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Persecutions of the early Christians

PERSECUTIONS OF THE EARLY CHRISTIANS.

William Emmett Speaker, '0[illegible].

The persecutions of the early Christians did not come upon them unawares; they had been taught by their Divine Teacher that 'the servant is not above his master, nor the disciple above his lord, if they have persecuted me they will also persecute you.' They had seen vividly set before them the fullness and extent to which human hatred and passion would go in the crucifixion of their Lord and Saviour. The cross which they bore as their banner was the symbol, not of all-conquoring force and power; but of all-conquoring love and endurance. The Master had taught them by precept and Example to accept persecution, fearlessly, trustingly, patiently. How well they had learned the lesson we will see from the lives of those whom we shall study. He had said 'they shall lay hands upon you and persecute you, delivering you up to the Synagogue and ~~the~~ to prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake.' 'And ye shall be betrayed both by parents and brethren and kinsfolk, and friends; and some of you they shall put to death and ye shall be hated of all men for my Name's sake.' The outlook would have been dark indeed, had it not been that along with the assurance of persecution, they had the promise of His presence with them, to give wisdom to their lips, and fortitude to their hearts, and blessedness to their lives even here, as well as the promise of eternal life hereafter.

For forty days after the resurrection of Jesus the Apostles enjoyed his companionship ere he led them out to the

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brow of Olivet, and gave them his final command., 'Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature, and lo I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.' They were to be his witnesses both in Jerusalem and Judea and the uttermost parts of the earth, they were to be endowed with power when the Holy Spirit should come upon them. This promised event occurred at Pentecost, when the Spirit descended upon them, attended with visible signs and wonders, the effect of which was that they all spoke with foreign tongues. This extraordinary manifestation brings the Apostles at once into prominence. The crowds are astonished at the miracles of tongues and Peter siezes the opportunity of speaking to them in order td convince them that Jesus was really the Messiah, the effect of which was that three thousand converts were baptized into the church and numbers were constantly being added.

All this was carried on in open and without fear of molestation by the disciples, Indeed, with only one or two short-lived attacks, such as when Peter and John were in prison at the instigation of the Sadducees, whose sole objection seems to have been to the disciples' declaration of Christ's resurrection and consequent propagation of the belief in a future state. And again when they are brought before the Sanhedrin, where they declined to obey and Gamaliel is represented as saying that perhaps God is supporting their cause, in which case nothing would succeed in checking it, and the Sanhedrin is content with inflicting corporal punishment, and imposing silence upon them.

There is then no violent persecution until it began with Stephen, about the year 35. The direct cause of this seems to have been the opposition which Stephen aroused, (by his preaching in the Synagogue) especially among the Libertines, Cyricians, and Alexandrians,-various sects of the Jews. "And as they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake they suborned men who said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God." And as his speech before the Sanhedrin seemed to confirm rather than deny this charge, as his hearers interpreted it, the result was the martyrdom of Stephen and a rupture between the Christian church and Judaism.

A general Jewish persecution followed; which evidently took place under the leadership of the Sanhedrin, and was therefore public. When men like Saul entered into it as volunteers they were ~~covered~~ armed with authority from the highest Jewish tribunals.

The Christians now for the first time were recognized to be renegades, the whole zeal of the guardians of the Law, was turned against them. And none was more furious than that party whose chosen life-work it was to cherish and maintain the law as the only source of their race's salvation, the center of all its truth and hopes. The persecution was Pharasaic. Under their leading the prophecy of Jesus was now on a fair way of being fulfilled. 'The son would rise against his father and the father against the son! The most zealous set out with

letters from the Sanhedrin, hunted the suspected, stirred up the populace, until family ties were disregarded, and the local courts incited to institute inquiries and inflict penalties.

But this very conflict which burst upon the Church led to its greatest advance. The Acts tells us how the persecution resulted in its extension throughout the country. And what seemed likely to prove the ruin of the infant Church became the first memorial of her advance, the starting point of her march through the world.

For not only did it serve to scatter the Christians to different regions, but it exerted a wholesome influence upon their inner life. The uprising of Judaism against Christians forced them to take up an independent position. They saw themselves for the first time persecuted in the name of the law, and the light dawned upon them that as a matter of fact, the law was no longer to them what it was to the rest. Their hope was in the coming Kingdom of Heaven, and in that Kingdom it would no longer be the law, but their Lord from whom they would expect salvation.

Following this, time was given for the Church to gather strength, for the persecution was not maintained with the energy of the first onset. As is usually the case when attempts are made to suppress a creed, the measures adopted were imperfectly carried out and their execution was fitful. But the hostility continued and no one could count at any moment on security. When Paul, nine years later, came to Jerusalem for the

first time, it was for the purpose of making the acquaintance of Peter and of coming to an understanding with him, James was the only other member of the Church in Jerusalem whom he saw. The fact that he was not presented to the church shows clearly that complete secrecy was of urgent necessity at this time.

The anxious times of suppression were not over. And once more there was an outbreak of hostility leading, as in the case of Stephen, to death, when the other James, the son of Zebedee, was executed. At this time Peter also was struck at. He was to be sacrificed and was placed in prison, but succeeded in making his escape. This could only, it seemed to the church, have happened by a miracle; An angel from the Lord, as we read, had delivered him. This persecution that was aimed directly at the leaders of the Church was directed by a new ruler, Agrippa I., the grand-son of Herod the Great, who had succeeded in obtaining from Claudius the right of sitting as ally on his hereditary throne. His motive seems to have been in aninordinate desire to gain popular favor with the Jews. Peter accordingly escaped death by flight, and the church was soon afterwards delivered from all danger from this quarter by the sudden death of Agrippa at Cesarea in 44 A. D. The Romans thereupon took the administration of the country once more into their own hands, the Procuratorship was reinstituted, and as these were not conditions under which it would be easy for the Jews to establish the authority of their religious courts, the period of persecution came to an end.

With a knowledge of the more or less widespread persecution that broke out with the Martyrdom of Stephen. And that which animated by Agrippa I. led to the death of James and the escape of Peter by flight. We would naturally expect, what many scholars have claimed, that Paul's death was accompanied by a general persecution, most connecting it with that under Nero. The two grounds for their reason being, first, that involved in the statement of Acts, 'That he lay in prison two years.' If Paul arrived in Rome in the spring of 62 A.D. then the reckoning would agree with the burning of the city in 64 A.D. and the other reason is the tacit assumption that but for that incident the trial must have resulted with the recognition of Paul's innocence, but according to Weizsäcker the "Two years had no decisive value, and the second reason is an erroneous hypothesis." "It is more probable that Paul was condemned as he had been accused as a promoter of disturbances. And it is at least uncertain whether his death took place during the great trial of the Christians. Up to the time of the death of Paul the persecution of the Christian faith arose chiefly from the quarter of Judaism. The Jews saw in Christianity a deadly enemy, whose apparent intention was to supplant their cherished tenets. They had crucified its Founder, they well remembered his bitter polemics against the Pharisees and Sadducees and how he had insulted their national pride by his attention to the Samaritans. They saw, also, how that in far distant Rome they were confounded in the mind of the populace with this despised sect.

And to increase their enmity, when Jerusalem was besieged the Christians fled from it to a place of safety, and later when the Jews revolted against the power of Rome, under such leaders as Barcocheba, the false messiah, the Christian took no part in the revolution. All these things added fuel to the fire already kindled and which was constantly being fanned by doctrinal differences, and all too frequently broke out into the destructive flames of persecution.

But now Christianity comes face to face with even a more formidable foe, One that threatened at times the existence both of Judaism and Christianity, and frequently directs its attacks against them in common. Thus under the Emperor Claudius, the Jews and Christians were both driven from Rome.

But the first decisive persecution, which arose from this new foe, occurred under the reign of Nero (A. D. 54 to 68.) This evidently proceeded less from antipathy to the Christians than from Nero's brutal nature. It is claimed by good authority that Nero set fire to the Imperial City in order to add dramatically to the representation of the Ancient Play, 'The Destruction of Troy.' But the conflagration went farther than he had anticipated. Thefire raged for six days and along with the poorer sections of the city which Nero was glad to see swept away, went many of the ancient palaces and costly treasures of countless wars. Only four out of the fourteen districts into which Rome was divided remained unharmed. The rest were in whole or in part destroyed. Nero was at once charged with the crime,

and in order to allay suspicion he took advantage of the hostility to the Christians, laying the blame of the fire on them as being enemies of society, eager to injure the city, and immediately began a persecution against them.

All the cruelty that could be instilled into the hearts of the persecutors by the bloody scenes of the arena, by revengeful wrath of the populace, by the invention of that Monster whose name has come down to us as the synonym of heartlesness, was vented upon the Christians. They were punished in many ways, some ~~even~~ were sewed up in the skins of wild beasts, and made the subjects of sport, while being torn to pieces by dogs. Some were placed upon wooden crosses covered over with pitch and burned as human torches in Nero's gardens. While Nero clad as a charioteer entertained the multitude by chariot races.

These extreme measures in torture roused the feeling of compassion even on the part of the Christians' enemy for the victims, as such unmerciful persecution is sure to do. And men felt that however merited their sufferings were, they were not inflicted upon them for the general welfare, but to gratify the passion of a cruel monarch.

The news of this persecution everywhere produced profound emotions in the hearts of the Christians, and although local in itself, it doubtless lent a sanction to persecutions of like nature in various portions of the Roman world.

During the reign of Vespasian and Titus the Christian

enjoyed a period of peace, but the persecution was renewed with terrible energy in the latter part of Domitian's reign. It was the Christians' rapid increase that incited the fear of Domitian, especially so as he had learned that Christ was of the royal line of the Jews, and rumors were brought to his ears that in distant parts of the empire there were men who claimed to be of the family and might aspire to the throne. It is said Domitian sent for these men, and having enquired of them and found them ignorant, and that their hands indicated that they were laborers, let them return home. He is said to have banished to an island on the west coast of Italy his niece, Flavia Domitilla, and the wife of his cousin, Flavian Clemens, was put to death for her confession of faith. Flavian himself was slain, probably for the same reason. Although Domitian did not systematically persecute the church, the evidence is abundant that he subjected many to martyrdom.

The reign of Nerva was for the Christian, an era of peace, but it was like the calm before the storm, for upon the accession of Trajan (A. D. 90) the persecution was renewed. The policy of the Roman government at this time is best seen in the letters of Pliny, the governor of Bithynia, and Pontus, to Trajan. Pliny had become very much perplexed in dealing with the Christian owing to the fact of the number that were brought before him, and the extent to which they had been insubordinate to the state. He was much impressed with the harmlessness of the principles of the new religion. But this general impression

did not effect his attitude toward it. He considered that it was a crime, and that those he had condemned were deserving of death, for obstinancy, if not for Christianity. Pliny's questions to the emperor may be summed up as follows: "Should any discrimination between different culprits on account of youth be made? Should those who repent be pardoned? Is the mere Name, without any proof that serious moral offenses have been committed, to be punished, or is it definite crimes conjoined with the name, that deserve punishment?" The reply of Trajan to the detailed account of the manner in which Pliny had dealt with the Christians was to this effect, viz. that Pliny's procedure against the Christian had been correct, his original assumption that the "Name of Christian, if persisted in, deserved punishment was corredt. Extenuating circumstances were to be considered according to the discretion of the governor. Penitence deserves pardon, if shown in act by compliance with the rights of the Roman religion. The governor is not to search for the Christians; but, if they are formally accused by an avowed accuser, the penalty must be inflicted."

Ramsey says "This rescript did not initiate procedure against the Christian. It is absurd to suppose that Trajan for the first time laid down the principal that "The Christians are criminals deserving death; but you may shut your eyes to them until an accuser insists upon your opening them." Trajan's language is that of one who feels unable to contravene or abrogate an existing principle of the imperial government, but

who desires this principle to be applied with mildness and not insisted on."

Although Trajan did not make the Name a crime, he left the life and the liberty of the Christian in jeopardy, their safety was at the mercy of their self-appointed accusers, many of whom would naturally take advantage of the situation. Among the many who were put to death the most distinguished names were Simon,Bishop of Jerusalem; Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch. The attitude of the Roman government was very much the same towards the Christians under Hadrian as it had been under the reign of his predecessor, but in order to avoid extreme abuses, Hadrian ordered his proconsuls to inflict punishment on Christians only when a charge was brought against them in legal form, and if any should be found guilty of bringing an accusation against the Christians through mere calumny or enmity, they themselves should be punished.

In the reign of Antonius Pius the hostility of the people against the Christians became so great that the emperor was obliged to take measures to restrain them. The occasion of the increased enmity lay in the fact that the country was visited with severe floods, pestilence, and famine, and the people superstitiously thought that the gods were angered because the Christian faith was permitted to be practiced in the Empire.

It is a sad fact to contemplate that in Marcus Aurelius one of the best of Roman rulers, Christianity should have found its worst enemy. The cause of this is to be found in the fact

that he saw in Christians the great obstacle to the revival of the national religion. The Christians met with resistance all his efforts to force upon them the heathen faith. Marcus Aurelius was determined to enforce his policy, the Christians were even more determined to resist the current ritual; consequently Christian blood flowed more freely under his reign than at any previous date with the possible exception of Domitian.

Throughout the reign of Commodius the church enjoyed an unaccustomed peace, the policy of persecution was stopped, while many of those condemned to the mines of Sardinia, under Marcus Aurelius, were released and the church flourished and many of the upper classes attached themselves to the new faith.

In the early years of the third century we see the Emperors beginning to realize that the church which their predecessors had persecuted was no mere body of anarchists to be rooted out wherever necessary, but a social organization of growing strength which made its suppression if possible, or if not its adoption, a political necessity. By the middle of the century this consciousness of a struggle had become so clear and definite that the more energetic rulers made efforts to crush out the church by the use of all the resources of the state. The police measures under Antonius gave place to a civil war without quarter. But unlikeother civil wars, only one side was armed and that side,strange to say, was destined to be defeated.

The first emperor to realize the new conditions and to attempt the suppression of the church was one who, at the first, had treated the Christians with a degree of leniency. But alarmed by the rapid growth of the new religion, Septimius Severus, thought it necessary to take active measures against Christianity. He ordered that no one should be allowed to become a proselyte to Judaism, and applied the same to the church and this decree was followed by the severest measure of repression. The persecutions under Severus, were confined chiefly to the East and to North Africa. They were so fierce that a large part of the church regarded him as the Anti-Christ. In Alexandria the father of Origen was beheaded and the beautiful Perpetua was torn to pieces. During the reign of Caracolla and his successor, Elagabalus, there was very little opposition to Christianity and Alexander Servius (222 to 235 A. D.) honored the Christian faith as a religion of equal worth with the national and other religions. Under Maximus there were still local persecutions, especially in Pontius and Cappadocia, when a violent earthquake was attributed to their presence. But during the reigns of Gordianus and Philip the Great the Christian enjoyed a brief respite from persecution and the church flourished and increased in numbers and popular power.

Decius Trajan came to the throne of the empire with the express purpose of blotting out the church and establishing the former religion. The Christians were called upon the sacrifice to the heathen gods, and if they refused they were hunted

out, banished, their property confiscated, and they themselves exposed to insult, outrage, torture and death. The persecutions of Decius were especially aimed at the leaders of the church under the supposition that if the officers were removed the church would collapse. So severe was the persecution that when Pope Fabian was executed no one for over a year was appointed as his successor, but the church held firmly to the faith and one of the remarkable features was the proportion of brave women among the confessors. The persecution was especially severe in Carthage and Egypt and many there were who, under the stress of suffering, denied their Lord, but we have some glorious examples of others who were faithful unto death. In Carthage we read of seventeen comrades of a confessor called Lucian who died together in prison of hunger and thirst. In Egypt we learn of Julian, aged and crippled so that he could not walk to the stake, who was carried on the back of a camel amid the jeers of the mob and, also, of Dioscuroe, a mere boy of fifteen who was neither persuaded by words nor restrained by torture from constantly confessing his Lord. Five Christian soldiers, were standing on duty and noticing a prisoner who showed signs of wavering, made vigorous signs for him to stand firm. On being observed by some of the authorities, they ran up to the Tribunal and offered themselves as martyrs on the altar of sacrifice.

The persecution was arrested by the attention of Decius being drawn away by a foreign war, and his sudden death spared

the Christians from further suffering at his hands. Under his successor, Sallus, the persecutions were continued with somewhat less energy, but this was atoned for in the reign of Valerian, who, favorable at first, later issued an edict that all Bishops, Presbyters and Deacons should be put to death; that all Christian senators and knights should be stripped of their office and property and, in case of their refusal to adopt the national religion, should be beheaded. Among the victims of his fury were Sixtus, Bishop of Rome, and Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage.

Gallienus was favorable to the Christians and endeavored to undo the evils imposed upon them by his predecessor. He secured an edict to the effect that all forfeited property should be restored to the Christians, and the exiled Bishops could return. His successor was, also, lenient in his policy. But Diocletian, who followed him, was bitter against Christianity on the ground of its great progress-as a competitor against the state religion. Accordingly he began a persecution in 303 A. D. and all Christian assemblies were forbidden. He issued four different edicts, each exceeding the preceding in intensity. The first was the burning of every copy of the Bible, the second that all churches should be abolished and all Christians deprived of their civil rights. The third provided for the imprisonment of all preachers, while the last required all Christians, on pain of death, to sacrifice to the heathen gods. After Diocletian and his associate ruler, Maximian, abdicated

and their subordinates, Galerius and Constantine Chlorius, reigned in their stead. A new edict was issued, and a veritable reign of terror ensued. It was in these fateful years that the real terror of the so-called Diocletian persecution was felt. All the torture that cruel tyrants could invent was exercised upon the Christians. At Caesarea Eusebius saw in one day 97 Christians on their way to the mines at Phaeno, each one minus the right eye and the left foot disabled by a hot iron, After doing all that he could to extinguish Christianity, and failing like all his predecessors. We find Galerius relenting on his death bed, tormented with a disease vulgarly known as the being eaten of worms,--a veritable prey of superstition. The gods upon whom he had depended had not helped him, so he issued his famous edict of toleration, and in this extraordinary document wrung from a man by the terror of the unknown, he tried to bargain with the Christians and their God, to remit from him the punishment due him for his cruelty. He had only persecuted, he maintained, to bring back the Christians to a good disposition toward the abandoned persuasion of their fathers, and the institutions of the ancients. He confessed that he had failed to induce his victims to display due reverence for the gods or pay heed to the God of the Christians. So the edicts were rescinded; in return the Christians were expected to pray to their God for his recovery, but it was too late. The unknown God, to whom Galerius had at last betaken himself, gave no answer to his insolent and tardy invocation, and five days afterward Galerius

died, and his kingdom passed into the hands of Maximan ~~Doga~~ Daja and Licinian. ~~Doga~~ Daja had refused to consent to the edict of toleration. He did, indeed, inform some of his magistrates that they need not exert themselves in this cause, and in many cases a temporary peace followed. From a thousand mines and prisons the ~~accused~~ scarred warriors of Christ returned home. But still they were at the mercy of local rulers, many of whom were bitter against them and begged for the privileges of persecution. When Maximan was making his tour in the East he came to a huge memorial, especially prepared for him, representing a procession of the gods, and asking permission to banish the Atheists. At Tyre the town council put up a brass tablet forbidding Christianity within the city. On receiving the news of this Maximan wrote to them his delight: "At last weakness has become strength. The night of error is scattering; the mist is breaking. Ask what you like and you shall receive it." But the last of the persecutors had about finished his course. His fierce onsets had brought about a reaction, which ended in a civil war known as the First Crusade in which Doga was destined to be defeated.

Constantine, being elected to royal honor, upon the death of his brother, Constantine Chlorus, crossed the Alps and gained his famous victory over Maxientius in 312 A. D. Here Constantine had seen his vision and from this time on did homage to the conquoring power of the Cross. He met his colleague, Licinian, at Milan and from thence, issued the Magna Charta to the Christians, which read as follows: "We have long seen tha

we have no business to refuse freedom of religion. The power of seeing the matters of belief must be left to the judgment and desire of each individual according to the man's own free will." Had a European rulers ever after, who looked to Rome for law, been ready to accept the spirit of this edict of Constantine's, what suffering would have been spared and what wisdom would have been displayed!

Not long after this Doga was defeated by Licinian and the edict went into effect both in the East and the West, and Doga a fugitive dying in delirium tremens, when the end came, declared his adhesion to the policy of Constantine, and thus died the last of the persecutors of the early Roman emperors, having seen the church, which he had tried to crush, arise from the contest with still greater strength. The emperor was defeated; the Gallilean had at last conquered!

It might be well, in conclusion, to give a few concrete examples of suffering to impress upon our minds the cruelty of the methods of torture implied, as well as to set forth the fortitude and endurance of the Christians. I have already referred to the methods of torture employed by Nero when "Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths, covered with the skins of beasts they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burned. But fearful as this first attack was, it was by no means the climax of the suffering of the Christians. It might be compared to the first volley in the battle when the foe takes aim and mercifully

kills outright, leaving for the after battle the awful havoc of blind butchery when suffering men, praying for death, have it denied them. In the later persecutions the Cross itself was not deemed sufficient torture by the persecutors, so while hanging on the tree, the Christians were beaten by rods until their bowels gushed out, while vinegar and salt were rubbed into their wounds. Many were shut up in sacks with serpents and thrown into the sea; some were taken and tied to catapults, instruments of war, and the limbs wrung from their bodies. To see Christians cast to the wild beasts, or tied to the horns or swung in nets where they could be gored to death by infuriated animals, was a common spectacle of amusement in the arena of the theaters of the larger cities.

Many were made to lie on sharp shells and tortured with scrapers, claws and pincers before being delivered to the flames. The feet of some were slowly burned away while cold water was administered at intervals lest they should expire too rapidly. It is told of one of Diocletian's servants that he was scourged to the bone and made to stand near a gridiron that he might witness the roasting of pieces torn from his body. The backs of many were burned with melted lead, while a few, by the mercy of the emperor, escaped death, after being punished by the tearing out of their eyes or the wrenching of their limbs from their body. No wonder it was written of them, "These are they that have come up out of great tribulation." It cost in those days to witness for Christ. Yet we hope to gain some time

their heritage without suffering. Fortunate were those for whom there was the relief of death. In the deadly mines of Sardinia with chains on their limbs, and insufficient food, destitute of clothing and comforts; beaten by savage masters, many wore away a wretched existence.

For women there were punishments worse than death, the least of which was their exposure in the arena. Some were tied to trees, head-downwards, and left to perish of hunger and thirst. They were more fortunate than some of their sisters, many of whom were dragged to the brothels to suffer shame before being led to the stake or cast to the lions. Christians to the Panthers, virgins to the Pandars, the cry of bestial cruelty was no mere jest but part of the cost that must be paid for Christ's sake. Said Theodora, of Alexandria, when the judge read to her the cruel order: "If you force me to do this I do not think God will count it a sin." Some thought to escape in the destruction of their beauty, or even in suicide.

Among the stories of martyrdom none is more interesting and true to life than that of Perpetua,--with her estatic visions and her unconquerable faith, she is one of the heroic figures of the early church. She was of good family, liberal education and well married. She tells in part her own experience in prison. "I was terrified; never before had I experienced such awful darkness! O dreadful day! The heat, overpowering by reason of the crowd of prisoners, the extortions of the guard! Above all I was torn with anxiety for my babe."

Two deacons obtained her removal, for a few hours a day to a better room; "Then," says she, "I sat suckling my babe, who was slowly wasting away. Nevertheless the prison was made to me a palace." When brought before the judge and ordered to sacrifice to the emperor she refused, and was condemned with her comrades to fight the beasts. She went back with joy to her prison. When the day came for her to be torn in the net she seemed in an ecstacy of joy, and after being severely gored, she asked, "When are we to be tossed?" and could scarcely be induced to believe that she had suffered in spite of the marks on her body. Finally she was put to death by a gladiator, the first stab being purposely misdirected. The next she guided to her own throat the uncertain hand of the young gladiator. Not the least part of the agony of Perpetua, as well as of other martyrs, was the entreaties of loved ones, oftentimes brought by magistrates into the hall of justice for this very purpose. Pathetic, indeed, were the entreaties of her heathenfather, as told in her own words: "Daughter," he said,'"have pity on my gray hairs; have compassion on thy father. Do not give me over to disgrace. Behold thy brother, thy mother, behold thy child that cannot leave without thee. Do not destroy us all.' Thus spoke my father, kissing my hands and throwing himself at my feet. And I wept because of my father, for he alone of all my family would not rejoice at my martyrdom. So I comforted him saying, 'In this trial what God determines will take place. We are not in our own keeping, but in God's'. So he left me

weeping bitterly." But onthe day of the trial he was once more at the bar calling out as he held her child in his arms. "Mother have pity on your babe!" Truly Origen has said, "It was the love of wife and children that filled up the measure of martyrdom.

I mention another who was even of sterner mould. Cyprian the Bishop of Carthage, when brought before the Proconsul for trial, the Judge said, "Art thou Thrasius Cyprian, the Bishop of many imperious men? " The most sacred emperor commands thee to sacrifice." "I will not," replied the Bishop. "Consider well," was the answer. "Execute your orders," replied Cyprian. "The case admits of no consideration." With some reluctance, after conferring with his council, he read the sentence, To the effect that Cyprian should be immediately beheaded. "God be thanked!" Answered the Bishop. And he as sturdily received the blow of the persecutor's sword, ~~the same~~ as he had received the knowledge of his sentence. Examples could be multiplied of this type. They were so numerous that the emperors were impressed with the fact that the Christians were only too happy to die. As Cyprian said, "The tortured stood more firm than the torturors. The torn limbs overcame the hooks that tore them. The blood of the martyrs became, indeed, the seed of the church. In the fine figure of Justin, "The church was a vine which, the more it bled, under the pruning knife, the more fruitful it became." What was the secret of this marvelous growth in spite of persecution? Says a prominent historian,

"The opinion that no belief, no moral conviction can be eradicated from a country by persecution is a grave popular fallacy ---How then came this new, despised and persecuted religion to overcome the dangers and perils of so grave a nature with no external agency in its favor and every external power ranged against it? There exists for us as historians no human cause or combination of causes sufficient to account for the triumph of Christianity." There is but one reason--the reason given in Revelation. The new religion came from God and could not be over-thrown of men. One of the most significant observations we gain from the history of persecution is this, that persecution always tended to purify the church and the church purified was ever invincible. The martyrs were tempted in every way to compromise their religion with the religions of Greece and Rome. They could have secured peace, outward peace at least, by a mere lowering of their standards. This they could not do. It is to their lasting glory they could not. They spurned the very thoughts of receiving favor by any compromise of their faith. Well would it be for the church today could she learn the lesson they taught. The lowering of the standard of the church to the level of the world has never gained anything for the church, save a merited mockery and scorn. We need again to catch the martyr spirit, having no confidence in human strength, but an invincible faith in the power of God, fearing naught of the world but sin, and seeking above all things to be surrendered to God's will and to become a peculiar, rather than