

A LAY OF THE ANCIENT CHURCH.

*The Martyrdom of the Seven Brothers, and St. Felicitas
their Mother.**

THE Matron stood, her sons beside, nor feared the Prefect's ire,
And throbb'd her heart, and glow'd her soul with hallow'd Chris-
tian fire :

"Think not, Tyrant, blandishments or bribes can e'er entice,
Or threats, or tortures force us to thy gods to sacrifice ;
For, strengthened by the Spirit of the TRUE GOD we adore,
Our homage is for HIM *alone*—Your idols we abhor !"

The Pagan frown'd and knit his brow—fire sparkled in his eyes ;—
"Deluded woman ! dost thou thus thy life—thy all despise ?—
Thy sons, thy offsprings dear, wilt thou compel me to destroy ?"
"My sons," she said, "with CHRIST shall live in everlasting joy,
If faithful to that only Lord ;—but if they bend a knee
To thy false gods, their souls in flames must burn eternally."

Again upon the morrow to the Prefect they are led,
And hop'd he still to see them swerve, and thus again he said :
"Felicitas, thy sons at length, oh pity !—Noble, young,
They yet may rise to honors high, their deeds in song be sung ;
Blast not their hopes thus premature ;—give not such flowers to
blight ;—
Spare, spare the buds to ope and bloom on glory's proudest height !"

"Name not such *cruel* pity. Thinkest thou my heart could be
The hardest, worst of mothers' hearts ?—my sons ! my sons ! will ye
List to the sympathy of hell ?—Behold yon heaven of light,
There shines THE LAMP that makes the hosts of Saints and Angels
bright !

Your JESUS !—Go ! HE waits ye *there* !—Shrink not from scourge
or fire !

Go, live with Him who deign'd for you, *in tortures* to expire !"

Enthusiastic flush'd each cheek, and glow'd each youthful heart
With holy fire, with strong desire to act a martyr's part.
And the Pagan frown'd with wrath as thus the Matron had repeated,
And with contumely and blows, the noble woman's treated !

Again the youths he summoned ; and each separately addressing,
He urg'd them still to sacrifice, entreating now—now pressing ;
But nought could move them ;—firm they stood, despite the tempt-
er's wiles ;

And brave defied the threats of Power, and fortune's luring smiles.

The eldest youth, being first addressed, thus firmly answer made :
"ONE ONLY GOD there is ; to HIM our homage shall be paid.
In vain exhaust thy cruelty—in vain each art employ,
Our faith, our hope in JESUS is !—Our souls thou'lt not destroy."

* See Butler's Lives of the Saints, July 10.