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THE ACTS

OF THE

EARLY MARTYRS

BY

J. A. M. FASTRÉ, S. J.

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P R E F A C E .



WITH the holy thou wilt be holy, and with the perverse thou wilt be perverted" (Ps. xvii), says the Prophet-King. If this is true, when said of good and of evil company, it is no less so when applied to good and to bad books; nay, without exaggeration, we may assert, that in the latter supposition the truthfulness becomes much more evident. True or false friends we cannot make our inseparable companions; but how easy it is to have with us, at all times, a favorite book, and draw from it lessons of virtue and wisdom; or a baneful poison, which, slowly but surely, undermines our nobler nature, and, at last, produces moral ruin and death! Would to God that all they, to whom the care of the young and innocent has been confided, were fully aware of the awful responsibility placed upon them in this

regard! how great the evils that might be prevented! how abiding the happiness that might be secured!

If, then, in this age of indiscriminate reading, we feel that we are actually doing a good work, when, from among the multitude of books daily brought to our notice, we can select some which we dare conscientiously recommend as not hurtful to morality and Christian piety, should we not make it a duty to spread, as far as we are able, those writings which make us acquainted with the virtuous lives and generous deeds of the heroes of Christianity—our Brethren in the Faith, who have ennobled our common nature? What lessons to be learned! what examples to be imitated!

May God, who is so wonderful in His Saints, bless our endeavors to make known more and more the mighty workings of His grace in the hearts of His chosen friends; that, in the days of trials and struggles, should they ever come, we, strengthened by their example, may, as children of the Saints, prove that we are not unworthy of having received their glorious inheritance!



THE MARTYRS.



I.

ST. CYPRIAN.

IF OF every one of God's Saints it may truly be said, that his death was precious in the sight of the Lord, there are very many among them about whom it is no less true to assert, that their life also was precious in the sight of men. For the bright example of their virtues so shone before others that, almost unawares, men were induced to study and practically to emulate what they admired most in the models placed before them. Thus it is that the friends of God comply with the injunction of the Saviour: "So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." Hence we

may also infer, that the higher the position to which God raises any one in His Church, the more should he strive by good deeds to excel his brethren and to go before them in godliness, in faith, in charity. What more illustrious example of all this can we find, than is presented to us in the life and death of the great St. Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage?

Born in Africa of a rich and noble family, Thascius Cyprianus was teaching eloquence when he became acquainted with a holy priest named Cæcilius. Cyprian was still a Pagan. The pursuit of worldly knowledge, the securing of a great name among men, had been the sole object of his ambition. He had, indeed, heard of the teachings of Christianity; but self-denial, humility, simplicity, contempt of the transitory riches and honors of this life seemed wholly beyond his aspirations. He knew not the all-powerfulness of divine grace. By degrees, however, as he gave himself up to the training of the servant of God, a new light illumined his mind, his understanding began to perceive the sublimity of the doctrines of truth, and his heart was opened to their hallowed influence. But when his soul had been purified in the saving waters of Baptism, he became in Christ a new creature. His views, his desires were changed. He longed no more to be of this world, except inasmuch as he

might be made an instrument of salvation unto others.

His master, Cæcilius, had passed to a better life, Cyprian inherited his piety and other virtues. Even when a Pagan, and still more when a catechumen, he had made it a law to himself, to endeavor to acquire every good quality which he discovered in those who were distinguished by their prudence and wisdom. He now devoted himself with unwearied zeal to the study of the holy Scriptures, less anxious to penetrate their meaning than to understand their practical bearing. This reading inspired him with a great love for the evangelical counsels: he began to lead a life of perfect chastity; he sold all his possessions, and distributed the price of them among the poor. After this, he undertook the defense of Christianity, in several learned works, and, on account of his acquirements and virtue, was raised to the dignity of the priesthood, although he was still a new convert.

On the death of Donatus, Bishop of Carthage, Cyprian was unanimously chosen to succeed him. It was in vain that he declared himself unworthy of so great a dignity, and incapable of worthily discharging its duties. His humility made him conceal himself for some time, but the will of Heaven was too plainly manifest to be long resisted.

This new office caused no change in his manners. To mildness and charity he united great firmness and courage. His very looks inspired those who approached him with respect and veneration. He was ever kind and cheerful, whilst at the same time he was grave and dignified. In his dress he was without worldly display, neither did he exhibit any affected poverty. How he loved the poor of his flock, we may judge by the interest he took in their well-being when he was only a catechumen.

The Church had enjoyed some years of repose, but, after the death of the Emperor Philip, his successor, Decius, inaugurated his reign by a most cruel persecution. Soon it extended to Africa. St. Cyprian, on account of his success in defending the Christian Religion, was especially obnoxious to the Pagans. They had ever shown a spiteful disposition toward him, because, being born among them and having followed their superstitions for a long time, he had devoted his extraordinary talents and vast erudition to a doctrine which they affected to despise. When they beheld him fearless amidst the dangers which threatened him from every side, and learned how, by his letters and eloquent words, he was cheering on his people to stand firm in the Faith, their angry feelings were still more violently aroused. Again and again, in the midst of the

festivities at the amphitheatre, the vengeful cry had been raised: "Cyprian to the lions!"

His personal safety did not move the holy Bishop, but the interests of the Church were to be considered. Wherefore, yielding to the earnest entreaties of the Faithful, he betook himself to a place of retirement. Here, however, he did not pass away his time in idleness. He wrote numerous letters to his clergy, guiding and exhorting them—like a watchful shepherd. He consoled the confessors, who were lingering in prison: he manifested the greatest solicitude for all whom the Lord had intrusted to his charge. Thus it was that, although absent, he seemed yet to be in their midst.

When peace was restored to the Church, St. Cyprian returned to Carthage. But he was soon again, and a third time, obliged to seek safety in exile. For the masters of Rome, who rapidly succeeded each other, seemed all to agree in one plan of policy, that of persecuting the Church. But the hand of God was also heavy upon them.

During these intervals of clouds and sunshine, our Saint had to keep up a ceaseless struggle against heresy and schism. The relaxation of morals among the people, was to him another source of grief and trouble. Besides, war and pestilence, which alternately ravaged the fairest

portions of the Empire, gave ample exercise to his unbounded charity. Thus his life presents an uninterrupted series of cares and anxieties, of opposition and success, of sorrows and consolation. But he that places his trust in God shall not be put to confusion, he shall stand firm as the rock, although the winds of adversity howl around him. So it was with St. Cyprian; he possessed his soul in peace, in spite of all the assaults of the enemies of truth.

Meanwhile, Valerian had obtained possession of the Empire. At first he showed himself favorable to the Christians. Unfortunately for himself and for the people, he suffered himself to be guided and ruled by Macrianus, one of his courtiers. This man, conscious that the lowness of his birth, and the meanness of his character caused him to be despised by the Romans, resolved to astonish them by the greatness of his power. To attain his aim, he availed himself of every means that his wicked mind could suggest: flattery, intrigue, threats, duplicity, even the secret arts of magic, all were brought into play. The fickle-minded Emperor became the sport of this sworn enemy of the Christians. An edict of persecution was issued. At first, the Governors of the different Provinces were satisfied with sending into exile those who refused to sacrifice to the gods: soon, however,

confiscation, and tortures, and death were deemed necessary to gratify the hatred of the persecutors.

St. Cyprian, who had so often strengthened and cheered on the Faithful by his eloquent words, was now to animate them by his example. Paternus, the Proconsul of Africa, summoned him to stand before his tribunal. He said to him :

“Our most pious Emperors, Valerian and Gallienus, have done me the honor of writing to me, that it is their will, that they who do not follow the worship of the Romans, be forthwith compelled to conform to the customs and ceremonies thereof. I have summoned thee before me, to learn from thy own lips, what answer thou hast to make in reply to the orders of our Emperors.”

“I am a Christian and a Bishop,” answered Cyprian. “I know no other gods, except the one true God, who created the heavens and the earth, and the sea and all things therein. He is the God whom we Christians serve. To Him we offer our prayers and supplications, both night and day, for ourselves, for all men, and for the health and prosperity of the Emperors themselves.”

“Dost thou persevere in that declaration?” asked Paternus.

“An upright resolution, which God directs, cannot be changed,” replied the Saint.

“Thou art then ready to go into exile to the City Curubis, according to the orders of the Emperors?” said the Proconsul.

“I am ready to go.”

“The Emperors have honored me by writing their commands not only in regard to the Bishops, but also concerning the Priests; I would, therefore, wish to know from thee, who are the Priests that live in this city.”

“Your own laws wisely and justly forbid us to become informers. They cannot, therefore, be reported and pointed out by me; but you may be able to find them in all the neighboring cities.”

“I will endeavor to find them this very day in their respective places,” said Paternus.

“Our principles and practice, which your own good sense must approve, forbid any of us to give himself up, of his own accord. If, however, you institute a diligent search, it will not be difficult for you to find them.”

“I will not fail to use a becoming diligence,” said the Proconsul. Then he added: “I have also orders to forbid you to hold your assemblies, or to enter into the cemeteries. Every one who

disobeys this command shall be punished with death."

"If you have such orders, it is for you to see how you can best comply with them," said Cyprian.

Upon this the Proconsul commanded that the holy Bishop should be taken to Curubis. This city was situated upon the sea-coast, about fifty miles from Carthage. The location was healthy and pleasant, although sandy and barren. The inhabitants treated the Saint with the greatest kindness. The Christians of the place, as well as those of the neighborhood, availed themselves of his abode among them to hold frequent intercourse with him. He solved their doubts, settled their differences, directed them in the path of Christian perfection, prepared them for Martyrdom,—which the disturbed state of the times seemed to foreshadow to many of their number. Nor was the Saint himself left without a warning of the Martyrdom which awaited him.

On the very night after his arrival, St. Cyprian had a vision, which he thus related to Pontius, his deacon, who had followed him into exile: "Before I fell asleep, there appeared to me a youth of uncommon stature: he led me to the residence of the Proconsul, and placed me before his tribunal.

No sooner had he looked at me than he began to write my sentence on a tablet, which he held in his hand. As he had not previously made me pass through the usual interrogatory, I had not the least knowledge of the nature of the sentence. The youth, however, who stood behind the Proconsul, read what had been written, and, as he was not allowed to speak to me, he gave me to understand by signs the substance of the sentence. For he stretched out one of his hands in the shape of a broad-sword, and struck the other, thereby imitating the action of beheading a person. No words could have made his meaning more plain and intelligible. I understood that the hour of my death was not far distant. Immediately, I begged the Proconsul to delay the execution of my sentence for a short time—even if it were only for one day—that I might set my affairs in proper order. After I had repeated my request, he appeared satisfied with the justice of the demand, and, smiling, he wrote again on the tablet. By twisting his fingers one behind the other, the youth signified to me that my petition had been granted.” This delay of one day the Saint understood to mean one year.

St. Cyprian now gave his undivided attention to regulating the affairs of his Church. Whilst he was thus occupied, there arrived a messenger from

Rome, sent to him by Pope St. Xystus. The Holy Father forewarned him, that the persecution was about to break out with renewed violence. Valerian, who was preparing his fatal expedition against the Persians, thought to propitiate the favor of the gods by publishing a more cruel edict against the Christians. He commanded that Bishops, Priests, and Deacons should be forthwith executed; that Senators and Roman knights should be first degraded, and that, if they persevered in their Religion, they should be beheaded; that women of high rank should be banished; that officers and domestics of the imperial household should be sold as slaves. The Saint immediately communicated these tidings to the other Bishops, that they might prepare themselves and their flocks to stand firm in the Faith. Senators, and many other persons of high rank, visited St. Cyprian, and besought him to change his place of abode, at least for a short time, until the first fury of the gathering storm should have passed away. But he preferred to await the good pleasure of his Father in heaven, rather than deprive the souls, committed to his care, of his presence—which the times had rendered so necessary to them.

Meanwhile, Galerius-Maximus had succeeded in the Proconsulship of Africa. He recalled the Saint

to Carthage, that he might have him near at hand as soon as the imperial edict should be promulgated. This edict reached Carthage about the middle of August, whilst the Proconsul was residing at Utica. He sent immediately a band of soldiers to seize the venerable Bishop, and to bring him to the place of his own residence. But when St. Cyprian heard of this order of his arrest, he yielded to the advice of his friends, and withdrew into a place of concealment: not indeed because he desired to escape death, but that he might die in Carthage, and—by the public confession of his Faith—give an example of courage and perseverance to his flock.

When Galerius returned to Carthage, the Saint went again to the garden, which was his ordinary abode. Here he was arrested by the chief officer of the Proconsul. Placed in a chariot, he was taken to a country-seat at Sextus, six miles from the city, where Galerius resided. The Proconsul not being ready, and, perhaps, unwilling to proceed immediately with the trial, put it off for some days. In the meantime, the Saint was intrusted to the keeping of the chief officer, who dwelled in the suburb called Saturnus, between the streets of Venus and Salus. When it became generally known, that the holy Bishop had been

taken, and was kept as a prisoner at the house of the chief officer, the whole city was stirred up. The Pagans, as well as the Christians, vied with each other in expressing their sympathy. They passed whole days and nights before his dwelling; for the noble qualities of the Confessor of the Faith, but above all his unbounded charity, had endeared him to all his fellow-citizens. It was not without great difficulty, that order could be preserved among the vast multitude, that was incessantly thronging around the house, anxious as they were to listen once more to his eloquent voice, and to have even a glimpse of his person. The chief officer, who treated the Saint with great kindness and respect, permitted several of the Faithful to take their evening meal with him.

On the fourteenth of September—a year after the vision of the Saint at Curubis—St. Cyprian, accompanied by a strong guard, was led to the prætorium of the Proconsul. The distance was about a stadium from the officer's house. The sky was calm and serene: the weather oppressively warm. An immense crowd of people of every rank and condition followed: except for the solemn silence which reigned among these vast numbers, the march might have appeared as that of a triumphal procession. When they arrived at the

prætorium, as the Proconsul was still absent, the officer requested the Saint to rest himself upon a seat covered with linen, as if prepared for a person of episcopal dignity. One of the soldiers, who had formerly been a Christian, seeing him all wet with perspiration, on account of the hurry of the journey, and the warmth of the day, kindly offered him a change of dry linen, but the Martyr excused himself, and said: "We are using a remedy for complaints, which will probably finish to-day."

Galerius now entered, and seated himself on his tribunal. Addressing the Bishop, he said to him:

"Art thou Thascius Cyprianus?"

"I am," answered the Saint.

"Art thou he who has shown himself the chief and father of sacrilegious men?"

"I am he."

"Our most sacred Emperors will and command, that thou shouldst offer sacrifice to the gods."

"I will not do it."

"Have a care of thyself."

"Do what you have been commanded. In a matter so manifestly just, there is for me no need of deliberation."

The Proconsul, after taking the advice of his

council, said, with some difficulty, as he was in ill health :

“Thou art long since accused of living without piety and religion ; thou hast misled many persons by instilling into their minds the ungodly principles of thy doctrines ; thou hast shown thyself an enemy of the gods of Rome, and hast despised her holy laws ; nor have our pious and most sacred Emperors, Valerian and Gallienus, and our most noble Cæsar Valerian, been able to make thee conform to the ceremonies of their worship. Wherefore, since thou art proved to be the author and leader of the most baneful crimes, thou shalt serve as an example to them whom, by thy wickedness, thou hast associated with thyself, that thus order and right principles may be established by thy blood.”

Having thus spoken, he raised his voice, and read from a tablet this sentence :

“It is our will, that Thascius Cyprianus be beheaded.”

“Thanks be to God,” replied the holy Bishop.

When the Christians, who thronged around the tribunal, heard the sentence, they all cried out as with one voice : “Let us go and suffer with him.” And a great tumult arose.

The Martyr left the prætorium attended by a

large body of soldiers, the centurions and tribunes marching on each side of him. They led him out of the city into a wide plain surrounded by a grove of high trees, upon which many climbed, because the immense crowd hindered them from witnessing the execution. Arrived at the appointed place, the Saint took off his mantle, and kneeling down, continued for some time in prayer. Then he put off his dalmatic, which he gave to the deacons, and, remaining in a linen garment, he awaited the executioner—to whom, as a token of that generous charity which had distinguished him through life, he ordered twenty-five pieces of gold to be given. Then, at his request, Julian, a Priest, and Julian, a sub-deacon, tied his hands, and holding them before his eyes, and bending his head, he received the stroke of death. He suffered on the fourteenth of September, A. D. 258.

The Pagans themselves wept over his death, because, in spite of their prejudices, they were forced to confess, that the holy Martyr, in his deeds of kindness and charity, had never made any distinction between them and the members of his flock. The Faithful buried his body in a field adjoining the place of execution. Here they were wont to assemble, and to implore

the intercession of him, who had been their guide and model whilst upon earth, and whose friendship and protection, they knew, would not be wanting to them—now that he was crowned with bliss in heaven.





II.

SS. TRYPHON AND RESPICIUS.

THE persecution under the Emperor Decius, was one of the most cruel endured by the Church. All the Governors of the Provinces, throughout the Empire, seemed animated with an unusual zeal to display their loyalty, by executing the edict of their master in a manner that might prove gratifying to his blood-thirsty disposition. If the localities in the neighborhood of the capital witnessed cruelties which shocked the feelings of the persecutors themselves, we need not wonder that the most barbarous exercise of power distinguished the Governors of distant countries. For cupidity, no less than hatred, inclined the officers of the law to hunt down and despoil the victims of arbitrary tyranny. Hence, every Christian who was supposed to possess wealth, or to rank high among his brethren, was at once doomed

to destruction. Neither age, sex, nor condition could avert the fatal blow, when the prospect of securing to themselves the possessions of the oppressed had once awakened the avarice of the men in power. Thus, too, it happened that the blessed Martyrs Tryphon and Respicius were called to glorify God, by their sufferings.

Born at Apamea, in Bithynia, they were persons distinguished among their countrymen by their wealth and position, but much more by the practice of every Christian virtue. No sooner was the edict of persecution published, than Fronto, the Irenarch of Apamea, resolved at once to cause the arrest of the two servants of God. Considering, however, their high rank, and the esteem in which they were held by all their fellow-citizens, he did not venture to proceed further, but sent information to the Governor of the Province of what had been done. Aquilinus was exceedingly rejoiced at the opportunity thus offered of trying before his tribunal two personages, so well known throughout his jurisdiction. He gave orders that they should forthwith be brought to Nicæa, where he resided. Their journey to the capital was one of great hardships, as well on account of the roads, which, at that season, were almost impassable, as on account of the treatment which they received from the

soldiers who had them in keeping. On their arrival in Nicæa, they were thrown into a horrid dungeon; wherein they lingered for many days, because the Governor, occupied as he was with affairs of State, or rather, desirous of gaining time to prepare for the trial, was unwilling to give them a hearing.

Meanwhile, the Confessors of the faith strengthened themselves for the contest by prayer and fasting, by mutual exhortation, and by the consideration of the uncertainty and transitoriness of the things of earth. From the dreariness of their prison, they looked up to the brightness and joy of the abode, where their heavenly Master was waiting for them—ready to bestow the crown of victory, if as true champions of the Cross, they would prove their fidelity by following in His foot-steps.

When at last the day of trial came, they were taken from their place of confinement and led before the tribunal of the Governor. A band of soldiers accompanied them through the streets of the city, and a vast multitude of people followed—all eager to witness the interrogatory of two Christians about whose virtues and wisdom they had heard so much. Aquilinus himself had taken care to gather around his tribunal a great number

of civil and military officers, in order to add solemnity to the proceedings.

When they stood in the presence of the Governor, the chief officer, addressing him, said :

“These are the holy men, as they are styled, brought from the neighborhood of Apamea, to be interrogated before your most eminent and illustrious tribunal.”

The Governor said to them :

“Then, first of all, tell me your names.”

The Saints replied : “One of us is called Tryphon, the other Respicius.”

Aquilinus then said : “About your rank in society, I will not ask you any questions : it matters very little. But what it concerns me to know is, how has the fickle goddess Fortune dealt with you ? Has she favored you with her smiles, or has she disdained to notice you ?”

Tryphon answered :

“Among us Christians, there is no such being known as that which you call the goddess Fortune. Whatsoever befalls us, whether good or evil, whatsoever happens in this world, we receive as coming from the hand of Divine Providence : this we believe, this we know. If, besides, you desire to learn what position we hold in society, I freely confess we are both of noble birth.”

Thereupon, Pompeianus, the chief officer, said to them :

“With that we were already acquainted ; but, perhaps, you yourselves are not aware that the Emperor has given orders, that all Christians of noble birth shall be burnt alive, unless indeed they are willing to offer sacrifice to the immortal gods.”

Respicius replied :

“Would to God that we might be deemed worthy to be burnt alive for our fidelity to our Lord Jesus Christ. If such are the orders which you have received, do not delay to execute them.”

The Governor said :

“The Emperor has, however, graciously condescended to make two exceptions, in case the person accused should not be of the proper age, or if he should not be of a sound mind. The former, I am convinced, does not regard either of you, as you both appear to be of full age ; the latter is not so evident to me. Tell me, then, do you believe yourselves to be of sound understanding ?”

“Our understanding is perfectly sound in Christ Jesus our Lord,” answered Tryphon. “For that very reason we are anxious to prove it by entering upon this struggle for His sake.”

“If you were really wise,” said Aquilinus, “you

would not hasten so thoughtlessly to your own ruin."

"What you look upon as our ruin is, on the contrary, the completion of our happiness," they replied.

"Foolish men!" exclaimed the Governor, "they know not what is in store for them. Is it the part of wisdom to prefer suffering to enjoyment? Did you ever reflect that tortures are fearful arguments, when they must be employed to teach good sense to men of your age and condition?"

"No torments shall ever hinder us from applying ourselves to the study of that perfect wisdom of which you are wholly ignorant. To live in the practice of its teachings, is joy and consolation; to die for its profession, is supreme happiness."

"We shall soon see how great is the difference between boasting, when you feel unhurt, and your perfect wisdom, when tortures are applied."

"We boast not, O Aquilinus," said Tryphon; "of ourselves, we are weak and helpless; but He, whose teachings we follow, will strengthen our weakness, and enable us to endure, not only patiently, but also joyfully, whatsoever torments you may choose to inflict—if such be His holy will. He alone is our hope: He too is our strength."

"Enough of all this," said the Governor. "Are

you ready, this very moment, to offer sacrifice to the gods?"

"Neither now, nor ever," both answered.

"Put them upon the rack," said Aquilinus to the executioners.

On hearing this command, the Martyrs immediately took off their garments, and showed themselves ready to undergo the torture. The executioners placed them upon the rack, and, during three hours, made them suffer all the horrors of this kind of punishment. The sufferers, however, seemed insensible to all their cruelties, so that the tormentors themselves were filled with astonishment at their power of endurance, and began to inquire of them how it happened that they possessed so wonderful a fortitude—which certainly was far above the strength of mortal men. They answered:

"These tortures are indeed calculated to shorten our lives; but the very knowledge of this is to us a source of comfort. We know that we suffer, because we profess the doctrines of Him who died to save us, and who is to be our Judge hereafter. By our sufferings we are likened unto Him, and He will reward us with a happiness whereof there shall be no end. But you also, you shall be judged one day by Him, and be made to give an account of all

your works. Are you prepared to stand before His judgment-seat, and to prove that all your deeds are done in righteousness and for justice's sake? You, especially, O Aquilinus, who are a judge upon earth, have you no dread of the judgments of an all-seeing and all-knowing God, who will summon you ere long before His tribunal? If you are as wise as you profess yourself to be, prepare to meet your own Supreme Judge; repent of your wrong-doings that you may find mercy before Him, who will judge one day yourself and your works."

This bold manner of speaking was by no means pleasing to the Governor. Wherefore, he resolved to make them feel the effect of his anger by protracting their sufferings. As on that very day he was going out on a hunting party, accompanied by his officers, he gave orders to have the Martyrs tied to horses in order to afford them, as he sportfully remarked, a last opportunity of enjoying the pleasures of the chase. It was the season of winter. Naked, torn, and bruised as they were by the torment of the rack, they were forced to run through rugged fields, where every step they made opened new wounds, and left the blood-stained impress of their feet. After that fearful excursion, Aquilinus called them again before him, and said:

"A bitter experience must have taught you that

it is by no means a pleasant matter to disobey our commands. Are you now willing to listen to wiser counsels, or to justify your conduct before us?"

"It is before God alone," answered Tryphon, "that we hope to be justified. His commands we obey, Him we serve: it is in vain for men to attempt to make us do things which are contrary to His holy law."

"I call our immortal gods to witness," said the Governor, "that unless you make up your minds willingly to offer sacrifice to them, no means will be spared to force you to comply with our order."

"We regard no orders which are contrary to our conscience, and to the obedience which we owe to our God, the Creator of heaven and earth," they replied.

"Let them again be taken to prison," said Aquilinus to his officers. "We will allow them time to consider the folly of their obstinacy. Imprisonment may cool down their enthusiasm and bring back the sober good sense which they were formerly supposed to possess."

Thereupon, the Martyrs were again led to the prison to endure still greater sufferings than they had undergone before—in consequence of special orders given to that purpose by Aquilinus.

Meanwhile, the Governor set out to visit some

other cities under his jurisdiction. On his return to Nicæa, he sent for the two prisoners, and said to them :

“ I doubt not that the delay which I have granted has had a good effect upon you. Hitherto, I own, I have treated you harshly ; but I have at my disposal, the means wherewith to make amends for the past : riches and honor await you, provided you resolve to follow the advice which I give. Justify yourselves before men by obeying the orders of the Emperor. If you do but offer sacrifice to the gods of the Empire, I myself will intercede for you, and obtain such favors that you will never regret the step you have taken ?”

“ If it were possible for us,” replied Tryphon, “ to render ourselves pleasing to man without displeasing God, we would not neglect the opportunity. No one is so silly as to disregard his own interests, when he can secure them by fair and honorable means. But when we must choose between the duty which we owe to our Maker and the iniquitous commands of man, it were the greatest folly to hesitate, even for a moment, in our choice. You have already heard our answer, we repeat it again : we know and serve but one God, the Creator and Ruler of the universe. It is useless to make any further attempts to force us to deny

Them: for we remember that our Lord Himself has said: 'He that shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before my Father who is in heaven.'"

"I admire your good sense," said Aquilinus; "it is for that very reason that I am desirous of saving your lives. I entreat you, therefore, once more, to have compassion on yourselves. Why would you forego the chance you have of securing happiness for yourselves, by offering sacrifice to the gods?"

"We cannot give a better proof that we have compassion on ourselves," answered Respicus "than by confessing our Lord Jesus Christ, the true Judge, who will come one day to call every one to an account for all his actions."

This unwavering constancy of the Confessor excited the anger of Aquilinus. Wherefore, he ordered their feet to be pierced with large nails. After this, he commanded them to be dragged through the principal streets of the city. The weather was very cold, the streets very rough. The brave champions seemed, nevertheless, insensible to the cruel treatment. When they were led back before the Governor, he was filled with wonder on seeing them so cheerful and unconcerned, and he exclaimed

"How is this? do you feel no pain?"

“None at all,” they answered, “the nails seem only to have been put in the soles of our shoes.”

“Well, let us see,” said Aquilinus, “whether there are not torments which prove more effective.”

Thereupon, he ordered the executioners to bind their hands and feet, and scourge them until they lay all covered with blood. After this their flesh was torn with iron hooks, and lighted torches were applied to their bleeding wounds. Whilst they were thus tortured, their countenances appeared radiant with a celestial joy; for an Angel from heaven hovered over them, displaying two bright crowns, which he seemed to place upon their brows. This vision inspired them with new powers of endurance, and both exclaimed:

“Lord Jesus Christ, suffer not that this day the evil one prevail against Thy servants. Hear us, and finish our course. As this combat is Thine, so let Thine be also the victory.”

The executioners filled with awe, as if some supernatural power had struck them, left off their bloody work. But the Governor aroused them, and suffered them not to relent.

“Torture them,” he said, “until they yield obedience to the Emperor’s will.” Then addressing the Martyrs: “How long will ye persevere,” he

said, "in your mad resolution? be wise according to your age, and obey at once."

"You have heard and seen, O wicked tyrant," replied Respicus, "that your useless words cannot change our firm resolve. You ought to know ere this that we despise your gods made of wood or stone. We serve the one true God. No torments shall turn us away from His love."

Aquilinus, apparently weary of the bloody work of that day, gave orders to put off the final execution. On the following morning, they were for the third time led before the Governor. He said to them:

"Are you now ready to obey the commands of the Emperor?"

"We have said again and again," answered Tryphon, "that we fear and worship the living God alone, who is in heaven."

"Beat them with leaden plummets," said Aquilinus, to the executioners, "until they can endure it no longer."

When he saw himself at last again disappointed, filled with rage, and at a loss what to do, he listened to the advice of his counsellors, and, holding a naked sword in his hand, he pronounced this sentence:

"These two men, Tryphon and Respicus, who

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are Christians, and unwilling to obey the commands of the Emperor, we order to be beheaded."

The soldiers, who were in attendance, immediately seized the Martyrs and led them to the place of execution. When arrived there, the unconquered soldiers of Christ, raising their hands to heaven, cried out with a loud voice :

"Lord Jesus Christ, receive our souls, and let them find rest in the bosom of the Patriarchs!" and forthwith they presented their heads to the executioner.

The Christians of the city took possession of the sacred remains and buried them in a secret place—where they were wont to assemble and assist at the sacred Mysteries—recommending themselves to the patronage and intercession of the holy Martyrs.

They suffered in the year 250. Their festival is kept on the tenth of November.





III.

ST. THEODOTUS.

ONE of the most illustrious Martyrs that adorn the Church of God, was St. Theodotus of Ancyra, in Galatia. His life and the humble occupation which he followed, seem of themselves little calculated to attract our attention; but the manner in which he made the lowliest means subservient to the noblest end, excites in us, almost in spite of ourselves, the highest admiration.

From his earliest years, he began to prepare himself, by the practice of every virtue, for the struggle which he was to sustain at the end of his life;—like a prudent champion desirous of securing a certain victory, he trained himself by first learning to conquer his own passions. Against the evil propensities of his own nature he declared a relentless war; nor did he desist before he had brought them under perfect subjection to the spirit.



Among the virtues which he called to his aid, whilst thus engaged in spiritual contests, the one upon which he placed his chief reliance was temperance. He held as a maxim, that a Christian should find a delight in mortifying the body; that his glory should consist in self-abasement; his greatest riches in enduring poverty with magnanimity, and a soul possessing itself in peace. Thus this man, in his humble calling of an inn-keeper, was guided by principles which make the hero and the sage. He used fasting as a means to combat the natural love of pleasures, temperance to overcome the assaults of the flesh, alms-deeds to deprive riches of the power of doing harm. Nor was he satisfied with thus devoting himself to his own perfection and sanctification. Zeal for the salvation of one's neighbor, which ever distinguishes genuine sanctity, animated also our Saint. By his earnest and powerful exhortations, he induced many of his brethren to lead new and edifying lives, and persuaded a great number of Jews and Pagans to embrace the precepts of Christianity.

As his house was a place of resort for persons of every class and condition in society, he availed himself of this circumstance to render services of kindness to all: he pleaded the cause of the innocent, who were oppressed by the injustice of

their powerful neighbors ; he took a special care of the sick and the poor ; he sympathized with the afflicted and soothed their pains ; in short, his charity knew no bounds, but had a balm for every wound, by making the sufferings of others all his own. God, in His goodness, blessed the Christian behavior of His servant ; and many miracles attested the sanctity of Theodotus. The most inveterate diseases yielded to the blessing of his hand : where other remedies had failed, there the voice of his prayer obtained a perfect cure. However, he applied himself chiefly to heal the ailments of the soul. Under his treatment, the dissolute became chaste, when they heard him extol the surpassing excellence of angelic purity ; men of pleasure embraced a life of sobriety, when, by his own example, they learned the advantages of self-control ; the covetous stretched forth the hand of generous liberality, when he had made them fully understand the words that had been spoken : “ It is a more blessed thing to give, rather than to receive.” Hence, his house became a school of holiness, and many of his followers had the glory of laying down their lives for the Faith.

Meanwhile, the government of Galatia had been given to Theotecnus, a man of a most violent and cruel disposition. He was an apostate,—having



forsaken the profession of Christianity in the hopes of obtaining worldly preferment. No sooner had he heard, that the Emperor was about to publish an edict of persecution against the Church, than, thinking that now was the favorable moment of securing the good graces of Maximian, he made a solemn promise of rooting out the very existence of Christianity in Ancyra, provided he were appointed its Governor. The Emperor immediately granted him what he so anxiously desired. When it became known, that Theotecnus was approaching the city, great consternation reigned among the Faithful. Many of them at once left their homes and fled to the mountains: others concealed themselves in caves, or sought the solitude of the desert. The Governor, in order to increase the alarm, and thus to lessen the difficulty of the task which he had undertaken, sent messenger after messenger before him, to proclaim, in advance, the rigor with which he intended to execute his cruel designs. Without waiting for his own arrival, the officers were commanded to tear down the churches, to drag the Priests into the temples of the gods, and to force them to offer sacrifice. This sudden storm so overwhelmed the Christians, that the greater number of them hardly bethought themselves of any means to avert its fury; for the long calm

which they had enjoyed had left them almost unprepared.

Their enemies, on the other hand, rejoicing at the easiness wherewith they were apparently securing their triumph, gave themselves up to every excess. They passed days and nights in mirth and revelry, amidst scenes of the wildest dissipations; and this licentious conduct, far from exhausting, served, on the contrary, to awaken their animosity against the Christians. For, when they left the places of loose indulgence, they broke open the houses of the Faithful, and destroyed or carried off whatever came within their grasp. If any one ventured to complain or to oppose them, he was treated as a rebel, and an enemy of the Empire. The magistrates, instead of endeavoring to restore order, appeared, by their own example, to encourage the extravagance of the revelers. After the imperial edicts had been published, this state of affairs became still more insupportable. No Christian ventured to show himself in public. The most distinguished among them, after having been despoiled of their possessions, were thrown into prison; their wives and daughters were dragged through the streets by heartless ruffians. They who succeeded in effecting their escape from the city, did not, by finding safety in the desert and on

the barren mountains, improve their condition. Here want and starvation followed them—all the more unendurable, as they had been delicately reared, amidst all the comforts which wealth can afford. The consequence was, many of them returned to Ancyra, in the vain hope of discovering that their persecutors were less inhuman than was supposed.

During these fearful times, the blessed Theodotus did not remain idle. Undismayed by the dangers which surrounded him on all sides, he boldly exposed himself to the assaults of his enemies, for the sake of giving aid to his brethren. It was not with the desire of hoarding up riches that he kept his inn; neither the acquisition of wealth nor its possession could have influenced a mind so noble and so generous. The object he kept ever in view was, that his dwelling should be a place of safety for the persecuted, a harbor of rest for the unfortunate, an asylum for the virtuous. But the extent of his charitable cares was not limited by what he did at home. He visited those who were imprisoned for the Faith, he consoled them in their sufferings, he supplied them with food and clothing. Nor did he neglect them after they had laid down their lives. He collected their ashes, or gathered together their torn and scattered limbs, and buried

them reverently—thus saving their sacred remains from being devoured by wild beasts and birds of prey. The pain of death, pronounced against those who performed this work of mercy, did not deter him from this pious duty.

The wicked Theotecnus had issued an order whereby it was commanded, that provisions of all kinds, before they could be exposed for sale, should first be offered to the idols. By this act of tyranny, the Christians were deprived of the means of obtaining food for themselves, as well as bread and wine for the celebration of the Sacred Mysteries, unless they outwardly conformed to the superstitious ceremonies of the Pagans. The priests of the idols were specially charged to watch strictly over the execution of this order. In this extremity, however, the provident care of Theodotus came to the relief of his brethren. He had laid in great stores of provisions, which he now resold to them without exciting the suspicions of the authorities, since his avocation granted him the right of so doing. Thus his inn was a place of shelter for the homeless, a house of worship, the abode of Christian charity.

Whilst the Saint was thus employed, one of his friends, named Victor, was arrested by order of the Governor. The priests of Diana accused him of having spoken disrespectfully of the great Apollo,

and of having said, among other sacrilegious things, that he whom they worshiped as a god had violated his own sister, Diana, in the temple of Delos. Victor did not deny these accusations. On the contrary, he boldly addressed his accusers: "These crimes," said he, "of which I say that your god is guilty, are no inventions of mine; your own poets and historians substantiate the charge. Let theirs be the fault, if these accusations are false. But this I say, that your regard for common decency, and your own self-respect should make you ashamed of worshiping as a god, one who is believed guilty of crimes, the commission of which would fill poor mortals with horror."

The pagan friends of Victor tried to persuade him, to avoid the punishment of the laws, by yielding to the orders of the Governor. "Obey the command of Theotecnus," they said, "thou shalt open for thyself the way to honors by securing the friendship of the Emperors. Wealth and preferment will be at thy disposal. If thou refuse these fair terms, thou becomest thy own most cruel enemy. The most dreadful torments await thee: confiscation of thy possessions, the ruin and disgrace of thy family, an infamous death must follow; thy lifeless body, deprived of the honors of the

tomb, shall be brutally cast away to be devoured by hungry dogs."

When Theodotus heard of the dangers to which his friend was exposed, he hastened to his assistance; under cover of the night, and by bribing the jailer, he obtained admittance into the prison. He said to Victor: "A Christian must care for naught, except to lead a blameless life, by being upright in his dealings with others, by standing steadfast in the true Faith, by securing the one thing necessary, life everlasting."

Then, after cheering him up, and encouraging him to endure patiently the hardships of the prison, he put him on his guard against the secret snares of his pretended friends. "Hearken not," said he, "to the deceitful proposals of false friendship. These men are evil counselors. They seek not thy advantage, but thy ruin. Wouldst thou forsake us to follow them? What do they offer thee in exchange for all thou must necessarily lose? Is it a life of pleasure? Is it wealth and power? Are these short-lived vanities to be compared with the joys of the spirit,—the life of heavenly purity, which hitherto have been thine? No, my beloved friend, the greater their promises, the more worthless the fulfilment. Of what profit to the wretched Judas were the thirty pieces of silver for which he



betrayed his Divine Master? Think on this and remember, that the gifts and blessings, which are worth possessing in this life, are not at the disposal of the ungodly. Our God alone is the Master of them, and reserves to Himself the bestowal thereof. They that love and serve Him are entitled to their possession."

These words of Theodotus reanimated the wavering Faith of Victor. He resolved to stand firm against all the insidious wiles of his false advisers. The day of trial soon arrived. He was put to the torture. The numerous spectators were filled with astonishment at the heroic fortitude which he displayed. He had nearly run his course; the crown of victory lay within his grasp, when he begged of the tyrant, to allow him time to consider the proposals that had been repeatedly made to him. The executioners, thinking that he had apostatized, immediately put a stop to their bloody work. He was taken back to prison, where he died shortly after of the wounds which he had received, thus leaving it unknown, except to God alone, in what sentiments he left this world.

At a distance of forty miles from Ancyra, is a town called Malos. During one of the excursions, which charity prompted our Saint to make into the neighboring country, he was led thither by the

special providence of God. He saw a vast multitude of people assembled on the banks of the river Halys. He soon learned from them, that they had just thrown into the river a part of the remains of the holy Martyr Valens, who, after suffering various torments, had at last been burned whilst still alive. When the crowd withdrew, Theodotus began to follow the tortuous course of the river, in the hope of obtaining possession of the Martyr's body. He had not gone far, before he saw, to his great delight, that the eddies had cast the precious relics upon the bank. Taking with him this sacred treasure, so providentially discovered, he did not venture to enter the town, but betook himself, at some distance below, to a grotto, near which flowed a branch of the Halys. Thinking that he would be secure from observation in this lonely place, he was greatly astonished at seeing himself suddenly surrounded by a crowd of men. They were Christians who had but recently been freed from prison by the intercession, and, especially, by the bribes of the Saint. For they had been accused by their nearest relations of having overthrown an altar of Diana, and were awaiting their final doom, when Theodotus undertook to save them. This unexpected meeting filled them all with the greatest joy. They could not sufficiently express their thankfulness to the

servant of God; he, on his part, praised their zeal and courage, and exhorted them to give all the honor and glory of what he had done to Him, who had deigned to use so poor an instrument as himself, to accomplish so worthy an end.

As Providence had thrown them so happily together, Theodotus thought it proper that they should not separate without rejoicing in common. Wherefore, he invited them all to stay and partake of a suitable repast, which his experience in matters of the kind, and his knowledge of the country, found it not difficult to prepare. They seated themselves upon the green sward,—the murmuring of the stream, the warbling of birds, their own canticles of thanksgiving enlivening the scene. Before beginning their meal, he sent two of his companions to the town, to invite the Priest to come and share their banquet, and bestow his blessing upon the good things which God's kindness had provided for them. For it was the Saint's habitual practice, never to take food without first obtaining, if at all possible, the blessing of a Priest; besides, he was now particularly desirous of enjoying this favor, as he was on a dangerous journey. When the men drew near the church, they were set upon by a pack of furious dogs, who disregarding the sacred rights of hospitality due to

strangers, would doubtless have done them some harm had not the Priest come to the rescue. Hearing the noise, as he was leaving the Church, after the prayer of Sixth, he immediately drove off the unmannerly brutes, and kindly saluted the strangers. They, however, did not know the Priest. On learning that they were Christians, he welcomed them most cordially to his dwelling. As they were entering, he suddenly stood still, and, gazing intently at his two visitors, exclaimed, "O Fronto, (for that was the Priest's name,) behold thy dream verified! Yes, my friends," he continued, "last night, I saw in a dream, or a vision, two men who perfectly resembled you in every feature. They said, that they had brought into this country a great treasure, which they were to give to me. As I doubt not that you are the two men whom I saw, please tell me, where and what is this treasure?"

"It is quite true," answered the men, "that we have found a rich treasure by meeting the wonderful Theodotus, whom you may see whenever you are ready to accompany us. But first, O Father, lead us to the Priest of this town."

"I am he who stand before you," said Fronto. "But I am all anxiety to behold the blessed man of whom you speak. Let us go without further

delay to welcome him to my dwelling; for, where there are Christians, it is not proper that any one should be suffered to pass the night in the woods."

Upon this they repaired together to the place where Theodotus and his companions were waiting for them. When they arrived, they all embraced one another in token of mutual esteem and affection. Fronto entreated them to take up their abode at his house, at least for a few days. But the Saint begged to be excused, as his duties would not allow him to absent himself for any length of time from Ancyra. "For there," said he, "a glorious field is opened for Christians to distinguish themselves in the service of their Master. And, although I do not look upon myself as a champion fit to sustain the glorious cause of Christ, yet I can be a witness of the generous struggle of others, and applaud them when they triumph. Besides this, I can always render some service to my brethren in their need."

When they had partaken of the repast, Theodotus, looking around him and smiling, said to Fronto: "How beautiful this quiet spot appears to me! If we could erect here a little chapel, I think it would be the very place suited for the reception of holy relics."

"I am of the same opinion," replied the Priest,

“but, would it not be better first to obtain some relics, before we make plans for a building wherein to put them? Have then a care to secure the sacred remains of some Martyr, and I will not fail to prepare a proper place for their reception.”

“I will look out for that,” said the Saint, “or rather the Lord Himself will provide. This only I ask of thee, Father, do not delay in making the preparation: the relics shall be here at an early day.”

So saying he took from his finger a ring, which he gave to the Priest as a pledge of his promise, and added: “Let God be a witness between us, that the relics shall be at hand after a few days.”

Upon this they all separated, after thanking God, whose kind providence had granted them so pleasant and unexpected a meeting.

When Theodotus reached Ancyra, he found the city full of consternation and confusion. The persecution seemed to have unsettled the state of affairs, as much as if an earthquake had spread dread and havoc among the inhabitants. Law and order were no longer known. Forgetting all care of others, every one was busy with forming plans for his own preservation.

At that time, there lived in Ancyra seven Virgins, who, from their very childhood, had consecrated

themselves to God. They had spent their days in the practice of every virtue, and, above all, they had ever been most solicitous to keep unsullied their purity—which they had placed under the special guardianship of their heavenly Bridegroom. The Governor gave orders to have them arrested. They were put to the torture; but no amount of cruelty was able to shake their constancy in the Faith. Finding himself disappointed in this, Theotecnus handed them over to some young libertines to be insulted at will, in contempt of their Religion. When they heard this inhuman sentence, which was to them worse than death—in the midst of torments, they raised their hands and eyes to heaven, and prayed: “Lord Jesus Christ,” they said, “so long as it was in our power to preserve undefiled our virginal purity, Thou knowest how carefully we have labored so to do. Suffer not that to-day we lose that which, by a willing and pleasing sacrifice, we have made wholly Thine.”

The most impudent of the young men was about to lay hold of Thecusa, the eldest of the Virgins, when, bathed in tears, she cast herself at his feet and said to him:

“My son, what endless remorse art thou preparing for thyself? What pleasure can there be in ill-using us, whom thou beholdest worn out with

fasting, sickness, torture, yea, and old age? Why wouldst thou dishonor these bodies, which, according to the Governor's command, are only fit to become the food of beasts and birds of prey?"

Seeing that her words, or rather the power given to them from on high, began to produce an impression on the mind of the young man, she removed the veil from her head, and, showing her gray hairs, she continued: "Behold, my son, seventy years have left their impress on this head; my sisters are not much younger. If venerable age and innocence do not move thee, does not thy memory associate them with some tender recollection of the past? Hast thou not, perhaps, a mother, a relative of the same age? If they be still alive, or even if unsparing death have laid them in the grave, let the remembrance of them plead this day in our favor. Spare us for their sake. Leave us to our tears and sufferings. Believe me, if, yielding to the noble impulse of a manly nature, thou harm us not, Jesus, our God and Saviour, will not leave thy generosity unrewarded."

This moving appeal produced the desired effect. The young men, far from making any attempt to injure their helpless victims, shed tears of compassion, and went their way, loudly protesting against the unfeeling barbarity of Theotecnus, who had

endeavored to make them the tools of his detestable tyranny.

Meanwhile, the Governor learned that his wicked designs against the holy Virgins had been frustrated. Determined to have his revenge, yet dreading to expose their chastity a second time, on account of the esteem in which their virtue was held, even by the Pagans, he resolved to employ another expedient. He ordered that they should be made to officiate as the priestesses of Diana and Minerva. The Pagans of Ancyra had a custom of going every year, on a certain day, to a neighboring lake to wash the images of these goddesses. The day, on which that ceremony was to take place, had just then come. Theotecnus willed that Thecusa and her companions should be placed at the head of the procession. Standing in a chariot, exposed to the impudent gaze and the derision of the assembled multitude, the modest servants of Christ appeared rather dead than alive. After them came the musicians, with flutes and cymbals; and the bacchants dancing, singing and howling, to testify that they were laboring under the inspiration of the god of wine. The Governor himself, attended by his guards, closed up the procession. Many of the spectators, although enemies of the Christians, were shocked at the barbarous sight, and openly

expressed their disgust; others praised the modesty of the holy Virgins, and even shed tears of compassion, when they beheld the rough treatment which they were made to endure.

Such was the spectacle which Ancyra presented, when Theodotus returned: He was not without uneasiness concerning the seven Virgins, who were struggling for the Faith; he feared that the natural weakness and timidity of their sex might at last give way before these long-continued trials,—less on account of their painfulness, than by reason of the publicity given to them. Wherefore, he begged of God, with many tears, to strengthen His servants in this hour of peril. That he might give himself to prayer without being interrupted, he shut himself up in a little cottage, belonging to a poor man, Theocharis by name; it stood near the church of the Patriarchs. Here he was joined by some Christians, among whom were the young Theodotus, a relative of the Saint, and Polychronius, a nephew of the Virgin Thecusa. They had thus remained in prayer, prostrate on the ground, from sunrise until midday, when the wife of Theocharis brought the news, that Thecusa and her six companions had been drowned in the lake. On hearing this, Theodotus raising himself from the ground, but still kneeling, lifted up his eyes toward heaven with a

look that bespoke the joy, the love, and thankfulness of his heart: "I thank Thee, O Lord," he said, "because Thou didst not suffer that my sighs and tears should be unavailing: Thou hast heard the prayer of Thy unworthy servant."

Then, addressing the wife of Theocharis, he asked her some particulars of the Martyrdom of the Virgins. She, having been an eye-witness of all that had passed, answered:

"After coming to the lake, the Governor began anew to tempt their constancy, by making to them the most flattering promises, if they would renounce their Religion, and worship the gods of the Empire. Thecusa and her companions would not so much as listen to his fair words. Then he tried once more to frighten them with threats of tortures; the holy Virgins heeded them not. Next the priestesses of Diana and Minerva advanced, and endeavored to clothe them with white garments, and to put crowns upon their heads, as a mark of their priestly office; the noble Christians tore the garments and the crowns, and with scorn and disgust cast them far away. At this, Theotecnus grew exceedingly furious; he gave orders, immediately, to put them all in a small boat, to tie stones about their necks, and to cast them into the depths of the lake. This

was done. They were drowned at a distance of from four to five hundred feet from the shore."

When Theodotus had heard the account of the Martyrdom of the Virgins, he resolved at once to obtain possession of their bodies. Wherefore he called in Polychronius and Theocharis, and together they began to deliberate about the most speedy and feasible means of effecting this purpose. About sundown a Christian youth, named Glycerius, came in and told them that the Governor, suspecting that the Christians would endeavor to carry off the bodies of the Martyrs, had placed a strong guard of soldiers near the lake. This news filled the Saint with great grief; it seemed to him now almost impossible to execute his intention, both on account of the soldiers, who were to hinder their approach, and by reason of the heaviness of the stones which had sunk the bodies into the water. Night had now come, and they had not yet agreed on any plan which appeared practicable. When the darkness had become so great that his steps could not be watched, the Saint went to a neighboring church of the Patriarchs, but on arriving there he was sorely disappointed. The Pagans had walled up the entrance. However, he prostrated himself outside, near the place where the altar stood. There he continued for sometime in prayer.



After this he betook himself to another church, called of the Fathers; and, finding that one closed up in the same manner as the former, he threw himself on the ground before the entrance, and poured forth his soul in fervent prayer. Suddenly he heard a great noise behind him, and thinking that he was pursued, he hastened to the dwelling of Theocharis. Here he had not been long before, worn out with fatigue and anxiety, he fell into a deep sleep. But he was scarcely asleep, when the blessed Thecusa appeared to him, and said:

“Sleepest thou, my son Theodotus, and hast thou no care for us? Hast thou so soon forgotten all the lessons and the good advice which I gave thee, during thy childhood and youth, whereby, contrary to the expectation of all, I led thee from virtue to virtue? When I was with thee, thou didst ever honor me as thy mother; knowest thou not, that, after her death, a dutiful son owes the last duties to his mother? Suffer not, my son, that our bodies beneath the waters become the prey of fishes. Arise, hasten to the lake; for after two days a great struggle awaits thee. But, above all, beware of a traitor.” So saying she vanished.

Theodotus awoke from his sleep, arose, and immediately calling the Brethren together, he related to them the vision. All declared themselves

ready to follow him whithersoever he would lead them. The remainder of the night they spent in praying, that God might grant a favorable issue to their undertaking. At the first appearance of day, they sent Theocharis and Glycerius to examine, by personal observation, how matters stood; for they had reason to suppose that the guard might have been withdrawn from the lake, as, on that day, the Pagans celebrated a great festival in honor of Diana. After an absence of about three hours, the messengers whom they had sent out returned. They reported, that the soldiers were still on guard, and that they had thought it unsafe to approach the lake, lest the soldiers, if aware of their presence, might suspect their intention, and redouble their watchfulness. Upon this they resolved to attempt nothing further that day, but to take some rest, and prepare for future labors.

So soon as night returned, they all went forth cheerfully, although they had tasted no food that day. Observing the strictest silence, they followed the road leading toward the lake. They were provided with sharp scythes so as to be able to cut speedily the thick ropes, with which the stones were tied to the bodies. The night was so very dark and cloudy that neither stars nor moon appeared. On their way they had to pass through



the place where criminals were publicly executed. No one ever ventured to pass over this spot after nightfall. All around, there were hanging dead bodies and skeletons, the flesh whereof had been devoured by birds of prey; the heads of others, stuck upon stakes, presented a ghastly spectacle. The ground was strewed with half-burnt limbs, that had been mangled upon the rack. A sudden feeling of dread and horror seized Theodotus and his companions. They began well-nigh to waver in their resolution, when, all at once, they heard a voice, saying: "Advance boldly, O Theodotus." This terrified them the more; but immediately each one signed himself on the forehead with the sign of the Cross. At the same time, there appeared before them, towards the East, a brilliant light in the form of a Cross. With mingled feelings of awe and joy, they prostrated themselves upon the ground, and, with their faces turned toward the glorious sign, they thanked and adored God.

Thus cheered on, they arose from prayer and proceeded on their journey. It was now so dark that they could not distinguish one another. To add to their distress a heavy rain set in, which rendered the road so soft and slippery, that it was next to impossible for them to keep on their feet. They saw no remedy for their troubles,

except to have again recourse to prayer. They were heard. On a sudden they beheld a stream of light coming, as it were, from a bright torch moving before them. At the same moment, there appeared two venerable men clad in shining garments, with snow-white hair and beard, they said to Theodotus: "Take courage, Theodotus. The Lord Jesus Christ hath written thy name among the Martyrs. He hath heard thy prayers and seen thy tears for the recovering of the holy bodies. We are sent to receive thee. We are they whom they call the Fathers. Near the lake, thou shalt find the Blessed Sosander, in full armor: he fills the guards with terror. But thou shouldst not have brought a traitor with thee."

Following the light that went before them, they arrived at last at the lake. The rain now began to fall in torrents; lightning rent the clouds; peal after peal of thunder succeeding shook the very ground; the unloosened winds seemed to threaten a general destruction. The guards were bewildered with fear. But they had not to struggle against the elements alone: for, whithersoever they turned their eyes, they beheld the gigantic form of a warrior, clad in coat of mail, with shield and helmet, brandishing a lance, whilst fire seemed to flash from his looks. Thrown into disorder, and more dead than alive,

the terrified soldiers fled, and succeeded at last in reaching some huts that stood not far off, wherein they concealed themselves. Meanwhile, the force of the wind had driven the waters of the lake toward the opposite shore, so as to leave uncovered the spot where lay the bodies of the Martyrs. Theodotus and his companions soon took possession of the precious remains, and, placing them carefully upon beasts of burden, removed them to the Church of the Patriarchs, where they buried them reverently. The names of these seven holy Virgins were: Thecusa, Alexandra, Phaina, Claudia, Euphrasia, Matrona, and Julitta; the three first had not only consecrated their virginity to God, but had also embraced the other evangelical counsels.

In the morning, it was rumored all over the city, that the bodies of the Martyrs had, during the preceding night, been taken out of the lake. This news excited a great commotion among the inhabitants. Wherever a Christian made his appearance, he was forthwith arrested and put to the torture, to force him to point out the probable authors of this misdemeanor against the laws. When the Saint heard what was going on, he immediately determined to deliver himself up to the magistrates, and to avow publicly that he alone was to be blamed for the act,—if the performing of

so humane an action were at all blameworthy. The Brethren, however, would by no means suffer him to follow his inclination in this matter.

Meanwhile, Polychronius, the nephew of Thecusa, disguised as a peasant, joined himself to some country people who were taking their produce to market; that thus he might ascertain more fully the feelings and opinions of the citizens concerning the occurrences of the night. This imprudent step he took without asking the advice of his more experienced Brethren. As he was well known to many of the inhabitants of Ancyra, his disguise did not save him from being soon fully recognized. He was arrested and taken before the Governor. When questioned by Theotecnus about the removal of the bodies, he preserved at first an unbroken silence—even when placed upon the rack, he seemed unwilling to betray his friends; but when, by order of the tyrant, the executioner put the sword upon his neck and told him to be ready to receive his death blow, he lost courage, and yielding to the fear of death, he declared, that Theodotus had carried off the bodies of the Virgins, and pointed out the place where they had been buried. Thereupon, Theotecnus commanded that the bodies should be taken up and burnt in public by the executioner. Then it was that the Brethren

understood that the wretched Polychronius was the traitor, against whom Theodotus had twice been warned.

When the Saint was informed of the treason of his young acquaintance, he shed many tears—weeping over the loss of one who had been so dear to him, on account of the relationship that existed between the apostate and the martyred Thecusa,—his own spiritual mother. From that moment, he became wholly indifferent to the things of earth, and thought only of death, which he knew was not far distant. He besought his Brethren to unite their prayers with his own, that God might deign to bestow upon him the crown of Martyrdom. All were filled with great concern when they heard him speak in this manner, the more so as, hitherto, he had been to them their greatest support, the source of consolation in all their trials and afflictions. Theodotus requested all to kneel down and pray with him. At first, he prayed in silence, but, after a while, raising his voice, he said: “Lord Jesus, O Thou the only hope of them that seem without hope, grant me the grace to finish courageously the bloody course that is before me; give me strength so to combat, that it may be made manifest to all, that Thou supportest me. I offer to Thee my blood, which I am eager to shed for the glory of

Thy name; receive this my oblation, and let it plead for the salvation of my Brethren; let the tyrant be appeased by this humble sacrifice which I offer unto Thee for their sake. Relieve them from further oppression; still the storm; give peace to Thy Church; that they, who believe in Thee, may worship Thee in freedom undisturbed, and sing and praise Thy power and mercy now and forever."

The Brethren who were present could not be consoled at the thought of being separated from one whom they so dearly loved. Weeping and lamenting, they said to him: "Farewell, beloved Theodotus, O thou so long the light and joy of all thy brethren. Thee, indeed, when thou departest from among us, the joyous choirs of Angels and Archangels will welcome into their midst; thee, our Lord Jesus Christ, will hail as His good and faithful servant, who has continued steadfast amidst all trials and tribulations; but who shall be left to comfort us? Grief, and mourning, and distress shall be our portion, when thou art no more. Who will uphold us in our doubts and troubles, when thou art gone?"

Theodotus was greatly moved by this manifestation of grief and affection. Mingling his tears with theirs, he embraced them all, as a token of his tender love for them. Then, suppressing every

outburst of feeling, he said to them, in a calm and earnest tone: "After a few days, the venerable priest Fronto will come to Ancyra; to him I have given a ring, which he will show to you; when he gives you this token of my trust in him, hinder him not from carrying off whatever there may remain of my body." After uttering these few words, he signed himself with the sign of the cross, and went forth courageously to the combat that awaited him.

When he was at some distance from the house of Theocharis, he met two of his friends, citizens of Ancyra. Hearing that he was going into the city to deliver himself into the hands of Theotecnus, the Governor, they said to him: "O Theodotus save thyself; do not expose thyself to the rage of the people aroused against thee. For know that, at this very moment, the priestesses of Minerva and Diana, attended by a crowd of the populace, are accusing thee before the Governor. They say that thou withdrawest the people from the worship of their goddesses, by telling them that they are lifeless beings made of wood and stone. Polychronius, also, charges thee with having carried off the remains of the seven martyred Virgins. Whilst it is yet time, go, conceal thyself; a man of thy prudence should know, that it is neither safe nor

wise to go, of his own accord, in search of torments and of death.”

The Saint replied to them :

“If ye are my friends, make no vain attempt to dissuade me from my purpose; but go to the Governor and say to him, in my name: ‘Theodotus, whom the priestesses and the whole city are accusing, is standing at the door, waiting to obtain a hearing.’ By so doing, you will grant me the greatest favor I can desire.”

Saying this, he began immediately to walk before them, with a firm and fearless step, as if he were engaged in transacting some business which might indeed awaken his zealous care, but the result of which could not in the least disturb his equanimity. With so calm and cheerful a mind did he meet his accusers.

The room, wherein Theodotus presented himself before the Governor, was not by any means calculated to inspire confidence or cheerfulness in a visitor. The fire, the caldrons with boiling water, the rack, the wheel, and various other instruments of torture, were ill-ominously displayed on all sides. The Saint surveyed this apparatus, without betraying the least emotion, except that he smiled when the Governor seemed to ask, by a look of inquiry, whether this terrible sight did not frighten him.



Soon, however, Theotecnus, assuming a gentle tone, which was altogether unnatural, said to him :

“Theodotus, the instruments of torture which thou seest are not intended for thee ; so far, at least, as it depends entirely upon thee whether or not it may be found necessary to use them. Be but wise, and offer willingly a sacrifice to the gods of the Empire ; this done, I will take it upon myself to acquit thee of all the offenses laid to thy charge. I will hearken neither to the expostulations of the whole city, nor to the accusations of the venerable priestesses of Diana and Minerva. Moreover, I promise thee the favor of our invincible Emperors ; they will honor thee with their letters, and, in turn, will be delighted to read thine own. And, if thou settest any value on my friendship, I assure thee from this moment it is thine. What do I ask in return for all this ? It is very little indeed. Renounce that man Jesus, whom Pilate, the Governor of Judea, years ago crucified. Endeavor to persuade others to follow herein thy example. Thou appearest to me a wise and prudent person ; now, a man’s wisdom consists in weighing well all matters which concern our own interest, and in availing ourselves of every favorable opportunity : in short, in rendering ourselves happy. Besides, I will make thee a priest of the great Apollo, the inventor and

master of sciences and of all useful arts. Thou shalt have the power to appoint officers to fill dignities in the State, and the sole control of the priests in the temples. Every imperial favor will be bestowed through thy hands. Desirest thou riches for thyself? Honor, and power, and boundless wealth are placed at thy feet. Thou hast but to will it, and all these magnificent promises shall at once be realized."

At these words of the Governor, a burst of applause arose from the vast multitude assembled in and around the hall. They congratulated Theodotus, and pressed him to accept, without delay, the generous terms offered by Theotecnus. No one doubted that, if Theodotus possessed half the good sense for which they gave him credit, he would, without hesitation, do all that was required to secure his worldly interests. When, however, silence was restored, the Saint, raising his eyes toward heaven, spoke as follows :

"First of all, I beg my Lord and Redeemer Jesus Christ,—of whom you have spoken this day as if He were merely a mortal man,—to grant me grace, that I may be able to refute your errors concerning your gods, and to explain briefly His Incarnation and the wonders of His life. With regard to your gods, it is almost impossible to speak of

them without blushing. The one whom you call Jupiter, whom you worship as the greatest of your deities, is in reality only such, because he is reputed the most infamous of them all. Orpheus, your poet, says that he slew his own father, Saturn; that he took for wife his own mother, Rhea; that he was again and again guilty of adultery and incest, and that, not satisfied with these crimes, he was, besides, a detestable corrupter of youth. Your other gods, Apollo, Mars, Vulcan, and the rest, were all the faithful imitators of the wickedness of their infamous chief. There is not a single one among them to whom you can point, as forming an honorable exception in their career of crime. Your laws punish such abominations with great severity; yet your writers extol them with admiring enthusiasm, when perpetrated by those whom you call gods. Is it possible that these things can be tolerated, and that decency, and virtue, and worth can have existence among you? Think of this and blush at the thought. Place in opposition to this the holy doctrines of our Religion. Here everything is pure, and chaste, and divine. Ages before His coming among men, the Prophets—men inspired from above—had foretold the Incarnation, the miracles, the sufferings, the death, the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The heavens themselves pro-

claimed His divinity: it was by the appearance of a wonderful star that the Magi, the sages of Persia and Chaldea, learnt His birth upon earth, went to adore Him as the God of the universe, and as such offered to Him their most precious gifts. I need not mention the miracles which He wrought; you have all heard of them: how he changed water into wine; how, with five loaves and two fishes He fed five thousand persons; how He walked upon the waters; how He gave sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf; how, by a single word, He healed every malady, and restored the dead to life, after they had been buried for days. Were He not God, could He have done all this? Were He not God, would nature have obeyed His voice as that of its Creator?"

These words of the Saint produced among the listening throng an effect similar to that which is observed on the sea, when its waves are gradually lashed into fury by the winds. At first, low murmurs of dissent were heard; next, as he proceeded with his remarks, shouts and riotous language succeeded; until, as he was finishing, tumultuous roars of execration burst forth from every side and overwhelmed the voice of the speaker. The priestesses of Minerva and Diana rent their garments, tore the crowns from their heads, and, with

hair dishevelled, rushed madly among the people, appealing to them to avenge their insulted deities. The mob, goaded on to frenzy, pressed toward the tribunal of the Governor. "Why not silence a man," they said, "who has the boldness to revile our gods in your very presence? Have you not heard his blasphemies? Put him to the torture at once, that the wrath of our mighty deities may be appeased, lest in their vengeance they destroy us all."

Theotecnus, cruel as he naturally was, did not need to be instigated by an infuriated mob. But, on this occasion, it seemed to him a stroke of policy to make a show of forbearance, in order that the blame of torturing one, who had ever been looked upon as a general favorite, might rest with the people. However, when the will of the populace was now clearly known, he entered with eager haste into their sentiments. Without considering that by so doing he degraded his station, he leaped from his tribunal, and began personally to superintend the preparations for the torture—thus acting in the twofold capacity of judge and of chief executioner. In the midst of all this uproar and confusion, Theodotus stood looking on, calm and self-collected, as if he were a stranger, who felt not the least concern in all this bustling excitement.

When everything was ready, the Governor ordered the Martyr to be stretched upon the rack. Immediately the executioners set to work: with pinchers and iron hooks they tore his limbs, and lashed his body with leathern thongs. Nor did the people stand by as idle spectators: every one who could, endeavored to get near the victim, and to add his share to the torture. They vied with the executioners themselves in unfeeling barbarity. The Saint, meanwhile, regarded them with a smiling countenance, without showing any signs of pain; for his mind and heart were occupied in the contemplation of the sufferings of his Redeemer, to whose love he made himself a willing sacrifice. When the torturers were almost exhausted with their cruel exertions, the Governor ordered strong vinegar to be poured over all the wounds, and then burning torches to be applied, so as to scar the whole body of the Martyr. As the Saint perceived the smell of the burning flesh, he turned his head a little aside. Thereupon, Theotecnus, imagining that his constancy was beginning to yield beneath the weight of torments, approached him, and sneeringly said:

“What has become of thy boasting words, Theodotus? A moment ago thou couldst bid defiance to our power, and now a little torturing

has made thee a coward. Assuredly, hadst thou worshipped our gods, instead of scoffing at their power, this misfortune would not have befallen thee. I would advise thee, since, after all, thou art but a miserable inn-keeper, not to put thyself forward as a brave and learned teacher; but to speak and think respectfully of our invincible Emperors, who have the power of life and death over thee.”

“And I would advise you, O Theotecnus,” replied the Martyr, “that you see to it, that your officers attend better to the commands you give them; for I perceive that they perform this business of torturing me in a very awkward manner; do not wonder, then, that I turn away my head. As to the amount and violence of your torments, know that I care not for them—no, not in the least. Our Lord Jesus Christ, who gives me strength and courage, enables me to despise your tyranny as that of a vile slave, and to defy the power of your wicked Emperors. Were I guilty of any crime, I would have cause for fear, but as I suffer for the truth of my Religion, I am ready to undergo cheerfully whatsoever you may think proper to inflict.”

Thereupon, the Governor, filled with rage, and disappointed in his expectations, commanded that the Martyr's jaws should be beaten with stones and his teeth struck out.

“Were you to tear out my tongue,” said Theodotus, “and deprive me of speech, still my God would graciously listen to the voice and prayer of my heart.”

As the executioners were now altogether tired out, Theotecnus gave orders that the Martyr should be loosed from the rack and taken to prison, that he might again be put to the torture at some future time. When he was led through the public place, many of the people drew near him, that they might see his ghastly wounds. Theodotus looked at them with a cheerful countenance, and said :

“Now you can all be witnesses, my friends, to the wonderful power of our Lord Jesus Christ. You see how He imparts strength to them who suffer for His sake. Old and feeble as I am, it was His grace that enabled this poor body of mine to overcome fire and steel. He gave courage to my spirit, so that I could despise the threats of your Governor, and spurn the impious edicts of your Emperors. Our God is no respecter of persons. He manifests His wonderful works in all, whether they be poor or rich, bondmen or free, Greeks or Barbarians, whensoever He thinks it proper so to do for His glory.” Then displaying before them the bloody marks upon his body, he added : “Such is the sacrifice which it behooves all, who believe

in Jesus Christ, to offer to Him, since He first sacrificed Himself for the salvation of every one of us."

After five days had elapsed, the Governor ordered his tribunal to be fitted up in the most public place of the city; for, in spite of the opposition which he met with on the part of Theodotus, he would not give up all hope of conquering his firmness in the Faith, but, on the contrary, he flattered himself that, by some means or other, his continued efforts must at last prove successful. Wherefore, the Saint was taken from prison, and again led before Theotecnus, who was seated on his tribunal surrounded by his attendants, and an immense concourse of people of every rank—whose curiosity had been greatly increased by the proceedings of the former trial.

As soon as the Martyr stood in the Governor's presence, Theotecnus assuming a tone of unusual kindness, said:

"Come nearer, Theodotus, and fear nothing. We are glad to hear that, since thou didst experience the effects of our anger a few days ago, thou hast laid aside thy pride, and art become quite tractable. In truth, hadst thou listened more to thy own good sense, and to the advice of thy friends, none of these hard things would have



befallen thee; but we were forced, contrary to our own feelings, to employ them. Let us forget the past. We are ready to repair the harm thou hast received, by using our best endeavors to treat thee well. We will keep faithfully the promises made the other day, and may add others, if it be desired. Now, therefore, be no longer headstrong; go, offer sacrifice to the immortal gods; acknowledge their supreme power, and, behold, thou becomest at once the happiest of men. Remember, that obstinacy is unbecoming in every man, and especially in one so wise as thou art. In short, consult thy own well-being; for we must again give thee warning, that, unless thou shalt choose for the better and avail thyself of our proposals, the torments which thou didst suffer lately will appear as a mere shadow, compared to those which most certainly await thee."

Unmoved by either promises or threats, the fearless Confessor replied:

"Think you, O Theotecnus, that, with all your cunning, you are able to invent any new torments so fierce and cruel, that the power of our Lord Jesus Christ cannot render them bearable and pleasant? Although, as you may yourself see, you have so torn and racked this poor body, that it is but one wound, yet, if you feel so inclined, give it another trial; that you may be convinced, how, in

so holy a cause, sufficient strength is always given to resist the powers of darkness."

The Governor immediately directed the executioners to stretch him again upon the rack, and to open all his old wounds. The more they tortured him, the more loudly the Saint raised his voice to praise our Lord Jesus Christ. He was then taken from the rack, and his body was rolled upon pieces of tiles made glowing hot. This torture was so excruciating, that the Martyr exclaimed: "Lord Jesus, if it be Thy will, allay the sufferings which I endure for the sake of Thy holy Name." At the very instant he felt relieved. Upon this he was put a third time upon the rack. Every part of his body had now been repeatedly tortured, except his tongue; this had been left sound in the hope that the Martyr would use it to renounce the Faith. But the expectations of the tyrant were doomed to disappointment.

Wherefore, being at a loss to invent new tortures, and seeing that even the executioners were exhausted, Theotecnus pronounced this sentence: "By the authority vested in us, we command that Theodotus be beheaded, for having declared himself the defender of the Christians; for being the enemy of our gods, and for refusing to obey the edicts of our Emperors, ever victorious,—as well as

our own. Moreover, we ordain, that, after the execution of this sentence, his body be burnt, lest the Christians carry it off, and bury the same according to their custom."

No sooner was this sentence pronounced than the Saint was hurried off to the place of execution. An immense crowd of people, Christians as well as Pagans, accompanied him. When arrived at the appointed place, Theodotus, kneeling down and raising his hands to heaven, uttered this prayer :

"Lord Jesus Christ, Creator of heaven and earth, who forsakest not them who hope in Thee, I thank Thee for deeming me worthy to be a citizen of Thy heavenly City, and a partaker of Thy Kingdom. I thank Thee, for having given me strength to overcome the infernal dragon, and to crush its head. Grant peace to Thy servants, and let the violence of their enemies be appeased by my death; give peace to Thy Church, and free her from the tyranny of the devil. Amen!" As he finished the word, Amen, he cast his eyes on the surrounding multitude, among whom he descried a great number of his brethren and acquaintances. All were bathed in tears; many cried and sobbed aloud. The Saint said to them: "Weep not, my brethren, but rather give praise and thanks to our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath given me grace to overcome the enemy,

and to finish my course by a glorious triumph. Henceforth, I will pray for you with greater confidence in heaven."

He had hardly uttered these last words, when, with one blow, the executioner severed his head from the body.

Thus died the humble and glorious champion Theodotus.

The executioners raised a very large funeral pile to burn the body of the Martyr, in accordance with the orders of the Governor. But they had no sooner placed the body upon the pile, than the whole mass of combustibles became suddenly enveloped in rays of light of so dazzling a brilliancy, that no one ventured to approach. The body meanwhile remained untouched. The officers went forthwith to acquaint the Governor with this marvelous occurrence. Theotecnus directed them to place a strong guard of soldiers around the place, so as to render useless any attempt of the Christians to carry off the remains of the Blessed Martyr.

Meanwhile, on the very day of the Martyr's death, Fronto, the Priest, had left Malos for Ancyra, to obtain from Theodotus, according to agreement, the promised relics. He had with him the ring given by the Saint at their late meeting. He was leading an ass laden with two skins of old wine,

from a vineyard which he himself cultivated. This he intended as a present to his friend Theodotus. It was growing dark as he was nearing the city. When arrived at the place where the soldiers were guarding the funeral pile, the animal, fatigued with the long journey, on a sudden lay down, and could not be induced to advance any further. The soldiers, who were looking on from a distance—whether moved by the prospect of another night of terrors, or by the sight of the wine-skins, may be conjectured, although it is not certainly known—seeing that the obstinate beast was putting the venerable old man to great trouble, went to his assistance, and said to him :

“Whither art thou going, venerable stranger? It is now too late in the evening to reach the city. Come, stay with us here to-night; thou canst resume thy journey early in the morning. If the ass feel inclined to sup, there is an abundance of grass on the place: or, if he prefer to take a stroll into the wheat-fields, no one will object, so long as we are here. Come, good friend, stay: thou shalt find a more hearty welcome in our hut than in the unaccommodating inns of Ancyra.”

Fronto suffered himself to be persuaded, and entered the soldiers' hut. Here he found a comfortable fire, and supper ready. When the cravings

of hunger were dispelled, the men addressed themselves to a huge wine-jar, which they did not spare, at the same time inviting the stranger to follow their example. Fronto thought it but right that he should, in some way, repay the hospitality of his rude entertainers. He went out, therefore, and returning with one of the wine-skins, asked for a cup; then filling it to the brim, he presented it to the nearest soldier, smiling as he said, "Taste this, my friend, I trust thou wilt not find it hard to take."

The soldiers seeing the wine sparkling in the cup, and perceiving the sweet aroma which perfumed the hut, exclaimed as with one voice :

"Ah! the delicious wine! Venerable stranger, please, tell us, how old is it?"

"It is of my vintage of five years ago," replied Fronto.

"Then we should all taste it. The very thought of so generous a wine makes one thirsty," said the soldiers.

"Welcome to it, my friends," said Fronto, "do not spare it."

A young soldier, named Metrodorus, after disposing of a cup, smacking his lips, cried out : "O the delicious beverage! it makes me almost forget that frightful night which we passed near the lake, whilst guarding the bodies of those Christian

women. I thought that all the waters of Lethe should never be able to efface from my memory the horrors and blows of that night."

"Take care," said another, named Apollonius, "lest it make thee forget that we are watching over the body of the man of brass, who stole the women out of the lake."

"I made a mistake," said Fronto, "by not bringing with me an interpreter to explain your riddles. Who are those women taken out of the lake? Who is that man of brass of whom you are speaking? Is it some brazen statue? Or, perhaps, are you amusing yourselves at the expense of an old man, who lays no claims to being very sharp-witted?"

Thereupon, one of the soldiers, Glaucentius by name, said to Fronto: "What my comrades are telling thee, is all perfectly true. Whether the man, whom we are guarding, was made of brass or of steel is quite immaterial; for he was harder than either of these metals, since fire can soften them. But neither fire, nor water, nor iron, nor stones, produced the least effect upon him."

"I am still as much in the dark as ever," said Fronto. "Speakest thou of a man or of a phantom?"

"That I do not know myself," replied Glaucentius,

“the whole subject is even now a mystery to us; I should not call him a man, for I do not suppose that a mere man could stand firm under tortures as he did. We, indeed, pretend to believe that he was a fellow-citizen of ours; that the whole city knows his name and family; but, for all that, facts prove that he was something more than human. Stranger, believe me when I tell thee, that he was scourged, racked and burned, yet his body seemed not to suffer any thing; for he never uttered a word of complaint: he stood like a rock in the midst of the waves, insensible, immovable. Perhaps thou desirest to know his name. He was called Theodotus; by profession a Christian, as that kind of people are called. By some skilful practice or other, he managed to carry off the bodies of seven women drowned in the lake; and that, too, whilst several of us were watching, night and day, to prevent the theft. Many persons belonging to his profession were daily arrested on suspicion of being concerned in that work. So, finally, he gave himself up to the magistrate, that he might be dealt with according to law. The Governor, admiring his good qualities, offered him every imaginable inducement to make him renounce his Religion. But he, rejecting every proposal, laughed at the power of our gods, spurned the edicts of our

Emperors, and hardly deigned to give an answer to our chief magistrate. He was, then, scourged and tortured, but no amount of torments seemed to affect him in the least. He was as lively and cheerful as if he were seated at a banquet with his friends; he sang canticles of joy, and defied the power of our Governor. This, however, did not last long, for his excellency waxed very wrathful, and ordered that his head should be struck off without any further delay, deeming this the only method of silencing the tongue of the man of brass. Orders were also given that the body should be burned, so that nothing might remain of him: but—” Here Glaucenius seemed to grow somewhat uneasy, and looked slyly through the crevices of the hut, in the direction of the place where lay the body of the Martyr.

“But what?” enquired Fronto.

“It is not unlikely,” resumed the soldier, “that something might happen to us here, on his account; for we have not yet forgotten what befell us at the lake. Thou shouldst know that, when the body was placed upon the funeral pile, so great a light surrounded it on a sudden, that no one ventured to approach, or to set fire to the pile. So we are ordered to watch over it here, lest the Christians might come and steal it away.”

So saying, Glaucientius led Fronto to the spot where lay the Martyr's body, covered with boughs and dried grass.

Fronto satisfied by what he had heard and seen, that the body was really that of his friend, the blessed Theodotus, thanked God; and implored His help to enable him to carry off in safety the sacred remains. Wherefore, disguising his intention, he returned to the hut, and began to entertain the soldiers with various interesting anecdotes. At the same time, he invited them not to be sparing of his good wine. They repeated their draughts so frequently that, after a while, the fumes of the generous liquid began to produce drowsiness; and soon the whole band, forgetting all about the object of their watchful care, lay snoring in the hut. Fronto did not neglect this favorable opportunity. He arose immediately, and, quietly removing the Martyr's body, placed it carefully upon the beast of burden. Then putting the ring on the finger of Theodotus, he addressed him as if he were still alive:

“Holy Martyr, the time is come to fulfil thy promise; behold the ring thou gavest me of late; let me not be deprived of the precious relics.”

As soon as the ass was let loose, he took the road in the direction of Malos. Fronto, after

replacing the boughs and the grass, so that it could not be perceived that anything had been disarranged, reëntered the soldier's hut, and composed himself to sleep during the remainder of the night. When they awoke in the morning, Fronto pretended to look after his beast of burden, but it was nowhere to be seen. He assumed a show of the greatest uneasiness, so as actually to excite the sympathy of the soldiers. They endeavored to console him in the best way they could, regretting, perhaps, less the loss of the beast than of the remaining wine-skin—the companion of which had procured them so comfortable a sleep, that neither fear of ghosts, nor apprehension of blows, on account of the man of brass, had been able to disturb them.

Meanwhile, the aged Priest, still affecting to be very sad at the loss of his animal, bade farewell to his honest entertainers with mutual expressions of good-will. He had not gone far before he met some of his friends who were coming from Malos. They informed him, that they had seen his beast of burden standing alone in a place which they described. Fronto became satisfied that now everything was safe. He hastened to the spot; and found that it was the very same where, a few days before, he had met the blessed Martyr, and where

the Saint had said to him: "This place seems to me exceedingly well adapted to receive some relics of Martyrs." By his zealous efforts a church was soon erected in honor of St. Theodotus; and God glorified His Saint by the many wonders which were wrought at his tomb.

The Martyr suffered in A. D. 303; his festival is kept on the 18th of May.





IV.

ST. CYRILLUS.

THE practice of virtue is not limited to any particular age, since, if we are faithful to duty and to principle, we must needs give our whole life to the service of our Maker. We are told, that "it is good for a man when he hath borne the yoke from his youth;" what then shall we say of the youth, who, in his tenderest years, surrounded by all the advantages of wealth and station—tempted by every allurements of the world—not only resists the one and tramples under foot the other, but lays down his life for the defense of his Faith? Such is the noble example which we admire in that heroic youth, the blessed Martyr Cyrillus.

Born in a country which, according to the Greek proverb, was looked upon by antiquity as distinguished for its wickedness, Cyrillus seemed called in a special manner to verify the truth that

“God is not a respecter of persons,” but that by His wisdom, in His own good time, He chooses the little and the weak to confound the great and the strong, and calls them to the true Faith “without which it is impossible to be pleasing to Him.” Like many children in every age and country, Cyrillus was kept in his childhood from the contamination of vice, not so much by the careful watchfulness of parents, as by their high position in society—which keeps them from the company of the vicious and corrupt. His father, a man of great wealth, was distinguished among the inhabitants of Cæsarea, in Cappadocia, for that stern virtue and adherence to principle, which characterized many of the ancient families of Greek or Roman descent, who clung to the superstitions of their forefathers, not because their reason and good sense approved of them, but because their great ancestors had not rejected their absurdities. The virtues of Pagan morality constituted the standard of his idea of social worth and excellency, and national pride prevented him from pushing his inquiries beyond the limits he had thus set to himself. It was his desire and ambition, that his son,—the future heir of all his possessions,—should be trained according to his notions of merit and greatness. But God, whose fatherly care watches with an unceasing

solicitude over the children of men, chose the youthful Cyrillus as a child of predilection, and called him to a knowledge infinitely surpassing the philosophy of his earthly parent—the knowledge of the truths of Christianity.

From the lips of the humble domestics of his father, the future Martyr learned to know Jesus, and the mysteries of salvation. The virtues and good example of those that surrounded him, when a child, produced that lasting impression which neither time nor circumstances can efface. Cyrillus was a Christian, and practiced every virtue of his Religion, almost before he knew what was meant by vice or wickedness. His father admired his artless simplicity, his dutifulness, his wisdom far beyond his years; he knew not the source whence flowed the noble disposition and excellent qualities of his son. At last, it was whispered that his Cyrillus, the object of all his hopes and affections, was in very deed a Christian, a follower of a Religion abhorred by men, proscribed by the laws of the Empire. His indignation knew no bounds; he considered himself disgraced and undone. There was an immense struggle going on in his breast; what should he do? could he cast off his only child? should he permit him to follow his inclinations? False friends were not wanting to bring

him to a determination—a resolve which rendered vain all his expectations in life, his peace of mind, his happiness on earth. Hoping that, possibly, his pretended friends might have been misled by envy or induced by secret malevolence to undermine his peace of mind, he called his son, that thus he might learn from his own lips the whole truth.

Cyrillus, knowing that the God whom he served would best defend his cause, stood calm and self-possessed before his father.

“Can it be true, my son,” said the father, “that, unmindful of a father’s love, thou hast dared to disobey his will and commands?”

“I have never been knowingly and wilfully disobedient to a father, whom I love with all the affection of a dutiful son,” replied Cyrillus.

“What! hast thou not turned recreant to the worship of thy fathers?”

“Herein I cannot reasonably be said to have transgressed a father’s will; since, again and again, he has protested that he desired his son to be virtuous and happy.”

“Thou art then a Christian?”

“I am a Christian, by the grace of the God of heaven and earth.”

This firm reply so aroused the anger of the father, that for some moments he was unable to give

utterance to his feelings. Yet his stoicism soon mastered his passion; he thought it unbecoming in a man of his age and condition, to pour forth the full tide of indignation that rankled in his breast. Looking sternly upon his son, as if he expected that his own excitement might have produced some emotion in him, he said:

“Knowest thou, my son, that this step which thou hast so imprudently taken, brings disgrace upon myself as well as upon all the long line of thy ancestors, who were so distinguished for their virtue and firm adherence to principles.”

“I have not been imprudent, dear father,” replied Cyrillus, “nor do I think it possible that my ancestors, if they valued virtue more than everything else, could deem it unworthy in their descendant, that he should aspire to the very perfection of virtue. Had they lived in our day, and had they known that there was a nobler, a sublimer knowledge than that which they possessed, they would, doubtless, have endeavored to make it their own.”

“Cyrillus, thou hast been misled by what appears good and praiseworthy; thou art not of an age to judge for thyself.”

“The God of truth, the common Father of us all, can make known His will to the little and the weak,

as well as to the great and the powerful. I have done what reason and conscience persuaded me to do; I feel that I have secured happiness for myself not only for this present life, but, above all, for the life of the hereafter."

"So thou art already turned philosopher! What madness has seized thee? Where is now that obedience which, as a dutiful child, thou wast wont to yield to my behests? Cyrillus, thou must give up that folly; thou must renounce forever a superstition, which is abhorred throughout the Empire."

"If truth and virtue be persecuted by men, must we blindly join in the general outcry against them? Should we condemn that which we do not know?"

"Obstinate youth! Art thou wiser than our sages, than our great and invincible Emperors?"

"True wisdom comes from God and leads us unto Him. The Divine Founder of our Religion gave thanks to His eternal Father, because He had hidden the mysteries of His kingdom from the wise and prudent of this world, and had revealed them to the little ones. I am but little, yet I know the way that leads to everlasting life. Oh! that God would remove the veil of darkness from the eyes of a father whom I love so much, that he too might behold the light of truth and salvation."

These words of the youthful Confessor seemed strongly to affect the father. A great struggle was going on in his breast. But alas! pride, human respect, the opinions of the world, choked the nobler sentiments of nature. At last his pent-up anger burst forth :

“Cyrillus,” he said, “for son I will call thee no more ; bethink thyself. Thou knowest my will. Obey my commands, or, if thou hesitate, consider thyself this very hour banished from my sight and from my house. Begone! I cannot endure the presence of an ungrateful boy, who, for a foolish notion, for the vain hope of a future life, whereof he has no knowledge, foregoes honor, wealth and greatness. Go: thou art disowned by me.”

So saying the angry father withdrew to devour, as it were, his own vexation and disappointment.

The youthful Christian was now an outcast from his father's house. He might have found ready assistance among the friends of his family ; but the father was a man of great power and authority in Cæsarea. The citizens heard with surprise that he had resorted to measures so severe. Every one expressed his opinion, according to the particular view which he chose to take of the matter. Some praised the conduct of the father, because they regarded him as a faithful supporter of the traditions

and the worship of their forefathers. Others admired him, because he had acted as a sage, who sacrificed his natural affections upon the altar of duty—who considered the maintaining of the religion of the Empire as an obligation, to which every private feeling should be made subservient. The more liberal-minded did not approve the harsh treatment, and suggested that other means might have been adopted to overcome the resistance of the son. Meanwhile, although the youth was the general subject of conversation, no one ventured to take a step in his favor ; because all dreaded to incur the displeasure of the father—even by exercising the privilege of hospitality in favor of Cyrillus, for which, however, they might have claimed the right of common humanity.

Accustomed to the surroundings of ease and plenty, it was a sore trial for the young Cyrillus to be thus cast off, and left to the cold charity of a world afraid of showing that he, who once had been the envy of many, had now become an object of pity. He, however, felt by no means disheartened, for he knew that He that “giveth food to the young ravens who call upon Him,” would not forsake them who, for His sake, are rejected by men. He remembered that, after all, the sufferings of this life—even as its joys and pleasures—are only mo-

mentary; and that, by the loss of every earthly possession, he had become the more assimilated to his divine Master, who, by giving up the splendor of the everlasting mansions, had dwelt poor and despised among men, thus sweetening the bitterness of want and destitution.

Meanwhile, the Governor of Cæsarea was informed of all that had occurred. Imagining that, by his authority, he might be able to obtain from the youth a compliance with the wishes of the father, he sent some soldiers to arrest him. When Cyrillus was brought before him, the Governor was astonished to behold a mere child, instead of a full-grown youth. He concluded at once, that it would be no difficult task to settle all matters by frightening the boy. Wherefore he said to him :

“Dost thou know, Cyrillus, that disobedient children deserve severe punishment? How comes it that a youth of thy station makes bold to give an example so wicked?”

“I make no show of boldness, but simply fulfil the first of all duties, when I give due honor and reverence to the Creator and Lord of heaven and earth, and of all things contained therein,” answered Cyrillus.

“But reason and the laws command thee to yield obedience to thy father.”

“That I have always done, in everything reasonable and lawful.”

“Yet I learn that thy father has cast thee off, and disowns thee, for acting altogether contrariwise. How is this?”

“Because he bids me do what is neither lawful nor reasonable.”

“Explain thyself, boy.”

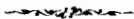
“God is the Supreme Lord and Master of all. His law is reasonable and just and true. If men ordain aught contrary thereto, they act unreasonably, unjustly, falsely. We must obey God rather than man.”

“Aha! I perceive thou hast picked up the doctrines of the new Religion.”

“The Religion which I follow is the doctrine of truth; if the truth appears something new to certain men, they are to be pitied; the truth is ever the same.”

This answer somewhat upset the calculations of the Governor; he knew not what to reply; wherefore, with an angry look at the youth, he said:

“We are not here to reason together. I am here to give commands; thou hast but to hear them and obey. Listen to me. I have spoken kindly to thee, hoping that by so doing I might persuade thee to be wise. But thou art rash and



obstinate. If fair means cannot win thee back to conduct thyself as a worthy son of a noble father, there remains a stronger argument to overcome thy stubborn will. I will have thee stretched upon the rack, until every bone in thy body be broken or dislocated. If this is not enough, I will bind thee to the stake, and burn thee with a slow fire. Now, tell me, art thou willing to return to the worship of the gods? or art thou ready to undergo tortures?"

"I am ready to suffer every torment, rather than abandon the service of the one, true God," replied Cyrillus.

"Thou knowest not what is meant by tortures. But come with me," said the Governor.

Thereupon he led him into an apartment of the Governor's dwelling, where all the instruments, employed in torturing persons accused of crimes, were displayed in dread array. The sight of these instruments caused an involuntary shudder in the young Christian. The Governor explained to him the different uses to which all these implements could be put; he warned him to take his advice, before actually experiencing, that the application of them bore no comparison to the horror which the very sight of them inspired. But the thoughts of Cyrillus had already taken another direction. He recalled to mind what he had learned concerning

the endless tortures of the reprobate, the shortness of this life, the instability of human affairs. He remembered the immense sufferings of his loving Redeemer, and the magnificent promises held out to them that forsake all to follow His steps, whether in the ordinary walks of life, or in the royal way of suffering.

The Governor, aware that a great struggle was going on in the breast of the youth, but mistaking its purport, resolved to make another attack.

“My child,” he said to Cyrillus, “I am willing to forgive, and to forget everything thou hast said; for I know that thy age and want of experience are a sufficient excuse for thy improper behavior. Thou knowest that, as the chief magistrate of Cæsarea, I have a right that my words be not disregarded. Furthermore, to prove that I have the greatest regard for thy noble father, and that I feel a special interest in thy well-being, I am ready this very moment to take it upon myself to restore thee to thy father’s favor and affection, and to reinstate thee in all thy rights. To secure so desirable a termination of all thy troubles, one word will suffice. Say that thou art willing to renounce the superstition that has misled thee.”

“That word I will never utter,” said the youth, “how could I prove false to my Religion, to my



God and Redeemer? You ask me to do that, which no earthly power shall ever persuade me to do. Your reproaches and your threats are alike thrown away. In life and in death, I am resolved to be faithful to my God. If, on this account, I must incur the displeasure and condemnation of men, I know in whom I have placed all my confidence. If my earthly father banish me from his presence, and refuse me shelter beneath the roof where I was born, my Father in heaven will receive me into His everlasting dwellings. I willingly forego all earthly treasures and possessions to secure those of heaven, which are infinitely greater, and perish not. I am not afraid to die for a noble and just cause, since by so doing I secure for myself an endless life and immortal bliss."

Whilst Cyrillus pronounced these words, he appeared inspired with a supernatural enthusiasm. The Governor felt convinced, that the young Christian possessed an intelligence and a wisdom far above his years, and hence was the more unwilling to adopt extreme measures. Nevertheless, lest he should compromise his dignity and authority, assuming a severe tone, he said to the youth :

"Cyrillus, I see full well that words have no effect upon thy stubborn spirit; I will now try the power of deeds. The funeral pile awaits thee."

“Thanks be to God,” replied the bold Confessor.

Thereupon, the Governor called in the executioners and ordered them to bind the youth, and take him to the ordinary place of execution. At the same time, however, he gave secret orders to one of his officers to see that no harm should befall the child, because the whole proceeding was merely intended to terrify him.

Cyrillus was exceedingly rejoiced, because he was at last enabled to make a public profession of his Faith. He called to mind the noble band of Martyrs, of every age and condition, that had preceded him in the glorious path of suffering, and he besought them to make intercession for him, that God might deign to accept the sacrifice, which he was about to consummate.

They arrived at the place of execution. The youthful Martyr was bound to the stake; the fire was kindled; he believed himself at his journey's end; when, to his unutterable disappointment, the officer, sent by the Governor, forbade the executioners to go on with their task.

It was indeed a sorrowful way for the youthful hero, when he was led back to the palace of the Governor. So near to the goal of his desires, he was to fight over again the battle of truth; and this time it was not impossible that his constancy might

be shaken. However, his hope lay not in his own strength, but in the protecting arms of the Lord of might.

The Governor soon learned, that the terrible display of his power had not caused the least uneasiness in the breast of the undaunted youth, but that, on the contrary, the sight of the funeral pile had filled him with the greatest joy. Cyrillus was summoned again.

“My child,” said the Governor to him, “thou hast now seen what sort of punishment awaits the wicked and the obstinate. Art thou resolved to be wise henceforth? Wilt thou hearken to my commands? Wilt thou be obedient to thy father, and strive to regain, by a dutiful submission, his affection and all the favors, which he is still desirous of bestowing upon thee?”

“You have already received my answer,” replied Cyrillus, “my resolution cannot be changed; the hopes of my everlasting happiness depend on my fidelity to my conscience and to my God. You have disappointed my expectations, and endeavored to make a mockery of what, doubtless, you call justice.”

“It is enough,” said the Governor, bursting with rage, “thou shalt find this time that I am in good earnest. Unless thou promise at once to worship

the gods of the Empire, neither thy age or condition, nay, not even the influence and respectability of thy father shall save thee from the flames. Speak, infatuated boy!"

"Must I again repeat my answer?" said the brave youth, "you have already done me a great wrong, when you supposed, that a true Christian is so feeble-minded as to forego, through fear of torments or of death, the inheritance that awaits him after this fleeting life. I long for the moment which shall destroy this mortal frame, that my spirit may be free, and stand, faithful in all things, before the Maker that gave it being. Him alone do I humbly adore. Before Him I long to appear."

The Governor was now convinced, that it would be useless to make any further attempts to prevail upon the youth to forsake his Religion. Wherefore, he ordered that he should be immediately put to death.

An immense multitude, drawn together by curiosity or by anxiety to witness the final triumph of the youthful Martyr, accompanied him as he was again led to the place of execution. All wept, when they beheld one so young, so beautiful,—one born to possess whatsoever the world loves and esteems, dragged to a death of torment and ignominy, which would have filled with terror the most fearless

spirit. In that vast assembly of horror-stricken spectators, Cyrillus alone appeared unmoved. When arrived at the place of execution, he was again fastened to the stake. As he cast his looks around him, and saw the crowd around shedding tears, and heard them wailing aloud, he said to them :

“Friends, Brethren, weep not over me. If ye love me, rejoice rather at my happy lot. I have been faithful to my God ; He is waiting to welcome me into His glorious mansions. Now raise ye a hymn of joy and exultation around this funeral pile, whilst my spirit is born into the company of the redeemed.”

The flames soon freed his generous soul from all the trials of earth, and the youthful Martyr found repose in the bosom of his Saviour.


His memory is kept in the Church, on the twenty-ninth of May.





V.

ST. AGNES.

 HOW beautiful is the chaste generation with glory," exclaimed the Wise Man; "the memory thereof is immortal, because it is known both with God and with man." It is the triumph of the Church of God that, in all ages, she can point to those among her children who passed through this world blameless and undefiled—who, upon earth, prepared themselves to be, in heaven, of the number of the Elect, that follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth, and sing before the Throne the Canticle which none but they can sing. Great, indeed, is the praise of chastity: admirable are they, even among the Saints, in whom this virtue shines with special brightness; but when, at the same time, it accompanies every generous quality that ennobles human nature, it challenges our highest admiration. The Angels of heaven gaze with

delight upon chaste souls, and love to associate with them; the Heart of Jesus, "who feedeth among the lilies," showers upon them His choicest favors. Hence the marvels of grace whereof we read in the lives of the holy Virgins; hence that mysterious and ecstatic union with her heavenly Bridegroom, which characterized the sweet and lovely Saint of whom we are about to speak—the Blessed Agnes, Virgin and Martyr.

Born in Rome of an ancient and illustrious family, all the advantages which wealth can secure were unsparingly used by her parents to educate her for that high position in society which, it was hoped, she would one day adorn. But the views and intentions of men are not always those of heaven. The divine Lover of chaste souls had chosen her as His own. He gave her special graces to draw her to Himself: her youthful heart corresponded to these great designs. Innocence and purity marked the days of her childhood, and her conversation even then seemed ever in heaven rather than upon earth. The name she bore, she verified in her daily walks—blending the purity of the lily with the innocence of the lamb. The love of Jesus was in her heart, and to keep it there was the sole aim of her life. To Him she consecrated herself, to Him she promised that, as a Virgin, she would

never cease to be faithful. How grand a promise this was, and how strong must have been her resolve, we cannot duly appreciate unless we reflect, that it was made by a tender maiden, living in the midst of the splendors of the imperial city. But “the grace of God and His mercy is with His Saints, and He hath respect for His chosen;” hence, what might appear rash, under ordinary circumstances, in one so young and so much exposed to the dangers and temptations of this world, becomes discreet and worthy of every commendation in one so highly favored.

When she entered upon her thirteenth year, she was a perfect model of a Christian young lady. Prayer and other religious exercises were to her not so much duties to be fulfilled, as an attractive charm and a sweet relaxation—born of the divine love that glowed in her bosom. Religion was to her in very deed the bond which united her to her Maker, in whose presence she delighted to abide forever. Modest, gentle, and reserved, she sought not after the company of them, that seem to have no other reason for their existence here below, than a restless anxiety to vie with each other in displaying their rich and gaudy finery. Nor was she, on the other hand, so squeamish as to obtrude upon others her unadorned simplicity, whensoever custom

and Roman hospitality required that social entertainments should be given at the mansion of her noble father. Whilst present in body at these festivities, her spirit still held uninterrupted communion with her God. Her high rank hindered her not from exercising, in person, the duties of charity to the poor. For how could she be the favored Bride of the heavenly King, unless she recognized Him in them, to whom especially the glad tidings of His gospel had been preached? Guiltless herself, and unsuspecting of evil, she was clad with the armor of righteousness, and spent her days in gathering treasures for heaven.

He, however, who, in the garden of Eden, robbed our first parents of their innocence and bliss, could not bear that beauty and virtue, combined in the person of our Saint, should grace unharmed and unassailed the streets of Rome. Wherefore, he projected the most artful devices to lure the angelic maiden into his snares.

Agnes, according to the custom at that time existing in Rome, attended school with other maidens of her own age and rank. One day, as she was returning home, a young nobleman, the son of Symphronius, Governor of the city, chanced to see her at a distance. Struck with the extraordinary loveliness of her appearance, he determined at once

to seek her in marriage. He began by making inquiries about her, and soon learned that she was of a noble and wealthy family. On the following day, he went to visit her parents, taking with him a casket filled with jewelry, and other ornaments of every kind calculated to excite the admiration of almost any young person, upon whom the sight of the treasures of this earth can make an impression. As the son of the Chief Magistrate, he was respectfully admitted; but, when he mentioned the object of his coming, the parents of Agnes—thinking that she was too young to settle for life—were by no means inclined to encourage the proposal of the young nobleman. Nevertheless, they permitted him to have an interview with their daughter, in their own presence. Agnes apparently listened to his words, and looked at the presents placed before her, but, in reality, was quite unconscious of both; her thoughts were with her heart and treasure far beyond the skies. The disappointed suitor stood astonished at the unimpassioned indifference of the Virgin. Pagan as he was, he could not understand, how precious stones could be looked upon as empty toys, by those who possess within themselves a jewel of priceless value—the knowledge, the love, and fear of God.

The unsuccessful result of this first interview did

not discourage the son of the Governor. Thinking that the display of riches which he had made was the cause of his failure, he resolved that there should be nothing wanting in this respect, if he had once more the good fortune of addressing the object of his affections.

Meanwhile, he had recourse to his own friends and to those of the family of the maiden. He induced them to take his cause in hand, and to endeavor to prevail on her parents to make her listen to his suit. They believing that such a union would redound to the advantage of all the parties concerned, neglected no opportunity of pressing the claims of the young nobleman. His good qualities and accomplishments, his boundless wealth, his influence, in consequence of the distinguished position of his father, the benefits even that might accrue to Religion—all these were put forward; but the parents of the Saint, inspired from above, returned invariably the same answer, that nothing should be done in this matter, without the free and full consent and choice of their daughter, whose welfare and happiness were chiefly concerned in such an alliance.

The young Symphronius, whose affection, far from diminishing, was only increased by this anxious delay and unexpected opposition, obtained

a second interview with Agnes. He told her of the happiness that awaited her, the influence and power of his illustrious family, his own devotedness and love, his future prospects and aspirations—all which he placed at her feet, that she might dispose thereof, and reign as supreme mistress over his heart.

When the maiden heard this language, she appeared as awakening from a trance: never had she known the use of the word love, except as connected with her heavenly Bridegroom. Indignant at the audacity of the young man, she addressed him thus:

“Depart from me, thou fuel of sin, aliment of evil, food of death; depart from me; long since have I been won by a far nobler Spouse, who has presented me with more precious gifts than thine. With a ring He has pledged me His troth; my wrist He has encircled with a bracelet of inestimable price. He has adorned me with a necklace of precious stones; He has ornamented me with earrings of peerless gems. My whole body He has bedecked with glittering pearls and sparkling diamonds. He placed His seal upon my brow, that I might never admit a rival. He clothed me with a state-robe woven of gold, with a collar of matchless perfection. He showed me treasures great

beyond expression, and promised me, again and again, that to me he will give them all if I continued faithful to Him. How, then, could I, without insult to my first love, so much as look upon another? How could I abandon Him to whom I am united with the strongest bond of affection? There is no other so noble by birth, none so strong in power, none so beautiful in person, none so sweet and lovely, none so possessed of every grace. By Him even now the bridal chamber has been prepared for me; the melody of His voice comes whispering to my soul. I hear the canticle of the Virgins that attend Him; the rapturous strains of their music fill my heart with joy. With milk and honey He hath nourished me. The mark of His blood is an ornament upon my cheeks. His Mother is a pure Virgin; His Father knows not woman. The Angels are His ministers; the sun and moon admire His radiant beauty. The odor of His perfume restores life to the dead; His cheering touch gives health to the sick. His possessions never decrease; His treasures never fail. For Him alone do I keep my plighted faith; to Him alone do I intrust myself with perfect devotion. If I love Him, I am chaste; if I touch Him, I am clean; if I accept Him, I am a Virgin."

This language, so strange and mysterious, filled

the young nobleman with amazement. It did not, however, produce any change in his sentiments. He returned home, crushed with disappointment. Jealousy now added another string to his already tortured feelings. Spoiled, as he had been, by an indulgent father, it was the first time that his will met with opposition. So great and worrying was the struggle going on within his breast—between the suggestions of reason on the one hand, and of passion on the other—that he fell dangerously ill. The physicians, who attended him, soon discovered the nature of his malady. They made known to the father what they had learned, telling him, at the same time, that there was but one remedy which could be effectually applied in disorders of this kind, namely: the realization of the young man's hopes.

Symphronius, thereupon, undertook to try what he himself might be able to do in this delicate matter. He went in person to the residence of the holy maiden, and renewed every promise made, heretofore, by his son, holding out besides many inducements, prompted by his anxious desire for the welfare of one designed to be the heir of his wealth, probably his successor in office. To all the promises and entreaties of the Governor of Rome, the youthful Agnes made the same reply:

“The word which I have pledged to the Bridegroom of my choice, I neither can nor will break.”

Symphronius was by no means pleased with this answer, he said to her :

“Thou shouldst reflect that, after having made a choice, it is not at all unbecoming to make a better.”

“It is impossible to make a better choice,” replied the maiden.

“How is this?” said the Governor, “if we except the divine Emperor himself, no one surpasses in dignity the Governor of Rome. To reject his proposals, when made with due respect and honor, were assuredly the very height of folly.”

“The Bridegroom of my choice far excels in dignity all the rulers of this world,” answered Agnes.

When the Governor heard this, he was greatly perplexed ; for he seemed to think, that a person of so great a dignity could have no existence, except in the imagination of an innocent girl. He did not, however, neglect to make enquiries, as earnestly as if he believed it all a reality. But none of his friends, no more than those of the family of the maiden, could enlighten him on the subject ; for it was a secret between Agnes and her Divine Master. Nevertheless, the devil, afraid lest the storm, which he had excited, might blow over

without doing any harm, stirred up an officious individual to give to the Governor the desired information. He presented himself before Symphronius, and said to him :

“Why does your Lordship give himself so much trouble concerning this person? Know then, that the girl is a Christian. From her very childhood she has been taught the art of magic, as it is practised among that sort of people.”

“But how does that account for her infatuation in believing herself espoused to a person of boundless wealth and surpassing dignity?” asked the Governor.

“In the simplest manner possible,” answered his informant; “their young maidens are taught, that, if they refuse to be given in marriage to a human suitor, they may, by leading the life of Virgins, choose Christ, who is their God, for a Bridegroom. This exalts them wonderfully in the eyes of their fellow-believers; and they are supposed to obtain, in consequence, an extraordinary skill in magic.”

Symphronius was greatly rejoiced, when all the strange conjectures he had formed in his mind were so easily explained away; and he had no doubt that, either by his influence or by his promises, he should be enabled to overcome the obstinate resistance of a mere child. Wherefore, he sent an

officer with a large body of attendants to summon her before his tribunal. It was a painful trial for a timid girl, whose life had been hitherto hidden from the eyes of the world, to be thus drawn into notice; but He, who is the strength of the weak, did not forsake her in the hour of anguish; He endowed her with the spirit of fearless fortitude, superior to all the attempts of her powerful tormentors. When Agnes stood in the presence of the Governor, he said to her:

“If I have thus publicly summoned thee before me, remember, my child, that it is not because any harm is intended. Contradictory reports have gone forth concerning thy Religion and mode of life. I believe them not. But as they are known throughout the city, I have given thee an opportunity of refuting them by speaking for thyself. Is it true that thou art a Christian?”

“I am a Christian,” replied the maiden.

“The laws of the Empire condemn Christians as wicked persons; they are enemies of the Emperor. Thy youth and want of experience may nevertheless serve as an excuse. Thou knowest not, probably, the wickedness of their teachings and practices; if thou art now willing to renounce both, I promise thee a full pardon for the past.”

“I have nothing to renounce,” said the fearless



Virgin, "I know that our teachings are holy; that they who follow them in practice are obedient to God, who created the heavens, the earth, the sea, and all things therein; that they are faithful to the Emperor, and observe the laws in all things just." •

"Be not rash in speech," said Symphronius, "we, who are old, are also experienced; I will not bandy words with one so young. Listen to me. Thou rememberest, doubtless, the proposals which I have made. Wealth, honors, pleasures, happiness are offered to thee; with one word thou canst secure them for thyself. Be wise; for, if thou despisest this fairest of chances, misery, tortures, disgrace will be thy portion. Make thy choice."

"No misery, nor disgrace can reach me, if I continue faithful to my God," replied Agnes, "my choice is made."

"Dost thou persevere in this mad resolution?"

"It is not madness, but true wisdom, to choose as I have chosen."

"The folly and the guilt be upon thy own head," said the Governor.

Thereupon, he ordered his officers to take her again to her home. Meanwhile, having sent for her parents, he tried, by every argument at his command, to induce them to make use of their authority to persuade their daughter to comply

with his requests. They, however, as they had trained their child in the practice of every virtue, and loved her with the tenderest affection, were wholly unwilling to interfere with the choice which Agnes had made. To all the promises and entreaties of Symphronius, they returned invariably the same answer: "It is a matter that rests between the conscience of our daughter, and the call from God; we have no right to oppose her choice."

The Governor was at a loss to decide what measures to adopt. As the family belonged to the highest nobility, he could not accuse them of any crime, without incurring the hostile opposition of all Romans of similar rank, a result for which he was by no means prepared, and which he seemed anxious to avoid.

The hour of trial had now come, for her parents as well as for the Saint. An immense sacrifice had to be made. The struggle between parental love and the voice of conscientious duty was painful indeed and bitter; but what was this life, so brief and uncertain, compared with the life that knows no ending? The more feeble and delicate was the mortal frame of the angelic child, the sooner would the offering be consummated. "Let God's holy will be accomplished in all things: our lives are in his hands: His ways are just and adorable." Such

were the reasonings of the parents. In the meantime, Agnes sought strength and courage in prayer. She held familiar converse with the chaste Bridegroom of her soul. She exposed her dread at the very thought of becoming defiled in body or mind. But the voice of her Beloved whispered to her heart: "Fear not: thou art Mine: I am thy keeper and protector." From that moment the timid maiden was changed into the fearless heroine.

The following day, Symphronius summoned her again before his judgment-seat. He said to her:

"Thou seest how great is my regard for thee. When thou wast so obstinate yesterday, I might have abandoned thee to thy fate; but age and experience have taught me, that time and reflection bring wisdom. Delay, I trust, has not been profitless to thee. Think better of thy future, my child; much happiness awaits thee. Say but the word, that thou art willing to be called my daughter, and the smiles of joy and contentment will greet thee from every side. Thy noble parents and myself will glory in the blissful union of two young hearts so worthy of each other. Come now, my child, speak wisely and promptly."

"You know my answer; my choice is fixed," replied the Saint.

"Fixed and unchangeable?" asked the Governor.

“Forever,” answered Agnes.

Symphronius became excited with anger. No one had ever ventured to disregard his will, and now he was baffled by a mere child, whose favor he had endeavored to win by a condescension unworthy of his high station. This thought annoyed him bitterly for a moment; but he soon found an infallible means, as he imagined, of having his revenge. Wherefore, he said to her:

“Now I understand it all. Thou art become so infatuated with the superstition of the Christians, in whose magical art thou pridest thyself, that, unless thou art placed altogether beyond their influence, thou canst never be cured of thy madness. Our good advice and wholesome warnings can make no impression on thy foolish heart. I will, therefore, send thee to the temple of the venerable Vesta. If thou art resolved to lead the life of a virgin, thou shalt be enabled to sing, with the Vestals, the praises of that goddess, and give thy care and attention, night and day, to the sacrifices offered upon her altars.”

To this the blessed Agnes replied:

“If I disdain to listen to the proposals and the insane expressions of love uttered by your son, who yet is a human being, and, therefore, capable of reasoning, of hearing and seeing, of feeling and

moving, who can also enjoy the light of day and the other blessings of life; if I reject him, I say, because I have consecrated myself, body and soul, to the love of my Lord and Redeemer, how, think you, can I ever be persuaded or forced to worship deaf and dumb idols, that possess neither life nor feeling? How can I, to the injury of what I owe to my God and Maker, bend the knee and bow my head in worship before senseless stones?"

The Governor said:

"I am willing to have pity on thee, because thou art still a child; nay more, I have patience with thee, although thou art blaspheming our gods, because I perceive that the fewness of thy years has not yet given thee understanding. Do not, however, so far overlook thy own interests as to draw upon thyself the anger of the immortal gods."

"Nor do you so far despise my tender age and youthful frame," said Agnes, "as to imagine, that I care in the least for either their anger or their favor. Firmness does not so much depend on the number of years we have lived, as on the earnestness of our resolves; and God, who is the Almighty, regards rather the disposition of our heart, than our age. As to your gods, whose displeasure you do not desire me to incur, suffer them to be angry as much as they choose; but I would ask you to

let themselves say so. Let them give me their commands, let them tell me how they wish to be venerated and adored, if they can. I see full well the object at which you are aiming; be assured you shall never be able to attain thereto; do, therefore, at once, whatsoever you have determined against me.”

Symphronius, when he heard these bold words of the noble-spirited maiden, could with difficulty control his rage. He was anxious to appear calm and self-possessed in presence of the large assembly of Roman citizens, called together by this extraordinary trial; but his pride and self-esteem revolted at the thought of being disconcerted by the superior courage and constancy of a child, whose generous fortitude awakened a feeling of deepest interest in the mind of the spectators—even of those who did not sympathize with her in the Religion, of which she now stood forth as the undaunted champion. Seeing that flattering promises could produce no effect upon her, and that it was useless to attempt to make her renounce the Christian Faith, he said to her:

“Without any more ado, make up thy mind, either to offer sacrifice, with the Vestal virgins, to our great goddess; or to be dragged into a house of debauchery, there to take up thy abode with

abandoned women. Then thou shalt have no Christians to encourage thee by their skill in magic, whereby they have so far misled thy innocence as to make thee believe, that thou art able to defy, with unshaken confidence this, as well as every other, misfortune. Wherefore, as I say, either offer sacrifice to the goddess Vesta, for the honor and glory of thy race; or, to the everlasting disgrace of thy noble family, thou shalt be treated as an unchaste woman of the town."

This threat of the wicked Governor did by no means terrify the virtuous maiden; she replied boldly:

"If you knew how great and mighty is the God whom I adore, you would not dare to use such language against His lowly but faithful servant. Yet, as I know the power of my Lord and Master Jesus Christ, I do fearlessly despise all your threats. I will neither offer sacrifice to your powerless idols, nor am I afraid that I shall in any manner be defiled by the foul infamy to which, thinking me helpless and wholly in your grasp, you are not ashamed to condemn me. I have with me an Angel of the Lord, as a guardian of my person. Moreover, the only Son of God, whom you know not, surrounds me with an impenetrable wall; He guards me with an ever-watchful care, and is ready to ward off from



me every danger. But your gods are either made of brass—of which it is more proper to make kettles for the use of men,—or of stones, which serve a better purpose when employed in paving the streets. The Eternal God dwells not in senseless stones, but in the heavens; He is not confined by brass, or by any other metal; but He reigns in His glorious kingdom on high. But you, and those who resemble you,—unless you repent and turn away from your wicked manner of life, and from the worship of your false gods,—the same everlasting punishment shall overtake you. For as the brass, of which your gods are made, is first melted and then cast in a mould,—to give them the form they have,—so shall they that worship them, be cast into the inextinguishable fire to suffer forever, on account of their impiety.”

These bold words of the noble maiden filled the Governor and his attendants with astonishment. All felt persuaded that no torments, nor even death itself, could have any terrors for one that could thus defy the threats of an enraged magistrate. Nevertheless, that which would have awakened the most generous feelings in a manly breast, aroused the most intense hatred in the fanatical Governor. He knew full well, that there was but one thing dreaded by Christians, sin, or even the appearanc

thereof. Wherefore, he gave orders, that the innocent Virgin should be stripped of her garments, and, in that state, led through the public streets of the city, to a house of debauchery, whilst a herald cried out: "This is Agnes, a Christian and a sorceress, whom the Governor of the city condemns for speaking ill of the immortal gods; let all deal with her and insult her as they please." It was in itself a most cruel and barbarous treatment, and in the present instance, where the object was a maiden so youthful and so chaste, and withal of so elevated a standing in Roman society, it aroused the indignation of every one, in whom the feelings of humanity had not been deadened by the all-powerful hand of tyranny. But there is One who watches with a jealous eye over the chastity of His brides. No sooner did the executioners take off the dress of the Saint, than her hair spread out in a wonderful manner, and, falling down, covered her whole person so completely, that she stood, as it were, modestly arrayed in her own garments. When she entered the house, where, according to all human appearances, her virtue was to be so much exposed, she beheld an Angel from heaven awaiting her arrival. Immediately, he threw around her so dazzling a brilliancy, that no one was able to look upon her without being overpowered by the

glare of light, which surrounded her. The very apartment wherein she was, shone with so heavenly a splendor, that the men, who had brought her there, struck with dread, hastened away from her presence. Agnes, filled with gratitude, fell upon her knees and thanked her Divine Lord for His visible protection, extended to her in this her hour of trial. Whilst she prayed, she saw placed before her a snow-white robe, which she put on, and found so exactly fitting, that she knew at once it could have been prepared for her by none other than the hands of angels. In an extasy of love, she addressed her heavenly Bridegroom: "I thank Thee, O Lord Jesus Christ, for that Thou deemest me worthy to be numbered among Thy handmaidens; and because, as a token of Thy exceeding condescension, Thou hast ordered this garment to be given to me."

This marvelous display of the power and care of her Redeemer inspired her with still greater courage. Now she knew, that her purity was in no danger so long as she drew nigh unto Him, in whom she had confidingly trusted. Several men, with evil thoughts in their hearts, or prompted by a vain curiosity, who attempted to enter the room of the Saint, on beholding the supernatural brightness which filled the place, were so overcome

that, ashamed of their wicked intentions, they cried out: "Great is the Faith of the Christians! Great is the power of Christ!" They felt themselves irresistibly drawn to admire and praise the spotlessness of the fair maiden, whose virtue was so singularly approved by Heaven itself. Thus, that which was supposed to be the abode of infamy, became a house of prayer, and a cause of conversion to many. However, the enemy of man's salvation did not rest; nor was he willing that Agnes should enjoy so easy a triumph over all his artifices. He stirred up again him, who had been the author of this wicked persecution. Led on by the spirit of evil, the son of the Governor assembles a number of his companions, as reckless and unprincipled as himself, and goes to the house where the Saint is detained. When he hears what has taken place, and sees the other young men who had preceded him, completely changed in their sentiments, and giving glory to the power of the God of the Christians,—who has shielded the innocence of the maiden from every harm—he laughs at their credulity, and upbraids them with cowardice. Then, puffed up with his own self-conceit, and to show how much he despised their imaginary fears, he boldly enters the apartment, where Agnes is kneeling, absorbed in prayer. At first, he is dazzled by

the light that surrounds her: passion blinds his understanding; he advances, stretches forth his hand to seize her in his grasp. But, before he touches her, the Angel, who guards the Virgin, strikes him as with a thunderbolt: the Governor's son falls dead upon the ground.

The companions of the rash young man stand anxiously waiting outside. Some seem to think that he will come out, even as they had done, changed in feeling, and confessing the power of Christ. They wait in vain: he comes not. They take counsel among themselves what to do. One of them, the intimate friend of the son of Symphronius, anxious about his fate, at last says: "I will go, and see why he lingers within." He goes, and sees his companion stretched lifeless upon the floor. Struck with horror, and almost unconscious with terror, he rushes out, and sets up a loud cry of lamentation: "Kind Romans, attend and give aid: that wretched girl has, by her magic art, killed the son of Symphronius, the Governor of the City."

All his companions immediately take up the cry, and raise a great tumult. The people of the neighborhood come running in great haste, to learn what has come to pass, and, by their loud exclamations, add excitement to the general confusion. Then there arises among them the voice of disputa-

tion. Some maintain that the unhappy girl is a sorceress, and should be punished as such; others say, that she is a sacrilegious wretch, who has dared to insult and defy the power of the immortal gods; others again protest, that she is the innocent victim of calumny and persecution, and that the wicked son of Symphronius has, at last, deservedly received the just reward of his criminal conduct. In this manner the whole city is soon in an uproar. Meanwhile, the dreadful tidings reach the ear of the unlucky Governor, who has, contrary to his expectations, drawn this great misfortune upon himself. Filled with grief, and forgetful of his dignity, he rushes, like a madman, to the house which was proving so disastrous to him. A tumultuous crowd of attendants follow the disconsolate man. When he beholds the inanimate body of his son, he tears his hair, and utters the most pitiful cries of despair. Soon his grief is changed into rage against the innocent maiden:

“O, thou most cruel of women,” he shouts, “thou born for the ruin of myself and mine! Was it because my unhappy son loved thee so passionately, that thou, miserable enchantress, didst make him the victim of thy fiendish arts?”

The blessed Agnes replied: “It is not myself, but the malice of the evil spirit, to whose sugges-



tions your son has lent a willing ear, that has brought this misfortune upon himself and upon his father. Why is it that others have presented themselves before me, and yet have gone away without suffering any harm? Because, when they saw the wonderful display of the power and goodness of my God, they gave glory to Him, and confessed that, in very deed, He has sent His angel to protect my person against the designs of the wicked. Understand, therefore, that no attempt against the purity of my body can be successful; for He, to whom I have wholly consecrated myself from my earliest years, will not permit that to be defiled, which He has accepted and claims by right as His own. This your son was unwilling to learn, and hence his unholy rashness has drawn this frightful punishment upon himself."

These words of the Saint produced quite a change in the feelings of Symphronius. He could not help seeing, that truth and innocence alone would speak in this manner. Yet he was ashamed of appearing before the multitude as having acted without judgment in this matter. Wherefore, he said to Agnes :

"If thou restore to me my son alive and sound, I too will confess that it is not by magic, but by the

power of Him who guards thee, that this affliction has befallen me."

She answered: "Your unbelief does not deserve that I should obtain from my Lord so great a favor for you. Yet, as it seems a fit opportunity of manifesting the glory of Jesus Christ before all the citizens of Rome, I will entreat Him, that He may deign to make known His infinite power and goodness. Let all withdraw, that I may offer undisturbed my prayer to my God."

Symphronius and his attendants immediately left the room, and Agnes, prostrating herself upon the ground, prayed in a loud voice to her heavenly Bridegroom:

"Lord Jesus Christ," she said, "Thou knowest my request: Thou knowest why I beg this favor of Thee. Deign to make known, to them that believe not, the greatness of Thy power, by restoring to life this young man; that Thy name may be glorified before men, and that all may understand, that whosoever confides in Thee, shall never be put to confusion."

And whilst she prayed and wept, behold the Angel of the Lord stood before her, and said:

"Agnes, Bride of Christ, weep no more; thy prayer is granted!"

And he touched the young man, and forthwith

he arose as if it were from a deep sleep, and going forth among the people, he began to exclaim :

“There is but one God in the heavens, upon earth, and in the seas—the God, whom the Christians adore. All our temples are deceptions; the gods, worshipped therein, are powerless, they can neither help themselves, nor give aid to others.”

The rumor of what had taken place—the death and the wonderful resuscitation of the son of the Governor—rapidly spread through the city. From all parts of Rome, crowds came hurrying to the house where the servant of God was still kept a prisoner. Many, who knew not the teachings of the Christians, now began to inquire into them, and were captivated by the beauty and holiness of them; others, who had hitherto despised the very name of a Religion, so opposed to the ideas and superstitions of Paganism, opened their eyes and hearts to the saving influence of Christianity; and thus the struggles and sufferings of an innocent maiden became a triumph for the cause of truth.

Satan, however, would not permit the cause of truth to obtain a glorious triumph in Rome, without the most violent opposition. Perceiving the change that was coming over the minds of the people, he stirred up the jealousy and hatred of the heathen priests, and the fanaticism of those among the

populace, to whom the ceremonies and practices of idolatrous worship were a means of securing a livelihood. These men, combining together, soon called around them a tumultuous mob of the most degraded among the inhabitants of the city, and began to cry out with threatening shouts :

“ Away with the sorceress, death to her ! By her magic art she casts a spell upon our people, blinds their minds, and perverts their hearts. Away with her ! ”

Symphronius, hearing these outcries of the excited crowd, became very uneasy. The miracle which he had just witnessed, and the knowledge he had of the guiltlessness of the maiden, had determined him to set her free ; but the fear of displeasing the people, and, above all, the fear of losing the favor of the Emperor, caused him to waver in his resolution. He addressed the multitude, and tried to appease them by an appeal to reason and justice. All his efforts proved useless : the more he endeavored to calm the passions of wicked and blood-thirsty men, the more he seemed to arouse their barbarous instincts.

For a long time, he hesitated between the fulfilling of a duty, and the desire of gratifying the populace. At last, however, cowardliness and injustice prevailed over every generous impulse,



and over his better judgment. Thinking to free himself from blame, and, at the same time, hoping to retain the favor of the people, he placed the whole matter in the hands of Aspasius, his lieutenant, and withdrew to his own dwelling.

Aspasius—like most persons, who from an inferior position, are suddenly raised to power—thinking the present opportunity a suitable means of acquiring distinction, and of gaining at one and the same time popularity with the citizens, and favor with his imperial masters, readily took upon himself the task of acting the part of the Governor of Rome. He immediately gave orders that Agnes should be brought before his tribunal. Satisfying himself that the clamors of the populace were a sufficient proof of the guiltiness of the accused, he commanded a great fire to be lighted, and Agnes to be thrown into the flames. His command was cheerfully obeyed, not by his attendants, but by the excited mob of fanatics, whose zeal had been aroused by the ministers of the idols. So great was the blaze that several of them, pushed forward by the crowd thronging around, were caught by the flames and burnt to death, before they could escape the raging fire. No sooner, however, did the maiden enter it, and sign herself with the sign of the Cross, than the roaring flames, suddenly

dividing themselves, and playing around her, left her, as it were, environed by a halo of glory, without injuring in the least her person, or even her garments. This visible interposition of divine Providence, instead of moving the people to acknowledge the power of the God of the Christians, produced altogether a contrary effect.

“This is another proof of the use which she makes of her magical arts to deceive us,” they exclaimed, “away with the enchantress!” and with wild and seditious shouts, they endeavored to frighten the astonished Aspasius, who was but too ready to listen to their cruel request.

Meanwhile, the sweet and innocent child,—doubly saved by her heavenly Bridegroom,—from the fire of concupiscence, which had assailed her spotless purity, and the fire enkindled by the wrath of wicked men—poured forth her prayer of love and thankfulness to Him, as she stood in the midst of the flames.

“Father Almighty! O Thou, so worthy of the worship and adoration of Thy creatures, accept the voice of my prayer. Thee, I bless, O Father of my Lord Jesus Christ, because Thy Son has rescued me from the hands of the wicked, and saved me from the defilements of the evil one. Behold, even now, by Thy Holy Spirit, a refreshing dew is

poured over me. The fire which encircled me is extinguished: the flames are scattered, and the burning overtakes them that fear Thee not. Thee, I thank, O Father! since, after I have stood fearless in the midst of these flames, Thou sufferest me to come unto Thee. Now I see that which I believed, now I hold that for which I hoped, now I embrace that which I desired with anxious longing. Thee I confess with my lips and with my heart; Thee I praise and thank with all the powers of my soul. Suffer me to come unto Thee, for whom my heart has sighed with ceaseless yearning. O Thou true and only God, who with our Lord Jesus Christ Thy Son, and the Holy Spirit, livest and reignest for ever and ever. Amen.”

When the Martyr finished this prayer, the flames were so completely extinguished, that there remained not the least appearance of a fire around her.

The furious mob, however, seemed unwilling to relent. They continued to shout and threaten, until Aspasius, frightened by their seditious demonstrations, ordered her throat to be pierced with a sword. Many of the spectators burst into tears, when they beheld the executioner advance to perform his cruel office. All, even the most hard-hearted, felt themselves overpowered by a natural

feeling of sympathy, at the sight of one so beautiful and so young, thus condemned to be cut off from the joys of life, before she had been able to learn its realities. She alone in the vast multitude seemed unconscious of fear. Patient and erect she stood, her eyes raised toward heaven, where alone was her treasure,—where also were her thoughts and her heart. The executioner, trembling and confused, gazed at the innocent victim; he knew not where, nor how to strike. She said to him :

“It is an injury done to the Bridegroom of my soul, to make Him wait for my coming. He, who chose me from the beginning, is ready to receive me in His chaste embrace. Why dost thou delay my bliss? Let this body perish which mortal eyes may look upon, that my spirit may live with Him, whom alone I desire to please.”

Thus she spoke, as in ecstatic adoration bowing down her head, she received the stroke of death; and, whilst the crimson stream bedewed the Virgin's body, her loving spirit found everlasting rest, in the blissful embrace of her divine Bridegroom.

The parents of the Martyr, without any display of grief, but rather rejoicing over her happiness, took possession of the sacred remains, and reverently entombed the sweet treasure on their estate,

not far from the city, on the road that leads from Rome to Nomentum. Thither crowds of Christians immediately began to resort, to pray at the sepulchre of the Saint. The Pagans, however, did not suffer them to enjoy undisturbed this consoling pleasure. They came in large numbers and with loud clamors, and by throwing stones, endeavored to interrupt the pious devotion of the Faithful. On the second day after the Martyrdom of the blessed Agnes, her foster-sister Emerentiana, still a catechumen, was praying at the tomb, when the riotous Pagans surrounded the place, and attempted by their threats of violence to drive her away. But the courageous maiden was resolved not to be kept by any intimidation from the spot, where she found a sweet enjoyment in watching over the remains of her beloved sister. She said to the crowd:

“In vain, O wretched and cruel men, do ye attempt to frighten the servants of Christ. This short-lived existence is deemed as nothing by them that hope and long for an endless life, which neither the wickedness nor the persecutions of mortal man can disturb. Repent of your evil deeds, and strive by good works to obtain mercy before it is too late, from an all-seeing God, who is soon to be your Judge.”

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These words, instead of appeasing, aroused the wrath of the multitude. Whereupon, as she called on the Lord Jesus, and asked Him to pardon her tormentors, they stoned her to death. As she expired, the ground trembled, and, although the sky was serene, loud claps of thunder were heard, and vivid strokes of lightning encompassed the sacrilegious crowd, so that the vengeance of Heaven fell suddenly upon them, and destroyed a great number of the wretches in the midst of their sins. From that time, the Christians were no longer molested, when they paid their pious visits to the tomb of St. Agnes.

Towards nightfall, the parents of the Saint, accompanied by several of the priests of Rome, went to the spot, and taking up the body of the martyred Emerentiana, buried it devoutly near the tomb of their sainted daughter—her foster-sister.

Meanwhile, with so fond an affection did the parents cling to the memory of their beloved child, that they came every night to watch and pray at her tomb. And so it befell that, on the eighth day after the Martyrdom, as they were keeping their pious vigil, they suddenly perceived themselves environed with a brilliant light, and beheld a great multitude of Virgins, clad in shining garments, with glittering crowns of pearls and precious stones upon

their heads. In the midst of them stood their daughter Agnes, having at her right hand a Lamb whiter than the purest snow. The parents and their attendants, dazzled by the splendor of the beautiful vision, were ready to fall down in an ecstasy of joy and admiration. But the glorious Virgin, drawing nigh unto them, said: "My beloved parents, weep not for me, as if I were dead. Do rather rejoice with me, because with these, my companions, I have received a bright throne in heaven. Now in bliss I am united to Him, whom, whilst I lingered upon earth, I loved with all the affection of my soul." After these words, the gorgeous train of heavenly Virgins disappeared.

This vision soon became known throughout the city, and inspired the Christians with a wonderful confidence in the intercession of the youthful Martyr—which was constantly increased by the many bodily and spiritual cures, whereby our Lord chose to glorify upon earth the virtues and merits of His chaste and faithful Bride.

Some years after, these wonders were related, by persons who had been eye-witnesses of many of the facts, to Constantia, daughter of the Emperor Constantine. This princess, although as yet unbaptized, was leading a life of retirement and great edification by the practice of many virtues. Her

health, however, was very delicate; for she was afflicted with an unsightly disease, similar to leprosy; so that from head to foot scarcely any part of her body was free from ulcers. By the advice of her attendants, she was induced to have recourse to the powerful intercession of the Virgin Martyr. Wherefore, one evening she went to visit the tomb of the Saint, and, kneeling down beside it, poured forth fervent prayers, begging her to use her influence in heaven with Him, whom she had loved so devotedly upon earth, that she might be restored to health and soundness. Whilst she prayed, a feeling, as it were of a gentle slumber, came stealing over her, during which she saw the blessed Agnes standing before her, and addressing her in these words: "Act consistently, O Constantia; believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, thy Redeemer; be baptized. Through Him thou shalt obtain healing, and be freed from all the suffering which thou endurest in thy body." Upon this Constantia awakening, beheld, to her great astonishment, and to the inexpressible delight of all her attendants, that not a single vestige remained of her former disease.

When she returned to the palace of her father, the joy of the Emperor and of his sons was unbounded. The whole city put on the appearance

of festivity: the soldiers, as well as the citizens, united in celebrating the happy event. Through gratitude for this signal favor, Constantia obtained from her father, that a beautiful church should be built on the spot, where reposed the remains of the Saint. Here she consecrated by vow her virginity to God, and her example was followed by many maidens of the noblest families of Rome. Thus the life and virtues of St. Agnes became a model of perfection to persons of every rank and condition, who were anxious, by their purity of mind and body, to emulate the youthful Bride of Christ.

Her feast is kept with great solemnity, on the twenty-first of January.





VI.

ST. AGATHA.

DO do and suffer great things for the glory of God, so as to excite the admiration of men, is doubtless a great privilege granted to some favored souls supported by special graces; but to endure patiently persecution, to undergo trials whereof Heaven alone is a witness, requires often a stronger faith, and a firmer hope to enable us to persevere in well-doing. Happy are they who understand this—thrice happy they whose “life hidden with Christ in God,” and forgetful of self, has no other aim than to please Him: their glory shall one day be revealed in such a manner, that they themselves shall be filled with wonder at the greatness thereof. This we see verified in the holy Virgin, of whom we are about to speak.

Agatha was born of wealthy and illustrious parents in the city of Palermo, in Sicily. In her

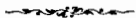
earliest years, she consecrated her virginity to God, and devoted herself wholly to His service by the practice of every Christian virtue. Her charity knew no bounds: the immense possessions left her by her parents she employed in alleviating the sufferings of the sick and the poor, of the orphans and widows. Her name was never pronounced without a blessing, by all who had the happiness of knowing the sweet and generous maiden. She alone appeared unconscious of doing anything that deserved to draw upon herself the attention of others; it was but a duty which she fulfilled to the best of her power: and for the faithful discharge thereof, what did she ask of her heavenly Bridegroom? That He might one day deem her worthy to lay down her life for His sake. It was not long before her prayer was heard.

In the year 251 an edict was published by the Emperor Decius, whereby the Christians were commanded either to sacrifice to the idols or to suffer death. Quintianus, the Governor of Sicily—who had heard much in praise of the extraordinary beauty of Agatha, and knew the vast estates she possessed—thought this a favorable opportunity of making himself master of both her person and her great wealth. Wherefore, he sent a band of soldiers from Catana, where he resided, to seize and bring

her before his tribunal. When the officer of the band presented himself before Agatha, he said to her :

“In accordance with the imperial decree, Quintianus, the Governor, summons thee before him, because thou offerest no sacrifice to the gods whom the Emperor worships, nor givest to them that honor which the practice of thy country demands. Resolve, therefore, at once to fulfill this sacred obligation, that we may conduct thee with honor to Quintianus, who is ready to forget the past.”

Seeing herself thus suddenly in the hands of the persecutors, Agatha asked for a moment's delay, that she might prepare to follow them. Then, entering her dwelling, she prostrated herself in the presence of her God and prayed: “Lord Jesus Christ, Thou seest my heart, Thou knowest my desire: be Thou my leader in this my war against the enemy. Behold, it is not now the first time that I did conquer, and trample him under foot. For the sake of Thy great and glorious Name, under whose protection I have led a life pure and undefiled, I beseech Thee, receive my tears and crush the evil one.” After this prayer, feeling herself armed with the buckler of Faith, she courageously followed the soldiers. Many of the



inhabitants of Palermo accompanied her; for it was a sad affliction to them, to see themselves deprived of one whose life had been a source of every blessing. But the maiden, although she pitied them in their sorrow, did not allow her thoughts to linger among her grateful citizens. The future, and the fearful struggles that awaited her, claimed her whole attention.

During the journey—which was made on foot—she kept up a cheerful heart by prayer and meditation. “This, although the greatest, is not the first combat,” she said to herself, “upon which I enter to preserve my chastity undefiled. How often has not the tempter assailed me with his wicked suggestions? As I overcame him then, so, by the grace of my heavenly Father, I need not fear him now. Does not my Lord and Saviour behold me from on high, ready to give aid and courage, should my own weakness expose me to defeat? He will combat in me, and with me, because in Him alone I trust. Thanks be to Him forever!” As they went their way, the latchet of her shoe having become loose, she stopped to fasten it, placing her foot upon a stone. At that moment, she perceived that the crowd of men and women followed her no longer: for they had all returned to their homes. This grieved her much,

since now she felt herself a lonely prisoner in the power of her keepers. Wherefore, she addressed herself to her heavenly Bridegroom, saying: "Lord Jesus, all they that cheered me on by their presence have forsaken me: deign to give to Thy unworthy handmaid a token that Thou wilt not abandon me." And immediately, on that very spot, there sprung up a beautiful wild olive-tree; the sight whereof filled her with the greatest consolation.

When she drew near Catana, a great number of its inhabitants, both men and women, went forth to meet her. Some of the women expressed their sympathy for her by loud lamentations; others, more thoroughly imbued with the true spirit of Christianity, extolled the generous constancy of the Virgin, who had dared to spurn the offers and promises of the Governor—for they had already heard of the chief object which he had in view, when he ordered her to be brought to their city. Many of the noblest matrons of Catana were allowed by the soldiers, to approach the maiden and embrace her: these gave her words of comfort, and encouraged her to perseverance, that she might finish her course in a manner worthy of the name and reputation she had hitherto enjoyed. To them Agatha replied:

"I have placed all my confidence in God; His

Son will give me strength. Full of reliance upon His powerful aid, I am resolved to overcome the tyrant's threats, blows, tortures, and death itself. Such is my hope, such is my longing desire."

When she was brought before the Governor, he received her, contrary to expectation, with pretended kindness. The innocent maiden had never learned that the wicked often disguise their real intentions, under the outward appearance of virtue. He said to her :

"It is indeed an unpleasant duty which I have to fulfil in thy regard. Did not the imperial decree oblige me, I should never have thought of disturbing thee in thy virtuous pursuits. But be patient: I will interest myself in thy behalf, and write to the Emperor in thy favor. Meanwhile, I will give thee in charge to a respectable matron, the mother of a family, who will keep thee from every harm. Confide in her; she will be to thee as a mother."

Agatha, who deemed it wrong to suspect evil where none was apparent, believed the words of the false-hearted Quintianus, and, thanking him for his generosity, willingly accompanied Aphrodisia to her home.

This woman, however, was altogether another person than the one described by the Governor. She had, indeed, several daughters, but their

reputation was very bad in the city. Their house was the abode of infamy; their occupation to corrupt the morals of young persons of both sexes. Among them Agatha had to encounter the severest struggles. They began by extolling the beauty of her person, the pleasure of having many admirers, the silliness of endeavoring to appear more virtuous than others. Next, they depicted to her the charms of a life devoid of care, and free to indulge in every luxury. They displayed before her costly garments and precious jewels, and with flattering words and all the arts of persuasion, exhorted her to secure for herself all this magnificence. When they perceived that this made no impression upon the mind of the maiden, they went on to use threats, and said that, if their good advice were of no avail to persuade her to think better of the joys of this world, the troubles which she was preparing for herself should open her eyes to the reality of the position, in which her wilfulness was placing her. During thirty days, Agatha was forced to listen to these and similar arguments, to all which she constantly replied: "My mind is placed upon a solid foundation, even upon Christ my Saviour. No attempts of men shall be able to separate me from Him. Your words are to me no more than the blast of the wind, which comes and passes away without leaving a vestige of

its transition. Your intercourse is like the pattering rain, perceptible for a little while, but soon dried up by the rays of the sun. Your threats are to me like the waters of a stream swelled for a moment, but rolling harmless into the immensity of the ocean: they excite an alarm by menacing my dwelling with destruction, but, when I reflect that it is built upon a rock, I laugh them to scorn."

Nor was the Saint satisfied with merely resisting successfully the assaults of the enemies of her soul. The fire of charity, which enflamed her bosom, induced her to endeavor at least to effect the conversion of the wretched persons with whom she was compelled to live. "As a Christian," she said to them, "I am obliged to return good for evil: therefore, I tell you now, that the same almighty Power that protects me from your wicked devices, will, at no distant day, call you to an account for all your misdeeds, your deceitful words, yea, your very thoughts. What answer will you make, when an all-knowing God demands of you the many poor souls you have led to everlasting ruin—souls, too, for whose salvation He shed His most precious blood? It is yet time for you to make amends for the past, by doing penance for your numberless crimes; but remember, that if God grants you the present day He has not promised you to-morrow.

The days of the ungodly are numbered: their triumphs shall be short-lived. And, after all, your pleasures, so false and fleeting, what benefit do they confer? days and nights full of weariness and remorse, thoughts of despair, and lastly, the certainty of being cast into the fires of hell, there to be tortured forever."

If these words of the servant of God did not cause Aphrodisia and her daughters to abandon their sinful manner of life, they served, at least, to open their eyes, and make them understand that they lost their labor in the vain attempt of perverting the youthful Christian. Wherefore, Aphrodisia went to the Governor, and said to him:

"It would be more easy to soften the hardest stone and to melt iron by my words, than to turn away the mind of that girl from the love of Christ. Myself and my daughters have given her no rest, neither by day nor by night; we have in turn assailed her with every weapon of persuasion capable of subduing the most obstinate heart, but all to no purpose. I have offered her the most precious jewels and the richest garments; I have promised her palaces in the city, and splendid residences in the country: all these she rejects and despises as so much worthless dust. In short, she is firmly resolved to live and die for the love of

Christ, to whom she has consecrated herself, body and soul."

Quintianus was very angry when he heard that all his cunning and hypocrisy, far from securing the end he had in view, only brought disgrace upon himself. "If art and persuasion," said he, "cannot produce the desired effect, let us see what force can do." Hereupon, he forthwith gave orders to his attendants to bring the maiden before his tribunal.

At the sight of the Virgin, he could with difficulty suppress the different feelings that were struggling in his breast. Assuming, however, a calmness, which he did not possess, he said to her:

"Of what family art thou?"

"I am of an ancient and noble family," answered Agatha. "All my kindred have long been distinguished for their wealth, as is well known throughout the Island."

"If thou art of noble birth, and wealthy, why then dost thou conduct thyself as a person of servile condition?" asked the Governor.

"Because I am a servant of Christ, and look upon myself as His bond-woman."

"If thou art really of noble birth, how canst thou call thyself a servant?"

“Our true nobility and our glory consist in proving ourselves worthy of serving Christ.”

“What!” said Quintianus, “do not we—who despise the service of Christ, and worship the gods of the Empire—possess true nobility?”

“If you have degraded yourselves to such a slavery as not only to be slaves of sin, but also worshippers of senseless idols—made of wood and stone—do you call that being free and noble?”

“Beware of speaking slightly of our gods; I might feel obliged to punish thy insolence. But tell me, why dost thou so much abhor the worship of the gods?”

“Do not say of the gods,” replied Agatha, “but of the devils. For they are only devils, whose likenesses you make of brass, and whose face—made of marble or gypsum—you gild.”

“I can endure this no longer,” said the Governor. “So make up thy mind to choose one of two things: either, as a foolish girl, to suffer the most cruel torments, like one condemned and disgraced; or, as a wise and noble lady, worthy of thy name and race, to offer sacrifice to the great and mighty gods of Rome.”

“I doubt not, you would deem it an insult, were I to wish that your wife might be as virtuous as the goddess whom you call Venus, or that yourself

might be as great and as good as your Jupiter. If this is so, would it not be the height of folly for me to give to them that honor, which belongs to the One True God alone?"

This bold reply so enraged the Governor, that he commanded one of his officers to strike her on the face, and said to her :

"After this, I suppose, thou wilt be on thy guard against using such impudent language in presence of thy judge."

Agatha answered: "Is it impudent language, to wish that you may be as good and virtuous as your Venus and your Jupiter, whom you call gods? You astonish me, when you show yourself unwilling to be like unto your gods, and to enjoy life like them."

"It is plain that, by thy insolent speech, thou art endeavoring to provoke me to inflict the severest punishment upon thee," said Quintianus.

"It is strange," replied the maiden, "that you, to all appearance a man of common sense, should be so unreasonable as to call gods, those beings whose example you would not suffer your wife to imitate, and according to whose manner of life you would be yourself ashamed to live. For, if they are true gods, it was a good wish to which I gave utterance, when I wished you to be like them. If, on the

contrary, you abhor their life and actions, you are of my own opinion. Confess, therefore, honestly and sincerely, that your gods are so bad and abominable, that, if any one want to wish a great evil to another, he has but to wish that his life may be as bad as that of his gods."

"Thou irritatest me beyond all endurance," said the Governor. "Offer sacrifice to the immortal gods, or prepare thyself for the most excruciating tortures."

"I offer no sacrifice to demons," replied the Martyr; "I care not for your tortures. If you let loose against me the wild beasts, at the mere mention of the Name of Jesus, they will become tame; if you apply fire to my body, the Angels of Heaven will cool me with a refreshing dew; if you tear me with lashes, I have within me the Holy Spirit, who will enable me to defy your cruelty."

Quintianus shook his head, as if he were at a loss what to say or to do. After a while, however, he ordered her to be thrown into a deep and dark dungeon.

"I give thee time," he said, "for thought and repentance, so that, before it is too late, thou mayest find means of escaping the torments which await thee."

"It were as well for you to repent of your own

misdeeds," answered Agatha, "you minister of Satan, that thus you may escape the everlasting punishments which await you in the next world."

The Governor—now aware that the spectators themselves perceived that he was over-matched by the Christian maiden—hurried her off to the dungeon. The Saint joyfully entered the frightful prison, and, as if invited to a banquet, thanked her heavenly Bridegroom, and with fervent prayer, recommended her approaching struggle to Him.

On the following day, she was again called before the tribunal of the Governor, who said to her :

"Well! let us hear; to what conclusion hast thou come to secure thy safety?"

"My safety is in the hands of Christ, my Lord and Redeemer; on Him alone I place all my reliance," answered Agatha.

"Wretched girl!" exclaimed Quintianus. "How long wilt thou continue to entertain these foolish notions? Disown thy Christ and His worship; honor the great gods of the Empire; attend to thy own interests and happiness; have pity on thy youth."

"It were better for you to follow the advice you give to others, by consulting your own welfare. Renounce your gods of wood and stone, and give

glory to the living God, the Creator of the universe, lest you be cast hereafter into everlasting fires."

The Governor then ordered her to be stretched on the rack, and to be subjected to all the tortures which usually accompanied that kind of punishment. When he saw that she bore her sufferings with the greatest cheerfulness, he said :

"Change thy mind, Agatha, that thy life may be spared."

"Sooner shall the sun lose its light," she replied, "than I will change my mind. Your tortures cause me not the least fear. I welcome them and find in them an inexpressible delight. The stag, when hunted down, longs not more eagerly for the cool water of a spring, than I desire to suffer still more for the love of Jesus. It was a glad tidings to me, when I heard you condemn me to these torments; they cannot be of long duration. I know, moreover, that wheat is not stored in the granary, before it is threshed and winnowed; in like manner, my soul cannot be admitted into the heavenly Paradise, until by your tortures it shall be freed from the shackles of this poor body."

These words of the Martyr seemed to rouse the wrath of Quintianus to such a degree, that he hardly knew in what way to take revenge. Soon a novel thought struck him. He commanded the

executioner to twist and torture the breasts of the Virgin in the most barbarous manner, and afterwards to cut off one of them. This inhuman order was immediately complied with; but the innocent sufferer, with a calm and dignified look, addressed the Governor :

“ You cruel, impious, sacrilegious tyrant, feel you no shame to torture a woman in her breasts, you, who from a mother’s breast drew your first nourishment? But you may destroy my body, for it is but weak and perishable; yet my soul, consecrated from my childhood to its Saviour, you cannot reach nor destroy.”

Quintianus heeded not the words of the Saint, for as the tiger, after tasting blood, becomes more ferocious, so he became more brutal as he proceeded from one torture to another. The executioners themselves became disgusted with his cruelty. He himself seemed aware that he had exceeded all bounds of judicial authority, and that it was hatred and revenge, rather than justice and the stern execution of the imperial orders, which animated his actions. Yet he feared, that it would have a bad effect upon the minds of the people, were they to think, that the noble fortitude of a weak and delicate maiden had triumphed over all his inhuman contrivances. At last, he gave orders that the



Martyr should be taken back to the dungeon; and commanded the keepers to be especially watchful, that no one should be admitted to see her, lest some of her relations and friends might introduce a physician to dress her wounds. He even forbade that any food or drink should be given to her, hoping, no doubt, that pain and exhaustion would cause her to die in prison. As soon as Agatha re-entered the dungeon, she laid herself down upon the cold and damp floor, and, bleeding and suffering as she was, she poured forth the sentiments of her heart, in prayer to her heavenly Bridegroom:

“Lord Jesus, now I may say with truth: ‘a bloody Spouse art Thou to me.’ Everlasting thanks to Thy infinite mercy and goodness, because by Thy power I have been able to overcome the tortures of the wicked. Receive, I beseech Thee, these sufferings of mine as an offering for the glory of Thy holy Name, and for the diffusion of saving truth by means of Thy holy Church.”

Great was the bodily pain which Agatha endured, as she lay that night, abandoned by relatives and friends, in her loathsome dungeon. But, “He that giveth sleep to His beloved,” sent her that comfort which weariness and exhaustion could not secure. A sweet and gentle slumber stole over her, and she found repose, as it were, in



the arms of Him for whose love she had braved the horrors of the rack. About the middle of the night she awoke, and was amazed to see the dungeon illumined with a brilliant light. As she wondered, and doubted whether she was asleep or awake, she beheld advancing towards her a venerable old man, attended by an angelic youth, holding with one hand a torch and in the other all sorts of salves and dressings for wounds. The old man, seeing that she was troubled, looked at her with a smiling countenance and said :

“Fear not, daughter; I am a physician. The cruel tyrant has made thee undergo immense sufferings, but thy generous confession of the Faith has overwhelmed him with defeat. I was witness to the combat, I saw that thy wounds could be healed, and for this purpose have I come hither.”

“Venerable physician,” replied Agatha, “I have never yet used any medicines for my body, and would think it unbecoming, at present, to break through a custom, which I have faithfully observed from my earliest years.”

“I praise and respect thy modesty, my child,” said the stranger. “I also am a Christian. Thou hast nothing to fear from me. It is with a father’s care that I desire to afford relief, and restore thee to soundness.”

“I thank you, venerable father, for the kindness you manifest to me; but I cannot allow that the hand of man should touch my miserable body, even were it only to apply remedies, that would restore it to perfect health.”

“And why wouldst thou not permit me to heal thee?” asked the stranger.

“Because I put all my confidence in my Saviour, Jesus Christ, who, with a single word, can restore me to soundness. If it be His holy will, I can be healed at once,” answered the Martyr.

Then the old man, sweetly smiling, said: “Thy confidence is not misplaced, daughter: The Lord Jesus has sent me to thee. I am Peter, His Apostle. Behold! in His Name, I tell thee, thou art healed.”

Having said this, he suddenly vanished from her sight. When Agatha felt her body, she found to her great joy that all her wounds had disappeared, and that even her breast had been restored. Immediately she fell prostrate upon the ground, and prayed aloud: “I thank thee, O Lord Jesus, because Thou hast been mindful of me, and hast sent Thy Apostle to heal Thy servant. To Thee I consecrate anew this my body and my soul; receive them as Thine own, and suffer them not to be defiled by the power of darkness.”

Throughout all that night so brilliant a light

shone through the dungeon, that it penetrated even to the other apartments of the building. The keepers, and soldiers on guard, were struck with terror at the wonderful sight, and, running away, left the doors open. Most of the prisoners, taking advantage of the favorable opportunity thus given them, made their escape. The Martyr was advised to follow their example but she replied: "Far be it from me, that I should suffer myself to be deprived of the crown which is to reward all my struggles, or that I should bring the guards of the prison into trouble. With the help of Jesus, my Saviour, who has restored me to health and vigor, I will persevere in the public confession of His holy Name."

During four days, Agatha was allowed to linger in her dungeon, deprived of all human consolation, but wonderfully refreshed and strengthened in mind by heavenly favors. The Governor seemed anxious to forget the victim of his barbarous cruelty, and waited for the glad news that should announce to him, that she had died of starvation and exhaustion; but he waited in vain. For when, on the fourth day, he ventured to inquire about her, he was answered that she was not only living, but also perfectly restored to soundness. He was at first unwilling to believe so marvellous a report, but when he was assured by several eye-witnesses of

the reality of the fact, he immediately gave orders, that she should again be brought before his tribunal. Seeing the Martyr before him, and no marks of previous torturing upon her body, he was filled with fear and wonder. He could not deny, that a supernatural interposition was plainly visible in this sudden restoration to health. He appeared for a while to hesitate between acknowledging the power of the true God, and gratifying the savage propensities of his heart. The demon, however, whom he had served through so many years, did not permit him to escape from his grasp, but worked upon his pride and avarice, until the wicked Quintianus was animated with a more ferocious hatred than ever before. Putting on a scowling look, he addressed the Martyr :

“How long will thy mad obstinacy prompt thee to oppose the decrees of our invincible princes? Sacrifice to the gods, or prepare thyself to suffer still more excruciating torments.”

“All your words and threats are but so many empty sounds,” replied Agatha; “your deeds, and those of your Emperors against us Christians, are so vile and unprincipled that they infect the very air you breathe. You foolish and wicked man, tell me, who is there so void of understanding, as to expect help in his troubles from stones or blocks

of wood, because you call them your gods? Why do you not rather worship the One, True God, whose power has healed all my wounds, so as to restore even that breast, which you had so inhumanly cut off?"

"Who is he that healed thee?" exclaimed the Governor, trembling with rage.

"Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God," exclaimed the Martyr.

"Darest thou still mention that same person, whose very name I detest to hear?"

"Yet I will never cease to confess Him with my lips, and praise and thank Him with my heart."

"Enough," said the Governor. "Now let us see whether thy Christ will heal thee a second time."

"Thereupon, he ordered the floor to be strewed with sharp pieces of tiles and earthenware, and red-hot coals, and commanded the Martyr to be stripped and rolled upon them, until her body, cut and burnt, presented but one continued wound. Her heavenly Bridegroom, however, was not unmindful of His servant, but manifested His displeasure by fearful signs; for, whilst she was being tortured, a violent earthquake shook the Island, and a wall of the building, in which they were, falling down, crushed to death two of the Governor's friends, at whose instigation he had done most of

his cruel deeds. The people of Catana were in the greatest consternation. They cried out, that God was visiting them with His wrath, on account of the inhuman treatment of His beloved servant. They ran in crowds to the Governor's dwelling and demanded vociferously, that she should be set at liberty. Quintianus, terrified by the earthquake, and the sudden death of his two friends, and fearing, lest the excited multitude might by force carry off his victim, gave orders to have her secretly taken back to prison; whilst he himself, taking advantage of the noise and confusion that reigned everywhere, made his escape from his own palace.

When the Martyr was come to the prison, as she was unable to stand, they laid her, faint and exhausted, upon the floor. Making a last effort, she lifted her hands to heaven, and prayed aloud:

“Lord, my Creator, who didst guard me from my childhood, and enable me, in my early youth, to act manfully; who didst take away from me the love of this vain world, and keep my body free from its defilement, who didst give me strength to overcome, and deem as naught, the torments inflicted by the enemies of Thy holy Name: I beseech Thee, receive this hour my soul into the hands of Thy mercy, and bid me come unto Thee; O Thou the sole desire and love of my heart.”

That very moment, her prayer was heard; and her spirit was admitted among the Virgins, "that follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth."

So soon as it was known that the Martyr had breathed her last, the Faithful, without any interference on the part of the Pagans, came in crowds to do reverence to the sacred remains of the noble and valiant maiden. After it was removed from prison, the Christian virgins and matrons embalmed the body, and, when they had rubbed it with sweet ointments, they wrapped it in fine linen cloths. The men then bore it with great solemnity to the place of burial, and the multitude followed, singing hymns of triumph. As they were consigning the precious remains to the tomb, there suddenly appeared among them a youthful stranger, of surpassing beauty, clad in the richest garments. Without saying a word to any one, he placed within the sepulchre, above the head of the Martyr, a white marble slab, whereon was written this inscription: *A holy mind, a willing honor to God, and delivery of her native land.* No one knew the stranger, no one had ever seen him before; and no sooner had he seen the tomb closed, than he disappeared from their sight—none could tell whither. Whence it happened, that the people believed him to have been an Angel from heaven. In consequence, the

last resting-place of the Saint became so celebrated that not only the Christians of the Island, but even Jews and Pagans, began to resort thither to obtain favors from God, through the prayers and merits of the blessed Martyr.

Quintianus, being now fully assured that he had no longer anything to fear from Agatha, resolved to gratify his avarice by taking possession of her vast estate. Wherefore, taking with him a cohort of soldiers, he forthwith set out for Palermo. On his way thither, he had to cross the river Symoethus. He entered a boat for the purpose of being ferried over: his horses took fright and became unmanageable. He was endeavoring to pacify them, when one of them rearing, and making a sudden plunge, fell upon him and kicked him into the river. The miserable Governor, stunned and helpless, was carried off by the swift current and drowned; nor could his body, in spite of the long and careful search made for it, ever afterwards be found.

A year after the death of the Martyr, there was a great eruption of Mount *Ætna*. During several days, the roaring noise, and the burning lava as it came streaming towards the city, filled its inhabitants with the greatest consternation. Situated at the foot of the mountain, Catana seemed doomed to certain destruction. The terror-stricken citizens



were flying in every direction. Every one appeared to have only one thought, that of securing safety for himself. It was then that it occurred to some of them, who had been present at the burial of the Blessed Agatha, that the words written by the mysterious stranger, "*Delivery of her native land,*" might be a prophetic promise. Pagans though they were, they immediately repaired to the tomb of the Martyr, and took from it the veil which covered the same. Hastening to meet the flowing lava, they spread the veil before it, and at once its further progress was arrested. This miraculous event,—happening on the 5th of February, the first anniversary of the Saint's Martyrdom (she having suffered in A. D. 251,) served to awaken to a still greater degree the confidence of the people in the powerful intercession and protection of St. Agatha.





VII.

ST. DOROTHEA AND HER COMPANIONS.

IN THE reign of the Emperors Diocletian and Maximian, there lived at Cæsarea, in the Province of Cappadocia, a noble young lady, Dorothea by name. Her blameless life and holy conversation, were a source of constant edification to all the Faithful. From her childhood, she had consecrated her virginity to our Lord, and as a true Bride of the Spotless Lamb, she devoted all her days to the practice of works of mercy, to prayer and sacred recollection,—whilst her humility and meekness, her penitential austerities and unobtrusive demeanor, filled all the people with respect and admiration. The Christians deemed it a special dispensation of God, that one so holy, so faithful in the observance of the law, could be pointed to as a model in the practice of every virtue; for no one, even among the Pagans, could bring forward the

least accusation to impeach in anything her holiness of life, and unwearied exercise of Christian charity. It cannot be supposed, that the wicked enemy of the souls of men would permit this virtuous maiden to continue, without molestation, her saintly course of life. As she was well-born, and connected with the most wealthy and influential citizens of Cæsarea, several persons sought her in marriage. Among these was Sapricius, the Governor of Cappadocia; who seemed to think, that it would not be difficult for him to distance all other rivals, because he held in his hands the power of life and death.

The Christian maiden, however, was wholly unwilling to listen, even for a moment, to his most flattering proposals. No sooner did Sapricius become aware that the religious belief of Dorothea was the chief cause of her opposition to his claims, than he resolved to obtain by force that which he could not secure by a free and willing consent. Although the laws made against the Christians were very severe, yet the strict execution of them depended, in a great measure, upon the disposition of the imperial officers. Disappointed, therefore, in his pretensions, the Governor of Cæsarea determined to take his revenge by making her apostatize from her Religion. Wherefore, he sent his soldiers to

arrest the noble maiden, and to bring her before his tribunal. When Sapricius saw her standing in his presence, he came at once to the conclusion, that it would be an easy task to persuade her to comply with his commands; for her attitude was so lowly and modest, that she seemed the very image of timidity personified. But that very virtue, of which the Governor, in his ignorance of all religious principle, had not even an idea, was a source of joy to the Angels of God. Knowing that she was entering upon a mighty struggle with the power of darkness, Dorothea was humbling herself in the presence of her heavenly Bridegroom, beseeching Him not to suffer her weakness to be overcome, by the powerful enemies of His holy name. Sapricius, therefore, pretending to be kindly affected to her, began in a gentle tone the customary interrogatory:

“Tell me, lady, what is thy name?”

“I am called Dorothea,” she answered.

“I have thus publicly summoned thee,” said the Governor, “to require thee to offer incense to the immortal gods, who preserve the Empire, in accordance with the commands of our august Emperors.”

“The true God, the august Emperor of the universe,” replied the maiden, “commands me to worship Him only. For it is written: ‘Thou shalt

—*—*
fear the Lord thy God and shalt serve Him only.' And again: 'The gods that have not made heaven and earth, let them perish from the earth, and from among those places that are under heaven.' Hence it is evident whom we should obey. Is not the ruler of heaven greater than all the rulers of the earth? the Creator mightier than His creatures? And who are the great Emperors? are they not poor mortal beings, as well as the powerless deities, whose images they worship?"

"If thou desirest to go hence, and to return safe and sound to thy home, keep down that bold spirit of thine, and be ready to offer incense to the gods. For, I assure thee, the rigorous enforcement of the law must soon compel thee to follow my good advice, and to give at the same time a base example of fear to all the people here present."

"On the contrary," replied Dorothea, "I will give to them all a good example of the fear of the true God, so that they too may fear Him, and stand in no dread of the torments inflicted by wicked men."

"Thou appearest, then, determined to persevere in thy most foolish resolution, and to be tortured to death in the company of those vile wretches, as obstinate as thyself? Hearken to my warnings, before it is too late. Do not rashly throw away thy

youthful life, by persistently refusing to burn a little incense in honor of the great Jupiter. Make thy choice between obedience to our commands and the tortures of the rack."

"The torments endured on the rack are only of short duration; the punishments of hell are everlasting. Would it be wisdom in me to expose myself to endless sufferings, for the sake of avoiding the transient ones which you may inflict? I remember too well the words of my Lord and Redeemer: 'Fear-not them, that kill the body and are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear Him, that can destroy both soul and body into hell!'"

"According to thy own saying," cried out Sapricius, "thou shouldst fear the gods; because if thou provokest their wrath by thy obstinacy, they will destroy both thy soul and thy body; wherefore, to render thyself pleasing to them, offer sacrifice without delay."

"I have already told you, oh Sapricius," rejoined Dorothea, "that you have no means in your power whereby to force me to offer sacrifice to demons. Did not your gods lead such disgraceful lives, that the mention of them would cause decent persons to blush? And they that follow their example, do their lives differ from those of irrational animals, that neither know nor reverence the great Creator

of the universe. They, therefore, whose images of brass and stone you worship, are now suffering in hell the punishment of their wickedness. And what must become of those who, despising the laws of their God and Maker, imitate, in their conduct, the shameful excesses of wicked devils?"

When Sapphira heard these words, he flew into a dreadful passion. He began to understand that mere threats were useless arguments against the courage of a youthful maiden, whose true character and resoluteness he had altogether underrated. Turning to the executioners, he said:

"Stretch her upon the rack. Perhaps, when she feels the torture, she may believe that I am in earnest, and think better of the gods, so as to become their devoted worshipper."

Whilst the servant of God was undergoing these dreadful sufferings, she did not exhibit the least sign of pain; neither did she give the Governor any hope that, by such inhuman means as these, he would be able to shake her constancy. For, as bold and fearless as before, she said to him:

"Why are you trifling with me after this manner? What induces you to wait? Why not torture me at once unto death, if you are so minded? Why not enable me soon to appear before Him, for whose

love I am anxious to lay down my life—for whose sake I esteem as naught your most cruel torture!”

“And who is he, whom thou lovest so much?” asked Sapricius.

“Christ the son of God,” answered the Martyr.

“And where is Christ?” inquired the Governor.

“As He is the Omnipotent God, He is everywhere; yet, as a Divine Being falls not under the senses, and as men are inclined to sensible things, He, a divine Person, assumed our human nature, and, after dwelling among men, yea, after suffering and dying for their redemption, He ascended into heaven, and is there seated at the right hand of His heavenly Father. He is One God, with His Father and the Holy Spirit, and invites us all to the enjoyment of the paradise of His delights—where the trees and groves are at all times adorned with fruit; where the lilies and roses, and all kinds of flowers are ever blooming; where the fields, the hills and the mountains are never without their pleasing verdure; where the cool and limpid streams and fountains are forever flowing; where the blissful souls of the Saints are rejoicing in Christ. If you believe these things, oh Sapricius, and, abandoning the worship of your false gods, give yourself to the service of the only true and

living God, you may enjoy one day the delights of Paradise."

"Thou hadst better renounce all that foolish nonsense," said the Governor, "and offer sacrifice to the gods of imperial Rome. Moreover, I would advise thee to take a husband, and to enjoy the pleasures of the present life like other people do, lest thou also perish as thy fathers have perished, on account of their folly."

"I will offer no sacrifice to devils," replied Dorothea, "because I am a Christian; neither will I take a husband, since I am a bride of Christ. And I am certain, that sooner or later, He will admit me into His heavenly dwelling, there to celebrate our sacred nuptials in the presence of the holy Angels."

In spite of his prejudices, Sapricius could not but admire the wonderful fortitude of so young and delicate a maiden. Seeing, therefore, that he gained nothing by the use of cruelty, he fancied that, perhaps, he might attain the object he had in view by gentle means.

There lived at that time in Cæsarea, two sisters, Christa and Callista by name, distinguished for their personal beauty and accomplishments. They had formerly been Christians, exemplary in their conduct, and admired for their deeds of charity;

but, unfortunately, in the beginning of the persecution, when arrested on account of their Religion—although apparently resolved to stand firm in their Faith—the threats of the Governor, and the sight of the torments inflicted upon their fellow Christians, had so terrified them that they lost all firmness, and miserably apostatized. The Governor, to reward them for the scandal they had given, had taken them under his special protection. They were living in the possession of every luxury which wealth can secure; and their present condition was pointed to as a sample of what might be expected by every Christian, who would choose to forfeit his future hopes for the present enjoyments of this world.

Sapricius sent for these two sisters, and said to them:

“You know with how great a kindness and consideration I have treated you, since, with a good sense, worthy of every commendation, you abandoned the follies and superstitions of the Christians. The great gods have lavished their favors upon you, as a reward of the worship you willingly pay to them. I rejoice to have been their instrument in conferring upon you this happiness. Now, you will lay me under the greatest obligation, if, by your skill and zeal, you induce this young

lady, in whose welfare I take no common interest, to give up her foolish notions, and to worship the gods of the Empire."

They gladly consented to comply with the request of the Governor, and took Dorothea to their home. They treated her with the utmost kindness, and it was rather by their actions than by their words, that they endeavored to make an impression upon the Christian maiden. Their desire, however, of bringing her over to Paganism, arose not so much from their belief in any of its absurdities, as from the thought of rendering their own apostasy less odious and criminal in the opinion of others, if a person of so great a reputation for virtue and holiness as Dorothea should also fall away from the Faith. Wherefore, they said to her :

"Do not, oh Dorothea, disappoint the Governor in his expectations. Agree to do his bidding, and comply with the imperial laws. For, after all, what harm can there be in burning a little incense before the image of Jupiter? We cannot be obliged to do that which is above our strength; nor can we be guilty, if we are unable to bear what is beyond all human endurance. We once thought as thyself, that it was possible to undergo every kind of torture; but a little experience soon convinced us of the contrary. Besides, why should we live at all, if it

is not permitted to enjoy any of the sweets of life? Think of thy youth, thy personal attractions, and the charms of this world. Must these be deemed as nothing? Must they be utterly forgotten and despised? No, no, Dorothea, that which appears to thee wrong, at present, will soon wear another aspect, when thou hast once made up thy mind to be no better than others. This our own experience has taught us, and we find no cause of regret in having forsaken our former queer notions of virtue."

Dorothea listened to their words without betraying the least emotion. When they had done speaking, she looked at them for some moments in silence, as if she were thinking what answer to make. Then, whilst the tears rolled from her eyes, she said:

"Oh, unhappy children, how I pity your sad condition! The wicked advice, which you give me, does not come from your heart; of this I feel persuaded. I see that you are miserable, in spite of the light-hearted appearance, which you would fain put on. And no wonder; for how could any one be cheerful and happy after renouncing the source of all blissfulness—the love of Jesus? Yet, even now, my heart tells me, that it is not too late to recover what, in an evil hour, you lost. You have, it is true, left the service of Christ, and put on

the livery of Satan: still, for all that, He does not forget you, but, by my voice, He, at this very moment, cries out to you: Return, return, ye that have gone astray; the arms of My mercy are still extended to receive you—ready to press you to My Heart? Do not then neglect His loving invitation: repent of the great crime you have committed. Say to Him: ‘Father, we have grievously sinned: we confess our offenses: pardon us for Thy mercy’s sake?’ He, the Father of mercies, will accept your repentance. He will receive you again among His beloved children.”

The words of the Saint produced a marvellous change in the heart of the two sisters. They stood for a time looking at one another in silence, as if unable to give expression to the struggle that was going on within them. At last, a torrent of tears gave them relief, and both exclaimed:

“Alas! Dorothea, servant of God, we confess that we have grievously sinned by going away from Jesus. How could we dare to return again to Him, laden as we are with so enormous a crime? How could He pardon our wickedness?”

“To despair of God’s mercy,” replied Dorothea, “would be a crime far greater than to have offered incense to the idols. No, dear sisters, fear not to return to the kind and skilful Physician of your

souls: He will heal all your wounds. No matter how deep and ghastly they may be, they will yield at once to His divine treatment. Is He called the Saviour, and does He not save? Is He the Redeemer, and does He not redeem? Who did ever apply to Him, and was put off? Do but repent with all your heart, your pardon is secured. His loving kindness will again fill your souls with peace and consolation."

Thereupon, both fell on their knees, weeping and praying and striking their breasts; and they said to Dorothea:

"O sweet and innocent maiden, intercede thou for us. Offer our sincere repentance to our loving Saviour; beseech Him to accept our united voice of supplication."

The Saint, kneeling down with them, and bursting into tears of joy and thankfulness, prayed aloud:

"God of mercies, who hast said: 'I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his ways and live;' Lord Jesus Christ, who hast said: 'There shall be joy in heaven, upon one sinner that doth penance, more than upon ninety-nine just who need not penance'—grant Thy merciful forgiveness also unto these, whom the evil one has tried to pluck out of Thy hand. Recall to Thy fold the sheep that have gone astray, that they may

not perish, but have life everlasting: yea, let their example encourage those that are still wandering in the wilderness of the world, far away from Thee, that they too may return and find salvation among Thine Elect.”

Whilst they were thus daily engaged in prayer, and, as a token of sincere sorrow and repentance, showed themselves ready, if it were God's will, to lay down their lives to make reparation for the scandal they had given, the Governor sent his officers to summon the three maidens before him. Full of anxiety to know the result of their efforts, he called Christa and Callista aside. Seeing joy and contentment depicted upon their countenances, he doubted not but that their statement would be agreeable to his wishes. With much eagerness, therefore, he said to them:

“Well, my good ladies, let us hear good news: has Dorothea changed her mind?”

“My lord,” both answered, “we have gone astray, we have done wickedly by sacrificing to demons, through fear of torments which last but for a moment. Dorothea is ever faithful to her God, who is now again our God; for by her prayers she has obtained for us the grace of bewailing and detesting our former cowardice. This open profession of our Faith, we are ready to seal with our

blood, if it be your pleasure to make a trial of our sincerity. Jesus Christ, in whom we put all our trust, will be our help."

Sapricius, hearing this unexpected answer, was beyond himself with surprise and indignation. In his rage, he tore his garments, and ordered the two sisters, tied back to back, to be cast immediately into a burning furnace, unless they should at once offer sacrifice to the gods. But they, with one voice, cried aloud: "Lord Jesus Christ, Father of mercy, receive our penance and pardon our sins."

They had scarcely uttered these words when their bodies were already in the blazing furnace. Dorothea, who stood by, called out to them:

"Go before me, beloved sisters, to the joys of heaven. By this martyrdom, you recover all you have lost. Your loving Father awaits you to bestow upon you the palm of victory, and to receive you into His embrace."

When the two sisters were burnt to death, the Governor turned his fury against Dorothea. He ordered her to be stretched again upon the rack. Whilst she was being tortured, she showed a countenance so calm and cheerful, that it seemed as if she had realized her fondest hopes. Sapricius was much annoyed at the sight, and said:

"What meanest thou by this impertinent show

of joy? Dost thou find these tortures so delightful?"

"Never in all my life," answered the Martyr, "have I felt such a joy as fills me this day. First, on account of those two souls whom the devil, by your means, had snatched away from God, and whom Jesus, through my instrumentality, has again taken to His loving Heart. To-day there is a great banqueting in heaven; for with them exult, amidst ineffable delights, the Angels and Archangels, the Apostles, the Martyrs, and the Prophets. Again, I am overjoyed, because I cherish the hope, that the hour is not far distant, when I too shall join their blissful company. Hasten, then, oh Saprificus, to do what you intend, that soon I may rejoice in heaven with them, with whom I have wept upon earth."

Then Saprificus commanded the executioners to burn her sides with lighted torches. But Dorothea, as if insensible to pain, said to him with a cheerful look:

"Have you not more power over us, oh Saprificus, with all your idols?"

Thereupon he ordered her to be taken from the rack, and said to his men:

"Now strike that insolent mouth and that beautiful face, and let us see whether she will look as cheerful and defiant as before."

This order was forthwith executed with so much cruelty, that the men themselves seemed ashamed of their unmanly doings. But the joys of the Martyr seemed to increase with the pains she was made to endure. At length, Sapricius, unable to overcome her constancy, pronounced the following sentence :

“We command that Dorothea—an exceedingly proud young lady—who is unwilling to save her life by sacrificing to the great and immortal gods, and resolved to die through love for Jesus Christ—a person whom we do not know—be beheaded with the sword.”

Dorothea, on hearing this sentence, exclaimed with a loud voice :

“I thank Thee, oh Lord Jesus, chaste Lover of souls, because Thou invitest me to Thy banquet in Paradise.”

As she was leaving the Governor’s palace, to go to the place of execution, Theophilus, a young attorney—who had been present at the first trial of the Martyr, and had heard her say that in the Paradise of her Bridegroom, fruits and flowers were wanting at no season of the year—came up to her, and said in a joking manner :

“Hearken to me, thou bride of Christ. As soon as thou arrivest in the garden of Thy Bridegroom,

send me some of its delicious fruits and beautiful flowers."

"Be assured," replied Dorothea, "I will not fail to comply with thy request."

When she came to the place where she was to be beheaded, she begged the executioner to allow her a few moments to pray. This being granted, she knelt down, and, before she had finished her prayer, there stood beside her a most lovely child, holding in his hand a basket, in which there were three delicious apples, and three most beautiful roses.

She said to the child: "Go, take them to Theophilus, and say to him: "Dorothea, according to promise, sends these from the garden of her heavenly Bridegroom."

After this she bowed down her head, and, receiving the stroke of death, her soul amidst the rejoicings of Saints and Angels, was admitted into the presence of Him whom she had loved upon earth with undivided affection.

Whilst all these things were coming to pass, Theophilus had gone into the city, and was amusing himself with his gay companions, by relating to them what had occurred at the trial of the Virgin Dorothea.

"These Christians," he said, "have wonderful

notions; they speak of their life and enjoyments in the next world as we would talk of a neighboring city or country, with the situations and attractions of which we are perfectly acquainted. A short while ago, for example, I saw a young lady, called Dorothea, led to execution. She thought herself the bride of Christ, their God. During her trial, at which I was present, she said a great deal about the garden of delights, wherein He had His dwelling. So, as I was passing by her, I said: 'Bride of Christ, when thou arrivest in the fairy garden of thy Bridegroom, be so kind as to send me some of its fruits and flowers.' And, sure enough, she was so silly as to reply: 'Certainly, I will not fail to do so.' See to what an extent those poor people can be deluded by superstition."

His companions could not but laugh at what they thought a rich joke, and each one had some remark to make about the promise to the attorney. As they were thus conversing together, there entered a beautiful little child, carrying a little basket, and going up to Theophilus, and, calling him aside, said:

"According to her promise, the blessed lady, Dorothea, sends these apples and flowers, from the garden of her heavenly Bridegroom, Jesus Christ."

Theophilus taking the basket and seeing its con-

tents stood amazed at the marvellous sight; a sudden change came over his heart. He felt as if he had become another man. Soon, however, recovering himself, he cried out with a loud voice:

“Jesus Christ is the true God; there is no falsehood, or deception in what is said of Him.”

His companions, not understanding what had happened, and seeing his bewildered look, said:

“Thou art gone mad, Theophilus, or thou art joking.”

“I am neither mad, nor am I joking,” said the attorney, “but I feel within me a faith that convinces and persuades; reason tells me that Jesus Christ is the true God. I firmly believe in Him.”

His companions, who knew, that, apparently at least, he had never been a friend of the Christians, endeavored to argue with him. They tried to prove that it would be unreasonable to change one's mind so suddenly, that he would become the jest of all the learned men of the city, that his reputation, hitherto so brilliant, would be gone forever, in short, that all would be anxious to know what reason could have influenced a man of his standing, to forego all his earthly prospects, for the sake of taking up the notions of the Christians.

“They will ask me, what reason could have

influenced me, will they?" he exclaimed; "tell me, my friends, what month of the year is this?"

"February," they answered.

"Gaze around you," he said; "ice is covering the ground, the snow-capped mountains of Cappadocia look bleak and barren, not a sign of verdure on the hills or in the plains, everything appears desolate; whence, think you, came these fresh-culled roses, these blushing apples with the green leaves around them?"

"We never saw the like of them for beauty and freshness—even at the proper season of the year."

"Was I not just now relating to you how I laughed at Dorothea, as she was on her way to die for Christ? Did I not tell you what I then scoffingly asked of her, and what promise she made? Behold now, no sooner has she reached the place of her desires, than, faithful to her word, she sends me this. You all beheld that angelic child, who is he? whence did he come? whither has he gone? More suddenly than he came has he vanished from my sight—without giving me time to put a single question. But I understand it all. Blessed are they that believe in Christ, more blessed they that die for the glory of His Holy name. He is the true God. And he is wise in very deed and truly rational whosoever puts his trust in Him."

Meanwhile, some of the citizens of Cæsarea, having learnt that something marvellous had occurred at the place where Theophilus and his friends were staying, hurried thither. They were greatly surprised to hear with what earnestness and eloquence he was proclaiming the power of Christ, and deriding the absurdities of Paganism. Their prejudices were aroused, their ignorant zeal awakened, and they hastened to the Governor to acquaint him with what they had heard and seen.

“Sapricius,” they said, “your friend, the attorney, who till now has excited you against the Christians, and who was one of their greatest opponents, is stirring up the whole city. He praises and blesses the name of Christ, and extols His power and greatness with so fervid an eloquence, that very many believe the truth of all he says.”

The Governor, though disinclined to believe the report, immediately sent for the attorney, and said to him :

“What is it I hear of thee, Theophilus? Can it be that these rumors are true? Let us hear thy own statement.”

“If they have reported to you that I publicly proclaim that Christ is the true God, they have spoken the truth; for this I know and believe,

although this very morning I would have said the contrary."

"I wonder," said Sapricius, "that a man, as prudent as thyself, should be willing, I do not say to praise, but even to mention, that Name, knowing that whosoever is bold enough to do so, subjects himself to the penalties of the law."

"Therein is made manifest," replied Theophilus, "the truth of my profession. In spite of the dangers to which I expose myself by so doing, I openly avow that He has made His power and divinity so clear to me, that I must needs yield my assent thereto, forsake the error of my ways, and cling to Him forever."

"The love and relish of wisdom," said the Governor, "are increased in other persons by the wisdom which they already possess; so that from wise, they become wiser; but thou, from a wise man art suddenly become a simpleton, so as to call Him God, who, as the Christians themselves say, was crucified by the Jews."

"I certainly confess, that He was crucified, and that I shared, in consequence, your own error, denying His divinity, and daily blaspheming His holy Name. But now, full of sorrow and contrition for my past crimes and blasphemies, I confess that Jesus Christ is God."

“When and where didst thou become a Christian?” asked Sapricius. “If I mistake not, thou didst this very day offer sacrifice to the gods.”

“The moment I believed in Christ,” answered Theophilus, “I felt that I had become a Christian. Wherefore, I began at once to bless His Name—a Name holy, blameless, true; wherein there is neither deceit nor imposture, as there exists in your idols.”

“Sayest thou that there is imposture in the gods?” said the Governor, in an angry tone.

“Think you that there is aught else except imposture in your idols, which the hand of man has hewed out of wood, made of brass or iron, and rendered heavy with lead; which the owls guard by day, and the spiders cover with their webs by night, and which serves at all times as the abode of rats and mice? You might accuse me of falsehood, could these things not be proved. But since you know them to be true, why would you refuse to acknowledge the truth, and abandon your errors? For it is but just, that he who must often judge of the truth or falsehood in others, should himself know and embrace the truth, as it is in Christ.”

“Thinkest thou, then,” asked Sapricius, “that ours are not living gods?”

“Our senses sufficiently testify,” answered Theo-

philus, "how much of life there is in them. If the sight and touch show to you that they are without life and sense, what sort of gods are they? The true God is the guardian and preserver of the universe; your gods must be guarded and kept in repair by man. If this is not so, you can easily prove the contrary. But if your reason and good sense tell you, that your idol worship is not only wrong, but absurd, acknowledge, at least, that by practicing it, you act against your own reason."

The Governor knew not what answer to make, and felt sorely annoyed; for he saw plainly that he was overmatched by the attorney. To cut the matter short, he said to him:

"Unhappy Theophilus, I see very well thou art anxious to die a miserable death."

"No, Sapricius," he replied, "I am anxious to find a blissful and never-ending life."

"Understand well, that, if thou perseverest in this thy folly, I will make thee undergo every kind of torture, and a most cruel death."

"That is the object of my greatest longing," said Theophilus.

"Nevertheless, thou shouldst have some regard for thy family and relatives, and not bring upon them the disgrace of seeing thee die by the hands of the public executioner. Hitherto, thou hast

ever lived as a sage, do not rashly rush to death like a fool."

"It is the highest wisdom to know how to command one's passions, by subjecting them to faith and reason, and, with God's help, not only not to fear your torments, but to despise them. Nor is there anything rash herein. I have given the matter due consideration, and have come to the conclusion, that it is true wisdom to prefer the things of eternity to those of time, and the things that abide forever to those that swiftly pass away."

"Dost thou call it the part of wisdom," asked Sapricius, "to choose the most cruel torments in preference to peace and happiness,—an ignominious death, rather than an honorable life?"

"Do not wrongfully accuse me," answered Theophilus; "I dread torments and fear death; but understand me well, Sapricius: the torments which I dread are those which last forever, and the death I fear, is that which leads to everlasting punishment. How great soever may be the tortures which you inflict, they must some time or other have an end; but the punishments which shall hereafter be the portion of the worshippers of idols, shall be far more cruel than yours, and shall never cease."

Sapricius appeared now fully convinced that Theophilus was really in earnest, and that his

conversion to Christianity was not the effect of any mental aberration. Wherefore, he said :

“It is indeed an unpleasant duty that calls upon me to apply the rigors of the law to one whom I have heretofore honored with my friendship ; only one chance of escape remains. Tell me plainly, Theophilus : Art thou willing to give up thy foolish notions about Christ, and return to the worship of the gods of the Empire ?”

“When one has found the truth, he would be a very madman, were he to renounce it to embrace the absurd superstitions of a worship which his reason teaches him to loathe and abhor,” answered the attorney.

“That is enough,” said the Governor. “Let the learned and eloquent Theophilus be placed on the rack, and let us see whether these arguments are not more powerful than his boasting words.”

When the Martyr lay stretched out upon the instrument of torture, he raised his eyes to heaven, and exclaimed : “Now at last I may truly say that I am a Christian : here I lie stretched upon this rack, even as my Saviour lay stretched upon the cross. Thanks to Thee, O Lord Jesus Christ, for deeming me worthy of so great a favor.”

When Saprificius beheld the streams of blood flowing from the Martyr's wounds, he said :

“Wretched Theophilus, hast thou no pity on thy poor body?”

“Unhappy Sapricius,” replied the sufferer, “have you no pity on your own soul. For myself, I cheerfully endure these torments in my body: the more severe they are the sooner they shall cease. I rejoice in the hope that God will spare my soul eternally.”

The Governor then ordered his body to be torn with hooks, and lighted torches to be applied to his side. Yet the Martyr showed no signs of pain, only from time to time he would exclaim:

“Lord Jesus Christ, I confess Thy holy Name: deign to receive me into the number of Thy Elect.”

Sapricius perceiving that the executioners themselves grew weary of their bloody work, gave sentence as follows:

“We condemn Theophilus, who once was a faithful worshipper of the immortal gods, but has become a follower of Christ—to die by the sword of the executioner.”

On hearing this sentence, the Martyr exclaimed: “I give Thee thanks, O Lord Jesus Christ, for this Thy great favor—undeserved by me, a poor sinner.”

Thus died Theophilus, the attorney, baptized in his own blood. Called, as it were, at the eleventh hour, he yet was deemed worthy to receive a

heavenly reward with them that had been sent into the Lord's vineyard at the first, through the infinite mercy of Jesus Christ, who has His chosen ones among all classes and conditions of men.

Their festival is kept on the 6th of February.





VIII.

ST. SEBASTIAN.

BORN at Narbonne, in Gaul, Sebastian was trained in the School of Virtue, at Milan, the city of his parents. Although destined from his youth for the army, he hesitated for a long time to follow a calling so full of dangers for body and soul. When, however, he began to reflect on the services he might render his brethren, and the good he might do to others, by word and example, he felt fully persuaded that by the help of divine grace, it was possible for him to be at once a brave soldier and a true Christian. Rome, above all others, was the place where his brethren were most frequently exposed to persecution; thither, therefore, he repaired. His noble qualities of body and mind soon endeared him to the Emperors, Diocletian and Maximian, and he was raised to the rank of a captain in the

imperial bodyguard. Whilst his prudence, his sincerity, his ready obedience in all things just, gained for him the esteem and confidence of his superiors, his uniform kindness, modesty and disinterestedness secured for him the respect and affection of the soldiers. For, as the spirit of Christian charity animated all his actions, all might deservedly look upon him as a model of every virtue, and learn of him that every station in life may be adorned by the blameless conduct of an upright man. Devoted and fearless Christian though he was, ready to sacrifice everything for the sake of his Divine Master, he yet thought it prudent not to make an open profession of his religion, that thus he might be enabled to help his brethren the more effectually, and diffuse more freely among all classes the knowledge of the Kingdom of Christ.

At that time there were imprisoned for the Faith, two persons of senatorial dignity, Marcus and Marcellianus, twin-brothers. They had been repeatedly put to the torture, but their high rank and the expectation that, sooner or later, they might be induced to deny their Religion, had, until then, delayed their final execution. These noble Confessors became the special care of Sebastian. Daily he visited them in their prison: he

comforted them amidst their sufferings, he cheered them on by his discourses full of fervor and unction. At last, however, Chromatius, Governor of the city, appointed the day for their martyrdom. When this became known, their parents, Tranquillinus and Marcia, who were Pagans, immediately hastened to the Governor, and entreated him to grant them a respite of thirty days, promising him that, in the meantime, they would use every effort to bring back their sons to the worship of the gods of Rome. Their request was granted. This ill-timed display of parental affection became the source of the greatest dangers to the generous Confessors. For to effect their purpose the more easily, the Governor permitted the two prisoners to be removed to the dwelling of Nicostratus, one of his chief officers. Here they were constantly visited by their friends, who employed every argument to induce them to abandon their Religion.

“How comes it,” they said, “that you, who were formerly so distinguished for your filial piety, seem to have stifled in your bosom every feeling of nature? How can you deliver up to despair your aged and illustrious father? What has become of your affection for your venerable mother? Being yourselves fathers of family, can you forget the duty you owe to those committed to your

charge—your own wives and children, who have a claim upon you as their natural protectors? And what are you to gain by this perverse obstinacy? Nothing save disgrace to yourselves and the contempt of all honorable men. Reflect upon this, we, as friends, entreat you. Be you Romans, worthy of your race, and of the honored name you bear?”

Whilst these false friends were thus endeavoring to shake the constancy of the Confessors, their aged mother presented herself, and with every demonstration of heart-rending grief, addressed them :

“Woe is me, that I should have lived to see this day! You, who in childhood and in youth, were the objects of my tenderest care, can you forget the anxieties and sufferings of a mother? I, who gloried in the stateliness of your manhood, and cherished the hope of seeing you great and distinguished among the noblest sons of Rome, must I see you thus disgraced and in chains? When, night and day, I felt no other solicitude than that of promoting your happiness, could I imagine that the hour would come when, forgetful of your glorious ancestry, you would thus disgrace your very name? Had you courted death in the field of battle, whilst fighting for your country's cause, I



could have regarded your very fall as a triumph; but to see you die by the hand of the executioner, as traitors to your country and enemies of the gods of the Empire, this is a crushing grief, a pang for which your mother's heart is not prepared. If you pity not your sorrow-stricken parents, pity at least your wives and helpless children. Obey the commands of our rulers and wipe away our tears."

Thus she spoke and wept aloud. At the same time entered their gray-headed father, dressed in the garments of mourning, supported by servants; for the infirmities of old age and an incurable disease had brought him well-nigh to the brink of the grave. For some moments he gazed upon his sons in silence as the tears rolled down his checks. At last, with trembling voice, he gave utterance to his feelings:

"I come to bid farewell to my sons who, weary of life, are anxious to shake off its burden. Long had I hoped that, like dutiful children, they would have bestowed upon me the last honors of the tomb, but their unfeeling selfishness does not even promise this sad comfort to my declining years. Was it this return, I had reason to expect for all my liberal favors? Was it for this I trained you to worth and distinction, so as to make you objects of envy to your less-favored acquaintances? Alas! all my

labors now are fruitless, all my hopes deceitful. What sudden madness has seized you, that you should covet death whilst in the full vigor of manhood? and such a death! Call to mind what you owe to yourselves and to others. Rush not rashly into a dishonor, which must leave an indelible stain upon the fair name of your families. Show yourselves worthy of a father's affection, and abandon a foolish superstition which perverts your reason and brings upon you misery and ruin. Spare your aged father; suffer not the few remaining days, which nature may still grant him, to be weighed down by a sorrow for which there is no comfort."

As their father was still speaking, suddenly their wives came rushing into the prison, and presenting to them their little children, exclaimed: "Can you thus abandon your children? What has become of the solemn promise you made of protecting and cherishing us? Shall we, your wives and children, be made the slaves of new masters, who will invade your possessions and homes? Alas! by what perverseness have you become so unfeeling as to despise your parents, to spurn your friends, to cast off your wives, to disown your children, to deliver yourselves, of your own accord, into the hands of the executioner?"

This appeal of distress and the sight of the

mournful display began to move the hearts of the two sufferers. Their constancy was on the point of being shaken, when Sebastian entered the room. He perceived at once that a great effort was being made to bring about the apostasy of the two brothers. Although he wished to conceal, as long as possible, from their friends and relatives, that he too was a Christian, he thought that it was now necessary for him to speak out boldly, even at the risk of being betrayed. Wherefore, addressing the two Confessors, he said :

“ Brave soldiers of Christ, by a generous confession of your Faith you have almost secured the palm of victory. Are you prepared, through a false pity, to lose your everlasting crown? Now is the time for you to show that it is not a human armor, but faith, that gives strength and courage to the champions of Christ. Shall it be said that natural affection, so weak and transitory, has prevailed in your bosom over grace and its heavenly power? They themselves, who stand weeping and lamenting around you, would rejoice at your constancy were they to know Him whose love has drawn you to Himself. They imagine that the present life is the only one, and if this be lost, that all is lost forever. Did they understand that, beyond the present, there is a life free from sorrow,

full of bliss, of endless duration, they would hasten with you to attain thereunto. For if they reflected but for a moment, they must see that the life here upon earth is one of misery and suffering, insomuch that they, who apparently were in possession of all its joys and pleasures, have in all ages pronounced its enjoyments unreal, unsatisfactory, producing more pain and wretchedness than comfort and felicity. But its deceptiveness is not the only fault to be condemned in the present life. If you desire to act according to its maxims there is no crime, how great soever, into which it might not lead you under some or other pretext. What is it that leads men into drunkenness and debauchery; what induces them to lie, to deceive, and to steal? whence arise quarrels among friends, discord in families, bribery and corruption in the administration of justice? Why does the pirate plunder the merchant, the highwayman lie in wait for the traveler, the extortioner oppress the poor and the weak? Nay, why does the brother slay his brother, the son his parent, in short, why are all crimes committed? Is it not because the wicked hope to derive from their evil deeds some advantage for the present life? because the love of the things of time makes them regardless of the things of eternity? The thought, therefore, of this life, O, my beloved

friends, has darkened your understanding; and when, by your unreasonable counsels, you endeavor to turn away the minds of our two brethren from the true and everlastingly blissful life of the hereafter, you show yourselves opposed to their dearest interests."

These words of Sebastian made a deep impression upon all who were listening to him. To the Pagan friends of the two Confessors they opened a new source of thought. Their lives and aspirations had been wholly devoted to things of this earth: they seemed never to have had even a desire of removing the veil, which hides, from mortal eyes, the mysterious future. The speaker, perceiving the interest he had awakened, did not neglect so favorable an opportunity. Turning to the relatives of his Christian friends, he said:

"Because you know not these truths you are trying, through a mistaken notion of affection, to deprive your sons and your husbands of a blissfulness which no earthly possession can secure to them. Were they to hearken to your prayers and entreaties they might indeed for a while continue among you, but sooner or later death would separate them from you, and endless miseries would be their portion hereafter. For, remember, for them that are faithless to their conscience and to

their God, there is an abode of woe and torments after this life, a place of endless punishment, of which all the combined sufferings of this world are not so much as the shadow. Allow them, therefore, to avoid those future miseries, and, if you are wise, do not fail to imitate their worthy example. If you do this, they shall not in reality be separated from you. They will only go before you to prepare bright and happy mansions wherein you may enjoy their companionship for ever. O, how beautiful are those dwellings! Whatever there is of beauty, of goodness, of grandeur here below, it is all as nothing compared to the delights of that heaven where Jesus, the Redeemer of men, rewards His faithful servants. Human speech cannot describe the unutterable good things, which He has in store for them that love Him and walk in the way of salvation pointed out by Him. It is the knowledge of all this, which makes us Christians ever ready to lay down our lives, for the sake of bearing witness to the truth. We are human, and naturally love those things which other men esteem; but we willingly make a sacrifice of them, when they hinder us from attaining to everlasting bliss. So you also, my beloved friends, when once you are enlightened from above, will gladly give up all things, even life itself, that you may possess those

heavenly treasures which surpass all understanding. Do not, then, throw obstacles in the way of these our brethren; let them hasten on to the reward which their many and cruel sufferings have prepared for them. Let us rather exhort them to persevere courageously to the end, that they may the sooner obtain that immense weight of glory which crowns the short trials of the present life. Let us change our tears into joy, since it were folly to bewail as dead, those whom we know to be living and rejoicing in triumph with Christ. Let us imitate their example of fortitude in the midst of the severest struggles, that when our fleeting days here upon earth pass away, we may again be united with them and sing forever the praises of Him, whose grace and mercy give victory to His Elect and never-ending bliss to His faithful followers."

As Sebastian spoke in this manner all the persons present beheld him surrounded with a heavenly light, whilst, at the same time, angels seemed to be hovering about him. A feeling of awe filled every breast.

Meanwhile Zoë, the wife of Nicostratus, had listened with the greatest eagerness to everything said by the Christian soldier. When he had finished his address she knelt down before him, and by signs, as well as by her imploring attitude, began

to beg of him to make her a Christian—for it was now six years since, during a severe illness, she had lost the use of speech, although her sense of hearing had in nowise been impaired. Sebastian, perceiving that she could not express in words the secret language of her heart, and, learning its cause, was moved with compassion. Then, feeling the motion of the spirit of Faith within him, he said :

“If I am a true servant of Christ, and if all the things which I have spoken—which also this woman has heard and believes—are true, may He who loosened the tongue of Zachary, His prophet, may our Lord Jesus Christ, restore to thee the use of speech.”

So saying, he made the sign of the Cross upon her lips. Immediately her speech was restored, and she cried out in a loud voice :

“Blessed art thou, and blessed are the words of thy mouth. Happy they who, through thee, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God. With my own eyes I saw an angel come down from Heaven, who held before thee, as it were, a book, whence thou didst read all thou hast spoken. Blessed are they who believe thy words ; for, as the rising sun dispels the gloom of night, so they have

enlightened my mind, and driven away every shadow of doubt.”

Nicostratus, her husband, filled with wonder and grateful for the marvellous blessing bestowed upon his wife, cast himself at the feet of the Saint, begging his pardon for having detained in prison the servants of Christ. Forthwith he loosened their bonds, and, clasping the two brothers in his embrace, he said :

“Go ; you are free. O how happy should I be if, for giving you freedom, I should be put in chains. Perhaps by shedding my blood in your stead I might be so cleansed as to escape that everlasting death, and attain unto that bliss which God has made known to us through the mouth of the noble Sebastian.”

Marcus and Marcellianus, however, were unwilling to take advantage of this sudden change wrought in the feelings of Nicostratus, and said to him :

“If, through gratitude for the gift of Faith, which thou hast but just now received, thou art ready to make so great a sacrifice as to expose thy life to imminent peril, what ought we be willing to do, who, from our youth, have had the happiness of professing that Faith? If thou, who hast not yet been cleansed by the regenerating waters of holy

Baptism, feelest already within thee the strength and courage of a true champion, shall we, who have a right to look upon ourselves as veteran soldiers, suffer ourselves to be outdone in generosity? We praise and thank God for what He, in His mercy, has done for you all; we pray that He may graciously deign to finish the work so unexpectedly begun."

A complete change had now come over the feelings of all the persons who had witnessed the conversion of Zoë and her husband. The grace of God had subdued within them the spirit of opposition, and all yielded a ready obedience to the voice of conscience, which directed them to seek salvation by professing the Christian Faith. The two Confessors were overjoyed at this sudden turn of affairs. Filled with new zeal and wishing to encourage the new converts, Marcus said to them :

"Since you are resolved, O my beloved relatives, and you my friends, to join the glorious army of those that fight under the standard of Christ, it is but proper to tell you that a great struggle awaits you throughout life. The Evil One will not fail to attack you by every means in his power. He may wound you, but the wounds received whilst fighting for your heavenly King, are they not honorable? are they not glorious? Your souls, however, he

cannot reach so long as you remain faithful to your Chief. Moreover, death, which they who have no hope of a better future dread so much, is, for the servants of Christ, the entrance into life—a life of bliss that knows no weeping, no sorrow, no ending forever. Remember this in all your trials here below, which soon pass away, and are rendered light by the knowledge that He, who invited you to follow in His footsteps, is ever nigh unto you with His help and mercy.”

All they who were present shed tears on hearing these words of Marcus, and expressed their sorrow, not only for having been unfaithful to their Maker, but also for having endeavored to draw away from the service of God those who were ready to lay down their lives for the truth. No words could give full utterance to their feelings of joy and thankfulness. Nicostratus, especially, was full of zeal and fervor. In a transport of religious ardor he declared that he would neither eat nor drink until he had received holy Baptism. Sebastian, hearing this, said to him :

“Since thou art so fervent in thy professions, it is but proper to prove this sincerity by adding a new dignity to that which thou already possessest. Hitherto thou hast been an officer of the Governor, be now also an officer of Christ. Go, therefore,

assemble here in thy house all the prisoners confided to thy care. For, if the devil tries his utmost to drag into everlasting ruin as many souls as he is able, is it not right that we should endeavor to restore to their Creator those whom he has unjustly taken away?"

"But, is it not dangerous," replied Nicostratus, "to confide the knowledge of the holy Mysteries to criminals, and to persons apparently devoid of every sense of justice?"

"It was for sinners," answered Sebastian, "that our Saviour came down from heaven. He gave His Sacraments to His Church, that, by the use of them, sinners might be restored to grace, and the just strengthened in their trials. If, then, thou render this first service to Christ, in gratitude for the blessings thou hast received, a great reward may be in store for thee—even the Martyr's crown."

Nicostratus hesitated no longer, but immediately hastened to Claudius, the keeper of the prison, and ordered him to bring all the prisoners safely to his house; "for," said he, "as they all are to be tried at the coming session, I wish to have them in readiness, together with those Christians who are staying at my house."

When they were assembled in the house of Nicostratus, Sebastian addressed them: "My

friends," he said, "why is it that I see you standing here in chains? The devil has tempted you to evil; you have listened to him because he promised what he cannot give. At his suggestion you have acted as if he were your master, but now, when he has led you into trouble, he does not help you, because he is unable, and knows, at the same time, that by your death you must become his own forever. We, however, who pity your misfortune, are anxious to snatch you from the grasp of your wicked enemy, and to restore you to your Creator. He, in His mercy, sent His only Son to redeem us all from the slavery of the devil. If, through ignorance, you have gone astray, ought you not, after He has been made known to you, to return to Him who, by His suffering and death, freed you from death and endless torments? Should you not be eager to enjoy the liberty of the children of God, if, by your suffering in time, you may secure it forever?"

Thereupon, he explained to them the principal teachings of Christianity, and made them understand the goodness of God, who is ever ready to pardon the penitent sinner, and to treat as His children those who, before, were His enemies. The poor prisoners were moved to tears, and unanimously protested that their wicked conduct had been the



result of their ignorance of the truth. They besought the Saint to do for them whatever he was able, that they, too, might become servants of Christ, and glorify the only true God, whom hitherto, by their wicked lives, they had so greatly offended.

Sebastian, seeing their good dispositions, ordered their chains to be struck off, and went in search of Polycarp, a Priest, who, on account of the persecution, had been obliged to hide himself. To him he related everything that had occurred. Polycarp, hearing the wonders wrought by divine Mercy, gave thanks to God, and at once accompanied the Saint to the house of Nicostratus. When he beheld the multitude of believers, he greeted them with great joy, and said :

“Blessed are ye all who to-day have heard the voice of Jesus Christ saying to you : ‘Come to Me, all ye that labor and are burdened, and I will refresh you. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me, because I am meek and humble of heart, and you shall find rest for your souls. For My yoke is sweet and My burden light.’ You, therefore, our Brethren, who are not cleansed by the saving waters of Baptism, prepare yourselves, by prayer and penance, for this great blessing of our Lord. Reflect with thankfulness on the grace He bestows upon you. Only

a short while ago, some of you interested yourselves to turn away others from their resolve to bear testimony to the truth, and now, you yourselves feel so great a change of heart that, instead of discouraging them, you would gladly lay down your lives for Christ's sake. O, the wonderful device of the mercy of our Redeemer! Yet it is one not now shown for the first time. Saul was a persecutor of the Church, and grace made him suddenly a vessel of election—the great Apostle of the nations. He who rejoiced in afflicting others, found afterwards his delight in his own sufferings for the sake of that Religion, which, whilst unconverted, he esteemed very wickedness in the sight of God. He who showed the power of His grace in Paul, has loosened you from the chains that bound you to Satan, and from darkness has called you to the admirable light of His Gospel. Wherefore, let each one prepare himself, by tears of repentance for the past, to give joy to the angels of God for his conversion. And now, give in your names as candidates for holy Baptism, and then, fasting and praying until evening, hold yourselves ready to receive the Sacrament of regeneration.”

Meanwhile, Claudius, the keeper of the prison, greatly excited, came to Nicostratus and said :

“ The Governor of the city is very angry, because

—
thou hast taken it upon thyself to invite the prisoners to thy house. He orders thee to present thyself without delay before him, I would advise thee to consider well what answer it were best for us all to give him.”

“Give thyself no uneasiness about that,” said Nicostratus. And immediately he hastened to the Governor’s palace.

When Chromatius saw Nicostratus entering his room, he at once addressed him :

“By what authority,” said he, “didst thou remove those prisoners to thy house?”

“I might almost say,” replied the officer, “that it was by the order of your Excellency. I know how anxious you are to make those Christians abandon their religion. If kindness and persuasion are unable to effect this, was it not reasonable to expect that the sight of the distress and sufferings of others, condemned by law, must be very powerful to produce a change of sentiments? Besides, is not terror the best means to impress criminals with a sense of their guiltiness?”

This answer was not very clear, nor to the point ; nevertheless, it appeared quite satisfactory to the Governor, who said to Nicostratus :

“I am pleased with thy zeal and foresight, and I assure thee, when we shall have brought those two

refractory Christians to a sense of their duty, I shall not fail to obtain from their parents a suitable reward for thyself."

As Nicostratus was returning home, he was joined by his friend Claudius, who was very anxious to hear the result of his interview with the Governor. Nicostratus told him all that had passed between them; after which he went on to give a circumstantial account of the wonderful things that had taken place in his house. "Didst thou know, friend Claudius," said he, "that the noble Sebastian, the friend of our Emperor, is a Christian? Yet, so it is. Thou shouldst have heard him speak on the vanity of all earthly things, on the happiness of knowing and serving the true God, on the glory that awaits the faithful Christian in the future life. None could resist the power of his words. All desired to embrace the religion which he professes. And then, wilt thou believe it? he prayed to Christ the Lord; and made the sign of the Cross upon the lips of my wife, and suddenly speech was restored to her, whom thou knowest to have been dumb these six long years."

"And is this true? Then praised be the God of the Christians," exclaimed Claudius. "Thou knowest, Nicostratus, that at home I have two children, the one afflicted with dropsy, the other

covered with ulcers from head to foot. I doubt not, but that he, who has restored the use of speech to thy wife, will be kind enough to have pity on my little children. I must hurry, therefore, and take them to thy house."

So saying, he left his friend and hastened home. In a few words, he communicated his intention to his wife, and taking their children, they brought them to the place where the new converts were engaged in prayer. Placing his sons upon the floor before them, he said:

"There is no longer the least shadow of doubt in my mind, nor in my heart. With all my heart I believe and confess, that Christ, whom you adore, is the true God. As a proof of my firm belief, I bring these, my little ones, fully persuaded that, by your prayers, they may be saved from the death of the body as well as that of the soul." All answered with one voice: "Whosoever is here to-day afflicted by any infirmity, shall find health so soon as the waters of Baptism will purify the soul."

Thereupon the names of all those who asked for baptism were taken. Tranquillinus, the father of the two Martyrs, was first on the list; next came six of his friends: Ariston, Crescentian, Eutychian, Urban, Vitalis and Justus; after these, Nicostratus and Castor, his brother, and Claudius, the registrar,

with his two children, Felicissimus and Felix; then Marcia, the mother of Marcus and Marcellianus, and their wives and children; then Symphorosa, the wife of Claudius, and Zoë, the wife of Nicostratus; after them, the entire household of Nicostratus to the number of thirty-three persons; lastly, the converted prisoners, sixteen in number, making in all sixty-eight candidates for Baptism. All these were, accordingly, baptized by St. Polycarp, the Priest. Sebastian himself stood sponsor for the men, and Beatrice and Lucia, two Roman ladies, were godmothers for the persons of their own sex. The two children of Claudius were baptized first, and no sooner had they received the regenerating waters, than every vestige of their bodily infirmities completely disappeared. After them came Tranquillinus. During eleven years he had been afflicted with the gout in his hands and feet, insomuch that, at times, he could not be touched without suffering excruciating torments. Even whilst they were taking off some of his garments, preparatory to Baptism, he seemed to endure intense pains. Polycarp said to him :

“Tranquillinus, if thou believest with thy whole heart, that Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, can restore thee to health, and grant thee the

remission of all thy sins, confess so before all these here present."

He replied:

"I believe and confess that Jesus Christ is the only Son of God, and that He can restore me to health; but I humbly beg only for the forgiveness of my sins. And, should my sufferings continue after I am purified by Baptism, I will equally bless and thank the Divine power and mercy." The whole assembly shed tears of joy at these words of the venerable old man, and prayed that God might grant him the reward of his generous Faith. Then Polycarp anointed him with holy chrism, and asked:

"Believest thou in the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost?"

"I believe," answered Tranquillinus. At the same moment every pain left him, and, as lithe-some and vigorous in body as in the days of his youth, he advanced toward the Baptismal font, saying: "Thou, O Lord, art the true and only God. Yet this miserable world knows Thee not." All the others were then successively baptised, and during the ten days which still remained of the thirty, granted to Tranquillinus in favor of his sons, the new Christians continued together

singing the praises of God, and preparing themselves for future struggles.

After the expiration of thirty days, the Governor sent for Tranquillinus, and inquired of him to what decision his two sons had come.

“First of all,” said Tranquillinus, “allow me to express my thanks to your Excellency for the great kindness shown to me. For, were it not for your moderation, I, a father, should have lost my children, and they should have lost their father. Now all my friends offer me their congratulations, and I doubt not your Excellency, also, will wish me joy, when you understand how security has been restored to them who were in constant dread, and life to those who were about to die.”

Chromatius, who did not see into the meaning of these words, said: “To-morrow, then, let thy sons come and offer incense to the gods; that thus they may obtain pardon and safety for themselves and their families.”

“Your Excellency,” replied Tranquillinus, “I trust, will hold the scales of justice even; if so, you will be able to learn that there is a wonderful power in the doctrine of the Christians.”

“Thou art mad, Tranquillinus,” said the Governor.

“Not long ago I was mad,” answered the old Roman; “yea, mad in mind and body; but so soon as I believed in Christ soundness was restored to both.”

“Now I perceive the mistake I made in granting this respite: thou hast not only not reclaimed thy sons, but thou hast thyself been ensnared by their errors.”

“For your own honor’s sake, your Excellency should not give the name of error to anything before knowing what it is.”

“Thyself mayest, perhaps, tell me what must be called an error,” said Chromatius.

“It is an error,” replied Tranquillinus, “to abandon the way of life, and to walk with pleasure in the paths of death.”

“And what callest thou the paths of death?”

“Does it not seem to you a path of death to give to dead men the name of gods? and what is it to give divine honor to images made of wood or stone?”

“And are they, then, whom we worship, no gods?” asked the Governor.

“So far from being gods,” answered Tranquillinus, “public records prove that they were not even decent men. Is not their history an enumeration of every vice and crime, that would dis-

grace the most infamous of mortals? You know all this as well as myself; your own good sense tells you, that our laws would not allow so great a wickedness to go unpunished. And knowing, as your reason tells you, that there is one omnipotent God, who reigns in the heavens, can you, whilst refusing to acknowledge Him, prostrate yourself before a stone, and say to it: 'thou art my god,' or to a piece of wood: 'help me'?"

"But," said Chromatius, "is it not a well-established fact, that, ever since you Christians began to speak evil of the gods and deny their power, they have manifested their displeasure, by permitting all sorts of misfortunes to fall upon the Roman Empire?"

"By no means is this a fact," replied Tranquillinus. "Does not Livy relate, that, on a single day, thrèe and twenty thousand Roman youths were slain, and this, too, after they had offered sacrifice to Jupiter? Have you forgotten that the Gauls formerly defeated our armies and took possession of our great city? How much famine and pestilence and bloodshed did not our ancestors witness before any among them worshipped the true God? And who can know the numberless calamities which, at present, are averted by the prayers of the Christians? Yet the God who

bestows so many blessings is ignored, and to the creature are attributed the favors received from the Creator.”

“If he is to be worshipped,” said the Governor, “who bestows favors upon mankind, assuredly the sun has the fairest claim to that honor; for he is the source of light and heat, he awakens vegetation, and produces in plants and fruits life and vigor and maturity.”

“This is another absurd error,” exclaimed Tranquillinus. “If you send a present to a friend by your servant, is it proper that your friend should feel thankful to your servant rather than to yourself? Or, when ships come to Rome laden with provisions and merchandise from distant countries, do we express our thanks to the ships? Is it not, then, meet and just, that for all blessings bestowed, we should give honor and thanks to the Almighty Ruler of the universe, whose will and command all the elements, the seasons, the earth, and the seas, as well as all the heavenly bodies, obey?”

“But you Christians say that the God whom you adore, is one and invisible; do you not, then, worship as God Christ, who was crucified by the Jews? How is this?”

“The question is quite proper,” answered Tran-

quillinus, "if you put it for the sake of learning the truth, by becoming acquainted with the teachings of our religion."

"Certainly," said Chromatius, "I desire to learn; for I have heard that Christ, according to all appearances, was a man like ourselves."

Thereupon Tranquillinus explained to him the doctrine of the Church, concerning the Incarnation of the Son of God; and related the wonders of His birth, His life, and His death for the salvation of mankind, as well as the mysteries of His glorious Resurrection and His Ascension into heaven.

The Governor listened attentively to all that was said, but seemed as far as ever from believing the truths of Christianity, and said to Tranquillinus:

"I am convinced that thou didst ask me a delay of thirty days, not to persuade thy sons to abandon their foolish opinion, but to have time to prepare these silly stories for my special benefit."

"The followers of Christ," replied Tranquillinus, "need no preparation to know what they should say when brought, for His sake, before Governors. He himself has told us beforehand: 'When they shall deliver you up, take no thought how or what to speak, for it shall be given you in that hour what to speak. For it is not you that speak, but the spirit of your Father that speaketh in you.' It was

not by preparing and meditating that I myself found my Creator, but by believing. For, when I was altogether broken down and helpless, by reason of a sickness of eleven years duration, I did no sooner believe in Christ than all the freshness and vigor of my youth returned. Therefore, I thank my Creator and give glory to Him, who, I trust—since He has given health to my body—will also grant salvation to my soul, if I persevere in my Faith, and confess His holy name before men.”

“But knowest thou not, Tranquillinus,” said the Governor, “with what severity the wrath of our invincible Emperors pursues the Christians? Darest thou, then, fearlessly persevere in thy resolutions?”

“Foolish is the fear,” answered the old man, “which makes us dread the wrath of man rather than that of God. They that hate us on account of our Faith may indeed persecute and torment us, but they can never hinder us from confessing in our hearts and with our lips, that Jesus Christ is our God and Creator, our Redeemer and Preserver.”

The Governor, thereupon, fearing lest the bystanders might censure his mildness if he let him go free, ordered him to be taken to prison, saying: “I will hear thee again at the next session.”

During the following night, Chromatius—who,

for several years, had also been afflicted with the gout—secretly sent one of his officers to the prison, with orders to bring Tranquillinus to his palace. As soon as he arrived, the Governor said to him :

“Friend Tranquillinus, thou knowest that I myself am afflicted with the malady which once caused thee so much suffering. Tell me, therefore, by what remedy hast thou been restored to health? and name any amount of money for confiding the secret to me.”

“Your Excellency should know,” replied Tranquillinus, “that they will infallibly incur the wrath of God, who think that His graces can be bought or sold for money. But, if you desire to recover your health, follow my example: believe in Christ, the Son of God. If I, who was helpless and in torments during so many years, suddenly became sound in body, when I embraced the Christian faith, there is every reason to hope that the same blessing will be bestowed upon you.”

“Go, I pray thee,” said the Governor, “and request him who made thee a Christian, to come hither at once, so that, if he promise me restoration to health, I, too, may perhaps become a Christian.”

Tranquillinus immediately went to Polycarp, the Priest, and related to him all that had passed between himself and the Governor of the city.

Although the man of God was not without some misgivings, that in all this there might be some deep-laid plan to entrap himself and the Christians, nevertheless, after a short prayer to place himself under the divine protection, he cheerfully followed his companion, who secretly introduced him into the Governor's dwelling. When Chromatius saw Polycarp, he said to him :

“Thou knowest, no doubt, that the hatred of our princes against the Christians is very great; the hope, however, of recovering my health, I must own with all sincerity, has induced me to send for thee. I will give thee whatsoever thou choolest to ask of me—even were it the half of all my possessions—if thou restore to me the free use of my limbs, and deliver me from these excruciating pains.”

The Saint smiled, when he saw with how great an earnestness the poor sufferer made these proposals, and said to him :

“May our Lord Jesus Christ dispel from your mind the mists of ignorance, and make known to your Excellency, that He alone can restore your health. They who offer gold, or receive it when offered for this purpose, do not only not present a remedy to them that suffer, but rather draw upon themselves an incurable malady.”

“What then must I do to obtain that which I so anxiously desire?” asked Chromatius.

“If you believe with your whole heart,” answered Polycarp, “even as Tranquillinus believed, you shall be healed.”

“How, and what must I believe to do this?” asked the Governor.

Then the blessed Polycarp instructed him in the principal truths of Christianity, and advised him to fast and pray during the three following days. After which he sent for Sebastian, who, during three days and three nights, abode with Chromatius, praying and fasting with him.

After the three days, Polycarp returned. The Governor received him with the greatest kindness, and requesting him to sit down by him, he said:

“I must confess, that it is the hope of finding a remedy for my sufferings, rather than anything else, which induces me to look with a favorable eye upon the doctrines of Christianity. I doubt not, thou wilt call this selfishness; and I admit it is. My pains are frequently unendurable. When I heard how my friend Tranquillinus had been freed from his long sufferings, I was greatly surprised; but when I saw him in all the freshness of youth, and learned from his own lips that

it was his believing in the doctrines and practices of the Christians, which had obtained his bodily health, I felt myself drawn, as it were, almost in spite of myself, to follow his example. I have prayed and fasted, as I was recommended to do; yet I fear that, after all, it was love of myself rather than any higher motive which has moved me to think well of the religion of the Christians. I am convinced that the worship of our pretended deities is all a deception; but, meanwhile, I know that I lack the firmness of Faith, which I admire in my friend Tranquillinus. Nevertheless, I am ready to follow his example in everything, hoping that I also may obtain the blessing of being freed from my present torments."

Polycarp said to him: "The pains which you at present endure, should remind you of those everlasting torments, which await the wicked hereafter. As to the firmness of Faith which you admire in your friend, you will please reflect, that it is an effect of his Baptism. Before the reception of this sacrament, the belief in the truths of our Religion may be earnest and productive of generous acts and noble aspirations, but that confiding trust in God—which characterizes His true children—which assures us, that He has chosen and marked us as His own, is ever wanting.

Besides, our God is wonderful in His ways, and frequently uses the simplest means to bring us to a knowledge and love of Himself. I doubt not that His mercy toward you manifests itself in this manner."

Chromatius said: "I am prepared to do everything that was required of Tranquillinus, and, since his two sons are Christians, I earnestly desire that my only son, Tibertius, may share with me the happiness of knowing and embracing the only true religion."

Sebastian, who was present, and had been attentively watching the drift of the whole conversation, said to the Governor:

"Your Excellency should be careful not to make recovery of health the sole or chief reason for embracing the Christian religion. Your principal object should be, to know the truth and to secure for yourself everlasting life hereafter. You should, above all, incline yourself to know your Creator, and to do His holy will."

"Is it, then, so difficult to know Him?" asked Chromatius. "Do I not see that the simplest of men—persons without any learning whatsoever—become good Christians? Have all these been obliged to go through a long process of reasoning before finding the truth?"

“The answer is contained in the question itself,” answered Sebastian. “From the very beginning of the world, God has loved to converse with the simple. They heard His voice whensoever He whispered to their hearts. In like manner when He dwelt among us, He chose the poor, the simple, the ignorant to be His disciples, that all might acknowledge that they did not teach of themselves the doctrines of salvation, but that it was Himself who spoke and taught by their mouth.”

“And why sayest thou, that I must first know my Creator, before I can find salvation?” said the Governor.

“Because you have worshipped many gods and goddesses. Unless, therefore, you exclude them altogether from your heart, and break to pieces the very images of them, and thus openly declare that you know and confess the only true God, you can never find life and salvation.”

“How, then, can I make it manifest to all, that I know, believe and confess the only true God?” asked Chromatius.

“When you send your servant to draw water from the well, think you, that, before filling the pitcher, he does not first examine whether it is quite clean, knowing that he would incur your displeasure were he to neglect this: and do you suppose, that

we can open for you the fountain of truth, and offer you the waters of life, unless your heart be first cleansed from the dross and defilement of idolatry?"

"How is that to be done?" asked the Governor.

"Give us permission," answered Sebastian, "to break all the idols of stone which you have in your house, to burn those of wood, and to melt down those of gold and silver; and then distribute the value of the latter to the poor."

"And what advantage shall I myself derive from all that?" said Chromatius.

"You shall at once recover the free use of all your limbs," replied Sebastian. "Then you shall know, that the false gods whom you have hitherto worshipped were your greatest enemies; and that He is truly your kind Father, who gives you health of body and soul—as soon as you begin sincerely to confess and worship Him."

"Then give yourselves no trouble about this," said the Governor, "I will forthwith give orders to my servants, to do everything you have had the kindness to suggest."

"Your good intention is deserving of praise," said the Saint. "Your Excellency should reflect, however, that the implacable enemy of mankind possesses great power over those who, during many

years, have been his worshippers. If your servants were to undertake this work, as they are timid and superstitious Pagans, they might possibly suffer some harm: in such an event they would ascribe it, as a matter of course, to the anger of the idols. The soldier who exposes himself without breast-plate or defensive arms to the attacks of the foe, is plainly guilty of rashness; in like manner, when we fight the infernal foe, we should be forearmed. For the Christian, Faith is both a breast-plate and a shield; he wears the helmet of salvation: no enemy can resist him."

"Let the will of God be done," said Chromatius; "act as it may seem best to yourselves."

Thereupon, Polycarp and Sebastian betook themselves to prayer. After which they began the work of destruction, and, in quite a short time, broke to pieces more than two hundred idols of every shape and material. This being done, they returned to the Governor, and found that his pains had not disappeared. They, therefore, said to him:

"It is evident to us, either that there remains something to be destroyed, or that your Excellency still clings to some superstition, which hinders you from giving yourself wholly and sincerely to God."

“To say the truth,” replied Chromatius, “I must own, that I keep in a small room some instruments which I use occasionally to consult the stars, or to draw the horoscope of my friends. One of these instruments I value very highly, because it was left me by my father, Tarquinius, who paid for it more than two hundred pounds of gold. I would not willingly part with it, the more so as I think it the most precious ornament in my house.”

“Your own good sense,” said Sebastian, “must show you at once, that this manner of fortune telling is one of the greatest and most absurd of superstitions. For, if men were to be good or bad because they happened to be born under this or that constellation, would it not follow, that the inflicting of punishments for misdeeds must be looked upon as the height of injustice? Could you, as a judge, condemn the man who commits crimes which he cannot avoid, because his star was an evil one? In like manner, what merit could there be in noble and generous deeds, when the lucky man is by these circumstances of his birth necessitated to perform good actions? You see, then, that the common sense of mankind condemns such a superstition; and the Christian Religion abhors it as the work of darkness, as

a means to draw deluded souls from the knowledge and service of the true God. Seek, therefore, your salvation in good earnest, and break asunder now and forever every chain that binds you to idolatry, lest afterwards it prove to you a source of temptation and a cause of ruin."

"Truly great is that God," exclaimed Chromatius, "who is served and adored by such faithful servants as yourselves. Your every discourse is filled with so much sound reasoning, that it brings conviction to the dullest understanding. Although at first I imagined, that there might be no harm in keeping those instruments merely as objects of curiosity, or for the sake of ornament, I am now fully persuaded, that to others they might give a cause of suspecting my sincerity. This I cannot permit. I believe everything Christianity teaches. I reject and abhor whatsoever it condemns. This is my Faith, whereby I hope to secure my salvation now and hereafter. Do as you judge proper with whatsoever I possess; grant me only the blessing, which I do not deserve, of being received among you."

Meanwhile, Tiburtius, the son of the Governor, had entered the room where the servants of Christ were conversing with Chromatius. When he heard the

last words spoken by his father, he became very indignant, and said :

“I can by no means suffer that so beautiful and precious a work of art be destroyed, unless you agree to certain conditions.”

“Name the conditions, my son,” said the venerable Polycarp.

“I will order two ovens to be heated: if you both consent to be cast into them, should my father not recover the soundness of his body—after you have destroyed those instruments of superstitious practices, as you call them—I will make no further objection.”

“No, my son,” said Chromatius, “this I cannot permit: I am convinced that they have taught me the doctrines of truth and salvation; I can no longer doubt the sacred truths of Christianity—even should it not be God’s will to restore me to health.”

The Saints, however, answered: “We accept most cheerfully the condition: prepare the ovens: we are confident that the result will manifest the power of God, and tend to His glory.”

Whilst they were in the apartment in which the instruments were kept, and were breaking them all to pieces, there stood before Chromatius a youth, most beautiful in countenance, with gar-

ments of a dazzling whiteness; his appearance filled the Governor with wonder and dismay. He said to Chromatius :

“Fear not, the Lord Jesus Christ sends me, because thou believest in Him: behold, thou art healed of all thy bodily infirmities.”

Chomatius arose at once, and perceived that all his sufferings had, at that very moment, disappeared. Full of gratitude, he fell prostrate before the heavenly messenger, that he might kiss his feet. But he said :

“Touch me not, Chromatius: thou art not yet purified by the waters of Baptism.” Thus speaking he vanished from his sight. At the very instant, Tiburtius entered the room with the two servants of God. On hearing what had just happened, Tiburtius cast himself at the feet of Polycarp, whilst his father embraced those of Sebastian, and both exclaimed: “Jesus Christ is the true God: blessed are you whose words have made Him known to us!”

Then Sebastian said to the Governor: “Your Excellency knows that I am a captain of the imperial body-guard. Whether I obtained this rank by my own services or by a special providence of God, I am unable to decide: but I know that, in wearing this military garb, I have had no other

desire than that of serving my Brethren, by instructing them in their duties, and by strengthening and encouraging them in the midst of their trials. Could I not have effected this, I would never have kept my present position. Let your Excellency consider, therefore, that your high dignity obliges you to do many things inconsistent with the spirit of Christianity: you have to be present at public shows, which are offensive to modesty, to charity, in a word, to good morals; you have to preside at trials, where it is a foregone conclusion that innocent Christians must be condemned. Wherefore, permit me to suggest that, under the plea of ill-health, or of advanced age, it would be proper to ask for a successor. Being thus freed from worldly occupations, you will be enabled to devote yourself to the salvation of your soul; and, by a new birth, you can begin a new life which will prepare you for the enjoyment of everlasting happiness."

Chromatius, delighted with this suggestion, immediately sent in his resignation as Governor of Rome;—through the influence of his friends, it was, on that very day, accepted.

St. Polycarp now began again to prepare him for the reception of holy Baptism; for it was deemed advisable that a man of his age and condition should be fully instructed in all the duties of a Christian,

especially as circumstances did not require any despatch. When the holy Priest, therefore, asked him, whether he was truly sorry for all his sins, and whether he sincerely renounced them forever, Chromatius resolutely replied :

“I am very glad that this question has been put to me before my Baptism. Yes, I truly and forever renounce all my sins. I forgive all my enemies ; all persons who have intentionally or unwittingly injured me. I will make restitution in full of whatever I have unjustly taken from others. Since the death of my wife, I have had two women, to whom I was not lawfully married ; to these I give their freedom, and I will make a liberal endowment for their settlement in life. The immediate fulfilment of all these promises, I hope, will be a convincing proof that now and forever, I renounce the devil and all his works.”

Polycarp praised the zeal of the new convert, and said :

“It is for this very reason that the Church ordinarily prescribes an interval of forty days before conferring Baptism ; that thus all obstacles being removed, the catechumen may be disposed to receive, with more fervor and advantage, the heavenly favors of the holy Sacrament.”

When the youthful Tiburtius saw the good dis-

positions of his father, he rejoiced exceedingly; for he had long and patiently waited, to see a reformation in the conduct of one whose pagan virtues had won the esteem of all the citizens of Rome. Feeling now persuaded that a happy termination was soon to crown all his desires, he said to Chromatius:

“Father, although it is necessary for you to have more time to settle your affairs, it is not required that my happiness should be delayed. I have but begun to show myself in the forum; the pleadings which I was to undertake in order to distinguish myself among the members of the bar, I intend to direct to a purpose more worthy of myself and more beneficial to my fellow men. Whatever I possess of learning and eloquence, I will hereafter devote to the cause of Christianity. If my words be not able to persuade others to seek happiness in the possession of the true Religion, I trust that my actions will not fail to induce them to despise the things of earth, and to seek everlasting salvation hereafter.”

St. Polycarp thereupon baptized the youth—Sebastian being his sponsor.

Nor was the Baptism of Chromatius delayed for many days. He had applied himself so industriously to the settlement of all his worldly affairs, that he had not only done everything that was demanded

of him, but he had, at the same time, by word and example, given so much edification that all around him were anxious to share his own happiness. In consequence, on the day of his Baptism, he had the pleasure of seeing the same blessing bestowed upon nearly every member of his numerous household, amounting to no less than fourteen hundred persons. To those among them who were slaves, he had previously given their freedom, after he had liberally provided for their future support, remarking, "They who have God for their Father, should not be looked upon as slaves by men."

Until then, the persecution raised against the Christians had been comparatively moderate; for the Emperor Carinus, who had many personal friends, and even relatives among them, would not permit the iniquitous laws of the empire to be rigidly carried into effect. But, after the death of this Prince, there came a great change. The feeling against them was now of such a nature, that it was almost impossible to procure the necessaries of life, without exposing themselves to the danger of committing some act of idolatry. In the public market small images of the gods were placed, and no one was allowed to buy or to sell anything unless he had first burnt incense before them. The same annoying trickery was resorted to in the baths:

and at the public fountains. In this state of affairs, Chromatius with the approval of the Pope, St. Caius, invited all the Christians who had been recently baptized, to take up their abode with him; and with so generous a charity did he provide for all their wants, that not one of them was exposed to the temptation of offering sacrifice to the idols. The violence, however, of the persecution rendered it improbable that the conversion of so many persons should long remain unknown to the people of Rome. Wherefore, by the advice of the Pope, he tried to obtain leave from the Emperor to withdraw into Campania, where he possessed vast estates; for, although he was now no longer Governor of the city, in his quality of Roman Senator, he was still required to reside in the imperial Capital, unless on account of old age, or by a special favor, he was freed from the obligation. As soon as he had procured the requisite permission, he invited every Christian, who was willing, to follow him into the country. Then there arose a generous contention between the Blessed Polycarp and Sebastian, to know which of the two should accompany Chromatius and his followers. Both were anxious to stay in the city, in order to have a better chance of gaining the crown of Martyrdom. The venerable Pontiff settled the

matter between them, saying: "Whilst you both have a right to contend for the crown of Martyrdom, you should not forget that the persons, so lately gained to the kingdom of Christ, ought not to be left to themselves. Wherefore, our beloved brother Polycarp, who is a priest, and well versed in the knowledge of the things of God, will accompany our Brethren into Campania, and endeavor to guide and comfort them in all their trials." Polycarp cheerfully yielded to this decision, considering it as a manifestation of the Divine Will.

On the following Sunday, the Pope celebrated the sacred Mysteries at the house of Chromatius, and afterwards addressed the assembly, saying:

"Our Lord Jesus Christ, knowing the weakness of our human nature, established among His faithful followers two degrees, namely: those of Confessors and Martyrs; so that they, who do not think themselves strong enough to bear the weight of Martyrdom, may keep the grace of Confession, and—leaving the chief praise to the soldiers of Christ, who fight for the glory of His name—may themselves, by good deeds, glorify the same God. Let them, therefore, who are willing, accompany our beloved sons, Chromatius and Tiburtius; let those who choose to do so, continue with me in the

city. Distance of places does not divide those whom the love of Christ unites; nor will our eyes perceive your absence, because, with our hearts, we will be with you wheresoever you are."

All appeared satisfied, when they heard these paternal words spoken by the Father of the Faithful. Not so, however, the young and fervent Tiburtius. Thinking that his zeal and courage were not sufficiently understood, he exclaimed:

"I beseech thee, Holy Father, suffer not that I should leave the city, as if I dreaded the persecution. I am ready to die a thousand deaths, if it be possible, for my Religion and my God. I desire to secure for myself that everlasting life of which no one can ever deprive me."

The Holy Pontiff, shedding tears of joy, replied:

"May God grant thee the reward of thy lively Faith; and may all who stay with us be deemed worthy to fight manfully, and to enjoy the triumph of Martyrdom."

Tiburtius, therefore, was allowed to remain with the Pope, as well as Sebastian, the twin-brothers, Marcellinus and Marcus, and Tranquillinus their father; also Nicostratus, Zoë his wife, and Castor his brother, together with Claudius, his brother Victorinus, and his son Symphorian, who had been healed of the dropsy. All the others went with

Chromatius. Caius ordained Tranquillinus a Priest, and his two sons Deacons. The other men were raised to the dignity of Sub-deacons; but to Sebastian, who had done so much for the faithful, he gave the glorious title of "Defender of the Church." After all these things had been arranged in the best manner that the circumstances of the time would allow, it became a subject of no little uneasiness to find a place where they might conceal themselves, so long as the violence of the persecution hindered them from taking up their abode at their own homes. Experience having taught the Holy Pontiff that their safety would be best secured where their presence was least suspected, he proposed to his companions to seek a place of shelter in the palace itself of the Emperor. Among the officials of the imperial household, there were several Christians, whose religious belief was rarely inquired into; because, when other persons were obliged to offer sacrifices to the idols, it was not deemed necessary, or even becoming, that those employed about the palace should be put to the same test. At that time, it so happened that the superintendent of the imperial baths, Castulus by name, together with all the members of his family, were most fervent Christians. The apartments which they occupied were large and commodious, and quite

removed from those of the other officers. Here they were all received with the greatest affection.

When they had thus found for the present a place of safety, they devoted themselves wholly to exercises of piety. They spent their time in fasting and praying, in mutually exhorting one another to the practice of every Christian virtue, above all, in begging of God to grant perseverance in the Faith to themselves and to their Brethren, that they might, at last, be found worthy to lay down their lives for the glory of His holy Name. The Christians, from whom their abode was not long concealed, came to them in great numbers,—but as privately as possible,—not only to receive instruction and spiritual consolation in their trials and persecutions, but also to be freed by their prayers from every sort of bodily ailment. For their heavenly Master had gifted them, to a wonderful degree, with the power of working miracles: the blind received sight, the sick health, the evil spirits were driven from the bodies of the possessed.

It happened one day, when Tiburtius had gone out on a visit of charity, that he came to a place where he saw a crowd of persons gathered around a poor young man, who lay upon the pavement bruised and bleeding, and to all appearances dead; for he had fallen from a great height. The parents



of the youth weeping and lamenting requested the bystanders to carry him to their home, that they might prepare him for burial. Tiburtius was moved at the sight of their sorrow, and said to them :

“Weep not: allow me to whisper to him a few words; perhaps he may be restored to life and soundness.”

Immediately the crowd made way for him. Kneeling down by the side of the young man, he recited over him the Lord’s Prayer and the Creed, and, all at once, the body of the youth was so perfectly healed that he arose as sound as if nothing dangerous had befallen him.

Tiburtius was going his way, when the parents of the young man, recognizing the son of Chromatius, detained him: “Please, sir,” they said, “leave us not without first receiving the expression of our gratitude. Our son was dead, you have restored him to us alive. Take him with you: suffer him to be your servant. With him we will also give you all we possess: for he is our only child.”

“If you do what I will tell you,” replied Tiburtius, “I shall receive the greatest reward I can desire for having healed your son.” “Should you decree us worthy of being received among the number of your servants,” they answered, “it

would be the greatest favor you could bestow upon us.”

Hereupon, taking them by the hand, he led them apart from the crowd, and explained to them the doctrines of the Christian Religion, and the power of the name of Christ. They listened with the greatest attention, and showed the utmost anxiety to live thenceforth as true followers of Jesus,—of whose teachings they had until then been wholly ignorant. Tiburtius satisfied that their dispositions were truly earnest and sincere, conducted them to Caius :

“ Holy Father and venerable Pontiff of the divine law,” he said, “ behold here three persons, whom Jesus Christ has this day made His own : I present them before you as the first fruits of my Faith.”

The holy Pontiff returned thanks to God, and, after questioning them, finding that they were sufficiently instructed, baptized the parents and their son.

Many occurrences of this kind were constantly taking place. But the enemy of mankind did not suffer the progress of truth to overthrow his power, without the greatest struggles. The persecution became daily more and more severe. Spies and informers were busy everywhere, employing the most cunning devices to discover and entrap the

Christians, whom a fancied security induced to engage in the ordinary pursuits of life. Zoë, the wife of Nicostratus, was the first to receive the palm of Martyrdom.

On the birthday of St. Peter, she had gone to pray at the tomb of this Blessed Prince of the Apostles. Some Pagans saw her, and immediately reported to the magistrate of the district what they had seen. For, to find out the Christians more easily, the city had been divided into several districts. The magistrate had her arrested, and said to her:

“Art thou a Christian?”

“Thanks to the great mercy of God, I am a Christian,” answered Zoë.

“If so, I command thee,” said the magistrate, “forthwith to burn incense before the great god Mars,” and he pointed to a statue of the god of war.

“Do you compel a woman to sacrifice to Mars?” asked Zoë. “Is this, perhaps, intended to show, that your Mars has a tender regard for women? Although by his arts he was able to overcome the unchaste Venus, as your records prove, do not imagine that he has any power over one who bears on her forehead the marks of Faith. It is not with my own strength that I struggle against him; but,

supported by the arm of Christ, I despise your vain attempts, and defy the power of your idol."

The magistrate ordered her to be thrown into a dark dungeon, where, during five days, she saw not a ray of light, and received no food of any kind. From time to time the keeper of the prison would come, and say to her: "Remember, there thou shalt die of hunger and thirst, and in utter darkness, unless thou promise to offer sacrifice to the gods." On the sixth day, however, when it was reported to the magistrate that she was still alive, he gave orders to hang her on a tree, with her head over a smoking fire. She was no sooner placed in this position than she yielded up her soul to God. The executioners tied a heavy stone to the body and cast it into the Tiber: "For," they said, "the Christians might come and worship her as a goddess." After her Martyrdom, she appeared to Sebastian, and made known to him the circumstances of her death.

When, on the following day, Sebastian related this vision to the Brethren, Tranquillinus arose and said: "For what are we living? Is it not a disgrace that we should be hiding ourselves, whilst the women are carrying off our crowns?" Wherefore, having gone to pray at the tomb of St. Paul, on the octave of the festival of the Blessed Apostles, he was seen by the populace, and by them

stoned to death; his body was also cast into the Tiber.

Whereupon, Nicostratus, Claudius, Castor, Victorinus, and Symphorian went in search of the sacred remains of the Martyr. Whilst engaged in this work of Christian charity, they were perceived by some of the Pagans, who arrested and dragged them before Fabian, the Governor of the city. During ten days, this officer tried by every means in his power to induce them to sacrifice to the idols, but in vain. Both the Emperors were at that time in Rome. The Governor knew, that the private views of the rulers of the empire frequently were at variance with their public policy; to ascertain, therefore, their real intention with regard to the Christians, he thought it best not to proceed any further without consulting his imperial masters. The answer he received was, that persons accused of being Christians should be put to the torture three times, at least, and, if after that they persevered in their profession, the magistrates might use their own discretion as to the manner of putting them to death. Acting according to this suggestion, Fabian endeavored by repeated torments to overcome the constancy of the Martyrs, but seeing that all his efforts proved useless, he gave orders that they should all be thrown into the

sea. Wherefore, with weights tied to their necks, they all were drowned, and thus obtained the palm of Martyrdom.

The Faithful, aware that on all sides they were now beset by dangers of every kind, used the greatest precaution to avoid detection. Not, indeed, because they were afraid of making an open profession of their Religion, but because they knew that the storm of persecution would pass away the sooner, if their enemies had time to reflect that their hatred of Christianity was altogether inconsistent with their professed liberality, and their tolerance of every religious opinion. Nevertheless, as happens not unfrequently, they learned by a sad experience that the worst trials often arise from sources which are the least expected.

An individual, Torquatus by name, passing himself off for a Christian, had succeeded in joining the company of the Holy Pontiff Caius; as he had formerly been a Christian, it was not difficult for him to practice this imposition. The life, however, which he led in secret was far different from that of the Faithful, with whom he was commonly supposed to associate. His outward appearance, his gait and gestures, betrayed a worldly spirit. Instead of uniting with the Brethren in watching and praying, and singing the praises of God, he

was wont to pass his time in sleeping, or even in frequenting public taverns and giving himself up to every sort of dissipation. Tiburtius, whose strict principals of morality soon made him see that there was something wrong in the conduct of Torquatus, was moved by the spirit of Christian charity to represent to him, that his behavior did not only disedify the Christians, but that it was a cause of scandal to the unbelievers, who, in spite of their unwillingness to embrace the teachings and practices of Christianity, were ever ready to testify to the purity of the lives of those who lived according to the precepts of their Religion. Torquatus took these admonitions of the holy youth seemingly in good part, and promised amendment; whilst, at the same time, he concealed his real intentions. By degrees he threw Tiburtius off his guard, and ingratiated himself so much with him, that he never objected to his company, whensoever he went to visit the sick and the poor, or to pray at the tombs of the Martyrs. Yet, during all this time, the traitor was watching for a favorable opportunity of delivering his true friend and benefactor into the hands of the enemy.

It had become a custom with Tiburtius to visit, on certain days, some places of special devotion. Torquatus, aware of this practice, gave notice to

some of the Pagans, who, in consequence, were on the watch for him. No sooner had he knelt down to pray than, rushing upon him, they made him a prisoner. The better to conceal the part he had taken in this wicked transaction, Torquatus suffered himself to be taken with his friend. They were both led before Fabian, the Governor of the city.

When Fabian saw the prisoners standing before his tribunal, he said to Torquatus ·

“What is thy name?”

“My name is Torquatus,” he answered.

“What religion dost thou profess?” asked the Governor.

“I am a Christian,” he replied.

“Knowest thou not,” said Fabian, “that our Princes, ever invincible, have given orders that they, who are unwilling to sacrifice to the immortal gods, should be put to the most cruel tortures?”

“This is my master,” answered Torquatus, pointing to Tibertius. “He has always been my teacher; whatsoever I see him do, I am ready to do in like manner.”

The Governor then, turning to Tiburtius, said :

“Thou knowest what thy companion says; what answer hast thou to make for thyself?”

“It is now some time,” replied the youth, “since Torquatus feigns to be a Christian. It is a sad

thing, that so holy a name should be assumed by one whose only aim seems to be to bring disgrace upon it. Your Excellency knows very well, that, in these times of trial, no one is desirous of bearing that name, unless he is resolved to do honor to it, by being in very deed a follower of Christ. To be such a one, it is necessary to devote one's-self to the love and practice of true wisdom, by despising the vanities of this world, and by constantly struggling against the vices and evil inclinations of our nature. Do you think that this man, whose very outward appearance betrays in all things a worldly spirit, whose scandalous conduct is known to many persons, has a right to claim the honor of being a true Christian? No; Christ does not acknowledge such servants. As, however, he asserts, that he is ready to follow my example, it belongs to your Excellency to put to the test the truth of his words. I have little doubt, that he will prove before all, that he really is—what I have all along expected him to be—an impostor.”

“It would be better for thyself,” said Fabian, “to look out for thy own safety by not disregarding the commands of our Princes.”

“I cannot more effectually secure my safety,” answered Tiburtius, “than by despising your gods

and goddesses; and by fearlessly confessing that the Lord Jesus Christ is my God and Saviour."

Torquatus then said: "This Christian is not only cruel himself, but he deceives many others, and leads them into troubles by making them believe that all the gods are wicked demons; meanwhile himself and his associates spend nights and days in magical incantations to cause harm to their fellow-men."

"He that bears false witness shall not go unpunished," replied Tiburtius; then, addressing the Governor, he said:

"This man, whom your Excellency sees, sought the company of the Christians to gratify the wickedness of his heart. He seemed ever anxious to be deemed better than all others, and to be thought more zealous in making outward professions; and, meanwhile, he cherished in himself the most contemptible of all vices,—that of betraying those whom he professed to love and esteem. Go on, Torquatus. After having acted the part of a traitor, be not ashamed of performing the office of an executioner. Gratify thy long wished-for desires. Now is the time. Draw forth the venomous shafts of thy vengeance, torture, slay, or do whatsoever inhuman cruelty may prompt; but cease at least to be a hypocrite and a traitor."

The Governor himself appeared moved when he heard these words of the noble youth, the spectators by their scowling looks expressed their contempt for the vile Torquatus. Thinking that, perhaps, by recalling to him his distinguished birth and high rank in society he might influence Tiburtius, Fabian said to him :

“Return, Tiburtius, to thy family; be what nature has made thee, disgrace not the nobility of thy race, by the foolish and extravagant conceit of professing a Religion which brings ruin and misery upon thee. It is unworthy of a Roman nobleman to debase himself to such a condition that torments, infamy, and death may be inflicted upon him, as if he belonged to the lowest of the plebeians.”

“O the wise and wonderful man whom the Romans call their Judge and Governor,” exclaimed Tiburtius. “Because I refuse to worship the wanton Venus, the incestuous Jupiter, the thief Mercury, and Saturn, the murderer of his children, I dishonor my name and family, and am branded with the mark of infamy. And because I adore the One, true God, who reigns in the heavens, you threaten me with tortures and with death! Know then, O Fabian, that I prove my nobility by confessing and proclaiming, without fear or disguise, that Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, came

down from heaven to redeem all men, by teaching them the way to truth; and the idols, whom you ignorantly call gods and worship, I spurn and defy with all their pretended power."

Thereupon, the Governor enraged by these words of the brave youth, ordered the ground to be strewed with burning coals, and said:

"Make thy choice, Tiburtius, either throw incense upon these coals in honor of the gods, or walk barefooted upon them."

Immediately the youth made the sign of the cross, and walked upon the red hot coals without feeling the least pain. Then he said to the Governor: "Put aside your unbelief, O Fabian, and confess, at last, that He is the true God whom all things obey. Or, if you want to make a trial, thrust your hands into that cauldron of boiling water there, call upon your Jupiter, and see whether his power will keep you from being scalded. Yet, these coals appear to me as soft and harmless as if I were walking upon a bed of roses: such is the power of Christ, the God whom I adore."

This freedom of speech, and, especially, the defiance made by the young Christian, put the Governor to confusion. He knew not what answer to make. Wherefore, to avoid further discussion, he said:

“We all know that your Christ taught His followers magical arts.”

“Be silent, wretched man,” rejoined Tiburtius; “let not your profane mouth utter blasphemously so sweet and holy a Name.”

This was too much for the proud Fabian to endure. Mad with rage, he at once gave sentence in these words: “Let Tiburtius, who has blasphemed our gods and uttered atrocious insults, be forthwith beheaded.” The Martyr was thereupon seized and led out of the city. When arrived at the third milestone of the Lavian Way, the executioner told him to be ready. Tiburtius knelt down to pray, commending his soul to his Redeemer, and, with one blow of the sword, his head was severed from the body. A Christian happened at that moment to be near by. Learning who the sufferer was, he secured the precious remains of the Martyr, and buried them on the very spot where God has ever since glorified His servant by many miracles.

The false-hearted Torquatus, becoming more hardened in wickedness, after having betrayed one whose friend he had pretended to be, looked out for new victims. He had for many a day been enjoying the hospitality of Castulus, who had so kindly given shelter to many of the Christians. Instead of being thankful to his generous host, he

went before a magistrate and accused him of being a Christian. Castulus was immediately arrested and taken before the tribunal of the judge. After having been interrogated and put three times upon the rack, as he fearlessly persevered in the confession of his Faith, he was thrown into a ditch, which was then filled with earth, and thus, being buried alive, he obtained the crown of Martyrdom.

After this, the two brothers, Marcus and Marcellianus, were also betrayed by Torquatus. The Governor ordered them to be fastened to two wooden pillars, with their feet nailed to them; and, seeing them in this painful position, he said:

“There you shall stand until you make up your minds to give due honor to the immortal gods.”

The Martyrs heeded not the words of the cruel persecutor, for whilst their bodies were thus tormented, their souls overflowed with spiritual consolation, and, raising their voices, they joyfully sang, as if celebrating some long-wished for meeting: “Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.”

When Fabian perceived that they seemed to make light of his power of tormenting, he said:

“Unhappy, infatuated men, give up your folly: why will you not free yourselves from these tor-

tures? Say that you are ready to comply with our commands, and you shall at once be released."

"No banquet ever appeared more delicious to us than this," they answered. "Now we begin to be firmly established in the love of Christ. Suffer us to remain as we are, so long as we are clothed in the garment of this body."

When they had thus continued for a whole day and a night, singing the praises of God, and thanking Him for His mercies, the Governor, having no longer any hope of causing them to apostatize, ordered their sides to be pierced with lances: and thus, after long and severe struggles, the two brothers secured their crowns. They were buried two miles from the city on the Appian Way, near the place called the Sand-pits, where a cemetery afterwards bore their name.

Meanwhile the Blessed Sebastian, who had been the happy instrument in the hands of God in bringing so many persons to the knowledge of the truth, and had also been a witness to their glorious confession of the Faith, was himself anxiously longing for the moment, when he, too, should be enabled to obtain the Martyr's crown. He had not long to wait. Diocletian, the Emperor of the East, had come to Rome to confer with Maximinian on affairs of State. He had ever felt the greatest esteem for

Sebastian, but he had never suspected that he was a Christian. Yet this fact was now to a great extent known throughout the city. The Governor, therefore, fearing lest this knowledge might be communicated to the Emperor, by others, to his own prejudice, went himself to make it known to Diocletian. The Prince was unwilling to believe the statement, for he looked upon the Christians as his greatest enemies. Nevertheless, he sent for Sebastian, and said to him :

“Sebastian, I have raised thee to honor and distinction among the officers of the palace, because I looked upon thee as one of the most faithful of my friends. Must I believe that all the while thou wast an enemy of the gods, and that I entrusted my safety to one who was disloyal to me?”

“I have ever been faithful and loyal to you,” answered Sebastian; “I have constantly prayed to the God whom I worship, that he might give safety to your august person and to the Empire. Of your idols of wood and stone I have never asked anything, knowing that they cannot give to others what they do not themselves possess.”

“Thou art then a Christian?” said the Emperor.

“I am a Christian,” replied the brave soldier; “such I have been from the days of my childhood;

and it is for this very reason that I have always performed my duties faithfully and conscientiously.”

This plain and candid answer did not satisfy Diocletian, but, on the contrary, made him very angry. Wherefore, he sent for the commander of the Mauritanian archers, and said to him :

“Take the tribune Sebastian, tell thy soldiers to shoot him to death with their arrows.” Immediately the dusky chief seized upon the Christian soldier, and led him forth into an open field. There the executioners bound him to a tree, and then shot at him, until the body of the Martyr stood bristling with arrows. Covered with wounds, and faint with loss of blood, he gave no longer any sign of life ; the soldiers, thereupon cut the cords that bound him, and, leaving the body where it fell upon the ground, they returned to their quarters.

As soon as it was dark, Irene, the widow of the Martyr Castulus, came with some of her people to take away the body of the Saint, that they might give it Christian burial. To their great joy, they found that he was still alive. Forthwith they carried him to the apartments of the pious lady, in the palace itself of the Emperor. Here he was nursed with all the care and tenderness which Christian charity and affection could suggest, so that, after a few days, he was restored to perfect

health and soundness in all his limbs. When the Brethren learnt all that had happened, they were exceedingly rejoiced at the miraculous escape of their generous champion. All were anxious to see once more their great defender. They besought him to withdraw from the city, and, at least, for a time, to flee from the wrath of the cruel tyrant. Sebastian, however, after consulting the Divine will by prayer, thought it his duty to give to all an example of heroic courage by remaining in the city.

It was a day of great solemnity. The two Emperors, attended by a numerous retinue, were going to offer sacrifice to the gods. As they went forth from the imperial palace, the brave warrior stationed himself on the great staircase of Helio-gabalus, where he had a full view of the pageantry. When Diocletian drew near to the palace where he was standing, Sebastian called out to him in a loud voice :

“Hearken to me, O Prince ! The priests of your temples deceive you by their wicked falsehoods against the Christians. They tell you, that we are enemies of the Empire ; yet it is by our prayers that the Empire is made to prosper. Cease your unjust persecutions against us, and remember the

day of reckoning is near at hand, when you, too, shall be judged by an all-knowing Judge."

The Emperor was struck with awe, on hearing these words, and still more at the sight of the former tribune of the imperial guard. But soon recovering himself, he exclaimed :

"Art thou the Sebastian whom some time ago we ordered to be shot to death with arrows? How didst thou return to life?"

"The Lord Jesus Christ, whom I serve," replied Sebastian, "has raised me, as it were, from the dead, for this very purpose, that once more I might meet you, and protest, in the presence of all the people here assembled, that you are guilty of the most cruel injustice, when you persecute His servants, whom you know to be innocent. Repent, therefore, of your crimes before it is too late."

Diocletian was greatly exasperated when he heard himself addressed with so much freedom; but, being naturally very superstitious, and his conscience telling him that the words of one, whom he looked upon as a visitant from the other world, were perfectly true, he was altogether at a loss what to say or to do. After a while, however, being assured by his officers that the seeming apparition was in reality none other than the late captain of the guards, he cried out to some of his attendants :

“Seize that man; take him into the hippodrome of the palace, and there beat him to death with your cudgels; do your work well, so that he trouble us not again.”

This command was instantly obeyed, and the Christian hero secured his crown by a death all the more glorious in the sight of God, the more ignominious it appeared in the eyes of men. By the Emperor's order, the body of the Martyr was thrown into the common sewer of Rome, so that his Brethren might not have the sad consolation of giving it an honorable burial. But, during the following night, the Saint appeared to the pious matron, Lucina, and said: “Arise, go to the great sewer near the circus, there thou shalt find my body. Take it thence to the Catacombs, and bury it at the entrance of the crypt, nigh to the steps of the Apostles.”

The holy lady arose at once, and, calling together a number of her servants, went with them at midnight to the place indicated. Having, without any difficulty, found the body, they took it up reverently and bore it in silence to the spot pointed out by the Martyr. Here they buried it with due solemnity, and, during thirty days, the blessed Lucina did not return home, but kept her pious vigil near the sacred tomb.



After some years, when peace was restored to the Church, a magnificent basilica was erected over the place where reposed the relics of the Saint.

His Martyrdom took place A. D. 288. His festival is kept on the 20th of January.



