

words of Jesus, first to the twelve, then to all the disciples, then to the great multitudes that followed Him: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it." Suffering? Yes, this is the divinely-ordained life of the Christian. It was not of an extraordinary, but of an ordinary, life that St. Paul spoke when he said: "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh." Persecution in the Christian life is never a reason for turning back, but the strongest reason for going forward. It is the proof of our ministry; it is a sign to the world that we belong to Christ; it is a sign to ourselves that we are living His life. "We are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him that we may be also glorified together."

II. Consider now the effect of persecution upon the spread of the Church. "In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." The promise here of the overruling providence of God, the bringing of good out of evil, of changing tribulation into a song of good cheer, is perhaps in nothing more strikingly fulfilled than in this, the way that the Lord through it has always multiplied the membership of the Church. Tribulation produces saints. The result which followed the first persecution follows still where the same conditions obtain. The disciples were "scattered abroad" in consequence of the persecution that arose over the preaching of Stephen, and "they went everywhere preaching the word." It is not difficult to recognize the sequence of these events. First, the persecution, then the scattering abroad, then the preach-

ing of the Word, with the final and blessed result that multitudes of fresh converts were gathered into the Kingdom. So it is true, verified by centuries of Christian history, that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Christian Church." Let us illustrate this by two historical pictures, one the persecution of the early Christians, the other the contemporary and rapid increase of Christian believers. First, the persecution of the early Christians. Ecclesiastical history furnishes us with the records of ten general persecutions, the word general having reference to the Roman Empire. The first took place under the iniquitous Nero, A.D. 64, and the others were continued from time to time under various emperors, ending with Diocletian, A.D. 303, or perhaps ten years later. Much controversy has been waged about the number of Christians that were put to death during these persecutions, the world side claiming less and the Church side claiming more. But it is safe to say that thousands and thousands of Christians, men and women, were put to death under these terrible outbursts of popular opposition, and that the sad record of the experience of the Old and New Testaments saints, of whom it was written, they "had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonments; they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword; they wandered about in sheep-skins and goat-skins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented (of whom the world was not worthy); they wandered in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth," this sad record, I say, was more than surpassed in number and severity in the tribulations that came upon the Roman saints. So much for the first picture. And now the other, the contemporary and rapid increase of Christian believers. Tacitus, an historian of great reputation and an enemy of Christianity, in giving an account of the fire that devastated Rome, asserts that the Emperor Nero, in order to suppress the rumours of having been himself the author of the mischief, had the Christians accused of the crime.

"At first," he writes, "they were only apprehended who confessed themselves of that sect, afterwards a vast multitude were discovered." Pliny, the younger, also a heathen and an enemy to Christianity, is another witness. He was Governor of Pontus and Bithynia in Asia Minor. The situation in which he found his province led him to apply to his master, another emperor, for directions in dealing with the Christians. He says, "Suspending all judicial proceedings, I have recourse to your advice; for it has appeared to me a matter highly deserving of consideration, especially on account of the great number of persons who are in danger of suffering; for many of all ages and of every rank, of both sexes likewise, are accused and will be accused. Nor has the contagion of this superstition seized cities only, but lesser towns also, and the open country." Justin Martyr who wrote about 30 years after Pliny makes this remarkable statement: "There is not a nation, either of Greek or barbarian, or any other name, even of those who wander in tribes and live in tents, amongst whom prayers and thanksgivings are not offered to the Father and Creator of the universe, in the name of the crucified Jesus." The Rev. F. W. Robertson, in one of his sermons, speaking about the same matter, says: "Read the account given by Tertullian of the marvellous rapidity with which the Christians increased, and you are reminded of one of those vast armies of ants which moves across a country in irresistible myriads, drowned by thousands in rivers, cut off by fire, consumed by man and beast, and yet fresh hordes succeeding interminably to supply their places." And who can read the story of missionary work in the Island of Madagascar or the story of more recent work in the country of Uganda without feeling convinced of this, that the Lord overrules persecution for good and brings out of the death of His saints abundant life in the hearts of multiplied believers? "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Christian Church."

III. Consider now the effect of Persecution upon the Spirituality of