioners to cut to pieces the body of the Martyr by little and little, and said to Plato:

"Let us now see whether Christ, in whom thou trustest, can save thee."

"Horrible monster!" exclaimed the Martyr, "you strive in vain to drag me into your own destruction. Know that I rejoice in these sufferings, because they are to me a treasure beyond all price."

As the executioners proceeded with their sickening work, treating the body of the youth as if it were a soulless statue, the spectators, the Pagans as

well as the Christians, wept aloud, uttering the while words of sympathy and admiration. But the noble athlete bravely fought the good fight, and said:

“I waited patiently for the Lord; He was attentive unto me, and heard my cry. He shall deliver me, and make them a reproach that tread upon me.” Then, taking a piece of flesh cut out of his side, and casting it before the Governor, he exclaimed:

“Wicked fiend, blood-stained demon! do you not know that God made man in His own image? How dare you, for the sake of the devils you worship, cut to pieces the noblest work of the Almighty? Do you forget that you yourself are clothed with flesh, and put together with bones and sinews? What pleasure can you find in thus hacking to pieces these limbs that have done no evil? Yet, I do not complain of this; the more this body of mine is mangled, the brighter shall be the crown wherewith my Lord and King will reward His servant. Take, Oh tyrant, take that piece of my poor body; it will serve as a testimony against you in the day of final retribution. Then it will remind you of your wicked injustice, whilst you were in power upon earth, and prove the justice of the all-knowing Judge, who condemns you to endless punishment—together with your idols.

“Hast thou not yet sufficiently insulted us and our gods?” cried Agrippinus. “Seest thou how

thy very entrails are issuing forth through thy wounds? and art thou not yet subdued?"

"You wretch!" answered the youth, boldly, "you continue to abide in the foulness of your crimes, and think not of the rottenness of your heart. Give yourself no trouble about me. These torments are purifying my body of its earthly dross, that it may appear clothed with a garment of glory in the presence of the heavenly King."

"I am well aware," shouted the raging Governor, "that thou pratest in this manner to induce us to slay thee at once; but, seeing how bold and impudent thou art, we keep thee for still greater tortures, that all they who refuse to honor our glorious god Apollo may learn from thy example what treatment they are to expect at our hands."

"Prove by your deeds what you threaten by your words," replied the Martyr, "and gratify the desire of your father, the devil. As a man of authority in this world, you have indeed some power over this poor body of mine; but what can you do against my soul?"

"I tell thee again," said the tyrant, "so long as thou dishonorest our gods I will have no pity on thee: nay, not even if thou wert as great a philosopher as Plato of old, whose name thou bearest."

"And you ought before now to be convinced," said Plato, "that I am not solicitous about my body,

and that, with God's grace, I endure your torments quite patiently, and am ready to suffer still more for the love of Jesus Christ our Lord."

Then Agrippinus ordered his men to stretch him again upon the rack, and to scrape with their iron instruments the Martyr's body, so that every bone was laid bare. While this was done, a herald cried out continually: "Sacrifice to the gods and thou shalt be set free." Seeing that his whole body appeared unstrung, the Governor said: "O stubborn wretch, what dost thou still hope for? All thy bones are laid bare, the skin is everywhere torn from thy body; why dost thou not propitiate our gods by sacrificing to them, that they may save thy life?"

"Why do you still force me to speak to you, Oh worshipper of devils?" answered the youth. "If I made light of your former tortures, why should I care for these present ones, that bring me so near to my crown? Stripped of my fleshly skin, but clad with the armor of faith, I shall the more readily escape from the face of my enemy and enter heaven. If you have more torments to inflict, delay them not, that you may the sooner be put to confusion."

"I have some patience with thee," said Agrippinus, "for the sake of the name thou bearest. The philosopher, Plato, was a great teacher, and withal he himself honored our gods, and taught others to

do in like manner. How happens it that thou, the descendant of a noble and ancient race, no longer followest the doctrines taught thy forefathers by thy celebrated namesake?

“Begone, Satan!” replied the Martyr. “The powers of darkness shall not prevail against me so long as I keep with me the Holy Spirit, and meditate night and day on His sacred doctrines. Of your Plato, Oh Agrippinus, I have nothing but the name. His wild and erratic philosophy, whereby, being himself deceived, he led others into error, is little more than an empty display of words. True wisdom is brought into this world, not by the vain disputations of philosophers, but by our Lord Jesus Christ, who makes it known to the clean of heart according as it is written: I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and bring to nothing the prudence of the prudent.”

The Governor was quite astonished when he heard the youth talk so calmly, and, as he knew not what answer to make, he said to his attendants:

“It is of no use to deny the fact—we can never conquer that young Christian.”

He then sent him to prison, with orders that only one ounce of bread and a cup of water should be given him each day, and that none should be allowed to visit him. The Saint, however, did not even make use of this poor allowance of food, and, after

three days, the keepers, fearing that he might die in prison, said to him :

“Wert thou to perish here with hunger, our lives would pay the forfeit. Take the food we bring thee, Oh noble youth.”

“Fear nothing,” said Plato. “Man liveth not by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. I will not taste of the food of the wicked, for I have within me the Spirit that strengthens the weak, the Spirit promised by our Lord Jesus Christ, who said: ‘I am the Living Bread which came down from heaven.’ And again: ‘He that shall drink of the water that I will give him shall not thirst forever; but the water that I will give him shall become in him a fountain of water springing up into life everlasting.’”

The Martyr was left in prison during eighteen days, after which he was again summoned before the Governor’s tribunal, near the temple of Jupiter. Agrippinus said :

“What hast thou resolved upon in regard to thy safety? Art thou prepared to offer incense to our gods? or dost thou prefer to die, and go to Christ, as thou sayst?”

“Christ is my salvation,” answered Plato. “Do speedily what thou hast resolved to do against me, and delay not my happiness by useless talk.”

“Since, with all our good will, we cannot over-

come thy obstinacy," said Agrippinus, "and since, by thy magical arts, thou even defiest our torments, we command that, on account of thy wilful perseverance in despising our gods, thy head be cut off with the sword."

The executioners forthwith led the Martyr out of Ancyra, to a place called the *Pleasant Plain*. Having obtained a moment's time to pray, the blessed Plato said :

"I thank Thee, Oh Lord Jesus Christ, for that Thou didst not suffer the threats and torments of the wicked to prevail against me. I thank Thee for sending Thy holy Angel to heal my wounds and to strengthen my poor body. Bid me speedily come to Thee ; receive my soul in peace ; graciously grant that this day I may find admittance among Thine Elect in the abode of Thy glory." Then, uncovering his neck, he said to the executioner :

"Now, brother, do what thou hast been commanded to do."

Immediately, the executioner struck off the head of the blessed Martyr. Thus died the heroic youth whose wonderful courage had become the admiration of the Pagans themselves. The Christians took possession of the sacred body, and, after embalming it, deposited it in a tomb near the spot whence his generous spirit had taken its flight to heaven