

THE EARLY CHURCH
FROM IGNATIUS TO
AUGUSTINE

THE EARLY CHURCH

**FROM IGNATIUS TO
AUGUSTINE**

BY

GEORGE HODGES

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Preface

These chapters began as Lowell Lectures in 1908. The lectures were given without manuscript, and have been repeated in that form in Cambridge, in Salem, in Springfield, in Providence, Rhode Island, and in Brooklyn, New York. The first, second, third, and fourth were then written out and read at the Berkeley Divinity School, Middletown, Connecticut, as the Mary H. Page Lectures for 1914. In like manner the sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth were given at Kenyon College, Gambier, Ohio, as the Bedell Lectures for 1913. The tenth was given in 1913, at Ann Arbor, Michigan, on the Baldwin Foundation. Finally, the lectures, as they now appear, were repeated in 1914 at West Newport, California, at the Summer School conducted by the Commission on Christian Education of the Diocese of Los Angeles.

The following extracts from a communication in 1880 to the Trustees of Kenyon College indicate the intentions of Bishop and Mrs. Bedell, founders of the Bedell Lectureship:—

We have consecrated and set apart for the service of God the sum of five thousand dollars, to be devoted to the establishment of a lecture or lectures in the Institutions at Gambier on the Evidences of Natural and Revealed Religion, or the Relations of Science and Religion.

The lecture or lectures shall be delivered biennially on Founders' Day (if such a day shall be established) or other appropriate time. During our lifetime, or the lifetime of either of us, the nomination of the lectureship shall rest with us.

The interest for two years on the fund, less the sum necessary to pay for the publication, shall be paid to the lecturer.

We express our preference that the lecture or lectures shall be delivered in the Church of the Holy Spirit, if such building be in existence; and shall be delivered in the presence of all the members of the Institutions under the authority of the Board. We ask that the day on which the lecture, or the first of each series of lectures, shall be delivered shall be a holiday.

We wish that the nomination to this Lectureship shall be restricted by no other consideration than the ability of the appointee to discharge the duty to the highest glory of God in the completest presentation of the subject.

The original sources from which a knowledge of this period is derived are readily accessible in translation. In *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (8 vols.) the reader will find most of the writings of the Early Church under the Pagan Empire, to the year 325. *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, in two Series (each of 14 vols.), contains the most important works of Christian writers from 325 till the beginning of the Middle Ages. The *first series* is given to Augustine and Chrysostom. The *second series* contains the books of the leaders of Christian thought and life from Athanasius to Gregory the Great. The *Church History* of Eusebius, extending to 324, has been translated and edited by Dr. A. C. McGiffert. The continuations of this history by

Socrates (324-439), by Sozomon (324-425), and by Rufinus (324-395) are translated into English,—Socrates and Sozomon in the *Second Series* of the *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*. Dr. Joseph Cullen Ayer's *Source Book* for Ancient Church History contains significant extracts from the writers of this period, with interpretive comments. The first volume of the *Cambridge Medieval History* deals with the fifth century. Professor Gwatkin's *Early Church History to 313* and Monsignor Duchesne's *Early History of the Church* are recent aids to an understanding of these times.

My friend and colleague, Professor Henry Bradford Washburn, has read these chapters in proof, and I am indebted to him for many helpful suggestions.

GEORGE HODGES

EPISCOPAL THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL

CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

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CHAPTER I

THE ROMAN WORLD

I

The Lay of the Land

The Roman world was bounded on the west by the Atlantic Ocean, on the north by the Rhine and the Danube, on the east by the Euphrates, on the south by the Desert of Sahara. The Egyptian world had been dependent on the Nile; the Assyrian and Chaldean world had been dependent on the Tigris and the Euphrates; the Roman world enclosed the Mediterranean Sea.

Outside of these boundaries lay the greater part of Africa, of Asia, and of Europe.

In Africa were savage people, whose descendants even to this day are separated from civilization by the wide barrier of the desert.

In Asia were three nations whose history antedated the time when Athens and Rome were country villages. With China and India, the Roman world was connected by an adventurous commerce. Every year

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merchantmen sailed down the Arabian Gulf and across the Indian Ocean to Ceylon. There they met traders from the ancient markets of the East, and returned with cargoes such as laded the ships of Solomon,—“ivory and apes and peacocks,” with spices, gems, and rich embroideries. But Persia was an enemy. Beyond the Euphrates the Persians remembered the day when they had ruled the world, and prayed for another Cyrus who should make them masters of the world again. They menaced Rome continually. Sometimes they succeeded in destroying Roman armies. Once they took a Roman emperor captive, and the rumor drifted back to Italy that the King of Persia, whenever he mounted his horse, stepped on the emperor’s neck.

In Europe, on the wide plains of Russia, in the thick woods of Germany, hordes of barbarians, impelled by mysterious forces such as summon the tides and the birds, were threatening the South. Already, in the Old Testament, the Book of Zephaniah was filled with the terror of the Scythians; and in the New Testament, the Epistle to the Galatians was written to the people of a province which had been seized and settled by invading Gauls. The Rhine and the Danube, rising only thirty miles apart, made a boundary line between the empire and these tribes, guarded by the camps of the legions.

Between Italy and Greece, the deep cleft of the Adriatic Sea divided the Roman world into two parts. The divided parts differed in tradition and in language. In the East—in Greece and Syria and Egypt—the Romans had conquered countries which had ancient and splendid traditions, and were more civilized than

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their conquerors. In the West—in Italy and Spain and Gaul—the Romans had overcome peoples few of whom had any history, and who had imitated the civilization and adopted the traditions of their masters. As for language, Greek was spoken by all persons of education in the Roman world during the first and second centuries of our era. Marcus Aurelius wrote his “Meditations” in Greek. It was not until the beginning of the fifth century—almost at the end of the period which comes within the compass of our present study—that the West had a satisfactory Latin Bible. Nevertheless, as time passed, the Latin language spread though the Greeks despised it; and by and by in the West Greek was forgotten. Thus the conditions were prepared for the political and theological misunderstandings which eventually divided the West and the East.

The Roman world was filled with cities. The civilization was intentionally urban. The government encouraged the centralization of social life, gathering the people into municipalities, dignifying the great towns with stately public buildings, and providing places of amusement. Out of these central cities, men went to work on the farms, coming back at night. The ruins which are found to-day in places now desolate and remote show both the extent and the splendor of this civic life. Every city had its wall and gates. Colonnaded streets led to the forum. There was a public bath, and a public library, club-houses and temples, a theatre for plays, an amphitheatre for games. Water was brought in aqueducts from the neighboring hills

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for use in private houses, and for fountains in the squares.

In the multitude of cities, certain of them shone like the greater stars: in Italy, Rome and Milan and Ravenna; in Africa, Carthage and Alexandria; in Syria, Antioch and Cæsarea; in Asia Minor, Nicomedia and Ephesus; in Greece, the cities of the Pauline Epistles—Philippi and Thessalonica, Athens and Corinth; Constantinople appeared at the beginning of the fourth century.

The cities were connected by substantial roads. They penetrated everywhere, like our railways: for the sake of trade and of travel, for purposes of peace and of war. Straight they ran, across the valleys and over the hills, and were constructed with such skill and made of materials so lasting that many of them are used as highways to this day. From the golden milestone in the Roman forum they extended over the empire—to Hadrian's wall in Britain, to the oasis of Damascus, to the Cataracts of the Nile.

It was an age of travelling. The journeys of St. Paul, from Jerusalem to Damascus, from Damascus to Antioch, from Antioch to Cyprus and Galatia, to Athens and Corinth, to Malta and Rome, illustrate the facility with which men went from place to place. Along the roads journeyed government officials with numerous retinues, rich patricians going from their houses in the city to their houses in the country, leisurely persons out to see the sights, philosophical lecturers seeking audiences, Roman soldiers, Jewish merchants, missionaries of Isis and of Mithra, preach-

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ers of Christianity. Some walked; some rode on mules, which millionaires shod with silver shoes; some were borne in carriages made comfortable for sleeping or reading. Posts marked the miles. Every five miles there was a posting-station, with relays of horses in the stables, for hire. The messenger who carried the news of the death of Nero from Rome to Spain travelled at the rate of ten miles an hour. The aged bishop of Antioch, in a tragic emergency, went to Constantinople, eight hundred miles, in a week, over fresh-fallen snow.

The bales of the merchants contained linen from Egypt, rugs from Babylonia and Persia, silks from China, furs from Scythia, amber from the Baltic, arras cloth from Gaul, spices from Ceylon. The postmen carried letters, newspapers (*acta diurna*), and books in handsome bindings or in paper covers from the publishers in Rome to the booksellers and the librarians in the provinces. It was an age of constant correspondence. Officials, all over the empire, made their regular reports to Rome. Much of our knowledge of the time comes from letters—epistles of Paul, epistles of Ignatius, epistles of Pliny, familiar letters of Ambrose to his sister. The last of the great Romans, Symmachus, kinsman of Ambrose, patron of Augustine, wrote nine hundred and fifty extant letters, occupying a disappointing amount of space in them with explanations why he had not written before.

The constant transportation and communication over these roads aided the extension of a new religion. So did the spread of commerce which established Jews in all important cities. So did the universal

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language which enabled the preacher to address the people directly, without the need of an interpreter. So did the imperial discipline, which made the roads of the Roman world more safe for unarmed travellers than roads in England in the eighteenth century. There was a cosmopolitan quality in the common life which did not appear again, after the fourth century, until it was restored by the railway and the telegraph in our own time.

II

The Emperors

The administration of the Roman world was centred in the emperor. He determined the general situation. If he was strong, the common life was uplifted. If he was weak, selfish and pleasure-loving, he gave over the empire to his favorites, and the court was in confusion. He was an absolute monarch.

There were, indeed, certain restraints upon this imperial power. Nominally, the Senate must be consulted. But during the period with which we are now concerned, the Senate was in subjection. Practically, during a great part of this time, the army made the emperors. The Roman world, in this aspect of it, was a rough, military democracy. Emperors were chosen by the acclamation of the legions; at first, at the capital, where the soldiers put down one and set up another in return for competing imperial promises; then on the

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frontiers, exalting their own commanders, and sometimes choosing men who had risen to command from the lowest ranks.

Maximin the Goth was born a peasant. He was remarkable among his rude companions for his height and his strength: he was eight feet high, and could outwrestle anybody in the neighborhood. Thus he got into the army. He attracted the attention of an emperor by running for miles beside his horse over a rough country, and then throwing a dozen stout men in succession. He rose to be a captain, then a commander. He was made emperor by his troops. He never saw Rome; his court was in his camp.

Philip the Arabian, who succeeded him, began life as a brigand. He became a soldier, and his fighting qualities made him an emperor.

A world in which a Gothic peasant and an Arabian brigand could ascend the imperial throne had in its order an element of informality and of popular opportunity which may fairly be called democratic.

But, once upon the throne, the Roman emperor held possession of his high place, even above the law. Constantine could kill his wife and son, Theodosius could order the massacre of seven thousand citizens, Commodus and Caracalla could hunt their enemies through the streets of Rome like wolves in the woods. The emperor was independent even of public opinion. He feared only the soldiers and the assassins.

The period of the Early Church, after the Apostolic Age, from the days of Ignatius to the days of Augustine, begins about the year 100, by which time

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most of the books of the New Testament had been written, and ends soon after the year 400, when the barbarians were actively engaged in the destruction of the Roman Empire. It is divided into two parts at the year 313, when the Edict of Milan granted liberty in religion. Before that time the Roman court was pagan; after that time, it was nominally Christian.

The two centuries which thus make the first part of the history of the Early Church saw three eras of imperial administration.

For eighty years (98–180) there were four strong and good emperors. They were among the best of all the rulers of mankind. Under Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius the world was governed by philosophers, whose sincere intention was to rule their people well.

Then for eighty years (from the accession of Commodus in 180 to the death of Gallienus in 268) there were nearly twenty emperors, good and bad, but more bad than good. Thus the peace and prosperity of the second century were followed by the adversities of the third. Some of these adversities proceeded directly from the weakness or the wickedness of the emperors. Some were due to calamities of nature, to a singular series of storms, earthquakes, fires, floods, plagues, famines, like the outpouring of the vials of doom in the Book of the Revelation. Some accompanied the victorious inroads of national enemies from the north and from the east.

After that, for forty years (268–313) four strong emperors redeemed the situation and saved the state.

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Claudius and Aurelian were victorious in battle. Probus reigned in such a time of peace that he employed his soldiers in the work of draining marshes. Diocletian in his court at Nicomedia eclipsed the splendor of Oriental monarchs. His abdication was followed by some confusion, out of which Constantine emerged triumphant.

The century which followed, being the second part of the era of the Early Church, was troubled by contentions between rival emperors, by wars of theology waged by Christians against Christians, and by the steady advance of the barbarians. In the history of this period (from the Edict of Milan in 313 to the death of St. Augustine in 430) there are four outstanding imperial names. Constantine (311–337) tried to make the empire Christian; Julian (361–363) tried to make the empire pagan again; Valens (364–378) tried to make the empire Arian. They were theological emperors. Theodosius (379–395) was the last ruler of the united Roman world. After him, the division between the East and the West became definite and permanent. He was followed by his incompetent sons, Honorius and Arcadius. Rome was taken by the Goths, and Carthage by the Vandals.

III

Society

The society of the Roman world in the age which thus extends from Trajan to Theodosius was

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composed, as we say, of higher and middle and lower classes. The higher classes were the patricians; the middle classes, the plebeians; the lower classes, the slaves.

The patricians were persons of ancient descent and abundant means. They held, for the most part, the great honorary offices, consular and senatorial. They lived in magnificent houses on the Palatine Hill, whose ruins still attest the spacious and luxurious manners of the time. In the summer, they retired to their villas in the country, among the mountains, by the lakes, and on the cool borders of the sea. They are described from the point of view of an unsympathetic outsider in the satires of Juvenal.

Juvenal had no part in the festivities of patrician society. He observed them from a distance, and in the spirit of the reporter who gets his information from the servants and writes it down for a constituency which is willing to believe anything bad about the rich. There were foolish and extravagant and vicious persons in that society, no doubt, as there are to-day under like conditions. But the great part of it was composed, then as now, of pleasant, kindly people, sometimes too content with their privileges and unmindful of the wants of their neighbors but living in dignity and virtue, and even in simplicity. There were extravagant and spectacular dinner parties; there were Roman ladies who eloped with gladiators. But these things are easier to write about than the plain goodness of decent domestic life, and have, for that reason, a prominence in the record which is out of all proportion to their importance.

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We have an example of the high-minded patrician in Pliny. His people had lived by the lake of Como since the beginning of the empire. He had been brought up by an eminent soldier, who had been governor of Upper Germany, and had twice refused the acclamation of the legions calling him to the imperial power. He had had the advantage of the society of his uncle, Pliny the Elder, who was forever in pursuit of knowledge. From him he learned habits of literary industry, and of restrained and simple living. He was educated in Rome under Quintilian, who put the chief emphasis of his instruction on the moral side of life. There he came to know and revere the Stoics, the Puritans of their time, and to appreciate their severe virtues without following their skeptical philosophy. He served in the army as tribute of a legion. Then he entered upon the study of law, and attained conspicuous success in that profession. He had such charm of speech that a crowded courtroom attended upon his orations even when he spoke for seven uninterrupted hours. In the intervals of his legal business, he devoted himself to literature, read the classics and wrote books, which, according to the fashion of the time, he read aloud, as he did his speeches, to his friends. He wrote letters, which were afterwards published. One of them we shall find interesting and valuable in connection with the history of the Christians. He was made governor of the province of Bithynia, to straighten out its tangled finances. He lived happily with his wife, Calpurnia. When he made his long speeches she had relays of messengers to tell her how the argument proceeded from point to point. When she was absent he was not content unless he had two letters from her

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every day. In the summer, they went to one of their places in the cool country, delighting in the scenery, and in the progress of the farm. In his native place by Como, he paid a third of the expense of a high school, and endowed a public library.

These benefactions were characteristic of the time. Partly by tradition, partly by the urging of public opinion, the patricians exercised a splendid generosity. The Roman millionaire spent a great part of his money for the welfare and the glory of the city. The extant inscriptions record his gifts, endlessly. Now he built an aqueduct, now an arch; here he endowed a temple, there a public bath; sometimes he paved a road, sometimes he provided a feast for all the citizens, or a free show of gladiatorial fighting. Herod Atticus, who died in the same year with Marcus Aurelius, was the most liberal benefactor of the Roman world. To Olympus he gave an aqueduct, to Delphi a hippodrome, to Corinth a marble theatre roofed with carved cedar, to Thermopylæ a bath with a colonnade. Money, he said, is to be used for the common good. Gold which is not well spent is dead.

The plebeians included all of the free population under the patrician class. They were of all degrees of wealth and poverty.

Many of the wealthier of them had come into the Roman world as slaves, taken in war. But the wars of Rome were often fought with nations who were superior to the Romans except upon the field of battle. The slaves brought back from such wars were more intelligent, much more cultivated and in the higher arts

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of life more able, than their masters. The Romans put them in charge of their estates and of their business. The emperor found among them the most efficient public servants, whom he might place over the departments of state. Under these conditions many slaves purchased their liberty. They applied themselves to trade, to commerce by land and by sea, to the management of factories and mills. Some of them grew very rich. Some of them were sore beset by the temptations which lie in wait for those who have suddenly exchanged poverty for wealth, being millionaires who had no traditions and did not know what to do with their money.

Over against the picture of the patrician Pliny we may set the picture of the plebeian Trimalchio, to whose famous banquet we are bidden in Petronius's novel, the "Satiricon." Trimalchio had been brought as a slave from Asia, in his childhood. He had won the affection of his master and mistress, and had inherited their property. So extensive were his investments in exports and imports that a single storm on the Mediterranean had cost him a million dollars. In his gorgeous house were four vast banqueting halls. His bees came from Hymettus, his mushroom spawn from India. He owned estates which he had never seen. Now he gives a dinner. One course represents the signs of the Zodiac. Then follows a boar, served whole, with baskets of sweetmeats hanging from his tusks; in rushes a huntsman and stabs the boar, and out fly thrushes which are caught in nets as they fly about the room. Then the ceiling opens, and down comes a great tray filled with fruits and sweets. The

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meal is accompanied by singing and instrumental music, and floods of wine. Trimalchio is a man of letters, and a poem of his own composition is recited, in which famous heroes and heroines play strange parts. Niobe is imprisoned in the Trojan horse, Iphigenia becomes the wife of Achilles. Rope dancers amuse the company. Gradually, wine overcomes the hosts and guests. Slaves come in and take their places at the table, while the cook gives an imitation of a favorite actor. Trimalchio and his wife have a lively quarrel, in the course of which he flings a dish at her head. Finally, the noise is so great the town watch come running in thinking that the house must be on fire.

The rich plebeians are better represented by the fine tombs which they built for themselves and their families, whereon they caused to be inscribed, like armorial bearings, the symbols of their honest trades.

But most of the plebeians were poor. They were impoverished in part by the extension of patrician estates which drove men from the farms, and in part by the presence of a vast population of slaves by whom most of the work of the community was done. Even for such poor folk as these, however,—the tenement lodgers of our modern cities,—there were pleasures in the civic life. The public baths were municipal club-houses. There were marble benches by the playing fountains along the shady streets. There were numberless fraternities, some of them organized on the basis of social congeniality, some on the basis of a common trade, to which a poor man, even a slave, might be admitted. There were public dinners, on festal occasions, served on tables spread in the streets

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for all the people. The women had their societies. The mothers' clubs determined the fashions and the social behavior of Rome.

Among the public pleasures a great place was held by the plays and the games. The theatre, which among the Greeks had given opportunity to the highest genius of the race, was mostly abandoned by the Romans to triviality and indecency. The plays were of the order of low-class vaudeville. The greatest interest centered in the amphitheatre. When Vespasian built the Colosseum he made forty-five thousand seats, and there was standing room for five thousand more. The area could be planted with trees for forest-fights with wild beasts, or flooded with water for battles of boats. There the tragedies were actual tragedies. The spectacle was so fascinating that Tertullian, in order to keep the Christians from attending it, promised them far more delightful spectacles in heaven where they should look down upon the agonies of persecuting princes and hostile heathen roasting in the flames of hell. And Augustine tells of a friend who being urged to go to the games against his will resolutely shut his eyes. Instinctively opening them at the sound of a great cry, he could not get them shut again.

Below the plebeians were the slaves. They made a great part of the population. A large house might have four hundred of them, a large estate four thousand. By some they were regarded as humble friends; some doubted whether they had human souls. They were in some measure protected by the law, but well into this period of history a lady might have her slave whipped to death if she broke a mirror; and at best

they were in the bonds of servitude, with all which that inevitably implies on both sides, for the slaves and for their masters.

IV

Religion

The Roman world, thus constituted politically and socially, was filled with interest in religion. There had been a time of scepticism, when the sacred institutions of Numa had been discredited and neglected. The philosophers had resolved the gods into ancient heroes magnified, or into personifications of the powers of nature. The temples had been deserted and the venerable liturgies forgotten. But this was only one of the ebb-tides in the ever-moving sea of human life. The years of spiritual dearth were followed by years of spiritual plenty. The first three centuries of the Christian era were marked by a general enthusiasm of religion. Christianity began in the midst of a religious revival.

One of the manifestations of this religious spirit was a widespread interest in Greek philosophy.

The Epicureans, indeed, denied the essential propositions of religion—the providence of God and the immortality of the soul. The gods, they said, dwell serenely aloof from human life, having no interest in our concerns; and the soul is perishable.

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But the Stoics vindicated the everlasting reality of religion. They believed in a living God, immanent in the world. All things are therefore good, and the wise man will so regard them, no matter how bad they seem to be. "Everything," says Marcus Aurelius, "is harmonious with me which is harmonious to thee, O universe. Nothing for me is too early or too late, which is in due time for thee." All men are brethren, having one divine father. The artificial distinctions which divide society, even the differences which appear in nations and in races, have no real existence. We are all members of one body. It is the divine intention that we shall love one another. The highest good in human life is to live virtuously and to serve our neighbor. Stoic teachers were going about making converts to these excellent doctrines, preaching sermons, comforting the sad, directing the perplexed, and giving counsel to disturbed consciences.

Plutarch, who rejected the philosophy of the Epicureans because of their materialism, and the philosophy of the Stoics because of their pantheism, believed in the personality of God, following the revived philosophy of Pythagoras. The Pythagoreans realized the difference between good and evil, attributing evil not to God but to matter. Thus they distinguished between the spirit and the flesh in man, holding that the spirit is in bondage to the flesh and can attain its freedom only by abstinence and purification and the subduing of the senses. They had their saints, by whose example they were inspired. While the Christians were reading the lives of Christ, the pagans were reading the lives of Pythagoras and of Apollonius

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of Tyana. They found a place for all the ancient gods, who entered their monotheistic system as angels and archangels.

Another manifestation of the contemporary religious interest was the welcome which was given in the Roman world to religions from the East.

From Phrygia came the religion of Cybele, the Magna Mater, the Mother of the Gods. Her Asiatic priests came with her, bringing their strange language and strange ceremonies, worshipping a meteoric stone. With Cybele came Attis, a god who being violently put to death had come to life again. On the 24th of March, called Sanguis, the day of blood, the votaries of this religion mourned the death of Attis, as the Hebrew women in the vision of Ezekiel had mourned the death of Tammuz. They lamented with wild cries, and horns and drums and flutes, with mad dances. On the 25th of March, called Hilaria, they celebrated the resurrection of Attis, with rejoicings equally unrestrained, with feasts and masquerades and revelry.

From Egypt came the religion of Isis and Osiris (= Serapis). After a baptismal initiation, the disciple passed through successive grades of approach to a central secret which was disclosed to those only who had thus made themselves ready to receive it. Daily services of litanies and hymns, matins and vespers, following immemorial usage, attended the opening and the closing of the shrine. On the 28th of October was enacted in a kind of passion play the death of Osiris, killed by Set the god of evil, with weeping and mourning. Three days after, the lamentation was changed to

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cries of joy: "We have found him, let us rejoice together!" Osiris had risen from the dead.

These religions, together with that of Mithra, which we will consider later, were mystery religions. They led their disciples on from grade to grade till they were taught at last a doctrine too sacred to be told to the common world. This doctrine, connected with the nature myth of the dying and reviving god, was a doctrine of redemption. It was at the heart of these religions as it was also at the heart of the Orphic mysteries of Dionysus, and of the Eleusinian mysteries of Demeter. Attis, Osiris, Dionysus, Demeter,—each is a god who dies, and rises from the dead. Each is a symbol of the great course of nature wherein vegetation dies from off the face of the earth in the winter and appears again alive in the spring. Each represents a primitive belief that man must somehow enact this necessary order, by his mourning and rejoicing, in order to make sure that, after the winter, spring will follow. Each religion lifted this physical idea to a spiritual significance, and from the miracle of the resurrection of the plants inferred the miracle of the resurrection of the body, and the immortality of the soul. These were, accordingly, redemption religions, helping men out of the slavery of sin, and promising them life everlasting.

But the philosophers—Epicurean, Stoic, Pythagorean—and the priests, with their mysteries from Phrygia and Egypt, touched only a few of the people. In the main the Roman world continued in the old religion.

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The old religion was indeed attacked by the influences of foreign conquest. The victors brought back in triumph to Rome not only the kings of vanquished peoples but their gods. It was discovered that they were many in number, with perplexing similarities and dissimilarities. Also the old religion was attacked by the invasion of knowledge. The boundaries of the region of mystery in which the gods dwelt were set back. The world was better understood. It was perceived that some of the events of life could be explained by other reasons than those which were pronounced by priests.

It was perceived, also, that whole tracts of life were beyond the range of the conventional religion, which took no account of sin and made no provision for salvation. The old religion was prosaic and practical. The purpose of it was to secure the favor or avert the anger of the gods, and this was done by mercantile transactions—so much paid and so much obtained in return. Spiritual needs were not considered, spiritual blessings were not asked nor desired. The contention between light and darkness, between summer and winter, between life and death, which in the East symbolized the contention between good and evil in the soul of man, was indeed represented in the mythology of Greece and Rome, but it was only faintly reflected in religious aspiration. When the sense of sin and the consciousness of the necessity of salvation awoke in the Western mind they found no satisfaction in the official religion.

Nevertheless, the ancient ways remained. The creeds and rites of the old time continued to be observed by ignorant persons, by peasants on farms and

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in villages, and by those who were naturally conservative, to whom any change from the traditional order involved the probability of some sort of bad luck. They continued to be observed also by cultivated persons, by whom they were associated with art and letters, with the refinements of society, and with the long past. Among these people the ceremonies of religion were family customs, connected with distinguished and revered ancestors. In spite of all the criticisms of sceptics, and the discontent of devout souls, the old religion dominated the Roman world. Christianity found it everywhere in control. Everywhere it pervaded the whole of life.

It was a domestic religion, associated with every detail in the conduct of the household. The door was consecrated to Janus, and the hearth to Vesta. The house was under the protection of the Lares, the contents of it were guarded by the Penates. Ceres presided over the growth of the grain; Flora attended to the blossoms, and Pomona to the fruit in the orchard. There was a divinity for every act of life from birth to death. And neglect of the invocation of the proper god at the proper time was likely to involve serious consequences. There is an ancient instinct, which we formally discredit and call superstition, which whispers to the soul of man that he would better do what his fathers did before him. It is one of the silent forces which they who were converted out of paganism had to defy. When things actually did go wrong, in those days when the relation of effect to cause was very imperfectly perceived, even the Christian was tempted to think that the old gods were taking their revenge.

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The Roman religion pervaded all the affairs of business. Not only were the transactions of exchange and barter, the occupations of industry, and the administration of law, conducted in the language of religion, under the patronage of the gods, but it touched all manner of employment. With its shrines and temples and images and liturgies, it engaged the services of the mason, the carpenter, the blacksmith, the goldsmith, the weaver, the dyer, the embroiderer, the musician, the sculptor and the painter. The schoolmaster gave instruction in its sacred books. Sowing and reaping depended on it. War waited for it. In a time when fighting was considered a normal part of the life of man, and the army was the most important institution of the state, the site of every camp was marked by the shrines of the soldiers, and the captains consulted the will of heaven before going into battle. When they were victorious, they all joined in a public thanksgiving to the gods. Religion entered into every department of civil life. Nobody in the employ of the government could possibly evade it. Every office had its sacred image. Every oath was taken in the name of the gods. Every senator as he entered the Senate-house cast grains of incense into the fire which smouldered before the statue of Victory.

The ancient religion included in its province all kinds of social pleasure. Its well-filled calendar abounded in festivals, which called the people together for processions and sacred feasts, with lighting of lanterns and decoration of house-doors with wreaths. To it were consecrated the theatre and the amphitheatre, and the plays and games were offered to the gods,

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like the sacrifices on the altars, as a vital part of religion; the idea being that the gods were as much interested in athletic sports as men.

To break with the Roman religion was thus to sever one's self from almost the entire round of social life. Even in the epistles of St. Paul we see what possible compromises might be involved in accepting an invitation to dinner, the meat of which might have been offered to an idol. What could a Christian do in those cities where there was an image of a god at every corner of the street, and where the entrance into every shop and market, into every employment, industrial, civil or military, and into every kind of amusement, was through some sort of pagan rite! The Christians stood apart from the common life. They were considered by their perplexed neighbors to be enemies of society.

And this religion was not only thus inclusive and pervasive, but it was of obligation. The emperor was the official head of it, and was himself divine among the gods. The political value of such a doctrine is evident enough, and it did not seriously offend men in those days when even the greatest of the gods were hardly more than human beings magnified, and when a god could be welcomed into Rome, or else expelled, by an act of the Senate. The emperor was the embodiment of the empire. The worship of the emperor, which consisted in burning incense before his statue, was a declaration of allegiance. Among the many and various religions, East and West, over all the local and provincial cults, this was the one universal creed. Otherwise, one might select and reject; Rome was tolerant

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of all religious differences; the only limit to religious liberty was the law which forbade men, in the zeal of their own creed, to deride or assault their differing neighbors. But the emperor must be worshipped by every man: that was imperative. To refuse this worship exposed the Christian to the charge of conspiracy or treachery against the state.

It was in the midst of such a world—political, social and religious—that Christianity appeared, a strange, unparalleled and menacing phenomenon. The world received it with instinctive enmity. The new religion was compelled to struggle for its life.

CHAPTER II

THE STRUGGLE FOR LIFE

At home, among their kinsfolk and acquaintance, the Christians were met with immediate hostility. They were put out of the synagogues, and worse punishments were visited upon them.

In the Roman world, they were at first treated with contempt and aversion, and then persecuted. The persecution increased from attacks on individuals and groups to concerted municipal and even imperial action against Christian society. Twice the government made an organized attempt to destroy the obnoxious religion.

I

The Tolerant State Persecutes the Benevolent Church

That Christianity should have been thus received in the Roman world is remarkable, because one

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of the most notable characteristics of the church was its benevolence, and one of the most marked characteristics of the empire was its tolerance.

The church was a benevolent institution. There is indeed a benevolence which seeks mainly to improve the intellectual, moral and spiritual condition of the neighborhood. It endeavors to impose its own interests and enthusiasms upon those who are interested in other aspects of life. It has new standards, and calls for conformity to them. It says, You must be like us. And this is instinctively resented by the neighbors, who hate to be reformed. But the benevolence of the church appeared in the effort to mitigate conditions which all men desire to have changed. The Christians ministered to the sick and to the poor.

The church remembered the social precepts and example of Jesus Christ. His constant emphasis on the supreme value of brotherly love—extended not only to the least human creatures but even to the most hostile—set the note of the ideal life.

Thus the first recorded act of the Christian ministry was the healing of the sick, when Peter and John made a lame man to walk, at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple. Thereafter, the Christians did that kind of helpful service every day. It was confessed by their neighbors, even in the midst of the accusations which pronounced the Christians the most unsocial people of all people, that they were very kind to all who were in trouble. It was perceived that when the plague came the Christians stayed and nursed the sick, while others fled; and it was seen that this fraternal care was be-

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stowed not only on the brethren in the society, but on all who needed it, without distinction.

The first recorded act of the Christian congregation was the appointment of persons to attend to the feeding of poor widows in Jerusalem. Thereafter the records of Christian ministrations to destitute, overlooked and unprotected persons continued without interruption. The first account of a Christian service, after the New Testament, is Justin Martyr's description of a friendly feast, sacramental but social, at which a collection was made for the assistance of the poor. The church was the association wherein the rich and the poor met together, and at first, as in Jerusalem, had all things in common. St. Paul was engaged on his missionary journeys not only in the preaching of sermons and the founding of churches, but in gathering Gentile money for the support of poor Christians in Jerusalem.

Not only was the church devoted to the practice of benevolence, but the state was committed to the principle of tolerance. The pagan state was tolerant of religious differences to an extent to which the Christian state, when its turn came, showed no parallel until very recent times. It is true that in the reign of Tiberius votaries of Isis were expelled from Rome; but that was on account of scandal. It is true that the Jews were similarly treated in the time of Claudius; but that was on account of a riot. And these expelled persons, after a decent interval, quietly returned. Eclecticism, as a free choice among the gods; syncretism, as a combination of creeds; mysticism, as a subordinating of all forms of ritual and religion in the endeavor to find God in direct communion with the unseen, were char-

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acteristic of the age. It was permitted to men of letters to ridicule or deny the gods. Courteous consideration was given even to so exclusive a religion as that of the Jews. No people were persecuted for their religion, except the Christians.

The tolerant state persecuted the benevolent church for two reasons: first on account of a general dislike, then on account of an increasing dread.

Dislike of the Christians colors the earliest references to them in contemporary writing. It appears in Tacitus, in his history, where he speaks of the Roman Christians in the reign of Nero (A.D. 64). It appears also in Pliny, in his letter concerning the Christians of Bithynia in the reign of Trajan (113).

In the history of Tacitus, the Christians are disliked on the ground that they are enemies of society.

The rumor spread in Rome that the great fire which destroyed a considerable part of that city had been set by Nero. He was notoriously fond of fires, and had been heard to say that if the world should ever burn, as some predicted, he hoped that he might live to see it. And he was the only person whom the conflagration benefited. It cleared the ground for extensive building operations which he had long desired to undertake. At last, when the common talk began to take on an ugly tone, so that Nero feared a mob, it seemed wise to divert the blame. It was laid upon the Christians.

The Christians were exposed to such a charge because they were "queer." They were unlike their neighbors. Thus they encountered that tremendous

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social force which makes for uniformity. Society, by a kind of instinct, resents the assertion of difference. Even to-day, when it is more hospitable to dissent than it has ever been since the foundation of the world, it still insists on observance of the common customs. Any nonconformist, in dress or in behavior, is immediately ridiculed. Formerly such a person was stoned, or hanged, according to the degree of his offence. The Christians were queer. They stood apart from both the religion and the recreation of their neighbors: they hated the images which all other people worshipped, and the games which all other people enjoyed.

The Christians were not only queer but mysterious. They met in private houses, secretly, under cover of night. Nobody knew how many they were, and ignorance magnified their number into portentous proportions. Nobody knew what they did when they met together. Thus they were easily accused of abominable practices. Vague rumors, beginning with mistaken reports of Christian sacraments, declared that they put infants to death, and that they ate human flesh. Even in our own time the idea of ritual murder makes its way easily from one to another in Russia, and is believed by persons who are otherwise intelligent.

Therefore Nero put the blame upon the Christians. Many were arrested, and on confession that they were Christians were condemned. Some were sent into the arena to be torn by wild beasts; some were smeared with pitch and made to serve as flaming torches along the paths of the imperial gardens. This, we are told, continued until Rome was weary of it. In a

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city accustomed to the tragedies of the games, where sympathy was dulled by the daily spectacle of pain, this implies some extended space of time.

The charge of incendiarism fell to the ground, but the dislike continued and increased. Tacitus says that the Christians were enemies of civilization, being filled with hatred of society (*odium humani generis*). From that time, Christianity was a capital offense. There seems to have been no law to that effect, but a precedent was established. The cases of the Christians came up not in the civil courts but in the police courts, and were disposed of by discretion rather than by legislation. From the year 64 a Christian was exposed to arrest and capital punishment, like a brigand or a pirate.

In the letters of Pliny, the Christians appear as persons obstructive to business.

A manuscript came to light in Paris, about A.D. 1500, which contained the correspondence between Pliny and Trajan. It was seen and used by a number of persons during several years, when it suddenly disappeared and has never since been found. There is no question as to its authenticity, but its appearance and disappearance, like the passing light of a comet, show how little we know about the conditions of life among the Christians in the beginning of the second century. For only in the pages of this fleeting manuscript have we any information concerning the distresses of the Christians in Bithynia. It is an easy inference that there were a hundred similar persecutions about which no record or tradition has remained. Even in the New

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Testament there are intervals of silence, so that nobody knows, for example, what St. Paul did for ten years after his conversion. It is as if we were reading a history in which pages have been torn out by the handful. There was a persecution under the emperor Domitian, about 95, which the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews may have been expecting when he cited, for the inspiration of those who had not yet resisted unto blood, the examples of the heroes and martyrs of old time; it may have been the distress referred to in the First Epistle of Peter, where some suffered not as a thief or a murderer, but “as a Christian.”

Pliny was sent out as governor to Bithynia and parts adjacent. The province lay east of what we now call Constantinople, and north of the Syria, Cilicia and Cappadocia of the Acts of the Apostles. It formed the southern shore of the Black Sea. There had been much mismanagement of governmental affairs there, especially in finance, and Pliny was appointed to bring the confusion into order. In going about the country on this errand, he came upon the Christians.

He found so many of them, both in villages and cities, that in some places the temples were deserted. He proceeded against them on the basis of information brought to him, and according to the custom which had prevailed since the days of Nero. But the matter was complicated by two considerations: in part by the fact that great numbers of persons were thus incriminated, especially on charges made by anonymous letters; and in part by the fact that some who were accused confessed that they had once been Christians,—some said twenty-five years ago,—but had long

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since repented of that error. How ought such cases to be treated? And, even where the case was plain, what ought to be done with such a multitude of offenders?

Pliny wrote to Trajan for instructions. Shall I punish the Christians without regard to age or social situation? Shall I pardon those who are willing to renounce Christianity? Shall I proceed against the Christians as Christians, or only by reason of offences? Pliny told Trajan what he had learned from peasants, and from such of the faithful as he had examined under torture. They are harmless people, he said, who meet daily to sing hymns to Christ as to a god, to partake of a common meal of innocent food, and to bind themselves to do no wrong. He remarked incidentally that dealers in fodder for animals to be used in sacrifice had begun to return to their business.

Trajan replied that obstinate adherence to the Christian name must be punished as usual, but that nobody is to be sought out, or arrested on any anonymous accusations. The penitent, he added, may be pardoned.

Pliny's remark about the fodder suggests the second cause of the general dislike. In the time of Nero, the Christians were disliked for social reasons. They interfered with business. The fodder-sellers of Bithynia objected to them, like the image-makers of Ephesus. Behind the persecution of the Christians in the Roman Empire there were economical causes,—trade antagonism.

To the dislike with which the Christians were regarded in the Roman world was added, as a second

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reason for their persecution, an increasing dread. They were feared by the two extremes of society,—by the poorest and most ignorant of the people on the one side, and by the best and wisest on the other. They were hated alike by the masses and by the magistrates.

The dread of the Christians by the masses was based largely on superstitions. The people were in fear of the gods. When calamity came—plague, earthquake, fire, flood, defeat in battle—they saw in it the anger of the gods. This was the universal doctrine of the ancient world. The second century was a time of unusual disaster, and the third was little better. There were portents in the earth and in the sky and in the sun. There was distress of nations with perplexity, such as seemed to indicate that end of all things which was predicted in the Gospels. To the general mind it was plain that there was indignation in heaven. The gods were sore displeased.

It was also plain that the Christians were the enemies of the gods. All other men accepted the current theology. The philosophers, indeed, conformed without much faith; some of them ridiculed the gods. And the Jews conformed from motives of prudence, denying the existence of all gods but their own, but not making a serious protest. The only non-conformists were the Christians; and theirs was an aggressive and militant non-conformity. They were not content to absent themselves from the temples and to abstain quietly from recognition of the divinities of Rome. They vigorously spoke against them. They boldly denounced idolatry, and destroyed idols. They were accounted atheists and antagonists of the gods.

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The logic of the situation was plain. When any community was visited with calamity—if fire broke out, if plague appeared—the blame fell on the Christians. They had provoked it. The gods had sent it because of Christian impiety and insult. Let the Christians, then, suffer for their sins. Let the angry gods be pacified by Christian blood. “The Christians to the lions!”

Even the magistrates shared in the dread thus arising from superstition, but they had also a more serious reason for alarm in the political situation. They saw the essential need of unity. The empire was composed of conquered provinces, held together by force of arms. The state lived in continual peril of revolution. The least appearance of disaffection must be met with immediate restraint by the local magistrate. Even the assembling of small companies of men in associations professedly social but possibly disloyal was forbidden by the government. Pliny asked Trajan to permit the organization of a fire company at Nicomedia, but Trajan refused. He was willing to provide improved apparatus, but he would not let the men hold meetings. The incident shows the nervousness of the administration.

The empire was in peril not only from revolt but from invasion. Along the frontiers were powerful enemies, civilized and uncivilized, waiting on any appearance of weakness to break the barrier. The situation demanded unfailing loyalty. Any civil strife might bring the empire to destruction.

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Thus we may understand the possibility of such a tragedy as the massacre of the Theban Legion. In the latter part of the third century (268) there was a peasant's war in Gaul. The peasants arose against the landlords and burned their houses. Thus they protested against the situation which had become intolerable. The emperor Maximian, whom Diocletian had made his colleague in the West, marched with an army to put the peasants down. Before the battle, the emperor summoned the army to pray for victory; that is, he directed the observance of certain rites appealing to the Roman gods. The Theban Legion, which was composed of Christians, refused to take part in these prayers. The emperor directed that the legion should be decimated. But the killing of a tenth of the men did not dismay the others, and again the legion was decimated, and so on till it was destroyed. The story may not be true, but it illustrates the state of mind of Roman generals who found soldiers in the ranks whose Christian consciences forbade them to obey orders.

Thus it was that the tolerant state persecuted the benevolent church. The Christians were disliked, for reasons partly social and partly commercial; and they were dreaded as being hostile both to the gods and to the empire. And they were continually increasing. Nobody knew where the evil might next appear, perhaps in his own family. Christianity seemed like a contagious disease, like a plague whose nature was not understood and for which there was no remedy, in the face of whose silent and secret progress men grew desperate.

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Moreover, the Christians invited intolerance by their own intolerant position. The religious liberty of the empire had only two limitations. It was required that everybody should leave his neighbor's religion alone; it was also required that everybody should pay to the official religion—especially as represented by the image of the emperor—the decent respect of outward conformity. The Christians defied these limitations. They declared, both in season and out of season, that all religions but their own were false; and they refused to render even the outward form or reverence for the emperor's image as a symbol of the state. Publicly and persistently they invited enmity, as the outspoken enemies of all the religions of their neighbors.

II

Local Persecutions

The age of persecution includes first a period of local attack. Now in one place and now in another, arising for the most part from the dislike and dread of the masses of the people. A public calamity was likely to be visited upon the Christians. Then follows a period of general attack, in the time of Decius and Valerian (in the middle of the third century), and in the time of Diocletian and Galerius (in the beginning of the fourth). On each of these occasions the Christians were under the ban of imperial decrees by which the government was endeavoring to destroy them. The purpose was to maintain the unity of the empire.

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An adequate history of the age of persecution will never be written. It is as impossible as to write an adequate history of the distress and tragedy of any war. Certain general facts may be set down, certain figures may be added up: so many martyred here and there and in such and such inhuman ways,—so many slain with the sword, so many burned with fire, so many stoned to death, so many frozen with cold, so many starved with hunger, so many drowned in the sea, so many scourged with whips, so many stabbed with forks of iron, so many fastened to the cross. Even on the statistical side the record is incomplete. But if we were to multiply the figures by two or by five, still we should be dealing only with the pains of body. We should miss the vital facts of faith and courage and self-sacrifice and glad devotion which made the martyrdom significant.

Out of the general terror, however, there are stories which illuminate the darkness. Sometimes when the martyr was a person of more than usual importance, or the torture was more fierce, or the courage was more fine than usual, some who stood by wrote a record, and the narrative, passed from hand to hand and read in secret meetings of the Christians, remains for us to read to-day.

Ignatius was bishop of Antioch at the beginning of the second century, while Pliny was in Bithynia. Under circumstances of which we are not informed, he was arrested and condemned, and sent to be put to death in Rome. He seems not to have possessed the privilege of Roman citizenship, else he might have been exempt from that form of punishment. A sen-

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tence in one of his letters suggests that he may even have been a slave before he became a bishop. Such a social position would have been in accord with the conditions under which the church was then recruited, and would have expressed its splendid disregard of the artificial positions of society. The bishop was to be exposed to wild beasts in the games of the Colosseum. He was put in charge of a company of ten soldiers, who, he says, made the whole journey a long martyrdom. Thus they traversed the country by the road which ran from Antioch to Troas, across the length of Asia Minor; thence to Philippi, and so by land and sea to Rome.

It was a very humble and pathetic triumphant procession. In every town the Christians met the martyr and ministered to him, and from neighboring places, off the line of the journey, the churches sent delegations of devout people with messages of faith and sympathy. In two cities, on the coast of Asia Minor towards Europe—in Smyrna and in Troas—he stayed long enough to write letters. In Smyrna, he wrote to those of the churches whose messengers had met him—the Ephesians, the Trallians, the Magnesians—and a fourth letter to the church of the city which was his journey's end,—the Romans. In Troas, he wrote three letters, two to churches which he had visited, in Philadelphia and Smyrna, and one to the bishop of Smyrna, named Polycarp. Other letters were added to this list by the zeal or error of a later time, but these seven are authentic.

The letters show a keen sense of the perils of division. It was reported to Ignatius, as it had already

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been reported to St. Paul from Corinth, that there was disagreement among the Christians. Even in the face of persecution, when all their strength was needed against a common enemy, they were contending among themselves. This was due in part to the novelty of the situation. The new churches were formulating their faith and organizing their life by the process of experiment. Such a process involved discussion, and discussion disclosed the inevitable differences which belong to human nature. Some men were conservative, some were progressive. A new sense of freedom increased the eagerness of these debates.

Against the individualism thus appearing, Ignatius protested. In the strongest language he urged the people to stand together, to subordinate their differences, and to be loyal to their bishops. "Obedience to the bishop," he said, "is obedience to God." "We ought to regard the bishop as the Lord himself." "Do nothing apart from the bishop." "He who does anything apart from the bishop serves the devil." These vigorous sentences provided material in later years for the use of churchmen in controversy with their brethren who were in a state of schism. But the intention of Ignatius was practical rather than ecclesiastical. The bishop as the pastor of the church was the appointed leader of the congregation. He was the natural centre of the unity of the people. Their progress, even their existence, depended on the strength of the united brotherhood.

The chief interest of the martyr, however, was in his approaching martyrdom. He wrote to the Romans begging that they would not intercede for him,

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nor try to save him. "Grant me nothing more than that I may be poured out a libation to God." "Come fire," he cried, "and iron, and grapplings with wild beasts, cutting and manglings, wrenching of bones, breaking of limbs, crushing of the whole body; come cruel tortures of the devil to assail me! Only be it mine to attain unto Jesus Christ." "I write you in the midst of life, eagerly longing for death."

With these seven letters, thus illuminating for a moment the way on which he went rejoicing to his death, the saint goes forward on his journey and is seen no more. Polycarp sent copies of some of them, perhaps of all, to the Christians of Philippi, at their request. Thus they were preserved. Then on some Roman holiday, in the crowded Colosseum, Ignatius was devoured by beasts.

Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna to whom Ignatius wrote, was born about A.D. 69, the year before the destruction of Jerusalem. He spent his youth in Ephesus, the city which for a time after the fall of Jerusalem became the centre of Christian life and activity. Tradition finds St. Philip near by, in Hierapolis, and locates the closing years of St. John in Ephesus itself. Polycarp would have been about thirty years old when St. John died.

To Polycarp, Ignatius wrote with affection, giving him encouragement and counsel, as an elder brother to a younger. "Be diligent," he said, "be diligent. Be sober as God's athlete. Stand like a beaten anvil."

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Among the disciples of Polycarp at Smyrna were two young men, Irenæus and Florinus. Florinus afterwards fell into heresy and Irenæus, who had by that time become bishop of Lyons, wrote to dissuade him. In the course of his admonitions he reminded Florinus of their old teacher. "I can tell," he said, "the very place in which the blessed Polycarp used to sit when he discoursed, and his manner of life, and his personal appearance, and the discourses which he held before the people, and how he would describe his intercourse with John and the rest of those who had seen the Lord, and how he would relate their words. And whatsoever things he had heard from them about the Lord and about his miracles or about his teaching, Polycarp, as having received them from eyewitnesses of the life of the Word, would relate altogether in accordance with the Scriptures. . . . And I can testify in the sight of God that if that blessed and apostolic elder had heard anything of the kind, [i.e., such as Florinus was foolishly maintaining] he would have cried out, and stopped his ears, and would have said after his wont, 'O good God, for what times hast thou kept me, that I should endure these things,' and would have fled from the very place where he was sitting or standing when he heard such words."

Irenæus remembered also concerning Polycarp that one day meeting the heretic Marcion in the street in Rome, Marcion said, "Don't you recognize me, bishop?" and Polycarp replied, "Indeed I do. I know you very well; you are the first-born of Satan!"

These incidents attribute to the saint a narrow mind and a hasty temper, and disclose a disposition to

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meet error by the easy but entirely ineffective method of abusing the heretic rather than by the difficult but only convincing method of reasoning with him fairly. The impression which they make upon the modern mind is somewhat mitigated by the story of the dealings of Polycarp with Anicetus, bishop of Rome. The two bishops represented the two parts of the Roman world, Greek and Latin, East and West. They conferred as to the true date of Easter. According to the common usage of both East and West, the date of Easter was decided by the Jewish Passover, and the Passover was determined by the vernal equinox, and the equinox was the day of the month which the Jews called the fourteenth of Nisan, and the Christians called the twenty-first of March. The full moon after the equinox marked the day of the Passover. The Eastern Christians kept the Easter on the day, whether it was a Sunday or not; it might be a Monday or a Friday. The Western Christians waited for a Sunday. Polycarp informed Anicetus that the Eastern custom was authorized by the word of St. John himself. The apostolic precedent was entirely on his side. It is an interesting fact that this argument made no impression upon the mind of Anicetus. He liked the new way better; the argument from authority did not greatly appeal to him. The bishops, however, agreed to disagree. Neither could convince the other, but neither carried the disagreement to the extreme of excommunication. The bishop of Smyrna celebrated the holy communion at the altar of the bishop of Rome, and returned, leaving his blessing.

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At last in Smyrna, at a festival season, the proconsul—the Asiarc—being present and presiding at the games, a number of Christians were arrested, for some cause unknown, and were ordered to immediate execution. They were exposed to the lions, in the amphitheatre. A cry arose for Polycarp, and mounted police found him, in his country-place, and took him to the city. On the way the chief of police met him, the brother of an eminent and devout woman in the bishop's congregation. He took Polycarp into his chariot, and tried in a friendly way to persuade him to offer incense in order to conciliate the mob, but to no purpose. Then, losing his temper, he threw the old man out into the road. The stadium was crowded when the guards arrived with Polycarp, and a great roar of hostile shouting greeted him. But he heard a steady voice saying, "Polycarp, be strong and play the man." The proconsul urged him to give up his foolish faith and abandon his disciples. "Disown them," said the proconsul, "cry, 'Away with the atheists!'" And this the martyr did, facing the crowd, and crying, "Away with the atheists!" but it was plain that he and the proconsul meant quite different persons. "Come," said the judge, "revile Christ, and you shall go free." Polycarp answered in words which have never been forgotten. "Fourscore and six years have I served Him, and He hath done me no wrong. How then can I speak evil of my King who saved me?" Then in the arena they heaped wood together, and tied him to a stake, and burned him. And the faithful gathered his charred bones together, and laid them up as sacred treasures,—

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Assured the fiery trial, fierce though fleet,
Would from this little heap of ashes lend
Wings to the conflagration of the world.

When Irenæus, the disciple of Polycarp, became bishop of Lyons, he took the place of Pothinus who with others of his flock had been put to death for loyalty to the name of Christ. In Pater's "Marius the Epicurean" (pp. 421-426) the hero of the book coming in the dark of the early morning to a celebration of the sacrament, hears a reading of the letter in which the survivors of the persecution in Lyons describe the tragedy to the churches.

The common hatred of the Christians had been increasing in Lyons, and they were insulted in the streets. A rumor, generally believed, accused them of abominable crimes, especially declaring that they followed the example of Œdipus, who had married his own mother, and of Thyestes, who had eaten his children. The conditions were such as have preceded, in our day, the massacre of Jews in Russia. Christians were hooted, stoned and beaten. Then, in the absence of the Roman governor, some were imprisoned until his return. He caused them to be examined with torture so cruel as to call out a public protest from one of the brethren, Vettius Epagathus, a man of distinction in the city, who asked to be permitted to testify that "there is among us nothing ungodly or impious." He was thereupon thrust into prison with the others. The examination of certain pagan slaves of Christian mas-

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ters added to the popular fury, for they declared that all the accusations were founded upon fact.

The wrath of the people, and of the governor, fell with special force upon Sanctus, a deacon from the neighboring town of Vienne, and upon Blandina, a slave girl, weak in body but invincible in spirit. They were tortured until their continuance in life seemed miraculous. Finally Sanctus was roasted in the arena in an iron chair, and Blandina, thrown in a net before a wild bull, was gored and trampled to death. Attalus, having been led around the arena with the inscription, "This is Attalus the Christian," was burned in the chair; and Ponticus, a boy of fifteen years, died after "the entire round of torture." These all agreed in crying in the midst of their pain, "I am a Christian, and no evil is done amongst us." The bishop Pothinus, being ninety years of age, died in prison, after being beaten by a mob. The bodies of the martyrs were burned to ashes, and the ashes were swept into the Rhone.

A little later, in the beginning of the third century, occurred the martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas. This took place in Carthage, when Septimius Severus was emperor of Rome, and at a time when the birthday of his son Geta was being celebrated. The narrative appears, for the most part, in the words of Perpetua herself. She was a lady of good birth and education, twenty-two years old, married, and having an infant son. Felicitas was a slave girl. They were arrested, with other young people, while they were receiving Christian instruction, not yet having been baptized. Perpetua's father, a man of gray hairs, begged her day after day, for his sake, and for her child's sake,

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to deny the Christian name. And these importunities added to her distress. But she continued constant. One night, in the prison, she dreamed that she saw a golden ladder reaching up to heaven, having sharp weapons fastened to the sides, and underneath a great dragon, "who lay in wait for those who ascended, and frightened them from the ascent." Up this she climbed, setting her feet on the head of the dragon, and came into a garden where one in white, dressed as a shepherd, bade her welcome. Saturus, the teacher, was devoured in the arena by a leopard; Perpetua and Felicitas were tossed and gored in nets.

III

General Persecutions

If now we multiply these four stories indefinitely, to the fury of the masses add the deliberate policy of the magistrates, and extend the time over a space of ten years twice, we get an idea of the two general persecutions, the Decian and the Diocletian.

The Decian persecution began in the middle of the third century. The empire had been celebrating the thousandth anniversary of the founding of Rome (A.D. 248). It was an occasion which summoned all patriotic and reflective persons to compare the present with the past. The comparison gave no ground for satisfaction. Roman power was failing, Roman character was degenerating. To the fear of the Goths was

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added the fear of the Persians. The emperor Decius, coming to the throne in these evil times, felt that the first step toward a restoration of the Roman valor was a revival of the fine old Roman virtues, and it seemed to him that the best way to bring back the old victorious virtues was to restore the old religion. To this, accordingly, he addressed himself, and began his campaign for reform with a resolute attempt to destroy what he considered to be the chief obstacle in the way of his pious restoration. Following what seemed to him the commands of conscience, and acting in the sincere spirit of patriotism, honestly desiring to do what was best for the empire over which he ruled, he endeavored to eliminate the Christian Church.

The imperial decree called upon all persons to declare their loyalty to the Roman religion by offering sacrifice. After a long period of general peace, during which many had become Christians conventionally, without individual conviction, the decree was answered by the submission of multitudes. Some cast incense on the altar willingly; some came so pale and trembling that "the crowd mocked them as plain cowards who dared neither die nor sacrifice." Some purchased certificates to the effect that they had complied with the decree, though they had not, and the word *libellus*, certifying such a certificate, gave to these persons the name *libellatics*, by which they were unfavorably known after the persecution was over. Hardly, however, had these troubles fairly begun, when Decius went to fight the Goths, and was killed in battle.

Valerian, the successor of Decius, continued the persecution. A man of advanced years, and of blame-

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less life, a friend of Christians, he saw the empire beset on every side by powerful enemies. He saw that the only safety lay in united strength. He had reason to suspect the loyalty of the Christians; at least, there were some among them who were eagerly anticipating the ruin of the empire. Commodian, in his "Carmen Apologeticum" was watching for the end of the world. "Soon the Goths will burst against the Danube, and with them comes Apollyon their king to put down by arms the persecution of the saints. Rome is captured. Goths and Christians are as brethren." Accordingly, the good Valerian carried on the contention which the good Decius had begun. To the demand that every Christian should renounce his religion by offering sacrifice, he added a prohibition of Christian meetings, even in the catacombs.

Then when Xystus, bishop of Rome, defied the decree by publicly transferring to the catacombs the bodies of St. Peter and St. Paul, the tragedy began. The bishop of Rome was martyred in the catacombs. Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, was beheaded. The sentence which was pronounced upon Cyprian expresses the mind of the persecution. "Your life, Cyprian, has long been a life of sacrilege; you have gathered around you many accomplices in your criminal designs; you have set yourself up as an enemy to the gods of Rome and to their sacred rites; nor have the pious and deeply revered emperors Valerian and Gallienus been able to bring you back to their religion. Therefore, as the upholder of a great crime, as the standard-bearer of the sect, I must now make an example of you in the presence of your associates in guilt. The laws must be

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sealed with your blood. Our sentence therefore is that Thascius Cyprianus be put to death with the sword.”

That was in 258. Two years later, Valerian in defeat was captured by the Persians, and was never seen again. The persecution was thus concluded. It had, indeed, disclosed at the beginning a shameful number of Christians whose religion has no serious significance, but it had finally shown a strength in the church which the whole power of the state had not been able to subdue.

The Diocletian persecution fell upon the Christians in the beginning of the fourth century, after more than forty years of peace. During those years Christianity had been steadily growing; Christians had found their religion no hindrance in the way to high office in the state; many of them were in the palace. Splendid churches in all the greater cities bore witness not only to the popularity of the Christian religion, but to a general opinion that the days of persecution were ended finally.

The conditions which gave rise to renewed contention against the church do not appear plainly. No unusual disasters or defeats suggested that the Christians were again angering the gods. The opposition may have been steadily but quietly increasing in proportion to the success of Christianity. To the patriotic Romans who felt that the church was a serious menace both to the Roman religion and to the Roman character, every new ecclesiastical building was a reason for alarm. The matter would lie heavily upon the conscience of a good man like Diocletian. It is said

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that one of those who urged him to do something about it was his aged mother, a devout pagan.

Then, one day, the occasion of an imperial sacrifice, the gods gave no omen; heaven was silent. The officiating priest informed the emperor that certain Christians had been observed making the sign of the cross. It was their presence which had been resented by the gods. This incident precipitated the persecution. On the morning of the feast of the Terminalia, being the twenty-third of February, 303, the great church of Nicomedia, over against the emperor's palace, was torn down. An edict was published condemning all the Christian churches to a like demolition, and ordering the surrender and destruction of all the Christian books. The persecution was directed not so much against the Christians individually, as in the days of Decius, as against the Christian society, in its officers, its buildings, and its books. Even these milder measures were in many cases enforced with intentional carelessness on the part of officials who were indifferent or sympathetic. They were willing to accept any books which the clergy might surrender, without looking too curiously to see whether they were sacred books or not. The rigor of the persecution depended on the temper of the local ruler. In many places, there were hardships and tragedies. A mob officially incited to pull down a church will not spare the clergy or the congregation. The Christians themselves were not disposed to look with forbearance on their brethren who tried to escape the storm. The demand that the books be surrendered must not, they said, be evaded; it must be defied. There appeared a new kind of of-

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fender. To the *libellatic* of the Decian persecutions was now added the *traditor*, the man who gave up the books, the betrayer of his trust, the traitor.

Then Diocletian retired from the throne of the empire; Galerius, who succeeded to his power, and renewed the persecution, died of a loathsome disease; and new men with a new perception of the significance of Christianity, men like Constantius, and Constantine, his son, appeared upon the scene.

The Edict of Milan, set forth in the year 313 by Constantine and Licinius, gave to the Christians and all others "full permission to follow whatsoever worship any man had chosen." The places of Christian worship which had been taken away, whether by purchase from the state or by imperial gift, were to be restored. "Those who restore them without price shall receive a compensation from our benevolence." Thus it was hoped that "whatever divinity there is in heaven" would be benevolent and propitious to the imperial government, and to all under its authority. With this edict the age of the persecutions came to an end.

Not only had the persecutions failed to destroy the church, they had mightily assisted it. They had made the profession of Christianity a serious matter, involving great peril and demanding courage. They had exposed every believer to the danger of the loss of all of his possessions, even of life itself. They had excluded from membership in the church all merely conventional and half-hearted persons. And the courage of the martyrs had attracted into the church the bravest spirits of the time. They had exhibited the true

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credentials of Christianity. They had commended their religion by the witness of their endurance for the love of Christ. Men are asking, "What is this new religion?" and were being answered by the patience, the devotion, the splendid consecration of the noble army of martyrs.