

Heroes of the Christian Faith.

II.—BLANDINA AND PERPETUA.

THE second century was drawing to its close; Ignatius and Polycarp were dead; when the storm of persecution moved slowly westward and settled over the fair city of Lyons, in the south of France. Lyons is now a large and busy commercial town; then it was small and insignificant, but not too small to possess a little Christian Church with a bishop of its own.

Both before and since the martyrdoms I have been describing, Christianity had been making rapid advances throughout the world. It was already firmly rooted in France. The Apostle Paul had in all likelihood planted it in Spain.

Even Britain, it was asserted, had bowed to the yoke of Christ. It is true indeed that of a race so far removed from civilisation, and itself so barbarous, little was known. 'Yet divided from the world as they are,' wrote an early Christian Father, 'they are united even with the Moors of the distant south in the worship of the One God.' It is almost certain that ere this, Christian missionaries from Asia Minor had pushed with the banner of Christ through many a thick forest and over many a wild region as yet untrodden by the Roman soldier.

If we would trace the source of our own and Gallic Christianity we must look somewhere in the direction of the Seven Churches of S. John.

Have you ever thought why the influence of the primitive Church was so strong and far-reaching—why the teaching of an Ignatius and Polycarp was so widely accepted? Did not their strength lie in their complete self-abandonment—in the joy with which they surrendered themselves to be torn to pieces in the arena, or to perish at the stake? It was that they refused to conform to the world's standard—that they would not allow their religion to be one among many. They stood by principle rather than expediency.

They rejected compromise, they worshipped truth. It was thus they won their way among men. 'They were tortured, not accepting deliverance.' And the blood of the martyrs became the seed of the Church.

Yet how easy would it have been to have accepted deliverance. All that was required of them was that they should cast a little incense into the fire burning upon some heathen altar, or modify some article in their creed, or speak a light word of their Saviour. Then life, and comfort, and freedom from annoyance would have been theirs. Little enough it seems to us. 'Little enough,' Satan whispered in timid ears. 'Little enough and meaningless too. There can surely be no harm. And at least there will be time sufficient for after-repentance.'

The temptation was strong. Some fell; and who will wonder? Even without the fire and the cruel death, and the dungeon and the torture in the background, are we quite sure that we should have stood firm?

Have we not known of a boy afraid sometimes to kneel at his prayers in his dormitory, because comrades laugh around? Do not men shrink from rebuking a foul-mouthed mate? Does it not require a great deal of courage to read our Bibles openly?

Are we never now in danger of denying Christ? Our own conscience and God alone can tell. There is much for us to learn from such as Ignatius and Polycarp. At least let us note this. It was not their own power that prevailed. It was the Lord who stood with them and strengthened them. Theirs was the same stay as long before supported those three Jewish martyrs who, as they moved in the flames, communed with a fourth. 'And the form of the fourth was like the Son of God.' 'Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.'

Now it was not to men alone in these early times that the crown of martyrdom