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The Martyrs of Rome.

PART I.

The First and Second General Persecutions

O God! Thy soldiers' great Reward,
Their Portion, Crown, and faithful Lord,
From all transgressions set us free,
Who sing Thy Martyrs' victory.



DUBLIN:
CATHOLIC TRUTH SOCIETY OF IRELAND,
27 Lower Abbey Street.
1907.

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The Author desires it to be understood that, unless where he expressly states that the Church or the Holy See has recognised the truth of miracles or other supernatural manifestations referred to in the following pages, he claims no credence for them beyond what the available historical evidence may warrant.

Permissu Ordinarii Diocesis Dublinensis.

PREFACE.



IN the pages that follow readers will, doubtless, miss many names they have been accustomed to associate with the First and Second General Persecutions. The absence is easily explained. The writer's intention is simply to set forth the causes that led to the persecutions, and along with this to give some account of those who suffered therein. Not of all, however; but of those alone who gained the martyr's crown at Rome and for whose life and martyrdom sufficient historical evidence is found to exist.

Rome, June 24th, Commemoration-Day of the Martyrs of the Neronian Persecution.

THE MARTYRS OF ROME



PART I.

THE FIRST AND SECOND GENERAL PERSECUTIONS.

I.



SEVEN hundred and fifty-three years before the birth of Christ, a band of homeless outlaws and robbers settled down on the Palatine Hill, beside the banks of the river Tiber, and laid the first foundations of the City of Rome. For a while they had a hard struggle to live—they were few, and against them many hands were raised. But they were brave, they were united, they were determined to survive, and fortune smiled on them. Little by little their power grew—bit by bit their dominion increased. At war with some, in league with others, they marched steadily on the way of conquest—subduing one by one the surrounding villages and towns and clans and peoples, and bringing them under their sway, but always in such a way as to attract and attach the conquered to the rule of the conqueror, making them one people with themselves, with identical aims, similar hopes, the same laws, and one fatherland.

Read at this distance of time, Roman history reveals a course of events that to us may well seem the waving of the magician's wand, but which, to the Romans themselves,

appeared the work of their bounteous goddess—Fortune. Clans and tribes and peoples that had ruled their own territory during centuries that history can only vaguely guess at, fell back before the conquering march of the sons of that robber-band who had made their home in the city of the Seven Hills. Latin states bowed down before them; Etruscan cities opened their gates to them; Central Italy, from sea to sea, was theirs. The conquest of Southern Italy soon followed; and ere long the Roman rule embraced all Italy south of the river Po. And then, looking abroad to other lands, their gaze rested covetously on Carthage, the greatest naval power the world had yet seen. In the long and bitter struggle that ensued, Rome was more than once hard-pressed, and it sometimes seemed as if Roman confidence in Fortune was about to be rudely shaken. But Roman discipline and Roman valour prevailed; Carthage fell; and Rome easily, and as a matter of course, became mistress of Africa, Spain, and Northern Italy. The East next attracted her attention, and with like result—one after another, Greece, Asia Minor, Macedonia, Syria, became subject to her, and, when this was accomplished, the Mediterranean Sea became what it was to remain for well nigh a thousand years—a Roman lake, its blue waters gently laving no land that was not subject to Rome.

Then came dreary years, when the republic was torn and almost destroyed by the wild ambition of men striving madly for power. Out of this chaos, the genius of Julius Cæsar,—the conqueror of France, Switzerland, Germany, and England—emerged triumphant; and when he came to die a violent death, he had almost accomplished his dream of spreading the Roman eagles from the Atlantic Ocean on the West to the grim Caucasus on the East, and from the frozen sources of the Danube on the North to the burning sands of the great Sahara on the South. But what an early death had prevented Julius Cæsar from accomplishing, was effected by his nephew, Augustus Cæsar, first Emperor of Rome, and ruler of the world—for before his death the world, as people knew it then, was identical with the Empire of Rome—and thus it came to pass that Augustus could set about the task of taking a census of the whole world—“having the whole world enrolled,” as the Gospels express it. It was at this very time, and in the

little village hidden away amidst the Syrian Hills, whither Mary and Joseph, in obedience to the Emperor's order, had gone to give in their names as subjects of Rome, that the Saviour of Man was born.

To understand the origin, duration, and meaning of the general persecutions of the Church, it will be necessary to bear in mind some idea of the nature of the Roman Government, as moulded and formed by Augustus, as well as of the extent of the power wielded by him and his successors.

That power was, in one word, absolute. Previous to the time of Augustus, the government *had been*, on the whole, representative—the people at large, or at least a considerable section of them, having a voice in the selection of what we should now call their parliamentary representatives; in the appointment of officials; in the maintenance of law and order; and in the general conduct of military operations. Augustus kept up the appearance of popular election and representation, but the reality was gone—he was head of the state, head of the church, commander-in-chief of the army, and all officials in every department had power only in so far as it was derived from him. His power over the whole world—over its fate and fortunes—was absolutely independent of all control.

We have said the Roman Emperor was head of the church, or, as we should perhaps call it, the established religion of that day. The Romans were then, and had ever been, an intensely religious people—deeply attached to the many gods to whom they bowed in worship. Every phase of nature, every action of life, every turn of good and evil fortune, was attributed to one or other of the many deities that were enshrined on the altars of Rome's glittering temples. It was no mere form, but a firmly-rooted instinct of the Roman mind, and the outcome of the belief of centuries, that ascribed to the national gods the nation's greatness, and regarded reverence to them as a mark of a true Roman. How sorely this belief was to press on the Christians of the first three centuries shall appear in the course of the pages that follow.

The priest-in-chief, or Pontifex Maximus, had from the beginning been a person of the very highest importance. He surely did not cease to be such when his office and that

of the ruler of the state were united in one and the same individual, as happened in the case of Augustus and his successors. It thus became part of the Emperor's duty to watch over the national religion, to guard it from all danger, to elevate it, and, in elevating it, to raise himself still higher in the imagination and estimation of the people. It is easy to imagine the extravagant lengths to which such a conception of religion was liable to carry the people, and the temptation it was likely to engender in the mind of a ruler who was independent of all control. Hence it causes little surprise to find the immediate successors of Augustus attaching more and more importance to this office of Pontifex Maximus, until at length divine honours and a place among the gods were decreed solemnly to the profligate and cruel author of the First General Persecution—the Emperor Nero.

Nero became Emperor at the early age of seventeen. No reign ever began with brighter promise than his. In his early years he was, to all appearances, gentle, humane, prone to good, fearful of evil. But manhood did not redeem the promise of his youth. Whether it was that his nature was radically vicious, or whether, as some explain, his mind became unhinged by a severe illness, Nero was not long in power before the bright promises of his early years were dimmed, and he entered on that mad career of cruelty, crime, and sin that has made his name a by-word and a reproach, and a type of all that is vile and base in man. Henceforward no one was safe—he spared neither high nor low, neither rich nor poor; neither friend nor foe, neither relative nor stranger. His mother died at his hands. His wife owed her death to him. His teacher and first friend had to commit suicide by the orders of that pupil of whom he was once so proud. Restrained by no earthly consideration, controlled by no hand, he ran his headlong career; and he who was at once “a priest, an atheist, and a god” came to regard the world and all it contained as a mere plaything to be used at his own sweet will. And, finally, when the terrified Romans saw their city reduced to ashes, small wonder if they were not slow to suspect their Emperor of having caused the conflagration.

The popular idea of this celebrated event pictures Nero standing on a lofty tower overlooking the city that had

been given over to flames by his order, and, violin in hand, singing songs of joy to commemorate a spectacle that was indeed worthy of an emperor and a god. The tower on which he is said to have stood is sometimes pointed out, but, unfortunately for the truth of the picture, the tower in question was not then built, nor indeed for several centuries later; and it is not at all certain that Nero was in Rome when the conflagration first burst out.

The facts were these: The fire broke out the 1st of July. For six days it raged—furious, beyond all control, devouring houses, shops, palaces, temples—the stately homes of the high and mighty, along with the rude cottages of the poor and lowly. For a time it was checked, but only to burst forth fiercely once more. And when, three days later, it was finally got under control, the frenzied Romans gazed in awe at the result of the calamity that had laid waste ten of the fourteen districts of which Rome was made up. They saw themselves homeless, with famine staring them in the face; and, to crown the bitterness of the cup, came the knowledge that the priceless records and memorials of a thousand years of national glory were scattered and destroyed beyond hope of recovery.

For some days the one thought that occupied the mind of all was how to procure food and shelter for the starving and homeless population. Nero did a man's part in assuaging distress; and his energetic action found many imitators. But no amount of restitution could stifle the gathering indignation, nor lessen the suspicion, becoming daily stronger and stronger, that the author of the conflagration was their vicious and profligate emperor; his character, his actions, various remarks made by him—all pointed to him as the man. He saw the gathering storm and the impending ruin that lay behind it, and, with the cunning and success of the father of lies, he set himself deliberately to attach the guilt to someone else. He looked round for a scapegoat, and his baneful gaze finally rested on the Christians and the young Christian Community of Rome.

II.

IN the interval of thirty years between the Crucifixion at Calvary and the Conflagration in Rome, Christianity had come to take up its home in the City of the Seven Hills. Its first seeds were carried to the world's capital by the traders, soldiers, travellers coming to and fro between Rome and the Holy Land; and ere many years had passed there was a flourishing little band of Christians in the Eternal City, ready to welcome St. Peter and St. Paul. Under the inspiring influence of these two great apostles, Christianity grew apace in Rome, found adherents amongst every class and nationality, and even penetrated into the very palace of the emperor. The spread of the new religion caused no remark for some time—the Christians were, in fact, regarded as identical with the Jews, who formed a recognised and lawful religious association at Rome. But to the Jews the name Christian was an abomination, and they left no stone unturned to convince the Roman authorities that between them and the Christians there was an immeasurable gulf. How well they succeeded shall appear presently.

“In order to put down the suspicion that was directed towards himself, he (Nero) accused and handed over to punishment that sect of men who were detested for their wickedness, and were known as Christians. . . . A vast number were convicted, not so much, however, on the charge of having caused the fire, but rather for their hatred to the human race.” So writes the Roman historian Tacitus, and his words make it clear that while the first persecution was founded on a charge of having set fire to Rome, it really was due to the fact that the Christians had come to be regarded as enemies to the state, and distrusted as exercising an injurious influence on the nation. It is not difficult to account for this feeling against the Christians—it sprung from their very life and religion. Their retired life, their secret meetings, their disinclination to explain certain of their beliefs, their abstention from public offices and appointments, their refusal to join in public celebrations, their undisguised hatred for the shows and spectacles that were dear to the Roman heart, their gravity of conduct, their

joyless seeming, their mournful habits—all these marked them out as, at the very least, peculiar, and at variance with the traditions and modes of life hitherto prevailing, and led gradually to the belief that they hated and were inimical to Roman civilization, which was of course taken as identical with the welfare of the human race. This feeling was intensified by the attitude of the Christians towards the religion of Rome.

To a Roman, the fate and fortunes of his country seemed to be bound to the national religion by ties that could not be severed—the safety of the nation depended on the worship and respect paid to the national gods. It was, indeed, permitted to profess other religions, and worship other gods; but to assert that these other gods alone were true, was nothing short of an attack on Rome—on its religion, its institutions, its wonderful fortune, and its political power—it was simply unpatriotic, and, more than that, it was equivalent to a direct attack on the nation's welfare, and as such was neither more nor less than treason.

This accounts for many apparent contradictions in the history of the persecutions. Thus the Romans had never refused to respect the prevailing national beliefs of the peoples they had conquered. Christianity professed that it belonged to no nation, but had come to convert the wide world to its teaching—thus leaving all questions of nationality out of count. This attitude, which, at first sight, might seem in favour of Christianity, was in reality the cause of all the ill-feeling that grew up against it. For it meant that the old gods of Rome had to go, that their day was over, that the established religion had to give way before that of Christ. Since, then, the good and patriotic Roman believed that the welfare of his country depended on the worship and favour of the national gods, it was a clear and patriotic duty to preserve that religion, and repress Christianity that attacked it. Hence it was that the belief that Christianity was injurious to mankind in general, and to the Roman Empire in particular, became a fixed and settled conviction, and led to a system of repressive legislation and persecution that was to recur for nearly three centuries with terrible frequency.

The intense feelings of the early Christians led only too readily to suspicion. They fixed their hopes on the life to

come; they proclaimed to all that the present life was fleeting, that it was to pass away one day; that even the great Roman Empire should not last, but should bow down before the Cross of Christ; that henceforth Christ was to rule in place of Jove; and, the vivid imagination of some of the early Church, made it known that these things were to come to pass ere many years, when the world, solid as it was, should be consumed by fire.

This much was known about them, and such was the popular conception regarding them, when Nero sought to avert from his own door the suspicion of having burned Rome. He found the Jews ready to his hand; they were looked down upon and regarded with contempt; and their mode of life and general character were such as to predispose people to regard them with anything but favour. Therefore, when Nero hinted that the Jews had set fire to Rome, he had little difficulty in persuading the Romans that they were possibly the culprits—a conclusion that gained ground from the fact that the Jewish quarters of the city had escaped all damage. The Jews saw the gathering clouds, and they resolved to turn to good use the difference between them and the Christians. Many times before they had drawn attention to this difference, and, to heighten it, they had accused the Christians of vague crimes, and of debased and brutal religious ceremonies and meetings. They made the most of the prejudice they had been gradually creating, and in the wild passion of the moment they found little trouble in convincing the public that the Christians were guilty of nameless crimes, were baneful and injurious to the human race, and had contributed by their impiety to bring down on the city the vengeance of the gods. Reason was lost sight of—vengeance only was thought of. The gods had sent an awful calamity on Rome—was it not because they were angry with the new religion? Rome had been destroyed by fire—was it not the Christians who had over and over again foretold the destruction of the world by fire? It was the duty of every good citizen to support the religion of his country—and were not they in open rebellion against the national gods? Whether they had or had not set fire to Rome, it was clear that they were in some way accountable for the calamity, and this being so, no punishment could be too severe for them. So men

reasoned, and the result was—the First General Persecution.

Of that cruel story the Roman historian—Tacitus—already quoted, supplies the bare outlines: “A very large multitude was convicted, not so much on the charge of having caused the fire, as for their hatred to the human race . . . To enhance the spectacle, mockery and derision were added to their agony. Some were wrapped in the skins of wild beasts, and were torn to pieces by dogs. Others were raised aloft to die on crosses. Others were told off to be set on fire, and, when day had given way to darkness, were burned as torches to light up the night. Nero lent his own gardens for the entertainment, and he ordered a chariot-race there, in which he might be seen mounted on his car, or mixing among the people dressed as a common charioteer. The result of all this cruelty was that a feeling of pity began to be felt towards the victims, who, even though they were guilty and deserved the extremest penalties, yet were destroyed, not for the common good, but to glut the savage cruelty of one man.”

Where the Vatican palace and the glorious Church of St. Peter's now stand, and where stood then the circus or amphitheatre of Caligula and the gardens of Nero, were enacted those scenes that flash out so luridly from the pages of Tacitus. To enhance the spectacle prepared for the people, Nero had thrown open his private grounds between the Tiber and the Vatican Mount. They were adorned with all the magnificence of the Rome of that day—they have long ago disappeared, and of all the splendour with which they were embellished only one object remains—the tall obelisk of Egyptian granite that now raises its graceful form in the centre of the square in front of St. Peter's. It was then nearer the mount—somewhere in the vicinity of the present sacristy. If that obelisk could only speak, what tales it might tell of those August nights of the year of our Lord 64. It would tell how “the gardens were thronged with gay crowds, among whom the Emperor moved in his frivolous degradation—and on every side were men dying slowly on their cross of shame. Along the paths of those gardens, on the autumn nights, were ghastly torches, blackening the ground beneath them with streams of sulphurous pitch, and each of these *living torches was a*

martyr in his shirt of fire. And in the amphitheatre hard by, in sight of twenty thousand spectators, famished dogs were tearing in pieces some of the best and purest of men and women, hideously disguised in the skins of bears or wolves." There was worse than that—weak and delicate women suffered terrible and monstrous indignities, which St. Clement barely alludes to, and which we can only vaguely guess at, before blessed death came to their relief.

How long did these scenes last? How many were the victims? We do not know. Tacitus does not state, neither does St. Clement. We only know that the victims were a "very great multitude," and the expression would seem to indicate an extended period of time over which the fiery ordeal lasted.

III.

OF all the martyrs that received their crown under Nero, the names of two alone are known to us—the glorious apostles Peter and Paul, who suffered martyrdom about the year 67; the one by crucifixion in the place where the majestic basilica dedicated to his memory now stands; the other by decapitation at some distance outside Rome, near the church and monastery of the Three Fountains, where, in later centuries, St. Bernard and our own St. Malachy loved to revel in heavenly conversation. The two great apostles had fought the good fight; they had been witnesses to Christ in many lands; they had carried the good tidings of His Blessed Name to the uttermost ends of the earth; and now the time was at hand when they were about to finish their course and show they burned with the "greater love," and were ready to lay down their lives for their Friend.

Ere yet the days of persecution had come to an end, the two apostles found themselves at Rome. A touching story told by St. Ambrose relates that Peter was urged to leave the city till the persecution had blown over, so as not to risk his life, which was so precious to the Church. He consented; but as he fled from Rome along the Appian Way, Our Saviour appeared to him with face turned towards

the city. Peter, in wonder, cried out : " Lord, where art Thou going ? " The Saviour, with face all sad, replied : " I go to Rome to be crucified a second time " ; and Peter, taking this as a sign that he was to face what lay before him, returned in gladness to what he knew was to be his death.

He was arrested and consigned forthwith to the terror and gloom of the Mamertine Prison, in which St. Paul was already confined. One may stand in that self-same prison to-day, and try to probe the thoughts that filled the minds of the two apostles as they awaited the day of execution. But no human imagination may venture to pierce the inaccessible heights to which their hearts were raised as they penned their last letters, and bade their last earthly farewell to the children they were leaving behind. Then one day they were brought before the dread tribunal of Cæsar on the Palatine to face the majesty of Roman law. Nero was then absent in Greece, but the Consul presided, assisted by the senators. Possibly the trial excited interest, and crowds ran to hear what these two strangers, who preached such curious doctrines, had to say for themselves ; possibly it excited no comment at all—such scenes had been only too common. But there could be no doubt as to the result of the trial. The charge was high treason against the welfare of the state—there was abundant evidence that they had spoken against the gods of Rome—and the sentence was death.

" When thou wert young," said Our Saviour to Peter, " thou used to put on thy own girdle, and walk wherever thou didst wish ; but when thou hast grown old, thou must hold out thy hands and someone else shall put on thy girdle and lead thee where thou dost not wish." Some years later—after Peter had gone to his reward—St. John, who narrates the prophecy, adds, just as if the fact were already known to all the world : " He (Jesus) said this to show the kind of death by which Peter was to glorify God." For, that death was to be a violent one—one against which nature recoiled—and by crucifixion : he was bound by other hands than his own, and he was called on to stretch out his arms and die as his Master had died, with hands expanded on the cross. But not altogether in the same manner. For, at his own request—a request made lest he should seem

too presumptuous in dying the very self-same death as the Man of Calvary, and granted only too readily because it was more cruel—Peter was crucified head downwards. And as he hung there for hours of dread agony, with no gentle word to cheer him, and with the scoffs of the bystanders ringing in his ears, not one of that immense crowd of spectators could dream that the poor fisherman of Galilee was the head of a new order of things that was to supplant the old and renew the face of the earth. And so he died an ignoble death in the very place where the glorious Church is now raised to God in honour of the prince of the Apostles.

The death of St. Paul was less painful and more noble ; for he was a Roman citizen, and, even in death, the law decreed a Roman citizen should not be treated with indignity, nor with an ignominious end of lingering torture. He was to be beheaded, and accordingly the same day on which St. Peter suffered, he was led to the place of execution, some five miles from the city. “As the martyr and his executioners passed on, their way was crowded with a motley multitude of goers and comers between the metropolis and its harbour—merchants hastening to superintend the unloading of their cargoes,—sailors eager to squander the profits of their last voyage in the dissipations of the Capital,—officials of the government, charged with the administration of the provinces, or the commander of the legions on the Euphrates or the Rhine,—Chaldean astrologers—mendicant priests from Egypt, howling for Osiris—Greek adventurers, eager to coin their national cunning into Roman gold—representatives of the avarice and ambition, the fraud and lust, the superstition and intelligence of the Imperial world. Through the dust and tumult of that busy throng the small troop of soldiers treaded their way silently, under the bright sky of an Italian midsummer.”* The scene of the martyrdom was soon reached. It was known then as *Ad Aquas Salvias* ; to-day it is called the Three Fountains, and is visited every year by thousands who come to gaze on the spot made sacred by the blood of the Apostle of the Gentiles.

Before quitting this subject, something remains to be said regarding the relics of the two apostles. The body of

*Conybeare and Howson—*Life and Epistles of St. Paul*.

St. Peter was reverently laid to rest on the verge of the Vatican Mount, quite near the place of martyrdom, and precisely where is now the High Altar of St. Peter's; that of St. Paul was carried towards Rome and deposited near the road that leads from the city to the sea. In the years that followed, rude memorials were, it would seem, erected over their graves, and these were respected even in times of persecution, for Roman law held sacred the resting places of the dead, and forbade, under severe penalties, the violation of graves. The tomb of St. Peter in the beginning, and for many years to come, could, indeed, have been little more than a simple vault; but his successors loved to lay their bones near the great apostle, and over it Pope Anacletus raised a tiny oratory which, down to the year 202, continued to mark the burial place of the popes.

Thus the Vatican contained the body of St. Peter, and St. Paul's, outside Rome, that of St. Paul. But in the year 258, owing to some cause that is not known to us, the venerable relics were removed to the Catacombs of St. Sebastian, some five miles from Rome. Here they were preserved for a time till they were restored to their original resting places, where they have remained throughout all the ages, a precious treasure of veneration to the faithful of the Catholic Church.

The people had by this time begun to tire of Nero. His enormities had become more than they could bear. He heard the distant mutterings of vengeance, and retired from Rome to the East. The anniversary day of his mother's murder, the 19th of March, 68, he was at Naples, when the news was brought him that the people had broken into open rebellion. He felt little alarm, relying on his mighty power and the terror of his name; and it was only when he learned that Germany and Spain were in arms against him, that he fully realised the desperate nature of his position and hurriedly returned to Rome. Mad schemes of vengeance chased each other through his brain, only to be succeeded by miserable moods of despair. His palace was deserted, his property stolen; not a soldier remained faithful to him. In terror, he rushed wildly out of the city, with not a place to offer him shelter, and with only four attendants to follow him. The curses of the people came floating through the air, and he crawled into a villa offered

to him in his hour of distress by one to whom he had shown some kindness. Ere long, despatches reached him from Rome to tell him the senate had declared him a public enemy, who was to be punished as the ancient laws of the country directed. On asking what this meant, he was told that he would be stripped naked and scourged to death. Horrified, he called for daggers, but, coward that he was, he dared not use them. At length the sound of horses' hoofs ringing on the road outside told him that his pursuers were upon him. He held the dagger to his own throat, and one of his slaves drove it home just as the soldiers rushed into the room. This was the 11th of June, 68. So died Nero, and the First General Persecution came to an end.

Calm was at length restored, and for a period of thirty years, the Christians who once more became identified, to all intents and purposes, with the Jews, were left unmolested to enjoy the fruits of blessed peace—to increase and multiply and reap openly and without hindrance the ripe harvest that sprung up from the blood of the martyrs. It seemed as if peace and prosperity were henceforth to be the portion of the followers of Christ. Providence decreed otherwise. After the lapse of thirty years, the Emperor Domitian renewed the scenes of blood and suffering and recalled the days of Nero.

IV.

LIKE Nero, Domitian's reign opened brightly. He ruled wisely, and it seemed as if he was going to follow in the glorious footsteps of the noble line of the Flavian emperors to which he belonged. His praises were sounded loudly—he was “a holy ruler,” who restored “the temples to the gods, and good morals to the people,” and “made Rome chaste once more.” But he was extravagant; he loved to raise costly buildings, and this mania—for mania it was—demanded unlimited supplies of money. He exacted it openly as long as he dared, and then he fell back on the resources supplied him by his unlimited power. The result was—a second Nero.

His plan was simplicity itself. Around him he kept a band of informers and perjurers, whose business in life it

was to make and prove accusations of high treason against the rich and noble. These were condemned, and their property passed by law to the Emperor for his own personal use. The informers did their work and were a power in the land. No house was too noble, no name too illustrious—money was the one crime that knew no pardon in the eyes of the imperial court. But this source of revenue, almost unbounded as it was, could not satisfy the cupidity of the Emperor. On the other hand, however much he might oppress the rich, he dare not touch the people at large; for they might rise up against him, and he might meet his fate at their hands as had happened to others before him. He found a way out of the difficulty.

Since their final defeat by the Romans in 70, the Jews had had to pay a special tax to their conquerors. Hitherto this applied only to Jews by birth, and did not include the Christians. But Domitian now decreed that the tax should be paid by all who belonged in any way to the Jewish religion. His decree had unlooked-for consequences—by a curious chain of circumstances it led to the Second Persecution. In popular opinion, the Christians were still more or less identified with the Jews. It was, of course, well known that they were divided on certain questions. But the two religions were regarded as practically one and the same, or rather Christianity was considered as essentially a branch of the Jewish worship. Up to the time of Domitian's decree, no one had paid much attention either to the points of similarity or of difference. But it was now to the advantage both of the imperial treasury and of the informers to regard the Christians as Jews, and as affected by the new tax. It was a cruel alternative that confronted the Christians. To them, Jews and Romans were the same—both were members of a false religion. If they consented to pay the tax, it would, it seemed to them, be just the same as if they admitted they really did form a branch of the Jewish religion, and this they considered would be equivalent to an open denial of their own faith. It could not be thought of for a moment, and accordingly they refused to contribute on the ground that they were not Jews. Their refusal gave the informers an opportunity they were not slow to take advantage of. Heretofore, during the thirty years of peace, Christianity had been tolerated, on the supposition that it

was, after all, part and parcel of the Jewish religion, which was, in the eyes of the law, a recognised form of worship. But now by their refusal the Christians made it perfectly clear that they belonged to no recognised or lawful form of religion—they were neither Jews nor pagans—they worshipped no recognised gods—nay, they even denied the existence of the national gods of Rome, and consequently they were *atheists*,* and, as such, punishable by law. The informers quickly found this out, and the result was—the Second Persecution.

For a while it would seem as if only the wealthy Christians were interfered with. The object was to exact and confiscate money, of which little could be expected from those who had none. The informers, however, could easily find plenty of victims amongst the rich and noble, the philosophers and senators. Christianity no longer skulked in the back lanes of Rome, nor was it confined to the poor, the miserable and the slaves. It had boldly entered into the household of the Emperor, and had found staunch adherents amongst his relatives—the very heirs to the imperial throne were Christians; and, if nothing were to happen, a few years had only to pass when the ruler of the world would be one of the followers of the Crucified. It was their wealth and position that led to their undoing. Domitian wanted their money, and their Christianity was an easy excuse for robbing them. Accordingly the informers set to work, the charge of “atheism and Jewish practices” was easily proven, and condemnation and confiscation followed as a matter of course.

* It may cause some surprise to find the Christians accused of Atheism: yet such was undoubtedly the case. The charge is referred to over and over again—amongst others by Dion, St. Justin, Athenagoras, Minucius, Felix, and Eusebius. As already explained, the charge meant denial of the Roman deities, and opposition to the Roman forms of worship. The charge was often coupled with that of *impiety*, which was, roughly speaking, equivalent to high treason, and which was founded on the idea that the Christians were opposed to the National religion, and, consequently, to the welfare of the nation.

V.

WE know that Christian blood flowed freely; but scant details have survived to preserve the names of the champions of the faith who laid down their lives in the Second Persecution. A few, however, have come to light after the oblivion of centuries. Foremost amongst these stands Titus Flavius Clemens. He was a Christian. He was a relative of the Emperor, and he was married to Flavia Domitilla, the Emperor's niece, and granddaughter of a former Emperor, Vespasian. His two sons had been adopted by the Emperor. Of his life little is known, beyond the fact that he held high offices and was made consul by Domitian in the year 95. But he showed small interest in affairs of state, and was blamed by his contemporaries for his "*contemptible inertness*," which we may take to mean his want of ambition and his aloofness from the public life of the day. Like other Christians, he found himself unable to be present at public functions and celebrations which were so often of a religious character, and in which there was much that was offensive to his religion, if not downright idolatrous. Domitian, having no sons of his own, had adopted the two sons of Clemens, and publicly declared them heirs to his throne. Not many years had passed ere he had sent their father to martyrdom, and exiled their mother, while they are heard of no more, and were perhaps victims of the tyrant's jealousy. In all probability the news that Clemens was a Christian came on Domitian by surprise, and could not but fill him with fear. Taken in connexion with the fact that a number refused to pay the tax because they were Christians, the presence of one of that sect in his own household and near his throne filled him with suspicion and nameless dread. Visions of a plot for his ruin danced before his eyes. The word went forth, and Clemens and many more were called on to lay down their lives on the charge of atheism, while others, Flavia Domitilla amongst the rest, were sent into exile, or, as we should say now, were sent into penal servitude, or transported.

Another illustrious martyr was Acilius Glabrio, condemned also for atheism and for strange beliefs and practices, which of course means Christianity. There was some doubt

as to whether Glabrio really had suffered for the faith, but recent discoveries in the catacombs have brought to light sufficient evidence to warrant us in counting him amongst the martyrs.

And finally, with the Second Persecution is linked the glorious name of the Beloved Disciple of our Lord, St. John the Evangelist. He was the last of the Apostles—the others had passed to their reward through the ordeal of blood. James the Great had suffered martyrdom at Jerusalem; so had James the Just. Thomas had well made up for his incredulity, and had laid down his life in the Indies, whither he had carried the faith in the Risen One; and nearer home Philip had won the martyr's crown in Phrygia. John had been brought to Rome while the persecution still raged. So well known a personage could hardly hope to escape the informers. Accordingly it is related that he was arrested at Ephesus in 95, twenty-eight years after Peter and Paul had sanctified Rome by their blood. He was brought before the Emperor, was questioned whether he was a Christian, was called on to deny his faith and offer sacrifice to the divinity of the Emperor. Condemnation followed refusal, and John was hurried to the place of punishment. This was beside one of the principal gates of the city—the Latin Gate—a place rich in historic memories, and commanding a lovely view of the smiling plain dotted over with villas and residences that lay stretched out between Rome and the azure slopes of Albano nestling in purple splendour against the cloudless sky. It is said that the Emperor was present on that occasion. If it be true, we may well pause to consider the contrast presented by these two men. One a type and example of all that was selfish, mean, and base—the other the living incarnation of honour, love, and truth; one the master of the world, with power unlimited—the other poor and lowly, with no home he could call his own; one passing sentence and gloating over another victim—the other meekly obeying and marching to his death; no one who looked on the two men could guess that the band to which John belonged, and the cause for which he was about to suffer, would one day triumph over the power represented by Domitian, and that where that day the Roman eagles fluttered their wings proudly, would one day be raised aloft in honour the lowly sign of the Cross.

John was first scourged with rods. He was then plunged into a cauldron of boiling oil—but He who preserved the three youths in the fiery furnace stretched out His hand over John, “the seething mass became a gentle dew,” and John came forth unharmed. He had gone through his martyrdom and still lived. This was the 6th of May, in the year of Our Lord 96. He was banished from Rome, and henceforth his name becomes associated with the island of Patmos and the city of Ephesus.

The persecution was drawing to its end. So long as Domitian confined his tyranny to the rich and noble, few beside the victims cared. But when, fearing a plot to supplant him on the throne, he attacked the Christians in the humbler walks of life, it was altogether different—he found that he could not oppress one section of the people without incurring the vengeance of all the rest, and, wise in his time, he revoked the persecution. A curious incident is said to have led to his decision. When, driven to fear by the numbers who were found to belong to the new religion, he made it his business to enquire carefully into the history of that Person whom the Christians looked to as their Founder and obeyed as their King, he was told that relatives of Christ were then living in Syria. He had them brought to Rome and conducted before him; but when he saw their horny hands, their bodies bent by toil, and their whole appearance denoting poverty; and when he found from their answers that the kingdom they belonged to was not of this world, but was to be manifested only when this world had passed away, he recognised that these men were not conspirators, and that his throne had nothing to fear from them. He accordingly dismissed them—and the persecution came to an end.

But it was too late for him to escape his fate. The world was tired of him, and the time had come when he, too, was to share the punishment meted out to Nero. He feared this, and suspicion and superstition lent terror to his days. None were admitted to his presence without being previously searched; the walls of the hall in which he passed his time were lined with polished marble to reflect the image of possible assassins; and he daily consulted fortune-tellers as to possible rivals to his throne. It is said they foretold the day of his death. The day came, and the appointed hour passed

with no signs of danger. Relieved, he prepared for his evening meal. But the danger was creeping close upon him. It is said that his Empress found by chance a list of victims destined to death, in which her own name was included, and that to save her own life she contrived a plot for his assassination. Be that as it may, the assassin stole on the tyrant; a desperate struggle ensued; the Emperor fought madly for life, and had almost conquered his assailant, when others who were in the plot came to their companion's assistance, and—Domitian followed Nero. This was the 18th September, 96, eight months exactly after the martyrdom of Flavius Clemens.

VI.

THE successors of St. Peter followed in his footsteps. St. Linus was Pope from the 30th of June, 67, to the 23rd of September, 78, the date of his martyrdom. No trustworthy details of his life or death have survived. We only know that he was buried beside the body of St. Peter, and a small fragment of his tomb, on which is carved the single word Linus, still exists. The next Pope, Clefús, went to receive the crown of his martyrdom in April, 88, when he was succeeded by St. Clement of Rome.

Of all the early Popes after St. Peter, there were few whose memories were so dear to the people of Rome as Clement. Though, as far as can be ascertained, his martyrdom took place early in the second century, yet, as his life and labours belong for the most part to the first century, it will be well to include his name and story amongst those heroes who fought the good fight in the first century.

Amongst the many who listened to the words of Peter, was the Roman youth Clement. Ere long he embraced the teaching of the Apostle, was baptized by him, and became one of the most fervent Christians of that fervent age. He devoted himself to the labours of the apostolate, became companion and fellow-worker with St. Paul, was ordained deacon, priest, and finally bishop by St. Peter; and in God's good time became Pope, in which capacity he governed the infant Church for about ten years, including the stormy and trying days of the persecution of Domitian.

He was banished to the Island of Cherson, away in the Euxine Sea, where he found hundreds of Christians who had been condemned to work in the marble quarries of that island. His presence encouraged them, his miracles assisted them; but his name and labours attracted attention, and his death was decreed. He was cast into the sea, and one of the noblest lives of the early Church came to an end. But legend tells how the sea preserved the sacred body and restored it to his friends and followers, who carefully treasured it, and it now reposes in the beautiful church dedicated to his name at Rome.

Amongst the most precious monuments handed down to us from that age, a letter written by Pope Clement holds the foremost place. So highly was it esteemed, that for centuries it was regularly read in various churches, and was regarded with little less reverence than the Sacred Scriptures themselves. Its object was to end a quarrel that had arisen between the Christians of Corinth in consequence of the high-handed action of some young men who had driven out the tried and true pastors from the churches, and had caused great confusion and much scandal. We may fittingly conclude this sketch of the First and Second General Persecutions with a passage or two from this beautiful and celebrated document, which is steeped in the very atmosphere of Christianity, and paints in simple and touching language the life led by the early Christians. It commences thus: "The Church of God, which is at Rome, to that which is at Corinth—to those who have been called and sanctified in the will of God, through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Having referred to the dissensions that divided them, he recalls to mind their former happy condition:

"Who is there who knew you and did not see that faith of yours, so strong, so firm, so rich in every virtue? Who has not admired that piety of yours, so prudent and so peaceful in Christ? Who has not praised these hospitable customs of yours, so liberal and so splendid? And who has not valued that wisdom of yours, so perfect and unerring? All things were done by you without any exception of persons. You walked in the

laws of God ; you were obedient to your Pastors ; you showed your superiors the respect due to them ; you taught young men and maidens prudence and honesty ; you encouraged the women amongst you to live in blameless, chaste, and clean consciences with due love towards their husbands. . . . All were practised in humility, with not a trace of vain-glory—more ready to give than to receive, more prompt to obey than command ; content with the gifts of God, to whom you turned your thoughts, diligently studying His words, and lovingly embracing them. And so, deep and abounding peace, with untiring will to do good, was given to you all. The bounteous outpourings of the Holy Spirit were copiously bestowed on you, and, filled with holy will, sincere promptness, and devout confidence, you were wont to raise your hands to the Omnipotent God, in suppliant prayer for forgiveness of the sins of human frailty ; mindful also day and night of the needs of your brethren in Christ, you prayed that they, in holy fear and with clean conscience, might be enabled to work out their salvation. Thus disposed, you were sincere and simple, knowing no bitterness, forgetful of injuries. Contention and discord were hateful to you. You wept over the sins of others just as if they were your own. You turned away from no good deed—‘ for every good work ready.’ Adorned with virtue, leading a perfect and venerable life, you did all things in God’s holy fear—His law and commands being written deeply in your hearts.”

He then passes on to consider the change that had come to reduce the Church at Corinth to its present evil plight—a condition due to jealousy and envy. This affords him an opportunity of describing the evil effects that had at all times followed in the wake of jealousy ; and the consideration of these effects leads him to speak of the necessity of penance :

“ Let us,” he continues, “ fix our eyes on the Blood of Christ ; let us bring home to our minds how dear to God the Father is that Blood, which, poured forth for our salvation, has purchased the grace of penance for

the benefit of all mankind. Let us review all the days of the world, and we shall find that in every age the Lord has given the means of penance to those who desire to return to Him."

After numerous examples of the effects of penance, he comes to consider the virtues of humility and obedience, and the blessed peace that results therefrom. Peace, harmony and obedience are dear to God. Everything proves this :

"The heavens, moving under His direction, obey Him in peace. Day and night, with not the smallest sign of conflict, fulfil the course marked out by Him. The earth, bountifully productive according to His will, unhesitatingly and unchangeably carrying out His decrees, brings forth abundantly and in due season the food that is necessary to man and beast and every living thing. The unsearchable abysses and the unutterable paths of the deep are bounded by His laws. The mighty volume of the sea, heaped up together by His ruling hand, goes not beyond its bounds, but as He has directed, so does it obey. The trackless ocean and the worlds that lie beyond its waves are ruled by the self-same laws of the Lord. Spring, summer, autumn, winter, calmly and peacefully follow in succession. The winds fulfil their task, not daring to disobey; the perennial springs, made for man's health and use, unfailingly send forth their bountiful supplies to cherish the life of man; and even the tiniest living things work together in peace and concord. All these the great Artisan and Lord of all established in peace and concord, bountiful to all, and most of all to us who fly to His protection through Christ, our Lord, to whom be glory and might for endless ages."

Such are the benefits the Christian receives from the hands of God,—benefits he may easily lose, if he refuses to live in peace and concord.

He then passes on to mention the rewards that are promised to the good, and the penalties threatened to the wicked. That these things will come to pass, the Resurrec-

tion of Christ abundantly proves ; and of the Resurrection itself we have a sure pledge in the omnipotence of God. God, then, must be worshipped in holiness and love, so that His bounteous blessing may shine forth in sincere faith and good works. In this Christ is our Leader, we His soldiers. Being thus similar to an army, all things should proceed in due order and inter-dependence, the lower subject to the higher. Christ received His mission from God the Father, the apostles theirs from Christ ; the bishops and deacons theirs from the apostles who ordained them lest contention should arise when they themselves had passed away. They, then, who attempt to depose these bishops, priests, or deacons, thus lawfully ordained and appointed, act against the will and order of God. This leads him to speak of the charms of union and charity, the confession of sins, prayer for sinners, fraternal admonition, threats against the turbulent and disobedient and those who disturb the peace of the Church. He then bursts forth into this beautiful prayer :—

“ We pray thee, O Lord, to be our Protector and Helper. Free those of us who are in distress ; have pity on the lowly ; lift up the fallen ; come to the help of the needy ; heal the infirm ; set our captives free ; raise up the ignorant ; strengthen the weak. Let all nations know that Thou alone art God, that Jesus Christ is Thy Son, and that we are ‘ Thy people, and the sheep of Thy fold.’ . . . Give concord and peace to us and to all the dwellers on the earth, as formerly Thou didst grant it to our fathers, who holily invoked Thee in faith and truth—to us who are obedient to Thy Omnipotent and All-holy Name, and to our princes and rulers on the earth. . . . As for the rest, may God, the Searcher of all hearts—the Lord of every soul and the heir of all mankind—may He who elected our Lord Jesus Christ, and made us through Him to be a chosen people, grant to every soul that invokes His Glorious and Holy Name, faith, fear, peace, patience, equanimity, purity, chastity, modesty, through our great High Priest and Patron, Jesus Christ, through whom be glory and majesty, power and honour to God the Father, now and for endless ages.”

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