

Volume 2

Stories from Church History

INSPIRING STORIES OF FAITH,
STRUGGLE AND TRIUMPH

A.D. 312-475

 IDEA CLASSICS

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INTRODUCTION

Stories from Church History is a collection of short stories gathered from a variety of volumes published in the mid to late 19th and very early 20th century.

Originally, this book was intended to include only the works of John Mason Neale. It was because of the help of Antonia Colias that many more stories came to our attention. Paidea Classics wants to thank Antonia for sharing with us the existence of these additional, very beautiful works, as well as her faithful help with editing and annotating texts. Neither this book, nor our other recently published titles, would be what they are without her ongoing contributions.

We at Paidea Classics have made minor alterations to most of these stories, occasionally altering grammar, punctuation and vocabulary to improve the understandability for the modern reader. We have also added annotations when appropriate.

ABOUT THE TERM "CATHOLIC" AND HOW THE APOSTOLIC FAITH WAS IDENTIFIED

Throughout this text, the word "catholic" is used to refer to the Church maintaining orthodox doctrine and teaching as opposed to heretical sects also described in these pages. "Catholic," which comes from the Greek term 'catholiki,' is found repeatedly in the earliest Church writings to describe the Church and the common Faith. 'Catholo' was originally a Platonic term used in Plato's philosophy, describing 'everything in accordance with the whole.' 'Holos' is the same root as 'whole,' 'cata' is 'according.' In early Christianity it referred to the universal Faith that had been taught by all the Apostles, in all the ancient churches together, which they had established.

According to St. Vincent of Lerins (+445) in his:

*A COMMONITORY—FOR THE ANTIQUITY AND UNIVERSALITY OF THE
CATHOLIC FAITH AGAINST THE PROFANE NOVELTIES OF ALL HERESIES:*

"Moreover, in the Catholic Church itself, all possible care must be taken, that we hold that faith which has been believed everywhere, always, by all. For that is truly and in the strictest sense "Catholic," which, as the name itself

and the reason of the thing declare, comprehends all universally. This rule we shall observe if we follow universality, antiquity, consent. We shall follow universality if we confess that one faith to be true, which the whole Church throughout the world confesses; antiquity, if we in no wise depart from those interpretations which it is manifest were notoriously held by our holy ancestors and fathers; consent, in like manner, if in antiquity itself we adhere to the consentient definitions and determinations of all, or at the least of almost all priests and doctors.”

And According to St. Augustine of Hippo:

"Petilianus said: 'If you declare that you hold the Catholic Church, the word 'catholic' is merely the Greek equivalent for entire or whole. But it is clear that you are not in the whole, because you have gone aside into the part.' Augustine answered: I too indeed have attained to a very slight knowledge of the Greek language, scarcely to be called knowledge at all, yet I am not shameless in saying that I know that means not 'one,' but 'the whole,' and that means 'according to the whole:' whence the Catholic Church received its name, according to the saying of the Lord, 'It is not for you to know the times, which the Father hath put in His own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in Judea, and in Samaria, and even in the whole earth.' Here you have the origin of the name 'Catholic.' ~ Augustine, Answer to Letters of Petilian, 2:38 [90] (A.D. 400).

Heresies, were man-inspired doctrines not originating from God (2Peter 2:1-3). They were innovative teachings that took root under individual teachers or church leaders at a certain time and place in history, distorting what had been universally taught throughout the whole, undivided Church from the beginning. If a doctrine was consonant¹ with what had been taught in all the ancient churches from antiquity, ‘according to the whole,’ then it was considered catholic and orthodox. Otherwise, lack of agreement with the Apostolic Tradition, rendered the teaching innovative and heretical.

¹There was flexibility for defining doctrine as in the case of adding ‘homoousios’ to the Nicene Creed to clarify Christ being of the same essence as God the Father. ‘Homoousios’ was not a term found in Scripture, which led to heated debate with the Arians. So a certain allowance was made for clarification, while maintaining harmony with the Apostolic Faith and not changing actual doctrine.

Accordingly, without exclusion, We subject to severest excommunication anyone—be it ourselves or be it another—who would dare to undertake anything new in contradiction to this constituted evangelic Tradition and the purity of the Orthodox Faith and the Christian Religion, or would seek to change anything by his opposing efforts, or would agree with those who undertake such a blasphemous venture. (Liber Diurnus Romanorum Pontificum, Patrologia Latina 1005, S. 54) ~ Pope St. Agatho (678-681)



THE FORTY MARTYRS OF SEBASTE

MARCH 9, CIRCA A.D. 312

BY JOHN MASON NEALE

THE snow lay deep and white on Mount Ararat. The cold winds came down from Mount Caucasus, and burned up the earth till it lay hard and stiff as iron. Mount Niphates glittered in the weak rays of the January sun, like a mine of diamonds. The barbarians of Sarmatia wrapped their sheepskins about them, and buried themselves in the dens and caves of the earth. Every night, the long melancholy howl of a wolf was heard along the banks of the Araxes. The bear, driven from his haunts by cold and hunger, prowled very near the abode of men.

It was, indeed, a cruel winter. Four Roman legions were quartered in Sebaste, a great city of Armenia. More than once, when the sentinel went, at the third watch, to relieve his companion, he found him frozen at his post.

Licinius ruled in the East, and though the Cross was now openly victorious, though Constantine in the West professed himself a Christian, though temples were everywhere decaying, and idols everywhere contemned²—he, the vain man that he was, would need to fight a little longer against the truth, if haply he might accomplish that which the ten great persecutions had failed to bring to pass.

Now there were in the legion called *Adjutrix*³, then at Sebaste, forty valiant confessors of Jesus Christ. These true soldiers, not of any earthly prince, but of the King of kings, set their faces like flint against idols and idol-worship. They would not yield to that which some of their brethren thought it no shame to practice, nor bow to the military standards in the *principia* (the headquarters) lest they should seem to adore the gods worshipped there. The

² Scorned.

³ Originally established by Nero during the civil wars of A.D. 68-9, this legion was composed primarily of men from Pannonia, Egypt, Syria, and Greece. It was reknown for its bravery.

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emperor's lieutenant heard tidings of their boldness, and he called them before him. There they played the man for their Lord. They were beaten with vine rods, they were torn with the *flagrum*⁴, the leaden whips; they were mangled, tortured, racked; but they, one and all, confessed a good confession, remembering Who has said, "Fear not them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do, but fear him Which, after he has killed, has power to cast into hell."⁵

Now it fell on a January evening, when the heart of Marcus Attilius, for that was the name of the legate, was merry with wine, that he resolved to bend the forty confessors to his will, or to end their lives. Four cohorts of the *Legio Adjutrix* were drawn up in the great square of the city. By the side of this square was a pool, then frozen hard to its very depths. And nigh at hand was a little temple, raised some two centuries before, to Mars, and the Fortune of the Empire. Then, at the word of the commander, the forty Christians stood forth in the midst.

"Soldiers," he said, "it is not unknown to you, that these men, whom you have up till now observed suffering in reward for their deeds: have dishonored the consular eagles, have disobeyed the command of the most victorious and pacific Augustus, have blasphemed the blessed divinities themselves, saying that there be no gods which are made with hands. Licinius has sworn by the fortune of Rome to extirpate these men and their profane teaching from the earth, as did the god Valerian, and the god Diocletian. And now," he continued, turning to the confessors themselves, "Citizens, for you that disgrace yourselves, I call not soldiers, listen to your doom: You see that pool, and the temple beside it. The Augustus, speaking by my mouth, gives order that you shall be stripped, and shall stand on the ice all this night. It is well known that more than one brave soldier in these very cohorts has perished by cold, notwithstanding all his care, in these inclement nights; and to be exposed to the frost on this icy pool will be certain death. Yet hear further: a fire shall be kindled in the house of the priest that joins the Temple; and they that will seek the protection of the god shall

⁴ Lead weighted dards carried by infantrymen.

⁵ Matthew 10:28.

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have shelter, shall have clothes, shall have food and wine, and, on the morrow, shall have good promotion.”

“Most excellent Legate,” said Lucius Pescenninus, a centurion of the first cohort, “it is true, in this matter alone we dare not obey the Augustus. It is meet to hearken unto God rather than to man. But in all other things we have always shown our courage and our fidelity to the Caesar. For it is written in our law, ‘Fear God; honor the king.’⁶ I myself have a *mural wreath*⁷; one of my brave brethren here has won a *vallar*,⁸ and one a *civic* crown.⁹ Be these the deeds of men that deserve to be called citizens? But do to us as it pleases you. In this one thing we refuse obedience. Make trial of us in whatever way, and in serving you we shall best serve our God. If it is your will that we should be exposed on the pool, we shall face the ice and the frost with as true a heart as ever we met the Persians on the field of battle.”

“It is well said,” replied the legate, “but ill done. Sempronius,”—he turned to a centurion—“I commit the charge of this affair to you. Keep watch in the priest’s house, and execute to the letter all I have said. Soldiers, to your quarters!”

“A victoriatu to a sestertius,¹⁰ Sempronius,” said one of his fellow centurions, “that not one lives until sunrise.”

“I take it,” replied the other. “Old Pescenninus has a stout look; and there are one or two more that I would venture somewhat on. But mind you—till morning only—for they will hardly survive for good.”

“Till sunrise,” said his friend. “But hark ye!—If any of them gives in, and takes refuge in the temple, he counts for nothing.”

“Agreed,” said Sempronius. “And now I must look to this business. Good night.”

⁶ 1Peter 2:17.

⁷ Corona Muralis or mural crown was conferred to the first man who scaled the wall of a besieged city and was presented by his commander. It was made of gold, and decorated with turrets (having the appearance of the city walls or towers that were scaled).

⁸ A circular gold crown with palisades, given to the soldier who first climbs the rampart and enters into the enemy’s camp.

⁹ It was regarded as the second highest military honor which a citizen could receive. It was awarded to Roman citizens who saved the lives of fellow citizens by killing an enemy in enemy held territory.

¹⁰ Betting a higher value silver coin, victoriatu, to a lower value sestertius coin.

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“The gods guard you, Sempronius! I will myself come down at sunrise, and see how matters have gone.”

Night closed in over the city. The shops were shut; the streets were still. Men went not willingly out into the bitter cold. No friendly cloud hung in the sky—it was a clear, starry night. The constellations glowed in the intense frost. The citizens heaped up their fires, and gathered closer around them. The soldiers discussed the speech of the legate, and canvassed the constancy of the sufferers.

There, on the frozen pool, stood the Martyrs of Jesus Christ. From the open door of the temple, a bright cheerful gleam of firelight shone. It threw fantastic shadows in the great square, and reflected itself on the clear, dark ice. Some presently fell, and slept that sleep which ends only in death. Some walked hurriedly up and down, as if to keep in the heat of life. Some stood with their arms folded, almost lost in prayer. Some consoled themselves and their brethren in the conflict.

“Better this cold,” said Pescenninus, “than the fire that never shall be quenched.”

“Now,” said Melithon, the youngest of the band, “are we the true soldiers of our Great Captain. There is no more cold where He is now. There is the perpetual sunshine of His Presence.”

“If we were fighting against an earthly enemy,” cried another, “how should we think scorn and contempt of him that played the traitor! But now we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness.”

“God grant that none of us turn back!” cried Melithon.

Then they prayed earnestly that He, Who had in a special manner consecrated the number *forty* to Himself. Who had bade Moses tarry in the mount forty days. Who had fed Elijah with that food, in the strength whereof he went forty days and forty nights. Who had given Nineveh forty days for repentance. Who had chosen for the first witness of his Apostles a man forty years old—they called on Him Who had Himself fasted forty days, and had lain forty hours in death, not to fail them then. “Forty athletes,” they said, “O Lord, we have entered the arena. Let forty victors receive the prize!”

Sempronius, meanwhile, with three soldiers, was waiting in the priest’s house for the result. Having given them their orders, he

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left them in the antechamber, and then, wrapping his cloak more closely around him, he leaned back in his chair and slept.

He slept, and in his sleep he beheld this vision. He stood by the side of the pool, and saw the martyrs in their conflict. As he gazed on them an angel came down from the sky with a golden crown in his hands. Its brightness was not of this world; it was most bright, most beautiful. He brought another, and another, and another, till the dreamer perceived that he was charged with the everlasting diadems of the victorious martyrs. Nine-and-thirty crowns he brought, but he came not with the fortieth.

“What may this mean?” asked Sempronius, as he awoke. “Is it in this manner their God rewards them that suffer in His service? And if it be, why yet is there one wanting to the perfect number?”

As he was speaking, there was a confusion in the anteroom, and one of the soldiers entered. “Quintilius sacrifices,” he said, “and no marvel; the cold is more than Scythian.”

Sempronius went out. The wretched man had been clad—was crouching over the fire, was drinking spiced wine; but such a look of horror and agony was in his face, that the centurion said half aloud, “Better to suffer the worst than that. Execute your orders,” he said more loudly to the soldiers; “let him be taken all care of. Give me my cloak, Cestius—I go to see the rest.”

He went forth. Still the cloudless night; still the intense piercing blast from the range of Caucasus. Most of them, on the frozen pool, had fallen where they stood. To them the bitterness of death was past; for they were in that last fatal sleep; and their diadem, though not yet attained, was certain. Others were praying, and most earnest of all was Pescenninus. “Forty athletes,” he said, “we have entered, O Lord, the arena; let forty victors receive the prize!”

“Nay,” said Sempronius; “that passes the power of your God, or of any; Quintilius has sacrificed.”

“He Who is Almighty,” said the centurion, “has means to accomplish His purposes which men can little know. Therefore cease I not to pray that there may be forty victors still.”

O wonderful power of prayer in all! But most wonderful virtue of intercession in Christ’s martyrs!

At that moment a thought rushed into the mind of Sempronius; a thought so sweet, so cheering, that the bitter Armenian night seemed to him as pleasant as the breath of a May

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morning in the gardens of the Hesperides. "Quintilius has fallen from his crown, I may attain to it."

In half an hour he had roused the legate from his sleep, and had professed himself a Christian. In half an hour more he stood himself on the frozen pool, a confessor among the other confessors. And there was yet life in Pescenninus and Melithon, to hail this new brother in arms in their spiritual warfare. He too, contending to the end, received the prize; the virtue of baptism, as the Church has ever taught, being supplied to him in this case by the grace of the martyrdom whereof he was counted worthy.

Thus the intercession of the confessors prevailed. Forty athletes entered the arena; and forty victors received the prize.



THE DEATH OF ARIUS

336 A.D.

BY JOHN MASON NEALE

IT was not intended that the Church of God should, while it is militant in this world, be at rest for long. No sooner is it delivered from "fightings without," than it is exposed to "fears within."

When Constantine had come to the Empire and persecutions had ceased throughout the world, an enemy appeared in the bosom of the Church far more dangerous than any with which she had yet had to fight. This was the heretic Arius.

Arius taught that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was not really and truly God. Those who had all their lives long been looking to Him, waiting for Him, calling on Him, believing Him to be their Archtype, their Sacrifice, their Redeemer, their Mediator, their exceeding great Reward, their Lord and their God were filled with grief and horror that anyone professing to be a Christian should dare to spread abroad so blasphemous a doctrine. But there were many who upheld it, and many who, by their teaching, were drawn away from the Truth

THE DEATH OF ARIUS

At last, the bishops of all parts of the Church came together to determine this matter, and they met at Nicea, in Bithynia. There the wicked Arius was declared to be no longer in the Communion of the Church, and he and all his followers were delivered over to a solemn curse. Then, too, it was that the Nicene Creed, nearly such as we have it in our Communion Service, was drawn up and declared to be the Faith of the Church.

One might have thought that Arius, finding himself thus condemned, would repent of the evil of his ways; but, like all wicked men, he was the more hardened in his wickedness. He went on spreading his heresy wherever he could. He had several bishops on his side. And, at the last, the Emperor Constantine,—the same who had seen the miraculous Cross—if he did not altogether become an Arian, thought that Arius ought not to have been cut off from the Church.

At this time St. Alexander was Bishop of Constantinople. He was ninety years old and had seen several persecutions of the Church, in all of which he had stood firm to the Faith. Now Constantine knew how much authority this good old bishop had and, sending for him, desired that, on a certain day, which he fixed, the bishop would receive Arius to his Communion. It was in vain that Alexander wept and besought the emperor not to urge him to commit so great a crime; in vain that he proved, by the clearest arguments, that Arius was a blasphemer. Constantine, who was not yet baptized, insisted and the bishop withdrew in the greatest grief. He came to his house, and called a council of the bishops and principal priests, who then happened to be in Constantinople, and they disputed much and long as to what was to be done. Some said that, considering all things, there would be no sin in receiving the Communion with Arius. Some said that they would rather suffer martyrdom than do so. And the greater part were greatly afraid and distressed.

At last James of Nisibis, of whom I shall tell you more another time, rose and spoke thus: “My fathers and brethren, it has ever been the lot of the Church of God, to thrive best when in the sorest trouble and, ever a mark of the Children of God, then to bring forth most plenteously the fruit of good works when they were in the midst of affliction. Job triumphed on a dunghill. The Three Children had no less a Companion than the Son of God in the midst

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of the burning fiery furnace. Paul and Silas sang praises in the dungeon. Holy Ignatius bore noble witness in the mouths of the lions, and Cyprian at the block. Wherefore, I am of good hope that out of our present danger our Lord, Who is our Only and Ever-living Head, will work out the good of His Church. But we have trusted too much to ourselves. We have gone about to dissuade the emperor with cunning words of human wisdom and have, therefore, failed. Yet that which the three hundred and eighteen” (James meant the bishops who were assembled at the Council on Nicea, and who amounted to that number) “have decreed, that we steadfastly maintain, that the *Son of God is of one essence with the Father*, as we daily sing in our churches. Wherefore, my counsel is that we leave off from further disputes which avail nothing and commit ourselves wholly to God, seeing that it is written, ‘It is time for Thee, Lord, to lay to Thyne Hand, for they have destroyed Thy Law.’¹¹ There is seven days to the time that this heretic is to be received into the Church; let us spend them in prayer and fasting; peradventure God will be gracious unto us, and deliver us from this great evil.”

Then answered Alexander, “What your Blessedness” (for that was the common title of bishops) “has said is well. This, also, is my counsel: heretics may use persuasion and disputation: prayer and fasting are the arms by which Catholics conquer.”

All that week there went up an earnest cry to God from the Church of Constantinople, that now, if ever, He would make bare His holy arm. There was prayer to the Lord Jesus Christ, that He would arise, and plead His own cause, and remember how the foolish man blasphemed Him daily. There was prayer to the Holy Spirit, that He, Who had inspired the Fathers of Nicea, would not forsake those who upheld what had been decreed by them.

And how did the Arians pass the week? In feasting and revelry. Their cause, they said, must be the cause of God, for the emperor had approved it, and it was all but victorious. Arius, now an old man, was caressed and praised by all, and his heart was lifted up within him.

It was to be on Sunday that he was to be received to Communion, and already it was the Saturday before. Arius had another audience of the emperor, who professed to be well satisfied

¹¹ Psalm 119.

THE DEATH OF ARIUS

with him, and dismissed him with great honor. It seemed to his followers that all was safe. A few hours more and they would have gained their wishes. And making a triumphal procession, they carried Arius through the city.

Still the Catholics went on praying. They did not see where help was to come, but they knew that with God nothing was impossible. Alexander, in his church, with two priests, continued in supplication, and though they heard the shouts of their enemies, they were only stirred up to greater fervency.

It was about three o'clock in the afternoon, and the procession had reached the Place of Constantine, the great square of the city. The countenances of the bishops and priests, who were with Arius, were flushed with their triumph. He himself looked pale and weary. He asked if there was no house where he could rest, and they showed him one into which he entered and, asking his friends to wait for him, said that he wished to be alone.

The crowd waited for some time with patience. Then people began to whisper to each other that the delay was very singular—that something must be the matter—that they did not like the look of the affair. Presently, the door of the house opened and a deacon, who was of Arius' party, ran across the public place, the crowd making room for him, to the house of Caius Lavinius, a physician, who lived on the opposite side. Several men cried out, "What is the matter?" "Who needs the physician?" but no answer was returned and the two entered the house together and closed the door.

And now suspense and impatience rose very high, and a feeling of terror came over the multitude, as if some awful thing were going on within. In a few moments, the physician came out and said, "Good people, I advise you to go to your homes. Arius is dead."

The heretic had, indeed, perished by the visitation of God; his bowels had fallen out, and the spot of his death was long held accursed.

Thus prayer triumphed, and St. Alexander, with a thankful, yet awe-stricken heart, celebrated the Communion with his flock on the following day.

{Authorities.—Socrates, i. 38, Sozomen, ii. 29. Fleury, iii. 223}



ST. PAUL, THE FIRST OF THE HERMITS

JANUARY 15, A.D. 227-342

BY ANDREW LANG

TRAVELERS in Egypt during the third and fourth centuries after Christ must have been surprised at the large number of monasteries scattered about in desert places, and the quantities of little cells or caves cut in the rock, which formed the dwellings of hermits. In those times each lonely anchorite lived as it best pleased him, or rather, as he thought best for his soul. But, of course, when many of them dwelt in the same house, this was not possible, and certain rules had to be made. In almost the very earliest of the monasteries, built a long way up the Nile, the monks were allowed to do as they liked about fasting, but were forced to work at some trade which would be of use to the brethren, or else, by the sale of the goods made, would enable them to support themselves. So in the house at Tabenna we find that among the thirteen hundred monks, there were basket-makers, gardeners, carpenters, and even confectioners, though probably these last were obliged to seek a market among the inhabitants of the various towns scattered up and down the Nile. In spite, however, of the numerous dwellers in the group of buildings which formed the monastery, Pachomius, the founder, had no intention of allowing his brethren to waste time in idle gossip. Whether working in the carpenter's shop, or hammering at the anvil, or shaping sandals, each man was bound to repeat the Psalms or some passages from the Gospels. He might eat when he was hungry, and could choose if he would give up bread, and live on vegetables and fruit and wild honey, or if he would have them all; but he was strictly forbidden to speak at his meals to other monks who happened to be present, and was enjoined to pull his cowl or hood over his face. And lest the monks should become fat and lazy, they were given no beds, but slept as well as they could in chairs with backs to them.

Paul, who is generally thought to be the first man to spend his life alone in the Egyptian desert, was the son of rich parents, who

SAINT PAUL, THE FIRST OF THE HERMITS

died when Paul was about sixteen. They were educated people, and had the boy taught much of the learning of the Egyptians, as well as all that was best in Greek literature and philosophy, but as soon as they were dead, the husband of Paul's sister, hoping to get all the family money for himself, made plans to betray his young brother-in-law, who was a Christian. For at this time the Roman emperor had commanded a persecution of all who would not sacrifice to the gods of Rome. Vainly did his wife implore him to spare her brother. The love of money had taken deep root in his soul, and he was deaf to her prayers and blind to her tears. Happily she was able to warn Paul of his danger, and one night he crept out of the house in northern Egypt, and fled away to the desert hills on the south. When the sun rose over the river, he explored the mountains in search of a hiding-place, and discovered at length a cave with a large stone across the mouth.

"If I could only roll that stone away!" he thought, and with a great effort he managed to move it, and clamber inside.

"No one will ever think of looking for me here," he murmured; "and how clean it is!" he added, for he had been used to a house tended by slaves, and did not consider dirt a sign of holiness like the later hermits.

So Paul took possession of his cave, and though he lived to be very old, he never more quitted the mountain side, but went every day to fetch water from a tumbling stream, and to gather dates from the palms, while he made himself clothes out of their leaves. But we are not told that he saw or spoke with anyone, till a few days before he died, and was taken up to heaven.

Paul had spent so many years in his mountain cell, that he had almost lost count of them, and could scarcely have told you his age if you had asked him. Several miles away dwelt another old man called Antony, who, when he settled in his cave beyond the great monastery, thought that he had gone further into the desert than anyone living, till in his dreams he heard a voice which said, "Beyond you and across the hills dwells a man holier than you. Lose no time, but set out at once to seek him, and you will gain great joy."

Then Antony awoke, and after eating a handful of dates and drinking a little water, he took up his staff made out of a palm branch, and set forth on his journey.

STORIES FROM CHURCH HISTORY

The sun was hot and the sharp grit of the burning sand hurt his feet. Indeed, it was so long since he had walked at all, that it was wonderful his legs were not too stiff and too weak to support him. But he kept on steadily, resting now and then under the shade of a tree—when he happened to pass one—and kept his eyes fixed on the distant mountains which seemed to give him strength. In this manner he was pressing forwards when a being came up to him, so strange to look upon, that he doubted if the like had ever been seen. The head and the front of it resembled a man, and its body and legs were those of a horse, and as he gazed, Antony remembered the verses of the poets he had read in his youth, describing such a creature, which they called a centaur; but at the time he had held these to be vain imaginings. The fearful beast planted itself in front of him, and gave utterance to horrible words. As he listened Antony grew persuaded that it was Satan himself come to vex him, and he shut his ears, and went on his way.

He had not traveled far before he beheld, standing on a rock nearby, another beast, smaller than the first, with horns growing out of its forehead. “And who are you?” asked Antony, trembling as he spoke, and the beast said, “I am that creature whom men know as a Satyr, and worship in their foolishness,” and at its answer Antony left it also behind him and passed on, marveling how it happened that he understood what the two beasts had said; for their language was unknown to him.

Night was now beginning to fall, and Antony feared lest his steps might stray in the darkness, and that the morning sun might find him far away from his goal. But even as the doubt beset him, his gaze lighted upon the footprints of an animal leading straight to the mountain, and he felt it was a sign that he would not be suffered to wander from the right path, so he walked on with a joyful heart. And when the sun rose he saw before him a huge hyaena, and it was galloping with all its speed in the direction of the mountain, but swiftly though it moved, Antony’s feet kept pace with it. Up the sides of the hill after it went the holy man to his own great wonder, and when they had both crossed the top, they ran down a steep slope where a cave with a very little opening was hidden among the rocks. Big though it was, the hyaena’s sides were very flat and it passed easily through the opening. Then Antony knew in his heart that in the cave dwelt Paul the Hermit.

SAINT PAUL, THE FIRST OF THE HERMITS

Although the walls of rock almost met overhead, the cave was not dark but full of a great light, and he beheld Paul sitting in the midst of it. He did not dare to enter without permission, so he took a small pebble and knocked with it on the wall. Immediately the rock was rolled across the opening, with only so much room left as a man might speak through.

“O let me in, I pray you!” cried Antony, falling on his knees.

“Small need is there to shut me out, for I am alone.”

“But wherefore have you come?” asked Paul, and Antony answered:

“I am not worthy to stand in your presence, I full well know it. But since you receive wild beasts, will you not receive me likewise? For I have sought you from afar, and at last I have found you. And if, for some reason that I know not, this may not be, here shall I die, so give my body burial, I pray you.”

Paul bowed his head as he listened to the words of Antony, and rolled away the stone, and they sat together and talked, and the hermit asked many questions of his guest about the world he had left.

“Tell me, I beseech you,” he said, “something of the children of men, for much must have happened since I took up my abode here, well-nigh a hundred years ago. Are the walls of the ancient cities still growing bigger because of the houses which are being built within them? Do kings yet reign over the earth, and are they still in bondage to the devil?” These and many more questions did he ask, and Antony answered them. Now while they were speaking they both looked up at the moment, and on a tree which hung over the cave they beheld a raven sitting, holding in its beak a whole loaf of bread and waiting till they had ceased speaking. When the two old men paused in their conversation, the raven fluttered to the ground, and laying the loaf down between them, spread its wings and flew away.

“Behold,” said Paul, “what mercies have been given me! For sixty years and more this bird has brought me half a loaf daily, from where I know not, but now has a double portion been bestowed on us. Take then the loaf and break it.”

“No,” answered Antony, “that is not for me to do;” but Paul would not listen to him, and darkness came on while they were yet disputing over the matter, till at the last each took hold of one end

STORIES FROM CHURCH HISTORY

of the loaf, and pulled it till it broke in two. And after they had eaten, they stood up and prayed till the dawn.

“The time of my rest has come, brother Antony,” said Paul in the morning, “and you have been sent here by the Lord to bury my body.” At his words Antony broke forth into weeping, and entreated that Paul would not leave him behind, but would take him into the heavenly country. But Paul answered:

“It is not fitting that you should seek your own good, but that of your neighbors. Therefore I entreat you, if it is not too much for your strength, return to the monastery, and bring me the cloak which was given to you by the holy Athanasius¹², that I may lie in it when I am dead.”

Antony wondered how one who had been for so long set apart from the world should know of the gift. But he arose at Paul’s bidding, and said farewell, kissing him on his eyes and on his hands.

Heavy of heart was Antony, and weary of foot, when his long journey was done, and he entered the monastery.

“Where have you been, O Father?” asked his disciples, who gathered eagerly round him. “High and low have we sought you, and we feared greatly that illness had come upon you, or that some evil beast had devoured you.”

But he would tell them nothing of his pilgrimage, only went into his cell, and took the cloak of Athanasius from the place where it hung, and having done this he set forth again on his road to the mountains, making all the speed he could, lest he might be too late to see Paul alive.

That day and all through the night Antony went on without resting, or eating food. But on the second day at the ninth hour he had a heavenly vision. In the air before him was a multitude of angels and prophets and martyrs, with Paul in their midst, his face shining like the sun. The vision lasted but for a moment, yet clearly he beheld the faces of them all. And when it had vanished he cast himself on the ground and wept, crying “O Fearer of God, why have you left me thus without a word, when I was hastening to you with the swiftness of a bird?”

Then he rose up and climbed the mountain, and soon the cell of Paul was before him. The stone which kept it fast had been

¹² St. Athanasius the Great, the patriarch of Alexandria who stood firmly against arianism.

SAINT PAUL, THE FIRST OF THE HERMITS

rolled away, and in the entrance knelt Paul himself, his face raised to heaven.

“He is alive and I am in time,” thought Antony, and he stood and prayed, and the body of Paul stood by him and prayed also. But no sound came from his mouth, and a certainty crept over Antony that the vision had been true, and that the soul of Paul had ascended to heaven. So he spread the cloak of Athanasius on the earth, and laid the body of Paul upon it and wrapped the cloak about him as the holy hermit had desired. Yet another task lay before him, and in what manner to accomplish it he knew not.

“How shall I bury him?” he said to himself, “for I have neither axe nor spade with which to dig a grave, and it will take me four days to go and come from the monastery. What can I do?”

Now as he pondered he lifted his head, and beheld two great lions running towards him, and his knees knocked together for fear. But as he looked again his fear passed from him, and they seemed to him as doves for gentleness, monstrous of size though they were. While he gazed the lions drew near, and by the body of Paul they stopped. Then they lifted their heads and fixed their eyes on Antony and wagged their tails at him, laying themselves down at his feet, and purring. By this Antony understood that they desired his blessing, and he blessed them. When they had received his blessing, they began to dig a grave with their claws, and the hole that they made was deep enough and wide enough and long enough for the body of Paul. And as soon as it was finished, they knelt down a second time before Antony, their ears and tails drooping, and licked his hands and his feet. So he thanked them for their good service, and blessed them once more, and they departed into the desert. Then Antony took the body of Paul and laid it in the grave which the lions had dug, sorely grieving.