

A. M. D. G.

THE VICTIMS

OF THE

MAMERTINE.

Scenes from the Early Church.

SECOND SERIES.

REV. A. J. O'REILLY, D.D.,

Missionary Apostolic, author of the "Martyrs of the Coliseum."

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PART FIRST.



CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION.

I.

IN treating of the Saints of the Mamertine, we feel like one sent to a graveyard long since abandoned, and told to give the history of those buried in its sacred precincts.

A few monuments only have survived the wreck of time, and tell the names of those who were players on the stage of life in generations gone by.

“You ask me, Valerianus, worthy pontiff of Christ,” wrote Prudentius, “what inscriptions are engraved on the numberless tombs of the saints I have seen in the city of Romulus, and what are the names of these blessed martyrs. I find it difficult to answer. Many tombs, indeed, bear written in small letters either the name of the martyr’s or

some epitaph, but the rest merely indicate the number of martyrs they contain.”*

Contemplating the number of martyrs that suffered in Rome during the ten great persecutions of the Church, it would seem a Herculean task to give the history of the victims of the Mamertine. There is a strange passage in the “Revelations of St. Bridget”: “Take a hundred square feet of earth, sow it with corn, each grain a finger’s breadth apart and bearing a hundred-fold, greater will be the number of martyrs from the time St. Peter came to Rome to the time Celestine abdicated.”

The Catacombs alone tell of hundreds of thousands. Yet of this immense number of happy souls the Mamertine was honored with only a few, and these the noblest names on the records of the Church. There are many martyrs mentioned in the Acts cast into vile and dark prisons, but as the *Tullian* or *Mamertine* is not mentioned we cannot treat them as victims of the prison. This prison was destined for political captives; for the hapless sons of the upper ten on whom fortune frowned or whose ambition, like the

* Pruden., “De Coronis,” ii.

demons of Simon Magus, raised them aloft to let them fall with greater ignominy.

Therefore, on the Christian page of its history we have persons of position and fame. This reflection bears with it an obvious consolation for the reader. Being remarkable men, enjoying the first position in the city, and feared for their wealth and influence, their lives were better known, and consequently their acts are more genuine. Thus the records of the martyrs of this prison, with a few exceptions, are a collection of the most authentic acts, not less so because teeming with sensation and wonder. We need not build castles of fancy or climb imaginary rainbows to gather feathers from the fleecy clouds; far beyond the assumptions of thought are the simple and touching scenes we quote from the sublime history of the Church—the records of the Providence of God over the cradle of Christianity.

The work is the fruit of a second visit to the Eternal City, and a further examination of the notes that gave birth to "The Martyrs of the Coliseum." Leaving the cares of missionary life to more able hands, it was our labor of love to take down again the mouldy

tomes from dusky shelves, and bring to light the beautiful and interesting records preserved with such scrupulous care in the venerable archives of the Benedictine Library at Monte Cassino, as well as the Augustinian and Dominican Libraries in Rome.

The reader will find in almost every chapter a link between the past and the present, maintained either through the devotion that still exists towards those early heroes of Christianity, in the notices of those churches where their relics are still enshrined or honored, or in the similarity of events that prove the same Providence guiding the Church.

In treating of the Saints of the Mamertine, we are of necessity obliged to include names already well known; but we hope in the way of detail to furnish much that is new, and to treat the same in a manner at once original and interesting.

It is neither our intention to enter into any critical analysis of dates, nor to refute various and strange conjectures advanced by incredulous or malicious writers, who build their opinions on false data and impugn facts received by history and tradition. Such is the denial that St. Peter was ever in Rome.

When men, bearing all the appearance of education and sanity, can question such a fact, what wonder they should cast doubts on the history of his imprisonment, the place of his martyrdom and interment?

Bending with reverential awe over much that is marvellous and interesting in the history of the past, our work is neither polemic nor controversial. We seek to instruct through the channel of facts, to edify by the sublime lessons taught in the infant school of our faith, culling flowers from the roadside of history to present to the reader a bouquet of lasting fragrance by means of the virtuous and pious sentiments they suggest.

As the bee gathers honey from every flower that decks the plain, we have collected facts from the treasures of ancient literature, both sacred and profane. Translations, quotations, and traditions are linked together to make the chain. We have occasionally given the *ipsissima verba* of others, with only a reference to the original source in the footnotes, and thus we may frequently lay ourselves open to the charge of plagiarism so commonly preferred against authors. However, we have dipped into sources not gen-

erally known, and hence flatter ourselves we have gathered a few chapters of useful, instructive reading, especially for youth.

Like one who brushes cobwebs from the old paintings in our ancestral halls, bringing to better view the grand historic shades of the past, we present this work, as the "Martyrs of the Coliseum," to the indulgent criticism of pious Christians, who will find even in its rude dress much to encourage and cheer in the sorrows and troubles of human vicissitudes. It is to be regretted that many modern historians, pandering to a popular prejudice, place in the foreground of their pictures the heroes of paganism, who were at best tyrants and murderers of the human race, whose fame is often but the record to posterity of the triumph of injustice, whilst the champions of religion and justice—the great before God—whose praises shall be written on the imperishable monuments of the eternal city of Jerusalem, are ignored and despised. 'Tis to vindicate the saints of Christianity, to recall, from records that are dead to modern languages, the names and glories of heroes who fought the battles of the great Jehovah and marked

with their blood the path we should follow, we give to the reader the thrilling records of sufferings, of virtues, of triumphs, that are echoed in the title—"THE VICTIMS OF THE MAMERTINE."

II.

ON cloudy days the mountains, rising over the distant horizon, are not easily distinguished from the mists that crown their summits; but as we approach nearer, the blue cliffs stand out in bold reality above the clouds. Thus, when we look far back through the haze of history, the shadows of legend are easily mingled with the realities of record; but on closer investigation the grand old monuments of the past stand forth in historic grandeur, cheering the mental vision with their hallowed memories and their venerable antiquity.

The Mamertine brings us far away into the mists of the past. Retracing our steps along the stream of time, we must pass the ten centuries of the temporal power of the Popes, the golden age of Cæsarism, and the warlike Tribunes of early Rome. After a journey of nearly

three thousand years we find ourselves amidst the rivulets that converge into the majestic current which first claimed importance in the vicissitudes of time. It is coeval with the days that heard the lamentations of Jeremias poured forth in the solitudes of Judea; when Nineveh and Babylon were the flourishing but ungrateful cities that blasphemed the name of the true God; when Solon was giving his laws at Athens, and Thales, following the course of the stars, startled the then known world with the first prophecy of the eclipse. Nations whose political influence is now felt at their antipodes, whose flags have braved a thousand years the battle and the breeze, were not then marked upon the map of the world. France and Germany were only known as barbarous tribes on the confines of civilization, and the cattle fed on the luxuriant meadows that covered the sites of London, Paris, and Berlin.

Commenced by a shepherd king six hundred and forty years before the Christian era, the Mamertine Prison is still intact, after the wreck and ruin of nearly three thousand years. The Cloacæ have drained the city of Rome for twenty-four centuries; the

gigantic aqueducts that bestride the Campagna in imperishable majesty claim a venerable antiquity; but the Mamertine served for the imprisonment of the refractory slaves employed in their construction. Seven hundred years older than the Pantheon, the Coliseum, or the palace of the Cæsars, the Mamertine is the most ancient and interesting relic of ancient Rome.

With a deep thrill of sympathy we visit the dungeons of the political inquisition at Venice, the prison of Tasso in the gloomy keeps of the castle of Ferrara, and the cell of the beautiful but ill-fated Cenci in the tomb of Adrian; with inward indignation we have read of many a dark scene of cruelty and injustice in the feudal castles of the middle ages; of the prisons of usurped and tyrannical powers; of the Bastile, and the Tower of London; but their terrors pale into comforts compared with the thrilling records of the Mamertine.

Although many a guilty wretch has here found a merited finale to a career of crime, yet its rugged walls received the last sigh of the noblest and bravest of the children of men. Heroes, who fought with unflinching

bravery for their liberty and their country, were dragged here in chains and cast into this gloomy abode of infamy, to starve or be strangled by the public executioner. Here were immured tender virgins of princely rank, who were not guilty of any political intrigues, and whose love for faith and chastity made them the victims of tyranny and lust. Here were flung venerable pontiffs, whose crimes were their miracles, and martyrs, whose guilt was their intrepid profession of Christianity. Loathsome and revolting, yet there is no prison on earth that has witnessed more patient suffering, more interior joy. Angelic spirits have passed days and nights in attendance on the champions of Christ, dispelling the darkness with miraculous light, spreading delicious odors in the noisome atmosphere, and cheering the lonely hours with joyous strains of celestial music.*

“How blest you consider yourselves when cast into the dungeons of the *Costodiorum*,” says Tertullian, addressing the martyrs thrown into those dismal prisons. “They are dark, but you are light in yourselves; they

*In the following pages we shall give record of several miracles of this kind.

have chains, but you are free in God; they have all the horrors of a miserable death, but you are bathed in the odors of celestial life.”*

Therefore, besides its antiquity, the Mamertine must attract the pilgrim to the Eternal City, with other and more hallowed reminiscences. The spots where the martyrs suffered are shrines of Christian devotion. In sympathy, in admiration, the fervent spirit floats in fancy over places that witnessed scenes of cruelty or triumph; shuddering at the blood-stained hand, the axe of the executioner, and the bleeding wounds of the sufferer, but kissing the smile of triumph and the crown the angels weave on the martyr's brow.

III.

IF the pilgrim to the Eternal City stand on the steps of the Church of St. Martina in the Forum, he will look in vain amidst the ruins of the past for some indication of this ancient and celebrated prison. Yet in that very position stood what in modern phrase-

* “Orat. ad Mart.,” ch. ii.

ology would be called the court-rooms of the prison; there, too, could be heard the piercing cries of the condemned issuing in subdued tones from the dungeons beneath. The place is so changed and tradition so indistinct it is difficult to replace the original structure. We must sweep away in imagination the beautiful churches that Christian piety has erected over the ancient sanctuaries, the miserable houses that now mark the site of the ancient citadel, and ten or twelve feet of soil which has accumulated with the débris of the fallen city. We may still find the massive wall of the façade which ran sixty feet towards the Salita di Marforio. On this wall, with the rock of the Capitol behind, we build to the height of forty or fifty feet a double square block—a larger one raised on a smaller one—heavy and massive in its architecture, and unadorned, amidst brilliant temples and palaces, portrayed in its gloomy simplicity the odious purposes for which it was destined. All these superstructures have passed away; although they existed in the golden age of the Cæsars, they were swept down in the devastation that levelled the majestic build-

ings adorning the Forum and the slopes of the Capitol. The prisons underneath were left intact, and supported on their rock-built walls the fallen masses of the upper edifice. Modern piety has removed every vestige of those ruins, and built a beautiful church over the dungeons, sanctified by the presence and miracles of a vast number of martyrs.

The construction of those prisons proves their antiquity, for they bear the massive character of the Etruscan era. There are two chambers excavated out of solid blocks of Peperino. When in use, they were entered by apertures in the centre of the ceiling; now a commodious flight of stairs, constructed in the last century, leads to both chambers. The upper apartment, which is considered the most ancient, constructed by Ancus Martius in 640 before the Christian era, is sixteen feet high, twenty-two in breadth, and thirty in length. The lower prison, supposed to be the Tullian extension, is one of the most horrible dungeons that can be imagined. Through an aperture in the floor of the upper chamber the victim was cast into a low, dark, and rugged cell hewn out of the heart of the rock. The roof displays

immense architectural skill. Large masses of volcanic tufa are arranged in courses converging towards the centre, not on the principle of an arch, but extending horizontally to a point.*

The absence of air and light and the effluvia of accumulated filth rendered this a horrid dungeon.

Although an inscription under the cornice of the entrance to the upper chamber, running thus

C . VIBIUS . C . F . RUFINUS . M . COCCEIUS .
NERVA . COS . EX . S . C .

proves that it has been restored in the 22d year of the reign of Tiberius, and probably enlarged, still we have in its integrity the dismal prison so often referred to in the writings of Livy, Varro, Sallust, and Flaccus.

The description of the upper portion of the prison is lost to history. Yet it is certain there were other apartments besides the keeps. In the "Acts of St. Martina," who is supposed to have been confined in the Mamertine, we read there were many apart-

* No mortar was used, but iron clamps were ingeniously worked into the joinings; they are not now visible. A similar kind of roof is seen in the tombs of the Tarquinii and Cære.

ments or chambers in her prison. In the "Acts of Pope Stephen" (acts of the highest authority), we find that the judge who condemned Tertullinus had his tribunal erected in the Mamertine. It would be absurd to imagine that the prefect would hold his court in one of those dungeons that have come down to us. The same is also proved by the "Acts of St. Alexander."

The front of the prison was not turned towards the Forum directly, but leaning a little towards the street formerly called *Vico Mamertino*, now *Salita di Marforio*. The position of the Gemonia stairs, which were on one side, gives sufficient indication that the entrance to the prison was not on the level of the street, but from the rear by a bridge.* The fortifications of the Capitol were just behind, and of course the prison was separated. That the *Scale Gemonie* thus led to the prison is the opinion of all

* We are aware that some have placed the *Scale Gemonie* on the Aventine and leading to the Tiber; but how can such arrangement stand with statements like the following from Valerius Maximus, writing of Crepione: "Corpusque ejus funesti cornificis manibus laceratum in Scalis Gemoniis jacens, magno cum horrore *Fori Romani conspectum est.*" We might give several other similar quotations, but enough for our purpose. (See Cancellieri, page 33.)

modern antiquaries. On these stairs the bodies of those killed inside were cast naked and left exposed for some time to strike terror into the people; they were then dragged to the Tiber. Pliny relates, in his eighth book and Chapter 40, of a faithful dog which remained day and night by the body of his master, refusing food and howling piteously until death relieved him like his master from the sorrows of life—felt even by a dog!

A great deal of doubt exists concerning the object or meaning of the small door that is found in the lower prison, leading to a long subterranean gallery, similar to some of the passages in the Catacombs. Some will have that it is as ancient as the prison itself, and was a secret passage in conjunction with the Claudian prison,* after the fashion of the *Latomia* of Syracuse, which has a similar subterranean catacomb annexed. This looks probable, as we know the Mamertine is but a reproduction of those famous prisons. Others will have that it is coeval with the changes made in the time of Tiberius, under the Consuls Vibius and Rufinus,

* *St. Nicholas in Carcere.*

and was intended to lead off to the Cloaca the filth, water, etc., which must of necessity have accumulated in the prison. The passage in the "Acts of Chrysanthus and Daria" would seem to suppose this: "Quia Cloacarum cuniculis digesta domorum stercora illic jugiter decurrebant et in hoc decursorio ut diximus erat ima et lutea et ita tenebrosa custodia ut penitus lucifluus aer, nec signum illi diei nec vestigium aliquod lucis ostenderet."* Yet there is no allusion made to this aqueduct by ancient writers, and modern antiquaries skilfully avoid it. On examination we find this subterranean passage leads over a hundred yards in the direction of the Forum. It has several avenues branching from it, but all closed by walls that are decidedly of ancient structure. It is low, damp, and rough. In the time of Panciroli, the lower prison was filled with dirt and water. He writes thus: "Se più vi sia questa e quella Dio lo sa, perche i ritorni ed uscite delle fontane tirate in Campidoglio hanno di modo riempito questa parte, che più non vi si puo calare." This may have arisen from the accumulation of filth and dirt. We are

*Surius, 25th Oct.

inclined to believe the passage was an aqueduct intended for the sole use of the prison. The other passages leading from it may have been opened at the time it was made, for the sake of the sand so necessary in all ancient buildings.

Up to the time of the Decemvirs there was but one prison in Rome. Juvenal congratulates the ancestral city on this happy sign of prosperity and order:

“ Felices proavorum atavos felicia dicas
 Sæcula qui quondam sub regibus atque tribunis
 Viderunt uno contentam carcere Romam.”*

This was the Tullian Prison. About 300 years after the building of Rome, the increased population, and with it the increased violation of the laws, called for more prison room. To restrain the ever-increasing audacity of a lawless people,* Appius Claudius, who was afterwards himself a victim of the Tullian, built the famous prisons whose ruins are now shown under the Church of St. Nicholas in Carcere. They were famous, for, like the Tullian shrouded with horrors, here the victims of the circus passed the pain-

* Sat. iii.

† “Ad terrorem crescentis audaciæ.”—Livy, dec. i. lib. i.

ful vigils of their immolation to make a Roman holiday; many a noble and injured object of patrician oppression passed its gloomy threshold to bid farewell for years to home and daylight, and, too often, to life itself.

In its history there is record of one scene full of romance. An aged father is condemned to die of starvation. His daughter, a young mother, is permitted to visit him daily. Days passed, and still the old man lived, full of vigor and vital energy. The guards carefully searched the daughter, but she had no food concealed. The continued existence and even good health of their aged victim increased their astonishment. At length they watched, and, lo! the young mother is seen suckling her aged father with her infant's milk. The strange circumstance was bruited through the city, popular sympathy demanded the aged man's liberty, and a temple was raised over the prison to the goddess of filial piety. The dark and gloomy dungeons were closed for other victims: the prison became dear to the Roman people, who, in the midst of their moral degradation, could still love the beauty of virtue.

Byron's beautiful lines on this touching in-

stance of filial affection raise our thoughts from the gloomy horrors of the dungeons that form the theme of our study, to contemplate the sublimity of virtue in the filial piety of the woman's heart, so justly styled—

“ LA CARITA ROMANA.

“ There is a dungeon, in whose dim drear light
 What do I gaze on? Nothing. Look again!
 Two forms are slowly shadowed on my sight—
 Two insulated phantoms of the brain:
 It is not so; I see them full and plain—
 An old man, and a female young and fair,
 Fresh as a nursing mother, in whose vein
 The blood is nectar—but what does she there,
 With her unmantled neck, and bosom white and
 bare?

“ But here youth offers to old age the food,
 The milk of his own gift—it is her sire
 To whom she renders back the debt of blood
 Born with her birth. No; he shall not expire
 While in those warm and lovely veins the fire
 Of health and holy feeling can provide
 Great Nature's Nile, whose deep stream rises
 higher
 Than Egypt's river—from that gentle side
 Drink, drink and live, old man! Heaven's realm
 holds no such tide.

“ The starry fable of the Milky Way
 Has not thy story's purity; it is
 A constellation of a sweeter ray,
 And sacred Nature triumphs more in this

Reverse of her decree than in the abyss
 Where sparkle distant worlds: O holiest nurse!
 No drop of that clear stream its way shall miss
 To thy sire's heart, replenishing its source
 With life, as our freed souls rejoin the universe."

The prison where this scene took place is supposed by Baronius to be the Tullian itself. However, the weight of authority is against the learned Cardinal; the descriptions left us of the Mamertine by Livy, Varro, and Sallust leave no doubt of its position at the foot of the Capitol, looking down on the Forum, twenty feet below the surface, and horrible in its whole appearance.*

Doubtless its present title of Mamertine, which, too, it has borne before the days of Christianity, may have supplied a reason for doubting its synonymous character with the ancient Tullian.† It is impossible to say with certainty whence this name came. Mamer-

* "Imminens Foro."—*Livy*. "Media urbe."—*Ib.* "Circiter viginti pedes humi depressus."—*Sallust*. "Quæ sub terra Tullianum," etc.—*Varro*.

† Amongst the names given to this prison by ancient writers we find it frequently called Robur from its great strength, as also from the custom of confining prisoners in cells of wood, "in arcis robusteis," as we find in Festus. *Latomiæ* is another title given the Mamertine, from their similarity to the *Latomiæ* of Syracuse, dungeons hewn out of the solid rock by the tyrant Dionysius. The spot now occupied by this

tine is a name familiar in ancient history. There were several prefects of the city bore this name; there was a lake, a school, a street, and a saint called thus; consequently, the most common opinion is, this prison received its present name from one of the Mamertines, who enlarged or restored it during the Republic. Martinelli, whose opinion is adopted by some, gives a very ingenious and probable interpretation of this title and its origin.

Near is the Forum of Mars. This god was also called Mamers, as Festus writes: "Mamercus prænomen est Oscum a Marte dictum, ab eo quod Osci Martem Mamertem vocitent qui a Romanis detractioe unius syllabæ Mars appellatur." And Varro even more clearly gives the same idea: "Mamers idem quod Mars significat et Mamertinus idem quod Martius." If, then, the word Mamertinus has the same signification as Martius, may we not justly

prison was in all probability a stone quarry, and adapted to its present form by Ancus Martius—deepened into another dungeon by Tullian, whence the name. Varro writes: "In hoc pars quæ sub terra *Tullianum* ideo quod additum a Tullio rege." Historical critics cannot determine why it is so frequently called *Custodia publica* and *Custodia privata*. We find it often mentioned by these names in the "Acts of the Martyrs."

conclude the prison takes its name from its original founder, Ancus Martius especially as the origin of the name is lost far away in the remotest antiquity?

Whatever doubt may be thrown on the identity of this prison with the Tullian, no one has ever doubted but this is the Mamertine so frequently mentioned in the "Acts of the Martyrs"; that here the Apostles Peter and Paul were confined, and many other holy martyrs of the Church.

The places where the martyrs suffered are shrines of Christian devotion. The fervent soul loves to kneel on the spot sanctified with the blood of the sufferings of our forefathers in faith. In fancy the spirit floats over the scene of horror; it sees the executioners, the bleeding wounds, the smile of triumph, and the crown angels weave. It is not necessary to explain to the children of faith why the Church flings so much veneration around the places once sanctified by martyrs' suffering and triumph. The spots hallowed with the memories of awful suffering are many about Rome; perhaps none of a deeper hue than the Mamertine.

Here many a brave martyr passed the

vigil of his awful death. The anticipation of pain is sometimes greater than its realization; so the victims cast into this gloomy prison suffered in thought the direst agonies of martyrdom. They were supported, it is true, by the divine grace, but the sensibilities of humanity were not suppressed, and the martyrs suffered, with some miraculous exceptions, in reality as well as in appearance. Before the tribunal of the judge, amidst the shouts of the Coliseum, there was a certain feeling of enthusiasm that lent courage and determination to the Christian sufferer; but in the long and dreary hours of the darkened prison the mind floated over scenes of horror, of bloodshed and agony, that at each moment sent a thrill through the terrified feelings. Here they had time to think over the broken ties of home and friendship, voluntarily sacrificed for God, but still keenly felt in the affectionate heart. The fear of not persevering in their trial, the remorse, perhaps, for some past delinquencies and anxiety for dear ones to be abandoned to the storms of a cruel world, must all have lent their quota of anguish for the confessors in their prison.

The material privations and the awful character of the dungeon contributed not a little to the sufferings of its victims. Perpetual darkness and fetid air, the floor rough hewn in the rock, the martyr naked, and the cell horribly damp and cold, heavy chains to the hands and feet, and in hunger and thirst, these sufferings mingle with the happy memories of many a bright and shining soul amongst the martyred band of heaven, who on earth were condemned to the Mamertine.

We can get a glimpse of what it was in the days of its terrors from the writings of the ancients. Sallust, in his history of the conspiracy of Catiline, whose associates were strangled in this dungeon, thus writes: "There is a place in the prison which is called the Tullian, where you descend a little to the left about twenty feet below the surface of the earth. Immense walls fortify it on every side, and overhead it is closed by a vaulted roof of stone, but, with the awful darkness and fetid smell, the whole appearance of the place is terrible."*

* "Est locus in carcere quod Tullianum appellatur, ubi paulum descenderis ad lævam circiter viginti pedes humi depressus. Eum muniunt undique parietes atque insuper camera

Calpurnius Flaccus, in his beautiful but ill-expressed ideas, thus speaks of the Tullian: "I see the public prison constructed with immense boulders, with narrow, oblong apertures in the rock, not receiving a shadow of light. Here the condemned behold the *Robur Tullianum*, and, when they hear the grating of the iron trap-door, they faint with fear [*exanimantur*], and, obliged to look on the sad end of others, they learn what awaits themselves. The strokes of the scourge are heard from below, and the unwilling victims are rudely pushed by the soiled hands of the executioner. The jailer sits there with an inexorable feeling; his eyes are dry when the mother weeps; there dirt irritates the body, and chains press the tender hands."*

We read in Livy the sentence pronounced by Scipio Asiatico on the younger Gracchus, when, at the head of a mob on the Aventine, if taken, he was to be cast like a thief and a robber into the stronghold, "that he might

lapideis fornicibus juncta, sed inculca tenebris et odore fœda atque terribilis ejus facies est."

* In *Declamat. et ad calcem Quintiliani*. "Sonant verbera intus": Flaccus alludes to the custom of scourging criminals before putting them to death.

die in darkness, and then be cast, naked, before the prison.”*

The titles given this prison by ancient historians conjure up horror. What an epitome of human woe rings through expressions like these: “Cell of groans!” “Abode of sorrow!” “Pluto’s Hospital amongst the living!” “A place darkened by perpetual night!” “A horrible and gloomy dungeon of fatal punishment,” and many others which we would find impossible to convey in English.† In the “Acts of SS. Chrysanthus and Daria,” as given in Surius on the 25th October: “He (Chrysanthus) is, therefore, cast into the Tullian, a prison most deep, frightful, and sordid; for there was there a lower prison, whence rose a horrible effluvia, for the filth of the houses was carried through it to the common sewer, . . . so dark that no ray of light ever penetrated to give the least sign of day.”‡

* “Tenebris exiret et deinde nudus ante carcerem projiciatur.”—*Livy*, lib. 38.

† “Cella gemitum; Tristitiæ domus; Apud superos Plutonis hospitium; Locus perpetua nocte cæcatus; Carcer ater, horribilis et funestæ pœnalis loci; Antrum carcerum; Specus densæ caliginis; Domus feralis,” etc., etc.—*Cancellieri*, “Notizie del Carcere Tulliano,” page 6.

‡ “Conjectus est igitur in Carcerem Tullianum profundissimum, teterrimum atque fœdissimum,” etc.



CHAPTER II.

PAGANS CONFINED IN THE MAMERTINE.

“ Along the sacred way,
Hither the triumph came, and, winding round,
With acclamation and the martial clang
Of instruments, and cars laden with spoil,
Stopped at the sacred stair that then appeared,
Then thro' the darkness broke ample starlight
As though it led to heaven. 'Twas night, but now
A thousand torches turning night to day
Blazed, and the victor, springing from his seat,
Went up, and, kneeling as in fervent prayer,
Entered the Capitol. But what are they
Who at the foot withdraw, a mournful train,
In fetters? The Tullian's victims—the fallen,
Those who were spared to grace the chariot-wheels.
And there they parted where the road divides—
The victor and the vanquished there withdraw—
He to the festal board, and they to die.”

ANONYMOUS.

I.

THE justice of God, that one day
overtakes the impiety of the un-
believer as well as the Christian,
has made use of the dungeons of the Mamer-

tine to vindicate the outrages offered to the moral laws stamped on the human heart. Such an abode was well suited to receive the last blasphemies of wretches like Appius, Jugurtha, Sejanus. There is a thrilling lesson to be drawn from this page of Roman history. The unchecked passion is more destructive than a raging fire: it is like an impetuous torrent that carries man in spite of himself to an ocean of ruin. Many a victim of blind ambition found his brilliant dream of wealth and power end in the horrible contrast of the Mamertine dungeon. Conquered kings, fallen favorites, and thwarted conspirators have here read the terrible lesson of the instability of human hope. We will glance at a few of the most remarkable names mentioned in Roman history, omitting those that we are not certain of, and briefly recording the events that led to their condemnation.

We believe the first on the list is Appius Claudius, the same who built the prisons now under the Church of St. Nicholas. Although he is supposed by some writers to have perished in his own prison, we will in this adopt the opinion of Baronius, and place the

scene of his suicide in the Mamertine. The prisons he built were intended for the plebeian class. In the confusion and uncertainty of dates we could prove his prisons were only commenced at the time of his death; and lastly, as no ancient writer has distinctly stated he died in his own prison, we may safely cast this great tragedy of early history amongst the reminiscences of the Mamertine.

Appius was one of the ten tyrants who, about 300 before the Christian era, cast the gloomy shadow of his vices over the simple but warlike people of the city. After the murder of Dentatus, the greatest soldier of the army, he was guilty of a disgraceful domestic tragedy that has branded his name with disgust to every child that has read the history of those days.

One day, whilst sitting at his tribunal to dispense justice, he saw a maiden of exquisite beauty, aged about fifteen, passing to one of the public-schools, attended by a matron, her nurse. The charms of this damsel, heightened by all the innocence of virgin modesty, caught his attention and fired his heart. The day following she

passed ; he found her still more beautiful and his heart still more inflamed. Accustomed to yield to those inferior passions that vilify the rational being, he determined to possess himself of this innocent child, whose honor and virtue were to be sacrificed to his lust. Passion cares naught for right, for liberty or honor. The sighs of outraged innocence and the sacred claims of a father are feeble barriers to oppose this passion. The tyrant vainly tried to corrupt the fidelity of the nurse, and then had recourse to stratagem and deceit still more dishonorable. He selected from the companions of his debauchery a man named Marcus Claudius, whom he bribed to assert the beautiful girl was his slave, and to refer the cause to his tribunal for decision. Claudius behaved exactly according to his instructions. Entering the school where Virginia was playing with her companions, he seized upon her as his property, and was about to take her away by force, but was prevented by the people who were drawn together by her cries. After the first impulse of opposition, this lying instrument of tyrannical oppression explained to the people how the girl

was born from one of his slaves, and therefore his property, but he was willing to plead his cause before the tribunal of Appius, who was then administering justice (save the word!) in the Forum close by. They consented, and the weeping girl was led to the tribunal of Appius, who saw them approach from a distance, and was delighted that his impious plot had so far succeeded. In the meantime the crowd had increased; a murmur of pity passed along; indignation was swelling the heart of some brave youths, who were determined to see the end of this unblushing infraction of the rights of the citizens. They knew the child to be the offspring of the brave centurion Virginius, who was then on the battle-field defending his country, and that she was betrothed to a noble youth named Icillius, for whom they despatched a messenger in haste.

Arrived before Appius, Claudius pleaded his case. She was born of his slave, sold to the wife of Virginius, who was barren, and brought up as his child; that he had several witnesses, but that until he could gather them together it was but reasonable the slave should be delivered into his custody,

being her master. In deep cunning the impious judge pretended to be struck with the justice of his claims. He observed, if the reputed father himself were present, he might indeed be willing to delay the delivery of the maiden for some time, but in his absence he could not detain her from her proper master. He therefore adjudged her to Claudius as his slave until Virginius could prove his paternity; but Heaven will not permit such impiety to triumph—the sigh of injured innocence has ever been heard at the throne of God and found vindication.

The tyrant had scarcely finished his sentence when a bustle is heard at the door; the crowd make way; a well-known voice falls on the ears of Virginia, another moment, and she is clasped in the arms of Icillius. The lictors were ordered to separate the youthful pair and seize Icillius; they approached, but drawing his sword, for he, too, was a centurion, and with a voice that struck terror into the menials of the tyrant, he bade them stand back. “Appius,” he cried, his eyes glistening with fury and his forehead wrinkled with a frown of defiance, “you must first pass over my corpse to seize Virginia. She

is espoused to me, and I will have her in her unsullied innocence. Whilst I live she will not leave the house of her father. If you have succeeded in usurping the rights of the tribunes and trampling on the liberties of the people, the curse of your lust shall not penetrate the sacred enclosure of our families to the insult of our wives and daughters. We will invoke the vengeance of the people and the army. Without passing a stream of blood, you will not execute the iniquitous sentence you have given."

Appius trembled on his throne; he heard the applause of the people; he saw the determination that fired every countenance; and, veiling his discomfiture, he calmly replied: "It is evident Icilius still breathes the sedition of the tribunes, and, under pretence of defending this slave, he wishes to excite the passions of the people. Not to supply cause for his seditious projects, I will not give any sentence to-day, but security must be given that the slave will be brought before me to-morrow."

The security was given, and the murmuring crowd parted, congratulating the weeping youths, and breathing vengeance on the

Decemvirate, whose days of tyranny would find a last and terrible sunset on the morrow.

In the meantime, couriers were sent with the fleetest horses to the camp to bring Virginius to Rome. The tyrant Appius had also sent despatches that Virginius should be detained, but his letters were intercepted; the brave centurion was already in full gallop towards his sorrowful home, and was soon in the embraces of his blooming child.

The next day—one of the most eventful in the history of Rome—Virginius, to the astonishment of Appius, appeared before the tribunal, leading his daughter by the hand, and both clothed in deep mourning. Claudius, the accuser, was also there, and began by making his demand. Virginius spoke in turn; he represented that his wife had several children; that she had suckled her children, as many could testify; moreover, if he had intentions of adopting a supposititious child, he would have selected a boy rather than a girl. It was surprising such a claim should be raised after fifteen years. The people gave from time to time unmistak-

able indications of their sympathy. The earnestness of the afflicted father had the eloquence of truth; and Appius, seeing the impression growing stronger, interrupted Virginius, and, in one of the most daring acts of injustice on record, once more adjudged the girl to Claudius.

A cry that would melt the heart of the greatest libertine burst from the poor girl; she threw herself on the neck of her father. Icillius was near. His hand was on his sword; he remembered his oath of the previous day, and the people, who knew the Forum was full of soldiers, trembled in suspense. At length Appius gave the lictors orders to clear the way and give the slave to her master; but, before Icillius could give vent to the passion that was burning in his heart like the interior of a volcano, Virginius, in a faltering voice, pretended to acquiesce to the sentence, and asked permission to take his farewell from one he had long considered his child and loved as such. Appius acceded on condition the interview should take place at once and in his presence. The hardy veteran, with a commotion that showed the poignant anguish

breaking his heart, took his almost expiring daughter in his arms, supporting her head on his breast, and wiping away the tears that rolled over her beautiful countenance. Unmindful of the crowd who wept around him, he gently made his way to one of the shops that surround the Forum. Suddenly seizing a large knife that lay on a block before a butcher's stall, he cried out, "Virginia, by this alone can I save thy honor and thy liberty!" and plunged the steel into her maiden heart. Drawing forth the blade reeking with her blood, he turned towards Appius, crying out with a loud voice, "Tyrant! by this blood of innocence I devote thy head to the infernal Furies!"

With knife in hand, foaming with fury, he ran through the city, wildly calling on the people to strike for freedom; thence he went to the camp, where, weeping and showing the knife stained with the guiltless blood of his murdered child, he roused the soldiers to fury and desire of revenge. The soldiers left the camp, abandoned their generals, and came to Rome to be avenged of their tyrants. They took possession of the Aventine. The people in the city, in the

meantime, led on by Icilius, were preparing a dreadful attack on the few wretches that still guarded the tyrant Appius. For several days he lay secreted. At length the soldiers, gaining from the Senate the change of government, banished all the Decemvirs except Appius and Opius, whom they cast into the dungeons of the Mamertine until they would determine the death they would give them. But they both strangled themselves in their prison before they could be torn to pieces by the fury of the mob.

Cicero must have had this fact before him when he wrote: "The uncontrolled desire is a burning fire; it not only destroys particular persons, but entire families, and ruins the whole commonwealth. From desires spring hatred, dissension, discord, seditions, and bloody wars."*

II.

THE Samnites were once the bravest and most formidable enemies of the commonwealth of Rome. They several times defeated the Roman armies, but always treated

* Cicero de Finibus.

their victims with mercy. On one occasion their brave General Pontius surrounded the whole army in the defiles of the mountains near Capua. Without shedding a drop of blood, having obliged them only to pass under the yoke and pay a fine, he sent them back to Rome. Twice was the Roman army at his mercy; but the indomitable spirit of the Romans never gave in. In the course of time they regained their former power and took this same General Pontius prisoner. Fabius, who triumphed on this occasion, had him put to death in the Mamertine. "Whilst he was borne along in his chariot," says Arnold,* "according to custom, his old father rode behind him as one of his lieutenants, delighting himself with the honors of his son. But the moment when the consul and his father, having arrived at the end of the sacred way, turned to the left to ascend the hill of the Capitol, C. Pontius, with the other prisoners of rank who thus far followed the procession, were led aside to the right hand to the prison beneath the Capitoline Hill, and there were

* "Rome," vol. ii., page 33.

thrust down into the underground dungeon of the prison and beheaded. One year had passed since his last battle, nearly thirty since he had spared the lives and liberty of two Roman armies, and, unprovoked by the treachery of his enemies, had afterwards set at liberty the generals who were given up into his power as a pretended expiation of their country's perfidy. Such a murder, committed or sanctioned by such a man as Fabius, is peculiarly a national crime, and proves too clearly that in their dealings with foreigners the Romans had neither magnanimity nor justice."

III.

THE last of the Macedonian kings, who bore in his veins the noble blood but not the great spirit of Philip, poured forth with his last sigh in the Mamertine the fulfilment of the prophecy of Daniel. Perseus, a weak and effeminate prince, was the last of the Grecian rule that dared resist the invincible legions of the iron empire. He was beaten in a pitched battle by the Consul Æmilius

near Enipeus. He attempted to procure safety by flying into Crete, but, being abandoned by all, surrendered himself to the conqueror, who brought him to Rome to grace his splendid triumph. When the gorgeous procession arrived at the foot of the Capitol, amidst the deafening shouts of the delighted people, congratulating their victorious general and heaping insult on the fallen king, he was led, as usual, to the Tullian keep. After this the warlike state of Macedon, whose king once sighed there were no more worlds to conquer, never stood in the battle-field again, for Greece became the luxurious and civilized garden of the empire.

IV.

JUGURTHA may be said to be, perhaps, one of the most remarkable of the pagan victims of this horrible prison. His miserable end is another proof that even in this world there is a providence that pursues the evil-doer; there are few instances in the annals of the world's crime where murderers have not

received some of their punishment this side the grave.

He was the nephew of the King Micipsa of Numidia, who at death left him in charge of his two sons, Aderbal and Jempsal. In ambition to seize the supreme power for himself he murdered, in cold blood, the eldest, Aderbal, and attempted the same on the youngest, but he escaped, for a while only, the machinations of Jugurtha, and appealed to the Romans for protection. Whereupon Jugurtha, being sensible how much avarice and injustice had crept into the Senate, sent his ambassadors with large presents to Rome, who so successfully prevailed that the Senate decreed him half the kingdom which he had thus acquired by murder and usurpation. The commissioners sent to divide the kingdom between him and Aderbal were ten in number; amongst them was Opimius, the murderer of Cæsar Gracchus, a man of venal character; they accepted still further bribes from Jugurtha to give him the richest and most populous part of the kingdom, which at best was but a temporary provision on the part of Jugurtha, for he determined to seize on the whole

kingdom. It was he that said, on this occasion, that Rome was so mercenary that she would sell herself to any one who was rich enough to buy her. The same was afterwards said in the days of the degenerate successors of the Cæsars. How strange the nineteenth century has looked down on the disgraceful fact that some of the venal and ungrateful children of the same city *have sold her and her king* to a stranger and a usurper!

Jugurtha soon threw off the mask of his ambition, and, besieging Aderbal in his capital, Cirta, at length got him in his power and murdered him. The Romans, who had still some sentiments of justice and generosity, complained of this treachery, and procured a decree from the Senate that he should be summoned before them. The Cimbrian usurper made no difficulty in throwing himself on the clemency of the Senate, whom he hoped once more to bribe; but failing in this, and giving no satisfaction for his conduct, he was ordered to leave the city. Albanus, the consul, was sent with an army to follow him, who, giving the command to Aulus, his brother, a person in

every way unqualified for the task, the Romans were beaten in several battles, and on one occasion the army, to be saved from being cut to pieces, surrendered and had to pass under the yoke—the greatest disgrace known in the military parlance of those days.

In this condition Metellus, the succeeding consul, found affairs upon his arrival in Numidia: officers without confidence, an army without discipline, and an enemy ever watchful and intriguing. However, by skill, by a rocklike integrity and attention to the reformation of the forces, he soon regained the power of Rome. In the space of two years Jugurtha was defeated in several battles, forced out of his own dominions, and constrained to seek for peace. Thus all promised an easy victory for Metellus, but he was frustrated by the intrigues of Marius, his lieutenant, who came to reap the harvest of glory which the other had sown. He got himself elected consul, and, returning to Africa, pursued the war with greater vigor and even with greater skill than Metellus. Jugurtha found a powerful ally in Bcchus, the king of Mauritania, but Marius finally

proved the superior force of the Roman arms by slaying 90,000 of the Africans in one engagement. Bocchus did not wish to hazard his own crown for the protection of his ally, and implored peace from the Senate. He was given to understand the delivering up of Jugurtha to the Romans would conciliate their favor and pardon.

Accordingly Jugurtha was drawn into an ambushade by the treachery of Bocchus. He was made a prisoner, loaded with chains, and brought to Rome to grace the triumph of Marius. When the triumphal procession arrived at the foot of the Capitol, the wretched captives were led aside to the Mamertine. Plutarch describes a sad scene that took place when this fallen general had entered the prison. Some violently tore his garments, others, while contending for his ear-rings, cut off one of his ears, and, casting him naked into the gloomy Barathrum, filled with horror, "By Hercules," he cried, "how cold is your bath!" They left him for six days sinking with hunger; and, hoping up to the last moment to receive a

reprieve, he ended his life in the merited retribution of his cruelties.*

V.

HERE also ended their days Lentulus, Cethegus, and Cæsius, who were leading members in the conspiracy of Catiline.

Catiline was a patrician, but being a designing man who wished to aggrandize his sinking fortunes on the ruin of others, and in unbridled ambition aimed at the supreme power. He assembled about thirty of his associates and informed them of his aims, his hopes, and settled plans. It was resolved amongst them that a general insurrection should be raised throughout Italy, the different parts of which were assigned to different leaders. Rome was to be fired in different places at once, and Catiline, at

* "Cui post triumphum in carcerem dejecto, quidam vestimentum violenter laceraverunt, alii vero dum in aures ei auferre decertarunt. Detrusus autem nudus in Barathrum perturbatione plenus, obtreptans, 'Heracleus,' inquit, 'quam frigidum vestrum est balneum!' Sed hunc sex dies collucantem cum fame et usque ad ultimam horam desiderio vitæ suspensum condigna pœna suis crudelitibus confecit."—*Plutarch in "Mario,"* page 412.

the head of an army raised in Etruria, was, in the general confusion, to possess himself of the city and massacre all the senators. Lentulus, who was one of his profligate assistants, who had been prætor or judge in the city, was to preside in their general councils. Cethegus, a man who sacrificed great power in the hope of gratifying his revenge against Cicero, was to direct the massacre through the city; and Cæsius was to direct those who fired it. The vigilance of Cicero being a great obstacle to their designs, Catiline was desirous to see him taken off before he left Rome, upon which two knights of the company undertook to kill him the next morning in his bed, in an early visit on pretence of business. But the meeting was no sooner over than Cicero was informed of all that passed in it, for by the intrigues of a woman named Fulvia he had gained over Curius, her lover, and one of the conspirators, to send him a punctual account of all their deliberations. His morning visitors were punctual to their appointment, but found Cicero prepared. Having taken precautions to protect the city, he assembled the Senate to deliberate on their

further movements. Catiline went boldly to the Senate to declare his innocence, but, confronted with the eloquence of Cicero, he hastily withdrew, declaring aloud that, since he was denied a vindication of himself, and driven headlong by his enemies, he would extinguish the flames that were raised around him in universal ruin. After a short conference with Lentulus and Cethegus, he left Rome by night with a small retinue to make the best of his way to Etruria, where Marius, one of the conspirators, was raising an army to support him.

In the meantime Cicero had those who remained in Rome seized, and Lentulus and Cethegus were cast, with their associates, into the Mamertine, where they were strangled after a few days by the executioner. They show in the prison some iron hooks, fastened to the peperino blocks, to which the strangling-cords were attached. Catiline himself was not killed in the Mamertine; he fell on the field of battle after a desperate fight. His small army of twelve thousand men fought to the last man, and fell, as Sallust remarks, with their face to the enemy and on the spot where they com-

menced to resist. Catiline himself was found "longe a suis," still breathing, in the midst of a circle of slain whom he had hewn down in his last desperate struggle. "What a beautiful death," Florus adds, "were it in the defence of his country!"

The names of those who suffered with Lentulus we have from the following passage of Sallust: "After Lentulus was cast into the Tullian, the judges of capital crimes to whom he was commissioned had his neck broken with a rope (*laqueo gulam fregerunt*). Thus, too, Patricius, of the illustrious family of the Cornelii, who had borne the consular dignity, and a man of worthy morals and deeds, found his end. Of Cethegus, Stalilius, Gabinius, Cæparius, we have to record the same sad fate."*

VI.

PLEMINIUS was another political firebrand confined in the Mamertine. Livy (Fourth Decad., fourth book) tells us that whilst in prison—one of the upper chambers of the

* *Catiline* c. lvi.

Mamertine—he planned his escape with cruel cunning. His partisans were to fire the city in several places at the same time, and in the confusion to break into the prison and free him. The conspiracy eked out before put into execution, and Pleminius was cast into the lower dungeon by order of the Senate and strangled.

VII.

THE birds in the tropics that kill snakes lift them in their talons in the air and then let them fall; the greater the snake the higher they bring it. How like the treatment the cruel and fickle goddess called by the pagans Fortune gives her votaries! She raises men at times to the summit of her slippery globe, and then, hurling them down, laughs at their fall. In her hands was a wretch from the court of Tiberius, who ended his days in giving the Mamertine its due; they called him Sejanus.

The imbecile and profligate Tiberius retired into voluptuous solitude, the better to indulge his abominable passions, leaving this monster, the nearest thing to the reflection of himself in the debauchery and bloodshed of the capital, to rule and sport with the

lives and property of his subjects during his absence. The historian Tacitus seems to want words to tell the horrors of this tyrant's career. "So direful," he writes, in the 70th chapter of his *Annals*, "was this reign of terror, that all social intercourse, convivial meetings, conversations, and even the interchange of common civilities between the nearest kindred and friends were interrupted; consternation and reciprocal distrust having so seized on men's souls that the stoutest spoke in whispers, looking round them tremblingly, as if the very statues or mosaics could betray them.* From wherever the frown of Sejanus fell all fled as from a devoted spot; whomsoever he hinted or glared at in anger was shunned and forsaken, as if devoted to the infernal gods. No day passed without its bloody tragedy, nor was any moment or place respected by the ministers of his tyranny; the very sanctuaries, where men were wreathed for sacrifice, where no loud word should be heard, were profaned by the blood shed in his anger and the cries of his victims."*

But the hour of his downfall arrived. He

* "Etiam muta atque inania tectum et parietes circumspiciantur."

was accused of treason to Tiberius, for in his pride he resolved to be emperor himself. He was dragged to the Mamertine amidst the execrations and groans of the people, and there strangled by order of the Senate. His body was cast naked on the Gemonial stairs, and then flung with ignominy into the Tiber.†

VIII.

IN Josephus we read (book 8, and chap. 5) that Titus, the scourge of the Jewish people, graced his splendid triumph with 100,000 of that fallen race, and Simon, the son of Giora, was led in chains by his triumphal car, and then "to the fate due to the conquered," as Cicero held, scourged, starved, and strangled in the Tullian.

There were others of less note, of whom we have no interesting particulars. Such were Syphax, King of Numidia, condemned in the triumph of Scipio Africanus; Bituitus, King of Avernus, the associates of Gracchus junior, Vercingetorix, the Gaulish leader, and victim of the triumph of Julius Cæsar. It is

* "Ubi inter sacra et vota, quo tempore verbis etiam profanis abstineri mos esset vincla et laqueus inducantur."

† Dion. lib. 58.

asserted by some historians that Perseus, Syphax, and Bituitus, although condemned to the prison, were afterwards reprieved and saved.

The last of the political prisoners of whom we have any record was Doryphorianus, of whom Ammianus Marcellinus (book 28, chap. 1), relating the events of the year 368 of the vulgar era, states he was condemned to death and cast into the Tullian, but was taken thence by the advice of the emperor's mother, probably on account of its sacred character, because it was before this time consecrated by Pope Sylvester to the service of God. Doryphorianus was then put to death by various torments outside of Rome.*

We now come to treat of the Mamertine in its Christian history—a field full of flowers so beautiful we hardly know which to cull first. We will endeavor to follow events in their chronological order. With a brief outline of the first persecution we will lead to the vicissitudes, or rather the arrangements, of Divine Providence that led the first Christian victims to the Mamertine.

* "Et Doryphorianum pronuntiatum capitis reum trusumque carcere Tulliano matris consilii princeps exinde rapuit, reversumque ad lares per cruciatus oppressit immensos."



CHAPTER III.

THE FIRST PERSECUTION.

I.

ONE year after the Ascension of our Blessed Lord a strange scene took place on the Pons Sublicius* at Rome. It was the vigil of the Feast of the Annunciation. Although Christianity was scarcely yet heard of in the great city, its secret, irresistible power had sent before it the first ripples of a mighty wave that was one day to sweep over the world, and they were strangely felt at Rome.

On the bridge there is gathered a troop of soldiers and a crowd of people. Amidst the confusion of voices, the screams of women and children, and the rough orders of the leaders, the soldiers are binding some aged men and casting them into the Tiber. They are

* Now called Ponte Rotto.

senators. They have conspired, perhaps, against the life of the emperor; they had incurred, perhaps, the displeasure of the tyrant, who, on the same bridge but a few weeks before, crucified the priests of the temple of Isis for interfering with his paramour. No less than the greatest crimes could draw such a terrible death on the venerable fathers of the country. It was not so. Their awful fate was strongly wrapt up in the realization of prophecies they knew not; they denied the divinity of Jesus Christ, and were flung into the Tiber by the orders of Tiberius. Christian reader, bear with us for a moment. We will interest you with a strange tradition, that has floated down to us from the first days of the Church.

Tiberius was a tyrant. Morose, melancholy, vindictive, an unguarded word or an incautious look might be sufficient cause for death in those days when the greatest wretches were permitted to wield the most absolute power. It is said this tyrant was affected with a loathsome leprosy, which had already consumed his extremities, disfiguring his hands and feet; hence, he sought lonely places, abandoned the court to pampered

menials, and buried himself in the seclusion of Caprera and Misenum.

About the eighteenth year of his reign, he heard of the wonderful works of our Jesus of Nazareth. The fame of the amiable Prophet of Galilee had floated on a thousand zephyrs with the consolations he spread in his track—giving light to the sightless eye, power to the paralyzed limb, and joy poured into desolate homes by departed spirits called back to life; demons banished and forbidden to molest the children of men; cures, blessings, and peace distributed to all who came under the beam of his smile, marvelously and instantaneously.

Hope cheered the emperor's heart, and ambassadors were despatched immediately to Judea to bring the Great Prophet to his imperial presence. They arrived in Jerusalem; but late; Calvary had witnessed the Deicide; and the clouds of heaven had already shrouded him from his weeping people, who had seen the Word Incarnate float away from Olivet into the realms of peace. During their stay they saw the impress of his venerable features on the towel of Veronica. They wished to bring the extraordinary

relic to their master, but more precious than gold was the treasure of the pious matron. Through force and fear she was obliged to accompany the ambassadors to Rome, bringing her treasure in a double case.*

Veronica was presented to Tiberius, who took into his hands the touching, sorrowful image of the Man of Sorrows. In deep silence he gazed on the divine countenance; shadows of sympathy passed over the iron features of the emperor. There, were the bloody stains and the cruel, thorny crown, the weeping eyes, the calm expression of resignation, and the ineffable sweetness that made Jesus so loved. With a suppressed sigh he handed the holy face to the kneeling Veronica; he bade her keep her treasure, and assigned her a pension for life.†

A few days after this event, Tiberius summoned the Senate to meet him in the Forum. Six hundred of the learned and wealthy men

* One of the cases in which Veronica placed the holy towel is still preserved, and was lately amongst the relics of the Pantheon at Rome.

† Piazza, "Emerologio Sacro," page 190. It is also said by some that Tiberius was cured on this occasion, but the assertion does not seem to have sufficient authenticity. The Holy Face or Towel of Veronica is still preserved in St. Peter's in Rome.

of the empire poured in from their marble palaces in the city or from their elysian villas on the Sabine or Alba Longa hills—men whose brows were whitened with the snows of many winters, who had learned the art of war and passed through the hardships of campaign, whose ancestors were heroes placed amongst the minor gods of the empire; who had passed through the stormy days of the triumvirate, heard the eloquence of Cicero, and had seen the blood of Cæsar flow under the statue of Pompey. The citation of the Senate was always an important event, but more so when the emperor himself announced his intention to meet the conscript fathers in council. Innumerable conjectures were afloat why the emperor, contrary to his usual retirement, came forth again from his privacy in his old age to meet the Senate in person in the arena of politics. None but God and his blessed spirits knew what was coming; he permitted it in his providence.

The appointed morning arrived. Tiberius stood before the august assembly; he unrolls a gilded parchment, and reads: **THE PASSION OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST!**

You start! It was not the sublime inspirations left us by Matthew or John: it was the crucifixion and death, the resurrection and miracles of Jesus of Nazareth, as were recorded by Pontius Pilate, his Procurator at Judea. Tiberius asked the Senate to place him amongst their gods, for, according to an old law of the empire, they alone had the power of conferring divine honors on the dead.

We tremble in awe in contemplating the mysterious forbearance of the eternal Son of the eternal God, who allows his creatures to class him with the impure and ridiculous fabrications that constituted the gods of paganism; but he is a patient God, who at times reserves his own terrible vindication for the days and regions beyond the tomb.

We may not tarry over the absurdities or blasphemies that even great men speak when blinded with prejudice. The Senate almost unanimously rejected the divinity of Jesus of Nazareth; but those who had the hardihood to speak out their minds against the wish of the emperor were the next day precipitated from the parapets of the Sublician Bridge, and found their graves in the muddy bed of the Tiber.

The wretched emperor had not the courage to follow up his intention of honoring the Galilean God. He retired sullenly to Misenum, and was shortly afterwards smothered between two beds by orders of Caligula.

The reasons given by the Senate for not accepting the divinity of Jesus Christ have been preserved for us by several historians, and are in keeping with the pride that made them fancy they could make gods.

1. They would not recognize him as a god, for some of the subjects of the empire had dared to invoke him without their permission.

2. He was a divinity that wished to be alone, and would not keep fellowship with their gods.

3. It was unbecoming the dignity of that august assembly to recognize as a god a man who was put to death as a malefactor in one of the provinces.

It is said history repeats itself. There is a striking analogy in the decision of the Roman Senate and the decisions of some of the modern parliaments of Europe. It has been asked in the Senates of London, Berlin, and Turin, Will we accept the law of this God as

our rule and guidance? The answer is No! with a large majority. And why?

1. Because his followers appoint their bishops and preach his doctrines without asking our permission.

2. He is a jealous God, and will not allow his followers to have fellowship with those who deny his divinity or mutilate his doctrine.

3. His law is one of suffering, humiliation, and penance. These do not become rich and powerful men!

Were we to anticipate a page of history, we would record a scene of desolation and woe often enacted in the vicissitudes of the past. Without the aid of prophetic vision we can transfer to the canvas of time pictures of ruin wrapped up in the clouds of the future.

Once there was a chosen spot on the banks of the Tiber where Fortune alighted from her slippery globe; wealth, power, and magnificence gilded the shrine of her temporary abode; the laws of its capitol and senate thundered with terror to distant nations; in the pride of power, in the voluntary blindness of idolatry, they ignored the true God. The breath of his indignation swept over the city, and ruin crumbled on ruin tells us that

there a nation once existed that dared to meditate vain things against the Omnipotent. Broken columns, fragments of mosaic pavement; the supports of a portico encrusted with marble, or the apsis of a temple covered with gold, tells passing generations where once assembled the haughty Senate of the empress city.

To-day laborers are employed to remove the soil that has accumulated twenty feet deep and lain for centuries over the spot where the Senate refused to accept Jesus of Nazareth as their God.*

We have heard of fabulous islands that have sometimes appeared on the blue rim of the ocean in the track the mariner has passed; thus nations that opposed the decrees of Providence appear in the past as if they never had been—the few mouldering evidences of their fall, like lurid clouds that hang around the setting sun when the storm has ceased, haunt the memory with the violence and intensity of their ruin.

The Church they persecuted, still young in the eternal youth of her Founder, smiling in

* A.D. 1874.

the confidence of her triumph, is still buffeted by the shock of angry billows ever rolling through the restless ocean of time; still suffering the persecution of the worthless offspring of forgotten generations, who like their fathers refuse to learn the lesson thundered from the history of centuries.

II.

AMONGST the chastisements that have fallen heavy on man there are few greater than the protracted reign of tyrants. When these wretches have been hurled from their thrones and flung into dishonored graves by the sedition of an outraged nation, loud and long rises the grateful shout to heaven from the liberated victims of oppression. "The tyrant is dead!" rings from city to hamlet, and seeks with joyful echo the trembling refugee in seclusion and exile. But when death does not stay the power to do evil, when from their tombs they are still permitted to molest the human race, we behold in their existence a curse like that of the demon permitted by an angry God for the punishment of man. History gives us a thrilling instance.

Long before Michael Angelo designed the superb entrance into Rome by the Flaminian Gate, long before the lovely parterres and artistic terraces of the Pincian replaced a grass-covered hill where children played and lambkins gambolled, and instead of broad avenues the hill was ascended by a foot-path, there was on the left of the ancient gate a large nut-tree, which stood in the midst of an enclosure held in horror by the people. At night the deserted plain rang with unearthly sounds, and horrible phantoms revelled around the solitary tree; the spirits assumed the most hideous forms, and especially like large, ugly ravens that spoke with a human voice. For centuries this haunted spot was the terror of the people. Many a thrilling, hair-standing tale was handed down from fathers to their children, and told around the firesides of the Roman people, of ghosts and frightful apparitions that infested the enclosure of the cursed nut-tree. Even corporal injuries were inflicted on those who, through curiosity or bravery, attempted to enter. Things were thus until Pope Paschal II., in the year 1099, believing much of the horrors of the place sprang from excited imagination

or fancy, levelled the enclosure, and reduced it to the same appearance as the plain around. But the annoyance became worse. It would seem the spirits of evil rejoiced in a larger field of operation, and laughed at the Pope who thought to banish them. The holy Pope was surprised and puzzled. He fasted, and prayed that God would make known to him the cause of this strange annoyance. At length God vouchsafed him a dream. He saw amidst a blue light, in the centre of the haunted spot, a number of devils dancing around an urn such as was used to contain the ashes of the dead in the time of the emperors. He immediately understood the cause of those nocturnal disturbances, and the next day, accompanied by some Roman clergy, proceeded with workmen to dig in the place intimated in his dream. Having sunk a few feet, they arrived at the columbarium of an old tomb; they broke away the walls, and found in the midst of the rubbish a large porphyry urn, bearing on it in bold characters the following inscription: *

* Martinelli, *Roma Ricercata in suo Situ*; also Gruter, page 237, No. 3.

OSSA

NERONIS CÆSARIS

GERMANICI CÆS. F.

DIVI AUGUSTI PRONEP.

FLAVII AUGUSTALIS QUÆSTORIS.

The groan that greeted this discovery passed through the city; thousands flocked around to see the hated relic. With ropes and sticks, each fearing to touch it, amidst a crowd, fortifying themselves with the sign of the cross, they dragged the accursed urn towards the Tiber. On the banks it broke to fragments, and the ashes were scattered on the muddy waters, to be carried to the ocean, where the demons that protected them might haunt the wild waste of waters away from the abodes of men. The city, at last was freed from the curse, and on the spot, so terrible, so feared by the passing generations, the sainted Pope, erected a magnificent shrine, which he dedicated to the *People's Virgin*—a happy change, attracting love and veneration to that which was the people's horror.*

* The church received the title of *Madonna del Popolo*, because built by subscriptions of the people. This strange origin of this beautiful church is given on a slab of marble in the choir behind the altar. It runs thus :

Behold the ashes and the accompanying spirit of the first persecutor of Christianity—the tyrant who, four years after the Senate refused to acknowledge the divinity of Jesus of Nazareth, stepped over the corpse of his mother's victim to seize the reins of empire and drive it to a slaughter-house of woe. Yet, on his accession, hope gave a deceitful smile; the world thought it had reason to rejoice. Young, in the bloom of manhood and the promise of virtue, he was hailed to the throne by the acclamations of a people who soon learned to rue their choice. Ere the pride of power and the indulgence of

ALTARE A PASCHALI PAPA II
DIVINO AFFLATU
RITU SOLEMNI HOC LOCO ERECTUM
QUO DEMONES
PROCERÆ NUCIS ARBORI INSIDENTES
TRANSEUNTEM HINC POPULUM DIVE INFESTANTES
CONFESTIM EXPULIT.
URBANI VIII. PONT. MAX. AUCTORITATE
EXCELSIOREM IN LOCUM QUEM CONSPICIS
TRANSLATUM FUIT
ANNO DOM. M.DCXXXII. DIE VI M.

This fact is also mentioned by Panciroli, Piazza, Martinelli, Marangoni, Jacopi, Baronius, and a host of others. The writer in Murray's Guide mentions it (page 162), but it is amusing to notice how other Protestant writers fumble over it. Augustus Hare ("Walks in Rome") says some crows used to light on the nut-tree, and Paschal II. dreamt they were demons!

passion had blasted the impress of nature on a generous spirit, pity reigned in the heart of Nero. When called to sign his first death-warrant, he cried out: "Would I had never learned to write!"

Oft has the bright morning seen a tempestuous evening. Oft has the noblest youth ended in the deepest depravity. There are parts of the world where the land is lower than the sea, and the mighty element breaks through its boundaries and sweeps over the cultivated lands, bearing desolation and woe; but so deep, so terrible was the sea of impiety that burst over the youth and virtue of this emperor that one historian tells us he was sent on the world to show us how much iniquity could exist in one man! Everything cruel, revolting, and wicked found in the after-history of the world is supposed to be described in the superlative when compared to its prototype in Nero.

Once in the tender compassion of youth that shuddered at the thought of bloodshed, he sighed over the merited death of a fellow-creature; the same man afterward, in an unparalleled longing for blood, sighed that the Roman people had not but

one head that he might slay them all at once.

There are few so depraved not to yield to even one noble sentiment of nature; not to recognize some stray feeling of affection for an aged mother or kind sister. Few have been the tyrants, the monsters, who could look without a shudder on the tender frame of girlhood writhing in agony in a pool of blood, and fewer still who have seen live victims cast into a burning furnace and call with brutal joy for a repetition of these thrilling horrors; yet deeper in infamy and more revolting in cruelty—as though he were the centre of a host of demons of cruelty—was the person of this demon, who was permitted by Providence to be not only the persecutor of his Church, but the scourge of the human race.

Nero commenced his bloodthirsty career by the murder of Britannicus, whose right to the throne was his only crime. It happened during the Saturnalia, when all distinctions are levelled, it fell to Nero, as they were playing forfeits after supper, to award the various modes of ransom. Accordingly, he enjoined to each of

the others some pleasantry, but nothing humiliating, until it came to the turn of Britannicus. The young prince was rudely ordered to rise from his couch and to recite some verses, standing in the middle of the banquet-hall, for his persecutor thus hoped to exhibit him as a blockhead, to the jeers and derision of the revellers. But, unabashed by his position, the royal youth commenced, in a clear and steady voice, to recite some verses about one who, in his boyhood, was pushed from his throne and degraded to the rank of a poor subject. The allegory could not be mistaken, and the sympathy for the prince excited in the hearers was enough to rouse the suspicions of the tyrant, and this they give (Tacitus) as the first cause that made him resolve on commencing at once his long-premeditated career of bloodshed.

A few days after a dose of poison was administered to Britannicus. In the midst of the triclinium and before the assembled guests the fatal draught was given. The cup-bearer, who, according to prescriptive rite, was to taste beforehand whatever beverage he presented, having been apprised beforehand, contrived to manage his office so

adroitly as to receive no injury ; but Britannicus, finding the draught cooling, emptied his glass with thirsting eagerness ; so instantaneous did the fatal virus do its work, that, in one agonizing but abortive effort to cry for help, he gasped, quivered in every limb of his fair frame, and fell dead.

The courtiers and attendants are thrown into consternation ; the old familiars, long initiated into the intrigues of the court and aware of the plot, show no signs of surprise ; nor did the heartless Nero move a muscle ; with an inhuman smile he remarked it was but one of the prince's epileptic fits ; he would be better when brought to the air. Agrippina, his mother, was present ; a sudden terror, that flashed from under the cool serenity beneath which she had long learned to entomb her most hideous passions, betrayed that she was as ignorant of the affair as poor Octavia, the prince's sister, from whose virgin cheek the hue of candor had been blasted by that atmosphere of dissimulation and enormity of the court, which had rotted every feeling of tenderness and sisterly affection in her dreary heart. After a moment's pause the mirth and gayety of the banquet was re-

sumed, and, waxed louder and more boisterous.

The fire that consumed the corpse of Britannicus glared out upon the dark hour of his murder; for, while this poor victim was being escorted to the triclinium and attended at the banquet with obsequious ceremonial, they were constructing his funeral pile and mustering the satellites who were to transport his injured ashes to the tomb. However, they were to repose amongst the urns of his mighty ancestors on the Campus Martius, and such torrents of rain fell during the hurried and truncated rites that the populace took it for a sign of divine indignation.*

“*Abyssus abyssum invocat.*” You have heard, perhaps, the loud echo of cannon rolling through the ravines of mountains, leaping from crag to crag, and seeming to increase like thunder from each concussion. Thus the unchained passions of Nero rushed on to greater excesses: his own mother is his next victim.

In doubt whether the cup, the dagger, or the firebrand should be the instrument of his hate, he consulted Anicetus, the com-

* “*Rome as She Was,*” vol. i.

mander of the fleet at Misenum, whose heart was as dark as the tyrant who gave him power. Having been a slave, he had some old accounts to settle with his imperial mistress, and the prospect of revenge made him a ready counsellor. "A state galley," he said, "could be so constructed as to go to pieces at a given signal; the sea is the native element of accidents, and where is the traitor that shall dare harbor a suspicion against Cæsar whilst the winds and waves can be impeached? Temples and votive altars to the deceased empress will not only stifle any sinister report, but add to the other imperial titles that of filial piety." *

The ingenious villany caught the matricide's fancy. The time, too, was propitious, for Nero was then engaged in celebrating the four-year games at Baia. Agrippina was absent from the court through some pique, and they determined to bring her back. The tyrant feigned repentance: the sacrifice which a son is bound to make to soothe

* "Nihil tam capax fortuitorum quam mare, et, si naufragio intercepta sit, quem, adeo iniquum, ut sceleri assignet quod venti et fluctus deliquirint? Additurum principem defunctæ templum et aras et cætera ostentandæ pietati. Placuit sollertia," etc.—*Tacitus*, lib. xiv. 3.

the displeasure and the momentary impulses of anger, and other duteous and amiable reflections, were got up to pretend the repentance of the refractory son. Agrippina was once more invited to the imperial cortége; in that passion for sights and pageantry so natural in the sex the decoy succeeded, and she was allured to her fate. With the well-feigned impatience of filial fondness Nero expected her arrival on the shore at Cuma, and when they met the tenderness of his embrace and the warm pressure of his hand convinced the unhappy mother that, after all, he loved her. Could guilt be greater than this matricidal hypocrisy?

From Cuma the joyful party proceeded to the imperial villa at the other verge of the neck of land (ad Baulos) looking out over the Bay of Naples; but it had been preconcerted that the imperial banquet should take place in the palace at Baiæ, that the deed of murder might be accomplished under the cloak of darkness, when she would be returning to her own villa on the Lucrine Lake. One stately barge looked more gay than the rest in its gala decorations, and seemed to invite the empress, who was fond of

being rowed in a gallant style, to step on board.

The hour of separation came; but Nero was not satisfied with embracing his mother once, but he flies after her through the brilliant saloons and corridors to repeat his adieus; he seems to cling to her bosom, and can hardly tear himself away—whether it was that these were the finishing strokes of a master in the arts of dissimulation or that the last sight of her who bore him, as she was on her way to death, exercised some mysterious influence even over his savage nature.*

The heavens shone with the placid lustre of the stars that were reflected in the tranquil deep; all nature was at peace, and it would seem the gods had ordered everything to discountenance and expose the plot. Agrippina was accompanied by only two of her own attendants. Caprereius Gallus

* "Nam pluribus sermonibus, modo familiaritate juvenili, Nero, et rursus adductus, quasi seria consociaret, tracto in longum convictu, prosequitur abeuntem arctius oculis et pectori hærens, sive explenda simulatione seu perituræ matris supremus adspectus quamvis ferum animum retinebat."—*Tacitus*, lib. xiv. 4.

† "Noctem sideribus illustrem et placido mari quietam quasi convincendum ad scelus dii præbuere."—*Ib.* cap. 5.

stood in waiting near the stern, and at the feet of her imperial mistress, reclining under a stately canopy, sat Acerronia, prattling with all the delight imaginable about the emperor's change, ascendancy at court regained, when, at the appointed signal, down comes the deck, overlaid with an immense weight of lead, and Caprereius is instantly crushed to death. Agrippina and her attendant owed their lives to the accident by which the pillars of the canopy had been left of sufficient strength not to give way under the crash; nor did the barge, as was intended, go to pieces; the crew having fallen into such confusion that the efforts of the accomplices were frustrated by the majority who were not privy to the design. There seemed nothing for it then but to overturn the boat by all running to one side; but, this extempore manœuvre being ill executed and some of the galliots running to the opposite side, the empress and her attendant were precipitated without violence into the water. The silly lady Acerronia was quickly despatched with oars or whatever came to hand, for, thinking to secure assistance, she kept crying "I am Agrippina! help, help the mother of

the emperor!" But Agrippina uttered not a word, thus fortuitously evading recognition. She got one wound on the shoulder. By swimming, however, and afterwards in a fishing-boat that picked her up, she made her way to the Lucrine Lake, and was carried to her own villa. •

When she had leisure to reflect on the whole tissue of occurrences, the motive of so many flattering invitations to come down to Baiæ, of so many caresses and marks of honor heaped upon her, became too obvious. Shipwrecked! not by a gale or by striking on hidden rocks, but in smooth water, and the deck falling down like a portcullis! She weighed every incident connected with the death of Acerronia; absorbed in thought, she remembered the strange warning of the sibyl, and, looking on the blood trickling from her wound, she resolved to have revenge, but in order to circumvent the traitor she dissembled all suspicion of his treachery. Accordingly, she despatched her freedman Agerinus to apprise Nero that, through the benignity of the gods, she had escaped a serious accident, and begged he would not be alarmed about her safety.

In the meantime, the news of the failure reached Nero, and, worse still, that suspicion had begun to settle in the right quarter. He almost fell dead with fear, and, shaking from head to foot, began to swear that his mother would be swift as a tigress to revenge. "She'll arm the slaves, stir up the troops to mutiny; or, off to Rome with her tragic tale of shipwreck, her attendants massacred, her own wound, she'll so work on the Senate and the people! What shall become of me?" He summoned Burrus and Seneca in haste to advise something.

Their conference was short. Burrus assured the emperor there was not a man in the pretorian camp would undertake the murder of the daughter of Germanicus, whom they adored, and Seneca suggested that Anicetus should be made to complete the work he had undertaken and so egregiously failed in. Anicetus was ready, but wished to know how much he was to get. Nero, as if beside himself, protests that he will consider himself indebted to his faithful, trusty Anicetus for his empire, but to hasten and select men of despatch. At this moment, the messenger Agerinus from Agrippina was announced.

Nero, on the instant, and without a hint from any one, extemporizes another act of the tragedy. Dropping a stiletto between the freedman's feet while he is delivering his message, he cries out to the guards, ordering the wretch to be manacled, as if seized in an attempt on the prince's life—a villain sent by Agrippina, who, no doubt, would put an end to herself on learning the miscarriage of her treason.

Anicetus surrounded the villa with a strong guard, and, having battered in the gates, seized every domestic he met lest they should give the alarm. Arrived in the ante-chamber, he found a few officers of the household at their post, all the rest having fled on hearing the tumult in the outer courts. One solitary lamp cast a dim and melancholy gleam around the closet of Agrippina, and one solitary handmaid watched beside her bed. The moments of suspense lagged drearily, and each added to the load of anxiety that pressed heavily on her heart—no messenger from her son—no sign of Agerinus. Suddenly she heard heavy strokes, followed by a crash and tumult, confused at first and presently in the ante-room,

the sound of flying feet and harsh struggles against her very chamber door. As she turned to rebuke her handmaid gliding away, she saw Anicetus standing before her, followed immediately by Hercules, captain of a three-benched galley, and a centurion of marines named Oloarites.

“If to enquire for my health, sir, say to your emperor that my wound is doing well. If bent on outrage, presume not to say that you have orders. I will not believe my son is a matricide.” But Hercules and Oloarites were waiting the signal on either side of the couch. The galley captain struck first—a grievous stroke on the head with a club, and, while the centurion was brandishing his weapon, she raised her body, crying with her dying breath, “*Ventrem feri*” (meaning that vengeance had lighted on the womb that had borne such a monster).*

The next victim from his own household was the young and beautiful Octavia, whose sad fate may justly cause a sigh.

* All the above facts of Britannicus and Agrippina are taken from a free translation of Tacitus, and are quoted from “Rome under Paganism and the Popes.”

We will not tarry over the harrowing particulars of her sad death. The thrilling tale may be told in a few words. She was betrothed to Nero, but not his spouse. He wished to get rid of her to marry the infamous Poppea; "a lady," says Tacitus, "adorned with every charm except virtue." *

Once more he procured the assistance of the vile Anicetus, who swore he was a paramour of the innocent Octavia. It was enough; her doom was sealed. She was yet in her "teens" (about eighteen at the time of her death), but had seen many a dark hour of grief. In crossing the bridal threshold of the imperial palace she entered a house of mourning. Her father, Claudius, was swept away by poison, then her brother Britannicus, and now she is put aside for her own handmaid, and, bitterest of all, worse than a thousand deaths, her honor branded.

In the hands of a brutal and licentious soldiery the forlorn Octavia seemed to cling to life. Although terrified almost to death by the doom which she anticipated, the poor young creature could not make up her

* "Huic mulieri cuncta alia fuere præter honestem animum."

mind to die. After a few days' delay, seeing she would not put an end to herself, the order came for her execution. Loudly proclaiming her innocence, and declaring to the gods that, although maligned, she was still a virgin,* invoking the shades of her murdered kindred and even Agrippina's lurid ghost for help. Regardless of her shrieks, they bind her limbs with fetters and open all her veins at once. As terror congealed her blood so that it would not flow, she was suffocated in a vapor bath. The severed head was borne, as in triumph, to the presence of the monster, when Poppea contemplated the traces of her rival's agony with complacency. †

Yet the depraved Senate decreed thanksgivings to the gods for these murders. The pagan historian blushes for the fallen manhood of his day. "This fact," he says, "we mention that whoever seeks acquaintance with those times, either through our writings or any other history, may suppose that thanksgivings to the gods are voted by

* "Et tantum sororem testaretur."—xiv. 64.

† Poppea herself afterwards met a terrible death, the monster having kicked her whilst *enceinte*.

the conscript fathers, with the applause of the Roman people, as often as exiles and atrocious murders are prescribed by the prince; for public and shameful disasters the same rejoicings take place as of old for great enterprises crowned with success." *

These as the words of the pagan who called Christianity a calamity; and said that Nero wished to exterminate it, because the Christians were odious to mankind on account of their crimes! "O tempora! O mores!"

We have quoted a dark page from the pagan historian of the past: in no other way could we better express the character of the first persecutor of the Church. The wretch that commences his career by trampling on the sacred ties of the domestic circle—who steeps his hands in the blood, and haunts his fireside with the shades of a murdered mother, wife, and re-

* "Dona ob hæc templis decreta. Quod ad eum finem memoravimus ut quicumque casus temporum illorum nobis vel aliis auctoribus noscent præsumptum habeant quotiens fugas et cædes jussit princeps totiens grates deis actas; quæque rerum secundarum olim, tum publicæ cladis insignia fuisse."—xiv.

lative, is a tyrant indeed. What could the outer world, what could the poor Christians expect from such a monster? Nothing less than smoking ruins of their homesteads, and the stream of blood that at one time was twelve inches deep in his garden—now the Piazza of St. Peter's!*

III.

THOSE scenes, of tortures that make us shudder in the very thought, were stretched out like a map, far away in the deep womb of eternity, and selected in the inscrutable wisdom of Providence, as the designs of a building are accepted by an architect.

Here is the great and real cause of the persecutions of the Church: they were destined by God for his greater glory, and happy the children of men in whom were fulfilled the decrees of Divine Providence! We would wish to stop here and hang in silence over the inscrutable ways of God; but as he has allowed his own decrees to find their effect in the secondary causes of crea-

* Clavis, "Chron.," an. 54.

tion, we must, in giving a brief historical sketch of the first persecution, give a few interesting glances at incidents that were the immediate cause of events that rank next in importance to the historical mysteries of Calvary—events that deluged Rome with blood, gave the Mamertine its first Christian victims, and heaven its galaxy of triumph.

May we not justly, with some of the fathers, attribute the persecution of the Christians to the innate wickedness and natural diabolical cruelty of the world personified in its rulers? Sulpicius Severus and Orosius, both priests and historians of the fifth century, tell us, even if the world had not clamored for the extermination of Christianity, Nero would have attempted it on his own account.

Hear Tertullian: “Whilst Nero ruled, Peter came to Rome, and, having performed wonderful miracles by the power given to him from God, he converted many to justice, and established for God a faithful and firm Church; which being announced to Nero, and he himself seeing that not only in Rome, but every where and daily, an immense number fell away from the worship of the idols,

passing over to the new religion and condemning the old, as he was an execrable and hated tyrant, he hastened to destroy the celestial temple and sweep away all justice from the face of the earth." *

But that which was the last and immediate cause of the persecution of the Church of God was the firebrand cast by Nero into the city. In the annals of the world, in the year 66 of our Lord, we read on the same page of history, Rome was burnt and Christianity was persecuted.

Cruelty and pride suggested the thought: a house of gold, and a city called after his own name, built on the ashes of Rome. As far as human depravity could carry out the suggestion, Nero was gratified in his house of gold, purchased by one of the most destructive conflagrations on record, and by the poverty and groans of thousands of his subjects. He gathered around him the miserable satellites of his cruelties and debaucheries, and at midnight, when all were silent and wrapped in sleep, inflammable brands were flung into a guard of the pretorians, near the

* "In Apol.," cap. 5.

spot where now stands the arch of Constantine. The quarter abounded in taverns and stores, and soon the devouring flames assumed their irresistible sway ; along the Circus Maximus it sweeps from goal to goal with the rapidity of the wind ; from the lower ground the wide-wasting element mounts the heights, and again rushes down over the interjacent valleys with a swiftness not to be retarded by human efforts. The character of the old city—a labyrinth of tortuous and narrow streets, encumbered with enormous piles of building that swarmed with inhabitants to the very tiles, contributed to accelerate the catastrophe and augment its horrors. Add to this, the terror shrieks of women, the touching spectacle of languid age and feeble childhood making abortive efforts to escape ; some, deaf to the cries of nature and of duty, think only to save themselves, others risking life and all to save those they love. Midst the ruin of tumbling edifices that came down upon them like avalanches of fire, the fugitives are crushed with the sick and helpless they are dragging away on litters or on their shoulders ; some linger in distraction about their flaming dwellings, and, impeding

the flight of others, contribute to heighten the confusion. As to endeavors to check the conflagration there were none, for desperate gangs, denouncing such an attempt, roamed through the burning city in all directions, and tossed flaming brands to spread the fire, vociferating they knew on what authority they acted.*

The monuments of Grecian art and of Roman power, the trophies of the Punic and Gallic wars, temples and splendid palaces, were involved in one common destruction. Of the fourteen regions or quarters into which Rome was divided only four escaped entire; three were levelled with the ground; the remaining seven which had experienced the fury of the flames displayed a melancholy scene of ruin and desolation. The splendid mansions of the Palatine, the Aventine, the Celian, and part of the Quirinal were reduced to unsightly masses of smoking ruins, whilst the relentless tyrant viewed the conflagration with delight from a tower on the Esquiline,

* "Nec quisquam defendere audebat crebris multorum minis restinguere prohibentium et quia alii palam faces jaciebant, atque esse sibi auctorem vociferabantur; sive ut raptus licentius exercerent seu jussu."—*Tacitus*, "An.," cap. 38, lib. 15.

singing, to the accompaniment of a lyre, Lucan's verses on the burning of Troy.

The sycophants who had welcomed Nero with unbounded acclamation when he returned from the murder of his mother, and were ready to deify him for atrocities of which others were the victims, conceived different sentiments when the effects of his destructive caprice came home to themselves. The tyrant was alarmed at public indignation; neither treasures squandered amongst the multitude, nor the magnificence of the new city which he built, nor the wiles of superstition could beguile or blind the public resentment or acquit him for having burnt Rome. He would have been torn to pieces had he not adopted a stratagem to avert the fury of public indignation and direct it in another channel.

The Christians were at this time numerous in Rome. . The followers of the Cross from the days the world crucified Jesus were hated, accused of every crime, and called enemies of the state. Nero knew the popular feeling against them. He seized the moment to vent the bitterness of his own heart, and give the people a food for their revenge. He accused the Christians of having burnt

Rome. He paid wretches to acknowledge their guilt and swear they were accomplices ; and thus commenced the dreadful carnage of the unoffending followers of the Crucified—the first and most terrible storm that passed over the Church since the death of Christ—the first ripe field gathered into the eternal harvest : a persecution that stained Rome with blood and filled heaven with joy, thronging the peerless galaxy of heroes who follow the Lamb with the crimson stole of martyrdom.

“ With this view,” writes Tacitus, the pagan slanderer of the Christians (to escape the consequences of his manifest guilt), “ he inflicted the most exquisite tortures upon a herd of wretches who, under the vulgar appellation of Christians, had already become objects of execration by reason of their flagitious practices. They derived their name and origin from Christ, who in the reign of Tiberius had suffered death by the sentence of the Procurator Pontius Pilate. Suppressed by this vigorous step, the baleful superstition burst forth again, spreading itself not only over Judea, the cradle of the calamity, but through Rome, the cesspool into which are discharged the

villanies of the whole world, and where every form of superstition, no matter how profligate, can celebrate its mysteries with impunity. Having seized on some miscreants who confessed themselves to be accomplices of the Christians, on their information an immense multitude (*ingens multitudo*) were convicted, not indeed so much for having set fire to the city, but for being enemies of the human race. They were put to the most cruel deaths; their torments were embittered by derision, and turned into sources of sport and merriment for Nero and the mob. They covered their bodies with the skins of wild beasts, that they might be worried and torn to pieces by dogs; they nailed them to crosses; made bonfires of their bodies, having smeared them all over with lard and pitch, or fastened them in such a manner on pedestals and in conspicuous places, that the flames issuing from them served to light the imperial gardens, and to shed lustre on the games and public entertainments which were blended with the punishment of the Christians. Nero had ordered the imperial pleasure-grounds of the Vatican to be thrown open on this exhibition, which was set off with chariot-races

and other sports of the circus on the grandest scale. The emperor himself appeared dressed as a charioteer, by turns careering upon the course at furious speed, or mingling with the mob on foot, loaded as they were with guilt, and deserving to be made examples of. Still this revolting mixture of levity and ferociousness, added to the reflection that they were victimized through the savage baseness of the despot, and not through solicitude for the public good, contributed to change abhorrence of these wretches into commiseration of their cruel fate." *

Such were the depravity of the times, and the virulence of calumny against the Christians, that the pagans but needed the hint from the ruling powers to discharge their pent-up fury on the devoted race. Hence they were no sooner proscribed by Nero, than they were everywhere pursued and subjected to the most excruciating torments. This was patiently permitted by Divine Providence, that future generations of men might see that the disciples should follow the Master, and that the Church triumphed over not one

* Book xv. chap. 44.

tyrant or the tyrants of one province only, but the united force of the pagan world.

Nero had a thousand abettors in his crimes. He was not the only one that revelled in such cruelties; the pagans emulated with each other in suggesting the direst cruelty. "It was deemed a virtue in them to do so," says Eusebius; "it was their study and the summit of their ambition, and that one triumphed over the others who surpassed them in refinement of cruelty." *

"It would be vain," says Lactantius, "to attempt the description of the atrocities which the ministers of the imperial vengeance have perpetrated on the disciples of Christ in every region of the world. Merely to enumerate the various species of torments devised by their cruelty would fill many volumes, for each followed the bent of his own barbarous caprice, having received unlimited power over his victims. Some, through apprehension of being accused of lenity, surpassed the cruel orders they had received; some were incited by the hatred they had conceived against us; others by

* Book viii. chap. 12.

desire to recommend themselves to the prince's favor and gain promotion, like that judge in Phrygia who set fire to the church when the faithful were assembled in it and burned them all to death."*

The Apostles Peter and Paul did not suffer in the first outburst of this terrible storm. They were not in Rome at the time, being away in the East at a council in Jerusalem. They hurried back to Rome to assist and encourage the Christians in their awful affliction, and three years passed from the burning of the city to the time we find the holy Apostles prisoners in the Mamertine. During the last two years the persecution began to lull, and the Christians, who sprang up a million-fold from the blood of the martyrs, were more numerous than ever in Rome.

The preaching of SS. Peter and Paul fell with miraculous power on every circle of society; their wonderful powers were spoken of on every side, and their triumph, if we may so speak, was the cause of their ruin. But strange and interesting events took

* "Divine Hist.," book v. chap. 11.

place before this martyrdom. We must bring the reader once more in spirit to the new and improved city built by Nero, and contemplate an extraordinary scene that took place in the Forum, within a few yards of the Mamertine Prison.

IV.

NERO had every vice; everything impious or infamous found a protection or an encouragement in this unparalleled monster. Amongst the crimes opposed to religion and pleasing to hell are witchcraft and diabolic magic. He was initiated into all the secrets of these dark arts, and, in the blind infatuation which they cast over the powers of reason, he foolishly imagined he would find in the livid streaks and reeking entrails of human beings the secrets by which he could rule his own divinities. It is said, when the brutes of the forest have once tasted human blood, they become infuriated for more; so, when abandoned wretches have plunged into the horrors of this abominable art, when their hands are stained

with the gore of bleeding victims, their eyes glisten in delight, and they hang for hours in mad fascination over the quivering entrails. The impostors who have pretended to gain information by these infamous studies have been ever held in hatred, and have been banished by law from every state. In Rome, the soothsayers and astrologers of Chaldea, as well as the professors of magic who generally came from the East, were proscribed by law; but, when the head of the empire was initiated, they flocked with impunity to the capital, and by the assistance of the demons occasionally performed wonders that made the people look on them as gods. Amongst the leaders of this diabolical sect, the most famous in the time and in the court of Nero was Simon Magus.

Simon, named the Magician, was a native of Samaria, and was baptized by Philip, one of the seven Deacons. Whilst yet in his native place, he saw St. Peter and St. John placing their hands on the newly converted, and conferring on them the Spirit of the Holy Ghost and the gift of languages and miracles. It was he that offered a large sum of money to St. Peter to purchase the power of per-

forming miracles, and hence arises the term of Simony—from his name—the traffic in sacred things.

After the departure of the Apostles from Samaria, Simon, instead of profiting by the charitable advice of St. Peter, became puffed up with pride, and listened to the suggestions of the evil fiend who took him entirely under his power. Apt disciple of the proud spirit of evil, he at once aspired to divine honors, and called himself the “Power of the Omnipotent,” “the Son of God,” etc. He designed a new religion, which may well be imagined as a compound of every infamy the devils could suggest. Were it not for the impiety and blasphemy expressed in his doctrines, we could laugh at their absurdity. Such, for instance, were his infamous teaching; the devils, whom he called angels, and not God, created the world; there was no such sin as impurity known before God; one of his own concubines, named Helen, was to be honored as the Holy Spirit, etc.

By the assistance of the devils, he performed some false miracles, such as to take the form of different animals, to make statues move, changing stones into bread, passing

fire without being burnt, and raising himself in the air. All these things he did before Nero, who held him in great esteem and even fear. On one occasion Nero followed him to punish him for some little difference. Simon disappeared, and instead of the magician the emperor held in his hand a little bird.

Thus, under the protection of the emperor, teaching a doctrine that flattered the pride and base passions of man, and contrasted keenly with the humility and chastity preached by the Apostles, confirming his teaching with everything that came under the demon power, this impostor was the greatest obstacle to the progress of the Gospel in the city of Rome. The Christians poured forth fervent prayers that God would confound him, that the great truth would triumph, that those who trusted in his holy name might not be shaken in their confidence by the power he permitted in his enemies. Their prayers were heard, and he who abandons the impious over to the foolish inventions of their own hearts allowed Simon to be the cause of his own ruin.

The first encounter of St. Peter with this

impostor is given us in a letter of Marcellus to the holy youths Nereus and Achilles, exiles in the Island of Pontius. The miracles performed by St. Peter on this occasion are the most authentic in the life of the great Apostle, and especially interesting to our English readers as involving the conversion of the family of the great British general Caractacus. The writer of the letter above mentioned was an eye-witness and a converted disciple of the magician—led to the knowledge of the truth on the occasion which he thus describes:

“It happened, whilst Simon was denouncing St. Peter as a magician, and endeavoring to stir up the populace against him, that there passed by that same place, with a great concourse of people and loud lamentations, the funeral of a widow’s only son. Then said St. Peter to the multitude who were listening to Simon: ‘Approach the bier, and let the body they are carrying to the tomb be set down between us, and let the faith of that one of us be followed as true who shall raise the dead man to life.’ When the people had done this, Simon cried out: ‘Now, if I make him alive, will you kill Peter?’ ‘We

will burn him alive!’ responded the multitude. Then Simon, invoking all the demons, began by their ministry so to act that the body was moved, which, the people seeing, began to laud Simon to the skies, shouting death to Peter. He having with the greatest difficulty obtained a hearing, said to the people: ‘If he be really alive, let him speak, let him walk, let him take food, let him return to his house, which if he fail to do, know that you are deceived by Simon.’ On this the people cried out: ‘If he do not thus, let Simon suffer the penalty he fixed for Peter!’ But Simon, pretending to be insulted by being doubted of, was taking himself off when the crowd laid hold of him, and, loading him with all sorts of abuse, would not let him go. Then Peter, expanding his hands to heaven, said: ‘Lord Jesus Christ, who has said to us thy disciples, “Go in my name, and cast out devils, cure the infirm, and raise the dead,” reanimate this youth, that all this multitude may know that thou art God, and that there is no other besides thee, who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost.’

“Immediately the youth that had been

dead rose, and, reverencing Peter, said: 'I saw the Lord Jesus Christ commanding the angels, and saying, "At the petition of my servant Peter, let the orphan of the widow be restored to his mother." Then all the people shouted with one voice: 'Whom Peter preacheth is the only God!' They would have burnt Simon alive, but Peter saved him, saying: 'Our Master taught us this: To do good for evil.' '*

Amongst the crowd who had gathered around, there happened to be a poor afflicted father who had lost his son the night before. He was returning from the Capitol, where he had been to invite some friends to the obsequies; he stood in silent grief, pensively observing all that passed. The face of the dead youth and wringing lamentations of the mother found a chord of sympathy in his own afflicted heart; the richness of his garments and the golden band on his toga announced him to be a senator; the populace knew him to be the wealthy Pudens, of the Vicus Patricius. With amazement he saw the youth bound from his bier at the

* "Acts of St. Petronilla," May 7.

prayers of Peter; he drew near the young man, he spoke to him, he convinced himself the resurrection was real; hope flashed through his aching heart; he thought a similar blessing might be brought to his own desolate home. Making his way through the crowd, he flung himself on his knees before Peter, and with many tears told his sad tale: his lovely child, in the dawn of youth, loved by all, cut down like a flower in the first fragrance of its bloom; he would give wealth, villas, and slaves, anything, but let life be brought again to the idol of his heart. St. Peter raised him gently, and in a kind, compassionating tone, told him he would go with him to his house.

“How our hearts burned as he spoke to us on the way,” was said by the disciples of our Blessed Lord when he accompanied them in disguise to Emmaus. So, too, might Pudens say of the conversation that passed as he conducted the apostle to his home. The sublime mysteries of Christianity have a thrilling effect when first heard by the hapless victims of idolatry; even the savage who sees for the first time the cross on the breast of the missionary expresses in the sha-

dows that pass over his countenance the passions that are stirred in the soul. Before reaching the superb mansion of the family, Pudens was a Christian at heart. While yet on the portico strange sounds of mingled mirth and woe rolled through the halls of the stately edifice. Laurel wreaths were hung from the capitals of the columns, or laid in handsome designs on the mosaic pavement; the statues of Joy and Prosperity were veiled, and shrill, clear voices were heard now and then calling out a loved one's name, and then dying away in the touching pathos of grief. All was gloom and sorrow. The cold shadow of death fell with its icy chill on the pagan home of eighteen centuries past, with all its heart-rendings, and separations, and woes, as bitterly as it breaks the family circle of our days.

Followed by the wondering guests, the afflicted Pudens led the Apostle to the room where the sable nuptials of death were celebrated. The revel of false joy paused as the patrician moved along the brilliant galleries. The sobs of hired sympathy, and the pretended lamentations of purchased grief, were silenced by the motion of the senator's hand;

here the giddy dance stood still ; there the boisterous clowns of the pantomime looked grave ; the timbrel, the madrigal, and the flute were hushed, and every eye escorted the broken-hearted father as he led the Apostle towards the dead body of his child.

The boy was habited as on a holiday, and reclined on a glittering couch, as if reposing after the toils of sport. A stole of flowers fell from his shoulders over his white and beautiful costume ; lilies and roses were twined with the clustering ringlets of his hair ; but their bloom only served to deepen the shadows overcasting that countenance, so lately beaming with youthful joy. Those features were now steeped in the mildew of death and were cold and white. That form which used to move in all the martial sports and exercises of Roman boyhood with agility and grace that enchanted every beholder, was now motionless as a Parian statue. That eye so full of Roman majesty and ambition was shrouded in eternal night ; those lips, livid and silent, were unable to utter one word of comfort to the afflicted father as he bent over the wreck of all his cherished hopes.

The noble spouse of Pudens, Claudia, not less celebrated for her beauty than her birth as the daughter of Caractacus, and her lovely daughters Pudentiana and Praxede, arrived at the scene of grief, weeping and loudly lamenting the affliction that had fallen on their family.* They called on Timotheus to awake; they took him by the cold hand with fondness, and, after again and again conjuring him by name as if he still lived, they drew the Apostle by the garments towards the bier, praying him to awake their

* It is not unlikely that Caractacus, the brave English general who defied the whole strength of the Romans for ten years, and brought to Rome in the time of Claudius, and pardoned by that emperor, contracted a second marriage while in Rome, with some lady about the court, whom British historians called Gervissa, and exalt to the honor of being the daughter of Claudius himself. What seems certain is that Caractacus daughter Claudia, who, like her father, changed her name in honor of the emperor, continued at Rome, and was married to the Senator Pudens, where she was celebrated for her beauty and virtue by the poet Martial, and commended by St. Paul amongst the chief saints of the Roman Church. See Milner's "Hist. of Winchester," page 31; Lingard, Wiley, etc. It is an interesting fact that the villa of Pudens, outside the *Porta Salaria*, where Caractacus afterwards lived with the family, is the property of the Irish College at Rome. Near this vineyard also is shown the spot where Nero tried to put himself to death, which, with the assistance of his freedman, ended his wretched days.