

MARTYR TALES AND SKETCHES BY G.W

by G.W.

Stories of Christian martyrdom written for younger readers, beginning with the account of Stephen, the first martyr. The author brings the heroic faith and sacrificial witness of the martyrs before the youthful mind in an engaging and profitable way.

8 Chapters

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01 Chapter 1. The First Martyr — Stephen.

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It is indeed a happy task to bring before the youthful mind that which is bright and pleasant, as well as profitable.

Many things, however, we may learn with profit, which are neither bright to the eye, nor pleasant to the ear. Besides, there are subjects presenting beauties to our mental sight, which far exceed any seen by the eyes of the body. It is with the desire that the young mind of my reader may be occupied with that which is morally lovely, that I relate these Martyr Tales. The scenes are far too harrowing in many cases for us to be able to follow them fully, nor need any unnecessary details be given. Yet, it will not do to turn from sorrowful sights, because they distress us, if, in looking on, we are learning needed lessons. Therefore, if under the blessing of God, the stories of these dear suffering ones lead your hearts to value the many privileges which you enjoy, they will not be lost. Should one note of praise from thankful lips, for the great goodness of our God, be the result, these tales will not have been told in vain.

It is good for us in this land of liberty, to look back on less favoured times, that we may learn our responsibilities in the present. It is well, also, to remember that if we are called upon to suffer, others have endured a vast deal more. In the sunny lands of the far south, brave spirits have yielded up their all for Christ. Under a scorching eastern sun many a faithful one has died the martyr's death. In the cold north, too, warm hearts have been found, who counted not their lives dear, when truth was at stake. Yes, and in the countries of the west, in our own favoured Europe, men, women, and children, have bled for the peerless name of Jesus. In that day when our precious Lord makes up His jewels, not one so dearly bought by Him can possibly be missing. From the north, the south, the east, and the west, He will gather His own to sit with Him in the glory of His kingdom. Will you, dear reader, visit with me a city in the East, while in thought we gaze upon a scene once enacted there? Outside its gates and walls an angry and excited crowd were seen, furiously stoning to death a helpless man. The men thus occupied were not the low, rough fellows of the city, but those who took the place of servants of God! It was the learned and religious men of the land who were there, and all shewing feelings of hatred and excitement. Even those who ought to have been the leaders of the people in peace and justice were only present to give vent to their rage. The object of their wrath and malice was, however, much more to be envied than they, for he was really gaining a victory. From the cruel hands of his countrymen many a stone had been fiercely hurled, for his plain and fearless words had stirred up their hate and enmity in rage and fury. But while it was easy for them to destroy the body, they could not touch the soul.

Wounded, suffering, and dying, Stephen received no mercy from his enemies, while those cruel missiles did too well their deadly work; yet the falling stones touched not that brave man's inner life, though they had given the death-blow to his mortal body. That gentle voice, which had so often spoken for the One he loved more than any on earth, was then heard speaking to his Lord

and Saviour in confidence. Listen to those wonderful words, as, with meekness and joy, they fall from his dying lips: — "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit"! And can we not most truly say that the cry was heard above, in the sympathising ear of the now exalted, but once rejected Christ of God? But that dying cry was not his only prayer. His last thoughts on earth were for his enemies — those very men who in their hatred and envy, had put him to death! Forgetting his pains and wounds and suffering, that dying man, with voice which all could hear, gave utterance to the fervent prayer — "Lord! lay not this sin to their charge"! Stephen was full of gentleness and love towards his cruel persecutors, while with firmness of purpose, he owned Jesus of Nazareth to be his Lord on high.

After thus committing himself into the Lord's eternal keeping, and asking forgiveness for his foes, Stephen slept the sleep of death, and his spirit went to be for ever with the Lord.

Thus died a holy, God-fearing man — stoned to death by those of his own nation who were considered to be religious! And why had he thus to die, and be cast out from the earth? Because he had spoken boldly the truth of God. Fearing not the face of man, he had dared to tell the members of that Jewish Council that they had murdered their long-looked for Messiah.

Let us return for a brief space to look at the circumstances which led to the death of this the first martyr for the name of Jesus. Stephen was a Jew, and had been brought up in the Jewish religion. The nation was looking for the Deliverer who had been promised by God long before — the Messiah, or the Sent One — who would free them from oppression, and rule in glory and power. There were many prophecies in the Old Testament which spoke of the great things to be done by Him, and the victories of His reign. These were treasured and valued words, yet, strange to say, many other scriptures which were equally distinct, were blindly passed over. While the former spoke of a victorious King, the latter told of "a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." The truth that the Royal Messenger was first to take a lowly position, and pass through death before ruling in power, was not understood, and, therefore, not believed.

Unlike the mass of the nation, Stephen believed that Jesus of Nazareth whom the Jews had lately slain, was the Son of God, the Messiah, long promised to His people. Indeed, we may look upon the first martyr as a man to whom Christ was everything, for he was known as "a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost." No one can possibly be in that condition without a great change having taken place, for it is the Spirit of God who occupies the heart with Christ. In our natural state, that is, with the nature which we have on being born into the world, we can do nothing to please God. Nor do we love Him in any sense, for our deceitful hearts are full of enmity. When we turn from our own ways and doings to trust in the finished work of the only perfect Man who ever lived, we are said to be converted. It is a wonderful change when the sinner looks to God, confessing his sins, and owns Jesus Christ as his Saviour. Such a change Stephen must have known, and consequently the Spirit of God dwelt in him. Much power also marked his course from this time, so that he did great wonders and miracles.

Stephen was one of the seven disciples who were chosen to take charge of the distribution of money to those who were in need in the church. This duty was undertaken in order that the apostles might be more free for preaching and teaching the word. In addition to this, he was fearless in speaking the truth of God, so that those who opposed him "were not able to resist the wisdom and spirit by which he spake." The rage of his opponents could not vent itself on him as a guilty man, and so they invented things to say against him and thus brought a godly man to trial

before the Council, by false accusation. Stephen stood before his judges, and the untruthful witnesses did their best to stir up the leading religious Jews against him — a faithful man, who had done them no wrong.

Most remarkable must that face have appeared to them as it rivetted the gaze of each one! Never could such a wonderful scene be forgotten by any who saw it that day! With a beaming face, and the love of God in his heart, that noble witness to a crucified Christ poured forth his faithful, telling words. The very look on his face was heavenly, as even his enemies did not fail to see. To them it was "as it had been the face of an angel." When the high priest put the question, "Are these things so?" Stephen answered by giving a powerful address. Going over the history of the nation, from the beginning, when God had called Abraham and led him forth, he spoke of Israel's ways and God's doings. He reminded them of Jehovah's faithfulness, of their own frequent failures as a nation, and their unbelief as the people of God. The climax was reached when this bold and courageous witness came to speak of the Son of God — the despised Jesus of Nazareth — whom they had cast out and murdered.

Then the rage of these outwardly religious men broke forth in all its fury, and in their hate they gnashed their teeth against the godly, truth-speaking Stephen.

Nothing daunted, however, that brave man fearlessly stood a witness for God, but only to increase the violence of their enmity. Full of the Holy Ghost, he turned his eyes to heaven, and there a sight, unseen before by mortal man, met his upward gaze.

Stephen saw "the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God." He told the Council of those opened heavens, and the Son of man in the place of honour and power, but his words only the farther increased the fury of his enemies.

Desiring to hear no more, they raised their voices, stopped their ears, rushed upon the defenceless Stephen, and cast him out of Jerusalem. Then, as we have already noticed, they speedily sent home to the presence of Christ, this first martyr to the name of Jesus.

How like his holy Master was this witness! Hated because he did what was right, and said that which was true, cast out because of his faithfulness, and praying for his very murderers, he committed himself into divine keeping, "saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." What an entrance into the presence of God must his have been — the first redeemed one who had sealed his testimony with his blood! Have you, my dear young reader, learned to confess the name of the meek and lowly Jesus, whom men despise? If so, you will be sustained, as Stephen was, when called to pass through suffering. For you, too, glory lies beyond this passing life, and for you the Christ of God lives at the Father's right hand.

But, dear reader, if unsaved, unconcerned, unconverted, how will you meet God? Will you run the risk, by continued delay, of finding yourself in the presence of Jesus as a Judge? Mercy's voice is calling to you to come "To-day." The risen Jesus bids you come as you are. Come now. To-morrow may be for ever too late.

02 Chapter 2. Vivia Perpetua at Carthage — A Wife and Mother Torn by Wild Beasts.

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Vivia Perpetua was a lady of high rank, whose heart had been won, and whose faith was upheld by Jesus Christ the Lord. She was a wife and mother, yet, with her child, she was torn from her home by cruel men, and cast into prison for the name of Christ. Her sorrowing relatives did all they could to obtain her release, but in vain. Liberty could only be procured on one condition, and that was that she would declare herself no longer a Christian. But she refused to deny the name of Him who had given His life's blood for her, so that her release was impossible. The visits of her aged father from time to time, tried and tested both her faith and affection. For, in the agony of his grief, he besought her with tears, to deny the truth for which she was imprisoned. The sight of his sorrow was most depressing to his affectionate daughter, and, much as she loved him, it was a relief when he did not come.

Amongst the four other Christians who shared the same dungeon with Vivia Perpetua was a woman who had been a slave. How unlike had been the lives of those two women — one brought up in the midst of luxury, the other accustomed to hard work and toil. Now through their faith in the Lord Jesus, they had much in common, for they were enduring pain and suffering for the name of Christ. At the time when these five were imprisoned, they were known to be receiving instruction in the truths of Christianity with a view to their being baptised. And the prison happily did not hinder that desire from being carried out. They had the intense joy and privilege of putting on the name of Christ by baptism, in their miserable yet happy cell. This great pleasure was speedily succeeded by a change of outward circumstances for the worse. These dear suffering ones were afterwards removed to another dungeon, into which no light entered. That cruel mode of punishment was most trying to these five prisoners, for the want of fresh air was added to the misery of darkness.

How little do we know what utter darkness means, who have the bright sun by day and the moon and stars by night, and have our rooms cheerfully lighted up within! During the hours of rest darkness is an aid to sleep, but our waking eyes naturally prefer the sunlight. Terrible indeed must it be to wake up in the morning and see no sun to pass the long hours of day and still no ray of light, each day and night repeating the same dark and dreary tale! No wonder that total darkness makes one sad and ill and had not some relief been speedily given to these captives, death would soon have ended their imprisonment. A person interested in those sufferers contrived through bribing one of the guards, to obtain for them the privilege of getting out of their narrow cell for a short time daily. Though not out of the prison, yet a purer air and the precious boon of daylight were much valued, and thankfully received.

What a sorrowful sight could then be seen, as their pale faces and wasted frames showed the dire effects of the gloomy dungeon! Each looking upon the other must have been painfully conscious of

the decline of health during those days of darkness. But they were also able to speak words of cheer and comfort to the heart, and see the eye light up with joy and brightness — a joy and brightness that sprang not from the earth, and which the dungeon's gloom failed to touch or to mar. In the light of day, Vivia Perpetua could now look upon her helpless babe, and profit thereby in mingled joy and sadness. The dear infant child was the companion of its mother's outward misery, yet was it happy in the mother's love. Child-like, it understood not its surroundings, so that its spirit was unaffected by them. As for the mother, she was happy and cheerful in spite of all her painful circumstances.

These days, however, came suddenly to a severe and testing end. In the midst of their prison meal they were one day unexpectedly startled by the presence of a company of soldiers. These men had come to take them to the place of trial before their judges. There, questions were asked of them which only gave to all an opportunity of declaring their belief in Christ Jesus their Saviour. At the moment when the lady Perpetua was being examined, a very sorrowful and trying scene took place. The aged father once more appeared, and appealed to his daughter on the ground of her natural affection. "Have pity on your babe," he implored. The judge also made an appeal for both father and babe. "Spare the grey hairs of your father, spare your infant, and offer sacrifices to the Emperor." Heart-broken though the daughter must have felt, yet she faltered not. When the judge finished his appeal with the question "Are you a Christian?" it only drew from the lady the decisive reply, "I am a Christian." To add to the anguish already rending her heart, she was called upon to bear still more from her persecutors. Her poor old father was torn from her side, and ordered to be beaten because of his daughter's steadfast faith and confession! Very keenly did Vivia Perpetua feel her parent's sorrowful position in being thus shamefully treated for her sake; yet true and firm the woman's heart was kept, for neither as a loving daughter, nor a youthful tender mother, was her brave spirit allowed to yield. No, like Paul, she was able to count everything but loss that she might win Christ. The sentence pronounced upon Vivia Perpetua and her four companions brought a trying prospect before them. It was one very common in those days of heathen power, but none the less shocking and painful to those persons who were thus called upon to die. They were condemned to be torn by wild beasts who had been kept without food for some days to make them more fierce and hungry. Only think of these wild ravenous creatures being let loose on weak and helpless women, by the wish and will of human beings! Yet with such a death before them, it is said that they "went back with cheerfulness to the prison." The choice had been given these five faithful ones of avoiding that sentence of death by yielding to worship idols. But no, life was too dear for them at such a price, since it meant disobedience to the word of God. The prospect of the end was sweeter far to souls who knew and loved the Saviour for His own matchless worth. The meek and quiet behaviour of these five condemned prisoners spoke of the divine life which God had given. None might touch or take from them that precious treasure. The Lord while on earth had said, "I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand." In the lowly example of the suffering Jesus they found a perfect pattern, and they sought to follow in His steps. The men who had charge of them were moved with compassion when they saw their gentle ways, and granted them favours which they were not ordered to give. They willingly permitted friends to visit them during their last days on earth. This was a great boon, giving opportunity for farewell words of love and affection to the dear ones from whom they were parted. At last the solemn day dawned, when Vivia Perpetua and her four companions were led forth to die. Once more a determined effort was made to get these Christians to deny their

Saviour. They were requested to bow down to idols, and thus own themselves heathen worshippers. But not even immediate exposure to the fury of those wild beasts sufficed to make them yield. These faithful ones preferred the cruel death that was before them, rather than to save their souls by dishonouring the name of their Lord.

We shall not follow that heart-rending scene through all its horrors, for they are too awful to relate. When death did at last release these captive ones from earth, it was only joyfully to usher them into the presence of their Lord.

Such was one of many displays of man's hate to God in the early centuries of the church's history. Raised seats overlooked the open space where the animals and victims were placed. And strange to say, many a human eye gazed upon those cruel sights, and took pleasure in the martyr's sufferings and death. But other eyes than those of men, looked down upon the inhuman spectacle. God, who "with-draweth not his eyes from the righteous," watched over those patient, persecuted saints, and turned the eye of faith upward to Him. With what tender pity did the Father's heart feel for them! And how must the blessed Lord, for whose name they had endured such sufferings, have looked down upon them in loving sympathy! Angels, too, gazed upon the sorrowful sight, and it was theirs to minister to those whom man despised.

What a scene to call forth our mingled feelings, as in thought we retrace the long centuries of the past! Under the promptings of Satan, man was following out the desires of his own evil heart. On the other hand, dear saints of God were patiently enduring, not only shame and scorn, but actual bodily pain. God sustained them, and the Spirit comforted till death snapped the tie that bound them to earth, and set them free for ever. Then had the blessed Lord the unspeakable joy of having His own with Himself in peace and love without alloy.

One cannot help pitying the aged and affectionate father in the helplessness of his grief. Oh, if he had only known the Christ of God, who was the object of his daughter's heart, how different would all have been! He would then have been able to understand that his beloved daughter possessed a hidden imperishable treasure, of more value than even life itself. His own heart too, would have been comforted by the presence of a sympathising Saviour and he could then have looked forward to a reunion in glory. But he knew not the secret strength which was her stay, nor the living Person who upheld her and therefore could only see sorrow and gloom. The old grey-haired gentleman was completely bowed down with the agony of his grief. Little wonder was it indeed, for the affectionate father only saw his loved one about to die. The gloom of death seemed to him to separate them for ever. One can only hope that in his sorrow he may have turned the eye to the Saviour, who has said, "Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out."

03 Chapter 3. Youthful Witnesses — Cyril, Denisa, Marcus and Marcellanious.

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Many hundred years ago, a little boy of the name of Cyril, was called upon to lay down his life for Christ. His father was a heathen, and hated Christianity, yet his youthful son did not hide from him, or from any, the fact that he believed in the Lord Jesus. Unhindered by the fear of man, Cyril was known as one who prayed to God, and neither punishment nor aught else could make him desist.

Enraged at this conduct, the cruel father sent him from his home, sternly declaring that he would no longer regard him as his son. This young believer was then taken before a judge, who endeavoured to reason him out of his faith. He told Cyril that he ought to obey parental authority, and that if he would do so he might return to his home, and all the past would be forgiven. The noble-hearted boy knew that he was called to obey One higher than his father, and the latter only "in the Lord." Since his parent was not allowing him to own the Lordship of Christ, he chose "to obey God rather than men," like the apostles of old. Cyril told his judge that he must ever be obedient to the Lord Jesus Christ, adding, "I am not sorry because I am turned out of the house, for I have a better mansion and I am not afraid to die, because then I shall have a better house."

Still hoping to make the boy yield, the judge endeavoured to frighten him into submission. He therefore commanded him to be fettered and taken from his presence, as if about to be put to death. But yield he would not, in spite of all that the judge could say or do, and even the flames before his eyes did not alarm him. Truly God alone gave the needed strength to that youthful witness, and stayed his heart upon Himself. "I am going to a better home," said he, "and greater pleasures; make haste and kill me, that I may enjoy them."

Some wept as they looked upon that young and courageous boy on the brink of the grave, while full of health and vigour. To these, Cyril said, "Oh, you know not what a city I am going to live in, or what a hope I have!" His longing was soon realised, for the precious young life was quickly taken, and that happy spirit freed to enter into the presence of the Lord. There, with the blessed One whom he had loved and trusted on earth, dear Cyril entered into rest, in the spring-time of his youthful days. My dear young reader, would you thus willingly die for Christ, if life were offered on such persuasive terms? You could only do so by having the heart first "set on brighter things above." Jesus Christ, the Son of God, must be known as your Saviour, ere you could say in confidence that your home is with Him. Yet the grace that was given to Cyril, is also free for you.

Death may overtake you, therefore why remain undecided any longer? Choose while young the way of life that leads to pleasures which are at God's right hand for evermore. Jesus saith, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me."

Many a grey-headed old man would give all he possesses to have the opportunity of giving to God the best of his days. Yes, and strong able men in the prime of life, have frequent regrets that they turned not to God in their youth. Oh, it is a privilege far beyond what you my youthful reader can at present understand, to be the Lord's while you are young! "Turn ye, turn ye . . . for why will ye die?"

I should like also to tell my young readers of a young girl, who like Cyril, suffered in those early days of Christianity. Her name was Denisa, and her age sixteen, when she comes before our notice in history. The circumstance which made known her faith was a sudden exclamation from her lips as she gazed upon a suffering Christian. The latter was a man who had been commanded to sacrifice to idols, and at first firmly refused, but being put upon the rack the pain at last became more than he could bear. In such an hour of weakness he denied the faith for the sake of life! No sooner had this denial fallen from his lips, than the intensity of his suffering so rapidly increased, that he died immediately! Denisa had been looking on this scene, and was greatly appalled at the sudden and solemn occurrence. On the impulse of the moment, she exclaimed with great feeling, "O, unhappy wretch! why would you buy a moment's ease at the expense of a miserable eternity?"

Optimus, the pro-consul of Asia, under whose direction the torture had been going on, overheard her words, and quickly asked, "Are you a Christian?" Denisa replied by boldly confessing Christ, as she owned with courage that blessed name.

Immediately the hatred of the pagan was aroused by the mention of the holy One whom he despised and hated. He commanded the young girl to offer sacrifice to the idols, but all he could say was unavailing. Denisa stood firm, and bow to other than the one God, she neither would nor could. Optimus, in great wrath, then delivered her into the hands of two brutal men she was placed wholly in their power, and her position was terrible in the extreme.

God interposed, however, on behalf of His suffering witness, and those wretched men became powerless to do her harm. At the dead hour of night they were startled by a sight which alarmed them greatly. So much were they overcome by the effects of that vision of the night, that they even cried to her for mercy. Throwing themselves at the feet of the helpless girl, they entreated her to pray for them, fearing that they were about to suffer at the hands of God for the evil done to this Christian. That midnight scene makes one think of the words of Eliphaz the Temanite in the book of Job. "In thoughts from the visions of the night, when deep sleep falleth on men, fear came upon me, and trembling, which made all my bones to shake." The heart which knows God in Christ need never be afraid, for nothing can overtake that soul for hurt. David, the psalmist, says, by the Spirit of God, "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them."

If the words of Eliphaz might have been uttered by these wicked men, those of David were true in Denisa's case, for God protected her in youth and helplessness. One would have thought that Optimus would have feared to lay hands on her again. But daring as ever in his wickedness, that cruel man soon gave orders for her execution, and rudely brought that precious life to an early and untimely end. Denisa was beheaded, but, like many others, only to leave a scene of sorrow for a home of eternal bliss. A christian lady many hundreds of years since Cyril and Denisa ended their brief young lives, has written: At thy right hand there are pleasures, There are pleasures for evermore; In the depth of thy glory are treasures — A measureless, countless store." And surely could they speak to us from their happy abode on high, their words would only confirm the truth of

the word of God expressed in this beautiful verse. Not only is there infinite and eternal bliss at God's right hand, but there is a risen glorified Man there, who waits in patience to have His own in that bright scene with Him. It is to Him the eye of faith is directed, and with Him the waiting believer desires to be. Ah, if we long to see His face, how must He also be looking forward to the moment when He will come from that radiant place for us, His blood-bought people! We rest in the faithfulness of His parting words, "I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."

"What will it be to dwell above, And with the Lord of glory reign, Since the blest knowledge of his love So brightens all this dreary plain? No heart can think, no tongue can tell What joy 'twill be with Christ to dwell." At the time when these young Christians' lives were rudely snatched from them, the trial of their faith was different from that which was given to others in after centuries. Yet, in each case, through nearly nineteen hundred years, the true test has been the name of Christ. Circumstances only changed as time rolled on, and the persecuting power was not a heathen one. In those early days the demand was — worship idols or die. In later times it was a contest between a true and a false Christianity.

Different modes of punishment were adopted in those early days, which usually corresponded with the habits and ways of the people. Cruelty in varied forms was ever exercised, and men grew ingenious in their plans when devising the most painful kinds of torture. But though the times grew darker and increasingly dangerous, yet the few believers in Jesus scattered here and there were kept faithful amid much temptation. As it was said in the days of the Judges, when Israel's history was indeed a dark one, so may we say of the true-hearted in those early centuries: "The word of God was precious in those days."

After shewing the faith of this little boy and girl, I want now to tell my reader about two brothers, as an instance of faithful witnesses whose words and conduct brought blessing to others. Marcus and Marcellianus were young Romans of noble family who lived towards the end of the third century. (Cyril and Denisa confessed Christ and died. Marcus and Marcellianus believed in Jesus and were permitted to live a little longer.) These two boys were under the charge of tutors while receiving their education. The guardians to whom they were thus committed were Christians, while the parents of the children were heathens. As such they would, in all probability, have brought up their boys, had they been more directly under their care. The fact therefore of these brothers being brought up under christian influence caused them to be closely watched. Their conduct evidently proved them to be Christians, and they were accordingly arrested. They were first cruelly put to torture, and then condemned to die. Their friends pleaded for the sentence to be delayed for one month, and that request was granted. During that period, parents as well as relatives, used every effort to make them abandon the christian faith, but all without avail.

God kept these two dear boys faithful amid all these temptations, and then largely rewarded their faith and firmness. The consequence was that the whole family nominally left Paganism, but whether every one turned to Christ I cannot tell. When the father was examined about the faith of his sons and if he had succeeded in getting them to turn again to worship idols, he startled the judge by telling him, that on the contrary, he was himself a Christian. Proceeding then to tell the prefect (who was questioning him) of the truths he held, he so fully convinced him of the reality of Christianity, that the latter turned from idols to serve the living God. Thus the testimony of these

christian brothers was blessed to not a few in the course of a very short time.

04 Chapter 4. Rome and Popery.

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What memories of persons, events, buildings, secular and sacred, are called up before the mind when we utter the name of Rome! How they crowd before the mental vision, and call forth varied feelings of admiration, pity, enthusiasm, or indifference! Rome on her seven hills, ruling the earth, calling herself "the eternal city," and claiming to her name the admiration of all — proud, imperious, powerful in the past! But Rome of to-day tells of departed greatness, of empty state, of power lost, and the vain show of a nominal greatness is all that remains. Such is that proud city in our time, a city which once made herself supreme in the church and the world.

If the greatness of Rome is a thing of the past, there still remain the relics of what it has been. The place itself is therefore a spot of absorbing interest to many a one in our own day, as well as in times gone by. In writing of it at the present moment, my object is not to tell of what the city has been, nor what it now is, but to explain a little the different terms in common use concerning Rome. That my young reader may clearly understand, it becomes necessary to touch on this well-known name. The "Church of Rome" is a familiar expression, which as commonly used, does not refer to a building. Nor does it refer to the church of which God speaks in His word. The Romish church is a religious system in which the people who belong to it, are ruled over by a man who lives in Rome. I should like to tell you by-the-way, that at the present time the city itself possesses more than three hundred religious edifices of various kinds.

Some of them are considered places of great attraction, and are remarkable for their historic interest. As buildings, their value, beauty, and grandeur, have gained a world-wide fame. St. Peter's, whose dome rises high above the city, was 120 years in building, and is the largest in the world. Rome of to-day has still much in common with the past: its grand old hills, its flowing Tiber, the sunny sky of Italy and the verdant lands of a southern clime. The vine and the olive, the orange-tree and the citron, still flourish around as in days of yore. But the size of the city is only one-third of what it once was. The church founded by the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost, did not long retain the simple character of its early days. At first the fact was very fully owned that the people of God were separated to Himself. This implied practical separation from everything that was not according to God. But as time went on, errors crept in; little by little hearts got away from the Lord, and were thus exposed to the temptations of Satan. When the church and the world came to be on friendly terms, the name and place of a Christian were less despised. Hence many took the name and followed the outward thing, who in their inmost souls knew not God. Such had no scruples as to what they did, but considered that they might do that which pleased either themselves or others. With no life in their souls, they were but empty professors, understanding not that God alone was to be satisfied. And thus meaningless forms and ceremonies took the place of that which the Lord had enjoined.

There was one class of men who took upon them to approach God on behalf of their fellow creatures. Assuming to be better than their fellows, they called themselves by the name of priests. A little attention to the word of God would have saved them from taking such an unwarranted place. For the Holy Ghost in the Scriptures distinctly speaks of all believers as an "holy priesthood." "Praise to God continually" is the only sacrifice which is asked from those who have trusted in Christ. He offered one sacrifice for sins. But these self-made priests said that there must be a daily repetition, in which the bread used to remember the Lord's death would actually become His body again. That empty ceremony, so contrary to the teaching of the word of God, is called "The Mass;" and it is actually being performed daily at the present time. In addition to the ordinary priests, one man from their midst, considering himself still better than they, took a yet higher place. That priest said that Christ had appointed him here on the earth instead of Himself, now that He had gone to heaven. The man in that position received the name of "Pope," which is a word meaning "father." Such a place was never given to mortal man, for none could represent a holy God. That title is expressly forbidden by the Lord in Matthew 23:9. When Christ, the Head of the Church, went on high, the Holy Ghost was sent to be here on His behalf. So neither the first pope, nor any who succeeded him, could have any scriptural authority for taking such a position. Of "the heavenly gift" Peter thus spake to the Jews when the Spirit came down. ". . . Jesus hath God raised up . . . therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear." (Acts 2:32-33.) The Lord also had said while on the earth, "The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things." (John 14:26.)

Having therefore a divine Person dwelling in the church of God, the believer ought to submit to His rule, and to those whom He appoints. Hence the assumption of a class of men to be priests, and one man to be pope, are distinct errors which gradually crept into the church hundreds of years ago. No wonder then, that godly souls have been found in all ages who have refused to own such men as part of the Church of God, willing rather to submit to death than bow to them. The word pope was originally given to every bishop, but principally to the bishop of Alexandria. In time, however, it came to be a title belonging only to the bishops of Rome. The latter city then took an important place, as being the abode of him who styled himself "Head of the church" and "Vicar of God." When, therefore, a man and a city were in such prominence in the church, it became known among men as "the church of Rome."

Obedience to the pope had taken the place of obedience to Christ. Hence, though it is christian in name, the term popery more truly stamps its character. In the Epistle to the Ephesians we read "The church is subject unto Christ." But the professing church had submitted to the pope, and dared not call in question anything which that dignitary said or did. Still, even when things had reached this corrupt stage, not a few true believers were to be found therein. Though a mass of people had come in who were Christians only in name, yet God had still the wheat where the tares abounded. With an empty religion and no Christ, with dead works and no faith, we need not wonder that the scriptures were set aside and tradition accepted. The pope ruled instead of Christ, and the followers of the former had corrupted Christianity into popery. The secret of all this failure lay in the lack of separation from the world and the neglect of the word of God. In proportion as Christians were true and faithful to their heavenly calling, so was the church a witness for Christ. But when the ways of the world were brought in, the name of the Lord was dishonoured. The

results of fidelity in the few who remained steadfast were simply suffering and persecution in some form or other. It is the old hatred of men and Satan to the Person of the Lord Jesus, because, as the holy One, His presence condemns all sin. Listen to the parting words spoken to the disciples whom He loved while He walked this earth: "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." (John 15:18-19.) But who and what is the world? one may ask. Let John the apostle give the short but divinely inspired answer. "All that is in the world . . . is not of the Father, but is of the world." Scripture does not, in these verses, speak of the earth on which we live as the world. Nor does it refer to the number of human beings composing it, as we often use the term. But it is applied to everything which is only of man, and not of God in any sense. Speaking of Him who delivers us from "this present evil world," Paul says that "Our Lord Jesus Christ gave himself for our sins . . . according to the will of God our Father." (Galatians 1:4.) When the Spirit of Christ was lacking, men began to interpret scripture according to their own ideas. As these were false and their hearts corrupt, all went wrong. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God . . . neither can he know them." The popish authorities then began to compel all to do as they did or die. Thus they imagined that they would uproot every thing and person opposed to them. Ah, their poor deluded souls little dreamt that the life was eternal that they were endeavouring to touch! Vain was the attempt in their self-will and ignorance. They were fighting against God and could not overcome.

Those who dared to differ from the Romish church were called "heretics." The fact of their faith in Christ and resistance to popery was styled "heresy." Heresy and heretics are words which have often been wrongfully applied. In Paul's able speech at Caesarea before Felix the governor, he used the word, saying, "After the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers." The papists apply the term "heretic" to all who are not of their creed. There are other Christians also who dare to speak thus of those who differ from them, yet cling to the word of God. Let us remember that heresy is one of the works of the flesh, as mentioned in the Epistle to the Galatians, and that it is the same word as sect or schism.

Even supposing, however, that every one who differed from the Romish church was a heretic, scripture gives no authority for putting such to death. No, nor yet putting bodily suffering of any kind upon them. A schismatic or heretic may be looked upon as one who breaks from the path of walking in truth. The word of God counsels the saints to admonish such a one. If he remain hardened after this has been once or twice done, then he is to be rejected. (Titus 3:10.) Thus men, instead of acting in the blindness of a zeal without knowledge, would have done better to have listened to the voice of God, and not to that which is always wrong, the "evil heart of unbelief."

"The atoning work is done;The Victim's blood is shed;And Jesus now is goneHis people's cause to plead:He stands in heaven their great High Priest, And bears their names upon his breast."

05 Chapter 5. Spain and the Inquisition.

Chapter 5.

Spain and the Inquisition.

I have no doubt that many of my readers would like to see the beautiful sunny shores of Spain. The very name makes one think of flowers, fruits and sunshine, blue skies and balmy air. The lovely waters of the Mediterranean on one side, and the bold free Atlantic on the other, give to the peninsula a very attractive coast-line. The country itself has an interesting variety of hill and dale, river and plain; hence the climate also differs much, according to the height or exposure of a place.

Oak and chestnut trees clothe the hills in the north, and the valleys produce rich and abundant harvests. That part is therefore in a measure like our temperate isles, only there may be greater fertility and richness. Towards the south the climate partakes of a semi-tropical character, and therefore life and vegetation are both abundant. What child does not connect oranges, grapes, and raisins with the glowing southern shores of Spain? The middle of the country is not so pleasant. The scorching heat of a burning sun at one time, and the cold of a piercing wind at another, are extremes which some find very trying. From the beginning of the christian era till within a few hundred years ago, Spain was very different from what it is now. To-day, the mass of the people are very ignorant; formerly, it was a land noted for its learning. At present its possessions are few, at one time they were far and wide. That "the sun never sets on her dominions," is said of our own beloved land now, it might also have been said of Spain some centuries ago. God's glad tidings were also preached, but for a time refused, and now consciences are fettered, and the people kept in ignorance of the word of God. In the days when such hindering influences began other evils crept in, and Spain's bright days of learning, power and freedom were over.

It was necessary in a former chapter to explain the words pope, priests, popery, and heresy. Another name, well-known only a few hundred years ago, comes under our notice now. I refer to the wicked Court of the Inquisition established by the Church of Rome, and with which Spain was very intimately connected. The object of the Court was the punishment and destruction of "heretics," and many faithful children of God were tortured and put to death by its means. This Court was composed of a number of men who made a show of justice, but from the moment that a person suspected as a heretic came before it, persecution and revenge — not justice — marked its course. In many a popish town those dark and gloomy prisons rose to view, striking terror when the thought of being within came before the mind. Their iron bars, the strong and cheerless walls, their size and gloom, all told a tale of unrelenting power and cruelty. Having once entered, the victim would there remain, or only pass outward to the flames as the end and aim of all. There were many cells, some of which were below the level of the streets; and some were even cut in the rocks, and were very cold and damp. The light of day never reached them, nor could any groan be heard above. Neither the passer-by nor the cruel persecutor need be disturbed, for the loudest cry could reach no pitying ear.

Force was the ruling power there, while violence was displayed in its direst forms, for the working of this awful Inquisition was fully in keeping with its dark and gloomy cells. Deeds of darkness of various kinds took place within its walls; but the vilest thing was the fact, that all was done in the name of Christianity and zeal for the church! The Court which was held there consisted of three men in prominent positions in the land. All were, of course, keen advocates of Romanism, and filled with deadly hatred to all who differed from them in their religious opinions. Especially was their enmity directed against the word of God, for that would have given light to a people whom they desired to keep in ignorance.

Over two thousand years before, David the King of Israel, wrote as he sang one of his sweet psalms to Jehovah: "The entrance of thy words giveth light, it giveth understanding unto the simple." In all ages, the sons of men who have turned from their own ways to serve the living God, have found these words true; and, consequently, they have cherished the precious life-giving word of God. As the scriptures were read, so individuals made progress in the truth of God; taught by the Holy Spirit, they followed the Christ of whom these testified; thus their lives became known and their enemies began to watch for opportunities of reporting them. It is a person's works which make manifest that which he is in heart; so the scriptures tell us, "Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit." (Matthew 7:16-17.)

Let us follow a little the usual mode of procedure when a victim was obtained for the Inquisition. We take an imaginary case to shew its character as carried out in many. A young girl in a certain town is observed to be reading the Bible; she has even been heard to sing a hymn. The empty forms of the religion in which she has been brought up have lost all charm for her. The mass she no longer attends, and she has ceased to make the sign of the cross. Her ways are quiet and her behaviour gentle, being more dutiful to her parents than before. All that she is in herself, however, will not make amends for this marked fact, that the Romish church obtains no honour from her now. The pope, the priests, the people, all demand this homage, or the fearful alternative — her life.

Some bigoted Romanist observes the change, and reports her to head-quarters; that is, he tells a priest or some official in authority who is a papist. The person who carries the tidings of what he sees is a "spy," and obtains an expected reward for the tale he tells. Alas, it usually brought death to the unsuspecting victim! Not only were spies employed to give information, but other mean men were employed to fetch the victim, and these messengers of the Inquisition were called "familiars." The latter took care that it should not be easily known who or what they were. A long dark cloak was worn, the hood of which covered the head and face. The only parts of the body exposed were the two eyes and hands. The time considered most suitable to set out on their errands of cruelty was night, as the person would then be more easily found. In day-light the knowledge that the "familiars" were on their way, might however give time to escape. Not so at night, for then the surprise was perfect. In the sweetness of sleep the victim would be suddenly roused, and sternly ordered to follow those wretched messengers. And whither go they with that gentle maiden in the dark hours of night? On to the cruel gloom of the Inquisition; and soon they have led their unresisting charge before their superiors. In them the same cruel spirit is brutally manifest, and no mercy can be expected there. These so-called judges then go through a pretence of an examination. Perfectly needless indeed it is, because their one intention is to punish the victim

now in their grasp. Justice was a meaningless name, but it suited their purpose thus to speak of their proceedings. In the dark shadows of a dimly lighted room sit the judges. Before them stands a cross of wood, and on the table lies a paper containing the accusation. Whether true or not it matters little to them; all they want is something on which to condemn. Hence the most dreadful untruths were frequently written against one who was no criminal, and guilty of any offence. As it was with Daniel, so the only true occasion these enemies could often find, was "concerning the law of his God." The accused, being charged with the things written, was not allowed to say much. But generally the answer given was a brave and noble confession of faith in Christ. Frequently a fearlessness of death was expressed, and oft-times it was esteemed a privilege to die. Coaxing, threatening, entreaty — everything was tried to get the accused to say that Rome was right. In other words, the arrested person was asked to give up believing in Christ, and to set aside the word of God, for both were implied in the denial of that which was felt to be true. To go back to the Church of Rome was the one thing demanded.

Sometimes terror drove the victim to give up Christ for the pope's authority. This was called "recanting," that is withdrawing a former opinion. It is also spoken of as "abjuration," when the recanting is by oath. Many stood firm, refusing to deny their Lord. Where Christianity had only been an outward thing, it was natural and easy to recant to avoid suffering. But where through fear a child of God did so, it was generally followed by deep repentance, and the sin confessed before others. When persuasion failed, the next step was to shew the arrested person the instruments of torture soon to be felt. For if first attempts availed not to produce recantation, fresh efforts were put forth when the prisoner was on the rack. The latter produced the most dreadful sufferings, every joint in the body being dislocated. The instruments of torture are too awful to dwell upon, so I shall simply mention another. Besides the rack, a second mode of causing agony was before the victim's gaze. A pulley raised the person from the floor, after heavy iron weights had been attached to the feet. The cord was then let go, and the helpless one suddenly dropped to the ground, grazing his back on spiked rollers as he descended. Such are specimens of the cruel tortures of the Inquisition.

Everything that wicked hearts could suggest and brains devise to inflict suffering, was to be found in those dreadful rooms. After the savage persecutors had retained their prisoners long enough to suit their fiendish purposes, they led them forth to die. Most were rendered unable to walk, crippled for ever by what they had undergone. The cold, damp dungeon had been a relief; and death was looked forward to as ending their terrible sufferings. No wonder then, that they left their gloomy cells frequently with joy as well as peace upon the heart and countenance; for a speedy release to the presence of the Lord lay in prospect for them. The greatest efforts were made to extract from the prisoners, such information as would lead to the arrest of others. In great bodily pain, this was sometimes obtained, but most very nobly maintained silence on the point. Great courage and patience were shewn by very many, which must have spoken loudly to hard and stony hearts; and they sought not to avenge themselves, but — "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord."

06 Chapter 6. Maria De Bohorques Martyred at Seville.

Chapter 6.

Maria De Bohorques Martyred at Seville.

Maria De Bohorques was a Spanish maiden, only one year younger than the mother of whom a former chapter tells. This young lady lived some hundreds of years later than the noble Vivia Perpetua. Both, however, were alike in the fact, that their earthly position was good, and also that they preferred death rather than to deny their Lord. The home of each was in the sunny south, but the blue waters of the Mediterranean rolled between. The lady Vivia Perpetua lived and suffered in Carthage, while Seville was the scene of the martyrdom of Maria de Bohorques.

All that wealth and rank could procure lay before this Spanish daughter, for her youth was passed with every luxury surrounding her. None of these things held her heart, however, for she possessed a better and more enduring treasure, which far outweighed them all. Maria de Bohorques knew Jesus as her Saviour, and was happy in the sense of His everlasting love. In the sixteenth century in which she lived, there was more gospel light in that priest-ridden country than at the present time. There were many homes in Spain where the word of God was read, believed, and valued in those days. The gentleman who acted as tutor to the young Maria, was one of the most learned men of that day. His name was Dr. Gil. He was a Christian, and the Bible was to him no sealed book. His youthful pupil had with him the great advantage of studying the scriptures in the original language. God gave His own blessing in the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ the Lord. He, and He only, can bring home with power to the heart, the written and the living Word.

Like many more, this young lady learned alone with God that His salvation is full and free, and that it is to "whosoever will," that the water of life is freely offered. You, my reader, do not live in those trying days when it was considered a crime to be seen reading the Bible. Yet, it may be, that you know not Christ, and are as dark in mind as any popish child. Oh, it will indeed be a solemn thing for you, if you "neglect so great salvation" — you who have the Bible in your native tongue, and whose privilege it is to hear the joyful sound of God's glad tidings. Come, oh come, "while it is called to-day," and trust the loving Saviour in glory, who once died for sin, but is now alive for evermore. In the days when Maria de Bohorques was drawn to Jesus, every Christian was closely watched. As soon as they were known to be such, many eyes were upon them; yes, and many a heart thirsted for their blood. Spies were never lacking to make known the victim, and the awful horrors of the Inquisition speedily became a reality to the persons arrested. The Inquisitors of Seville were not less severe in their dealings than those of other Spanish towns, and the mode of suddenly claiming a victim was as Satanic as elsewhere. The dear, gentle Maria knew the outside of the gloomy prison, and had heard not a little, doubtless, of the proceedings of that well-known Court. And full well she knew the possibility of her feet having to pass within those gates, to suffer for Christ when her faith should become known. Therefore, alone on her knees, she oftentimes cried to God for strength to meet the arrival of that dread hour. When the moment did come, her prayer was answered, and meekly she met the prospect before her. Suddenly, the high-born maiden was

snatched from the comforts of her luxurious home, and led within those dismal Inquisition walls. There she was taken to a secret room, to be questioned as to faith in Christ or allegiance to Rome.

Human friend or helper she had none, when, in the defencelessness of her youth and sex, Maria de Bohorques stood before those heartless judges. The room was quite in keeping with the dark deeds enacted there, for all was shade and gloom. Enveloped in shadow, and scarcely recognisable, sat those men who professed to try the suspected one. But it was a poor trial where justice was unknown, for the sentence was sure and certain, whatever the accused might say. Like cruel hawks, those keen-sighted men were only eager and ready to pounce upon their prey. All kinds of inducements were held out, to make a timid one deny the faith, but promises made with this object were usually broken, and death was certain to be the result. At first, persuasion was tried in Maria's case, and smooth words were spoken. The judges declared that their desire was to restore her soul, which, they said, had wandered from God and the church. These statements did not succeed however in entrapping the courageous girl, but only drew from her lips an open confession of her faith. Her would-be judges then became very angry, and threatened to make her yield. But neither had this method any effect, for the cry of her heart was going up to God, and He strengthened her to be faithful. The instruments of torture were shewn, and Maria was made to understand that her body should soon feel their power. Yet even the sight of those awful horrors failed to make her courage give way. She refused to call herself a papist, or acknowledge, in any way, the Church of Rome. The next step was an effort to get Maria to mention any others who were of the same faith. To this they at first received no reply, for their victim would not give the slightest information. But, alas, for human nature! the reply was at last obtained. When put upon the rack she owned, in her agony, that her sister had conversed with her about her faith. This was told in a moment of bodily weakness, and most bitterly repented of, for it brought to torture and to death her own beloved sister, and this was no small grief. Yet who could wonder at the dear suffering girl if, to stop her agony, her firmness gave way for a moment, and the fatal intelligence was given? The joints were starting from their sockets, and her body felt as if being torn limb from limb. And men, inhuman, hard-hearted men — whose bodies could feel like her own — turned the awful instrument, and gloated over her sufferings like wild beasts! How comforting to know, that that once suffering child of God is now for ever with the Lord, having entered into rest! The body waits the resurrection-morn, and the spirit has returned to God who gave it. Departing to be with Christ, which is far better than earth's brightest scenes, the noble, true-hearted Maria de Bohorques left behind for ever the sorrows of the way.

Maria was taken from the rack to a cold damp cell, where, at least, rest and quiet were to be had. Even the discomforts of that dreary place were welcome, after the horrors of the rack, and the ceaseless voices of her tormentors. There in calmness she awaited the expected end, while she encouraged herself in the Lord her God.

Once more an empty form of trial was gone through, and then sentence was passed upon the already crippled victim. Maria de Bohorques was condemned to be burnt at the stake, with other believers who, like herself, preferred to die rather than deny the Lord. One would have thought that the helpless condition of the dear young sufferer would have drawn pity from the hearts of the men who judged her. Alas, they were too hardened by such sights, and too greedy of their prey, to be melted by any such feeling. Unable to walk, from the effects of the rack, Maria had the additional pain of being borne by those who only hated her and sought her destruction. No love was there to

brighten her earthly path as it neared the end, yet the love of God shone in her heart, and gave her a joy beyond that of earth. The quiet of the cell into which she was carried was soon broken in upon by visits from various priests. Her rank and position made them eager to win her back to the Romish Church, if at all possible. Every plan they could think of was tried, to persuade the courageous girl to recant, but all were alike useless. She must have been wearied with their foolish arguments, yet patience was given her to endure. Wisdom, too, was not wanting to return the fitted answers, while a firmness, which God alone could have given, kept Maria de Bohorques steadfast and true.

Gentle firmness marked the ways and words of that Spanish lady, and true nobility of character shone out in those closing days of her youthful life. But God was the Giver of all, for the natural heart could never have produced such gentleness, wisdom, or patience. The same beautiful spirit towards all, was shewn to the end of that brief life. The Great Square of Seville was chosen as the public place whence this young believer was to depart to be with Christ. Even her last evening on earth was disturbed by the crafty priests again visiting her in her place of imprisonment, hoping to see her yield at the last through fear of death. But death had no sting for that courageous heart. The popish hopes of restoring to the Church of Rome that gifted daughter of a noble Spanish family, were therefore dashed to the ground. And well that it was so since life could only be obtained by denying Him who had shed His blood for her.

Once again that youthful witness was carried from her miserable cell, but now borne forth to die for the Lord she loved. She was not only peaceful, but a surprising cheerfulness was distinctly manifest. Being happy herself, that dear one was free in heart to encourage and cheer her fellow-sufferers. Other women were amongst the number, and she spent life's last moments seeking to strengthen their faith in God. Maria shewed neither fear nor timidity, but a holy boldness marked her rejoicing end. When bound to the stake, she asked her fellow-martyrs to join her in singing a psalm. That was more than her wicked enemies would allow. It made the dying ones too much like victors (as they truly were), when they could praise God in face of death. So they gagged the mouth of Maria de Bohorques, that she might cease to lead others to praise the living God. That was an indignity not usually put upon women, so Maria was distinguished by this additional suffering for the name of the Lord.

Before the pile of wood was lighted, the gag was removed, the sentence again read, and a last appeal made for the martyrs to abjure their faith. The same calmness continued unbroken as Maria distinctly uttered the words, "I neither can nor will recant." At a later moment, with the lighted torch before her eyes, she was again entreated to own the Church of Rome. She replied with a repetition of her faith, and continued speaking till the moment when, in their wrath, they strangled her, and thus added to their own guilt and condemnation. On the 24th of September, 1559, Maria de Bohorques was "absent from the body, present with the Lord," and the lighted fagots soon consumed her body to dust which now awaits the resurrection-morn.

07 Chapter 7. John Rogers — A Husband and Father Burnt at Smithfield.

Chapter 7.

John Rogers — A Husband and Father Burnt at Smithfield. In these days of liberty in our cherished England, it is difficult to realise the bondage of the past. That there was a time when it was considered a crime to read the word of God, seems hard for us to understand. A great deal depends upon the sovereign, and we owe much, under God, to the peaceful reign of our honoured Queen. There have been monarchs on the throne of England who would neither read the Bible themselves nor allow their subjects to do so. In their self-will and ignorance, they quite overlooked the fact, that a man's conscience is not a thing which a sovereign can order, as he would a servant. He may command his subjects outwardly to accept the religion preferred by royalty; but a man can never be made to believe that which he doubts, even at the command of a monarch.

Such a vain attempt did Mary, Queen of England, make, in seeking to compel her people to follow popery. For there beat honest hearts on English soil, who would not forswear their conscience to suit a monarch's folly. Consequently such faithful ones were made to suffer, and many to die, to please the blood-thirsty queen. Her reign was so full of bloodshed that her name is handed down in history with that word which ever reminds us of her ungodly deeds. The young King Edward VI., who preceded her, had honoured the Bible and given perfect liberty in his kingdom regarding the sacred book. Nay more, he encouraged the study of it, by having a large copy placed where any one might read. This plan for bringing the scriptures within reach of the people had been adopted by his father, Henry VIII., sixteen years before, though not from any personal love for the word, as was the case with the young king. It was usual to fasten it by a chain, to a stand or desk in the churches.

It was only within the means of a few to possess Bibles in those days. One copy cost many pounds, and was too large and bulky to be carried about like the present pocket Bibles. In addition to these difficulties, there were few who could read, so that not many could directly profit. It was therefore no uncommon sight to see a number of people around one person, a little more learned than themselves, who read to them the words of life. It must have been a very interesting scene when the eye lighted upon such an earnest group. I am sure my young reader would have been delighted to look upon those earnest faces, and to listen to a style of reading which would be difficult for us to understand now. Jeremiah the prophet could say to God, "Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart," and so doubtless could many a soul say in the days of King Edward VI. That brief reign of six years and a half brought these happy peaceful days to an end. For the accession of Mary after his death brought a bigoted Roman Catholic to the English throne, and liberty for the conscience was unknown in England while she lived. The result was that able, learned, and God-fearing men, in common with all, were expected to bow to her wishes in religious matters, whether it suited them or not. That the queen should be obeyed was right and lawful, they very well knew, but that she should rule their consciences was a thing to which they could not

agree. The reason was simple — the word of God and the queen's wishes were not alike, and consequently obedience to the monarch meant disobedience to God. Therefore sorrow and trouble became their earthly lot, yet withal, many grew brighter in soul as the days of persecution increased in fury. When command and threat alike had failed to cause a faithful man to deny the truth of God, nothing but death remained for him. Consequently, many a noble-hearted believer in Jesus was speedily sent from earth to heaven by the fires which popery kindled in the reign of Queen Mary. A brief examination settled the point of guilt. The suspected person was brought before his judges to answer them on one particular point. A word was sufficient, and on it, hung the doom of the person suspected. The whole thing hinged on whether one error of Rome was believed or denied. That was the false and foolish Romish doctrine, that the bread, used to remind us of the body of Christ, actually became His body of flesh after being blessed by the priest. When these faithful ones denied that error, only the stake and the fire remained for them on earth. The first to suffer was John Rogers, a faithful and much-loved preacher of the gospel. During a residence on the Continent, he had met with such pious and learned men as William Tyndale and Miles Coverdale. These, and other Englishmen, were exiles from their country because of their faithfulness, and were occupied in the translation of the scriptures. The society of such Bible-loving men was good for John Rogers, and he too gained an intimate knowledge of the word of God. During Edward's reign, Rogers returned to this country to preach the gospel. He continued to do so after Mary had ascended the throne of England, but it was only for a brief space. A notable sermon which he preached at St. Paul's Cross in London, brought upon him the displeasure of the queen. He had openly warned the people against the popish errors so soon, alas! to be forced on them, and bade them stand true to sacred writ. When put upon trial and ordered to make his defence, he did it so ably, and with such power, that he was allowed to go free. Regardless, however, of punishment or danger, he continued to preach the truth of God.

Once again the brave John Rogers was called before a council of bishops, because he would not give up Christ for popery. The queen had commanded that nothing but her corrupt religion should have any liberty in her realms. It was disobedience to this unrighteous law, that brought that persevering servant of God again into notice. He was ordered to be kept shut up in his own house, as within the walls of a prison. But that kind of imprisonment, trying as it was to him, was not severe enough to please his enemies. Bonner, bishop of London, a man notable for his cruelty and wicked zeal, arranged to have John Rogers taken from his home to a common prison. Within the walls of Newgate therefore, that christian man was forced to pass his days among the worst criminals of the land.

Still, all that indignity and shame were only leading on to more and more. A day arrived when he was awakened from sleep with the startling news that he was to be committed to the flames. Only one request he had to make, and that was harshly denied. It was, that he might see his beloved wife before being taken to the stake, but even the melancholy satisfaction of a sad farewell to those he loved, was too much for his cruel persecutors to grant.

Before leaving the jail, the sheriff, as the representative of the law, called to ask Rogers to recant. The answer of the latter was clear and decided: "That which I have preached, I will seal with my blood."

"Thou art a heretic," the sheriff said.

"That shall be known at the day of judgment," answered Rogers.

"Well, I will never pray for thee," said the sheriff.

"But I will pray for you," was the Christ-like reply, called forth from lips so soon to be silent in death. The victim was led to Smithfield with a heart so sustained by God, that he comforted himself by repeating a psalm as he passed along. Many who looked on praised God for the grace given to that beloved man, so cheerfully going to death. His wife, carrying her babe, and accompanied by their ten children, met him as he went onwards. Oh, how she and they must have longed for a parting word! But, alas, it only the further pleased the persecutors, thus to tear a good man from his wife, his family, and every earthly tie. Whatever he felt, he looked perfectly calm, and did not allow natural affection to hinder his dying testimony.

"The fires of Smithfield" bear to us even now an awful meaning, for we know that many a precious one was there committed to their mercy. But oh, to those who lived in those days, what a scene of dread and suffering would the very words present! Those who were faithful to God and His word, must often have trembled when the possibility of such a death came before their minds. Yet, when the moment arrived, the weakest believer found that an unchanging God was on his side. The calm peace, and even cheerfulness and joy, manifest in such circumstances, shewed that the source of all was not of earth. The apostle Paul wrote, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" and, quoting David's words, he adds, "For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." Those early martyrs knew something of that condition, and yet they could have said with Paul, "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us."

Let us look for a little at the scene around John Rogers at the stake in Smithfield. Mary, the Queen of England, was about to send him from her presence, but God was going to receive his soul on high. That was a place of which she knew nothing. Noblemen, officials in authority, private persons who were rigid Romanists, besides men who loved the man about to die, were assembled to see the end. As usual, an endeavour was made to make him deny his faith in Christ, and own the Romish Church. A pardon was brought and offered, if he would only recant. But no, not even a pardon tempted him; he desired only to be kept faithful. The patience manifested by this worthy man was most remarkable, and his stedfast spirit was upheld to the end. When the fire had been lighted, and even had begun to do its work, the flames seemed to possess no terror for him. He was seen to put his hands amid the flames, as if washing them in the coldest water. Then, lifting them towards heaven, he remained in that position, till they were burnt in the fire as it rose. Speedily that fire at Smithfield did its work, and nought remained but smouldering ashes. The body of John Rogers, the faithful servant of God and preacher of the gospel, was reduced to dust, and his enemies were satisfied. But every atom in these ashes is precious in God's sight, as part of a body purchased by the blood of Christ. And thus was a happy believer set free from the pain and sorrows of earth, to pass into the paradise of God. Fire was but the gate of entrance — the flame only snapped asunder the last link with earth. Our hearts go back with pity when we think of what those martyrs endured, yet let it also be with hearty thanks-giving. For, surely, we may truly thank God that He kept them "stedfast, unmoveable," as only divine power could. It is easy for us to say it now, but may we not also thank the Lord that men have been honoured to die for Him? Even face to face with death, many a martyr felt it a holy, happy privilege thus to shew to the world that

Christ was dearer than life.

08 Chapter 8. William Hunter — A Young Man Led to the Stake at Brentwood.

Chapter 8.

William Hunter — A Young Man Led to the Stake at Brentwood.

William Hunter was a young man whose home was at Brentwood, Essex. He was employed in London as a weaver, but while his daily life was passed in the busy city, his father's house in the country was dear to him, and there he spent many a quiet time. William loved and could read the Bible, though he did not possess a copy. He was therefore in the habit of repairing to the chained treasure within those well-known walls in his native village. There, in the quiet stillness of the place, he delighted to read and study the precious book. God had given to this young man a desire for the "sincere milk of the word," and truly he grew thereby in the divine life.

One day, William was observed by a papist to be thus engaged, and taunted with attempting to explain the sacred volume. The boy answered gently and respectfully, that he did not do so but, he said, "I read it for my comfort." A conversation followed, in which William spoke modestly of his belief in the scriptures, but the papist spy only answered with hate and scorn. The latter then left the building, that he might bring a priest to see this "heretic." That official spoke in the same threatening strain, and plainly shewed that fatal results would follow. The young man immediately returned to say good-bye to his parents, and left for London without delay. William considered that the only hope of safety lay in flight, for the attitude of those two enemies had been too plain to be mistaken. To leave his parental home and become a fugitive for the truth's sake seemed the only course open to him.

Popery was too thirsty for the blood of the saints to be thus baffled. The father was sent for, and demanded to give up his son. "What, sir," he asked the priest, "would you have me seek my son that he may be burned?" Yet with these words of parental affection on his lips, the old man was forced to set out at once in search of his son. He hoped that he might not find him, but suddenly and unexpectedly he found himself face to face with his beloved boy. William had seen his father in the distance, and made haste to meet him. When he heard on what errand his parent had been sent, he immediately desired to return, that he might save him any further trouble. It was a difficult position for the father, but he gave in to the wishes of his son, and the two returned to Brentwood the same evening.

During the darkness of that night, the papist messengers came for their victim. In their cruel hands, there remained little else but suffering for William Hunter. He was, however, kept cheerful in his spirit, and thus the name of the Lord was honoured. He passed twenty-four hours in the stocks, and then with day-dawn, his persecutors began their efforts to make him recant. By the grace of God given in that hour of need, every effort was unavailing. The next step was to send William at once to the Bishop of London. The latter, in his turn, tried every possible way of making the young believer deny the truth, but equally without success. The bishop's mode of seeking to overcome

the youth was very cunning, and had William not had divine wisdom given to him, he would have yielded. That unprincipled man endeavoured to get his captive to believe that anything which he might say would be in confidence. But that young witness was not to be beguiled into saying aught to such a man, other than a repetition of his faith in Christ, and in the teaching of the word of God. Therefore, by all his wiles and worldly inducements, Bishop Bonner failed to make William Hunter recant. This being the case, poor William was again sent to the stocks, there to remain for forty-eight hours. A crust of bread and a cup of water were put by his side, but were left untouched at the end of that time. When the bishop came to see this young victim in the stocks, and saw that he had eaten nothing, he ordered him to be taken out and breakfast given to him. After the meal, the crafty Bonner once more summoned William before him. Again he demanded whether he would recant, and again he met with a firm refusal. Bonner then taunted him with denying the faith in which he was baptised. "I was baptised in the faith of the Holy Trinity," said William, "which I will not go from, God assisting me by His grace." The bishop further asked how old he was. On making the reply that he was nineteen years of age, he said, "Well, you will be burned ere you be twenty years old, if you will not yield yourself better than you have done yet."

"God strengthen me in this trouble!" was the brief but earnest reply of William Hunter, and thus closed his interview with the Bishop of London. That wicked, cruel man had not done, however, with his young prisoner. He kept him in captivity for nine months, and during that period, he called him five times before him. The money spent daily on William's food at that time, was the small coin of one halfpenny. So, while the bishop was living in comfort and luxury, he was keeping a young man, in the bloom of youth, starving and suffering within those prison doors. The instructions given by the bishop when the imprisonment began were, that the jailer should "put as many irons upon him as he could possibly bear." There, within those gloomy prison walls, that bright young spirit was kept till the final sentence was given. Still, however, William Hunter clung to the word, and trusted God through Christ.

Once when the bishop sent for the young man, in the hope that prison life had made him willing to yield, he offered what was a considerable sum in those days, if he would only abjure his faith. Then he proposed to make him steward of his own house, but neither temptation could move the stedfast youth. "My lord," he answered, "if you cannot persuade my conscience by scripture, I cannot find it in my heart to turn from God for the love of the world; for I count all worldly things but loss, in comparison with the love of Christ."

Seeing that nothing succeeded, the angry bishop then gave orders that the courageous witness should be burnt at the stake. A month afterwards William Hunter went again to his beloved Brentwood, knowing full well that he entered the little town only to die. As the place was too small to possess a prison, he was taken to an inn, and a guard set to watch him. There he was visited by his broken-hearted mother, for the constables had been unable to resist the sight of her grief and affection. It was a very great comfort to that sorrowing mother to witness the calm firmness and courage of her imprisoned boy. Her heart and thoughts were turned to God, and found relief in praising Him for the faith given to her son.

William comforted his mother with these touching words: "For the little pain which I shall suffer, Christ has procured for me a crown of joy; are you not glad of that, mother?" There together, for the last time, they knelt in prayer, when the mother commended her son to God, and asked for

needed grace in the dying hour. When the day dawned on which William was to die, he was led forth with a poor empty show of law. Needless, indeed, it was to guard him by constables, for he was submissive enough, and turned not from the death appointed. A sheriff, and the men calling themselves justices, had little need of expending their energies on that happy, radiant martyr, yet they formed part of the procession to the stake. Priests, too, were there, in their endeavours to carry out an ignorant zeal, but better had it been for them to have been less active. To add to the number of that imposing company leading a young man to death, were those miserable men who were to carry out the final sentence. What a mockery! what infatuated zeal was this in the garb of religion! Ah! for every deed of darkness God has yet to reckon with them, unless any afterwards turned to the blood that "cleanseth from all sin." On the way from the prison to the stake his father met the procession, and in bitterness of soul poured forth his heart's deep affection. But while his tears fell fast, his farewell words were full of hope as his wife's had been. "God be with thee, son William!" The quiet and loving response was, "God be with you, father! be of good cheer; I trust we shall meet again, where we shall rejoice together." As he passed that which had been his home, he could only give a passing glance of love on his weeping sisters. To the companions of his youth and childhood he expressed an affectionate farewell, and indeed, to all whom he knew there. Many a tear of sympathy flowed for William Hunter, that day, from eyes that were not wont to weep. When the place of death was reached, he was bound to the stake by a chain, and fagots of wood were heaped around, for all had been carefully prepared. Then the victim having been secured, the fire was speedily applied to complete the Satanic work.

Once more William was asked to deny his faith, and pardon was promised if he would. "No," he answered firmly, "I will not recant, God willing." He then turned to the people, and asked prayer for him in the moment of need. One cruel, blasphemous man, whose position was nominally that of a justice, scornfully replied, "I will no more pray for thee than I would for a dog." With touching meekness, the young believer gave the gentle answer, "I pray God this may not be laid to your charge at the last day."

Expressions of sympathy broke forth from some of the bystanders, when the final scene began. The lighted fagots burned readily, for a malicious care had been taken that they should be dry for the occasion. William held in his hand a copy of the Psalms, which he was able to throw to his brother who stood near. The latter on receiving that dying gift, cried, "William, think of the sufferings of Christ, and be not afraid!"

"I am not afraid," was the prompt reply, and then the inspired prayer broke from his dying lips, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!"

Soon the crackling flames rose high, and consumed that body which was so precious in the sight of God. And thus died William Hunter, in the middle of the sixteenth century, in our own beloved England. In the morning of his days he trusted in Jesus, and he early entered into rest. An old elm-tree near the spot, serves to shew the place where his spirit passed from earth to heaven. The happy confidence in God which marked his brief course and early end, may teach both old and young; and "faithful unto death," might indeed be written over the spot where he now rests.

Persecution is not confined to time or place, and history records its dire deeds again and again. These few chapters travel far and wide, both as to locality and date — from the glowing East, to our grey cold Isles in the West, and down the long vista of sixteen hundred years of time.

We have noticed the martyrdom of Stephen as given in holy writ, in the seventh chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. The place was outside the city of Jerusalem, and the time shortly after the beginning of the christian era. Next we followed the Lady Vivia Perpetua, from the home of her married life in Africa, to prison and to death with four christian companions. It was heathen hate which took their lives, early in the third century, on the southern shores of the Mediterranean. Cyril, the child who suffered in the province of Cappadocia; Denisa, the girl martyred at the age of sixteen; Marcus and Marcellianus, the twin brothers, were each and all examples of very young Christians in the early centuries of the church's history.

Those followers of Christ were hated and despised because they refused to worship idols, and found their delight in the true God; therefore the rage of the heathen vented itself on them, and pagan rulers sent the Christians from the earth as often as they could. But the days changed when persecution came, not so much from the Jew, nor yet from the Gentile, but from that which was called the church of God. The corruption of that which was so fair and beautiful in its beginning, led on to many wicked methods of obtaining submission to the Church of Rome.

Maria de Bohorques was a victim to the latter, and the spot whence she passed from earth was the Great Square of Seville. Over fifteen hundred and fifty years had run their course from the church's beginning till then.

Following the flow of time, popery in England came before us, the fires of Smithfield were lighted, and persecution raged fierce and keen. The good and brave John Rogers headed a long list of suffering witnesses, following each other in rapid succession. His death, and that of the youthful William Hunter, took place on English soil, in the middle of the sixteenth century.

We thus see the grace of God shining out in every relationship of life, in various paths on earth; the wife and mother, the husband and father, the young man and maiden, even to the little child, proving the reality of those divine words, "As thy days, thy strength." The unchanging God who stood by them to strengthen in their hour of need, will never, no never, forsake His own beloved people, thus divinely taught to trust in Him.

We may not be called upon to die for Christ, but let us be able to say from the heart, like Paul, "For me to live, Christ, and to die, gain!"

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