

They confessed that they used to meet before dawn to worship and 'to sing a hymn to Christ as God'; and again in the evening 'to unite in an innocent meal.' He notes that the new religion is spread largely by 'women, boys, cobblers, and leathersellers,' and that it continues to draw converts from the old idol temples. Further than this his observations do not go.

Ah, Pliny, we could explain your picture. It is Baptism, and the Holy Communion, and the early Christian Love-feast that you have seen or heard of. The hymn to Christ as God is our own Communion hymn, 'Glory to God in the highest.' Nay, you probably heard, too, the 'Holy, Holy, Holy,' in which we join with angels and archangels at our Eucharistic Feast. And possibly upon your ears fell the first notes of the 'Te Deum.'

It was amid such simple worship and such surroundings that Ignatius and Polycarp lived. Both were disciples of S. John, had sat at his feet, and drunk deeply of his teaching. Of Ignatius it was even said that he it was whom, as a little child, Jesus took in His arms and sweetly blessed. Be this as it may, together these two disciples shared the love and veneration of the whole Christian world. They were old men now—grown old in the Master's service.

The Apostles, one by one, had gone to their well-earned rest. Even S. John was dead. But the first glow of devotion and enthusiasm still lingered on. It had not died with them. All the Gospel events were so recent. Had not these two veterans still living conversed with those who had seen the Lord? Imagine with what interest their pupils at Antioch and Smyrna would gather round and listen as they told of John, the beloved disciple, and how reverently, and, as it were, with bated breath, he used to speak of the looks, the gestures, and the bearing of the Lord Himself.

For nearly half a century Ignatius had been labouring as Bishop of Antioch, when Trajan the Emperor paid a visit to that city. As a good shepherd Ignatius was ready to protect his sheep from oppression. He was summoned to Trajan's presence. The sentence passed upon him was brief and to the

point. It was that he should be 'carried bound to great Rome, and there thrown to wild beasts for the amusement of the people.' He accepted it with joy, for here was the promise of martyrdom for his Saviour. Amid the tears of his people the aged bishop set out on his journey over land and sea. His route lay by Smyrna. Picture the meeting of these two holy bishops, dear friends as they were. How would their talk run upon the Master, whose Face one of them was so soon to see, for whom both were to endure a painful death! It was a sweet but a short reunion. It was the last on earth.

That Ignatius was in Smyrna, on his road to martyrdom, passed lightning-like through the churches of Asia Minor, and brought to the city a crowd of Christians from all parts.

We may be thankful that they came. For it was in reply to their prayers and exhortations, that Ignatius wrote those beautiful letters which remain to us among the most precious relics of Christian antiquity. To them we are indebted for much of the light thrown on the earliest period of Church history.

He writes in burning words of the joy of suffering. Like S. Paul he is 'ready to be offered and to be with Christ.' 'It is better for me to die for Jesus Christ than to reign over the ends of the world.' To the Roman Christians he sends forward a letter praying them not to intercede for him, but to let him depart and be with Christ.

'Only request on my behalf,' he pleads, 'both inward and outward strength, that I may not merely be called a Christian, but really be found to be one. I am the wheat of God. Let me be ground by the teeth of the wild beasts that I may be found the pure bread of Christ. I pray that they may be eager to rush upon me. Let all the dreadful torments of the devil come upon me, only let me attain to Jesus Christ.'

Such an enthusiastic longing for the martyr's crown we may not too closely imitate. It is enough that we gaze with reverent awe at one whose heart was so wholly weaned from the world, and so fully fixed on Heaven.