

Speedily was his prayer answered. It was Christmastide when he reached Rome—a season then, as now, given up to social festivity. What is the meaning of that throng hurrying along the streets, pushing in at the doors of the amphitheatre, struggling for seats on the crowded benches that rise tier above tier around the arena. Is there to be a spectacle to-day?—some fight of gladiators, some raging wild beasts? Yes, indeed. But in the midst of the thousands of every rank in imperial Rome, with all eyes upon him, stands one and only one on the blood-stained sand. His eye is serene, his bearing calm and undaunted, his figure erect, though the long silvery locks fall over his neck and shoulders. One moment more, and from an uplifted iron grating bound leopards of the Lybian desert, fierce and beautiful. A short, a terrible struggle, and Ignatius the Christian, Ignatius the Bishop, is in the light and presence of his God.

Reverently under the silent night did the Christians of Rome gather together the bones that were left, that they might find their last resting-place among the flock at Antioch he loved so well.

And what about the other disciple of S. John, away in his home at Smyrna? 'Stand fast, as an anvil when it is beaten,' were the parting words of Ignatius to him. They were scarcely needed.

To Polycarp, so it would seem, as Bishop, or Angel, of the Church at Smyrna, had been addressed those memorable words, 'Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.' If so, they had sunk deep down into his heart. He was permitted to claim and to receive the fulfilment of the promise.

As the evening of his life drew on he saw the cloud of persecution lowering over his own beloved city, and he knew that he must pass through the furnace of affliction. Remembering the words of the Lord, however, 'When they persecute you in one city flee ye unto another,' he retired first to one country village, then to a second. In the hope of discovering his retreat the persecutors seized upon two Christian boys of Smyrna, and put them to the torture. The

one endured bravely and revealed nothing. The other, overcome by intense pain, betrayed his master.

Hearing the approach of the soldiery to his abode, Polycarp calmly said, 'God's will be done,' and placed himself in their hands. A short space of rest being granted him, he prayed so fervently for two whole hours for the Church throughout the world, that even the soldiers were moved. He was then escorted back to the city and led into the theatre, which was now filled with an infuriated mob, thirsting for his blood.

As he entered, he is said to have heard a voice from heaven saying, 'Be strong, Polycarp, and play the man.' Most nobly did he obey the exhortation, for when tempted to blaspheme his Lord, and thus purchase his freedom, he replied in words that have become famous, 'Eighty and six years have I served Christ, and He hath done me no wrong. How can I now blaspheme my King and my Saviour?' He was immediately condemned to be burned. At the stake, by his own request, he was simply tied, instead of being fastened with iron cramps, 'for,' said he, 'He who gives me strength to sustain the fire will enable me to stand unmoved without your nails.'

As the pile was kindled, the flame, 'like the sail of a ship filled with wind,' swept around him, as though loath to touch so holy a man. His lips seemed to move in prayer, and now and again the bystanders fancied they caught his words: 'I bless Thee that Thou hast thought me worthy of this hour, to have a share among the number of the martyrs and in the cup of Christ. I bless Thee, I praise Thee, I glorify Thee, through the eternal High Priest, Jesus Christ.' Then an impatient soldier stepped forward and stabbed him with his sword. Thus Polycarp exchanged a burdensome cross on earth for a crown of glory in heaven.

God grant us all grace so to follow the example of these His blessed saints in their virtuous and godly living that we may come to those unspeakable joys which are prepared for those that unfeignedly love Him. Amen.

J. H. M.