

He meaneth Hadrian which adopted this Antoninus of hys sonne in law, to be hys sonne & heyre. O noble edict.

And to me also many there be, which write, signifying their mind in like manner. To whome I have answered againe, to the same effect and maner as my father did. Wherefore, if any hereafter shall offer any vexatiō or trouble, to such, hauing no other cause, but onely for that they are yea, let him that is appeached, be released and discharged free, yea although he be founde to bee such, (that is a Christian) and let the accusor sustaine the punishment, &c.

This godly Edict of the Emperour was proclaimed at Episcopus, in the publique assembly of all Asia, wherof Melito alio Byshop of Sardis, who flourished in the same tyme, maketh mention in his Apologie written in defence of our doctrine to M. Antoninus Verus as hereafter (Christ willing) shall appeare. By this meanes then the tempest of persecution in those daies began to be appeased, though the mercifull prouidence of God, which woulde not haue hys Church utterly to be overthrowne, though hardly yet to growe.

* The fourth Persecution.

After the decease of the foresayd quiet and milde Prince Aurelius Antonius Pius (who among all other Emperours of that tyme made the most quiet end, followed his sonne M. Antoninus Verus, with Lucius his brother, about the yeare of our Lord. 162. a man of nature more sterner and fencere. And although in iudoy of Philosophy, & in ciuile gouernement no lesse commendable: yet toward the Christians sharpe and fierce, by whome was moued the fourth persecution after Nero. In whose tyme a great number of them which truly professed Christ, suffered most cruel torments, and punishments, both in Asia and in Fraunce. In the number of whome was Polycarpus, the worthy Byshop of Smyrna, who in the great rage of this persecution in Asia, among many other most constant Saintes was also Martyred. Of whose end and Martyrdom I thought it here not vncerpient to comit to history, so much as Eusebius declareth to be taken out of a certaine letter or Epistle, wrytten by them of hys owne Church, to the brethren of Pontus the tenor of which Epistle here followeth.

The congregation which is at Smyrna, to the congregation which is at Philomilium, and to all the congregations throughout Pontus, mercy to you, peace, and the loue of God our father, and of our Lord Iesu Christ, be multiplied. Amen. We haue wrytten vnto you brethren of those men which haue suffered Martyrdom, and of blessed Polycarpus which hath ended and appeared this persecutiō, as it were by the shedding of his own blood. And in the same epistle, before they enter into farther matter of Polycarpus, they discourse of other Martyrs, describing what patience they abode and shewed in suffering their torments: which was so great and admirable (saith the Epistle) that the lookers on were amazed, seeing and beholding how they were scourged and whipped, that the inward waynes & arteries appeared, yea euen so much that the very intreailes of their bodies, their bowels and members were seen, & after that, were set vpon sharp shels taken out of the sea, edged, and sharpe, and certaine nailes and thornes for the Martyrs to sharpe vpon, which were sharped and pointed called Obelisci. Thus suffered they all kind of punishment and torment that might be deuised: and lastly, were throwne vnto the wild beasts to be deuoured. But especially in the foresayd Epistle, mention is made of one Germanicus, how he most worthily persecuted and ouerrame by the grace of God, that feare of death which is ingrafted in the common nature of all men, whose notable patience & sufferance was so notable, that the whole multitude wondering at this beloned Martyr of God, for this his bold constance, and also for the singular strength and vertue proceeding of the whole multitude of the Christians: began sodenly to cry with a loud voyce, saying: destroy the wicked men, let Polycarpus be sought for. And whilest a great vprore and tumult began thus to be raised vpon those cries: A certaine Phrigian named Quintus, lately come out of Phrigia, who feeding and abhorring the wilde beasts, and the fierce rage of them, of an ouer light mynd betrayed his own lascite. For so the same letter of him doth report, that he, not recerently, but more malicertly then requisite, was together with others rushed into the iudgement place, and so being take, was made a manifest example to all the beholders, that no man ouer rashly and vnreremently with such boldnesse, to chuse in himself, to entremedde in matters, wherewith he hath not to do.

But now we will successe to speake more of them, and returne to Polycarpus, of whome the foresayd letter consequently declareth as followeth: How that in the beginning, when he heard of these things, was nothing at all afraid

nor disquieted in mynd, but purposed to haue taried still in the Citie, till being periuaded by the intreatie of the that were about him (which desired him instancly that he would conuey himselfe away) hid himselfe in a grange or village not farre off from the Citie, and there abiding with a fewe more in his company, did nothing els (nigh not day) but abode in supplication, wherem he made his humble petitiō for the obtaining of peace vnto all the congregatiōs through out the world. For that was his accustomed maner so to doe. And as he was thus making his prayers three dayes before he was apprehended, in a vision by night he saw the bed set on fire vnder his head, and sodenly to be consumed. And when he awaked, he told by and by & expounded vnto them that were present, his vision, and told them before what thing should come to passe, that is, how that in five he should lose his life for Christes cause. It is further mentioned, that whē they were hard at hand, which lo narowly sought for him, that he was enforced for the affection and loue of his brethren, to flect into an other village, to which place notwithstanding with a litle while after the pursuers came, and when they had taken a couple of children that dwelt therabouts, they so beat one of them to whips, & by the betwaying or confession of him, they were brought to the Inne wher Polycarpus was. And they say that the pursuers making no great hast to enter, found him in the uppermost place of the house, from whence he might haue escaped into other houses, if he would, but this he would not do, saying: the wil of God be done. Furthermore, whē he knew that they were come, as the said history sheweth: he came downe, and spake vnto them with a very cheerful and pleasant countenance, so that it was a wonder to see those which a while agoe knew not the man, now beholding & viewyng his comely age, and his graue & constant countenance, lamented that they had so much employed their labour, that so aged a man should be apprehended. To conclude, he commaunded that straightway without any delay the table should be layd for them, and perswaded the that they would eate and drinke well, and required of them boldly, that he might haue an houres respite to make his prayers, which thing after it was granted, he arose and went to pray, so being replenished with the grace of God, that they which were present, and hearyng the prayers that he made, were astonied at it, and now many of them were loy that so honest and godly an aged man should be put to death.

After this, the foresayd Epistle or letter, prosecuting the historie, addeth more as followeth: After he had made an end of his prayers, & had called to his remembrance al those things which euer hapned vnto him, and to the vniuersal catholike church throughout all the world (whether they were small or great, glorious or els inglorious) and that the houre was now come in which they ought to set forward, they set him vpon an Ass, and brought him to the Citie vpon a solenne feast day. And there met him Irenarchus Herodes, and his father Nicetes, which causing him to come vp into the chariote where they sate, perswaded him & sayd: what hurt I pray thee shall come thereof to thee, if thou say (by the way of salutation) My Lord Caesar, and to do sacrifice, and thus to saue thy selfe? But he at the beginning made them none answer. Till that when they enforced him to speake, he sayd: I wil not do as ye counsel me I should. When that they sawe he could not be perswaded, they gaue him very rough language, & of purpose molested him, that in goyng downe the chariot from them, he might hurt or breake his legs. But he forcing very light of the matter, as though he had felt no hurt, went merrily and diligently forward, making hast vnto the place appointed. And when there was such vprore in the place of execution, that he could not be heard but of a very few, there came a voyce from heauen to Polycarpus, as he was going into the Stage or appointed place of iudgement, saying: be of good cheare Polycarpus and play the man. No man there was, which saw him that spake, but very many of vs heard his voyce. And when he was brought in, there was a great noise made by them which vnderstand that Polycarpus was apprehended. The Iudges asked him whē that he was come, whether his name was Polycarpus or not, and when he said, yea it was, he gaue him counsaile to deny his name, and said vnto him, be god vnto thy selfe, and fauour thyn old age, and many other such like words which they accustomed to speake. So were saith he, by the Emperours good fortune, looke vpon this matter, say thou with vs: Destroy these nauyghtie men. When Polycarpus beholding with constant countenance the whole multitude which was in the place appointed, and geuing a great sigh, leaped vp to heauen, saying: Thou, thou it is that wilt destroye these wicked nauyghty men. And the Iudges thus being earnestly

Polycarpus flyeth persecution.

Polycarpus prayeth for the church.

Polycarpus hath a vision of hys burning.

Polycarpus purified and taken.

Polycarpus might escape and would not

Polycarpus falleth to prayer.

Polycarpus refuseth to doe sacrifice.

Polycarpus comforted by a voyce from heauen.

Polycarpus allured to change hys name would not consent.

M. Antoninus Verus Emperour.

Anno. 162.

Polycarpus, the blessed Martyr Byshop of Smyrna.

Ex Euseb. hist. Eccles. Lib. 4. Cap. 15. Hieron. in Catalogo.

Twelue Martyrs in Asia.

The cruell and beauly handling of the Christian Martyrs.

The singular patience, and constancie of the Christians.

Germanicus a most constant Martyr.

Quintus a Phrigian to hardic hold.