

PLEASANT HOURS

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CHRISTIAN MARTYRS.

BY THE EDITOR.

DURING the early Christian centuries the enthusiasm for martyrdom prevailed, at times, almost like an epidemic. It was one of the most remarkable features of the ages of persecution. Notwithstanding the terrific tortures to which they were exposed, the fiercer the tempest of heathen rage the higher and brighter burned the zeal of the Christian heroes. Age after age summoned the soldiers of Christ to the conflict whose highest guardian was death. They bound persecution as a wreath about their brows, and extolled in the "glorious infamy" of suffering for their Lord. The brand of shame became the badge of highest honour. Besides the joys of heaven they won imperishable fame on earth, and the memory of a humble slave was often haloed with a glory surpassing that of a Cæsar or Horatius. The meanest hind was ennobled by the accolade of martyrdom to the loftiest peerage of the skies. His consecration of suffering was elevated to a sacrament, and called the baptism of fire or of blood.

Burning to obtain the prize, the impetuous candidates for death often pressed with eager haste to seize the palm of victory and the martyr's crown. They trod with joy the fiery path to glory, and went as gladly to the stake as to a marriage feast. "Their fetters," says Kusebins, "seemed like the golden ornaments of a bride." They desired martyrdom more ardently than men afterward sought a bishopric. They exulted amid their keenest pangs that they were counted worthy to suffer for their divine Master. "Let the ungules tear us," exclaims Tertullian, "the crosses bear our weight, the flames envelope us, the sword divide our throats, the wild beasts spring upon us; the very posture of prayer is a preparation for every punishment." "These things," says St. Basil, "so far from being a terror, are rather a pleasure and a recreation to us. "The tyrants were armed," says St. Chrysostom, "and the martyrs naked; yet they that were naked got the victory, and they that carried arms were vanquished." Strong in the assurance of immortality, they bade defiance to the sword.

Though weak in body they seemed clothed with vicarious strength, and confident that though "counted as

sheep for the slaughter," naught could separate them from the love of Christ. Wrapped in their fiery vesture and abroad of flame, they yet exulted in their glorious victory. While the leaden hail fell on the mangled frame, and the eyes filmed with the shadows of death, the spirit was enraptured

to his ear—and the odours of an opening paradise filled the air. Though the dull ear of sense heard nothing, he could listen to the invisible Corypheus as he invited him to heaven and promised him an eternal crown." The names of the "great army of martyrs," though forgotten by men, are written

The crimson stream, the gash inflicted
And not a drop is shed in vain.

This spirit of martyrdom was a new principle in society. It had no classical counterpart. Socrates and Seneca suffered with fortitude, but not with faith. The loftiest pagan philosophy dwindled into insignificance before the sublimity of Christian hope. This looked beyond the shadows of time and the sordid cares of earth to the grandeur of the Infinite and the Eternal. The heroic deaths of the believers exhibited a spiritual power mightier than the primal instincts of nature, the love of wife or child, or even of life itself. Like a solemn voice falling on the dull ear of mankind, these holy examples urged the inquiry, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" And that voice awakened an echo in full many a heart. The martyrs made more converts by their deaths than in their lives. "Kill us, rack us, condemn us, grind us to powder," exclaims the intrepid Christian Apologist, "our numbers increase in proportion as you mow us down." The earth was drunk with the blood of the saints, but still they multiplied and grew, gloriously illustrating the perennial truth *Sanguis martyrum semen ecclesie*. The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.



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the beatific vision of the opening heaven, and above the roar of the mob fell sweetly on the inner sense the assurance of eternal life. "No group, indeed, of Oceanides was there to console the Christian Prometheus; yet to his upturned eyes countless angels were visible—their anthem swept solemnly

in the Book of Life. "The Lord knoweth them that are his."

There is a record, traced on high,
That shall endure eternally,
The angel standing by God's throne
Treasures there each word and groan:
And not the martyr's speech alone,
But every wound is there depicted,
With every circumstance of pain

TRANSPORTING SHIPS BY RAILWAY.

THE world will soon know whether or not loaded ships can be safely and profitably lifted out of their element and carried across an isthmus upon a railway. Vessels plying between the Gulf of St. Lawrence and the ports of our north-eastern seaboard are now compelled, of course, to go around the peninsula of Nova Scotia. About three hundred miles would be saved if they could use a canal across the narrow neck that connects that peninsula with the mainland of New Brunswick. It was once proposed that a canal should be made there, but now a ship railway is to be built on the line of the proposed waterway. Work has already begun upon this railway, and it will be carried on by an English company whose president is Lord Brasenore and whose chief engineer is John Fowler, who built the London Underground Railroad. It may be that Captain Eads will find by and by