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THE ACTS

OF THE

EARLY MARTYRS

BY

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THE MARTYRS.

I.

ST. PONTIUS.

HIS 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 patriot, "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.”

Before 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 renoucest 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 smothered

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

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.”

“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,

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 Aureliar.





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 beseech 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