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The Succession of Martyrs.

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"And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow-servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be published."—Rev. vi. 11.

It is sometimes desirable, on such annual occasion as the present, to call the attention of the assembled brethren to facts and principles identified with our denominational peculiarities. They are regarded by us as important, and they ought to be held in constant remembrance.

For this reason the passage now read, has been selected for our consideration. It relates to the opening of the fifth seal. The Apostle saw in vision under the altar "the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held." They are represented as wondering at the delay of divine vengeance. It seems to them that a crime so heinous as the slaughter of pious men on account of their piety should meet with prompt and condign punishment. They knew not how to reconcile the forbearance of God with his justice, and they exclaim, under the influence of deep emotion, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" In reply, they are bidden to be patient many more will be put to death for the faith. There will be a Succession of martyrs for ages to come. "The time appointed is long." Individual cases of retribution will occur, but the full and final punishment of persecutors is to be reserved till "the time of the end," and that is far distant. When the number of their suffering "fellow-servants and brethren" shall be "fulfilled," God will "plead his own cause," and raise his church to a state of endless peace and glory.

We proceed to observe, that there has been a succession of martyrs in the Christian church; that in that succession those who professed Baptist principles hold a distinguished place; and that these facts are instructive, consoling, and admonitory.

I. THERE HAS BEEN A SUCCESSION OF MARTYRS IN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

The Saviour foretold the persecution of his followers. "They shall deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you; and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake," Mat. xxiv. 9. "Whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service," John xvi. 2. The apostolic history presents a continuous fulfilment of the prediction. The preachers preached at the risk of liberty or life, and profession of Christianity in those days might cost a man his all. The disciples were warned that "through much tribulation they must enter the kingdom." They learned by painful experience that "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution," 2 Tim. iii. 12.

So it continued for nearly three centuries. On the one hand, governments claimed the right to prescribe modes of worship, and to punish neglect of established forms, accounting disobedience as a crime equal to sedition. On the other, Christian men pleaded a higher law, to which all must bow, and which, in case of clashing of authorities, must ever be supreme. "We ought to obey God," they said, "rather than men," Acts. v. 29. Hence arose a perpetual conflict. Earthly rulers demanded soul-submission; but the servants of Christ held that

"Consciences and souls were made
To be the Lord's alone."

The horrors of those times cannot be described. Paganism put forth all its strength to crush the new religion. Magistrates and mobs withstood the missionaries; now, the aid of the law was invoked—anon, popular vengeance was suffered to run riot without restraint. To whet the appetite for slaughter, Christians were charged with the perpetration of the most atrocious deeds, and denounced as unfit to live in civilised society. When calamities befel the empire, such as famine, floods, or pestilence, all was placed to their account, and the wrath of the gods was to be assuaged by their destruction. Imperial despots sought to ingratiate themselves in public favour by the wholesale massacre of the Christians. Their blood drenched the soil of the amphitheatre. Their flaming bodies lighted up Nero's gardens. In the Decian persecution, in the middle of the third century,—and in the Diocletian, at the beginning of the fourth, cruelties before unheard of were

inflicted.* But the church survived them all. God's army flinched not from the fight. As fast as the ranks were thinned they were filled up again. The arm of the persecutor was wearied, but the faith of the sufferers did not fail. Victims followed victims, in long succession, glorying in the pangs of martyrdom. The holy family could not become extinct. "The word of God grew and multiplied."

And now another scene opens to the view. Though Constantine the Great did not personally profess Christianity till the last year of his life, he favoured and patronised it. Succeeding emperors followed his example. The Christian religion was enjoined by law and supported by the State. Then a strange revolution took place. Power changed hands, and the professed servants of Jesus learned to persecute. Refusal to worship idols had been a capital offence under Paganism; that worship itself was punishable by death under Christian rule. Still stranger events ensued. Brother hated brother, if difference of opinion separated them, and manifested the hatred by anathema and proscription. Government was called on to sanction nought but orthodoxy, of which the ruler for the time being assumed to be the judge, and he naturally declared in favour of the system or speculation to which he had attached himself. So it happened that Trinitarians and Arians were orthodox by turns: under Constantine the Arians were banished—the Trinitarians, under his son Constantius. Many a bishop lived in an episcopal palace one year, and occupied the exile's hovel, or laboured far down in the mines the next. The few Pagans that were left laughed at the folly; angels, if they could, would have wept over it.

At length one form overshadowed the rest. Antichrist sat enthroned at Rome, and gave laws to kings. For a long time the Church lorded it over the State, and mighty monarchs did her bidding, shuddering in coward fear at her curses. Yet there rose up brave spirits, all through the middle ages, manfully contending for truth, freedom, and right. They protested against the will-worship of the times; they appealed to the Bible; they would not bow down to images, nor pray to saints, nor defile themselves with the superstitions which had supplanted godliness; and they said, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye." How were they treated? Let ancient records tell. Their narratives are fearfully graphic. The tales of martyrdom are frightful beyond measure. Paganism was far outdone by Popery, both in regard to the number of victims and the varieties of torture. One illustration may suffice. In the crusades against the Albigenses, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, ecclesiastics directed the operations of the invading armies, and stimulated the fury of the soldiers; as fortress after fortress fell, and towns and cities were successively stormed, torrents of blood were shed; indiscriminate slaughter was the order of the day; and the chronicler, a hard-hearted monk, boasts that they spared "neither rank, sex, nor age," but slew all without mercy, and that when, on one occasion, some hundreds were cast into the flames, they were "burned alive with great joy." It has been computed that one million lives were sacrificed in these crusades. Who can wonder that the souls under the altar exclaim, "How long, O Lord?"

"Time would fail" to tell of the doings of that most atrocious of all tribunals, the Inquisition. If Popery has been not inaptly styled "the master-piece of Satan," the Inquisition may be as appropriately called "the master-piece of Popery." It is regarded with intense abhorrence, not only by Protestants but also by Christian-minded Roman Catholics; only they are obliged, if resident in Popish countries, to speak of it "with bated breath," lest they fall under the power of its terrible fangs. The numbers that have perished, by public execution or private murder, will not be known till God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing."

It was a busy time with inquisitors, and their coadjutors and agents in the sixteenth century, when the people rose up in revolt against the Pope throughout a large part of Europe, demanding freedom of thought and worship. They were answered by angry bulls and brutal policy. The prisons were

*They are thus described:—"The most excessive barbarities were made use of upon all who would not blaspheme Christ and offer incense to the imperial gods. They were publicly whipped—drawn by the heels through the streets of cities—racked till every bone of their body was disjointed,—and their teeth beat out,—their noses, hands, and ears cut off,—sharp pointed spears run under their nails,—were tortured with melted lead thrown on their naked bodies, had their eyes dug out,—their limbs cut off, were condemned to the mines—ground between stones,—stoned to death,—burnt alive,—thrown headlong from high buildings,—beheaded,—smothered in burning limekilns,—run through the body with sharp spears,—destroyed with hunger, thirst, and cold,—thrown to the wild beasts,—broiled on gridirons with slow fires,—cast by heaps into the sea,—crucified, scraped to death with sharp shells,—torn to pieces by the fangs of trees, and, in a word, destroyed by all the various methods that the most diabolical subtlety and malice could devise."—Dr. Chandler's History of Persecution, p. 51.

crowded; the martyr-fires blazed; the headsman's axe was ever in requisition; "blood, blood!" was the cry wherever papal influence prevailed.

Protestants were slow to unlearn the lesson taught them by Rome. They feared to cast away carnal weapons. They, too, must have fines, and prisons, and scaffolds, and implements of death. Lutheranism was established by law. Calvinism was established by law. Episcopacy was defended by pains and penalties, in England; Presbyterianism, in Scotland. Even in this enlightened nineteenth century the mania for persecution shows itself. In some ecclesiastical constitutions it is evidently hereditary. Popish Spain expels Protestants. Protestant Sweden expels Papists.

II. Having established the fact, that there has been a succession of martyrs in the Christian church, it is proposed to show that IN THAT SUCCESSION THOSE WHO PROFESSED BAPTIST PRINCIPLES HOLD A DISTINGUISHED PLACE.

The first martyrs, you are fully aware, were all Baptists, for infant baptism was not known till the middle of the third century, and was not generally practised for a long time afterwards.

Among the witnesses for the truth who suffered during the dark ages those who rejected infant baptism were generally doomed to the severest inflictions. All classes rose up against them. Priests and people were equally enraged. Peter of Bruys and his followers, in the twelfth century—the Albigenses—the Waldenses—and other sects, bearing different names, but agreeing in their testimony against prevailing superstitions, were subjected to all manner of outrage. Innumerable murders were committed in the name of religion. The blood of the saints was poured out like water.

Systematic opposition to the truth, carried on unremittingly for centuries, had well nigh accomplished its object. The separatists from Rome were crushed, or driven for a time into concealment. Emboldened by the rise of the Reformers, our Baptist forefathers left their hiding places, claimed kindred with the protesting parties, and invited them to a fuller development of their principles. But their advances were scornfully rejected. The Reformers refused alliance with them, and strove to put them down. Papists regarded them as the offscouring of the Reformation, and poured upon them double vengeance. They were threatened with extermination on all sides. The storm burst on them with unmitigated fury.

The death-work began in Switzerland. "Qui iterum mergit, mergatur," said Zuingli—"let him who re-dips [it was all dipping them—sprinkling was not in use] be drowned." And drowned they were, "without mercy," as the edict threatened they should be, Felix Mantz, a learned and godly preacher of the gospel, leading the van of the martyr-host. Germany followed the example of Switzerland, emulating her savageness. The persecution reached the height of demoniacal brutality in the Netherlands.

The number of Baptist martyrs in the sixteenth century has not been reckoned. In some places they were swept away in masses. Six hundred were put to death in one town in Alsace. Historians tell with horror of two hundred and eighty-eight Protestant sufferers in England during the reign of Queen Mary—and truly it was horrible,—but they keep out of sight the still more startling fact that ten times that number of Baptists sealed the truth with their blood in different parts of Europe.

The sufferers were of all classes—the rich and the poor—the learned and the illiterate—aged men and women—fathers and mothers—young men and maidens—pastors, preachers, deacons, members, and hearers; any, the slightest connection with a Baptist Church, was deemed sufficient ground for the sentence of death.

All kinds of cruelties were inflicted on them. They were cast into filthy, under-ground dungeons, with nothing but the bare ground to lie on, and nothing to cover them. They were tortured to the utmost extremity of endurance. The manner of death varied. Some were drowned; some were beheaded; some were strangled; some were roasted alive; some were burnt. In many instances, their heads were stuck on poles, and their bodies left to rot on the gallows. Sometimes they were led to public death; on other occasions the sentence was executed in prison and in the silence of the night, lest the people should express sympathy for the martyr.

We may not undertake to defend every position these good men assumed, or to justify every measure they adopted. But it is undeniably evident that they suffered for spiritual religion. They dared their persecutors to convict them of any crime. Whatever else was purposely mingled with the process, in order to justify or excuse the condemnation, it was really for the rejection of infant baptism, or for being baptized on profession of faith, or for administering such baptism, that they suffered.

[Conclusion next week.]