

ROSES OF MARTYRDOM

STORIES OF THE
"NOBLE ARMY OF MARTYRS"

FOR CHILDREN

By C. M. CRESSWELL

WITH EIGHT ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLOURS

*"And Martyrdom hath roses
On that celestial ground."*—DR. NEALE.

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INTRODUCTION

When you say the *Te Deum*, and come to those glorious words, "The noble army of Martyrs praise Thee," do you know what the word "martyr" actually means? You will say, "Yes: a martyr is one who lays down his life for our Blessed LORD JESUS CHRIST and the Christian Faith." You will be quite right.

In its first and widest signification, however, the word "martyr," which is derived from the Greek, means a "witness." As those who contended for the Faith unto death, choosing rather to lay down their lives than to deny their LORD, were held to have more especially by their marvellous courage given proof of the divine origin of their religion, the word "martyr" came to be exclusively given, in honour, to them.

These are stories of such witnesses—CHRIST'S princes and princesses, who, through dark paths and bitter sufferings, trod to their reward in the King's country. They were beset by the powers of darkness and the spirits of evil, and the "great dragon who is called Satan"; but the good spirits, their angels, were at their sides to help them, and the King's might overshadowed them. So they came at last, victorious, to the royal Presence; and, truly, they do "live happy ever after!"

Every boy and girl of you who reads these stories must be, perhaps less gloriously, but no less truly, a prince or princess of CHRIST; for, on your foreheads, at your Baptism, was set that Sign which, at last, must show you as one of His victorious children—or as a traitor. You too walk towards the King's country, seeking, if not the "roses of martyrdom," an eternal glorious reward; you too are opposed by the spirits of evil, and at the side of every one of you is your good spirit, your holy guardian angel, to help and defend you, that you, at last, may come into the King's palace to abide there for ever.

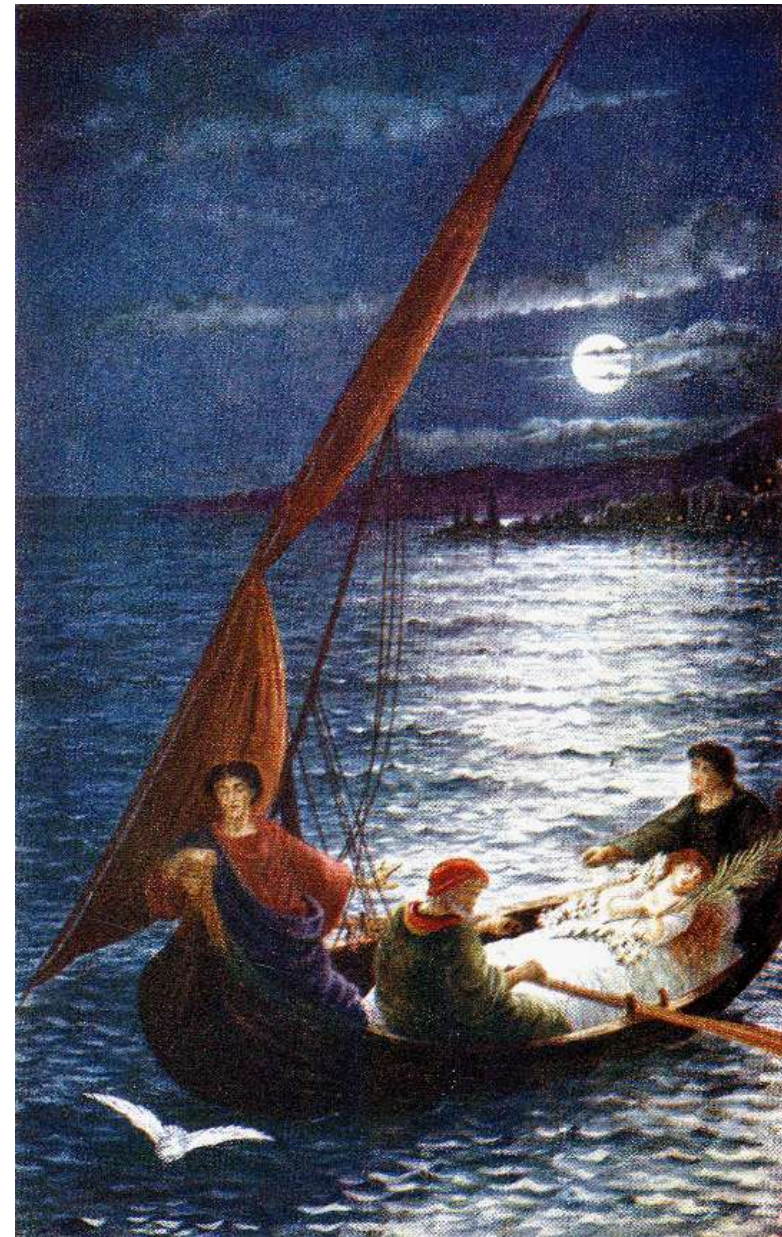
About 300 years ago a little Spanish girl, named Teresa, was so inflamed with love and faith at reading the acts

of the martyrs that she longed for a similar glorious death and victory. Taking her little brother with her, she set out from her home, to seek for martyrdom among the Moors. The children were followed and brought back. Teresa might not die for CHRIST. She determined to do what she could, and to live for Him. So well did she persevere in her resolution that, though not a martyr, she is numbered among the saints.

We too, in these days, may not be called to die for CHRIST. We may not even care to hope to live for Him as gloriously as that Spanish girl. But we must all try to live in His strength as perfectly as we can, for our LORD JESUS CHRIST, that we may be, in these latter days, if not martyrs, in the noblest sense of the Greek word, nevertheless, witnesses to the divine truth of our blessed Faith.

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CHAPTER I

ST. AGNES, VIRGIN AND MARTYR

This is the story of St. Agnes. Perhaps you have already heard it, for all the world knows her, in her spotless innocence, with her loose, bright hair, and the lamb at her side. But, as these stories are first of all for children, it seems only fit to begin with her who is the queen of all child-saints, and, after the ever-blessed Virgin Mother, who bore the Incarnate Word, the queen of all maiden martyrs.

It was a fine morning in Rome, towards the end of January, 303. Although cool—for at daybreak hoar-frost had sparkled on the ground, and the mountain-ring, engirdling the plain in which the queen of cities stands, was snow-covered—the air had a genuine touch of spring in it, far-off and elusive, but spring-like none the less. Overhead stretched a sky palely, dearly blue. A delicate movement stirred the trees, and the almonds were bursting into bud.

Nowhere did the morning seem so lovely as in the garden of a Roman house, lying some distance beyond the gates on the Nomentan Way. The early sun struck full on the white marbles and columns, making them flash like the distant snows towards which the building looked out from its shelter of cypresses and ilex-trees, and the groves of evergreen shrubs that lay dark before the terraced approach to the garden. In the grounds themselves the touch of winter was still apparent in bare borders and ponds destitute of water-plants; but wealth and care had succeeded in producing many flowers in the sheltered corners near the lemon-grove, and the pigeons and a very busy flight of hedge-sparrows, twittering among the pinky almonds nearer the house, were quite of opinion that spring had already come.

Under a hedge of myrtles and laurels, warm in the sun, and so sheltered that the breezes scarcely stirred her blue dress, sat a little studious girl, with a big sleepy dog at her side. She was about thirteen, lovely with the dark rich beauty of the Latin peasantry. One brown hand stroked the dog's ears, and her rosy crossed feet swung to-and-fro—for her seat was too high for her—as she bent earnestly over the scroll in her lap; so earnestly that the pigeons and the noisy sparrows were unheeded by her, and she never raised her eyes till a movement of the big dog made her look up.

Another little girl had come out from the house, and, before descending, stood for a moment at the head of the steps leading down through the shrubs.

Slight and graceful as a white lily against the background of dark green myrtles, she was as fair as the other child was dark—so fair, that her high-born, delicate beauty, her white dress and her gold locks, coiled at her neck, presented an almost ethereal appearance, as the full blaze of the sunshine fell on her, and the wind on the terrace swept her thin, gold-embroidered draperies, cloud-like, round her slenderness. Though but a child in years, with all childhood's happy simplicity, she wore on her face an earnestness that made her not quite as other children. In her too, as in the day, stirred a touch of awakening, a breath upon her soul from the far-off eternal spring-time, the voice of the Bridegroom whispering,—

"Lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land. . . . Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away."

Her appearance was the signal for all the various living things near her to make a movement in her direction. The dog was at her side in a moment. The flock of twittering sparrows came fluttering round her like little falling brown leaves, till a kitten, as small as the dog was large, darted out from behind a lemon-tree and began to play with her trailing dress.

A tame heron, who spent a favoured existence between the pond in the atrium and the larger hunting-grounds in the garden, advanced towards her with stately steps. It seemed as if the very flowers were gladder, and the sunshine brighter for her presence.

Most gladly of all, the little dark girl had risen, dropping her scroll, and moved forward half impulsively, half shyly, as if in the presence of some dearly loved and higher creature.

The golden-haired child ran swiftly across the open space, caught her in her arms, and kissed her. Seen side by side, they were evidently of just the same age, though the new-corner was rather the taller and slighter. She looked more like a lily than ever, as the black curls and blue frock now fluttered close to the gold-flecked whiteness of her own raiment, and the brown tanned arms of her little friend encircled her neck in a hug of genuine affection, from which all the shyness had vanished.

"You have good news, Emerentiana," said the white-robed child at length, "I see it in your eyes. Sit down and tell me."

Together they climbed on the high marble seat; and now four rosy feet dangled and swung in a row.

"Dear lady Agnes," said the peasant, "I have, indeed. How can I ever thank you for having sent for me to come to Rome? The good priest says my course of instruction is nearly over, and that I am to be shortly admitted to Baptism."

"Dear *sister* Emerentiana," corrected the other gently, "you know we arranged it should be so between us, when we sent for you—my very own foster-sister—to be my friend and companion here. Well, who could be more glad than I am at your news? And, if GOD wills, I hope to be at your Baptism, and to be one of your sponsors. Only, I too have news that you ought to know."

Emerentiana looked anxiously at her foster-sister. The words were not re-assuring, though she saw no fear on Agnes's face, and waited for her to continue.



'YOU HAVE GOOD NEWS, EMERENTIANA.'

"The son of Symphronius has been here again to ask for my hand in marriage."

"And you still have no love for him," asked the peasant child, "though he is wealthy, well-born, and handsome?"

Agnes stopped her.

"I love none but CHRIST," she said.

Her voice lingered tenderly, and a light colour glowed in her cheeks, as if merely to speak that Name gave her untold pleasure; while she lifted her eyes to the spring sky, seeking Him there.

You may think it strange for two children of thirteen to be thus talking about marriage. But, remember, this was in the year 303, and in Rome, where girls were sometimes married when only twelve years old.

"But I am dreaming again," said Agnes, at length; "no, Emerentiana, I shall never marry. I have given myself, for this world and the next, to Him Whom alone I love, Who has adorned me with His jewels, and pledged me with His betrothal ring; and so I told the son of Symphronius. Now he is jealous!"

Such a heavenly smile broke over her face that Emerentiana could almost have worshipped her.

"Poor man!" continued her friend, "jealous of Him Whom the angels serve, and on Whose beauty the Sun and Moon hang in adoration! However, he came again, and guessed that I was a Christian. So his father sent for my parents and frightened them into urging me to agree to the marriage, lest, as he said, worse should befall me. But I told mother, as I have told her before, that I was betrothed already, to CHRIST. They would never force me to marry, and so they sent back word to Symphronius that I could not be the wife of his son. Now we must see what will happen next."

Emerentiana's brown cheeks turned pale.

"Agnes!" she cried, "they may come and take you by force! If they know that you are a Christian, they may even—"

Agnes slipped down on her knees by her friend's side, and clasped her arms round her waist.

"If some wealthy husband took me away from my home to his, you would not grieve. If CHRIST come to take me to His home, shall you grieve then?"

Her rapture grew and shone in her face; but the little peasant looked down at her with troubled eyes, only half-comforted. Agnes noticed it, laughed, and jumped up.

"Come, now," she cried, "how do we know what will happen? Least of all, why should we be sad this glorious morning? Let us go down the garden and tease old Lucius to give us lilies for the chapel altar. He always scolds me for asking, and gives them to me by handfuls. I have found out from his son that, if other people ask for them, he says 'No, they are all for Lady Agnes.'"

Reassured at last, Emerentiana slipped off the seat, and, hand in hand, laughing and chattering, the children, now running, now walking, went down the path together, with the dog and the kitten, to the gardener's house. Only, from time to time, Agnes's feet lingered, and her cheeks flushed delicately. For the Voice of her Love whispered ever to her,—

"Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away."

That night Emerentiana was awakened from her first sleep in her little bedroom not far from Agnes's by the tramp of heavy feet, and the glare of torches through the folds of her curtains. Then came the weeping of women and slaves, and then a heavy silence. The little peasant, newly come from her hill-side farm to the patrician house in this great, terrible Rome, sat up, with her heart beating wildly.

Presently the mother of Agnes, lamp in hand, stole in. Seeing the child awake, sitting up in bed, wild-eyed, pallid, her little fingers twisted in terror into the tangles of her dark

hair, she caught her up, weeping and lamenting that now she had no daughter but her. Symphronius had revenged himself, and Agnes was gone.

Or, shall we say, that the Bridegroom had spoken no longer in whispers, but clearly, "Come away."

Symphronius sat next morning in a quiet room of his palace, and ordered Agnes to be brought to him. Both because of his son, who loved her desperately, and on account of her tender age and her rank, he had decided to examine her privately. Only a few soldiers stood on guard, when she was led in, looking indeed a child. Last night her captors had taken her in haste, giving her no time for preparations, so that she now wore only a plain white linen robe, and had neither sandals for her bare feet nor fillet for her head. Her long gold hair, too, fell uncoiled to her knees, confined by a ribbon at her neck.

Eyeing her wonderingly for a moment, as she stood, modest but confident, before him, the Governor leant forward and, with all the eloquence he could command, dwelt on the advantages of the marriage, and urged her to submit. She replied gently, that she intended to remain ever unwed.

"If that is really your desire," said Symphronius, "we will let that pass. Consent, however, to renounce your superstition. Then, with all honour, you may be exalted to the rank of a vestal virgin.

"Shall I," replied the child, "who have refused your living son, give myself to an idol of stone?"

"Do not be so headstrong," answered Symphronius warmly; "in years you are nothing but a child, and must therefore yield to the wisdom of those older than yourself, who can guide you better."

"It is true that I am very young," replied Agnes, "but faith dwells in my heart, and I have for my help a Strength and a Wisdom that neither pain nor death can destroy."

Symphronius frowned. So many were the Christians whose sufferings he had witnessed that he knew at once, from her manner, that this little prisoner of thirteen would not be frightened by threats of death. For the moment he was worsted.

Then Satan whispered a dreadful suggestion into the ears of Symphronius. It is dreadful even to write it, but it shows how great is our Blessed LORD'S love and protection to those who, like the holy Agnes, trust themselves wholly to Him.

"Listen to me," said Symphronius sternly; "if you are obstinate, I shall deal with you thus. Your clothes will be taken from you, and you shall be driven out into the streets of Rome for the people to mock at."

Agnes lifted her blue eyes to his. He saw no terror in them. Neither did her voice tremble, as she replied,—

"You may do so; yet shall that never part me from CHRIST. Nay, rather will He show His love to His handmaiden, and send His angel to defend me."

Symphronius signed to the soldiers. In fear of him, but with shame in their hearts—for one saw his sister, another his daughter, another his young new-made wife, in the sweetness before them—they thrust Agnes towards the door, opened it, and tore her robes from her slender, childish body. As their whiteness fell away from her, she loosened the ribbon at her neck, and the rippling torrent of gold flowed over her, so that she stood on the threshold, before the wondering crowd, clothed in the GOD-given robe of her own bright hair. The next moment, while those who would have mocked hushed their words in a strange awe before her purity, a stronger light than the sunshine flashed round her, and she saw her Guardian Angel, powerful and terrible, stand as her protector by her side.

He smiled at her, and held out his hands. They were filled with a white, glistening web, that streamed through his

fingers like silver rain. As she meekly bent her head before him, she felt his gentle touch on her shoulders. The next moment she was robed in a garment white as snow, falling in gleaming folds to her feet. The people, looking on her beauty, clothed now in a radiance of silver and gold, cried out in amazement. Heedless of them, Agnes crossed her little hands and raised her glad eyes in thankfulness to her Angel's face, and from him to the clear heavens above her; while such favour from GOD shone over her youth, her innocence, and her fearlessness, that the hearts of those watching her were touched, and they began to move away, murmuring against the laws and expressing their sympathy for the child.

Meanwhile, the son of Symphronius, hearing about Agnes from his father, had hastened out of the palace to find her. As he drew near, he seemed to see nothing but a blinding light; and from the midst of it some awful avenging power struck him, so that he fell senseless at Agnes's feet. Amidst cries of consternation from the people, soldiers rushed forward to lift the young noble, and Symphronius, hearing the tumult, hurried thither also to seek his son.

When he saw him lifted, fainting, from the ground, and Agnes standing by, clothed in dazzling whiteness, he was overwhelmed with fear and rage.

"Who dared to clothe you thus, against my command?" he asked her.

"My angel," replied the child, "whom CHRIST gave me, to protect me from harm."

"You are a witch, and shall die for this," cried Symphronius; "you have killed my son."

Agnes smiled, and stretched out her hands to the young man. Shuddering, he opened his eyes again to the light. As he raised himself from the arms of the soldiers who had supported him, and saw the little prisoner, sweet and gentle, in her lovely whiteness, standing near him, shame at his share in the treatment of one so young overtook him.

He turned to his father.

"Let her be," he said, "she is only a child. Besides, something watches over her, unknown to us, to shield her."

Fear stole over Symphronius. None the less was he determined that Agnes should not escape. So, writing at once to the deputy Aspasius, he told him all that had happened, and demanded that the witch should be punished by law.

Presently, soldiers came to lead Agnes to the place of judgement. She was tranquil as ever. Her holy angel had indeed withdrawn his visible presence, but she knew that he still watched at her side. And had not her Bridegroom given her a marvellous proof of His love and protection? Even though cries of "Witch!" were now raised against her by those who were in Symphronius's favour and feared to lose it, she still smiled, unmoved, seeming not a prisoner going to death, but a bride passing to her new home, in her shining raiment, and with her hair as her golden "flammeum" (the yellow veil worn by Roman maidens at their wedding) spread over her. Should not her LORD'S own dear arms soon enfold her, and lift her feet safely over His threshold?

Standing at last, a child, in the wide open Forum, before the deputy Aspasius, with the people around clamouring for her death, she still maintained, unmoved, her calm trust and faith. The deputy asked her a few questions, but on receiving her steadfast answer that nothing could part her from CHRIST, he ordered her to be burnt alive as a witch.

The wood was piled up, and the child set in the midst. As the flames began to mount, Agnes spread out her hands and prayed, "O LORD, Almighty, most to be adored and worshipped, most powerful, I bless and glorify Thy Name for ever and ever."

The gleaming fire, and the little white-robed figure made a picture from which many began to turn away their eyes in pity. One of the officials, even, seated near Aspasius, veiled

his face. But neither shame nor pain were to disturb the peace of CHRIST'S happy bride on the day of her espousals.

Suddenly a shout arose. As Agnes finished her prayer, the flames had ceased to leap and spread. Presently they died down altogether. A few threads of grey smoke floated around her like incense; and the fire was extinct.

Louder and louder grew the cries of the crowd, some clamouring in anger, many now in pity for the innocent victim. It was clearly dangerous to waste more time, so Aspasius called the executioner to him, and bade him loosen Agnes and dispatch her at once with his sword.

The man slowly climbed the pyre to where Agnes awaited him. When he had loosened the chain that held her erect to the stake, she smiled on him, fell on her knees, and stretched out her hands to heaven for a moment before she bent her neck to receive the blow. The man at her side faltered. Rough and hardened as he was, public executioner and torturer, who had taken his part, unmoved, in inflicting many a dreadful death; beside this fair flower of spring and the drift of yellow locks now sweeping the ground, he could only stand and tremble. The crowd and the judge noticed his emotion. Aspasius, in a fury, stamped.

"Do thy duty," he cried; "dost wish, also, to die by the sword?"

A dimness before the executioner's eyes had blurred all the beautiful vision to a mist of gold-shot whiteness. But, with a sigh, he brushed it away and raised his sword.

Agnes has come at last to the King's palace, where the angels roll back the gates for her, as the Bride-groom comes forth to greet the little bride.

Her parents received her body, whose white robes were now stained with a holy crimson. Sorrowing, indeed, at her loss, but consoled at the thought of her glorious victory and reward, they carried her to her tomb. Emerentiana, parted from

the sister she had so lately found and so adoringly loved, walked at her side, holding one little dead hand in hers, and feeling, in her child-like desolation, further off still from Agnes because she was as yet herself unbaptized: whilst her heart almost broke at the remembrance that only yesterday they had run, hand in hand, together down the garden to tease old, scolding, devoted Lucius for the gift of lilies just like those that lay now with the new-cut palm-branch at the martyr's side.

On the same day, in the evening, the mourners laid Agnes in a tomb of one of the catacombs, not far from their own house. Here, in an underground chamber, lit by an opening in the roof, approached by a flight of steps, and sheltered by myrtles and laurels, they placed the body of the holy martyr in a stone sarcophagus, under a wide archway, painted and decorated with symbols of the life immortal. Lilies, white roses, and palms were piled up on the stone that covered the lovelier lily within; and high up in the dark arch burned a little lamp. The news of Agnes's victory had spread rapidly through Rome; and the Christians gathered by hundreds on the Nomentan Way, and crowded round the shrine, to glorify GOD in His saint, and to pray for strength for themselves.

In the tomb knelt a little blue-robed girl, her arms spread out on the stone, among the lilies, and her dark hair lying like a shadowing cloud on the drifts of whiteness. It was Emerentiana.

"O CHRIST, Incarnate Word," she prayed, "I am not yet Thine by Baptism; but I confess Thee, and I love Thee. Make me Thine indeed, and let me not be long parted from my sister Agnes."

The evening grew apace, and, as night came on, many of the watchers went to their homes; but within the tomb-chamber, the peasant child still knelt among the palms and lilies.

The sun rose again, and the faithful began to collect in greater numbers round the shrine. Within, Emerentiana had scarcely stirred. She was pale with weariness, but her heart never failed, and her lips murmured—

"CHRIST, make me Thine indeed, and bring me to my sweet sister Agnes."

Outside a tumult arose. The deputy, hearing of the concourse of Christians, had sent men with staves and swords to drive them away. The morning air was filled with cries of pain, and the sound of hurrying feet. A soldier looked down into the tomb.

"Come here!" he cried to his fellows, "here is still one of them."

Men cried to Emerentiana to come up at once; but the kneeling figure and cloud of dusky hair never moved. With an oath, the soldier who had first spoken sent a sharp and heavy stone crashing down on her shoulders.

The child lifted her head, as she was struck, and crossed her hands on her breast, praying for the last time—

"CHRIST, make me Thine indeed!"

Then stone followed stone, in a cruel shower, till she bowed herself; a tumbled, blue heap, among the scattered palms and lilies, their whiteness enriched now with another martyr's blood.

Sealed with the Baptism of martyrdom, at her foster-sister's tomb, the Christians found her, and buried her. Now her peasant feet tread the golden pavement at the side of patrician Agnes, in that land where—

"The bondsman and the noble,
The peasant and the king,
All gird one glorious Monarch
In one eternal ring."

Still, that is not the end of the story of St. Agnes.

Her parents thought hourly of their little daughter's glorious lot in heaven; but it made them very sad to think that, perhaps, for a long while yet, they would see her face no more. Day by day they went to pray at her tomb. So a week passed. On the eighth night they were there as usual. In the dusk above them the lamp glimmered over the fresh-cut flowers that poor old Lucius brought now with tears, not scoldings, for the dear little mistress who would lovingly tease him no more. Father and mother prayed long and earnestly, not without weeping. At last, as the hour grew late, they both prepared to turn homewards. Suddenly they saw Agnes before them.

She stood under the high archway, clothed in dazzling garments, a glory crowning her head and shining hair. About her flashed angelic faces and the tremor of angelic wings, half revealed; and round her flowed and pulsed an effluence of unimagined light, as the crimson radiance of her martyrdom alternated with the blinding whiteness of her purity. Yet, amidst all this, she was the same Agnes; the same gentle dignity and innocence shone on her face, and the same smile played about her lips. She bore a lily and a palm and a white lamb in her arms, and bent towards her father and mother with her usual caressing love.

"Grieve not," she said gently, as they knelt overwhelmed with awe and joy, "for you see me as I am, and is there cause for tears? These are now my blessed companions, and, with them, others, angels and saints without number. Beyond all joys a throne also is prepared for me at His side Whom alone on earth I loved, and to Whom in heaven I am united forever."

CHAPTER II

ST. LAURENCE THE DEACON

The Roman Forum, even now, in its decay, is one of the most wonderful places in the world. From the Arch of Titus to that of Septimius Severus, beside the rising hill of the Palatine, where the cypresses girdle the ruined palaces of the Caesars, it is possible to wander by temples and buildings that cry aloud the stories of the past. On this side of the way stands the regia of the High Priest; on that, the temple of the Vestals. Here, at the shrine of Juturna, old half-legendary Roman history tells us that the Twin brethren watered their horses after the battle of Lake Regillus. Hard by, the traveller who visits the Forum may stand beneath the columns of Castor and Pollux, in the very place where Antony stood to speak the funeral oration over the body of murdered Caesar. Over these stones of the Via Sacra walked the poet Horace; those of the Via Nova were trodden by the feet of fallen Sejanus, when he was led away, despairing, and yet hoping against hope, that at yonder corner a vestal virgin might come out of her house and claim his release, before he was dragged to death in the Tullianum prison. That prison too is still to-day but a stone's throw off; on the other side of the road.

If the Forum is so wonderful now, what must it have been when Rome was still Imperial, and the Emperors still held sway on yonder ruined hill?

On such a day, towards the end of an August afternoon, the Forum was waking up to life, after the stifling heat of noon. Beneath a sky of intensest blue, the roofs, columns, and statues, shone out in gold and white and in all the rich mottlings of marble. The streets were crowded with people, with the rich in their chairs and litters, and with the poor (glad that the cool of evening was coming) contented to trudge on foot. In the booths and shops the merchants were

plying a brisk trade, while, under the lengthening shadows of the porticoes, and on the steps of the basilica that great Julius built, idlers, beggars, and the degraded rabble of Rome lounged, laughed, and squabbled.

Through the cheerful crowds a little procession wended its way along the Via Sacra towards the Capitol—a procession of a kind that had been, and still was common enough throughout the Roman Empire, from the cities of Gaul and sun-lit Carthage to far-off Asia Minor.

On that August evening the prisoner was an old and venerable man. To the dignity of years he added the dignity of one who held high office. His guards might buffet him so that he stumbled as he walked; his chains might bow his aged frame almost to the ground; the rabble might pelt him with dirt; but nothing could mar the majesty of his bearing, or the power of his noble, grey-crowned head. Among the crowd, by the roadside, were a few Christians, whose hearts well-nigh broke at the treatment of the well-known, beloved form. Even, here and there, a pagan turned away his head in pity, reminded of his own father by the old prisoner before him.

At a turn in the street, hard by the Tullianum prison, where the throng was densest, a man stood out from the crowd to face those coming towards him. He was quite young, only in his first manhood. Grace and vigour combined in his tall figure, and his dark beauty was simply set off by his plain white robe. As his eyes, fixed lovingly on the prisoner, noticed the rough treatment accorded to the old man, a mist of tears clouded them. When the group was almost opposite him, he stepped forward boldly into the roadway, heedless of the many witnesses of an act that at once avowed his faith. Thrusting aside, with no uncertain strength, one of the guards, he bent like a son over the captive.

"Why dost thou leave me, holy father?" he said in tones of love and reproach. "Should the priest go to the Sacrifice without his attendant deacon?"

For a few seconds, while the mob watched curiously, the strong young hands clasped the weak wrists and eased the weight of the old man's fetters, as the two looked into each other's eyes with a love beyond that of this world. Then the angry guards tore them apart, and dealt the younger man a furious blow, that sent him, despite his strength, staggering backwards into the crowd. Meanwhile, the prisoner, ere they dragged him away, turned and said,—

"Fear not, my son. After three days thou shalt follow me."

The guards closed round him and hurried him away to the dungeon.

The old man was Sixtus, Bishop of Rome, the younger his Archdeacon, Laurence.

When the doors had closed on Sixtus, Laurence, paying no heed at all to a disposition on the part of the crowd to jostle and threaten him on account of his speech with the prisoner, hurried away from the press of the Forum, through quieter streets to the house where the bishop had formerly dwelt.

Four or five men were there, among them two other deacons and a young soldier. The latter, by his not giving the greeting customary among Christians, proved himself not of their faith. But he was evidently a friend and a favourite, and the first to clasp Laurence's hand.

"I have seen Sixtus," said Laurence, "and have spoken with him outside the prison."

The younger of the deacons made a gesture of surprise.

"Have you betrayed yourself, then?" he asked. "O Laurence, we shall hear of your arrest next. Hippolytus here has brought us word that he was present when the deacons Felicissimus and Agapitus were taken, and you are far better known than they were."

"I have good news for you," replied Laurence smiling. "After three days I am to follow Sixtus to martyrdom—for so he himself has just told me. Who knows, friend?"—and he turned to the young soldier—"by that time you yourself may be assisting at my arrest!"

"But will you not escape while you can?" suggested Hippolytus anxiously. "By Castor, Laurence, you know that I should never betray you, and I am only too ready—"

Laurence laid his hand on his shoulder, almost playfully.

"Now, Hippolytus," he asked, smiling, "do you think it likely that I shall run away, when the supreme desire and yearning of my heart is promised me? Ah, you cannot understand. May CHRIST draw you to Himself; to yearn as I do to see His face."

"But, Laurence," cried one of the deacons, "your duties! the treasures—"

Laurence stopped him with a gesture commanding silence.

"I must be hastening homewards," he said, "there is business of importance that needs immediate attention. It might be well that one or two of you should accompany me."

The deacons responded at once, and, with a few words of farewell to their companions, left the house with Laurence.

When they were in the streets, over which the darkness of evening had fallen, the latter said—

"I did not wish you to speak of the treasures of the Church before Hippolytus. He is indeed our friend, but not of our faith; and should the authorities suspect that he had knowledge of the Church's wealth, well, he has not our strength in CHRIST to keep silence under torture, and we must not let him suffer on our account. All has been arranged. The blessed Sixtus foresaw what was to come. During the last few

days he and I have been busily engaged in taking precautions. The gold and jewels and sacred vessels have all been gathered together at the house of the widow Cyriaca, and we have an agreement with Demetrius the goldsmith that, at a moment's notice, he will buy them from us. The money paid for them is to be distributed among the poor. All can be done to-morrow, quietly, and with the utmost secrecy. Yet I would have as few as possible know this. I shall go to Demetrius to-night. So much for the treasures of the Church. I will say farewell here;" and he paused at the door of his own dwelling, and his voice grew divinely tender, "for now I am going to see my treasures."

The three young men parted. Laurence, having entered the house for a moment only, to get a cloak to cover his white robe, hurried on to the lower parts of the city.

There he called on Demetrius, and made arrangements for the sale of the treasure early on the morrow at Cyriaca's house.

Before the business was transacted and Laurence was free to leave, it was quite dark. Among the great stars, the young moon, already low over the roofs, was hurrying to its setting. In the steep, narrow streets, scarcely a breath of wind stirred. Laurence walked on swiftly, amid a network of courts and cross-roads. He was now in the poorest and most miserable quarter of Rome. Many of the houses—or rather, hovels—were half ruined. Here and there, amid their squalor, some sculptured cornice or battered column, over which the ragged vine now sprawled, spoke pathetically of better days, where naught could be seen now save decay and direst need. Laurence had reached his treasure-house, and in it he found his treasures—the poor, the infirm, the crippled.

As he passed from one poor lodging to another, they came out to him, and crowded round him, happy if they might but touch his garments, as though he were an angel in their midst, as indeed, in love and pity, he was. His arms, more tender than the mother's, held the dying baby; his form bent

over the aged, and over the far worse deformities, dreadfully prevalent there in manhood and youth, as if he ached to give his vigorous health and strength to them, and to bear all their pain at once in his young body, that they might suffer no more. He was not afraid to lay his hands in soothing, cleansing touch on the open sore, not ashamed of the tears that stood in his eyes for the eyes that were blind; and always he spoke of courage, of love, of CHRIST. So, for three hours, he walked in their midst, transfigured, and transfiguring them by the might of his love, leaving more ease of body where he had ministered, and more peace of mind where he had spoken. Only, as midnight approached, for he had much to do on the morrow, he returned to his house and slept.

In the morning he joined Demetrius at the house of Cyriaca, and in the presence of a few priests and deacons the precious gold and silver of the Church were sold. That same afternoon, under Laurence's personal supervision, the money was quietly distributed among the poor and needy committed to his care.

It was evening before he once more directed his steps homewards. As he came up the street he saw that he had acted by no means too promptly. A Roman soldier stood on guard before the door. That meant only one thing. Laurence advanced to him with a brisk step.

"Good evening, friend," he said pleasantly; "you have come for me, of course. I am quite ready, and we will go together."

The soldier, whose name was Romanus, regarded him with surprise. Hardly knowing what to make of the extremely cheerful air of his prisoner, he began stammering something about his orders.

"I know!" interrupted Laurence; "I was fore-warned, and have been expecting you."

With which he at once stepped to his side; and the two started off down the street towards the place of judgement as if

they were bent upon an evening stroll; Laurence chatting so pleasantly about the affairs of the day that Romanus became too abashed and uncomfortable to be able to answer.

Indeed, when they arrived at the court, any one might have concluded from their faces that Rornanus was the prisoner and Laurence the guard.

The proceedings which ensued were purely formal. It had been considered too late to examine the deacon that evening. The authorities had decided, therefore, to commit him to prison under the ward of an officer. That officer was Hippolytus.

The young soldier made no open recognition of his friend; but when the prisoner had been handed over to him, and night had fallen, Hippolytus stole to Laurence's cell, and entering, closed the door behind him. With a strange, new gladness in his face, he stretched out his hand.

"Laurence, dear friend," he said, "yonder, the minister of the Caesars demands of you the treasures of the Church. I come to-night to ask of you the treasures of heaven. At last, I too believe." And he knelt at the deacon's feet, and besought Baptism.

Almost too glad for speech, Laurence took water, and spoke the blessed words whereby another soul was sealed unto CHRIST. Then they sat side by side on the stone slab that was the only couch, and, in low tones, Laurence spoke of the treasures of heaven: of the new city with foundations laid of sapphires, whose walls are called Salvation and whose gates Praise; gates through which "the kings of the earth "and "the nations of them that are saved "shall pass in, to go out no more. He spoke of the River of Life and the Tree of Life, whose leaves are for the healing of the nations: of the curse passed away for ever: and of the throne of GOD and of the Lamb. Last of all, he spoke of that ineffable promise: "and they shall see His face."

A silence fell on them, in which one at least was even now not far off from that beatitude. At last Laurence woke as from a dream, and, standing up, gently dismissed Hippolytus, on the plea that he needed rest and prayer before the morrow.

On the following day Laurence was led up the Clivus Victoriae—truly the first slopes of the Hill of Victory for him—to the Palatine.

It is possible to-day to trace the road he trod, through the corridor whose stones, two hundred years earlier, had reddened with the life-blood of the Emperor Caligula, and into the Basilica Jovis. Here, to-day, before the apse of the judge's seat, still stands a part of the marble balustrade that separated prisoner and judge. Here we, CHRIST'S servants in the latter days, may stand where that most glorious servant stood seventeen centuries ago.

Early as it was, the court was crammed. Laurence the Archdeacon was as well known in Rome as the Bishop Sixtus. Among the crowd were many Christians who had come to see the chief deacon of the Church witness a good confession.

Laurence stood quiet and very unconcerned while the prefect asked if he were indeed the Archdeacon of Rome and friend of Sixtus. On his replying in a simple affirmative, the prefect continued:

"And the keeper of the treasures of the Church?"

"That is so also," answered Laurence.

"Then the divine Augustus demands that you produce and deliver up that treasure to us."

Laurence appeared to consider. During the pause a horrified silence fell on the Christians watching in the crowd. They knew nothing of yesterday's distribution, and were aghast at the deacon's bearing. Was Laurence, the friend, the beloved son of Sixtus, going to yield? They could hardly believe their ears when he said in a clear voice,

"It will take some time to collect."

"Why, yes, of course," interrupted the prefect, melting suddenly from sternness to his most gracious manner.

He was delighted, for he had little expected so easy a victory. The gratified triumph of greed and success fairly shone on his countenance. He bent forward courteously, as he continued,—

"We have heard much of the abundance and richness of this treasure. By all means take your own time. We grant you what you ask."

The dark eyes of the prisoner read his face, and the lust of gold that had sprung to view there, as legible as in a book; but, in the excitement prevalent in the court, few noticed the cold severity of tone in the deacon's answer:

"I shall need a day and a night."

"Then, to-morrow morning," said the judge, smiling blandly, "we may expect you here. Of course, as a mere matter of form, Hippolytus must still be your guard. Otherwise, from this moment, you are, to all intents and purposes, free."

He would have been gratified by some acknowledgement of his clemency. Laurence, however, had no more to say, and, without a word, turned and left the court with the soldier at his side. As he trod through the rich and beautiful halls, a sternness, foreign to his usual cheerful and loving mien, grew on his face. Was he thinking, amidst the luxury around him, of the greedy prefect, and of those other treasures, poor, blind, despised? Hippolytus looked at him askance, and feared to speak to him.

But when they came out on the Clivus Victoriae Laurence was laughing.

"I shall see you in court to-morrow," he said gaily, "when I bring the treasures so desired yonder," and he nodded

in the direction of the hall of judgement; "till then, farewell. May CHRIST be with you."

Still smiling, he hurried away, leaving Hippolytus wondering.

All the afternoon, and long into the night, Laurence was passing to-and-fro among the houses where his poor lived, visiting now a crippled child, now an old man or a blind woman. He never tarried long—only a few minutes, to put an eager question, and to receive in every case a sudden smile and nod; in answer to which he would also smile and say, "To-morrow, then, by noon, near the Temple of Saturn."

The morrow came, and by midday, in spite of the burning heat of August, the court was even more closely crowded than before. The prefect sat expectant, persuaded, without a shadow of a doubt, that Laurence would shortly bring in the treasure of the Church. The Christians were there, puzzled, yet convinced that Laurence would never fail them. Pagan ladies and patricians chatted of the prisoner, his handsome face and noble bearing, and his wise submission to authority, so unusual in a Christian, and, in his case, so very unexpected.

Slowly the minutes dragged on. At length a tribune in the corridor called to his fellow at the door. The latter went out, stared down the passage and stood petrified with amazement. Inside the hall, amongst those who could not see the two soldiers, excitement rose to fever-heat. Another astonished guard hurried in, stammering, and hard on his heels came the noise of many feet and the tapping of sticks; and then, as those nearest the door bent their necks to see what was going to happen next, Laurence walked calmly into the court leading a little lame child by the hand. After him followed a crowd of men and women, halt, crippled, blind. Leading them into the centre of the court, before the astonished eyes of the rich and careless audience, he ranged them before the seat of judgement, and fixing steady eyes on the face of the prefect before him, said, in tones of quiet reproof,—

"Behold the treasures of the Church."

An awed silence fell on the assembly, and many Christian hearts leapt in elation. Then, unexpectedly, some one in the back rows, whose sense of humour was tickled by the prefect's blank look of disappointment, burst into laughter. The spell of silence was broken. The judge stood up, pallid with rage.

"Drive those people away!" he said to the lictors.

As they obeyed, Laurence calmly blessed his flock with smile and gesture. When the court was cleared, the judge turned to him.

"Now," he said in tones that trembled with anger, "now we will deal with you." And he signed to the tormentors.

The victory of martyrdom is glorious beyond description; but the ordeal by which that victory is won most terrible. Fearful were the weapons—the leaded whips, the cruel iron-starred "scorpions," the bars of heated iron—with which the powers of evil assailed the endurance of this blessed soldier of CHRIST. It is painful to write or read of such a conflict. Turn instead to the glory of the spiritual consolation given him from on high.

Romanus, the soldier who had arrested Laurence was in the crowd. He, like the rest there, saw the tortured flesh, and the unflinching, silent courage that endured. Only, as the pallor of agony grew on the beautiful young face—albeit it remained calm as ever—he saw something else.

By Laurence's side stood a glorious angel, who wiped the brow of the sufferer with a white and gleaming cloth, and fanned his faintness with the sweep of his wings. With that sight came faith. Romanus crept away from the place of torment, at heart a Christian. When Laurence was at length released and carried back to his prison, the soldier followed him, and waited for night to come. In the gloom that gathered

early in the low corridors of the prison he approached the door of Laurence's dungeon, and sought admittance.

Some one within opened to him cautiously. It was Hippolytus the guard. Romanus, looking in, saw Laurence stretched on the ground amidst what poor comforts his soldier friend, who had also been tending his wounds, could bring him. Laurence turned with his old bright smile to the new-comer and stretched out one hand to him.

Trembling with compassion and reverence, Romanus slipped in, and fell on his knees at the martyr's side. With Laurence's hand in his, he told him his vision, confessed CHRIST and besought Baptism. Laughing a little at his own weakness—though rage against the tormentors filled the hearts of the two soldiers—Laurence managed to raise himself. He bade Hippolytus bring water, and support him in his arms while he baptized his new friend.

Romanus entered into his rest almost at once. He was seen to leave the prison, and was arrested. When questioned, he confessed that he had been to see Laurence, and that he was a Christian, and his head was forthwith struck off.

The next evening, August 10th, men came to lead Laurence away to his death. Hippolytus, burning to accompany him, would have avowed his faith. But Laurence laid one finger on his lips, and in obedience to his friend, the soldier remained silent. Yet he joined himself to the crowd that gathered and pressed on the deacon's footsteps. The prisoner was led to the open space before the villa of Sallust, and there they made ready his death. He was to be roasted on a gridiron of metal bars over a slow fire.

The grating was prepared. The fire glowed on the pale watching faces, and on him who was to endure it, the calmest and the gladdest man there. At last the executioners were ready, and stretched Laurence on the iron bars over the fire.

Now, like the tender-hearted lictor in command, turn away so as to see no more; for who can bear even to speak of

those slow hours of agony. (Only—what does *he* now think of his sufferings, in CHRIST'S kingdom!) No sound broke upon the still night air, save the hissing of the fire, the rattle of the iron forks with which the executioners tended the brands, and, from time to time, the choking sob of some spectator, who could bear to watch no longer. But no murmur of pain came from the martyr, and those who were bold enough to draw near him could see no faintest shadow of anguish on his face—only the dark earnest eyes bent on heaven, the lips that smiled, and the angelic tenderness and strength of the whole countenance. He has forgotten the world; he is already away with his LORD in Paradise. Once only does he descend to earth. When death is very near, he turns his head on the burning mass towards the prefect his tormentor, and, with a ripple of laughter in his voice, says to him,—

"Turn me! One side of me is done!"

Not long after, he is dead.

The judge and the lictors went away in state. Gathering up their tools, the executioners plodded homewards, and with them the crowds dispersed, till only a few people loitered and whispered near the still form and the dying fire. And soon these too were gone. The embers crackled, flamed up into a momentary life, and then glowed, one by one, more faintly, with a duller red. A great silence reigned over the loneliness. Behind a column of the temple, near by, Hippolytus sat, his head bowed in his hands, and wept as if his heart would break.

For awhile—darkness. Then the stars paled over-head, like the fires of torment, and the temples stood out, ghost-like, in the dawning light that stole over the sky and the streets, over the grey embers and the martyr's body.

From side-streets people began to creep up by twos and threes to the gridiron. When Hippolytus realized that they were Christians, come to prepare Laurence for burial, he joined himself to them. Together they took what was left of the poor body—but, oh, how glorious it shall be when the

Resurrection morning dawns!—from the grating, and hid it away in white linen. They carried it solemnly out of Rome to a sand-pit on the Tiburtine Way, and there they laid it.



THE DAWNING LIGHT STOLE OVER THE MARTYR'S BODY.

Hippolytus was not long parted from his friend. His share in the deacon's burial was ascertained and he was himself arrested. And now, after his painful trial here, he has joined St. Laurence and St. Romanus in the "noble army of martyrs" before the throne of GOD.

On the next 10th of August, if it be a clear night, go out and gaze upwards at the calm brilliance of the thousand stars that shine in that vault of ether, beyond which CHRIST reigns among His saints in the city where—oh, wonder of wonders!—even we dare to hope, through His Cross and Passion, some day to be. If your eyes are quick, from time to time you will see a starry sparkle flash into view, trail across a span of sky, and vanish. Such sparkles are called falling stars; meteors, that have strayed into the outer atmosphere surrounding our globe, and have become enkindled by their own rapid motion and at once consumed. Think of them, on this night of the year, by their old sweet name, "St. Laurence's tears"—not tears shed for his own sufferings, for he shed none; but tears of compassion for the poor, the crippled, and the suffering, for which the wickedness of men gave him the agonies of fire, agonies of fire for which his Master has given him a crown more death-less than the stars. "For heaven and earth shall pass away," but not His Word Who promised, "Whosoever therefore shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before My FATHER Which is in heaven."

CHAPTER III

A CHILD-MARTYR OF CORSICA

The name of the little saint of this story has probably never come to the ears of most people, though she also was found worthy of the crown of martyrdom. The "noble army of martyrs" has countless soldiers in its ranks, more than can be numbered, known and unknown to us, though their names stand in the Book of Life and are known, one and all, to Him for Whom they died. Martyrs there are who suffered before the watching world; martyrs also on whose lonely agony no eyes looked save their tormentors'—and His; and what more than the latter Witness did they desire? Many are the blessed ones who died in fullest courage, as though pain was not; and many are the blessed ones who triumphed no less gloriously, through fear and trembling, when the crown and palm seemed lost in mortal darkness, and they held fast, they knew not how. Now, if they at all remember the pain and fear, they smile to know it was He Who upheld them, as we, in our great weakness, pray that He may uphold us.

One spring morning a little girl was playing in the atrium of a house in one of the towns of Corsica, playing as happily and thoughtlessly as any child who reads this may play any day of his or her life. It was a very pretty atrium, with its tiny blue-tiled pond in the middle, where gold-fish swam among lily and iris-stems, and where a jet of water flowed from a column with the head of a Hermes above it. The atrium was paved in grey and blue, and the walls beneath the colonnade were painted with little Cupids, brewing, baking, hunting, like those which may be seen in the house of the Vettii, at Pompeii. Above these, on a black ground, were graceful, floating female figures. The court opened on one side on a tiny garden, where grew some flowers and an orange-tree in a tub. Against the farther wall stood a shrine, also very tiny

(to suit the miniature garden over which it presided), inlaid with bright blue mosaics, its little red roof, supported by two columns, sheltering a bronze god.

The little girl matched in charm and delicate simplicity this dainty realm where she evidently ruled like a fairy queen. She was about twelve, with soft brown hair, falling round her sweet little face to her waist. Her eyes were as blue as the Corsican sky, her arms and feet bare, except for a bracelet or two, and white sandals, fastened with amethysts set in gold. She wore a white dress, reaching to her ankles, girdled with a gold belt, and partly covered with a short outer robe of palest pansy mauve. To-day she had also made herself a wreath of pansies of the same colour, from the garden. She had a thin gold chain round her neck, the end of which was hidden under her dress. What lay concealed there was a gold cross—perhaps a strange ornament to be worn in those days by the child of a house that had a Hermes in its courtyard and a bronze god in its garden shrine.

White doves flew all about her, or pecked at the grain her hands had just scattered for them; whilst she trailed a white lily over the pavement among the tame, scuffling feeders, playfully tickling their snowy backs or little red legs, as they pecked away, quite undisturbed. Her bright laughter rang out merrily in the silence. She looked like some one's spoilt, pretty pet, the darling of the whole household.

A man had come into the atrium, stepping from the street over the *salve* and *cave canem* pavement of the entrance-passage. He had pulled back the curtain over the door, and, for a minute, before she noticed him, watched the happy child in her white dress amid the flutter of silver wings and the eager, hungry birds. As the curtain fell back, the little girl turned and saw him. With a glad shout she dropped the lily and sprang towards him, to leap into his arms, kiss him again and again, and to stroke his grizzled hair and beard with her hands.

"Dear uncle," she cried; "Uncle Eutyches, come back again at last."

"My little Devota," he said fondly, kissing her lips,

and eyes, and soft cheeks, scanning her face lovingly and tenderly, yet, at the same time, with a fear so terrible and anxious that she could not help noticing it.

"Now you are in trouble," she said, half teasingly; "that is not good—to come back so grave when you have been away so long. What is it?—may I know?"

He looked at her in silence, before he spoke, his eyes fixed almost hungrily on her sweetness, as though he could not bear to think of a hair of her head being injured, and his hands closed over the little childish fingers till he almost hurt them. At last he answered—"When I landed to-day, after coming from Gaul, I learnt that the edict against the Christians had just reached here also."

Then—for child as she was, she knew what that meant—she too turned just a little pale, while one hand, loosed from his, tremblingly, yet with sweetest instinctive trust, crept to her breast where the cross hung. She stood quite still and waited for him to speak again.

"There is no doubt that the news is true," he continued, "for the crew of our boat spoke with the crew of the legate's boat as we lay off the harbour. So the dreadful business is to begin here also. The old gods—if they be gods—at least they are mine—will shield me well enough. But you, dear!—by Jupiter, when I think—," and he broke off and his eyes darkened.

She drew a little closer to him, in love and pity for his distress; and he looked away from her, as he added, half-ashamed, "I suppose it would not be possible for you—here, privately, perhaps?—the matter of a mere outward form of sacrifice—"

"Hush!" she spoke quickly and firmly enough now. "You never have said that to me—never, since I was brought

here to you, when only a little child. Least of all, say it now, uncle dear."

He looked at her sadly.

"As you will, Devota. After all, I would not be unfaithful to the promise given to your dying parents. Perhaps the old gods may defend you, innocently enough, against your will; for, of course, I shall sacrifice with the rest; and you will, likely enough, escape notice. Only, you must not go out, dear. We will not have you seen more than we can help. At best we must hope the persecution will not last long, or may not be very violent here. This—praise be to the gods—is not Rome. I saw your friend, priest Benenatus, as I came through the town; and Gratian, the boatman, rowed me ashore. I told them the news, so they both know and can warn the other Christians. Benenatus agrees with me that you should show yourself as little as possible. You will obey me, my darling?"

She laughed teasingly at this.

"Though every one says you have spoilt your little Devota, yet you know she loves to do as you wish.

"Besides," and she looked at him gravely, "I am young and weak, and how should I dare to put myself wilfully into temptation of apostasy by going out against your will—and His? How could I hope He would help me then? Uncle, let us think no more about it now. Come in and rest, and I will pray to CHRIST."

The two went into the house together.

Eutyches, senator, wealthy, and a worshipper, in the lax fashion of his day, of the pagan gods, was not really Devota's uncle, though in love she called him so, but only a distant relative into whose hands the little girl, left an orphan when scarcely more than a baby, had been entrusted. She was of Christian parentage, and he had not only never once tried to turn her from CHRIST, but had allowed her freely to be brought up in her faith, for he was a kindly-natured man, disliking

persecution and loving the child as his own daughter. She had grown up with an equal love for him, happy in her simple child-life, and in her worship at the little hidden Christian church, whither Eutyches sent her, carefully attended. She had only one sorrow—Eutyches would never listen to her persuasions that he too should become a Christian.

Now the last and greatest persecution of the Church had swept down over the faithful throughout the Roman world.

After the edict things were only a little different in that quiet house. Eutyches, his clients, servants, and slaves sacrificed at the same time as the other senators, with much ceremony, and it was hoped that the absence of one little maiden would not attract attention. Girls in those days were far more secluded than now. So Devota was only more in the atrium and a little less frequently with her attendants outside the house. Of course she sorrowed that she might not be with her fellow Christians in their time of trial, when they crept secretly and by night to their stolen acts of worship. But the priest Benenatus had managed to send her a message, bidding her in all things follow the wise advice of her uncle, and she obeyed. Did not she pray daily, "Lead us not into temptation"? She did not know much of what was happening, for her uncle kept the sufferings of the Christians from her; but she had heard of the earlier soldiers of CHRIST who had died for Him, and she knew what the tender mercies of the Roman law were. So perhaps she guessed more than Eutyches thought, and that made her sweet face a little graver.

Spies were everywhere. We cannot tell how it happened—whether one of Eutyches' friends or a slave of the household, in thoughtless talk, first said it to ears only too glad to listen. In some way the report spread abroad that Eutyches sheltered a little Christian maiden in his home.

Another morning came when Devota was playing in the atrium with her flowers and her doves, little guessing how soon to the lily of her girlhood was to be added the palm of

martyrdom. Eutyches was reading in the library, so it was not his footsteps that Devota heard in the outer passage. She turned to see a Roman soldier at the door, where, a few weeks ago, her uncle had come with his news. The man stood there, firm and inexorable as the great power he represented. If his heart felt a sudden pang of pity for the white-robed child, with her floating veil of brown hair, among her pets, that tender feeling never reached his face.

Devota stood up quickly.

"What do you want?"

The soldier produced a sealed missive.

"I bring this for the Senator Eutyches," he answered; "let him be summoned."

Devota crossed the atrium quietly to the door of the library. Eutyches looked at her and knew instantly that something was amiss. She laid one finger on her lips and stretched out her other hand to him. Both guessed at once that the end had come.

"There is a centurion outside," she said; "he has a letter for you from the governor."

The man and the child went out together, he holding her hand in his. The centurion had come into the court, and the doves had taken flight before him, as though some dread presence had entered with him. Eutyches was trembling and white to the lips in fear for his darling. She, however, stood quiet, with her wide grave eyes on the soldier's face, as Eutyches took the fatal missive from him, broke the seals, and read.

It was an order from the governor of the town, commanding the instant arrest of the Christian Devota and the death of Eutyches the senator by poison, as punishment for having harboured an enemy of the empire and of the gods.

Eutyches' first thought was for the child—to save her, if possible; but, if she must die (and he also knew the Roman law and the hopelessness of resistance), he desired to spare her what he knew would be more cruel than all else to her—the thought that she was partly responsible for his death.

He called the centurion aside.

"There is no possibility of appeasing the governor? He knows I have sacrificed."

"*She* has not," replied the soldier, "and you have sheltered and abetted her. The law must take its course. I warn you against any resistance. The house is already surrounded by my men, and we only wait to see your sentence carried out before we arrest her—unless, of course, she consents to sacrifice. If you can persuade her to that, her submission might very likely buy your pardon."

Eutyches turned his face away; but his great and steadfast love never wavered. Would she consent, he might live! And he knew that no pain, nor loss, no, nor death, could shake her firmness as would the knowledge that, on the one hand, her submission would save him, and that, on the other hand, her refusal would condemn him to die for a cause not his own. But his faithful heart was not going to let him say now, and for his own sake, the words of persuasion he never had said—words that would cause her tenfold more shame and agony if spoken by his lips than if uttered by any other's.

"That is impossible," he said roughly.

"Then the sentence must be carried out," replied the soldier, at the same time moving as if to call in the other men.

"One moment," pleaded Eutyches, "I have a last request, that it will not harm you to grant. Do not let her know that I also am to die."

The man hesitated; but something in the sorrowful love of the senator's face moved him. After all, this was little to ask.

"So be it," he replied; "when she has gone, I will leave my fellow centurion here, who will see your sentence carried out."

Eutyches still lingered.

"Her death will be an easy one? Might not she die here, as I must, by some swift poison?"

"You ask too much!" was the soldier's quick and angry retort. Then, as the Roman brutality broke out in him, he added, "Besides, means will be taken to force her to comply with the law."

Eutyches' heart was bursting within him. He knew what some of the "means" were, which would be used on that slender body, and those little limbs. He was unarmed, else, in that moment, he might have killed her himself as Virginius killed his daughter Virginia. In agony he threw his toga over his face and groaned aloud.

Devota had stood quietly apart, while the two men spoke together; but now, in an instant, she was in his arms, stroking his cheeks, kissing him and comforting him.

"Dear uncle," she said, "do not grieve so. See, I do not grieve. I am ready to go. I am glad to go, to die for Him Who died for me. I used to think I might be afraid, but now the time has come, I am not. Good-bye dearest uncle. I thank you for all your loving care of me. And, oh!" with the utmost earnestness, "if you would but seek Him! I do pray it now with all my heart, that we may be for ever together, before His throne."

She stretched out her hand, to sign his forehead with the sign of the Cross, and, as she did so, the court re-sounded with the trampling of soldiers' feet. Eutyches' face was bathed in tears, but Devota smiled brightly back at him that he might, at least, be comforted to see that she felt only peace and gladness at the approach of death. The two would have been torn roughly apart, had not Eutyches, to spare her any idea of

his own fate, loosened the arms that clung to him, not in fear but in love. Then the soldiers took her unresisting, and led her from the atrium to the outer passage; and the curtain fell and hid her from her uncle's sight.

Little time was wasted in the carrying out of his sentence. From the days of the first emperors, death by suicide at the order of the imperial master, had been common enough for those who held high rank. Indeed, compared with other possible deaths, it was a merciful one.

Eutyches had no desire to live now that his darling had been taken from him. He went back to his library. The fatal draught was brought, and he drank it at once, while a soldier remained on guard outside, till the end overtook him. In his last hour, did he turn to the merciful Redeemer, to Whom Devota had so often commended him? We do not know. But we like to think it was so, and to hope for the kind and tender man who had loved and sheltered, to the loss of his own life, one of our Blessed LORD'S little ones, now more than that, one of CHRIST'S glorious martyrs in the Church Triumphant.

For what, meanwhile, was happening to Devota? It is better to pass quickly over those last few hours, not dwelling on them longer than is necessary to understand how great was this little girl's love for her Saviour, and how great the strength that He gave her. She was only a child, among rough soldiers and cruel executioners, torn suddenly from her play and her home, to go to a dreadful death. The soldiers bound her feet together with cords, and in this manner, amid laughter and jeers, dragged her over the rough ground to the hall of judgement, till her pretty clothes were torn from her body, and her skin cut and bruised. When, at last, the governor's court was reached, she was wounded from head to foot, and so faint that a soldier was forced to support her before the judge's seat, while mother-hearts in the watching crowd pitied her wretchedness. And yet, oh, blessed child! great is thy reward in heaven.

They asked her if she would sacrifice. Her eyes, uplifted in prayer, gave their silent answer. So the judge ordered her to be stretched on the rack.

Yet her love never faltered, and her LORD spared her further pain. As she lay bound, exhausted, and aching in every slender limb, she prayed to CHRIST to take her to Himself. Her prayer was heard and granted; and her gentle soul fled to His embrace for Whom she died.

Suddenly, in the sunshine that poured down through the open roof in a blaze of glory over the cruel rack and the dead body on it, a little white dove, even whiter than the radiance of the midday sun, was seen fluttering over Devota's breast. For a moment it hovered there. Then it spread its wings, and, while the judge and court watched in wonder, flew up and up through the stream of light and into the free air! and then, again, up and up, till it was lost in the deep blue vault of heaven.

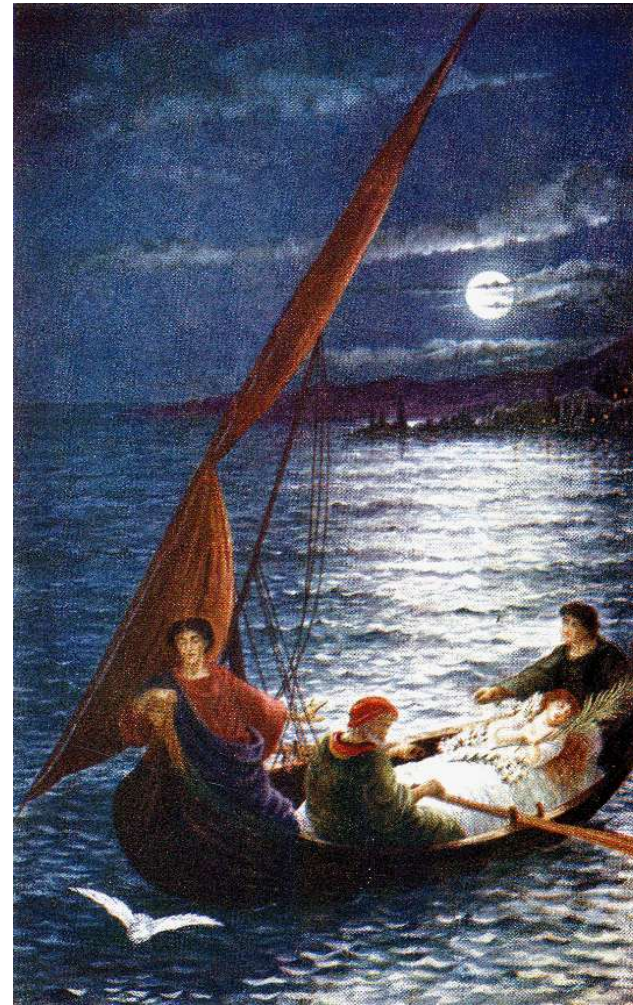
In the hushed silence that followed, the judge's voice broke in harshly, for he feared a popular movement in favour of the martyred child.

"Slaves," he commanded, "throw the body into the outer court. It can be burnt to-night on the pyre with the common dead."

His order was obeyed. All the long afternoon the mortal loveliness that had held the far greater immortal beauty of Devota lay among the refuse and dirt of the lower court. But the news had spread among the Christians, and those were not wanting who were ready to risk all to save the body of CHRIST'S holy servant from dishonour.

When dusk fell, an old man stole softly through the court, and slipped a purse into the hands of the watching slave. The latter knew well enough what was meant, and that the judge need never find out that one body the less had been burnt on the pyre: so he conveniently turned his back, as the stranger gathered the little form in his arms. He was the old

Christian boatman, Gratian, whom she had loved and who had often rowed her in his boat among the rocks on the seashore. His tears fell on the pure dead face as he carried her down the darkening street. Under some olive-trees at the end of the town, two more men were waiting—the priest Benenatus, and his deacon Apollinarius. The former stepped out of the shadow and took Devota from Gratian.



'SEE YONDER, WHAT IS THAT?'

"Dear, blessed child!" he said softly, "and blessed beyond all words that peace and glory she now enjoys before His face! May her innocent soul pray for us all!" and the others murmured, "Amen."

Benenatus, with his companions, carried Devota down the steep way to the beach, where Gratian had previously made preparations for her reception in his hut; and while the water lapped against his boat outside, they cleansed her wounds and set her brown hair in order, speaking softly the while, as in the presence of a holy thing. Then they wrapped her in white, with sweet-smelling spices, set her lily and her palm in her hand, and carrying her out, put her in the little boat. When they had themselves embarked, scarce knowing what they meant to do, they rowed out to sea.

By this time the moon had risen, and poured her pale glory over the waves, the boat and its white-robed treasure. The three men wondered whither they should go next.

"See yonder," said Apollinarius suddenly, pointing to the bows of the boat—"what is that?"

His companions turned to look where he pointed.

Silvered in the white, quivering moonbeams, shone a little dove. It fluttered before the bows of the boat, as if inviting them to follow it. They looked at one another in silence, for the appearance of a dove at the martyr's death had been made known to them by witnesses, and the remembrance of it at once flashed into their minds.

"We must follow where it leads," whispered Benenatus, "for it comes from GOD. We are in His hands, and He has made the sea calm for us."

The boat was steered to follow the dove. Through the pale moonlight and the growing dawn, and into the sunshine the bird flew before them, now skimming over the waves, now fluttering on, and now waiting for them to follow, but never

leaving them. Under its guidance they came, at last, after a long voyage, to the town which is now called Monaco, where they laid the body of the child-martyr to await the Resurrection morning.

But Devota herself, in the kingdom to which she has gone, has now a playground in one of the "many mansions" of our FATHER'S house; and the Holy Innocents make daisy-chains with her in the meadows that stretch around the Tree of Life.

CHAPTER IV

ST. PHOCAS THE GARDENER

The evening of a glorious September day was falling over Sinope, in Pontus of Asia Minor. Under the last slanting sun-rays everything glowed with vivid hues of orange and purple, whilst the white-walled town shone as if dipped in liquid gold.

A breeze—just fresh enough, after the heat of the day, to speak pleasantly of the coming cool of autumn—had sprung up from the waters of the Euxine (which is now called the Black Sea), and at the gate of a garden on the outskirts of the town an old man had come out to enjoy the evening air. He was Phocas the gardener, one of the few Christians of Sinope, living here simply on the produce of his garden, giving away the surplus to the poor, and well loved by all who knew him, even if they were not of his faith.

In front of him lay the sea, on one side the glowing town, behind him, and around his house, where a passion-flower climbed and rioted over the porch, was his garden, sloping uphill to the higher ground that sheltered the city. Such a pretty garden it was!—with its beds of lilies and bowers of roses among the homely rows of vegetables that formed his food. Vines, heavy for the vintage, climbed over his pergola; gnarled grey olives bowed down their fruit-laden branches; and, at the end of the garden, tall on the hill, and black against the blue-purple sky, stood the cypress-trees, like sentinels, keeping watch over the profusion of flowers and fruit below.

The old man stood at the gate and looked on all the peace and beauty before him—the shifting lights, the calm sea, the tranquil sky, and the glory of orange and yellow above the golden city. Then he thought of the other changeless Golden

City, "the peace of the Sabbath that hath no end," and the wide sea around the throne of the Lamb.



THE OLD MAN STOOD AT THE GATE.

The lights changed. The gold and purple deepened and passed. The sun set, and the wind became a little chilly, as the violet which the sun had left faded into grey. In the rapid deepening of the twilight three men came toiling up the hill, past the house of Phocas, towards the gate of Sinope. They were tired and stained with travel, and they turned longingly to the peace of the garden, where the flowers nodded among the vines and olives, and the gentle, white-robed old man reigned as king over his little Elysium. So quiet did the haven of rest seem that their gaze and then their feet lingered, as though they were very fain to enter. Phocas saw their weariness and their longing. They were rough-looking fellows, but what of that?—"I was a Stranger, and ye took Me in." He jerked back the gate with a friendly gesture.

"Friends," he said cheerfully, "you look tired and hungry. Come in and rest here before you go on to the town."

The three needed no further invitation. They passed through the garden into the house. Here, in a room where everything was plain, but clean and fresh, Phocas, with simple courtesy, bade them be seated while he lit the lamp, brought them water to wash away the dust, and spread the board with food—bread and fish, fruit and vegetables from his garden, wine from his vineyard, olives and olive-oil from his olive-trees.

The four sat down, and, as they ate, fell to talking. At length, as must have happened anywhere in those days of A.D. 303, the conversation turned to far-off Imperial Rome, the Emperor, his edicts, and then to the Christians and the persecution. The weariest of the strangers broke out into loud abuse of the pestilent sect, that had forced him to leave his home and to take a sudden and irksome journey at most insufficient notice.

"Then your business in Sinope concerns the Christians?" asked Phocas quietly, whilst he thought, "Who knows? This visit may be ordained of GOD for me to help and forewarn His faithful servants."

"With one of them," replied the second stranger. "We have orders to arrest him, and, unless he will consent to forsake his superstition, to behead him at once. What is his name, Caius?—you hold the order for his arrest. Ah, I have it—Phocas. Perhaps you know of him, sir?"

The lamp gave a dim light, and none of the three saw the sudden smile that flickered on the old man's lips. Only a momentary hush broke the conversation, and only a second's hesitation held Phocas silent before his quiet answer came

"I know him rather well—I will show him to you to-morrow."

Stretching out a hand, the slight tremor of which might have been easily taken for infirmity of age, he refilled the wine-glasses and turned the talk to another subject.

When supper was ended, the strangers, amid hearty thanks, were reluctantly preparing to go on their way. But Phocas detained them. Would they not rest that night in his house? It was late, and business was over in Sinope. They could rise early in the morning, when he would point out Phocas's dwelling. They needed very little persuasion. So the beds were made ready, and, after the pleasant bustle of preparation and saying "good-night," the strangers retired to rest, and silence fell on the house. But Phocas did not sleep. A great awe had fallen on his soul, and, leaving the lamp burning in his room, he went out quietly into his garden, to his flowers and dear familiar trees, the sweet night-scents and the solemn stars, while this new wonder wrapped him from head to foot. What was this message that had come to him to-night? What should he do? Was it his duty to save his life by flight? Had not His Divine LORD and Master Himself said, "When they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another"?

Should he, then, hurry away while his executioners slept? But he had told them that he would show them Phocas; and he was very old to seek a living among strangers. Once he turned and noticed, through the shifting and interlacing of the

olive-boughs, the light in his house beacon him homewards. But yonder star, above the cypresses—to what home does that beacon? Suddenly the unfading palm and ineffable crown of martyrdom blazed before him, and he bowed his humble head in wonder that he, the old gardener, was called by his Master to so great an honour.

As in a dream, with slow-moving feet and eyes that scarcely saw for the spiritual dazzle of the crown to come, he fetched his spade from the shed where he kept his tools, and, turning his back on the little friendly light in his window, passed, half-unconscious, under the pergola where the grapes hung ripe for the wine-press, to the fairest part of his garden. Bending down there he began to dig. The olive-grove made dark shadow not far from him, and the lilies stood up pale and ghostly against it, and nodded over the crimson carpet of rose-petals at their feet, as he dug and dug in the turf, hollowing out—what? The air was heavy with perfume, the stars went on their slow way, gazing down on him, the tall cypresses stood sentinel that none should disturb him, and bent and whispered to one another of the thing that he—scarce knowing—did. Only when the stars paled, and the garden was grey as the olive-leaves, and the dawn-wind sighed to the little birds to awake—he had finished his work, and knew that he had dug his grave.

Under an ashen sky, that quickened, minute by minute, to a sheet of primrose, and changed, glowed, and rippled into mauve, rose, and flame-colour, the old man knelt and prayed in love and worship to CHRIST the LORD. The birds bore him company, and his flowers stood around—roses red as the martyr-blood so soon to fall; lilies white as his blameless life; violets, whose breath was less sweet than his prayer; daisies, with their eyes fixed less steadfastly on heaven than his unwavering heart. Then the sun rose and flooded with glory him upon whom the Sun of Righteousness would soon rise for ever. GOD'S day had come, and truly, for Phocas, "there shall be no more night."

He arose, and went towards his house. His gladness made his step that of a young man, and the three strangers, who were already up, gazed on him astonished. He stretched out his hands to them.

"Now," he said, "I will show you Phocas."

He led them into the garden, and up the path, and past the vines to the grave; and, as they stood in wonder, he said to them, "I am Phocas, and I am ready."

Upon their heathen hearts fell shame and sorrow, and bitter anger against the Emperor and his edict, that bade them slay this blameless, kind old man, their host. But he, who saw their trouble, stepped up to them, and laid his hands on theirs and on the executioner's sword that one of them carried, and said, "Friends, fear not, but do your duty, for none is more glad to yield to such a fate than I myself, who pass, by this most blessed death, to life immortal."

When they still hesitated, marvelling at his words, and fearing the Emperor's anger, if they disobeyed the imperial mandate, Phocas quietly knelt down by the grave. Yet, for a moment, they hesitate. Then—for the wrath of the Emperor is no light thing—the leader of the three snatches out his sword. With one merciful blow he severs the martyr's neck, and flings the hateful weapon from him, while the shaken flowers of a red-rose-bush rain down over the now prostrate form a shower of lovely crimson tears.

Hurriedly, with averted eyes, as from a murder, but with reverent touch, the men wrap the old gardener in his white robes, lay him in the grave that his own hands had hollowed out for-himself, and throw the sods and earth over him. Their leader picks up his sword, and, one by one, they steal away, and leave Phocas to the flowers, his mourners.

High above the deserted garden a lark soars triumphant into the blue sky; and, far above garden, lark and blueness, CHRIST'S pierced hand has crowned His martyr.

CHAPTER V

ST. GENES THE ACTOR

"Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in."

Our LORD JESUS CHRIST tells us of the great wedding feast, of the invited guests who refused to come, and how the highways and hedges were searched that the house might be filled. So the "noble army of martyrs" has been sometimes recruited. Not all, like the blessed St. Polycarp, have been able to say, "for eighty-five years I have served my LORD." Some have been suddenly called to this great honour, and, as men in their ignorance might say, even unprepared. For the world does not know what blessed preparation, unperceived even by themselves, while they lived here, these holy ones received. Some few have even been called when unbaptized—for martyrdom itself confers the Baptism of blood.

One might not expect to find a fool's cap and bells among the emblems of these blessed ones! The palm, the lily, the Book of the Gospels, the cruel instruments of their passion and triumph, these seem fitting; not so the other. But a fool's cap and bells are the emblems of one of the holy martyrs, and they may be seen here in England, in a church at Coombe-in-Teignhead, in Devonshire. They belong to an actor who was called most wonderfully to the crown of martyrdom.

August 25, 303, was a very great day in the theatre at Rome, and, in spite of the heat, scarcely mitigated by the awning overhead, people had been pouring into their seats from an early hour, content to wait long for that afternoon's spectacle. Talk, laughter, and eager expectation, rippled round the theatre. Was not the divine Augustus, the Emperor Diocletian himself to be there in person, to see this latest representation of the clever comedian Genes? Word, too, had

spread abroad as to what this representation was to be—a fine subject, indeed! A burlesque of those obstinate Christians who defied the Augustus and were everywhere paying the penalty under death and torture. Some one had heard that Genes had Christian relatives, and so had been able to study, at first hand, all their absurdities. No doubt he had hit upon the very thing that would most raise laughter and mockery against them.

The theatre had been carefully prepared for the Emperor. The royal seat was richly hung, roses and bay-leaves garlanded the columns and balustrades, braziers flamed brightly and incense smoked on the altars in the orchestra and before the fine statue of the goddess Venus, standing high and rose-wreathed on a pedestal to the left of the stage. Presently, amidst a blare of trumpets, the Emperor Diocletian entered with his lictors and soldiers, and the white-robed nobles, privileged to bear him company. The hum of conversation ceased for a minute, as all eyes turned to look at him while he and his courtiers were seated. Then it continued more gaily than ever, until a signal was given and the curtain rose. Roars of delighted laughter broke from the audience. In the centre of the stage, on a bed, lay their favourite, Genes, his handsome limbs muffled in bandages and his handsome face contorted into a most woe-begone countenance. He appeared to be sick to death, and was loudly groaning. Other actors stood round, among them the clown, who, however, as all knew, would not be so funny as Genes himself. The play began.

"I am dying, and my conscience afflicts me unendurably," moaned the actor, with the most ludicrous face, "I feel heavy and oppressed, and I fain would be light and relieved."

"Well, my good man," replied his comrades, "what can we do to help you?" One of them added, "How can we make you light if you are heavy? Do you think we are carpenters, and can plane you down?"

Here the audience laughed again, but they had eyes and ears for little else on the stage save the ridiculous figure tossing in the bed.

"Only one thing can help me," groaned Genes, "I desire to die a Christian."

"What! *You* desire to become a Christian! Well, who would have believed that?"

As Genes groaned the louder and rolled from side to side, the clown testified in pantomime to the audience the extreme undesirability of being a Christian in those days of the scourge, the rack, and the lions. When people had ceased laughing, Genes was allowed to get out his answer: "That, in the great last day, I may take refuge in GOD, and be found in Him."

All this mockery sounds, and was, most horribly blasphemous. But wait and see how wonderfully He Who sent into the highways and hedges for His wedding guests was working, amid this heathen company, before the heathen audience, in the soul of him who scorned Him.

"Well, then," continued one of the actors, "if there is no other way to help you, go, Caius, and call in a Christian priest."

Amidst the shouts of the onlookers, now entirely delighted with the performance, on strutted a man, dressed as a Christian priest. With a great show of commiseration, and many sanctimonious grimaces, he sat down by the bed, took Genes's hand, and said—"My son, why hast thou sent for me?"

Genes turned to him. Into his acting he seemed now to have infused a serious earnestness. "I wish," said he, "to receive the favour of CHRIST, that I might be reborn in Him, and set free from the miseries of my iniquities."

At a sign from the priest, on staggered some men carrying a huge tub of water, which they placed in the centre

of the stage. With much horse-play, Genes, still absurdly serious, was dragged out of bed.



GENES WAS DRAGGED OUT OF BED.

They led him to the tub. His gravity was perfect, although the actors themselves could scarcely restrain their mirth, and even the sham priest wore a broad grin on his face. Genes was plunged in the tub, and the ceremony of Baptism, correct in every detail (for had he not been at great pains to ascertain from his Christian relatives the rites attendant on this Sacrament?) was performed at length by the priest, while the theatre fairly rocked with merriment, and the Emperor himself had forgotten his dignity and was laughing as heartily as the rest. When Genes was taken out again, and clothed in the white robe, given in those days to the newly-baptized, they all yelled still louder.

Never was there such a man! His mimicry was beyond words, his acting perfect to the life.

"Look at him now!" they gasp to one another, breathless, as they stamp their applause. He stands silent, motionless, changed, his face humbly bowed to the ground. Then he lifts his eyes heavenwards, and he stretches his arms upwards in an infinite yearning, as if forgetful of himself, his fellows, the Emperor, the theatre, the applauding, laughing audience; and his face is that of one who has looked on GOD.

As the newly-baptized stood silent in the wonder and freshness of the grace just given him, from both sides Roman soldiers rushed up to seize him and to bring him before the Emperor to be sentenced. All this had been arranged beforehand, as an additional touch of nature, and the audience received it with amazing delight.

Only—had Genes forgotten himself, or was he bent on improvising some further buffoonery, that had only that moment dawned on his brilliant mind? Instead of yielding mildly to his captors, as the average Christian did, he shook them off, and, running to the left-hand of the stage, threw down the statue of Venus from the pedestal, and stood on it himself.

In a moment, the applause had died out in curiosity, and there were even a few murmurs of disapproval as the Venus rolled on the ground with a broken arm, for this seemed to be carrying things too far. But Genes motioned to them all to be silent, and, turning to the Emperor, addressed him thus:

"Listen to me, sire, and all you present, wise men and people of Rome. I have hated the name of Christian so much that I have ever insulted those who died for it; and I have diligently studied the mysteries of the Faith that I might be able to mock them in your presence, as you have seen to-day.

"But, sire, as I lay on yonder bed, the realities of death, and the remembrance of my many sins began to grow on me, and a black cloud of despair fell over me. I was dipped in the water of regeneration, and when in the mockery of the play, I accepted CHRIST with my lips, then I accepted Him for ever in my heart. While you all shouted and thought that I still acted, the darkness melted away, and I beheld above me a band of radiant angels, who held in their hands an open book wherein all my black sins had been written, but which had now become as white as snow, while they bade me acknowledge His mercy, Who, of His love, gave me, in very truth, what I had purposed to feign in mockery. Then"—his voice grew low and tender—"me seemed, in a flash, I saw CHRIST the LORD. So, here, before you all, who laughed at my acting, I confess in earnest that CHRIST is Very GOD and Very Man, my Light, my Salvation, my Eternal Joy, the King of kings and LORD of lords, in Whom alone do I put my trust."

Dead silence fell upon the audience, and they knew not what to think; for, as they watched the actor's glowing face, they read in it something that was far from mimicry. But Diocletian frowned angrily, and motioned to the soldiers to seize Genes, and drag him from the pedestal. He yielded readily enough now, and was led before the Emperor.

"You may carry a jest too far," said Diocletian sternly, "so now, in time, beware. We will overlook the broken Venus, for you act well, and the piece was good. Still, we have had

enough of this. Go behind the stage, and get ready to act something else."

"Sire," answered Genes looking up, "I speak the truth. I mean what I say. I *am* a Christian."

"Then I can be in earnest, too," cried the Emperor; "let Genes the Christian be beaten with rods till he repents of his folly."

The lictors hurried down into the orchestra. Genes was seized and bound. They stripped the white tunic of Baptism from his shoulders, and beat him till his blood flowed on the marble pavement. Calmly he bore it all. The audience, sitting in stolid silence, scarcely able to believe their eyes, watched this burlesque that had turned thus suddenly into completest reality.

The patience of the Emperor was exhausted before that of the martyr.

"Take him away to the prefect," said Diocletian in disgust, "he has more means at his control than I have here, to force this lunatic back to his senses"; and he turned to leave the theatre.

His departure was the signal for the loosing of all tongues. Amid a perfect babel, those nearest the exits, who had only waited till the Emperor had left, rushed out to see Genes, surrounded by a gesticulating mob of soldiers, lictors, musicians, and his fellow-actors, led away to the judgement-hall. The news flew abroad quickly to Christian and pagan. "Genes, the actor, has suddenly gone mad! He confessed himself a Christian in the middle of the performance!" "Genes, the comedian, who mocked our LORD, is being led out, believing on Him, to die a glorious martyr for His Name!"

The audience to see him suffer was as great as the audience had been to see him act, and a great deal more excited. A breathless interest pervaded the whole place. Plautianus, the prefect, used persuasion, arguments, threats,

and even offered bribery. At last, at his wit's end, he ordered Genes to be stretched on the rack.

So the tormentors bound Genes, by wrists and ankles, to the bed of torture, and cruelly racked the handsome limbs on whose antics the Roman populace had been wont to gaze in delight. The popular young actor, the privileged favourite of both high and low throughout the whole city, who had known little of pain in his gay and careless life, endured the torture in silence, while his face enkindled with as divine a love as ever shone on the countenance of priest or deacon consecrated to the Saviour's service. And no word could they force from his lips, save,—

"I am a Christian. There is no GOD save the Eternal, the Almighty, the Three in One, and One in Three, Whom I adore."

At last, seeing all was in vain, Plautianus ordered him to be loosened from the rack, and his head to be struck off

The actor-soldier of CHRIST bowed his head with the utmost gladness. Only two or three hours ago he, who now bent before the stroke of death, had stooped, laughing and jesting, to bind the comedian's buskins on his feet, little thinking that he was going to his last performance. Oh, marvellous power of the Crucified, with arms stretched wide in love at the portals of eternal life, compelling His chosen to come in!

From the stage where he had mocked, and from the judgement-hall where he had so nobly borne witness to the truth, Genes the actor passed up to those golden gates, and through them to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. He, indeed, was called most wonderfully, and as far as our poor human understanding can see, incomprehensibly, from the "highways and hedges" of unbelief and ridicule, to a throne at that Divine Banquet; cleansed with the Baptism of blood; and clothed, as to his wedding garment, with the refulgent, crimson robe of martyrdom.

CHAPTER VI

THE PROMISE OF ST. DOROTHEA

"Christeta and Callista have sacrificed. Pray for them and for us."

It was a very short note, but few could have been sadder in the days in which it was written, A.D. 303, during the last great persecution of the Church. It meant that two of CHRIST'S servants had fallen away from Him, becoming apostates by offering incense on the altars of the pagan gods, thus, by denying Him before men, calling down upon themselves the fear that He would deny them before His FATHER.

The lady—or girl, rather—for she was only about nineteen or twenty, to whom the note had been sent that afternoon by the sorrowing relatives of the apostate sisters, sat with her hands folded in her lap, and her face bowed in most gentle pity. She was the Lady Dorothea, a Christian of Caesarea in Cappadocia, rich in this world's goods, as the beautiful yet simple room in which she sat, testified; far richer in the imperishable treasure above, where, in thought and longing, she ever walked with CHRIST her Spouse. Christeta and Callista were her friends. They had played together as children, and grown up together to happy girlhood. Now, when they should have gone before her, by martyrdom, to heaven, they had utterly fallen away. She had heard of their arrest, of their first examination, and of their courage under torture. She had known that their second examination had been fixed for that day; then, while she hoped they might be enjoying the first moments of their eternal triumph, the note had been brought to her—"Christeta and Callista have sacrificed."

She felt no anger or contempt for them—only an infinite sorrow and yearning, and compassionate sympathy at their loss. After all, she thought, who was she that she should blame them? If she feared less for herself was it not only because she *knew* her love and her LORD would bring her safely through all pain to His embrace? And even this blessed certainty was His own gift to her. Also, she thought, "she was in body and health stronger than they were; and little Callista, at least, was two years younger." So, finding every excuse and no blame, she prayed earnestly for them, and for those who sorrowed over them.

"My turn must come soon," she thought; "they cannot pass me over. For, before the persecution, I ever lived openly as a Christian. While I suffer, and when it pleases Him to bring me to see His face, I can pray for my friends."

Even as she pondered thus, a thunderous knocking shook the calm of the house. Dorothea stood up smiling.

"So soon!" she said to herself; "well, thank GOD, I am ready."

She took a lamp in her hand; she, the wise virgin, with her light ever burning brightly, ever prepared to go forth gladly when the call came, to meet her Bridegroom, and went down through the corridors to those who had come to take her away. One of her servants had opened the door, and outside, seen by the smoky light of torches, was a group of rough men and soldiers.

"We seek the Lady Dorothea," their leader said. "We hold an order for her arrest."

"I am she," Dorothea replied. "I pray you to trouble my servants no more, as I am ready."

She paused to whisper a few words of instruction and farewell into the ears of the sorrowful doorkeeper, who, like all the household, was a Christian, and then calmly surrendered herself to be bound and hurried along the streets

to the prison, where they thrust her into a dark cell. But Dorothea knew no terror. "Perfect love casteth out fear"; and no darkness could touch that soul which walked ever in the light of CHRIST.

Sapritius, attended by his guard of lictors and soldiers, sat in his chair of state on the raised platform. At the further end of the hall a crowd of rough people from the town had gathered in cheerful expectation of seeing another Christian tortured. Nearer the judge were an equal number of people, men and women too, well-born and well educated, quite equally ready to be similarly entertained. Among them sat a lawyer named Theophilus; he was about thirty, but looked older, owing to his weary eyes, and discontented mouth. He was a man well known in the city, and a favourite, in spite of his great self-assurance, which amounted at times to a positive rudeness. A young man leant at his elbow, one of the pagan philosophers of the day, bent on expounding a very confused theory respecting the future life. Theophilus waved him away, with undisguised boredom.

"I am afraid," he said, "this does not much interest me. I am not, and shall not try to become worthy of sharing the joys of the gods in Olympus; while Hades, whither you say I am bound, has always appeared so gloomy, that I will gladly forego it altogether. But you must stop talking now, for the prisoner is coming. These Christians are dreadfully in earnest; and, as that is a quality I shall never possess, it amuses me to see it in others."

The gentle maiden victim, introduced before them, excited an unusual interest in the hard-hearted assembly. The men began to compare notes on her tall, delicate figure, her brown hair, and the confidence of her bearing. The ladies—for there were ladies there, though it might seem strange that they should have come to witness so cruel a scene—were disposed to be scornful. Theophilus bent his bold eyes on Dorothea's face, measuring her strength and capacity for endurance, and wondering how long she would hold out, or which of the

hideous tools lying near would be the one to shake her at the last.

The judge addressed her gently (he was well pleased with his success with her two friends), and asked her to sacrifice. Dorothea calmly replied that for her to do so was impossible.

"Think well, lady," he said; "we would deal gently with you. But, remember, we have means to compel you, as we have compelled Christeta and Callista."

"I fear none of your tools," she answered; "rather I count myself happy to bear pain for Him Who bore so much for me. As to my friends, I pray with all my heart that my torture and death might yet awaken in them the resolution to undergo the same."

"But think," persisted Sapritius; "will you, so young, surrender life, and go out from this fair world, from the blue heavens and the hills, and the green country and the flowers, into a darkness of which we know naught?"

"I go into no darkness," said Dorothea smiling, "but into a garden where there is neither death nor decay, where the Tree of Life yields its fruit for ever, and the lilies and roses bloom with unfading petals under the beams of a Sun Which never sets."

Theophilus settled himself in contented amusement. To his unbelieving mind her faith was most diverting.

Only, he began to think, she might be rather longer in yielding to torment than he had at first supposed.

"Think again," said Sapritius; "you are beautiful, and your life is but beginning. In a few years you may be happy with husband and children. If the loveliness of the world holds no allurement for you, do these joys of home also mean nothing to you?"

"You speak truly," she answered gently, "in thinking these joys most blessed. For all love is fair—and no earthly love fairer than that of husband and wife. But"—and she raised her fettered hands—"my Love is in heaven. My Bridegroom awaits me there, CHRIST, the Eternal SON, the Incarnate Word, Whom mine eyes long to behold. I pray you, seek no more to persuade me, but set about your work at once, that I may be the sooner crowned by Him with the ever-lasting roses of His kingdom."

Theophilus thought that perhaps she would not yield at all.

"You are obstinate enough," continued Sapritius, whose temper was rising; "but we have heard the like before, and sometimes seen swift submission afterwards. Only we are unwilling to proceed to the torture of one so fair if other means may prevail. Perhaps you may listen to your playfellows, when your stubbornness refuses to listen to me. The ladies, Christeta and Callista, await you in a room near by. Will you go to them, or will you refuse this offer also?"

"I will go, and gladly," replied Dorothea, her whole face lighting up. "I pray you lead me there at once."

The judge graciously ordered a soldier to take her to her friends. As she was led away, Theophilus rubbed his chin in perplexed meditation. Was the girl, then, going to submit before she had tasted any torture? Truly, the Nazarenes were an incomprehensible race!

The room into which they led Dorothea was small, beautifully decorated, and opening with a small semi-circle of columns, on a garden. Two girls, pale and ill-at-ease, sat on a marble seat under the colonnade. Dorothea was ushered in, and the jailer, closing the door, left the three together. At the first moment Christeta and Callista averted their eyes. They were, both of them, obviously ashamed to meet her. But when Dorothea, with a pitying smile, stretched out her arms to them, and they heard, at the same time, the jangle of her chains and

her sweet voice, asking, "Christeta and Callista, have you nothing to say to your old playfellow?" the younger of the two got up and, running to her, buried her face in the bosom of her friend's dress. Dorothea, who was taller by a head, kissed the fair curls, and, still holding Callista, crossed to the seat, placed herself by the elder girl, and made the younger sit down also by her. For a moment there was silence. Dorothea looked at the pale, disconcerted faces, the averted glances, and the restless, intertwining fingers. Suddenly she put an arm round each, and, with a half-whimsical laugh, said, "I think you are both dumb. Have you nothing to tell me? In the court they gave me to understand that you would have so much to say."

The younger girl caught her breath with a dry sob; the elder sat still, with her head turned away. Dorothea looked from one to the other, and laughed softly.

"It seems that I must do the talking, and I think it is best so. For I know all they would have you say—the joys of life here, the happiness and beauty of this world, the anguish of torture, and the darkness of death. Listen to me while I tell you what you know you have lost."

She got up, and led them swiftly to the open colonnade, overlooking the gardens.

"Look out yonder. It is drawing towards evening. Where you should be is no night. Here, to-day, the skies are cold and grey. There they do not even need the sunshine, in those gardens where the flowers never fade. Unhappy ones, whose joy, already assured, I, in my mortal trial, might even now be envying."

She waited a minute or two, and then continued, speaking softly,—

"It was yesterday, was it not, that your call came? Yesterday, oh, happy ones, who have already been long hours in heaven! Hush! You have passed the dark river, and the gates of pearl. You hear the harpers and the angelic voices and the new song around the Lamb. And that whisper—it is the

waves of the crystal sea breaking at the foot of His throne. How bright the golden pavement you tread! how white your robes, and how dazzling the crowns that deck you! Behold, too, the majesty of the angels at your side, and the blessed ones who have come here before you! I see Polycarp, and Perpetua; and yonder is Laurence; and there, Blandina, the slave-girl of Lyons, whose brightness would blind you, were you not yourselves as she is. And above, and beyond, yet around and near, on Whose beauty and on Whose wounds my mortal eyes cannot look, but on Whom *your* eyes, oh, immortal ones! are fixed for the ages of eternity—He is before you on His throne, and calls you to Him, and before the holy saints and angels, and before His FATHER, confesses you His brides and martyrs, while He wipes away all tears from your eyes.

"Only, it is getting dark here, and the winds of earth are chill, and the marble pavement of Sapritius' hall of judgement is cold at your feet, as night comes on over the world."

Callista, with a cry, slipped from Dorothea's supporting arm, and fell before her in an agony of tears. Christeta's lips quivered, and her friend felt the shudder of her whole body. She spoke again in a sterner tone, from which the sisters flinched.

"And all this is *true*—for never dare to speak to me what they would have you say of doubt and uncertainty. Whilst in your uncrowned, discomforted, apostate souls is worse night and worse death than that which you escaped yesterday, worse death than the mortal passing that must come at last—that might *have come*, and have been by now blessedly endured and ended for ever. Is this to be? Is His face to be turned in denial from you? Are your eyes to be filled through long years, perhaps through an awful eternity, with tears His hand will *not* wipe away? Christeta and Callista, will you not," and her voice sank now from sternness to an infinite hopefulness, "go up to the marriage feast, only one day late?"

"Dorothea!" cried Christeta, and she too fell at her friend's feet, "what could we, what can we do? It was the torture that moved us. We are not brave and strong like you—though," with a sob, "we have suffered worse torments in our souls since."

"I am not brave or strong of myself," replied Dorothea, "it is He that maketh me so; and He will do the same for you also. He is waiting for you out yonder in the court of judgement. He, your Love, waiting to receive you again and take you yonder—" and she pointed upwards, "and you cannot now refuse Him."

"Pray for us, then," whispered Callista, "pray for us that we may be faithful."

Dorothea knelt with them and prayed long and fervently. At first their eyes were fixed only on her bright face, as if they drew their courage through her. But at length they too lifted their eyes more hopefully, and presently their trembling lips joined in her petition for forgiveness and strength to obtain their crowns at last. They were calm and composed when the jailer came for Dorothea. He was amazed to see the three on their knees. But they arose at once, and went hand in hand back to the hall: and before the seat of Sapritius Dorothea kissed her friends and commended them to CHRIST.

"What is this?" cried Sapritius, "you witch, have you perverted them?"

"His strength," answered Dorothea, has led them back to their King and Saviour."

A stir of interest moved the audience. The young lawyer, raised from his langour, leant forward curiously, for a better sight of the girl, whose convictions, foolish as he deemed them, had been strong enough to nerve two of her companions, after their terrible experience of yesterday, to face death. But Sapritius, in wrath, ordered Christeta and Callista to instant execution. They went, joyful, and by their

steadfast faithfulness set the seal on their repentance, happy to be, as Dorothea said, only one day late at the marriage feast.

A determination had grown on the prefect not to slay, but to force Dorothea to his will. Did she now at last sacrifice, it would be the greater triumph for him, the greater humiliation for her. He called the executioner and his brutal assistants, and bade them proceed to her torture. When they had bound her, he once more commanded her to yield and sacrifice. But she turned away her head, and told them to do their worst, for so should she the sooner go to be with her Love.

So this blessed martyr, a delicate, high-born girl, entered upon her trial alone—yet not alone, for her Saviour stood at her side to strengthen her, and she suffered in silence, upborne by His arm. Those assembled round her watched with cruel interest judge, soldiers, townsfolk, and, alas! ladies, well-born and, according to their ideas, refined. More than that, even girls watched the torment of one who, in age, was their fellow. If some of the younger ones were at first inclined to shrink away in pity, their hearts soon hardened. For was not this one of those impious Christians—enemies of the Emperor?

The lawyer Theophilus lay back in his comfortable chair, and watched with growing attention, wondering a little at Dorothea's courage, but a great deal that any one could be so mad.

The afternoon wore on. The setting sun made a rift in the grey clouds, and for a moment bathed the court, the crowd, and the calm martyr-face with its rich glow. It was plain now that Dorothea was sinking fast, and when, at the judge's command, they freed her from her bonds, she was already dying. Sapritius abruptly ordered that her head should be struck off.

Dorothea thanked him in a low voice, and turned to follow the headsman to the place of death. As it chanced, she had to pass quite close to Theophilus. He had risen, and, as she

came towards him, he leant to address her over the marble balustrade that parted them.

"Spouse of CHRIST!"

He spoke half-mockingly, half-cynically, in a voice that cut like steel. She stopped, and lifted her eyes to his. For a moment they faced each other—she so broken, but so gently patient; he so sneeringly insolent.

"Spouse of CHRIST!" he repeated, bowing, as the bold smile grew on his lips, "when thou comest at last into that garden, whither thou dost hasten, I pray thee, in remembrance, send me some of its roses."

Her look never wavered: and she too smiled now, but how differently!

"I will," she answered.

Amid the titter of amusement that arose near them, she was led away to death. She bent her head a moment in prayer, then laid it on the block. And with one blow the executioner severed her neck.

When the lictor announced that the sentence of death had been carried out, the court broke up, and the people gathered in groups to talk of the occurrences of the afternoon. Theophilus was in high good humour, and very pleased with himself, complimenting the ladies, chaffing his friends and chaffed by them for his last witty words to the prisoner, and going here and there, reminding a few favoured ones that they were to be at his house for supper not long hence. At length, as the litters arrived for the noble ladies, and the young men sauntered away, he went out also, and descended the steps into the road, arranging to his taste the folds of his toga. As he passed a side-street that had an entrance adjoining the court of the prison, he chanced to look down it, and saw a solemn group of people laying a white-shrouded form on a bier. They were some Christians who had waited for and received the body of the holy martyr.

For the first time, a shade of compunction smote on his hard heart. He suddenly remembered a white, uplifted face and earnest eyes. He had been rather a brute, he thought, to say what he had said, mocking the girl and her belief at such a moment. After all, she was a woman, suffering and dying, and his man-hood had made but a sorry show of itself before her.

He walked on, his cynical assurance passed, leaving in its place a puzzled weariness that pained him strangely. But when he came to his house, he found that arrangements for supper needed his superintendence, and that he had scarcely half an hour to make ready for his friends. In the bustle of pleasant preparation, he soon forgot Dorothea and became the old, self-complacent Theophilus.

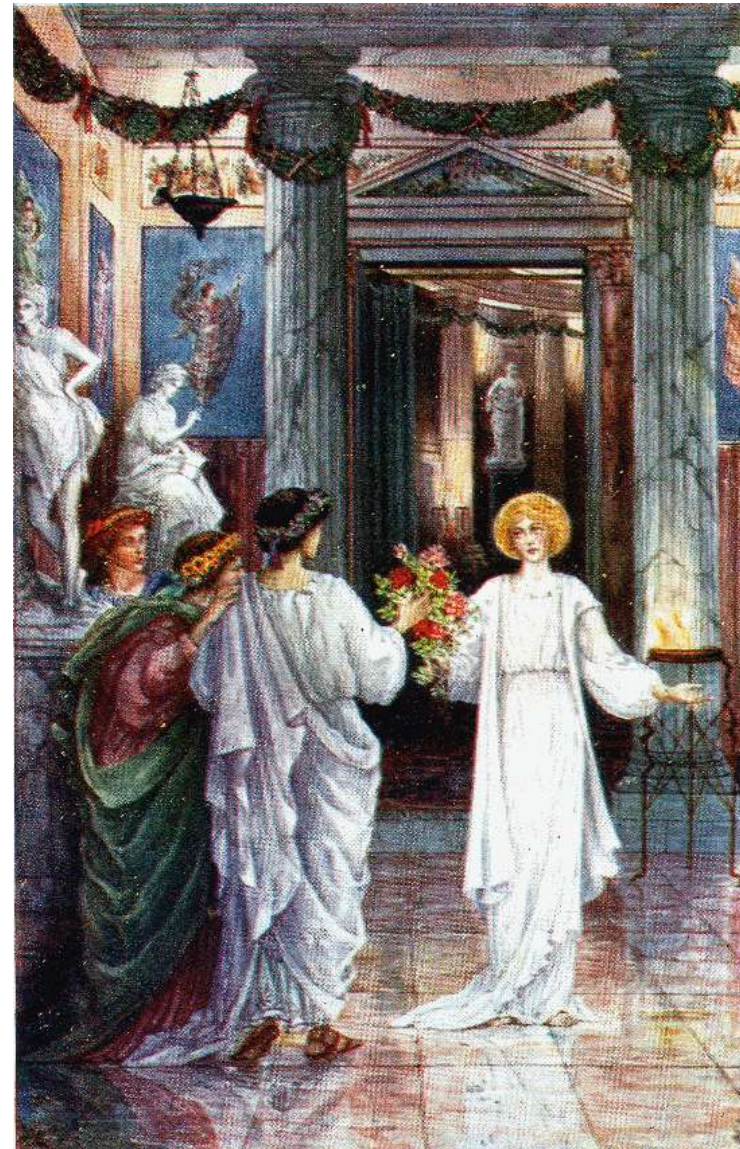
He waited—perfumed, white-robed, chapleted—in the hall by his dining-room, where the bronze and gold lamps glimmered here and there through his beautiful home. Presently, two or three guests arrived. Theophilus stood with them under the portico, and they talked lightly and cheerfully of the news of the day, and of some art treasure of statuary that the lawyer had recently bought. He was pointing out its beauties, when a step behind them made them turn.

A young man stood by them. He was a youth in whose countenance perfect tenderness and gentleness were blended with a majesty before which the men, strong in the knowledge and power of this world, felt their eyes droop, abashed. About his golden locks a strange light played, his white robe flowed in folds to his feet, and in his hand he held a bunch of roses—fresh-gathered, dewy, wonderful. He held them out to Theophilus.

"Dorothea, according to her promise, sends you these," he said, "from the garden whither she has gone before you."

He put the flowers into Theophilus's hands. The latter took them, speechless and stupefied with amazement. His friends pressed to him to look, and to touch the marvellous

petals. When, moved by a common impulse, they all turned to inquire further of the stranger—he was gone.



DOROTHEA SENDS YOU THESE.

Through the hall, where the flickering lights were reflected on every side in polished marble—silence! and the breath of the wondrous roses, rising up, floating on the night air, filling every corner with the ambrosial scent of the bowers of Paradise!

"By Bacchus!" then said one of the men in an awed whisper, "how was that done?"

Theophilus still stood silent. At last he lifted his eyes from the roses.

"Domitius," he said quietly, "you will stay here, and send away the other guests. There can be no supper to-night. I am going."

"Is he mad?" exclaimed his friend. "Art possessed, man? What ails thee?"

Theophilus placed his hand a moment before his eyes as if a great light had dazzled him. Then he spoke, firmly, triumphantly.

"I, too, am going to that garden where Dorothea has gone."

Domitius caught him by the arm.

"Are you, too, bewitched? By all the gods, Theophilus, are you a *Christian*?"

"I am," he answered calmly: "these are real. What she said was true. I go to give myself up to Sapritius. I mocked her, and she kept her promise. And I am going to that garden to find her; and not all Rome, nor all the world, nor death itself, nor Hell, shall hold me back."

His voice rang out, strong and strange, in the flood of earnestness that had come to him. He was no longer their old Theophilus. While they stood and wondered, he had already passed out of his house to seek the garden where Dorothea awaited him.

Burning with the zeal of his new-found faith and with love for that pure soul who had thus repaid his scorn, Theophilus sought the house of Sapritius and sent in word that he too was a Christian. As he waited for the answer, he stood humbly among the jeering slaves at the doorway—he, the proud and fastidious lawyer, who had disbelieved the soul's immortality, and had ever flinched at the thought of death—while he longed and prayed for martyrdom.

Sapritius, angry, and thinking that he was the victim of a fool's trick, came out most unwillingly from his dinner. When he really saw Theophilus before him, his wrath changed to bewilderment.

They faced each other in the archway, the torchlight glaring over them and over the intent faces of the watching slaves.

The young man eagerly stepped forward.

"I am a Christian," he said; "I am here to die."

And he persisted in his profession of faith. To all Sapritius's words of incredulity, surprise, persuasion, and mockery; in spite of all the bewilderment and rage that followed, the calm voice ever answered, "I am a Christian!" and the calm eyes, once so languid, looked into the eyes of the judge with the steadfastness that had gladdened Dorothea's in her last hour. When threats followed swiftly on wrath, he still quietly answered,—

"I am a Christian; I am here to die."

Before the stroke of midnight had announced the birth of another day, Theophilus, dying by the sword, was born to the Life Immortal.

Come for a moment to the threshold of that garden, where angels walk hand in hand with the blessed saints, among the stems of the unfading rose-trees. Through the garden, and through the dazzling light, with wondering eyes and overflowing heart, Theophilus goes up to find her who had

gone before him. Amidst the flowers, St. Dorothea, palm—sceptred, crowned, and garlanded with the lilies and roses of Paradise, angel-messenger before her, and Christeta and Callista on either side, steps to meet him. She smiled on him when he mocked her before the judgement-seat of Saprilius, yonder on that little earth, so far below. But with what a smile does she greet him now, her fellow martyr, under the rainbow-arch of effulgence, where the seraphs' wings flash and quiver around the throne of Almighty GOD.

CHAPTER VII

ST. PELAGIUS, THE SPANISH HOSTAGE

"He that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

Our LORD JESUS CHRIST tells of the great feast and of the guests assembled for the banquet. One man, thinking himself of some importance, took his seat among the higher places. The Master of the house saw him, and bade him yield to one worthier than himself. Another guest had humbly taken his seat in the lowest place: to him the Master said, "Friend, go up higher."

A boy was once sent to take the place of a man in a prison because the man was accounted of more importance than the child. But it was the child who was bidden, "Friend, go up higher," in the kingdom of his LORD.

In Cordova, in Southern Spain, the sun was shining brightly on mosque and minaret, on humble dwellings of the poor and on the palace of the king. At last its rays pierced a narrow prison-window far down one of the long corridors of the royal dwelling, and waked a boy who was sleeping there. He stirred uneasily on his hard bed, sighed, and sat up. Chains jangled on his wrists as he turned lovingly to the young sunlight dancing on the wall. It was only in the first hours of morning that he could see it.

He was thirteen years old, a Spanish boy of great beauty, beauty wonderful still in spite of his thinness and the pallor consequent on a long imprisonment. As he knelt by his bed in his poor discoloured garments, made the sign of the Cross, and began his prayers with the sunbeams crowning him with ruddy glory, it would have been difficult to find in all Cordova a fairer creature than in that prison-cell.

As a prison, considering the times—for this was in A.D. 925, under the Moorish dominion in Spain—the cell was, perhaps, not so bad. It is true that it was small, not over-clean, and possessing but one window, barred and high up in the wall over the young captive's head. He himself was poorly fed, poorly clad, and fettered. Still, he had, to a certain degree, air and light, and Abdurrahman, King of Cordova, had, underground, worse dungeons for those who had offended him. This child had not done that. He was here, himself innocent, as a Christian hostage, and security to the king for the good faith and behaviour of some one else, who was free; and he would have to pay, not with his liberty alone, but even with his young life, if the person whom he represented were to be found guilty of any treachery or broken word to Abdurrahman.

Three years before, in the contests between the Moors and the Christians in Galicia, the Christians were on one occasion defeated, and a bishop, named Hermoygius, taken prisoner by Abdurrahman, who carried him in chains to Cordova and imprisoned him there.

Now Hermoygius did not like to be in prison, and he was also anxious for the welfare of his flock. He entered into terms with Abdurrahman. Hermoygius had a young cousin, named Pelagius, and the bishop offered him as hostage, while he himself returned to his people, either to raise ransom-money or to effect an exchange of prisoners. The king agreed, the child was handed over, and the bishop set free. The latter hoped soon to have the ransom-money, and meanwhile his freedom seemed of more importance than that of a little boy of no more use in the affairs and issues at stake in the great world than thousands of other little boys. Only, "The last shall be first!"

Meanwhile, three years had passed. During those weary months the Christian boy languished in the Mohammedan prison, for—by what oversight it is not known—the ransom never came, nor did Hermoygius return to

free the little hostage. Pelagius was now thirteen, pale, and weary, and weak from those wearing years of captivity. How long the days seemed! In the morning he waked to wonder it that day would set him free. In the evening he humbly prayed that, if it was GOD'S will, he might come forth to-morrow into the sunshine. As the weeks dragged on and no answer was vouchsafed he strove patiently to endure, bearing no resentment against Hermoygius, believing that at last the ransom would surely come.

Patience, Pelagius! Your prayers are heard, and you are soon to be free, soon to go home in triumph. How boundless that freedom shall be, how unspeakably august that triumph you have no idea.

On this morning of his life, when he had said his prayers and set his cell in order, he sat down to wait till his food might be brought him. Presently he heard in the corridor the rattling of bolts, and then a step at his door. Pelagius looked up with genuine pleasure to greet his jailer, for the man who had had charge of him during the last six months had been really kind to him, adding what he could to his food, and even a few times allowing him to stretch his limbs in the low, long corridor between the cell and the jailer's quarters.

The door was opened, and a sturdy Moor entered. "Good news at last, Pelagius!" he cried; "thou art to go before the king to-day!"

The prisoner sprang up with a glad shout.

"Then the ransom has come?" he asked—" Oh, Abdullah, that is good news indeed!"

"I know not about the ransom," answered the man, as he took the boy's face between his hands and turned it to the light, to scan it, feature by feature.

"But all my talking and my reports about thy beauty—and thou art most beautiful, not all thy prison life has spoilt thee—has come at last to the ears of the king. Abdurrahman

returned here last night, and the governor spoke to him of thee. He remembers all about thee, and would see thee. So, no doubt, thy fortune is made, for he cannot fail to be pleased with thee."

"Thou thinkest so?" asked the prisoner a little anxiously. He was disappointed about the ransom, and his heart did so yearn for the certainty of freedom.

"Fear not," said Abdullah; "he likes a handsome boy, and there is none like thyself here—not even Prince Selim. He will free thee. When thou art of liberty, thou wilt speak a word in my favour? Thou wilt say that I treated thee kindly?"

"Indeed, I will, dear Abdullah," said Pelagius gaily, catching the unaffected good-humour of the man; "thou hast been more than kind." He stretched out his hand impulsively—"May CHRIST reward thee!"

The Mohammedan's face darkened for a moment as he heard that Name; but he truly loved the little prisoner, Christian though he was, and wished him well.

"Just so, just so," he murmured, turning aside; "yet, Pelagius, if thou wilt do well to-day, let there be no such talk as that before Abdurrahman. Now I must leave thee awhile. Here is water, and a white robe of my Hafid, who is about thy age, and a red sash, for thou must not spoil thy beauty with faded rags; and I have brought a little wine with thy food, to put heart into thee. I shall come back soon, that thou mayest see the king before the afternoon."

It is not needful to say that Pelagius was ready by the time his jailer returned. The white dress suited his dark beauty. His eyes sparkled with excitement. The jailer scanned him carefully, and noted with satisfaction the delicate flush that hope had brought into his usually pale cheeks. There was no doubt that he would please the king.

Pelagius could hardly wait while the door was unfastened. It seemed to him, though the fetters were still on

his wrists, that he was already free. They went along the corridor (Abdullah meanwhile prattling about the magnificence and kindness of Abdurrahman), through two or three rooms, up a staircase, and out through an arcade of the most wonderful columns to a terrace overlooking the garden.



PELAGIUS HELD FORTH HIS CHAINED HANDS.

Pelagius stopped entranced. To him it was like coming into Paradise. Over his head stretched the deep blue sky; round the horizon, beyond the stately piled-up domes and minarets, lay the snowy girdle of "the everlasting hills," and at his feet the king's rose-garden. There it stretched, lawns, and bowers, and fountains; and, around and over everything, a thousand thousand roses—white, pink, yellow, blood-red, and purple-black, they lifted their dewy heads to the sky. Pelagius, his eyes tear-dimmed, held forth his chained hands towards their beauty and their perfume. Oh, to go down among them, to bury his face in their sweetness, to pluck them in great handfuls, to weave a wreath for his head, and tread the fallen petals of yesterday with his feet! Well, perhaps that very afternoon he might be allowed to walk there if the king was as kind as Abdullah said.

He was reluctant to turn away, when the jailer suggested that they should hurry on to the royal presence; but, with his eyes still turned towards the rose-garden, he suffered himself to be led along the terrace to a doorway opening into a lofty and splendid hall. Here he found himself in the presence of Abdurrahman.

No formal court was being held that day. The king sat at the other end of the hall, on an eminence raised a couple of steps above the level of the floor; some of his courtiers were with him. He himself and most of the elder men there wore the green turbans denoting that they had made the pilgrimage to their holy city, Mecca. A few boys, sons of the king and his nobles, and some slaves were also present; and, though Pelagius did not know it, behind the "grille" high in the wall under the farther arch, the ladies and slaves of the royal harem were peeping curiously down to see the handsome captive, the account of whose good looks had penetrated also to them.

Abdurrahman was not in the best of humours. He was irritated at the bishop's conduct, and at what he reasonably considered his bad faith in leaving a mere child in place of his valuable self, and never sending the ransom. But his wrath had

been mollified by the accounts of the boy's beauty and his own curiosity to see him; and, as Pelagius was led in, the king bent forward to scan him with a look of genuine pleasure on his dark features.

Pelagius stood before the king (unaware that the murmur that greeted him was one of admiration for himself), respectfully yet fearlessly. The gentle courage of his bearing pleased Abdurrahman even more than his beauty. He had heard too of the boy's uncomplaining patience during his imprisonment. He turned to the jailer.

"Take off his chains," he commanded quickly.

The fetters were unfastened, and Pelagius shot a look of gratitude at his master.

"Come up here to me," continued Abdurrahman.

Pelagius ascended the steps to the side of the king's seat. Abdurrahman placed his hands on the boy's shoulders, carefully looking at him feature by feature, and turning him from side to side. Evidently he was well pleased, for a smile of satisfaction broadened on his face.

"They certainly did not lie, who said thou wast of uncommon beauty," he remarked. "See him!" and he turned Pelagius, still holding him by the shoulders, to the nobles, till the boy did not know where to look for embarrassment. "Selim, come here."

When one of the young princes, perhaps a little jealous in his heart of this handsome stranger, stepped up, the king made the children stand back to back, and noted with satisfaction their equal height, though the Spaniard was a year younger than the Moor.

The king again drew Pelagius to him.

"And thou wilt prefer to be my page, rather than go back a prisoner to thy cell?" he asked smiling.

"Oh, sire," replied Pelagius, his eyes alight with gratitude, "I will be a good servant to thee, in return for thy kindness. I have so *longed* to be free!" and he looked, with a sigh, at the marks of the chains on the wrists that lay now, white and slender, in the dark grasp of the Moorish king.

"Thou hast been badly enough treated!" cried Abdurrahman, his resentment and his pride flashing out anew against Hermoygius. "Thy rascally bishop has dealt ill with thee, and with me too, in saving his own skin scot-free, and leaving a child in payment. Only, thou art a very handsome child," he added in more contented tones.

"Do not speak so, sire," Pelagius said boldly; "the good bishop meant no harm. The ransom will surely come at last. Besides, he was bound, if possible, as thou thyself wouldest be, to return as soon as he could to his people, who needed him."

"Well, well," replied Abdurrahman, not so ill-pleased, for, after all, loyalty was not a bad attribute; "we will let that pass. So thou wilt enter my service!" He pushed the hair back from Pelagius's forehead, and looked into his wide, glad eyes. "We will make a page of thee, and thou canst be the companion of my sons. We will train thee up in arms. Who knows, too, if thy people will ever claim thee? We may even, a few years later, for so handsome a boy find a well-born fair maid who will take thee gladly enough for a husband."

He was just about to call his slaves to lead Pelagius to a room of his own, and to see that he had all he needed, when a man, standing near the king—a man who wore the Mecca turban, and had a fierce, cruel face, and had looked, from the first, with scarcely veiled disfavour on the young Spaniard—bent down and whispered a few words in the king's ear.

Abdurrahman heard, and nodded in recollection, with a gesture he recalled Pelagius.

"One moment," he said, "I had forgotten. There is one little thing thou must first do for me. Poor child, thou art an

infidel. We will teach thee better. Thine own folk, too, have not been so thoughtful of thee as to make thee cling to them. We only ask that thou shouldest deny thy CHRIST, and acknowledge our Mohammed."

As a sudden hushed silence fell on the crowd, Pelagius knew which King it was to Whose Presence he was summoned.

When we read of the glorious martyrs, we think and rightly, first of those white robes, unfading palms, and shining crowns, that they have for ever in heaven; and perhaps, sometimes, too little of what it cost to win them. Yet the mortal flesh may have shrunk from the torment; and the mortal eyes, darkened in physical anguish, may have failed, for a moment, to see clearly the everlasting crown. Pelagius had, as he thought, found a happy freedom. He saw instead, before his very feet, the waters of the red sea of martyrdom. Death? Liberty? He remembered the king's rose-garden—could almost smell the sweetness of it. For a moment the hall was dim before him. Then he fell back from the king's side, and in the stillness, with a little catching of his breath, he answered slowly and quite clearly,

"I can *never* do that."

There was a movement of surprise in the hall, and a smile of satisfaction woke on the face of the Mohammedan who had whispered to Abdurrahman. As for the latter, he seemed hardly able to believe his ears.

"Is the boy mad?" he exclaimed; then, turning to him, continued, "Pelagius, come, be reasonable. All that is asked of thee is to repeat a few words, to satisfy us. We will be content with that for the present. Then thou shalt be advanced in honour among us, free, and loved as one of my own sons. Come, now—and remember," he added sternly, "that I have power not only over thy liberty, but over thy life."

"There is no god but Allah, and Mohammed is his prophet."

Pelagius knew that if he would but say those few words once, the king would be satisfied. But that meant to deny CHRIST. True, that, as far as he knew, no fellow Christian would witness his denial. Even if he were at last claimed by his own people, they need never know of his momentary apostasy. But—his holy guardian angel stood at his side, the blessed ones in heaven leaned towards him over the golden barrier, and CHRIST Himself blessed him with hands pierced for his sake, and bade him be a faithful servant. He lifted brave eyes to the king.

"I will, indeed, be true to thee and obedient in all else," he answered; "but first, I am CHRIST'S. Nothing may part me from Him."

"Silly child," exclaimed Abdurrahman, "dost thou not think that I have means at hand to force thee to comply. Better yield now, with a good grace, than crawl into my favour later after torture."

Pelagius stood silent. A mutter woke in the crowd. The Mohammedans who had been so ready to praise Pelagius's beauty saw in him now only the hated Christian. Abdurrahman watched him under lowering brows. Then the boy Selim strode up to him and, with a mocking laugh, struck him on the cheek with such violence that he staggered. The hot Spanish blood boiled under the insult, as Pelagius recovered himself, and for a second or two he faced his tormenter with clenched fists. He was the stronger, he knew, and something within him whispered that, if he revenged himself swiftly, he would not fare the worse in his captor's sight. But only for a moment—then he turned away, and, stretching out his arms almost exultantly towards the lofty, sun-lit dome, he cried aloud,—

"I am a Christian, and believe in CHRIST. CHRIST I will never deny."

The green-turbaned man laughed.

"He mocks you," he said in the king's ear: "the Spaniard mocks you, as his friend the bishop did, in His Christian insolence."

He touched Abdurrahman on his weakest spot—his pride, a pride already hurt by the conduct of Hermoygius. The king clutched the arms of his chair in anger. He had suffered enough at the bishop's hands. Should this boy too, here, in his own palace—a boy whom he wished to befriend and to place, as a companion, with his sons; a boy to whom he had openly offered all these advantages—should this youngster defy him to his face and shout aloud the Name of his CHRIST, as though the king's command and the king's power of life and death went for nothing?

His face darkened with wrath. The beauty of Pelagius was forgotten. What Abdurrahman saw before him was only a hateful Spanish Christian dog.

Turning aside he struck the gong that stood near him. A slave entered.

"Summon the executioner at once," he commanded, and leant back in his chair. He would demean himself no more by speaking to the ungrateful boy.

Pelagius heeded nothing. His hour of trial had come upon him so suddenly, and he was praying with all the strength of his soul that he might endure to the end.

The executioner came—a burly negro, with knotted hands and a cruel smile. Abdurrahman nodded towards the prisoner.

"Take him out," he said shortly, "and hang him up by his wrists till the pain forces him to deny his CHRIST."

The negro laid his hands on the slender boy, and dragged him from the room. Some of the king's attendants hurried after them to see what was done. Abdurrahman sat silent and immovable, waiting, with rage in his heart. But nothing happened, and no cry came from beyond the doorway.

The minutes crept on, and the long, still silence seemed to grow heavy. At last the negro came back. "He has fainted," he said.

Abdurrahman stood up angrily.

"Revive him, and bring him here," he replied.

The executioner carried the little white-clad figure in, and laid him on the ground. His arms fell limply apart, and a trickle of blood from the rope-galled wrists stained the bright marble: but his eyes were uplifted and his lips smiled. Abdurrahman strode over to him.

"Once more, and for the last time," he said, "infidel and ungrateful as thou art, I give thee another chance. Happy freedom, honour, my favour and protection—or death. Choose!"

"I have chosen," replied the boy firmly, turning away his head. "CHRIST!"

The king scowled sullenly at the little victim.

"Take him away," said Abdurrahman; "cut off his hands and feet and throw him into the river."

With a nod to his nobles to follow him, he left the hall.

They carried Pelagius—for he was too weak to walk—to the terrace, and down the steps and through the rose-garden to a gate opening on to the river. As the perfume of the flowers breathed on his faintness, he smiled a little, remembering how, a few hours ago, he had longed to be among the fragrant buds and blossoms, whilst he had wondered whether the king would be pleased with him. His captors marked the glory that grew and shone in his eyes. The martyr knew that his King would be pleased with him—"Well done, thou good and faithful servant; . . . enter thou into the joy of thy LORD."

An hour or so later, while Abdurrahman sat at table, the negro sent in word to him that his commands had been carried out.

So Pelagius was set free and brought home in triumph at last. And instead of walking in the rose-garden of Abdurrahman, the Moorish King of Cordova, he walks by the River of Life in the unfading garden of the King of kings, and is crowned for ever with the roses of martyrdom.

CHAPTER VIII

A CHAPLET FROM JAPAN

The "noble army of martyrs "is of all ages and of all lands. Its ranks stretch from St. Stephen and the holy Apostles to the victorious saints of the Ten Persecutions, and to the Christians who died rather than acknowledge the false prophet Mohammed. After them, age by age, follow the missionaries and their converts, suffering for the Faith in every land on the face of the globe. In days nearer our own time we may remember the thirteen nuns of Compiegne, who sang the *Veni Creator* at the foot of the guillotine, and the many other martyrs of the great French Revolution; while, scarcely fifty years ago, in Cochin-China, there were blessed ones who died by hundreds for CHRIST. Thus is that army a glorious, ever-growing host of "every nation, and kindred, and tongue." From St. John, the beloved disciple, martyr in will if not in deed, to Bishop John Patteson, of the year 1871, whose memorial-pulpit may be seen in our own Exeter Cathedral; from Grecian Margaret in far-off Eastern Antioch to Indian Margaret in far-off Western Onontague of Canada, whose tale you may read for yourselves more than beautifully told by Dr. Neale in his *Lent Legends*—those have been without number who have confessed CHRIST before men unto the death; and we are assured that yet others will be added to their great company.

In all this wide and countless host stands no more glorious legion than that which bears the name—" The Martyrs of Japan." During the sixteenth century the Cross was carried to the Far East, and in hundreds and thousands the Japanese embraced its Faith. In hundreds and thousands too they died for it when the great persecution broke out which, for a time, destroyed Christianity in Japan. The maid-servant proto-martyr of Firando (for it is a servant-girl who holds that honour in that legion), beautiful Queen Grace of Tango; the

tiny boy, whose little legs could only keep pace with his executioner by running with all their baby might; old blind Damien of Amangucchi, who, when the missionaries were driven away, took on his shoulders, as far as was possible to one lacking Holy Orders, the whole management of the infant Church in his district—teaching, baptizing, visiting the sick—till rewarded with the crown of martyrdom; men and women, young and old, rich and poor, passed by trials as fearful as any endured by the early martyrs, to their exceeding great reward in heaven.

This is the story of some of those holy ones.

Night had fallen over the prison of Arima, near Nagasaki, in the southernmost island of the Empire of Japan, but, in one of the wards where the dungeon-darkness, heavier and blacker than that of the star-spangled vault outside, was lit only by a few smoky torches, none of its inmates had laid themselves down to sleep. For, when the next day had passed into night, they were to be led out to a cruel death. First among the prisoners were three Christian nobles of Arima who had refused to deny their Faith. With them, according to Japanese custom, were their children and relatives, Christians also, who were to suffer at the same times—in all a considerable company. This story, however, is not chiefly concerned with these noblemen—noble, indeed, in every sense—but with a little group by itself in yonder corner.

A Japanese lady, young and beautiful, clasped in her arms her son, a boy of eleven, who, half-kneeling at her side, had laid his head on her shoulder. Near him was a young girl, two or three years older, who, though not his sister, had, as her loving face and actions showed, a sister's and a daughter's affection for the other two.

"And so, James," the lady said, "by this time tomorrow—for it is now past midnight—we may hope, please GOD, to have already triumphed. I have prayed all day, and I pray again now, that He keep thee faithful and strengthen thee through thy painful trial." "Fear not, mother," answered the

boy, with a gay smile—" He will do that. I am young and weak, I know, but I have given myself to Him, as we all have—thou, and those yonder, and Magdalen here, who is only a year or so older than I am, and a girl too."

"I think," said the lady, "that Magdalen is wholly His already, by the vow with which she bound herself to Him in perpetual virginity. But thou art only a child, not yet from school, never having known pain or sorrow."

"Yet fear not," replied the boy gently, as he pressed closer to her side; "the greater my weakness, the greater His strength. Do not trouble thyself for me. Tell us, mother, is it true, as we heard before our arrest, that thy friend Martha and her little grandsons have already triumphed? I thought I heard the good father bring thee tidings of their martyrdom."

"It is true, James," she answered; "and none died more bravely than those children. The father told me that even the soldiers who were sent to slay them were moved by their courage. Doubtless, my darlings, to-morrow night we shall hear about it from their own blessed lips. Those children, James," she added with a look of yearning love on her son, "were younger than thou art. May thy triumph equal theirs!"

"For the third time, mother, I say, do not fear," cried the boy; "dost thou think me so great a coward or my love for CHRIST so little," he whispered sadly, "that thou thinkest I am *certain* to fall?"

"My child, I know thou lovest Him," the lady cried. "It is only my weak, foolish heart that fears lest thou shouldst lose thy most blessed reward. Their trial also was less than ours shall be, for it was by the sword, and ours must be by fire. They tell me too that we shall be so loosely bound that the cords will perish at the first breath of flame, so that naught but our wills may hold us firm at our stakes."

"*His* will shall hold me there," said the boy; "I only pray that we may be side by side at that hour—and dear Magdalen too," he added, putting his hand lovingly in hers.

"But, see, the holy father yonder beckons us to join the rest—mother, the heavenly Feast is prepared."

The three went over to the circle of light, where the other prisoners knelt round the priest, who had come to be in their midst for these last few hours. There, from his hands, they received the most Holy Sacrament of the precious Body and Blood of our LORD JESUS CHRIST, that, from that moment, through the suspense of the day of waiting, and the torment of the following night, they might truly have with them the strength of His invisible Presence to sustain and comfort them, until their eyes opened, in His kingdom, on the blaze of His eternal visible Presence for evermore.

The day dawned and waned; night came again, and the faithful company knew that their hour was at hand. They put on the white robes, that they, like all the other Japanese martyrs, when possible, had taken care to prepare beforehand for their death, and surrendered themselves calmly to the executioners who came to lead them forth. Though James did not know it, he was the centre of interest His mother even heard bets offered and taken as to his constancy when the fire should loosen his bonds, and her soul shrank within her at the mere idea of leaving him an apostate on earth, when she might be called to her immortal crown.

They passed out of the prison-doors into the fresh night air. A marvellous sight, fit to inspire courage into the most trembling heart, awaited them. True enough, yonder, before their eyes, the faggots and the stakes stood in the place of death, prepared for them in the centre of a wide, bare plain. But a great concourse of hundreds upon hundreds of people awaited them, all with lighted candles in their hands—the assembled Christians from all the country around, who had come to witness the passing of the martyrs to the life unending! James's eyes were dazzled with the light, and a sudden rush of tears further dimmed them. His mother stooped to whisper to him.

"See, my son, the Church Militant here on earth, as the Church Triumphant yonder in heaven, stands to witness our confession. And CHRIST the LORD waits to acknowledge us before His FATHER."

The child's emotion at the crowds gathered before him prevented his answering, and they proceeded in silence to the place of death. There a true sorrow awaited him. He was separated from Magdalen and his mother. The executioners thought his constancy might be the less if he were allotted a stake apart from those who loved him. When her son was torn from her, the first pallor of fear spread over the mother's face, and a wistful look woke in James's eyes. But, in his case, it suddenly yielded to a smile of wonderful brightness, as if some idea that caused him pleasure had flashed through his mind. Still smiling, he was led away. Magdalen was permitted to remain with his mother. His own stake stood far to the left, near one of the noblemen.

The tall posts, with their heaps of faggots, had been placed a little distance from one another, the intervening spaces being carpeted with masses of small, dry brushwood, that would burn with the utmost fierceness and, very little smoke. James, like the other confessors, kissed his stake, and was bound, by his hands only, with fine fibres. His mother had spoken truly. He could easily have broken them, with one pull of his strong young arms.

The nobleman bound near him addressed him in cheering, earnest words. From the other side, beyond a long line of stakes, his mother and Magdalen smiled to him. The watching Christians had made a great ring round the centre pyre—an amphitheatre of loving, faithful hearts, such as, perhaps, had never been seen before in the Church's history. Those who had banded themselves together in the "Confraternity of Martyrs" stood near their leader, who unrolled and held aloft a banner on which was a picture of the SON of GOD, bound like the sufferers, to a post.

"See, my child," his companion said to James, "He was bound for us, as we stand bound for Him. But now He sits in glory unspeakable at the right hand of the FATHER, and will there take us to Himself this night. Fear not the passing. A few minutes now, and we shall meet yonder, and say to one another, 'There shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.'"

Even as he spoke, and James in silence smiled his bright reply, the fatal moment came. The executioners set fire to the first pile of fuel, which had been placed at some distance from the central pyre, that the sufferings of the martyrs might be prolonged by the gradual approach of the dread element of death. As the flames shot up in a great tower of light to the sky, a prayer, that was at once a groan for their own sins and a petition for strength for the sufferers, broke from the watching multitudes, who fell on their knees and stretched their hands up to heaven.

James's friend bent forward as far as he could from his stake, to encourage his little fellow martyr: but the child's eyes were bright and fearless, and, though he did not speak, he still smiled eagerly, as one who waits.

Nearer and nearer crept the gleaming, leaping torrent, while the shouts of the executioners mingled with the prayers of the spectators. Nearer and nearer—and now the heat began to be felt and the martyrs' voices, encouraging one another, mingled with the other sounds. Nearer and nearer—and the air grew like a furnace-blast. Far off, loving mother-eyes watched James; his friend, the nobleman, again bent to speak, earnestly, anxiously. The child's face glowed in the awful heat, the perspiration streamed from it; but still he did not flinch.

Now the fire was upon them. With a crackle and a roar, the scattered brushwood caught, and the whole space was a sea of crimson flame. The thin bonds flared up and withered, and the martyrs stood free.



'HE HATH HELD ME FAST.'

Every eye was on the boy. Would he, *could* he stand, of his own free will, in that awful, fiery torrent? Yet one moment he remained motionless. Then, with his little hands

over his face, to shield it from the fire, he sprang forward from his stake.

A groan, not of pain, but of sorrow came from his companion's lips; and the mother's heart nearly broke, as she bowed herself in an agony greater than any anguish of the flame.

But the boy's faith and courage had not faltered. It was *through*, the fire, not *out* of it, that he ran: through the raging, devouring torrent, until, with a glad cry that rang triumphant he had thrown himself into the arms of his mother.

"Thou seest!" he whispered, He hath held me fast!"

They stood together, locked in a close embrace. Beside them, Magdalen, freed from her bonds, stooped down, and, gathering in her hands the glowing embers, set them as a bridal wreath in her hair. It was her last act. Her knees trembled, and she fell forward as if in the prostration of prayer, and CHRIST her Bride-groom crowned her, not with flame, but with unfading flowers, and gathered her to His embrace.

The mother of James, forgetful now, as ever, of herself, found strength to bless and comfort her son in his last moments. Almost at the same instant their souls departed, and they passed, as it were, hand in hand—"unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living GOD, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and Church of the Firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to GOD the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to JESUS."