

The Early Christians

from,

The Book of Martyrs

by John Foxe

published in 1563 A.D.

CHRIST our Saviour, in the Gospel of St. Matthew, hearing the confession of Simon Peter, who, first of all other, openly acknowledged Him to be the Son of God, and perceiving the secret hand of His Father therein, called him (alluding to his name) a stone, upon which Rock (Christ) He would build His Church so strong, that the gates of hell should not prevail against it. In which words three things are to be noted: First, that Christ will have a Church in this world. Secondly, that the same Church should mightily be impugned, not only by the world, but also by the uttermost strength and powers of all hell. And, thirdly, that the same Church, notwithstanding the uttermost of the devil and all his malice, should continue.

Which prophecy of Christ we see wonderfully to be verified, insomuch that the whole course of the Church to this day may seem nothing else but a verifying of the said prophecy. First, that Christ hath set up a Church, needeth no declaration. Secondly, what force of princes, kings, monarchs, governors, and rulers of this world, with their subjects, publicly and privately, with all their strength and cunning, have bent themselves against this Church! And, thirdly, how the said Church, all this notwithstanding, hath yet endured and holden its own! What storms and tempests it hath over past, wondrous it is to behold: for the more evident declaration whereof, I have addressed this present history, to the end, first, that the wonderful works of God in His Church might appear to His glory; also that, the continuance and proceedings of the Church, from time to time, being set forth, more knowledge and experience may redound thereby, to the profit of the reader and edification of Christian faith.

At the first preaching of Christ, and coming of the Gospel, who should rather have known and received him than the Pharisees and Scribes of that people which had His law? And yet who persecuted and rejected Him more than they themselves? What followed? They, in refusing Christ to be their King, and choosing rather to be subject unto Caesar, were by the said Caesar at length destroyed.

The like example of God's wrathful punishment is to be noted no less in the Romans themselves. For when Tiberius Caesar, having learnt by letters from Pontius Pilate of the doings of Christ, of His miracles, resurrection, and ascension into heaven, and how He was received as God of many, himself moved with belief of the same, did confer thereon with the whole senate of Rome, and proposed to have Christ adored as God; they, not agreeing thereunto, refused Him, because that, contrary to the law of the Romans, He was consecrated (said they) for God before the senate of Rome had so decreed and approved Him. Thus the vain senate (being contented with the emperor to reign over them, and not contented with the meek King of glory, the Son of God, to be their King) were scourged and entrapped for their unjust refusing, by the same way which they themselves did prefer. For as they preferred the emperor, and rejected Christ, so the just permission of God did stir up their own emperors against them in such sort, that the senators themselves were almost all destroyed, and the whole city most horribly afflicted for the space almost of three hundred years.

For first, the same Tiberius, who, for a great part of his reign, were a moderate and a tolerable prince, afterward was to them a sharp and heavy tyrant, who neither favoured his own mother, nor spared his nephews nor the princes of the city, such as were his own counsellors, of whom, being of the number of twenty, he left not past two or three alive. Suetonius reporteth him to be so stern of nature, and tyrannical, that in one day he recordeth twenty persons to be drawn to the place of execution. In whose reign through the just punishment of god, Pilate, under whom Christ was crucified, was apprehended and sent to Rome, deposed, then banished to the town of Vienne in Dauphiny, and at length did slay himself. Agrippa the elder, also, by him was cast into prison, albeit afterward he was restored.

After the death of Tiberius, succeeded Caligula, Claudius Nero and Domitius Nero; which three were likewise scourges to the Senate and people of Rome. The first commanded himself to be worshipped as god, and temples to be erected in his name, and used to sit in the temple among the gods, requiring his images to be set up in all temples, and also in the temple of Jerusalem; which caused great disturbance among the Jews, and then began the abomination of desolation spoken of in the Gospel to be set up in the holy place. His cruelty of disposition, or else displeasure towards the Romans, was such that he wished that all the people of Rome had but one neck, that he, at his pleasure, might destroy such a multitude. By this aid Caligula, Herod Antipas, the murderer of John Baptist and condemner of Christ, was condemned to perpetual banishment, where he died miserably. Caiaphas also, who wickedly sat upon Christ, was the same time removed from the high priest's room, and Jonathan set in his place.

The raging fierceness of this Caligula had not thus ceased, had not he been cut off by the hands of a tribune and other gentlemen, who slew him in the fourth year of his reign. After whose death were found in his closet two small books, one called the *Sword*, the other the *Dagger*: in which books were contained the names of those senators and noblemen of Rome, whom he had purposed to put to death. Besides this *Sword* and *Dagger*, there was found also a coffer, wherein divers kinds of poisons were kept in glasses and vessels, for the purpose of destroying a wonderful number of people; which poisons, afterward being thrown into the sea, destroyed a great number of fish.

But that which this Caligula had only conceived, the same did the other two, which came after, bring to pass; namely, Claudius Nero, who reigned thirteen years with no little cruelty; but especially the third of these Neros, called Domitius Nero, who, succeeding after Claudius, reigned fourteen years with such fury and tyranny that he slew the most part of the senators and destroyed the whole order of knighthood in Rome. So prodigious a monster of nature was he (more like a beast, yea rather a devil than a man), that he seemed to be born to the destruction of men. Such was his wretched cruelty, that he caused to be put to death his mother, his brother-in-law, his sister, his wife and his instructors, Seneca and Lucan. Moreover, he commanded Rome to be set on fire in twelve places, and so continued it six days and seven nights in burning, while that he, to see the example how Troy burned, sang the verses of Homer. And to avoid the infamy thereof, he laid the fault upon the Christian men, and caused them to be persecuted.

And so continued this miserable emperor till at last the senate, proclaiming him a public enemy unto mankind, condemned him to be drawn through the city, and to be whipped to death; for the fear whereof, he, flying the hands of his enemies, in the night fled to a manor of his servant's in the country, where he was forced to slay himself, complaining that he had then neither friend nor enemy left, that would do so much for him.

The Jews, in the year threescore and ten, about forty years after the passion of Christ, were destroyed by Titus, and Vespasian his father, (who succeeded after Nero in the empire) to the

number of eleven hundred thousand, besides those which Vespasian slew in subduing the country of galilee. They were sold and sent into Egypt and other provinces to vile slavery, to the number of seventeen thousand; two thousand were brought with Titus in his triumph; of whom, part he gave to be devoured of the wild beasts, part otherwise most cruelly were slain.

As I have set forth the justice of God upon these Roman persecutors, so now we declare their persecutions raised up against the people and servants of Christ, within the space of three hundred years; which persecutions in number commonly are counted to be ten, besides the persecutions first moved by the Jews, in Jerusalem and other places, against the apostles. After the martyrdom of Stephen, suffered next James the holy apostle of Christ, and brother of John. 'When this James,' saith Clement, 'was brought to the tribunal seat, he that brought him and was the cause of his trouble, seeing him to be condemned and that he should suffer death, was in such sort moved therewith in heart and conscience that as he went to the execution he confessed himself also, of his own accord, to be a Christian. And so were they led forth together, where in the way he desired of James to forgive him what he had done. After that James had a little paused with himself upon the matter, turning to him he saith "Peace be to thee, brother;" and kissed him. And both were beheaded together, A.D. 36.'

Thomas preached to the Parthians, Medes and Persians, also to be Carmanians, Hyranians, Bactrians and Magians. He suffered in Calamina, a city of India, being slain with a dart. Simon, who was brother to Jude, and to James the younger, who all were the sons of Mary Cleophas and of Alpheus, was Bishop of Jerusalem after James, and was crucified in a city of Egypt in the time of Trajan the emperor. Simon the apostle, called Cananeus and Zelotes, preached in Mauritania, and in the country of Africa, and in Britain: he was likewise crucified.

Mark, the evangelist and first Bishop of Alexandria, preached the Gospel in Egypt, and there, drawn with ropes unto the fires, was burnt and afterwards buried in a place called there 'Bucolus,' under the reign of Trajan the emperor. Bartholomew is said also to have preached to the Indians, and to have translated the Gospel of St. Matthew into their tongue. At last in Albinopolis, a city of greater Armenia, after divers persecutions, he was beaten down with staves, then crucified; and after, being excoriated, he was beheaded.

Of Andrew the apostle and brother to Peter, thus writeth Jerome. 'Andrew did preach, in the year fourscore of our Lord Jesus Christ, to the Scythians and Sogdians, to the Sacae, and in a city which is called Sebastopolis, where the Ethiopians do now inhabit. He was buried in Patrae, a city of Achaia, being crucified by Aegeas, the governor of the Edessenes.' Bernard, and St. Cyprian, to make mention of the confession and martyrdom of this blessed apostle; whereof partly out of these, partly out of other credible writers, we have collected after this manner: When Andrew, through his diligent preaching, had brought many to the faith of Christ, Aegeas the governor, knowing this, resorted to Patrae, to the intent he might constrain as many as did believe Christ to be God, by the whole consent of the senate, to do sacrifice unto the idols, and so give divine honours unto them. Andrew, thinking good at the beginning to resist the wicked counsel and the doings of Aegeas, went unto him, saying to this effect unto him: 'that it behoved him who was judge of men, first to know his Judge which dwelleth in heaven, and then to worship Him being known; and so, in worshipping the true God, to revoke his mind from false gods and blind idols.' These words spoke Andrew to the proconsul.

But Aegeas, greatly therewith discontented, demanded of him, whether he was the same Andrew that did overthrow the temple of the gods, and persuade men to be of that superstitious sect which the Romans of late had commanded to be abolished and rejected. Andrew did plainly

affirm that the princes of the Romans did not understand the truth and that the Son of God, coming from heaven into the world for man's sake, hath taught and declared how those idols, whom they so honoured as gods, were not only not *gods*, but also most cruel *devils*; enemies to mankind, teaching the people nothing else but that wherewith God is offended, and, being offended, turneth away and regardeth them not; and so by the wicked service of the devil, they do fall headlong into all wickedness, and, after their departing, nothing remaineth unto them but their evil deeds.

But the proconsul charged and commanded Andrew not to teach and preach such things anymore; or, if he did, he should be fastened to the cross with all speed.

Andrew, abiding in his former mind very constant, answered thus concerning the punishment which he threatened: 'He would not have preached the honour and glory of the cross, if he had feared the death of the cross.' Whereupon sentence of condemnation was pronounced; that Andrew, teaching and enterprising a new sect, and taking away the religion of their gods, ought to be crucified. Andrew, going toward the place, and seeing afar off the cross prepared, did change neither countenance nor colour, neither did his blood shrink, neither did he fail in his speech, his body fainted not, neither was his mind molested, nor did his understanding fail him, as it is the manner of men to do, but out of the abundance of his heart his mouth did speak, and fervent charity did appear in his words as kindled sparks; he said, 'O cross, most welcome and long looked for! With a willing mind, joyfully and desirously, I come to thee, being the scholar of Him which did hang on thee: because I have always been thy lover, and have coveted to embrace thee.'

Matthew, otherwise name Levi, first of a publican made an apostle, wrote his Gospel to the Jews in the Hebrew tongue. After he had converted to the faith Aethiopia and all Egypt, Hircanus, their king, sent one to run him through with a spear.

Philip, the holy apostle, after he had much labored among the barbarous nations in preaching the word of salvation to them, at length suffered, in Hierapolis, a city of Phrygia, being there crucified and stoned to death; where also he was buried, and his daughters also with him.

Of James, the brother of the Lord, thus we read: James, took in hand to govern the Church with the apostles, being counted of all men, from the time of our Lord, to be a just and perfect man. He drank no wine nor any strong drink, neither did he eat any animal food; the razor never came upon his head. To him only was it lawful to enter into the holy place, for he was not clothed with woolen, but with linen only; and he used to enter into the temple alone, and there, falling upon his knees, ask remission for the people; so that his knees, by oft kneeling (for worshipping God, and craving forgiveness for the people), lost the sense of feeling, being benumbed and hardened like the knees of a camel. He was, for the excellency of his just life, called 'The Just,' and, 'the safeguard of the people.'

When many therefore of their chief men did believe, there was a tumult made of the Jews, Scribes and Pharisees, saying; There is danger, lest all the people should look for this Jesus, as the Christ. Therefore they gathered themselves together, and said to James, 'We beseech thee restrain the people, for they believe in Jesus, as though he were Christ; we pray thee persuade all them which come unto the feast of the Passover to think rightly of Jesus; for we all give heed to thee, and all the people do testify of thee that thou art just, and that thou dost not accept the person of any man. Therefore persuade the people that they be not deceived about Jesus, for all the people and we ourselves are ready to

obey thee. Therefore stand upon the pinnacle of the temple, that thou mayest be seen above, and that thy words may be heard of all the people; for all the tribes with many Gentiles are come together for the Passover.'

And thus the forenamed Scribes and Pharisees did set James upon the battlements of the temple, and they cried unto him, and said, 'Thou just man, whom we all ought to obey, this people is going astray after Jesus which is crucified.'

And he answered with a loud voice, 'Why do you ask me of Jesus the Son of Man? He sitteth on the right hand of the Most High, and shall come in the clouds of heaven.'

Whereupon many were persuaded and glorified God, upon this witness of James, and said, 'Hosannah to the Son of David.'

Then the Scribes and the Pharisees said among themselves, 'We have done evil, that we have caused such a testimony of Jesus; let us go up, and throw him down, that others, being moved with fear, may deny that faith.' And they cried out, saying, 'Oh, oh, this just man also is seduced.' Therefore they went up to throw down the just man. Yet he was not killed by the fall, but, turning, fell upon his knees, saying, 'O Lord God, Father, I beseech thee to forgive them, for they know not what they do.' And they said among themselves, 'Let us stone the just man, James;' and they took him to smite him with stones. But while they were smiting him with stones, a priest, said to them, 'Leave off, what do ye? The just man prayeth for you.' And one of those who were present, a fuller, took an instrument, wherewith they did use to beat and purge cloth, and smote the just man on his head; and so he finished his testimony. And they buried him in the same place. He was a true witness for Christ to the Jews and the Gentiles.

Now let us comprehend the persecutions raised by the Romans against the Christians in the primitive age of the Church, during the space of three hundred years. Wherein marvelous it is to see and read the numbers incredible of Christian innocents that were tormented and slain. Whose kinds of punishments, although they were divers, yet the manner of constancy in all these martyrs was one. And yet, notwithstanding the sharpness of these so many and sundry torments, and also the like cruelty of the tormentors, such was the number of these constant saints that suffered, or rather such was the power of the Lord in His saints, that, as Jerome saith, 'There is no day in the whole year unto which the number of five thousand martyrs cannot be ascribed, except only the first day of January.'

The first of these ten persecutions was stirred up by Nero about the year of our Lord threescore and four. The tyrannous rage of which emperor was very fierce against the Christians, 'insomuch that (as Eusebius recordeth) a man might then see cities full of men's bodies, the old there lying together with the young, and the dead bodies of women cast out naked, without all reverence of that sex, in the open streets.' Many there were of the Christians in those days, who, seeing the filthy abominations and intolerable cruelty of Nero, thought that he was antichrist.

In this persecution, among many other saints, the blessed apostle Peter was condemned to death, and crucified, as some do write, at Rome; albeit some others, and not without cause, do doubt thereof. Hegesippus saith that Nero sought matter against Peter to put him to death; which, when the people perceived, they entreated Peter with much ado that he would fly the city. Peter, through their importunity at length persuaded, prepared himself to avoid. But, coming to the gate, he saw the Lord Christ come to meet him, to Whom he, worshipping, said, 'Lord, whither dost Thou go?' To whom He

answered and said, 'I am come again to be crucified.' By this, Peter, perceiving his suffering to be understood, returned back into the city. Jerome saith that he was crucified, his head being down and his feet upward, himself so requiring, because he was (he said) unworthy to be crucified after the same form and manner as the Lord was.

Paul, the apostle, who before was called Saul, after his great travail and unspeakable labours in promoting the Gospel of Christ, suffered also in this first persecution under Nero. Abdias, declareth that unto his execution Nero sent two of his esquires, Ferega and Parthemius, to bring him word of his death. They, coming to Paul instructing the people, desired him to pray for them, that they might believe; who told them that shortly after they should believe and be baptized at his sepulchre. This done, the soldiers came and led him out of the city to the place of execution, where he, after his prayers made, gave his neck to the sword.

The first persecution ceased under Vespasian who gave some rest to the poor Christians. After whose reign was moved, not long after, the second persecution, by the emperor Domitian, brother of Titus. He, first beginning mildly and modestly, afterward did so far outrage in pride intolerable, that he commanded himself to be worshipped as god, and that images of gold and silver in his honour should be set up in the capitol.

In this persecution, John, the apostle and evangelist, was exiled by the said Domitian into Patmos. After the death of Domitian, he being slain and his acts repealed by the senate, John was released, and came to Ephesus in the ear fourscore and seventeen; where he continued until the time of Trajan, and there governed the churches in Asia, where also he wrote his Gospel; and so lived till the year after the passion of our Lord, threescore and eight, which was the year of his age about one hundred.

Clement of Alexandria addeth a certain history of the holy apostle, not unworthy to be remembered of such as delight in things honest and profitable. The words be these: When John was returned to Ephesus from the isle of Patmos, he was requested to resort to the places bordering near unto him. Whereupon, when he was come to a certain city, and had comforted the brethren, he beheld a young man robust in body, of a beautiful countenance, and of a fervent mind. Looking earnestly at the newly-appointed bishop, John said: 'I most solemnly commend this man to thee, in presence here of Christ and of the Church.'

When the bishop had received of him this charge, and had promised his faithful diligence therein, again the second time John spoke unto him, and charged him as before. This done, John returned to Ephesus. The bishop, receiving the young man committed to his charge, brought him home, kept him, and nourished him, and at length baptized him; and after that, he gradually relaxed his care and oversight of him, trusting that he had given him the best safeguard possible in putting the Lord's seal upon him.

The young man thus having his liberty more, it chanced that certain of his old companions and acquaintances, being idle, dissolute, and hardened in wickedness, did join in company with him, who first invited him to sumptuous and riotous banquets; then entices him to go forth with them in the night to rob and steal; after that he was allured by them unto greater mischief and wickedness. Wherein, by custom of time, and by little and little, he, becoming more expert, and being of a good wit, and a stout courage, like unto a wild or unbroken horse, leaving the right way and running at large without bridle, was carried headlong to the profundity of all disorder and outrage. And thus, utterly forgetting and rejecting the wholesome doctrine of salvation which he had learned before,

he entered so far in the way of perdition, that he cared not how much further he proceeded in the same. And so, associating unto him a band of companions and fellow thieves, he took upon himself to be as head and captain among them, in committing all kind of murder and felony.

It chanced that John was sent for to those quarters again, and came. Meeting the bishop afore specified, he requireth of him the pledge, which, in the presence of Christ and of the congregation when present, he left in his hands to keep. The bishop, something amazed at the words of John, supposing he had meant them of some money committed to his custody, which he had not received (and yet durst not mistrust John, nor contrary his words), could not tell what to answer. Then John, perceiving his perplexity, and uttering his meaning more plainly: 'The young man,' saith he, 'and the soul of our brother committed to your custody, I do require.' Then the bishop, with a loud voice sorrowing and weeping, said, 'He is dead.' To whom John said, 'How, and by what death?' The other said, 'He is dead of God, for he became an evil and abandoned man, and at length a robber. And now he doth frequent the mountain instead of the Church, with a company of villains and thieves, like unto himself.'

Here the apostle rent his garments, and, with a great lamentation, said, 'A fine keeper of his brother's soul I left here! Get me a horse, and let me have a guide with me.'

Which being done, his horse and man procured, he hasted from the Church, and coming to the place, was taken of thieves that lay on the watch. Be he, neither flying nor refusing, said, 'I came hither for the purpose: lead me,' said he, 'to your captain.' So he being brought, the captain all armed fiercely began to look upon him; and soon after coming to the knowledge of him, was stricken with confusion and shame, and began to fly. But the old man followed him as much as he might, forgetting his age, and crying, 'My son, why dost thou fly from thy father? An armed man from one naked, a young man from an old man? Have pity on me, my son, and far not, for there is yet hope of salvation. I will make answer for thee unto Christ; I will die for thee, if need be; as Christ hath died for us, I will give my life for thee; believe me, Christ hath sent me.'

He, hearing these things, first, as in a maze, stood still, and therewith his courage was abated. After that he had cast down his weapons, by and by he trembled, yea, and wept bitterly; and, coming to the old man, embraced him, and spoke unto him with weeping (as well as he could), being even then baptized afresh with tears, only his right hand being hid and covered.

Then the apostle, after that he had promised that he should obtain remission of our Saviour, prayed, falling down upon his knees, and kissing his murderous right hand (which for shame he durst not show before) as now purged through repentance, and brought him back to the Church. And when he had prayed for him with continual prayer and daily fastings, and had comforted and confirmed his mind with many sentences, he left him restored to the Church again; a great example of sincere penitence and proof of regeneration, and a trophy of the future resurrection.

The causes why the Roman emperors did so persecute the Christians were chiefly these – fear and hatred.

First, fear, for that the emperors and senate, of blind ignorance, not knowing the manner of Christ's kingdom, feared and misdoubted lest the same would subvert their

empire; and therefore sought they all means possible, how, by death and all kinds of torments, utterly to extinguish the name and memory of the Christians.

Secondly, hatred, partly for that this world, of its own natural condition, hath ever hated and maliced the people of God, from the first beginning of the world. Partly again, for that the Christians being of a contrary nature and religion, serving only the true living God, despised their false gods, spoke against their idolatrous worshippings, and many times stopped the power of Satan working in their idols: and therefore Satan, the prince of this world, stirred up the Roman princes and blind idolaters to bear the more hatred and spite against them. Whatsoever mishappened to the city or provinces of Rome, either famine, pestilence, earthquake, wars, wonders, unseasonableness of weather, or what other evils soever, it was imputed to the Christians.

The tyrants and organs of Satan were not contented with death only, to bereave the life from the body. The kinds of death were divers, and no less horrible than divers. Whatsoever the cruelty of man's invention could devise for the punishment of man's body, was practiced against the Christians – stripes and scourgings, drawings, tearings, stonings, plates of iron laid unto them burning hot, deep dungeons, racks, strangling in prisons, the teeth of wild beasts, gridirons, gibbets and gallows, tossing upon the horns of bulls. Moreover, when they were thus killed, their bodies were laid in heaps, and dogs there left to keep them, that no man might come to bury them, neither would any prayer obtain them to be interred.

And yet, notwithstanding all these continual persecutions and horrible punishments, the Church daily increased, deeply rooted in the doctrine of the apostles and of men apostolical, and watered plentifully with the blood of saints.

In the third persecution Pliny the second, a man learned and famous, seeing the lamentable slaughter of Christians, and moved therewith to pity, wrote to Trajan, certifying him that there were many thousands of them daily put to death, of which none did anything contrary to the Roman laws worthy persecution. 'The whole account they gave of their crime or error (whichever it is to be called) amounted only to this, - viz. that they were accustomed on a stated day to meet before day-light, and to repeat together a set form of prayer to Christ as a God, and to bind themselves by an obligation – not indeed to commit wickedness; but, on the contrary, - never to commit theft, robbery or adultery, never to falsify their word, never to defraud any man: after which it was their custom to separate, and reassemble to partake in common of a harmless meal.'

In this persecution, suffered the blessed martyr, Ignatius, who is had in famous reverence among very many. This Ignatius was appointed to the bishopric of Antioch next after Peter in succession. Some do say, that he, being sent from Syria to Rome, because he professed Christ, was given to the wild beasts to be devoured. It is also said of him, that then he passed through Asia, being under the most strict custody of his keepers, he strengthened and confirmed the churches through all the cities as he went, both with his exhortations and preaching of the Word of God. Accordingly, having come to Smyrna, he wrote to the church at Rome, exhorting them not to use means for his deliverance from martyrdom, lest they should deprive him of that which he most longed and hoped for. 'Now I begin to a disciple. I care for nothing, of visible or invisible things, so that I may but win Christ. Let fire and the cross, let the companies of wild beasts, let breaking of bones and tearing of limbs, let the grinding of the whole body, and all the malice of the devil, come upon me; be it so, only may I win Christ Jesus!' And

even when he was sentenced to be thrown to the beasts, such was the burning desire that he had to suffer, that he spoke, what time he heard the lions roaring, saying, 'I am the wheat of Christ: I am going to be ground with the teeth of wild beasts, that I may be found pure bread.'

After the decease of the quiet and mild prince Antoninus Pius followed his son Marcus Aurelius about the year of our Lord 161, a man of nature more stern and severe; and, although in study of philosophy and in civil government no less commendable, yet, toward the Christians sharp and fierce by whom was moved the fourth persecution.

In the time of the same Marcus a great number of them which truly professed Christ suffered most cruel torments and punishments, among whom was Polycarp, the worthy bishop of Smyrna. Of whose end and martyrdom I thought it here not inexpedient to be taken out of a certain letter or epistle written by them of his (Polycarp's) own church to all the brethren throughout the world.

Three days before he was apprehended, as he was praying at night, he fell asleep, and saw in a dream the pillow take fire under his head, and presently consumed. Waking thereupon, he forthwith related the vision to those about him, and prophesied that he should be burnt alive for Christ's sake. When the persons who were in search of him were close at hand, he was induced, for the love of the brethren, to retire to another village, to wit, notwithstanding, the pursuers soon followed him; and having caught a couple of boys dwelling thereabout, they whipped one of them till he directed them to Polycarp's retreat. The pursuers having arrived late in the day, found him gone to bed in the top room of the house, whence he might have escaped into another house, if he would; but this he refused to do, saying, 'The will of the Lord be done.'

Hearing that they were come, he came down, and spoke to them with a cheerful and pleasant countenance: so that they were wonder-struck, who, having never known the man before, now beheld his venerable age and the gravity and composure of his manner, and wondered why they should be so earnest for the apprehension of so old a man. He immediately ordered a table to be laid for them, and exhorted them to eat heartily, and begged them to allow him one hour to pray without molestation; which being granted, he rose and began to pray, and was so full of the grace of God, that they who were present and heard his prayers were astonished, and many now felt sorry that so venerable and godly a man should be put to death.

When he had finished his prayers, wherein he made mention of all whom he had ever been connected with, small and great, noble and vulgar, and of the whole universal Church throughout the world, the hour being come for their departure, they set him on an ass and brought him to the city. There met him the irenarch Herod, and his father Nicetes, who taking him up into their chariot began to exhort him, saying, 'What harm is it to say "Lord Caesar," and to sacrifice, and save yourself?' At first he was silent: but being pressed to speak, he said, 'I will not do as you advise me.' When they saw that he was not to be persuaded, they gave him rough language, and pushed him hastily down, so that in descending from the chariot, he grazed his shin. But he, unmoved as if he had suffered nothing, went on cheerfully, under the conduct of his guards, to the Stadium. There, the noise being so great that few could hear anything, a voice from heaven said to Polycarp as he entered the stadium, 'Be strong, Polycarp, and play the man.' No one saw him that spoke, but many people heard the voice. When he was brought to the tribunal, there was a great tumult as soon as it was generally understood that Polycarp was

people, observing that his body could not be consumed with the fire, ordered the confector to approach, and to plunge his sword into his body. Upon this such a quantity of blood gushed out that the fire was extinguished. But the envious, malignant, and spiteful enemy of the just studied to prevent us from obtaining his poor body. For some persons suggested to Nicetes, to go to the proconsul, and entreat him not to deliver the body to the Christians, 'lest,' said they, 'leaving the crucified one, they should begin to worship *him*. And they said these things upon the suggestions and arguments of the Jews, who also watched us when we were going to take the body from the pile. The centurion, perceiving the malevolence of the Jews, placed the body in the midst of the fire and burned it. Then we gathered up his bones – more precious than gold and jewels – and deposited them in a proper place.

In the same persecution suffered the glorious and most constant martyrs of Lyons and Vienne, two cities in France; giving a glorious testimony, and to all Christian men a spectacle or example of singular fortitude in Christ our Saviour. Their history is set forth by their own churches, where they did suffer: -

The whole fury of the multitude, the governor, and the soldiers, was spent on Sanctus of Vienne, the deacon, and on Maturus, a late convert indeed, but a magnanimous wrestler in spiritual things; and on Attalus of Pergamos, a man who had ever been a pillar and support of our church; and lastly on Blandina, through whom Christ showed that those things that appear unsightly and contemptible among men are most honourable in the presence of God, on account of love to His name exhibited in real energy, and not in boasting and pompous pretences. For – while we all feared, and among the rest while her mistress according to the flesh, who herself was one of the noble army of martyrs, dreaded that she would not be able to witness a good confession, because of the weakness of her body; - Blandina was endued with so much fortitude, that those who successively tortured her from morning to night were quite worn out with fatigue; owned themselves conquered and exhausted of their whole apparatus of tortures, and were amazed to see her still breathing whilst her body was torn and laid open. The blessed woman recovered fresh vigour in the act of confession; and it was an evident annihilation of all her pains to say – 'I am a Christian, and no evil is committed among us.'

Sanctus, having sustained in a manner more than human the most barbarous indignities, while the impious hoped to extort from him something injurious to the Gospel, through the duration and intenseness of his sufferings, resisted with so much firmness that he would neither tell his own name, nor that of his nation or state, nor whether he was a freeman or a slave; but to every interrogatory he answered, 'I am a Christian.' This, he repeatedly owned, was to him both name, and country, and family and everything.

The faithful, while they were dragged along, proceeded with cheerful steps; their countenances shone with much grace and glory; their bonds were as the most beautiful ornaments; and they themselves looked as brides adorned with their richest array, breathing the fragrance of Christ. They were put to death in various ways: or, in other words, they wove a chaplet of various odours and flowers, and presented it to the Father.

Maturus, Sanctus, Blandina, and Attalus, were led to the wild beasts into the amphitheatre to be the common spectacle of Gentile inhumanity. They were exposed to all the barbarities which the mad populace with shouts demanded, and above all to the hot

iron chair, in which their bodies were roasted and emitted a disgusting smell. These after remaining alive a long time, expired at length.

Blandina, suspended from a stake, was exposed as food to the wild beasts; she was seen suspended in the form of a cross and employed in vehement supplication. The sight inspired her fellow-combatants with much alacrity, while they beheld with their bodily eyes, in the person of their sister, the figure of Him Who was crucified for them. None of the beasts at that time touched her: she was taken down from the stake and thrown again into prison. Weak and contemptible as she might be deemed, yet when clothed with Christ, the mighty and invincible champion, she became victorious over the enemy in a variety of encounters, and was crowned with immortality.

Attalus also was vehemently demanded by the multitude, for he was a person of great reputation among us. He advanced in all the cheerfulness and serenity of a good conscience; - an experienced Christian, and ever ready and active in bearing testimony to the truth. He was led round the amphitheatre, and a tablet carried before him, inscribed 'This is Attalus the Christian.' The rage of the people would have had him dispatched immediately; but the governor, understanding that he was a Roman, ordered him back to prison: and concerning him and others, who could plead the same privilege of Roman citizenship, he wrote to the emperor and waited for his instructions. Caesar sent orders that the confessors of Christ should be put to death. Roman citizens had the privilege of dying by decollation; the rest were exposed to wild beasts.

Now it was that our Redeemer was magnified in those who had apostatized. They were interrogated separate from the rest, as persons soon to be dismissed, and made a confession to the surprise of the Gentiles, and were added to the list of martyrs.

The blessed Blandina, last of all, as a generous mother having exhorted her children, and sent them before her victorious to the king, reviewing the whole series of their sufferings, hastened to undergo the same herself, rejoicing and triumphing in her exit, as if invited to a marriage supper, not as one going to be exposed to wild beasts. After she had endured stripes, the tearing of the beasts, and the iron chair, she was enclosed in a net and thrown to a bull; and having been tossed some time by the animal, and proving quite superior to her pains, through the influence of hope, and the realizing view of the objects of her faith and her fellowship with Christ, she at length breathed out her soul.

Now let us enter the story of that most constant and courageous martyr of Christ, St. Lawrence, whose words and works deserve to be as fresh and green in Christian hearts, as is the flourishing laurel-tree. This thirsty hart, longing after the water of life, desirous to pass unto it through the strait door of bitter death, when on a time he saw his vigilant shepherd Sixtus, Bishop of Rome, led as a harmless lamb, of harmful tyrants, to his death, saying, 'O dear father! Whether goest thou, without the company of thy dear son? What crime is there in me that offendeth thy fatherhood? Hast thou proved me unnatural? Now try, sweet father, whether thou hast chosen a faithful minister or not? Deniest thou unto him the fellowship of thy blood?' These words with tears Saint Lawrence uttered, not because his master should suffer, but because he might not be suffered to taste death's cup which he thirsted after.

Then Sixtus to his son shaped this answer: 'I forsake thee not, O my son, I give thee to wit, that a sharper conflict remaineth for thee. A feeble and weak old man am I, and therefore run and race of a lighter and easier death: but lusty and young art thou, and more lustily, yea more gloriously, shalt thou triumph over this tyrant. Thy time

approacheth; cease to weep and lament; three days after thou shalt follow me. Why cravest thou to be partaker with me in my passion? I bequeath unto thee the whole inheritance.'

Let us draw near to the fire of martyred Lawrence, that our cold hearts may be warmed thereby. The merciless tyrant, understanding him to be not only a minister of the sacraments, but a distributor also of the Church riches, promised to himself a double prey, by the apprehension of one soul. First, with the rake of avarice to scrape to himself the treasure of poor Christians; then with the fiery fork of tyranny, so to toss and turmoil them, that they should wax weary of their profession. With furious face and cruel countenance, the greedy wolf demanded where this Lawrence had bestowed the substance of the church: who, craving three day's respite, promised to declare where the treasure might be had. In the meantime, he caused a good number of poor Christians to be congregated. So when the day of his answer was come, the persecutor strictly charged him to stand to his promise. Then valiant Lawrence, stretching out his arms over the poor, said: 'These are the precious treasure of the church; these are the treasure indeed, in whom the faith of Christ reigneth, in whom Jesus Christ hath His mansion-place. What more precious jewels can Christ have, than those in whom He hath promised to dwell? For so it is written, "I was hungry and ye gave me to eat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me to drink; I was harbourless and ye lodged me." And again; "Look, what ye have done to the least of these, the same have ye done to me." What greater riches can Christ our Master possess, than the poor people, in whom He loveth to be seen?'

O, what tongue is able to express the fury and madness of the tyrant's heart! Now he stamped, he stared, he ramped, he fared as one out of his wits: his eyes like fire flowed, his mouth like a boar foamed, his teeth like a hellhound grinned. Now, not a reasonable man, but a roaring lion, he might be called.

'Kindle the fire (he cried) – of wood make no spare. Hath this villain deluded the emperor? Away with him, away with him: whip him with scourges, jerk him with rods, buffet him with fists, brain him with clubs. Jesteth the traitor with the emperor? Pinch him with fiery tongs, gird him with burning plates, bring out the strongest chains, and the fire-forks, and the grated bed of iron: on the fire with it; bind the rebel hand and foot; and when the bed is fire-hot, on with him: roast him, broil him, toss him, turn him: on pain of our high displeasure do every man his office, O ye tormentors.'

The word was no sooner spoken, but all was done. After many cruel handlings, this meek lamb was laid, I will not say on his fiery bed of iron, but on his soft bed of down. So mightily God wrought with his martyr Lawrence, so miraculously God tempered His element the fire; not a bed of consuming paid, but a pallet of nourishing rest was it unto Lawrence.

Alban was the first martyr that ever in England suffered death for the name of Christ. At what time Dioclesian and Maximian the emperors had directed out their letters with all severity for the persecuting of the Christians, Alban, being then an infidel, received into his house a certain clerk, flying from the persecutors' hands, whom when Alban beheld continually, both day and night, to persevere in watching and prayer, suddenly by the great mercy of God he began to imitate the example of his faith and virtuous life; whereupon, by little and little, he being instructed by his wholesome exhortation, and leaving the blindness of his idolatry, became at length a perfect Christian.

And when the aforementioned clerk had lodged with him a certain time, it was informed the wicked prince, that this good man and confessor of Christ (not yet condemned to death) was harboured in Alban's house, or very near unto him. Whereupon immediately he gave in charge to the soldiers to make more diligent inquisition of the matter. As soon as they came to the house of Alban he, putting on the apparel wherewith his guest and master was appareled, offered himself in the stead of the other to the soldiers; who, binding him, brought him forthwith to the judge.

It fortuned that at that instant when blessed Alban was brought unto the judge, they found the same judge at the altars offering sacrifice unto devils, who, as soon as he saw Alban, was straightways in a great rage, for that he would presume of his own voluntary will to offer himself to peril, and give himself a prisoner to the soldiers, for safeguard of his guest whom he harboured; wherefore he commanded him to be brought before the images of the devils whom he worshipped, saying: 'For that thou hadst rather hide and convey away a rebel than deliver him to the officers, that (as a contemner of our gods) he might suffer punishment of his blasphemy; what punishment he should have had, thou for him shalt suffer the same, if I perceive thee any whit to revolt from our manner of worshipping.' But blessed Alban, who of his own accord had betrayed to the persecutors that he was a Christian, feared not at all the menaces of the prince; but being armed with the spiritual armour, openly pronounced that he would not obey his commandment.

Then said the judge, 'Of what stock or kindred art thou come?' Alban answered, 'What is that to you, of what stock I come? If you desire to hear the verity of my religion, I do you to wit, that I am a Christian, and apply myself altogether to that calling.' Then said the judge, 'I would know thy name, and see thou tell me the same without delay.' Then said he, 'My parents named me Alban, and worship the true and living God, Who created all the world.' Then said the judge, fraught with fury, 'If thou wilt enjoy the felicity of prolonged life, do sacrifice (and that out of hand) to the mighty gods.' Alban replieth, 'These sacrifices which ye offer unto devils, can neither help them that offer the same, neither yet can they accomplish the desires and prayers of their suppliants.' The judge, when he heard these words, was passing angry, and commanded the tormentors to whip this holy confessor of God, endeavouring to overcome with stripes the constancy of his heart against which he had prevailed nothing with words. And he was cruelly beaten, yet suffered he the same patiently, nay rather joyfully, for the Lord's sake. Then when the judge saw that he would not with torments be overcome, nor be seduced from the Christian religion, he commanded him to be beheaded.

Now from England to return unto other countries where persecution did more vehemently rage.

Pitiless Galerius with his grand prefect Asclepiades invaded the city of Antioch, intending by force of arms to drive all Christians to renounce utterly their pure religion. The Christians were at that time congregated together, to whom one Romanus hastily ran, declaring that the wolves were at hand which would devour the Christian flock; 'But fear not,' said he, 'neither let this imminent peril disturb you, my brethren.' Brought was it to pass, by the great grace of God working in Romanus, that old men and matrons, fathers and mothers, young men and maidens, were all of one will and mind, most ready to shed their blood in defence of their Christian profession.

Word was brought unto the prefect, that the band of armed soldiers was not able to wrest the staff of faith out of the hand of the armed congregation, and all by reason that

Romanus so mightily did encourage them, that they stuck not to offer their naked throats, wishing gloriously to die for the name of their Christ. 'Seek out that rebel,' quoth the prefect, 'and bring him to me, that he may answer for the whole sect.' Apprehended he was, and, bound as a sheep appointed to the slaughter-house, was presented to the emperor, who, with wrathful countenance beholding him, said: 'What! Art thou the author of this sedition? Art thou the cause why so many shall lose their lives? By the gods I swear thou shalt smart for it, and first in thy flesh shalt thou suffer the pains whereunto thou hast encouraged the hearts of thy fellows.'

Romanus answered, 'Thy sentence, O prefect, I joyfully embrace; I refuse not to be sacrificed for my brethren, and that by as cruel means as thou mayest invent: and whereas thy soldiers were repelled from the Christian congregation, that so happened, because it lay not in idolaters and worshippers of devils, to enter into the holy house of God, and to pollute the place of true prayer.'

Then Asclepiades, wholly inflamed with this stout answer, commanded him to be trussed up, and his bowels drawn out. The executioners themselves more pitiful at heart than the prefect, said, 'Not so, sir, this man is of noble parentage; unlawful it is to put a nobleman to so unnoble a death.' 'Scourge him then with whips,' quoth the prefect, 'with knaps of lead at the ends.' Instead of tears, sighs, and groans, Romanus sang psalms all the time of his whipping, requiring them not to favour him for nobility's sake. 'Not the blood of my progenitors,' said he, 'but Christian profession maketh me noble.' The wholesome words of the martyr were as oil to the fire of the prefect's fury. The more the martyr spoke, the madder was he, insomuch that he commanded the martyr's sides to be lanced with knives, until the bones appeared white again.

The second time Romanus preached the living God, the Lord Jesus Christ His well-beloved Son, and eternal life through faith in His blood, Asclepiades commanded the tormentors to strike Romanus on the mouth, that his teeth being stricken out, his pronounciation at leastwise might be impaired. The commandment was obeyed, his face buffeted, his eyelids torn with their nails, his cheeks scotched with knives; the skin of his beard was plucked by little and little from the flesh; finally, his seemly face was wholly defaced. The meek martyr said, 'I thank thee, O prefect, that thou hast opened unto me many mouths, whereby I may preach my Lord and Saviour Christ. Look; how many wounds I have, so many mouths I have lauding and praising God.'

The prefect astonished with this singular constancy, commanded them to cease from the tortures. He threatened cruel fire, he revileth the noble martyr, he blasphemeth God, saying, 'Thy crucified Christ is but a yesterday's God; the gods of the Gentiles are of most antiquity.'

Here again Romanus, taking good occasion, made a long oration of the eternity of Christ, of His human nature, of the death and satisfaction of Christ for all mankind. Which done, he said, 'Give me a child, O prefect, but seven years of age, which age is free from malice and other vices wherewith riper age is commonly infected, and thou shalt hear what he will say.' His request was granted.

A little boy was called out of the multitude, and set before him. 'Tell me, my babe,' quoth the martyr, 'whether thou think it reason that we should worship one Christ, and in Christ one Father, or else that we worship many gods?'

Unto whom the babe answered, 'That certainly (whatsoever it be) which men affirm to be God, must needs be one; and that which pertains to that one, is unique: and inasmuch

as Christ is unique, of necessity Christ must be the true God; for that there be many gods, we children cannot believe.'

The prefect thereat clean amazed, said, 'Thou young villain and traitor, where, and of whom learnedst thou this lesson?'

'Of my mother,' quoth the child, 'with whose milk I sucked in this lesson, that I must believe in Christ.' The mother was called, and she gladly appeared. The prefect commanded the child to be hoisted up and scourged. The pitiful beholders of this pitiless act, could not temper themselves from tears: the joyful and glad mother alone stood by with dry cheeks. Yea, she rebuked her sweet babe for craving a draught of cold water: she charged him to thirst after the cup that the infants of Bethlehem once drank of, forgetting their mothers' milk and paps; and she willed him to remember little Isaac, who, beholding the sword wherewith, and the altar whereon, he should be sacrificed, willingly proffered his tender neck to the dint of his father's sword. Whilst this council was in giving, the butcherly tormentor plucked the skin from the crown of his head, hair and ll. The mother cried, 'Suffer, my child! Anon thou shalt pass to Him that will adorn thy naked head with a crown of eternal glory.' They mother counselleth, the child is counselled; the mother encourageth, the babe is encouraged, and receiveth the stripes with smiling countenance.

The prefect perceiving the child invincible, and himself vanquished, committeth the blessed babe to the stinking prison, commanding the torments of Romanus to be renewed and increased, as chief author of this evil.

Thus was Romanus brought forth again to new stripes, and punishments to be renewed and received again upon his old sores. No longer could the tyrant forbear, but needs he must draw nearer to the sentence of death. 'Is it painful to thee,' saith he, 'to tarry so long alive? A flaming fire, doubt thou not, shall be prepared for thee by and by, wherein thou and that boy, thy fellow in rebellion, shall be consumed into ashes.' Romanus and the babe were led to execution. When they were come to the place, the tormentors required the child of the mother, for she had taken it up in her arms; and she, only kissing it, delivered the babe. 'Farewell,' she said, 'my sweet child; and when thou hast entered the kingdom of Christ, there in thy blest estate remember thy mother.' And as the hangman applied his sword to the babe's neck, she sang on this manner:

All laud and praise with heart and voice,
O Lord, we yield to thee:
To whom the death of this thy saint,
We know most dear to be.

The innocent's head being cut off, the mother wrapped it up in her garment, and laid it on her breast. On the other side a mighty fire was made, whereunto Romanus was cast, whereupon a great storm arose and quenched the fire. The prefect at length being confounded with the fortitude and courage of the martyr, straitly commanded him to be brought back into the prison, and there to be strangled.

(Source: Library of Congress, Rare Book Collection)