Victor Tried.

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THE

THEBAN LEGION:

A STORY OF

THE TIMES OF DIOCLETIAN.

BY THE

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PREFACE.

THE chapters of this little book originally appeared in "Our Monthly," a popular magazine. After a careful revision and the addition of several pages, they are now published in order to interest the young people in Church history. The author has aimed to tell a simple story, true to the life of a distant time, by making vivid the facts as they are found in the voluminous histories written by Fleury, Tillemont, Le Seur, The Magdeburg Centuriators, Mosheim, Neander, J. C. Robertson and John Foxe. Thick volumes have been written upon the question whether the Theban Legion ever existed. Our object has not been to decide the controversy. We treat its existence as probable, rejecting the exaggerated forms of the legend, and thus make it a thread upon which to run the leading facts in the last great persecution of the ancient Church.

THE THEBAN LEGION.

CHAPTER I.

VICTOR'S FAITH TESTED.

THE April days of the Christian year 276 made damp the tents of the Roman legions who lingered in their winter-quarters at Tarsus. Most of the men were homesick, restless and eager for the march into Italy.

"If a bath in this old town gave Alexander the Great a cold and threw him into a nearly fatal fever," said the rough Maximian, "then what of us poor fellows who are drenched through day and night?"

"As soon as our good emperor recovers his health," replied Probus, "we shall be ready to move."

The emperor was Tacitus, who bore the

name of the great Roman historian, and who claimed to be his descendant. He was an aged man, learned, mild, generous, just, temperate; the enemy of all pomp, an admirer of the simple manners of the ancient Romans, a reformer of abuses and a rigid economist in national affairs. He had won the esteem of all Christians by his tolerance. His predecessor, Aurelian, had not been content to extend to them the freedom enjoyed for nearly twenty years, and had signed new edicts of persecution. But death removed the persecutor, and Tacitus made void the cruel edicts. He had reigned but six months, and a fever was now consuming his life.

"If we strike tents," said Maximian, "we shall have hard marches. What roads, swamps, torrents and mountains! Come, Victor, why don't you pray to Paul, your god, who, you say, was born in this ancient city? Pray to him and have these rains stopped."

The rude scoff was pleasing to many a soldier, and the laugh was raised.

"I do not worship Paul," meekly answered Victor. "Was Paul crucified for me? Nay; it was Paul's Lord who died and rose again. I only wish my brave commander would read the letters of the great apostle and learn whom to worship."

"Can you never cease talking of Paul?" said Maximian, angrily, and starting as if he would drive the Christian soldier from the tent.

"I can never cease to honor and love him, for under his preaching my forefathers were converted from paganism, and to this day their children keep the Christian faith. Some of them sealed their testimony to Christ with their blood. They were burned, they were butchered—"

"No more stories about martyrs! You seem to delight in the fact that they were tortured and slain."

"Nay; we delight in the faith for which

they suffered, in their courage, in their victory and in the God who counted them worthy of the martyr's crown. Such a faith must be of great value to us."

"Poor Christians! You want to be martyrs, do you? If I were emperor, I would silence you or expel you from the army. You are too eager to die to be good soldiers."

"Have not Christians been in the army from the days of Cornelius the centurion? Have they not been good soldiers?"

"Excellent," said Probus, who interposed; and, turning to the angry captain, said: "You and I have come from a country where men do not know of Christ." (They were of Pannonia, in modern Austria, near the junction of the Save and the Drave.) "I respect these Christians. Perhaps their prayers once saved our people from being destroyed by war."

"How was that?"

"Let Victor tell us the story of the Thundering Legion."

Victor bowed and waited a little to refresh his memory. He had often heard the story of a wonderful event which was said to have occurred one hundred years before, and which had grown into the legend of a miracle.

"The Emperor Marcus Aurelius," said he, "was in your country fighting against the Quadi and the Marcommani (men of the marches, or border-men), and he led his army into extreme peril. The hot sun burned upon the faces of the soldiers. They were tortured with thirst. The plain was dry as a desert. The enemy threatened to rush upon them. Then the Christians of the Twelfth Legion dropped upon their knees and prayed for rain. The shower fell, and the Roman soldiers caught the water on their shields. The storm arose, the thunder rolled and frightened the enemy, and thus the Twelfth was called the Thundering Legion."

This story kindled the wrath of Galerius,

a man of high temper, cruel to his foes, ungrateful to his friends and a despiser of Christians.

"The prayers of the emperor secured the rain," said he, "for Aurelius raised his hand to Jupiter, and said, 'This hand, which has never yet shed human blood, I lift to thee.' It was not the Christian's God who saved the army."

"I deny that there is any such god as Jupiter," replied Victor. "Only one God exists, and him we worship. It is he, as Paul declares, who giveth rain and fruitful seasons."

"He denies our gods!" cried Galerius; "let him be punished."

"I do not deny the one only and true God of heaven. I say that if any prayers availed on the battle-field, they were those of the Christians; if the rain fell in answer to prayer, our God sent it."*

* Whether a fact or not, the story of the Thundering Legion was current among the early Christians, and made a deep im-

"Insolent wretch!" shouted Galerius. "Atheist and blasphemer! He is under my command. He shall be put in chains, and in a wet tent let him pray to his God for these rains to cease. If they cease not by to-morrow morning he shall be put to death."

"I appeal to the emperor and to the most high God," said Victor, and then submitted to the iron fetters.

He was placed in a shattered tent which afforded scarcely any shelter. There he knelt on the damp earth, and, with the rain falling upon his face as he turned it to heaven, he prayed, not that God would work a miracle in causing the rain to cease, but to show mercy to himself and to his enemies. Other Christian soldiers through all that dark and stormy night prayed that the Lord would deliver their brother from the impending death.

pression upon their minds. We need not presume that any miracle occurred. At most it might be only a remarkable providence.

Scarcely had the morning dawned when a sad report ran through the entire encampment:

"The emperor is dead," said one.

"He is slain by his own troops," said another.

"Who knows," added a third, "but that his brother Florian has sent spies to murder him, and that he will now cause himself to be proclaimed emperor?"

All the camp was in excitement. Few soldiers thought of the dull rain or of poor Victor.

"Who shall be emperor?" was the absorbing question.

Every ambitious commander was ready to be a candidate. Each expected his name to be shouted in the air, if he did not hire some one to shout it.

"Galerius! Galerius!" cried one man as the crowd was gathering.

"Who are you but the slave of Galerius?" was the response; "and who is he but the

son of a Dacian shepherd? He has fury enough to make him a keeper of wolves. He raged too fiercely yesterday."

"Maximian!" shouted another man.

"A peasant's son, a Pannonian," was the reply. "Quite too barbarous. Yesterday his anger betrayed his weakness."

The fact was, Rome had so degenerated that the old patrician families were almost extinct. They gave to the empire few sons worthy of high office. Almost in vain might the Senate search for another Tacitus. The army was expected to elect the chief ruler. Soldiers cared nothing for ancient nobility. They elevated their favorite, even had he been an ignorant peasant in the remotest province.

The commanders took their stand to address the troops. Probus was urged to speak first. He rose, greeted with cheers. No one hurled at him the reproach that he was the son of a gardener in Pannonia. His mother was of a noble family. In his boy-

hood he had won high military promotion. The civic crown had been awarded to his courage. In various countries he had been a gallant warrior, and now he was governor of the entire East, and was regarded as "the firmest pillar of the Roman power." He told the soldiers what kind of an emperor was needed. "Choose a man," said he, "eminent for his valor, honesty, piety, gentleness, economy—"

He hesitated in modesty.

"And probity," answered one who knew that this usually brought up the rear of the Roman virtues.

"Let Probus be emperor," said one of gentle voice from a tent near by. Was Victor speaking? Then one loud, unanimous shout arose in favor of the candidate. Again it rose: "Probus is emperor." "His name is Probity."

Since Galerius had failed in his ambition, he was not likely to remember the Christian soldier praying in his fetters. The rain had

not ceased. The life of a poor man was nothing to the warrior who had uttered the threat of death. Victor was thinking that the new emperor would be too busy and burdened to care for him, when a messenger entered his wretched tent, saying:

"You are wanted. I am ordered to relieve you of these chains and bring you speedily before the emperor."

"Who are you? Are you a Christian?" inquired Victor, finding himself gently handled and touchingly pitied in his sufferings.

"I am Ælian, for years the servant of Probus. I am not a Christian, but I hate the men who yesterday abused you. If ever I have the chance, depend on it I shall avenge this outrage."

"Nay, nay; my Master bids us love our enemies, bless our persecutors and pray for them that despitefully use us. I wish I had an hour to tell you of his love to his enemies. If to-day we part to meet no

more on earth, then take this as my last advice: go to some Christian and learn the way to heaven. Believe on the Lord Jesus."

Shivering with cold, yet with a firm step, Victor was led through the crowd of soldiers, with a roll of parchment in his hand. A comrade suddenly caught hold of his arm and whispered in his ear: "Be true to Jesus. He will not forsake you. The conversion of some pagan soldier may depend on your testimony this day to Christ."

"If I am put to death, tell my wife and children how I receive my crown. Tell my son Maximilian not to enter the army until he is a Christian."

The emperor stepped forward to the edge of the platform on which he had been seated, stooped down, took the hand of a soldier, lifted him up into full view of the multitude, and said: "Victor, you appealed yesterday to the emperor. Even then I was determined that you should not be put to death. As governor of the East, I would

have released you. But I wished to see your faith tested. Now I am emperor. Your appeal is granted. Ælian, lead this man to your own tent and take care of him."

"Blessed be the Lord!" was the thought of all Christians present. They had hoped that Probus would not walk in the ways of Nero, Domitian, Trajan, Hadrian and Decius —emperors who had made butchery of the Church of Christ. They now felt assured of his tolerance. If they wept over the corpse of Tacitus, they rejoiced that a man of like spirit was now in his place. Their joy could be known only by a people whose fathers had been persecuted almost incessantly for two centuries. We cannot measure it. We may read the history; we may dwell upon the merciless edicts; we may think upon the inhuman cruelties inflicted; we may make ourselves familiar with the names and lives of the chief martyrs; we may imagine ourselves present when Perpetua is thrown to the lions; or when Cyprian is led

out of Carthage into a grove; the weeping crowd stands among the trees; he lays aside his mantle; he orders his deacon to give twenty-five pieces of gold to the executioner; he kneels down, prays in silence and lays his gray head upon the block, and, with the fall of the axe, he passes away to a holy and painless world,—but we cannot feel the anxiety of the early Christians when a new ruler took the throne, we cannot measure their dread and horror if he raised his hand to scourge and slay the children of God, nor their rejoicing if he treated a savage law as a dead letter, and struck from the statutes an edict of violence.

Probus is little known in our day. The Church histories draw, at full length, the portraits of emperors who sought to blot out with blood the Christian name. His face dimly appears. The Chief Shepherd raised him up to befriend the Church and give to his long beaten flocks six years more of quiet in his green pastures. The rest

was needed, for a great persecution was coming—one fiercer than all before it, and the last one waged by Roman emperors. In the army of Probus were the future rulers of the empire and the deadly foes of the Church—such commanders as Maximian and Galerius. In the army their hatred was fostered and their violence put forth against the Christians.

For days Victor lay upon a soft couch in a dry tent smitten with a fever. When delirious he must have his roll of parchment in his hand, and his talk ran upon it. When his mind was calm he had his friend read from it the words which cheered his spirit. Ælian learned that it was a part of the New Testament. He studied it as he watched by the bed of one who illustrated to him the faith of a Christian and the law of love.

An order came for the camp to be broken up.

"Your legion is to be sent into Egypt and quartered at Thebes," said Ælian to his

new friend. "We are to march into Italy and to the Danube."

"And I shall perhaps visit my family in Numidia," replied Victor, starting up in his couch. "Thanks to the emperor! But must we be separated? How I wish you could go with me into a land of churches! Are there any Christians in your legion?"

"None; but do you see this?" He held up a fresh copy of Paul's Epistles, saying: "I made it from your own while you knew it not. Think of me reading it afar off in the woods of Pannonia."

When these two soldiers parted, Victor was quite too confident that Ælian was a true Christian. The one could not foresee the effect upon the other of a wild army life and a hatred provoked by oppression. We shall meet the one in the Theban Legion and the other at the head of the Gallic peasants who rebelled against the tyranny of Maximian.

For six years Probus maintained the

grandeur of the Roman empire. His reign presents a series of the most brilliant achievements. He subdued enemies in all quarters and secured a general peace. He was greatly loved by the soldiers for his gentle but firm discipline and for his minute care of all their wants. Many Christians were induced to enter the army. Yet he said:

"I hope soon to have the empire so quiet and prosperous that there shall be no need of soldiers."

"The mice dare not gnaw for fear of Probus," was the common saying. Certainly the lions had no opportunity to tear Christians to pieces in the theatres.

All domestic broils being allayed and all foreign enemies held in awe, the emperor devised a plan for keeping his soldiers well employed.

"Since they eat the public bread and have no fighting to do," he said, "they should labor for the public good. Hanni-

bal's troops planted olive trees in Africa: mine shall drain marshes, or plant vines on the wild hills, where we may establish colonies."

Thus warriors hung up the sword and drove the ploughshare. They repaired the ruins of seventy cities. They built bridges and made rivers more navigable. They reared temples in Egypt and cultivated vineyards in Greece.

"The promised reign of peace is coming," said the Christians.

Soldiers were draining the marshes of Sirmium, the native city of the emperor. It was sickening work in the heat of summer. A word might easily kindle discontent.

"When this mean work is done," said certain men of Maximian's legions, "we shall be disbanded and sent home. The emperor declares that there will be no longer need of soldiers."

"And then how shall we get our living?"

asked those who had made war the business of life.

"What does he care for that?"

A plot was soon formed, and a conspiracy was on foot. A band of mutineers, with concealed swords, assailed the emperor and drove him into a tower, from which he had watched the soldiers at their work. They stormed it; they dragged him forth and murdered him. Others hastened to the spot and bewailed their loss. The army raised to him a stately monument, thus inscribed:

"Here lies Probus, whose life illustrated his name. He subdued all the barbarous nations, and conquered the tyrants who rose up in his time."

Rome had never been ruled by a better emperor.

"Would that he had been a Christian!" said Victor when the sad tidings reached him. The whole Church had reason to lament his death.

CHAPTER II.

THE ANXIETIES OF MAURICE.

"ONE hour with Victor might settle my doubts," said Maurice, the centurion, as he gazed from a high mountain on the western border of Persia. He had learned the gospel from Victor, and looked to him as a guide in matters of Christian duty. And now he was far away from his best earthly adviser. Around him were the tents of the Roman legions, covering the mountain. Almost in his view were the desolations made on a rapid march across the native land of Abraham. His backward gaze brought up the vision of cities pillaged, towns on fire, churches in ruins, Christians slaughtered, and bands of people driven from their homes to weep and starve in wintry wilds. He knew that other Chris-

tians to the eastward were in dread of outrage from their advancing enemy, and churches whose history ran back quite to apostolic days were exposed to the spoiler's avarice and fury. No wonder that Maurice felt his soul revolt.

"It is hard enough," said he, "to fight the pagan foes of my country, but to slay my brethren in the faith, as we did at Edessa, is more than I can bear. Never again, without resistance, will I see a Christian woman cut to pieces while clinging to her daughter, whom Galerius would make his slave."

Was it right for him to serve in the army? Could he in honor leave it? Should he desert, and risk the terrors of capture, or thenceforth be a vagabond in a strange land? Must he march against the Christians of Persia? These were the questions that troubled his mind. He lifted his eyes to heaven, asking God to give him wisdom and deliver his people from the woes of war. "Let my right hand wither," said he, "if

it draw the sword upon one of Christ's flock." Jehovah would prove the Shield of his Church in Persia, and turn back the pitiless invader.

An old warrior was seated upon the frosted grass eating his supper. His rations were stale bacon and hard peas. He cared for nothing better. A coarse purple robe marked him from other soldiers. Certain Persian ambassadors were brought before him, and were told, "This is the emperor." They bowed pompously to Carus, the successor of Probus.

They were astonished to find him so rough and so devoid of courtly style and luxury. They began their speeches. Their "great king" had sent them to talk of peace. They thought peace very desirable. War was not at all convenient for them. They were ready to hear terms.

"Let your master admit the superiority of Rome," replied Carus, who raised the cap which concealed his baldness. "If he does

not, I will speedily make Persia as bare of trees as my head is of hair." The ambassadors trembled, and took their leave. They went home to prepare a fierce reception for the rude old leveler.

Carus began to put his threat into execution. He ravaged the neighboring country. His boastful message to the Senate was, "Look for the downfall of Persia. I shall add Arabia to the empire."

"Must I help to do that?" Maurice silently asked himself. Arabia was then thick with Christian churches. Could he aid in destroying them? Could he longer serve an emperor who allowed himself to be called "lord and god"? This was no new assumption. Preceding emperors had gloried in such titles. Maurice wondered if the true God would not rebuke the blasphemy.

A violent storm rolled up. Shafts of lightning caused alarm in the camp. A sudden shout announced the death of the emperor. Men said he was struck by lightning; the

divine vengeance had been provoked. His secretary thus reported the event to Rome: "While Carus, our dear prince, lay sick in his tent, a furious tempest arose. Day was suddenly turned to night, and so dark was it that one man could not discern another. While we were in utter confusion, frightened and dismayed, and after a clap of thunder more terrible than all before it, we heard the cry, *The emperor is dead!* It soon appeared that his servant, in a rage of grief, set fire to his tent, and this gave rise to the rumor that he was killed by lightning. But, so far as we can judge, he died of his illness."

But this version of the case had no credit in the camp. Numerian was hailed emperor in the stead of his father. He dared not pusue his father's plans. The ancients had a horror of any spot struck with lightning, and the cry arose, "Lead us away from the scene of Heaven's wrath." An old oracle was remembered which had declared that

the gods would not permit the Roman empire to extend beyond the Tigris. A sudden retreat was ordered. The Persians were astonished.

"The Lord saves his people," thought Maurice, who might have wondered that Galerius did not throw the blame upon the Christians, on account of their prayers.

On the retreat Numerian was borne in a close litter, for his eyes, naturally weak, were now made more tender by his tears. That age was too rude for so gentle a man. His sphere was that of a poet and an orator. During the long march he never showed himself to the army. By the side of the closely-covered litter marched his father-in-law, Aper, who acted as his deputy. This man feigned the utmost care of the invalid. He allowed no prying hand to draw the curtains. For nearly eight months he gave to the legions the pretended commands of the invisible emperor. The army halted at Chalcedon in Asia Minor.

"I suspect foul play," whispered a soldier to Maurice. "That pavilion is used to hide an emperor who is dead."

"Can that be?" was the reply. "Long have we prayed that God would send us a Christian ruler, and I hoped that this was he."

The whisper broke over all secresy. A suspicion was harbored against the deputy-general. It caused an excitement among the troops. It grew into open talk, and then into a loud clamor. The soldiers ventured to raise the curtain of the imperial tent, and there saw only the corpse of Numerian. His father-in-law had acted a dishonest if not an inhuman part, but craft and ambition had overreached their mark.

Though grieved and enraged, the military leaders held a council. They elected Diocletian, commander of the body-guards, to succeed their beloved emperor. Aper was brought before them in chains as a prisoner and a criminal. As Diocletian felt that his

former office exposed him to some suspicion, he ascended the tribunal, raised his eyes toward the sun and protested his innocence. Then he drew his sword, and plunging it into the breast of the prisoner, he exclaimed: "This man is the murderer of Numerian!"

Thus came into power the man who was to hold the chief sway over the Roman empire for more than twenty years. It was not a good beginning: still worse would be the end of his reign. Diocletian had come up from a low station. His parents seem to have been slaves of a Roman senator in Dalmatia. They gained their freedom, and their son entered the army to win promotion. Had he been trained in a better school, his name might not now be associated with the severest persecution of the early Church. He was not a man whom vice made notorious and madness terrible. He had most of the pagan virtues. He was devoted to the gods; paganism was his religion; and yet for years he took no active

part against the Christians. His military skill enabled him to change the face of the empire, for he found it weak and shattered, almost rent by internal feuds and torn in pieces by foreign violence; but he might have left it strong and united, with peace at home and power abroad, had he resisted the counsels of evil men. Yet his was not "the daring and generous spirit of a hero, who courts danger and fame, disdains artifice and boldly challenges the allegiance of his equals." It is useless to imagine what he might have been with more independence and a will of his own; we may know what he was under the influence of Maximian and Galerius.

One of the famous watering-places of that age was Nicomedia. The Roman who had not steamed himself in its warm baths or drank from its mineral springs was not a fashionable invalid nor a first-class traveler. It had grown to be the chief city of Bithynia. The emperors had begun to prefer

it to Rome, in which those of provincial birth spent little of their time. Diocletian began to boast that he would make it a second Rome, on account of its power and the beauty of its buildings. In order to make room for a sumptuous palace, he would drive away the poor man and tear down his cottage. If a new palace did not suit him, he had it leveled and another erected on a different plan. The vast expenses were met by unjust taxes and the estates of rich men unjustly seized. Yet he is often praised for his love of the fine arts. His new and favorite city was now the scene of unusual liveliness. New families were at home in the imperial palace. On one day Diocletian entered it, and was hailed as the sovereign of the realm. On another he made grand the welcome to Maximian. These two men were soon closeted together. There was serious business on hand. From all quarters came mutterings of discontent and threats of war.

A bold scheme was devised. These two men were to have joint rule over the empire, Diocletian taking the East and Maximian the West. The first assumed the title of Jovius, as the personation or representative of Jupiter, supposed to have supreme wisdom and to manage all affairs with dignity. The other was called Herculius, as if he were a second Hercules, whose arm would banish all monsters and tyrants from the earth. Such were the new gods of the empire!

"First, then," said this unclassic and very human Jovius, "you will put down the rebel peasants of Gaul."

"That I'll do," replied his colleague; "and Ælian shall know what it costs to revolt with a part of my legions. I punished him once within an inch of death, and the fellow pretended to renounce what he called his faith. The next time he shall die for his folly."

"Perhaps you were too severe?"

"What is too severe for a man who despises the gods? He learned from Victor to adore Christus the Nazarene, who is called Lord and King by all his followers. Will such men call you lord? The gods will not grant us peace until the empire is rid of them."

"Are they not loyal?" asked Diocletian, who was touched by the cruel insinuation, for there were Christians in his own household. "In the churches they are peaceable: in the army they are valiant. Where is there a better soldier than Maurice?"

"Give him to me," answered the savage pagan, "and we shall see how he will fight against Ælian, the ringleader of the Gallic rebels."

It was soon noised abroad that a Christian was at the head of the rebellion in Gaul. In some eyes this was a crime for which the whole Church ought to be persecuted. To lay the blame of any new trouble upon the Christians was an old device. Once, if there

was a drought, the cry was, "Jove withholds the rain: it is the fault of the Christians." If there was any public calamity—a famine, a pestilence, a flood, an earthquake or a great fire—the cause was sought in this race of men so hateful to the gods, or to those who assumed to be their champions, and the demand was, "Away with the Christians to the lions!" Now there was an uprising of poor Gauls, and the crime must be charged upon the followers of Christ.

Maurice felt the keen reproach. Indignant yet cautious, he said to a little band of the faithful in a corner of the palace: "Who can blame a down-trodden people for resisting oppression and rising up to shake off a heavy yoke? Even peasants wish to be free."

"Very true," replied Helena, once the daughter of an innkeeper, but now the wife of Constantius, a valorous general; "the poorest thirst for liberty. But may not

these peasants boast that they are Roman citizens?"

"Nay, they are slaves. I saw them when in Gaul with our emperor. I heard their groans. They needed the gospel, but would not accept it from their oppressors. They are called Bagaudæ and rebels; and if Ælian has fled to them and taken their part, how shall I accuse him or them of wrong?"

"Hear this," said Helena, rapidly turning over a manuscript which she had been reading to certain ladies of the court: "'Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers.' Does this allow rebellion?"

Maurice thought upon that word of the Apostle Paul and grew calmer. His warm impulse had been to excuse Ælian: his cooler judgment was to yield to Paul. The doctrine of submission to rulers was firmly rooted in the minds of the early Christians. Had they resisted every unjust decree, the Roman eagle would have been assailed

everywhere as if it were a hated vulture. They would have rebelled and been crushed. The Church of the first three centuries was the meek, resistless lamb in the hands of the shearer, who often flayed his victim.

"What if Ælian be not a true Christian?" inquired Valeria, the daughter of Diocletian.

"Then so much the more should we pity him," replied Maurice. "If he has fallen in the way, shall I beat him? Shall I run upon him with the sword? May my right hand wither—"

"I see your difficulty. You are not willing to serve under Maximian." Valeria whispered that sentence in his ear, for she must be cautious. To insinuate that her father's partner was a tyrant, or to express sympathy for one who dreaded him, was to put herself in danger. In such a court the people were not always the most trustful of one another. Hers was not a home of mutual confidence and defensive love.

The eye of Maurice grew moist, and yet his face brightened. For once the hardy, sunburnt soldier knew that he had the sympathy of a princess. She had read the thought which he dared not utter. She pitied him, for she had a dread of Maximian. She wondered that her father had chosen such a man for his colleague. She did not wonder that he was to be sent away from the court. His manners were barbarous. His mind was savage. If he imitated Hannibal and Scipio, he perhaps knew not their names. Lawless himself, he had no mercy upon those who disobeyed his commands. Nothing pleased him more than to force others to perform unpleasant duty. To few vices was he a stranger. War was his profession, courage his boast and cruelty his passion. His very looks revealed the coarseness of his nature and his readiness for enormous crimes.

"Leave it all to me," said Valeria, and she tripped away with the grace of one who

had been educated by a Christian lady of high rank, and with the ardor of a novice in kindly offices. For the first time she was to plead for a favor to a Christian soldier. It was a heroic affair. The nerves were not to be consulted.

"What now?" asked Theodora, the step-daughter of Maximian, when suddenly met by her friend in the palace hall. "You are flushed. Are the slippers finished?"

They talked together as if momentous events hinged upon the plot which they were contriving. They agreed upon the nice arrangements, the hour, the place, the persuasives and the little speeches.

"Now, remember," said Valeria as they were parting, "study his mood. Don't fish for a compliment, and be sure to give no hint of your request until he praises you. Then speak."

Two scenes were to be enacted that evening—one in the parlor of each of the joint emperors. Certain ladies of the court were

trained to act their parts. Yet with all the whispering and gliding here and there, no detective could have gathered up a thread of the net which was to be sprung upon their majesties.

Serena Prisca had learned the reserved and courtly etiquette to be maintained in the presence of her husband, Diocletian. On that evening she had been particularly careful to please him. The vegetables of which he was fondest had been set before him. She had given special orders about the mushrooms and spiced them to his taste. He had been pleased; even a smile had evinced his appreciation of the good cheer. And now she might attend him from the table to his lounging-room. She fixed him comfortably on the divan. His good-humor was quite apparent. His eyes settled upon the gorgeous hangings over the window, and he spoke of Valeria.

"May we not spare our daughter for a while," said the empress, "and send her to

Thebes to spend the winter? Her health requires a change."

"It is a long journey," he replied, "and whom could we find as a trusty escort?" His wife was silent.

The door opened. Valeria entered, very careful of the princely style to be observed. "Let the poor work of my unworthy hands be accepted by the feet of the emperor," she said, putting on them a pair of silken slippers, wrought with purple and embroidered with gems.

Surprised out of his studied dignity, he sprang to his feet and showed himself a father. "And this, too, may his shoulders bear!" she added, throwing over him a robe of the cloth of gold. His heart was touched. He had a fondness for rich dress. He was ready to say, almost, as Herod had said to his step-daughter, "Ask of me whatsoever thou wilt, and I will give it thee." He condescended to talk of family affairs. He felt more interest in his daughter's health. He

thought of the advantages that she would derive from travel, which was a superior means of education in times when culture was secured by contact with people of other lands and habits. "Yes," he declared, "you shall go to Thebes, if I can find a trusty attendant."

"Will you let me choose him?" she inquired. He scarcely needed to have the chosen name mentioned, and while he was thinking favorably upon the plan she was listening for something to happen in another apartment of the palace.

Maximian had gone to his parlor rather dull and silent. What cared he for etiquette and finery? A military cloak for rainy weather was more to his mind than all silken trappery. A warrior's boots would better fit him than jeweled slippers. And there they were, well arranged to produce a sensation. "Ha!" he said, "a hint for me to be off in haste to the wars."

"Not that," replied his wife, Eutropia,

with a remembrance of the more graceful emotion which her former husband would have exhibited on such an occasion, "only part of the outfit for your hard campaign."

"Somebody is very kind." He meant to thank his wife.

"Who could that somebody be but our daughter?" she replied. "Do you like the trimmings of imperial purple?" He took up a boot and pronounced it well made. He lifted the cloak and coolly said: "Splendid!" That word gave relief to one whose heart was beating at the door, and whose eye and ear were catching all they could. "Just what I need!" he added. "I am proud of my daughter."

At this moment in came Theodora, and he warmed into cordiality and compliment. "I have half a mind to take you with me," he said, "and leave you at Rome to spend the winter."

"That would be delightful, only that I should be separated from Valeria."

"What if Valeria should go to Thebes?" was the suggestion of her mother.

"Thebes!" exclaimed Maximian. "You would need a body-guard." His inmost thought was that the Thebaid was a very Christian country for his daughter to visit; and if he sent a fiery pagan captain thither, he might provoke a new trouble.

The next morning the two emperors met in council. One result was thus expressed: "Maurice shall conduct part of the imperial families to Thebes."

Maximian was soon upon the march into Gaul. Not often had Maurice seen the legions depart upon a hard enterprise and leave him to gentler service. Now what rare privilege! The chief emperor was indulgent. The more secluded air of the court was Christian. Serena and Valeria rather cautiously took sides with the faithful. Theodora and her mother gladly listened to "the good centurion" as he quietly told them what the Lord had done for him.

Certain officers of the palace, with their families, more openly professed the gospel, and none were more highly honored. A great church stood in a prominent spot of the city. It was often crowded with joyful worshipers.

The Christians began to trust in the favor of princes and think themselves secure in their prosperity. Eusebius, who wrote not long after this time, told of the honors which they enjoyed. The imperial palaces were full of them, and no one hindered their worship. Some of them were the confidential friends of the emperors, the governors of provinces and military commanders. Vast numbers of people everywhere forsook their idol gods and made profession of Christianity. Therefore, in all cities, large buildings were erected for religious worship. Multitudes resorted to them. Only one thing more seemed to be desired: that was the conversion of one or more of the great rulers of the empire. Was there not some

hope of such an event? Diocletian had one faithful officer who watched for a time when he might find his master in the library and lead him to inquire concerning "the Lord of lords and the King of kings."

The day came for Maurice and his charge to begin their journey. One glad prospect was before him: he might visit Jerusalem. There he had been converted to the Christian faith. There he might point out to his young friends the places made sacred by the sufferings of Christ. Yet one sad thought often crossed his mind: Ælian might fall into merciless hands.

Rashly had Ælian vowed to take revenge upon Maximian, and persuaded Amandus to join him in his scheme of revolt. Escaping from the Roman army, these two men had taken refuge among those malcontents who roved in bands through Gaul and lived by robbery. They were quite as often robbed. A priest named Salvian, living about the time, thus describes them: "Roman oppres-

sion makes men no longer Romans. The Bagaudæ are those who, plundered and maltreated by base and bloody judges after they had been deprived of Roman liberty and rights, choose to lose the honors of the Roman name. We call them rebels and traitors, but we have compelled them to become criminal. By what other causes are they made Bagaudæ than by our iniquities?" These servile peasants groaned under the tyranny of their masters, the soldiers and the tax-gatherers. Patience gave way to despair. They grasped their rustic weapons, and rose in fury. The ploughman became a foot soldier. The shepherd mounted his shabby horse. An army was collected. At the head of it were Ælian and Amandus, who were accused of assuming the badge of emperors. The whole country was in commotion and alarm. The nobles took means to defend their rude castles. The loyal people fled from the scene of anarchy.

But it was vain for these deluded peasants

to measure strength with the skilled legions of Maximian. They fell under the first blows. The dead were treated as brutes, the living as fiends. Terrible was their punishment.

"You Christian rebel!" was Maximian's greeting when the captured chief was led into his presence.

"Not a Christian," was the bold reply. "I am unworthy of that name. Let not my conduct be a reproach to it. But punish me as a rebel, if it be rebellious for a man to seek liberty for himself and for the oppressed."

"Bind him in chains until morning. Weary men are not now strong enough to torture him."

The morning came: Ælian was gone! Who had released him?

CHAPTER III.

A RIDE THROUGH CHRISTENDOM.

THE finest city of Galatia was named Ancyra (now Angora), because there was kept the anchor of Midas, its supposed builder. Traveling punsters used to say that they *anchored* safely in the tavern of Otho, or Theodotus, a famous character in that region. He won more respect than was usually granted to an innkeeper in those times. His was a "house of paths."* The city was the meeting-place of the great roads in that part of Asia Minor. It was a well-known station on the long line of travel from York to Jerusalem. Hence it was a common affair for him to have his rooms all engaged, and he did not put on airs about it, as one who is proud of the patronage bestowed on him. Even if his house was

* Proverbs viii. 2. *Original.*

small, his heart was large enough for all who came, especially for those who he thought were "strangers and pilgrims on the earth." He had a way of detecting them and making light their bills for fare and lodging.

One evening, rather late, the foaming post-horses brought to his door a man who had ridden hard over the old Bithynian road. He must be some great official, thought the bystanders, or the Roman post would not be granted him. He gave orders in a haughty tone, demanding the best accommodations, as if he had the first right to all the comforts of the house. The blusterer would not put himself on the level of a beggar by asking for favors. Not he! for he expected to pay for them as pompously as he ordered them. A good supper—that he could have, but the very best room was wanting.

"What!" he said angrily, "do you not know who I am?" Otho looked to see if he

were an emperor, but the face was not familiar. "I am Hierocles, the former governor of Bithynia, and now on my way to take the governorship of Alexandria."

"Very sorry that I have no room worthy of you," said Otho, "but first come, first served. This centurion came an hour ago from Nicomedia and engaged the best quarters. Yet you shall not have the worst."

The governor turned, saw Maurice, and scarcely repressed his contempt of one who held only the rank of a centurion. "Ah! a soldier," he said, for he had before seen Maurice. "A *Christian* soldier, and, perhaps, a coward, skulking from the imperial service and traveling on some errand for the Church. Your Master, as your preachers say, 'had not where to lay his head,' but you love the uppermost rooms. This town is beset with these Christians. I called at the great inn, and that was nearly full of them. And there comes another bishop."

Several men were ready to protest against

these insults, but they waited for Maurice to speak. All eyes were fixed upon him. Was he brave enough to defend himself? He was brave enough to be silent, yet he came near to the governor and mildly said: "I am here as the guardian of some ladies" (he had strict orders not to tell who they were), "and if they consent you shall have my room. I can stand guard at their doors."

"Women! Why are they roaming about? Christians, too, I suppose. Let them be 'keepers at home,' as their apostle bids them."

A call was heard from an upper window, "Maurice, hither." It was that of Valeria, who was resolved upon defending her protector in his rights. He should not accommodate the rude Bithynian. She would inform her father of the insult. Maurice insisted that this would not be Christian. He pleaded that it was his duty to honor the rank of one who held so high an office by

appointment of the emperor. The plea was magnanimous. When this failed he still entreated that the insult to him might never be reported. Perhaps the emperor never heard of it, not even when Hierocles was afterward urging a persecution of all the Christians in the palace.

An old man, gray and crippled by some former torture, was now saluting the innkeeper and handing him a small written roll, saying: "Pamphilus of Cæsarea sends this to thee." They talked a moment. The aged man was thankful to have even a bed of straw.

"Good enough for such a fanatic," thought Hierocles, who claimed to be a philosopher. He was now employing tongue and pen against Christianity, and was eager to use the sword against its professors. No one was doing more to rekindle the fury of the Decian period. To see this old disciple, all scarred and broken nearly forty years before by the agents of Decius, and now warmly

greeted as a confessor, was too much for his philosophic temper. In those days the man who had boldly confessed Christ in the very jaws of death, and yet had been delivered from martyrdom, was called a *confessor*. He was regarded as one who had almost looked into heaven. Honors too great were often paid to him. His prayers were supposed to be of peculiar efficacy in behalf of others. If disposed, he might assume a higher authority than all ministers, dictate rules and laws, assure the penitent of forgiveness, or impose upon the credulous by telling them whose names he had seen written in the Book of Life.

It was soon apparent that the aged man was a confessor. A group of admirers had gathered around him. One besought him to visit a sick child. Another begged the privilege of washing his feet. A third wished him to come and lay his hands upon a poor lunatic.

"Nay, nay, my children," he said, "I am

nothing. Why do you look for help in me? I may only stand in the way between you and your Lord. Go directly to him. I am only one of little faith once counted unworthy of the martyr's crown. Oh that he would yet give it to me!"

The philosopher was overheard muttering, "He may soon have it if he courts it by his folly."

"I am now ready to be offered up," replied the old man, stepping forward, with his hands clasped and his eyes raised to heaven.

"Miserable wretch!" exclaimed Hierocles, "if you really wish to die there are halters and precipices enough." There was a laugh in the crowd.

Valeria had caught a sight of the old man's uplifted face as she looked from the window, and her interest in him became so earnest that she laid a plan to meet him. Wishing to conceal their rank, she and Theodora assumed the level of the people about

them. The innkeeper was consulted. "Look!" said he in happiest mood; "a book of Holy Scripture which I never before saw or knew."

Maurice eagerly took it and began to read: "The elder unto the well-beloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth," and then said: "You must be the Gaius, for you are 'given to hospitality.' But is it really Holy Scripture?" In those days the Sacred Writings were not yet all collected into one volume, and this portion (3 John) was not so well known as most of the books of Scripture.

"How beautiful!" said Theodora as the reading went on. "How it meets our circumstances! Who could have written it?" The question must be answered. Perhaps the aged bearer could tell. He was invited to the room of Maurice. While he was coming the roll was read again.

Very appropriate was this to Otho: "Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers;

which have borne witness of thy charity before the Church: whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well."

And this they applied to the philosopher, who was still in the street venting his wrath upon the Christians: "If I come I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words."

"His deeds ought to be punished now," interposed Valeria.

"Not by us," replied Maurice, "for listen to this rule: 'Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good.'"

The venerable confessor now appeared. So weary and worn did he seem that it required an effort to greet the little company and say: "God bless you, my children, and all who inquire for the truth."

Not once did he suspect that they who took every care to make him comfortable were princesses whose fathers were heathen. They asked his age: it was seventy years.

They inquired how an arm had been broken and a foot turned out of place. He told the sad story of his tortures. They wished to know of his family.

"A wife crowned nearly forty years ago," said he; "two sons, then mere infants; one pitied by a pagan widow, who reared him in her ways and put him in the army; the other carried off into the East by a Christian woman, and he, too, is a soldier now. Ah, they did not grow to know each other as brothers. I have heard that the first, not long since, was learning of Christ; the other I know is a Christian. The Lord bless them!"

"Their names?" inquired Maurice.

"Ælian and Adrian."

He did not know that Ælian had revolted. Of Adrian he said: "I wanted to see him before he set out for Gaul and tell him how he might recognize his brother."

"I know them," said Maurice; and the old man sprang up to clasp in his arms the

friend of his long-lost sons. One had much to relate about Adrian, but was reserved concerning Ælian, whose defeat had not yet occurred; and the other finally remarked: "I think they will soon find each other."

He started to go, as if his youth were quite renewed.

"You are my guest now," said Maurice. "You are to lodge with me to-night." The old man reluctantly yielded.

Theodora suggested that the question concerning the roll had been forgotten.

"I am no scholar," said the confessor, "but am sure that it is Holy Scripture. If you should visit Pamphilus, at Cæsarea, he could tell you all about it. You should see his large library."

"Let us call on him." The plan was arranged. The scroll was again read, Otho and his family being present. A hymn was sung, and the happy old confessor offered prayer, as one who believed that when God listened prayer had power to remove sins, repel

temptations, heal the sick, loose the prisoner from his bonds, stay the wrath of enemies, delight the magnanimous, nourish the poor, control the rich, raise the fallen, preserve those who stood, guide the traveler and be the shield of those at home. Thus Tertullian had described the wondrous power of prayer.

"I hope the governor will sleep like a philosopher," was Otho's parting remark, "for we have put our family-room at his service, and unlike a true philosopher he has accepted it. He is no Stoic, I assure you."

The princesses retired to think and talk, rather than slumber. Maurice thought that the confessor spent almost the whole night in prayer.

The next morning, when the post-horses were ready for their various routes, Hierocles said to Maurice: "So you go to Jerusalem? Very well; I hope the city will be holy enough for you. I suppose you will pay

honors to your Christ, who sent out nine hundred men to overrun the land of Judea, and whom the Jews drove out of their city. You hold him to be divine because he made a few blind men see and performed certain other wonders. Be Jews, then, and adore your Nazarene. We Greeks honor Apollonius, who lived at the same time, traveled more widely and did greater wonders. We regard him not as a god, but as one peculiarly beloved of the gods. He understood the language of brutes, while your apostles were 'unlearned and ignorant men,' as your Scriptures say. I go by way of Tyana, a town built by his kindred, where he had his home, and where a temple is dedicated to him. Go on in your fanaticism; you may see the day when you will repent of having made light of this sublime philosophy."

No one thought it worth while to answer his scoff or to show him that Apollonius was an impostor, and that the accounts of his deeds were fictions. It was but a weak de-

vice of the pagans of that age to compare the pretended deeds of such a man with the historical acts of the true Christ. Yet to this work Hierocles was devoting his energies with all the ardor of a fanatic. Some of the travelers, now glad to be rid of him, were to meet him again and painfully learn his influence at the imperial court.

Good was the company on the fine road to Antioch where, three hundred years before, the disciples were first called Christians. The very route brought up the history of Christianity. Galatia had not forgotten Paul, who endured so much as a missionary to its people. To the right was Iconium, where he was threatened with a stoning. Nearer still was Lystra, where the people brought oxen and garlands to make sacrifice to him and Barnabas, and where he was stoned and left as dead. Close at hand was Derbe, where Timothy was reared in a home of Bible-readers. In these cities the gospel had triumphed and churches had been

planted. Tarsus, too, had its sacred memories.

"Really," said Theodora, "I take a great interest in these Christians. I find myself looking for their place of worship in every town through which we pass."

"And how many there are of them!" said Valeria, pointing to a little church with its door open, so that the people might resort thither at any hour and read the copies of the Scriptures fastened to the public desks.

"Yes," answered Lucian of Antioch, returning from the great meeting at Ancyra, "and yet there are not half enough churches for the Christians. It is only a short time since any were allowed to be built. But Christ's worshipers are filling the empire. Nor are they, as Celsus said, 'the dregs of the populace—mere peasants, tanners, cobblers, wool-workers, the meanest of mankind, drawing after them women and boys, beggars and slaves.'"

"A philosopher might be found among

them," suggested Valeria, as a compliment to him.

"People of every class are among them. They are everywhere. It was, perhaps, the too strong boast of Tertullian, seventy years ago: 'We are a people of yesterday, and yet we have filled all your places—your cities, islands, castles, towns, camps, council-rooms, senate, forum, and to you we leave your temples only. We can count your armies: you cannot reckon our numbers even in a single province. If we should withdraw into some remote corner of the world, the loss of so many good citizens would astonish you and cripple your power. No doubt you would tremble at your solitude. You would shrink from the silence and stupor of a dead world. You would ask if you had anybody to govern.'"

"We know that orators have not been wanting to you," said the princesses. "Your own eloquence makes our journey swift."

Lucian checked his flight of thought. He was led to another theme. He told how he had been taught the true religion when a child on the banks of the Euphrates; how he was left an orphan at the age of twelve; how he gave his property to the poor and became quite a monk at Edessa; and how he came to Antioch and founded a theological school.

"Ah! then my pride led me astray," he said with emotion, "for I adopted Gnostic errors almost as delusive as those of Hierocles. My Christ was not then the real Jesus. The Church rightly denied me its communion. What a wretched outcast was I! It is a sad and fearful thing to depart from the true faith. But how great is the power of Christ! He brought me back to his fold."

Maurice and the princesses seemed to reach Antioch too soon, for they must part with one who had taught them in his talk. Lucian, once more at home, vigorously pur-

sued the work which made him one of the most thorough biblical scholars of his age, one of the kindest of men to the poor, and whose eminence would mark him out hereafter as the victim of pagan malice.

In his library at Cæsarea, in Palestine, sat Pamphilus, a devout presbyter and a literary miner in the search for the hidden treasures of ages then past. An old manuscript, pagan, Jewish or Christian, however dingy and torn, was to him a prize; if rare or excellent, he must have a copy of it. He and his students used the pen as the great printers used the press at the dawn of the Reformation—in multiplying copies of the ancient classics and the Holy Scriptures. His was a sort of publishing-house in the third century. He gave his wealth to the purchase, correction and increase of books. Every friend of science or student of the Bible might find that his name expressed his character, for Pamphilus meant *all-love*, or *lover of all;* "a name thrice dear to me,"

says Eusebius, who added it to his own. Some borrowed, some bought his manuscripts, and others received them as presents.

One day certain visitors were announced. "Bring them in," said he to his polite student, Eusebius, known afterward as the historian of the Church, and he looked to see how he might step out of the mass of papyrus leaves and scrolls of parchment by which he was surrounded. He might have said, wittily, that he was "circumscribed."

"Valeria, Theodora, Maurice," were the names given, with no hint of rank, except that the latter was a centurion.

"I do not wonder that our city has attractions for a centurion," said the scholar, "since it was here that Cornelius received the gospel from the Apostle Peter. Here the door was opened to the Gentiles, that they might enter into the fold of Christ. Here dwelt Philip the Evangelist and here his four daughters prophesied. Here Paul rested several times on his journeys."

The Library of Pamphilus.

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"It is well," added Eusebius, "that here should be a stronghold of Christ's militia* and an armory in which the soldiers of the Lord may find weapons for their spiritual warfare."

He pointed to the piles of manuscripts on the floor and the rows of them upon the shelves.

"What a library!" whispered the ladies to each other, eager to look into the books. They were shown into other rooms quite as full of literary treasures. It was a vast collection for that age, even if we cut down the report that it numbered thirty thousand volumes. It was given to the church of that city. The Arabs seem to have destroyed it in the seventh century.

"Would you see this?" inquired Pamphilus, opening a box and showing a fine copy of the Gospels and the Epistles of John, made by his own hand.

* *Milites Dei et Christi*, a favorite term among the early Christians, who regarded their life as a warfare in behalf of their Lord and King.

They admired it as beautiful, elegant, splendid. "He must be very rich who buys it," said Valeria.

"Since I heard that there were saints in Cæsar's household, I hoped that it might find its way into the palace of the emperor, who is so gentle toward us."

The young ladies were startled. Was their rank detected? And were they to be counted among "the saints?"

"Yet, as you seem to value it," he continued, "I will ask you to accept it if you will promise to study it."

"What! I accept so costly a book?" she replied, with an art that rather discloses than conceals one's social position. "I am not worthy. But if you will write in it your name, I will see that it reaches the emperor's daughter, who, I know, will value it."

"And, perhaps, you need not carry it very far," he said, smiling, and then wrote, "Pamphilus to the princess unnamed to him."

Little could he foresee the price of that autograph and donation—a price yet to be paid by both giver and receiver in the endurance of persecution.

The good presbyter thought he had found out enough to warrant more than ordinary care of his visitors. He must stay at home and attend to his theological school, already growing famous for training young men in the knowledge of the Bible. But when they were about leaving the city he said to Eusebius: "Go with them to Jerusalem. Tell them the history of places through which you pass. And just whisper cautiously to the bishop that I think he may find himself preaching to a princess or two."

In Jerusalem lived Valens, a deacon of gray hairs, gentle spirit and wonderful knowledge of the Scriptures. It is related that they were so treasured up in his memory that he did not require to refer to the written pages when he would quote a text or recall a paragraph. On a Sabbath morning, walking

to the church, he saw two ladies near a broken wall surveying the ruins of that city which the nations had tried to wipe out of existence. He overheard one of them say: "If this were Christ's city, how is it that he left these noble buildings to such desolation?" Had such a question been suggested by Hierocles, the philosophic scoffer?

The deacon halted, and they appeared as if waiting for an answer from a man so venerable.

"Verily, this was Christ's city," he said, "but its people would not receive him. They thrust him out, and yonder they crucified him. And yet these ruins declare that he was a true prophet, for he said that not one stone should be left upon another."

Their tears started as he told them of the sufferings there endured by Jews and Christians. They were walking at his side when Eusebius and Maurice met them. How delighted was the gray patriarch when he led

them into the church! Very earnest was the bishop, Hymeneus, who expounded the sermon of Peter at Pentecost and said:

"Who can limit the Christ to this city or this land? He is everywhere, the Saviour of all who believe. He may be trusted, loved, followed, imitated and worshiped as well in Britain or Bithynia as in Judea." (His eye glanced at the strangers.) "And the great ones of the earth have as much need of his salvation as the lowliest peasant in our desolated valleys."

Maurice greeted many of his former comrades, known to him when he was stationed in the garrison of the city.

"There are one thousand of us," said Candidus, "on the way to the Nile to fight against the Five Clans, and we are nearly all Christians."

"There will be other Christian soldiers in that war," Maurice informed them, "for all along the route I have met them."

"If we could all be in the same legion

and have Maurice for our commander!" was the wish expressed. The proconsul heard it, and soon had a scheme to lay before the emperor.

Far away at Thebes, Valeria wrote back to her mother, and described the boat-trip up the Nile: "We were greatly honored; we had a bishop on board—Theonas of Alexandria. Tell our Lucian to look for a letter from him, and it will be a good one. He got off at a certain place, where the shore was lined with monks to meet him. Monks, monks, monks—these seemed to fill the country, as if the towns and cities were emptying themselves into the desert. Paul of Thebes, about forty years ago, set the example by living as a hermit. Antony followed it, and now it is the rage to forsake society, fast and be filthy. . . . Is there some plot to rob us of Maurice? Pry into it, and if there be such a plan we must give father some more slippers and a wreath for his diadem."

Thus the princesses had gained a more full knowledge of Christianity. At their homes they had seen it standing quite timid and reticent in the background. In villages and cities they had noticed that it came more boldly to the front. It was popular. The hearts of the people were enlisted in its progress. They had been at its birth-place. They had traced somewhat its history and wondered at the extent of its influence. They had visited some of its scholars and become interested in its literature. "Who would have believed," one of them said, "that there were so many Christians in the world?"

"And such good people, so loyal to the empire!" replied the other. "They speak well of the emperors. How they would have honored us if they had known who we were!"

"Only let me give a hint of your rank," said Victor, who had been quite attentive to the visitors, "and all Thebes will pay court

to you." But they preferred not to make themselves known. They were seeing, hearing and learning all they could concerning the life and spirit of the Christians.

After some time had passed, Maurice one day said that he had news very important for those in his charge. He must march to the wars and they must go to Alexandria. Such was the imperial order.

"Why is that?" they asked in surprise.

"Because the people of the provinces below us are rising in rebellion, and you may not get home for years if you remain at Thebes."

These new plans were executed in haste. The princesses received a welcome at Alexandria from the excellent Theonas, who showed them the churches and told them how Clemens and Origen had labored for the gospel in that city. But he was not pleased when he learned that one of the great generals had inquired for them.

"It is Galerius," said Theodora, who was

rather glad to meet any one just from Nicomedia.

"Almost the last man I wish to meet," replied Valeria. "I never saw a man who so hated the Christians. And what have they done to injure or provoke him?"

They appeared, however, and the greetings were scarcely over when they were quite startled to see in the room one whose presence was far less welcome than that of Galerius. It was scarcely necessary for the latter to introduce him, with great parade of his own delight, as "My friend Hierocles, a philosopher worthy of the name." They remembered the philosophic temper which he had displayed at Ancyra and were disposed to shrink from him. He imagined that they had never seen him before, and that their excessive reserve was due to their extreme respect for him.

The plan of Galerius was to commit to Hierocles the care of the princesses, so that he should take them to the heathen temples

and give them full instruction in his art of scoffing at Christianity. After being his scholars for a time, they might return home confirmed in paganism and able to counteract the Christian influences at court.

The conversation had become quite free and lively when the philosopher said to the princesses, "I shall be happy to-morrow to show you some of our fine temples, and perhaps an evening at the theatre will be pleasant."

"To-morrow?" replied Theodora, looking into the face of Valeria, so as to be helped out of a close corner. "What day is this?"

"To-morrow is called by Christians the Lord's day," answered Valeria, with considerable spirit.

Hierocles laughed, saying, "Who cares what they call it? Is it a day for the Nazarenes only? Come, let us devote it to the gods!"

"Yes, to the one God," quickly replied Valeria. "We have already engaged to

spend it in his worship." She did not intend to explain farther.

"You come with us," said the more artless Theodora, "and hear the good bishop Theonas preach."

"The foolishness of preaching!" retorted the philosopher in a scoffing tone. He then indulged his hatred against the gospel. He declared that Christianity was dead.

"Christians are not all dead, that is quite certain," answered Valeria. "The world seems full of them. They have borne a great amount of persecution, and may endure very much more and yet not be utterly swept from the earth. I think that God must be on their side."

"How came you to know so much about them?" asked Hierocles, hardly willing to have an answer. "You have listened to some Jewish stories about Christ. You pay honors to him. Let me tell you about the wonderful Apollonius. You never heard of him, I suppose?"

"We once heard you speak of him at Ancyra."

This was enough for Hierocles. He seemed baffled, for Valeria had retorted quite triumphantly, as if taking some revenge on account of the affair at Otho's inn. When Galerius, with his friend, took leave of them, he perceived the failure of his scheme. The philosopher was not the man to teach these princesses. He resolved upon a new plan for benefiting them: as soon as he had visited the army in Egypt he would attend them to Nicomedia.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BELT AND THE VINE BRANCH.

IT was March, A. D. 292. The emperors were in council at Nicomedia. The empire was governed too much, and hence rebellions were frequent in the provinces. But they resolved to govern it more and terrify men into submission. These two Augusti determined to appoint two Cæsars, or sub-emperors.

"I choose Galerius," said Diocletian. Thus the milder man selected a savage.

"I choose Constantius Chlorus," said Maximian. The savage man chose one of the most humane, liberal, temperate and tolerant of all his generals. Constantius was the only one of the four who had in his veins the blood of the old Roman nobility. He was now forty-two years of age. At

Drepanum, it seems, he had married Helena, an innkeeper's daughter, who became the beautiful Josephine of that age, the heroic saint of the traditions.

To bind them closer to the emperors these two Cæsars must be divorced from their wives and marry into the imperial families. The law was made. Certain women were shocked; others fairly shrieked. Poor Helena! It was heartbreaking to see Theodora wedded to the man who, she knew, was acting from mere political interest. Helena retired with her son Constantine, then twenty years of age, and waited until he should overthrow the tyrants, rise above paganism and lift her out of the obscurity into which she had been thrust.

"Must it be so?" said Valeria when told that Galerius was to be her husband. "I hated him when he was bringing us home from Alexandria." Had Maurice been chosen Cæsar she would have sung for joy. Romans had no heart in these affairs. Nor

did they teach their children to have much conscience.

Galerius, the lowest in rank, was bent upon making himself chief of the four rulers. One of his plans was to force men to enlist in the army, and then corrupt or crush the Christian element in it. In this Maximian agreed with him. This was the process of years: it began with the lesser tests; it ended in deathly trials. Galerius breathed his malice at court; it slowly ate like rust upon the finer qualities of Diocletian.

The tests were two—the adoration of the emperor and sacrifice to the gods. In the one case it was to deify a man; in the other, to make offerings to an imagination. One was blasphemy, the other, idolatry.

The first was pleasing to Diocletian, the new Jovius. He assumed the title of lord, challenged divine honors and allowed the pagans to adore him as god. Other emperors had permitted those who asked a favor to kiss their hands or even their cheeks:

this man decreed that all persons should bow and kiss his foot. The second was in accordance with his own custom. No one was more superstitious, none more careful to offer sacrifices to the gods. Yet he was slow to enjoin these upon the Christians. The tests were first applied in Lower Gaul and in the African provinces over which Maximian had rule.

Maurice had been promoted and given command of several companies largely made up of Christians from the churches of Palestine. He had marched from Thebes and done good service against the Five Clans, a name applied to certain legions which had mutinied, drawn to them the robbers and rebels of the country and pretended to form a government of their own, with Achilleus as their emperor. Then it was that, when any hard fighting must be done, the cry was, "Give us the Theban Legion."

A company was to be sent into Numidia, in Northern Africa, where one Julian had

assumed the imperial purple, and Maurice hoped to do a favor to a brave soldier by saying: "Victor, you may go with your captain and aid the troops of Maximian in the North-west. You would like to visit your home."

"This is very kind," replied Victor; "but what if I should be ordered to adore the emperor or sacrifice to the gods? Then it would be very cruel."

"There is little danger of that, so long as we are greatly needed in these parts. And Diocletian, who rules Egypt, has sent me this word: 'No tests for the Theban Legion.' You are safe."

If Victor had been a leisurely traveler, he might have lodged with a Christian brother in many a town through which he passed. He was in a land where churches were not rare. Before him was Carthage, in which eighty-seven bishops had met in Cyprian's time. He found himself at Tevasta, in Numidia, near his home. What a joy! He

might visit his family. Yet what trouble there!

"I am ordered by the magistrate to enter the army," said his son Maximilian. "Can one be a Christian in such service?"

"I trust I have been one," replied his father, who listened to all the objections, and then added: "If you refuse, you will suffer as a criminal; if you enlist, you may serve your country loyally and win the favor of our rulers. Best of all, you can serve Christ by resisting idolatry, should it be forced upon you."

"If I could be in the Theban Legion—"

"Perhaps you may be transferred to it." Victor concealed the sadness of his heart. Law and love were in conflict.

The day for enlistment came, and Maximilian was brought before Dion, the proconsul. His father was allowed to be present, with many other soldiers.

"Your name?" said Dion.

"Why learn my name?" replied the

young man of twenty-one years. "It is not right for me to bear arms: I am a Christian." He meant that it was not right for him to be a soldier if he must offer sacrifice to the gods. He had just seen an altar still smoking with the remains of a victim.

"Measure him," was the order.

"I cannot do wrong," he insisted. "I am a Christian." His protests were unnoticed.

"Five feet, ten inches," shouted the officer who applied the rule.

"Take the badge of the service," said the proconsul.

"I shall take no such badge," was the answer. "I already wear the badge of my Christ." He meant that the sign of the cross* had been made upon him. It was an invisible badge, nothing like a charm, amulet or talisman.

* This sign of the cross had come into use in a very simple way, and it was a long time before any superstitious virtue was attached to it. Augustine, at a later period, warned his hearers against making it their joy and dependence.

"Wear it, or I shall presently send thee to thy Christ."

"That would be to me the highest honor."

"Who persuaded thee of this?" inquired Dion.

"My own mind and He who called me to his holy profession."

The proconsul turned to Victor, saying, "Advise thy son better."

The reply was, "He can advise himself. He does what he thinks right."

"Put the badge upon him," was the stern order of Dion, who wished to make short work of the controversy. An officer came forward to place upon his neck a medal of lead.

"If you hang it upon me," said the young man in the ardor of his faith, "I shall break it off, for it is useless. It denotes the service of this world. I cannot wear this lead upon my neck after having once received the sacred token of my Lord, whom you know

not, but who endured the cross for our salvation."

After pressing him still further, Dion said to him, "In the army of our masters there are Christian soldiers who render good service. Why cannot you be a soldier and a Christian at the same time?"

"They know not what they do: for my part, I cannot do ill."

"What ill do they do?"

"You know what idolatry is required of them."

Dion said to the register, "Put down his name." Then he addressed Maximilian: "Since you, out of a rebellious spirit, have refused the service, you shall be made an example to others. You shall be punished with death."

"God be praised!" was the reply. He had been reared in the country of Tertullian, who had taught men to court martyrdom rather than avoid it. While led to the place of execution he said to those who

pitied him, "My dearest brethren, strive to attain to the vision of the Lord and to receive such a crown." Then turning to his father, who would not persuade him to act against his conscience, he said: "Give the new military cloak which you have provided for me to the soldier who shall execute on me the sentence of death."

Another name was soon added to the list of martyrs so greatly honored in that age. Even a father could rejoice, not in the sad sight, but in the fact that God had imparted to his son a triumphant faith and a glorious crown. A Christian lady obtained the body, had it carried to Carthage and buried in her own tomb, near to that of the famous Cyprian.

Months wore away very slowly and sadly with Victor, while tenting on the borders and fighting the Moors, or witnessing the idolatrous rites performed by the heathen troops. His expectation was that he would be forced to engage in them or be slain for

his refusal. Maurice began to suspect that his friend had been removed from him for a purpose. "Do they imagine," he asked, "that we would put our heads together, hatch a conspiracy and then revolt?" He had great confidence in the justice and gentleness of Diocletian. If the chief of the empire only knew the facts of the case, he would surely relieve his friend. He sent a request to his emperor that Victor might be returned to the Theban Legion. Why was not the request granted? We must look for the reason in an event which aroused the superstitious fears of Diocletian.

In the palace of the emperor was the good servant whom Valeria had called "Our Lucian." He was honored with the office of high chamberlain. He had received the letter from Theonas, bishop of Alexandria, and read such words as these: "You must not boast, my dear Lucian, that many persons in the imperial palace have been brought by your means to a knowledge of

the truth. Rather give thanks to God, who has made you so useful in a good cause and brought you into high repute with the emperor, so that you can make known the Christian name. Since the emperor believes that he can trust Christians with his body and life—none others being so faithful to him—you should be all the more careful to serve him well, so that he may learn to have faith in our Lord. Do not sell access to him for gold, nor let any one cause you by threats to give him unworthy counsel. Far from you be all attractions of gain, for this looks more like idolatry than the religion of Christ. No ill-gotten gain, nor falsehood, becomes the Christian. No slanderous, offensive language must be heard among you. Act wisely, kindly, honestly, that the Lord may be glorified."

Lucian hurried to the librarian, saying, "Theonas sends you this advice;" and he read from the letter: "Be careful not to show a contempt for the pagan literature in

which the emperor takes delight. Let him see that you are well versed in it. Praise whatever you find good in the great writers and philosophers. Only sometimes let drop a word in praise of the Holy Scriptures. Show him that they are superior to all other writings. He may mention Christ, or give you occasion to speak of him; then show that he is truly the Son of God."

To others in the palace Lucian read this part of the letter: "Let no day pass in which, at a given time, you do not read a portion of Holy Writ and meditate upon it. Never neglect the reading of the Bible, for nothing so nourishes the heart and enriches the mind as this. Learn from it to fulfill your calling wisely, patiently, honestly, piously and in the love of Christ."

Of late there had been little chance to entertain Diocletian in his library and draw his mind to Christian literature. He had been in Egypt suppressing the rebels. He had been provoked at the failure of Galerius

in the Persian expedition. When he met his son-in-law at Antioch, he made this haughtiest of men, clothed in his purple, to know who was really the master. Galerius had to step out of his carriage, and on foot follow the chariot of the chief emperor for a mile or two, greatly humbled in the presence of his own officers.

"Give me another chance," entreated Galerius. "Permit me to retrieve my honor and that of the Roman arms."

The submissive plea was granted. He led back a recruited army of twenty-five thousand men to prove himself a valiant general.

Meanwhile, as it seems, Diocletian proposed to secure for his armies the favor of the gods. Anxious to pry into the future, he ordered sacrifices. The priests and diviners came forward, eager to make their religion more conspicuous and powerful than Christianity, which the imperial court had so greatly favored. An altar was built, the

slain victims were placed upon it. Around it was gathered the army. The priests searched in the livers and lungs of beasts for the signs or tokens of future events. "We find nothing," they said in disappointment.

"Slay other animals; search again," was the order. They obeyed, thinking that some trifling ceremony had been omitted, and hence the "spirits" had not appeared to reveal the future.

"No signs yet," said the diviners. Again they performed their heathen rites: still there was something wrong.

Lucian, obliged to stand near the emperor, was shaking his head at certain Christians near him, for they were making the sign of the cross upon their foreheads. But they gave him little heed. They probably rejoiced in the failure of the divinations at the altar.

"And still no signs," said the priest, his body bent forward, his eyes staring, his fin-

gers stiffly distended and his voice full of dismay. A baffled soothsayer was likely to lose his reputation and his fee.

"The reason is," cried the master of ceremonies on detecting the secret, "there are some profane persons in the assembly. They have tainted the holy solemnities." He glanced at the Christians then present. Others gazed at them. They had frightened away the gods by making the sign of the cross! Such was the charge; and if any persons attributed a magical power, they were the superstitious heathen. Was this simple sign the point on which the fate of the Church was to turn?

The emperor was enraged at the failure of the priests. The Christians were blamed at once. "Let them sacrifice to the gods or be scourged," he commanded. One was beaten until he was too weak to renew the sign of the cross. With such a frightful example before them, a few, whose religion was that of easy times, went to the altar and

touched the sacrifices. Even so slight an act was counted sufficient. This excited the courage of nobler men, who were ready for the "trial of cruel mockings and scourgings."

Diocletian was now at his lodgings dictating to Lucian the orders for his commanders. The written edict ran: "All soldiers who shall refuse to pay honor to the martial deities of Rome shall be expelled from the army."

The required number of copies were made, and one of them was written with a tremulous hand. It was for Maurice. "Let me see that," said the emperor in an excited tone. He read it. Those words seemed terrible, as he weighed them out, for a man to whom he was so much indebted. "Ah! Maurice, is it?" he said, talking to himself. "He is at Thebes again. He must be there to keep down the rebels of Thebaid. Lucian, can I trust you to take this letter and lose it on your way, and then say to Maurice that

you have lost the warrant and know not what it is?"

"Pardon me, my master; would you have me tell what is false?"

The emperor tore up that copy of the edict, paced the room, halted, stood a while in deep thought and then said: "Go to Maurice; let no other man know what you tell him. Say that he shall require all soldiers of the old religion in his army to worship the gods by sacrifices."

"That would be contrary to his conscience and mine."

"Then say that he shall not forbid any soldiers from offering sacrifices if they choose. He need not force them to pay honors to the gods, but he must simply permit them to do so if they choose. And tell him that Victor shall remain in the army of the West."

Maurice received the message in due time, and calmly remarked: "So he imagines that if the soldiers have their fullest liberty

they will be easily tempted into idolatry! If he would proclaim to all his troops a real liberty of worship, hundreds more of them would accept the Christian faith. Not forbid them if they choose! Then I shall try to prevent them from choosing to engage in so false a worship." He would persuade, not persecute.

Many captains were glad to have the new orders. "Burn incense or be expelled," was their command. "Sacrifice or be disgraced and doomed to poverty." It was no light thing for a soldier to lose what his comrades called "honor." Some obeyed; others only seemed to yield by passing through a mere form or mummery. A noble number, of all ranks, threw up their commissions, flung down the belt and quitted the service.

It was a high day with the soldiers at Tangiers, in Africa, when they made a festival on the birth-day of Emperor Maximian, who was willing to intensify the late orders. They sacrificed to the gods, feasted and

reveled, all according to the pagan fashion. Marcellus, a centurion, rose from the table, threw down his military belt and the vine branch (the symbol of his official rank), and said with a loud voice, "From this moment I cease to serve your emperor as a soldier, nor will I worship your gods of wood and stone, which are deaf and dumb idols. I despise them. If the service requires me to sacrifice to gods and emperors, I cast away the belt and vine branch, renounce the standards, and I am a soldier no longer. Yes, I am a soldier of Jesus Christ."

His comrades were surprised at his bold words and strange act. He was seized and led before Fortunatus, the commander of the legion, who thrust him into prison. There he had no repentings. Perhaps he indulged such thoughts as Tertullian had expressed upon the advantage of prison-life to the confessors of his time: "Compare life in the world and life in the prison, and see whether the spirit does not gain more than the body

loses. Thou seest no strange gods; thou partakest not of the festivals of the heathen by living among them; the foul steam of their sacrifices does not touch thee; thou art not dinned by the shouts of the theatre, nor shocked by the profligacy of those who frequent it; thou art more free from temptations, and even from persecution. . . . Discard the name of prison: call it retirement. Walk about in spirit, and do not imagine that you are among shady groves and long avenues, but in the way that leads to God."

After two months and a half had passed, Marcellus was led before Aurelian the judge, who asked him: "Did you disown Cæsar and speak in contempt of the gods?"

"I did what I am charged with having done."

"What fury could inspire you to throw away the tokens of your oath and utter such words?"

"Those who fear God are not inspired with fury."

"Did you throw down your arms?"

"I did, and that because a Christian, who is a servant of Jesus Christ, cannot fight to increase idolatry in this world."

"Receive your sentence." Cassian the clerk was writing it down upon a waxen tablet. "It is ordered that Marcellus, a common centurion, shall be put to death for having publicly broken his oath and abused the gods and the emperors."

At this, Cassian dropped the stylus and the tablet, saying loudly: "I am shocked by so cruel a sentence. It is an outrage upon justice." The officers were in an uproar: some cried one thing, some another. Marcellus calmly smiled.

"Cassian," shouted the judge as he rose in great passion, "why have you thrown down the tablet with such a disdainful air?"

"Because of your injustice."

"Throw the fellow into prison," was the speedy command. Marcellus smiled again upon the new candidate for martyrdom.

When the centurion was on the way to execution he said to the judge: "May God shower down his blessings upon you!" The block, the axe, the stroke, and he breathed no more. The next month Cassian was beheaded on the same spot.

Thus far, not many soldiers were put to death, but the army was materially reduced by those who, for conscience' sake, threw down the belt and the vine branch and retired to their homes.

It is stated in some of the histories that such men acted provokingly. To act conscientiously, or in the ardor of a right impulse, is often provoking to certain people, who admire icy prudence along with the easy compliance of willows under a sudden stroke of the wind. They would have had Abel more prudent with Cain, and Peter more politic before the council which ordered him to be silent concerning the gospel of his Lord. But the early Christians were not Stoics. Human nature is not made of stone;

hence, Stoicism is not natural to most human beings. No doubt there was a lack of wisdom in some instances, as will be seen in the course of our narrative. The right thing was not always done in the best, calmest or most graceful way, yet even that was better than to do the wrong thing. Who could do the wrong deed in the right way?

A sudden, impulsive act does not prove the lack of principle. One may have the truest convictions and still be wanting in perfect self-control. For the very reason that he has truth in his heart and a stout, rigid conscience, he is sensitive to error, to inhumanity, to injustice, to idolatry and to outrage. When violence is done to his moral judgment or best feelings, his soul rises in righteous indignation, and his zeal may carry him beyond the limits of prudence or safety. Caution is not the shield he grasps.

It is a very feeble apology for the heathen persecutors to say that their dignity was

insulted in a few cases by men who revolted against their unjust commands. The first insult was really given to the Christians, and to their God. To resist may have been death, whilst an act trifling in the eyes of a time-server was a means of protection. But that act was a great crime in the eyes of conscientious men. Hence their indignation and resistance. A late writer, whose sympathies do not seem to be upon the side of the Church, says of the Christians under prolonged and varied tortures: "For the love of their Divine Master, for the cause they believed to be true, men and even weak girls endured these things without flinching when one word would have freed them from their sufferings. No opinion we may form of the proceedings of priests in a later age should impair the reverence with which we bend before the martyr's tomb."

CHAPTER V.

IN THE CATACOMBS.

"WHO will now trudge on foot behind the emperor's chariot?" was the thought of Galerius on his next return from the Persian war. He had been victorious. His insolence was now almost unbounded. There was a terror of him in the palace. A letter comes addressed to him as "Cæsar." He exclaims, "Must I still be merely Cæsar?"

The letter, however, is from Maximian, who writes in this strain: "Since peace is generally restored, let us give the Christian soldiers plenty to do. I have found some slavish work for them, and shall devise more. They willingly perform any drudgery if they may only sing and pray over it. You ought to see them carrying mortar to make

the baths of Diocletian at Rome and Milan. Those shall be splendid baths, meant to last for centuries. When will you be again at Sirmium? Have you not some marshes to drain in that region? Or will you send me some of these Christians to defend Eastern Gaul?"

He wanted to have more soldiers at command.

With oily tongue and wily art, Galerius talked to his father-in-law about "those baths at Rome—those grand structures rearing as monuments to his enterprise." Diocletian was flattered. His taste for splendid architecture might be further gratified. Maurice was ordered to Rome with his Theban Legion. Far down in the sand-pits, beneath the Appian Way and just out of Rome, a band of soldiers shoveled the tufa into baskets and sent it up to their comrades to be used in cementing the huge walls of the imperial baths. Those walls have stood to this day, and travelers look on them with

wonder. But the groans which they cost long ago ceased, and the pride which reared them met its doom.

"Is there no end to these quarries?" asked a soldier, straightening himself up and taking breath. "They run on into long galleries. I followed one a half a mile or more this morning."

"And I saw a very strange thing just at the end of that fine aisle," said another. "It was this inscription on a tomb: 'I, Procope, lift my hands against god, who snatched away me, innocent. Aged twenty years. Proclus set up this.' This must be a pagan cemetery. I shudder to think of it." Such inscriptions prove that the heathens of Rome had made a burial-place of these artificial caverns.

"A colder shudder must run over one as he sees such impiety on a tomb," added a third. "But I saw this inscription, the other day, on a tablet: 'To the shades of Tit. Claud. Secundus, who lived fifty-seven

years. Here he enjoys everything. Baths, wine and love ruin our constitution, but they make life. Farewell.'"

"Poor heathen! they live in mirth; they die in despair." The soldiers felt an awe of the place.

"Less talk and more sand," was the cry from the top of the shaft, as the baskets stood unfilled. The workmen below had quite forgotten themselves, and their eyes were staring into the deep, dark, solemn aisles. For Clarian had just said that he had seen, not an hour since, a few women and children down there in the silent gloom.

"What! living people?" exclaimed a soldier from Thebes, where the sight of haggard, uncouth monks had given rise to goblin stories. "Ghosts perhaps — spectres, shades of the lost heathen! These places may be haunted!" He was ready to leap into a basket and give the signal to be drawn up. Far down one of the galleries a

lantern was seen—a step was heard—then a call to a child.

"It was there I saw the women," said Clarian; "and, no mistake, they were real women too; they ran when they saw that I was a soldier, and were out of sight in an instant. There! do you hear that?"

After a breathless silence, they had reason to think that some father had found his child. The little fellow and his mother had suspected that pagan officers were there to persecute them. The light was soon gone. All was quiet. Yet the place and all connected with it were full of awful mystery to the strangers.

"What does this mean?" was the question of a man who had been let down unexpectedly in a basket. They were startled. They looked closer; they recognized Maurice, their trusted commander. He had started down with a sharp reproof on his lips, for he thought that his men were very idle.

"Have you sent us out of the world?" the Theban inquired—"sent us down into the lower regions, among graves and ghosts?"

"Be calm. Are you to be frightened by anything here—you, the veterans and heroes of battles numbered by your scars? Keep secret what I tell you. These are sacred halls and galleries. You are in the Catacombs."

No other term starts in us a tender sympathy for the ancient Christians more quickly than that—the Catacombs. A vast artificial cavern, and once a city within it; streets, houses and churches there; sermons, prayers, baptisms and burials there; refuge, birth, life and death there—nay, not death, for that chilling word was scarcely recognized by those who "fell asleep in Christ." No human hand has been able to trace that history of God's hidden ones. Volumes have been written, and yet the unrecorded sighs, tears and entreaties, faith, hope and charity, fervent songs and final slumbers,

would make the only true history of the Church of the Catacombs.

What civilizations were there shadowed? What races and peoples there repose together, as if the dust brought all into brotherhood? The pagans of one age unconsciously make a refuge and lay out the cemetery for the Christians of another. The Romans scoop out the sand and purchase a ruinous glory by their architecture in the city. The Lord is the real architect, all the time, causing a safe retreat to be made for his people, against whom the heathen rage and the kingdoms are moved.

When Rome was enlarging herself and in want of more houses and grander buildings, quarries were opened in the volcanic subsoil of the neighborhood, to obtain the materials for brick and mortar. Thus, under the roads and streets, there came to be cells like those of bees, halls and rooms as in a vast palace, and mile upon mile of dark labyrinth and winding way. The sand-diggers were,

at first, the poor degraded caste. They dwelt there for want of better homes. The missionary found them, pitied them, taught them, loved them and elevated their spirits as none before had ever dreamed of doing. Many of them gladly received the gospel. Where groans had fallen in vain, songs and prayers now rose in all the majesty of a simple worship. Persecution came to the Church up in the open air and beneath the shining sun, but who thought of sending the human hounds into these deep, dark quarries, where slaves were burrowing for their masters? When Christians of the city were in quest of a hiding-place they found amid trees and bushes the opening of a shaft; they crept down into it; they groped along through the bewildering passages; they heard the notes of a psalm; they called for light and help, and they were soon among brethren. Others came, and all were welcome. No formal oath of secresy was necessary. Their common faith was pledge

enough that no informers and traitors would be found to expose them to the vengeance of an emperor. Or, if a rumor of their presence got vent and a band of keen pursuers came to trace them out, a sentinel gave the signal, and they knew where to hide. Thus, one after another, generations of the faithful lived and fell asleep in those dreary mines. Some were there arrested and slain. Captives were occasionally flung down the shafts, to be crushed in the fall. The bodies, or mere ashes, of martyrs were brought thither to be buried. Certain devout women gave time and means to these kind offices. Seventy thousand epitaphs are said to have been traced in those vaults.

But our Theban soldiers had not solved the mysteries around them. The dwellers there were equally suspicious. They were shy, and warily kept at a distance. "Work on, brave men," said Maurice, "and sing aloud your Christian hymns." A good song is a passport to wary hearts. Rippling away

through the gloomy recesses went a hymn like this:

Never was there such a morn,
'Tis the morn of Jesus' birth;
Now the Light of light is born,
Rises now the Sun on earth.

Angels from the holy sky
Sing to shepherds on the plain,
"Glory be to God on high,
Peace on earth, good-will to men."

Tell it in the village street;
Tell it up on Salem's way;
Tell to every man you meet,
Christ the Lord is born to-day.

The song was heard by the dwellers in the Catacombs. "It is Greek," said one. "It is Christian," said another. They ventured nearer. They were sure that they had heard it in the churches of the city, for those churches were essentially Greek rather than Latin. Soon Lannus and Lucan came near, their children timidly staring at the soldiers, for they had never seen the like of them. Questions and answers readily pass-

ed. It was an old charge against the Christians that as soon as they met they knew each other as members of one great confederation, also that they prayed and fasted and conversed more about the life to come than the present.

"There are few of us here now," said Lannus, "for it requires persecution to fill these retreats. In times of peace we venture out into the open world."

"May you ever have peace then!"

"Already are there signs of a storm. Our churches are growing so worldly that we shall all have to be chastised. In our city the blow is falling upon those who refuse to eat at heathen altars. Some are fleeing into these retreats for safety."

"Military men they must be," said Maurice, who drew aside his new friend, in hope of getting a clue to the truth of a strange report which had been whispered in his ear, and which had come from Otho, the innkeeper at Ancyra.

"We are here," replied Lannus very cautiously, "at the expense of certain soldiers who escaped from Gaul a few years ago. They have wealth, and they have often roamed off in disguise, but they keep rather close in these days."

"What are their names? Ælian? Adrian?"

"I do not thus call them. In honor, I cannot give any names."

"Is there an aged man with them? An old confessor? Their father?"

There was no answer. The artless Roman, in explaining why he and his family were living in so dismal a place, had let slip what he would gladly have recalled. At length he said: "Come with me. You will be seen before you see anybody. If you are known you may be called. This is our way of introducing visitors."

Through passages now winding and now straight, here branching out and there crossed by others, Maurice was led into a chamber which had been, and would again be, a

sanctuary. There was the arm-chair, cut in solid stone, for the preacher, and here the space for the people. In the sides were niches for the bodies of the sleeping saints, unforgotten by the friends who stood so near them praising the Lord. The idea of a cemetery (sleeping-place) was everywhere impressed. In every wall were cut these niches or tombs for the dead.

"Beautiful emblems!" said Maurice as he passed along through other galleries and noticed on the tombs the rude sketchings, the vine, the palm branch, the dove returning to Noah, the three Hebrews in the flames unhurt, the Good Shepherd with the sheep on his shoulders or Lazarus rising from the grave. These simple pictures expressed the great thoughts and hopes of the early Church.

"Soticus, laid here to sleep," was one of the touching inscriptions which Maurice lingered to read. Others were like these:

"In Christ. In the time of the Emperor

Maurice in the Catacombs.

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Hadrian, Marius, a young military officer, who had lived long enough, when, with blood, he gave up his life for Christ." (About the year of our Lord 125.)

"Alexander is not dead, but lives above the stars, and his body rests in this tomb. He ended his life under the Emperor Antoninus. . . . While on his knees, about to sacrifice to the true God, he was ordered to be slain, and he was speedily led away to execution. Oh sad times, when amid sacred rites and prayers, even in caverns, we are not safe! . . . He has scarcely lived who has lived in Christian times." (About A. D. 140.)

"The sleeping-place of Elpis."

"Valeria sleeps in peace." (This tomb had been opened, and on the stone was to be seen only a little dust so arranged as to resemble the shadow of a skeleton. Even Horace had said: "We are but dust and a shadow.")

The visitor was now led to a brighter spot —a room with the comforts of a home.

Through the opening came down the healthful light. Near by was a well of pure water. Tidy mothers had their children around them. And yet the walls of this home were thickly set with sleeping-places for the departed. Quite suddenly a name was spoken: "Maurice?" He started; he was recognized. It was the voice of welcome.

A man stepped round a corner, in the dress of a Roman citizen. Sixteen years, with unusual cares, had changed his appearance. Once he had full hair and a smooth face: now he was bald and bearded heavily. He came near; he gave the salutation, yet was not fully known until he pronounced his own name, "Adrian!" Then the embrace was like that of brothers. It was some time before their conversation took a historical turn. Each had many inquiries to make.

"Your father?" said Maurice.

"He fasts and prays to-day for Ælian. I must not call him away from the cell in which he may be said to live." The old

man had become even more devout since the night which he passed with Maurice and Otho at Ancyra.

"And what of Ælian?"

Adrian shook his head. The two men went aside in a closer apartment. Each had a long account to give of himself, yet the chief theme was Ælian. "You know that on one night, years ago, he was put in chains by Maximian, under whom I was serving. The next morning he was to be tortured and put to death without the least form of a trial. This we knew, though I knew not his relation to me. I was put in charge of him. I fastened the chains upon him, and how brave he was! I had the care of the watch about his tent. In the night he said to me: 'Sergeant, you are kind. Perhaps you are a Christian. I thought I was once. If you could get it, I would leave to you a copy of the gospels, which I made long since.' Then he became silent, until I heard him say to himself: 'Oh, Victor, I have denied thy

Christ!' Then I drew from him the story of his life, and found that he was my brother."

"But how did he escape?" inquired Maurice.

"Dare I tell you? Enough that one guard after another learned how we were related. 'Can you let your brother die? Can you see him horribly tortured to-morrow?' they asked. They suggested plans of escape. I opposed them all, for, in my loyalty to the empire, I could not aid in releasing one whom I regarded as guilty of conspiracy. The entire camp seemed to be asleep. Suddenly one of them set his own tent on fire. Then the torch was applied to mine. I dragged out my brother, who was loth to flee. I loosed his chains, and, while there was utter commotion in the camp, I found myself running away with Ælian."

"And never found?"

"Not yet by even the shrewdest of the spies of the great empire. The reason is

that they have searched for us among the peasantry or the barbarians. Once we were reported to be with Carausius, helping on his revolt in Britain; again we were in Africa aiding the Five Clans; now we are just over the Alps vexing Maximian, or raising up more Bagaudæ to overturn the government. The next thing, you may be ordered to march far off and crush the rebels under Ælian and Adrian."

"Perhaps you will both join me in that enterprise? What a fine joke that would be!"

"Ah, Maurice, you wonder that I do not smile. But you know not the misery of my days. They drag like ages. Conscience measures them. I have felt guilty of deserting the army. If I could redeem my honor by entering again the ranks, I should be a truer and happier man. But what shall I do? Confess my crime committed in deserting my post in order to save an only brother from the inhumanity of a tyrant? And

make the confession to the tyrant himself? Ah, Maurice, how can I?"

The case was fully discussed. One plan was for the two brothers to enlist in the Theban Legion under the newer names which they had assumed. Who would detect them? Or what if one did? might not brave deeds retrieve their lost honor? "Nay," said Adrian; "no military heroism can make a man right in God's eye. There is the act of desertion. A clean breast must be made of it, or conscience will not be at rest."

"Do you remember Valeria and Theodora?" inquired Maurice, with a scheme of reconciliation in his mind. "One has a kindly father, the other a generous husband. Even Maximian has been known to yield to the pleas of his daughter."

"Are you ready to believe a little romance?" whispered Adrian. "I have seen Theodora. I have been in the very tent and palace of Constantius, who received me

at night. He forgives, and remembers that I was properly his soldier when I deserted. See that proof of his confidence." (He showed a ring given him by the noble general.) "And he knows that Maximian and his son Maxentius are nursing plots against the empire. Perhaps Galerius has a sly hand in them."

"Have you been acting as a spy?"

"Not unfairly or dishonorably—not to betray but to save the empire, and to shield our threatened and beloved Church." The reader of history has probably noticed how Maximian and his son cherished the scheme of severing the West from the East, and making old Rome again the capital of an empire in Europe.

In the hope that he might yet secure a military pardon, Adrian was inclined to enroll himself in the Theban Legion. But what of Ælian? He had fallen, both as a soldier of the empire and as a soldier of Christ. He was for years sad, gloomy, al-

most beside himself at times. He was treated as one of the *lapsed.*

In the early Church, if one denied his Lord in time of persecution, this term *lapsed* was applied to him. The Church (in most places) would not admit him again to its privileges unless he passed through some sort of penance. This Ælian had long refused, saying: "I have betrayed the Lord; there is no hope for me. It is impossible to renew me again to repentance."

His aged father, in his wanderings, had found him, and said: "O my son, Peter fell, but he wept bitterly, and his Lord accepted his repentance. Come with me and pray." The heart of the lapsed man melted under the old confessor's prayers.

And now, on this very day, he was secreted in the house of Marcellinus, the bishop of Rome, performing his final acts of penance. These acts were then quite simple humiliations, such as a parent may inflict upon a child. They were not so evil in form

or tendency as the penances of a later age. Ælian had been reproved before the officers of the Church, had been obliged to stand so many hours daily in a lonely corner, and to fast so many days every week.

At the dusk Ælian was heard coming down the shaft. "Tell my father that I have it," said he in great delight, showing a paper given him by the bishop. The old man, who had vowed to remain alone in prayer until his son should return, was called. What a meeting! What embraces and tears of joy!

"This, my son, was lost and is found," exclaimed the father. "He was dead and is alive again."

"Read it," said the restored penitent, dropping into a stone chair. The paper was read. It was a certificate that he was readmitted to the fellowship of the Church. It was to him a commission giving him common rank in the army of Christ.

"If we only had the fatted calf to kill,

our feast should be worthy of the event," said the wife of Lucan, thinking of her plain table.

The old man replied: "God's forgiveness is a feast."

Maurice had stepped aside, lest his presence should be an intrusion. A lad had guided him back with a lantern, that he might see whether all his men had gone to their camp. He returned, and such an evening as they spent was never before passed by the men there gathered.

"Now," said Ælian, "I can face the world. Let me go before Maximian. If he cut me to pieces I am ready for the martyrdom."

"Go, my sons," was the old man's advice—"go where duty calls you. I shall find friends. Otho invites me to live with him at Ancyra."

Months passed away. One morning Maurice drew up his Theban Legion in full array, every soldier ready for the march.

Many of the Christians of the city walked to the camp to bid farewell to brethren whose presence in some of their forty churches had been welcome and their acquaintance delightful. Some of the forty-five or fifty pastors were on the spot. Marcellinus took his stand at the centre of the line. He addressed these "soldiers of Christ." He baptized some of them; he counseled them all. "The power of Rome lies in her soldiers," he said. "The army is her empire. Has not Christ his immortal legions of a nobler mould, and with weapons of greater power? You have taken your *sacramentum*, your oath of loyalty to your heavenly King. Your confession is your watchword, ever at the end of the tongue. Wherever you pray, there is your station, there you enter into the tabernacle of the Almighty. Be faithful, even unto death."

"We will," was the shout.

"If required to burn incense to the gods or to take part in a sacrifice, then—"

"We will refuse," was the loud response. "We will die first."

"Go, then, and under the arms of prayer guard the standard of your divine Commander. Never go spiritually unarmed. Never prove deserters."

Exuperus, the standard-bearer, lifted the eagle, and the legion was more and more dimly seen crossing the hills and plains on the march into the Alps. "It is to put down a little rebellion, they say, caused by one Ælian and certain Bagaudæ," was the explanation given by Lannus to the lingering citizens. He did not know that the genuine Ælian and his brother were in the legion which was marching as a flock of sheep to the slaughter.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TITHING OF MEN.

THE heroic spirit of mountaineers is proverbial. They love independence; they rarely fawn upon monarchs or bow the neck to a tyrant. Nor is this the effect of modern progress. It is even older than any type of educated freedom.

The people of those Alpine valleys whose waters fill the Rhone and the Leman lake were children of liberty. They detested the Roman power. They thought themselves shaved close by taxation in order to maintain the Roman grandees in luxury. To revolt from injustice was easy, for hiding-places were always near at hand. To hunt them down was a hard task. The rivers were their trenches and the Alps their fortresses. So far as they knew the gospel, it

taught them the equality of all men before God. Perhaps the first Christians in that region were the refugees who escaped from the murderers at Lyons and Vienne, in the second century. The tribes who cast aside their Pennine gods and received Christianity might thank the refugees, but they scarcely knew for what to thank an emperor. What had a Cæsar ever done for them to demand their gratitude? His very title was ominous of persecution.

Maximian had not made musical the imperial name; he had not cared to win that best of titles for a ruler, "the father of his people." Rather was he their scourge. Housed in his palace at Milan, he could reach over the Alps and lay the rod upon them. Such cruelty as his was too great for a mere man: he gave the credit of it to the gods. Had this Hercules ever met Jupiter in the old temple which stood in the pass of the Great St. Bernard? Votive tablets have been found among its ruins, but what

were his vows none can tell. No great war was now upon his hands, and therefore he had time for a small one. He magnified some trifling offence of the people, and led an army toward the Lake of Geneva.

On the Rhone, not far above the lake, was the ancient Octodurum, now called Martigny. There, about the year of our Lord 302, we find Maximian. "The soldiers will eat up everything," say the villagers; "and why are they here?"

"To teach us their religion," is the sharp reply. An altar was reared; victims smoked upon it, and the fumes arose to please the gods of Rome. The warriors took an oath of loyalty to their empire and to their paganism.

Under the mountain shadows came Maurice and his Theban Legion. Some writers make it to have consisted of 6666 men, and all of them Christians—a statement we need not entirely accept. Half that number might have been considered a legion,

as in our day a mere remnant is sometimes called a regiment. Maurice posted his men ten miles below, at the old Agaunum. We shall see how his name was given to the little town.

"For what are we here?" inquired Adrian as he stood in the valley, deep and narrow, as if the Rhone had cut in twain a vast mountain range. No enemy was to be seen. "Is it to glorify God? Is it to praise him for the majesty of his works?"

"Perhaps," replied Maurice, "our faith is to be tried. That altar which we passed looked ominous." They were to know in a few days what to expect.

At length an order came like this: "The soldiers of your legion shall come to-morrow and take an oath at the altar to be loyal to the empire."

The reply was: "We are willing to take the oath of loyalty, but not at the altar."

The artful scheme was to test their religion in such a way as to make their refusal

to worship the gods appear as disloyalty to the empire.

"You shall bow to the emperor's image and worship him as god," was the next order.

"We honor and obey the emperor as a man," was the reply; "but our God, the only one and the true, is a far different being."

"You shall burn incense and do sacrifice."

"Our incense is that of prayer; our sacrifice is that of a broken heart, trusting in that offering of Christ once made for all."

"Every tenth man of you shall die."

These orders and replies had been some hours in passing to and fro, and by this time Maximian had led part of his army to the place. The lots were cast. Every tenth man was drawn from his ranks for decimation.

One soldier, filled with horror and know-

ing that if he merely pretended to sacrifice he might be spared, exclaimed: "I will cast a grain of incense on the altar."

"Come to me," said the emperor, assuming a smile which proved too attractive to the time-serving soldier.

"Poor man! he has lapsed," was the remark of his pitiful comrades. Even Maximian would despise him.

"I will take his place," said one, coming forward eagerly and with decided step, "and prove myself more firm."

"Who are you?" gruffly asked the emperor.

"The man whom you once expected to torture: I am Ælian. I confess the wrong—"

"Cut him down. He shall be the first example." There were pagan zealots more than willing to slay him, and he fell beneath their blows.

"Now will you submit?" the emperor inquired of the rest.

"Not one of us," was the response.

Then the scene was almost enough to have imparted feeling to the rocks about them as one man said to another: "You are young; let me, an old man, take your place;" or, "You have a wife and children far away at home; let me die in your stead." Even such privileges were denied. Maurice was scarcely allowed to encourage the men who were victims of murder rather than martyrdom. They were slain.

Maximian was in a fury. The discovery that Ælian was found in loyal service, rather than at the head of a new rebellion among the peasantry, only fired his malice. His fresh order to the Theban Legion was: "You refuse to honor the gods: you shall fight against the Christians now."

The next day the "happy legion," as it has been termed, was put to the test. Maurice and Adrian thus addressed Maximian: "O emperor, we are your soldiers, but, as we freely confess, we are also God's

servants. To you we owe service in war, to him innocence. From you we receive wages, from him life. To obey you in this thing would be to deny our Lord who created us and you."

"To obey the emperor is to obey God," said one of Maximian's advisers, as if he would entrap the unwary by his logic.

"Then it follows that to adore the emperor is to adore God. This we cannot believe nor practice. We first swore allegiance to our God and then to our ruler. Would you have us break our first oath? Then you could not trust us to perform the second. We were brought hither to oppose the enemies of our country. Where are those enemies? We are ready to pursue them. These right arms of ours shall be bared against them. But you command us to search out our peaceful brethren, to track these Christians, hunt them down, plague them, punish and destroy them. If the innocent must be slain, you need not send us

to drag them into your presence: here we are; we offer ourselves. We choose to be killed rather than kill, and guiltless die rather than guilty live."

"I do not claim to be so innocent," said Adrian, "and I confess that I once did you a wrong by deserting—"

"Away, you wretch! You wish to make a virtue of your crimes." Maximian was unwilling to believe that this was Adrian. He, in a terrible rage, ordered the legion to be again decimated. Again every tenth man was drawn from the ranks, and they all stood ready for the slaughter.

"Now will you obey your emperor?" was the demand, as if they might now be sufficiently terrified to submit.

"Yes, when his commands are just and not contrary to those of God; but never, if we must be idolaters and murderers."

"Charge upon the whole legion!" Maximian shouted to his body-guards. But these men hesitated. He called up a pagan

legion and gave the order, "Fall upon these Christian rebels. On them, horsemen, footmen and all." Some of them rushed forward and cut down men who threw down their arms and welcomed the blows. But the work was too nearly infernal for the most barbarous of the pagans. Many were pitied and even urged to escape. In their flight they were scattered in every direction. The Theban Legion was no more. Here and there we may find a trace of some of its members.

Maurice fell a martyr along with other brave officers. When the Alpine church had fixed firmly in her mind the tradition or legend of his death, she gave to the town where his legion was encamped the name of St. Maurice. The whole country is full of the story. Other towns bear his name or claim to possess some memorial of his legion, whose fame peopled every grove of the Valais, every romantic spot in the western chain of the Alps, with shrines and tradi-

Slaughter of the Theban Legion.

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tions. The name of Maurice was long associated with all that was most brilliant and sacred in the chivalrous records of Burgundy and Savoy.

He was canonized by popular voice. On the spot where he fell there rose a church in the fifth century (it is said)—a church more than once crushed by the rocks which rolled down the mountains. There was built the splendid monastery of St. Maurice, the great centre of all the convents of Burgundy. Here nine hundred monks could be gathered, and their nine choirs were so arranged that one of them was constantly in place singing the *Laus perennis* or the unceasing hymn of praise.

Thus a soldier—real or imaginary—grew into a patron saint. His name took hold of the popular heart.

One little story here of maternal love and monastic song: A mother put her only son into this famous abbey, where he excelled in chanting the services. He fell sick and

died. His mother in despair came and buried him. Every day she returned to lament over his grave. One night she saw St. Maurice in her dream, and he tried to console her, but she answered him: "No, no; so long as I live I shall weep for my son." He replied: "But you must not weep for him as if he were dead. He is with us, rejoicing in eternal life. Come tomorrow, and at matins you shall hear his voice in the choir of the monks; and not tomorrow only, but every day you live." She rose and waited impatiently for the sound of the convent bell. Then coming to matins she recognized the voice of her only son, and so every day she heard it when listening to the choral harmonies. Even such a fiction may be underlaid with this truth, that the pious dead are singing in the heavenly choir, and their songs, unheard by us, should still be as music to the lonely heart.

The ring and lance of St. Maurice became very prominent in the regalia of the Bur-

gundian kings, showing how his fame colored the affairs of state. The ring contained an oval agate engraved with the figure of a warrior on horseback, and, if it never belonged to "the warrior-martyr of Thebaid," it was at least a jewel of great value for its antiquity. An abbot of the Great Monastery presented these relics to the House of Savoy, and the dukes and kings of that House wore the ring until it was lost in 1796, when the French routed the Savoyard princes out of their palaces.

And, still more curious, the name of our hero was given to an order of cavaliers in the sixteenth century. The pope had just celebrated the French massacre of St. Bartholomew's day and issued the medals of reward. The Duke of Savoy asked him to charter an order of men who should make it their business to repress "heresy"—such heresy as the Bible taught to all Protestants. What a perversion to give it the name of St. Maurice! If they had imitated him

they would have died as martyrs, rather than shed one drop of Christian blood.

We return to our story. Victor had been sent with his legion from Tangiers into the Alps. Aged and sick, and unwilling to burn pagan incense, he had been allowed to retire from the army. Lodging in the neighborhood, he had now come down in hope of meeting old friends among the newly-arrived troops. Hearing the noise of mirth in one of the tents, he came near it. "Sit down with us," said some of the emperor's guards. "We have done a good day's work. We shall feast presently."

"You have won a victory, I suppose?" he said, accepting their invitation and eager for the news.

"A grand triumph! See the spoils!" They showed him what they had stripped off the martyrs. He rose to go, not daring to utter a word of abhorrence.

"Old man," they asked in contempt, "are you a Christian?"

"As such I have lived; as such I shall die," he replied.

They rushed upon him and made him partner of the honors which his friends had received.

At Turin lived Juliana, the Dorcas of that town. One evening three men called at her house. "You once gave us bread," they told her, "and now we beg a morsel more in the name of Him whose outcasts we are."

"I gave you bread?" she answered, gazing at them very skeptically. They looked like homeless brigands rather than Christians.

"We are a remnant of the Theban Legion," said they. She remembered them, for on their way into the Alps they had halted at Turin long enough to receive kindness from its Christian people. What a privilege to afford them a shelter!

In the dress of peasants they toiled in the fields and vineyards. They made them a cottage, and dwelt in safety for two or three

years. When the Church was everywhere under ban they were detected and slain. Juliana had them buried, and erected to their memory a monument. These three men, Octavius, Adventor and Solutor, were unduly revered in that city during the Middle Ages, when legend exaggerated the numbers and the virtues of martyrs and a thriving trade was driven in the supposed relics of the saints.

Treves claimed four martyrs of the Theban Legion; Cologne fifty others, or some have it three hundred and eighteen! Troyes professed to be satisfied with three hundred and thirty of them. Soleure, Aosta and Marseilles asserted that a goodly share had fallen to their inheritance. Great was the demand for relics in the popular mind. Great was the profit of the priests and monks, as they reaped a harvest from the credulity of their visitors in the days of martyr-worship and of pilgrimage.

CHAPTER VII.

WILES AND WOES.

ROMULIA thought that her son Galerius was about the greatest man in all the world. As she had managed him when he was a rough shepherd-boy, and still kept a close rein upon him, she must be the greatest of women. No one held a higher head at the court of Diocletian; none was more intensely superstitious than she. Almost every day she offered sacrifice to the gods of the mountains, and then made a feast upon meats presented to idols. It often provoked her to find that the Christians of the palace would not accept the invitations to her costly dinners.

One morning she met Valeria and her mother in the hall, and said to them: "Sure-

ly you will dine with me to-day, while your husbands are in Rome celebrating the Persian victory?"

"Excuse us," they replied. "We have had sad news concerning some friends—very sad indeed." They dared not refer to Maurice and his legion.

She turned away muttering: "Yes, very sad all these Christians are of late, with their fasting, and weeping, and praying! My son is a conqueror; that is the reason. Wait until he is emperor, and they may need their tears. Well, there is one comfort: I don't hear so much singing among the servants."

She went to her temple, on a high hill, and the sacrifice did not burn rightly. Her priests had cunningly used wood green and gaseous, so that the smoke was thick and vexing explosions were frequent. Her nerves lost their dignity. "Little devils are spitting fire at us," said the priest in a woeful tone. "The gods are waiting to see the

earth purged of all religions hateful to them; until then no sacrifices will burn acceptably."

The hint was sufficient. Romulia grew even more zealous for her religion. She would first act the spy, and then the informant. She intruded into the worship of the Christians. Hearing that the Lord's Supper was to be administered in the church, she said to Lucian: "Since you will not attend my feast, I propose to attend yours." She had a secret design. Her eye was aching to detect the part which a servant was acting.

"How happy we should be," he answered, "if you came as a sister in Christ! But you know our rule."

"A sister! Do you imagine that I am one of your catechumens or penitents?" She was indignant, yet she resolved to see what the Christians did in their most holy service.

Going, one Sabbath, from the altar to the door of the church, she was met by Peter

the deacon, who was also a high servant of the palace. In that day church-officers were careful whom they admitted as spectators of their worship. It was a lesson taught them by persecutors, for spies had betrayed them. Peter was not rude, yet to deny a request so gracefully as to satisfy this haughty woman was quite impossible. He told her the rule. She left in a rage.

When Galerius returned she had a volume of griefs to tell in his ear and a long lecture to read him. "I am treated with disrespect," she declared, "and even abused, scorned, despised and forbidden the company of these sectaries. Your Persian slave is good enough to enter their church, but I am shut out—I, the mother of an emperor." (She would offend him by calling him a Cæsar.)

"What do you say?" exclaimed Galerius, as soon as reference was thus made to Persis, the beautiful Christian girl whom he violently brought away from Edessa, and had

so treated for eighteen years that Valeria might have been jealous of her. "Is she led into their snares?" (Valeria entered the parlor.)

"Yes, they have had her sighing and crying, fasting and repenting, as they call it, until she heeds me no longer. Valeria now treats her as an equal."

"Why may I not," asked Valeria, with stinging gentleness of rebuke, "since my husband has treated her as my equal for years?"

The Cæsar was furious. So fierce was the domestic storm that Valeria left the room, saying: "If it be a crime to reclaim a captive girl, fallen and debased, from the bondage of sin, then count me as guilty. Drive us together from the court. She was a Christian child: may she henceforth live a Christian woman!"

Persis had been led back to her early faith by her proper mistress. In church she had been treated as one of the lapsed.

To witness her restoration to its communion had been the real design of Romulia on the day when she sought to enter the house of worship.

"Our gods are insulted," said Romulia, when the gust of wrath had lulled and her son's jealousy and hatred were worked up to the desired pitch. "Our gods who preside over the mountains are insulted, for these Christians are allowed to build their temples on the hill-tops."

"Fewer people, then, can get to them," was his careless view of the matter, for his thoughts were more deep than hers in the devices of cruelty.

It seems that from the day Noah reared an altar on Ararat true worshipers had often, and the idolaters nearly always, built altars and temples in lofty positions. On a mountain east of Bethel, Abraham pitched his tent and built an altar unto the Lord. On a mountain he proved his willingness to offer up Isaac. "Jacob offered sacrifice upon the

mount" before parting with Laban. Mount Moriah had its sacred history. In all this there was no superstitious idea that hill-tops were nearer to the dwelling-place of the Most High. But the idolatrous heathen seem to have made a virtue of "high places," the world over. They "burned incense upon the mountain and blasphemed God upon the hills." Jupiter claimed Mount Ida; Mars' Hill was sacred in Athens. Indeed, the Roman deities were supposed to have the right to all the mountains of the empire.

It was not strange that the Christians built some of their churches upon the higher places, as at Carthage and Nicomedia. Nor did they refuse to convert to sacred use a heathen temple standing alone in a grove or on the brow of a hill. But it was easy for their enemies to make this an offence and raise the cry that the gods were driven from the mountains.

"Is my advice no longer valued?" was

the plea of Romulia. "Are my tears to fall unheeded? Am I no more your mother?"

"Be calm," Galerius replied. "Let me have time to form my plans." He changed the topic by inquiring if the philosopher Hierocles had arrived.

The mind of Galerius was darkly brooding over a scheme for the hugest crime. The motive was power. He could brook neither superior nor rival; he must make himself sole ruler of the empire. But the Christians stood in the way. Their great numbers, their wealth and rank and their public spirit might defeat his ambition. What if he should quarrel with his father-in-law, and make war the way to the throne? Then the Christians might rally to the standards of Diocletian and Constantius and overwhelm him. He must remove Constantius. He must keep the young Constantine in a state of repression. He must weaken the power and resources of the Christians. He must array the heathen priests and phil-

osophers against his mild father-in-law, and rouse him to the work of exterminating the Church of Christ.

The emperor and the Cæsar of the East were often closeted together. They could not agree upon measures to be taken against the Christians. After long discussions, Galerius boldly proposed a public war upon them.

"I might grant," said Diocletian, quite unable to stem the fury of his son-in-law, "that they be removed from every post of rank and authority, that they be excluded from the palace and the army, and that all our servants and soldiers be compelled to sacrifice to the gods; farther I cannot go."

"But they will only increase in the empire. The ancient religion of the state will decline. They may rise and place a Christian emperor on the throne."

"Let us be as earnest in our religion as they are in theirs." Diocletian might have listened calmly to a Gamaliel had there been one at court.

"The empire," exclaimed the schemer for a crown, with a pretentious loyalty to it, "the empire is at stake. These men will ruin the empire. They will grow too strong for us. Our predecessors exhorted them, threatened them, confiscated their goods, threw them into prisons, tortured and banished them, and slew many of them, and still they grew. We must make a more thorough work, and root them out. Decree that they shall acknowledge the gods of Rome, or be quartered, hanged, beheaded and burned alive."

"I cannot so ordain."

"Then summon a council."

"To that measure I do not object." Yet here was a question: who should be called? Galerius named military officers, for he was more sure of their cruel sympathies. The emperor wished to invite jurists, judges, statesmen and philosophers. By any compromise they were likely to summon no true friend of Christianity.

The council met. And what did the em-

peror hear? A rehearsal of the silly slanders and flimsy assertions of Celsus, Lucian (the Voltaire of his age) and Porphyry against Christianity. Even the pagan Diocletian could readily see through the fallacies and falsehood of writers who misrepresented the religion which they hated and feared. "Send for that old bookworm at Cæsarea, Pamphilus, and he will show you that these writers were ridiculing Jews," said the emperor, "and not Jesus. What if Christ was more than a Jew?"

Then spake Hierocles: "I will show you that these Christians have corrupted the religion taught by Christ. He sought to correct certain faults in the ancient religions. He taught us to honor the agents of divine Providence, that is, the inferior deities who preside over nations and all nature. But these men who pretend to be his followers have departed from the precepts of their Master. Oh! they worship him, but they declare it a sin for us to pay honors to our

deities over nature. Because they have changed the laws of Christ, and introduced teachings of their own, they are divided into various sects, all contending against each other. Compel them to return to the ancient religion and worship our deities, and then all disputes will be at an end."

Such was the baseless theory of certain philosophers of that age. It looks quite like one boastfully set forth in our own times. A child, with the Gospels in his hand, may answer it and expose its fallacy. It was invented by men who sought to unite in one system heathenism and Christianity. In the union, however, heathen ideas were to predominate, and some Christian practices were to be adopted for the sake of decency. The pagans borrowed from the Christian system that which would make their superstitions popular. Counterfeiters must use some good coin in order to make the spurious the more easily accepted.

"Then you would spare the 'Lives of

Jesus,' which these people ask us to read?" said one of the counselors.

"No: I would burn all the sacred books of the Christians," replied the philosopher.

"How, then, could we learn what Jesus taught? How find those laws of Christ which you say have been perverted?" Hierocles was puzzled. He could not find an answer. To deny the essence of the gospel and yet pretend to set forth the original Christianity is an absurdity not quite worthy of the modern progress of thought. A Christianity without the fully inspired Gospels and apostolic writings is a Christianity without Christ, and hence utterly worthless.

The decision of these advisers was, "Let the Christians be put to death."

All eyes were fixed upon Diocletian as he said: "I cannot yet give my consent. Men are fallible. Let us refer the matter to the gods, particularly Apollo of Miletus."

With great speed and no little trouble messengers were sent to consult the Miletian

deity. As this Apollo was in the hands of pagan priests, the answer was likely to be less ambiguous than usual. Yet, being hard pressed, he admitted that his oracles had failed of late. Why? "*Because of the just on earth.*"

Here, then, was more of a riddle than was expected. How was this answer of Apollo to be understood? Who were "the just"? Of course, the Christians. And yet they were opposed to Apollo! "He speaks in irony," suggested one of the wise men. "He reproaches the Christians, as those who pretended to be more just, more righteous, than we are. They make a religion of righteousness, and thus despise the sacrifices and rites of our religion."

"Away with them! This is what Apollo means," said Galerius.

"They shall be required to sacrifice to the gods," was the slow decision of the timid, unstable and superstitious emperor. "The decrees shall be issued."

"Let all who refuse be burned alive," demanded his son-in-law.

"Nay; there shall be no loss of life." The assault was to begin upon the Christian temple crowning one of the hills. The time was set, the actors were ready. The time was the day which marked the end of the old Roman year, when the god Terminus was honored with the festival of the Terminalia. No other day seemed so fitting as this to hallow the murderous enterprise. Its very name promised a speedy *termination* of the hated religion. By a desperate stroke Christianity should come to its end!

The 23d of February, 303, was dawning, when certain officers of the city and the court took their way to the fine church of Nicomedia. The doors were broken down; they rushed into the building. Amazed to find it so vacant, they sought in vain for some image of the Christ. They seized copies of the Scriptures, and instantly burned them. All else were objects of plunder.

From the palace Galerius was viewing the tumult and pillage. Eager for a new enjoyment, he asked that the building might be fired. Diocletian feared that the fire might spread to the more splendid edifices adjoining, and suggested a safer mode of destruction. The guards were sent, and with axe and grappling-hook they soon demolished the temple of Christ.

"What does it mean?" was the inquiry of the Christians. They were startled by the suddenness of the onslaught. The storm had come with scarcely a sign. The blow fell without a serious threat. They ran to the bishop, Anthimus. "Be patient," said he. "Our pride and worldly spirit needed this correction. Take it all as from the Lord. Worse things may come. Stay up your minds for the edict of to-morrow."

"Wise counsel, no doubt," said John as he walked away. "But why should we not defend ourselves? There are nearly Chris-

tians enough in that palace to drive the tyrants out of it. I should like such work as that."

The next morning John was early on the spot to read the edict. And he read: "All Christian churches to be leveled with the ground; those of stone pulled down, those of wood burned. All sacred books of the Christians to be delivered up to the magistrates. Death to Christians who refuse to give them up, and to magistrates who fail to seize them. All books thus collected to be publicly burned." (This was a masterpiece of heathen policy. It was aiming to destroy the seed, that there might never be another harvest. What an amount of Christian literature may have been lost! What wonder that the Church history of the first three centuries is so defective?) "All Christians who refuse to sacrifice to the gods shall forfeit all offices, honors, rank, civil rights and privileges; if they be servants, they shall never be set free. All religious assemblies

forbidden to Christians. All houses and lands belonging to Christians to be confiscated."

John was indignant and hardy enough to pull down the edict and tear it in pieces. A man of any spirit would not have been excused if he had coolly passed on as if it were a sheriff's advertisement. Yet with less rashness John would have proved himself a nobler Christian. "I will furnish them with a more appropriate topic for edicts," thought he as his mind turned to the real enemies of the empire, whom the emperors ought to have been fighting. So he posted up this sentence: "Such are the victories of the emperors over the Goths and Sarmatians!"

Too fearless to run or hide, John was soon in the grasp of the law. "It is a glorious crime," said he, "and I avow it." He was a man of no mean origin, and was highly esteemed. But no plea could save him. He was roasted alive, and until dead, over a

slow fire. He bore the agony with heroic composure, while his fellow-Christians were stricken with horror. The more wise and prudent among them may not have commended him for courting destruction, but in the eyes of all he was a Christian hero, if not in the highest sense a Christian martyr. The Greek Church has him as a saint in her calendar.

In a short time a fire burst out in the palace, and spread quite to the emperor's chamber. The authors of terror were themselves terrified. Who kindled it? Some said the Christians did it. They retorted that Galerius caused it, in order to charge it upon them, and alarm Diocletian into more violent measures. In later years, Constantine, an eye-witness, declared that the palace was struck by lightning. Yet was he well informed or honest? May not he have sought so to explain it that all parties would cease to accuse each other? or may he not have been mistaken?

Fifteen days later, and the palace was on fire again. "My life is not safe here," said Galerius, and he hastily fled from the city, branding himself only the more deeply with the suspicion that he had applied the torch. He left his wife to the persecutors. At last his desire was gained, for Diocletian now believed that the Christians were engaged in a plot to burn him and overthrow the government. He raged against the innocent. He could stand by and see his own servants inhumanly tortured, and even put to death in modes too horrible to be told. During the next few months edict followed edict in angry barbarity, each with accumulated violence, sending a shudder through the Christian world. The climax of pagan wrath was attained.

Valeria, forsaken by her husband, heard her father's order that every inmate of the palace must offer sacrifice to the gods or die by torture. "And must you also?" she asked her mother.

"Your father must be obeyed," Serena Prisca replied. Did they try to reason themselves into the false conviction that it was a moral duty to submit to the will of a husband and father? Was Romulia present to smile as they wept, and offer to lead them to her altar and make easy the form of compliance? Or was it enough that they should eat of her viands, first devoted to her gods? The sad story is that they yielded. What they afterward endured was perhaps worse than martyrdom.

But there were braver spirits among the servants and officers of the palace, of whom forty or fifty were likely to be charged with the crime of serving the Lord Jesus as their heavenly Master. Confidence, affection and honors had not chilled the pious devotion of Lucian, Peter, Dorotheus or Gorgonius. The emperor had treated them as brothers and sons. Amid long and exquisite tortures they could say, each of them, "I can never deny Him who endured the cross for

me." They were faithful unto death, assured that they should receive the crown of life. In the city of Nicomedia, the bishop, Anthimus, endured the tortures until his breath was gone, while his flock crowded about him to hear his last words of hope and victory.

Thus the work was begun. It went on throughout almost all the empire, except where Constantius Chlorus had sway over the West. Pages might be filled with cases of suffering whose details run on in woeful monotony.

Man is as grass. "The grass withereth and the flower thereof falleth away, but the word of the Lord endureth for ever." The Church might spare her men—others would be raised up to take their place. But how could she live if the Holy Scriptures were taken from her children? They could not be reproduced. Never was there an attack upon the very existence of the Bible so desperate as that which the Nicomedian edict required. Let us see how it was met.

Those who gave up Christian writings were afterward called *Traditors*, a term of great reproach. It branded them as apostates, lapsed, traitors. Perhaps only here and there a copy was voluntarily surrendered. At Cirta, a Roman town in Numidia, the Christians saw their church pulled down, and they thought this was tribulation enough. They met for worship in a private house, rejoicing that they had saved the Bible. One day Minutius, the magistrate and "priest of the idols," came with his police to rob them of their treasure. "Show us the writings and sacred vessels, which this edict requires you to deliver to me," he said to Paul, the pastor.

"The readers have the Scriptures," he replied. "What we have here we surrender."

So one of the men took the inventory: "Two chalices of gold and six of silver, six silver flagons, one little caldron, seven golden lamps, two large candlesticks, seven small

candlesticks of copper, eleven copper lamps with chains, fourscore and two vestments for women, thirty-eight veils, sixteen vestments for men, thirty-seven pairs of stockings for men, and forty-seven for women." The garments were for the poor. The other articles may prove that the Church was wealthy and fashionable, if not quite ritualistic.

The troop then hasted off to one of the readers, or men who read the Scriptures in the public services. Felix, a stonecutter, had charge of the sacred books, and five copies were given up to be burned.

The magistrates were not always very intent upon the seizure of Bibles, nor very particular as to what sort of writings fell into their hands. To them, they were only a few obscure and valueless manuscripts. One bishop plainly said, "I cannot surrender the word of my God."

"Give us some useless fragments," the police answered; "anything you please."

The poems of Horace would have sufficed them.

Mensurius, bishop of Carthage, took care to remove the manuscripts of the Bible from the church to his own house. But he left behind some writings of heretics. The officers went to the church and took the heretical books, asking no further questions.

"Search the bishop's house," a senator said to the proconsul.

"What do I care for his Scriptures?" he replied; "these are nearly enough Christian for me." The time came when Mensurius and his supporters were accused of being Traditors. A loud noise was made. The whole African Church was rent in twain by the Donatists, who caused the greatest schism of the first five centuries.

Other Christians stoutly refused to obey the edict. In Sicily the good Euplius was asked, "Why do you keep the Scriptures, which the emperors forbid you to have?"

"Because life eternal is in them," was the

noble reply, "and he who gives them up loses eternal life." He was made a martyr.

Felix, an African pastor, said to the officers who were searching his house, "I have the Scriptures, but I will not give them up."

"Put him in prison," was the order. "Bind him to the very bottom of it." He had sixteen days allowed him to change his mind. Then in the night he was brought before the proconsul, the chains upon him. He would not submit.

"Let him be beheaded," was the decision.

"I thank thee, O Lord," he said with a loud voice, "that thou wilt thus deliver me." On the scaffold he thanked God that he had lived fifty-six years, preserved the gospel and preached truth and faith. He was one of those heroes who preserved for us that divine Word which is above all price.

In the Thebaid the persecution raged like a pestilence, except that the latter would not have carried with it such tortures. It would

not have hung women on hooks, nor scraped men with shells, nor mangled them with bludgeons. In that province hundreds were slain in a day, and the slaughter went on for years. The sword lost its edge. The executioners grew weary, and were relieved by others. The governor had brought before him a deacon named Timothy. He was ordered to renounce Christianity.

"I cannot become a pagan," he answered as he looked on the altar before him. "You demand that I shall deliver to you the Scriptures, that you may burn them. Never, sir, never! Had I children, I would sooner deliver them to you than the word of God."

"Your eyes shall be put out, and then your Scriptures will be useless to you."

"But they are written on my heart." Timothy had his eyes burned out. A gag was put in his mouth, and he was hung up by his feet, with a weight around his neck. His courage did not fail.

Some one then said to the governor,

"This fellow, about three weeks ago, married a wife, and he thinks the world of her. Her name is Maura."

"Bring her here." As she was coming the governor promised her a large reward if she would persuade her husband to worship the gods. Tempted by the bribe less than by the desire to have him saved alive to her, she wavered. She plied him with all the arts of the most tender affection.

"Is this the way you love me?" he said when his tongue was free. "Would you forsake me after I have lost my eyes? Would you have me lose my soul? Let me die for my faith."

Maura at length returned to the governor and said, "May God forgive my sin! I will die with him, rather than tempt him to deny Christ." They were crucified together.

Hierocles was busy writing something which he thought wiser than God's word. Now he used the sword in murdering Christians; again he took his pen to console

them! He treated devout maidens to a fate worse than death, and then had the impertinence to address some "Truth-loving words to Christians." Terribly frightened must have been the people who read his admonitions. And where are they now? Every book of his long ago perished. So too the writings of his friend Porphyry had a short life.

And where are those writings against which such men fought so zealously? They are in the millions of godly homes throughout Christendom. Mere foam has never been so enduring as the rock against which it was flung.

One thing was sublime: the Christians regarded persecution as coming from the hand of God, bowed to receive it, and said, "We deserve it all!" It was needed in order to revive the faith and charity of the former times. Prosperity had brought in its attendant evils. Pride, worldliness, love of ease, selfishness, ambition, controversy and

dissension had wrought their mischief. It was then as true as it ever is that

> "Affliction is the wholesome soil of virtue,
> Where patience, honor, sweet humanity,
> Calm fortitude, take root and strongly flourish."

"As the shepherd sets his dog upon the sheep, when they go astray, to bring them in, and then rates them off again, so," says an old writer, "God lets loose wicked persecutors upon his own children, but 'tis only to bring them in unto him; and then he not only restrains their rage, but casts the rod into the fire."

The same author, finding poetry in his awful theme, says that "God's children are like stars, that shine brightest in the darkest night; like torches, that are the better for the beating; like grapes, that come not to the proof till they come to the press; like spices, that smell the sweetest when pounded; like young trees, that root the faster for shaking; like vines, that are the better for bleeding; like gold, that looks the brighter

for scouring; like juniper, that is sweetest in the fire; yea, God knoweth that we are best when we are the worst (in the mere outward condition), and live holiest when we die the fastest; and therefore he frames his dealing to our disposition, seeking rather to profit than to please us."

CHAPTER VIII.

REFUGE.

THE desert was fearful to the people of the East, on account of its deathly influences. A shelter, a retreat, a place of refreshment, was rarely to be found; but if one were found, it was appreciated by the traveler exposed to the burning heat or drifting sands. Hence the reference of the prophet to a time when "a man shall be as an hiding-place from the wind and a covert from the tempest: as rivers of water in a dry place: as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." Such should a king be at a future day. But no such king, prince or emperor appeared in the East during those years of which we are writing. The imperial breath was as the deadly wind, making a

desert on which were dying thousands of heavenward pilgrims.

The man who was as a shadowing tent in the daytime from the heat, "and for a place of refuge and for a covert from the storm," was usually to be found in humbler life. Here and there was a shield for the saints of God.

No house was better known as a refuge than that of Otho, the innkeeper of Ancyra. It was called a Noah's ark. It was a *rendezvous* for the persecuted of all that region. It was a home in which plundered Christians were supported; a hospital for beaten and tortured confessors, or for the eyeless and the hamstrung heroes who groped and limped along their way of escape; a church wherein bread and wine were furnished gratuitously to those who refreshed their souls in the Supper of the Lord, and forgot their sufferings when they remembered Calvary.

Otho and his wife were worthy of the portrait drawn by the orator Tertullian

when he had in his eye a Christian home. Of such a wedded pair he says: "How shall we find words to express the happiness of that marriage which the Church effects, and the oblation confirms, and the blessing seals, and angels report, and the Father ratifies? What a union of two believers with one hope, one discipline, one service, one spirit and one flesh! Together they bow, together they pray, together they keep their fasts, teaching one another, exhorting one another, bearing up one another. They are together at the church and at the Lord's Supper; they are together in sorrows and in relief. Neither conceals anything from the other; neither avoids the other; neither is a burden to the other. Freely the sick are visited and the needy relieved. Alms are bestowed without torture, sacrifices (gifts in the church) without scruple; there is daily diligence without hindrance; no using the sign (of the cross) by stealth; no hurried salutations (of fellow-Christians); no silent

benedictions; psalms and hymns resound between the two, and they vie with each other who shall sing best unto their God. Christ rejoices on hearing and beholding such things: to such he sends his peace. Where the two are, there he is himself, and where he is, there the evil one is not."

The same eloquent North African describes the pagan husband of a Christian wife as "one who would not allow his wife to visit Christ's flock, going from street to street, making the round of strange cottages, even the poorest; nor suffer her to creep into a prison to kiss the chains of a martyr or offer water for the saint's feet. Nor if a stranger came would he be furnished a lodging; nor if a present were to be made would the barns and cellars be open." Not such a man was Otho. His tavern was of good service to the Church.

One day there came to the inn a woman of middle age and elegant manners, in a soiled dress and very weary. She inquired

for Aletia, the wife of Otho, to whom she gave a letter in which was this: "Will you remember Valeria, who once sent you a few trinkets from Thebes? Will you give shelter to Persis, the keeper of my wardrobe? We are in great distress here." It was Persis flying from persecution in the palace.

"Certainly," said the hostess; "you are a welcome guest. Do tell me about Valeria. Will she be put to death?"

The sad account of affairs at the palace was related, and also this by Persis: "The officers came into our rooms searching for Christian books. They found the copy of the Gospels presented to Valeria by Pamphilus. They asked who he was. Then they talked together in a low tone. But I heard one of them say that Pamphilus must be reported to the governor of Palestine. He must be tortured, for he is a notorious Bible-maker. He has given away hundreds of copies of it."

"Come with me; you must tell my hus-

band all about it," said Aletia, leading the refugee through a hall.

Suddenly Persis saw an officer whom she had not expected to meet. She started into a corner, hiding her face. "That was the man," she whispered, "whom I saw take away Valeria's Gospels and heard threatening Pamphilus. He is here to seize me."

Otho heard the news, and said to his wife and her alarmed guest: "Keep cool! I shall treat this man in grand style, as one from the emperor's court, and he will not dare to act the spy in my house. Besides, he is on the wrong road. He thinks that Cæsarea in Cappadocia is the town to which he is sent. Let him go thither to-morrow." There happened to be another town of that name.

With due caution Otho soon went to Vivian, a refugee in his house, and said: "A man who escaped from the slaughter of the Theban Legion can make good speed on an errand of mercy. Go to Cæsarea, in Judea,

and bring hither Pamphilus; start this very night."

Vivian, with minuter instructions and upon one swift horse after another, reached Cæsarea in due time. But where was Pamphilus? "He was arrested a few days ago," said a young deacon there, "and tortured, because he had concealed the Christian books of his library."

"Is he alive?"

"No doubt Ulpian, the governor, wishes he were dead." The deacon was exceedingly reserved, until he had reason to confide in the urgent inquirer. Pamphilus was in a dungeon. Vivian thought that he knew how to get him out. Post haste he rode to the more northern Cæsarea, and laid certain facts before Basil the lawyer.

A rough ride to Antioch, and Basil was in the presence of Maximin, who was acting as the Cæsar at that time. "Very true," said Basil; "Pamphilus has made copies of the Sacred Writings. But who has done

more to collect and preserve the Latin and Greek classics, from which you and your party get your ideas of the gods? I plead for his library to be protected."

"It shall be safe," said Maximin, a nephew of Galerius, as ignorant of the classics as he was proud of the complimentary reference to his taste for pagan literature.

"Would you save the books and hold in prison the man who knows most about them?"

"He shall be set free."

"And will you still honor the governor who has tortured him? You know the crimes of Ulpian." Maximin was jealous. These crimes were investigated. The savage governor was shortly afterward beheaded in the city where his revenge upon the Christians had known no bounds.

More rapid riding, and Pamphilus was free. The jailer who let him go said of Basil, as the three men rode away, "He lied like a Cappadocian," for that was a

proverb of the day. It was quite as strong as to say that one "lied like a Cretan." But Basil stood out in strong contrast with his countrymen, who were so infamous for cowardice, servility and deceit.

"You will be safer with us than at Ancyra," said Basil, striking across the hills to his own city, and pointing out near it the loftiest mountain in all Asia Minor, its summit ever white with snow. Basil was rich, and his friends had every comfort in the well-furnished house. The rich quality of the faith in that family was what Pamphilus most highly prized. Macrina, the mother of his host, had been a confessor in her younger days. Emelia, the good housewife, had resolved in her youth to remain in single life and to devote herself to the works of piety and kindness to the poor; for that idea had been recently growing in the Church. Yet there were no "nunneries" in that age. Such a folly came with the later corruptions of religious life. When

Emelia's parents died, she gave up her notion of serving her Lord single-handed.

"It was to protect her rare beauty," said Basil, playfully, "and to be charitable to a poor lawyer, that she consented to walk by my side through life."

"And now, when your husband has wealth," Pamphilus said to the blushing hostess, "you have the more to give to the poor. The Lord is best served in a Christian home." He had but to look at the many who were fed and clothed by that family to have proofs of their unstinted charities.

The day came for the celebration of the feast of Mars, when one event threw Cæsarea into an unusual excitement. Gordion had been a brave soldier and captain of a hundred men. In the time of extreme persecution he had quitted the service, left his parents, friends and property, and retired into the wild places among the mountains of Cappadocia. He was trying the rude life

of a hermit. There he fasted, prayed and meditated upon the Holy Scriptures until he felt strong enough to endure trial. "I am now ready for the combat," thought he, meaning the combat with tortures and death. On the day of the feast to Mars he came into his native city and suddenly appeared in the theatre. Jews, and even some lapsed Christians, were engaged in the games. Just when the races of the circus were drawing the eyes of the vast crowd, he went forward and cried with a loud voice, "Behold, I am found of them that sought me not, and I am made manifest unto them that ask not after me," meaning that he came to surrender himself of his own accord. Every one looked to see who was shouting. The confusion was great.

"Silence!" cried the manager, who arrested the intruder. He led him to the magistrate, who asked him whence and why he came.

"I am come to publish my disregard of

your edicts and to profess Christ to be my hope and salvation. As you are among the most cruel of men, I thought it a fit time to put myself in your way."

"Torture him," was the order, and it was soon obeyed, with great delight to the tormentors.

Gordion sang out this verse of a Psalm amid his sufferings:

> "The Lord is my helper;
> I will not fear what man can do unto me."

The officer saw that threats and harshness availed nothing. Resorting to gentler means, he said: "You shall have large rewards if you will deny Christ. I will make you captain of as many men as you wish to command."

"What earthly good is to be compared to a place in heaven?" Inquiry was at an end: persuasion was of no force. The sentence of death was pronounced. His father and mother begged him to yield and dissemble.

They wept and held out every temptation. But he went courageously into the flames and was consumed. It is needless for us to say that he was unwise or to point out the error of such enthusiasm.

"I knew that man," said Vivian. "He was in the Theban Legion, but did not go with us into Europe."

Pagan fury was kindled. Other victims were wanted. Basil found that if the judges should not arraign him and his family the mob would soon be upon his house. Carrying with them what they could, he, his mother and his wife fled into the wild districts of Pontus. In later years they gave to the Church that saintly woman, Macrina the younger, and three eminent bishops—Gregory of Nyssa, Peter of Sebaste and Basil the Great. They belonged to that Cappadocian legion of Christ's army who did such valiant service against Arianism.

Pamphilus took refuge for a short time with Otho at Ancyra. Did he think that

some few Christians were fanatical? He might see that the fanaticism of pagans was quite as extreme. The Cæsar had a new device. He ordered that all sorts of eatables be sprinkled in the shops and markets with water or wine which had been devoted to the gods. Thus he would drive all the people to share in the heathen rites or starve. It was a time to read what Paul had written concerning the eating of meat offered to idols.

"Not yet shall we starve," said Otho, "for I have expected this, and laid up a good store of provisions for all who may come." He was risking his life every day by sheltering the persecuted, or burying the bodies of martyrs, or securing liberty for those in prison.

Some Christians had overturned an altar of Diana, and been seized by their own kindred and imprisoned. Otho obtained their release with great effort and expense. Going one day to a neighboring town, he met

them, and they poured their thanks upon him. "Come," said he, "sit down on the grass by the river and dine with me."

They almost wondered if he could work a miracle. (His good deeds have been exaggerated by the legend-makers into miracles.) He would show them. They sat down upon the flowery bank, the trees shading them and the birds singing over head. He caused provisions to be brought from his stores, and they had a feast.

In one house lived seven women, unmarried, some of them aged and all of them devoted to works of mercy. Driven away by some abandoned young men, they begged to be saved from violence. "Why do you, my son, thus abuse such harmless people as we are?" said the eldest of them. "I am above seventy years of age. Would you send us into the woods to be devoured by wild beasts? Perhaps you have a mother as old as I am—" She hesitated, fixed her eyes upon his and looked him out of counte-

nance. He was like a tiger crouching under human gaze.

"May my mother forgive me!" he exclaimed in tears, and then led his boisterous companions away.

But the governor came and said to the poor women, in mockery, "You shall be priestesses to Diana and Minerva." Otho interposed, but his plea was answered with a threat.

It was the custom, once a year, to have these idols washed in a pond near at hand. A vast procession graced the occasion. These seven women were put into a chariot at the head of the procession, in order to ridicule and torment them. Then followed the idols, and then a crowd of people singing, howling, playing flutes, dancing and striking cymbals, as if derision were a madness.

In a house in the city were Otho, a nephew of the eldest of the virgins, with other Christians, engaged for six hours in prayer

for the poor women. At length hearing the feet of a messenger, Otho said with tears: "I thank thee, O Lord, that our prayers have not been fruitless!" He then arose and asked what had occurred.

"All the governor's derision, threats, promises, flatteries and persuasions were of no avail. They scorned to be decked with the chaplet and white robe forced upon them by the priestesses of the idols, and they were drowned." Such constancy was regarded as the answer to prayer. Their death as firm martyrs was considered infinitely better than any sort of compromise with their persecutors.

Two men came to Otho, saying: "You will be the next victim if you remain here. Escape, and save your life."

"If you would do me a favor," said he, "go and tell the governor that Otho, whom the priests of Minerva and Diana accuse, is now at the gate."

It was needless to bear such a message.

The officers soon had him in their power. They led him where he could see the various machines of torture. "I shall be happy to rank you as one of my friends," said the smiling governor, "if you will yield a little to our ancient religion. I shall procure you the favor of the emperors. They will do you the honor to write letters to you and receive letters from you. You shall be a priest of Apollo and have power over the whole town. You shall have other priests under your authority."

"Your gods are false. They are represented as guilty of great crimes. They require the most infamous acts in their worship. But I must tell you of the one holy God, and of Jesus Christ, who teaches no man to sin."

"Stop his mouth!" cried the priests, rending their garments and clamoring for his death. The governor sent him to the torture. Broken as he was, he was kept alive for five days, and then beheaded. History

has preserved his name with honor and recorded some of his noble deeds.

Among the mountains of Cappadocia, in a lonely cottage, dwelt Salvian, a retired centurion, and once a comrade of Maurice. Thither fled Aletia, Persis and Pamphilus. The hospitable inn at Ancyra was confiscated, and in it reveled the pagans who had slain its owner. Every heathen greedy for a fine property knew an easy way to obtain it. All he need do was, to accuse its owner, and get the reward of a lie or of an act of treachery. There was a malicious delight in breaking up those homes which were the refuge of the persecuted.

Meanwhile, Diocletian had abdicated in favor of Galerius, and had retired to Salona, where he built a splendid palace amid the finest of gardens.

Maximian also had resigned to Constantius Chlorus, and yet this crafty barbarian was illy disposed to be at rest. He was secretly plotting to gain for himself and his son a

tyrant's power. He loved office too well to make retirement comfortable to him. He urged his former colleague to resume the offices of state.

"Nay," was the reply of the aged and sick, disgusted and unhappy Diocletian. "Could you see the fine vegetables which I raise with my own hands at Salona, you would never urge me to take the rule over the empire."

In one part of the world no very severe steps had been taken against the Christians. Western Gaul and Britain had been under the rule of a merciful Cæsar. Constantius had sought the welfare of the people. Probably he allowed some church buildings to be torn down in order to give appearance of obedience to the edicts, and to prevent the worshipers from being more severely treated. He is declared to have had Christians in his palace; even ministers of the gospel were there to preach and conduct Christian worship.

"Then you must send away those good people," said Theodora to him, after reading the terrible edicts.

"Perhaps not," Constantius replied. "We may yet retain the very best and truest Christians among them."

"But you will violate the edict."

He would see to that in his own way. Calling together his officers and servants, he said to them, "You are required by the authorities at Nicomedia either to offer sacrifices to the Roman deities, or to leave me and my house."

It seemed very hard. They made their choice. Some consented to deny their religion, but others of them returned the answer that they would not sacrifice. They would go from him, strangers, out into a strange world.

"No," he said to the faithful ones, "you shall not be banished. It was not I, but Galerius, who so decreed. I shall utter my own sentence upon you." They were listen-

ing to hear of something far worse than banishment. They thought that he might declare no less a punishment than hanging. "You are not such selfish cowards as those who are willing to deny their religion for an office. They shall go; they are false to their God, and hence not worthy of my confidence. If faithless to the highest power, how can they be faithful to that which is lower? But you have shown yourselves true to God. I can trust you with all that I have."

Stories had gone abroad that this prince was so gentle and generous that he did not collect his revenues. "How is it," wrote the emperor, "that I hear of your empty treasury? You neglect the public weal. You are in poverty. You are too indulgent to your subjects."

"Remain with me a few days," he said to the messengers who came to investigate the finances. "I will have it explained." He then sent word to the wealthiest of his peo-

ple that he was in want of money, and if they wished to prove their affection for him, now was the time. They poured their gold and silver into his treasury, one eager to surpass another.

"Now look into my treasury," he said to the committee of investigation. They were astonished. "Go tell the emperor that the love of the people is the safest and surest treasury. The owners have been keeping this for me just as securely as the treasurer would have done."

As soon as the inspectors were gone it is said that he sent for the donors, or loaners, and commended them for their true loyalty, and restoring their money to them, he sent them to their homes.

Constantius was now one of the Augusti, and the emperor of the West. Why should not his son Constantine be a Cæsar? But Galerius had forestalled this matter by appointing two creatures of his own—Maximin and Severus—to the posts of Cæsars, and

thus he hoped to have the empire in his power. "Why does my son delay to come to me?" said Constantius, who had sent letter after letter to Nicomedia urging him to join him in Gaul. "Must he be held as a hostage all his life?"

"Rather as a prisoner," said one of the generals. "He will need to be crafty to get away from the tyrant who watches him. Galerius only waits for you to die, and then he will rule with terrors."

"Woe, then, to the empire!"

"And woe to the Church!"

Would the Great Shepherd permit it? or would the Lord of lords take Constantine by the hand?

CHAPTER IX.

RELIEF TO THE CHURCH.

THE eye that measured Constantine flashed with jealous fire or fastened upon him in admiration. He was described as superior in all royal qualities. "No one," wrote Eusebius, who once saw him standing by the side of the senior emperor, "was comparable to him for grace and beauty of person or height of stature, and he so far surpassed his compeers in personal strength as to be a terror to them." Broad shouldered, muscular, sturdy in health, commanding in presence and about thirty years of age, he was a fine specimen of the military chiefs of the declining empire. Fierceness and gentleness strove together in his lion-like eye. His neat style of dress, his courtly manners and his calm self-control were

memorials of the care which Helena had bestowed upon him. For ten years probably he had not seen his father. It was part of the divine plan in his life that this future deliverer of the church should be reared in the very palace of its oppressors, and be instructed in all their wisdom. He had opportunities to witness the deceits of the pagan priests in their efforts to sway the mind of the emperor. He might have fallen by the persecutor's hand had there been any reason for suspecting that he was favorable to Christianity. But Apollo was his patron rather than Christ his Lord. He was at a court which had little reputation for wisdom. Galerius was the Pharaoh of those killing times. "At that tender age, and blooming with the dawn of early youth, Constantine dwelt, as God's servant Moses had done, in the very home of the tyrants."

Nor should he leave it, if Galerius could prevent, unless upon some road beset with death. If some danger were to be encoun-

tered, if some one were to be put in front of the battle, if a fearful risk must be run among the savage beasts of the forests or if some one must meet with peril in the martial games, Constantine was the chosen man. That his death was desired, if not plotted, scarcely can be questioned. But to hire an assassin or to fall upon him openly was too bold a measure. It would provoke the army, in which he was a favorite, and cause a civil war.

"Once more I entreat you to send my son to me," was the purport of a letter from Constantius to his colleague.

"Your father wishes you to remain here and perfect yourself in military discipline," was the version of it given to Constantine, who knew it to be false, but held his peace. To bide one's time is a proof of moral strength. He was cultivating the reserve and discretion to which much of his greatness was due. He knew that the post of Cæsar was properly his own; but had he

uttered what he felt, he would have been crushed at once.

At length he demanded it as a right and a duty to obey the call of his father. Wincing under his sharp eye, Galerius could no longer divert him with pretexts and promises, and he said, "You shall go to-morrow." He then wrote him a passport and an order putting the relays of horses at his service. The check upon the treasury was to be given him the next morning, along with the final instructions.

Galerius then craftily sent a speedy messenger in advance, to Severus, with such advice as this: "Waylay Constantine. Provoke him to a quarrel, and manage to get rid of him prudently and efficiently." Before retiring that night he said to his servant, "Let no one awaken me till very late in the morning." He would pretend to be indulging in long slumbers, and thus delay Constantine, but he was outwitting himself.

Constantine shrewdly suspected the plot,

and as soon as the plotter was fairly asleep he took the post-horses and eloped. To hinder pursuit, the horses used by him and exchanged for fresh ones, along the first stages, were hamstrung.

Galerius thought it a fine joke to sleep until noon. He then threw open his doors and called for Constantine. "Gone," he was told. In violent rage he ordered pursuit. Had he risen earlier, the swift horsemen might have overtaken him. When he learned that the post-horses had been maimed he almost burst with fury.

Crossing the Alps with astonishing speed, the young prince joined his father at Boulogne and helped him to repress the insurgents of North Britain, thus proving his valor to the army. In that flight was involved the relief needed by the Church. His father had long been feeble in health, and probably this was the reason why he was surnamed Chlorus, or the Pale. After he took his quarters at York, in Britain, he found

that he must soon die. He asked the soldiers whom they would have for their emperor, perhaps naming his eldest son as one who was in sympathy with the legions of the West.

"Constantine!" was the shout. "None but the pious Constantine." When he presented himself to them, they hailed him as their Augustus. This event gave his name a peculiar interest to all the English-speaking race. The legend of his British birth grew so definite that the supposed place was long pointed out within the walls of York. His father's tomb was there shown until the destruction of the monasteries in the sixteenth century. His mother's name is still borne by numerous British churches.

"If I wish to live, I must reign," thought Constantine, who affected more diffidence than was real when he assumed the imperial robes.

He then sent a letter to Galerius, saying: "If I had sought to be the successor of my

honored father, I should have acted in the regular and constitutional manner. I have not taken the purple on my own account. It was forced on me by the love and violence of the legions. Yet I might claim some natural right to my father's place. I beg that you will confer on me the title of Augustus." He then prepared to take the field against all who might dispute his claims. He was supported by an army of soldiers who were eager to teach liberty to tyrants.

"I will burn the letter," exclaimed Galerius, in surprise, disappointment and rage. "Where is the messenger who brought it?"

"I am here, sir."

"You ought to be thrown into the fire, you villain, for bringing such a message as this! What! make your master an Augustus! He is insolent."

"Burn me then, and the fire will so warm the soul of my master that all the legions of the West will march to your gates and demand the reason."

"Who are you?" Galerius may have suspected that the face and voice had once been familiar.

"A simple man who has done something to save the empire. It was I, in my hiding-place, who detected the schemes of Maximian to wrest Italy from your hands and place his son Maxentius on the throne at Rome. I beg pardon, Maxentius is your son-in-law."

"Do you mean to insult me? For all that, Maxentius is a rebel, a conspirator, a scoundrel."

"There are some thanks due then to the men who first discovered that fact and caused you to know it."

"Against him I have sent my son Severus, who shall be the titled Augustus. Tell your master he is but a Cæsar. But where did you fall in with Constantine?"

"At his father's court."

"Is he to marry Fausta, the daughter of Maximian?"

"If so, I am not the match-maker."

Galerius was cooling by the very perplexity of his mind. Who was this man, so mysterious, so brave and so apt in disclosures? How had he discovered the evil designs of Maxentius? Was he there to provoke a quarrel between the East and the West? Was he anxious to be a victim, whose ill treatment would rouse Constantine to take revenge and hurl his legions upon the forces in Asia Minor? The enigma was not solved at Nicomedia.

The messenger was Adrian, an escaped hero of the Theban Legion. Long impressed with the suspicion that Maximian, aided by his son, was intent upon schemes which would lift him into the highest place of solitary power, and fond of adventure and peril, he had hidden in the mountains, hung on the outskirts of camps, or crept into the courts of barbarian princes and ferreted out the designs of conspirators against the empire. He claimed that it was a Christian

service. He was as familiar with many of the bypaths and refuges of Europe as David was with the fastnesses of Judea. He had won the confidence of Fausta while she was visiting her sister Theodora, and Fausta often shuddered at the infamies of her brother Maxentius.

"Only a Cæsar! Very well!" thought Constantine; "titles are trifles to one who has already the power to confront those who withhold them." There was a great West to sustain him tremendously. It was now Constantine against the ambitious world.

A military tragedy was enacting. The empire which had been so long the foe of the Christian Church was now punished by civil war. Six masters were in the field. In the East were Galerius, Licinius and Maximin. In the West were Maximian, Maxentius and Constantine. The one question to be settled was: "Who is emperor?" The settlement of this question depended not upon mere men, but upon policies and principles.

Should tolerance or persecution prevail? Should Christianity or Paganism win the day? Should the Lord of the universe or the imaginary gods of Rome achieve the victory?

Constantine married Fausta, and not long afterward had to defend himself against her father and brother. The one was outwitted in his treacherous schemes, and finally put to death for having sought to persuade Fausta to let him slay her husband while asleep in his room at Marseilles. She exposed the plot. The other ruled in Rome, and was bent upon ruling all Christendom.

An event was coming which would bring the Church into sympathy with Constantine. Death was to be one means of making Christianity triumphant over the author of the persecution and its ten years of terror.

In the year 311, Galerius was dying at Sardis of the strange disease which had relieved the Apostolic Church of a Herod. Physicians could do nothing to baffle it.

Apollo's advice only added to its virulence. The raving invalid put some of the physicians to death because they could not hide the disgust which his loathsome presence caused. One of them, seeing his danger, said to him: "You are mistaken, sir, if you think that man can cure a malady which God has sent upon you. We are helpless. Remember what you have done against the servants of God and his holy religion. Then you may know in whom you have help. Think that you are but a man."

"Only a man," said Valeria. "To God make your confession. Is there not mercy?"

"I have injured you—"

"I can forgive. Ask the pardon of God."

"Beg the Christians to pray for me." Then in great agony, he cried: "I will atone for my crimes. I will rebuild the temples of God. Bring in a scribe to write an edict such as Constantine has advised."

There, on his bed of remorse, he put forth

an edict that Christian prisoners should go free, that confessors should be released from the mines, that the houses of worship should be rebuilt and that the Christians should enjoy their rights of conscience. Yet he prefaced these tokens of "princely compassion" with an apology for his former laws, "which have had good effect upon many!" He closed by saying: "In return for this our favor, we expect that the Christians will pray their God to restore our health." Think of such a man asking the Christians to pray for him! And they were willing to do it in the sublimity of their compassionate loyalty.

Galerius went to his solemn account. His edict bore also the names of Constantine and Maximin. "I shall not publish it," said Maximin, and he labored to defeat its power. This caused the Christians of the East to know who was their friend. They hoped that God was raising up their deliverer. Prayers went up for the son of the pious Helena.

"Constantine and the Church are the hope of the empire," said Adrian to the Christians who crept out of their refuges and thanked God, from whom all help must come.

Over the Cottian Alps with his veteran legions of the West, 98,000 good soldiers in all, Constantine marched to conquer Maxentius. He won victories at Turin, at Milan and at Verona. One more battle was to decide the contest. The plain of the Tiber was to be the valley of decision. At the Milvian bridge, not far from Rome, the shock was to come. On the contest of that day, October 28, A. D. 312, the mightiest interests were staked.

At some point on the route occurred what is termed the conversion of Constantine. His mind must have been agitated. He had not yet formally renounced paganism. It was a fearful venture to throw his troops into Italy, the graveyard of so many armies, or to hurl them upon Rome, the an-

cient venerated city where were the palaces of the gods and the sacred treasures of her civilization. To war against them might be an impiety, a sacrilege. To go forward might provoke Jupiter to smite him with his thunderbolts. But should he fall back, and let the edict be trampled under foot and the Christians be exposed to wholesale slaughter, Christ might visit him with direst vengeance.

While thus anxious and brooding over the possible results of a great religious revolution, he saw, or thought he saw, one afternoon, a cross of light above the sun inscribed with the words, "By this conquer." Some pretend that he had a vision of this in his sleep. Others claim that he saw the cross in answer to his prayers. We cannot think that there was any miracle in the case. Possibly the entire scene was an imagination, an optical illusion or an afterthought. Yet it seems that in some way the cross was adopted as the military stand-

ard, and now the question was, Shall the Christian cross or the Roman eagle win the day? Shall Jupiter or Christ reign in the empire?

Look at the chieftains. Maxentius, twice sorely defeated, and now desperately intent upon victory in the third hazard, summons the old deities of the empire to his aid. The man who is the dread of every Roman matron and maiden is agonized with devotion. Around him are his priests, soothsayers and divines. Altars smoke with victims. Prophets utter their omens. The pagan ritual is minutely observed. The priests of Baal in their contest with Elijah were not more earnest than are these heathen on the night before the battle.

Across the Milvian bridge (if we may credit the reports) is a Cæsar in prayer. He sees not the cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night, but the cross in the sky. By that he will conquer. Christ shall be his God of battle. The holy sign of redemption

is made the banner of bloody war. Was it an improper treatment of the cross? War had been made upon the crucified Lord. Christ, in his people, had been put to an open shame and persecuted. The cross had been hated, despised, set at naught and made the derision of the world. According to some accounts, the simple sign of the cross had first excited the malice of the pagan priests who clamored for the slaughter of the saints. Was not the occasion worthy of its elevation as the standard in the eyes of the legions who marched unconsciously to the relief of the Church?

The hour came. The battle drew on. The fight was fierce. The Western legions were driving the Eastern into the river. Maxentius saw his Africans give way. His prætorian guards did their work in desperation, for they expected no mercy if captured. Most of them fell where they fought, intent upon the last honor of heroes—that of covering the field with their corpses. Their leader,

forsaken by gods and men, fell back upon a bridge of boats; the bridge sunk, machinery, soldiers, frightened fugitives, horses, chariots and all going down beneath the waters. Maxentius was anchored to the bottom by the weight of his armor. The legend is that the seven-branched candlestick, long before carried by Titus from Jerusalem, was on that day lost in the waves of the Tiber, as if the pagans had been using it in their ceremonies.

For the first time a military conqueror bore the cross over the Milvian bridge. There had been decided the fate of Rome and of paganism. Constantine entered the city, whose gates were flung open to receive him, amid the shouts and honors of the people. The streets were in jubilee. Men, women and children greeted him as a deliverer and a benefactor. Gladness and congratulations echoed on every hand. Soon a statue was erected representing him holding the cross and saying: "By this saving sign,

the true symbol of courage, I have liberated your city from the yoke of the tyrant."

Even the sombre catacombs were full of cheer. Imagine Adrian going down into his former refuge to visit his friends. He finds this touching line freshly traced upon the tomb: "Lannus, Christ's martyr, rests here. He suffered under Diocletian."

A new edict of liberty is published annulling all laws against the Christians. But there are two men still rioting in the murder of the Church. One is Maximin, a man of gigantic vices. Had he no remorse on account of the martyrs of Palestine? In some of them, as old friends, we have an interest.

Pamphilus had ventured back to his home in Cæsarea. He was soon thrown into prison. Eusebius visited him, and they wrote books for the instruction and solace of the confessors in the mines. The prisoner was questioned in public and sentenced to a horrible death. A young man, a servant of the great scholar, shouted out in the crowd,

"Let me bury my master after you slay him."

"Who are you?" inquired the brutal judge.

"I am a Christian." Nothing more was needed. He was put to death as one of the wrestlers for the crown of life.

"I saw him die," said Salvian to Pamphilus, whom he had attended from Cappadocia. "He was as calm as a true philosopher." For this Salvian was slaughtered on the spot. And so many others, as if a train of witnesses should attend Pamphilus to glory and tell how he had given them the word of God.

One man named John, an exile from Egypt, may show us how the Scriptures were sometimes learned in that age. Eusebius says that "in the excellence of his memory he surpassed all in our time." Among other losses by torture, his eyes had been put out. "He had whole books of Scriptures written, not on tables of stone,

nor on parchment, nor papers destroyed by moth and time, but on the tables of the heart, in an enlightened soul; so that whenever he wished to produce any passage from the Law, the Prophets or the Gospels he could repeat it as from the treasury of learning. I confess that I myself was astonished when I first saw the man standing amid a vast crowd and repeating certain portions of the Holy Scriptures. For as I could only hear his voice, I thought that he was reading, until I came nearer to him. I had a proof that it is not mere external form which is the real man, but mind and soul. Though mutilated in body, he exhibited the greater excellence and virtue."

Valeria also was suffering from the insolence and cruelty of Maximin. After the death of Galerius, she had retired to her estates, a childless widow. Even while in mourning robes she was compelled to use severity in refusing the persistent offer of Maximin's hand, he having a wife already

and being vicious in character. The repulse drove him into a fury. He assailed her reputation, put some of her servants to death, deprived her of her goods and sent her and her mother into exile. It was sport to him to hurry them from place to place. Diocletian entreated that his daughter might be allowed to come from a lonely village in a Syrian desert and share his retirement at Salona. But she must not even return to close the eyes of her aged, gloomy and almost insane father. Nor was Licinius more merciful. A refuge at his court was so unhappy that an escape was preferred. She and her mother wandered through the provinces for more than fifteen months disguised as women of the peasantry. They were seized and beheaded at Thessalonica.

Lucian of Antioch, the friend of the poor, was driven forth to wander in the deserts. He was seized and thrust into a prison at Nicomedia. The severest tortures could only wring from him the answer, again and again,

"I am a Christian." No food was offered him but such as had been devoted to idols, and he refused to eat for fourteen days, dying of wounds and starvation. His body was cast into the sea. It was washed ashore at Drepanum, the probable birth-place of Helena, whose noble son rebuilt the town in honor of the martyr and his own mother, naming it, for her sake, Helenopolis.

Maximin had cause to remember such persecutions as these when Constantine routed his army, the soldiers falling like wheat in harvest. The baffled Cæsar fled to Nicomedia, riding one hundred miles in two nights and one day. With his wife and children he again started for more distant retreats. In Cappadocia he died, crying out in the distress of his conscience: "It was not I, but others, who did it." One account is that he confessed his guilt and begged for the mercy of Christ.

And still another persecutor was to be conquered—Licinius, the brother-in-law of

Constantine. This bold soldier of fortune was cruel, treacherous, revengeful and murderous. No Christian was allowed in his camp or court. One of his orders was that men and women should not attend or sit together in church. When the churches of Pontus were pulled down, he said in a sarcastic tone to the people, "Go into the fields and hold your meetings: the open air is more healthful for you." Again he said to some of them, "You do not pray for me, but for my rival, Constantine." Perhaps this was the fact. They knew that the time brought a new crisis to the Church. If Licinius were victor, the war would be carried into every Christian assembly and every prayerful home. No wonder that Constantine felt the support of those who pleaded with God for his success.

"If I win," Licinius is reported to have said, "then my religion is true, Christianity is false." Thus he staked truth or falsehood upon the result of a battle.

"By this conquer," was the watchword of his opponent. The cross was victorious.

"Spare his life," was the plea of Constantia when her brother had the tyrant as a captive. "Let him retire to private life." The request was granted. But he was soon accused of treachery. As an old lion, however tame he appeared, was still dangerous, he was executed. Thus, in A. D. 324, Constantine obtained the sole headship over the Roman empire. The Church was freed from persecution.

Is it any wonder that Constantine noticed the fact that the emperors who adored the heathen gods or assumed divine names, and made it a matter of life or death to accept their paganism, nearly all perished miserably, while his father revered the God of the Christians and uniformly prospered? Therefore, to enjoy a happy life and reign, he resolved to imitate the example of his father and join himself to the cause of the Christians. It may be that he never rose

higher than this politic, utilitarian view of Christianity. He was never entirely rid of the superstitions that had fettered the Greek and Roman mind for ages. He was the patron, rather than the pious example, of the religion of Christ. Yet it is not strange if the Church of that epoch repressed his faults and exaggerated his excellent traits of character. He had relieved it of oppression. He had rolled off the burdens. He removed the terrors which crouched at every Christian's door. Master of the Roman world, he was intent upon making Christianity the religion of the empire.

If the Christians of that age had not been grateful to him and thankful to God for sending them such a deliverer, we should think of them as having been very cold and heartless. We are quite ready to excuse them for touching lightly his faults, and for painting his virtues in strong colors. Nor would it show a right spirit in us to reverse the order and throw his errors boldly

into the foreground. He sometimes rebuked those who praised him in too exalted terms.

"Blessed art thou, O Constantine!" said an enthusiastic court preacher one day in his presence—"blessed art thou, for thou hast been counted worthy to hold absolute and universal empire in this life, and thou art destined to share the empire of the Son of God in the world to come!"

"Stop!" exclaimed the emperor, with indignation. "I forbid you to use such language. Rather do you pray earnestly for me, that in this life and in that which is to come I may be found worthy to be a servant of God."

Still he could listen to the long oration of Eusebius Pamphilus, on the thirtieth anniversary of his reign, and hear such words as these: "Our emperor is perfect in discretion, in goodness, in justice, in courage, in piety, in devotion to God; he truly and only is a philosopher, since he knows himself, and

is fully aware that supplies of every blessing are showered on him from Heaven. He alone wears that imperial purple which so well becomes him. He is indeed an emperor who calls on his heavenly Father in prayer and implores his favor night and day. He longs for the spiritual kingdom of God and hopes to attain it, for he sees earthly sovereignty to be a mere petty and fleeting dominion over a mortal and temporary life, and he rates it not much higher than the power of a shepherd or herdsman; nay, his is more burdensome, and his subjects are more stubborn than theirs. The acclamations of the people and the voice of flattery he reckons rather troublesome than pleasing, because of the steadiness of his character and the thorough discipline of his mind. When he beholds the military service of his subjects, the vast array of his armies, the multitude of horse and foot, entirely devoted to his command, he feels no astonishment, no pride, in such mighty power, but he

turns his thoughts inward on himself, and recognizes a common nature with his soldiers. . . . He abstains from all excesses in food and wine, and leaves superfluous dainties to gluttons, deeply convinced of their pernicious tendency and their effect in darkening the powers of the mind."

The orator, in the same discourse, highly commends the emperor for his strict maintenance of religious services in the palace and in the army.

His soldiers, even the pagans among them, were required to assemble each Lord's day on an open plain near Constantinople, and there, at a given signal, they should all unite in offering a prayer which had been prepared by Constantine and by them committed to memory. The prayer, as recorded by his biographer, was in these words: "We acknowledge thee the only God; we own thee as our King, and implore thine aid. By thy favor have we gotten the victory; through thee are we mightier than our enemies. We

render thanks for thy past benefits and trust thee for future blessings; together we pray to thee, and beseech thee long to preserve to us, safe and triumphant, our emperor Constantine and his pious sons."

He assumed a singular power over the Church. At a company of ministers he one day said, "You are bishops whose duty it is to attend to affairs within the Church: I also am a bishop, ordained of God to overlook all the external affairs of the Church." Thus he acted at the famous Council of Nice (A. D. 325), at which Arius and his party were condemned for denying that Jesus Christ was truly the Son of God, equal with the Father. He sometimes preached sermons to the crowd which gathered in the palace, and lashed the sins of ambitious courtiers and office-seekers. To one of these he once said, "How far, my friend, are we to carry our covetous desires?" Then taking his spear he drew on the ground the figure of a man, and added, "Though you could

gain the whole world, you will at last have no more than this little spot—if indeed so much as this!"

He ordered Eusebius to prepare fifty copies of the Holy Scriptures, on the best parchment, to be used in the churches. No doubt most of them were placed where the people could have access to them, and thus read God's word for themselves. He was the first, but we are glad that he was not the last, monarch who evinced such a zeal in making the Bible the people's book.

And yet, with all his interest in the Church, Constantine was not a member of it until he came to die. Not even was he baptized until his earthly life was ending. Then he laid aside his imperial purple, never to resume it, and he was arrayed in purest white, which he wore till death. He died at the age of sixty-four, having reigned almost thirty-one years. Great was the lamentation over his burial. People for whom he had built churches, widows whom he had

supported, orphans and foundlings to whom he had given home and education, slaves whose liberty he had purchased, nobles and peasants,—all had tears to shed. The soldiers who had marched with him when he had a tent in the form of a church, and on whose shields the sign of the cross was engraved, were almost frantic in their grief. The citizens ran wildly about the streets like a flock whose shepherd was lost. "The good emperor" was gone. But his influence upon the empire and the Church—an influence not entirely good—has never passed out of history and human progress.

Not a saint, not perhaps a real Christian at heart, Constantine was the first great Christian emperor, the first royal defender of the faith, the first imperial patron of the Church—a man "not to be imitated or admired, but much to be remembered and studied."

This story is ended. We have aimed to make it more than a story. If the Theban

Legion was but the ideal of some old legendist, it was still a compressed picture of the age which has been called "the era of the martyrs." We have not given the exaggerated view of it, but endeavored to combine the probabilities of the various accounts. Such men as Maurice and Victor, Gordion and Adrian did live in those times. Such characters as Pamphilus and the Lucians, the princesses and the emperors, the confessors and the martyrs, herein named, are drawn from history. Martyrdom is too solemn and sacred a thing for groundless fiction. Martyrs were realities in the early Church: we wish them to be real in our minds.

Our aim has not been to linger amid the horrors of death on the scaffold, in the fires or by the sword of the persecutor. It has been to walk through the Christendom of an ancient time, and see what was the manner of Christian life and trial in court and camp, among the lofty and the lowly, amid the

quietude of books or the perils of the highway, at home and in exile, in the freedom of society and in the hidden places of refuge. It has been to see how the Bible was preserved, how faith was tested and how charity was illustrated. Some wavered, faltered, fell; others triumphed, and proved the vital power of the only religion which can secure victory in the last battle. If it required courage to be a martyr in that age, it may require even a manlier steadfastness to wage the warfare against the temptations of our time. The enemy of piety strikes no deathly blow: he smiles, and captivates the unwary. Two inspired phrases need to be pondered: "The friendship of the world" and "the wiles of the devil." They reveal the modern empire of opposition to the Christian Church.

THE END.