

them from the fury of persecution. The learned and eloquent, the doctors and ministers, and chiefly the rich for the confiscation of whose fortunes the rapacious magistrates were perpetually gazing, were the persons most exposed to the dangers of the times."

Not only was the infant church exposed to all the

#### TERRORS OF PERSECUTION,

but there were other agencies at work sapping its life and vitality, found in the invasions of false teachers made in the ranks of its members, notwithstanding the exhortations of the apostles and the elders. It is true that as the members of the church were found adhering to false doctrine they were dealt with according to the discipline of the church, and where found obstinate were excommunicated, and so long as the apostles and elders were permitted to live, the church was kept rid of faithless and unworthy members. Shortly after the martyrdom of the Apostles Peter and Paul, the notorious Nero died by his own hand, and others succeeded him, who bore no love to the unoffending Christian. Violence against the latter was a daily occurrence. The other apostles were, with the exception of John the Revelator, soon put to death in various parts of the empire.

For ready reference we annex the following form of the death and martyrdom of all the apostles:

Peter crucified with his head downward at Rome about the year 66.

James beheaded at Jerusalem by order of Herod about the year 44.

Mark was dragged to death in the streets of Alexandria.

Luke was hanged on an olive tree in Greece about the year 90.

James the lesser was thrown from a pinnacle of the Temple and beaten to death with a pillar.

Paul was scourged and crucified about the year 52.

Andrew was bound to a cross and preached till he died.

Thomas was run through with a lance on the coast of Coromahal in the East Indies.

Jude was shot to death with an arrow about the year 72.

Bartholomew was flayed alive.

Simon was crucified in Persia about the year 74.

Mathew was slain with a halberd in Madabas about the year 60.

Barnabas was stoned by the Jews about the year 73.

Paul was beheaded by Nero in Rome in the year 66.

John the Revelator it is said was cast into a cauldron of boiling oil, but escaped unhurt, and was afterwards banished to the Isle of Patmos, in the Egean Sea by the Emperor Domitian, in the year 96. This Emperor inaugurated the two persecutions in 93.

#### IN THE INTERIM

between the death of Peter and the banishment of John elapsed 30 years, during which many innovations were made by the various forces at work to deteriorate the purity and correctness of the doctrines of the Gospel.

Prominent among them was the sect of Gnostics who of all others were more formidable than any for evil in the insinuations of their false and erroneous doctrine. From among the many things mentioned by historians concerning this sect I quote the following from Chap. 3 Mosheim Ecc. History.

"The notions of this sect concerning Jesus Christ were impious and extravagant. For though they considered Him as the Son of the Supreme God, sent from the pleroma or habitation of the Everlasting Father, for the happiness of miserable mortals, yet they entertained unworthy ideas of His person and offices.

"They denied His deity, looking upon Him as the mere son of God, and consequently inferior to the Father, and they rejected His humanity upon the supposition that everything concrete and corporeal is, itself, essentially and intrinsically evil. Hence the greatest part of

#### THE GNOSTICS

denied that Christ was clothed with a real body, or that he suffered really for the sake of mankind, the pains and sorrows which he is said to have sustained in the sacred history. They maintained that He came to mortals with no other view than to deprive the tyrants of the world of their influence upon virtuous and heaven born souls, destroying the empire of these wicked spirits, to teach mankind how they might separate the divine mind from the impure body, and render the former worthy of being united to the Father of spirits."

The errors embodied in the Gentile doctrine are the more apparent when we reflect, that to doubt the divinity of the mission of our Savior is to disrupt the whole plan of salvation, and set aside the great economy of the Father respecting the probation of His creatures.

Among the body of Gentiles were to be found many philosophers whose erudition and respectability, added somewhat to the plausibility of their views, and on this account their efforts to distort the plain principles of the Gospel were in some instances successful. The end and operations of this sect being to introduce false doctrine into the church, was aided by the corrupt doctrine of the Nicolaitans of which mention is made in Revelations.

In the 29th chapter of Eusebius' Ecc. History we find the following concerning this heresy: "Nicolaus one of the deacons who with Stephen were appointed by the Apostles to minister to the poor, having a beautiful

wife, and being reproached after the ascension of our Lord, with jealousy by the Apostles, he conducted her into the midst of them, and permitted any one that wished to marry her. This they say was

#### PERFECTLY CONSISTENT

with that expression of his, that everyone ought to abuse his own flesh. And thus these that adopted his heresy, following both this example and expression literally, rushed headlong into fornication without shame. Among those who took an active part in the dissemination of false doctrine are mentioned by the apostle and Mosheim as: Hymenaeus, Alexander, Philetus, Hermogenes, Demas, Diotrophes, Simon Magus and his disciple Menander. While others were studious to blend with the doctrines of Christ, the opinions, customs and traditions of the Jews."

Within a few years previous to the close of the first century, we find the exhortations, coupled with the admonitions of the Savior, recorded in the first chapters of John's revelations, to the seven churches in Asia wherein are to be found the premonitions of apostasy, rebuked, and the exhortation to return to faithfulness, and to be steadfast in the truth. Corruption among the members was pointed out, and the blighting processes of false doctrine declared in unmistakable terms.

The close of the first century witnessed the primitive church in a somewhat dismembered condition. The twelve apostles, chosen to be the special witnesses of the Gospel, were, with one exception, martyred for the truth, and John, the beloved apostle, it is said, had closed his eyes in death at Ephesus having been released from Patmos.

#### HISTORY HAS FAILED

to chronicle our apostolic succession and in no period of the Christian era can we look consistently for an event of this character if at all than to the very age in which the apostles themselves lived, and none is to be found. That the Melchisedec Priesthood was held by others than apostles, there is no doubt, for we read of seventy elders being called who assisted the twelve in their ministerial labor. But it is also certain that in the persecutions that raged, many of them were put to death.

The destruction of Jerusalem together with its temple under Titus in the year 70, forms an era in this century of remarkable prominence, together with the slaughter of 1,100,000 souls and the captivity and dispersion of upwards of 100,000 more. It must be remembered that this direful event was in fulfillment of the prediction of the founder of Christianity, in consequence of the rejection by the Jews of the Savior, and the doctrines which He taught. This event affected the cause of Christianity, inasmuch as it incensed the surviving Jews throughout the empire with

#### GREATER VIRULENCE

against the Christians than before. It frequently happened when anything occurred of the nature of a calamity of any kind, both Jews and Pagans of all phases looked upon the Christians as the cause thereof.

While this once mighty and favored people, the Jews, had rejected the Messiah and put Him to death as also thousands of His followers, and were obdurate in their hearts against the Gospel, the Almighty in His wrath brought upon them the judgments and calamities pronounced against them in the event of their faithlessness, by the Prophet Moses in all their realistic fullness. How sad indeed is the end of that nation and people that fight against God.

The dawn of the second century witnessed a church without apostles, stripped of that beautiful organization that its Founder gave it before His departure; confronted with heresy among its members and the prey of the fierce prejudice and persecution of the Roman power. In the year 104 the third persecution began under Trajan, in which the Christians were wantonly exterminated. The processes of the disintegration of the church during this century were accelerated by the persecutions set on foot under Adrian in the year 119, as also by Severus in the year 197, which were instigated by the philosophers, priests and Jews, who incessantly raised false reports against the Christians, and complained to the emperor of their grossness. These rulers being goaded on by these parties, often against their will, issued edicts of slaughter against the Christians, whose only and sole offense was that of belief in the Lord Jesus Christ and their refusal to worship the images of the Caesars. During this century thousands of the early Saints were sacrificed

#### UPON THE BLOODY SANDS

of the amphitheatre at Rome at the great feasts held there, and torn to pieces by wild beasts for the amusement of the populace of that once barbarous city.

The Saints were frequently given the alternative between death and life, between freedom and imprisonment, by recanting and renouncing their religion and promising to attach themselves to the Pagan views and rites of the Romans, which few indeed accepted, preferring to end their lives in faithfulness and fidelity to the Almighty in martyrdom.

The annals of this century describe many innovations upon the ordinances and doctrines of the Gospel. The amalgamation of Pagan and Jewish dogmas perverted the simple and genuine methods of worship established

by the Savior, and propagated by the Apostles. Schism after schism had arisen among many of the dioceses of the church, doctrinal controversies were frequent, requiring the adjudication of the synods and presbyters of bishops, which were not at all times successful in their deliberations. Disputations often arose regarding the introduction of pagan and Jewish rites and ceremonies into the Christian Church, which was sought to be effected, to bring it more into conformity with pagan and Jewish rituals which were more calculated to appeal to, and gratify the external senses than the spiritual.

Occasionally bishops would arrogate to themselves authority over others of their diocese and seek to bend them to their ideas and opinions respecting the observances of

#### CERTAIN FESTIVALS

which had been interpolated into some of the churches, as the following quotation from Mosheim 11th section, 4th chapter, 2d century, will show: "Victor, Bishop of Rome, endeavored to force the Asiatic Christians by the pretended authority of his laws and decrees, to follow the rules which were observed by the western churches in this point. Accordingly, after having taken the advice of some foreign bishop, he wrote an imperious letter to the Asiatic prelates commanding them to imitate the example of the western Christians with respect to the time of celebrating the festival of Easter. The Asiatics answered this lordly requisition by the pen of Polycrates, Bishop of Ephesus, who declared in their name, with great spirit and resolution, that they would by no means depart in this manner from the custom handed down to them by their ancestors. Upon this the thunders of excommunication began to roar. Victor, exasperated by the resolute answers of the Asiatic bishops, broke communion with them, pronounced them unworthy of the name of his brethren, and excluded them from all fellowship with the church of Rome. This excommunication, indeed, extended no further; nor could it cut off the Asiatic bishops from communion with the other churches whose bishops were far from approving the conduct of Victor."

The words of the Prophet Isaiah, 24th chapter, 5th verse, were verified before the close of this century, in the changing of the ordinances, inasmuch that baptism was administered to infants by sprinkling, and sponsors were introduced in connection therewith.

#### Endless and nonsensical CONTROVERSIES

had arisen respecting the divinity and identity of the person of the Savior, resulting in the rise of various sects known as the Nazarenes, Ebionites, and others whose contentions and errors in point of doctrine and discipline, augmented the causes that led to the perversion of the Gospel.

The opening of the third century presented to the struggling Christians difficulties imposed by the passage of laws inimical to their interests. The Emperor Severus, in the year 203, made a law prohibiting the subjects of his empire from changing the religion of his ancestors for the Christian and Jewish faith. From Mosheim we learn that this law in its effects was most disastrous for the Christians. It induced malicious magistrates to persecute unto death the poorer sort among the Christians, that the richer might be intimidated to purchase amnesty and thereby become exempt from similar persecutions.

The doctrines of the Church were undergoing a gradual change. The doctrines of Plato were largely introduced among the churches, which tended to impoverish the purity of the Christian faith and doctrine. Schism after schism occurred among the prominent bishops and writers of the Church, resulting in increasing divisions and confusion. In the year 255 the sixth persecution under Maximian raged, and the fury of the heathen was let loose upon the Christians, which terminated at the death of the emperor after a reign of three years. In the year 249

#### THE SEVENTH PERSECUTION

under Decimus, began and is said to be the most severe of any that had been waged up to that time. The tortures to which the early Saints were subjected are enough to harrow the soul; some had their limbs broken; some were cast from upper windows to the ground; others were placed upon the rack and stretched to death; old and feeble women had their jaws beaten, and their teeth broken out. One woman who refused to worship an idol in an idolatrous temple was tied by her feet and dragged through the streets, and dashed against the millstones, and afterwards stoned to death. Others were beheaded, some were burned to death, others were lacerated with iron scrapers; and hundreds were torn to pieces with wild beasts, upon the arenas; while hundreds that wandered about in deserts and mountains perished by hunger and thirst, frost and disease, robbers and wild animals. Such was the price the early Saints paid for their religion, which was exacted and sanctioned by law.

Eusebius informs us that after the cessation of the bloody persecution the churches throughout the east and elsewhere that had been divided, became united again and rejoiced exceedingly at the peace and harmony that prevailed. But this was not of long duration, for in the year 257, under Valerian, the eighth persecution began, resulting in the death of many persons.

In the year 272 the ninth persecution, under Aurelian, was inaugurated. This was the last persecution of the third century, and perhaps milder in its execution than any that took place in this century. Respecting the

#### DOCTRINAL DEGENERACY

that obtained in this century it is proper to remark that rites and ceremonies were greatly multiplied. The spirit and genius of the Gospel were supplanted by the vagaries and errors of Paganism and mystified by the vain philosophies of the schools among the various sects. The various theological writers, who were not a few, among the Christians, differed in their ideas and sentiments to a remarkable degree upon the vital and cardinal principles of the Gospel. Some of them asserted that in order to secure the blessing and favor of the Almighty, and prepare themselves for the better world, it was necessary to stultify every emotion of the heart, every impulse of their natures, and to practice self-abnegation to such an extent as to substantially shut out every ray of human happiness from their souls. Following the bent of such gloomy and unsocial notions, they abandoned society and sought the seclusion of the forest and desert, the caves and dens of the earth, to gratify their morbid and degenerate souls. Spurning the idea of marriage, they subjected their bodies to hunger and thirst, and submitted to the most excruciating miseries and discipline which their melancholy imaginations could invent. It is said that one Paul, a hermit, lived in the deserts of Thebais for 90 years, more like a savage animal than a rational being.

#### EMBELLISHED WITH IMAGES

and other ornaments, and while there was a form of godliness there was a conspicuous lack of the power thereof.

Respecting the rites observed in the administration of baptism Mosheim says: "No persons were admitted to this solemn ordinance, until, by the menacing and formidable shouts and declamation of the exorcist, they had been delivered from the dominion of the prince of darkness and consecrated to the service of God. The origin of this superstitious ceremony may be easily traced, when we consider the prevailing opinions of the times."

The Christian doctors applied themselves to the study of letters and philosophy, and abandoned frequented paths and wandered in the speculative wilds of fancy. They endeavored to bring the doctrines of celestial wisdom into a degree of subjection to the precepts of their vain philosophy. In short they relied more upon their own wisdom in the inculcation of that which they termed Christianity, than in the dictation of the Holy Spirit; which gave evidence that they had lost the power and efficacy of their priesthood, and had departed from the precepts and ordinances of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is apparent that this condition of things was inevitable, when we call to mind the teachings of the Savior to His Apostles, that if they (the Apostles and His Saints) observed all things which He had taught them, He would be with them to the end.

Christianity did not bear the same fruits at this period of time as in the beginning, which was due to the fact that they had

#### NOT OBSERVED

those things which the Savior had taught them; and consequently they were left to be driven about by every wind of doctrine.

The dawn of the fourth century witnessed the Christian Church in a peculiar condition. It had passed through many vicissitudes; it had been deprived of its apostles by an early martyrdom, and the cruel hand of persecution was red with the blood of the Saints. Worst of all the degenerating influence of heresy had become interwoven in the very woof of the church. The changes in the rites and ordinances of the Gospel had been gradual and insidious. The pagan sentiments and practices had become so intertwined with the views and faith of Christians at this time, that it may be truly stated that Christianity had become paganized instead of the latter becoming absorbed by the former.

It appears, however, that what remained of Christianity at this period was intolerable to unbelievers in Christ, and that the very name of Christian was obnoxious to the Pagan and Jewish ear. One historian informs us that "The fundamental principles of the Christian doctrine were preserved hitherto incorrupt and entire in most churches, though it must be confessed that they were often explained and defended in a manner that discovered the greatest ignorance, and an utter confusion of ideas." The historians of those times were hardly competent to judge of the true spirit and form of Christianity established by Jesus, for the reason that

#### THE LIGHT OF THOSE TIMES

was not sufficient to enable the Christians of the fourth century to comprehend, in a proper degree, the wide difference that existed between the Christianity of both periods. The fundamental principle of Christianity being faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, it is fair to presume was generally accepted by members of the Church, while a vast number of the rites and ceremonies observed by them could not be

distinguished from those of the Pagans. At stated periods in their rituals they performed baptism, and observed the Lord's supper, but invested these ceremonies with such an air of pomp and outward show, as to completely divest them of the sanctity and spirit that were originally intended and enjoyed. The powers of darkness, whose aim was the utter extinction of the Church, alarmed the Pagans, whose interests were closely allied to the perpetuation of the ancient superstitions, which were jeopardized by the remaining forms of Christianity and the prospects of its spread throughout the empire, the signs of which became daily more apparent. Under these apprehensions of the downfall of their craft, they assiduously addressed themselves to Diocletian, the chief the three emperors, to engage in a persecution against the Christians. Accordingly, in the year 303, the emperor issued an edict to pull down the churches of the Christians, to burn all their books and writings, and to take from them all their civil rights and immunities, and render them incapable of any honors or civil promotion.

It is said by Mosheim, "that many Christians, and among them several bishops and presbyters, seeing the consequences of this refusal, delivered up all the

#### RELIGIOUS BOOKS

and other sacred things that were in their possession in order to save themselves." Some time after this the emperor issued a new edict ordering all the bishops and ministers of the church to be thrown into prison. Not long after this inhuman violence a third edict was issued, ordering all sorts of torments to be employed, and the most fiendish punishments invented, to compel those incarcerated to renounce their faith by sacrificing to the heathen Gods, in the hope that if the leaders of the Christians could be induced to abandon their religion, the common members could be easily induced to do the same. In the second year of this the last and worst of all the persecutions, a fourth edict was published by Diocletian, instigated by Galerius, one of the co-emperors, and other inveterate enemies of the Christian cause. By this edict the magistrates were authorized to force all Christians, irrespective of rank, or sex to sacrifice to the heathen gods, and were ordered to employ all sorts of torments in order to drive them to the act of apostasy.

In order that the reader may form a more distinct idea of the trials and tortures of the Christians of that period, I copy from an eminent author as follows: "The trial of a Christian prisoner brought before a Roman judge was somewhat after the following manner:

#### THE MAGISTRATES

were seated on the subsilla, one of the duumvirs presiding, in his white robes bordered with purple; his sistor standing behind him. Near the door of the court, to confront the prisoner on his first entrance, were the usual instruments of torture. There were the heavy yoke for the neck, of iron or of wood, similar to what in China is called the canga; the fetters; the stocks, in which hands and feet were inserted at distances from each other which strained or dislocated the joints. There, too, were the rods with thorns in them; the whips and thongs, cutting with iron or bruising with lead; the heavy clubs; the hook for digging into the flesh; the ungula, said to have been a pair of scissors; iron combs, or rakes for tearing; and there was the wheel, fringed with spikes, on which the culprit was stretched; and there was the fire, ready lighted, with the water hissing and growling in the large cauldrons which were placed upon it. The Christian culprit was now brought in, and the sight of the place, with its furniture, would be enough to appal a stout heart. He was asked, "Are you a Christian?" "Upon the reply everything depended. If made in the affirmative he was exalted, by the allegiance he owed as a subject of the empire, to the gods, and to the divine emperor, to abandon the foolish plea, to renounce the folly of the Nazarenes, and to sacrifice in the prescribed form to the genius of the Caesars. There was

#### AN ALTAR PREPARED

a flame already lit, incense burning, priests in waiting; let them be called in and a sacrifice made. All would then be over. The prisoner would be acquitted and even honored by the authorities.

"If, however, the plea was obstinately persisted in, sentence was immediately pronounced. This would be death, not immediate—that would have been too merciful—but death slow and lingering. The offender was first thrown into the disgusting Barathrum (the cesspool of a prison, enclosed in a dark room), then to be stretched on the rack, or otherwise tortured; lastly to be beheaded, or thrown to the beasts; and in case of decapitation, the body to be cast to the dogs."

Events transpired, caused by the resignation of Diocletian, which afterwards brought Constantine the Great to accept the purple and become the chief emperor of the Roman Empire. This emperor put a stop to the persecutions of the Christians by his edict of Milan, and from that time persecution almost entirely ceased. With his sole supremacy, which occurred in the year 324, came the final struggle be

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