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**THE MARTYRS OF THE  
EARLY CHURCH**

# THE MARTYRS OF THE EARLY CHURCH

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## PREFACE

THE following pages, though to some extent following the lines already set forth in the author's larger work *Persecution in the Early Church* (1906),<sup>1</sup> seek to fulfil a different purpose, and to appeal to a wider class of readers. In the earlier work the interests of scholars and students are uppermost, and the notes and appendices giving the critical reasons which led to any conclusion form no small part of the whole. The scheme of the work was also analytic, dealing with a difficult problem on which little of scientific value had been published in English. The following pages, on the contrary, are intended to set forth in simple story, without distraction of note or comment, or scientific evidence, the records of the martyrs, in the hope of thus reviving popular interest, especially on the part of the young people of the Church, in its early heroes. If such a revival of interest should lead to a larger measure of the heroic in their own lives, never more necessary than in these self-indulgent days, the author will have obtained a full reward.

Though the popular presentation of the theme is thus the primary consideration, every care has been taken that in a subject which abounds in myth there shall be no tampering, so far as the author knows, with accuracy or truth. Such tales as the

<sup>1</sup> Third Edition, 1912.

martyrdom of Timothy and Maura, of St. Lawrence, and of others that could be mentioned, have therefore been rigidly excluded, as not possessing, at any rate in their present form, sufficient historical evidence. The reader desirous of further study of the subject will find a full setting forth of the grounds and reasons which have led the author to his conclusions in his larger *Persecution in the Early Church*, of which it is intended shortly to prepare an enlarged edition, with additional critical notes and appendices.

It may be well to add that quotations from original documents are always enclosed within ' . . . ' ; from modern works within " . . . " , a distinction of considerable importance.

WESTMINSTER,

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## CHAPTER I

### THE MARTYRS OF THE APOSTOLIC AGE

“ A glorious band, the chosen few  
On whom the Spirit came,  
Twelve valiant saints, their hope they knew,  
And mocked the cross and flame ;  
They met the tyrant's brandished steel,  
The lion's gory mane,  
They bowed their necks the death to feel :  
Who follows in their train ? ”

‘ And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth  
after Me, is not worthy of Me.’—*Matt. x. 38.*

## ARGUMENT

- § I. The Martyr of Calvary—The Imitation of Christ—  
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## I

WE propose in the following pages to tell the story of the martyrs of the Early Church. The tale of their dauntless heroism is one which men can never willingly let die. In all ages men have looked upon the martyr as the highest expression of the spirit of self-surrender; in every country and century he has won for himself that homage and esteem which renunciation, whether in greater or less degree, never fails to procure. In part, no doubt, the value that the Christian Church has always attached to martyrdom must be attributed to the example of Jesus; if for the moment we may contemplate the Crucifixion, not in its eternal significance as the atonement for the world's sin, but under its aspect as an episode in human history. The story that moved the world was the Cross. A crossless Saviour would be a crownless king; for Christ the 'hour' of His crucifixion was the 'hour' of His glory, the one 'hour' of His timeless being.<sup>1</sup> 'Lifted up' in shame, He drew all men unto Him in adoration. In spite of the cultured sneers of the Greek philosopher Lucian, at One whom he called the 'crucified Sophist,' the Martyr of Calvary laid His spell on the world from the first; a fact the more remarkable when we remember that mere suffering could never have appealed to an age that

<sup>1</sup> John xvii. 1, xiii. 31.

was steeped in cruelty, and for which crucifixion; the punishment of slaves, was one of the commonest sights of life. Through His cross the Man of Sorrows became the crowned King, of whom it has been finely said that His "pierced hand lifted empires off their hinges, and turned the stream of centuries out of its channel, and still governs the ages." Theories of the Atonement have been devised more or less satisfactory in their efforts to explain in finite symbols the infinite love and sorrow that lie at the heart of God. But even those for whom such theories are meaningless have rarely failed to render homage to the Divine Sufferer.

By a sure instinct the Church discerned in the death of the martyr the repetition of the central Sacrifice of Calvary. 'As we behold the martyrs,' writes Origen (one of the greatest of the Fathers of the Church, himself a martyr), 'coming forth from every Church to be brought before the tribunal, we see in each the Lord Himself condemned.' So Irenaeus of Lyons (another martyr of the early years of the third century) speaks of the martyrs as 'endeavouring to follow in the footsteps of Christ,' and of St. Stephen as 'imitating in all things the Master of Martyrdom.' In the Early Church the imitation of Christ, as a formal principle in ethics, played but a secondary part, so far, at any rate, as the average member was concerned. The whole idea is modern, and is due largely to the influence of the great mediaeval work known to-day as *The Imitation of Christ*. But in the early days the martyrs and confessors alone were thought of as actually imitating Jesus; they were pre-eminently the 'true disciples' of the Master.

One consequence of this last idea made its appearance in the Church at a very early date. We refer to the legends of martyrdom of the first Apostles. These are, for the most part, the production of an age which could scarcely conceive of a perfect renunciation which did not issue in the cross or the stake. Such Christians interpreted too realistically the cry of love: Let us also go, that we may die with Him. They reduced the way of the cross to one well-trodden path. They remembered, perhaps too literally, our Lord's ordination charge to His disciples, with its foreshadowings of the hour when they should stand before kings and governors for His name's sake, and its warning of the greater fear than the fear of them that kill the body and after that have no more that they can do.<sup>1</sup> We in these latter days, for whom self-surrender must take a form of gentler type, may rejoice that God's demands upon His servants are not all the same. "They also serve who stand and wait," and the Apostles who died in peace at home are not less truly His heroes than they who, like St. Paul or St. Peter, counted their lives to be but dross for the sake of Christ.

These legends first appeared, about the middle of the second century, in an heretical work called *The Wanderings of the Apostles*. Though some of them, doubtless, possess a basis of tradition, yet, for the most part, they must be discredited, inasmuch as they are largely the outcome of the Millenarian beliefs which dominated the Early Church. We see in them the attempts to show that the gospel had been preached to every nation, even by the first Apostles, and that all things, therefore, were ready for

<sup>1</sup> Matt. x. 16-38.

Christ's second coming. The literature of the Christian Church in the second century is full of this idea, and, in consequence, greatly exaggerates the extent to which the gospel had diffused its influence, and won its conquests. In the second century hope was too often mistaken for accomplished fact.

But while we cannot accept the stories concerning the martyrdom of St. Thomas in India, and so forth, there are yet a few precious anecdotes concerning the martyrdom of some of the Apostles which have been handed down to us from earliest times. These, in our judgement, possess a considerable measure of probability ; at any rate they deserve to be known by all Christian people.

The record of the earliest martyr, Stephen, is in the Scriptures.<sup>1</sup> In his case the lead in prosecution would appear to have been taken by a synagogue of Roman freedmen called the Libertini, the descendants of the Jewish slaves sold at Rome by Pompey. Probably they were under the influence of another Roman citizen, a young man from Tarsus, Saul by name, a most bitter enemy of the new 'Way,' to give the name by which the new faith was popularly known. Immediately after the stoning of the proto-martyr a general persecution which reached as far as Damascus drove all except the Apostles from the city.

From the *Acts*<sup>2</sup> also we learn how in the year 44, Herod Agrippa I, the grandson of the Herod who massacred the Innocents at Bethlehem, killed St. James, the brother of St. John, with the sword, and would have seized St. Peter, whose time, how-

<sup>1</sup> Acts vi.-vii.

<sup>2</sup> Acts xii. 1-19.

ever, was not yet come. According to a very early writer, Clement of Alexandria, the man who had led St. James to the judgement seat, possibly, though not necessarily, his accuser, was so impressed with his testimony that he too professed faith in Christ, the first of many led to the truth by the ' witness ' of the ' martyrs.' ' Both therefore were led away to die. On their way he entreated James to be forgiven by him. James, considering a little while, replied, " Peace be to thee," and kissed him. So these two were beheaded together.' Thus St. James obtained, after many days, the fulfilment of the prayer of his mother, Salome ; he drank of the same cup, and was baptized with the baptism of Christ.

O great Apostle ! rightly now  
Thou readest all thy Saviour meant.

Of the martyrdom of the other James, the author of the *Epistle*, the brother of our Lord, the first bishop of Jerusalem, we have an account written by a Jewish Christian, the exact historical value of which it is difficult to appraise. But though the details may be doubtful, we may, perhaps, accept the truth of the main outlines. By the strictness of his life and his exceeding piety—' his knees had become as hard as the knees of a camel in consequence of his habitual supplication '—St. James had won the respect even of his opponents. Nevertheless the high-priest Annas, the son of the Annas who had condemned our Lord, determined upon his destruction. An opportunity was found in the interval between the death of one Roman governor, Festus, and the arrival of his successor. So the rulers came to James and said, ' We entreat thee restrain the people who

are led astray after Jesus. Persuade them not to be led astray. Stand therefore upon a wing of the Temple, that thy words may be heard by all the people.' Then they placed James upon a wing of the Temple and cried out to him, 'O thou Just One, since the people are led astray after Jesus who was crucified, declare to us what is the door to Jesus the crucified.' But James answered with a loud voice, 'Why do ye ask me respecting Jesus the Son of Man? He is now sitting in the heavens, on the right hand of a great Power, and is about to come on the clouds of heaven.' In their rage at his testimony the Pharisees hurled him down from the tower and stoned him. But St. James kneeled down and prayed, as Jesus had prayed before him: 'I entreat Thee, God and Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' 'Stop your stoning,' cried one of the priests, 'the Just One is praying for you.' 'But a fuller ran up and beat out his brains with the club which he used to beat his clothes.' For this vicious tiger-leap against the Christians of Jerusalem and their leader, Annas was deposed from office by the new governor, Albinus, upon his arrival (A.D. 61).

St. James was not the only member of the family of our Lord who suffered from the hatred of the Jews. The historian Eusebius, to whom we owe so much of our knowledge of the Church in its early days, tells us that 'after the martyrdom of St. James' the disciples at Jerusalem, led by 'those related to our Lord,' elected Symeon the son of Clopas, the first cousin of Jesus, to be the second bishop. A few years later Vespasian, in the course of his campaign against the Jews,

'commanded all of the family of David to be sought after, that no one might be left among the Jews of the royal stock.' Symeon and his brethren survived this persecution, which was evidently political rather than religious in character. The emperor Domitian, to whose persecution of the Church we shall refer again, renewed the persecution, for reasons similar to those of his father Vespasian. Whereupon 'certain heretics accused the two grandsons of Jude,' the brother of Jesus. When they were brought before the emperor, 'Domitian demanded whether they were of the stock of David. This being confessed, he asked again: What possession and what substance they had. They answered that they had between them but nine and thirty acres of land, and that they sustained their families by their own labour; showing forth their hands to the emperor, being hard, and rough, and worn with labours, to witness that the words they had spoken were true. . . . So Domitian, despising them as vile persons, let them go.' A few years later, probably in A.D. 104, Symeon, who by this time was of more than patriarchal age, was crucified as a Christian 'after he had been tortured for several days.'

The last relative of Jesus, of whom we have knowledge, died as a martyr, probably under the emperor Decius in the great persecution of the third century, on the accusation, as it would appear, of the Jews. His name was Conon, a market-gardener of Magydus, in Pamphylia. On being asked by the governor the usual questions, Conon declared: "I came from the town of Nazareth in Galilee, and am a kinsman of Christ." "If you know

Christ," replied the tyrant, "know our gods also. Be persuaded by me and you shall gain great honours. I don't say "Sacrifice," or anything of that sort. It will be enough to take a pinch of incense, a drop of wine and an olive branch, and say : " Most sovereign Zeus, save this multitude ! " ' ' But Conon was true to his royal lineage. He would have none of the governor's specious distinctions, and refused ' the pinch of incense. ' So, with nails driven into his feet, he was whipped along in front of the governor's carriage until he died.

## II

The murders of St. Stephen, St. James, and the other relatives of Jesus, the persecution at Damascus and elsewhere, of which we read in the *Acts of the Apostles*, and the early imprisonments of St. Paul, both at Caesarea and for two years at Rome, were the results of Jewish hatred. The infant Church was now to experience the more dreaded enmity of the Empire. Hitherto, Christianity had enjoyed a certain measure of protection, possibly even of favour, from the Roman Government. As the *Acts of the Apostles* shows, in the earlier days the Christians found that the tribunal of the pagan magistrates often proved the most assured refuge from the fury of the synagogue. But the cause of this was not any official countenance of Christianity as such, but a careless indifference on the part of Roman officials to what appeared the mere minutiae of Judaism. Judaism was a religion which had received special privileges from the State, and Christianity at first seems to have been confused

with it. But a great change shortly took place in the policy of the Roman Government in its treatment of Christianity.

On the evening of July 19, 64, there broke out in Rome a disastrous fire, the least effect of which was the burning down of no small part of the congested quarters of the city. The fire marks the beginning of an era of persecution of the Church, which lasted for nearly three centuries. In a well-known chapter of the heathen historian Tacitus, we read :

'Neither human assistance in the shape of imperial gifts, nor attempts to appease the gods, could remove the sinister report that the fire was due to Nero's own order. And so, in the hope of dissipating this rumour, he falsely diverted the charge onto a set of people to whom the vulgar gave the name of Chrestians (*sic*) and who were detested for the abominations which they perpetrated. The founder of this name, one Christus by name, had been executed by Pontius Pilate in the reign of Tiberius; and the dangerous superstition, though put down for the moment, again broke out, not only in Judea, the original home of the pest, but even in Rome, where everything horrible and shameful collects and is practised.'

This passage is of such importance that we have quoted it in full. One or two comments upon it will perhaps be helpful. The reader will notice that the followers of Jesus had now obtained, or rather had foisted upon them, a name of their own. For the new religion did not start with a ready-made label. At first it was regarded as a sect of Judaism, and was called 'The Way.' The title Christian, i.e. 'Christ's faction,' was a bitter nickname of Latin formation, invented either by the wits or magistrates of Antioch, which may have been originally, and was still popularly, mispronounced

as 'Chrestian' as late as the third century. The new name helped both the government and the mob to distinguish between the Christianity and Judaism which they had hitherto confused.

Of more importance is it to notice the course of events. At first the rumour was that Nero himself had caused the conflagration. After Nero had succeeded, by the imperial gifts which he lavished upon the sufferers, in stifling this report, his ministers, the chief of whom was the infamous Tigellinus, diverted the charge against the Christians. In all probability Tigellinus and Nero were influenced by the Jews, of whom a large and wealthy colony, nearly 16,000 in number, were located in Rome. In the excited suspicions of the mob they saw an opportunity both of saving themselves and of wreaking their vengeance on the hated Nazarenes. Poppaea, the mistress, afterwards the wife of Nero, was much under the influence of a court favourite, the Jewish actor Aliturus. Working through Aliturus and Poppaea the Jews thus 'falsely diverted the charge' onto the Christians. The charge of incendiarism, as Tacitus informs us, broke down completely, both with the Roman judges and with the populace. But

The lie  
Had time on its own wings to fly,

and was made the occasion—not, perhaps, without some ground in the incautious utterances of enthusiastic Millenarians—of an accusation more dangerous by far, 'hatred against civilized society,' or, as we should phrase it to-day, the crime of anarchism. From the days of Nero to the final victory of the

Church under Constantine, the imperial idea that Christianity was a danger to the State and civilization itself, an anarchist institution, was maintained with varying insistence, some modification in detail, and occasional intervals of toleration. To the reasons which gave this charge plausibility and credence with both statesmen and people, we shall return in our next chapter. Meanwhile, we must not forget the victims at Rome of court intrigue and mob unreasonableness.

The persecution of Nero, that baptism of blood of the Roman Church, has been described for us by a master of language, the vividness of whose picture loses nothing from his manifest contempt for the Christians struggling with his horror at the outrage, or his hatred of the tyrant. In a short chapter of Tacitus we have one of the most awful scenes of infamy of all time :

' Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination when daylight had expired. Nero offered his gardens for the spectacle, and was exhibiting a show in the circus, while he mingled with the people in the dress of a charioteer or stood aloft in a car.'

We can see it all after the lapse of centuries, so lurid are the colours. The two great circuses of Rome had been burnt down, so Nero offered the use of a great circus which he was erecting in his own gardens on the Vatican hill, one of the walls of which was afterwards used by Constantine for building the old St. Peter's. There sport was provided for the people. Christian men, tied in the skins of wild beasts,

were hunted down by savage dogs, while tender women and girls were tied naked by their hair to bulls, or subjected to insults worse than death. When night fell the mob passed out into the gardens—where now stands the palace of the popes and the church of St. Peter—to witness the rare illuminations. By Roman law incendiaries could be burnt. So the Christians, wrapped in tunics well smeared with pitch, were nailed to low wooden crosses, and then set alight, while Nero drove round in his chariot to gloat upon their agony. The number of Christians who thus suffered is unknown, but according to Tacitus it was a 'vast multitude'; a statement borne out by the writer of the *Apocalypse* when he speaks of 'the woman drunken with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus'.<sup>1</sup> The loss of the early written records of the Roman Church has robbed us of all names; only with difficulty can we record the story of its two most distinguished victims, St. Peter and St. Paul.

For the martyrdom of St. Peter and St. Paul the earliest evidence is that of St. Clement, the earliest of all the Fathers, in a letter from the Church of Rome to that of Corinth, written about thirty years after the event. We could wish that it had been a little less rhetorical, and more exact in its information :

'Let us come to the athletes who lived but lately, the noble examples of our own generation. . . . Let us set before our eyes the good Apostles. There was Peter, who by reason of unrighteous jealousy endured not one nor two but many labours, and thus having borne his witness by martyrdom went to his appointed place of

<sup>1</sup> Apoc. xvii. 6.

glory. Paul also, by reason of jealousy and strife, pointed out the way to the prize of patient endurance. . . . He won the noble renown which was the reward of his faith; having taught righteousness unto the whole world, and having reached the bounds of the West; and when he had borne his witness before the rulers by his martyrdom, so he departed from the world and went unto the holy place, having been found a noble pattern of patient endurance.'

With the acquittal of St. Paul after his first captivity (A.D. 61) the Apostle of the Gentiles vanishes, though as one immortal, from the pages of certain history. The rest, his journeys East and West, possibly, as some have thought, as far as Spain, his sudden arrest in Asia, at Troas or Nicopolis, his second entrance as a captive into Rome, the letters of this second captivity, the manner of his trial, the date of his death, are matters of dispute, the exact details of which, in any case, are lost. As we read the story, St. Paul at the time of the fire was away from Rome. But Poppaea and her Jewish friends were not likely to forget the prisoner who had escaped from them two years before. Steps were instantly taken for his arrest. The imperial couriers rode fast, and before many weeks his retreat would be found. The Apostle was brought back to the city in the autumn or winter of 64. Very different was his journey to Rome from that which had been his lot on the former occasion, so graphically described for us by St. Luke. No kindly officer-courier—for so we must interpret the words translated as 'Augustan band'<sup>1</sup>—now did his best to make things smooth for his captive.

<sup>1</sup> Acts xxvii. 1.

On the contrary, the police had not even allowed the old man time to find his overcoat or necessary documents,<sup>1</sup> possibly the parchments which would prove his citizenship. No Christians came down the Appian Way to the Three Taverns to meet him ; the fear of the awful terror still lay heavy upon them. Instead of his ' own hired lodging ' in the Ghetto or Jewish quarter there would be a noisome dungeon. His friends had deserted him, some, as Demas, for fear of the persecution ; others, even, had turned traitor, and were willing to appear in court against him. He was hated by the mob, treated as a malefactor,<sup>2</sup> and as such now put upon his trial. That he had a trial at all, instead of the summary punishment of his brethren, witnesses to the importance attached by the Government to a show of legality in the prosecution of the leader.

There seem to have been two counts in the indictment against the Apostle. By the ancient rules of Roman law each was tried separately. The first count, probably, was complicity in the fire. But even the false witness of Alexander, the copper-smith, who had turned informer because of his recent excommunication by the Apostle,<sup>3</sup> could not upset the alibi which St. Paul was able to establish. So on this charge he ' was delivered out of the mouth of the lion,'<sup>4</sup> a phrase which possibly may point to the trial taking place before Nero himself. In the interval between the two trials he wrote in prison his immortal last words. He had ' fought the good fight,' he had ' run his race.' He had no delusions,

<sup>1</sup> 2 Tim. iv. 13.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Tim. ii. 9 ; cf. 1 Pet. iv. 15.

<sup>3</sup> 2 Tim. iv. 14 ; 1 Tim. i. 20.

<sup>4</sup> 2 Tim. iv. 17.

no hope save to depart and be with Christ. There remained the 'offering up,' and then 'the crown of righteousness.' The second count was either *majestas*, i.e. high treason—almost anything could be brought under this head—or the new crime of being a Christian, the crime of 'the Name.' On this indictment there could be but one verdict. The pride of St. Paul was that he preached Christ—of this crime he was more than willing to pay the penalty.

Round St. Paul's last days legend has woven a web of fancy, unless indeed, as we prefer to think, the living tradition of the Church at Rome has thus preserved for us the outline of the events. After his condemnation he would probably be confined in the dungeon of Roman citizens and captives of eminence, the famous Mamertine, a noisome cell far below the level of the ground, to which the only access was by a hole in the middle of the ceiling. In one corner is a spring of excellent water, which sometimes, to the discomfort of the prisoners, overflowed and covered the floor. How long St. Paul was imprisoned we do not know. But at last his release came. He was raised up from the dungeon, and conveyed by Roman soldiers past the busy quays, leaving Rome by the gate now called by his name. Almost the last object upon which his eyes would rest would be the pyramid of Caius Cestius, which thus became a monument, unconsciously erected by a pagan to the memory of a martyr, who suffered, like his Master, 'without the gate.' As a Roman citizen Paul escaped the more cruel fate of his brethren, and died, as the law ordained, by the headsman. A short distance along the Ostian Way

the procession halted; the prisoner knelt down; the sword flashed, and St. Paul was with the Lord.

Very beautiful is the story of St. Peter's own release, though, unfortunately, its historical value is not beyond dispute. When the persecution of Nero broke out, the Apostle, who had arrived in Rome, as we read it, towards the close of St. Paul's first captivity, was persuaded to flee. So in the dead of night Peter left the city, and hastened down the Appian Way, the great road that led from Rome to the East. But when he came to a place where to-day stands a chapel named *Domine quo vadis*, then—

'Lo on the darkness brake a wandering ray;  
A vision flashed along the Appian Way.  
Divinely on the pagan night it shone—  
A mournful Face—a Figure hurrying on—  
Though haggard and dishevelled, frail and worn,  
A King, of David's lineage, crowned with thorn.  
"Lord, whither farest?" Peter, wondering, cried,  
"To Rome," said Christ, "to be re-crucified."

'Whereupon Peter'—to continue the story which has come down to us from the early years of the third century—'perceived that Christ must be crucified a second time in his little servant. And he turned and went back and made answer to the Christians as they questioned him, and forthwith men laid hands upon him, and by his cross he glorified the Lord Jesus.'

Thus Peter, as our Lord had prophesied,<sup>1</sup> was 'girt' by another, and 'carried' out to die along the Aurelian Way, to a place hard by the gardens of Nero on the Vatican hill, where so many of his brethren had already suffered a cruel death. At his

<sup>1</sup> John xxi. 18, 19.

own request he was crucified head downwards, as unworthy to suffer like his Master. The story of his meeting St. Paul in the Mamertine, and of the two Apostles suffering together, are later fictions which need not detain us, the origin of which, as we shall see later, is easily explained.

According to a very ancient story, reported to us by Clement of Alexandria, the truth of which we see no reason to doubt, St. Peter, before his own death, had the pain of first seeing the martyrdom of his wife, who, as St. Paul tells us,<sup>1</sup> always accompanied her husband on his missionary travels. 'Then was the blessed Peter glad because she had been called and was now going home. So he lifted up his voice and cried to her in a comforting manner, addressing her by name, and saying, "O thou, remember the Lord!" Such was the marriage of the blessed ones and their perfect love.'

One of the reasons why we accept these ancient stories is because in recent years the spade of the archaeologist has done much to strengthen our belief in the value of tradition, as embodying, when critically sifted, a kernel of fact. We have an instance of this in the story of the burial-places of the two Apostles. According to tradition, a convert of St. Paul, a lady of distinction, Lucina by name, took away the body by night and buried it in her garden on the Ostian Way, where to-day stands in his name one of the most stately churches of Christendom. As for St. Peter, a very early document, upon which we are dependent for much of our knowledge of the Church at Rome, informs us that 'he was buried close by the place where he was crucified, on the

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. ix. 5.

Aurelian Way, near the temple of Apollo, close to the palace of Nero and the Triumphal Bridge.' By way of illustration of how the archaeologist and the historian work together we will examine both these stories in some detail. They will show the methods which we must employ in sifting the traditions of the early martyrs.

First of all let us meet an objection. The reader familiar with the mediaeval fanaticism which tossed the ashes of Hus into the Rhine, tore up Wyclif from his grave at Lutterworth and cast the dust into the Swift—two only out of many illustrations which we could give—may wonder that the Roman governors allowed the burial of the martyrs at all. But in this matter pagan Rome must not be compared with the horrible vindictiveness of the mediaeval Inquisition. To the heathen judge, the dust even of the criminal was sacred, and, by law, must be delivered up to the relatives or friends. Even a Nero dare not tamper with that right. There is nothing, therefore, in itself improbable in the story that a Roman matron of wealth should be allowed to claim and bury the bodies of St. Paul and St. Peter in her own rural freehold, for burial within the city was forbidden. What was more, the place of burial, even of a slave or a criminal, by that very fact became sacred in the eyes of the law, a place as inviolable as the holiest temple. Thus the tombs of the martyrs, whether above ground or below, could be built with as much impunity as the great tomb of the emperor Hadrian, known to-day as the Castle of St. Angelo. All rights of access to the tombs, moreover, would be fully secured, even in case of the sale of the property.

With this measure of probability already established, let us next inquire who was Lucina? We believe that her real name was Pomponia Graecina. This high-born Roman lady, the wife of Plautius, the conqueror of Britain, may claim with some certainty to have been the first Roman of whose sufferings for the sake of Christ we have any record. In the year 57 Pomponia was arraigned before the Senate on the charge of 'foreign superstition,' and, in accordance with usage, handed over by that court to the judgement of a family tribunal. She was acquitted, but for the remaining twenty-six years of her life never put off her seriousness of demeanour or her deep mourning. Critics of repute have claimed that this 'foreign superstition' was Christianity, and in the judgement of one of the most eminent scholars of the nineteenth century, Bishop Lightfoot, "this surmise, probable in itself, has been converted almost into a certainty by an archaeological discovery of recent years." For the great Italian archaeologist, the Chevalier de Rossi, has shown that in the so-called crypt of Lucina, a first-century fragment of the catacombs of Callistus, we have the name of a descendant or near kinsman of Pomponia Graecina. Evidently, then, there were Christians in her family within a generation of her trial. Furthermore, this crypt must have been built by a lady of rank and wealth, and as the name Lucina does not occur elsewhere in Roman history, though common among Roman Christians, de Rossi suggests that this is none other than the baptismal name of Pomponia Graecina, who, as Tacitus tells us, died in A.D. 83, or about the time of the erection of this crypt. A lady of the wealth and rank of Pomponia Graecina

would both have the means of obtaining the bodies of the Apostles, and also of buying at once, if she did not already possess, freehold plots near the scene of their martyrdom in which, without observation, the martyrs could be conveniently buried, and the memory of their heroism perpetuated.

We will now examine the tombs themselves; what claim have they to be original places of burial, and not the later invention of a relic-hunting age? Very early documents have handed down an exact statement of where St. Peter was executed and buried. The researches of de Rossi, Lanciani, Duchesne, and others prove that the details there given fit in accurately with what the spade has revealed. They show that St. Peter was crucified in the circus of Nero, halfway between the two end goals—a very natural place for so prominent a Christian—in other words at the foot of the obelisk which now towers in front of his church, but which then stood in a somewhat different place. In the fourth century the exact spot was marked by a small building called the chapel of the ‘Crucifixion’; this was swept away eight centuries ago. The Apostle could not be buried, of course, in the circus of Nero, but by the side of the circus there ran a road called the Via Cornelia. On the other side of this road, opposite the circus, were private gardens, several of which were already used as burial-places. In one of these, not far from the place of his crucifixion, surrounded by a high wall, but close to the high road, St. Peter was buried. When the foundations of the modern St. Peter’s were dug, the ancient road, the high wall, and a number of tombs near that of St. Peter were discovered. One of these bore the

name of Linus, who succeeded St. Peter, and of whom we know from very ancient documents that he was 'buried side by side with St. Peter in the Vatican, on October 24th' of a year unknown. Hard by this tomb of St. Peter were also buried all but two of the first fifteen bishops of Rome, until the small garden could hold no more.

The tomb of St. Peter has, probably, not been disturbed, except twice, during all the centuries. The mad emperor Elagabalus determined to run in the circus on the Vatican a race of four chariots drawn by elephants. As the course was not sufficiently wide he proceeded to destroy some of the tombs on the Via Cornelia. For safety's sake the body of St. Peter was temporarily removed to a more secret catacomb on the Appian Way, near the third milestone. In the year 258, during the persecution of Valerian, it was found necessary also to take the same precaution, and at the same time and for the same reasons to remove to the same secret place the body of St. Paul. As this removal took place on June 29, the legend arose in later years that this was the date of the martyrdom of the Apostles, and that they had suffered and been buried together.

As a matter of fact St. Paul, as we have seen, had been buried by Lucina, close to the place where he was executed. This was advisable, for burial processions of Christians through the city were only an invitation to further persecution. When in 1834 the old church of St. Paul was burnt, the excavations necessary for the present building revealed that within a few feet of the grave of the Apostle there were a number of graves of pagans, and that the

Apostle had been buried in a private garden. The main road to Ostia, which could not be diverted, ran so close to the tomb that when Constantine built his memorial church to the Apostle it could only be of unworthy proportions. So when in 386 the church was rebuilt in greater splendour, a special decree of the Senate was passed changing the orientation of the church from east to west, and thus retaining for the tomb its central place. The curious direction of the church, so contrary to the usual, is itself one of the proofs of the reality of the burial-place. But whether the body of St. Paul is still there is uncertain, for in 846 the church was sacked by the Saracens and its contents pillaged.

### III

With the murder of Nero (June 9, 68) and the accession of the Flavians there was a respite, so far, at any rate, as any organized persecution was concerned, until the second great outbreak under Domitian. The Christians were not alone in suffering from the cruel suspicions of this tyrant. Of the agony of the Roman world under his rule there can be no doubt. How great was the danger of the Christians under this tyrant may be seen in the well-known tale of Domitian's banquet to a select number of nobles :

' So he fitted up an apartment all in black. The ceiling was black, the walls were black, the pavement was black, and upon it were ranged rows of bare stone seats, black also. The guests were introduced at night without their attendants, and each might see at the head of his couch a column placed, like a tombstone, on which his own

name was engraved, with a cresset lamp above it, such as is suspended in the tombs. Presently there entered a troop of naked boys, black also, who danced a horrid dance, and then stood still, offering the guests the morsels of food which are commonly presented to the dead. The guests were paralysed with terror, expecting death at every moment—the more so as, amid the deep silence of the company, Domitian spake of the things that appertain to the state of the dead.'

In this case Domitian's delight in exquisite torture did not end tragically ; but the result was generally otherwise. If Juvenal's satire is true, that even to talk with Domitian about the weather was to cast hazards for your life, how real was the peril of those who through allegiance to Christ disdained to ascribe to a suspicious madman the divinity on which he laid such stress !

Domitian seems to have been anxious, also, to conceal his vices, perhaps from himself, certainly from others, by a scrupulous devotion to the old forms of religion. So he flung his whole strength into a religious reaction, and, in accordance with this design, sought to crush out the Christians. The policy begun by Nero was continued. It was taken for granted that all Christians were the enemies of society. But the two persecutors differed in their methods. The Neronian persecution had proved a wholesale onslaught of reckless fury, somewhat restricted, it is true, in its area ; that of Domitian was a succession of sharp, sudden, partial assaults, striking down one here and another there from malice, or jealousy, or caprice, and harassing the Church with an agony of suspense.

Domitian struck at the highest. Among his victims, probably for the crime of being a Christian,

was the ex-consul Acilius Glabrio, whom he compelled (A.D. 91) to fight against a lion and two bears ; also 'for atheism'—the common title, as we shall see later, under which Christians were condemned—Flavius Clemens, his cousin, who was either consul at that time or had but recently resigned the office, and whose two sons were Domitian's destined heirs in the Empire. The house of Clemens is, probably, still in existence, the oldest of all the old churches in Rome. From the evidence on its walls we see that at one time Clement or his family, before embracing Christianity, had addicted themselves to the worship of Mithra—a new cult of Eastern origin, very fashionable at this time in the army. It is also of interest to note that this Flavius Clemens the consul was the son of the Flavius Sabinus who, as city prefect, must have been the chief executor of Nero's hatred against the Christians. The persecution, or, rather, the heroism, of the early martyrs may have led to the son's conversion. On the same charge of 'atheism' Domitian banished Clemens' wife, Domitilla, his own niece, to Pontia, a little island in the Tyrrhene sea (A.D. 95). There in a narrow cell, which in the time of Jerome was visited by pilgrims, 'Domitilla drew out a long martyrdom for the confession of the Christian name.' She gave her fellow Christians a catacomb or cemetery, now known as Tor Marancia, in which many of her kinsfolk are buried.

Another relative of Flavius Clemens and of Domitian was certainly a Christian martyr. This was Aurelia Petronilla, the daughter of Titus Flavius Petron, an uncle of Vespasian. In her case we have an interesting instance of the kernel of truth which research may discover in the wildest traditions.

Later ages, when all but her name was forgotten by mistaken etymology made Petronilla the daughter of St. Peter, as if the word meant 'little Peter,' then added to this false foundation all sorts of fantastic details. But the story preserved in a distorted form the memory of a martyr otherwise unknown. The discovery of her tomb in 1875 has shown the real truth which underlay the tradition, and gave rise to the legends.

According to tradition, the wrath of Domitian fell on others in the Church even more illustrious than his cousins. He is said, in some accounts, to have put to death Clement the Christian doctor, the third or fourth bishop of Rome, possibly a freed-man of the consul, certainly the writer of the letter from which we have quoted the earliest evidence for the martyrdom of St. Peter and St. Paul. As he was one of the two bishops of Rome who alone, out of the first fifteen, was not buried in the tomb of St. Peter on the Vatican, and as his burial-place was lost at a very early date, the legend arose that he had been banished to the Crimea. It certainly looks as if he had been martyred away from Rome.

According to some early writers Domitian also persecuted the Apostle John. The matter is one of extreme difficulty, into a discussion of which we cannot enter. But we think that there is here a confusion between Domitian's reign at the close of the first century, and his very arbitrary regency in the early months of the year 70, while his father Vespasian was coming from the East. If due to Domitian at all, the banishment of St. John to Patmos, so familiar from the references in the *Apocalypse*,

must be referred to this early foreshadowing of the tyrant's rule.

We prefer to interpret St. John's banishment to Patmos as another result of the persecution of Nero. Hard labour for life in the mines and quarries of certain islands, especially Sardinia, formed one of the commonest punishments for Christians. Patmos, it is true, was not a regular imperial convict settlement, nor were there any mines there. But whatever the reason for the selection of the island the writer tells us that he was in Patmos as 'the brother and partaker in the tribulation' of those who were suffering elsewhere for the sake of Christ, a statement which would appear to rule out voluntary retirement.

According to an old tradition, St. Peter had been accompanied to Rome by the Apostle John. St. John was seized by the police of Nero, and condemned to be plunged into a cauldron of boiling oil, at a spot near the present Latin Gate—a horrible punishment generally reserved for slaves. By what Providence St. John escaped we know not, but in the *Apocalypse*, as we interpret it, we have the cry of horror of a witness who has known 'the Beast,' who has seen the bleeding bodies of his brother martyrs, and who in his exile at Patmos tells us of the afflictions and consolations of the children of God. In his exultant song over the burning of Rome,<sup>1</sup> as well as in the hatred of the Empire which breathes through every page, we see clearly some of the reasons which explain the hostility of the Government to the Christians. At work in the quarries, or engaged in other convict task, the seer yet dreamed his dreams

<sup>1</sup> *Apoc.* xviii.

and saw his visions. He stood on the shore of the sea and beheld 'the Beast' rise out of the waves, he saw the battle joined, he heard the clash of arms in heaven and hell, he rejoiced in the victory certain to be won, and in the descent of the City of God. Throughout the long weary years of exile his faith in the future never grows faint; he brings in a new world to redress the balance of the old.

We know nothing of the events which secured St. John's release from this convict settlement. The fall of Domitian, and the annulment of his acts, may have led to an amnesty for the Apostle, after a quarter of a century of suffering. More probably he had been banished not so much by direct imperial as by magisterial sentence, perhaps by the magistrates of Ephesus. For some cause or other, which we cannot now explain, the sentence became reversed. There are grounds also for thinking that some years before the death of Domitian the Apostle returned from Patmos to Ephesus, already his home before his exile. Very beautiful are some of the tales which are told of his life and labours there. Friends were astonished to find him in his hours of recreation stroking a tame partridge; to their inquiries he replied that the bow could not always be kept strung, and that without some recreation the spirit would lose its spring. Once he journeyed to the mountains to recover a young man who had lost his faith, and become a brigand. In his last years he became so weak that only with difficulty could he be carried to the church in the arms of his disciples. At the meetings all he could say was always the same: 'Little children, love one another.' Fortunately,

## 30 MARTYRS OF EARLY CHURCH

he was spared the horrors of martyrdom. For the  
Apostle of love peace was

The soft seal of long life's closing story.

He lived through the horrors of two great persecu-  
tions, and died quietly in extreme old age at Ephesus,  
possibly as late as the reign of Trajan.

And now the man  
Lies as he lay once, breast to breast with God.

## CHAPTER II

### THE CAUSES OF PERSECUTION

'Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake : for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad : for great is your reward in heaven : for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.'—*Matt.* v. 10-12.

'Think not that I came to send peace on earth ; I came not to send peace, but a sword.'—*Matt.* x. 34.

## ARGUMENT

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## I

PERSECUTION in its origin must be ascribed to the Jews ; it was really an attempt on the part of the Sanhedrim to crush out the new sect. But within a few years persecution ceased to be Jewish, and became Imperial. In opposition to the infant Church there arose the might of Rome. The conflict was inevitable, the direct result of the genius of Christianity. A Christianity which had ceased to be aggressive would speedily have ceased to exist. Christ came not to send peace on earth but a sword ; against the restless and resistless force of the new religion the gates of hell should not prevail. But polytheism could not be dethroned without a struggle ; nor mankind regenerated without a baptism of blood. Persecution, in fact, is the other side of aggression, the inevitable outcome of a truly missionary spirit ; the two are linked together as action and reaction. To the student of ancient history all this will appear intelligible, perhaps even axiomatic. As a modern historian has well put it : "The birth-throes of the new religion must needs be agonizing. The religion of the civilized world was passing through Medea's cauldron." Out of the cauldron there would come a new world, but not without fire and blood. Persecution, in short, was no mere incident in the life of the Church which might, possibly, have been avoided. Not so do we

read either history or Christianity. Persecution rather was the necessary antagonism of certain fundamental principles and policies in the Empire of Caesar and the Kingdom of Christ. We propose in the present chapter to explain more fully the reasons of this antagonism and hatred, and to give illustrations of the persecutions to which, in consequence, the Christians were subjected.

We have already seen that from the time of Nero it had become the settled policy of the Roman emperors, and of the wonderfully efficient police administration which they controlled, to treat the profession of Christianity as itself a crime. The new religion was regarded as a danger to the State and to civilization—an anarchist institution, which, when it showed its head, must be destroyed at once.

The charge of anarchism exposed the Christians to one peril in special. It put them outside the law and brought them under the arbitrary executive jurisdiction of the magistrates and police superintendents. These were entrusted with large powers of immediate action against all persons whose conduct was likely to lead to political trouble. Just as in modern Russia the nihilist or the innocent reformer can be arrested and sentenced on mere 'administrative order,' without the pretence of trial, so with the early Christian. Their trial could be conducted in private, the results alone being made public. In the case of Christians sentences of torture and death were within the magistrates' competence, though, curious to say, they were not allowed to inflict banishment until the time of Marcus Aurelius. But the question of the sentence was the least part of the magistrates'

care, inasmuch as the penalty was fixed ; ' in the case of base-born Christians, the fighting with beasts in the arena, or the being burnt alive ; in the case of Roman citizens, the headsman's sword.' Room was, however, afforded for ingenuities of cruelty in the preliminary tortures, and it was in the varieties of these that the greatest agony of the persecution lay. Only the more lenient or indolent magistrates would condemn to death at once ; the most active magistrates would always seek by their tortures to discover the accomplices in what they looked upon as a dark crime against the State.

The reader who has followed this argument will find an answer to the further question, Were persecutions the exception or the rule? In theory, Christianity was a hateful thing, a danger to society and the State, to be crushed out wherever found. In practice, vigilance varied considerably ; there were spasms of enforcement of the law, followed by reactions of indifference on the part of both Government and people. Persecution was also to a large extent a local matter ; an outburst of popular hatred driving the magistrates to put into force enactments that would be distasteful to some, if only because of the extra work that they involved, to others because of their consciousness of their futility. A modern illustration may make the matter clear. The Christian was looked upon very much as an anarchist or nihilist is looked upon by the police of New York or St. Petersburg. He is kept under strict observation ; the police can proceed against him any day without formality or delay. But because of that very fact the anarchist is only arrested when popular feeling or his own doings demand. If he

keep quiet the police do not trouble him. So with the Christian. "The current conceptions," writes the great German historian Mommsen, "of the so-called persecutions of the Christians labour under a defective apprehension of the rule of law and the practice of law subsisting in the Roman Empire. In reality the persecution of the Christians was a standing matter, as was that of robbers; only such regulations were put into practice at times more gently or even negligently, at other times more strictly, and were doubtless on occasion specially enforced from high quarters." These times of "enforcement from high quarters" formed the seasons of special stress and strain known to the historians of the Church as the "General Persecutions." They have received an attention which, by its very exaggeration, has spread confusion. For these "general persecutions" were but the coming to a head of a virulence against the Christians always more or less at work in the imperial system.

There was a second way in which the State might have tried to suppress the Christians other than by the method of treating them as outlaws and anarchists. The Empire was always jealous of all unregistered clubs and societies. We must own that the dread was not unwarranted, when we remember, on the one hand, the constant disaffection of the displaced oligarchy, and, on the other, the vast slave populations, the complex racial elements, and the smallness of the standing army by means of which peace was preserved. In the days of the Republic the only societies under the ban were those which met secretly or by night. But Augustus, on political

grounds, placed all societies under the strictest control. Henceforth all new societies had to obtain permission either from the emperor or from the senate. Unregistered clubs could be suppressed by the police at any time ; though here again the power of suppression must not be confused with the deed itself. Probably clubs of all sorts would be allowed to meet, more or less openly recognized though without formal licence, the more so because the police knew that they could at any time put an end to their existence.

Of the jealousy of the Empire of clubs and guilds one illustration must suffice. In Nicomedeia, one of the greatest cities of Asia Minor, a disastrous fire destroyed many houses and buildings. The authorities applied for permission to form a fire brigade of 150 men. Pliny, the then governor, forwarded their request, and promised that he would take care ' that no workman should be received into the brigade, and that it should not be used for other purposes.' But the emperor Trajan dreaded clubs, trades unions, and private societies more than fires, and so refused.

But these rigid restrictions overshot themselves and proved impossible. Laws and ordinances were paralysed by greater though impalpable forces ; by the universal craving for mutual sympathy and succour ; by the immense development of a free proletariat with collective interests of its own ; above all by the intense desire of the people to obtain relief from the dullness of their lives. Slowly but surely, the people asserted for themselves the right to organize societies, though under restrictions jealously guarded by the police.

Thus the age of the infant Church became an age of clubs and guilds, of efforts in various ways to attain the new ideas of unity and brotherhood. There were clubs of all sorts ; of old men and of young men ; of wandering traders and military veterans ; of artisans in almost every branch of industry or specialized skill, from the mule-drivers of the Alps to the men whose business it was to strew in the arena the fine sand which covered over the blood of the fallen gladiators. The Great Mother, Isis, Serapis, and other gods, all alike had their colleges, as the clubs were called ; religion, in fact, played no small part in this vast club life. We have also one club at least that was virtually a White Cross Guild, though this must be balanced by the clubs of the ' late sleepers ' and ' late drinkers ' at Pompeii. It was not difficult for any society desirous of advancing any special object to enrol itself under forms allowed by law ; though freedom was somewhat narrowed by the fact that meetings were only allowed once a month, and that no permanent head, or ' master of sacred rites,' could be appointed. Owing to these last restrictions, perhaps, or from unwillingness to lower their religion to the level of a club, or because they were aware that there were many religious clubs which had received no licence and yet existed, the early Christians either refused or neglected the opportunity and freedom of such registration, while their sacraments, love-feasts, weekly meetings, and evening services would make them an illegal society, the crushing of which would need no further formalities. As a matter of fact, the State preferred, as a rule, to proceed against the Christians, not as members of an

illegal guild, but as political agitators or anarchists of the most dangerous form. We have proof of this in the fact that at the commencement of the third century, when the Christians here and there took steps to enrol themselves as burial clubs—the first legal form of any State recognition of the Church—the persecutions did not thereby necessarily cease. The Christians were punished, not as members of an illegal society, but ‘for the Name.’

## II

To the modern reader the crime of anarchism thus alleged against Christianity seems so preposterous that he finds it hard to believe that such a charge could ever have been seriously entertained. Nothing, in fact, is more difficult in the study of history than to put oneself back into the thoughts and feelings of past centuries, and to view events from a standpoint the very foundations of which have utterly perished. The student who succeeds in doing this will discover that the notion was not so utterly absurd, after all, as at first sight it appears. To both people and bureaucrat the Christians would seem, if not exactly anarchists, yet something scarcely distinguishable. History, the judge from whose verdicts there is no appeal, has shown that the statesmen of the Empire were wrong, as history has exposed similar follies in every century. Nevertheless, the astute rulers of the Empire did not adopt their views without reasons which on the surface, as we shall see later, appeared sufficient. The difficulty of the reader in understanding this charge is increased when he remembers the known tolerance

of the Roman Empire for all sorts of religions. For Rome had slowly adopted as her own, by senatorial decree or popular verdict, a vast pantheon of alien gods. Not only had strangers introduced into the great city the various superstitions of their native countries, but Rome herself had bestowed the freedom of the city on all the gods of mankind. In the case of some of these imported gods the rites were not always remarkable for their moral power. And yet the worship of Isis, though never formally adopted by the State, was allowed in spite of attendant orgies; that of Jesus was forbidden.

Here again, as in the charge of anarchism, the reader must beware lest modern ideas pervert his judgement as an historian. We must distinguish between things that differ; for instance, the liberty of thought and the liberty of worship. Liberty of thought, so far as the Roman Government was concerned, was complete—far more so than in the times of the Inquisition, or under the rule of Laud or of the Presbyterians—if only because men were not sufficiently interested in their gods to make them a battleground. But liberty of worship was a different matter, depending chiefly on political and local considerations. The rites allowed, or even favoured, in Phrygia or Gaul could not be equally tolerated elsewhere. In this matter the Romans, like most great imperial administrators of subject races, whether in ancient or modern times, were opportunists. In Jerusalem they protected the worship of Jehovah; the Roman who passed within the portals of the temple was put to death. In Ephesus they were equally ready in the interests of 'the great goddess Diana' to crucify the Jew. Political expediency

rather than abstract theory lay at the root of their system of toleration ; toleration as a creed never entered Roman thoughts. When political considerations demanded the Romans crushed out remorselessly religion or rites which seemed to them to stand in their way.

Nor must we forget that the toleration of Rome, such as it was, was nearer akin to contempt and indifference. Now, the toleration which springs from contempt is often intensely intolerant of one thing, namely, of "enthusiasm," using the word in a sense better understood and disliked in the eighteenth century than to-day.

We will give an illustration, taken from a very old document—undated, alas ! but probably referring to the time of Diocletian—relating for us the trial of a veteran in the army named Julius, who had served twenty-six years without a stain, who had won distinction in seven campaigns, but who was now charged with the crime of being a Christian. The judge who tried the case was at first most anxious to save so old and valued a soldier. When Julius confessed that he was a Christian Maximus tried to point out an easy way of escape : ' There is nothing,' he said, ' very serious in offering some incense, and then going on your way.' ' Do you think,' retorted Julius, ' that I, who for twenty-six years was never charged with a military crime, who was faithful in that which was lesser, am likely to be unfaithful in that which is better ? ' The humane Maximus tried again. ' Julius,' he said, ' I see that you are a man of common sense. Take my advice and sacrifice. If you think it a sin, let it be put down to my account. I will force you to it, that it may

look as if you had been unwilling to comply. Then you can go home without fear. You will receive the soldier's largesse, and nobody will give you any further trouble.' But Julius was not to be led astray by the specious argument. 'Neither Satan's money, nor your crafty arguments, can entice me from the eternal Lord.' Maximus lost his temper; he could not understand such 'obstinacy.' 'If you don't sacrifice I will cut off your head.' 'That is a good thought,' replied the veteran, 'give the sentence that I may obtain my heart's desire.' 'If you were suffering for your country or the laws yours would be everlasting renown.' 'I am suffering for the laws,' said Julius, 'for the laws of God.' 'Laws,' retorted Maximus, 'given you by a dead man who was crucified. What a fool you are to make more of a dead man than of a living emperor!' 'He died for our sins,' was the solemn answer, 'that He might give us eternal life.' The governor was bewildered. 'Sacrifice and live, then,' he said. 'If I choose life,' replied the veteran, 'I choose death; if I die I live for ever.' The patience of Maximus was exhausted. He gave orders that Julius should be beheaded. He would feel that in sentencing such an "enthusiast" to death he was ridding the earth of a madman. We see this same contempt for "enthusiasm" breaking out time after time; in the sneers of Pilate and Agrippa, and in the arguments of magistrates for over three centuries.

The reader will not fail to notice one result of the Roman idea of toleration. Toleration was a local matter, if only for the simple reason that polytheism was essentially a local matter. Each god had his rights, within certain areas; but each god must be

careful to respect the rights of his neighbour. To ignore this rule would lead to chaos, or rather the end of the whole system. Now an absolute or universal faith, provided it makes any real demands on its devotees, is inevitably forced to come into conflict with polytheism. The claims of the local and of the universal, each to be dominant, cannot be reconciled. Thus the Christians were not persecuted because of their creed, as such, but because of their universal claims, and of the aggressive temper with which these claims were emphasized.

The failure to understand this ground of their persecutions lies at the root of the constant complaints of early Christian apologists as to the different treatment measured out to them and 'to the men who worship trees and rivers and mice and cats and crocodiles.' Heathenism was content to live and let live. But for Christianity this compromise with other faiths was an impossibility, at any rate in its earlier and purer days. To the Roman governor it was the Christian, not himself, that was intolerant. With sublime audacity the followers of Jesus proclaimed that Christ must be all and in all. Christianity emblazoned on its banners its loathing and disdain for the cults around: 'We know that no idol is anything in the world, and that there is no God, but one.'<sup>1</sup> And the Christians demonstrated their convictions by the logic of the rack and the stake. We to-day, who suffer from the curse of a compromise with the world which gnaws at the heart of the Church, could not wish it otherwise. An accommodated Christianity would never have conquered the world.

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. viii. 4.

This absoluteness of the Christian faith, this intolerance of others, as the Romans considered it, led to the charge against the religion of Jesus of anarchism, because of its necessary dissolvent effect on the current religions, and its tendency to endanger the imperial peace and the political unity. For this anarchism on its religious side the Romans had a special name. They called it sacrilege, or atheism. From his own standpoint the Roman was right. The Christians were clearly 'atheists' ("men without gods") who proclaimed loudly that the gods—radiant Apollo, Diana of the Ephesians, even Jupiter himself—were but malignant 'demons' ensconced behind wood and stone; the imps of Satan, who had thus introduced the worship of themselves in order, as the early Christians believed, 'that they might obtain their favourite food of flesh fumes and blood.' With these hordes of hell there could be no compromise: 'though there be that are called gods, yet to us there is one God the Father, of whom are all things, and we unto Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and we through Him.'<sup>1</sup> This was the foundation of the Christian faith, the first article of the creed. Of the aggressive intolerance, as the Romans deemed it, thus produced we may take the case of Symphorian, who was martyred at Autun in Burgundy, on August 22, 179. The chief worship of Autun was that of the Phrygian goddess Cybele. At a great feast of the goddess it was noted that Symphorian took no part; he was consequently arrested and brought before the governor. 'Are you a Christian?' he asked in surprise; 'there are

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. viii. 5.

not many who profess that name in these parts.' On Symphorian's reply that he was, he was asked why he would not worship Cybele. 'I do not worship the image of a devil,' was the bold answer. 'Give me leave, and I will gladly smash it up with a mallet.' We can scarcely wonder that the Romans called such uncompromising monotheists by the hard name of 'atheists.' The Christians, they said, reduce our deities to devils. As one pagan speaker puts it: 'They despise the temples as dead houses, they scorn the gods, they mock sacred things.' To this charge there was no possible answer, inasmuch as it was true; the glory and danger of the Christian faith.

### III

The more powerful reason for the charge of anarchism yet remains. The Christians professed that 'nothing was more alien to them than politics'; in reality, from the standpoint of the Roman governor, they were intense politicians of a most dangerous type. The Christians were condemned, not because of their theological views, but because of their supreme loyalty to a law and a throne outside the Roman law and throne. They were not anxious to run counter to the laws and customs of the Empire. But if at any time such law and customs came into conflict with the will of God, as interpreted by themselves and their standards, they must, they pleaded, obey God rather than man. To the Roman executive, which demanded absolute submission of will and life from all its subjects, such a doctrine could not be other than a danger to the State, once its

purport was clear. They could not overlook the existence in their midst of 'a new people,' as they called themselves, of cosmopolitan character, who proclaimed openly that 'they looked for a kingdom'; who went so far as to 'frame laws for themselves according to their own purposes'; who refused to obey any laws which ran contrary to those of their Master; and who daily grew in numbers, influence, and wealth.

This fundamental antagonism of the Church and the Empire came to a head in the refusal of the Christians to take any part in the common religion of the Empire. For Augustus, the better to work out those ideas of equality in citizenship and government for which the Empire stood, as contrasted with the older Republic, had found it necessary to institute throughout the Empire a common religion, the worship of the 'Fortune or Genius of the Empire,' to give a unity to provinces otherwise diverse in creed, language, and custom. This was the beginning of a universal church with a priesthood, sacrifices, and temples of its own, in conception and aim very similar and yet very different from the Catholic Church with which it was destined to come into conflict. But, such as it was, the worship of Rome and of the reigning Caesar undoubtedly supplied something which the local polytheisms had failed to give, a common religious link holding together the innumerable races and creeds of a dominion that stretched from the Irish Sea to the Euphrates.

The Christians alone stood out against this servile and degrading cult. Whatever the political value of the new religion in the consolidation of the Empire, they would never bow the knee to the emperors.

No patriotic words as to the Genius of the Empire, no sophisms of philosophers, for example of the elder Pliny, that 'for a mortal to help mortals is the essence of deity,' no subtleties about the divine life of the State and its connexion with an unseen order, could deceive the Christian into forgetting the degradation for God and man alike of this system of apotheosis. He saw clearly the insult to God; the putting the Genius of the Empire in the place of Divine Providence, the attributing to man prerogatives which belong solely to the Almighty. He realized the degradation of man resulting from thus fixing the worship of men upon one of themselves, however exalted. He knew that in all ages a man's views of his god are the measures of his ideals for himself and his neighbour. He was aware of all that could be said in favour of the new religion by its supporters; that it was a symbol of unity, the keystone of the imperial policy, an incarnation of the race's solidarity, the recognition of a divine foundation for order and empire, and the like. Such specious arguments did not move him. For the Christian there was but one Lord, to whom he owned supreme allegiance; this he was prepared to prove by the renunciation of all things, even life itself. For the Christian the unity of the race was symbolized, not by a Tiberius or even a Marcus Aurelius, but by the incarnation of the Second Adam; in the Man Christ Jesus alone was the hope of humanity. This apotheosis of Jesus, to look at the matter for the moment from the standpoint of the heathen philosopher, he claimed to be on a different footing from the apotheosis of Vespasian or Marcus. Leaving on one side all question of character, the one

was the apotheosis of a supreme renunciation, the other the idolatry of success. . And there is nothing so fatal in the long run to all higher instincts and aspirations as the idolatry of success, whether in the form of a second-century emperor or a twentieth-century millionaire.

This imperial cult, because of its universal character and obligations, furnished an easy touchstone whereby the Christians could be distinguished. Moreover it proved a useful means of summary conviction. The alternative, 'Caesar is Lord' and 'Christ is Lord,' was in itself a judicial process, only needing an altar of Caesar or the Fortune of the Empire and its usual emblems to be complete. The Christian who refused this sacrifice fell automatically under the charge of *majestas*, i.e. of treason to the emperor, who represented in his own person the majesty, wisdom, and beneficent power of Rome. Nor was the peril slight. The presidents of the diets of the different provinces of the Empire were armed with ample powers for calling in the aid of the police against all who refused to take part in this popular cult ; from the middle of the second century sacrifice was compulsory.

The name of the Christians who thus suffered for their refusal to worship Caesar and Rome is legion. In the Roman province of Asia the temple of Rome and Augustus was first erected in B.C. 29 at Pergamum, the official capital, ' where the throne of Satan is.' The writer of the *Apocalypse* has handed down to us the name of one brave Christian, Antipas, ' my faithful witness,' who suffered death there rather than join in the worship of ' the Beast.' And from the days of Antipas to the close of the era

of persecution the chain of those who refused to take part in this degrading ritual was never broken. In fact, apart from all questions of using the worship of Caesar as a test, the annual festivals instituted in every province of the Empire on the emperor's name-day were generally the occasions for the breaking out against the Christians of the smouldering fires of hatred. On these days the magistrates, even if otherwise averse to cruelty, were not anxious, for political reasons, to restrain the people from any exhibition of loyalty. The festival of Caesar supplied all that was needed; vast crowds gathered together from every city of the province; the presence of the official diets and of judges with power of summary conviction; beasts of prey already procured for the games—a most important point this, lions and tigers were not always in stock—a frenzied jingoism on the part of the mob, and an endeavour on the part of the Jews to divert attention from themselves to the hated Christian. Of this connexion we have illustrations, as we shall see in our next chapter, in the martyrdom of Polycarp, who was burned at Smyrna on Caesar's festival, in the great outbreak at Lyons, which took place when crowds had poured into the city for the annual festivities in honour of 'Rome and Augustus,' and in the sacrifice to the beasts of Perpetua and her companions 'on Caesar's birthday.'

As an illustration of the attitude of the Christians to this worship of Caesar, and the persecution thereby involved, we will take the case of seven men and five women from the village of Scili in Numidia, who suffered at Carthage as the result of the persecution under Marcus Aurelius (July 17, 180). When

brought before the court the pro-consul, irritated evidently by their claim that Christianity was the only religion, addressed them: 'We too have a religion, and ours is a simple one. We swear by the fortune of our lord the emperor, and pray for his safety. You should do the same.' One of the Christians, Speratus, was not prepared to allow that his religion was not as 'simple' as that of Saturninus the governor. 'If you will listen quietly,' he said, 'I will tell you the secret of simplicity.' Saturninus had not come to argue: 'Swear,' he replied, 'by the Genius of the Empire.' Speratus at once refused, in words that could not fail to seem full of treason, 'I do not recognize an empire of this world. I serve that God whom no man hath seen or can see. The Lord I acknowledge is the Emperor of all kings and all nations.' 'Honour to Caesar as Caesar,' added a woman, named Donata, 'but reverence to God alone.' 'We reverence no one except our God in heaven,' replied a third. 'Would you like some time to think it over?' asked the Governor. 'What is the use?' replied Speratus; 'the matter is as plain as can be.' On their continued refusal to recant, or to accept a remand for thirty days, the formal sentence was pronounced:

'Speratus and the rest having confessed that they are Christians, and having refused to render worship to Caesar, I pronounce that they be punished with the sword.'

When the recital was finished, 'We give God thanks,' cried Speratus. 'Thanks be to God,' added Nartzalus, 'to-day we shall be in heaven.' 'March them off,' ordered the pro-consul. 'Thanks be to God,'

they cried as one man, and were at once beheaded for the Name of Christ.

This refusal of the Christians to sacrifice to the emperor came perilously near, at times, to treason. Eusebius, for instance, tells us of a certain Procopius, a reader in a church of Palestine, who when commanded to offer libations to the four rulers among whom Diocletian had divided the Roman world, retorted by quoting a verse from Homer :

‘The rule of many is not good; let there be one ruler and one king.’

This intrusion into current politics so incensed the magistrate that Procopius was immediately beheaded. Two other Christians in the same persecution, Zacchaeus, a deacon of Gadara, and Alphaeus, a reader in the church of Caesarea, suffered tortures and death for declaring that there was but ‘one King, Christ Jesus.’

#### IV

Hitherto in our study of Persecution we have dealt with the relations of the Church and the Empire in their broadest outlines. We have seen that persecution was no accident, but the necessary result of certain main principles in Christianity itself, which brought the new faith into conflict with the outer world. We have also noted that the state of conflict was continuous though persecution itself was intermittent. Periods, long or short, of comparative security elapsed, in which they suffered little save the curses and scowls of their neighbours. But the smouldering fires of popular hatred were ever

liable to break out into sudden flame. For the early Christians lived under the shadow of a great hate. We purpose in the remaining sections of this chapter to examine the reasons for this hate. We shall first point out two permanent causes of persecution, apart from all political or social questions. The one was the ill-will of the Jews; the other the superstition of the heathen. We shall then inquire into the factors in the life or thought of the Church itself which brought upon it the suspicion and hatred of the world. Illustrations from the annals of the martyrs will be given of the working of all these forces.

Judaism, in spite of its aggressive proselytism, had been recognized as a lawful religion by the founder of the Empire, Julius Caesar, and endowed by himself and his successors with many privileges. The Jews alone were exempt from offering sacrifices in the temples of Caesar and Rome; nor were they under the obligation of military service. To these franchises the destruction of Jerusalem made no difference; if anything, the loss of a local centre of intense nationalism and possible danger made concession by the emperors the more easy.

The Jews were the more dangerous to the Christians because of the extent of their dispersion and the greatness of their numbers. Go where he would the Christian found the Jew already there. There were Jews in nearly every province of the Empire; but their numbers were greatest in Syria, Egypt, and Asia Minor. In Egypt they totalled a million, or nearly one-sixth of the whole population. In Alexandria, where they governed themselves by means of a council, they occupied two out of the five

wards of a city of half a million inhabitants. In Syria, especially Antioch and Asia Minor, their numbers were even greater. In Rome they would number in the days of St. Paul between ten and fifteen thousand in a city of close upon a million. Altogether the Jews formed seven per cent. of the total population of the Empire, or at the least computation between five and six millions in all.

Mere numbers formed the least part of their influence. In some respects, though without a country, or centre of worship, the Jews were the most united if the most scattered race in the Empire ; in wealth, then, as now, the bankers of the world ; strongest of all because of the rigid exclusiveness of their religion, a weapon more potent to guard their race than fortified frontiers. Nor must we under-rate their social influence. In spite of the hatred felt for the Jews by the people at large, Judaism had attracted to itself proselytes and semi-proselytes in every land. These were not the less influential because both in motives and character they were curiously mixed. In Rome Judaism became at one time a fashionable form of dilettanteism, circumcision included, until in the second century this last was stopped by edict. Nor was the power of the Jews the less because they were massed in crowded ghettos. Then, as now, the Jews refused to settle in the country. But Christianity was also at this period a town religion, which for the first three centuries made little impression on the rural districts. Jews and Christians faced each other in the same cities, severed by a hatred that daily grew more intense.

The hatred of Jew and Christian was the more bitter inasmuch as it thus partook of the nature of a family quarrel. As such it seems at first to have been regarded by the Romans, with a consequent indifference on their part to the real meaning of Christianity. This official indifference, of which we have many illustrations in the *Acts*,<sup>1</sup> only stirred up the Jews the more vehemently to make the distinction between themselves and the Christians clear to their rulers. We have seen how the great fire of A.D. 64 gave them their opportunity. They succeeded once for all in convincing the police, who had hitherto been in some doubt, that the Christians were not members of the synagogues, and therefore were not entitled to the political and religious franchises which enrolled members of the synagogues received. This distinction secured, the Jews lost no occasion of arousing against the Christians the enmity of the bureaucracy. Said Justin Martyr, a famous Christian writer of the second century: 'The Jews treat us as open enemies, putting us to death and torturing us, just as you heathens do, whenever they can.' As a rule their part in persecution was done by secret methods, the stirring up of the heathen mob, the scattering broadcast of horrible charges as to the Christians and their Saviour. In all persecutions, at any rate in Asia, we may detect the Jew in the background. We shall see illustrations of this in the cases of Polycarp and Pionius. To the Jew also the Roman governor was generally indebted for the distorted impression he formed of the religion of the prisoner before him. We have already referred to the martyr Conon, the last known kinsman of Jesus,

<sup>1</sup> Acts **xxi.** 31; **xviii.** 14-15; **xxv.** 19.

an old gardener upon an imperial estate in Pamphylia. In the course of his examination the magistrate let out the secret of his disdain :

‘ Why are you such a fool as to call a man God, and that, too, one who died a violent death ? For so have I learnt accurately from the Jews, both as to his race, and his death by crucifixion. They brought his memoirs, and read them out to me. Leave off this folly, and enjoy life along with us.’

## V

Not less universal as a factor in the persecution of the Christians was the superstition of the heathen. All the disasters of nature were traced to the offended gods, who had thus visited upon the people the neglect and sacrilege of the Christians. ‘ If,’ writes Tertullian, ‘ the Tiber floods the City, or the Nile refuses to rise, or the sky withholds its rain, if there is an earthquake, famine, or pestilence, at once the cry is raised : Christians to the lions.’

The superstition of the heathen further charged the Christians with the practice of magic arts. Of the widespread nature of this belief in the second and third centuries the proofs are overwhelming. ‘ Where are the magicians, your teachers in this jugglery ? ’ said the governor Marcian to the martyr Achatius. ‘ You are sorcerers,’ he added, ‘ bringing in some new kind of religion.’ To the dire magic of the Christians was attributed also the failures of the current religion. The heathen believed that by their superior exorcisms the Christians could reduce to silence oracles which hitherto had proved the fortune of a whole country ; that their black arts

caused the customary manifestations of the supernatural to miscarry.

We have an interesting illustration of the current superstition in its relation to persecution in the career of the impostor Alexander of Abonutichos, as described for us by the master-hand of the Greek writer Lucian. This rogue Alexander, 'a fine, handsome man with a real touch of divinity about him,' set up in his native town of Abonutichos an oracle of the popular god of healing, Aesculapius. Lucian describes minutely how the trick was done. Brazen tablets were buried in the temple of Apollo at Chalcedon, announcing that Aesculapius would shortly pay a visit to Pontus. The 'chewing of soap-wort,' a 'serpent's head of linen,' and the 'burying of a goose-egg in which he had inserted a new-born reptile,' did the rest. The clever rascal, after proper formalities, dug up the buried egg, 'and announced that here he held Aesculapius.' When the crowd saw the reptile, 'they raised a shout, hailed the god, blessed the city, and every mouth was full of prayers.' 'Alexander proclaimed that on a stated day the god would give answers to all comers. Each person was to write down his wish and the object of his curiosity, fasten the packet with thread, seal it with wax. Alexander would receive these . . . and return the packets with the seals intact and the answers attached.'

Lucian adds, for the information of the unskilled in these matters, three methods by which the seals could be opened and refastened without fear of detection. Alexander's oracles 'were either crabbed and ambiguous, or unintelligible.' Of the latter, the following may serve : 'Morphi ebargulis for night

Chnenchiorante shall leave the light.' But unintelligible or ambiguous, the trick succeeded. At a fixed charge of a shilling per oracle, Alexander made something like £3,000 a year. His agents were everywhere, spreading abroad, on commission, the fame of the new god. We must not prolong the astonishing story. But it is of importance for our present purpose to note that when Alexander was 'instituting his mysteries on the first day proclamation was made to this effect: If there be any atheist or Christian here spying upon our rites, let him depart in haste. . . . Alexander himself led the litany with the cry, "Christians, begone." The crowd responded; for the evil eye of the Christians, to say nothing of their sorceries, could ruin even an oracle of Aesculapius.

Another interesting illustration is the story of the martyrdom, in the year 306, of the five sculptors of Sirmium, a town in modern Hungary. At one of Diocletian's quarries there was an encampment of 622 masons and carvers, under a number of 'philosophers,' as the foremen seem to have been nicknamed. Among these masons there were four Christians of special ability, named Claudius, Symphorian, Nicostratus, and Castorius, who won the praise of the great emperor Diocletian by quarrying a single block of stone, out of which they carved an image of the sun in his chariot, the whole group being not less than twenty-five feet in length. They were well rewarded, and further commissioned to carve a number of columns in porphyry. One of the gang working with the Christians found that his tools broke more frequently than those of his comrades. He asked the reason, and was told

that it was because they were Christians and made the sign of the cross over all their work. He thereupon requested his comrades to bless his tools also, and was so impressed by the good results that he asked to be received as a disciple. So one night he was baptized by Bishop Cyril of Antioch, who for three years had been working as a slave in the quarries, one of the many victims of Diocletian's cruel persecution.

The little band soon fell into trouble, through the jealousy of their pagan comrades, when a few months later Diocletian ordered the five to carve an image of Aesculapius surrounded by a number of Cupids. The Christians, who had carved without demur an image of the sun, refused to touch the statue of the god of health. For of all the gods the most detested by the Christians was Aesculapius, whose title of 'saviour' or 'healer' seemed to them blasphemy against Jesus. So they set to work instead on the Cupids. The 'philosophers' saw their opportunity, and accused the stonemasons of Christianity and magic. Diocletian, at first, was vexed. 'I will not have my skilled workmen reviled,' he said. But after some delay his hatred of Christianity, and his disappointment at the poor botched statue of Aesculapius which the other masons had turned out, prevailed over his love of good artists. The stonemasons were thrown into prison. After nine days in jail, as they still persisted in their confession, Diocletian ordered the five confessors to be beaten with scorpions, then enclosed in lead, and thrown into the river Save.

## VI

We now turn to the elements in the life and faith of the early Church which brought against it the charge of anarchism, and the wrath of both mob and empire. One caution must be given at the outset. Persecution as a rule did not affect the average member of the Church; it fell hardly upon the out-and-outs.

There were several internal causes of the hatred felt for the Church by government and people. First, though not foremost in importance, was the effect of Christianity as a disintegrating factor upon the family—including the tendency among many of the early Christians to discourage marriage. Of the suspicions thereby caused we may give as an instance the examination on April 27, 304, of the martyr Pollio, a 'reader' in the church of Cibalae (Vinkovce), a town in modern Hungary. 'What is your name?' asked the judge. 'Pollio.' 'Are you a Christian?' 'Yes.' 'What office do you hold?' 'I am the chief of the readers.' 'What do you mean by a reader?' 'One whose duty it is to read God's word to the congregation.' 'You mean,' retorted the judge, 'those people who impose upon silly women, and tell them that they must not marry.' As Pollio refused to sacrifice he was finally condemned to be burnt.

Even where marriages were allowed, intermarriage with heathen was forbidden; a necessary command if the purity of the Christian faith should be maintained. The effect, however, must have been constant friction with heathen families, who would bitterly resent what they would regard as the

Christian pride and aloofness. They would feel, not without justice, that the Christians despised the world in which they lived, and were somewhat contemptuous of its race and family interests. 'Tampering with domestic relations'<sup>1</sup> was one of the earliest charges brought against the followers of Jesus.

All this was inevitable. Strife in the home is the first effect of missionary effort, whether in the second or the twentieth century, and is a greater difficulty in modern India than it was in the Roman world. One example must suffice for many, the case of the lady Alce of Smyrna, whom one of the earliest martyrs, Ignatius, calls 'that name beloved by me.' Her brother Herod, chief of the police, and her father Nicetes were foremost in securing the arrest of Polycarp. From a comparison of dates of Ignatius and Polycarp we see that Alce must have embraced the new religion as a young girl, through causes of which we know nothing, while her father even in old age was still bitterly opposed to the Christians.

Moreover, with the best intentions in the world, and under the most judicious missionaries, the proselytizing efforts of the Christians, by thrusting a wedge into the life of the home, could not fail at times to give rise to scandals. We see this in the case of Dativus, a senator of Carthage, who, in the great persecution of Diocletian, had looked after the village church of Abitini, when it was basely deserted by its bishop. Forty-nine of the little flock were brought to Carthage, and tried on the charge of having held the Lord's Supper. When Dativus was stretched on the hobby-horse, an accusation was laid against him by a certain Fortunatian, a noble

<sup>1</sup> 1 Pet. iv. 15 (Greek).

barrister of Carthage, who afterwards became a Christian, but who was at this time still a heathen,

“ that in the absence of our father, while I was at my studies, he seduced our sister Victoria and led her and two other girls away from this great city to Abitini. In fact, he never entered our house without beguiling the girls’ minds with his soft soap.” Victoria interrupted with a Christian’s freedom of speech : “ I set out and journeyed to Abitini of my own free will, and not at the persuasion or in the company of Dativus. I can call citizens to prove this.”

Towards the close of the trial Victoria was offered her freedom if she would leave the other Christians and go home with her brother. ‘ No,’ she replied, ‘ I am a Christian, and my brethren are those who keep the commandments of God.’

Dativus would not be alone in having to face such charges. We may be sure that the heathen interpreted the most innocent acts into occasions of scandal. Thus we read, during the same persecution, of several Christian girls from Thessalonica, who ran off to the mountains without their fathers’ knowledge. One of the accusations against them was that ‘ they had wilfully kept a great quantity of the parchments, tablets, notes, and writings of the wicked Christians of all ages. Nevertheless, if you will acknowledge the gods, and eat of the sacrifices to-day, you shall be free. Are you prepared to do so?’ Irene, their leader, at once refused. After a vain effort to find out with whom they had been living, or who had supplied them with bread, or persuaded them to keep their Bibles, they were condemned. By the sentence he passed upon Irene, the judge evidently considered that they were women

of frail reputation. After moral tortures worse than death she was finally burnt alive.

## VII

A more important cause of popular hatred lay in the misunderstanding of the nature of certain Christian rites and ceremonies. The conviction that the Christian conventicles were orgies of lewdness, and receptacles of every crime, took hold of the popular mind with the terrible vehemence of an aversion that resists all arguments and heeds not refutation. In part these charges were due to Christian secrecy, a necessary result of the aloofness which underlay their faith. But because of this secrecy the heathen alleged that Christian services were scenes of shameless lust. Of this secrecy and the jealousy with which it was guarded, we have an instance at Rome, in the persecution of Valerian, in the story of the young acolyte Tarsicius. There had been a service in one of the chapels in the Catacombs that in times of persecution were used for the purpose, and Tarsicius was carrying the Eucharist concealed beneath his coat to certain confessors in prison. As he walked down to the Appian Way he met a band of soldiers. They stopped him and asked what he was carrying. On his refusal to uncover his treasure the soldiers beat him until he died.

The charge of cannibalism, so often brought against the Christians by the mob, was the result of a misunderstanding of the nature of the Christian Sacraments. The carrying of infants to the church to obtain baptism was twisted, as in the case of the

Jews in the Middle Ages, into a horrible design. Baptism was mixed up in popular imagination with the Eucharist, the bread of which was supposed to be used 'to collect the gushing blood' of the babes. For us the language of the Lord's Supper, hallowed by nineteen hundred years of association, has lost its original and startling daring. But the words: 'except ye eat My flesh and drink My blood, ye have no life in yourselves' would sound more than strange to heathen ears. To the heathen controversialist Porphyry, it seemed

'trivial and absurd, surpassing all absurdity and trivial coarseness, for a man to eat human flesh and drink the blood of his fellow tribesman or relative, and thereby win eternal life. Tell me what greater coarseness could you introduce into life, if you practise that habit? What crime will you start more accursed than this loathsome profligacy?'

## VIII

A further cause of persecution lay in the frequent 'atheistic' attacks by the Christians upon the heathen temples and ritual. A few illustrations will show how this issued in martyrdom. We may take a case reported for us at some length, that of Leo of Patara, an aged Christian of Asia Minor, whose friend Paregorius had suffered death in the persecution of Decius. Leo, it would seem, was deeply grieved that he had not suffered with his friend, and so obtained the martyr's crown.

'Now it happened in those days that the pro-consul came to Patara and celebrated the feast of Serapis, taking occasion against the Christians and compelling all to sacrifice to idols. And when many were hastening to the

temple Leo withdrew in indignation to the place where rested the bones of the blessed martyr Paregorius. There he poured out his wonted supplications and returned home, wrapped in the thought of the glorious deeds of his friend. After a while he fell asleep and dreamed a dream. He thought that he saw a mighty storm, and a raging torrent, with Paregorius and himself in the midst of the floods. When he awoke he set out at once for the burial-place of his friend, nor would he choose a quiet road, but the one which lay through the midst of the market. And when he came to the temple (of Fortune) and saw the lanterns and tapers burning before the shrine, he tore down the lanterns with his hands, and trampled the tapers beneath his feet, crying out the while: "If you think the gods have any power let them defend themselves."

The inevitable result followed. On his return to the city—for the outrage would seem to have taken place very early in the morning—Leo was arrested. Taking pity on his white hairs, the judge offered to pardon the insult done to the gods and to forgo the act of sacrifice if only Leo would repeat after him the words, 'Great are the gods.' 'Yes,' replied the old man, 'great in destroying the souls of those who believe in them.' So Leo was sentenced to be dragged to the top of a high rock and pitched into the torrent which flowed through the town. 'But that brave athlete of Christ,' worn out with the lashings, died on the way. Even after the nominal conversion of the Empire to Christianity it was not always safe for Christians to commit outrages against the heathen temples, in spite of the fact that by the law of 341 they were closed and their sacrifices forbidden. At Tipasa, in Mauretania, a little girl called Saloa crept into a temple, seized a bronze god and threw it from the top of a cliff. But the heathen caught her, and hurled her over the same

cliff to rejoin at the bottom of the sea the idol she had destroyed.

Another case is that of a young Syrian, a recruit called Theodore, in the persecution of Diocletian. Arrested for his Christianity, he was brought before the authorities of Amasea, the capital of Pontus. When asked why he would not sacrifice, the rough enthusiast replied,

' I know nothing of your gods. They don't exist. You are wrong in calling seducing impostors of devils by the name of gods. My God is Christ, the only begotten Son of God.'

The authorities gave him a little time for 'reconsidering his insanity,' and did not even put him under arrest. Theodore used his reprieve for a different purpose. That night he set on fire the temple of a goddess known as the Great Mother. Building and statue were alike reduced to ashes. Theodore made no attempt to escape, but boldly proclaimed the deed. He was condemned to be burnt, and 'so passed to God by a splendid road, singing: "I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth."'

## IX

The governing classes persecuted Christianity because they saw clearly its political danger; the lower classes had an intense hatred for the new religion because it was a thing apart. The Christians, according to their own confession, were a 'peculiar' people, with peculiar views of their own, and, what was worse, proud of their peculiarity.

That the 'peculiarity' of Christianity exposed its disciples to various persecutions needs no evidence, and but little illustration. The same result has happened in every age and clime, as it is happening to-day on every mission-field. The conscientious Christian could not save himself from thrusting forward his peculiarities before a society which had surrounded every act of life with pagan ritual. As Milman has well put it: "Paganism met him in every form, in every act and function of every day's business; not merely in the graver offices of the State, but in the civil and military acts of public men; in the senate which commenced its deliberations with sacrifice; in the camp, the centre of which was a consecrated temple. The pagan's domestic hearth was guarded by the Penates, or by the ancestral gods of his family or tribe; by land he travelled under the protection of one tutelary divinity, by sea of another; the birth, the bridal, the funeral had each its presiding deity: the very commonest household utensils were cast in mythological forms; he could scarcely drink without being reminded of libations to the gods; and the language itself was impregnated with constant allusions to the popular religion."

In every direction the disciple of Jesus was beset with difficulties. In social life, in the life of business, in the professional world, in politics, and in his amusements he was a marked man. From many offices in the State, as well as from some professions, the duties of which involved the performance of heathen rites, the conscientious Christian, in the opinion of many, was necessarily excluded.

The most difficult question of all was that of the

army. The reader should remember that the army was not only the symbol of patriotism ; it was also, especially in the third century, the refuge of a trembling world against the growing power of the barbarians. Should the Christian serve at all, or, if unable to escape this obligation, what was his duty? Opinion on the army varied considerably. Many of the Fathers held that ' Christians must not fight, even if the emperor requires us so to do.' Others, of equal eminence, were not so extreme, and preferred to point to the many Christian soldiers in the pages of the New Testament, above all to the story of the believing centurion at the foot of the Cross. As a matter of fact the army never lacked Christians, true heroes of God, who were prepared, if need be, to lay down their lives rather than deny their Christ. The proportion of martyr-soldiers is uncommonly large, and is, no doubt, to be explained by the fact that in times of stress and persecution detection of Christians who were soldiers was easy, escape, in other words desertion, impossible; while the first effort of the Government when persecution broke out would be directed to the purging the army of the accursed taint. The number of Christians who refused to serve in the army, and suffered in consequence, would appear to have been but few ; the Christians in the army who, when called upon to confess their faith, laid down their lives for their Master form a goodly company.

Of Christians who refused to enlist, and suffered in consequence, we may take as an illustration the case of a youth called Maximilian of Theveste, in Africa (March 12, 295). Curious to say his father, though a Christian, obtained his living by the army.

His business was to collect the money of conscripts who wished to commute service for a fine. On his being pressed as a recruit Maximilian refused to serve, and so was brought before the pro-consul Dion. 'I cannot serve,' said Maximilian, 'I am a Christian.' The magistrate paid no attention to the excuse, and ordered the attendants to measure him. 'He is five foot ten,' was the answer. 'Enrol him then at once,' said Dion. 'Cut off my head if you like,' cried the youth, 'but I cannot be a soldier of the world, I am a soldier of my God.' They hung the leaden badge of service round his neck. 'I don't accept it,' he said; 'I have already the badge of service under Christ.' 'I will soon dispatch you to your Christ,' retorted Dion. 'I wish you would do so,' was the calm reply. 'Remember that you are a young man,' argued Dion, 'service in the army is the proper thing for a young man.' 'My service,' answered Maximilian, 'is for my own Lord. I cannot become a soldier.' So Maximilian persisted to the end, and with 'a bright smile' obtained his 'crown.' 'Give to the executioner,' he said, turning to his father, 'the soldier's dress you made ready for me.'

The difficulty of a Christian in the army was increased if he were appointed a non-commissioned officer, for instance a centurion, for then he was bound to perform, or at least to witness in silence, certain sacrifices, or else resign at once office and life. This happened in many cases, of some of which we still possess the records. We may take as an example the story of Marcellus, 'a centurion of the Trajan legion,' stationed at Tangiers. The birthday of the emperor Maximian was being celebrated with

the usual sacrifices when Marcellus, horrified at the idolatry that he saw around him, suddenly flung away his military belt and his centurion's vine-stick (the symbol of his office) and cried,

'I am a soldier of Jesus Christ, the eternal King. I have done with fighting for your emperors. I despise the worship of deaf and dumb gods of wood and stone. If the terms of service are such that one is bound to offer sacrifices to gods and emperors, then I refuse to be a soldier.'

He was, of course, arrested and tried (October 30, 303). 'Were you in service as a centurion?' asked the deputy prefect. 'I was,' Marcellus replied. 'How came you then to be so mad as to renounce your oath and speak like that?' 'There is no madness in those who fear the Lord,' was the reply. 'Did you say the very words given here in the commandant's report?' 'I did.' 'Did you throw away your vine-stick?' 'I did.' For a breach of discipline so daring there could be but one issue. As he was led away to be beheaded, Marcellus turned to the prefect; 'God bless you,' he said. 'That,' adds the writer of this old record, 'was the proper way in which a martyr should take leave of the world.'

Marcellus was not alone in his triumph. The military secretary of the prefect, a man named Cassian, in accordance with his duty was taking notes of the trial. It would seem that he was a Christian; at any rate when he heard the sentence against Marcellus he flung down his pen and his notes, and spoke strongly against the trial. Marcellus laughed aloud for joy, but the magistrate in anger sprang up from his bench and demanded an explanation. When Cassian announced that the sentence

was unjust, the magistrate committed him for trial. A few weeks later he was beheaded.

The reader who remembers the peril of the Roman Empire from the barbarians will, probably, sympathize with the magistrates in the difficulties in which they were placed. Probably, as we see from the story of Cassian, the Christians in the army were more numerous than they knew ; it was only the centurions who ran great risk of detection. The difficulty of sacrifices did not apply to the rank and file. But there were other dangers that the Christian private ran, an illustration of which will be found in the recently discovered story of Dasius, of the army of the Danube. The troops were accustomed to elect one of their number to act as ' king ' during the Saturnalia, the annual heathen feast of slaves, now supplanted by Christmas. After thirty days of rule, during which he was permitted to do what he liked, this ' king ' was expected to offer himself as a sacrifice to Saturn. When the lot fell upon Dasius he refused to act, pleading that he was a Christian. His comrades, in their anger, reported him to the legate. Dasius was ordered to ' pray to the sacred images of the emperors. Even barbarians revere them.' On his refusal the legate offered him two hours in which to think it over. ' What is the use,' said Dasius, ' of offering me two hours? I have already told you what I think. Act as you please. I detest your emperors, I despise their glory.' For the daring of his answer he was at once beheaded (November 20, 304).

In times of persecution the army was invariably purged. A famous instance of this is the martyrdom, in the persecution of Licinian, of the Forty Soldiers

of Sebaste in Cappadocia, whose curious last will or testament, written in prison, disposing of their remains, and asking that they might be all buried together, 'since we have set before ourselves one common strife for the prize,' has been preserved for us. We see the growth of superstition in their anxious request 'that no one will secure for himself a single fragment of our relics gathered out of the fire.' The final torture of these brave confessors was to stand all night on a frozen lake, almost naked, with a keen north wind blowing. To add to their temptation, hard by was a bath-house with hot water and a fire, to which one of the soldiers, who could bear the torture no longer, fled, only to drop down dead on reaching the warmth. When the morning broke, and it was discovered that the Christians on the ice were still alive, orders were given that their legs should be broken.

We must bring this chapter to a conclusion. The causes of the hatred of the Church by the Empire were many, nor was the reasonableness all on one side. To many of the magistrates, as to the great emperor, Marcus Aurelius, the Christians must have seemed both narrow in their beliefs and dangerous to the State. For our present purpose the reader should realize all that our argument involves, taking it in its broadest issues. For nearly three hundred years the leaders among the Christians were branded as 'anarchists' and 'atheists,' and hated accordingly. For three hundred years to become a Christian meant the great renunciation, the joining a despised and persecuted sect, the swimming at every turn against the tide of popular prejudice, the coming under the ban of the Empire, the possibility

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at any moment of imprisonment and death under its most fearful forms. For two hundred years he that would follow Christ must count the cost, and be prepared to pay the same with his liberty and life. For three hundred years the mere profession of the Christian Name was itself a crime, the one plea for which there was no forgiveness. And the Name, in periods of stress not a few, meant the rack, the blazing shirt of pitch, the lion, the panther, or in the case of maidens infamy, or public outrage worse than death.

## CHAPTER III

### THE MARTYRS OF THE SECOND CENTURY

' Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance ; that they might obtain a better resurrection : And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment : They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword . . . (Of whom the world was not worthy :) . . . Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us run with patience the race that is set before us.'—*Heb.* xi. 35-xii. 1.

“ Ah ! for their faith !

And I would splash the flames about my head  
Gladly as in a bath for splendid death.”

S. PHILLIPS.

## ARGUMENT

- § I. Number of the Martyrs—Trajan—The Letter of Pliny—Ignatius. pp. 75-81.
- § II. Polycarp. pp. 81-85.
- § III. Marcus Aurelius and the Christians—Justin Martyr—The Martyrs of Lyons—Sanctus—Blandina—Ponticus—Dionysia of Troas—Carpus—Agathonice—Punic Martyrs—Apollonius. pp. 85-94.

## I

THE question is often asked : Were the martyrs many or few? Unfortunately, the question, at the best not easy to answer, has become mixed up with theological polemics. Some have represented the Roman magistrates as men of singular humanity and moderation, whose 'philosophy' led them, as a rule, to decline the task of persecution, or who, at most, singled out here and there some Christian distinguished in rank or influence by whose death they might strike terror into the whole sect. Others, on the contrary, with equal exaggeration, have reckoned the battalions of the 'noble army of martyrs' as almost inexhaustible.

The truth lies between the two extremes. We may dismiss at once the incredible legends in which the mediaeval Church delighted. But with equal justice may we claim as false the idea that the penal laws against the Christians were not put into force, save at certain infrequent intervals. If the arguments in our last chapter are correct, the Christians were always liable to persecution and death. They lived from day to day conscious of the danger to which they were exposed, and which some act of indiscretion on their part might bring to a head. We may grant that the outbreak of persecution in systematic form was an infrequent occurrence ;

depending chiefly on local circumstances. There were, however, seasons of special activity in persecution, enumerated by the early Church as ten in all, when the storm of hatred against the Christians burst forth, not locally, but over wide areas. The history of these persecutions, their causes and results, with illustrations drawn from the records of some of the more famous martyrs, now claims our notice.

The first and second of the ten great persecutions were those under Nero and Domitian. But with these we have already dealt in our first chapter. The murder of Domitian at the close of the first century ushered in the golden age of the Empire. From Nerva to Marcus Aurelius a succession of rulers of rare gifts and insight preserved throughout the second century the peace and prosperity of the world, in spite of the growing signs of bankruptcy and dissolution. But for the Church their rule was by no means a golden age of toleration. The depravity of a Nero or Domitian has too often led historians astray. As a matter of fact, it was not the worst emperors—a favourite fiction of the Christian apologists in their appeal to the outside public—but the best who were the persecutors of the Church. The greater the ability and vigilance of the emperor, the more determined he was to crush out sedition and disorder, wherever found and whatever its source; the more he was resolute to preserve the unity of the Empire, the more was he likely to come into conflict with so divisive a factor as the religion of Jesus. We have two most interesting illustrations of this in the case of one who was in some respect the greatest of all the emperors, Trajan. The first case is given to us in certain

correspondence concerning the Christians between Pliny and Trajan, the importance of which it is difficult to overrate. In September, 111, Pliny the younger, a cultivated Roman lawyer, whose uncle had perished at Pompeii in the memorable eruption of Vesuvius, was sent out to restore order in the disorganized province of Bithynia-Pontus, in Asia Minor. About a year after his arrival, he received anonymous accusations charging 'many persons' with Christianity. The new religion, it seems, had taken considerable hold of the whole district. According to Pliny, who, possibly, in his report exaggerated matters in order to magnify his vigilance, the temples were abandoned, and in consequence the trade in sacrificial animals and in the fodder needful for their keep was in a perilous state. Acting on information volunteered, probably, by the aggrieved tradesmen, the police arrested the Christians, and Pliny examined them. The upshot was various. Some acknowledged the charge, and on the third time of asking were at once ordered off to execution as if they were assassins or coiners, while the Roman citizens among them, in accordance with their privileges, were dispatched to Rome to await Trajan's pleasure.

So far all is plain; Pliny acted according to custom. But there was a complication, or what seemed a complication to Pliny. The mere profession of Christianity was evidently a capital offence in itself, without the test of refusal to worship the emperor. Some of the accused denied the charge, and substantiated their denial by offering wine and incense in sacrifice to Trajan. Others claimed they had ceased to be Christians, in some cases as far back

as twenty-five years previous to the trial. Such were now willing to worship the emperor and curse Christ; to this last, owns Pliny, 'real Christians could never be forced.' Nevertheless, they maintained that when they were Christians they had done nothing wrong. They had, they said in a passage of the utmost importance for the light it sheds on the life of the Early Church,

'been accustomed to meet before daybreak on a fixed day that they might sing a hymn to Christ as God, to bind themselves by a mystic ordinance to commit no crime, neither be guilty of theft, robbery, adultery, the breaking of a promise, or the keeping back of a pledge.'

Later in the day they assembled for a common meal, probably the Lovefeast, an action, they owned, contrary to the imperial edict against clubs which Pliny had published immediately on his arrival.<sup>1</sup>

To test this report Pliny examined by torture two slave women, who were called deaconesses, but could discover nothing 'save a degrading and irrational superstition.' Pliny professed to feel in a dilemma. Is he, he asks, to take into account extenuating circumstances such as youth? Is he to punish Christians simply because of their religion—for the 'Name'—and therefore criminals *ipso facto*, or is he to decide by proved misdeeds? Further, should the accused recant, is that sufficient, or should they receive punishment for having held such baleful errors in the past?

Trajan, who evidently considered Pliny's report himself, and did not leave it to the clerks of his Home Office, answered that 'there can be no hard and fast

<sup>1</sup> See *supra*, p. 37.

rule.' Christians openly accused and convicted must be punished if they persist ; that they purge themselves by performing heathen rites will suffice. Moreover, a magistrate may make this distinction between his action against a thief or murderer and against a Christian ; he need not spend his time in hunting down the Christians until they are formally accused ; in the case of robbers he must act at once. Anonymous accusations of Christianity must be thrown into the paper basket ; ' they form a bad precedent contrary to the real spirit of the age.' This last decision was of great value to the Christians. The necessity of the presence of a formal accuser gave the Christians a general protection, and often enabled merciful judges to dismiss a case. Thus Tertullian tells us of a magistrate at the close of the second century called Pudens, who, when a Christian was brought before him ' without the presence of the informer,' tore the charge-sheet in pieces ' as not being consistent with the imperial edict.'

Of the martyrs in the reign of Trajan few names have survived. This is not surprising : we should never have known of the martyrs of Pontus but for the correspondence of the heathen Pliny ; nor would this have been preserved for us but for his literary eminence. The case of Symeon of Jerusalem has been already noted. One name can never die, that of the illustrious Ignatius.<sup>1</sup>

Of the circumstances which led to the condemnation of Ignatius, the second bishop of Antioch, we know nothing. As a rule Christians, unless Roman citizens, were executed in the place of their crime ; but for special reasons (probably connected with

<sup>1</sup> See *supra*, p. 8.

the extraordinary spectacles which Trajan had given in the Coliseum, whose magnitude had long since drained Rome of both gladiators and criminals) Ignatius was sent from Antioch to Rome, 'to make a Roman holiday.' He tells us that he was in the charge of ten soldiers, whom he compares, with a touch of humour, to 'ten leopards.' Every effort on the part of himself and his friends to appease them only led to fresh cruelties and exactions. The details of this journey of Ignatius, the *Epistles* which he wrote *en route* to various churches, with their wealth of intercourse and love, must not detain us, though, owing to their early date, they are of the utmost importance for understanding the life and thought of one section of the Early Church. After landing in Europe, we lose sight of him after Philippi. The rest is only legend. But there is little doubt that on October 17 in a year unknown, but probably about 115, in a fight with wild beasts, in the Coliseum, at Rome, Ignatius paid the price of his faith with his life. Some of his disciples who had followed their bishop to Rome gathered up the fragments of his body and reverently bore them back to Antioch. There he was buried outside one of its most famous gates.

In no documents of the Early Church is the ecstasy of the martyrs, and their indifference to death, more clearly brought out than in the *Epistles of Ignatius*, though no doubt some allowance must be made for his excitable Syrian nature. In his *Epistle to the Romans* Ignatius had already anticipated the final act in his description of himself as 'God's wheat, ground fine by the teeth of the wild beasts, that he may be found pure bread, a sacrifice to God.' In

more than one passage we see Ignatius, not so much resigned to as eager for the day of martyrdom, 'in the midst of life, yet lusting after death.' He realizes all the struggle, he is more than assured of the victory:

'Come fire, and cross, and grapplings with wild beasts, cuttings and manglings, wrenchings of bones, breaking of limbs, crushing of my whole body, come cruel tortures of the devil to assail me. Only be it mine to attain unto Jesus Christ.'

In passages such as these we hear the shout of one triumphant already. 'Near the sword,' he cries, 'the nearer to God; in company with wild beasts, in company with God.' He bids his brethren 'sing a chorus of love to the Father' for the grace that is his, 'to be poured out as a libation to God.' For he is assured: 'If I shall suffer, then am I a freed-man of Jesus Christ, and I shall rise free in Him.' So he prays that he 'may have joy in the beasts, and find them prompt. If not I will entice them that they may devour me promptly, not as they have done to some, refusing to touch them through fear.'

## II

On his way to his passion in Rome Ignatius had exhorted Polycarp, the young bishop of Smyrna, of whose early life we know little save his intimacy with St. John, 'to stand firm as an anvil when it is smitten. A great athlete should receive blows and conquer.' Forty years later the 'athlete' received his crown (February 23, 155). A full account of this martyrdom was sent soon after the event by the

Christians of Smyrna to a neighbouring church. From this we gather that the annual festival of the emperor, in this case the noble Antoninus Pius, was in progress at Smyrna. As was usual, the occasion was turned to profit by the enemies of Christ. Eleven martyrs, mostly from Philadelphia, had already fought with beasts. 'They were so scourged,' wrote one, who was a witness of the scene, 'that their veins and arteries were laid bare, so that some of the spectators were sorry for them. But they, like men of valour, neither moaned nor groaned, thus proving that in the hour of torture the Lord was standing by them.' One of them, Germanicus by name, when exhorted by the pro-consul 'to have pity on his youth,' dragged the beast to him that he might the quicker perish. The cry arose: 'Away with the atheists; let search be made for Polycarp.' By the torture of a slave the aged bishop's hiding-place was found. Mounted police were dispatched; late at night they burst into the upper room of a small cottage. There was time for further escape, but Polycarp refused. 'God's will be done,' he said, and requested a short time for prayer. This was granted; the police were busy at the supper which the saint provided for them, and in nowise anxious to journey back in the dark. For two hours he stood in intercession 'for the Church throughout the world'; then as morning was breaking set off to the city, riding on an ass. The captain of the police, one Herod by name, together with his father Nicetes, met him on the way, and took him into their chariot, endeavouring to persuade him to recant. 'What harm,' they said, 'is there in saving yourself by saying "Caesar is

Lord? ” Their interest was not merely that of officials ; perhaps Herod was thinking of the peril of his own sister Alce, one of Polycarp’s flock. But all their efforts were vain ; so, on Polycarp’s repeated refusal, they thrust him out of the chariot with such violence that ‘ he bruised his shin.’

On the entrance of Polycarp into the arena, ‘ our people who were present heard a voice, though no man saw the speaker : Polycarp, be strong, and play the man.’ ‘ Swear,’ said the pro-consul, ‘ by the fortune of Caesar ; retract and say, Away with the atheists.’ The old man gazed in sorrow at the raging crowd ; then with uplifted eyes, waving his hand, he said : ‘ Away with the atheists.’ The pro-consul, mistaking Polycarp’s meaning, pressed him further : ‘ Swear, and I will release thee ; blaspheme Christ.’ ‘ Eighty and six years,’ was the immortal reply, ‘ have I served Christ, and He has never done me wrong. How can I blaspheme my King, who saved me ? ’ After further entreaties, the pro-consul threatened to throw him to the beasts, or burn him alive. ‘ ’Tis well,’ replied Polycarp ; ‘ I fear not the fire that burns for a season and after a while is quenched. Why delayest thou ? Come, do what thou wilt.’ So the herald thrice proclaimed, ‘ Polycarp has confessed himself a Christian.’ A howl of vengeance rose from the heathen, in which the Jews, who were present in large numbers, joined. ‘ This,’ they cried, ‘ is the teacher of Asia, the overthrower of our gods, who has perverted so many from sacrifice and adoration.’ So they desired the president of the provincial diet, whose business it was to provide the games, to let loose upon him a lion. The president excused himself ; the games in honour of

Caesar were over ; he had exhausted his stock of beasts.

' So the mob with one accord lifted up its voice, clamouring that Polycarp should be burnt alive. The execution followed close upon the sentence. The wood for the stake, torn in an instant from shops and baths, was carried to the fatal spot by eager hands, the Jews as usual freely offering their services.'

The old man was stripped. But

' as they were going to nail him to the stake : " Leave me," he said, " as I am. for He that hath granted me to endure the fire will grant me also to remain at the pile unmoved, even without the security that ye seek from the nails " So they did not nail him, but tied him.'

Then he offered his last prayer :

' O Lord God Almighty, the Father of Thy well-beloved and ever-blessed Son, Jesus Christ, by whom we have received the knowledge of Thee . . . I thank Thee that Thou hast graciously thought me worthy of this day and of this hour, that I may receive a portion among the number of the martyrs, in the cup of Thy Christ. O that I may be received before Thee to-day, numbered among them, in a full acceptable sacrifice.'

No sooner had he uttered his Amen than the fire was kindled and blazed up. But, to the astonishment of all, the flames arose, curving like the bellying sail of a ship, leaving him in the centre, unharmed. The reader will remember the similar cases of Savonarola of Florence, and Hooper of Gloucester. So an executioner was sent to dispatch him with a dagger-thrust. In their fear lest the body should fall into the hands of the Christians, the Jews took steps to have it thrown back into the midst of the fire. At

the moment of Polycarp's death a curious thing happened. His pupil, Irenaeus of Lyons, then on a visit to Rome, heard a voice as of a trumpet saying, ' Polycarp has been martyred.'

### III

The presence of the emperor Marcus Aurelius among the persecutors of the Church must ever prove a matter of astonishment and regret. That the one ruler of men who, at first blush, realizes to the full Plato's dream of the philosopher on the throne should be the hard taskmaster of the Christians is one of the ironies of history. The vision is indeed strange of one, " the very dust of whose thoughts was gold," whose soul soared to heights of resignation to the divine will given to few even among the saints of God, as the deliberate persecutor of the followers of Jesus. No doubt part of our surprise arises from a false estimate of the reign of Marcus Aurelius. In some respects his rule was successful. His laws on behalf of the slave, the child, and the orphan mark the rise in the world of a new moral consciousness, to which, however, Marcus Aurelius was not the first to appeal. Nevertheless, the reign of the great thinker was, on the whole, a dismal failure, marked by incapacity, and dogged by continual disaster.

But whatever the cause, the fact itself cannot be gainsaid that Christian blood flowed more freely under Marcus Aurelius than in any previous reign. For the details of these persecutions, the cruelty with which they were executed, we must not hold Marcus Aurelius responsible. He administered an

empire twelve times as large as France ; details were necessarily left to local officers. But the emperor decided the general policy ; and in this sense the noblest soul of the ancient world became a strenuous persecutor, who did not, it is true, initiate a new antagonism to Christianity so much as carry out more strictly, and in a different spirit, the existing penal code.

Marcus Aurelius was succeeded by the worthless Commodus. Throughout his reign, with the exception of the first few months when the policy of Marcus was still in the ascendant, the Church enjoyed an unaccustomed peace ; in part because of the influence of his mistress, Marcia, who, if not a Christian herself, had sympathy with the new religion ; more perhaps because of an easy-going indifference to causes of disturbance which to more strenuous rulers had seemed of the highest moment. Shortly after his accession the policy of persecution was stopped, while many of those condemned by Marcus to the mines of Sardinia were released. The Church grew mightily, and in Rome many of the upper classes and of the court attached themselves to the new faith with their whole households. From the contrast between these two emperors again we see the untruth of the current idea that the persecutors of the Church were the most infamous of the emperors.

Of the martyrs under Marcus Aurelius, the most famous was the philosopher Justin, the first of those who are called ' Apologists,' or writers in defence of Christianity. Justin, who was by birth a Gentile Samaritan, was a great student of the heathen philosophers. But one day, as he was roaming on the

seashore, he met an old man, whose gentle dignity attracted him. Conversation followed, and the old man told Justin that there was a higher philosophy still, which alone could satisfy; he urged him to pray for the opening of the gates of light. Justin never saw the old man again, but his words were never forgotten. His conversion was completed by seeing some of the martyrs suffer, 'fearless of death and of everything that men count as terrible.' Justin earned his own title of 'Martyr,' by which as a second name he has since been known, about the year 164. He was then on a second visit to Rome, and was lodging with a man called Martin, whose house in some public baths was used as a meeting-place for Christians--the only one, curious to say, that Justin knew of. In company with six others he was brought before the tribunal of Rusticus, the prefect of Rome, formerly the tutor of Marcus Aurelius. They all confessed that they were Christians. 'And you, Evelpistus, what are you?' asked the prefect, turning to one of the emperor's slaves. 'I, too, am a Christian,' was the reply, 'and I share the same hope by the grace of Christ.' When asked whether they had been 'made Christians by Justin' they replied in the negative; the slaves, it seemed, had been so taught by their parents. The prefect then turned to Justin: 'Listen to me,' he said, 'you are reported to be a clever man. Do you suppose if you are scourged and your head cut off that you will ascend up to heaven to receive some recompense there?' 'I do not suppose,' was Justin's answer, 'for I know it, and am persuaded of it.' 'That is enough,' said Rusticus, 'let us come to the point. Agree together to sacrifice to the gods. If you refuse to obey you

shall be punished without mercy.' 'Do what you will,' they all replied, 'we are Christians and will not sacrifice.' So philosopher and slaves alike were led away to death.

Another famous persecution in this reign was that of the Christians in Lyons, at that time the capital of Gaul (A.D. 177-8). The details have come down to us in a long but interesting letter written at the time by 'the servants of Christ who dwell at Vienne and Lyons to their brethren throughout Asia and Phrygia,' and afterwards copied by the historian Eusebius. The persecution began in a boycott rendered the more easy by the foreign origin of the little church, the majority of whose members, including Attalus, a Roman citizen from Pergamum, and a Phrygian physician called Alexander, seem to have come from Asia Minor. From this boycott—'exclusion from markets and baths'—the persecution passed to

'hootings and blows, draggings, plunderings, starvings and confinements, everything that an infuriated mob is wont to perpetrate against those whom they deem bitter enemies. And at length, being brought to the forum by the tribune of the soldiers, and the magistrates that had charge of the city, they were examined in the presence of the whole multitude; and on their confession they were shut up in prison until the arrival of the governor.'

When the Christians, 'who wore their bonds as a bride adorned with fringes of gold,' were brought before the judgement seat, Vettius Epagathus, no alien but a young nobleman of Lyons,

'asked that he should be heard in defence of his brethren, to show that there was nothing wicked or impious amongst

us. On this those who were round the judgement-seat so cried out against him that the governor, not for a moment listening to his just request, merely asked if he were a Christian. And on his confessing in the clearest voice that he was, he was immediately taken up into the number of the martyrs, being called the advocate of the Christians.'

When the aged bishop Pothinus was brought to the bar, the mob 'maltreated him in every way with their hands and feet, while those at a distance hurled at him whatever came to hand, for so they thought they would avenge their gods.' Day after day the persecution continued. Some, alas! some ten in all, 'were unable to endure the strain of so great a contest,' but as they failed 'day after day those who were worthy took their places,' while many who at first denied, at a later stage, touched by the kindness of the stalwarts and strengthened by their example, repented of their weakness and once more confessed. Before the persecution ceased forty-eight martyrs had won their discharge, many of them, including the aged bishop Pothinus, mercifully stifled in the filthy jail.

Two of the Christians were specially singled out for torture. One was the deacon Sanctus, whose 'obstinacy' they tried to overcome 'by fixing red-hot plates of brass to the most delicate parts of his body.' After this he was slowly roasted in the iron chair. 'But he remained firm and unyielding, showing that there is nothing fearful where the love of the Father is, and nothing painful where is the glory of Christ.' Equally remarkable was the constancy of the frail Celtic slave-girl Blandina. Even her mistress, herself one of the martyrs, had

feared for her ' that she would not be able to make a bold confession on account of the weakness of her body.' But after the tormentors had tortured her ' from morning until evening, until they were tired and weary, confessing that they were baffled, for they had no other tortures that they could apply to her,' her fellow Christians realized that ' in Blandina Christ showed that the things which appear mean and deformed and contemptible are with God deemed worthy of great honour.' ' For the blessed woman, like a noble athlete, renewed her strength by repeating: " I am a Christian ; there is nothing vile done among us." ' So when finally after many days of renewed torture she was

' hung up, fastened to a stake in the shape of a cross, as food for the wild beasts that were let loose against her, she inspired the others with great eagerness, for in the combat of their sister they saw Him who was crucified for them. . . . And after she had been scourged, and exposed to the wild beasts, and roasted in the iron chair, she was at last enclosed in a net and cast before a bull.'

So Blandina, the slave-girl, who could have been bought for a few pounds in the market-place, passed over ' as one invited to a marriage supper,' and sat down in the King's presence. As was usual, the remains of Blandina and her associates were burned by the executioners and their ashes thrown into the Rhone.

Among those who were martyred was one Ponticus, a slave-lad of fifteen. Day after day he was brought in with Blandina ' to look on while the others were tortured, in the hope of thus breaking down his resistance. But encouraged by his sister ' Blandina, ' Ponticus nobly endured all.' He was not the only

child of whom we hear as winning the martyr's crown. In the great African persecution under Diocletian one of the victims was a little boy called Hilarian, who had seen his father and brother tortured, another brother beaten to death, and whose sister Mary lay in prison. The magistrate in kindness tried to throw the responsibility upon his father: 'I am a Christian,' interrupted the boy, 'of my own freewill and choice.' 'I will cut off your nose and ears, then,' retorted the judge. 'As you please,' replied Hilarian, 'I am a Christian.' When condemned to prison and death the court rang with his clear witness: 'Thanks be to God.'

The heroism of the boy Ponticus may be matched by that of the young girl Dionysia of Troas, in the great Decian persecution. A Christian named Nicomachus was being tortured; in a moment of weakness he cried out that he would sacrifice. 'Poor wretch,' said Dionysia, who was among the spectators, 'for one short moment's relief you have gained eternal pains.' Her remark was overheard, and she was dragged before the governor. 'Follow his example,' he threatened, 'sacrifice, or you shall be outraged, and burnt alive.' 'My God,' replied the intrepid girl, 'is greater than you. I am not afraid of your threats. He will enable me to bear whatever you inflict.' After a night of agony in the hands of a brutal jailer she was beheaded.

About the same date as the persecution at Lyons some Christians were put to death at Pergamum in Asia Minor. When one of them, Carpus by name, was nailed upon the cross, at the foot of which faggots were ready, he was observed to smile. 'What made you laugh?' asked his tormentors, in

astonishment. 'I saw the glory of the Lord, and was glad,' was the answer. Standing by was a woman named Agathonice. The narrative that has come down to us is but a fragment, but from the comments recorded by the bystanders we learn that she had been already condemned. Her young son was standing by her, but undeterred by his risk she caught the infection of the martyr's enthusiasm. 'That supper,' she cried, 'is prepared for me'; then tore off her upper garments and laid herself upon the cross. When the flames were lighted she thrice called out: 'Lord, Lord, Lord, help me or I perish.' A third Christian was a senator called Papyrus, who seems to have been a most successful evangelist. When asked if he had any children: 'Yes, many,' was the reply. Hereupon a bystander cried out: 'That is a Christian way of talking. He means he has children in the faith.' The pro-consul was angry: 'What do you mean,' he asked, 'by telling me lies?' 'I have children in God in every city and province,' was the reply. 'Will you sacrifice or not?' asked the judge. On his refusal he was hung up, and three pairs of executioners employed in the awful torture of scraping him. But he said not a word. At last, release came for all; the fire was lighted and they were burnt.

Two years later persecution broke out in North Africa. The first to suffer, at a village called Madoura, near Carthage, were Namphano and Miggin, Suname and Lucitas—harsh Punic names, at which, in the time of St. Augustine, a heathen grammarian jeered, not knowing that they were written in the Lamb's Book of Life. Shortly afterwards twelve others, from Scili, were beheaded 'for the Name.'

But the story of their heroism has been already told.

But the martyrs of this time were not all men of low degree. In Apollonius we have another Justin, a learned philosopher, according to some accounts a member of the august Roman Senate itself—one of the few members of that wealthy conservative body to suffer for the new doctrines. When asked whether he would sacrifice to Apollo and to the emperor he refused. 'All Christians,' he added, 'offer bloodless sacrifices to God on behalf of those whom His providence has appointed to be rulers.' 'I will give you a day,' said the prefect, 'in which to take counsel for your life.' But the respite was useless. When again brought before the Senate Apollonius proceeded to lecture them on the follies of idolatry. 'Enough of philosophy, however excellent,' said the prefect, 'the Senate has prohibited Christianity.' 'Yes,' replied Apollonius, 'but a law of the Senate cannot prevail over a law of God.' 'Are you determined, then, to die?' asked the prefect. 'I enjoy life,' replied Apollonius, 'but am not, on that account, afraid to die. For there is nothing more to be desired than life, life eternal I mean.' As the prefect was perplexed by the words, a cynic philosopher came to his rescue and began a discussion with the senator. Apollonius replied with an eloquent defence of the faith which touched even the prefect. 'I wish,' he said, 'I could release you. But I am not allowed. Nevertheless I will show that I have kindly feelings towards you in death.' The 'kindly feelings' took the form of giving orders that the legs of the informer, by whose evidence Apollonius

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had been condemned, should be broken. Then Apollonius, still glorifying God, was led away to be beheaded 'in the month of April according to the Roman calendar, in the eighth month according to the calendar of Asia, but as we reckon time, in the reign of our Lord Jesus Christ.'

## CHAPTER IV

### THE MARTYRS OF THE THIRD CENTURY, TO THE CLOSE OF THE PERSECUTION OF VALERIAN

' And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes ? and whence came they ? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said unto me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.'—*Apoc.* vii. 13, 14.

' For martyrdoms, I reckon them amongst miracles ; because they seem to exceed the strength of human nature.'

BACON.

## ARGUMENT

- § I. The Changed Status of the Church in the Third Century—Struggle with the State—Septimus Severus—Guddene of Carthage—Perpetua and Felicitas—Their Dreams—Saturus. pp. 97-103.
- § II. Philip the Arabian—Decius—Certificates of Sacrifice—Pope Fabian—Abdon and Sennen—Julian of Alexandria—Dioscuros—Dionysius of Alexandria—Origen—Pionius of Smyrna—The Apostate Euctemon—Babylas—Nestor—Achatius. pp. 104-112.
- § III. Valerian — Xystus II—Saturninus—Cyprian—Flavian—Quartillosia—Marianus—Aemilian—Fructuosus—The Fall of Valerian—Gallienus. pp. 112-120.

## I

WITH the dawn of the third century we enter upon a new era in the history of persecution. Hitherto, the suppression of Christianity, though the rule of the Empire, had been a matter of police regulation, carried out locally in a somewhat fitful manner, in the same way as if the question had been one of brigandage, or of illegal trades unions, rather than pursued systematically on definite instructions from head quarters. Of any consciousness that Christianity as a Church was in itself a danger to the State, except in the sense that all wrong-doers are dangerous, we see as yet little sign. The hatred of the new religion was more a matter of personal feeling than a question of high politics; though the outbreak of local persecutions could not fail to come under the notice of the emperors, and to receive their sanction or regulation.

But all this was now changed. In the early years of the third century we see the emperors realizing, dimly and imperfectly at first, that the Church was no mere body of anarchists but a rival organization, whose increase in numbers and whose unity of administration made its suppression, if possible, or, if not, its adoption as a 'tolerated religion,' a political necessity. By the middle of the century this consciousness of a great struggle had become so clear

and definite that we see organized efforts on the part of the more energetic rulers to crush out the Church by the use of all the resources of the State. The police measures of the early emperors gave place to a civil war without quarter. But, unlike all other civil wars, only one side was armed. Strange to say, this was the side that was ultimately defeated. On the one hand were the vast masses of paganism, and the immense resources of the Empire centralized in one supreme will; on the other, the passive resistance of a zealous 'handful of people' making these resources useless.

The first emperor to realize the new conditions was the able Septimus Severus. At the outset of his reign Severus had treated the Christians with a certain degree of leniency; he had received benefit during a dangerous illness from a Christian slave, who had anointed him with oil. He allowed Christians in his court. The nurse as well as the tutor of his son Caracalla were Christians. According to one account, on his entry into Rome after his victory over his rival Albinus, Severus protected certain well-known Christians from the anger of the mob. But in the beginning of the year 201, on his journey through Palestine to Egypt, Severus, alarmed by the rapid growth of the new religion, possibly resenting also certain indiscretions of Christians in the army, found it necessary to take active measures against Christianity. But his persecution was chiefly confined to North Africa and the East.

In Africa the fires commenced at Carthage. There we hear of a certain Punic girl, Guddene (June 27, 203). Four times was she racked, then torn with a

hook. She had been preceded a few weeks earlier (March 7, 203) by two other Carthaginian women, Perpetua and Felicitas, the record of whose martyrdom, as well as that of their companions, at a place called Thuburbo major, is perhaps the most pathetic and true to human nature of any that have come down to us. Vibia Perpetua, with her ecstatic visions and her unconquerable faith, is in very deed one of the heroic figures of the Early Church. Of good family, liberal education, and honourably married, Perpetua tells her own story, though the introduction and completion are by another hand, possibly Tertullian's. She was but twenty-two when arrested and cast into prison :

' I was terrified ; never before had I experienced such awful darkness. O dreadful day ! the heat overpowering by reason of the crowd of prisoners, the extortions of the guard. Above all, I was torn with anxiety for my babe.'

Not the least part of the agony of the martyrs lay in the frenzied entreaties of loved ones, oftentimes brought by the magistrates into the hall of justice for the very purpose. The great Christian commentator, Origen, was right—he was, in fact, speaking from his own experience, for his father, Leonides, was martyred in this very persecution—' It is the love of wife and children that fills up the measure of martyrdom.' For Perpetua there were the entreaties of her aged heathen father, the wailings of the babe at her breast :

' When I was in the hands of the persecutors, my father in his tender solicitude tried hard to pervert me from the faith. " My father," I said, " you see this pitcher ; can we call it by any other name than what it is ? " " No," he said. " Nor can I call myself by any other name than

that of Christian." So he went away, but on the rumour that we were to be tried, he returned, wasted away with anxiety: " Daughter," he said, " have pity on my grey hairs; have compassion on thy father. Do not give me over to disgrace. Behold thy brothers, thy mother, thy aunt; behold thy child who cannot live without thee. Do not destroy us all." Thus spake my father, kissing my hands, and throwing himself at my feet. And I wept because of my father, for he alone of all my family would not rejoice in my martyrdom. So I comforted him, saying: " In this trial what God determines will take place. We are not in our own keeping, but in God's." So he left me weeping bitterly.'

When the day of trial came her father was once more at the bar, calling out to the mother as he held her child in his arms, ' Have pity on your babe.' But Perpetua was faithful to the end. When ordered to sacrifice to the emperor, she refused, and was condemned with her comrades to fight the beasts. ' So we went with joy to our prison.' Two deacons, Tertius and Pomponius, obtained her removal for some hours a day to a better room :

' There I sat suckling my babe, who was slowly wasting away. Nevertheless the prison was made to me a palace, where I would rather have been than anywhere else.'

In part her joy was due to her visions. In one of these Perpetua saw a ladder of gold, the top of which rested in heaven. Beyond the highest rung, surrounded by a white-robed throng, stood the Good Shepherd in the midst of a wonderful garden like unto Eden. But on either side of the ladder were instruments of torture, while a terrible dragon guarded the approach. Up this ladder of gold, so narrow that only one could climb at a time, the saints passed to God. But they must first crush

the dragon's head ere they could hear the welcome of the Shepherd: 'Thou hast borne thee well, child.' In another vision Perpetua dreamed that she was taken into the arena, stripped, and rubbed down with oil as if she had been a gladiator. Then she saw come out to fight with her a hideous giant, an Egyptian negro, with whom she began to box. He tried to trip her up; 'but I,' she writes, 'was lifted up in the air and began to stamp upon him.' 'Then the master of the gladiators kissed me and said, "Daughter, peace be with thee." So I began to go with glory through the door that is called *Sanavivaria*'—the gate, that is, through which the triumphant gladiators passed out from the arena.

Perpetua was not the only one who had her visions. Her companion Saturus dreamed that he was carried by four angels into the midst of heaven itself, 'though their hands touched us not.' There, in a palace 'whose walls were built of light,' and which stood in the midst of fields covered with violets and other flowers, he 'heard the voice of those who sing unceasingly, Holy, Holy, Holy,' and received the kiss of Christ:

'There also we found Jocundus and Saturninus, and Artaxius who had been burnt alive in the same persecution, and Quintus who had died as a martyr in prison. And we asked them where were the others. But the angels told us to come within and salute our Lord.'

We must not forget the slave-girl, Felicitas. When arrested with Perpetua, Felicitas, who was the wife of a working man, was in the eighth month of pregnancy. As the day of the games approached she feared above all lest on that account her martyrdom should be postponed, as, indeed, the law

required. So her 'brother martyrs prayed with united groaning,' and her travail began :

'As she lay in her agony in the crowded jail the keeper of the stocks said to her, "If you cannot endure these pains, what will you do when you are thrown to the beasts?" "I suffer now alone," she replied, "but then there will be One in me who will suffer for me, because I shall suffer for Him."' '

Perpetua maintained her calmness to the end. When a tribune, who held the popular idea that the Christians dealt in the black art, and so might escape from prison by their enchantments, dealt harshly with the prisoners, she reminded him that since they were to fight on Caesar's birthday they ought not to disgrace Caesar by their condition. On their last night they joined together in the agapé. The lovefeast was interrupted by people whose curiosity had led them to visit the prison, that they might see what sort of victims would be provided for their sport. 'Mark well our faces,' said Saturus, 'that you may recognize us again on the day of judgement.' On the morrow,

'When the day of victory dawned, the Christians marched in procession from the prison to the arena as if they were marching to heaven, with joyous countenances, agitated rather by gladness than fear. Perpetua followed, with radiant step, as became the bride of Christ, the dear one of God.'

Attempts were made to force them to put on certain dresses, the men the robes of those devoted to Saturn, the women of Ceres. They refused, and marched to death in their own garments, 'Perpetua singing psalms, for she was now treading down the Egyptian's head.' 'When they came in sight of

the prefect they called out : ' You condemn us, but God will condemn you.' For this daring insult they were condemned to be scourged along a line of huntsmen. In the arena Satorus was exposed on a slightly raised platform to the attack of a bear, ' for there was nothing that Satorus more detested than a bear.' As the beast would not leave its den, Satorus was handed over to a leopard, who with one bite covered him with blood. The mob called out in their glee, in derision of the Christian rite of baptism, ' That's the bath that brings salvation.' The two women, one of them scarce recovered from childbirth, were hung up in nets, lightly clad, to be gored by ' an exceedingly savage cow.' After Perpetua had been tossed her first thought was of her shame, as she tried to cover herself with her torn tunic. ' She then clasped up her hair, for it did not become a martyr to suffer with dishevelled locks lest she should seem to be mourning in her glory. This done she raised up Felicitas, and ' the cruelty of people being for a while appeased,' they were permitted to retire. Perpetua herself seemed in a trance. ' When are we to be tossed?' she asked, and could scarcely be induced to believe that she had suffered, in spite of the marks on her body. Finally the two heroines of God were put to death by gladiators. After exhorting the others ' to stand fast in the faith and love one another,' Perpetua, ' first stabbed between the bones that she might have the more pain, guided to her throat the uncertain hand of the young executioner.' So the two women, Perpetua the high-born, and Felicitas the slave, passed over, and all the trumpets sounded for them on the other side.

## II

With the death of Septimus Severus at York (February 4, 211), the Church enjoyed forty years of comparative peace, though with outbreaks of persecution here and there. But with the fall of Philip the Arabian (December, 248), the mildness of whose five brief years of rule led to the myth that he himself had become a Christian, the Empire set itself resolutely to the task of crushing out the Church.

The movement for reform, for such the persecution of the Christians seemed to the pagan party, had its centre in the army, the one branch of the body politic least influenced by Christianity, where the old manners and discipline still retained to some extent their power. Decius, an able Pannonian soldier whose virtues, according to heathen historians, 'ranked him with the ancients,' conscious of the weakness of the Empire, and its growing inability to bear its burdens, attempted to restore strength by striking at what he considered a prime cause of disunion. He determined to enforce universal observance of the national religion, and thus put an end to social and moral confusion. For this purpose he allied himself with the Senate, the home of all heathen and conservative reactions. To strengthen his hand he revived in the person of Valerian the office of censor. For outbreaks of local hatred he would substitute a universal and organized scheme.

Early in 250 Decius published his edict against Christianity. He commanded provincial governors and magistrates, assisted where necessary by a commission of notable citizens, to see to it that all men sacrificed to the gods and to the Fortune of the

emperor on a certain fixed day. Part of the ritual consisted also in tasting the sacrifices. Special attention was to be paid to the officers of the Church, under the belief 'that if he removed all the heads the entire fabric would dissolve.' But Decius did not contemplate extermination. At first, capital punishment, except in the case of bishops, does not seem to have been authorized, though banishment and torture might be employed to break the stubborn. The emperor was persuaded that if the magistrates only put sufficient pressure upon the Christians, they would abandon their faith. He had grounds for this belief in the recent addition to the Church of thousands of converts who had rather changed their creeds than their characters. Such rushed eagerly to the magistrates to obtain their *libelli*, or certificates of sacrifice, and when the days of persecution were over were as eager to be readmitted to the Church. These certificates, which form such a feature in the persecution of Decius, were probably all of similar form, and ran as follows (we quote from one discovered in Egypt in 1893) :

TO THE COMMISSIONERS OF SACRIFICE OF THE VILLAGE OF ALEXANDER'S ISLAND, FROM AURELIUS DIOGENES, THE SON OF SATABUS, OF THE VILLAGE OF ALEXANDER'S ISLAND, AGED 72 ; SCAR ON HIS RIGHT EYEBROW.

*I have always sacrificed regularly to the gods, and now, in your presence, in accordance with the edict, I have done sacrifice, and poured the drink-offering, and tasted of the sacrifices, and I request you to certify the same. Farewell.*

HANDED IN BY ME, *Aurelius Diogenes.*

I CERTIFY THAT I SAW HIM SACRIFICING, . . . *nonus.*  
(Magistrate's signature partly obliterated.)

IN THE FIRST YEAR OF THE EMPEROR, CÆSAR GAIUS MESSIUS QUINTUS TRAJANUS DECIUS, PIUS. FELIX, AUGUSTUS ; THE SECOND OF THE MONTH EPITH. (i.e. JUNE 26, 250.)

There was hardly a province of the Empire in which the storm was not felt, and which did not obtain its bede-roll of martyrs. For the faithful who refused to sell their Lord were hunted out, banished, their property confiscated, they themselves exposed to outrage, torture, death. The 'confessors'—the technical name for those who were imprisoned or tortured, but never executed—it is true, were more numerous than the martyrs, for the object of Decius was by prison and torture to produce recantation. A measure of forbearance also was shown to the humbler Christians, unless indeed it be that no steps were taken by the Church to record their sufferings. In Rome itself the policy of striking down the officials rather than the members was strictly carried out. On January 20, 250, pope Fabian was executed, and so severe was the persecution that for fourteen months no successor could safely be appointed. But 'the Church held firmly to the faith, though some fell through fear.' The proportion of brave women among the confessors, of whom, alas! we know nothing but the names, is remarkable. Two high-born Persians, Abdon and Sennen, as well as two Armenians, Parthenius and Calocerus (May 19, 250), witnessed by their death at Rome to the spread of the gospel. These two Armenians, whose tombs are still visible, were the trustees of a girl called Anatolia. They were first accused of wasting her fortune, and finally burnt at Rome as Christians. The Persians, perhaps, were fugitives from persecution elsewhere, for, strange to say, Rome, with its large Christian Church, seems to have been almost the safest place in the Empire, at any rate after the departure of Decius. We see

this in the arrival at Rome of no less than sixty-five confessors from Africa in one ship. They were met at the harbour by Numeria and Candida, two girls who attempted to atone for their own weakness in the day of trial by ministering to the needs of the persecuted. Candida, it seems, had actually sacrificed; Numeria, on her way to the capitol to sacrifice, had bribed an official to say she had sacrificed, when she had not, and so returned home.

The severity of the persecution was most experienced in Africa. In Carthage, though many were faithful unto death, the more part of the Church apostatized, 'spurring one another on with encouraging words, and in turn pledging each other in the cup of death.' In Egypt also there were many backsliders. 'Others, however, were firm and blessed pillars of the Lord,' among them an old man, Julian by name. As his gout would not allow him to walk, he was carried to the stake on a camel, amid the jeers and scourges of the mob. One of the magistrates, on discovering that his steward was a Christian, took a stake and drove it through his body. Against the women we are told, the tortures were 'ineffectual; they were always defeated by them.' We read also of Dioscuros, a boy of fifteen, 'who was neither persuaded by words, nor constrained by tortures.' Five Christian soldiers, one of them a veteran, were standing on duty by the tribunal. Noticing signs of wavering in a prisoner, they made vigorous signs to him to stand firm. On being observed, 'they ran up to the tribunal and declared that they were Christians.' 'So they passed from the court to their martyrdom, God leading them in triumph gloriously.'

Dionysius, the great bishop of Alexandria, to whose letters we are indebted for much of our knowledge of this Egyptian persecution, himself escaped. For four days he lay hid in his own home while the police searched high and low, 'never thinking that the object of pursuit would stay at home.' He then decided on flight, and was captured by the soldiers. But as one of his friends, named Timothy, who happened to have escaped when the bishop's escort was captured, was flying along in great distress, 'he met a peasant who asked the cause of his haste. On hearing the same the peasant went his way, for he was going to a marriage feast.' On his arrival the countryman told the story to the others, some of whom, apparently, were Christians :

'These, forthwith, with a single impulse arose and came as quickly as possible upon us with a rush and a shout'—(Dionysius himself tells the story)—'The soldiers immediately took to flight, and the peasants came upon us, lying as we were upon the bare bedsteads. I indeed, God knows, thought at first that they were robbers. Lying there on my bed, naked save for a linen cloth, I offered them the rest of my clothes. But they told me to get up and get away as quickly as possible.'

As Dionysius seemed unwilling to flee, his friends set him on the bare back of an ass and carried him off to the desert.

In Syria and Asia Minor the persecution raged fiercely. The great theologian Origen, who was now in his sixty-eighth year, was racked to the fourth hole. From the tortures he then received he never recovered. One of the most interesting stories of martyrdom is that of Pionius of Smyrna, who was arrested with his companions 'on the birthday of

the blessed martyr Polycarp.' As we read this priceless document we can still see the little band on the eastern side of the square of Smyrna, with ropes round their necks, surrounded by a brutal and jeering mob. The porches and coigns of vantage are crowded with sightseers anxious for a better view. The martyrs are not all 'of the Catholic Church'; good men differed then, as now, in minor matters of faith, and some of them seemed to the more strict to be but heretics, yet they are one in their courage and loyalty. A slave-girl, Sabina, in her terror at the threats of a punishment worse than death, was clinging to Pionius. 'Look,' cried a wit, 'the babe is afraid she is going to be robbed of her mother's milk.' Others handled the ropes, and asked ironically: 'And what are these for?' Pionius replied that they were a sign that their minds were made up. Said the contractor for the public games to the martyr Asclepiades, in jest at his diminutive stature, 'I am going to ask for you to fight in my son's exhibition of gladiators.' 'That is not the way to frighten me,' was the brave answer. As they entered the jail a police officer gave Pionius a knock on the head, so violent that the blood ran, but an incident of that sort was so common as scarcely to warrant mention.

Not the least of the tortures of this brave band of Christians lay in the knowledge that their bishop, Euctemon, had fallen away like Judas. Pionius and the others were dragged to the temple at the instigation, it was said, of Euctemon himself, in the hope that the example of their superior might lead to their own fall. On arrival they flung themselves to the ground, but six constables held Pionius fast

and brought him to the altar, struggling and shouting, 'We are Christians.' There the apostate bishop, with garland on his forehead, was still standing beside his sacrifice, part of which he had reserved to take home in order that he might hold a feast. But backsliders so hardened in their crime were not common. As all efforts to make Pionius sacrifice, the example of Euctemon included, proved useless, the Christians were taken back to prison, and thrust into the noisome inner ward.

On the arrival of the pro-consul, Pionius and his companions were formally tried. The judge tried to persuade him that Zeus and God were one and the same. On his refusal to sacrifice Pionius was strung up and his flesh torn with iron claws. 'Why are you so bent upon death?' asked an official. 'We are bent, not upon death,' replied Pionius, 'but upon life.' 'You are so bent upon death,' added the pro-consul, 'that you make nothing of it. You shall therefore be burnt alive.' When nailed to the cross, the officer made one last effort to induce him to recant. 'Carry out the edict,' he promised, 'and the nails shall be withdrawn.' 'I felt that they were in,' was the answer, as, turning to the people, he bid them remember that 'after death came the resurrection.' When the fires were lighted, 'with joyous countenance, he cried, Amen.' 'So he too,' adds the chronicler, 'passed through the narrow gate into the large place and to a great light' (March 12, 250). Side by side with Pionius there had been burnt a priest called Metrodorus, who had embraced, as the orthodox writer of the record tells us, 'the heresy of the Marcionites. But both died, looking towards the

sun-rising'—a sentence that to us seems significant of the new day beyond these shadows, where there is neither 'heretic' nor 'catholic,' but Christ becomes all in all.

We have seen the cowardice of bishop Euctemon. The bishop of Antioch, Babylas, was of sterner mould. He first saw six of his catechumens perish before his eyes. Then he laid his head upon the block, saying, 'Here am I, O God, and the children whom Thou hast given me.' According to the great orator Chrysostom, his chains were buried with him, by his own desire, 'to show to the world that the things which the world despises are the glory of the Christians.'

Equally brave was Nestor, bishop of Perga, the chief city of Pamphylia. 'Will you be with us, or with your Christ?' asked the governor, as they hung him, 'well strapped and curry-combed,' upon the cross. The bishop answered: 'With Christ I am, and always was, and always shall be.' So with nails fastened through all his joints he was left to die a lingering death.

'Sacrifice or die,' said the pro-consul Marcian to Achatius, who seems to have been bishop of some village near Antioch. 'That is what the highway-men of Dalmatia say,' was his contemptuous reply, 'when they meet you in a dark, narrow lane. The traveller has the choice given him: "Your money or your life." Your verdicts are of the same order.' 'Give me the names of your companions,' demanded Marcian. 'Their names,' said Achatius, refusing, 'are written in the book of heaven. Do you suppose,' he added, 'that you would do better if you had a number of prisoners before you, when you find

that one man is more than a match for you.' Whether owing to the death of Decius, or because the magistrate feared Achatius as possessing the "black art," Achatius seems to have escaped the final penalty.

### III

The persecution of Decius, happily, was of but brief duration. The barbarians unintentionally came to the assistance of the Church, as also in the later crisis under Valerian. Even before the death of Decius, at the hands of the Goths in the marshes of the Dobrudsha (August, 251), the pressure of his foes had wrung from him a measure of rest for the Christians. But the accession of the aged censor Valerian (August, 253), a noble Roman of rigid life and unswerving fidelity to duty but of somewhat irresolute character, soon issued in the renewal of the struggle. The reign of Valerian—who at an early date associated with himself his son Gallienus—in spite of the many virtues of the emperor, was one of the most unfortunate in the annals of Rome. On its frontiers Germans and Goths were pressing in upon the dying Empire. For fifteen years a great plague ravaged its provinces, carrying off in Alexandria and other cities more than half the population. Seasons of scorching drought were followed by terrific tornadoes. Famine, earthquakes, and huge tidal waves completed the ruin.

In the early months of his reign, though the laws of Decius were still in force, the Christians were not molested. But the disasters of the Empire, acting upon the superstition of the people, produced a change of policy. In the summer of 257 Valerian

issued an edict especially directed against the bishops and priests. These the magistrates must seize and compel, under the alternative of banishment, to offer the outer signs of conformity, as in the persecution of Decius. The decree also forbade, under pain of death, the assembling together of the Christians for worship, or their further use of their cemeteries—this last a great innovation upon the Roman customs of centuries. A year later (August, 258) Valerian, conscious of the failure of his first edict, published a second of increased severity. Wherever found, of whatever grade, the penalty for the clergy was death, without the avail of recantation. The leaders, among the laity, senators, and knights, were condemned to the same fate, but with the option of backsliding. Noble ladies were sentenced to be banished. Members of the court were to be sent in chains to work as slaves on the imperial estates. No mention is made of the treatment of humble Christians. Valerian hoped that the sheep thus left without shepherds would come back to the true fold without being worried.

The first victim of the rescript was pope Xystus II, or Sixtus, as he was later called. In spite of the edict, he had assembled the faithful in a little oratory in one of the catacombs. The soldiers rushed in, the pope was hurried before the judge, and of course condemned. He was brought back to the oratory and put to death as he sat in his episcopal chair, together with four of his deacons (August 6, 258). Elsewhere also the persecution raged. At Toulouse Saturninus, the bishop, was lashed by the mob to a bull, which was then driven up and down the narrow streets, until his brains were dashed out.

Of the other bishops and clergy who suffered death at this time, the most illustrious was Cyprian of Carthage. Such was his eminence and character that, within two years of his conversion to Christianity, Cyprian had been appointed bishop of the second see of Christendom. During the persecution of Decius, Cyprian, for whom the mob clamoured that he should be thrown to a lion, had yielded to counsels of prudence and withdrawn for a while from Carthage. In the spring of 251 he returned, and distinguished himself by the zeal with which he flung himself into the work of visiting the plague-stricken city. Under his lead, Christians just emerged from the mines or the prison, with the scars of recent tortures upon their bodies, were seen exposing their limbs to a more honourable martyrdom. But such works of charity did not lessen the hostility of the heathen, who looked upon the plague as the chastisement of the gods for their toleration of an unnatural religion. On the renewal of the persecution by Valerian, Cyprian, who did not this time withdraw from the city, was summoned before the pro-consul Paternus, and ordered to return to the practice of the religion of his ancestors (August 30, 257). Cyprian refused. 'I am a Christian bishop, I know no gods but the only true God.' 'Have you made up your mind to that?' asked Paternus. 'A good mind,' replied Cyprian, 'cannot alter.' When asked for the names of the ministers in his diocese, Cyprian replied that by law informers were not allowed. So he was banished to a town fifty miles from Carthage, though after a while he was suffered to return to his country house. So far he had fared better than many of his brethren.

Nine bishops of neighbouring sees were labouring in chains in the mines of Numidia.

Shortly after the accession of a new pro-consul, Galerius Maximus, Cyprian was once more apprehended, and brought to Carthage. As he drove through the streets his friends noted how alert and joyous he seemed. He was lodged for the night in the private house of one of his jailers, and treated with respect and consideration. All through the night the streets were filled with a vast but orderly crowd of enemies and friends. In the morning Cyprian was brought before the pro-consul. He looked, wrote an eye-witness, 'as if he were going to take death by storm.' No words were wasted. 'Art thou,' said the judge, 'Thascius Cyprian, the bishop of many impious men? The most sacred emperors command thee to sacrifice.' 'I will not,' replied the bishop. 'Consider well, in your own interests,' was the answer. 'Execute your orders,' replied Cyprian; 'the case admits of no consideration.' The judge, after conferring with his counsel, read the sentence :

'That Thascius Cyprian should be immediately beheaded, as the enemy of the gods of Rome, and as the standard-bearer and ring-leader of a criminal association which he had seduced into an impious resistance against the laws of the most holy emperors, Valerian and Gallienus.'

'God be thanked,' answered the bishop, when the reading of the sentence was finished. 'Behead us with him,' shouted the Christians; but Cyprian was led away under an escort to a natural amphitheatre with steep, high slopes, thick with trees, into which the spectators climbed. There his presbyters and deacons were allowed to assist him in laying aside

his garments. With his usual indifference to money, the bishop desired his friends to hand the executioner a fee of about £15. This done, Cyprian covered his face with a cloth. The executioner was so nervous that he could not grasp his weapon, so a centurion took his place. The sword flashed, and at one blow the head was severed from the body (September 14, 258). In spite of the dangers they ran, his faithful people gave to their beloved bishop a triumphant burial.

The death of Cyprian was followed by a bitter attack upon the African Christians. A batch of believers in Carthage were arrested together. They have left an interesting record of their own sufferings. They were thrown into an inner dungeon, and tormented with hunger and thirst. 'The miseries of our prison,' they wrote, 'are beyond words, nevertheless our prison shone with brightness.' Their tortures, in fact, coloured their dreams, by the relation of which they were otherwise cheered. Quartillosia, for instance, whose husband and son had witnessed the good confession three days before, saw in a trance her son enter the prison in which she herself lay, expecting death—for two days she had been without food—

'And he sat on the brim of a fountain and said, "God hath seen your tribulation and labour." And after him entered a young man, wonderfully tall, carrying two bowls of milk in his hands. And from these bowls he gave us all to drink; and the bowls failed not. And suddenly the stone which divided the window in the middle was taken away, letting in the free face of the sky.'

Another named Flavian, one of Cyprian's flock at Carthage, on being condemned, dreamed that he

asked his bishop 'whether the death-stroke was painful.' And Cyprian answered and said, 'The body does not feel when the mind is wholly devoted to God.' After enduring for some months the horrors of this prison, the little band was led out to die. 'I have got what I wished for,' said Flavian, 'for I always prayed that it might be granted to me to enjoy martyrdom, and appear often in chains.'

In Numidia the persecution was even worse than in Carthage. We possess an interesting narrative, written by a Carthaginian Christian, concerning the martyrdom, among others, of two of his friends, to whose memory he cut an inscription on a rock in his garden. One of them, Marianus of Cirta, who held the minor office of 'reader' in his church, dreamed that he saw a great scaffold, on which the judge was condemning bands of Christians to the sword. 'My turn came. Then I heard a great voice saying, "Fasten Marianus up."' So he too mounted the scaffold; but, lo, instead of the judge, he found himself amid green fields and grass waving with sunlight, holding the hand of the martyr Cyprian, who smiled, as he said, 'Come and sit beside me.' The day before this dream Marianus had been hung up by the thumbs, with unequal weights tied to his feet, while his body had been torn by an iron claw. In the awful thirst which such torture brings, we can understand the further vision; how he saw

'a dell in the midst of the woods, with a full clear spring flowing with many waters. Then Cyprian caught up a bowl which lay beside the spring, filled it and drained it, filled it again and reached it out to me, and I drank it, nothing loth. As I was saying "Thanks be to God," I woke at the sound of my own voice.'

Among the prisoners was a certain knight, called Aemilian. As he was being taken out of prison he met his heathen brother, who told him that if he persisted in his obstinacy he would certainly be put to death. 'I was afraid,' reports Aemilian, 'that he was mocking me with a falsehood, so, desirous of making sure of my heart's desire I asked him: "Are you sure that we shall all suffer?"' 'Yes,' replied the brother; then he asked the curious question whether all the martyrs would receive an equal reward in heaven. 'Lift up your eyes to the skies,' replied Marianus. 'Do all the stars shine with equal glory?—yet the same light shines in them all.'

On the night before his martyrdom, another of the same devoted company, James of Cirta, dreamed that he saw the martyred bishop Agapius

'surrounded by all the others who were imprisoned with us, holding a joyous feast. Marianus and I were carried away by the spirit of love to join it, as if to one of our love-feasts, when a boy ran to meet us, who turned out to be one of the twins who had suffered three days before in company with their mother. He had a wreath of roses round his neck, and bore a green palm in his right hand. And he said "Rejoice and be glad, for to-morrow you shall sup with us."'

When the day broke Marianus, and James, and the other clergy 'obtained their release from the tribulation of the world.' They were brought out to a natural amphitheatre near a stream. As the number of the Christians to be executed was so great the executioner hesitated to pile up a heap of corpses on one block, so laid them out in rows, then struck off their heads at a run (May 6, 259).

In Spain, at Tarragona, Fructuosus, the bishop,

had retired to rest when he was seized by the police. 'By all means,' said the bishop, 'let us go. But will you wait while I put on my shoes.' When brought before the governor, 'have you heard,' he asked, 'the decrees of the emperors?' 'I do not know what their decrees may be,' replied Fructuosus, 'but I am a Christian.' 'Are you a bishop?' asked the governor. 'I am,' was the reply. 'You mean that you *were*,' was the retort, as he condemned bishop and deacons to be burned alive. When the fires were lighted the fastenings which bound the victims to the stake were at once burned. So the martyrs 'with gladness kneeled down, with arms outstretched in the form of a cross, and so remained until they died.' 'Blessed Martyrs,' added the eye-witness to whom we owe this record, 'ye who have been tried by fire like fine gold are now crowned with the diadem that cannot fade away; for ye have bruised beneath your feet the serpent's head.'

But the fall of Valerian was at hand. In attempting to prevent a junction of Goths and Persians the emperor was defeated by the latter under Shapur (Sapor) and betrayed to the enemy (A.D. 260). For six years the unfortunate emperor was dragged about at the stirrup of his conqueror, robed in purple but weighed down with chains. When at length death came to his release, his skin was dyed with vermilion, stuffed with straw, and hung up in unavenged derision in a Persian temple.

Valerian was succeeded by Gallienus, a clever man without character or patriotism. He took no step to procure his father's release; the revolt of provinces was accepted with a smile. For all these things Gallienus, cynic and voluptuary, cared

## 120 MARTYRS OF EARLY CHURCH

nothing. But whether from indifference or statesmanship, Gallienus determined to put an end to the sanguinary struggle between Christianity and the State. The Empire was bleeding to death; one wound, at any rate, might be stanchèd. So Gallienus issued an edict of toleration, restoring to the Church their confiscated basilicas, reopening their cemeteries, and guaranteeing freedom of worship. At length the Christians had rest; a short peace before the final storm.

## CHAPTER V

### THE GREAT PERSECUTION UNDER DIOCLETIAN

' And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints. and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw her I wondered with a great wonder.'—*Apoc.* xvii. 6.

" For all the saints who from their labours rest,  
Who Thee by faith before the world confessed,  
Thy name, O Jesu, be for ever blessed.

Alleluia !"

" I was some time in being burned,  
But at the close a Hand came through  
The fire above my head, and drew  
My soul to Christ, whom now I see."

BROWNING.

## ARGUMENT

- § I. Diocletian—Early Years—Genesius—Galerius Maximian—Hadrian and Natalia—Destruction of Bibles—The Policeman Ox—Felix of Autumni—Euplius of Catania—Theodotus of Ancyra. pp. 123-133.
- § II. Diocletian's Abdication—Galerius and Maximin Daza—Nicander and Marcian—Daria—Tarachus, Probus, and Andronicus—Pamphilus—Porphyry—Romanus—St. Alban—Vincent of Spain—Eulalia. pp. 133-143.
- § III. Death of Galerius—Maximin—Constantine—Edict of Milan—End of Persecution. pp. 143-146.
- § IV. The Lessons of Persecution—Cause of the Triumph—'Secondary Causes'—Syncretism—No Accommodated Christianity—The Triumph of Selflessness. pp. 146-152.

## I

WITH the accession of the great emperor Diocletian (September 17, 284), we enter upon the final struggle. Diocletian's parents had been slaves in the household of a Roman senator; their child refounded the Empire on a new basis, transforming it into an absolute monarchy. Diocletian's reorganization of the Empire was followed by the concentration of all the forces of that Empire against the Church. All was changing; Rome had become almost a provincial city, forced to pay taxes like the rest of the world, almost of less importance than Milan or Nicomedeia. The old rule of a solitary emperor gave place to a puzzling division under four, two chiefs called Augusti, and two juniors called Caesars; the old provinces had been regrouped as dioceses. Nothing would have been more natural than that Diocletian should have done what Constantine found it necessary to do later, to consolidate his other changes by a change in the national religion. But the time for that was not yet.

The conflict with the Church did not break out immediately. In his early years, Diocletian had somewhat favoured Christianity. His wife and daughter were catechumens, though as yet they had made no open confession of faith. So also were many of his court officials. As his earlier acts prove,

by temper Diocletian was tolerant because indifferent, inclined to look on all national religions as worthy of patronage. Nevertheless, by his adoption at his accession of the title of Jovius, Diocletian showed his determination to uphold the religion of the Empire. Isolated persecutions here and there, especially in the army, show the slumbering forces of hatred; while the description by the Christian historian Eusebius of the 'vast congregations of men who flocked to the religion of Christ' and of the 'spacious churches' that were daily being erected indicate that the death-grip of the two rivals could not long be averted. In Nicomedeia, the capital of Diocletian, the most conspicuous edifice was the great Christian basilica, which towered up on an eminence in full sight of the palace windows. For the Church in every province the last forty years had been years of remarkable growth. The Empire must determine whether it should maintain the national religion, or allow it to be displaced by the new faith.

The heathen priests soon found their opportunity in the devotion of Diocletian to the rites of divination. The emperor, who was anxiously awaiting at Antioch for news of the success of the Caesar, Galerius, in his second expedition against the Persians (297), consulted the omens. Victim after victim was sacrificed, but with no result. Then the master of the soothsayers, who had observed some of the court sign themselves with the cross—the familiar remedy of Christian officials when forced by their position to bow themselves in the house of Rimmon—informed Diocletian: 'There are profane persons here who obstruct the rites.' Diocletian, in a rage, gave

orders that all who were present should be made to sacrifice, and sent messages that the same test should be applied to the troops. But his anger soon passed away ; for a time nothing further was done. With the success of Galerius, Diocletian celebrated at Rome the last triumph which ever swept along the Sacred Way (A.D. 302).

It was, probably, on the occasion of this visit of Diocletian to Rome that there happened the strange martyrdom of Genesius. It came about in this wise. In the theatres mimes, clothed in white garments, were accustomed to parody the Christian sacred rites to the huge amusement of the crowd. To please Diocletian, who happened to be present, the mime Genesius

'made sport of the Christian mysteries. "I feel so heavy," he cried, as he lay down on the stage as if he were ill, "I want to be made light." "How are we to do it?" his companions cried. "Are we to plane you as if we were carpenters?" "Idiots," replied Genesius; "I want to die a Christian, that on that day I may fly up to God as a refuge." So they summoned a (sham) presbyter and exorcist. "Why have you sent for us, my son?" they asked.'

The rest of the story is one of the miracles of grace. Genesius, it would appear, had sprung from a Christian home at Arles, in Provence; he had picked up his knowledge of religious phrases when a little lad. Of the story of his fall we know nothing, or rather we know all from ten thousand similar experiences. But now 'in a moment' the work of conviction began, and on the boards of the theatre, with mock priest and exorcist at his side, the laughing crowd all round, Genesius cried out, 'no longer

in acting, but from an unfeigned desire: "I want to receive the grace of Christ, that I may be born again, and be set free from the sins which have been my ruin." The pantomime was turned into reality. The mock baptism over, for the crowd still thought he was acting, Genesius boldly proclaimed aloud his faith: 'Illustrious emperor, and all you people who have laughed loudly at this parody, believe me: "Christ is the true Lord."' When Diocletian understood how matters stood he ordered Genesius to be stretched on the hobby-horse. His sides were torn with the claws, and burned with torches. But he kept repeating

'There is no king except Christ, whom I have seen and worship. For Him I will die a thousand times. I am sorry for my sin, and for becoming so late a soldier of the true King.'

At length, as all tortures failed to procure recantation, he was beheaded (August 25, 303).

Galerius Maximian, in his youth a Dacian neatherd, was the evil genius of Diocletian. A brave and able soldier, faithful and obedient, as cruel as he was superstitious, he had grown up imbued with his mother's hatred of the Christians, who had angered the old lady by fasting and praying when invited to join her entertainments. After long conferences, Diocletian was induced by Galerius and Hierocles, the president of Bithynia—this last an able controversialist against the Christians, who is said to have known the Scriptures by heart—to issue a decree, intended to set a limit to the growth of the new society (February 23, 303). By this rescript the edict of toleration of Gallienus was repealed, the

statutes of Valerian re-enacted. All churches were ordered to be demolished; all sacred books to be burnt, all Christian officials to be deprived of their civil rights; Christians who were not officials to be reduced to the rank of slaves. Galerius had wished to condemn to the flames all those who declined to sacrifice. Diocletian refused to allow the shedding of blood. He intended to crush out the Church, not rob his empire of citizens. He desired a Test Act, not a measure of extermination. But two fires in the palace within a fortnight were skilfully used by Galerius to stir up Diocletian to still greater repression. The empress Prisca and Valeria, his daughter, were compelled to sacrifice; the trusted officials Dorotheus and Gorgonius were strangled; a page named Peter was scourged until the bones showed, then with salt and vinegar rubbed into his wounds he was grilled to death over a slow fire. Everywhere persecution raged; the Christians were seized and thrust into prisons. Some were burnt; whole shiploads were carried out to sea and the vessels sunk. In one instance, at least, a town in Asia Minor was burned, with all its inhabitants, because it had embraced the faith of Christ.

A few months later Diocletian issued a second edict. He put into force the chapter in the edict of Valerian hitherto omitted, and ordered the imprisonment of all the clergy. Throughout the world the passions of the heathen were let loose without restraint. The clergy were the peculiar object of vengeance. Especial search also was made for the Scriptures. Deacons and readers were tortured until they surrendered their copies to the flames.

Among the heroes of this persecution one or two

may be specially singled out. In the magistrates' court at Nicomedeia the chief official, named Hadrian, whose young wife Natalia was a Christian, though he himself remained a heathen, was so impressed with the courage with which a batch of twenty-three confessors bore their witness that he stepped out in the trial and told Galerius to add his name to that of the prisoners, 'I, too, am a Christian.' 'Are you mad?' asked Galerius; 'do you want to throw away your life?' 'I was mad once,' replied Hadrian, 'but am now sane.' 'Stop talking,' said Galerius. 'Say that your request was a mistake, and it shall be at once erased from the minutes. Ask for my forgiveness.' 'I will ask for forgiveness from no one but God for my past errors,' was the firm reply. So Hadrian was thrown into prison with the rest. When the day of trial came he was brought in carrying with his own hands the hobby-horse on which he was to be tortured. His wife Natalia was present to give him confidence. 'Do you persist in your madness?' asked Galerius. On his reply that now at last he was sane the torture began, while Natalia slipped round to the cells of the other confessors, and besought them to pray for her husband. As he refused all offers of promotion and other inducements to recant, his wrists and ankles were so broken with an iron rod that he died of the consequent mortification.

The effort of the persecutors to stamp out the Scriptures led to some interesting incidents. In many churches the precious manuscripts were hurriedly hidden, so that 'when the officers reached the library the bookshelves were empty.' At Cirta (the modern Constantine in Algiers) when the

police examined the church they found no books ; they discovered, however, ' thirteen pairs of men's shoes, forty-seven pairs of women's, sixteen men's tunics, eighty-two ditto for women, thirty-eight women's head-dresses,' and other similar articles, evidently a clothing club for the poor. There were also eighteen smocks, for the use of the six grave-diggers who were attached to the church. In the hall attached to the church there were also four casks and six great jars intended, probably, to hold the tithes of the faithful. As the Bibles, if not in the church, must be somewhere, we see the magistrates, with a policeman called Ox—how the African *gamins* must have rejoiced in such a name for their enemy !—going round from house to house to discover them, guided by the bishop's traitor secretaries (May 19, 303) :

' And when they came to the house of Felix the tailor, he brought out five books, and when they came to the house of Projectus, he brought five big and two little books. Victor the schoolmaster brought out two books. One of the magistrates called Felix said to him, " Bring your Scriptures out ; you have more." Victor the schoolmaster said, " If I had had more I should have brought them." When they came to the house of Euty chius, who was in the civil service, the magistrate said, " Bring out your books, that you may obey the order." " I have none," he replied " Your answer," said Felix, " is taken down." At the house of Coddeo, Coddeo's wife brought out six books. Felix said, " Look and see if you have not some more." The woman said, " I have no more." So Felix said to policeman Ox, " Go in and see if she has any more." Said the policeman, " I have looked, and found none." " If we had not done this," said the magistrate Felix to his colleagues, " we should have got into trouble."'

We hear one wily bishop, who removed all the library of his church, but took care not to leave the shelves bare, and thus arouse suspicion. He placed thereon a number of heretical works of little value. The pagans fell into the trap and destroyed the poison, while the bishop's library escaped, in spite of certain busybodies who tried to inform the pro-consul of the mistake his police had made.

We owe the record of the doings at Cirta to a later inquiry, under Constantine the Great, into the character of certain of the parties concerned. To the same cause we are indebted for another photograph of the times, which deals with the trial at a later date of Felix, bishop of Autumni, 'for giving his consent to the surrender of the Scriptures.' The magistrate who had been in office in Autumni in 303, the year of the persecution in question, was put into the witness-box. He deposed as follows :

'I had been with Saturninus to Zama to buy some linen. When we came back to Autumni, the Christians sent to me to the court, to ask, "Has the imperial decree reached you yet?" I said, "No; but I have already seen copies of it, and at Zama and Furni I have seen churches destroyed, and books burned, so you may as well be ready to produce whatever books you have and so obey the sacred edict. . . ." Shortly afterwards they sent to the house of bishop Felix, ordering him to produce the Scriptures that they might be burnt. The police brought back word that he was away. . . . So I wrote a letter to the said bishop Felix.'

The letter was handed up, hastily recognized by Caecilian, and then read to the court. It was as follows :

'I hope you are very well. I enclose the signet-ring which the Christians sent to me to avert punishment.

You remember you said, "Here is the key. You may take away all the books in my stall, and all the MSS. on the stone slab. But please do not let the police take away my oil and wheat." And I said to you, "Do you not know that every house in which Bibles are found must be pulled down?" You said then, "What shall we do?" I said, "Get one of your people to take the Bibles into the yard that you use for your talks, and put them there, and I will come with the police to take them away."

On further inquiry it turned out that the latter part of this letter was a shameless forgery. But the picture it gives of the shifts in which complaisant magistrates and Laodicean Christians too often took refuge is in the main correct.

But the majority of the Christians were made of sterner stuff. Of such was Felix, bishop of a village near Carthage. Immediately after the edict was posted in the town the magistrates summoned the leading Christians and ordered them to surrender the Bibles. They replied that the bishop, who had gone on a journey to Carthage, had them. On his return the next day the mayor ordered him 'to surrender his Scriptures, or some parchments of some sort'; for the more merciful judges were often willing to take and burn in place of Bibles any 'waste scraps.' Felix refused. 'It is better,' he said, 'that I should be burnt myself than the Scriptures.' After three days' time for reflection, the upshot of which was continued refusal, Felix was hurried off to Carthage. 'Why don't you surrender some spare or useless books?' asked the pro-consul. But all subterfuges and hints were in vain. 'I have Bibles,' said Felix, 'but I will not surrender them.' So, after a month of misery in the lowest cells of the prison, Felix, heavily chained, was shipped off to Italy

in the hold of a ship carrying horses, and there laid down his life rather than give up his gospels (August 30, 303).

Another brave man was a deacon called Euplius, who lived at Catania in Sicily. Euplius, who seems to have deliberately sought for martyrdom, went outside the governor's office, and cried out, 'I am a Christian; I desire to die for the name of Christ.' When brought before the governor he was discovered to have a manuscript of the gospels in his possession. 'Where did these come from?' he was asked; 'did you bring them from your home?' 'I have no home, as my Lord Jesus Christ knows,' replied Euplius. 'Read them,' said the judge. So Euplius opened the books and read: 'Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' He turned over a few pages, and read again: 'Whosoever will come after me, let him take up his cross and follow Me.' When asked why he had not previously surrendered these writings, he replied: 'It is better for me to die than to have given them up. In these is eternal life, whoever gives them up loses eternal life.' The governor had heard enough. After a short controversy he ordered that Euplius should be examined by torture. After many torments Euplius was executed, with his gospels tied round his neck, repeating to the end, 'Thanks be to Thee, O Christ. O Christ, help; it is for Thee that I suffer' (August 12, 304).

A final illustration must be the interesting story of Theodotus, who kept an eating-house in Ancyra, where he sold to Christians food that he could guarantee had not been polluted by heathen libations. One day some Christian women were seized, taken

down naked to a lake near the city where the annual festival of the bathing of the images of two heathen goddesses was in progress. They were offered garlands, white raiment, and life itself, if they would take part in the bathing ; on their refusal stones were tied to their necks, and they were drowned in deep water. At night Theodotus, who had been brought up by one of the women, managed to recover the dead bodies, severing them from the stones by the means of a sharp scythe. By the imprudence of one of his friends the deed was discovered, Theodotus was arrested, the bodies seized and burned. He was offered by the magistrate unusual honours and rewards if he would forswear ' that Jesus whom the judge Pilate crucified.' On his refusal blazing torches were applied to his sides. ' Come,' said the magistrate, ' you are only a shop-keeper, be advised by me.' As Theodotus still refused to blaspheme Christ, after five days of fresh tortures he was beheaded. Orders were given that the body should be burned. But it was late ; the soldiers told off for the task were tired ; they intended first, at all events, to eat their supper. Just at the moment, by accident, an old village priest, who knew Theodotus, rode up with an ass laden with old wine. The soldiers, with an eye upon the wine, invited him to share their meal. The priest consented ; the wine did its work ; and when the soldiers fell into a drunken slumber, the priest rode off in triumph with the body of Theodotus.

## II

In the autumn of 304 the health of Diocletian failed. For forty years he had borne the burden of

erecting a new empire out of chaos ; now his mind refused to rise to higher themes than the opening of a new circus. Galerius and Maximian could thus pursue with less restraint their own designs. 'O Augustus,' shouted the mob to Maximian, on the occasion of a rare visit to Rome, 'no Christianity !' The cry fell in with Maximian's wishes. A fourth edict was issued affixing to Christianity the penalty of death, while the magistrates were informed that the entire population must be tested by sacrifices. Nobly did the Church respond to the call. The fury of the pagans was more than met by the 'obstinacy' of the Christians. Hell was let loose in its vilest and most cruel forms ; but against the onward march of the hosts of God its gates could not prevail.

The abdication of Diocletian, and the reluctant retirement of his colleague Maximian (May 1, 305), removed from the persecutors all restraints. Diocles, for the ex-emperor resumed his original name, settled down to cultivate cabbages at his splendid palace at Spalato, in Dalmatia ; his successors, Galerius and Maximin Daza—this last 'a young half-savage more accustomed to herds and woods,' a kinsman of Galerius—addressed themselves to their task of crushing out the Church. But the pace was too great to last, and early in 308 mutilation was substituted for death as the punishment of the faith. At Caesarea the historian Eusebius saw one day ninety-seven Christians, men, women, and young children, on their way to the mines ; each one, little children included, minus the right eye, and with the left foot disabled by hot irons. For a few months the 'flame of persecution relaxed its violence, almost

extinguished by the streams of sacred blood.' But in the autumn of 308 there began a new reign of terror. A fifth edict appeared even more stringent than the previous. The fallen idols were to be re-erected, all households were to sacrifice, and, lest there should be any escape, all goods for sale in the markets, especially bread and wine, the elements needed for the Eucharist, were to be polluted by libations, thus forcing the Christians into idolatry even in their sacraments. For two years it rained blood. At the convict mines of Phaeno—a desolate place at the south end of the Dead Sea—where the Christians were so numerous that they had actually erected places of worship in the mines themselves, a number who were incapable of work because of their mutilations dwelt in a quarter by themselves. They were under the lead of a monk called John. Though blinded by red-hot irons he could comfort his brethren by reciting to them whole books of the Bible. But orders came from Maximin that thirty-nine of the mutilated, including John, should be beheaded on one day.

Of the martyrs of this terrible time the following may serve as examples. They are but few out of a vast and noble army, who in every country laid down their lives for the Captain of their salvation. For there was no shrinking when the day of trial came, oftentimes, on the contrary, the greatest daring. We have an instance of this in the story that Eusebius tells us of how Urbanus, the governor of Palestine, on his way to the amphitheatre to open a show of wild beasts was met by six young men, who, having first bound their own hands, 'confessed that they were Christians, and showed that those

who glory in the religion of the God of the universe do not cower before the attacks of wild beasts.' Another Christian, a youth called Apphianus, who had carried off many prizes in the university of Berytus, on hearing one day in the streets of Caesarea the heralds summoning the Christians to the temples, rushed up to Urbanus, who was at the altar, seized his hand, and tried to prevent him from finishing the sacrifice. For this he received fearful tortures over a slow fire, and 'was finally thrown into the depths of the sea.' His example was followed by others.

In the legion quartered in Bulgaria there were two soldiers, Nicander and Marcian. Nicander had not always been a Christian; he had been brought to the knowledge of God through his wife Daria. When ordered to sacrifice both refused. 'You need only throw a pinch of incense in sacrifice,' pleaded the governor. 'How can a Christian worship stocks and stones?' replied Nicander. Daria, who was standing by, bade her husband 'look up to heaven and not deny our Lord.' 'You blockhead,' cried the governor, 'do you want your husband to die?' 'Yes,' she replied, 'that he may live with God and never die.' For twenty days the two were thrust into prison, then once more were questioned whether they would sacrifice. 'The number of your words,' replied Marcian, 'will not make us deny our God. We see Him, and we know what He is calling us to. Dispatch us quickly that we may see the Crucified!' As they were carried off to execution Marcian's wife tried to dissuade her husband: 'Take pity on me,' she cried, 'look at your darling little boy. Do not reject our appeal.' But a Christian seized Marcian's

hand: 'Be of good cheer, brother, you have fought a good fight.' Kissing his wife and child, Marcian bade them 'depart in God.' 'Lord God Almighty,' he added, 'take Thou care of the lad.' Meanwhile the wife of Nicander was brought to him to say farewell. 'God be with you,' said the husband. 'Be of good cheer,' replied Daria,

'play the hero. Ten years I spent at home without you, and every moment I prayed God that I might see you. Now I rejoice that you are setting out for life. How loud shall I sing, and how proud I am that soon I shall be a martyr's wife! So be of good cheer, and bear your witness to God.'

'The two martyrs then fell on sleep'—we quote the touching ending of the narrative—'on June 17th, in the reign of our eternal Lord Jesus Christ,' but the exact year of that 'reign' is not given. To the Early Church the struggle seemed one between the emperors of the moment, whose brief reigns they were careful to date, and the King of endless ages who had chosen for Himself the crown of thorns, and who deigned to allow the meanest of His subjects to don the royal insignia. In this eternal reign there are no years, as of His empire there are no frontiers or other marks of limitation.

Few deaths were so easy as those of Nicander and Marcian. Very different were the tortures of three martyrs, Tarachus, Probus, and Andronicus, who suffered at Tarsus, the city of St. Paul. Of their trial we possess a very full record, copied word for word out of the official documents by a clerk of the court, who was paid £10 by the Christians of Tarsus for his task. The three were brought before a cruel judge called Numerianus Maximus. 'What is your

name?' Tarachus was asked. 'I am a Christian,' was the reply. 'Hit him on the mouth,' shrieked Maximus, 'and tell him to answer straight.' Every answer, in fact, produced a blow, the beginning of a long series of torments, which, however, were powerless to break the daring defiance and contempt of the prisoner. 'Take hold of his cheeks and rip them up,' said Maximus, as Tarachus stood before him for the third time of torture, with jaws crushed, ears burnt off, his body one mass of wounds. 'Don't think,' replied Tarachus, 'that you can terrify me with your words; I am ready for you at all points, for I wear the armour of God!' When the turn of Andronicus came he was told that his friends had already sacrificed, and, in consequence, had received great honours. Andronicus refused to believe the lie, and scoffed at their threats. So he was beaten with raw hides until his whole body was one wound. 'Rub his back well with salt,' laughed Maximus. 'You must rub in more salt than that,' was the joking answer, 'if I am to keep.' 'You cursed fellow,' said Maximus, 'you talk to me as if you were my equal.' 'I am not your equal,' retorted the Christian, 'but I have the right to talk.' 'I will cut out your right, you ruffian,' cried the judge. 'You will never be able to do that,' said the prisoner, 'neither you, nor your father Satan, nor the devils whom you serve.' The third, Probus, was hung up by the toes, red-hot spits thrust into his sides and back and between his fingers, and sacrifices from the altar stuffed into his mouth. As all proved ineffectual, he was nailed to the cross with burning nails. 'Glory to Thee, O Lord Jesus,' sang the undaunted martyr. Finally, after days of examination

and torture, with eyes burnt out, and tongues twisted off, all three were handed over to the beasts. Against such men the gates of hell could not prevail. 'These are they,' as St. Cyprian had written half a century earlier, with a glance back at his heathen days,

'whom we held sometimes in derision, and as a proverb of reproach. We fools counted their life madness, and their end to be without honour. Now are they numbered among the children of God, and their lot is among the saints!'

The historian Eusebius has narrated for us at some length the story of the martyrdom of his friend, the learned Pamphilus, who had made it his life-work to edit correct copies of the Bible. On November 5, 307, Pamphilus and eleven others were seized at Caesarea, in Palestine, and on their refusal to sacrifice were thrown into a prison already crowded with Christians. For two years they lay there, apparently forgotten. But one day (February 15, 310) there arrived at the gates of Caesarea five Egyptians. Something in their appearance aroused the suspicions of the guard; they were questioned, and at once confessed that they were Christians who had accompanied some confessors to the mines of Cilicia, that they might minister to their needs by the way, and who were now returning home. They were accordingly brought before the governor Firmilian, who seems to have then remembered also Pamphilus and his companions. The five Egyptians were then questioned, and seem to have irritated the governor by talking about the 'new Jerusalem.' We may note in passing that though Firmilian was the governor

of Palestine he seems never to have heard the name of Jerusalem at all, so completely, after its destruction by Hadrian (A.D. 132), had the heathen title of Aelia taken its place. At last, after many scourgings, the five Egyptians were beheaded, together with three of the companions of Pamphilus.

As Firmilian was leaving the court a young slave called Porphyry, who was famous for his calligraphy, asked the governor that he might take away the bodies for burial, a request in strict accordance with the law. But Firmilian, hearing that he was a Christian, ordered that he should be scraped to the bone, then roasted over a slow fire. At length 'like one victorious, though covered with dust,' Porphyry's 'contest' was over.

The execution of Porphyry was reported to Pamphilus by a soldier of gigantic stature but tender heart called Seleucus. As he had been seen kissing one of the martyrs Firmilian ordered that he should be executed; 'the tenth,' adds Eusebius, 'to suffer death that day.' He was followed by Pamphilus, of whose death, however, no details have been preserved; by a very old slave, from the household of Firmilian; and by an inhabitant of Caesarea, called Julian, who had been away from home, but happened to return that very day. As he entered the gates he was told of the martyrs, and, without going home, at once went to the square where they lay, and kissed their dead bodies. For this he was condemned to be burned over a slow fire. 'Thereupon, leaping and exulting, and in a loud voice giving thanks to God,' he went to his death.

Another martyr in Palestine of whom Eusebius tells was a deacon of Caesarea called Romanus.

When told ' by the judge that he was to die by fire he received the sentence with a cheerful countenance and ready mind.' He was bound to the stake and the wood piled round him, but as Galerius was not yet present the fire was not lighted. On the arrival of Galerius he was unfastened and his tongue was torn out, then thrown into prison until the emperor's anniversary, when he was duly martyred.

The story of the first British martyr, though not without its difficulties, deserves attention. That there were Christians in England in the third century is certain, if only from the recently discovered British churches at Silchester and other Roman stations. But there was little if any systematic persecution, for Britain was under the direct government of the humane Constantius, the father of the more famous Constantine the Great. But one martyr there seems to have been, who lived at the important city of Verulam, not far from London, now known from his name as St. Albans, where, in after days, one of the greatest of English monasteries was built around his shrine.

According to the Venerable Bede, Alban was a heathen soldier, who one day kindly sheltered a Christian priest in his cottage, and in consequence was led to accept the same faith. When the retreat of the priest was discovered, soldiers were sent to arrest him. They were met by Alban, dressed in the priest's robes, who was accordingly arrested and led away to the judge, while the priest escaped. The mistake, however, was soon discovered, and Alban was ordered to sacrifice or suffer the penalties of the Christian faith. ' If you wish to live and be happy,' said the magistrate, ' be quick

and sacrifice to the gods.' 'These sacrifices,' he replied, 'are offered to devils, and of no advantage to the worshippers, and can never obtain the answers to their prayers.' As stripes produced no effect the judge finally ordered that he should be beheaded. A little over a hundred years later his tomb was visited by Germanus, a bishop from Gaul, who did much to establish Celtic Christianity, and whose evidence to the reality of St. Alban we may accept.

But death was oftentimes the most merciful of all the penalties of the Christian faith. For some there were agonies without release, as, for instance, for Vincent of Spain, who, after being tortured on a horse, was thrown for several days into a dark dungeon, the ground of which was strewn with broken potsherds, upon which he was placed with limbs drawn as far apart as possible. He survived the awful torture, and was brought up to the surface, with resolution still undaunted. 'But while the governor was thinking out a new punishment, Christ arranged for the reward and took His disciple home.' Another martyr, the girl Eulalia, who suffered in Spain at the same time, was told that 'if she would only just touch a grain of salt or a pinch of incense with the tips of the fingers all would be well.' In reply she dashed the images to the ground. So torches were put to her sides and hair. 'Lord,' she cried, 'they are burning in the words that Thou art mine.' When her hair caught fire she opened her mouth, sucked in the flames, and died. But Eulalia was fortunate in her death compared with some of her fellow Christians, tender girls who were condemned to a life of shame. Aedesius, the brother of Apphianus, protested against one of these

brutal sentences, and in his righteous anger sprang upon the tribunal, and trampled the judge beneath his feet. For this he endured the tortures and death of his brother.

### III

In 311 the worst horrors of the persecution ceased ; Galerius relented. He was on his deathbed, tormented with the disease vulgarly known as the being eaten of worms. Like all the men of his day, he was the prey of superstition. The gods whom he had defended had not helped him ; perhaps it was not too late to appeal to the new deity. So from his deathbed he issued (April 30, 311) his famous edict of toleration which bore also the signatures of his colleagues, Constantine and Licinian. In this extraordinary document, wrung from a man by the terrors of the unknown, Galerius tried to dupe the God of the Christians into remitting for him the punishment of his cruelties. The edicts were rescinded ; in return the Christians were expected ' to pray to their God for our recovery.' But it was too late. The unknown God to whom Galerius had at last betaken himself gave no answer to his insolent and tardy invocation. Five days or so after the decree was posted Galerius died. His dominions were shared between Maximin Daza and Licinian, while Maxentius, the son of Diocletian's colleague Maximian, ruled in Italy.

Maximin Daza had refused to affix his seal to this edict of toleration. He seems, however, to have issued some instructions of his own to the magistrates of the Eastern provinces, informing them that

they 'need not for the present exert themselves further in the cause.' From a thousand prisons, mines, and convict settlements the scarred warriors of Christ streamed home. Everywhere men began to re-erect their ruined churches, or to build new oratories over the graves of the sainted martyrs. But the leaders of the pagan party did not intend thus tamely to yield. As Maximin toured round the East he was met by deputations from the heathen cities, urging that they might have local option in the matter of persecution. In Nicomedeia, a huge memorial was presented to him, with due procession of gods and the like, asking permission to banish the 'atheists.' At Tyre the town council put up a brass tablet forbidding Christianity within the city. At the same time steps were widely taken for the reformation of paganism. The Christian sacraments and institutions were imitated, a heathen hierarchy established of men of high rank. For the mob there was a clever winking Jove, for the devout a daily heathen service. To the new pontiffs was given the power of mulcting in noses, eyes, and ears those who absented themselves from the temples. Four prostitutes of Damascus professed that they had once been Christians, and had learned their trade by participating at Christian sacraments. Copies of their statements were circulated broadcast. But a more infamous device was the forgery of a report from Pilate, with reference to the trial of Jesus, which bespattered the Saviour with mud and His Cross with contempt. Maximin pretended that this had been discovered in the archives at Rome, and ordered that it should be taught in all the schools.

The device of local option in persecution succeeded

admirably. Wherever in the East the heathen were in a majority, they tried to cut down the leaders of the Church. Armenia, the first country officially to embrace Christianity, determined to interfere. The war which followed—the first crusade or “war of the Cross” known to history—ended in the defeat of Daza.

At this stage a greater than Armenia intervened. The fortunes of Constantine (whose grandfather, on his mother Helena’s side, kept a village inn in Dacia), from his birth to his famous ride from Nicomedeia across Europe back to his father Constantius’ court at Boulogne, must be read elsewhere. The death of Constantius at York (July 25, 306) was followed by Constantine’s own elevation to the purple, with the title of Caesar. Civil war between Constantine and Maxentius followed; in reality a struggle of far deeper issues than the conquest of Italy. Constantine’s passage of the Alps and subsequent victory over the vicious Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge, near Rome (October 27, 312), one of the few great battles that have for ever altered the fortunes of nations, will stand out to all time in the annals of both Empire and Church. Constantine had seen his vision; henceforth he did homage to the conquering sign of the Cross. The God of the Christians was too powerful to be despised. Pagan and Christian alike attributed his success to divine interposition. With this conviction deeply implanted—we may call it Constantine’s conversion provided we clearly understand our terms—the great statesman went down to Milan to meet his colleague Licinian. Thence he issued (March, 313) the famous document which marks an era in the history of the world.

'We have long seen,' ran the edict, 'that we have no business to refuse freedom of religion. The power of seeing to matters of belief must be left to the judgement and desire of each individual according to the man's own free will.'

The defeat of Daza by Licinian near Adrianople (April 30, 313) turned the edict into accomplished fact in the East as well as the West. A few months later Daza, a hunted fugitive, died in delirium at Tarsus. Before the end came he had signified his adhesion to the policy of Constantine. Diocletian, broken with disappointment and sickness, had already passed away (Summer, 313). He had seen the Church which he had tried to crush arise from the contest with still greater strength. The Empire was defeated, the Galilean had gained the victory. A few years later Christianity was formally adopted as the religion of the State. A new chapter had begun in the long annals of humanity. For the Church there was peace, with the rise of new difficulties, less easy to overcome than the sword and the State, fraught with perils to the soul the more deadly because the less clearly discerned.

#### IV

We are unwilling to conclude this short record of the heroes of the Cross without some attempt to answer the question which will have already presented itself to many of our readers: What is the evidential value of the endurance of the martyrs to the reality of the Faith for which they suffered? Purposeless renunciation, the renunciation of dervish or fakir, can never appeal to the Western world.

But the renunciation of the martyrs was neither purposeless nor self-centred. As their name shows, they were 'witnesses'; in the first century 'martyr' and 'witness' are almost interchangeable terms. As the needle turns to the Pole, so they point, not to themselves, but to Another, to whose reality they gave their evidence, not by words merely, but by deeds. Every martyr's death was an emphatic *credo*, uttered in a language that all could understand, proven with logic more persuasive than any that Nicea or Athanasius could devise, and which made its appeal to all classes. 'See Socrates,' exclaims Justin Martyr; 'no one trusted in him so as to die for his doctrine: but in Christ . . . not only philosophers and scholars believed, but also artisans, and people illiterate.' They made this manifest by 'despising both glory and fear and death.' We may own with Tertullian that the argument, historically considered, is not perfectly sound; that in all ages and countries men have been willing to lay down their lives for beliefs that to the majority of their fellows have seemed trivial or superstitious. Especially must discount be taken from the evidential value of 'martyrdom' when the 'martyrs' are restricted to some special time or place. In this as in much else the value of the evidence lies in its extent and prolongation, in other words in the degree to which it appeals to wider experience. Judged by this test the evidential value of the 'martyrdom' of the early Church becomes of the highest import. As an argument it fits in, not merely with the experience of Justin Martyr himself, but with that of thousands of others in different centuries and climes:

'For I myself,' writes Justin, 'when I was contented with the doctrines of Plato, and heard the Christians slandered, yet saw them fearless of death and of everything that men count terrible, felt that it was impossible that these men could be living, as was reputed, in wickedness and mere pleasure.'

We see this power of conviction of which Justin speaks in the records, too numerous to be later inventions, of those who were won to Christ by witnessing the martyr's death, or by having the custody of the prisoners in their last hours. One illustration may suffice—that of a young officer of the Court of Galerius, whose story we have told already.<sup>1</sup>

The 'martyrs' also were 'witnesses' to a creed, simple it is true, but none the less definite and real. They did not lay down their lives for vague generalities, wider visions, or larger hopes. They knew not only in whom, but in what they believed, and bore witness before judge and mob, oftentimes with their dying breath, to the vitalizing power of a concrete, definite faith. In the later stories of the martyrs there is a tendency to amplify their creeds, to turn them from their simplicity into argumentative and theological systems. In the earlier records, however, faith is not a philosophy, but dwells rather on the central truths which to the martyr seemed so all-important that for them he would lay down life itself. Prominent among these was the belief in his own immortality as the result of the resurrection of his Lord. Not otherwise can we account for that absolute defiance of death which is one of the notes of the early Church, and which led her to date

<sup>1</sup> *Supra*, p. 128.

her records by that phrase which meets us again and again in the story of the martyr—‘ in the reign of the Eternal King.’

The consideration of this victorious confidence so characteristic of the martyrs leads us to ask a final question. We do so in the words of a great master of English.

“ Whence came this tremendous spirit, scaring, nay offending, the criticism of our delicate days? Does Gibbon think to sound the depths of eternal ocean with the tape and measuring-rod of merely literary philosophy? ”<sup>1</sup>

We cannot do better than quote in answer the wise summary of a recent secular historian, whose study of the principate of Nero has led him to survey the conflict and its issue, and to weigh up what Gibbon called the “ secondary causes ” for the growth of Christianity.

“ We may not under-rate the ‘ secondary causes ’ of Christianity’s growth. But neither may we neglect the external circumstances which promised only, it might seem, too surely to destroy it altogether. Persecution may be a sign of strength. It is hardly a cause of strength when it is cruel and persistent. . . . Persecution may kill a religion and destroy it utterly, if that religion’s strength lies only in its numbers, by a simple process of exhaustion. The opinion that no belief, no moral conviction, can be eradicated from a country by persecution is a grave popular fallacy.

“ Christianity, we conclude, answered man’s needs and his cry for aid, articulate and inarticulate, conscious or unconscious, in the early days of the Roman Empire, as did no other creed or philosophy. When, however, we face soberly the questions whence came such a creed into existence which could satisfy human wants, as none other before or since, and how came the new, despised, and persecuted religion to

<sup>1</sup> Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, 483.

overcome perils and dangers of a terrible kind, with no external agency in its favour and every external power ranged against it, we do not feel inclined to deduce the rapidity of its growth and its victory over all opponents from a mere balance of its internal advantages over its external disqualifications. We admit the vigorous secondary causes of its growth, but we have left its origin unexplained, and cannot but see as well the vigour and strength of the foes which willed its destruction and powerfully dissuaded from its acceptance. And there exists for us, as historians, no secondary nor human cause or combination of causes sufficient to account for the triumph of Christianity." <sup>1</sup>

There is, in fact, but one sufficient explanation: 'the new religion descended out of heaven from God.' And the supernatural origin of the religion is the only satisfactory explanation of the supernatural courage and confidence of its martyrs.

But the central 'witness' of the 'martyrs' was to the living reality of the person of Christ. In the glowing phrase of St. Cyprian the martyrs wore the 'white-robed cohort of Christ's soldiers, marching through footprints of glory'; but with united voice they ever proclaimed that one was their Lord and Master—'morituri, te salutamus.' If in the noble army of martyrs we hail the conquerors of the world, we must not forget the cause of this victory. Theirs was a confidence in His divine claims so absolute that they scorned the most awful torments that malice could devise rather than subtract one jot or tittle from His honours. Nor was their 'witness' to the historic Christ alone. The modern cry, "Back to Jesus," would have had no meaning for men whose experience daily proved that the "gospels are not four but ten thousand times ten

<sup>1</sup> B. W. Henderson's *Life and Principate of the Emperor Nero*, 357.

thousand, and the last word of every one of them is: Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."<sup>1</sup> For there is no evidence more certain than that of the 'martyrs' that when the great day came and they passed into the furnace, lo! there was One standing by them like unto the Son of Man. This consciousness of the presence of a living, victorious Christ was by no means restricted to the constitutionally brave—if it were its value might be discounted. The early Church was not without its Mr. Fearing, and Mr. Despondency's daughter, Much-Afraid; timid souls, who dreaded that when the trial came they would be found wanting. But when they, too, passed into the dark valley they found that He was there, and their fear left them.

We have pointed out already that the martyrs were witnesses to the absoluteness of the Christian faith, that the religion of Jesus would have nothing to do with the current syncretism, i.e. with the tendency then so fashionable to look upon all religions as much the same in substance, differing only in labels. Time after time we find the magistrates, either actuated by mercy or prompted by their "philosophy," striving to draw the martyrs into syncretistic admissions which would have given them their liberty at the price, as would have seemed to their judges, of a mere quibble in words. But the martyrs refused to purchase life by any compromise between their faith and the world, or by any language which would lower in the slightest the absolute claims of Christ to be all and in all. Well would it be for the Church to-day if she could learn the lesson they taught. The fashionable syncretism of the Empire

<sup>1</sup> Glover, *Conflict of Religions in the Roman Empire*, 140.

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has passed away ; men are no longer intent on the identification of the gods of Greece and Rome. In its place we see a more dangerous fusion, the identification of the world and the Church, the attempt to claim for a rotten social system the sanctions of religion, the syncretism of material and spiritual things, the disbelief in all forms of spiritual enthusiasm. We need once more to catch the martyr-spirit, a belief in the absoluteness of the Christian faith translated into facts which shall make the Church 'a peculiar people,' whose strength does not lie in any false blending of light and darkness, but in her renunciation of and aloofness from the world, and in her defiance of all social systems, organized politics, and world interests which are antagonistic to the great laws of the Christian Commonwealth, not as interpreted by modern cowards, but as laid down by Jesus Himself.