

interpretation of the Scriptures made the name of "Biblicals" of ill repute among Catholics, though the Sacred Scriptures are the special deposit of the Catholic Church, so there is risk that the missionary name may become synonymous with mere material greed and unctuous cant in the ears of Catholics among ourselves. It is a matter of regret that vocations to the mission life have been hitherto scarcer in English-speaking countries than among the Catholics of France, Spain, Italy or Germany. The deficiency may, possibly, be in a part connected with the low idea of "missionary work" made familiar to the American and English public by the methods of the commercial missionaries of our own time. It is well that the distinction between such and Catholic missions should be widely known and recognized.

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CHRISTIANITY AND PAGANISM IN ROME DURING THE TRANSITION PERIOD.

I. FROM THE ACCESSION OF CONSTANTINE TO THE DEATH OF MAXIMIN (A. D. 306-313).

BY the abdication of Diocletian at Nicomedia on the 1st of May, 305, and on the same day, by mutual agreement of Maximianus Hercules, his colleague at Milan, Galerius became sole master in the East and Constantius Chlorus in the West; while under them Flavius Severus and Daza, afterwards known as Maximin, governed, with the title of Cæsar, the first the provinces of Italy and Africa, the second Syria and Egypt. This arrangement prepared the way for the execution of God's design to establish in the centre and stronghold of paganism a Christian Emperor. It placed upon the throne of half the empire Constantius Chlorus, father of Constantine the Great, whose marble statue set up in his lifetime in the Baths named after him in Rome has kept guard for centuries at the entrance of the Lateran Basilica, mother and mistress of all the churches.

Constantius Chlorus is described by Eusebius in glowing terms. "Of the four Augusti he alone kept peace with God: the others razed the churches and oratories of the Christians to the ground, he never soiled his hands with their ruin: the others slaughtered the worshippers of the true God, he always preserved his soul innocent of

that crime: the others were sunk in the lowest superstition and slaves to demons. He allowed liberty of worship to all, they harassed their subjects with taxes and made life more miserable to them than death. Constantius was the only one of the four who ruled in peace, and whose government was paternal."¹ These qualities must have endeared him to his people, but they also made the senior Augustus regard him with diffidence if not suspicion, and when it was hinted that although the people might be contented, the coffers of the State would be found empty, a commission of inquiry was appointed to investigate and report. When Constantius heard this, he called the most wealthy of his subjects and told them that he was in need of money, and asked them to show their friendship. They responded at once by filling his treasury with gold, silver and other precious articles, each one trying to outdo the other. He then invited the messengers to inspect the collection and report to their master what they saw. After their departure he recalled the donors, thanked them for their ready generosity and directed them to take back their property and return to their homes.²

This anecdote is an example of Constantius' mild and paternal rule: Eusebius relates another incident which reveals another feature in a higher level. A fresh persecution arose, and special orders were sent to the Governors of the provinces all over the empire to exterminate the Christians. The signal was given in the imperial palaces, which contained numerous officials and dependents professing the faith, and countless martyrs suffered at the time. Constantius, too, received orders to put the edict in force, but evaded the command by a stratagem. He summoned to his presence all the palatine dependents, from the lowest class of servants to the highest rank of judges, and put two alternatives before them, requiring from them an immediate choice. If they consented to sacrifice to the idols, they might remain in the palace with their customary emoluments; if they refused to sacrifice, they would be dismissed from his service. When they had all made their choice and ranged themselves on opposite sides, Constantius addressed them, disclosing the purpose he had hitherto kept secret; sternly rebuked those who had weakly conformed, and praised the recusants for their steadfast adherence to their religion. The former, he said, were traitors to their God and unworthy to serve their prince, and he dismissed them from his service; the others he took into his special favor and appointed to offices of the greatest responsibility.

Eusebius proceeds to contrast Constantius with his colleagues, and to set in relief his virtuous life, his belief in one only God, his abhorrence of polytheism, his house blessed with the prayers of holy

¹ Eusebius, "De Vita Constantini," I., xiii. ² *Ib.*, xiv.

men, his whole family, wife, children and servants consecrated to the King, God, so that the multitude that was congregated in his palace differed in nothing from an assembly of the faithful: among the rest there were also some ministers of God, who prayed without ceasing for the Prince's welfare, while elsewhere the very name of Christian could never be mentioned.³

The attitude of Constantius towards the Christians, both during his subordinate position as Cæsar and after his elevation as Augustus, was peculiar. Perhaps it is going too far to say with Eusebius that he never gave execution in his States to the latest proscription of Diocletian. Lactantius is probably more exact when he writes that in order not to seem in conflict with his colleagues, "he suffered all their meeting places, a few bare walls that could easily be built up again, to be cast down without doing any harm to the living temple of God, who dwells in man."⁴ Compared with the other princes who reigned at the time, he was no persecutor. Tolerant of all worships, and with a special leaning towards Christians, among whom he had many friends, he made no objection when his wife Helen joined them some years after her marriage. But he himself never professed the faith, although he willingly conversed with priests and Bishops and made them welcome in his circle. His condition of mind was not singular at the time; a broad spirit of toleration had become common among the educated classes; paganism had lost its hold on their intelligence and even on their imagination; they were tired witnessing the cruel punishments inflicted on those who refused to give divine worship to what many of themselves treated with scorn. Christianity, too, was beginning to be a power that had to be reckoned with, not from fear of a rebellion among its adherents, but from a dread in those who wielded power, of the chastisements that so often fell on its oppressors. The veneration of Eusebius for Constantine the Great and the enthusiasm which makes his life of that Emperor a panegyric rather than a history may perhaps affect also his description of Constantine's father; but the moderation of Constantius Chlorus is testified many years after his death by the words in the petition of the Donatists to Constantine: "We make our petition to you, O Constantine Emperor, because you come of an upright stock; your father, alone among the Emperors, never enforced the persecution, and so Gaul was spared the infamy."⁵

³ Eusebius, "De Vita Constantini," I., xvii. ⁴ "De mortibus persecutorum," XV., "Constantius, ne dissentire a majorum præceptis videretur, conventicula, id est parietes, qui restitui poterant, dirui passus est, verum autem Dei templum, quod est in hominibus, incolome servavit." ⁵ "Rogamus te, Constantine Imperator, quoniam de genere justo es: cujus pater inter cæteros imperatores persecuciones non exercuit: et ab hoc scelere immunis est Gallia." Optatus, "De Schismate Donatistarum," I., xxii.

Constantine was born in 274. He was the eldest of a numerous family. He spent his earliest years in the house of his father, under the care of his mother Helen, who became a Christian some years after his birth, and after passing through the sorrow of a forced separation from her husband, imposed for reasons of state, and a long widowhood, lived to an advanced age in the exercise of charity and devotion, to die a holy death and merit the veneration of the Church as the Empress Saint down to our own day. In the tolerant circle of his father's home the boy was brought up, making the acquaintance of many Christians, learning something of their religion, familiarizing himself with their belief and observances and profiting by their conversation and example. When Constantius was promoted to the rank of Cæsar and had the province of Gaul assigned to him it did not suit the policy of Diocletian to allow Constantine to accompany him to the seat of his government, where he would naturally be looked upon as heir presumptive to his father in the West, because it was his design to substitute adoption for heredity in the succession of Cæsars. He accordingly requested Constantine to remain in his service, where he was soon in high favor, one proof of which was his being selected to accompany Diocletian in his progress through Palestine and taking the first place on his right hand on ceremonial occasions. His features were handsome, his figure tall and majestic and his dignified bearing made him the centre of observation in every assembly, but his modesty gave a special grace to all his movements. His cultured mind, his knowledge of classic writers, his discretion and prudence, his activity, insensibility to pleasure and many virtues marked him for a career of great distinction. He took part in the wars of Egypt and Persia and rose to the rank of tribune of the first class. His surroundings at court and in camp were very different from what he had been accustomed to at home, but the new examples did not efface the impressions of his early youth in Gaul. He was not seduced, but repelled, by the manners of his new associates, although he carefully endeavored to conceal his feelings. He was particularly indignant at being made to witness the cruelty of the persecution on one of its first victims, and his hatred of the cruelty increased his contempt for the chief actors and his sympathy for the sufferers. The jealousy of the two Emperors, Diocletian and Galerius, especially of the latter, who in the declining health of Constantius Chlorus was looking forward with confidence to the time when his death would leave him sole master, was a cause of anxiety to Constantine, and he seized the opportunity when Galerius reluctantly consented to his father's repeated request and gave permission to visit him, to depart immediately, and by forced stages he succeeded in outstripping the pur-

suers sent to intercept him. He arrived at Boulogne when the Emperor was about to cross the Channel on his last expedition to Britain; a victory over the Caledonians finished the campaign. Very shortly after Constantius died in the imperial palace in York, on July 25, 306. He was buried with due honor, and the army at once unanimously elected Constantine, who presented himself in his father's purple and was enthusiastically applauded. Galerius when he heard the news thought it prudent to dissemble his chagrin, and accepted the accomplished fact, giving, however, only the title of Cæsar to Constantine. He, too, adopted tactics of dissimulation, and resolved to wait for his opportunity.

Severus, a favorite of Galerius, meanwhile received the title of Augustus. But his reign was of short duration. The Romans, disgusted at the arbitrary violation of their privileges by the minions of Severus, who neglected the government and lived away from the city, chose Maxentius, son of Maximian, in his place. Maximian joyfully left his seclusion to support the fortunes of his son; his experience, ancient dignity and reputation in arms added strength to the party of Maxentius. At his request Maximian resumed the purple, and when Severus, roused from his indolence, made an attempt to enter Rome he was repulsed; and, compelled to surrender after a battle near Ravenna, at the command of his conqueror put an end to his own life. Constantine and Maximian were now near neighbors and almost face to face. The latter crossed the Alps, had a personal conference with Constantine, made an amicable arrangement with him, and gave his daughter Fausta in pledge of the alliance. Constantine was now trimming and watching the approaching conflict between the masters of Italy and the Emperor of the East and deliberating how he might best serve his safety or ambition in the event of war. The situation of both, exposed to similar dangers, drew Constantine and Maximian together in spite of their difference of character, and they united their forces in common defense.

Galerius made an unsuccessful attempt to recover Italy and returned into the East. He raised his friend Licinius to the rank of Augustus in place of Severus. This promotion provoked the jealousy of Maximian, who was vigorously engaged in the oppression of Egypt and Syria, and disdaining to bear longer the inferior title of Cæsar, extorted that of Augustus. The Empire was now, for the first time, governed by six Emperors: Maximianus Herculeus and Maxentius in Rome, Severus in Italy, Constantine in Gaul, Galerius and Maximian in the East. Bitterly opposed to each other, they cautiously refrained from open hostility till after the death of the two older princes. Maximian fell a victim to his own severity and ex-

actions, which irritated the populace and provoked the prætorians to revolt, and to escape their fury he left the city. Maxentius, his son, was elected by the soldiers in his place as absolute sovereign. Maximian first took refuge in Illyricum, but Galerius, who knew his treacherous disposition, did not think himself safe till he expelled him from his dominions; he then fled to the protection of his son-in-law, Constantine, in Gaul, who received him honorably, but refused to be drawn into his quarrel with Maxentius. In his exile he did not relinquish his intrigues; detected twice in a conspiracy against Constantine, and pardoned, he abused the generosity and hospitality of his benefactor by plotting against his life. Constantine was this time relentless, and gave to Maximian the choice of the manner of his death; he chose hanging.

Galerius in 310 was attacked by a malady which is described in details too revolting to be repeated by historians of the time. An abscess formed in his body and turned to cancer, which did not confine itself to the surface, but penetrated to the entrails. Myriads of worms swarmed over the living carcass and filled the air with a pestilent odor. It was the punishment of the most notorious persecutors of God's people in the Old and New Testaments repeated in Galerius, worthy successor of Antiochus and Herod. No skill of physicians availed to alleviate his sufferings, and in despair he turned to the gods. Both Esculapius and Apollo failed him; an oracle of the latter divinity prescribed a remedy which only aggravated his malady.⁶ Then he bethought him of the God of the Christians and of his cruel treatment of them; and emaciated with pain and half his body rotting away and the other half enormously swollen, he resigned himself to the humiliation of surrendering to the Majesty of God, professing repentance and imploring forgiveness and a respite from the torments he could bear no longer. From his sick bed at Sardica he issued an edict which was published at Nicomedia on the last day of April, 311, bearing his name and the names of his colleagues, Constantine and Licinius. It is not known whether the draft was submitted to them, but Galerius might well depend on their consent, for Constantine was not a persecutor and Licinius only a half-hearted and intermittent one, as he thought it politic. The text has been preserved to us by Lactantius in Latin and in a Greek translation by Eusebius.⁷ It is as follows:

"Among many measures which we were promoting for the public good we desired long ago to restore uniformity of discipline in accordance with the ancient laws and customs of the Romans, and especially to bring the Christians who abandoned the religion of their fathers to a better mind. But such was their obstinate folly that they could not be brought to follow the ancient observances

⁶ Lactantius, "De morte persec.," xxxiii. ⁷ Eusebius, "Hist. Eccl.," viii., 17.

ordained by their founders, but invented regulations at their caprice, and in several places collected congregations who met apart. At last when we commanded them all to return to their ancient customs many obeyed through fear, others suffered punishment; still the great majority persevered in their obstinacy, and now we see that they neither give honor and worship to the gods of the country nor due reverence to the God of the Christians. Prompted, therefore, by our extreme clemency and our habitual disposition to be lenient with every one, it has seemed good to us to extend our indulgence also to them and to allow from this time forward Christians to exist as such and to permit them to resume their assemblies, provided nothing is done against the public peace. In another letter we shall give instruction to the magistrates for their guidance. For this our indulgence let them pray to their God for our safety, for the prosperity of the State and their own security. This edict is given at Nicomedia on the day before the Kalends of May, in the eighth year of our consulate and the second of Maximin's."⁸

In this singular document one does not know what to marvel at most. False statement, insidious suggestion, hypocritical pretence, to give to the cruelties of his persecution a justification in the interest of the State and of the Christian religion itself. He puts himself forward not as a repentant persecutor, but as an unsuccessful reformer. He laments that the Christians have fallen away from their primitive simplicity and split into sects. The remedy he now applies is a general absolution, or plenary indulgence, for the past and liberty to worship as they please in the future. With impudent audacity he overlooks his own atrocious deeds, done for the interest of the Church; how the confessors were condemned to the mines, maimed and crippled by previous torture; how the oratories were rifled and destroyed, the sacred books and registers burned or carried off, the arenas of the amphitheatres reeked with the blood of martyrs and the pyres were still smoking. This edict, insolent and abject at once, a masterpiece of hypocrisy and dissimulation, concludes with a petition for the prayers of the Christians, disguised under words of dubious meaning.

Galerius did not long survive the edict of toleration. A few weeks after its publication he expired in terrible suffering, recommending with his last breath his wife and son to the protection of Licinius, who had hastened to his bedside in appearance out of affection for his friend, in reality to be ready to lay hands upon his inheritance. This friend two years later put both wife and son to death.

The superscription prefixed to this edict in the version of Eusebius does not contain the name of Maxentius, who ruled in Rome and its

⁸ "De morte persec.," xxxiv.

district, or of Maximin, who governed the provinces of Syria, Egypt and Cilicia, in the East. The authority of Maxentius was not recognized by Galerius, but there was peace in the regions under his rule and no occasion to promulgate an edict of toleration for the Christians at that time. In the East the condition of the Christians was far different. Maximin, "that most wicked of men and deadly enemy of religion," as he is called by Eusebius, ranked by Saint Jerome in his enumeration of the greatest persecutors, Valerian, Decius, Diocletian, Maximian, "saeuissimus omnium Maximinus"⁹—the most ferocious of all—gave the edict an evasive execution. He did not dare to suppress the document altogether, but would not publish the text. He gave verbal orders to Sabinus, Prefect of his Prætorium, to write a circular letter to the prefects of the provinces embodying the prescriptions of Galerius' rescript and commanding the judges to set at liberty all who were in prison on account of religion and abstain from further persecution. The letter of Sabinus is given by Eusebius:

"For a long time the majesty of our sacred Lords the Emperors, in their constant anxiety to make all men lead pious and regular lives, used every endeavor to bring those who had gone after strange rites and customs back to the worship of the immortal gods. But the pertinacity and obstinacy of some have now gone so far that neither the command of the Emperor nor the fear of penalties deters them. Seeing, therefore, that many are in trouble on this account, our invincible princes, in their clemency, have ordered us to signify to you that when a Christian is brought before you charged with following his own religion, you are to set him at liberty immediately, and not permit him to be punished in any manner. For experience has shown that no persuasion will ever make them change. Write accordingly to the superintendents (curatores) and magistrates of the various districts and towns and let them understand that henceforth they have no jurisdiction in such matters."¹⁰

The officials obeyed this order with alacrity, believing in the sincerity of Maximin and that they would gratify him by their promptness. The transformation that ensued immediately was marvelous. "Like fires from heaven lighted on earth, shining brightly after the darkness of a long night, churches were reopened in every city and filled with congregations of the faithful, celebrating the sacred mysteries with accustomed ancient rites."¹¹ The heathens wondered at the sudden change and many confessed that only the one true God could have wrought it. The confessors liberated from prison were acclaimed with the honor given to martyrs who had faithfully fought; those who had in their weakness hesitated or fallen away came

⁹ In cap. II. "Zachariae." ¹⁰ "Hist. Eccl.," ix., 1. ¹¹ Ibid.

repentant to ask the mercy of God and the prayers of their brethren. Those who had been condemned to hard labor in mines and quarries were welcomed as victors from the athletic contests and accompanied in groups to their homes as they went joyfully through the streets singing canticles and hymns to God.

When the Christians were congratulating each other on the end of the persecution Maximin was chafing under the mortification and planning a more terrible trial for them. Six months had not passed from the promulgation of the edict when the Emperor Galerius died, and Maximin became sole ruler in the East. Two competitors were in wait for the succession of Galerius, Licinius and Maximin. Constantine stood aloof. Diocletian, secluded in his retreat at Salone, did not interfere and was not even consulted. At first it seemed that the question would be referred to the sword, and that a civil war would decide the result. This was, however, avoided by an amicable arrangement between the two rivals to divide the spoil. An incident occurred at this time which embittered the hostility of Maximin to the Christians: Valeria, daughter of Diocletian and widow of Galerius, rejected the addresses of Maximin, who aspired to marry her, offering to repudiate his own wife. The refusal of Valeria exasperated Maximin, and supposing that her objections arose from religious scruples, a relic of her Christian profession which she renounced to wed Galerius, he resolved to have his revenge on them and began to study how he might do this without coming to a breach with his colleagues.

He now initiated that insidious policy which best suited his character of duplicity, pretending moderation while steadily advancing towards the most extreme severity. He craftily availed himself in the first place of the ambiguity of the edict and of the fact that it had never been formally published in the dominions subject to his rule. With caution and prudence he was assured of his ultimate object—the destruction of the Christians. Less than six months after the death of Galerius he began by revoking all concessions made to the Church. The oratories over the martyr's tombs were the first object of his attack. The veneration of those champions of the faith, his own victims, appeared to him an insult and a defiance. In October, 311, he interdicted all assemblies in the cemeteries. By degrees he came to regard the Christians as a low caste of an inferior race outside the protection of the law, too contemptible as yet to be punished by fire or sword. But his blows fell heavy on them; coldly deliberate, and calculated to cut, but leaving no trace of a wound.

His next move was to create a fictitious public opinion favorable to his policy, to make it appear when the time came for him safely to use more rigorous measures that he was only yielding to the pres-

sure of his subjects. He employed emissaries to start a general agitation against the Christians for their banishment. Maximin was not content with giving directions, but made a progress through his States and received deputations and preconcerted petitions from various towns, asking for the expulsion of the Christians. He found an efficient lieutenant and organizer of popular opinion in Theotecnus, a wily, cruel and unscrupulous man, who held the office of *Curator*, or chief municipal magistrate in Antioch. Before the year was ended he had notices posted in the chief cities of the province with false charges against the morals of the Christians and old calumnies revived. The petitions and rescripts, decrees of banishment and other sentences were inscribed on tablets of bronze or marble and affixed to columns erected in the forums or market-places.¹² To rouse still more the populace he appealed to their superstition. He invented a new divinity, dedicating a statue to Jupiter Philius, Jove the Gracious, which was consecrated with a new ceremonial and execrable rites. The worship had its initiations, mysteries and expiations—parodies of baptism and penance. An oracle was installed with priests in charge, and its first utterance was a command to expel the Christians. Other cities imitated the example of Antioch, and Maximin, to preserve uniformity and order in the new cult, instituted a gradation of functionaries in imitation of the Christian hierarchy, with its Bishops, priests and deacons. In the capital city of the province a high priest, *Sacerdos*, was head of the whole organization; in the smaller towns a "*flamen*" was the local superior. They had both spiritual and temporal authority, symbolized one by a white mantle, the other by an armed body-guard. Inferior officers were appointed to inspect and keep order—on the whole, a fair attempt at a counterfeit. By extraordinary ceremonies Maximin endeavored to revive reverence for idolatry, and by slander to bring contempt on the belief and practices of the Church. Directly attacking the person of Christ, he scattered false gospels broadcast among the people and sent them to the provinces with orders to the magistrates to make them widely known. He had counterfeit Acts of Pilate, with a description of the trial and judgment of Christ filled with impious blasphemy, distributed in the schools, to be committed to memory by the children and recited in their exercises of declamation. The malignity of the enemy went the length of suborning dissolute women to present themselves in the

¹² An inscription in Greek and Latin was found at Arykanda in Asia Minor. It contains part of a petition from the inhabitants of Lycia and Pamphylia to Maximin in 311, asking him to expel the Christians, who are called "atheï," so that the citizens may be free to give themselves to the worship of the gods and pray for the welfare of the emperor and his colleagues. A few lines of the answer in Latin are preserved on a separate fragment. Apparently it was favorable to the petitioners. See De Rossi, "Buletino di Archeologia Sacra," 1894, p. 54.

tribunal as converts from Christianity and testify to infamous deeds of ordinary occurrence in their assemblies. The false testimony was recorded in the proceedings of the court and reported to the Emperor, who ordered it to be affixed in the forum of every city under his jurisdiction.

We have followed thus far the progress of Maximin's animosity against the Christians in this the last of his persecutions. Beginning with his vexatious and cruel treatment of the two princesses and their sympathizing friends, his antipathy grew from a personal dislike and desire to be revenged to generalize in its hatred all who professed their religion. Up till now he had not shed a drop of blood, but he had no longer any fear of active interference on the part of his colleagues, and decreed the commencement of a violent persecution at once. The magistrates were commanded to resume the search for Christians, which had been suspended after the latest edict of toleration, with special orders to seize first all the Bishops and priests conspicuous for their activity in preaching the faith. The list of martyrs would fill the pages of a martyrology. Silvanus, who had been Bishop of Antioch for forty years, was condemned with three others to be thrown to the wild beasts; Peter of Alexandria was beheaded with a number of Egyptian Bishops; Lucianus, a priest, was carried to Antioch and cast into prison, where he was slain; Methodius of Tyre, and many more, suffered in various ways. All who were in any way prominent fell victims, but the Emperor's agents disdained to make a process against obscure persons, and it was in this way that Saint Anthony the Hermit was defrauded of the martyr's palm, to obtain which he had left his cave in the desert. He received instead the staff of the patriarch and became the father of a progeny of holy imitators of his solitude that will never fail, but will form a circle of glory round his head for all eternity.

Maximin congratulated himself on the favor which the gods were showing after the revival of fervor in their worship through his exertions. He could not refrain from thanking the gods in terms of triumph for the fair weather of the summer of 311 and the promise of an abundant harvest. Eusebius has preserved his manifesto, copied from the bronze tablet on which it was inscribed in the forum of Tyre. It begins by congratulating the citizens on recovering their spirits and bidding them trust in the protection of the immortal gods, who had already shown so many signs of their benevolence. He tells them that their city deserves to be called the home of the immortals, and continues: "Preferring the public good to your local petty interests, you appeal to us to protect the religion of the country. In reward for this Jupiter and the other divinities are showing you how they provide for you. It is by their special favor

that the earth does not reject the seed you sow ; that the sun does not burn everything up, and drought wither the crops ; that you do not suffer from floods and storms and earthquakes and other calamities that carried disaster so frequently during the past years when error was allowed to run rampant. Rejoice that by your prayers and sacrifices the warlike Mars has been appeased and peace restored. Most of all, let those rejoice who have been delivered from their blindness—like men recovering from a dangerous illness, who find that life has still some benefits in store for them. If any persist in their detestable error they shall be banished according to your petition, that your city, purified from their contamination, may be free to give itself entirely to the gods. To show our pleasure in receiving your petition without waiting to hear what other requests you have to make, we grant them all in reward for your piety.”¹³

This is a specimen of a pagan discourse, probably inspired by some of the neo-platonic favorites who at that time swarmed in the palace precincts. It is a song of triumph chanted too soon, just at the eve of the final defeat of idolatry. The event very quickly gave the lie to the prophetic part. A famine and a pestilence followed immediately this boasting defiance, and a war in Armenia ended in disaster to Maximin. Three scourges came together to confound the arrogance of the tyrant. The distress of the people, in the country and in towns, was extreme, among the wealthy as well as the poor. Rich proprietors were reduced to sell their land for food, ladies were seen in the forum holding out their hands for alms, men like ghosts dragged themselves wearily along or stumbled in their exhaustion and lay prostrate on the ground, weakly imploring a crust of bread. Corpses were left unburied and devoured by dogs, and men who had still a little strength left hunted the voracious starving animals and killed as many as they could to stamp out a species of rabies that made dogs attack the living. The wealthy and well provided with food did not escape the pestilence, which rather seemed to single them out, the rapid but acute suffering of the malady always ending fatally. Everywhere was desolation ; in the streets, lanes and open spaces where music and song before resounded nothing but wailing was heard.

During this calamity the devotion and charity of the Christians to sufferers without distinction astonished the pagans, who could not conceal their admiration. Dividing themselves into groups for the various sections of the city, they were seen in turn taking charge of the sick and dying or burying the dead, who otherwise would have mostly remained abandoned in their houses or in the streets. They divided their bread with the famished, and their generous self-sacri-

¹³ Euseb., "Hist. Eccl.," iv., 7.

fice regained the esteem of the grateful populace who had been disaffected to them for a time by misrepresentation and fraud, and extorted even from their enemies the highest praise. The proud tyrant himself had to bow his head to the visible chastisement of Divine justice and cease from troubling the people of God. The taunt of Eusebius is well deserved: "Hujusmodi praeium fuit superbissimae illius Maximini jactantiae, et decretorum quae civitates adversus nostros ediderunt." "This was all that Maximin gained by his proud boast and the decrees of the cities against us."¹⁴

He had yet to pay the last penalty of his wicked deeds in a most abject humiliation and in a painful malady that reduced him to a condition as miserable as the end of Galerius.

But it was not Maximin, but Maxentius, who accelerated the catastrophe of paganism, and in order not to lose chronological sequence in the narrative we must return to the West and describe important events that were maturing there. Maxentius in Rome emulated the enormities of Maximin in Nicomedia. He began by affecting a leaning towards the Christians; he forbade all prosecutions and put on the mask of a pious and merciful ruler. Soon he cast it aside and perpetrated every sort of abominable crime, sparing no class or order of victims to gratify his avarice or passion. For a trifling fault he ordered a general massacre of citizens, committing the slaughter to the praetorians. Individual Christians had to suffer from the extortion and vices of the Emperor, but collectively they enjoyed a certain toleration and even favor. The Christians had no complaint to make of their treatment by Maxentius, and it was even after the declaration of war between the two competitors that he issued his famous edict ordering restitution of the property confiscated from the Church and authorizing Pope Melchiades to recover legal possession of it along with the cemeteries.

Religion was really not the cause of the brief war that ended so disastrously for idolatry. On pretence of avenging the death of Maximian, Maxentius, in 311, declared war on Constantine and ordered all the statues that had been erected to him in Italy and Africa to be cast down with ignominy; then made preparations to invade the Gallic provinces. Constantine, anticipating him, crossed the Alps at the head of forty thousand men, to carry the war into Italy. The enterprise was full of danger; the armies of Maxentius amounted to a hundred and seventy foot and eight thousand horse. But the hardy, well disciplined legions of Gaul, trained by the intrepid, self-denying invader, were more than equal to a contest with troops enervated by indulgence and luxury in the capital under an inexperienced commander.

¹⁴ *Ib.*, ix., 8.

Constantine led his army over Mount Cenis and descended into the plains of Piedmont, arriving before the fortified city of Susa before the court at Rome had notice of their departure from the banks of the Rhine. The siege did not detain them long; they set fire to the gates and stormed the place, putting to the sword the greater part of the garrison, but the remains of the city were preserved from total destruction. A doubtful engagement with an army of Italians in the plains of Turin, furnished with heavy cavalry after the fashion of the East, ended after the flight of the Maxentians to Turin, where they found the gates shut against them, in the slaughter of almost all by the victorious pursuers. Milan, Verona and the whole of Italy between the Alps and the Po embraced with enthusiasm the party of Constantine. Verona, an important place with a strong garrison under Pompeianus, could not be left in the rear of an army advancing upon Rome and had to be reduced by siege; then two roads, the *via Aemilia* and the *via Flaminia*, were open to Rome.

Maxentius had not himself left Rome during the campaign because an oracle had menaced his life and Empire if he left the city. He sent his best generals in his stead. His resources were still great; an army was at his command more numerous than the armies lost in the two great battles in the north, before Turin and Verona. But it was far from the intention of Maxentius to lead his army in person. He trembled at the apprehension of such an untried experience as the exercise of war, but had to bend to the contempt of the people. Meanwhile Constantine rapidly advanced till within sight of Rome and pitched his camp at a place called *Saxa Rubra*, an excellent strategical position for an invading force, distant from the city about eight miles. To his surprise and satisfaction, he found the enemy ready to give battle on the north side of the river, where it is crossed by the *Milvian Bridge*, and prepared to dispute the passage. Lactantius says:

“The morrow was the sixth of the *Kalends* of November and the anniversary of the assumption by Maxentius of the imperial purple and the termination of the *Quinquennalia*. Constantine was admonished in his sleep to mark the heavenly sign of God upon his shields, and give battle. He did as he was commanded, and ordered the letter X with the upper bar bent across, the monogram of Christ, to be emblazoned on all the shields. Armed with this sign they advanced to the attack. The enemy approached to meet them, but without their Emperor, and crossed the bridge. The two opposing vanguards closed in assault. Both sides fought bravely; neither thought of retreat. News of the battle reached Rome; a riot broke out in the city; the people complained that the Emperor had deserted the public weal. Then of a sudden the populace (gathered together

in the circus for the games given that day) raised a loud cry, 'Constantine is invincible!' Terrified at the shout, Maxentius roused himself from his lethargy, and calling together some Senators had the Sybilline Books brought to be examined, and it was found that on that very day an enemy of the Romans would perish. Flattered by this answer as an assurance of victory, he took his place at the front. After he passed the bridge broke down. At the sight the battle raged more fiercely, and the hand of God was stretched over the array. Maxentius, filled with terror, turned in hasty flight towards the bridge that was broken in two, and crushed by the multitude of fugitives fell into the river and was drowned."¹⁵

Lactantius, it is to be observed, was a witness beyond criticism, an intimate friend of Constantine, no dreamer or repeater of idle stories, called by the Emperor himself to be tutor to his eldest son Crispus, and must have received from Constantine's own mouth the account of this important event in his career.

Of equal authority, and in greater detail, Eusebius gives two accounts, one brief, in his history, and another more complete, in his "Life of Constantine."¹⁶ Of both what follows may be considered a sufficient summary that can be controlled by the references:

Constantine was extremely anxious when he first entered on his campaign against Maxentius. He had come to be persuaded that more than military force and skill was required to overcome an enemy formidable by the number and experience of his legions, and was considering to what heavenly power he should recommend his cause. He had lost all faith in the divinities of Rome, and he remembered that his father, who alone of all the Emperors had never persecuted the Christians, never suffered an eclipse of his prosperity, and contrasted his success with the disastrous and miserable end of all who had persecuted the Christians, although they were assiduous in paying worship to the national gods. The failure of such protectors to help in time of need did not invite Constantine to put his confidence in them in his present difficulty, and troubled and undecided, he turned to the half-determined conception which he had learned from his father of a Divinity one and supreme, and besought Him to give some visible sign for his guidance. His prayer was heard.

A little after mid-day, when the sun was beginning to descend towards the horizon, he saw a flaming cross in the sky, over the sun, with the words: "Hac Vince," "By this conquer." He himself and all the soldiers who accompanied him saw the miraculous sign and were filled with astonishment. Constantine was still revolving

¹⁵ Lactantius, "De morte persecutorum," xliv. ¹⁶ Eusebius, "Hist. Eccl.," ix., 9. "De Vita Constantini," I., xxvii., 31.

this in his mind when night fell, and during his sleep God's Anointed, "Christus Dei," appeared to him bearing the sign which he had seen in the sky and commanded him to have a military standard made like it, to be carried in front of the troops as a safeguard in battle. The Emperor employed skilful workmen to fashion the standard, which consisted of a tall staff plated with gold, having a shorter transverse beam forming a cross. On the top of the staff was a wreath or crown, wrought of gold and precious stones; in the centre of this wreath were designed the first and second letters of the name of Christ in Greek, X P, the P decussate in the middle.¹⁷ These letters the Emperor adopted also to ornament his helmet. From the transverse beam of the staff was suspended a purple banner of costly material, richly embroidered with gold and pearls and precious stones, beautifully wrought and of magnificent effect. Between the wreath and monogram at the top of the staff and the embroidered banner a medallion was fixed containing busts of Constantine and his sons. Similar standards were provided to every division of the army to be borne in front.

Constantine made his entry into Rome on October 29, the day after the battle. At the head of his victorious army, with the Labarum carried for the first time in triumph, he went direct to the Palatium. He was met at the city gate by the whole Senate and equestrian order, their wives and families, and an immense crowd gathered to welcome him. He went direct to the Palatium, accompanied by the acclamations of an ever-increasing multitude, who in their eagerness to see their deliverer pressed forward almost to pass the "sacrum limen" and invade the precincts of the imperial quarters.

Immediately after the battle at the Milvian Bridge he issued an edict putting a stop to the persecution of the Christians. This edict has not come down to us, but it contained certain limitations and restrictions which Constantine on reflection considered unfair and remedied in the edict which he signed with Licinius in the following year, 313. He gave orders to place the trophy of the cross, as the Labarum came to be called, in the right hand of a statue which the Romans were about to erect in his honor in a public place in the city. He himself dictated the inscription: "By this saving sign, the badge of true valor, I liberated your city from the slavery of a tyrannical yoke and set free the Roman Senate and people, restoring

¹⁷ Eusebius, "Hist. Ecl.," ix., 9. "Vita Constantini," I., 27-31. He introduces his account of the vision by saying that he tells it in his history as Constantine himself related it to him many years after, when Eusebius was admitted to his familiarity, confirming its truth by an oath: "Horis diei meridianis, sole in occasum vergente crucis tropæum in coelo ex luce conflatum, soli superpositum, ipsis oculis se vidiase affirmavit, cum hujusmodi inscriptione: Hac Vince. Eo viso et seipsum et milites omnes, qui ipsum nescio quo iter facientem sequebantur, et qui spectatores miraculi fuerant, vehementer obstupefactos."

them to their ancient dignity and splendor."¹⁸ The Senate appointed the 28th and 29th of October to be kept every year with the celebration of public games, and inscribed in the civil calendar as "Evictio Tyranni: Adventus Constantini," in memory of their deliverance. It was rather a work of supererogation to decree to the victor the title of First of the Augusti, but Constantine was politic enough to accept it gravely. By the same authority a temple to Romulus in the forum was rededicated to his honor, and a triumphal arch was hastily constructed out of material from old buildings and bas reliefs taken from an arch to Trajan transferred to adorn the monument to Constantine.¹⁹

Constantine was merciful in the exercise of severity to the leaders of the defeated faction, putting only the son of Maxentius and some of his most cruel and unprincipled agents to death. But the prætorians, who had so long domineered over Rome and made themselves the ready instrument of every changing tyranny, were disbanded and abolished forever, and their fortified camp, a perpetual menace to the city, dismantled. Rome had regained her liberty.

One of the first acts of Constantine after his victory was to send a peremptory message to Maximin to cease from persecuting the Christians. This communication, conveying almost a threat in case of refusal, Maximin did not dare to disregard openly, but he gave it a very ungracious compliance. Instead of frankly disavowing or revoking the policy of the past and promising toleration in the future, he limited himself to sending a rescript to the Prefect of the Prætorium, counselling him not to use violence but persuasion and gentleness in his efforts to bring the Christians back to idolatry.

Constantine did not insist on more at that time, but he was busy preparing a document which was to lay the foundation of the whole fabric of successive legislation in ecclesiastical policy. This was what is known as the Edict of Milan, promulgated in the beginning of 313, with the consent and superscription of his colleague, Licinius, then a faithful ally. The dispositions of the edict were not new; they were substantially the same as those ordained in the rescripts of Gallienus fifty years before, addressed to the Bishops, and later

¹⁸ Euseb., "Hist. Eccl.," ix., 9.

¹⁹ An inscription on both fronts of the arch is important from the veiled allusion, "*Instinctu Divinitatis*," to the divine inspiration conducting Constantine to victory:

Imp. Caes. Fl. Constantino Maximo
P. F. Augusto S. P. Q. R.
Quod instinctu divinitatis mentis
Magnitudine cum exercitu suo
Tam de tyranno quam de omni ejus
Factione uno tempore justis
Rempublicam ultus est armis
Arcum triumphis insignem dicavit.

(Under the central arch: *Liberatori Urbis. Fundatori Quietis.*)

decreed again by Galerius in his edict of 311; with regard to church property "loca ecclesiastica," it had been anticipated by Maxentius in his missive to Pope Melchiades. But those previous decrees were political expedients, serving a temporary purpose or promoting a particular policy of the ruler of the day; this edict is the formal expression of a fundamental principle to be held and applied for all time to come and inherent in the very essence of the organized body that was receiving its first solemn charter. It abolishes every disability and consecrates the liberty of the Christian conscience to worship according to its laws. The following is a version of the text from Lactantius, preceded by the introductory paragraph given by Eusebius, but omitted by the earlier writer:

"It is now some time since we, recognizing that religious liberty is not to be restricted, but every one left free to worship as he pleases, ordained that Christians and all others should continue to follow the belief and observances of their respective sects. But because in that decree an invidious distinction was made among the members of various sects, some gave up their religious practices.²⁰

"Therefore We, Constantine and Licinius, Emperors, discussing in friendly congress at Milan certain matters affecting the peace and happiness of the people, especially concerning the public worship of the Divinity, have agreed to grant to the Christians, and to all persons, liberty to profess any religion they please, so that the Deity who presides in His heavenly dwelling may look down appeased and gracious upon us and all our subjects. Moved by these just and salutary considerations, we ordain that no one is to be hindered from following the observances of the Christians or conforming to that religion which they prefer, and this in order to merit a continuance of the favor of the Supreme Deity before whom we all freely bow down. You are therefore to abolish all restrictions formerly imposed on Christians by former instructions through your office, and henceforth permit every one who wishes to practise the Christian religion, to follow his choice without let or hindrance. We wish you to understand distinctly that we give absolute and entire liberty to the said Christians to worship according to their religion. You must also remember that we have given the same free and public exercise of other religions for the sake of peace, because we have no desire to diminish respect to any form of religion. Furthermore, with regard to the Christians, we ordain that if the places where they were accustomed to assemble have been confiscated, even by written orders through your department, either by our Fiscal or by any other person soever, they are to be restored to the Christians without cost or expense, setting aside any opposition

²⁰ Eusebius, "Hist. Eccl.," x., 5. What follows is from Lactantius.

or evasion. All who have received property of theirs in gift must restore it as quickly as possible to the Christians; all who acquired it, either by purchase or gift, if they wish to appeal to our benevolence, may petition us through the Vicariate, and their case will be considered. All this property is to be conveyed to the body corporate of Christians without delay. And as the said Christians held not only the places of meeting, but other property belonging to the corporation, that is to the churches, not to individuals, the whole is included by this decree, beyond doubt or question, to be restored to the corporation and meeting places in the manner aforesaid, and any one who is obliged to give back without compensation may hope in our benevolence. In everything endeavor to favor with all your power the body of the Christians, that our orders may be more speedily executed and public security secured. In this way the Divine favor, which we have often experienced, will endure to the happiness of our people and the success of our undertakings. In order that the tenor of these dispositions may be universally known, we direct copies of this decree to be sent in every direction, that this solemn act of our benevolence may escape the notice of none."²¹

Constantine and Licinius sent a copy of the Edict to Maximin, who pretended friendship for both. Tyrant as he was, it irritated him, but on reflection he did not suppress it altogether, but sent as of his own accord a message to Sabinus, his prefect, in the form of a letter. He begins by enumerating all that he had done to bring about a reconciliation with the Christians, and ascribing his failure to their obstinacy. He refers to his desire to be indulgent and to the petitions that poured in upon him asking for their reduction to submission or expulsion. He wished to satisfy these petitions whenever he ascertained that the majority desired it, as he had proved in the case of Nicomedia and other places from which he had banished the Christians, but this could not always be done; and he doubted if the majority really wished their banishment. He accordingly recommends the magistrates not to employ severity, but gentle persuasion, in their efforts to convert the Christians, and avoid harsh or cruel treatment, protect them from injustice and plunder and for the choice of a religion let them have their way. He concludes by directing Sabinus to communicate these instructions to all the provincial governors.²²

No one was deceived by this manifesto; the Christians did not avail themselves of the indulgence, no assemblies were held, no Christian avowed himself publicly. Unlike the concessions of Constantine and Licinius, which made meetings lawful, the edict of Maximin only forbade them to be riotously broken up.

²¹ Lactantius, "De morte persec.," xlviii. ²² Eusebius, "Hist. Eccl.," x., 5.

The presumption and arrogance of Maximin and his violation of the convention with Licinius soon brought him into collision with the latter. Two months had been sufficient for Constantine to put everything in order in Rome, and in December, 312, he went to Milan to meet Licinius, who was coming to marry Constantia, the sister of Constantine. When Maximin understood that they were occupied in the festivities he seized the opportunity—although it was mid-winter and his troops were reduced in numbers and weakened by privations and want of forage for their horses—to make an irruption into Bithynia. He crossed the Hellespont in safety, but his progress was arrested before the walls of Byzantium, where Licinius had left a strong garrison to protect it from a surprise. The place held out for eleven days, but had to surrender. Maximin was again delayed before Heraclea, which also yielded to him. Licinius hastened his advance to repel Maximin, and the two armies were almost in sight of each other. An engagement was unavoidable; the position was perilous from the inequality of numbers. The army of Constantine was far away on the banks of the Rhine and could not give any assistance, but the soldiers of Licinius had heard of their exploits, and, inspired by the account of the Divine intervention, made light of the numerical superiority of their opponents, trusting that God would give them the same good fortune. They were irritated, too, by the ostentatious supplications ordered by Maximin in his camp to propitiate the heathen divinities. The tyrant, before the battle which was to decide his fate, placed all his confidence in the power of superstition, the help of his familiar demons and the multitude of his legions, and vowed to Jupiter, if he was victorious, to extinguish the very name of Christian.

Licinius, on the other side, either from a passing conviction or from political calculation, put his cause under the protection of the Deity who had so powerfully assisted his colleague, Constantine. The war on both sides became a religious war. The night before the battle an angel was said to have appeared to Licinius and promised that if he prayed in the morning with his whole army, in certain words, he would have the victory. Licinius obeyed. Copies of a prayer taught in the dream were distributed among the soldiers, to be learned by heart. As day dawned a prayer preserved to us by Lactantius,²⁸ containing an invocation of One Supreme God, was read in front of the army. An extensive plain, called Campus Serenus, stretched between the hostile ranks. The Licinians, officers and men, took off their helmets, laid their shields on the ground, then raising their hands to heaven, recited together in a loud voice after the Emperor: "Most High God, we beseech Thee,

²⁸ Lactantius, "De morte persec.," xlvi.

Most Holy God, we beseech Thee. We commend to Thee our just cause; we commend to Thee our safety; we commend to Thee our rule. By Thee we live, by Thee we are victorious and happy. O God, most High, most Holy, hear our prayers. We stretch out our hands to Thee. Hear us graciously, most Holy, most High God."²⁴

This invocation, three times repeated, made such an impression that Maximin consented to hold a parley with Licinius, to spare, if possible, further carnage, but would not agree to terms of peace. The trumpets sounded the attack, and both armies closed in a struggle, hand to hand. The onset of the Licinians was so impetuous and well sustained that it swept all before them. Maximin made futile efforts to harangue the soldiers of Licinius, and offered bribes and threats to induce them to desert, but in vain. No one listened to him, and at last, to save himself from their resentment, took refuge behind his own lines. He quickly saw that the situation was desperate, divested himself of his imperial mantle, and disguised as a slave made his escape from the field unobserved, was able to cross the straits, and in a day and a night reached Nicomedia, his capital, a hundred and sixty miles distant. Taking with him from Nicomedia his wife and children, he pushed on into Cappadocia, where he gathered a few fugitives. Licinius followed close, entered Nicomedia, which capitulated, and on the thirteenth of June, 313, published in that city the edict which five months before had been signed by Constantine and himself in Milan.

Maximin continued his flight into the mountainous region of Taurus, and finally took refuge in Tarsus. It was here that he issued a proclamation giving his adhesion to the Edict of Milan, not in express terms, but in a diluted paraphrase of the original, sufficiently distinct to commit him to it. But it was superfluous, and it came too late. He had not the satisfaction or merit of even tardily setting the Church free in Asia, for it was the Edict of Milan, affixed by Licinius when he passed through Nicomedia, that made the law in the East as well as the West. The text of the edict of Tarsus has only come down to us through a copy made by Eusebius.

The efforts of Maximin had all failed him signally. His legions were routed, he himself had been a fugitive wandering many weeks in woods and deserts, cursing the soothsayers who betrayed him with false prophecies, and he put some of them to death. He had to engage in battle a second time, when again his army was defeated. He did not even die the death of a soldier, for when the remnant of

²⁴ "Summe Deus, te rogamus. Sancte Deus, te rogamus. Omnem justitiam tibi commendamus, salutem nostram tibi commendamus, imperium nostrum tibi commendamus. Per te vivimus, per te victores et felices existimus. Summe sancte Deus, preces nostras exaudi. Brachia nostra ad te tendimus. Exaudi, sancte summe Deus." Lactantius, l. c.

his troops was waiting for his arrival to be led to the assault, a mysterious malady spread over all the surface of his body; he was seized with violent pains and convulsions that cast him violently on the ground, where he rolled in agony with eyes starting from their sockets—his body reduced to a skeleton, the cage of an imprisoned spirit. In despair, and to escape capture, he resolved to end his life by poison, and after the fashion of some suicides of his time, ate and drank to excess before swallowing the draft. His overloaded stomach rejected it and his suffering was prolonged and aggravated. For four days he was a raving maniac, stuffing his mouth with earth scraped from the ground with his fingers to appease his hunger. Striking his head against the wall, he knocked out both his eyes. He fancied that he saw God in anger presiding as a judge at his torture, and kept imploring in pitiful cries the mercy of Christ, till, screaming as if he were being burned alive, he expired.

Thus ended the race of persecutors of the name of God. For Licinius did not imitate after his victory the moderation of Constantine. By his orders Valeria, the widow of Maximin, was thrown into the Orontes and her son and daughter massacred. All who by blood or friendship were supposed to be favorable to the defeated party were put to death. The daughter and widow of Diocletian, Valeria and Prisca, constrained to apostatize by him, persecuted by Maximin and hunted in their obscure retreat by Licinius, were at last arrested in Thessalonica and barbarously beheaded and cast into the sea.

Well may Lactantius ask, before closing his book, "*De Mortibus Persecutorum*," "Where are now the illustrious names of the Jovii and Herculei, famous in every region of the earth, which Diocletian and Maximian were the first arrogantly to usurp, and which became vile when they passed to their successors? For the Lord hath destroyed them and cut them off from the earth. Let us then keep God's triumph with gladness; let us sing the praises of His victory; let us celebrate by praying, by day and by night, that the peace which He has granted to His people may be confirmed unto them forever."²⁵

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²⁵ Euseb., "*De mort. persec.*," lii.