



St. Justin the Martyr.

"Around Thy judgment-seat they are assembling,
Clothed in their robes of blood, and in their need,
They show their gory wounds, in silent trembling;
Eloquent mouths which for Thy pity plead."

ST. JUSTIN, who is well known by the epithet of "The Martyr," was born at Neapolis, in Palestine, a place which was anciently called Sychem; and he was early distinguished by the proficiency which he made in every branch of human learning. Egypt being at that time a celebrated resort for philosophers, St. Justin bent his steps thither, for the purpose of perfecting himself in philosophy and science. After examining the pretensions of the different schools of philosophy, he decided upon attaching himself to that of the Platonists, whose views and doctrines were most agreeable to his own mind.

It happened that one day, while he was busily employed in acquiring a complete knowledge of the doctrines of Plato, that he

took a solitary walk by the sea side. Being deeply occupied with his own thoughts, an aged man of grave aspect approached him unperceived; and it was not until he was addressed by the stranger that he was aware of his presence. The stranger courteously addressed him, and their conversation soon turned upon philosophy, and upon the superiority of the doctrines of Plato, which St. Justin asserted were the only true way to happiness, and to the knowledge and sight of God. This the stranger denied; and after showing the impossibility of Platonism affording the happiness which he imagined, concluded by telling him who were the true philosophers, and who were most likely to put him in the way of obtaining that after which he was now vainly seeking. "There were," said he, "long before your reputed philosophers, certain blessed and holy men, lovers of God, and divinely inspired, called Prophets, who foretold things which have since come to pass. These men alone understood the truth, and have declared it to the world in books which are still extant; and which, if read and studied, will instruct a man in that which it most becomes a philos-

opher to know. The fulfilment of these predictions sufficiently prove their faithfulness and integrity; and the mighty miracles which they wrought set the truth of what they said beyond the power of contradiction. They magnified God, the great Creator of the world, and proclaimed His Son JESUS CHRIST, the Redeemer of mankind. But as for thyself," continued he, "above all things pray that the gates of light may be set open to thee: for these are things not discerned and understood by all, unless God and CHRIST grant a man the knowledge of them." Upon saying this, the stranger departed, having made a deep impression on St. Justin's mind. A divine flame appeared to be kindled in his soul, which produced a sincere love, not only of the prophets, but also of all those men who were the reputed friends of CHRIST. He set himself to examine the Christian religion, and being convinced of its truth, pronounced it as the only certain and profitable philosophy; a philosophy which might well alarm and persuade those who were out of the right way, and soothe and comfort those whose minds were conversant with it. This, however, was not the only inducement to ex-

change the doctrines of Plato for those of CHRIST. He was powerfully affected by the innocency of the Christians' lives, and by the fearlessness with which they encountered death in the blackest shape. "For my own part," said he, "being yet detained under the Platonic institutions, when I heard the Christians traduced and reproached, and yet saw them fearlessly rushing upon death, and venturing upon all those things that are accounted most dreadful and alarming to human nature, I concluded with myself that it was impossible that those men should wallow in vice, and be carried away with the love of lust and pleasure. For what man that is a slave to pleasure and intemperance, can cheerfully bid death welcome, which he knows must put an end to all his pleasure and delight? Would not such an one rather endeavour to prolong his life as much as possible, by eluding his adversaries, and concealing himself from the notice of the magistrate, instead of voluntarily betraying himself to an instant execution?" This reasoning was unanswerable, since there can be no greater proof of a man's sincerity than the laying down of his life in order to prove it. The

heroic manner in which the martyrs of old met their deaths, had a very powerful effect upon the mind of many a beholder; and hearts which went to the amphitheatre for the purpose of enjoying a spectacle, returned home thoroughly convinced of the truth of Christianity! The conversion of St. Justin, as might be expected, was a source of great regret to his heathen friends, who were at a loss to imagine what had wrought such a wonderful change in their friend. It was in order to explain the motives of his conduct, as well as to bring about their own conversion, that he thus addressed his former friends: "Think not, O Greeks, that I have rashly, and without consideration, departed from the rites of your religion. I could find nothing in it really sacred, and worthy of the Divine acceptance. Religious matters among you, as your poets have ordered them, are nothing but monuments of madness and intemperance. No sooner shall a man apply himself, even to the most learned among you for instruction, than he shall find himself entangled in a thousand difficulties, and become utterly confused. He then proceeded to expose the folly and absurdity of the founda-

tion of the Pagan's creed, and thus concluded his address:—"Come hither, O ye Greeks, and partake of a most incomparable wisdom; be instructed in a religion which is truly divine, and acquaint yourselves with an immortal King. Become as I am, for I sometime was as you are. Study the arguments which prevailed with me. Examine the efficacy and divinity of a doctrine which, like a skilful charm, expels all corrupt and poisonous affections from the soul, and banishes lust which is the fountain of all evil; from whence enmity, strifes, envy, emulation, and such like passions proceed, which being once driven out, the soul presently enjoys a pleasing calm and tranquillity. And being delivered from the yoke of evils that before lay upon its neck, it aspires and mounts up to its Creator, it being suitable and right that it should return to that place from whence it originally came." Although St. Justin was now a sincere Christian, and was well known to be such, he still retained the dress of a philosopher, and defended the Christian religion in that garb.

Some time after St. Justin was converted to the Christian faith, he paid a visit to

Rome, and is said to have taken up his abode near the Viminal mount. During his residence there, he was constantly employed in defending Christians, and promoting the cause of true religion. He was particularly successful in attacking and confuting the heresies which, at the beginning of the reign of Antoninus Pius, were disturbing the peace of the Church.

Although this emperor was a mild and excellent prince, and issued no edicts against the Christians, yet, as the followers of CHRIST were everywhere spoken against as a wicked and barbarous generation, they suffered severely from the effects of the edicts of his predecessors, which were now put in execution against them. It was in order to vindicate the Christians from the calumnies which were unsparingly heaped upon them, that St. Justin wrote the celebrated defence which is called his apology, and which he presented to the Emperor Antoninus, and to his two sons. In this apology he used very powerful arguments against the objections which the enemies of the Christians brought against them; and not only proved the divine origin of the Christian faith, but also showed the unreasonable-

ness of proceeding against the Christians without any evidence of their guilt, and contrary to the usual forms of law. He moreover explained the rites and usages of the Christian assemblies, and lastly reminded the emperor that his predecessor, Adrian, had commanded that Christians should not needlessly nor unjustly be harassed, but that their cause should be heard in a public court of justice. St. Justin's address was not unsuccessful, for the emperor shortly afterwards gave orders that the Christians should be treated for the future in a more gentle and regular manner.

It was not long after he had presented this address, that St. Justin visited the East, and at Ephesus fell in with a Jew of considerable reputation, named Tryphon, with whom he had a long discourse; and at its conclusion, Tryphon expressed himself much pleased with St. Justin, and entreated him to extend his friendship to him, in whatever part of the world he might chance to be.

It is not known what places St. Justin visited on quitting Ephesus, before he returned to Rome: but at length he arrived there, and had frequent contests and disputes

with a philosopher named Crescens, a man who, although of considerable ability, was given up to the lowest vices, and associated with the most abandoned wretches. St. Justin freely censured the conduct of Crescens, which provoked him to use every exertion to accomplish his destruction; and not long afterwards, an opportunity presented itself of gratifying his wishes. There happened to be a married couple at Rome, who being heathens, lived in the indulgence of every kind of licentiousness; but the woman having been converted to Christianity, forsook her evil courses, and having in vain endeavoured to reclaim her husband, was at last persuaded to procure a divorce from him. This so exasperated the man, that he accused his wife of being a Christian; but when she put in a petition to be heard in her own defence, he left the prosecution of his wife, and accused one Ptolemy, by whom she had been converted, and whom he procured to be cast into prison, and there tortured, merely because he confessed himself to be a Christian!

At length he was brought before the præfect of the city, and condemned to death. His condemnation being contrary to all law

and justice, Lucius, a Christian who stood by, could not forbear telling his judge that it was very hard that a virtuous and innocent man should be sentenced to die for no other crime than confessing himself to be a Christian. This was no sooner said, than Lucius himself, together with a third person, was sentenced to the same fate. The severity of these proceedings roused the solicitude of St. Justin for his brethren, and he immediately published another address or apology, in which he exposed the cruelty and injustice of these proceedings against the Christians; and begged that what he had written might be read, in order that the world at large might judge of their conduct, when they had heard the case fairly stated.

St. Justin's activity and zeal in the cause of the persecuted Christians, excited the malice and hatred of Crescens; and as he could not withstand St. Justin in argument, he resolved to instigate the secular power against him.

Marcus Aurelius was now on the throne; and although he was celebrated for his love of philosophy, was a zealous maintainer of heathen worship. He was well acquainted

with the undaunted manner in which the Christians met their deaths; but instead of assigning it to its true cause, he attributed it to mere stubbornness and obstinacy. As the emperor held these opinions, it was no difficult matter for Crescens to excite his particular hatred against St. Justin, who was so able and active in promoting the interests of the Christian religion. Indeed, St. Justin once told the emperor publicly, that he expected nothing less than that either Crescens, or some other of their philosophers, would form plots to undermine him, and procure his destruction. Nor was he mistaken in his anticipation; for before many days had elapsed, Crescens caused him to be cast into prison, and afflicted with many tortures. St. Justin was not alone in his trials; for six others were apprehended with him, and kept in the same prison. On being brought before the magistrates, the præfect of the city endeavoured to persuade St. Justin to obey the emperor's edicts, and worship his gods. Upon which St. Justin told him that no man could be justly condemned who obeyed the commands of the LORD JESUS CHRIST. The præfect then asked in what kind of learning

he had been brought up? St. Justin replied that he had endeavoured to understand all kinds of philosophy and learning, but had finally taken his rest in the doctrines of Christianity.. "Wretch that thou art," cried the præfect, "art thou then taken with that doctrine?" "I am," said St. Justin, "for with right doctrine do I follow the Christians." When asked what that doctrine was, he answered, "The right doctrine which we Christians profess is this, we believe the one only God to be the Creator of all things visible and invisible; and confess our LORD JESUS CHRIST to be the SON OF GOD, foretold by the prophets of old, and who shall hereafter come to be the Judge of mankind, a SAVIOUR, Preacher, and Master, to all those who are duly instructed by Him. As for myself, I think myself too mean to be able to say anything becoming His infinite Deity. That was the business of the prophets, who many ages before foretold the coming of the SON OF GOD into the world."

The præfect next inquired where the Christians were wont to assemble, and on being told that the God of the Christians was not confined to any particular place, he asked

where St. Justin gave instruction to his disciples; St. Justin immediately informed him where he dwelt, and added, that he preached the Gospel to all who resorted to him. The præfect then proceeded to examine the companions of St. Justin, and finding them resolute in adhering to their profession, he thus addressed the martyr:—"Hear thou, that art noted for thy eloquence, and thinkest thou art in the truth; if I cause thee to be scourged from head to foot, thinkest thou that thou shalt go to heaven?" To which the other answered, that although he should suffer what was threatened, yet he hoped he should enjoy the portion of all true Christians, well knowing that Divine favour and grace were laid up for all such, and would continue to be, as long as the world endured. And when, again, he was asked whether he thought he should go to heaven, and receive a reward, he replied, that he not only thought it, but was as sure of it as of a thing about which there could be no doubt. The præfect, seeing that it was useless to argue, ordered them to depart together, and to offer sacrifice to the gods. "No man who is in his right mind," replied St. Justin, "will desert true

religion to fall into error and impiety." A threat was then held out, that unless they complied, they should be tormented without mercy; in reply to which St. Justin declared, that there was nothing which they so much desired, as to endure torments for the sake of our LORD JESUS CHRIST. "For this," he added, "is that which will promote our happiness, and procure for us confidence before that dreadful tribunal of our LORD and SAVIOUR, before which, by the Divine appointment, the whole world must appear." The others expressed their assent to this declaration, and cried out, "Do quickly what thou wilt, for we are Christians, and cannot sacrifice to idols!" Upon which the præfect pronounced this sentence: "Let those who refuse to sacrifice to the gods, and to obey the emperor's edicts, be first scourged, and then beheaded according to the laws."

The holy martyrs rejoiced, and blessed God for this sentence which was passed upon them. On being led back to prison, they were scourged with whips; and while their bodies were torn and bloody with the cruel treatment they had received, they were beheaded. Their fellow Christians, who had as

yet escaped the fury of the persecutors, were not unmindful of those who had just suffered, but came and removed their lifeless bodies, and decently buried them; rejoicing that their beloved companions were thought worthy of being enrolled in THE NOBLE ARMY OF MARTYRS.

