

LECTURE V.

Testimony of the Fathers, 2°. To the *intensity* of the persecutions, unduly extenuated by Gibbon. Reflections on his account of the Letter of Pliny and of the martyrdom of Cyprian. Early narratives of martyrdom not to be confounded with the fictions of later times. The sources of information as reliable as those from which Gibbon drew his history. Explanation of a passage in Eusebius unfairly used by him. 3°. To the *nature* of the persecutions. Domestic as well as official ones foretold by Christ. Verification in the effect of Christianity on the relations of husband and wife, parent and child, master and servant. Its inconsistency with many trades and occupations. Consequent pecuniary losses to the converts. Their embarrassment in legal and commercial proceedings.

I HAVE said that the writings of the early Fathers would convince us, that not the *extent* only of the persecution suffered by the early Christians had been greatly underrated by Mr. Gibbon; but that the *intensity* of it had been unduly extenuated, and the *nature* of it but partially exposed.

The feeling with which he sat down to write on the subject of persecution may be incidentally discovered by the view he takes of Pliny's famous correspondence with Trajan. "The learned Mosheim," says he, "expresses himself with the highest approbation of Pliny's moderate and candid temper. Notwithstanding Dr. Lardner's suspicions, I am unable to discover any bigotry in his language or proceedings."¹ I have already admitted that Pliny's reluctance to execute the laws against the Christians to the uttermost, arose from a natural horror of condemning such multitudes of persons, many of them of a tender age, to death, upon so inadequate a charge. Let that measure of praise be conceded to him. But what can we think of an author who undertakes to give a candid representation of the affairs of these early Christians, and informs us at the outset that he is unable to discover any bigotry in the proceedings of Pliny—of Pliny who actually tells us with great composure that he had considered it necessary to put to the rack two

¹ Gibbon, vol. ii. p. 417, note.

female attendants of the Christians, probably Deaconesses, in order to ascertain the nature of their meetings; "necessarium credidi ex duabus ancillis, quæ ministræ dicebantur, quid esset veri, per tormenta quærere."¹ No wonder, therefore, that writing in this temper he should be found detailing the particulars of Cyprian's martyrdom in the manner he does; choosing that case, it should seem, for reasons which will appear, as a fair specimen of the treatment the martyrs in general received at the hands of their oppressors. "A short abstract of the most important circumstances" (of Cyprian's death), he writes, "will convey the clearest information of the spirit, and of the forms, of the Roman persecutions."² Now how does he treat this pattern case? Cyprian was banished; but, says he, it was to "a pleasant situation, a fertile territory" (*apricum et competentem locum*³). "He was recalled from banishment," but it was to "his own gardens" near Carthage that he was now confined. "The frailty of nature tempted him to withdraw himself by a secret flight from the danger and the honour of martyrdom," so proceeds Gibbon⁴: but why should Cyprian's own account of the transaction be suppressed, given in his 83rd Epistle, that he fled because agents had been sent to carry him to the Proconsul at Utica, whereas he preferred to die at Carthage, and suffer in the midst of his flock? for on the removal of that magistrate to Carthage, he voluntarily returned to his former quarters, and waited the event. He was summoned to die, but he was conducted by the ministers of death "not to a prison, but to a private house," and "an elegant supper was provided" for his entertainment; so Gibbon dresses up the phrase in Pontius' narrative, "unâ nocte continuit custodiâ delicatâ." Sentence was passed on him, but it was to be beheaded, "the mildest and least painful" manner of execution—only to be beheaded! no "use of torture admitted, to obtain from the Bishop of Carthage either the recantation of his principles, or the discovery of his accomplices;"⁵ and yet that was the very thing that Gibbon could see no harm in Pliny's having recourse to. "His corpse remained during some hours exposed to the curiosity of the Gentiles;" but then it was removed "in a triumphal pro-

¹ Plinii Epist. lib. X. Ep. xcviij.

² Gibbon, vol. ii. p. 430.

³ Pontius, De Vitâ Cypriani, c. xii.

⁴ p. 432.

⁵ p. 433.

cession," the friends who had performed for him the last offices "secure from the danger of inquiry, or of punishment."¹ Another man might have thought of the agony of the martyr, or the tyranny of the martyrdom; Gibbon is occupied with the merits of the executioner. One remembers no parallel to this, but the well-known passage of Isaac Walton's Fisherman, so often quoted, because so often pertinent, who was to put the hook through the mouth of the live frog, and out at his gills, and with a fine needle and silk sew up the upper part of his leg with only one stitch to the arming wire of the hook, and in so doing, all the while to *use him as though he loved him*. I ask, is it possible for a man composing his history in a frame of mind such as this, to be capable of fairly stating the amount of suffering allotted to the martyrs, or to do justice to their terrible wrongs? There is, too, a little circumstance connected with Mr. Gibbon's mode of handling his authorities in this narrative, which I regard as characteristic. In this instance, he is very much more than commonly civil to the biographer of a martyr; such parties seldom finding much favour in his eyes; but the document happening to furnish him with points on which he could plausibly construct his pleasant picture of the martyrdom we have seen, it becomes his interest to exalt the merits of this piece of biography; and accordingly in a note he says, "We have an original Life of Cyprian by the Deacon Pontius, the companion of his exile, and the spectator of his death; and we likewise possess the ancient proconsular acts of his martyrdom. These two relations are consistent with each other, and with probability; and *what is somewhat remarkable, they are both unsullied by any miraculous circumstances.*"² And yet Pontius writes in this very same memoir, which supplies Gibbon with the particulars of these transactions in a manner so much to his mind, that "on the day of Cyprian's arrival at the place of his exile, there appeared to him, before he was yet asleep, a youth of more than common stature, who seemed to him to lead him to the hall of justice, and place him before the tribunal of the Proconsul. The Proconsul beheld him, and instantly, without asking him a question, began to make a note of his sentence. But the youth who stood at his back, with great curiosity, read what he had written down. And

¹ Gibbon, vol. ii. p. 434.

² p. 430, note.

when he could not declare in words what it was, he did so by a sign. For spreading his hand like a broadsword, he imitated the blow of the executioner; and so conveyed his meaning as clearly as if he had uttered it. Cyprian understood the sentence, and entreated for a respite, if but of one day, that he might set his affairs in order. And when he had repeated this petition many times, the Proconsul again began to write on his tablet: but what it was he knew not, but he conjectured from the calmness of the judge's countenance, that he had been moved by so reasonable a request. The youth, who had already informed him by a gesture of his sentence, speedily, but secretly, apprised him by a twist of his fingers, that the day's delay was granted."¹ "All that was thus predicted," adds Pontius, "came to pass; the words of the Deity were in no degree falsified; only the single day signified the single year which Cyprian was to live after the vision."² Now certainly there are many persons who would not see anything miraculous in this incident, anything which might not be accounted for naturally by the circumstances of the case. But supposing the life on the whole had not suited Gibbon's purpose so well as it did, and supposing that instead of relating the last scenes of Cyprian's career in the unimpassioned manner it does, it had painted the punishment of the martyr in the revolting colours it might have done with strict truth, can we believe that Mr. Gibbon, knowing what we do of him, would have suppressed all allusion to this vision, and even have gone out of his way to say of the biography, that "what was remarkable, it was unsullied by any miraculous circumstances"? Would he not have been the very man to make himself merry with it; to attempt, by means of it, to cast discredit on the whole history, by distorting what he would have called this supernatural part of it; and would he not have asked triumphantly, whether any authority could be assigned to such a manifest legend?

The vivid imaginations of the monks of the middle ages may have peopled the literature of that period with many fictitious scenes in the tragedies of martyrdom; and this fact may have given scoffers an advantage in misinterpreting the character of the earlier martyrologies, confounding all together. But those of the first three centuries are, for the

¹ Pontius, *De Vita et Passione Cypriani*, c. xii.

² c. xiii.

most part, sober matter-of-fact narratives, and in general very brief ones. Eusebius has given a great many in a summary detail, such as the martyrdom of James, from Hege-sippus¹; of Simeon, from the same²; of Ignatius, from tradition,³ of whom also we have a distinct Martyrology; of Polycarp, from the contemporary Epistle of the Church of Smyrna⁴; of Blandina, of Sanctus, of Attalus, of Pothinus, of Alexander and Maturus, from the contemporary Epistle of the Churches of Lyons and Vienne⁵; of Origen,⁶ of Metras, of Quinta, of Apollonia, of Julian, of Epimachus, of Alexander, of Ammonarium, of Mercuria, of Dionysia, of Heron and Ater, of Dioscorus and Nemesion, and others by name, from Dionysius, a contemporary Bishop of Alexandria⁷; with many more which might be mentioned. But on looking them over, you will not find them in general disgraced by any fantastic fictions. The visions—for visions there are connected with the deaths of Ignatius and Polycarp, and perhaps others—are such as would be well accounted for by the circumstances of the cases, and certain unusual rather than marvellous events which attended some of these instances of martyrdom—such as the indisposition of the wild beasts to meddle with the culprit, or the agitation of the elements at the moment of his execution—might very well have happened, and been imputed by the excited bystanders to some providential sympathy with the victims. Possibly an incident in the death of Polycarp, however, may be thought to bear the aspect of a tale of these later times. The executioner stabbed him, and then ἐξήλθε περιστερὰ καὶ πλῆθος αἵματος ὥστε κατασβέσαι τὸ πῦρ, “there came forth a dove, and a rush of blood enough to extinguish the fire.”⁸ But no mention is made of this dove by Eusebius, who also gives the particulars of the history much as we have it in the Martyrology; nor does it seem to combine with the context. It is scarcely possible that the author of the account should not have added a word more on the subject of this strange event, but having said that a dove and some blood enough to extinguish the fire proceeded from the martyr, should have left us in this surprise just as if he

¹ Eusebius, Eccles. Hist. ii. c. 23.

² iii. c. 32.

³ c. 36.

⁴ iv. c. 15.

⁵ v. c. 1.

⁶ vi. c. 39.

⁷ c. 41.

⁸ De Polycarpi Martyrio, c. xvi.

had been relating the most ordinary occurrence imaginable. It seems therefore, a very natural conjecture which has been suggested, that there is here an error in the reading, and that instead of ἐξῆλθε περιστερὰ καὶ πλῆθος αἵματος, κ.τ.λ., it should be ἐξῆλθεν ἐπ' ἀριστερὰ καὶ πλῆθος αἵματος, κ.τ.λ. "There issued out on the left side (the region of the heart) even so much blood as was enough to extinguish the fire." There is also, I will add, in Tertullian the record of a fact, which has been thought to be of the same character: that of the Apostle John having been cast by Domitian into a bath of hot oil, out of which he escaped unhurt¹—an incident which rests upon his authority alone, though repeated by others after him. The truth of it has been called in question by modern critics, and possibly Tertullian may have admitted an occurrence of which the scene was neither in his own country nor in his own time without sufficient evidence, or as Mosheim² conjectures, he may have taken literally an account of some persecution which befell John, conveyed to him in the figurative language of the East. But at the same time we must remember, that with respect to all such events we have been long under the strong bias of a sceptical age—that our Lord certainly gave unto his disciples, John amongst the number (for it is not of any indifferent person that the story is told, but of one that we know of a certainty bore a charmed life), "power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy"³; and that "if they drank any deadly thing, it should not hurt them"⁴; or, as it is more fully expressed by the other Evangelist, that "nothing should by any means hurt them," that is, until their hour was come, and they had fulfilled their mission, which John would not have done in the case before us, for he had his Revelation still to write; and that under this guarantee, as Papias tells us, Barsabas called Justus, having drunk a poison, sustained no harm from it⁵; and that certainly Paul was enabled to shake off the viper, one of the few incidents of this nature recorded of the Apostles in Holy Writ; and yet many similar ones we must suppose to have occurred in fulfilment of our Lord's

¹ Tertullian, De Præscript. Hæret. c. xxxvi.

² Mosheim, De Rebus Christian. ante Constant. p. 111.

³ Luke x. 19.

⁴ Mark xvi. 18.

⁵ Eusebius, Eccles. Hist. iii. c. 39; Routh. Rel. Sacr. vol. i. p. 12.

contemplations when he uttered the words I have cited ; and this one of St. Paul, like the one in question of St. John, would certainly have been made matter of debate, had it been related by an early ecclesiastical historian, and omitted by an Evangelist.

But the statements of the sufferings of the early Christians, as I have already hinted, are far from being confined to the regular Martyrologies. They enter incidentally, but very largely, into almost all the writings of the early Fathers, the Apologies above all ; and are derived from so many quarters, and relate to so many districts, that to set them aside would be an act purely arbitrary, and such as no materials for history whatever would be proof against. How can we feel ourselves justified in refusing to give credence to unvarnished accounts of suffering recorded in many instances by men who, as I have said before, show no disposition to aggravate them, but with the account of the persecution supply at the same time any circumstances of mitigation on the one side or of failure on the other, that attended it ; any instances of the humanity of the magistrate as well as of the weakness of the victim ? The greater part of the facts of Mr. Gibbon's history would not rest upon better testimony than the following ones, for all of which I have references : that in the early times of Christianity, the calumny which represented the Christians as guilty of infanticide and incestuous intercourse in their assemblies, had been so industriously circulated, and taken such effect, as to set multitudes against them ; insomuch that even in Origen's day, when experience had abated it, there were some who would not even speak to Christians on the commonest subject from a horror of their character¹ ; that the Christians were beheaded, crucified, cast to wild beasts, consigned to bonds and fire, and all other torments, and yet did not shrink from their confession² ; that they were sometimes stoned by the populace³ ; that they were furiously driven by them from their houses, from the markets and baths, and were hunted whenever they appeared in public⁴ ; that they were

¹ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, VI. § 27. Origen again speaks of the calumny as having been exploded in his time. Ὡς γὰρ ταῦτα λεγόμενα ἤδη καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν πολλῶν, καὶ πάντῃ ἀλλοτρίων τῆς καθ' ἡμῶν θεοσεβείας, καταγινώσκειται

ὡς κατεψευσμένα Χριστιανῶν. — § 40.

² Justin Martyr, *Dial.* § 110.

³ Tertullian, *Apol.* c. xlviii. ; Theophilus, *Ad Autol.* III. § 30.

⁴ Eusebius, *Eccles. Hist.* v. c. 1.

known by the nick-name of *Sarmenticii*, from the faggots or *sarmenta* with which they were burnt, and *Semaxii*, from the split axles which served for the stakes¹—designations which would scarcely have been assigned to them had not the punishment they indicated been very familiar to the people; that “Down with the sepulchres of the Christians” was one of the war-cries of their oppressors²; that their women were condemned to defilement, in spite of Mr. Gibbon’s insinuation that such imputations were the inventions of the monks and of a later age³; so that it was a matter of consolation in a season of unusual mortality, that the Christian virgins would thus depart to their glory, nor have before them the fear of threats of violation or of the brothel⁴; that the lash, the club, the flames,⁵ the prison, the sword, the wild beast, the cross,⁶ the chains, the rack, the hot metal plates,⁷ the stocks,⁸ are all spoken of as instruments of the torture of the Christians in a manner that shows they were ordinary and accustomed weapons used in this savage warfare; that women as well as men, whose names are given, for these things were not done in a corner, were submitted to these engines of pain and death; that they were branded by the hot plates of brass applied to the more sensitive parts of the person; left for a few days for their wounds to fester and inflame; tortured again; torn by the wild beasts in the amphitheatre; tossed in nets by furious bulls; fried in an iron chair; in some instances the same individual made to pass through a series of these sufferings, if life lasted; and these matters, too, brought to our knowledge, not by Christians writing in indignation to heathens, but in confidence to Christians; contemporaries not talking at second-hand, but speaking of events which they had witnessed with their own eyes.⁹ Again, that others (and here, once more, in the instance I am alluding to, we have the names of several of the sufferers recorded) died of starvation in prison¹⁰; and that ordinary pains not sufficing to glut the vengeance of the persecutors, methods were devised for protracting the pangs of their victims, and tedious tortures applied

¹ Tertullian, *Apol.* c. i.

² *Ad Scapulam*, c. iii.

³ Gibbon, vol. ii. p. 424; Tertullian, *Apol.* c. i.

⁴ Cyprian, *De Mortalitate*, § xv.

⁵ *De Lapsis*, § xii.

⁶ *De Bono Patientiæ*, § xii.

⁷ *De Laude Martyrii*, § xv.

⁸ Eusebins, *Eccles. Hist.* v. c. 1.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Cyprian, *Ep.* xxi.

to the body by a refinement of cruelty¹: not to speak of excesses, if possible, even greater than these, which are described in the twelfth chapter of the eighth book of the history of Eusebius, to which I must refer you; and the effect of which even Mr. Gibbon seems to have felt to be so staggering, that he endeavours to destroy the authority of the historian on this subject by a disingenuous note, as though he had confessed that in his narrative he was governed by the principle of relating whatever would redound to the glory, and suppressing all that would be to the disgrace of religion²—a version of his confession which the references Gibbon gives to passages in that writer's works are far from supporting. For what does the confession amount to? That he will not be instrumental to publishing the weakness of those who shrunk from the trial and fell away, but will act the better and more profitable part of preserving the memory of the confessors of the truth that stood fast³; in other words, that it is his plan to give a catalogue of martyrs, not of apostates. Where is the duplicity? There was no absolute call on him here to state that apostates there were; and the statement should be taken rather as an argument of the candour and veracity of the historian than of his partial dealing and suppression of testimony.

But there is another view of persecution, which Mr. Gibbon overlooks, but which is one of the most serious of all, and in reference to which it was that I said the *nature* of the persecution which the early Christians suffered was very partially set forth by that writer; nor, indeed, is it sufficiently developed by authors in general, who treat of these times of trouble. And yet it is the one, which the words of our blessed Lord point to and anticipate. He does not simply tell his followers that people "shall lay their hands on them and persecute them, delivering them up to the synagogues and into prisons, and bringing them before kings and rulers for his name's sake;"⁴ it shall not be simply *official* persecution, which they shall have to endure, but *domestic*. "I came not to send peace," says he, "but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-

¹ Ad Demetrianum, § xii.

² Gibbon, vol. ii. p. 490, note 178.

³ Eusebius, Eccles. Hist. viii. c. 2.

⁴ Luke xxi. 12.

law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household."¹ A great deal of what we read in the early Fathers, is but a comment on these words. And though, no doubt, the public and legal, or the popular persecution to which the primitive Christians were subjected, was the form of it which makes the impression in history; still probably that which was far more felt, and which was far more extensive in its influence was the *fireside* troubles, which the profession of the Christian faith fostered. I touched upon some of these in a Lecture of my last Course, when I was defending the Fathers against the animadversions of Barbeyrac; but I did not then exhaust the subject, nor indeed had I then to contemplate it from quite the same position as at present. Thus the Christian member of a family otherwise heathen (and this sort of intermixture was of course the most ordinary and usual of combinations), was constantly living in a state of uneasiness and discomfort. Sympathy with his nearest kindred would be greatly weakened by the enormous difference in their respective feelings, and in their notions of right and wrong; and even his personal safety would be constantly in jeopardy. Suppose a wife to have an unbelieving husband, his crimes might revolt her and lead her to seek a divorce; but he has her at his mercy, for he can denounce her as a Christian²: in the meanwhile there is not a religious exercise which she may desire to discharge, in which he cannot thwart her³; not an offensive heathen practice, sight, or sound, to which he may not expose her.⁴ Nor is this all; so utterly odious was Christianity in the eyes of some of these husbands, that they could not bear to have a Christian under the same roof with them, and would put away their wives for this cause, when their chastity was above all suspicion⁵: nay more, husbands who in time past had watched their wives with the utmost jealousy, on finding them become sober and domestic, and discovering that the cause of their change was their conversion to the Christian faith, putting away all their former feelings, would now give them every opportunity of licence and excess, preferring to have for their partners those who were prostitutes rather than those who were Christians.⁶ On the other hand, does the

¹ Matt. x. 34, 35, 36.

² Justin Martyr, Apol. II. § 2.

³ Tertullian, Ad Uxorem, II. c. iv.

⁴ c. vi.

⁵ Tertullian, Apol. c. iii.

⁶ Ad Nationes, I. § 4.

wife endeavour to conceal her faith from her heathen husband, the concealment is itself an intolerable restraint; nor can it be done effectually; and the very attempt excites his jealousy and suspicion. What can she mean by crossing herself? Why does she rise from her sleep to pray? Is she engaged in some magical craft? What can that bread be which she eats with so much reverence? Can it be what she says it is? But he will keep his own counsel till occasion may serve, and she may provoke him to produce the weapons, with which she has armed him.¹ I am not putting imaginary cases, as you will perceive by the nature of the details I have given; but such cases as the Fathers supply us with. How much fortitude, how much self-restraint, how much patient tribulation, how much suffering, in short, for righteousness' sake, would be required of her who should realise the following deportment recommended by Clemens probably in anticipation of a case of unequal yoke-fellowship! "Scripture very well says that the woman is given by God to the man as a helpmeet for him. It is plain, therefore, I conceive, that if anything falls out amiss from her husband in her household, she will adjust it by reason and persuasion: but if he will not listen to her, then she will endeavour, so far as human nature is capable of it, to lead a life void of offence, whether it be required of her by the Word (or reason) to die or to live; knowing that she has God for her ally and partner in such a course of conduct, a real Champion and Saviour both for the present and the future."² And again, where other relations are contemplated as well as that of husband and wife, "Often do we see sons and wives and servants, even in spite of fathers and masters and husbands, become of the number of the best of persons (*i. e.* Christians). It is not the less a duty, therefore, to be zealous to lead godly lives, because some may seem to forbid it. But in my opinion, it becomes us to strive the more with all zeal and alacrity that we may not be overcome, and fall away from those counsels, which are the best and most needful of all."³ These are simple words, but what disruption of family ties do they imply! This distress had begun to show itself even in the Apostles' time, as, indeed, had most of the other difficulties, which

¹ Ad Uxorem, II. c. v.

² Clem. Alex. Stromat. IV. § xx. p. 594.

³ Clem. Alex. Stromat. IV. § viii. p.

attended the intimate social connection of Christians and heathens; and most of the seventh chapter of St. Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians relates to it. The position of parent and child, when the parties differed in faith, a case which is also alluded to in the passage of Clemens just cited, is full of similar embarrassments. Thus to go for a moment into details; we are told of the father abandoning his son, who had been to him the most dutiful of children, on becoming aware that he was turned Christian¹: or even for the like reason disinheriting him at the very moment when his conduct was no longer (as it had been formerly) a cause for complaint.² The relation of master and servant under the circumstances also touched on in the same paragraph of Clemens is encompassed with the like perplexities. The slave or domestic servant, supposing him to be a heathen, could not be the inmate of his Christian master's house, without becoming aware of his master's faith more or less distinctly; whilst the latter must have felt that he had a spy under his own roof, and that he had to act accordingly. What a perpetual source of apprehension and solicitude must this have proved! How must this single ingredient have poisoned the security of home! The sentiments of distrust engendered by it transpire in several places in the early Fathers. "We have servants," says Athenagoras, in defending the Christians against the horrid accusations of incest and cannibalism laid to their charge, "we have servants; how can we conceal such things from them? Yet none of them have testified against us to anything of the sort"³; as though the Christians considered themselves even in their greatest privacy to be under inspection. And Tertullian, when challenging the same testimony on the same occasion, "Could not the curiosity of our servants steal a peep at us through chinks and holes?"⁴ And again, in language still more calculated to impress us with the precarious situation in which Christian masters felt themselves standing, who had heathen servants, "The date of our religion, as we have shown, is from the time of Tiberius. From its very first appearance the truth was opposed through that hatred which always exists towards truth. There were as many enemies

¹ Tertullian, *Apol. c. iii.*

² *Ad Nationes, I. § 4.*

³ Athenagoras, *Legat. pro Christianis,*

§ 35, Paris Ed.

⁴ Tertullian, *Ad Nationes, I. § vii.*

to it as there were strangers; the Jews peculiarly out of jealousy; the soldiers, out of a spirit of extortion; even our very servants, out of that nature which belongs to their condition. We are daily beset, we are daily betrayed."¹ And we in fact find that the servants of the Christians at Lyons under apprehension of the torture did pretend to disclose the secret habits of their Christian masters, and uttered unfounded calumnies against them which brought them to their deaths²: nay, perhaps, they really themselves misunderstood much that they saw and heard, and honestly thought there was mischief in what was at any rate mysterious,³ as *e. g.* a Thyestean feast in the spiritual participation of the Body and Blood of Christ. But even when matters did not proceed to extremities after this manner, the relation of master and servant must have been almost reversed, when the latter felt that the law gave him a hold over the other, which whenever it suited his purpose he could turn to account. Or take it the other way, and let the servant be a Christian; and now the master who has been ever humane to him in time past, and who probably for that reason will not proceed further against him still, will nevertheless drive him from his sight, however faithful he has been to him; the abhorrence of the Christian prevailing over every sense he may have of the virtues of the man.⁴ Or, if he has had the good fortune to conceal his profession from his master's knowledge, then he will have perhaps to attend him to the temple and the sacrifice. What is he to do in that case; and how is he to act, so as to have a conscience void of offence? I do not invent these difficulties.⁵ They are facts left on record.

Neither is this all. There is another trouble which pressed hard upon the early Christians, scarcely, perhaps, coming under the head of persecution, but still akin to it; and as constituting one of the fines which the Christians had to pay for their calling, one of the hardships they had to endure for the profession they had made, may be here conveniently considered: for, like positive persecution, it was calculated to try the faith to the uttermost; to shake it where it was wavering; and to minister to the Evidences by showing how sound

¹ Tertullian, Apol. c. vii.

² Eusebius, Eccles. Hist. v. c. 1.

³ Irenæus, Fragm. xiii. p. 343, Bened.

Ed.

⁴ Tertullian, Apol. c. iii.

⁵ De Idololatriâ, c. xvii.

the early Christians must have felt the ground to be under them, in order to be induced to submit to such penalties as they did for the purpose of maintaining it. I mean the pecuniary losses, the absolute poverty, the dislocation in society, the interruption of the old habits of life, which the profession of Christianity often exacted of the converts as a deodand. We have seen that one effect of it was to induce fathers sometimes to disinherit their children; but the evil I speak of was not confined to this form of it. There were many trades and occupations, the exercise of which was scarcely compatible with the Christian calling; so that the conversion to Christianity entailed on a convert belonging to those classes many scruples of conscience and much trouble of mind, if he continued in his craft; whilst, on the other hand, the resignation of it was the surrender of that by which he altogether gained his bread. For idolatry had wormed itself so thoroughly into the system of life, that there might be many such trades. We have seen in the passage I have already had occasion to refer to, that a certain Christian who was a player, was not permitted to communicate; and that, by consequence, it was proposed to make him a frugal allowance, a bare maintenance out of the fund of the Church, to secure him at least from starvation, whilst he followed the dictates of his conscience.¹ This case must have, no doubt, been a common one. How many statuaries, for instance, must have felt it impossible to reconcile their employment of making idols with their allegiance to Christ, and yet the abandonment of such a calling proved so costly, that some even in ecclesiastical orders, Deacons probably or of lower rank, could not find in their hearts to give it up²! The seller of incense must have been as common a trade as the tobacconist now is, he had a designation of his own, "Turarius;" yet how would he reconcile it to himself to minister to the worship of idols, for the article he dealt in was bought for scarcely any other purpose³? What a trying situation, again, was that of the schoolmaster; to read with his scholars works of mythology, *i. e.* of idolatry still flourishing; to keep heathen holidays: the Minervalia in honour of Minerva, the Saturnalia in honour of Saturn; to decorate his school with garlands in honour of Flora⁴; for to

¹ Cyprian, Ep. lxi.

² Tertullian, De Idololatriâ, c. vii.

³ c. xi.

⁴ c. x.

renounce all this would be to ruin his school and proclaim himself a Christian! What an intolerable compunction must the Christian soldier have felt at mounting guard on a heathen temple, a mere brothel, let to the highest bidder, as our turnpike gates, or, indeed, at making one of a camp, where *signa venerari, signa jurare, signa omnibus diis præponere erat tota religio*.¹ Yet what an act of self-surrender was it to leave the profession of arms! Eusebius thinks it matter for high commendation that Christian soldiers under Diocletian suffered themselves to be turned out of the army rather than renounce their religion, and represents their station as very honourable and very lucrative.² It would be easy to pursue this subject still further into its details, but these I have given may suffice to put my hearers on following them out for themselves: and are enough, I am sure, to satisfy them that the secret and unobtrusive sacrifices which the early Christians must have been called on to make for the sake of holding fast their faith, were, perhaps, the most trying, as they were certainly the most universal of all. Indeed, the self-denial they required is acknowledged by Tertullian, who supplied me with the facts³; and who argues in the uncompromising manner, which is usual with him, that the cost to be sure is great, but that it ought to have been counted before the Christian profession was embraced; that the cross was to be borne by the followers of the crucified; that James and John forsook their calling for the Lord's service; and that a sound faith has no fear of lacking bread. But all this is more easily said than reduced to practice.

I have already observed that these troubles do not directly fall under the head of persecution; but they do fall under the head of sufferance inflicted on the Christians by circumstances, if not by magistrates or mobs; and besides developing the condition of the Primitive Church, which is an object I have before me, redound to the Evidences (which is the topic I am now handling, and showing how the Fathers furnish a valuable contingent to it) by manifesting yet more, how entire must have been the conviction of the early Christians of the truth of the religion they had adopted, to have induced them, as it did, to submit to trials so many, so various,

¹ Apol. c. xvi.

² Eusebius, Eccles. Hist. viii. c. 4.

³ Tertullian, De Idololatriâ, c. xii.

and so protracted. Perhaps it scarcely adds to the portrait of the rigour of the position of the Christians to remark how effectually all the avenues to advancement in the state were closed, and particularly how completely the discharge of all judicial and magisterial functions was interdicted to them by the idolatrous rites with which they were attended, and at which it was impossible that the Christians could connive. But as I dwelt at some length on this part of the subject in a former Lecture,¹ I shall be content with merely hinting at this further tax which they had to pay for the faith they had followed.

There is, however, one consideration more, which it behoves us to bear in mind, as affecting most disastrously, and in a very high degree, the nearest and dearest interests of the Christian, the little use he could make of the courts of law, as well for other reasons as because the heathen oaths there administered were effectual obstacles in his way.² He was, in fact, virtually an outlaw; one with respect to whom the paternal influence of the law was suspended; and this distressing position, we must remember, he chose to place himself in for the sake of Christ. This difficulty again, like so many others, discovered itself whilst the Apostles were yet living. "Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints?"³ "Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? no, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren? But brother goeth to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers."⁴ It is the ingenious and very probable conjecture of Professor Dobree, that the incestuous union mentioned in the chapter before that in which this passage occurs, had given rise to some question of property, and that thus is supplied the connection between the two subjects, otherwise apparently incongruous. This, too, would further account for St. Paul's impassioned animadversions on this matter, a matter which was so well calculated, when carried before a heathen tribunal, to bring a scandal on the Christian cause. Similar difficulties were, no doubt, perpetually arising in the Church in subsequent times, the more likely indeed, as the social relations of the Christians became more complicated. And

¹ The XIth of the former Series.

² Tertullian, *De Idololatriâ*, c. xvii.

³ 1 Cor. vi. 1.

⁴ vv. 5, 6.

when we take into account that whatever decisions, whether in civil or criminal cases, were come to by Christians amongst themselves, were after all merely private agreements, having no force of law, nor capable of being pressed, should either party swerve from the award, we may well imagine how much this must have contributed to the hardships under which the early Christians laboured ; whilst the reluctance thus felt to go before heathen tribunals, or to be contaminated by heathen forms, must have perpetually stood in the way of advantageous contracts which Christians might otherwise have made with heathens (who would of course naturally insist on their own securities), precluding them, for instance, from executing bonds as creditors (the case is put by Tertullian himself¹), and so rescuing themselves from embarrassments which the extension of credit often removes ; and, indeed, intercepting in a very great measure the mutual advantages which result from the free intercourse of man with man, to the damage of both, but to the ruin of what the Christian probably was, the poorer party.

¹ Tertullian, *De Idololatriâ*, c. xxiii.