# THE TWO EMPIRES

## THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD

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# THE TWO EMPIRES

## THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD

BY THE LATE

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# PREFACE

THE present volume contains lectures on Church History delivered by Dr. Westcott at Cambridge during the earlier years of his tenure of the Regius Professorship of Divinity. At that time the Dixie Professorship of Ecclesiastical History had not been founded, so that there was no other provision for the teaching of Church History than that which the Divinity Professors might be willing to supply.

In the lectures here presented to the public I seem to be able to distinguish three courses, the first being on the Early Persecutions, the second on the Age of Constantine, and the third on the Nicene Council. But the manuscript does not entirely agree with such fragmentary outlines of these courses as I have been able to discover, so that it is not improbable that considerable portions of the lectures were committed to writing subsequently to their original delivery. There has certainly been some later revision.

The title which I have given to this volume is that which Bishop Westcott selected for an essay on the same subject which he published in his Commentary on *The Epistles of St. John*. The following passage taken from these lectures (p. 298) will show that *The Two Empires* is not an inappropriate title :—

> The conflict of the two Empires—the Empire of Caesar and the Empire of Christ—was well-nigh ended. It remained only that Roman emperors themselves should solemnly record the victory of the faith with which Roman emperors had for three centuries vainly contended.

The study of Church History, especially in its controversial aspects, is not always exhilarating, and my father has been known to remark that he felt oppressed at times by the burden of the Four General Councils ; but he has supplied a tonic for drooping spirits in his description of the subject :—

"The History of the Church is indeed nothing less than the History of the Risen Christ conquering the world through the body in which He lives. It is undoubtedly a chequered and often a sad history. The human organs often obey most imperfectly the spirit which moves them. There are times of torpor, of sloth, of disease in the body, but even so the spirit is

not quenched. There are fallings away and dismemberments, but an energy of reproduction supplies the loss. Empires rise and pass, but the Church lives on, changed from age to age and yet the same, gathering into her treasure-house all the prizes of wisdom and knowledge, and gradually learning more and more of the infinite import and power of the Truth which she has to proclaim."

In editing this work I have endeavoured not to obtrude myself more than was absolutely necessary, but have been obliged to fill up a few gaps in the narrative portions which my father had left incomplete, always using in such cases the original authorities which he had indicated. I have also ventured to insert an additional Chapter (viii.), as the gulf which separates the persecution of Decius from the Edict of Galerius appeared to need some sort of bridge; but readers, thus fairly warned, may jump it.

These lectures would have been comparatively easy to edit had it not been for the very numerous references. It would have been a great relief to me if the plan of the work had entirely forbidden references, as has sometimes been the case. I have, however, done the best I can with these, and have verified a very large number, including all those which on account of their defective

legibility puzzled me. When, however, the references were perfectly distinct I deemed verification an interest rather than a necessity, feeling confident that my father would not give a wrong reference. As all these references were scribbled in pencil, and generally at the foot of the page or in odd corners without any mark to indicate their connection with the text, I shall, I hope, be pardoned for a reasonable amount of errors.

I have prefixed to the Lectures a fairly full analysis of their contents, using in a few cases, where they were available, the author's original rough notes; but with so full a Table of Contents supplied I judged an Index to be a superfluity.

A. WESTCOTT.

CRAYKE,
*June* 24, 1909.

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[1] This chapter is not the work of Dr. Westcott.

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XIPHILINUS, *Epitome of Dion Cassius.*
ZOSIMUS, Ἱστορία νέα.

Quotations from the Roman Jurists are derived from Haenel's work, and other quotations are taken from Routh's *Reliquiae Sacrae*, Ruinart's *Acta Sincera Primorum Martyrum*, Baronius' *Annales Ecclesiastici*, Pitra's *Spicilegium Solesmense.*

* These works are contained in Migne's *Patrologia Latina*, vol. viii., and the quotations are frequently referred to the pages of that volume.

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTORY

### EUSEBIUS, THE FATHER OF CHURCH HISTORY

THE second and third centuries include a marked and complete stage in the development of the Christian Church. In the course of this brief space the Gospel penetrated successively the regions of domestic life, of speculation, of government, and at last was openly revealed as a power claiming complete sovereignty over the whole sum of human interests. The period is therefore in itself singularly fitted to furnish an introduction to Church history. And if it is essential that the history of the Church should be studied in its original sources, the materials in this case lie conveniently at our command. The *Ecclesiastical History* of Eusebius —the oldest and greatest of the ancient ecclesiastical histories which have come down to us—is the principal source of what we know about the period. Constructed out of the works of more than fifty earlier writers, whose words are inwoven into the text, furnished with numerous copies or

translations of imperial decrees, animated by the records of personal experience during the last and most systematic persecution, the book places us in direct contact with the greatest leaders in the first victories of Christianity. It is marred, as will appear, by many faults; but when every deduction is made for imperfections, due either to the character of the age in which it was composed, or to the special weaknesses of the composer, we cannot but feel the deepest gratitude to Eusebius, the true father of Church history, faithful, devout, and patient, for the grand conception on which he planned his work, and for the general fidelity with which he executed it.

The *History* of Eusebius, which thus forms the most important source of information on the period before us, is supplemented in some degree by his *Life of Constantine* and his *Chronicle*; and during the time of the Diocletian persecution by the narrative of an eye-witness, *On the Deaths of the Persecutors*, ascribed to Lactantius. The later abstracts of Sulpicius Severus, and Orosius have little or no independent value. On the other hand, the collections of the *Acts of the Martyrs* contain, amid much that is certainly apocryphal, numberless traits of individual trial which give life and distinctness to the outlines of Eusebius. From pagan writers little can be gleaned. The historians, with one or two well-known exceptions, are wholly silent on the progress of Christianity. Of the moralists Plutarch, the most genial and large-minded, never

notices it; others dismiss it with a contemptuous allusion, or ridicule it in a wild caricature. Yet the attacks of Celsus and Porphyry show that there were some among them who could feel the dangers with which the new faith menaced the old order, even before the time of the final struggle came.

To these historical sources we must add also what can be gained indirectly from other patristic writings, from the *Apologies*, especially from the *Philosophumena* ascribed to Hippolytus, and from the *Letters* of Cyprian, which together go far to fill up what is wanting in Eusebius with regard to the fortunes of the Latin Church. But all these authorities are only of secondary value. They serve as tests and supplements. For the clear expression of what the history of the Church was felt to be at the moment of its first great triumph, for the record of the continuity of its growth, for the harvest of golden fragments illustrative of its progress, gathered from works now lost, we must go to Eusebius. It is then necessary that we should gain a distinct conception of what he professed to do, and of what he actually did, before we enter on any details of the narrative.

It has been conjectured that Eusebius composed his *History* at the suggestion of Constantine. Nothing, however, in the work itself lends countenance to this idea. He speaks in his preface to the book of his own sense of the extreme necessity of the undertaking, which was only a natural sequel to what he had already done.

The *Chronicle*, which was published previously at
least in some form, shows that he was well
provided by independent study with materials for
the execution of that task, and also that he had
a large view of the scope of historical study.
Under such circumstances there was no need
that he should receive any external impulse.
i. 1. "I consider," he says, "that it is of the utmost
necessity that I should strive laboriously to fulfil
my design, because I have observed that no
ecclesiastical writer hitherto has devoted himself
to this branch of writing." The design, he
frankly admits, is one which he cannot expect
to fulfil adequately and completely, but this he
pleads is a ground for considerate criticism.
The Christian society had emerged from its long
struggle; a clear and serene light, as he thought,
rested upon the Churches of Christ throughout
x. 1. the world, undimmed by the shadow of any
i. 1. cloud; the beneficent and propitious help of the
Saviour had rescued His servants from their
enemies; and the time was come when it was
fitting that some detailed record should be made
of the conflict which had reached this triumphant
issue.

It is indeed probable that the *History* grew
naturally out of what Eusebius himself had seen
in the persecution of Diocletian. His account of
the martyrs of Palestine, which now follows the
eighth book, was written as the result of his own
observation; and this treatise appears to have
formed part of a larger work in which he included

the records of ancient martyrdoms, reaching back as far as the reign of Marcus Aurelius. In this way he must have become familiar with what may be called the heroic aspect of early Church history; and at the same time his more comprehensive labours on the *Chronicle* supplied him with the systematic framework of a continuous narrative. There are, it is true, very considerable differences between the *History* and the *Chronicle* in the form in which it has been preserved to us; but Eusebius says distinctly that it was his object in his *History* to give in complete detail what was contained in epitome in the *Chronicle*. Fresh authorities may have modified his judgment. It may be doubtful whether the actual chronology of the *Chronicle* or of the *History* represents his latest opinion. All that is really important is to notice that the conception of the History of the Church arose out of the conception of a History of the world.

v. Praef.; v. 4; v. 21.

It is impossible to fix the exact date of the publication of the *History* by direct evidence. One fact, however, is clear. The whole must have been completed before the execution of Crispus, who was put to death in 326 (July), for it is inconceivable that Eusebius should speak of him as he does in x. 9 as "a most pious prince and in all respects like his father," if Constantine had already sacrificed him to his fears. The general tone of the book agrees with this supposition. The exultant language in which the historian speaks of the prospects of the Church,

of "the forgetfulness of old evils, the oblivion of all impiety, the enjoyment of present blessings, the manifold expectations of blessings yet to come," is hardly consistent with the times of trouble and division which followed the Council of Nicaea. And yet more, some terms which he uses in reference to the Person of the Lord might have been adopted without offence before the Council, but afterwards could not escape censure.

Other internal evidence points to a date much earlier than 325 for the greater part of the *History*. If we compare the closing sentences of the ninth and tenth books, it is evident that when the ninth book was written Eusebius was not aware of the rupture of Licinius with Constantine, which happened in 314; and it appears also that he was at the same time very imperfectly informed of the course of affairs in the West, which led to the decisive victory of Constantine over Maxentius in 312, though he was well acquainted with the eastern campaign which ended with the death of Maximian in 313. We may therefore suppose that the nine books were composed not long after the Edict of Milan in 313, while the tenth book was added in the interval between 323 (the time of the death of Licinius) and the close of 325, when the changed aspect of the Christian empire suggested a fresh conclusion to the record of its establishment.

If this view of the date of the *History* be true, the book gains an additional interest. It becomes itself the last great literary monument of

the period which it describes. It belongs not only in substance, but also in theological character to the ante-Nicene age. It gathers up and expresses in a form anterior to the age of dogmatic definition, the experience, the feelings, the hopes of a body which had just accomplished its sovereign success, and was conscious of its inward strength. Eusebius saw before him a cloudless future, and it was a joy to him to look back over the storms which had been scattered. We may think sadly of the disappointment which he lived to realise, of the fresh succession of trials through which the Church has been called to pass; and yet it is a privilege to be able to transport ourselves again to times when the sense of triumph was still fresh and unalloyed, and to realize that the triumph was indeed complete with regard to the first enemies whom Christianity had to meet.

What, then, we can now ask, was the exact task which Eusebius proposed to himself, and how did he execute it?

The opening sentence will answer the first question. In that Eusebius lays down distinctly, though the expression is rough and involved, the plan which he had sketched out. The history which he has to relate is that of a conflict as well as of a growth; he must, therefore, take account not only of the Church, but also of the enemies of the Church. In this twofold division lies the first characteristic of his design. Each of these parts is then further analysed. The historic development of the Church is manifested in three

ways: first, in the unbroken continuity of its organisation; next, in the particular facts which mark its annals and the great leaders who stand out prominently from time to time; and, lastly, in the definite exposition and defence of the divine Word. There is, in other words, an underlying principle of life; there is a practical manifestation of life in deed; there is an intellectual manifestation of life in thought. Each of these must, as Eusebius feels, claim the notice of the Christian historian.

As the exhibition of the life of the Church is threefold, so also is that of the opposition to the Church. There is the antagonism of heresy springing from within; the antagonism of Judaism, seen now at last only in the effects of disastrous retribution; the antagonism of Paganism, fruitful in sufferings and death from age to age.

But the conflict which he has to relate is not one which was left undecided. A seventh division marks the close. He crowns his work with the record of the closing struggle, through which he had himself lived, and of the love and mercy of the Saviour by which it was propitiously terminated.

There is, then, a singular unity and completeness—the completeness as of the plot of a great drama—in this outline which Eusebius draws of the work before him. However much he may have failed in achieving his task, he felt its real significance and grandeur. He knew that he was looking on the life, the conflict, the victory of a great body; and it would not be easy to point to

later historians who have seized more firmly the idea which is alone able to verify the past.

There are, however, two points in Eusebius' conception of his work which require to be noticed specially. The first is the manner in which he connects Christ with the past, affirming the continuity of revelation; and the second is the stress which he lays on the direct succession of the followers of the Apostles, affirming the historic continuity of the faith.

"I shall begin," he says, after he has enumerated the several details of his plan, "from no other point than from the first dispensation touching our Saviour and Lord Jesus, the Christ of God"; or, as he defines his meaning a little more clearly below, "My treatise will begin from reflections on the dispensation and divine being of our Saviour Christ, which is indeed more sublime and deep than human power can reach." We are called Christians, he goes on to say, and that glorious title carries us farther back and to a diviner order than men commonly suppose. So far from Christianity being a novel and new-fangled creed of to-day or yesterday, it reaches to the beginning of creation, nay, even beyond it. There is a dispensation of Christ (*οἰκονομία*), whereby He was revealed to men in His earthly life, in His incarnation, and His passion; and there is also a divine aspect of Christ (*θεολογία*), whereby we know him as the Son, and the Word, and the Wisdom, through whom the Father made the world, and by whom, before the fulness of

i. 1, § 2.

i. 1, § 3.

time, He made himself known in fragmentary revelations.

So it is that Eusebius apprehends truly the character of the history which he has to narrate. It is not the history of a revolution which was unprepared, suddenly introduced among men, but the history of the consummation of the covenant of God gradually made known from age to age, as each generation could bear the access of knowledge, to patriarchs, and lawgivers, and prophets. When once we connect Church history with the Incarnation and the divine Person of Christ, it becomes at once the soul of all history. It is no longer isolated and apart, the record of a fragment of the life of humanity. It is seen to be the life of our common life. And just as the Incarnation gathers up into a fact all that had existed before among men of hope and aspiration of promise and type, so all the annals of the world contribute to the understanding of that history in which the Incarnation is realized.

The clear enunciation of this cardinal truth, the vital coherence of Christianity with all the past, is alone sufficient to justify the claim of Eusebius to a place among Church historians of the highest rank. It was perhaps the consciousness that he had found in it a principle which others had wanted which enables him to draw so broad a line between himself and his predecessors. Hegesippus had written a history of the Church up to his own time (*c.* 190), but he began "from the passion of the Lord." He had not only lived

Hieron. *de Vir. Ill.*

before the history could in one sense be contemplated as a whole, but he had missed its union with the past.

The second point in the Prologue of Eusebius to which I wish to call attention is a different one. In specifying the objects at which he aims, he gives the first place "to the successions of the Apostles according to their chronological order." And we find in his *History* that he gives at length the successions of bishops at the greatest sees—Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, and Rome. It would be foreign to my purpose to examine the authenticity of the lists which he gives, or to compare the differences of reckoning between his *History* and *Chronicle.* What it is necessary to observe is, that the prominence given to the historic continuity of the Christian Church marks a distinct view of the divine society. It is characteristic of the first great period into which we have divided Church history. The Church is looked at from without as an organized body, preserving its unity by a traditional union with the Apostles. Each fresh bishop witnesses to the preservation of the faith which he has received from his predecessor—for it is in this aspect that the succession is regarded—and thus step by step the occupant of an apostolic see is sensibly connected with the teaching of its founder.

There is a danger in this exclusively objective conception of the Christian body. When formal doctrine is treated as an unchangeable traditional deposit, one of the most important functions of

the life of the Church is practically denied. There can be no absolute enunciation of dogma. Modes of thought and language vary within certain limits from age to age. But not to dwell on this point now, it will be seen that the view which Eusebius gives is of the highest value in relation to the office which he had to fulfil. In the absence of full literary memorials of the second and third centuries, it is of the utmost importance to feel that the conception of the historic continuity of the faith was clear and definitely expressed. This or that link in the chain may be doubtful or untrustworthy; but the sense present in the Churches of the unbroken tenor of their life, to which the records of the succession witness, cannot have been at fault. And at the same time it is a great help to the understanding of the conflicts of the Church, both with the Empire and with false opinion, to feel that there is behind martyrdoms and controversies a definite organization and a traditional rule of Truth. So that the existence and creed of the body is not perilled in the steadfastness and judgment of individuals.

From what has been said, it will be seen that Eusebius had a just or rather a noble idea of what his *History* ought to be. We have next to consider how he realized his conception. Briefly, then, his work is of very unequal excellence, but his faults are in the main literary—his merits are in the main moral. We may notice his faults first.

Simple faults of style may be disregarded.

Indeed, the method which Eusebius proposed to himself of gathering whatever suited his purpose i. 1.
from the scattered notices of earlier writers, preserved in the original language of the passages, excludes the very possibility of a historical style. It is rather to his praise that he was contented to keep his treasures untouched without endeavouring to remould them. But not to dwell on this defect in literary form, he is fragmentary, desultory, and uncritical.

He is fragmentary. His quotations constantly begin with words like "for this reason," or "for," or "therefore," or with a simple relative, when it would be of deep interest to know the connexion in which the passages stand, *e.g.* v. 13 (διὰ τοῦτο); iv. 4, 23 (γάρ); v. 5, 24 (οὖν); v. 15 (ὅθεν); iv. 8 (οἷς). Sometimes the sense is incomplete from the loss of the original context (v. 7; viii. 10). Elsewhere the construction is broken (vi. 25). One very important fragment on the Montanists is referred in the most tantalizing way to "one of the writers whom I have lately mentioned" (v. 16).

He is desultory. Nothing can illustrate this characteristic better than the manner in which he deals with the canon of the New Testament. After mentioning the martyrdom of St. Peter and St. Paul at Rome, he proceeds at once, without iii. 3.
any further preface, to enumerate the writings attributed to them respectively, distinguishing those which were generally received by ancient tradition from those which were disputed. At

the same time he adds a notice of the *Shepherd*, because it had been attributed by some to the Hermas mentioned by St. Paul. After this he resumes his narrative, and then having related the
iii. 24, *f.* last labours of St. John, he gives an account of the writings attributed to him, promising a further discussion of the Apocalypse, which, however, does not appear. This catalogue is followed by some fragmentary discussions on the Gospels, to which a general classification of all the books claiming to have apostolic authority is added. When this is ended the *History* suddenly goes back to a
ii. 15. point in the middle of the former book. Elsewhere he repeats the account of an incident for the sake of adding some new detail, yet so as to mar the symmetry of his work.[1]

This desultoriness frequently leads Eusebius into serious contradictions. He seems to have noted down from time to time whatever struck him as important in any author who might come into his hands, and then to have reproduced each statement as he found it without heeding any discrepancies in his different sources. Then, though he refers to the *Chronicle* as giving briefly the facts which he relates at length in his *History*, there are very considerable variations in the two books as to the chronology of the bishops of Rome.

It was a result of the same habit of mind that he does not appear to have revised his quotations, or to have reconsidered difficulties which

[1] *e.g.* i. 13 || ii. 1 ; ii. 23 || viii. 13, etc.

he might have solved by the help of his own materials.[1]

A certain want of precision also often exposes him to misunderstanding, and not a few of the objections which have been urged against his accuracy are removed when due allowance is made for his manner of reference and quotation. i. 8; iv. 11.

It is almost unnecessary to add that he is uncritical. He uses without doubt documents which are unquestionably apocryphal, as the alleged correspondence of the Lord with Abgarus (i. 13), and the decree of M. Aurelius (or Antoninus Pius) to the common council of Asia (iv. 13). He quotes the interpolated text of Josephus with reference to Christ (i. 11), and also with reference to the death of Agrippa (ii. 10). And it is even a more grave error that he identifies the Therapeutae with Christians, being misled by superficial points of resemblance (ii. 17).

It is a more serious defect, though it cannot be called a fault, in Eusebius that he was altogether unacquainted with the Latin literature of Christianity, and very imperfectly acquainted with the Latin language. The only Latin writer whom he quotes is Tertullian, and of Tertullian he quotes only the *Apology* which had been already translated into Greek. Moreover, the fact that his knowledge of Pliny's letter to Trajan was Tertull. *Ap.* 2, iii. 33. *Ap.* 5, ii. 2; *Ap.* 5, iii. 20; *Ap.* 5, ii. 5; *Ap.* 5, v. 5.

[1] *e.g.* iii. 7, when he misquotes Josephus as to the losses of the Jews in the Roman war; viii. 4, where he professes ignorance of a name given in the *Chronicle*. The variation between ii. 19 and the two corresponding but inconsistent passages in Josephus may be due to an error of copyists.

derived only from this book shows that he was equally ignorant of the classical Latin writers; and though he cannot be held responsible for the passages of the translation given in his *History*, which abound in the grossest errors, one or two translations of public documents which may be due to his hand are very far from satisfactory. On the other side, it may be noted that the one version which he distinctly claims to have made himself "to the best of his ability" (iv. 8, 9) appears to be accurate in the main.

xv. (1) = Lactant. *De Mort. Persec.* 48, viii. 17; ix. 1.

It has seemed best to dwell at length on these faults and deficiencies in the work of Eusebius that we may be free to dwell without any further reserve upon his merits. If he failed, as he certainly did fail, to carry out his design with equal success in every part, it must yet be granted that he consistently sought his information from original sources, and that in all that relates to the Greek-speaking Churches his history was based on adequate reading. Further, it can be shown that he was candid in acknowledging the faults of Christians, and in other respects honest and truth-loving.

Almost every page witnesses to the zeal with which he collected testimonies from writers who lived at the time of the events which he describes. "There is nothing," he says, "like listening to the words of the narrator" on whose authority the facts are told (iii. 32, 2). Such records as the letters of the Church of Smyrna on the death of Polycarp, or of the

Churches of Vienne and Lyons on the persecution there, seem to him to be essential to his *History* (iv. 15; v. 1). He will not rewrite the incidents. Those first fresh impressions appeal directly to the heart. There is no part of his *History* more instinct with feeling than his account of Origen (vi. 1 *ff.*), and this he derived from some letters and the account of those who had known him and "survived till his own time." And so throughout the sixth and seventh books he evidently rejoices to be able to use for the foundation of his narrative the contemporary letters of Dionysius. "Dionysius, our great Bishop of Alexandria," he writes, "will again help me by his own words in the composition of my seventh book of the *History*, since he relates in order the events of his own time in the letters which he has left." And the words have a still deeper meaning when we recall the noble character of Dionysius himself, who could say even in controversy: "The Truth is dear and most precious of all things. If anything be said rightly we must give to it our praise and welcome; if anything can be shown to be written unsoundly, we must examine and correct it."

vii. Praef.

vii. 24, cf. vii. 7.

In accordance with this instructive desire for original testimony Eusebius scrupulously distinguishes facts which rest on documents from those which rest on oral evidence. Some things he relates on the authority of a "general" (iii. 11, 36), or "old report" (iii. 19, 20), or "from tradition" (i. 7; ii. 9; vi. 2, etc.). In the lists of the

successions he is careful to notice when written
iv. 5. records failed him. "I could not find," he says, "by any means the chronology of the Bishop of Jerusalem preserved in writing. Thus much only I received from written sources that there were fifteen bishops, all Hebrews, up to the date of the siege under Hadrian" (iv. 5).

It is no less characteristic of his spirit, however much he may have failed to carry out the injunction to the letter, that he quotes a solemn adjuration in which Irenaeus charges each copyist to compare his transcript with the original and transmit the charge to his successors. "It was for our good," he adds, "we must allow this was
v. 20. said by him and related by us, that we might have these ancient and truly holy men as the best pattern of most earnest care." The words, in fact, made so deep an impression upon him that he placed them at the beginning of his *Chronicle*.

The reading of Eusebius was commensurate with his zeal for exact information. He quotes about a hundred different works, many of which
v. 25. are known only through his citations, and men-
v. 27. tions a large number besides which he has read, and adds with perfect candour the names of some also which he had not been able to read. His position, indeed, at Caesarea offered him every
vi. 32. literary advantage. Pamphilus had collected there a most extensive library; and he was within easy reach of the library provided at Aelia (Jerusalem) by Alexander, in which was preserved a large

correspondence of men of the early part of the third century, and it was from this he says that vi. 20. he gained the materials for his history.

And here it is impossible not to notice the intense literary activity of the second and third centuries. Wherever a clear glimpse is opened upon the Church of Asia, of Alexandria, or of North Africa, we can see the intellectual working of the new life. There is almost a morbid restlessness in the eager desire which is shown to meet the many problems which Christian thoughts open. At least we can be assured that the truth was tested as it was shaped. The Christian consciousness worked in full light.

No one can refuse Eusebius credit for these merits, for the care with which he searched for early records of the progress of the faith, for the fidelity with which he preserved his authorities in their original form, for the extent and patience of his researches. But it is said that he was prejudiced and credulous; that he writes as an avowed advocate of the Catholic Church, pledged to relate only what was to the credit of the orthodox party, and that his narrative is disfigured by superstition.

These charges have been repeated so often that persistent reiteration has given them something of the semblance of acknowledged truths; but they offer, in fact, a memorable example of the unfairness of partial quotation. Eusebius is no blind advocate, though he is jealous for the honour of the truth; he is no lover of fables, though he certainly believes that God may make himself

known in other ways than those which we call natural.

His own words taken in their context will explain his position in the first respect. In detailing the circumstances of the last persecution he had a very sad and yet a very noble work to do; and no language can well be stronger than that in which he describes the deteriorating effect of long prosperity and peace upon the character of the Church. For a time the ancient discipline, and loyalty, and devotion remained in the societies
viii. 1. which increased day by day in number and power. But afterwards a period of melancholy disorder followed. "From growing freedom," he writes, "our spirit has turned to idle pride and indolence. Christians indulged in mutual envy and abuse. We all but waged open war upon one another, arrayed with the armour and weapons of controversy. Leaders came into collision with leaders, and congregation rose in faction against congregation. Unspeakable hypocrisy and dissembling advanced to the utmost point of wickedness. And then it was that the divine judgment, as is generally the case, began to visit us gently and mildly while our assemblies were still being formed. . . . But we remained insensible, and took no thought to propitiate the favour of Providence. We supposed, as if we had been atheists, that our conduct was unheeded and unobserved, and added one wickedness to another. Those who seemed to be our pastors set aside the ordinances of godliness, and were inflamed with

mutual rivalries, simply increasing strife and threats, emulation and enmity, and hatred one against the other: passionately vindicating their claims to authority as if they were tyrants. And then it was according to the voice of Jeremiah that 'the Lord covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in His anger, and cast down from heaven unto the earth the beauty of Israel, and remembered not His footstool in the day of His anger!'"

Such is the preface which Eusebius makes to his account of the Diocletian persecution, and it is hard to see what more he could have said. The bitterest enemy of the Church could not have confessed more unreservedly the degeneracy of a large part of the Christian body, which came from the faith becoming a subject of profession rather than of conviction. But an enemy might have indulged in the elaborate portraiture of each incident of vainglory, and self-seeking, and uncharitable contentiousness. This Eusebius could not do, nor was such a work to be required from him. And so when he goes on to the narrative of the persecution itself he professes that he shall follow the same method. "It is not my purpose," viii. 2.
he writes, "to detail the melancholy calamities which happened in the last trial. It was not my proper business, as I explained, to record the dissensions of (the Christian leaders) among one another before it and their unreasonable acts. And for this reason I determined to relate nothing more of them than might enable me to justify

the divine judgment. In like manner I am not led (now) to mention those who were shaken by the persecution, or of those who made utter shipwreck of their salvation, and were voluntarily submerged in the depths of the stormy waters, but I shall only add those facts to my general history which are likely to prove of service, first to ourselves, and then to those who come after us."

In this summary he does not, as you will see again, in the least degree disguise or excuse the magnitude of the evils by which the Church was troubled. He distinctly admits that they were sufficient to call for the purifying ordeal, and that it was his duty to declare that it was so. And when in another place he treats of the same subject, he signalises with sufficient character the nature of the disorders which thus continued even in the course of the severe and salutary discipline. "It is my intention," he says, "to pass over the events which happened in the intervals between the persecution, the strange punishments of faithless shepherds of Christ's flock, who were condemned, as it were, by a divine retribution to the charge of camels and horses, the insults and injuries which were endured for the sake of the sacred furniture, and, moreover, the ambitious contentions of the majority, disorderly, unlawful elections, and the divisions among the confessors themselves, and all the measures which the young men, in the spirit of faction, diligently set on foot against the relics of the Church, putting forward one strange innovation after another, and mercilessly

*De Mart. Pal.* 12.

dwelling on the misfortunes of the persecuted, and piling trouble on trouble, judging that it does not belong to my work [to dwell upon them] . . . while I consider that it does most strictly belong to the history of the noble martyrs to tell, and write, and commit to faithful ears 'whatever things are honest and of good report,' 'if there be any virtue and praise.'"

No minute narrative could add anything to the general impression of these sad revelations. Eusebius lays bare without reserve the wounds of the Church. He makes no attempt to conceal the melancholy truth that the chief men among the Christians justly called down upon themselves in some cases the punishment which they suffered, that persecution gave rise to dissensions among those who bravely endured it, that intolerant zeal exaggerated the disasters which came from weakness and irresolution. To say more would have been unnatural, if not superfluous; to say less would have been dishonest and misleading. There was no need that the historian should work out the details of the picture, but the darker shades were necessary to the truthfulness of the effort.

In this instance Eusebius is speaking from his own experience, when the temptation to unfairness would be strongest; and there is no reason to think that he followed any other rule in other cases. One touching passage from the narrative of another persecution will be sufficient to show that he did not dissemble the frailty of believers at earlier times, and though the words occur in a

quotation, they furnish on this account a more complete illustration of the candour of the Christian annalists. A violent attack was made upon the Churches of Vienne and Lyons, of which an account was written by some of them who witnessed it. Some there were of those first assailed
v. 1. who with all zeal witnessed to their faith. "But there were seen also those who were unprepared and untrained, and still weak, as they were unable to bear the strain of the great trial. Of those, about ten in number actually perished, in a spiritual sense, by an untimely fate; and they created in us great grief and infinite sorrow, and checked the zeal of the rest who had not been apprehended, who, although suffering the greatest distress, yet stood by the martyrs and did not leave them. Then, most truly, we all were filled with great alarm and suspense, because of our uncertainty as to the confession [of those examined], not fearing the punishments applied to them, but looking to the end, and fearing lest any should fall away." The scene is evidently drawn from the life, and the faithfulness with which weakness is recognized by the historian may well inspire confidence when he tells only of courage and victory.

The charge of superstition which is brought against Eusebius is not more injurious to his character as a historian than the charge of wilful partiality. Undoubtedly he relates many incidents which may seem to us incredible, but when he does so he gives the evidence on which they

were recommended to him. At one time it is the express testimony of some well-known writer, at another a general belief, at another an old tradition, at another his own observation. For example, he quotes Irenaeus to show "that the varieties of spiritual gifts remained even up to his times among those worthy of them." In another place he relates two wonderful events from the life of Narcissus, a Bishop of Jerusalem, on the authority of an unbroken tradition preserved in the place itself. Other alleged miracles he gives on the information of those who professed to have direct knowledge of them. The most remarkable passage bearing upon the question is one in which he recounts his own experience during the last persecution in Palestine. Many victims had fallen at Caesarea, and their bodies were exposed unburied without the city walls. Such scenes of horror followed as might be expected. And when this state of things had lasted for very many days, what seemed to be a strange prodigy happened. "There was clear weather and a bright sky, and a complete calm all about. Thereupon, all at once, out of most of the columns which supported the public porticoes oozed tear drops, so to speak, and the markets and streets, though no rain had fallen, were all wetted with showers of water from some unknown source, so that a rumour forthwith spread among all men that the earth had wept, incredible as the story might be, since it could not bear the impious enormity of the deeds then done, and that stones and

v. 7.

vi. 9.

vii. 17, 18.

*De Mart. Pal.* 9.

lifeless matter wept over what had happened to reprove the obdurate and pitiless nature of men. I know that which I say will seem in all probability idle talk and fable to later generations, but it did not so seem to those whom the season convinced of the reality of the fact." There can be no doubt as to the actual occurrence of the phenomena which Eusebius describes; and it does not appear that he can be reproached for adding the interpretation which his countrymen placed upon it. What he vouches for we can accept as truth; what he records as a popular comment leaves his historical veracity and judgment unimpaired. It is very likely that he believed that the occurrence was a divine sign, but his own opinion falls altogether out of sight, and what he does think it right to say of the judgment of others furnishes an important trait in the portraiture of the time. So it is also, to take a somewhat different instance, when he mentions
iii. 8. the current application of Messianic prophecies to Vespasian. The feeling, however baseless, was a symptom not to be disregarded, and the parallels
*Hist.* v. 13. which Tacitus and Suetonius offer in this case
*Vesp.* 9. furnish a complete justification of the procedure of Eusebius.

But though the credit of Eusebius as a historian is in no way lessened by these accusations of unfairness and superstition, it is true that he writes as one who believed that the Christian faith is infinitely precious, and thankfully recognized in the course of life the signs of a divine order. He

felt that the narrative which he had to relate was more than the exhibition of a series of outward events. There was, far underneath the stormy waves or sunny calms which he described, a still depth of spiritual power never to be forgotten. It is in no idle form that he begins his work with the solemn invocation of heavenly assistance, "that i. 1.
God may guide him and the power of the Lord work with him." It is no rhetorical figure when he undertakes the last book as the crown of all, reciting the words of the Psalm, "O sing unto the x. 1.
Lord a new song, for He hath done marvellous things: with His own right hand and with His holy arm hath He gotten Himself the victory. He hath declared His salvation: His righteousness hath He openly showed in the sight of the heathen." He knew that the essence of the struggle which he had to picture was spiritual and not visible. The faithful alone could truly understand what he had to tell.

"Others," he says, "in the composition of their v. Praef.
histories commit to writing victories in war and trophies reared over enemies, triumphant successes of generals and the brave exploits of soldiers, stained by countless deeds of blood, in defence of their children, their country, and their property. But the narrative which shall tell the story of our [Christian] commonwealth and our [Christian] life, will record on eternal monuments the wars which were most truly wars of peace, waged for the peace of the soul; [it will tell of] the men who displayed their courage in these for truth more

than for country, for religion more than for their dearest treasures, proclaiming for eternal memory the acts of constancy of the champions of religion, their courage in supporting manifold trials, the trophies which they raised over demons, the victories which they won over unseen adversaries, the crowns which consummated all their labours."

It was a strangely solemn history over which he looked back—a history wholly unique in the magnitude of the revolution which it recorded; wholly unique in the ineffable grandeur of the facts out of which it flowed. And Eusebius knew the vital meaning of what he had to tell; he knew that Christ and the faith in Christ stand without parallel in the annals of mankind; he knew that the recognition of Christ by bands of worshippers throughout the world as king and prophet and priest was a strange marvel; he knew that the confession of Him as the loved of God pre-existent before all ages, and the worship of Him as God, was a strange marvel. "But strangest marvel of all was it," to use his own words, "that we who
i. 3. have been consecrated to Him do not honour Him with voice only and sounds of words, but with every disposition of our soul, so that we set our witness for Him even before our own lives." Thus the light of triumphant martyrdom rests upon all the record.

There is indeed something, as has been said, of tragic pathos in the comparison of the great exultation with which Eusebius welcomes the triumph of Christ, and what we know to have

followed that first conquest. He writes as if it were certain that the goal of peace was reached when he had recorded the sole sovereignty of Constantine. Bitter experience must have taught him afterwards that his hope of permanent tranquillity was vain. But for us it is an unspeakable advantage to be able to read the first annals of the faith in the words of one who had witnessed its last great conflict, who was penetrated with a sense of its sovereign power, who could feel that its early victory did contain in it the pledge of final and absolute supremacy.

## CHAPTER II

### THE EARLY PERSECUTIONS

THE narrative of the Acts, which is in other respects a type of the history of Christianity in all ages, offers characteristic examples of the causes and forms of persecution. At first the Jewish leaders, by their own power, either lawfully or by the help of popular excitement, endeavoured to suppress the new sect, which had not as yet been definitely separated from Judaism in name or observances. So it was that St. Stephen was the first martyr on religious charges. When the disciples were consequently scattered and had adopted or received the title of Christian, the temporal power interfered. The name was at least capable of a dangerous interpretation, and Herod found that the policy, which was suggested in all probability by reasons of state, "was pleasing" also "to the Jews." Then James the brother of John fell a martyr to civil fears. The area in which the faith worked was again widened, and persecution took a new form. The Jews who believed not stirred up the Gentile population against the Christian

Acts xi. 19 *ff.*, 26.

Acts xii. 1 *ff.*

Acts xiii.

teachers, and caused them to be driven from the places where they had found some acceptance. Thus it happened at Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra, but in the meantime Gentile congregations were formed, and the Church grew still.

As a fresh field was opened in this way fresh dangers were encountered. The first preaching of the gospel in Europe was attended by a new form of hostility. When the spirit of divination was cast out of the damsel at Philippi, her heathen masters were exasperated by their loss, and denounced Paul and Silas as violaters of the law by seeking to proselytize to a strange creed. The lesson was not lost upon the Jews. The preaching of Christ—the Messiah, the King—at Thessalonica gave them an opportunity of rousing the jealousy of the people, and representing the Apostles as advocating the claims of another king than Caesar. Elsewhere in the greater cities they appear to have had less influence, and not to have employed this mode of attack. At Athens St. Paul was not met by any violent opposition, if he found little inclination to receive his preaching. At Corinth the Jews gained no audience from Gallio for their religious complaints, and it does not appear they brought any charge of treason against the Christians. At Ephesus the Jewish animosity was fairly overpowered; but once again the selfish fear of loss was strong enough to bring to a tumultuous end the apostolic labour of two years. The arguments of Demetrius roused the citizens to vindicate the claims of the national

Acts xvi. 21.

worship of Diana; thus the last account of the free public preaching of St. Paul, which has been preserved, completes the array of the original adversaries of the faith—Judaism, selfishness, materialism, scepticism, idolatry. For the organization of the Christian society was not yet so far advanced as to place the Church and the Empire in their real antagonism.

Acts xix. 27.

It is unnecessary to follow out the working of the various forces hostile or favourable to Christianity in the trial and imprisonment of St. Paul. So far the Roman Government was an impartial spectator and judge of what appeared to be rivalries and divisions in a tolerated sect. The Church grew up "under the shelter of a lawful form of worship" till it could stand in its proper strength. The first change from this policy of indifference was due to Nero four years before his death;[1] and "we glory," writes Tertullian, "in the fact that such a man inaugurated our condemnation (tali dedicatore damnationis nostrae etiam gloriamur); for whoever is acquainted with his character can understand that it could have been nothing but a great good which was condemned by Nero. And though this manifestation of his cruelty was due to what we are tempted to call incidental circumstances, it is impossible not to feel a fitness in the fact that the matricide, the completed embodiment of selfishness, should appear as the first persecutor and present the

A.D. 6.

*Apol.* 5, *cf.* 21.

[1] Probable influence of Poppaea (favourable to Jews, Jos. *Ant.* xx. 3), as opposed to that of Acte (favourable to Christians).

image of the expected Antichrist. The occasion of the Neronian persecution was the conflagration at Rome, which was commonly attributed to the emperor. When all other modes of removing the suspicion had failed he fixed the crime upon the Christians, who were already "hated for their scandalous crimes (per flagitia invisos)." The accused, who amounted to "a great multitude," in which were included, according to an early tradition, St. Peter and St. Paul, were convicted, not for setting fire to the city, not for the alleged excesses of their secret worship, but chiefly for their "hatred of the human race," for their isolation, that is, for their absolute refusal to take part in the pagan ceremonies which made up the chief part of the holiday and even of the ordinary life of their fellow-citizens. On such grounds Tacitus does not scruple to call them "guilty culprits worthy of most signal punishment," and appears to regret that the extravagant tortures which Nero devised created some weak pity for their execution.

Euseb. *H.E.* ii. 25.

Tac. *Ann.* xvi. 44, *cf.* Suet. *Nero*, 16.

It is commonly supposed that Nero issued a special edict against the Christians, declaring that it was a capital offence to confess the faith. But there is no evidence for such an opinion, and enactments already in force were, as we shall see, quite sufficient for the purpose of a persecutor. Nero no doubt first applied the law against secret societies and the law of treason to the case of Christians, and thus set a precedent for others to follow; but as Christians could actually be made

liable to death by these provisions, it is most improbable that an emperor like Nero would deem such a sect worthy of special legislation. And so it is that Tertullian, in the passage which is the foundation of the popular belief, does not speak of an edict, but of a practice. "This practice (this proceeding) of Nero alone has survived, while all others have been obliterated (permansit evasis omnibus hoc solum *institutum* Neronianum)." And when he elsewhere speaks of the law which none but tyrants put in force against Christians, the reference is explained most naturally of the general provisions of the statute book.[1]

*Ad Nat.* i. 7.

*Ap.* v.; *cf.* Just. *Ap.* i. 45.

For about fifteen years, which included the great tragedy of the fall of the Holy City, the Christians seem to have been unmolested. The enactments which could be made to reach them required to be enforced by a vigorous persecutor, and in the excitement of other events such a body was naturally overlooked. At length Domitian, half a Nero in cruelty, in Tertullian's words, but with some traces of humanity still left in him, in the last year of his reign recommenced the persecution, but with nobler victims. "He put to death his own cousin, Flavius Clemens, on a charge of atheism, for which many others, who had gone over to the customs of the Jews, were condemned." At the same time Flavia Domitilla, the wife of Clemens, and herself a kinswoman of the emperor, was banished for the like offence. It seems

A.D. 95. *Apol.* 5.

Dion C. lxvii. 14.

[1] The later testimony of Sulpicius Severus (ii. 29, datis legibus), has no independent value.

probable that these were Christians; and the fact that Domitian caused the kinsmen of the Lord to be examined in Palestine indicates that his persecution extended beyond the limits of Rome, and was in some degree at least connected with political apprehensions.

Euseb. *H.E.* iii. 19, 20.

Domitian had naturally encouraged informers, and Christians could not but suffer from them. Nerva, who was chosen by the Senate to succeed him, at once checked an evil which undermined the foundations of society, and put to death the slaves and freedmen who had given information against their masters. At the same time he forbad the institution of charges for "impiety" (*ἀσέβεια, i.e.* constructive treason for refusing due honour to the emperor) and Jewish observances. These enactments gave as much security to the profession of Christianity as it could well obtain under the Empire; and at the extreme close of the apostolic age, for St. John is said to have lived to the reign of Trajan, the Church was duly placed to enter upon its independent conflict.

Dion C. lxviii. 1 (*cf.* Dion. lxvi. 9).

Euseb. *H.E.* iii. 23.

The epoch was in every way a critical one. The accession of Trajan marked a new period in the development of the Empire. As an adopted son of the nominee of the Senate he could not claim in the remotest degree the sacredness of blood which belonged to the Julian and Claudian lines, or the designation by destiny which seemed to mark Vespasian and his family for sovereignty. He was a Spaniard by birth, though probably of

an Italian family by remote descent. His claim to supreme command was that he was the most skilful, loyal, and resolute soldier of the age, who was at once able and ready to support the feeble government of Nerva. In him for the first time simple strength, vigour, and power of government were offered for the worship of the Roman world, when he was described as "the greatest and most illustrious of gods" in the language of a contemporary inscription.

Boeckh, 2454.

The age corresponded to its chief. Though it was marked by good administration and successful wars, it was a little age and it was a coarse age. It was a little age. We shall look in it in vain for any signs of enthusiasm or lofty hope. There was no faith present, except that which was misunderstood and persecuted, which could lift men beyond the cares of daily life or fill them with generous aspirations for the regeneration of their race. The dreams of a golden time with which the Empire was ushered in had passed away. There was much material splendour and probably much material prosperity, but the chief lesson of philosophy was resignation, and the chief delight of history was in a remote past.

Dion C. lxviii. 7.

It was a coarse age. Trajan was trained in a camp, and though he was fond of the society of scholars he laid no claim to any refinement of education. He was addicted to some gross and degrading vices, and it is but a slight palliation of their gravity, which provoked the censure of Julian, that he did not allow them to interfere

with his imperial duties. "He knew," it was said by an ancient writer, "that the Romans wanted two things above all other, bread and the games, and that the latter were of more influence than the former, because they satisfied the larger body at once." So it was that he restored the pantomimes which at first he had forbidden after the example of Domitian, and gratified a degenerate populace with savage shows. Eleven thousand beasts are said to have been slain in the spectacles by which he celebrated his Dacian triumph, and ten thousand gladiators fought in them. No successes could atone for the abasement which was the necessary result of giving or delighting in such amusements. And there is a terrible parable in the record of Trajan's last victory. The Senate decreed a triumph for the Parthian war at the close of which he died. His successor, Hadrian, declined to accept one, however, which he had not earned, "and carried the image of the late emperor in the triumphal car, that the good prince might not even after death lose the dignity of the triumph." The triumph was a startling figure of the Commonwealth. Even in the hour of conquest the Empire was already a power from which the soul had gone. But where faith had perished dark fears still lingered. Both Plutarch and the elder Pliny say that human sacrifices were offered in Rome itself to avert the consequences of some alarming prodigy.

Frontinus, p. 249, ed. Niebuhr.

Dion C., lxviii. 15.

Spart. *Hadr.* 6.

*Quaest. Rom.* 83. *Hist. Nat.* xxviii. 3 (2).

In this general connexion it is that we find the first clear description of the Christians by a heathen

writer. This is preserved in a letter of the younger
*Ep.* 97. Pliny addressed to Trajan from his government in Bithynia. He writes to the emperor, detailing what he had been able to learn of the strange and growing sect, and how he had dealt with it, and asks for guidance as to his future course. Trajan
*Ep.* 98. in reply traces out in a few lines the policy which his successors carried out with more or less care till the systematic persecution of Domitian. These two letters, then, will now be the subject of our investigation. Short as they are, no documents bearing on the history of the Church immediately after the apostolic age are more precious, and the circumstances under which they have come to us invest them with a peculiar interest.

A simple accident might have deprived us of the whole book of letters in which they occur. It does not exist at present, as far as is known, in any manuscript whatsoever. The manuscripts of the letters which remain are of three classes. The first, represented by three copies, contains the nine books; the second contains a collection of one hundred letters extending as far as v. 6, derived from one archetype; the third contains a large number of late copies in which the eighth book is wanting. No one of these manuscripts then contains the tenth book, or the book of the letters of Pliny and Trajan, or any part of it. But about the very beginning of the sixteenth century, when several imperfect editions of the Letters had been already published, a copy was found at Paris containing the

nine books of Pliny's Letters and the single book of the Letters of Pliny and Trajan. From this manuscript eighty-one letters of Pliny and Trajan —from the forty-first to the last—were copied by Peter Leander and published by Avantius in 1502. The same letters were republished by Beroaldus a few months later, and by Catanaeus in 1506, but without any fresh help from independent manuscripts. Two years afterwards, Aldus, who had obtained a complete copy of the manuscript from Jucundus Veronensis, who first discovered it, and also the manuscript itself, to which he ascribed an extreme antiquity, published the perfect collection, but it appears that in spite of the value which he attributed to his manuscript, he trusted more to the conjectures of scholars than to the original text. From that time the archetype and the copies of it have alike disappeared, so that our final knowledge of this priceless correspondence is entirely derived from one incomplete and one complete edition of an emended transcript of the text of a single lost manuscript.

But while the external apparatus for the criticism of the correspondence is thus meagre and unsatisfactory, the internal character of the book establishes its authenticity beyond all doubt. Not only is the style of Pliny quite undistinguishable from that of his acknowledged writings, and the style of Trajan marked by a clear and vigorous individuality, but the life, the variety, the minuteness of the contents carry complete con-

viction that the letters deal with real events as they arise, and preserve an immediate and unique picture of the administration of a Roman province under a governor of exceptional goodness and an emperor of consummate practical power. At one time Pliny raises detailed questions of finance, at another difficulties of police, at another scruples of religious observance. Scarcely any point seems to be too small to be submitted to the judgment of Trajan, and Trajan is content to deal with each point by itself without affecting to lay down any general principles. So it is that the glimpse of the Christians is offered to us as one of the shifting scenes in the busy life of the legate. The subject appears once only side by side with schemes for the water-supply of Sinope, and for the construction of a covered sewer at Amastris, and then disappears for ever. And yet in that glimpse we can see what the Christians appeared to be, and what they were in the generation which followed the death of the last surviving Apostle.

The testimony of Pliny, which would be valuable in any case, is invested with fresh importance from the fact that he was sent to Bithynia on an
*Ep.* 32. extraordinary mission. The province was in great disorder, and he was chosen to regulate what was amiss, to remould in some manner the general character of the inhabitants, and lay down such ordinances as might secure the lasting tranquillity of the district. Several indications show that his attention was specially directed to social and secret combinations, and this fact, as we shall

see, probably influenced his judgment in dealing with the growing Church.

Two different dates have been assigned to Pliny's mission. It has been commonly placed, on the testimony of an imperfect inscription, in the interval between the first and second Dacian wars A.D. 103-4. But the direct evidence for this opinion is wholly untrustworthy, and the internal evidence of Pliny's general correspondence is conclusive against it. In this, which certainly reaches to the year 107, he makes no allusion to what was the most distinguished episode in his career, though he refers with evident pride to the other offices which he had discharged. It could then hardly be doubted that he went to Bithynia at some time after the latest date fixed by his his other letters, even if no other evidence were forthcoming. But we are not left to conjecture: the conclusion thus suggested is definitely supported by an inscription which fixes collaterally the date of his government within narrow limits. At the time when Pliny was legate in Bithynia, Calpurnius Macer was legate of Mœsia, and in one of the few Mœsian inscriptions Macer is mentioned as holding his office in 112. Pliny's legation lasted for about eighteen months; so, if Macer's was of corresponding duration there can be no great error in placing the departure of Pliny for his province about 110 or 111 A.D.

*Epp.* 42, 61, 62.

We can then place the picture which Pliny has drawn in connexion with other familiar works of great masters of antiquity. While Pliny was

debating as to the best means of dealing with what he held to be a mischievous sect, which could be effectually suppressed by considerate firmness, Epictetus was still delivering the noble lessons which present Stoicism in its most attractive form; Plutarch was busy with the series of lives to which we owe chiefly whatever living delight and personal enthusiasm we have in ancient history; Juvenal was writing satires in his declining age, higher in tone and more tranquil in contentment than those in which he denounced fiercely the vices of his countrymen; Tacitus was gathering bitterness with years, though he had lived to that happy period when there was perfect freedom of thought and word. There were many grammarians and critics, but there was no poet. The old order had fulfilled its work, and the springs of its inspiration were dry. There were great men and good men still busy in an age which was little and coarse, but the power of life had finally passed from their keeping, however little they could understand the energy of that faith which was in their eyes a "perverse and extravagant superstition."

Tertull. *Ap.* 2, *cf.* Euseb. *H.E.* iii. 33.

The first point which Pliny's letter suggests is the rapid extension of the Christian faith. He speaks of Christians without preface or explanation, such as Tacitus and Suetonius add, as if he could assume that Trajan would be familiar with the name and the popular associations connected with it: "I have never been present at judicial proceedings about Christians"; and Trajan in his

*Ep.* 97.

reply writes exactly in the same strain. It is clear, therefore, that the Christians were by this time a notorious body, even if they were misunderstood. And they were a growing body. "This subject [of the right method of dealing with the Christians] Pliny writes, "seemed to me to be one on which I might properly ask your advice, especially on account of the number of those who are imperilled. For many of every age, of every rank, of both sexes also, are exposed to danger and will be so exposed. The contagion of this superstition has spread not only through cities, but also through villages and country places; yet I think that it can be checked and corrected. Certainly there can be no doubt that the temples which were almost deserted have begun to be frequented, and the solemn rites which had been long interrupted have been resumed, and that a sale is found for the pasture of victims, for which up to this time scarcely any purchaser was found. From which," he concludes, "it is easy to suppose what a number of men can be brought to a better mind if opportunity is given for repentance."

It is not likely that Pliny would exaggerate the prevalence of the novel religion, and yet his words are an anticipation of the splendid rhetoric of Tertullian: "We are but of yesterday, and we have filled your cities, your islands, your stations, your boroughs, your council chambers, your very camp, your palace, your senate, your bar; we have left you only your temples." Men lament as though it were a disaster that persons of both sexes, of every

*Cf. Apol.* 39.

*Ap.* xxxvii. 2.

age and condition, and even of every rank pass over to the profession of Christianity." It is true that Pliny was placed in a position where the Christians were relatively powerful. Asia Minor, which had in the earliest times taken the lead in harmonising the thought and civilisation of the East and West, now takes the lead in welcoming the Gospel in which they are finally reconciled. And other evidence proves that the faith was spread early and took deep root in the north of Asia Minor. The salutation of the First Epistle of St. Peter bears witness to the existence of Churches in Bithynia long before the close of the first century, though St. Paul was not allowed to go there. Some of those whom Pliny examined had been Christians twenty years before, so that they might have listened to St. John. And about half a century later a pagan impostor was able to strike terror into his hearers by reminding them that "Pontus was full of atheists and Christians," whereby they were in danger of losing the favour of their ancient gods. But without Pliny's testimony several important details as to the constitution of these early Churches would have been unknown. He shows that they were not composed only of the poor. There are many Christians of every rank; and the fact that scarcely any of the more costly victims were offered proves that the wealthier part of the population was included in their number. Some also were Roman citizens whom Pliny reserved for transmission to Rome. Again, Christianity had already extended into the rural

Acts xvi. 7.

Luc. *Pseudomant.* i.

districts. The first preaching of Christianity was naturally confined to the great centres of life. From these the message was afterwards carried, slowly for the most part, through the adjoining regions; and the term "pagan" is itself a touching sign that it was long before the "countrymen" accepted it. In Bithynia, however, the zeal of the believers had carried the faith more speedily over the whole province. Once again the Church had evidently grown in persecution. Pliny implies that severe measures had been tried and in the general result had failed. Christians had, he well knew, been brought to trial though he had never been present at the proceedings; and the fact that he found some who had left the faith shows that what had been done had not been wholly ineffectual. Moreover, the mention of specific periods seems to point to two definite epochs of attack. There were among the accused persons brought before Pliny certain "who said that they had been Christians, but had ceased to be, some for three years, some for several years, and one or two for even as long as twenty years"; and it is worthy of notice that the times thus more exactly marked coincide roughly with the respective dates assigned by Eusebius to the martyrdom of Ignatius and the persecution of Domitian. But it seemed to Pliny that the occasion had come for some more systematic and liberal action. Though he was prepared, if need were, to inflict the heaviest punishments, his expectation of success lay in the

offer of pardon to those who were willing to abjure. The sect was evidently too great to be exterminated; he imagined that it was not too resolute to be broken up by the judicious use of motives of fear and hope. Something of the fresh enthusiasm and fellowship in belief had passed away. There were those who could draw a simple and truthful picture of the manner of Christian life, and yet confess that they had abandoned it.

This portraiture of the Christian life—the oldest after those in the apostolic writings—is the next point in Pliny's letter which must be noticed. His informants, who had been Christians in former times, "assured him that this was the sum of their fault or error, that they were accustomed to meet on a fixed day before light, and repeat a fixed form of words (*carmen*) among themselves in order (*secum invicem*) to Christ as a God, and bind themselves by an oath (*sacramento*), not to the commission of any wickedness, but not to be guilty of theft, robbery, adultery, not to break their word, not to withhold a pledge entrusted to them when called upon to restore it. When this was done (they said) it was their custom to separate, and again to meet for a meal, which was, however, of the most simple fare and innocent; and that they had ceased to do this after Pliny's edict in which he had forbidden guilds in accordance with Trajan's instructions."

Of the faith of the Christians, Pliny, it will be observed, says nothing more than that later inquiries showed it was "a perverse and extra-

vagant superstition." In accordance with the Roman conception of religion he was not concerned with opinions, but with acts. He aimed at discovering not what the Christian thought, but what they did, or rather what they did as a society. Nothing is said of their private conduct or observances. The governor, as we shall see afterwards, considered rightly that he had to deal with a large secret association, and his purpose was to ascertain the corporate rites by which it was held together. Within these limits the details which he has preserved are of singular interest. He notices the periodic gathering for common worship, for the administration of the sacrament, for the celebration of the love-feast. Some allowance must be made for his imperfect acquaintance with the technical words which were used, but the general outline of the Christian services is clearly drawn.

The gatherings were "on a fixed day and before light." The first detail is defined by Justin: "On the day called Sunday (*τῇ τοῦ ἡλίου λεγομένῃ ἡμέρᾳ*) all who live in the town or country places come together," and the usage of assembling together on "the first day of the week," or "the Lord's day," dates from the apostolic age. The second detail is not noticed by Justin; and the early hour of meeting may have been due to local circumstances, to the fear of interruption or espionage, to some tradition of what had been an evening meal, the Lord's Supper, combined with the natural desire to link this rite with the memories of the first Easter morning. But

*Apol.* i. 67.

whether the custom was suggested by considerations of prudence or fitness, it is evident that a practice which could not remain secret was certain to aggravate suspicion, and the nightly assembling of the Christians, as suggesting every kind of irregularity and license, formed one of the popular charges against them.

*Cf.* Orig. *c. Cels.* i. 1. Minuc. Fel. 9.

The language in which the service itself is described is obscure and ambiguous. *Carmen* may describe a metrical composition, a hymn, as it is commonly translated after the paraphrase of Tertullian, or a prose form; all that it necessarily implies is a set form of words. For the rest it may have been a psalm, a thanksgiving, a litany, a lesson, a creed; and it is probable that all these elements were contained in the service. Nor again are we justified in concluding that the use of a "set form of words" shows that no other modes of exhortation or prayer were admitted. The language of Justin suggests the idea of extemporaneous prayers as well as extemporaneous exhortations. The interpretation of the phrase *secum invicem dicere* is no less uncertain. It may mean that the recitation was alternate or antiphonal, as the presbyter and congregation, or different parts of the congregation, took up in succession different clauses of the form; or it may mean that the congregation repeated the form after the minister, or took to themselves in some general response the words which he had said. And here again it seems likely that both combinations found a place in the early ritual.

*Cf.* Tert. *Ap.* 39.

And the best commentary, perhaps, can be found in the general description of Justin: "When the reader has ceased the presiding minister (ὁ προεστώς) addresses to us the [appropriate] admonitions, and invites us to imitate the noble examples [proposed in Holy Scripture]. Then we all rise up together and pray. And when we have ceased from the prayer, bread is brought and wine and water, and the presiding minister offers up prayer, and alike thanksgiving, according to his ability, and the people joyously respond, saying the 'Amen' . . ." *Apol.* i. 67.

The remaining phrase, *Christo quasi Deo* is not without difficulty. Tertullian, in a free quotation of the passage, writes *Christo et Deo*, according to all existing manuscripts. On the other hand, Eusebius quotes from a Greek translation of the *Apology* τὸν Χριστὸν θεοῦ δίκην ὑμνεῖν, which seems to show that an early if not the original reading in Tertullian, was *Christo ut Deo*, as the words stand in Jerome's edition of Eusebius' *Chronicle.* As Pliny would use the words, it seems right to render them "to Christ as a God," and not, as would be natural to us, "to Christ as God." The same phrase as used by a Christian and a heathen would have a very different meaning; and probably Pliny understood no more by it than that the members of the sect rendered divine honours to their founder.

This is the first part of the common worship. The second clause of the description seems undoubtedly to refer to the sacrament, or more

particularly to the Eucharist, as following on and completing the covenant of Baptism. It was in this service that the fellowship of Christians was most distinctly set forth, and by it they were most closely bound to one another and to their common Lord. The inquiries of the governor would necessarily be so framed as to ascertain whether any definite compact was made between the members of the body, and whether it was renewed from time to time. There would be something of reticence in the answers, even of apostates, to questions on these mysteries of the faith. Still they might naturally speak of the "renunciation" and the solemn devotion to Christ's service, which would suggest the enumeration of recognised moral obligations, and the use of the word *sacramentum*—a military oath—if it had not already been adopted in the common vocabulary of the Latin-speaking Christians. They would also be forced to make some reference to the most solemn communion of believers, which was part of the weekly service, and from the circumstances of the first age closely connected with the sacrament of initiation. For the dogmatic side of the sacraments Pliny could have no interest, even if it had been revealed to him, and he has apprehended fairly their moral side. The paraphrase of Tertullian confirms this interpretation of the passage. "Pliny," he says, "reported to Trajan that he discovered nothing else about their solemn compacts—their sacraments—than that they were assemblies before daybreak, for the purpose of

*Cf.* Just. *Ap.* i. 65.

*Ap.* 2.

singing to Christ and God, and to strengthen the bonds of their system (ad confoederandam disciplinam), forbidding murder, adultery, fraud, treachery, and (all) other crimes.

After the conclusion of this first twofold service the Christians separated and met again, probably in the evening, for the celebration of the Agape, the common meal, which expressed in action the social lesson of the Eucharist. It is remarkable that Justin makes no express mention of this custom. Tertullian, on the other hand, speaks of it as having long attracted the criticism of the heathen, and gives a striking description of the form of the observance. "As being part of the duty of worship it admits," he says, "no meanness and no excess. They do not take their places at the table before they have first partaken in prayer to God. They eat as much as satisfies their hunger; they drink as much as is consistent with sobriety. They feast as men who remember that they must pray to God even in the night; they converse as men who know that the Lord is listening. Then water for the hands and lights are brought in, and a general invitation is given to celebrate the praises of God (canere Deo) as each can, either from the Holy Scriptures or from his own ability. . . . Prayer in like manner brings the banquet to a close. . . . This meeting of Christians is deservedly illegal, if it is like those which are illegal; it is deservedly an object of condemnation if any one raises a complaint against it on the ground for which complaint is

Tert. *Apol.* 39.

made against seditious meetings (factiones). . . . (But) when honest and good men meet, when reverent and holy men are gathered, the meeting is not to be called that of a faction, but of a senate."

So far Pliny sets down fairly and coldly, without the least moral sympathy or the least judicial prejudice, the information which he had obtained. He adds also an account of the method which he had followed in dealing with those who were brought to him, of the conclusions to which he had been led, of the difficulties which he still experienced.

His method was simple and decisive. "I asked them," he writes, "against whom information was laid before me as being Christians if they were so. If they confessed, I asked them a second and a third time, threatening them with punishment; if they still persisted I ordered them to be led away to execution (perseverantes duci jussi).[1] For I did not doubt but that contumacy and unbending obstinacy ought to be punished, whatever might be the nature of their profession.

The Christians, therefore, were not only known as a body, but it was known also that their faith, if it were sincerely held, necessarily included practical consequences which made them liable to capital punishment. What these were Pliny implies in

[1] *Duci*, as used here absolutely, must, as it seems, be interpreted as equivalent to ἀπάγεσθαι. *Cf.* Tert. *ad Scap.* 5.

(Lact.) *de Mort. persec.* 40.

Tertullian, *Ap.* 2, speaks of degradation as well as of capital punishment being inflicted by Pliny.

describing the tests to which he subjected those who professed to be falsely accused or to have abandoned the profession. "Those," he adds, "who said that they neither were Christians nor had been, after they invoked the gods in words of my dictation, and offered supplications with incense and wine to your image, which I had ordered to be brought for that purpose with the statues of the gods, and besides cursed Christ,[1] I supposed ought to be discharged, for it is said that those who are really Christians cannot be forced to do any of these things."

In this case the charge broke down. The accused proved that they were not Christians, and it could not be shown that they had been. There was yet a third class of those who had been Christians and now recanted. The sincerity of their recantation was established by the same trial as before. They paid adoration to the image of the emperor and the statues of the gods, and cursed Christ. Still the fact remained that they had been Christians, and Pliny was not clear how he ought to deal with them. If it could be shown that they had been guilty of any gross immoralities in the past their apostacy could not save them from all punishment; if this could not be shown, the right decision might be doubtful. And on this point the testimony of the renegades was, as has been seen, most explicit. Their gatherings had been, they affirmed, innocent or rather praiseworthy. "For this reason," Pliny goes on to say,

[1] *Cf.* 1 Cor. xii. 3; Rom. x. 9.

"I believed it to be more necessary to inquire also by torture what was the truth from two female servants who were called deaconesses [ministrae]. I found nothing," he concludes, "except a perverse and extravagant superstition." So true it is, as has been well said, that this first description of Christians by a heathen is the first Christian apology. The severest examination which he could institute—aided by the testimony of apostates and the power of torture—failed to detect any wicked or disloyal aim in the society, any personal guilt or corruption in its members.

*Cf.* Euseb. *H.E.* v. 1.

Under these circumstances Pliny seems to have been so far moved by the certainty of the moral innocence of the accused, that he was unwilling to decide unfavourably to conforming Christians such points as were doubtful. Two chief doubts remained which he therefore laid before Trajan. The first was "whether any distinction held in regard of age, or no difference was to be made between the very young and those of maturer years." As a general rule youth might obtain exemption from liability to or mitigation of punishment. And though Pliny does not expressly raise the question of sex, that is also suggested by the form of the inquiry. This was his first doubt; his second, "whether pardon was to be granted on recantation, or one who had once been a Christian could gain no advantage from apostacy," which also involved a further question as to whether (in such a case) "the simple name,

if unconnected with gross moral offences, or the offences connected with the name, called for punishment." Two points he had decided for himself, that those who denied the accusation of Christianity, and made good their denial by satisfying the tests which he proposed should be set free; and again (a point upon which he was absolutely clear), that all who admitted that they were Christians, and persisted in the profession in spite of all warnings, were, unless they were Roman citizens, to be executed for their contumacy. The citizens he reserved necessarily for a higher tribunal.

Such was the whole case which was presented to Pliny's consideration; such the judgment which he pronounced upon it. And our former inquiries will enable us to understand how he could condemn without the least misgiving men whom he believed to be pure and just. As he believed this, he heard also that they were embodied in a society which was absolutely illegal, and that each Christian held fixedly certain opinions which placed him in conflict with the State. Christians, in spite of specious virtues, were guilty corporately and individually. The first offence obtained special importance from local circumstances. A single example from this correspondence of Pliny to Trajan may serve as an illustration. When Nicomedia had been devastated by fire, Pliny suggested to the emperor that it would be well to establish there a company of engineers consisting of 150 men. He offered to guarantee

*Ep.* 33. that none but engineers should be admitted, and that the corporation should not be used for any other than its legitimate end; so small a number, he added, could easily be kept in order. The reply of Trajan was decisive: "Your suggestion for the establishment of a company of engineers at Nicomedia has very often been made. But we must remember," he goes on to say, "that that province and these cities have been troubled
*Ep.* 34. by bodies [factionibus] of that kind. Whatever be the name we give to societies of men so collected, and whatever be the reason for collecting them, . . . they will soon become guilds." If so small a combination could excite the emperor's suspicion, it is obvious that a brotherhood like that of the Christians would appear not only illegal, but also formidable.

This general cause for mistrust and correction was strengthened by other marked points in the conduct of a Christian. He could not, like any polytheist, offer sacrifice to the national gods, and therefore he appeared as an atheist (ἄθεος). He could not pay religious worship to the emperor, and therefore he was held to be disloyal (ἀσεβής). He was known to be devoted to the service of one distant and supreme Lord, and therefore it was concluded that he must be a worthless and bad citizen. Even if the case had been less clear, absolute opposition to the laws of the Empire would have been a capital offence. No man could set himself with impunity against the will of the Commonwealth. It does not even occur to Pliny that the Christians

could possibly be right. Under any circumstances obedience and conformity were, in his opinion, unquestionable duties. Opinions he treats with absolute indifference. Conscience has no place whatever in his reasoning. Leniency, so far as he could entertain it, lay in the endeavour to force the accused to deny their convictions. It would have appeared monstrous to him that any faith should be worth dying for. But to the Christian the death, which was the crown of faith, was the highest glory. "If he is denounced," and the words of Tertullian, fresh from the scene of persecution, best express the feeling, "he exults; if he is accused, he offers no defence; if he is questioned, he volunteers to confess; if he is condemned, he returns thanks. What strange crime is this which has none of the natural concomitants of crime—fear, shame, prevarication, remorse, regret? Is this a crime with which the criminal rejoices to be charged; when the accusation is the burden of prayer and the punishment the assurance of happiness?"

Such are the facts, such the inquiries submitted to Trajan. The emperor's answer is short and clear, and, as in other cases, deals practically with the immediate matter in hand. "You have followed, my dear Pliny, the right mode of proceeding in dealing with the case of those against whom information has been laid before you as being Christian. For it is impossible that any method can be prescribed which shall admit of no modification. They are not to be sought

for :[1] if information is given against them and they are convicted, they must be punished. At the same time it should be understood that one who says that he is not a Christian, and proves the truth of his assertion in act—I mean by offering supplications to our gods, although he be under suspicion for the past, will obtain pardon for recantation. Anonymous writings of information ought not to be admitted in any charge. The precedent is most vicious and inconsistent with the character of our time."

Trajan then distinctly approves the general policy of Pliny, and decides the doubtful points in the scale which he had indicated. On the question of age and sex he gives no directions. This, probably, he wished to be regarded as one of those details which could not be determined by any general principle, but must be left to the discretion of the judge. And, in point of fact, many children and women suffered as Christians.[2] Nor, from the Roman point of view, was there anything unreasonably harsh in this. The nature of the offence with which the Christians were charged placed them in an exceptional position. They were not accused simply of having done a wrong act, but of being in a wrong state towards the Commonwealth. The pleas of ignorance and indiscretion and influence could not be applied in

[1] *I.e.* "You are not bound to search for them": "it is no part of your business to institute inquiries"; but the words do not absolutely forbid the search.

[2] *Ep. Eccl. Lygd. et Vien.* Euseb. v. 1, 49; Minuc. F. 37; Lactant. *Inst.* v. 13; *Mart. Cyrilli*, Ruinart, p. 289.

mitigation of punishment, where impunity was offered to all who were willing to abandon the course which had brought them into danger. For Trajan concedes, as Pliny evidently wished, full pardon to all who recanted. But in doing so he requires the satisfaction of the open test of "supplication to the national gods (supplicando diis nostris)"; and if he is less explicit than Pliny in describing the form which this act of worship should assume, his silence sufficiently proves that he saw nothing excessive or irregular in the condition that Christians should be forced to render sacred honours to the image of the emperor. He knew what his representative had done, and he confirms his mode of acting. So far Trajan interpreted the laws favourably to those who pleaded that they had been led astray for a time by a superstition innocent in itself, although it was technically illegal and inconsistent with the principles of the Empire. But at the same time he lays down, as distinctly as Pliny did, that perseverance in the faith, that is, a personal refusal of conformity with the usages of the Empire, must be punished. No question had been raised whether Christians might enjoy toleration as Christians, if it could be shown that the charges of private misconduct brought against them were unfounded. The consideration of moral innocence came first into account when the Christian had abjured his creed. Till then all pleas of individual uprightness were irrelevant in the case of men who were charged with political

offences. If faithful confessors were brought before the magistrate he could not but condemn them.

Not to repeat what has been already said on the personal relations of Christians to the various forms of polytheism and the loyal honours claimed for the emperor, one point remains which requires to be dealt with a little more in detail than has yet been done. The Christians, as has been said, were guilty in the eyes of the Roman law not only personally, when they were brought to trial and refused to satisfy the tests prescribed to them, but also corporately before all trials. They were members of an unauthorised society which was held together by common obligations in no way sanctioned by the State, and asserting its right of corporate action in regular meetings, in stated collections of money, in the exercise of
*Ap.* 39. some judicial functions. Tertullian enumerates these details in such a way as to show that he felt the legal importance which attached to them, though he shows that the guilt of the Christians according to the letter was in appearance and not in spirit:—"We are a body formed by an obligation of worship [conscientia religionis], and a unity of discipline and a bond of hope. We come together for a meeting and assembly, that we may, so to speak, gather our forces and assail God by the prayers which we address to Him. With such violence He is pleased. . . . Sentences are also pronounced with great weight, as in a company of men who are sure that they are in

the sight of God. . . . Elders of tried character preside who have obtained the honour, not by money, but by reputation. . . . Moreover, if there is what may be called a (common) chest it is not supplied by fees paid for a mercenary worship . . ." Each successive phrase deals with some point which might furnish an accuser with a plea; and the Roman governor who considered the whole constitution of such a society would have abundant grounds for believing that it came within the definition of societies proscribed by the law. He might wish to leave it unmolested, but if he was forced to pronounce judgment the provisions of the law were distinct. There can be no doubt that, in the language of the jurists, a Christian congregation would rightly be described as a *collegium*; and if so, it was inherently an unlawful combination till it received the sanction of the senate. Corresponding bodies were undoubtedly formed by members of the same craft, or citizens of the same town, which enjoyed an unauthorised toleration; but they were liable to be broken up at any moment, and to persist in maintaining them was an offence of the gravest character. This principle was established under the Commonwealth and confirmed under the Empire. Thus Asconius notices that about sixty years before the birth of Christ "gatherings of seditious men (coetus factiosorum hominum) took place without public authority to the injury of the Commonwealth. And that for this reason guilds (collegia) were dissolved by a decree of the senate and

Cic. *ad Q.F.* 2, 3.

Ascon. *in Cornel.* Orelli, *ep.* 75.

several laws, except a few and those for a definite object which the interests of the State required." So again in the reign of Nero, Tacitus relates that on the occasion of a riot at Pompeii, "the guilds which the inhabitants had formed contrary to the laws were dissolved."

*Ann.* xiv. 17.

The statements of the later jurists on this subject are very distinct. "Generally," Marcianus writes, "unless a guild has been formed with the authority of a decree of the senate or of the Emperor, the meetings of the guild are against the decree of the senate and the prescriptions (mandata) and ordinance (of the Emperor)." If the meeting was for a religious purpose, as, for example, to perform the common rites of a particular family or place, an exception was made, yet only on the condition that it was such as not to violate the decree of the senate upon the matter. The objects of the Christian gatherings were not limited to the celebration of periodical services. They included important details of finance and jurisdiction which removed them beyond the scope of such a concession. The independent exercise of these powers, if noticed at all, could not but be condemned; and a single instance will show the jealous care with which the most innocent societies were guarded. An early inscription records the establishment of a burial club to provide for the solemn interment of the members. The club was sanctioned by the senate, but on the express condition that its meetings should be held only

Haenel, p. 34.

once a month for the purpose of receiving subscriptions.[1]

It is very likely that no continuous effort was made to enforce rigidly the provisions of these enactments. But they remained unrepealed, and could be put into execution at any moment. A particular method of proceeding was prescribed under the Empire, and a penalty was fixed. According to a rescript of Septimius Severus (*c.* 195, A.D.) information as to the meeting of illicit guilds was to be laid before the prefect of the city; and the punishment is thus defined somewhat earlier by Ulpian: "Whoever has been in the habit of attending an illicit guild is liable to the penalty appointed for those who are condemned of having occupied public buildings or temples with an armed force." The offence, therefore, was treated as a species of treason, for which exile or death was the statutable penalty, and the attempt to form any such societies or meetings was dealt with in the same way. This, as we have seen, was a natural application of the principles of Roman law; and the statement of Ulpian is so much the more deserving of notice as he is said to have paid special attention to the loyal position of Christians. In his treatise *On the Duty of a Proconsul* he collated, according to Lactantius, in a special book "the wicked rescripts of emperors, to explain (ut docent) what punishments they ought to

Haenel, p. 139.

2 D. xlvii. 22.

*Inst.* v. 11.

[1] The same restriction was laid upon "Benevolent Societies" among the soldiers of Septimius Severus.—Haenel, p. 140.

suffer who confessed themselves worshippers of God."

From this point of view some of the many virtues of believers could not fail to excite the suspicion of their enemies. Their mutual charity was regarded as the proof of a wide conspiracy. "They recognize one another," it was said, "by secret marks and signs, and love almost precedes knowledge." At the same time the frequent or general practice of the Christians to meet in the dark, at night, or in the early morning, exaggerated the fears thus suggested, and increased the legal guilt of those who frequented them. Nocturnal assemblies were forbidden by ancient laws which were still binding. "Let no one," so it is prescribed in the laws of the Twelve Tables, "hold meetings by night in the city." And a later law imposed death, according to ancient precedent, as the penalty for organizing secret gatherings at Rome.

Min. Fel. 9.

Cic. *de Legg.* ii. 9.

Lex Gabinia.

It may be objected that the position occupied by the Jews in the Empire is inconsistent with the view thus given of the essential illegality of the Christian societies. But the differences between the Jewish and Christian congregations was considerable, and from the Roman point of view all in favour of the old system. Judaism had obtained a kind of sanction as a national and ancient faith. If it spread beyond the limits of the Israelitish people, it was rather as a system of opinions than as an exclusive and definite faith. The sacraments, the collections, the tribunals of

the Christians placed them in open conflict with the law. And, on the other hand, the Jews at least enjoyed a most precarious toleration. Their isolation exposed them to constant attacks scarcely less violent than those from which the Christians suffered. And when persecutions became systematic, Jews and Christians were treated exactly in the same way.

The importance of this charge against Christians of forming and persisting to maintain illegal compacts is evident from the arguments of the adversaries of Christianity and of the apologists. One example will be enough. The first count in the indictment preferred by Celsus against the Christians was that they made compacts (*συνθήκας*) "secretly with one another, contrary to the injunctions of the law." And Origen in his general reply does not attempt to show that the Christian confederation was lawful. He simply maintains that the law which it violated was a bad and barbarous law which had no moral force; and ventures to draw a parallel which, while it places in a clear light the generous motives of Christians, makes it no less clear that a statesman who believed in the Empire would be forced to persecute. "If a tyrant were to seize upon the government, men would do right," so he argues, "to form secret compacts to slay him; just in like manner"—with equal justice and from a similar motive—"Christians, since he whom they call the devil and falsehood holds a tyrannical sway, form compacts in violation of the injunctions which the devil

*c. Cels.* i. 1

has laid down, against the devil, and for the salvation of others whom they may be able to persuade to revolt from a law which is barbarous and tyrannical."

These facts enable us to see how it was that the Christians could be punished simply as Christians. It was notorious that they belonged to a great and aggressive organisation. Something more was involved in dealing with them than considerations of private morality. It might even seem that individual greatness would make the political bearing of the sect more formidable. There was truth in the argument of Tertullian which could be variously applied. "The very obstinacy for which you revile us proves a teacher. For who is not moved when he regards our cause to inquire what is its character at bottom? And who, when he has inquired, does not embrace it?"[1] There was a prevailing force in Christianity which could not be despised. "It is clear," says Justin, "that when we are exposed to the sword, and to the cross, and to wild beasts, and to bonds, and to fire, and to all those other tortures to which you have recourse, we do not abandon our profession, but in proportion as these are more frequently employed so many more are made faithful and devout believers through the name of Christ."[2] And all this would be felt most keenly by those who were the most far-sighted governors and the truest Romans. So that the paradox becomes intelligible, that the

[1] Tert. *Ap.* 50; cf. *Ad Scap.* 5. [2] *Dial. c. Tryph.* 110.

best princes were in the end (in spite of Tertullian's argument) the worst persecutors, because they were most capable of foreseeing that Christianity could not be finally reconciled with the principles of the Empire.

But while Trajan enjoined, and from his point of view necessarily enjoined, that Christians should be punished if they openly maintained their faith when brought before the magistrates, he laid down two regulations which mitigated in a large though variable degree the severity of the decision. The Christians were not to be sought for, and no anonymous information against them was to be received. Both limitations rest upon the same idea. Persecution was made to depend upon public feeling. It was laid down that the Government, as such, was in no way bound to take the initiative in dealing with the question; and, further, that any accuser must be prepared to bear the full responsibility of the charge. The first provision relieved the governor from the necessity of doing that which might be undesirable in his province; and the second protected what might be an important body of citizens from the malice of single enemies. It followed that, on the one hand, an imperial officer was not prevented from persecuting if he thought that such a course was wise; and, on the other hand, if the Christians were viewed with favour in any particular place, this sentiment would effectually restrain private animosity. A fanatical governor might still do much, but for the most part it would be necessary

that there should be a strong popular opinion to call out or to justify the adoption of violent or extreme measures.

It was natural that the apologists should treat with scorn a policy which did not rest upon absolute and uncompromising conviction of right.

*Ap* 2. "What a sentence is this of Trajan's, confused by the exigencies of his case. He says that we are not to be sought for, as if we were guiltless; he commands that we be punished, as if we were guilty. He combines mercy and cruelty; he shuts his eyes to our crime and inflicts sentence upon it. Why, O power of judgment, dost thou overthrow thyself? If thou condemnest, why dost thou not also search for the culprits? If thou dost not search for them, why dost thou not also acquit the accused?" But, indeed, the theory of the Empire was alien from such a logical system as this. It was strong, not by abstract principles, but by giving definiteness and expression to general feelings; and in circumstances of difficulty it was not foreign to the wisdom of a prince to wait for the deliberate opinion of those whom he represented.

It is impossible to tell how far the spirit of persecution had spread in the reign of Trajan before his rescript. The absence of records of martyrdom in any portion of the empire is no proof that the tranquillity of the Churches there was undisturbed. The persecution in Bithynia was certainly severe and lasting; the victims appear to have been numerous and not confined

to one class; and yet no ecclesiastical writer has preserved any original notice of it. All that we know of the nameless martyrs is contained in the brief sentence by which their judge characterises their crime and their punishment. Eusebius, speaking generally of the persecutions under Trajan, says that "a tradition prevails that the persecution of the Christians was renewed in his reign partially and in separate cities owing to the rising of the mobs" (ἐξ ἐπαναστάσεως δήμων). This appears to be a true account of the case, and so far it marks a distinct stage in the history of the Church. The motives through which the Churches were assailed were social and general, and not personal.

*H.E.* iii. 32.

It has been plausibly conjectured that the Bithynian persecution was due to the influence of the local priesthood. Pliny was himself a devout or even a superstitious man, not unlikely to listen to the complaints of those who represented the principles of the national religion; and, on the other hand, the spread of Christianity could not but seriously interfere with the many temporal interests which were bound up with the support of idolatry. Thus a popular grievance could be named to a magistrate ready to take account of it. This may be regarded as the type of a general charge raised by Gentile opponents against Christians. In most great cities there were large bodies of Jews, and these, though unpopular themselves, could stir up the prejudices of the people against the Church. So it was that

*Ep.* x. 35; 52; 100. viii. 24

Symeon, the kinsman of the Lord and Bishop of Jerusalem, was put to death on the information of Jewish sectaries as being "of the race of David and a Christian." The fear excited in this case was that of some national rising; and when once it was roused it became so great that the accusers of Symeon were themselves sacrificed to it, because they happened to be of the royal race. The martyrdom of Ignatius, if the simplest account of it which has been preserved is trustworthy in this respect, was due to another cause. The Christians at Antioch, it is said, were so dismayed by the threats of Trajan, who commanded them to sacrifice to the gods on pain of death—a statement which can only be received with considerable modifications—that the bishop, fearing for the Church, voluntarily offered himself up to the Emperor like a brave soldier of Christ, that he might confirm by his own example the faith of the waverers. And the sacrifice appears to have been successful, for in the course of his voyage he writes to the Churches of Philadelphia and Smyrna charging them to congratulate the Church of Antioch on the restoration of peace and the "recovery of its proper constitution (*ἀπεκατεστάθη τὸ ἴδιον σωματεῖον*)."

*H.E.* iii. 32.

Ign. Mart. 2.

*Ep. Philad.* 10. *Ep. Smyrn.* 11.

Two other notices show that there were persecutions during the same period in other places. Polycarp, in writing to the Philippians not long after the death of Ignatius (c. 13), mentions "Zosimus and Rufus, and certain others from among them," as having given, like Ignatius,

*Ad Phil.* c. 9.

examples of endurance even unto death. Persecution, therefore, as we learn from this casual notice, had been active in Europe. And Tertullian has preserved in a striking anecdote the memory of a persecution in proconsular Asia some years earlier, as it seems, of which there is no other record. "When Arrius Antoninus," he writes, "was vigorously persecuting in Asia, all the Christians of that state joined together in one body and presented themselves before his judgment seat. Thereupon he ordered a few to be led to execution, and said to the remainder, "'Poor wretches, if you *will* die, you have your choice of cliffs or halters.'" No note of date is given; and two proconsuls of the same name administered the province of Asia,—one in the time of Trajan, the other in the time of Commodus. The reference is probably to the former, who was maternal grandfather of Antoninus Pius, and a correspondent of the younger Pliny.

*Ad Scap.* 5.

These passing references, and no more remain,[1] will indicate roughly how far the persecution had spread, before the rescript of Trajan, to Syria, Asia Minor, and Macedonia. Italy appears to have escaped.

The practical effect of the rescript is very well described by Eusebius: "The most violent terrors of the persecution were stayed; but still excellent opportunities were left for those who wished to

*H.E.* iii. 39; *cf.* iii. 32.

[1] The letter of Tiberianus, a supposed governor of Palestina prima, to Trajan, given by John of Antioch, and quoted probably from him by Suidas, is a manifest forgery.

do the Christians an ill turn, the mob in some places, the local governors in others, contriving the plots which were formed against us, so that without open persecutions, partial persecutions were kindled in separate provinces, and a considerable number of the faithful bravely faced various forms of martyrdom." Of the events thus generally described no details have been preserved. But the constancy of those who suffered did not fail in its effect, though we cannot trace in every case the process of its action. The blood of Christians was, according to the well-known image, the seed of Christians, which fell on the soil prepared for it: (semen est sanguis Christianorum). And one memorable instance reveals what must have passed in the breasts of many at the sight of these unrecorded martyrdoms. "When I heard the Christians calumniated," Justin writes, "while I was still a devoted disciple of Plato, and yet saw that they were fearless in meeting death and everything that is held to be fearful, I considered that it was impossible that they could live in vice and sensual pleasure." And so it was that he was prepared to receive that teaching whereby, as he says elsewhere, a fire was kindled in his soul, and he was possessed with a love for the prophets and those who were Christ's friends; and found upon reflection that Christianity was the only sure philosophy suited to the wants of men.

Tert. *Ap.* 50.

*Apol.* ii. 12 (Euseb. iv. 8).

*Dial. Tr.* c. 8.

# CHAPTER III

## THE AGE OF THE APOLOGISTS

THE reign of Hadrian marks a distinct stage in the history of the Christian Church. "This was especially a time," in the language of Eusebius, "in which the doctrine of salvation attained its full power and spread among all men (ἡ σωτήριος εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους ἤκμασε διδασκαλία). Several causes may have contributed to this result: the character of the emperor, the natural growth of Christian influence on life and thought, the rising and overthrow of the Jew.[1] There was not, indeed, anything in the personal character of the emperor which could lead him to form a truer or nobler estimate of the Christian faith than Antoninus Pius or Marcus Aurelius; but his frivolous superstition and eager curiosity in investigating mysterious rites[2] may have led him to regard the

*Prep. Ev.* iv. 17.

Tertull. *Ap.* 5, Spart. *Hadr.* 22.

[1] At a later time it is possible that the scandal of the apotheosis of Antinous may have found a hearing for the Apologists who denounced it.—Just. M. *Apol.* i. 29.

[2] Tertull. *Apol.* 5 curiositatum omnium explorator.—*Orac. Sibyll.* viii. 56 *ff.*

It is remarkable that the one record of martyrdom referred to the reign of Hadrian is connected with the rites of dedication of his Tiburtine villa.—*Acta SS. Symphorosae et vii. Filiorum*, Ruinart, pp. 70*f.*

new religion with indulgence, or even with interest, although his toleration might be coupled with contempt. It is difficult to say how far he may have been carried at one time or another by a capricious impulse, but the tradition which relates that he entertained the idea of dedicating temples to Christ is both improbable and inadequately supported. It is more likely that the buildings unfurnished with statues which gave rise to the rumour were designed for himself, as they were actually called after him, for he is known to have claimed divine honours at Athens and in Asia Minor. However, the reason which is alleged for the abandonment of the design is undoubtedly characteristic. He was withheld, it is said, "by those who had discovered by divination (consulentes sacra) that, if he executed his purpose, all men would become Christians, and the other temples would be deserted."

Lamp. *Alex. Sev.* 43.

Spart. *Hadr.* 13.

But though Hadrian was unfitted to appreciate the spiritual side of Christianity, his education and literary tastes naturally made him accessible to the pleadings of Christian teachers, who now appeared in the dress and adopted the style of philosophers. He was carefully trained in the language and arts of Greece, and after his accession to the Empire spent a considerable time at Athens, where the rival labours of professors of every school maintained, as it were, a great university of ancient culture. His munificent zeal in embellishing the city gained for him a place beside Theseus as a second founder; and his initiation

in the Eleusinian mysteries must have given a fashionable impulse to the ancient religion. It was probably on this occasion that "an attempt was made to harass the Christians." The priests may have thought that the devotion of the emperor would furnish them with an opportunity of crushing the sect, which was no longer contemptible. However the effort was occasioned, it appears to have failed, but it gave occasion to the first of the long series of Apologies, of which the extant specimens give us the most vivid pictures of Christian life in the second century. The author of the work was Quadratus; and there can be little doubt that he is identical with the Bishop of Athens, whose predecessor, Publius, was martyred in a time of persecution, when the Church was brought to the verge of extinction. Quadratus, it is said, at that crisis gathered afresh the members of the scattered congregation, and rekindled their faith; and so now he appealed to Hadrian "in behalf of the Christian religion." The work was still widely circulated in the time of Eusebius, who quotes from it a most characteristic and striking appeal to the reality of Christ's works, or, in other words, to the true historic foundation of Christianity. Quadratus was supported by Aristides, who also addressed an Apology to Hadrian, and probably on the same occasion. This was framed, it is said, in a philosophical style, and Aristides himself retained his old scholar's dress when he became a disciple of Christ.

*H.E.* iv. 3.

*H.E.* iv. 23.

*H.E.* iv. 3.

Hier. *de Vir. Ill.* 19.

These Apologies are supposed to have moved Hadrian to issue his rescript to Minucius Fundanus, proconsul of Asia, in which he replied to a letter addressed to him in behalf of the Christians, according to the description of Eusebius, by the former proconsul Serenius Granianus. The rescript was appended, in the original Latin, to the end of Justin's longer Apology in the fourth century. Eusebius translated it into Greek, to use his own modest words, "as well as he was able"; and at present this translation occupies the place of the original in the manuscripts of Justin. It has, indeed, been supposed that Rufinus inserted the original in his translation of Eusebius, and the style of the Latin has been alleged as a proof that he gives us the words of Hadrian. The conjecture is attractive, but the character of Rufinus' work does not lend any support to the idea that he would take the trouble to seek from another book what he could himself give, at least with as much accuracy as he sought, by retranslation. The Latin is paraphrastic and more like a free rendering of the Greek, than the Greek is like a compressed imitation of such a Latin original. Moreover the style of the Latin does not appear to have any resemblance to that of Hadrian, or of the age of Hadrian. To mention one detail only from the address: it is incredible that the emperor should transpose the words of the official title *vir clarissimus*; while, on the other hand, it was not unlikely that a careless translator would follow the order of the Greek.

*H.E.* iv. 9.

There is, however, every reason to believe from internal evidence that Eusebius has preserved faithfully the substance of the rescript. It runs to the following effect: "To Minucius Fundanus. I received a letter addressed to me by Serenius Granianus, a most illustrious officer, whom you succeeded. Referring to this, I do not think it right to leave the matter uninvestigated, that the persons may not be vexatiously troubled, and occasion may not be furnished to informers for malicious accusations. If then the people of the province are able to maintain their demand (*ἀξίωσις, petitio*) against the Christians so far as to answer in open court (*πρὸ βήματος*), they must adopt this simple method, and not use demands and simple clamour. For it was by far the more proper course that if any one wished to accuse, you should give judgment on this question. If then any one accuses [the Christians] and shows that they act in any way contrary to the laws, do you give decision by the legal method (*οὕτως*) according to the gravity of the offence. On the other hand, if any one should allege this charge [of Christians] simply as an informer (*συκοφαντίας χάριν*) [*i.e.* for purposes of extortion], take care that you punish him with due regard to the seriousness of the case."

*H.E.* iv. 9.

Copies of this rescript, or letters to a similar effect, seem to have been addressed by Hadrian to many other governors, but the question of Granianus appears to have arisen out of some special outbreak against the Christians, in which

(Melito), *H.E.* iv. 26.

men had suffered without the form of a trial "Was he, as pro-consul,"—this was his difficulty, —"to overlook or connive at the violation of the law in consideration of popular feeling?" We have already seen that the Christians were technically liable to the capital charges of treason and of holding unlawful assemblies, and their security against the strict application of the law lay, as in many parallel cases, in the protection of public opinion. Their general bearing and conduct might naturally conciliate this in their favour. If it was evident that the Christians lived as quiet and loyal citizens they would not be troubled because they were guilty according to the letter. If their conduct appeared upright and their rites harmless, they would be suffered to follow with impunity what would be called contemptuously "an extravagant superstition." But public opinion is unstable and easily excited. There were rumours of strange excesses committed in the Christian assemblies: the language which Christians used of their mutual relations and of their secret mysteries was strange and suspicious to heathen ears. It was notorious that the ceremonies of their most solemn rite, the Holy Communion, were most scrupulously kept from the sight and knowledge of all except those fully admitted into the society. If by any chance the phrases of the Gospel which record the institution of this sacrament were spread abroad, it is obvious how terribly they would be misunderstood by men to whom the idea of human sacrifices was not unfamiliar.

If the people of a heathen city heard of the love-feasts of Christians, of the nightly gatherings of men and women, of the equal religious fellowship of freemen and slaves, of the sacred kiss of peace, of the universal titles of brother and sister, it was scarcely possible that they should not interpret the reports by what they knew of the worship of Cybele or Bacchus or Saturn. The frantic excesses of some heretical sects, if we may trust the testimony of antiquity, and the experience of the sixteenth century, gave countenance to the charge of like practices against the orthodox with whom they were confounded under the general name of Christians.

Tert. *Ap.* 9.

For about a century the charges which I have indicated of cannibalism, for it was no less, and hideous profligacy in their most solemn meetings were brought against the Christians.[1] The Apologists labour indignantly to refute the calumnies, and at last the manifest purity of the Christian life triumphed by its own power. Men did see at last that "no voluptuary or profligate who thought that to feed on human flesh was a pleasure would welcome death." But we must distinctly present to ourselves that for a long time the charges were common, and believed in, and to a heathen not inherently unlikely. Then only can we understand the real meaning of the popular

[1] Just. M. *1 Ap.* x. 23, 26 (and Otto's note); *2 Ap.* 12, 13; *Dial. c. Tryph.* 10. 17; Athenag. *Leg. pro Chr.* 3. 31 *ff.*; Tat. *ad Gr.* 25 (cf. *Ep. ad Diogn.* 5); Theoph. *ad Autol.* 3. 15; Orig. *c. Cels.* vi. 27; Euseb. v. 1, § 21; Tertull. *Ap.* 7; *ad Nah.* 1. 7, 15, 16; Minuc. Fel. 3. 30, 31; cf. *Orac. Lib.* iv. 35 *ff.*

risings against the Christians, and feel the intensity of agony which believers had to bear as knowing that they were suspected of such crimes. Even if they were supported by a sense of innocence, "having God the unbegotten and ineffable as witness of their thoughts and deeds," they saw that the truth, which was dearer to them than all things, was hindered by a falsehood which retained its force even to the time of Origen,[1] and was repeated in the persecution of Diocletian.[2] Justin, writing from the middle of the conflict, paints most sadly the effect which such accusations had in checking the progress of the gospel. The reports and the earlier crimes sung of by poets, which made the reports credible, were to be attributed, in his judgment, to the influence of evil demons. Otherwise, he says, the word as divine would have effected what "human laws could not do"—reunite humanity, that is, with God—"if wicked spirits had not spread many false and godless accusations against us, with none of which we are chargeable, finding support in the utterly evil and naturally variable lust in each man."

*Apol.* i. 23, *cf. Apol.* ii. 13.

*Ap.* i. 10.

It is easy to see how swiftly the smouldering hostility against Christians, which was kept alive by the circulation of these reports, could be fanned into a flame by even the most trivial influence. Some unusual incident—a child strayed from home, as we have heard in the case of the Eastern Jews even in our time—would suddenly give shape to the horrible fancies by which men had been

[1] Orig. *c. Cels.* vi. 27. [2] Euseb. *H. E.* ix. 5.

haunted, and then wild popular violence would usurp the place of law. In this way we can understand that there is no exaggeration in the famous sentences of Tertullian. "Our enemies," he says, "defend their hatred by the vain excuse that the Christians are the cause of every public disaster, of every common misfortune. If the Tiber rises to the city walls, if the Nile fails to rise over the corn lands, if there is a drought or an earthquake, or a famine or a pestilence, the cry is raised at once, 'The Christians to the lion.'" "Tantos ad unum?"[2] he adds, with sarcastic bitterness.

Tertull. *Ap.* 40.[1]

Thus a new form of persecution arose which was more fatal than the earlier political persecution, because it was supposed to be justified by moral reasons. It professed to be the righteous protest of violated humanity against a sect guilty of crimes by which the name of religion had been disgraced before. If the alleged charges were true —and the worst faults of a multitude are due for the most part to their credulity—the feeling of the best men would be against the sufferers. It was otherwise when Christians were persecuted on purely legal grounds. There is very little popular sympathy with the rigid execution of technical enactments. In the case of constructive treason it would be difficult for any but a statesman not to pity the enthusiasts who preferred to die rather than to comply with a common observance.

[1] *cf.* Lampridius, *Commodus*, 18, "delatores ad leonem."
[2] *i.e.* "So many to one."

In the letter of Pliny no mention was made of any popular hostility to Christians. He may have had suspicions, which Tacitus indicates, but in the absence of all evidence he lays no stress upon them. A new problem, therefore, was offered to the Government by the local spread of reports injurious to the Christian faith and the edict of Hadrian.

The edict of Hadrian lays down how the magistrates were to deal with acts of violence which were caused by these calumnies. Pliny had spoken only of the method to be observed in legal proceedings, and the reply of Trajan was confined exclusively to this aspect of the accusation of Christians. But now the case was changed. The "demands" and "simple clamour" plead punishment as the due of acknowledged and not of proved guilt. If there was any legal process at all, which does not appear, it was certainly not directed to establish the facts for which practically the Christians were condemned. The law punished for the name; the indignation of the people was roused by the crimes supposed to attach to the name. The question, therefore, was not of legal punishment, but of improvised vengeance. The tumult which had come under the notice of Granianus, though perhaps isolated and transient, was still typical of a class. Christian teachers were no doubt, as we may gather from the narrative of the Acts, exposed from their earliest appearance to the sudden lawlessness of the mob, but now for the first time the attention

of the emperors was directed to an act which might become a precedent. The reply of Hadrian distinctly provides that this shall not be so.

It is impossible to tell why the emperor's answer was delayed, or how long it was delayed. It may have been that the Apologies which he received at Athens recalled his attention to a subject which he had forgotten or disregarded; it may have been that he waited to gain information from other sources; but at any rate his decision was clear. The Christians were not placed outside the pale of law. They could claim the protection of the courts. If violence or intimidation were used against them, it was the business of the magistrate to examine and punish the offenders. The Christians might be guilty, but it was necessary to specify and prove the crime of which they were accused. Informers, it appears, had made use of the popular prejudice felt against the Christians on the ground of their imaginary excesses as a support in preferring charges which established their technical guilt; and the Christians were liable to extortion and ill-treatment because, though they were innocent of the offences which excited the general hatred, they could not rebut other accusations which made them liable to capital penalties. This practice Hadrian definitely condemns. He modifies no law, but insists that the laws shall be fairly carried out. He makes no concession in favour of the Christians as Christians, but

*Cf.* Melito *ap.* Euseb. *H.E.* iv. 26.

simply requires that the accusation for which they suffer shall be openly avowed and established. If the Christians were publicly and legally convicted of treason or impiety or criminal profligacy, they were to suffer. But it was necessary that the responsibility of the accusation should be undertaken by an open prosecutor.

The rescript is thus conceived exactly in the same spirit as that of Trajan. Trajan forbade anonymous information; Hadrian forbids popular violence. Both protect the Christians only so far as public feeling justified or allowed the non-enforcement of the law. If any one was willing to take upon himself the office of accuser, then the law took its course. The question, "Art thou a Christian?" was still fatal to a resolute confessor if a governor pleased to propose it, or an individual was willing to incur the burden of supporting the indictment in his own person. Much, therefore, was left in the power of the magistrate; and one remarkable case has been recorded which shows how widely the rescript was circulated, and what effectual protection it could afford. Pudens, an African governor in the time of Marcus Aurelius, "discharged a Christian who was sent to him when he understood from the bill of information that he was accused vexatiously, and at the same time tore up the bill, and said that he would not hear the case without an accuser according to the rescript."

Tert. *ad Scap.* 4.

From what has been said it is easy to gain an adequate conception of the position in which the

Christians were placed. They were tolerated, so far as they were tolerated, by the force of public opinion and not by the letter of the law. At any moment a storm might burst over a Church and scatter it. But meanwhile the faith spread and became better known. Thoughtful men admitted that the grosser charges brought against it could not be true. It found advocates in the schools. It was at length separated even popularly from Judaism. The fierce persecution of the Christians by Bar-Cochba had revealed the real chasm between the exclusive nationalism of the Jews and the Messianic creed of the Church;[1] and the foundation of the Gentile city of Ælia upon the site of Jerusalem closed the succession of the Hebrew episcopate of the circumcision.[2] Christians appear as characters in ordinary literature.

*Dial. c. Tryph.* 10.

Three pictures which belong to the time of Hadrian show in lively colours how the Christians appeared to the man of the world, to the satirist, and to the believer. These will complete the outline which has been given of their political and popular standing.

The first sketch is drawn by the emperor himself in a letter written to the consul Servianus,[3] his brother-in-law, in the year 134. In this Hadrian gives an amusing account of his impressions of Egypt. "I have found Egypt, my dearest Servianus, which you commended to my admiration, utterly frivolous, fickle, and ready to

[1] Just. M. *Ap.* i. 31; cf. *Dial.* 16. [2] Euseb. *H.E.* iv. 5, 6.
[3] Put to death by Hadrian at last. Spart. *Hadr.* 25.

Fl. Vopiscus, *Saturn.* 7.

yield to every gust of humour. The worshippers of Serapis are Christians, and those who call themselves bishops of Christ are devotees of Serapis. There is no chief of a Jewish synagogue, no Samaritan, no Christian presbyter, who is not also an astrologer, a soothsayer, a trainer (*aliptes*). The patriarch [of the Jews] on coming to Egypt is constrained by some to do worship to Serapis, by others to Christ. . . . The people [in Alexandria] have one god, money. Christians, Jews, every race alike, pay their devotions to this deity." . . .

Whatever may be thought of the fairness of this description, which gives the superficial aspect of Alexandrine life, there can be no doubt as to the value of the testimony which it bears to the social importance and spread of Christianity. In this first glimpse which we obtain of life of the Church at Alexandria, the Christian bishop is as prominent a figure as the priest of Serapis; the Christians appear as a body as well known as the Jews; and if there is any foundation for the statement of the general instability of believers, it would seem that professors of a second generation had received the faith as a tradition and not welcomed it as a personal gospel.

The second portraiture is drawn by Lucian in his account of the death of Peregrinus or Proteus, who threw himself with great parade into a burning pyre which he had constructed for the purpose at the close of the Olympian games about 165 A.D. Lucian relates in a letter to a friend that he was at Olympia at the time, and

witnessed the suicide, which he describes with characteristic wit and bitterness. The history of Peregrinus he professes to have heard from a fellow-visitor who was roused to speak by the ridiculous praises which were bestowed by some disciples and friends upon the voluntary martyr. This vainglorious cynic then, as he became at last, had lived, according to this account, a strange and eventful life. In his youth he was obliged to fly from his native country, Parium, near Lampsacus, for parricide and other crimes, and so came after many wanderings to Palestine. *De Mort. Per.* 11 *ff.* While there "he made himself master of the marvellous wisdom of the Christians by intercourse with their priests and scribes (*τοῖς ἱερεῦσι καὶ γραμματεῦσιν αὐτῶν ξυγγενόμενος*). To be brief," the satirist continues, and almost every phrase bears witness to the effect which Christianity had produced on those who despised it, "he soon showed them that they were all children, being himself prophet, master of the revels (*θιασάρχης*), chief of their assembly, everything in his single person. Some of their books he interpreted and explained, many he actually composed, and they held him to be a god, and followed him as a lawgiver, and adopted him (*ἐπεγράφοντο*) as their patron; [I don't indeed vouch for this, but] at any rate (*γοῦν*) they still worship that great one, the man who was crucified (*ἀνασκολοπισθέντα*) in Palestine, because he introduced this new religion (*τελέτην*) into life [so that the statement is at least quite credible]. After a time Proteus was apprehended on this

charge [of Christianity] and thrown into prison—a circumstance which gained him no small reputation to help him in later life and gratify his passion for imposture and glory. The Christians were distressed at his imprisonment, and set every power in motion in their endeavours to rescue him. When this proved impossible, they showed him every other attention, not as a matter of form, but in earnest. As soon as it was dawn you might see," the narrator continues, "old women lingering about the prison, widows and orphans; and those in authority among them went so far as to sleep with him in the prison, bribing the keepers. Afterwards luxurious (*ποικίλα*) meals were carried in, and their holy discourses were repeated, and our excellent friend Peregrinus—for he was still known by this name—was called by them a new Socrates. Nor was this all; men came even from the cities in Asia charged by the Christians with a general mission to help and defend and console him. And it is marvellous what speed they show whenever any public misfortune of this kind happens; for, in a word, they spare nothing. So Peregrinus, as you may suppose, received considerable sums from them on the ground of his imprisonment, and found in this no small source of income. For the poor wretches have convinced themselves that they will be absolutely immortal and live for ever (*βιώσεσθαι τὸν ἀεὶ χρόνον*), and in consideration of this they despise death and commonly offer themselves of their own accord [for martyrdom];

and besides this, their first lawgiver persuaded ? St. Paul.
them that they are all brethren, when once they have transgressed and denied the gods of Greece, and pay worship to their crucified sophist, and live according to his laws. They despise, therefore, all possessions equally, and hold them as common, having received such principle without any exact faith. If, then, any cunning charlatan comes forward to join them, who knows how to use his opportunity, he shortly gains great wealth and makes himself merry at their simplicity. However, Peregrinus was discharged by the governor of Syria for the time being, who was a man fond of philosophy, for he perceived his desperate character, and knew that he would welcome death for the prospect of glory, and so dismissed him as being unworthy even of punishment." Thereupon, Lucian continues, in the words of his informant, Peregrinus returned home; but when he found that his crimes were not forgotten, he purchased the goodwill of his countrymen by giving all his property for public uses. "So he started for a second time on his wanderings, assured of finding his ways and means in the Christians, who protected him and supplied him with everything in abundance. And for a time he was supported in this way, till he transgressed their laws also—for he was seen, I fancy, eating something which they are forbidden to eat—and they refused to receive him any longer." The scene is then changed, and the Church passes out of Lucian's picture.

Now, whatever view we may take of this singular narrative, there can be no question as to its peculiar interest. The incidents may be entirely due to Lucian's imagination, or Peregrinus may have been the vagrant hypocrite whom he paints, but in either case the romance or the record bears an important witness to the position of Christianity, to the dangers and frequency of persecution, to the self-denying labours of all in behalf of confessors, to the very excesses of devotion in the self-surrender of the faithful, to the arbitrary powers which rested in the hands of provincial governors. There is the reality of life in the description, and we can welcome the sketch drawn by an avowed enemy. The temporary success of an impostor, whether it was real or only invented as probable, throws no discredit on the society which succoured and defended one who professed to be a penitent till he was proved unfaithful. Evidently the Church had a religious criterion which no clever knavery could evade or alter. There was a rule which no one, however powerful, not even an emperor, could break with impunity. On the other hand, no mockery can mar the beauty of the traits of Christian character brought out by the sufferings of "the brethren." The unceasing ministrations of the clergy, the watchful offices of the widows, the sympathy of distant Churches, the lavish support cheerfully and naturally rendered to confessors, reveals something new in the fellowship of men. Lucian felt that he was dealing with something quite novel if it was

also in his opinion weak and contemptible, and he felt rightly that this practical embodiment of the new truth, that "it is more *blessed* to give than to receive" was to be explained by the unshaken firmness with which believers held the cardinal truths of their personal immortality and common brotherhood, through "the crucified man," as he contemptuously writes, whom they held to be God.

So it was that heathen writers spoke of Christians: we have yet to hear what was the ideal which Christians themselves formed of their own life and mission in the world. This is described with remarkable beauty of conception by an unknown writer in the letter to Diognetus, in which we have the words of an apologist for the faith, who addressed, not an indifferent or c. 1.
hostile magistrate, but an inquirer of rank who was favourably and deeply interested in the subject. "Christians," he says, after showing c 5. 6.
their points of variance from Gentiles and Jews, "are not separated from other men by country, or language, or habits. They do not dwell alone in any special (ἰδίας) cities, or use any peculiar dialect or adopt any singular style of life. [And the reason is obvious. They can allow the divine principle which they have received to manifest itself as it will.] Their system has not been prescribed to them by the invention and thought of restless and ingenious men (πολυπραγμόνων ἀνθρώπων); nor do they stand forth as champions of a human doctrine as some do. But while they

dwell in cities of every people (Ἑλληνίδας τε καὶ βαρβάρας) as their lot is cast, and follow the national customs, they exhibit the form of their own conduct [as citizens of a spiritual kingdom], in dress and food and every detail of life so as to excite wonder and surprise in all. They live in their own countries but as sojourners; they share every [privilege] as citizens, and endure every [discomfort] as foreigners; every foreign land is their country, every country is a foreign land. They marry like all men, and have children, but they do not expose their offspring; they provide a common table, and yet one which is not common. They are in the flesh, but they do not live after the flesh: they pass their time on earth, but possess their higher life (πολιτεύονται) in heaven: they obey the prescribed laws, and in their own lives overcome the laws. They love all and are persecuted by all. They are unknown and they are condemned: they are put to death and so they are endowed with life. They are poor and make many rich: they are in want of all things, and in all things they abound. They are dishonoured, and in their dishonours they are glorified. They are blasphemed, and they are proved just. They are reviled and they bless: they are insulted and they render honour. When they do good they are punished as wicked: when they are punished they rejoice as receiving life. By the Jews they are treated as aliens and enemies; and by the Greeks they are persecuted; and they who hate them cannot tell the cause of

their enmity. In a word, what the soul is in the body that are Christians in the world. The soul is spread over all the limbs of the body; and Christians throughout all the cities of the world. The soul dwells in the body, but is not of the body; and Christians dwell in the world, but are not of the world. The soul is invisible, but is kept in the body which is visible; and Christians are recognised as being in the world, but their worship remains invisible. The flesh hates the soul and wars against it, though it suffers no wrong, because it is hindered from indulging in its pleasures: the world also hates the Christians though it suffers no wrong, because they renounce its pleasures. The soul loves the flesh and the members which hate it; and Christians love those who hate them. The soul is enclosed in the body, and yet it is that which keeps the body from dissolution; and Christians are confined in the world as in ward, and yet it is they who keep the world from ruin. The soul, though immortal, dwells in a mortal tabernacle; and Christians sojourn in a corruptible order while they wait for the incorruptible which is in heaven. The soul, when severely disciplined in meat and drink, is made better; and Christians, when punished day by day, gain more strength. So grand is the fort in which God has placed them, and it is not right for them to decline to maintain it."

To paraphrase such words—which ring like an echo of apostolic exhortation—would only be to dilute them. As we ponder them we feel that

they live with a power of victory, and that they still reveal to us the spring of our strength, the cause of our weakness in fulfilling in these days the work to which we are called.

Antoninus Pius appears to have followed the policy of Hadrian in dealing with the Christians without any change. They were still subject to popular attacks in many places; and Melito states that the emperor wrote to the several states, commanding the people "to abstain from riotous proceedings about them (περὶ τοῦ μηδὲν νεωτερίζειν περὶ ἡμῶν)"; and specially "to the people of Larissa, and Thessalonica, and Athens, and to all the Greeks." But these general instructions did not, as we have seen, suspend the action of the laws under which Christians could be capitally punished; and during the reign of Pius the Christians were exposed to continual perils which issued not unfrequently in the death of confessors. Eusebius, for example, says, on the authority of Irenaeus, that Telesphorus, Bishop of Rome, suffered martyrdom in the first year of his reign; but the date of the event is involved in the general obscurity which attaches to the chronology of the early popes; and so again the martyrdom of Felicitas and her seven sons, who are said to have been condemned by the emperor's direct command, offers a most suspicious resemblance to the martyrdom of Symphorosa under Hadrian.

*Ap.* Euseb. *H.E.* iv. 26.

*H.E.* iv. 10.

Not to insist therefore on these narratives we can turn to the writings of Justin Martyr which preserve

a clear and contemporary picture of the time. There are some difficulties as to the date of his two *Apologies*, but on the whole it may be affirmed with tolerable certainty that both are addressed to Antoninus Pius and M. Aurelius about 146-7, if indeed the second be not simply an appendix to the first; and his own martyrdom followed, as he had himself expected, not long after the second was written. In these and in his *Dialogue with Trypho* the sufferings of Christians occupy a large place. Persecution is not indeed described as systematic or everywhere pushed to extremities, but it is always seen to be possible and imminent. And it was through persecution that faith grew, as Justin triumphantly shows. His own prejudices were dispelled by the constancy of confessions, and so it was also with others. "You can plainly see," he writes, "that when we are beheaded and crucified and exposed to wild beasts, and chains, and fire, and every other torture, that we do not abandon our profession, but just in proportion as such sufferings are inflicted so many more are added to our faith and religion through the name of Jesus. The gardener cuts off the limbs of the vine which have borne fruit that other branches may spring forth, and thus render them vigorous and productive. And so it proves with us. The vine which hath been planted by God and our Saviour Christ is His people."[1]

This general description of the position of

[1] *Dial.* 110, comp. *Ap.* i. 8, 25, 39; *Ap.* ii. 2, 4, 12; *Dial.* 34 *s.f.*, 46 *s.f.*, 96, 119, 121, 131.

Christians is illustrated by a remarkable narrative which Justin gives of events at Rome of a very recent date (χθὲς καὶ πρώην γενόμενα), which throw great light upon the loyal position of Christians and at the same time show that it was as yet strange that the letter of the law should be enforced against them. The wife of a profligate man, he writes, who had once shared her husband's vices became a Christian. After her conversion the wife patiently endeavoured to reclaim the husband, but when her efforts failed she obtained a divorce. On this her husband denounced her as a Christian. She neither admitted nor denied the charge, but obtained from the emperor permission to set her affairs in order, and undertook to reply to the accusation when she had done so. The husband being thus foiled turned his attack against Ptolemaeus, by whom she had been instructed. He persuaded a centurion to arrest Ptolemaeus, simply asking if he were a Christian. As he could not deny the fact he was thrown into prison. After a long confinement he was brought before Urbicus, the prefect of the city, and the same simple question was asked him. 'And again,' to follow the words of Justin, 'conscious of the noble treasure which he had gained through the teaching derived from Christ, he confessed the school of divine virtue; for he who denies anything, either denies it because he condemns the thing, or avoids the confession because he knows that he is himself unworthy of the thing and alien from it. And this does not

*Ap.* ii. 2. Euseb. *H.E.* iv. 17.

apply to the true Christian. And so when Urbicus ordered him to be led away to punishment, one Lucius, who was himself a Christian, seeing the decision which was thus irrationally pronounced, said to Urbicus, 'What is the reason why you condemn a man who is not found to be an adulterer, or a profligate, or a murderer, or a thief, or an extortioner, or, in a word, to have committed any crime, and punish him for admitting the title of the Christian name? Your decision, Urbicus, does not become an emperor who is surnamed the pious, or an emperor, too, who is a philosopher, or the holy senate.' Whereupon Urbicus, returning him no other answer, said to Lucius also, 'I think that you too are such as he is,' and when Lucius said, 'Most certainly I am,' he ordered him also to be led away to execution. Lucius expressed his gratitude, as knowing that he obtained deliverance from evil masters in such men as these, and that he went to the Father and King of heaven. A third also came forward and was condemned to punishment. And I too," Justin goes on to say, "expect to be sacrificed to the intrigues of some of [my friends or relatives], or possibly of Crescens (a cynic whom he had worsted in argument), the lover of noise and display, for it is not right to call him a lover of wisdom." . . .

This expectation was shortly fulfilled, and Justin with six companions was martyred at Rome. The Acts of the martyrdom seem to be in the main undoubtedly authentic, and there is

a strangely moving pathos in the very monotony of the confession. When Justin had explained his faith and the mode of meeting of his congregation, the prefect Rusticus concludes all by asking, "In short, you are a Christian?" "Yes," said Justin, "I am a Christian." "I am Christian," said Chariton, "by the command of God." "I am a Christian woman," said Charito, "by the gift of God." "I am a Christian," said Caelpistus, a slave of the emperor, "set free by Christ, and I share the same hope [with these] by the grace of Christ." "I am a Christian," said Hierax. "I was a Christian before I heard Justin, and I will still be." "I too am a Christian," said Paeon, who appears to have offered himself voluntarily to share the fate of the others. "I too am a Christian," said Liberianus. "I pay adoration and worship to the one true God." "Hear," said the prefect to Justin, "thou who art said to be learned, and thinkest that thou knowest words of truth; if thou art scourged and beheaded, art thou persuaded that it will be thy fate to ascend into heaven?" "I hope," said Justin, "that I shall have the gifts of Christ if I endure this, for I know that the gracious gift of God awaits those who have so lived till the fulfilment of the course of the whole world." "Dost thou suppose," Rusticus asked, "that thou wilt ascend into heaven to receive some recompense?" "I do not suppose it," was Justin's reply, "but I know it with certain knowledge, and am fully convinced of my faith." So it was that no threats could move the

resolution of the accused. The confessors, as Justin said, *knew* the truth of their hope, and "went forth to the accustomed place of execution glorifying God, and consummated their martyrdom in the confession of their Saviour."

# CHAPTER IV

## THE AGE OF MARCUS AURELIUS

ONE singular document still remains to be examined, which would, if it were genuine, present the policy of Antoninus in a very different light from that in which we have regarded it. This is a rescript purporting to be addressed by the emperor to the common council of the deputies of proconsular Asia in answer to the petition of Christians who were "afflicted with all kinds of insults by the populace in the several districts." It is preserved in the *History* of Eusebius, and it is also appended in a very different text to Justin's longer *Apology*, where it is connected with an unquestionably supposititious letter of M. Aurelius to the senate on his victory over the Germans. It is, however, to be remarked that the two remaining MSS. of Justin's *Apologies*, which date respectively from the close of the twelfth and the beginning of the thirteenth century, only represent a single archetype, so that the documentary evidence in favour of the present position of the rescript is very slight. Moreover,

Euseb. *H.E.* iv. 12.

it is evident that Justin was unacquainted with it, nor can it be said that it was the result of his *Apology*. From a comparison of the texts it appears that the text in Eusebius is the earlier, and that which is now found in Justin is a free revision. One difference between the two texts is most remarkable. The name of the emperor is different in the two; for though Eusebius himself attributes the rescript to Antoninus Pius, the text which he gives bears the name of M. Aurelius. In Justin the rescript bears the name of Antoninus Pius. The chronological data with which it is furnished are in both cases hopelessly erroneous. These facts alone are sufficient to lead to the belief that the document is a fabrication, and the conviction becomes irresistible when we consider the character of the writing itself. It is to the following effect:—

"The Emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus Augustus, Armenius, Pontifex Maximus, invested with tribunician power the fifteenth time, consul the third time, to the common council of Asia, greeting. I am assured that the gods themselves take care that such men as you describe should not remain undiscovered. For they would much more certainly punish those who do not choose to worship them than you; and while you vex and harass them you confirm the opinion which they hold accusing you as atheists. Moreover, they would desire to seem to prefer death to life in honour of their peculiar god when accused. And so, in fact, they win the victory when they

*H.E.* iv. 13.

gladly surrender their own lives in preference to obeying your injunctions. As to the earthquakes which have happened and still continue, it may be well for me to suggest this thought for your consideration, as you are despondent whenever they occur, and compare our position with theirs. They become more confident towards God, while you disregard the other gods and the service due to the Immortal One, for the worship of whom you harass the Christians and persecute them unto death, during the whole time in which you seem to be ignorant [of His action]. In behalf of these men many of the provincial governors wrote also to my father, of most blessed memory, to whom he gave answer that they should cause no trouble to such men unless they could be shown to be engaging in any scheme affecting the Roman Government. And many also have given information to me concerning such men, to whom I naturally replied in accordance with my father's judgment. But if any one persists in bringing any one of the class into trouble as such, let the person against whom the information is given be at once acquitted of the charge, even if he be shown to be such, and let the informer be liable to a penalty. Set forth in Ephesus in the common council of Asia."

It is possible that some actual letter of Antoninus may have furnished part of the framework of this edict, but in its present form it is clear at first sight that it cannot be an authentic imperial decree called forth by the circumstances to

which it is referred. It appears as an answer to representations of the common council against the Christians, and not to the pleadings of apologists in their favour. Taken in its general scope, it is in part a Christian and not a heathen contrast of the bearing of Christians and heathen in the face of great national calamities, and in part a gloss in a Christian sense on Hadrian's rescript. The first part is wholly alien from the tone of Roman thought. The second part offers a singular confirmation of the authenticity of the earlier edict, emphasizing the points which are left vague in that, and bringing out into a more favourable light the difference between the legal liability of Christians and the moral prejudice which was felt against them. To add one further argument, which would be alone conclusive, the history of persecutions in the reigns of Antoninus Pius and his successor is absolutely inconsistent with the existence of such a rescript.

The document must, therefore, be pronounced a forgery both on internal and external grounds. But still it is valuable as an illustration of Christian feelings, and probably dates from the reign of M. Aurelius. Tertullian seems to have been acquainted with a rescript attributed to that emperor very similar in substance, and the prominence given to the earthquakes, to which Asia Minor was specially liable, is a historic trait. The reigns of the two Antonines were marked by the frequency of such disasters, which must have contributed greatly to the unpopularity of the Christians, who stood

Capit. *Ant. P.* 9.

out as the one strange body, separated, as it appeared, from the general life of the Empire, and resolutely hostile to the ancient faiths.

Capit. *Ant. P.* 13.

This political and religious isolation of the Christians seems to have attracted the attention of Marcus Aurelius, whose reign was now come, and is a sufficient explanation of the persecutions which, at least, he permitted to be directed against them. It has often been regarded as a strange or even as a tragical fact that M. Aurelius was not drawn to the Christians. But his very virtues, no less than his design of consolidating the State, made him indisposed to acknowledge and unable to understand a faith which was individual and spiritual as well as catholic, based on absolute self-sacrifice and issuing in the resurrection. To one who strove to restore the stern solidity of the Roman character, who fulfilled with costly devotion the claims of national and even of local religious ceremonies, who looked upon human action in its highest form as the calculated result of thought, the Christian Church must have been, so far as he could see it, an obstacle, a vexation, a riddle. If there was a visible society to which men owed an allegiance before the Commonwealth, Rome could not be supreme. If even a small minority ridiculed and assailed the rites in which he saw due honours rendered to the protectors of the Empire, there was an antagonism which could not be disregarded. If the highest fellowship with the unseen was to be gained by the exercise of the affection and not of the intellectual power of man,

if the true conception of life was victory and not endurance, then his stoicism was at fault. Exactly as M. Aurelius believed in the principles which he embodied, and apprehended the tendency of the new faith which was spreading around him, he was necessarily hostile to the Church.

But while we must distinctly acknowledge the inherent and inevitable opposition between the emperor and the Christian Church, we must not suppose that it was very distinctly apprehended at the time on either side, or carried out to its legitimate consequences. Though M. Aurelius was so far responsible for the persecutions of his reign that he took no pains to check them, and when appeal was made to him confirmed the violent action of the provincial governors, authorizing them to use torture and to inflict death upon the unyielding, there is no sufficient evidence to show that he directed any general edicts against the Christians as such. The two proofs which have been alleged to show that he did so break down completely. The edict which is quoted in the *Acts* of Symphorianus, if it be genuine, cannot be ascribed to him. Not only do the MSS., with one exception, read Aurelianus, but the emperor could not have described himself by the name Aurelius. After his accession to the throne his only legal style was M. Antoninus. In the time of Aurelian, on the other hand, the imperial nomenclature was changed, and that name alone could properly be used. So, again, the words of Melito, in which he speaks of the Christians as

"persecuted by new decrees throughout Asia, a thing which had never happened before," cannot be supposed to mean that the emperor had singled out the Christians for attack. Such an interpretation would be inconsistent with the tenor of the whole passage, in which the apologist professes in sincerity, we must believe, to feel doubt as to the emperor's meaning, and still more so with the epithets which he applies to him as "more humane and more philosophic" than Hadrian or Antonine, who had mitigated the severity of persecution.

*H.E.* iv. 26.

At the same time an edict is ascribed to M. Aurelius which might furnish occasion to informers to harass the Christians. "Marcus," it is said, "insisted that if any one did anything by which the unstable minds of men were alarmed by a superstitious fear of the Deity, they should be transported to an island"; or, as the provisions of the same law apparently, described elsewhere, enact "those who introduce new religious rites, or such as are unknown in use and principle, if of higher rank are banished, if of humbler rank are put to death." This enactment, though it may not have been directed against the Christians, necessarily included them in its scope, and shows, in fact, the spirit by which the emperor would be moved in using violence to repress their spread. The strength of the Commonwealth, as he judged of it, lay in a calm, sober maintenance of discipline after the traditional type. For this the masses would be led to labour by the superstitious reverence for the gods which could not be further

Haenel, *Exp. Legg.* p. 128.

Julius Paulus, *Sent. Rec.* v. 21, 2.

shaken with impunity; in this the thoughtful would be constrained to acquiesce by a sense of their own powerlessness and of the merciless sovereignty of nature. But the Christians disturbed alike the spirit of awe and the spirit of cold submission. The religious equality of believers on which their organisation was based displaced the foundations of the old order; and the doctrines of personal responsibility and of future judgment called forces into play by which the thoughts of many might be shaken. So far, then, the general law touched the Christians no less than the innumerable impostors who traded on the terrors of an age which had lost or was losing its faith, and informers would plead in some degree the sanction of the emperor for their prosecutions.

From what has been said we can form a fair notion of the manner in which M. Aurelius would treat Christians if they came in his way. We are not, however, left wholly to conjecture. The single sentence in his *Meditations* in which he has condescended to notice them shows how completely incapable he was of apprehending their character, how inconceivable to his mind was that present realisation of the unseen and the eternal, which is the soul of the Christian faith. "What a soul xi. 3.
is that," he writes, "which is ready, if need be, to be separated at once from the body and either to be extinguished, or dissipated, or still remain. But this readiness must proceed from individual judgment (*ἀπὸ ἰδικῆς κρίσεως*): [we must] not [face death] in simple defiance (*κατὰ ψιλὴν παράταξιν*)

as the Christians, but after reflection (λελογισμένως), and with dignity (σεμνῶς), and so as to win others without parade (ὥστε καὶ ἄλλον πεῖσαι ἀτραγῴδως). Every word might seem chosen to reveal some fresh aspect of the work of the Christian martyrs which the emperor failed to see and yet felt to be glorious. Never was constancy in the presence of death more clearly seen to spring from personal conviction as distinguished from the august and yet undefined influence of patriotism and tradition, than when the confessor proclaimed and felt his fellowship with a present Saviour. "Dost thou bear in thyself Him that was crucified?" Trajan said to Ignatius. "Yes," was the answer, "for it is written: 'I will dwell in them, and will walk among them.'" "O Lord God Almighty, Father of Thy beloved and blessed Son Jesus Christ," was the last prayer of Polycarp, "through whom we have received our larger knowledge of Thee. . . . I bless Thee that Thou hast deemed me worthy of this day and hour to receive a portion in the number of Thy martyrs, in the cup of Thy Christ, unto resurrection of life eternal, of soul and body, in incorruption of the Holy Spirit." "It is our devout wish," said Justin, just before the sentence was spoken, "to be saved by suffering for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, for this will prove our salvation and boldness before the most awful and universal judgment seat of our Master and Saviour." "The martyrs of Christ," writes the Church of Smyrna, "showed in the hour of their torture that they were absent from the flesh,

*Ign. Mart.* 2.

*Mart. Pol.* 14.

*Mart. Just.* 5.

*Mart. Pol.* 2.

or rather, that the Lord stood by and held converse with them." The intensity of the trust of the martyr in One who was with him makes his courage natural, so to speak. He had of all men most truly counted the cost of his enterprise. He could not but meet death without fear, and his attitude was not that of defiance, but of accomplished victory; not of unreasoning obstinacy, but of certain assurance. It is difficult to imagine scenes of greater dignity and simplicity than those of the martyrdoms of Perpetua, of Speratus, and of the boy Cyril. And as for the effect which the faith of the Christians wrought through their anguish, that has passed into a proverb. "No refined cruelty which you invent avails you." These are the words with which Tertullian closes his *Apology*. "We multiply the more we are mown down. The blood of Christians is as seed. Many of your own writers cheer men to the endurance of pain and death. . . . Yet their words do not find so many disciples as Christians by the teaching of deeds. The very obstinacy with which you reproach us teaches our faith. Who is not moved, when he regards it, to inquire what there is really at the bottom of it? who is there who, when he has inquired, does not embrace it? Who, when he has embraced it, does not desire to suffer, that he may purchase the whole grace of God, and obtain perfect pardon from Him by the price of his blood?" There is exaggeration and even grave error in the words, but they bear witness to that infection of enthusiasm which adds

*Cf.* Tert. *ad Scap.* 1.

*Mart. Scillit.*

a touching interest to many of the records of martyrdom. Again and again some bystander claimed fellowship in death with the victorious confessor. Not unfrequently the work of St. Stephen was renewed, and a stronger champion was won for the truth even from the ranks of the persecutors.

A passage from the work of Celsus against the Christians, which was probably written in the reign of M. Aurelius, lays bare, as it seems, one of the chief sources of the emperor's antipathy to the Christians. He could not, in judging of their doctrine, leave the position of a philosopher, or understand that the new religion was essentially different from the old, which boasted of no martyrs. "I beg any one to satisfy himself by the following facts," Celsus writes, "that I bring no more bitter charge [against them] than the truth constrains me to do. Those who invite men to other sacred rites proclaim these conditions: Whoever is pure of hand and wise in word [let him come]; and others again, 'Whoever is pure from every pollution, and whose soul is conscious of no evil, and who has spent his life well and justly.' And these are the conditions they proclaim who promise rites to purify from sins. Now let us listen who they are whom the Christians invite: 'Whoever (they say) is a sinner, whoever is simple, whoever is a child, and, in a word, whoever is a poor, wretched creature; him will the kingdom of God receive.' . . . What other," he asks, as summing all up, "could a robber have publicly invited?"

Orig. *c. Cels.* iii. 59.

The Christian gladly accepts the contrast, and rejoices that he has received and can proclaim a gospel.

Celsus shows how Christians offended the natural pharisaism of moralists; Galen, in two casual references, marks the claims which it made to absolute authority which were scarcely less distasteful. "You would sooner," he says, in order to put his argument in the strongest form, "persuade the followers of Moses and Christ to change their opinions, than the physicians and philosophers who have devoted themselves to the several sects." "It had been far better," he writes in another place, "to have given a reasonable ground for the statement, if it were not possible to give a sure demonstration, that the student might not hear undemonstrated laws, as though he had come into the school of Moses and Christ."

*De Diff. Puls.* iii. *ff.*

*De Diff. Puls.* ii.

The antagonism of Christianity to the Empire, and to the old philosophies, was, as we have seen, inherent; but the spread of the faith into the schools raised up a new class of adversaries. The rhetoricians, the representatives of popular culture, found it open to attack as rude and vulgar, and also, as they judged, selfish and hypocritical. Aelius Aristides, one of the best representatives of the class, an influential friend of the emperor, and a devout follower of the old religion, when defending his art, has drawn a remarkable and elaborate picture of the Christians, whom, however, he does not mention by name. Some few traits

from this, for the whole is too long to quote, will complete the sketch of Christians as they appeared to heathen men of standing and education in the reign of M. Aurelius. "These critics of Demosthenes," he writes, "utter more solecisms than words: they look down on others as much as they ought to be looked down upon: they test others, but forget to appraise themselves: they glorify virtue, but fail to practise it, and walk about like 'simple phantoms of the dead.'" . . . He describes the spiritual equality of believers as mere idle licence: "They are found constantly in the vestibules of the wealthy, but they spend more time with the porters than with their masters, using effrontery as a corrective of flattery, and cherishing this one proof that they do not associate with men to please them, in that they wear out every one by their disagreeable pertinacity." . . . Systematic almsgiving seemed to him to be shameless extortion: "They have attached to robbery," he writes, "the name of fellowship; to envy, that of philosophy; to poverty, that of contempt of money: . . . they beg for what does not belong to them more readily than others claim what is their due: they are men who think that shamelessness is freedom, that boldness of speech consists in giving offence, that the exercise of humanity lies in receiving: . . . and they have invented a most novel definition of generosity, . . . for they exhibit it not by making great gifts, but by claiming to receive them." . . . The abstinence of Christians from

Ac. Arist. Ὑπὲρ τῶν τεττάρων, 307 *ff.* (511 *ff.*).

the common pursuits of their fellow-citizens provokes his satire as much as their special zeal. "No men," he continues, "are more utterly useless to assist in serving any object which is required, while they are cleverer than any in forcing their way into a family and setting the members at variance. They never utter, or invent, or execute a fruitful proposal: they add nothing to the beauty of our festivals; they pay no honour to the gods: they give no counsel to our cities, . . . but slinking into their holes (χηραμούς) they exhibit their marvels of wisdom there, and discourse at length with some shadow.' . . . At last something of fierce passion rises out of his satire, and he concludes: "They are men we ought not to try severally, but carry them away to their burial piled upon waggons like corpses at Corcyra. For what good do they do to the race of mankind, since one could not readily use them even as victims? Yet still we may grant them without grudging the enjoyment of this privilege, and admit that in this one respect they can do good service to our states, if the citizens should feed them and then make scapegoats of them. As one might say that they could get no better or more complete release from trouble and evil, than if they were delivered from these monsters. And unless Providence had joined to their vicious nature and evil deeds weakness and cowardice, they would have made the whole world uninhabitable." . . .

It will be evident how little mercy the Chris-

tians could expect from the multitude when a scholar could so regard them. But, happily, we can correct this judgment from without by the actual teaching of those whom it condemns. The Apologists have drawn in this reign also a contemporary picture of Christian life and thought; and the extant writings of Theophilus, Athenagoras, Tatian, and Melito show what believers had to bear and in what spirit they suffered. Moreover, there is far more precious evidence even than these in the letters of the Church of Smyrna and of the Churches of Vienne and Lyons, which give an account of the martyrdom of Polycarp and of the persecution in Gaul. These records, as J. Scaliger said, are such that one is never tired of reading them. "For my own part," he adds, "I have never found anything in ecclesiastical history by which I have been more deeply moved, so that I seem to be wholly carried away by the narrative (ut non amplius meus esse videar)." It is impossible to translate or abridge them without destroying the perfection of their beauty. They must be read as they were written, and so read they are a divine apology for the faith.

But though no transcription can reproduce the effect of the originals, there are some details out of them which may be quoted in connexion with the heathen criticisms which have been already noticed. We may mark, then, the simplicity of these early martyrs. Among the confessors at Lyons was one Alcibiades, who had lived in great

squalor in former time, taking only bread and water, and when placed in confinement he wished to follow the same habit. But a revelation was given to Attalus, a Christian of name among his fellow-prisoners, that he did not do well in declining to use the creatures of God. We can fancy what the trial would have been to spiritual pride, but Alcibiades was convinced, and partook of all things freely, and gave thanks to God; for Eusebius most truly adds, "these men were not unvisited of the grace of God, and the Holy Spirit was their counsellor." Not less conspicuous than their simplicity was their spiritual sympathy. Persons of very different rank and character were found among them, but they were of one heart. Foremost among them were Attalus a Pergamene, Sanctus a deacon of Vienne, Ponticus a boy of fifteen, who found support in the encouragement of his sister Blandina, and the poor slavewoman Blandina herself, whose mistress trembled in agony for her constancy. But so it was that the frailest, as the heathen thought, and the most abject survived, unshaken by every torture to the last, and then, in the grand words of the Church, which lift us above every distinction of class, she, like a noble mother who had cheered on her children and sent them victorious to her King, . . . hasted to them with joy and exultation, as though they were bidden to a marriage feast and not condemned to be cast to wild beasts." Their humility, again, must strike us. It was natural, perhaps, that they should be humble who

*H.E.* v. 3.

*H.E.* v. 1 § 51.

were untried, but there is something which may well move us in the words with which those who had suffered for Christ declined the title of martyrs — that title which they rendered to
*H.E.* v. 2. Christ, "the faithful and true witness" (μάρτυς). "They are really martyrs," they said, "whom Christ thought fit to be taken up at their confession, having sealed their witness by their decease, but we are simple, humble confessors." And they besought the brethren with tears, entreating that earnest prayers should be made for the happy crowning of their trial. So far from shrinking from death, they felt that there was a danger lest they should selfishly claim a crown of glory which was not prepared for them, without thinking of the case of others. "Polycarp," the Smyrnæans write, "waited to be delivered up, even as the Lord, that we also may imitate Him, not only looking at what affects ourselves, but also at what affects our neighbours. For it is the mark of true love and firm, not only to wish to be saved oneself, but also that all the brethren
*Mart. Poly.* I. [should be saved]." A yet rarer and more Christ-like virtue which they showed was tenderness
*H.E.* v. 2. towards the weak and yielding. "They indulged in no boasting over the fallen, but that in which they abounded themselves they imparted to those who were in need, with the deep compassion of a mother, and shedding many tears for them in supplication to their [heavenly] Father. They asked for life, and He gave it them; and this they shared with their neighbours. Departing victorious over every

trial they went with peace to God, having loved peace always, and committed peace to our solemn keeping, leaving no legacy of pain to their mother [the Church], nor of strife and contention to their brethren, but joy and peace, and concord and love." Few records of persecution are closed with such a testimony. Their enemies burnt their mutilated bodies, and swept the ashes into the Rhone, and said, "Let us see now if they will rise again, and if their God can help them and take them out of our hands." But they lived on, and in their death proclaimed the Resurrection.

There is one episode in the reign of M. Aurelius which cannot be passed over without notice, though it has often been misinterpreted and misapplied—his deliverance in the German war from imminent peril, by what was long known as the miracle of the Thundering Legion. The narrative is in every way so instructive, it illustrates so admirably the faults and the sagacity of Eusebius, that it will be worth while to dwell in some detail upon the accounts of an event which undoubtedly made a deep impression at the time, and seemed to all alike an unquestionable manifestation of supernatural power in favour of the emperor. Dion Cassius may be taken as giving the heathen, Eusebius as giving the Christian view of the occurrence.

"In the war with the Quadi," Dion writes, "Marcus had the good fortune to obtain a surprizing (*παράδοξος*) victory, or rather it was given him by God. For divine Providence (*τὸ θεῖον*)

*Dion Cass.* lxxi. 8.

delivered the Romans in the most surprising manner when they were in peril in the battle." They were surrounded by the enemy, cut off from all water, almost consumed by heat and thirst. "Suddenly masses of cloud collected, and floods of rain burst down by some supernatural intervention" (οὐκ ἀθεοί). For a tradition prevails (λόγος ἔχει) that Arnuphis, an Egyptian magician who accompanied Marcus, invoked some other deities and Hermes, the god of the air,[1] with certain enchantments, using every art he could, and by

c. 10.

their means brought down the rain.[2] Thereupon the soldiers tried to catch the rain in their shields and helmets, and would have been at the mercy of the enemy through their eagerness to slake their thirst if a violent hail and showers (οὐκ ὀλίγα) of thunderbolts had not fallen upon them. So men could see in the same spot fire and water streaming together from heaven. The one side were wetted and drank; the other were consumed by fire and died. The fire did not touch the Romans, or if it did ever come among them it was instantly quenched. The rain gave no help to the barbarians, but rather, like oil, fed the flame which devoured them.

Capit. *M. Ant.* 24.

This strangely florid description is illustrated by the simpler references of other writers. Capitolinus briefly says that "Marcus wrested thunder

[1] Medal 174, Mercury, Religio Augusti, belongs to the *year before.* See Eckhel, vii. 61. A medal of 177, with Jupiter hurling a thunderbolt at a naked barbarian, may refer to this event.

[2] Suidas (*s. v.* Ἀρνουφις) mentions this tradition, but adds that others attributed the miracle to "Julianus the Chaldaean." The two reports seem to be alluded to in Lampridius, *Anton. Elagab.* 9.

from heaven to foil the device of his enemies, and gained rain for his own men when they were distressed by thirst." The poet Claudian, celebrating the praises of a Christian emperor, tells the incident in neat verses :—

Laus ibi nulla ducum, nam flammeus imber in hostem Decidit :
Tum contenta polo mortalis nescia teli
Pugna fuit. Chaldaea mago seu carmina ritu
Armavere deos, seu (quod reor) omne tonantis
Obsequium Marci mores potuere mereri.

*Cons. Honor.* vi. 342 *ff.*

No praise of chiefs was there, a fiery rain
Fell on the foe. . . . The strife was waged by Heaven
Without the arms of man. It may have been
Chaldean charms which sent the gods to war,
Or rather virtue was of force to win
The Thunderer's favour for the emperor.

One other contemporaneous memorial of the event still remains, which is even of greater and more vivid interest—a relief on the column of Antonine, in which the typical figure of Jupiter Pluvius is represented pouring down floods of water, which the soldiers are catching in their upturned shields, while the barbarians lie prostrated by the violence of the storm.[1]

By each of these heathen writers, then, a distinct prodigy is recognized, whether it was the

[1] There is an admirable representation of the relief in Bartoli's *Columna Antoniniana*, pp. 14, 15, from which Montfaucon has taken the figure of Jupiter Pluvius, *L'Antiquité expliquée*, i. p. 44. The figure in Baronius s. a. 176 is worthless. "The Olympian Jupiter," "the opened heavens," and the "appalling thunderbolts" of Dean Merivale (*History of the Romans*, vii. 586), are due to a lively imagination.

work of enchantment, or the answer to the prayers of the emperor, or the merciful intervention of Jupiter. From the heathen narratives we now pass to the Christian.

*H.E.* v. 5. "There is a tradition (λόγος ἔχει) that when M. Aurelius was preparing for an engagement with the Germans and Sarmatians, his army suffered so severely from thirst that he was reduced to great distress; and that the soldiers of the so-called Melitinian legion, which through faith has continued in existence from that time to the present, when they were drawn up in array against the enemy, knelt down, as is our characteristic custom, in prayer, and offered devout supplications to God. The strange spectacle was regarded with surprise by the enemy, but the tradition (λόγος ἔχει) goes on to relate that a more surprising incident followed immediately—a storm of thunder and lightning which drove the enemy to flight and ruin, and a shower of rain which fell upon the host of those who had invoked the help of Providence, and restored them all, when they were upon the very point of destruction from their thirst. The account is found in the works of historians who are very far removed from the Christian faith, who have undertaken to record the events of those times. It has been set forth also by our own writers. But there is this difference: the historians who were not of our body, as being foreign to the faith, have recorded the surprising occurrence (*τὸ παράδοξον*), while they have not also admitted that it was produced by

the prayers of the Christians; our authors, on the other hand, as devoted to truth, have related what was done simply and ingenuously. We may reckon among these Apollinarius[1] who asserts that from that time the legion which occasioned the surprising occurrence through prayer, received from the emperor a title corresponding to the event, being surnamed in the Roman language 'the Thundering legion.' Yet further, Tertullian might be considered a trustworthy witness to these facts, since he addressed an apology for the faith to the Roman senate, which I mentioned on a former occasion, and supports the narrative with a greater and clearer proof; I mean that he writes expressly that letters of Marcus, the most judicious emperor, were still current in his time (*εἰσέτι νῦν φέρεσθαι*), in which [the emperor] testifies that when his army was on the point of being destroyed by want of water in Germany he was saved by the prayers of the Christians. Moreover, he says that [the emperor] also threatened with death those who took upon them to accuse us. . . . But [not to dwell longer on the subject] every one must form his own judgment upon the narrative (*ἀλλὰ ταῦτα μὲν ὅπῃ τις ἐθέλῃ τιθέσθω*)."

It will be seen that Eusebius does nothing more than record what was a current report, and even guards himself from vouching for the Christian interpretation of the event. He cites the evidence with which he was acquainted, and leaves his readers free to form their own opinion. The

[1] Claudius Apollinarius, the Apologist, Bishop of Hierapolis.

testimony of Apollinarius is no longer open to examination, but it appears to be certain that Eusebius has misunderstood his words. If Apollinarius said that the legion first received the name of "the thundering legion" from the part which it took in this victory, he was wholly in error on a point of which he could hardly have been ignorant. The twelfth legion bears the title "*fulminata*" (not *fulminatrix* or *fulminea*, as it is commonly given) in an inscription on the statue of Memnon, as early as the time of Nero;[1] and it is very unlikely that Apollinarius should not have known that the epithet was an ancient one. The improbability becomes still greater if the headquarters of the legion, as appears likely, were in Cappadocia.[2] The legion was there in Dion's time, and probably as early as the reign of Vespasian, and it was still stationed in the same district in the fifth century. On the other hand, nothing could be more natural than that he should say that the epithet received its justification in this remarkable deliverance; and it would be quite in accordance with the mode of thought of his age to see in the title a foreshadowing of the event, so that he may have said that the legion was so called, not in memory of the occurrence, but rather by an unconscious prophecy in anticipation of the signal miracle which it should be allowed to work.

[1] Orelli, *Corp. Inscr.* 517. Again it is mentioned in Trajan's reign, *l.c.* 5447. See also 3174, 6497, 6522, 6777. The epithet κεραυνοβόλος is given to the legion in Dion's account of the Roman army, lv. 23.

[2] Dion lv. 23; Suet. *Vesp.* 8; Tac. *Hist.* ii. 81.

The passage of Tertullian on which Eusebius chiefly relies is still accessible in the *Apology*. No persecutor, he argues, can be found among the better emperors. "We, on the contrary, can show a protector if inquiry be made for the letter of M. Aurelius, a most admirable (gravissimi) emperor, in which he bears witness that the famous drought in Germany was dispelled by a shower obtained by the prayers of soldiers who happened to be Christians. He did not, I allow, openly free men of that profession from punishment; but still he openly dispelled the danger in another way by affixing a sentence, and that a more terrible one, to their accusers." And in another place he refers to the circumstance generally: "Marcus Aurelius, on his German expedition, obtained rain in the famous drought through the prayers which Christian soldiers addressed to God."

Tert. *Ap.* 5.

*Ad Scap.* 4.

There is nothing, it will be observed, to show that Tertullian had seen the letter to which he referred, nor does any one at any time profess to have direct personal knowledge of the existence of such a document. Every later writer who mentions the letter transcribes and adopts either the words of Tertullian or Eusebius' free version of them. Thus the existence of the letter is attested only by the vague language of Tertullian, which probably expresses no more than the hasty belief that the letter could be produced if the search were made for it. It is known, indeed, that M. Aurelius wrote an account of his victory to the senate, according to the usual custom; and

a letter attributed to him is found at the end of Justin's longer *Apology*. But all that is known of the former is that it contained an explanation of the exceptional circumstances under which the emperor received at once the title of Imperator from his army, in which his providential rescue was likely to be mentioned ; and the latter without the least doubt is a late forgery. Thus there is no independent evidence whatever to support the account which Tertullian gives of the contents of the letter. On the other side, one single fact conclusively shows that the emperor could not have written of the Christians in such terms. The date of his victory was 174, and in 177 he definitely sanctioned the persecution at Lyons, directing that those accused of Christianity should be tortured and released only on recantation. It is not conceivable that so sudden a change could have come over his policy. He could not have forgotten in three years the benefits which he had publicly acknowledged, and cancelled the privileges which he had granted.

*H.E.* v. 1. 42.

If, then, Tertullian quoted accurately any letter about the German deliverance bearing the name of M. Aurelius, it was apocryphal. But another explanation of the passage seems to be more probable. The form of the sentences not only admits, but suggests the separation of the acknowledgment of the deliverance from the decree in favour of the Christians. And it is not unreasonable to suppose that Tertullian combined together what he had heard of the false rescript to the common council

of Asia with two notorious facts,—the one that the emperor had publicly admitted that he was rescued by divine help, and the other that Christian soldiers had offered prayers for him in the crisis of his peril. In these facts, attested on the one side by heathen evidence and on the other by the very nature of the case, no less than by direct testimony, we can find an adequate historic basis for the whole narrative. There were, as there could hardly have failed to be, Christians in the Roman army. The antipathy to military service was not at any time universal. In one legion, which was recruited in all likelihood from Asia Minor, they may well have formed a considerable body. In the extremity of danger they naturally prayed for help,[1] and when the strange and unexpected help came, they saw, and expected that others would see, a direct answer to petitions addressed to the One True God. "When," asks Tertullian in connexion with this very event, "have not droughts been removed by our genuflections and fastings? On these occasions the people also by crying to the God of gods, who is alone powerful, give testimony under the name of Jupiter to our God." In this way we obtain an intelligible and natural view of the incident; and we obtain also a glimpse of the part which Christians assigned to themselves in the whole economy of the Empire. The narrative expresses in facts, and we may believe with substantial truth,

*Ad Scap.* 4.

[1] *cf.* Cypr. *ad Demetrianum*, c. 20, pro arcendis hostibus et imbribus impetrandis, et vel auferendis vel temperandis adversis rogamus semper et preces fundimus.

the idea contained in the letter to Diognetus that "the Christians, though prisoners in the world, held the world together." It is unnecessary to fix the exact details of the incident. The solemn kneeling in the face of the enemy, of which Eusebius speaks, may have been a real trait, or it may be due to the historian's desire to realize the scene vividly. For, as time went on, the very few writers who have mentioned the event, though they had no materials beyond those which we possess, added fresh touches to the picture. Gregory of Nyssa states that the Christians retired from the rest of the army to pray apart; and Xiphilinus still more boldly turns the whole legion into Christians, and makes the emperor request their intercession on being informed of their spiritual power.

*Greg.-Nyss.* iii. p. 505. Xiphil. on Dion C.

It is undoubtedly unsatisfactory to find inaccuracy and exaggeration and invention in the Christian records of such an event as this "miracle of the Thundering legion." But, on the other hand, the strictest and soberest criticism encounters the fewest difficulties. It is not impossible to separate the facts from the interpretation and the rendering of the facts in the original words. The account of Eusebius is, on the most unfavourable view, less extravagant than that of Dion. And at the same time he warns his reader to weigh the tradition which he relates. He gives his authorities; he distinguishes the points for which he alleges them. He indicates his own misgivings. And the reserve of Eusebius extends to other early Christian writers.

Gregory of Nyssa is the only father who refers to the miracle before the end of the fourth century, notwithstanding the testimony of Apollinaris, Tertullian, and Eusebius; and, on the other hand, Themistius, addressing Theodosius in 381, when Christianity was the religion of the country, refers the miracle not to the prayers of the Christian soldiers, but to the prayers of M. Aurelius. "When his army was distressed by thirst," he writes, "the emperor held up his hand to heaven and said, 'With this hand, with which I never took away life, I supplicate Thee, the Giver of Life.' And then he moved God by his prayer, so that though it was clear before, clouds came and brought rain to his soldiers." So far there is no exceptional credulity, no impatience of other views, no restless desire to claim the miracle, among Christian writers; but just such a representation of the facts has been preserved as rumour would be certain to furnish and to adorn. If we begin our inquiry with the earliest witnesses the result is fairly certain and reasonable. In this case, as in every other similar record, it is easy to explain the accretion of foreign materials round the original nucleus, if we take that for our starting point; it is not easy to receive the final mass and from that divine by any process of our own its worth and history.

Themist. *Or.* xiv.

# CHAPTER V

## AGE OF SEPTIMIUS SEVERUS

*Cf.* Euseb. *H.E.* v. 16, 17.

AFTER the death of M. Aurelius the Christians were undisturbed by any general or severe persecution for more than twenty years. During the reign of Commodus (180-192) several circumstances contributed to their peace. The Empire enjoyed external tranquillity, broken only by some insignificant incursions of barbarians. No great calamities irritated the masses against the Christians. If the calumnies against the faith were repeated, experience made them less credible when there were no special reasons for seeking the origin of great disasters in some secret cause. The profligacy of the emperor was itself not unfavourable to the growing sect. He could not appreciate, as M. Aurelius may have done, the dangers which such a society introduced into the State. No zeal for the national religion was likely to animate him against men who treated it with contempt. No spirit of philosophy moved him to anger with teachers where enthusiasm was stronger than stoical endurance. Private influence

also guided him to leniency, or even to favour. Marcia, a woman who exercised great power over him, is said to have been attached to the Christians, and Hippolytus has preserved an anecdote of her intercession with the emperor when she wished to do them a good turn. "She sent," he relates, "for Victor, who was bishop at the time, and asked him what martyrs were in Sardinia. He gave her the names of all except that of Callistus, with whose crimes he was acquainted. Marcia obtained her petition from Commodus, and gave the letter for their release to Hyacinthus, a eunuch, a presbyter, who took it and sailed over to Sardinia and delivered it to the officer who at that time was in command of the place, and obtained the release of all the martyrs except Callistus. Callistus fell at his feet, and with tears entreated that he also might be set free. So Hyacinthus, being overcome by his importunity, begged the governor [to discharge him]. He said that he had reared Marcia, and engaged that he should incur no risk." There is much that is strange and painful in the story, which shows how widely, and yet how imperfectly, the power of Christianity was felt. The first-known act of imperial grace to Christian confessors is granted at the request of a favourite by a worthless tyrant. The first glimpse of the early life of a Roman bishop shows him as a criminal who shared by accident the punishment and the release of martyrs. The Church already appears to be mingling with the world. However, under these

Dion C. lxxii. 4.

Hipp. *Adv. Haer.* ix. 12.

iv. 30. 1. circumstances Christianity spread widely. Irenaeus speaks of "the faithful who were in the imperial court." Hippolytus describes Carpophorus, the master of Callistus, as a man of substance and position, "a believer of the household of Cæsar." Eusebius states generally that the "Churches throughout the whole world had peace." Converts, he adds, were gained from every race and every class; and whole families at Rome, distinguished by rank and wealth, embraced the gospel. At the same time the position of believers was precarious. They had obtained no legal protection. A popular rising, or a malicious enemy, might put in force the laws which their profession necessarily violated. Eusebius has recorded one instance of the kind which offers several features of interest. Apollonius, he relates, a Christian of high repute for his philosophical attainments, was denounced at Rome. Perennius, the favourite of Commodus, received the information as prefect, but at once condemned the informer to have his limbs broken. He then endeavoured to induce Apollonius to recant, and when he failed, persuaded him to plead his cause before the senate. This Apollonius did with the greatest ability, but, as he persisted in his confession, he was necessarily condemned to death. Eusebius refers to his collection of the *Acts of the Ancient Martyrs* for the details of the examination and the defence; and Jerome, who may have had access to these documents, adds that Apollonius was a senator, and that the informer

*H. E.* v. 21.

v. 21.

was a slave. The last fact explains the punishment of the accuser. A slave who betrayed his master was liable to capital punishment, and though an exception was made in the case of treason, if the charge was established, an officer like Perennius was not likely to strain the letter of the law in the favour of such an informer, if any court influence was used to protect the accused. He probably assumed that the charge would be removed by a formal concession to an established usage. At least it was not one which required to be treated with unusual severity. On the other hand, the martyrdom of Apollonius is a complete proof of the fact that in the eye of the law Christians were guilty of a capital crime, and that if the law were pressed they had no escape from the sentence of death.

*Cf.* Dion C. lxviii. 1, *Nerva*, Haenel, p. 190. *Severus*, Haenel, p. 139.

In the period of military violence and civil war which followed the assassination of Commodus, the Christians escaped notice in the general confusion; and as they abstained from partisanship, the rapid changes of government failed to affect their general position towards the Commonwealth. The time was one of a complete political revolution. The whole constitution of the Empire was changed; the authority of the senate and the old nobility was overthrown; the throne was first openly sold by the praetorian guard, and then won by the army for a general who was an African by birth, and sprung only from an equestrian family; but, meanwhile, the Church steadily gained vigour and organization as the

*Cf.* Tert. *ad Scap.* 2.

State was degraded into a mere system of force.

Septimius Severus (193-211) represents the consolidation of the new military order of the Empire. For a time the Christians continued to enjoy peace under his reign. According to Tertullian, the emperor had once received a service from a Christian, of which he retained to the last a grateful recollection. "Many men of rank," he says, writing on the reign of Caracalla, 'have obtained relief from spirits and sicknesses. Even Severus himself, the father of Antoninus [Caracalla], remembered the [good deeds of the] Christians. For he sought out Proculus, a Christian, who was surnamed Torpacion, the steward of Euhodia,[1] who had cured him[2] by means of oil on one occasion, and kept him in his palace until his death. Antoninus also, who was reared on Christian milk, was perfectly well acquainted with the man.[3] Moreover, when Severus knew that men and women of the highest rank belonged to this sect, he not only refrained from injuring them, but bore honourable testimony to their character, and openly opposed the people who vented their fury upon us."[4]

*Ad Scap.* 4.

But whatever consideration was extended to the Christians by their emperor, their impunity

[1] The conjecture "Euhodi" for "Euhodiae" is very plausible. Euhodus was a freedman of Severus who had charge of Caracalla (τροφεύς, Dion C. lxxvi), and would be likely, if a Christian himself, to give the young prince a Christian nurse.

[2] Certainly Severus from context.

[3] *cf.* Spartian. *Vita Ant. Carac.* I.

[4] The reading in *Apol.* 5 is *Verus*, not *Severus*.

was still due simply to the forbearance of the magistrate and not to the protection of the law. A provincial mob could still claim them as victims, and mercenary governors, or unscrupulous informers, traded on the fears of the timid and sold connivance for money. The peril of the Christians was also increased, if Severus, as appears to be probable, reviewed and enforced the legislation against unauthorised guilds. He is certainly known to have issued a rescript that those who were charged with meeting in such assemblies should be accused before the prefect of the city, to whom he gave an extended jurisdiction and larger powers of punishment. The special provision for hearing the cases seems to imply that great attention was directed to them; and though the terms of this enactment may perhaps have saved the Christians from vexatious prosecutions, the enactment itself must have kept alive the sense of the illegality of their Churches.

Haenel, p. 139.

The date and operation of this edict must be left undetermined, but a second edict which Severus issued in the year 202 undoubtedly gave a fresh occasion for attacks upon the Christians. The turbulence of the Jews appears to have occasioned him considerable trouble. Palestine had fallen under his displeasure for the part which they had taken on the side of Pescennius Niger, but the punishment which he had imposed upon them had been remitted. Fresh difficulties may have arisen afterwards, but though the

details of the events are unknown, his successes in Syria were sufficiently important to allow him to accept a Jewish triumph for his son. While he was still in Palestine he endeavoured to provide for the security of the country by numerous enactments. One of these was to the effect that no one should become a Jew, under a heavy penalty (*Judaeos fieri sub gravi poena vetuit*); and, it is added, "he laid down the same law in the case of the Christians" (*idem de Christianis sanxit*). It might be argued that this edict conceded to the Christians what they had not enjoyed before—a position among the professors of ancient tolerated religions. If proselytism only was expressly forbidden, hereditary faith might seem to be sanctioned. But such reasoning is illusory. The Christians could not claim, properly speaking, to hold a traditional faith. They were, as we have already seen, a sect and not a nation. An unscrupulous judge could easily vary the position of the line which separated innocent retention of the faith from illegal conversion. And yet, more than this. Christians were liable to persecution not only because they held a new and unrecognised religion, but also because their religion involved practical results which conflicted with the usages of the Empire. And once again: even if such partial toleration had been granted effectually, it would have been of no avail. Christianity lived, and still lives, by extension. It cannot be stationary. To forbid the propagation of the

Spart. *Sept. Sev.* 17.

faith is to persecute the faith itself, and to admit the restriction is practically to apostatise.

It is impossible to tell what was the motive of the emperor in issuing the decree.[1] He may have wished to reconcile in such a way the respect which he felt for the Christians as a body already existing with the fear excited by their untiring proselytism, which showed that in the future they would be more formidable than the Jews. But, as was natural, the decree gave strength and form to the popular animosity which had shown itself previously. Violent persecutions broke out, especially in Egypt and North Africa, and some thought that "the presence of Antichrist was drawing near, so violently did the renewal of the persecution at the time disturb the minds of the mass of believers." *H.E.* vi. 7. The question was no longer embarrassed by doubts as to the real character of the Christian tenets and practices. Whatever these might be it was decided by the supreme authority that they should not be further extended. If it were allowed that Christians were guiltless in holding what they had received from their fathers, the law at length distinctly said that every one who sought to spread the belief or who embraced it was guilty. Here then was a new issue; and several incidents which have been preserved show that the persecution fell principally on active teachers and young converts. Such, for example, was Leonides, the father of Origen, martyred at Alexandria, who

[1] The letter of Severus to Philippus, a prefect of Egypt, by Baronius, s.a. 204, from the Acts of Eugenia (Dec. 25) is certainly apocryphal.

roused his boy to the profound study of the sacred Word, and rejoiced that God had given him a scholar who promised to do greater things than he could do. Such was Origen himself, who won by his life and teaching, while a youth of eighteen, hundreds of disciples, and sent from his school a noble band of martyrs, men and women, to die for their faith. Such was Alexander of Jerusalem, the friend and helper of Origen, who felt that his bonds were made light and easy when he learnt that the Church of Antioch had found a worthy bishop to guide it in the time of trial. Such was Heron, "the newly baptized"; such were Heraclides and Herais, still catechumens, who received the baptism of fire and not of water; such was Basilides, the soldier, who confessed the faith which a virgin martyr had taught him by her death.

*H.E.* vi. 1, 3, 4.

*H.E.* vi. 11.

This persecution was accompanied by a marked change in the literary activity of the Church. No fresh apology was called forth by these new trials. The proper work of the great Apologists was completed. What they had begun was carried out partly in the more comprehensive works of Clement and Origen; partly in the more vigorous writings of the Latin Apologists. Roman lawyers and rhetoricians restated the case which had been urged by students of Greek philosophy. Tertullian's *Apology*, the earliest, and in most respects the greatest, of these later pleadings, is the one most conspicuous monument of the era of Severus, and when every allowance is made for the

exaggeration, the reckless vehemence, the imaginative redundance, the enigmatical obscurity of the style, it is a splendid example of passionate eloquence, rich in thought and masterly in isolated phrases, and almost inexhaustible in fertility of words. The Latin is undoubtedly the Latin of an African, but the fiery life which passes through it saves it from the charge of vulgarity or affectation.

It is impossible to dwell now on the writings of Tertullian, which give the most vivid if a partial picture of the age; but there are three simple memorials of Christian heroism during the persecution of Severus which place us even closer to the martyrs than his stirring words: the martyrdom of Potamiæna, told by Eusebius; that of the Scillitan martyrs, derived, as it seems, from the proconsular records; that of Perpetua, written down to the opening of the last scene by the martyr herself. "Thus far," to quote the words with which she concludes her narrative, "I have written up to the day before the games. Let any write who pleases the event of the show itself." The history was worthily concluded, and some have thought that the account of the last struggle which an eye-witness has added was written by Tertullian.

The story of Potamiæna offers a striking illustration of the popular effect of Christian martyrdom. Potamiæna was a young maiden of Alexandria of singular virtue and beauty. When brought with her mother before the judge she

*H.E.* vi. 8. *Cf.* Pallad. *Hist. Laus.* 3.

patiently endured a great variety of tortures. On this the judge, vexed at his defeat, threatened to give her up to the mercy of some gladiators if she persisted in her contumacy. She paused for a time and then uttered, as it were by a divine impulse, a phrase of contempt for the heathen gods which saved her from the worst indignities. She was at once condemned, and slowly put to death as boiling pitch was poured over her whole body. But she triumphed in her last agony. A soldier, Basilides, who was charged to conduct her to execution, drove back the crowd who tried to insult her with unseemly words. Potamiæna expressed her gratitude for his compassion, and told him to be of good cheer; after her departure she said that she would pray that he might be given to her of her Lord, and that before long she would return him the due recompense for what he had done. In a short time Basilides had occasion to confess that he was a Christian. His fellow-soldiers thought that he was jesting. When he persisted he was thrown into a prison, and being asked the cause of his strange and sudden impulse, he said that Potamiæna three days after her martyrdom had stood by him at night and set a chaplet upon his head, and told him that she had entreated the Lord for him, and had obtained her petition, and would soon receive him to her new home. The brethren who heard his narrative sealed him with the cross for Christ, and on the day following he was beheaded. "And," Eusebius adds, "it is recorded that many others suddenly

embraced the word of Christ, as Potamiæna appeared to them in dreams (so they said) and called them to her." So inevitable, we may well believe, so lasting, and so persuasive to the minds of men was the vision of that frail form which was seen to overcome by faith the extremity of mortal pain.

The martyrdom of Speratus, the chief of the Scillitan martyrs, was different in kind. Speratus, and five others, three being women, were brought before the proconsul at Carthage, who required that they should do homage to the gods and to the emperor. They replied that they could not violate their allegiance to a greater than an earthly sovereign. "You persist, I see, in being a Christian," the proconsul said to Speratus. "This Christian persistence I trust I have," was his reply, "not by my own strength, but of the gift of God. If you would know the set judgment of my heart, I am a Christian." "Perhaps," said the proconsul, "you wish a space for reflection." Speratus said, "No second deliberation is required for so good an object. For we decided then not to abandon the worship of Christ when, renewed by the grace of baptism, we renounced the devil and followed the steps of Christ." "Tell me," said the proconsul, "what is the substance of the teachings in your religion." Speratus replied, "The books of the Gospels, and the epistles of Paul the apostle, a most holy man." "Take a respite of thirty days," said the proconsul, "that you may retract your confession of this sect.

Perhaps you will return to the sacred ceremonies of the gods." Speratus replied, "A respite of thirty days will not be able to change our profession, but do you rather choose to take this space for deciding about life, that you may abandon this base worship of idols and prove a lover of the Christian religion. But if you are not worthy to receive it, withdraw the respite: read the sentence. Doubt not that, after the pause of thirty days, we shall be such as you see us today." Judgment was then given. As they had confessed that they were Christians and refused the opportunity of recanting, they were condemned to death. Speratus said, "We give thanks to Christ," and one of his companions added, "To-day we martyrs are in heaven. Thanks be to God."

The narrative of Perpetua is one of deeper and tenderer pathos. Like that of the Churches of Vienne and Lyons, it cannot be abridged or transcribed: it must be studied as a whole. As a picture of Christian enthusiasm it is probably unique, and yet ecstasies and visions are joined with so many trials of simple human feeling that we never miss the reality of actual life. Perpetua was of noble family, well brought up and honourably married. She and her brother were catechumens when they were called upon to confess or abandon their faith. Their resolution was unshaken, and both were baptized in the certain prospect of martyrdom. The prayer of Perpetua at her baptism was simply that "her flesh might

bear her trial" (sufferentia carnis), so the Spirit taught her, and she had great need of support. Not only was she a woman, and young, but she was only lately a mother. Everywhere the womanly instincts find expression even to the last cry of pain (exululavit). "How terrified I was," she writes, when first thrown into prison, "for I had never felt such darkness: the heat was stifling; the place was crowded; the soldiers were rude; but my greatest trial was anxiety for my child." After a time, however, she obtained permission to receive her infant. "Straightway," she says, "my prison became a palace, so that I preferred it to any other place in the world." Strange spiritual joys brightened her confinement. At one time she saw the Good Shepherd surrounded by many thousands, clothed in white, and when He welcomed her she knew that her passion was close at hand. At another time she saw a brother who had died some time before, suffering in a place of gloom from heat and thirst, and unable to reach the water of a fountain which was near him. She prayed day and night for him, and before her martyrdom she saw the gloom enlightened and the boy drinking freely of the water, and she knew that his sufferings were over. At another time she saw in a figure her own last struggle. It was shown to her that she should have to fight, not against wild beasts, but against the devil. Her nature was changed for the conflict, and by the issue of the vision she knew that victory was assured to her. The entreaties and unbelief of

her aged father filled her with pity and grief; but she could have only one answer for the judge: "I do no sacrifice. I am a Christian." And so far even the heathen were moved by the constancy of the martyrs that, when they would have forced them to assume the dress of ministers of Saturn or Ceres, they yielded to the remonstrance of Perpetua, who reminded them that they died in order to avoid such idolatry. Only one trait more can be added. Perpetua had borne the first attack of the infuriated animal to which she was exposed in the amphitheatre; wounded and bruised she awaited its second onset; and even so, calmly in sight of the wild crowd, and in the present expectation of a troubled death, she gathered her robe round her and bound up her streaming hair: "For it was not becoming," the writer adds, "that a martyr should suffer with dishevelled hair, lest she should seem to mourn in her glory."

# CHAPTER VI

## THE ORIENTAL DESPOTS

THE persecution which had been occasioned by the edict of Severus against the propagation of the Christian faith died out gradually, and it is impossible to fix exactly the limits within which it was confined. In Africa it appears to have continued into the reign of his successor Caracalla, but the attacks made upon Christians at that time, of which Tertullian speaks, were probably due to the individual hostility of particular governors, called into play by the open defiance of the more restless and impatient members of the Church. At last, however, the persecution ceased even in Africa. The influence of Tertullian was weakened as he became more and more identified with the extreme party of the Montanists; and he left no successor to rouse, as he had done, the enthusiasm and even the passions of Christians. The wise and catholic teaching of the Alexandrine school gained a wide predominance, and for more than twenty years (211-235) the Churches had peace.

Meanwhile the Empire was undergoing a series of the most remarkable vicissitudes. We have seen that the military usurpation of Septimius Severus, accepted and ratified by the State, marked an epoch in the history of Rome. The license of the army, which thus reached its height, was soon followed by the characteristics of Eastern despotism, and two princes of Syrian blood—types respectively of the vices and virtues of Orientals—occupied in succession the throne of the Caesars.

Severus himself opened the way to this strange revolution also. Julia Domna, his second wife, the mother of his children, was a Syrian, and attached to mystic philosophy. Whatever may have been her influence over her husband, she undoubtedly had borne a great part in the administration of the Empire under the reign of her son Caracalla, and made it afterwards possible for her sister Julia Maesa to secure the succession for her own grandsons, Elagabalus and Alexander Severus, who were the last representatives of the family.

The introduction of this foreign Eastern element, which had for a long time invaded and troubled Roman society, into the supreme government, marks more clearly, perhaps, than anything else the failure of the original idea of the Empire. Rome the centre, the life, the divinity of the world was declared to be no longer one and supreme, as Augustus or Tiberius had presented it for the worship of the world. Two facts characterise the change which was accomplished. The

first was the acknowledgment that the Empire could be divided; the second the obliteration of the exclusive privileges of Roman citizenship. Caracalla proposed, on the death of Severus, a scheme for the division of the Empire between himself and his brother Geta. A Western Empire was to be consolidated round Rome; an Eastern Empire round Alexandria or Antioch. The popular indignation with which the proposal was received showed that the citizens had not yet realised that the unity of the Empire was practically destroyed. It appeared to be upon the surface nothing more than an attempt to satisfy the desires of two brothers who were implacable enemies. Julia opposed the design, and the execution of it was averted by fratricide; but still the significant idea remained to bear fruit. A Roman emperor had suggested that the Empire should be divided.

Caracalla inflicted in this way a fatal blow upon the unity of the Empire at the instigation of his unnatural ambition. Under the impulse of avarice he injured no less grievously the conception of the sovereignty of Rome. It appears that M. Aurelius had extended the privileges and burdens of citizenship, with certain limitations, to all free men throughout the Empire. Caracalla abolished these distinctions, and established a universal equality. His object was simply to recruit his treasury, but the measure showed that the idea of the exclusive sanctity of Roman rights, as answering to a central and mysterious power,

was lost. Nothing but force remained to hold together the fragments of an order which was no longer assumed to be indivisible or shown to be animated by a power superior to that which existed naturally in each of its constituent parts.

The essential dissolution of the Empire which was distinctly foreshadowed by Caracalla became yet more plain shortly afterwards.

The reign of Elagabalus offers the most degrading picture of the triumph of Eastern manners at Rome. Elagabalus had been priest of the Sun at Emesa, and the soldiers who frequented the temple, attracted by his appearance and the resemblance he was supposed to bear to Caracalla, recognised him as a son of their favourite, and secured for him the throne by the defeat and death of Macrinus. The dress, the vices, the very name of the new emperor brought vividly before the senate the completeness of their degradation. He had substituted for his proper name Bassianus that of Antoninus, to catch something of the favour which was attached to it; but he delighted rather to be called Elagabalus, by the title of the god to whose service he remained devoted even at Rome.

The aspect of the old belief was necessarily changed under the new conditions. It is recorded that Elagabalus went so far as to entertain the notion of bringing Christians together with other religions under the protection of his national deity. He built a temple to Elagabalus—represented by a meteorite—on the Palatine,

adjoining the Imperial palace, and sought to transfer to that all the most sacred symbols of the ancient worship,—the image of Cybele, the fire of Vesta, the shields of Mars, that "Elagabalus might be the only god adored at Rome." "He said, moreover," Lampridius continues, "that the religious rites (religiones) of the Jews and Samaritans, and the Christian worship (devotionem), must be removed thither, that the priesthood of Elagabalus might embrace the mystery of all cults (omnium culturarum secretum)." The design appears in all its terrible profanity when it is added that he was guilty of offering human sacrifices, "selecting for the purpose throughout all Italy boys of rank and beauty whose parents were both alive, I suppose," the historian bitterly remarks, "that the father and mother might feel the keener grief." Nothing could show more clearly the complete degradation of worship than the toleration of such excesses, and at the same time these hideous rites explain how the calumnies against the Christians found credence.

Lampr. *Elag.* 3.

Lampr. *Elag.* 8. *Cf.* Euseb. *H.E.* vii. 10 §§ 3, 4.

The vices of Elagabalus soon became intolerable even to the army. For a short time he was sustained by the reputation of his cousin Alexander Severus, who was raised to the dignity of Caesar, but such an alliance could not last long. The popularity of Alexander aroused the jealousy of the elder despot, which the soldiers resented. When he attempted to exert his authority to suppress their sedition he was murdered, and Alexander was placed upon the throne.

Elagabalus had exhibited in their grossest form the dark features of Eastern religion. Alexander exhibited the bright side of it. He started, as it seems, from the patriarchal type of monotheism, and not from the antagonistic type of nature worship. Though he might shrink from the titles, there was truth in the mocking words of the men of Antioch and Alexandria, who styled him "a Syrian ruler of the synagogue and high priest." Elagabalus had endeavoured to concentrate in one horrible service whatever had moved the minds of men with terror and awe. Alexander sought to unite in a harmonious co-ordination the various types of god-like life and character to which he was drawn by the aspirations of a pure and tender soul. But the syncretism of terror and the syncretism of devotion—the fusion of all the elements of dread in religion, and the fusion of all the elements of hope—were alike powerless to apprehend or supersede the teaching of Christ.

Lampr. *Alex.* 28.

Alexander was only seventeen years of age when he became emperor, and his mother Mammaea guided him in the administration of the government. Through Mammaea, Alexander was brought into connection with Origen, and it is impossible not to believe that the sympathetic instruction of a master who could feel the necessities of a young Syrian, called, it might be, to rule the Roman world, influenced his policy and opinions. "Mammaea, the mother of the emperor," Eusebius writes, "was a woman of the truest piety, if ever any one was, and discreet in her

vi. 21.

conduct. When the reputation of Origen was noised abroad everywhere, and came even to her ears, she felt a great desire to be allowed to see him, and gain some direct knowledge of his understanding in divine matters of which all spoke with admiration. So when she was staying at Antioch she invited him to visit her and gave him an escort of honour. He spent some time with her, and set forth very much to illustrate the glory of the Lord and the virtue of the divine school, and then hastened to resume his usual occupation." Later writers have not scrupled to affirm that Mammaea became a Christian. The epithet which Eusebius applies to her is certainly remarkable, and has furnished the occasion for this opinion. But the historian would scarcely have left the fact to be deduced from a casual expression if he had been assured of it, and the divine honours which were granted to Mammaea after her death are inconsistent with the strict interpretation of the term. Lampr. *Alex.* 57.

The interview of Mammaea with Origen probably took place before the accession of her son to the Empire, and the young prince, during his reign of thirteen years, showed many marks of favour to the Christians. Eusebius relates that at his death "his household contained a considerable number of the faithful"; and generally it is said that "he reserved their privileges for the Jews, and tolerated the Christians (Christianos esse passus est)." He permitted them, as the words seem to imply, to avow their faith, and consequently to be excused *H.E.* vi. 28. Lampr. 22.

from the application of those tests which had hitherto proved fatal to them in the hands of their persecutors. In his private chapel (lararium), where he commonly paid his morning devotions, he "had representations of the most virtuous among the emperors and of other holy men (animae sanctiores), among whom were Apollonius and Alexander the Great, and, as a contemporary reported, Christ, Abraham, and Orpheus, and the like." It is even said that "he wished to build a temple to Christ and to receive him among the gods." Such a design, however, would have been equally opposed by the Christians and by the jurists with whom Alexander surrounded himself. The personal influence of the emperor, as long as it was exerted, might be able to shield the Christians, but as yet the time was not come for the civil recognition of the faith. One of his most trusted advisers was Ulpian, who had composed a treatise on the duty of a Proconsul, in which he collected "the rescripts of the emperors, in order to show with what punishments men should be visited who confessed that they were worshippers of God."

Lampr. 29.

Lampr. 31.

Lampr. 43.

Dig. i. 16.

Lact. *Inst.* v. 11.

It is also evident that the feeling of Alexander in favour of Christianity was not very intelligent or profound. It appeared to him as a well-ordered system of monotheism, and not as an essentially distinct revelation. When he directed that the names of those who were designated for public offices should be set up for public animadversion, he said "that it was a serious fault that this

course was not adopted in the case of governors of provinces, to whose charge the fortunes and lives of men are committed, while the Christians and Jews followed it in the announcement of priests for ordination." On another occasion, "when the Christians had taken possession of a piece of common ground, and the tavern-keepers preferred a counter claim, he decided that it was better that God should be worshipped there in any form soever than that it should be "surrendered to the tavern-keepers." But nothing shows his misconception of the teaching of Christ more significantly than the fact which might seem to be his most public homage to it. "He used very often to repeat openly," it is recorded, a sentence which he had heard from some "Jews or Christians, and retained in his memory, and ordered the words to be proclaimed by a herald when he chastised any one: 'Do not thou to another that which thou dost not wish to be done to thee'; and he was so fond of the precept that he ordered it to be inscribed on his palace and other public works." But this negative sentence of Confucius is not characteristic of Christianity. The teaching of the Gospel is inherently positive and not negative. If we grasp in any way the meaning of the Incarnation, that fact brings with it a rule of conduct as comprehensive as the conditions of life. It involves action and not abstention. The central precept of the Sermon on the Mount is not "Do not," but "Do." The difference is fundamental; and those only who overlook it can speak of

Lampr. 45.

Lampr. 49.

Lampr. 51.

Christian morality as anticipated, even in form, by heathen teachers.

The gentle virtues of Alexander were unequal to cope with the difficulties of the Empire. He was at length murdered by the barbarian soldier Maximinus, on whom he had heaped the highest honours which he could bestow. This revolution interrupted for a short time the long peace of the Christians. By a savage instinct the Thracian emperor thought that he could recognise his natural enemies in those whom Alexander had favoured or trusted; and he directed that "the leaders of the Churches—that is the clergy—as being responsible for the teaching of the Gospel, should be put to death (ἀναιρεῖσθαι)." But this persecution was confined in scope, and not carried out to the utmost severity, even within the limits prescribed. In some parts of the Empire, as North Africa, the Christians were left undisturbed. In others, as Cappadocia and Pontus, the hostility of Maximinus encouraged the people and provincial governors to open fresh attacks upon them. Asia Minor was visited by frequent and violent earthquakes, and the Christians again became the victims of the popular terror. But still, even then the persecution was local and not general, and those against whom it was directed were able to obtain safety by flight. In fact Origen is said to have composed his tract on *Martyrdom* while living in retirement at the time with Firmilian in Cappadocia; and one trait of the persecution which he has preserved appears to have been

*H.E.* vi. 28.

*Ep. Firmil.* (lxxv. *Epp. Cypr.*) § 10.

*Cf. H.E.* vi. 28, 27.

derived from his experience there. "The churches," he says, "were burnt," so openly were the Christian congregations now able to assemble. *Comm. in Mat.* 28 § 39.

The short and partial outbreak under Maximinus was followed by a peace of ten years (238-249). During the last five years of this period the throne was occupied by Philip the Arabian, an adventurer from Trachonitis, whom tradition has represented as a Christian. Eusebius has preserved the legend in a most picturesque form. "The Emperor," it is said, "on the last vigil of Easter—the most solemn time, that is, of the eve of Easter day—wished to join with the congregation in the prayers held in the church [at Antioch according to later notices]. But [Babylas] the bishop at the time would not allow him to enter before he had confessed and classed himself with those reckoned as in transgression, and occupying a place [in the church set apart for those still in a state] of penitence. This was the only condition on which he could be received owing to the many charges brought against his life. He is reported," the narration continues, "to have obeyed cheerfully, showing practically the sincere piety of his disposition towards the fear of God." *H.E.* vi. 34.

Dionysius appears to allude to this strange tradition as current even in his time; nor is it difficult to see the cause which may have given rise to it. Philip, like Alexander, was as an Arab attached to a patriarchal monotheism. This alone would lead him to regard Christians with favour. It is even possible that he may have been present *H.E.* vii. 10.

in the East at some Christian service. He certainly held intercourse with Christians. A letter of Origen addressed to him, and another addressed to his wife Severa, were extant in the time of Eusebius. But these considerations which serve to explain the legend lend no support to the literal truth of it. Origen's *Reply to Celsus* was written during the reign of Philip, and he constantly speaks of the settled tranquillity which Christians were allowed to enjoy, but nothing indicates that he believed that he was living under a Christian emperor.

*H.E.* vi. 36.

This great work of Origen evidently marks a crisis in the history of the Church. It gathers up the fruits of the two first victories of Christianity and indicates the approach of the last conflict. Life had been conquered; thought had been won; the government of the Empire yet remained. Origen could acknowledge gratefully the rapid increase of the faith which now numbered among its adherents "men of wealth and distinction," and "had at last obtained open toleration (*παρρησία*)," but he feels, with something of a prophetic instinct, that the time of trial was not yet over. Hitherto "few only, and those very easily counted, had died for their religion at various crises," that the Church might not be annihilated in its infancy; but as persecution had ceased, so also the security which had followed might in turn be brought to an end, if the enemies of the gospel succeeded in persuading the people that the disorder by which the Empire was troubled, was due to the

*c. Cels.* iii. 9.
*c. Cels.* vii. 26.
*c. Cels.* iii. 8.

multitude of the Christians, who were no longer persecuted as in former times.

Origen lived to see his anticipations fulfilled. The successor of Philip was Decius Trajanus, who set on foot the first systematic persecution of the Christians, and in torture and in imprisonment Origen was able to prove the truth of his own words: "Our confidence is in Him who said, 'Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.' And truly He hath overcome the world. For this reason, as far as He who conquered it willeth, who received from the Father the power to conquer the world, we are confident in this victory. But if He willeth us again to contend and struggle for our religion, let our adversaries come and we will say to them: I can do all things in Him that strengtheneth me, Christ Jesus our Lord. For when two sparrows are sold, in the language of Scripture, for a farthing, one does not fall into a snare without our Father in heaven."

*H.E.* vi. 39.

*c. Cels.* viii. 70.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE DECIAN PERSECUTION. CHRISTIAN MARTYRDOM

THE strange Eastern episode in the history of the Empire was terminated by the accession of Decius, to whom the legions of Maesia offered the choice between the Empire and death. Decius was a senator and a citizen of the old Roman type. He claimed descent, it is said, from the heroes of the republic whose name he bore, though he was born in Pannonia, and his object during his short and troubled reign (249-251) was to bring back, if it might be, the old virtues of the State and check the ruin which menaced it. One memorable design symbolises the character of his policy. Since the time of Titus the office of the censor had fallen into abeyance. Decius endeavoured to revive it. The choice of the senate, to whom the election was entrusted, fell upon Valerianus, who was afterwards called to the throne, and the emperor conveyed the charge to him in words which show how keenly he felt the disorganization of the Empire, and how readily he consented to abridge his own power for the restoration of order.

Treb. Pollio, *Val.* cc. 5, 6.

Valerianus, however, declined the dangerous and impracticable duties, and Decius was defeated and slain by the Goths before he could carry out his schemes of reform.

The Christians naturally arrested the attention of such a reformer as Decius. If they had been generally spared during the period of disgraceful decay which had followed the death of M. Aurelius, and had in some places openly degenerated by the enjoyment of toleration, it might seem to a Roman politician that their spread was one of the causes of the national decline. The tacit relaxation of the law in their favour might be regarded as a dangerous example of the dissolution of the ancient discipline of the State. Thus there is probably no great exaggeration in the phrase which describes him as "beginning at once upon his accession to vent his fury against God, as though he had been raised to the seat of power for that very end." The form of the edict which he issued is not known, but it appears from the contemporary notice of Dionysius of Alexandria that it imposed upon all the necessity of sacrificing under the penalty of death or exile. The decree was enforced at Rome, in North Africa, in Asia Minor, in Egypt. Many apostatised, many evaded the test by subterfuges, some escaped by the compassion of their judges. The letters of Dionysius have preserved a singularly vivid picture of the persecution at Alexandria, every trait of which seems to have been drawn from life, and the record is the more important because he places in close

*Cf.* Cypr. *Epp.* 7 § 4. *De lapsis*, 5.

*De Mort. Persec.* 4.

*H.E.* vi. 41 *ff.*

connection with the execution of the imperial decree a parallel picture of an outbreak of popular fanaticism at Alexandria by which the Christians had suffered in the former year. The contrast between the effects of unauthorised violence and the action of legal persecution is most striking. What was before occasional, irregular, partial, becomes systematic and universal. We can see, as Dionysius paints them, the motley crowds who fell within the scope of the edict. Here poor wretches crept to the altars, pale and trembling, more like victims than worshippers; there bold renegades tried to prove their former innocence by reckless indifference. Some fled; some were captured. The deserts and the mountains were filled with fugitives, who perished by famine and cold and wild beasts and robbers. And not a few maidens and soldiers gloried in the witness of a triumphant death which they were allowed to render to Christ.

The splendid deeds of the martyrs appeal so powerfully to the imagination that it is probable that we exaggerate the number of those who died in the persecutions which we have examined. The language of the Apologists, who necessarily generalised from individual cases, is calculated at first sight to mislead. Tertullian, for example, dwells with noble enthusiasm on the constancy of Christians. He knew the endurance of which they were capable, and the perils to which they were exposed. But it is remarkable that even he only mentions by name two martyrs, one of

them, Perpetua, who had died in Africa in his own time. These, no doubt, as we know in the case of Perpetua, had companions in their trial, but it appears from the language of Cyprian that no great number of Christians had fallen in Africa before the time of Decius. And Origen, who was not likely to err from want of information or want of sympathy, says that up to the time of Philip those who had actually "died for their religion were few and very easily to be counted"; and the most exact accounts which have been preserved go to establish the truth of his statement. Pliny says that "the number of those in peril" led him to consult Trajan as to the course which he should follow. It is not, therefore, likely that he had already condemned many to death; and the tenour of the emperor's rescript at least discouraged informers. In the persecution in which Polycarp suffered less than twenty fellow-martyrs are enumerated. The attack upon the Christians at Lyons was unusually violent, and yet it does not appear that a very considerable body of the accused were put to death. Once or twice small bands of six or eight confessors are commemorated by name together as sealing their faith by their blood. But there is no evidence to justify the belief, which is expressed in later legends and has since found favour, that hundreds or even thousands of believers were massacred in systematic assaults made upon the Church.

*De An.* 55.

*c. Cels.* iii. 8.

But the number of those who died for Christ offers no measure of the sufferings of Christians,

or of the effect produced by their constancy. Exile, labour, stripes, imprisonment, torture were freely inflicted by governors who shrank from the last punishment of death. The cruel violence of a mob could outrage its victims without killing them. And there were other agonies to which believers were daily exposed, more terrible than any which governor or mob could invent: the loss of all that was dearest in their former life; the reproaches of parent, or husband, or brother; the suspicions which destroyed all confidence; the estrangement which cancelled all ties. If we may venture to judge, the keenest pang which Perpetua was called to bear was when she was constrained to hear unmoved the supplications
*Mart.* 5. of her aged father, who entreated her to spare his grey hairs the open disgrace of her shameful death.

And so again if only one martyr had died for the sake of the risen Christ, he would have proclaimed to the world a new and ineffaceable fact. Men have been found ready at all times to face death in maintenance of their opinions, for truth, as they held it, for their friends, for their country; but the Christian died for One in whom he believed without seeing, whom he carried in his breast; he died, not as defying all the power of his antagonist, but as conquering and transforming all that was of the earth; he died, not as rising above the visible order in the serene solitude of his own soul, but as linking the seen to the unseen in the assured communion with his Lord,

"who stood by him in his hour of agony and held converse with him." *Mart. Pol.* 2.

In this connection there is one aspect of martyrdom which requires careful attention. Martyrdom is commonly spoken of as a "second baptism," a "baptism by blood" or "by fire." Not only was it supposed to supply the defect of the "baptism by water," but also to renew the full blessing of that sacramental union with Christ which had been impaired by later transgressions.[1] "This," it was said, "was the baptism with which Christ was baptized, and that a baptism far more august than all others, inasmuch as it is defiled by no second stains." Greg. Naz. xxxix. "The baptism of blood," Origen writes, "is the only thing which can make us purer than the baptism of water made us. . . . Few are so blessed as to be able to keep that unstained to the end of life. But he who has been baptized with this baptism can sin no more. And if it is not rash to venture on any statement in such matters, we can say that by that baptism past sins are cleansed, by this future sins are done away with. In the former case sins are forgiven, in the latter they are made impossible." *Hom. in Jud.* 7. "Even though one still a catechumen [and so unbaptized be called to death] let him depart without sorrow," it is said in another place, "for the suffering for Christ will be to him a more real baptism, for he dies with the Lord actually (τῇ πειρᾷ), while all beside die in a figure." *Const. Ap.* v. 6. "Whoever have suffered for the name of the Lord," writes Hermas, "are iii. 9, § 28.

[1] *Cf.* Tertullian, *De Bapt.* 16 (water and blood), *Scorpiace*, c. 12.

held in honour with God, and all their offences are blotted out, because they have died for the son of God." When the crowd saw Saturus, one of the companions of Perpetua, covered with blood at the first attack of the leopard, they cried out, "Washed and saved, washed and saved (*salvum lotum*)," unconsciously describing, as the narrator thought, this all-prevailing baptism. The extravagant language of Tertullian, who speaks of a plenary forgiveness obtained at the cost of life, has been already quoted; and Cyprian's words are hardly less startling. "The blood of martyrs," he says, "was fit to quench the burning of persecution and abate the flames and fires of hell." "Precious is that death which buys immortality at the price of blood, which receives a crown from the consummation of virtue." "It is one thing," he writes again, "to be purified by enduring protracted suffering for sins and to undergo a long cleansing by fire, and another once for all to cleanse every sin by a martyr's death (*passione*): it is one thing to await anxiously for the verdict of the Lord in the day of judgment, another to be crowned by the Lord at once." Or, as he sums up these different thoughts in another passage: "This baptism [of blood] is in grace greater, in power more sublime, in honour more precious [than the baptism of water]; it is a baptism in which angels baptize, a baptism in which God and His Christ exult, a baptism after which no one any longer sins, a baptism which completes the growth of our faith, a baptism which

*Mart.* 21.

*Ep.* viii.

*Ibid.*

*Ep.* lii. § 20.

Cypr. *Exh. ad Mart.* Praef. 4.

at once unites us to God on our withdrawal from the world. In the baptism of water we receive remission of sins; in that of blood a crown of virtues."

In this way special prerogatives were assigned to the martyrs. It was supposed that they passed at once into the immediate fruition of perfect glory. Their prayers were considered to have an unfailing efficacy. The consummation of the age and the advent of the kingdom of God were believed to be in some way dependent upon their sufferings. They shared the throne of Christ, and joined with Him in judgment. And yet more than this, in some sense their work was regarded as mediatorial; and though this aspect of it is foreign to our modes of thought, still, if it be rightly viewed, it reflects light upon some mysterious passages of the Apostolic writings, and brings out vividly the truth which I have ventured to call the central characteristic of our faith, the union of the believer with the risen Christ.

Tert. *de An.* 55.

Cypr. *Ep.* xv. 4.

Euseb. *H.E.* vi. 42.

One or two quotations from Origen will adequately express the idea to which I refer. "Let us remember that . . . it is not [possible] to receive remission of sins without baptism, and that it is not possible, according to the laws of the Gospel, to receive baptism for remission of sins with water and spirit a second time; and that the baptism of martyrdom has been given us . . . and consider whether the baptism of martyrdom itself also being made pure, proves for the

*Exhort. ad Mart.* (§ 30).

healing of many, as that of the Saviour proved for the purifying of the world. For as the priests, according to the law of Moses, waiting upon the altar, seemed to minister remission of sins through the blood of bulls and goats to the Jews, so the souls of those who have been slain (πεπελεκισμένων) for the testimony of Jesus, waiting not in vain upon the altar in heaven, minister remission of sins to those who pray. At the same time, also, we observe that as the High Priest Jesus the Christ offered Himself as a sacrifice, so the priests of whom He is High Priest offer themselves as a sacrifice, and owing to this they are seen by the altar as by a place with which they are properly connected. . . . And who is the faultless priest offering a faultless victim, but he who holds fast his confession and filleth up the whole number which the tale of martyrdom demands." The cessation of persecution he ascribes in another place to the devices of the devil, who "knew that by the suffering of martyrdom remission of sins was wrought"; and so he expresses a fear "lest from the time when martyrs ceased to be made, and the sacrifices (*hostiae*) of saints to be offered up for the sins of Christians, they should not earn remission of sins." And again, in another place, he argues that "perhaps, as we were bought by the precious blood of Jesus, who received a name that is above every name, so by the precious blood of the martyrs some shall be bought, and the martyrs themselves shall be exalted higher than they would have been exalted if

*Hom. in Num.* 10.

*Exhort. ad Mart.* § 50.

they had proved themselves just men but had not suffered martyrdom."[1]

Such words as these are at first startling, till we recall what St. Paul teaches when he speaks of "filling up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in His flesh for His body's sake, which is the Church." What is the essential meaning of the phrases which underlie all the exhortations of the preacher, "in Christ," "not I, but Christ in me"? what is the assured promise to believers in the Lord's High Priestly prayer? And then we come to realise how the agony of the martyr is truly Christ's agony, and partakes the virtue of His presence. It becomes more than a figure when we read that Blandina, "the mean and feeble and contemptible slave, put on the great and invincible champion, even Christ," in her hour of trial; that "Christ suffered in Sanctus, and achieved great deeds of glory"; that Felicitas, when her gaoler compared her travail pains with the coming pains of martyrdom, replied, "Now it is I that suffer what I suffer, then there will be another in me who will suffer for me, because I also shall suffer for Him"; that Cyprian pleads, "He who once conquered death *for* us, conquers it always *in* us. . . . He is not simply the spectator of our conflict. It is He who wrestles in us; He wages our battles; in the conflict of our strife it is He who gives the crown and He who receives it."

Col. i. 24. Cf. *Exhort. ad Mart.* § 36.

Gal. ii. 20.

*H.E.* v. 1 § 37.

*H.E.* v. 1 § 19.

*Mart.* § 15.

*Ep.* 8.

It is impossible to read such narratives as

[1] Cf. *Hom. in Num.* 24, Christ the Lamb, other saints and martyrs, calves, goats, etc.

those on which we have dwelt without feeling something of the spirit which the scenes described must have produced in those who witnessed them. There is a constraining power of attraction in the spectacle of humanity triumphing over the seen by communion with the unseen, which inspires humble and devout souls with a longing for such a sensible victory over the wearisome monotony of common temptations, and which moves even those which are less noble and less pure. The spiritual benefits of "the baptism of blood" were acknowledged to be so overwhelming and certain, when it was sustained in fellowship with the Church, that they might seem to be cheaply purchased by the brief space of agony which was required to secure them. The temporal honours which awaited the confessors—the visits of the faithful, who even kissed their chains, the deference of their fellow-believers, the supplications of the fallen for their availing intercession, the claim which they established to authority if they escaped death, the solemn commemoration of their truer "birthday" if they sealed their confession with their blood—might more than satisfy the cravings of ambition. It is not, therefore, surprising that many were carried away by the desire to mount the fiery chariot of the martyr who could not bear its consuming glory; that many were over-hasty to seize what they regarded as a passport to eternal happiness; that many disparaged the humble and silent offices of a life half-hidden in comparison with the splendid daring of a death

Cf. *Poly. Mart.*

Tert. *ad ux.* ii. 4.

Cypr. *Ep.* 21.

openly courted and bravely borne. There are shadows even in these bright pictures of Christian heroism which we must not disguise. On this last stage the Gospel exerted its inherent power to try and to reveal the manifold thoughts of men, when the sword pierced the hearts of the most tender and the truest.

Two characteristic anecdotes have been preserved which place this revealing power of martyrdom vividly before us. Among those whose daring provoked the mob to demand the death of Polycarp was one Quintus, a Phrygian. He had constrained others to join him in offering themselves voluntarily for execution. His companions seem to have supported the trial, but he turned coward when he saw the beasts, and yielded to the entreaties of the Proconsul, who urgently begged him to swear and offer sacrifice. "Therefore, brethren," the writer concludes, "we do not praise those who come forward of their own accord. It is not so the Gospel teaches us." To this scene Tertullian has drawn the reverse. There was, he says, one Rutilius, "who had frequently avoided persecution" by fleeing from place to place, "and he had even, as he thought, purchased security from danger. Unexpectedly, however, in spite of the precautions by which he had provided for his safety, he was apprehended, brought before the governor, mangled by torture ('as a chastisement of his flight, I believe,' Tertullian adds), and then consigned to the flames. And so he owed to the mercy of God the passion which

*Poly. Mart.* 4.

*De fug.* 5.

he had avoided." Having thus related the story, Tertullian, who was a Montanist at the time, draws from it the moral which it seemed to him to teach, "What else did the Lord wish to prove to us by this lesson than that we ought not to flee, because flight is of no avail against the will of God." We, perhaps, shall interpret the incident differently, and rejoice to learn that the spirit of martyrs was active in many who, from humility, from prudence, from self-distrust, from regard for others, from yielding tenderness, shrank from claiming the conflict and the palm.

And if we allow that we are unable to sit in judgment on those who avoided the occasions of perilous confession, we shall be no less unwilling to condemn individually those who snatched too eagerly the crown which was within their reach. If Alexander at Lyons, and the little knot of soldiers at Alexandria, so showed their sympathy with their brethren upon trial as to attract the attention of the court; if "all the Christians of the district" offered themselves in a body to Arrius Antoninus to share the death which he designed for some; if Lucian indignantly protested against the condemnation of Ptolemaeus, and thanked the magistrate who commanded that he should share his fate; if Apollonia, when left free, sprang into the flames from which she was supposed to shrink—we may be content to allow these and other similar cases to stand out in opposition to the calm judgment of the Church. That which would be perilous if done by pre-

*H.E.* 5, i. 45.
*H.E.* vi. 41, 20.
*ad Scap.* 5.
*H.E.* iv. 17.
*H.E.* vi. 41, 86.

meditation or acknowledged as a precedent, may claim admiration as an expression of a generous and exceptional enthusiasm wholly unlikely to disturb the common laws of life.

*Cf.* Thom. Aq. *Summa*, ii. 2, 124, 1, 2.

But while it is easy to justify our involuntary admiration for the personal self-sacrifice of martyrs, it is not easy to extend a corresponding indulgence to the exaggerated language of men like Tertullian, who unconsciously laboured to degrade Christianity as a life while they dwelt upon the glories of martyrdom. To quote one example only: Nothing can be more false than the view which Tertullian gives to the heathen of the attitude of Christians in times of public calamity. "All the blows by which the world is visited come from God, for our warning, I may allow, but for your chastisement. Nay, more, we are in no wise hurt by them; firstly, because we have no concern in this life (*aevo*), but leave it as soon as possible; and next, because, if we have any trouble, it is due to your deserts." If such a view were true, the worst calumnies of the enemies of Christianity would be true too. But the Catholic Church never gave sanction to the opinion that the world must be abandoned and not won; that life must be destroyed and not transfigured. Martyrdom, if we have interpreted it rightly—Christian martyrdom—is not the despairing renunciation of the visible world, but the declaration of victorious faith, that under that which is seen there is that abiding which is unseen, in that which is temporal there is a presence which is eternal.

*Ap.* 41.

# CHAPTER VIII[1]

## BRIEF HISTORICAL SKETCH A.D. 251-308

THE persecution of Decius was happily of short duration. Decius was a soldier, and for practically the whole of his brief reign of thirty months he was engaged in warfare with the Goths, and was slain by them in battle towards the end of the year 251. His death brought a brief period of peace to the Church, but after a few months the persecution was renewed by his successor Gallus, who ordered sacrifices to be offered throughout the empire to Apollo Salutaris on account of the prevalence of a dire pestilence. The Christians could not sacrifice, and suffered accordingly.

The reign of Gallus was a brief one (251-254), and Valerian, who succeeded him, was at first favourably disposed towards the Christians, having many of them about his person and court, and, when eventually he was persuaded to take measures against them, he wished to adopt a

[1] This chapter is not written by Bishop Westcott, being merely a brief historical sketch of the relations of the Church and the Roman Empire from the time of the persecution of Decius to the Edict of Galerius.

bloodless policy. His first edict forbade the assembly of congregations and the performance of public worship, and banished the bishops. But this edict was ineffective, because the bishops were able to keep in touch with their flocks by means of letters, and found opportunity in their exile to devote themselves to missionary work. So in the following year (258) Valerian issued a second edict of great severity. This edict, which has been preserved in one of the last letters of Cyprian, orders all bishops, presbyters, *Ep.* 82. and deacons to be put immediately to the sword; senators and magistrates to be deprived of their rank and property, and if they still refuse to apostatise, to be put to death; women of rank to lose their property and be banished; members of Caesar's household who were or had been Christians to work in chains as the Emperor's slaves. This edict is remarkable as being the first which fixed statutable penalties for different classes of Christians, and as leaving the poorer classes untouched. Cyprian of Carthage suffered under this edict, and received his sentence with the words, "God be thanked."

Valerian having been taken prisoner, probably at the close of the year 260, while warring with the Persians, Gallienus, his son, who had previously been associated with him in the government, became sole sovereign of Rome. Gallienus appears to have been a man of weak character and deficient in moral earnestness. The empire had during the past years suffered severely

from war, famine, and pestilence, and needed a strong ruler to avert general anarchy and dissolution. That general ruin which Gallienus lacked power to avert was warded off by the various soldiers and able officials, who in different parts of the empire fought the empire's battles and established their own authority. These are the rulers whose biographies Trebellius Pollio wrote and called *The Thirty Tyrants*.[1] Gallienus needed to devote all the time which he could spare from his pleasures to contending with these Thirty Tyrants, so he lacked opportunity as well as energy for the work of a persecutor of the Church.

In 261 he issued an edict, unhappily lost, which was so favourable to Christianity that it is generally regarded as making it a *religio licita*. Eusebius merely says that Gallienus "stopped the persecution and ordered that the ministers of the word should perform their customary duties with freedom" (*ἐπ' ἐλευθερίας τοῖς τοῦ λόγου προεστῶσι τὰ ἐξ ἔθους ἐπιτελεῖν δι' ἀντιγραφῆς προστάξας*). But he has also preserved a rescript of Gallienus addressed to "Dionysius, Pinnas, Demetrius, and the other bishops" (*τοῖς λοιποῖς ἐπισκόποις*), telling them that the pagan officials have orders to evacuate "the consecrated places" (*τόπων τῶν θρησκευσίμων*) and that the rescript will be their warrant to occupy the same without molestation. It is

*H.E.* vii. 13.

[1] They were, in fact, nineteen in number. The most distinguished of them were Odenathus, whom Gallienus recognised as a colleague, and Aureolus, who was eventually defeated by the Emperor Claudius, and slain in the battle.

interesting to notice that the Emperor here officially recognises the Christian bishops, with whose title he appears to be familiar. He recognises also their right to hold property, which they could hardly have done unless Christianity were a *religio licita.* For forty-five years from the date of this edict the Church had peace. This peace, it is true, was threatened by Aurelian, who had actually signed an edict against the Christians, when his assassination prevented its publication (275).

Aurelian's reign is memorable as offering the first instance of an ecclesiastical appeal to the civil power. The appeal came from Antioch, where Paul of Samosata, who had been deposed for heresy by an episcopal synod, refused to vacate the bishop's residence. Paul was supported by Zenobia, and remained in possession until the Queen of Palmyra was conquered by Aurelian. When Aurelian became master of Antioch the orthodox party appealed to him for a settlement of this question of property. The Emperor ruled that the house should belong to that party which the bishops of Italy and Rome recognised. Another interesting incident of the reign of Aurelian is his reproof of the Roman senate for their dilatoriness in consulting the Sibylline books. He accuses them of acting as if they were met in a Christian church instead of in the temple of the gods. From these two incidents we may infer that Christianity really was a *religio licita* at this time; that its churches

Euseb. *H.E.* viii. 27 *ff.*

Vopiscus, *Vit. Aurel.* 20.

were large and conspicuous, and that, in all probability, a considerable number of the senators of Rome were Christians.

During this "Peace of Gallienus" the Church was enabled to restore its discipline and to heal the wounds inflicted by the grievous persecutions by which it had been tried. The old churches were restored and new buildings of greater size and splendour erected. During these years of peace the Church continued to grow in numbers and influence until the last great storm burst over it in the closing years of the Emperor Diocletian.

Diocletian[1] was a man of humble, even of servile origin, who, having entered the army and served with distinction under the Emperors Probus, Aurelian, Carus, and Numerianus, had attained to the rank of commander of the palace guard. After the murder of Numerianus by Arrius Afer, the prefect of the Praetorians, Diocletian was nominated Emperor by the army at Chalcedon, and with his own hand slew Afer, thereby ridding himself of a dangerous rival, and also perhaps sealing the lips of an accomplice. He was subsequently enthroned as Emperor at Nicomedia. These events happened in the year 284, memorable henceforth as the Era of Diocletian or the Era of Martyrs.

Diocletian signalized his rule by a complete

[1] Diocles was the Emperor's original appellation, but he amplified this simple name on his accession into the more high-sounding Diocletianus, adding to it also the patrician name of Valerius.

reorganization of the Roman Empire. He had reason to appreciate the insecurity of the peace of the world and its ruler, when a military plot or the assassin's dagger could in a moment strike down a sole sovereign. His first measure, therefore, was to choose a colleague, Maximian, to whom he assigned the western portion of the Empire, retaining the Eastern division for himself. A.D. 286. A few years later he completed his scheme of partition by the appointment of two subordinate rulers with the title of Caesar for East and West. A.D. 293. Constantius Chlorus was proclaimed Caesar of the West, having Britain, Gaul, and Spain assigned to him, and Galerius the Eastern Caesar, with the charge of Illyricum and the line of the Danube. With a view to strengthening this fourfold sovereignty Diocletian insisted on the four rulers being connected by matrimonial alliances. Diocletian was, in fact, the founder of a new Roman Empire, and to further obliterate the old associations of the former *régime* he degraded Rome from its predominating position as capital of the world. His own capital was Nicomedia, and the three capitals selected for the other three divisions of the Empire were Milan, Sirmium, and Augusta Trevirorum (Tréves). Rome and the Praetorian Guard were thus deprived of the power of making and unmaking Emperors.

For some twenty years Diocletian's reign was prosperous and crowned with victory, in so much that he and his colleague Maximian went to

Rome in the year 302 to celebrate a Triumph—a rare event in those days. During all these years Diocletian had laid no hand upon the Church; indeed, the army and the court were filled with Christians, so that if he did not actually favour the faith, he at any rate knew its power and was little minded to embark upon a dangerous conflict with it. But the sinister influence of Galerius, a convinced enemy of the Church, was brought to bear upon Diocletian with such effect that the waning years of the Emperor's rule have obliterated with their horrors the memory of the long years of his successful and, so far as the Christians were concerned, peaceful reign.

The trouble began in the army. Galerius had long been offended because Christian officers would not attend his mother's sacrificial banquets, but other cases arose which seemed to strike at the root of military discipline. At Teveste in Numidia a young man, named Maximilian, declined to serve in the army, because he was a Christian; and at Tingis (Tangiers) in Mauretania, a centurion named Marcellus threw down his staff and belt and renounced the standards and military service rather than share in the sacrifices which his legion were celebrating in honour of the Caesar. Such cases as these would no doubt drive Galerius to the conclusion that discipline in the army would be at an end if Christians were to decline to serve, or to repudiate the service on religious grounds.

Whatever may have been Diocletian's religious

views,[1] he had at any rate a profound belief in omens. On one occasion, when a number of Christian officers of the court were present, having satisfied their consciences by signing themselves with the cross, the diviners declared that they could not find what they had expected to find in the entrails of the victim. Again and again they sacrificed victims, but without success. At last the chief diviner declared that they could get no response because of the presence of profane persons.[2] This pronouncement greatly enraged Diocletian, who at once ordered all the officials of his palace to offer sacrifice under penalty of scourging. The same order was sent to the officers of the army, but the Emperor would not consent to any stronger measures until having consulted the oracle of Apollo at Branchidae near Miletus he received the answer that the oracle could not speak the truth because of the presence of Christians on the earth. After this Diocletian

[1] Diocletian on his accession assumed the name of Jovius and bestowed that of Herculeus upon his colleague Maximian. This may have been intended to assert his determination to support the worship of the old gods. Yet besides his apparent leaning towards the cult of the Sun, he is said also to have restored temples of Isis, Serapis, and Mithras; so that he was decidedly broad in his religious views, and not inclined to be a persecutor, for any but political reasons.

[2] "Ut erat (sc. Diocletianus) pro timore scrutator rerum futurarum, immolabat pecudes, et in jecoribus earum ventura quaerebat. Tum quidam ministrorum, scientes Dominum, cum adsisterent immolanti, imposuerunt frontibus suis immortale signum. Quo facto, fugatis demonibus, sacra turbata sunt. Trepidabant aruspices, nec solitas in extis notas videbant; et quasi non litassent, saepius immolabant. Verum identidem mactatae hostiae nihil ostendebant, donec magister ille aruspicum, Tagis, seu suspicione, seu visu, ait idcirco non respondere sacra, quod rebus divinis profani homines interessent." Lactantius *de M.P.* x.

could hesitate no longer, though he still urged that there should be no shedding of blood.

The Festival of the *Terminalia* was selected for the opening of the persecution of the Christians, that the aid of the god Terminus might be enlisted in making an end of the Christians. On February 23, in the year 303, the great Christian Church at Nicomedia was entered by soldiers, pillaged, burnt, and finally razed to the ground. On the following day the edict of persecution was published. It was ordered that all churches should be demolished; all sacred books be burnt;[1] all Christian officials be deprived of their dignities, and of their civil rights, and Christian freemen be reduced to slavery.[2]

In Nicomedia itself the edict was torn to shreds by a zealous Christian, who was tortured and burnt alive at a slow fire for his reward. It was a foolish act, for such treatment of an imperial edict was clearly treasonable, and

[1] This attempt to destroy all the records of the Faith has left its mark for all time upon the text of Scripture. Those Christians who surrendered Scriptures to the inquisitors were called *Traditores*. The treatment of *traditores* after the persecution had passed proved as anxious a matter as the treatment of the *lapsi* and *libellatici* of the earlier persecutions.

[2] Eusebius summarises the two first edicts as follows:

First Edict—

*τὰς μὲν ἐκκλησίας εἰς ἔδαφος φέρειν, τὰς δὲ γραφὰς ἀφανεῖς πυρὶ γενέσθαι προστάττοντα, καὶ τοὺς μὲν τιμῆς ἐπειλημμένους, ἀτίμους, τοὺς δὲ ἐν οἰκετίαις, εἰ ἐπιμένοιεν τῇ τοῦ Χριστιανισμοῦ προθέσει, ἐλευθερίας στερεῖσθαι προαγορεύοντα.*

Second Edict—

*τοὺς τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν προέδρους πάντας τοὺς κατὰ πάντα τόπον πρῶτα μὲν δεσμοῖς παραδίδοσθαι, εἶθ' ὕστερον πάσῃ μηχανῇ θύειν ἐξαναγκάζεσθαι.* Euseb. *H.E.* viii. 2.

indicates how hopeless was Diocletian's endeavour to prevent bloodshed. The Emperor was himself compelled by such an act to greater zeal in persecution, and was further stimulated by two fires which broke out in his Palace, which were attributed, no doubt according to the intention of their authors, to a like Christian fanaticism. The Emperor was thus thoroughly alarmed, and even compelled his own wife and daughter to sacrifice, in addition to the trusted members of his household.

The first edict was quickly followed by a second, ordering the arrest and imprisonment of all the clergy without the option of sacrifice.

Diocletian, in the November of this memorable year, paid a second visit to Rome to celebrate his *Vicennalia*, intending to remain there until January for investment with the consulship. But he curtailed his visit because he was little pleased with the manners of the Romans. It was part of his policy, in assuming the diadem and surrounding himself with semi-oriental state, to keep himself apart in magnificent isolation, and the easy freedom of the citizens of the ancient capital was repugnant to him. He therefore decided to enter on his consulship at Ravenna.

But the *Vicennalia* of Diocletian gave occasion for a third edict of persecution. On such joyful occasions it was customary to release prisoners, so now with cunning malice Christian clergy were promised their liberty if they would sacrifice; but they were to be subjected to torture if they refused.

The result of this proclamation was most painful, for many of the imprisoned clergy, unable to endure any further suffering, offered sacrifice, either before or after torture.

On his way from Rome to Ravenna in rain and cold Diocletian fell ill, and did not pursue his journey until the following summer, reaching Nicomedia at length in such case that his death and even burial was noised abroad. He partially recovered however, and showed himself in public.

A fourth edict of persecution was published in Diocletian's name after his return to Nicomedia in 304. This last edict was of unexampled severity, for it required every Christian to sacrifice or die. Whether Diocletian really was a party to this cruel edict must be uncertain. He was at this time completely broken in health, and when Galerius urged him to resign, as it was part of his new scheme of government that the Augusti should not hold office for more than twenty years, he consented to abdicate, and his colleague Maximian was reluctantly persuaded to do the same. So Galerius and Constantius now became Augusti, and the title and office of Caesar was bestowed upon Severus and Maximinus.

The persecution of Diocletian raged with very unequal severity in the different divisions of the Empire. So far, Diocletian had done a service to the Church. In the extreme west where Constantius held sway some Christian buildings were destroyed, but few living beings were called upon to suffer. Galerius the instigator of the

persecution was its most zealous promoter, and Diocletian having completely surrendered to Galerius, the persecution reigned with fury throughout the East. Maximian too being of a cruel nature was pleased to seize this opportunity for indulging his ignoble lust for blood, so that Lactantius says, "The whole earth was afflicted, and except the Gauls from East to West three most savage beasts continued to rage."[1]

While Diocletian in his retirement found solace for his wounded spirit in planting cabbages, the able man who had already recognised the futility of persecution was growing in power, for, on the death of Constantius at York in 306, his son Constantine had been immediately proclaimed Augustus[2] by the army. Galerius was powerless to oppose this step, much as he disliked it, but he and Maximinus continued to persecute with unabated fury. In 308 they issued the fifth edict of this persecution (against the Manichaeans) and perpetrated such cruelties that popular feeling began to take the Christians' part, and so pronounced the failure of the persecuting policy.

[1] "Vexabatur ergo universa terra, et praeter Gallias, ab oriente usque ad occasum tres acerbissimae bestiae saeviebant."—Lact. *de M.P.* 16.

[2] Galerius recognised Constantine as Caesar only.

# CHAPTER IX

## THE TOLERATION EDICTS

THREE remarkable edicts, which have been happily preserved, signalise the three stages of the final triumph of Christianity over the old religious system of the Empire. Each one of these was invested with a strangely tragic interest; and it cannot be surprising if contemporary Christian writers saw in them manifest tokens of the direct action of God. The first edict, that of Galerius (311), was issued when the emperor was already stricken by the loathsome disease which very shortly afterwards proved fatal to him. The second edict, that of Milan (313), was contemporaneous with the death (probably by suicide) of the aged Diocletian, who was unwilling to attest the ruin of his own policy, and unable to resist or confide in the victorious Constantine. The third, that of Constantine himself (323), followed upon the final defeat of Licinius,[1] when the conqueror assumed the sovereignty of the East, and once again united in his own person the whole government of the Empire. In the

[1] On the death of Severus (307), Licinius was made Augustus.

first, toleration was conceded to Christianity; in the last, toleration was conceded to Paganism. In twelve years the old religion and the new had openly changed their places in relation to the State. No narrative can be more eloquent than the simple recital of these public monuments; no more complete revelation could be made of the new power which had silently grown up, first to share the throne of the Caesars, and then to occupy it. For from the first evil and good were mixed together in the temporal success of the Church. Perhaps we can hardly separate them. At least we must learn, by the teaching of this great example, through what chequered courses of events, what questionable schemes of policy, what imperfect men, God is pleased to work: we must learn how He makes His counsels known even through intrigue, and violence, and self-seeking; how at last they stand clear and immovable when that which was earthly and evil in the conditions of their first revelation has passed out of remembrance.

At each great crisis the same lesson is repeated —in the ninth century, in the thirteenth, in the sixteenth, in the eighteenth; and as we look back we can see that Christian truth has come out purer, fuller, stronger, from the conflict, advanced even by those who seemed to bring it into peril.

The edict of Galerius is a characteristic expression of the views of a Roman statesman on the office of religion. Maximinus and Maxentius[1]

Lact. *De Mort. Persec.* 34. Euseb. *H.E.* viii. 17.

[1] Maxentius was proclaimed Emperor at Rome (306), and maintained his position against the opposition of Severus and Galerius.

are passed over. It is directed, according to the address preserved in the translation of Eusebius, in the name of Galerius, Constantine, and Licinius, to the inhabitants of the several provinces. The translation is fairly exact. Rufinus, it may be observed, retranslated Eusebius, and did not insert the original Latin in his version of the history; but Eusebius and Lactantius agree in attributing its authorship to Galerius alone. The dying persecutor, writing from Nicomedia, the new capital of the East, frankly explains the motive of his persecution, and admits that it had failed. Then with a true Roman spirit he accepts the consequences; and his own terrible sufferings give something of pathos to the words in which he implies the civil necessity of worship, and pointedly asks for the prayers of the Christians. "We wished," he writes, "in accordance with our general design of furthering the interests of the commonwealth, to correct all [the evils of the State] in accordance with the old laws and the national constitution (*disciplina*) of the Romans, and to take measures for bringing back the Christians, who had abandoned the religion (*sectam*) of their fathers, to a right judgment." Their faith appeared to him both self-willed and foolish: self-willed, because it rested on a capricious neglect of traditional rites; foolish, because it affected to embrace different peoples in one body. Partial success had in some measure justified his policy; but he goes on to say, "Since a very large number persisted in the course, and we saw that they did not

either render to the gods the worship and service due to them, or give honour to (*observare*) the God of the Christians, in consideration of our most merciful clemency and with regard also to our constant custom of extending consideration to all men, we have believed that we ought to show our readiness in extending indulgence in their case also, by allowing them to profess themselves Christians again (*ut denuo sint Christiani*), and to form their congregations, provided only that nothing be done against the constitution.[1] In another letter we propose to indicate to the judges the course which they ought to observe. In conformity with this our indulgence it will be their duty to pray to their God for our well-being and for that of the commonwealth as well as for their own, that the commonwealth in all its parts may continue unharmed, and that they may live undisturbed in their homes."

Several points of interest present themselves in the interpretation of the edict. It expresses very clearly the ground on which a Roman emperor condemned the Christians. It lays down the imperial view of the relation between religion and the State. It limits the concessions made to the Christians by a general principle.

The ground of persecution lay in the essential character of Christianity. The Christians made laws for themselves at their own will; they refused to follow ancient institutions, even though their

[1] *Cf.* Ael. Lampr. *Elagab.* 3 "Dicebat praeterea Judaeorum et Samaritanorum religiones et Christianam devotionem illuc transferendam."

fathers had established them;[1] they aimed at uniting different nations, who would naturally have different modes of worship. Their faith was, to recur to the characteristics which we have noted before, personal, absolute, universal; and in these respects it was fundamentally opposed to the religious system of the Empire. A reformer who made "the ancient laws and the Roman constitution" the rule of his legislation could not but persecute. And this explains the seeming paradox that the best emperors were the fiercest persecutors. Diocletian proposed to himself Marcus Aurelius as a special object of divine adoration, and in this respect the words of Galerius show that in undertaking the persecution at last he imitated his policy. He sought deliberately to remove an element which was inconsistent with its principles.

Jul. Cap. *Vit. M. Ant. Phil.* 19.

A contemporary and corresponding document serves as a commentary upon the edict of Galerius. The emperor Maximin, probably from personal motives, did not attach his name to that edict; but he gave instructions to his officers to carry out the policy which it prescribed. These instruc-

[1] The interpretation of Keim (*Theol. Jahrb.* 1852, p. 213 ff.), who supposes that the *instituta veterum* represent the original form of Christianity, and that the object of Galerius was to check the schisms of the Christians and bring them back to their ancient unity, is wholly in opposition to the whole spirit of the persecution of Diocletian, and therefore of this edict which stayed it. He would not say that Catholic Christians were "of a right mind," according to the idea of the Roman Constitution. Another remarkable phrase, *quae forsitan primum parentes eorum constituerunt* would naturally refer to the local and domestic rites which formed a large part of the heathen worship. The Christian abandoned not only the national gods, but what seemed to a Roman perhaps more grievous, the *religiones* of his family.

tions were given in a letter addressed by Selinus, who stood highest in his service (*praefectus praetorii*), to the several provincial governors. The plan of the letter corresponds with that of the edicts of the three other emperors, and was evidently based upon it, but the letter has none of that strange personal craving for the help of religion which we have noticed in the language of Galerius. It is throughout cold, almost contemptuous, in its tone towards the Christians, and presents in its phraseology the boldest pretensions of the emperor to divine honour. It recounts the purpose of "the divine spirit of our most divine sovereign lords" to lead the followers of strange customs to render the due worship to the gods, which had been frustrated by the obstinacy of some who were inaccessible alike to reason and fear. Many had consequently brought themselves into peril, and it appeared impolitic to allow them any longer to be endangered for such a cause. If, therefore, any Christian were found to observe the worship of his own people—the clause is important—he was to be set free from all trouble on that account. The execution of the former decree was suspended.

*H.E.* ix. 1.

The death of Galerius followed within a few days of the publication of his edict, and opened new prospects to the genius of Constantine. He came to an understanding with Licinius, and the two emperors appear to have issued together the letter explanatory of the application of the edict of Galerius to the Christians. Greater events

soon followed. Early in 312, Constantine availed himself of a favourable opportunity to invade Italy. This measure was the decisive turning-point in his religious policy, as I hope to show at a later time; and he accepted the defeat and death of Maxentius as the divine ratification of his judgment in favour of that exalted monotheism which he recognised in Christianity. With the least possible delay he met Licinius at Milan, and there the allied emperors issued the second edict —the famous edict of Toleration—which superseded the edict of Galerius to which they had appended their names. The later history of the two princes leaves little doubt that the edict was the work of Constantine; and its language reveals what we may suppose to have been at the time his real feelings as to Christianity.

Galerius speaks as the representative of that which was passing away. Constantine speaks as the champion of a new power, which he could not fully understand even while he felt its vital energy. The principle of personal freedom in the choice of a religion is distinctly laid down. The rights of Christians are recognised not only from the immediate date, but retrospectively. It is affirmed that the privileges granted to Christians were not contrary to the imperial design for the reformation of the Empire, but an essential part of it.

Euseb. x. 5. *De Mort. Persec.* 48.

The opening of the decree offers a remarkable parallel in form, and a no less remarkable contrast in substance, with the edict of Galerius. "When we, Constantine and Licinius," so the words run,

"had happily met at Milan, and were engaged in discussing all the questions which affected the interests and security of the State, we believed that the following ordinances, among others which seemed likely to be for the general good, were specially necessary to be made, affecting the worship due to the Divine Power; namely, that we should grant both to Christians and to all, free power of following whatsoever form of religion they wished, in order that the Divine Power in heaven (*quicquid sit divinitatis in sede caelesti*) may be duly made propitious to us and to all who are set under our authority." All reference to ancestral obligations of worship is omitted. No usage is pleaded against personal conviction. No reserve is made which would furnish a malevolent magistrate with an excuse for oppression. The liberty for which the apologists had argued and the martyrs had died was at last granted. Something also was added in reparation of past wrongs. It was enacted that all the buildings, sites, and other possessions held by the Christian body (*corpus Christianorum*) should be at once and freely restored to them. The conference undertook themselves to make good the loss which might thus fall upon those who had either received or purchased church property. "In all these particulars," the emperors conclude, "we require the speedy fulfilment of our orders, that herein, through our clemency, we may provide for the public tranquillity. So it will come to pass that the divine favour towards us which we have experienced on

critical occasions will continue through all time to further our success and secure the happiness of the State."

We have seen that the first edict of the three emperors was followed by a separate edict of Maximin, which paraphrased its terms. The edict of Milan was followed by a corresponding document. Maximin knew that the defeat of Maxentius by Constantine was the signal for his own attack by Licinius, and he could not afford to have the Christians in his provinces discontented. He defends the course of his former policy. He grants fresh protection to Christians against the oppression of local governors. He speaks of winning them back by gentle measures. But his cause was lost, and within six months he died, if Lactantius may be trusted, defeated and a fugitive, by his own hand.[1]

Euseb. *H.E.* ix. 9.

[1] The texts in Lactantius (*De Mort. Persec.* 48) and Eusebius (*H.E.* x. 5) agree with tolerable exactness, though the Greek translation is often loose and inaccurate. Some points of difference, however, must be noticed:

1. The opening clause in Eusebius ἤδη μὲν πολλά—ἀνεκρούοντο is wanting in Lactantius. This clause is simply a preamble.

2. In § 5 the words ἅτινα πάνυ σκαιὰ καὶ τῆς ἡμετέρας πραότητος ἀλλότρια εἶναι ἐδόκει have no corresponding phrase in the Latin.

3. In § 4 the words *cujus religioni liberis mentibus obsequimur* have no corresponding words in the Greek.

4. In § 3 ἐν πολλοῖς ἅπασιν appears to be a combination and corruption of two readings: (1) πολλοῖς, (2) ἅπασιν. And in § 4 πράγματος is probably a corruption of τάγματος.

The chief difficulty has been raised about the rendering of αἱρέσεις which corresponds to *condiciones* in the Latin. But this is really of little moment: *condiciones* is certainly the original word: and in late Greek αἵρεσις is used in the sense of *condition*. Thus in spite of the occurrence of the word in a different sense (in § 2) the Latin must rule our interpretation of it. The rendering "sect," even if it could be reconciled with *condicio*, gives no tolerable sense.

It has been very commonly supposed that Constantine and Licinius

A comparison of the edict of Milan with the edict of Galerius brings out three important differences of principle between them, which mark the progress which had been made even in two years in estimating the political significance of Christianity. The later edict recognises not only the right of remaining a Christian, but also the right of becoming a Christian. In the next place it gives Christians absolute right to carry out according to their conscience the practice of their faith. And, once again, it treats the Christian churches as corporate societies.

The edict of Galerius gave no sanction to the propagation of Christianity. It extended no protection to fresh converts. The edict of Milan, on the other hand, places in its front the right of

issued an independent edict on the Christians prior to that known as the edict of Milan, and distinct from the letters explanatory of the edict of Galerius, of which we have spoken already. This opinion rests upon the allusion to *prius scripta* in the edict itself. But, on the other hand, there is no distinct reference to any such decree in Lactantius or Eusebius, and several considerations point to the conclusion that no such edict was made.

1. It is very unlikely that such an edict should have left no other trace of its existence than an ambiguous phrase.

2. The edict of Maximin (Euseb. *H.E.* ix. 9), which has been supposed to correspond with it, does not answer to the description of the substance of the *prius scripta* as the two other letters in his name answer respectively to the edicts of Galerius and Milan.

3. There was no time or opportunity for composing such an edict in the year 312.

4. Even if there had been an occasion for doing so, it is scarcely likely that a great change could have come over the policy of the allied emperors in a few months, both edicts being alike subsequent to the death of Galerius. Some interval, though short (*μετ' ὀλίγον*), was requisite to show the bad working of the edict which was revoked.

5. The edict of Galerius, in which Constantine and Licinius had joined, covers the general reference (*πίστιν φυλάττειν*), and the instructions to the magistrates would naturally take the form of the restrictions which the edict of Milan removes (§§ 3, 7).

each individual to choose his own faith. No prerogative is granted to a national or ancestral creed. The permission before given to Christians to follow their creed is repeated. The permission to adopt the Christian (or any other) creed is distinctly added. But while the principle is extended to all religions, it is evident that it was suggested by one. The partial liberty allowed by Galerius had marked the secret advances of the faith. The only way to meet the case was by laying down a general law, which of however little practical use elsewhere, at least met this special exigency.

And still more than this: the edict of Galerius had imposed a vague and elastic condition upon the celebration of Christian rites. It had confirmed the rule that the mode of Christian worship must be compatible with the old idea of the State (*ut ne quid contra disciplinam agant*, i.e. *publicam disciplinam Romanorum*). But the edict of Milan grants "free and absolute liberty of practising Christian worship." No idolatrous rites could be enforced any longer under the plea of loyal duties.

Not less important was the recognition of the Christian societies or corporations, with the corollary that the property of which they had been deprived should be given back to them without cost. Some different regulations had been laid down on this point before (*certa forma*, *τύπος ἕτερος*); but the later provisions leave no privilege in this respect unconceded. The legal

status of Christians personally and ecclesiastically was determined in all points in their favour.

But in one respect the edicts of Galerius and Constantine agree. The favour extended to the new religion is treated as a ground for expecting from Providence (*divinitas*) corresponding favour towards the Empire. As yet the God of the Christians was treated as one representative, perhaps the strongest, of a mysterious power, which might perhaps still manifest itself in other ways not to be lightly closed up. A neutral word best reflected the wavering thought. And in the same spirit while Constantine observed none of the idolatrous rites of the triumph after his victory over Maxentius, he obtruded no profession of Christian faith upon the Roman people. It is said that in a statue erected in his honour he was represented with the cross, "as the saving sign by which he had given liberty to the people." But however decisive this emblem might appear when regarded in the light of a later time, for the moment it would appear to be no more than another symbol added to the sacred store. The cross (as we shall see) appears upon coins which bear the legends *Soli Invicto* and *Marti Conservatori*. A coin of Licinius bears a standard which terminates in a cross. The faith of Constantine at this crisis is accurately reflected in the words of the inscription still legible upon his arch, which was significantly built with fragments of earlier work. This records that his successes were won not by the inspiration of Jupiter, still less by

*H. E.* IX. 9.
*V. C.* I. 40.

the inspiration of Christ, but by the inspiration of Providence (*instinctu divinitatis et mentis magnitudine*).[1]

*H.E.* x. 5, 16. That term *divinitas*—ἡ θειότης τοῦ μεγάλου θεοῦ—marks the point which the emperors had reached. Licinius after his defeat of Maximin "returned thanks to God by whose help he had conquered." *De Mort. Persec.* 48.

It seemed for the moment as if the end were now reached. Eusebius uses the same language of exulting confidence in speaking of the future prospects of the Church after the edict of Milan as he repeated once again on a later review of his history after the final defeat of Licinius. Councils gathered in the East and West showed the vigour of the organization of the Church. Magnificent buildings bore witness on all sides to the wealth and devotion of believers. An oration pronounced by Eusebius at the dedication of the "Basilica" of Tyre—for this title was now transferred from the Imperial courts to the Christian churches—which he has preserved in his history, forcibly expresses the general hope. Nor was the hope wholly vain: for ten years the edict of Milan guided the religious policy of the Roman Government to the advantage of the Christians.

See *H.E.* x. 1.

*H.E.* x. 4. See description of Church, §§ 37 *ff.*

But while the government was divided and the recollections of the old Empire were yet vivid, a permanent peace was impossible. Constantine was inherently ambitious and aggressive. Licinius

[1] It is significant of this period of transition that Lactantius is fond of this vague term for God.

could not but feel the increasing ascendency of his colleague. His hope of independence lay therefore in gathering round him the forces which Constantine had alienated. In this way one of the two dignitaries of the edict of Milan came to be regarded as the representative of conservative or retrograde paganism; and though his wife Constantia must have been favourable to Christianity, if not already a Christian, he accepted the part. Eusebius may have coloured too highly the pictures which he has drawn of the rival emperors, but there can be no doubt that the general outlines are correct. The same influences which strengthened Constantine in his zeal for Christianity moved Licinius against it.

Almost from the date of the attainment of their common end symptoms of disunion between the emperors had appeared. Within a year after the edict of Milan war broke out between them. The grounds of this quarrel are unknown, but there is no reason to suspect that religious differences were mixed up with it. The case was different when the rivalry which had gathered strength through eight years of growing power on the part of Constantine issued in war in 323. At that time the forces and hopes of the two parties in the Empire were gathered into the adverse camps. The opposing armies displayed the ensigns of the two faiths. Constantine was surrounded by a company of Christian priests: Licinius by soothsayers. On the one side the troops were cheered by the sight of the mysterious

standard which had already led them to victory: on the other by the time-honoured omens of birds
*V.C.* ii. 3. and victims. It was rightly felt that the supremacy of the new religion or of the old throughout the Empire was at stake in this last struggle between the brothers-in-law.

Eusebius has preserved the record of a scene which presents the contrast in a striking form. He received the account, as he says, shortly after the occurrence, from one who was present at the time.
*V.C.* ii. 5. On the eve of the first battle, so the story runs, Licinius assembled his generals and friends in one of the sacred groves, and after offering sacrifice reminded them "that they were about to fight for their ancestral deities against an enemy who was even more truly the enemy of their gods than of themselves: that the issue of the contest would decide the claims of the strange god to dethrone those in whom they trusted: that their defeat (if that were possible) would bring with it the unquestionable sovereignty of the heavenly usurper whom they ridiculed: that their victory would be the prelude to a war against the godless (ἄθεοι)." There can be little doubt that the words express thoughts which were widely spread. Men's minds were strained in excitement. Visions were said to have appeared like those which have been commonly reported on the eve of a great conflict. Bodies of Constantine's troops were seen at midday marching through cities when they were yet far off. In a short time the armies met. Licinius was defeated, but he was unwilling to accept the

conclusion which he had indicated. A second battle forced him to surrender. His confinement and his execution followed shortly afterwards, and it is impossible now to judge whether Constantine had just cause to withdraw the promise of life which he had given him.

The overthrow of Licinius decided the conflict of the two religions and restored unity to the whole Roman State. The Emperor assumed the title of "the conqueror," and hastened to express his gratitude to the God of the Christians, to whom he attributed his success.[1] Of the two edicts which he published, which were addressed respectively to the inhabitants of Palestine and to the inhabitants of the East, the latter is perhaps the most characteristic, and completes the group which has been marked out. In this Constantine recounts some of the experiences of his own youth which led him to embrace the cause of the Christians. The persecutors, who had trusted to the promises of false gods, had all perished miserably. Their fate was the proof of the truth of the religion which they had tried to destroy. Then bursting into a confession of his own faith he adds: "So now, I beseech Thee, most great God, be merciful and propitious to Thy people of the East, to all Thy people in the provinces, crushed by long calamity, extending relief to them through me Thy servant. And this request it is right for me to make, O Lord of the Universe, Holy God;

*V.C.* ii. 19.

*V.C.* ii. 24 *ff.*

*V.C.* ii. 40 *ff.*

[1] The title Victor Constantinus Aug. appears on coins, but only with "Debellator gentium barbararum."

for by Thy guidance I have brought to a successful issue the deliverance which I undertook, having Thy cross (σφραγίς) everywhere before me I have led my army to victory, and if any public need should call me I will follow the same symbols of Thy goodness (ἀρετῆς συνθήμασιν) when I march against the enemy. For this cause I devote to Thee my own life (ψυχήν), purely tempered with mingled love and fear: For Thy name I sincerely love: and Thy power I respect, which Thou hast shewn me and (so) confirmed my faith." But while he speaks thus clearly for himself, he still holds firmly by the policy of toleration. He prays that all may win the perfect joy of peace which Christianity alone can give, but meanwhile the perfect forbearance of Christians might lead them to this goal. "For the rest," he says, summing up all, "let each refrain from injuring his neighbour by that which he has adopted from personal conviction: let one, if it be possible, profit the other by that which he has seen and known; if this cannot be let him take no notice of him. It is one thing to undertake voluntarily the struggle for immortality: it is another thing to impose it by penalties. These remarks and explanations I have extended beyond the mark which I should be naturally inclined to fix, since I was unwilling to hide the true faith (τὴν τῆς ἀληθείας πίστιν), particularly because some, as I hear, say that the customs of the temples have been done away and the power of darkness; an end which I should have

recommended to all men, unless the spirit of violent resistance due to the evil error [of idolatry] had been rooted beyond all measure in the minds of some to the hurt of the general restoration."

With these words the cycle of the revolution was completed. The faith of Constantine may not have been very exact, but it was expressed boldly. The principle of religious freedom which was affirmed in favour of Christianity was now applied to shelter those who clung to the old beliefs. The Emperor himself, to use the words of Eusebius, became, "as it were, a loud-voiced herald of God." *V.C.* ii. 61.

# CHAPTER X

## CONSTANTINE THE GREAT

WE have seen that the religious conception of the Roman State failed under the corrupting influences of superstition and luxury. We have seen that the political system of Diocletian failed because it rested upon nothing higher than the individual power of the sovereign. We have seen that as the Empire grew weaker through the dissolution of the spiritual forces by which it was held together, a new organization had been formed within it extending beyond its utmost boundaries, binding together in a closer union nations and classes, claiming not only to stand in a living connexion with a divine ancestry, but at each moment to unite the seen and the unseen in a true fellowship. It was the glory of Constantine that he saw in the Christian Church the possibility of the renovation of the Empire. And if the epithet of great is due to the men who can read most clearly the wants of a disordered age and use most vigorously the means for satisfying them, I think that Constantine with all his faults and

weaknesses may fairly claim the title. He was "great" in the same sense though not in the same degree as Alexander or Charles or Peter or Frederick, not by commanding moral power, still less by the sublime elevation of self-sacrifice, but by insight, by tenacity, by unwearied, unshaken faith in his mission. Constantine never doubted that he was called to do a momentous work for the world, and he interpreted his successes as manifest tokens of immediate divine favour. However severely we may judge his personal career, still it always bears the mark of genuine enthusiasm, which saves it from being ignoble. I have no intention of discussing the great tragedies of his later life. Unprejudiced historians have drawn different conclusions from the scanty evidence which bears upon them. It is indeed too likely that he was corrupted by power, and made unscrupulous as to the means of securing the objects which he felt to be paramount. But it may be remembered that Constantia, the mother of the younger Licinius, whose violent death can least easily be referred to any adequate cause, remained in the closest relations with her brother till her death.

All that I propose to do is to consider Constantine in relation to the first essay towards a Christian state; to notice the circumstances which predisposed him to favour Christianity; to point out the natural significance of his first direct connexion with the Faith; to mark the development of his religious policy during the ten years

when he was allied with a heathen colleague in the East (313-323); to sketch the outline of the position which he occupied as a Christian Emperor for the fourteen years of his sole sovereignty.

Constantine was prepared both by the peculiarities of his position and by his natural character to attempt the consecration of the Empire by the public adoption of Christianity. The events of his early life must have exercised a profound influence upon him. When Constantius was made Caesar (292), Constantine was attached to the service of Diocletian and Galerius, to serve perhaps as a hostage for the loyalty of his father, and soon distinguished himself in the Eastern wars. Eusebius, who saw him in Palestine on the march to Egypt (296), has left a description of him as he appeared then, tall and well-built, noble in bearing, pure and temperate in life. His ambition and his power already inspired the emperors with fear. And in his turn he became alienated from their religious policy by what he saw of the sufferings and the constancy of the Christians. After the abdication of Diocletian in 305 (May), his position at the court of Galerius became most perilous. The feelings of the Emperor towards him were sufficiently shown by the fact that he had passed him over and raised Maximin to the rank of Caesar. Meanwhile, Constantius urgently pressed his son to join him in the West. The jealous vigilance of Galerius interposed every obstacle; but at last Constantine escaped and met his father at Boulogne, just as he was

*V.C.* i. 19 *f.*
*Paneg.*
*Max. et Const.* § 4
*V.C.* i. 2.
*V.C.* ii. 50.

embarking for Britain. He accompanied him on his expedition, and when Constantius died very shortly afterwards at York in 306 (July), he accepted the purple which was offered him by the army. The assumption of the Empire was indeed his only means of safety; and what he had already seen must have suggested to him the arduous, and yet attractive, problems which lay before the prince who desired to deal with the disorganization of the Empire. The contrast between the Eastern and Western provinces could not fail to strike his attention as he passed from Bithynia, through Thrace, Pannonia, Italy, to Gaul. Nicomedia had been one of the centres of persecution. Gaul had been saved from widespread civil disorder by the moderation of Constantius, "who allowed the churches, that is the walls which could be restored, to be destroyed, but preserved the true Temple of God, that is in men, unhurt. Such a spectacle was not likely to be lost upon a prince who was already looking forward to the power which had been denied him; and at a later period he dwelt emphatically upon what he had seen and heard in Asia. It was clear to him that the policy of persecution was equally impolitic and unjust, and this impression would be strengthened by the fact that the bitterest enemy of the Christians was also his own.

*Ad Sanct. coet.* c. 25. Lact. *De Mort. Persec.* 15. *Cf. V.C.* i. 13. *Cf.* Opt. Mil. *de Schism. Don.* i. 22.

It is impossible to judge how far Constantius may have conveyed his own religious opinions to his son. He seems to have been a monotheist; and his remote government enabled him to act

*V.C.* i. 17.

with an independence impossible at Rome. His court was filled with Christians, and Eusebius ventures to say "that the multitude of believers who were collected in the walls of his palace formed a complete church of God, supplied with proper ministers, who performed constant service for the king, at a time when, in most cases, the bare name of Christian was forbidden." But at the same time there was nothing distinctively Christian in the creed of Constantius. The devotion of his soldiers obtained for him a speedy consecration, and the great variety of the types of his coins struck in London, Lyons, Trèves, Aquileia and Rome is a singular proof of the affection with which he was regarded.

The dangers which Constantine had passed through, and the example of his father, so far as it had wrought, acted upon a disposition inclined rather to superstitious excesses than to indifference in religion. He appears in all accounts as zealous in the performance of the offices of worship. The notices of his devotion are too many and too varied to be set aside; and they are too much mixed up with selfish aims to be open to the charge of great embellishment. He may have fallen far below the standard which his faith required, but he believed without reserve that one supreme spiritual Power swayed the fortunes of men: that this supreme Being was Himself moved by earnest supplication: and as time went on he came to believe that the events of his own experience proved conclusively not only the folly of

polytheism, but also the specific truth of Christianity.

So far we have seen that Constantine was predisposed to favour Christianity by the circumstances which attended his early service in the Eastern Empire, by the religious example of his father, by his own marked tendency to the belief in a personal Providence. These natural and political inclinations gained strength and consistency with time. In their first form the lower and more earthly element in them prevailed; and the circumstances under which Constantine was first led to shew an active interest in the Christian Faith reveal the side from which he approached it. He had resolved on the invasion of the sacred precincts of Rome. Maxentius was prepared to meet him, armed with the superior resources of Italy and the still more formidable terrors which the majesty of the ancient capital inspired in her enemies. He had also invoked (it is said) supernatural assistance, and surrounded himself with charms and sorceries. In this crisis Constantine considered what countervailing assistance he could secure: what deity he could gain as his protector. He reflected that the emperors who had distinguished themselves by zeal for polytheism had suffered grievous disasters. Decius was routed and slain by the Goths; Valerian was captured and put to death by the Persians; Aurelian was murdered in the midst of his successes; Diocletian, in his solitary exile, was looking on the failure of his own designs. On the other hand his own

*V. C.* i. 27.

*ad S. C.* xxiv. *f.*

father had lived and died in prosperity: "He had honoured throughout his life the supreme and ineffable God and had found him the Saviour and guardian of the kingdom, the giver of every good thing." He reflected further that those who had hitherto attacked Maxentius had been polytheists and had failed signally. Could he not then obtain the aid "of his father's God who had given many and clear proofs of his power?"

*V.C.* i. 27.

Such a line of reasoning may be far removed from our present modes of thought. As we gain larger views of the sphere of divine Providence, and of the manifold relations of human life, we may shrink from all attempts at adjusting the moral balance of visible retribution as premature and presumptuous; but still the consideration of a righteous judgment executed on the earth, which men might read plainly, does belong to the earlier phases of faith. And it would be rash to affirm that that form of divine working which found a place in the history of the patriarchs and in the institution of the Law, was not again manifested in the infancy of the Christian Church. At any rate the facts were patent and impressive, and Constantine never wearies of referring to the open and unmistakable signs of divine vengeance inflicted on the enemies of the One God, and of divine blessing extended to His worshippers.

*Cf. V.C.* ii. 27; *Laud. C.* xvii. Yet he refers also to the future. *ad S.C.* xxiii. *f.* *Cf. L.C.* vi. § 9.

It is easy to see how under the influence of these hopes and fears Constantine may have "entreated his father's God with prayers and supplications to show him who He was, and

extend His right hand over him." It is easy to see how he must have interpreted the celestial phenomenon which followed—the cross-like parhelion, such as has been often seen; how in his dreams he may have received the interpretation of the sign which could not fail to have floated before his waking thoughts. The narrative of the appearance given afterwards to Eusebius by Constantine himself, if only we suppose that the words represent what the Emperor seemed to find written in the lines of light, is perfectly credible, and it was given at a time when he had no end to serve. The variations which are found in the accounts of Lactantius and Philostorgius[1] are just such as might have been expected in writers who heard of the event only by distant rumour. And the allusion to some wonderful vision which is found in the contemporary panegyrist Nazarius, who delivered his oration at Rome in 321, shows that the event had attracted wide attention, and "was still talked of through all Gaul."[2]

*V.C.* i. 28 *ff.*

Nazar. *Paneg. C.* 14.

But while it appears to be unquestionable that Constantine's religious feeling was moved by some extraordinary sight on his march against Maxentius, which he regarded as an answer to his prayer for divine help; that he had adopted the Cross in consequence of this as "the saving sign which should expel all hostile power," and constructed the labarum as his sacred standard; that

*V.C.* i. 31.

*H.E.* ix. 9 § 9.

[1] Lactant. *De M. P.* 44; Philost. i. 6.

[2] The supposed reference in Eumenius (*Paneg.* c. 21) appears to be too vague, and the vision probably occurred after the date of the oration (310).

he placed himself from this time in close connexion with Christian teachers; that the Cross was in some way represented in the statue at Rome which commemorated his victory, yet it is a misuse of words to speak of his "conversion" as having been at once accomplished. It was only by slow degrees that he afterwards came to any real understanding of Christianity as a subject of personal devotion. With the lapse of years his knowledge of the faith grew fuller, but it was not till the last war with Licinius that his choice was finally made, and he broke for ever with Paganism.

And even then Constantine retained much of the old spirit of his first belief. He had found in Christianity a refuge from external dangers, and he continued to regard it mainly from without. The mysterious Being to whom he addressed himself as the author of his father's good fortune had answered his prayers, and he could never forget the aspect under which he had first regarded Him. His worship to the last was addressed to "the Lord of Hosts," whom Christianity had made known. For him the Cross was rather the symbol of temporal victory rather than of spiritual redemption. At least up to his baptism he separated the political and personal aspects of Christianity. His first vague hopes had been converted into manifest realities. He had sought the God of the Christians as the giver of earthly succour, and his experience seemed to assure him that the search had not been in vain. "I assign religion (*τὴν εὐσέβειαν, i.e.* the orthodox Christian faith)," he writes, "as the cause

*ad S. C.* xxii. *cf.* v. 26.

of my own prosperity and of all my blessings; and this conviction is attested by the issue of all my prayers, by deeds of prowess, by victories over my enemies, by trophies, and [Rome] our great capital, knows that it is true." *Cf. L.C.* ix. § 19.

These words spoken at a much later period show what we must look for in the earliest stage of Constantine's approach to the Christian faith. At the date commonly assigned to his conversion Neo-Platonic fancies were still mingled with ideas of the God of the Christians. The vision of light seems to have suggested to him the thought of the sun-god, who occupies a conspicuous place in late Roman history. Eumenius, writing in 310, speaks of Constantine's special regard for the worship of Apollo, and professes to believe that the deity had revealed himself to the Emperor, who evinced his gratitude not long before the probable date of the vision by offering rich gifts to the temple of Apollo at Autun. This confusion of thought is further illustrated by the continued use of the legend type *Soli invicto* or *Soli invicto comiti*, with the figure of the sun-god upon the coins of Constantine as late perhaps as the year 323. But the device is evidently symbolic, not polytheistic, and in two types it is actually combined with the Cross.

We must not then exaggerate the change which was effected in the mind of Constantine by the defeat of Maxentius, though he attributed his victory to the help of the God whose emblem was the Cross. It is quite possible to see the direction in which his beliefs were moving, but the edict of

Milan marks distinctly the point which he had reached. He and the pagan Licinius could use the same language in returning thanks for their successes. Christian emblems have been found upon coins of Licinius. As yet there was no open divergence between the policy of the allied emperors; and both are described in an official act of the year 314 as deigning to show that goodness (*pietatem*) to the Christians that they are unwilling that its principles (*disciplinam*) should be corrupted, but rather desire that that form of religion should be observed and cultivated. And though Constantine avoided the characteristic acts of pagan worship he still conformed to usage, which had a social or civil value. He allowed a temple to be consecrated to his family in a city of Umbria on the condition "that it should not be polluted by the deceptions of a pestilent superstition." He exercised his prerogative as Chief Pontiff in requiring that the reports of the Haruspices on places struck by lightning should be addressed to him. He even permitted the erection of a statue to the Fortune of Constantinople very shortly before his death.

Migne, viii. p. 725. *Cf. De Mort. Per.* § 48.

(*c.* A.D. 327. Haenel, p. 203.)

*Cod. Theod.* xvi. 10, 1 (A.D. 321).

We must then probably admit that at the date of the edict of Milan, and for many years after, Constantine's conception of the doctrines of Christianity was probably very imperfect, but at the same time he fully apprehended the importance of the organisation of the Church as a powerful agent in the extension of the monotheism in which he already saw the pledge of the future religious

unity of the empire. Writing as early as 314 on the occasion of the Donatist troubles, he explains very clearly his own conception of his work at that time: "I do not think it right that contentions and disputes of that kind should be passed over by us without notice, seeing that in consequence of them the Supreme Providence (*Summa Divinitas*) may be moved not only against the human race, but also against myself, to whose care He has committed the direction of all earthly things by His own heavenly will." The same thought recurs at a later time. "I had," he says, "two objects in the work of government which I undertook: first, to bring the views of all the nations about the Deity to one harmonious state; and, secondly, to reform the general body of the civilized world, which was afflicted by a grievous malady." With this object he urged upon disputants peace almost at any price; and when once a decision was obtained he was prepared to enforce it by the arm of the State.

Migne, viii. p. 485.

*V. C.* ii. 65.

*V. C.* iii. 12; xxi. 4, 42.

*V. C.* iii. 65-66.

This action belongs to a later period of his reign, when he had definitely taken his part with the "Catholic Church" against pagans and schismatics. But in the meantime the copious records of his legislation from the date of the Edict of Milan shew the paramount ascendancy which Christian thoughts and Christian interests are gaining over him. A very rapid survey of the enactments which he issued during the period of his joint empire with Licinius reveals the untiring energy with which he threw himself into the

reformation of evils great or little by which the State suffered. In the three years 315, 319, and 321 more than a hundred different decrees witness to his zeal, and the distant places from which they are dated prove his self-devotion in the work of government. At one time he mitigates the severity of the criminal code; at another he confirms the rights of freemen and limits the privileges of class; at another he provides relief for the despair of the indigent; at another he enforces the observance of a higher morality and checks the vices of superstition. In one or two cases he legislates on points specially affecting the Christians themselves.

One of the first laws in which he dealt with the provisions of the penal code is also one of the most characteristic, though it deals only with a detail. "Let no one," he writes to Cumelius, lieutenant of Africa, "who has deserved to be condemned to the gladiatorial games or the mines, be branded on the face. A brand on the hands or on the thighs is sufficient; the face, which is fashioned to the likeness of the divine beauty (*pulcritudo caelestis*) I should wish to be preserved from disfigurement." In the same spirit he forbade the punishment of crucifixion and the torture of breaking the legs. Such laws might have been dictated by a natural sentiment, but Constantine went much further. He laid down humane and thoughtful rules for the treatment of untried prisoners.

A.D. 315.

Aurel. Vict. *Caes.* xli. § 4. Soz. i. 8.

If unavoidable circumstances delayed their

trial they were to receive all possible consideration. Their bonds were to be such as would give no pain, but only secure safe custody. They were not to be thrust into dark cells, but to enjoy the (A.D. 320.) light of day. They were to be protected against the venal cruelty of their warders. If, in any case, a severer confinement were inflicted, it could be only by a public sentence. The perils and (A.D. 326.) sufferings of debtors were proverbial in Roman history. Constantine endeavoured to lessen the dangers of those who were indebted to the treasury by a general edict. "Let no one fear," he writes to the people, "the prison, or the loaded scourge, or the weights (*peine forte et dure*), or other punishments which have been invented by the perverse ingenuity of judges in the proceedings for the payments of debts." The pernicious trade of informers was suppressed as "the one (A.D. 322.) greatest evil of human life," which required to be strangled at its very birth. Precautions were to be observed in the execution of a capital sentence. (A.D. 313.) No one was to be put to death even for the most heinous crimes—adultery, murder, sorcery, except (A.D. 319.) after his own confession, or in accordance with such a combination of concurrent testimony as made all denial valueless.

The disorders and persecutions of many years had impaired the old dignities of citizenship. Many freemen had spent the greater part of their lives in servile work. Constantine extended every facility to such sufferers to establish their claims to liberty, and generally imposed the

most cautious restrictions upon the proceedings of those who claimed a professing freeman as a slave. For the first time the part of the Christian Church in the great struggle for the equal brotherhood of man was recognized. Freedom conferred upon a slave in the Church before the bishop (*sub aspectu antistitum*) was made legally valid
(A.D. 321). just as if all the usual forms had been fulfilled, and the privilege was extended to the clergy of leaving freedom to slaves by will. The ceremony of this Christian manumission must have been not infrequent; for when other legal business was forbidden on the Sunday an exception was made in favour of the emancipation of slaves as "an act of pleasure and joy which fell in with the spirit of the festival." Something at the same time was done to guard the slaves against the worst atro-
(A.D. 319, 306). cities of their masters, which are enumerated in one edict with terrible minuteness, but in the main the good treatment of the slave was left even by Constantine to depend upon his owner's sense of self-interest. It was a far greater advance he made when he took from men of the highest rank
(A.D. 317). their exemption from liability to trial for great criminal offences before the provincial courts in the memorable words, "The criminal charge excludes all consideration of rank" (*omnem honorem reatus excludit*).

Still more remarkable are two edicts of Constantine on the public support of indigent children, which seem to stand alone in the Roman statute book. They were issued at a considerable

interval of time and addressed to different provinces. The first was directed in 315 to meet the case of the Italian states; the second was sent in 322 to Africa; but both alike recognize the office of the emperor to save his subjects from the last extremity of want. There is an impetuous urgency in the first edict, dated from Constantine's birthplace, Naissus, in Dacia, which seems to speak of some recent events by which the emperor's compassion had been deeply stirred. He writes evidently under the influence of strong feeling, with an indefiniteness of liberality more suitable to a Christian enthusiast than to a statesman. "Let a law," so the letter to Ablavius runs, "be published in the most conspicuous way through all the states of Italy, which may keep the hands of parents from child murder, and turn their desires to a better end. And if any parent bring a child which he is too poor to rear, take the utmost care, according to your duty, that there is no delay in supplying it with food and raiment, since the wants of a young infant demand immediate attention. For this purpose I have given orders that my imperial revenues (*fiscus*) and my own private property be alike at your service."

M. p. 121.

The second edict, dated from Rome, is worded more carefully. "I have learnt," he writes to Menander, governor of Africa "that persons in the provinces suffering from want of food and sustenance sell or pledge their children. I direct therefore that any one found in these circumstances, who has no private means and who finds it a grievous

M. p. 236.

difficulty to support his children, should receive assistance from my imperial revenue, before he fall into any calamity . . . either in money or food as the case may require. . . . For it is utterly inconsistent with my character to allow any one to perish of hunger or be driven to an inhuman action."

The measures may have been transitory and ineffective; the action of the emperor may have been precipitate and unreflecting; the means at his disposal may have been inadequate to deal with a gigantic evil; experience may have shewn that effusive benevolence alone could not do more than meet immediate and local distress; yet the spirit which such legislation embodies cannot but claim gratitude and honour. The wise framing of a poor law is not an easy task; it is something that the conception of a poor law, however imperfect and rudimentary, was coeval with the founding of a Christian state.

It is not unreasonable to see in these eleemosynary laws the influence of the principles of the Church, which from the first had made the systematic care of the poor one of the first practical duties of Christian life. This influence is still more unmistakable in a series of laws which Constantine issued for the maintenance of personal purity. The enactments against seduction and violence are so stern and uncompromising that they read more like passages from the legislation of Puritan New England than from a code of the Roman Empire. If a woman admitted her

consent to screen the man who had dishonoured her, she became liable to the same capital punishment. Parents who tried to hide the wrongs of their children were subject to banishment. Slaves who had acted as instruments in an intrigue were to be put to death by pouring molten lead down their throats or by burning. No offender when clearly convicted had the privilege of appeal. Yet even here Constantine's zeal for purity was less strong than his sense of the difference between freemen and slaves. He forbade under severe penalties all connexion between persons of rank (*Decuriones*) and slaves, on the ground that their offspring would be slaves. And scarcely any words could express more forcibly the degradation brought by class differences than the reason which he alleges for dismissing all charges of adultery brought by an attendant at a tavern: "Let the accused be discharged, since the observance of chastity is required from those women who are bound by legal liabilities (*juris nexibus detinentur*); these women, on the contrary, ought to be free from the severity of the courts who are considered unworthy of the regard of the laws from the meanness of their life." The position, that is, and not the proved character of the slave woman, was supposed to deprive her equally of protection and responsibility. This edict was issued in 326, the year after the Council of Nicaea.

p. 194 (A.D. 320).

p. 397.

p. 296 (A.D. 326).

In close connexion with the edicts on purity are those directed against the private soothsayers and sorcerers, whose services were often made to

minister to profligate excesses. The soothsayer who had entered a private house to exercise his art was to be condemned, according to a law of 315, to the stake; the person who had solicited his services was to lose his property and be transported to an island. A later edict (of 321) explains the scope of the law. "The science of those men," such is its tenour, "who shall be shewn to have practised against the health of others, or turned others from purity to licentiousness by the help of magical arts, deserves to be punished and visited with the severest penalties." Then follows a curious exception, which marks the difficulties of this stage of transition: "Charms for the relief of bodily ailments are not to be considered as criminal; nor such helps as are sought in rural districts against the injuries of violent rain or hailstorms, seeing that they are not for the injury of any one's health or reputation, but designed to save the gifts of God and the toils of men from destruction."

p. 153 (cf. p. 202. A.D. 320).

p. 220.

Two other enactments which belong to a rather later time fall within this group of moral reforms. In one Constantine forbade in the strictest terms the mutilation which accompanied some of the wildest forms of Asiatic superstition. In the other (in 325) he ordered the discontinuance of gladiatorial combats in certain provinces of the East; or rather, as it appears, he forbade the condemnation of criminals to this exhibition, adding a general reprobation of the practice. Later historians have misinterpreted

p. 396.

p. 293.

the edict and affirmed that he put an end to gladiatorial exhibitions universally. But this result was only slowly won. Gladiatorial exhibitions, though discouraged and repressed, were not finally abolished till the reign of Honorius (A.D. 404), and then owing to the heroic self-devotion of the Eastern monk Telemachus.

Soz. i. 8. Theod. *H.E.* v. 26.

Constantine's legislation directly affecting the Christians remains still to be noticed. One of his first edicts refers to certain immunities enjoyed by the Catholic clergy, which he distinctly confirms against the vexatious objections of heretics. A later rescript explains in what these immunities consisted. "Let those who discharge the services of religion in divine worship—that is, those who are called clerics—be entirely exempted from liability to any office, that they may not be called away from their sacred duties by the sacrilegious envy of any." This exemption was afterwards extended by name to the inferior orders, the readers and sub-deacons, and interpreted to cover attendance in the provincial senate.

p. 100 (A.D. 313.)

p. 180 (A.D. 319.)

p. 344 (A.D. 330.)

The value of the privilege thus accorded to the clergy was so great that it speedily led to a serious evil. Many persons obtained orders, not with the object of fulfilling spiritual functions, but for the purpose of obtaining freedom from irksome and costly duties. Constantine issued a stringent edict against this abuse in 320. "We enjoin," he says, "that those who decline public services after the passing of our law and take refuge

p. 200.

among the clergy should be completely separated from that body, and reinstated in the ranks of the city council (*curiae*) and discharge public services." The law to which he refers has apparently been lost, but the general provisions of it are recited: "That no decurion, or son of a decurion, or other person possessed of adequate means and fitted to discharge public duties, should take refuge in the name and service of the clergy; but that for the rest men should be appointed to the clerical office, who were of slender means and not bound by the obligation of civil offices, and these only to fill the places of deceased clergy." The same subject is treated at greater length and with more precision in an edict published six years afterwards, in the following form: "Exemption from the performance of public duties is not to be granted by common consent, nor at the request of any one on the plea of clerical office (*sub specie clericorum*), and let not clergy be appointed at random and without regard to the population; but when a cleric has died, let another be appointed in place of the deceased, who has no hereditary connexion with the burghers, and is not possessed of such wealth as can support with perfect ease the charge of public offices; so that if a doubt arise between the city and the clergy in any case, if equity draw him to public service and he be determined to be a burgher by descent or competent by patrimony, let him be removed from the clergy and required to fulfil civil functions. For the wealthy ought to bear the necessary burdens

p. 314 (A.D. 326).

Text corrupt.

of the world, the poor ought to be supported by the riches of the churches."

It is impossible to enter here upon the most interesting social questions which are raised by these remarkable edicts. They will probably come before us again at a later time. But one other concession must be noticed, which, though not made specifically to the clergy, was probably occasioned by their circumstances. Celibacy was gradually becoming more general among them, and the celibate was liable to various disadvantages by the old Roman law. These Constantine removed. "Let all alike," so he enjoined, "the unmarried and the childless have equal power of enjoying whatever they deserve." While these great changes in the character of the Christian clergy were in progress the oldest trouble of the Church was still felt. The Jews continued to persecute converts to Christianity. One of the earliest and one of the latest of Constantine's laws deal with this disorder. The first inflicts the penalty of burning on those who offended in this way; the second, a punishment variable as occasion might require.

*Cf.* privileges to Jewish priests, p. 350 (A.D. 330). p. 232 (A.D. 321).

p. 189 (A.D. 320).

p. 130 (A.D. 315). pp. 384-5 (A.D. 335-6).

Two memorable enactments marked the year 321. The first, by which the Emperor conceded "to the Council of the Catholic Church the right of receiving legacies," I have already noticed; the second was the ordinance for the observance of the great festivals in honour of the events of the Lord's life, and also of the Sunday "as the day of light and of the sun." In this latter edict he

directed the suspension upon such days of all military exercises and all legal proceedings with the characteristic exception, which has been noticed above, of the manumission of slaves. Thus at the same time he firmly established the position of the Church as a temporal power, destined to command almost unbounded wealth, and recognised Christianity as in some sense the religion of the Western Empire. Yet while doing this, he seems to shelter his command under the cover of the old faith. "Let all judges," such are the words of his law, "and the common people in cities, and all crafts, rest on the venerable day of the Sun. Those, however, who dwell in the country may devote themselves with full and perfect freedom to the cultivation of the fields, so that there is no better day for sowing corn or transplanting vines, lest the opportunity granted by divine providence (*caelesti provisione*) be lost."

Euseb. *V.C.* iv. 18. M. p. 223 (A.D. 321). *Cf.* Soz. i. 8.

*Cod. Just.* iii. xii. 3.

An enactment of the following year—the last which I shall notice, for the enactments against heretics and schismatics will come before us afterwards—is a significant symptom of the dangers which were then gathering in the divided Empire. "Since we have found," Constantine writes, "that some ecclesiastics and others who are attached to the Catholic sect are compelled by men of different religions to attend the sacrifices of the lustra, we ordain that any one who supposes that such as obey the most holy law are to be forced to observe a rite of a strange superstition, be beaten publicly with rods, if his station

p. 253 (A.D. 322).

allow it; if, however, his rank forbids such treatment, that he undergo the heaviest punishment which is allowed by the usage of the several states."

The legislation of Constantine exhibits, as will be seen from the traits which we have noticed, a steady progress in embodying Christian ideas in the reconstitution of the Empire. There is no marked distinction between one period of his reign and another. Above all, there is no movement backward. This steadiness of successful resolve alone would justify his claim to the title of "great." He seized the conditions of the vast problem which he had to solve, and he offered an approximate solution of it which has not yet lost its interest or value.

The contrast offered by the policy of Licinius serves as a rough standard of the merit of Constantine. Both entered on their sovereignty under like circumstances and with like hopes. Licinius, no less than Constantine, was believed at the time to have received divine guidance for his success. An angel of God is said to have dictated to him in a dream the prayer which inspired his army with victorious courage. Both emperors agreed at first upon the same lines of policy; but Constantine saw distinctly the necessities of the state and the forces which were ready for his use. He was at once attracted by the solid and hierarchical organisation of the Catholic Church. The very title appeared to have a charm for him. Even if the centralization

Lact. *De Mort. Pers.* 46.

*Cf. Ep.* ap. Euseb. *H. E.* x. 5 § 16.

of its forces was imperfect, it was so far completed that he could himself supply what was wanting. He saw in it a power which might reanimate the Empire and bind its parts together by an enduring principle of life. He felt no jealousy of the influence of the clergy, whose privileges he increased, saving only the necessary interests of the state. He interposed no obstacles to their free action, believing that he could command their support for the ends which he had in view. He had bishops constantly in his company. But in all this he may claim the foresight of genius. His colleague Licinius was alarmed by the same phenomena which opened to Constantine visions of enduring peace. Licinius strictly forbad all gatherings of bishops, and even the visits of single bishops to neighbouring dioceses. He endeavoured by all means to isolate the clergy and diminish their mutual confidence. He removed Christians from offices of trust about his court, and expelled them from the army. He imposed vexatious restrictions upon the celebration of worship and the method of teaching. He stopped the ministrations of charity by which Christians gained the sympathy of men and openly shewed the practical character of their faith. The opposition is complete; and it must not be forgotten, if we would do justice to the first Christian emperor.

*Cf.* Zos. ii. 40.

*Cf. V.C.* ii. 67. *V.C.* i. 51 *ff.* *Cf.* iii. 1. *H.E.* x. 8.

As a Christian emperor Constantine still remains to be considered.

It was almost a necessary consequence of the

position which he assumed towards the Church that he should claim a sacred character for himself. Under the old theory of the Empire the prince embodied in his own person the highest religious powers in the State. Constantine, though he was not actually a member of the Christian Church, at once placed himself in the same relation towards the new faith. He claimed to deal with it as part of the constitution of the Empire, in virtue of an independent divine commission which he had himself received. His own power was given to him directly by the Supreme God, the same God who was revealed in the Gospel and worshipped in the Church. In virtue of that authority he issued instructions to bishops and to congregations. He conducted religious services; he issued a prayer for general use in his armies; he acted with a larger jurisdiction and a more general charge than that entrusted to the leaders of the Church, but still co-ordinate in origin and directed to the same great objects. In virtue of this divine right, he took his place in the episcopal assemblies as appointed by God to be a general overseer (bishop). And once when he received some bishops at an entertainment he said in the hearing of Eusebius, "You are overseers (bishops) of those within the Church, but I may be regarded as appointed by God as overseer (bishop) of those without." And so, the historian adds, "with a purpose answering to his word he acted as overseer over all his subjects, and urged them, with all his power, to pursue a pious life." He was, so to

*V.C.* iii. 24. *Cf.* iii. 60.

*V.C.* iv. 17. *Cf.* iv. 22.

*V.C.* iv. 20.

Zos. ii. 40.

*V.C.* i. 44 (*cf.* 42). (*Cf.* iii. 17, 2.)

*V.C.* iv. 24.

*V.C.* iv. 29 § 4. speak, "a vicegerent of God upon earth, from whom he had received supreme authority; and in imitation of the sovereignty of that Higher power he distributed special administrations among his officers, who would all in due season render the account of their deeds to the Great King."

There is, indeed, something almost startling in the language which is used to describe his relation *ad S.C.* 2 *f.* *Cf.* 26 § 1. to God. He himself claims to speak even in the sacred assembly as one who "had the happy privilege of divine inspiration." Eusebius does not shrink from adapting to his case the language of St. Paul, as though he were one to whom "God *L.C.* 11. Himself, not of men nor by man, but by our common Saviour, and the divine vision which had often flashed upon him, had plainly set forth and *L.C.* 18. revealed the secrets of the holy truths." "He had enjoyed the sight," it is said elsewhere, "of innumerable manifestations of his Saviour, innumerable visits from Him in sleep." The vision of the *V.C.* i. 47 §§ 2, 3. Cross, with its divine interpretation, was only one of the many revelations by which he was in- *V.C.* ii. 12. formed of perils by which he was surrounded, or instructed in the course which he ought to follow. He lived, as it were, in immediate fellowship with an unseen world, of which he was the interpreter and the envoy.

The consideration of these facts will help to remove the difficulty which has been felt as to Constantine's postponement of his baptism till the immediate approach of death. He could separate his political relation to Christianity from his

personal relation to it. He might have been perfectly convinced of the public office of the Church; he might have felt the keenest interest in the settlement of the internal differences by which its harmonizing power was weakened; he might have exercised with perfect honesty sacred functions corresponding to those of the Christian teacher; he might have confirmed canons which were drawn up by the proper authorities for the guidance of the Church; and yet he might not have been prepared for that most solemn initiation into the mysteries of the faith, which brought with it individual obligations of infinite extent. No doubt something of superstition, something of imperfect knowledge, something of unworthy fear, was mingled with other motives; but his delay in undertaking the responsibilities of a personal confession gives no colour to the charge of insincerity against his former conduct. His position was wholly exceptional. He fulfilled a new mission. And the Eastern Church which gave him the title of ἰσαπόστολος may have intended to mark in this way the speciality of his office, though he shares the name with Helena, with Thekla, and with Mary Magdalene.

*V. C.* iv. 27 § 2.

If we examine the memorials of his teaching we shall find that it corresponded to the character which we have assigned to him. He dwelt with especial force on what we commonly call the doctrine of natural religion, on the Unity and the Providence of God, on the future life and the just retribution of men. The prayer which he issued

*V. C.* iv. 29.

*V. C.* iv. 20.

for the use of his soldiers is a simple expression of faith in one God. In his last recorded discourse, delivered very shortly before his death, he spoke at length of the immortality of the soul, of
*V.C.* iv. 55. the blessings reserved for the pious in the presence of God, of the final overthrow of the wicked. There may have been vanity and love of praise in these public exercises, but they must have offered a strange and moving spectacle to those
*V.C.* iv. 29. who were present. At the Emperor's invitation multitudes flocked together to hear his discourses. He stood erect, and with earnest countenance and composed voice seemed to initiate the audience in divine lessons. If he were interrupted by applause he raised his eyes to heaven, and signified that the honour was due only to the King of all. Often, too, he drove home his arguments by personal applications to the courtiers standing about him ; and faces bent to the ground witnessed that his words touched the consciences of some.

The public policy which Constantine adopted towards polytheism becomes at once intelligible, according to this general view of his religious position. He dealt with it as one who was in an especial sense "the overseer of those without the Church," and charged to convert, if it might be, to salutary uses whatever higher aspirations he could find. With the true feeling of a statesman
*V.C.* ii. 60. he checked the intemperate zeal of men who would
*V.C.* iii. 55, 58. have extirpated paganism by violence. At the
*V.C.* iv. 25. same time, as soon as he had power, he abolished

those services which were openly immoral or dangerous to good order. "He forbad the abominations of idolatry"; and the prohibition was extended by fear far beyond its legitimate application. He exposed the deceptions of the priests. He put an end to private services and divinations. In his own city, Constantinople, where his choice was free, he allowed no idols, no sacrifices, no pagan festivals, no gladiatorial shows. But where polytheism was firmly established, he simply sought to mitigate its danger, to punish its scandals, to undermine its authority, to bring to bear upon it the judgment of a pure morality.

*Cf. Cod. Theod.* xvi. 10, 2.

*V.C.* ii. 45. iii. 57.

*Cf. Cod. Theod.* xvi. 10, 1.

*Cf. Cod. Theod.* ix. xvi. 1-3. iv. 48.

As yet no one could foresee that the Empire —the organized power of the old world—was doomed. Somewhat less than two years before his death Constantine celebrated his *Tricennalia.* On that occasion Eusebius pronounced a very remarkable oration in his honour, which has been preserved. And among other subjects he treats in this of the relation of the Church to the Empire, in a fashion which probably expresses very fairly the ideas of the Emperor himself. Two great powers, he says, rose simultaneously in the world, the source of blessing to men, the Roman Sovereignty, and the teaching of Christianity. The one put an end to the wars and bloodshed which had separated the many nations of the world; the other abolished the power of the demons who had fostered the divisions of men. Everywhere faith in one God was proclaimed, and obedience to one sovereign was enforced. Side

*L.C.* 1.

by side, so Eusebius most strongly argues, these great twin powers advanced, starting from one goal, moving towards one end. What was wanting to their perfect triumph was at length within reach. By the help of Christianity, which prepared the way for its extension, the Empire would soon reach to the utmost boundaries of the world.

It is easy to see from such language how a Christian bishop was blinded by the glory of Rome; and then it is not less easy to see how the Emperor, with even more excusable misapprehension, was led to claim in the name of his office functions to which he had no right; how a fatal confusion of the spiritual and temporal powers came to pass of necessity in the Eastern Church; how the worst evils of Byzantinism were included in this first great triumph of Christianity. But for the moment we can sympathize with the spectators of the splendid vision, and yet not forget that meanwhile another sovereignty was gathering strength in the deserted capital of the old world to continue the supremacy of the eternal city; nor forget that by the Rhine and by the Danube new peoples were learning the name of Christ, who should teach fresh lessons from the Gospels to the many kingdoms of a later age.

One other point demands careful regard in this connexion. In Constantine we have seen the clearest assertion of a divine power of sovereignty; and it was by various stages of descent

that the theory of divine right was fashioned from his example in later times. But it will be observed that the divine authority of the Emperor was official, and not hereditary in this primary type. Constantine claimed it, not by descent, but as one called to the supreme government. The Empire, so to speak, and not the family was divine. The Emperor exercised his spiritual functions as the head of the state, in virtue of the higher life of the state and not as the representative of a certain line by an indefeasible privilege propagated in direct succession. So far the first Christian Emperor accepted and ratified the old principle of the Roman Commonwealth, while at the same time he embodied it in a loftier and more commanding shape.

Any account of the religious history of Constantine would be incomplete without some notice of his baptism, in which it was consummated. It is needless to dwell on the wild legends by which it has been embellished. Eusebius, who may have been present at the occasion, has left a narrative of the circumstances which bears every mark of truth. *V.C.* iv. 61 *ff.*

He says that when Constantine felt that his end was near he thought that the time had come to expiate the sins of his lifetime, firmly believing that baptism would blot out all. So having confessed his sins in the Church of the Martyrs, and implored the pardon of God, he summoned the bishops to Nicomedia and begged them to baptize him. He said that it had been his purpose to be

baptized in the river Jordan, but God, Who knew best, had ordered otherwise. He was accordingly baptized in the Church of the Martyrs, which he had built, and having been robed in white after the completion of the rite, declined to wear the purple any more. After giving thanks to God, he added, "I know that now I am really blessed; that now I am worthy of eternal life; that now I am partaker of the divine light."

It has seemed to me necessary to dwell somewhat at length upon the growth of the faith of Constantine, upon the development of his religious policy, upon the outlines of his theory of a Christian empire, because these considerations illustrate the nature of that period of transition with which we have to deal. To speak of Constantine, as Niebuhr is reported to have done, "as a superstitious man, who mixed up his Christian religion with all kinds of absurd superstitions and opinions, . . . whose religion was a strange jumble indeed," is entirely to lose the main lesson of his history. His conversion, if it was occasioned by a miracle, was not wrought by a miracle. The heavenly fire which flashed upon him did not at once mould him, as the Apostle Paul was moulded, to the fashion of a Christian. Slowly and painfully, moving ever towards the light, he seems to have seen, as he advanced, more and more clearly what the faith was which at first he identified with the Author of his own successes.

Even to the last he stands before us as Constantine the Conqueror. When Helena sent him

the nails which had fastened the Saviour to the Cross, according to the familiar legend, he used them for his helmet and the bit of his war-horse. The fragment of the Cross itself he placed in his own statue, with the attributes of the sun, at Constantinople, on the great purple column, in the firm faith that the city where it was preserved would be immortal.

Socr. i. 18.

Constantine is a figure of the passage from the old world to the new. And it is well that we should notice that the passage is presented to us not in the person of a philosopher busy with his own thoughts, but in that of a statesman who with all his weaknesses looked for One without him who might give him the succour which he could not find elsewhere, who believed in the efficacy of prayer, who trusted in a personal fellowship with the object of his worship. Such a nature was exposed to many dangers, and Constantine did not escape them. But if his worth be estimated by what he did he will rank second to few among the benefactors of humanity.

# XI

## THE COINS OF CONSTANTINE

THE coins of Constantine[1] offer a partial and yet a most interesting commentary on the changes and aspirations by which his reign was marked. I propose only to notice those which illustrate the particular points which have already passed under our consideration. I shall, therefore, in the first place enumerate very briefly some of those which appear to reflect in their devices or legends the great hopes with which the age was inspired. Afterwards I shall endeavour to trace the disappearance of distinctively pagan emblems. And then I shall examine the various types which bear Christian symbols, the cross or the sacred monogram.

[1] The numismatic authorities cited by Dr. Westcott appear to be the following :—

Anselmus Bandurius. *Numismata Imperatorum Romanorum a Trajano Decio ad Paleologos Augustos.* Paris, 1718.

Henri Cohen. *Description générale des monnaies frappées sous l'empire romain jusqu'à la chute de l'empire d'Occident.* Paris, 1859-1868.

Joseph Eckhel. *Doctrina numorum veterum.* 1828.

Rafaelle Garrucci. *Revue numismatique.* 1866. *Numismatique Constantinium.*

Comparatively few of the coins of Constantine are dated, but the general limits of different groups can be fixed by the public events of his reign. He was created *Augustus* in 308: he received the epithet *Maximus* in 315: the younger Licinius, Crispus, and the younger Constantinus were created Caesars in 317: Constantius was declared Caesar in 323: Constans in 330: Dalmatius in 335: Constantinople was founded in 330. The absence or occurrence of a particular type in the series of one or other of the Caesars furnishes a clue to the date of its introduction or disuse. If, for example, a type otherwise common does not occur in the series of Constantius Caesar it may reasonably be concluded that it had passed out of use before 323. If, again, a coin bears the mint-mark of Constantinople it must have been struck after 330. Other criteria of date can be obtained from the size of the pieces; but the broad historic divisions which I have mentioned will be sufficient for our inquiry.

Some of the characteristic legends employed on Constantine's coinage were borrowed from earlier types: as *saeculi*, or *temporum*, or *reipublicae felicitas*, *felicia tempora*, *concordia imperii* or *militum*, *utilitas publica*.

Some new legends which he shares with Licinius mark the anticipations which were formed from the common successes of the allied emperors, as *claritas reipublicae*, with the device of a ray-crowned figure of the Sun; *sapientia principis* or *principis providentisimi sapientia*, with the double

symbol of an owl and arms to mark the twofold victories of peace and war; *victoriae laetae principis perpetui*, with the device of two Victories resting a buckler on a pedestal; the bold boast *ubique victores*; and the proud hope, *fundator pacis*.

The legends which Constantine himself introduced are singularly lofty in their language. One group in which the stability of the Empire is asserted is particularly conspicuous: *victoria perpetua*, *virtus perpetua*, *gloria perpetua*. Scarcely less significant are *gaudium reipublicae*, *gloria Romanorum*, *ubertas saeculi*, *liberator orbis*, *salus et spes reipublicae*, *restitutor libertatis*. One of the most interesting types bears the legend *beata tranquillitas*, with the striking device of a globe resting upon a solid square plinth or altar with three stars above. But perhaps the most interesting type of all is that in which the Emperor is represented, seated upon a breastplate, reaching forward to receive a phoenix placed upon a globe which is offered to him by a military figure. A renovated world is presented as the reward of peace won by war. Two legends are connected with this striking device and both are new. One is *Gloria saeculi virtus Caesaris*, and the other *Reparatio saeculi*. Neither is found afterwards, but the legend, *Felix temporum reparatio*, in combination with a single figure of the phoenix standing on a globe is found on coins of Constans and Constantius.

On the earlier coins of Constantine, pagan inscriptions are very common, as *Jovi conservatori*,

*Herculi Victori*, *Marti propugnatori*, *Genio imperatoris*, *Genio populi Romani*, *Soli invicto*, *Soli invicto comiti*; but of these no example can be shewn to be subsequent to 323, and the names of Jupiter and Hercules do not occur later than 315, that is, they are not combined after the defeat of Maxentius with the title Maximus; and in the absence of other evidence it is reasonable to suppose that Constantine ceased to use these pagan types about the time of the edict of Milan. At the same time it must be noticed that the inscription "*Jovi conservatori*" is found on coins of the Caesars Crispus and Constantine, which must have been struck after 317, but these coins were struck in mints which were under the control of Licinius (as Nicomedia), and illustrate the confusion of the time when the coinage of the two parts of the Empire reflected the influence of the two faiths.

Two types, however, remain: *Soli invicto comiti*, and *Marti* or *Marti patri conservatori*, which were certainly used by Constantine himself for some time after the other pagan types were discarded. These actually occur in combination with the cross and the monogram. And this fact points to the conclusion, which I have already noticed, that the figures were regarded as emblems, just as Victory or Peace, and not as representations of the old deities. The features and the helmet of Mars are said to be unmistakably those of the Emperor; and there are abundant traces of Constantine's desire to appear with the attributes of the Sun as

Banduri, p. 263 n.

Cf. Banduri, ii. p. 269.

"the golden light of the new world." A conspicuous ornament of Constantinople was a statue in which he was represented like the sun; and the figure of Apollo which accompanies the legend *Soli invicto*, is found also with the legend *Claritas reipublicae* in a series of Constantinian coins reaching as late as Constans (A.D. 333), if a single example of that prince is genuine; and in these the figure evidently has a symbolic value. But it would be necessary to make a far more careful examination of the types and mints than I have been able to make before asserting that no truly pagan type was struck in Constantine's dominions between the years 313 and 325. It is certain, for example, that in Egypt pagan types continued to be used, though very rarely, till near the close of the century. Coins of Crispus, Valentinian, and Valens, are found bearing the image of Isis; a coin of Constantine's bears that of Anubis; and, what is still more surprising, a coin of Gratian bears a new type of the Egyptian Hercules. Still, when every reserve is made, the fact remains substantially true, that after the final defeat of Licinius, when Constantine became supreme master of the Empire, the coinage was henceforth universally cleared of pagan inscriptions and devices.

The pagan devices disappear, but their place is not at once occupied by Christian devices. The coins of Constantine and of his sons which were struck during his lifetime have fewer distinctively Christian emblems than might have been expected.

The language of Sozomen, who says that Constantine "ordered that the divine symbol [of the cross] should be combined with all representations of him upon coins or in paintings," is strikingly at variance with existing facts. The fullest enumeration gives barely forty types, and even of these few are conspicuously Christian in treatment. The first two series, including all coins earlier than 330, presents only the simple cross or monogram generally on the field. After 330 the monogram appears upon the banner, a treatment of the symbol which was most commonly adopted in later times. Soz. i. 8.

Some coins in the earliest series are interesting. In two examples the sacred monogram is found upon the Emperor's helmet with the legend *Victoriae laetae principis perpetui.* No clue fixes exactly the earliest date of these pieces, but it is worthy of notice that Eusebius, when describing the monogram, mentions particularly that "the Emperor was accustomed to have it upon his helmet" after the date of the vision. The same legend (*Victoriae laetae principis perpetui*) occurs in combination with a simple cross upon the face of a pedestal which supports a shield held by two Victories. The type was probably introduced in honour of the double victories of Constantine and Licinius, though coins with the latter device were struck after 317 in several western mints as Thessalonica, Arles, and London (?). Another legend combined with the monogram on coins of Constantine and Licinius, and of the younger Constantine, the V.C. i. 31.

younger Licinius and Crispus (that is after 317) is *Virtus exercitus*, which first appears on coins of Galerius. Both the legends agree in presenting the cross under the aspect in which Constantine first adopted it, as the pledge of Victory. The remaining coins of this first series are those which bear the seemingly pagan legends, *Marti conservatori*, *Marti patri conservatori*, and *Soli, invicto comiti*, in combination both with the monogram and the simple cross.

The coins which belong to the series from 323 to 330 offer very few Christian emblems. The one legend is still a legend of victory, *Gloria exercitus*, and a cross stands either between soldiers bearing standards or on the field with a single soldier. To these must be added a single type of the queen-mother Helena bearing the legend *Pax publica* with a plain cross.

After 330 the types of the Christian coins become more varied. The martial legends still prevail: *Gloria exercitus* with two soldiers and the monogram on the field between them, or (which is the commonest type of all) two soldiers with the labarum bearing the monogram upon the banner: and *Victoria Constantini*, with the simplest form of the monogram (☧). On another coin the Emperor himself holds the labarum with the monogram upon it. Coins of Constantinople occur with the cross and with the monogram; and, what seems a startling combination, in some examples of a coin of Rome the monogram is placed above the figure of the wolf who is suckling the sacred twins.

One coin struck at Constantinople is a most remarkable piece. Four specimens of it have been described. It bears on the reverse the legend *Spes publica*, with the device of a labarum resting upon a snake. The figure of the labarum corresponds with the description of Eusebius, and the whole design is similar to that of the painting which, according to the same historian, Constantine set up over the royal portico to be visible to the "eyes of all." To the coins which have been enumerated two further types must be added, which bear a new legend, *aeterna pietas*. Both represent a figure of the Emperor holding in his right hand a globe supporting the monogram; and one of them adds to this a simple cross in the field.

*V.C.* i. 31

*V.C.* iii. 3.

This brief summary includes, I believe, all the coins of Constantine or of his family struck during his lifetime which bear Christian emblems. Other coins which have been described are of questionable authencity, as one which bears the monogram between *a* and *ω* with the legend *Victoria maxima*; and another with the monogram and a star above with the legend *in hoc sin.* (*sic*) *vic.* Some genuine coins again have been strangely misinterpreted, as, for instance, a bronze medallion of Crispus with the legend *Salus et spes reipublicae*, which is said to exhibit a seated figure of Christ between two soldiers. For if the coin be genuine, there can be no doubt that it represents the Emperor with his two sons, Crispus and Constantine, a device which is found with the same legend on one of

Garucci, p. 109.

Eckhel, viii. p. 84.

Band. ii. p. 256.

Constantine's own medallions. But the most remarkable of these ingenious mistakes was made with regard to the interpretation of a legend *Constantino P. Aug. B.R.P. nato.* The last phrase is found only on coins of Constantine and Flavius Victor, son of the usurper Maximius (383) and the examples of the coins are rare. It was not therefore surprising that the letters should have been misread B.A.P. N.A.T. and supposed to commemorate the rebirth of Constantine in baptism. Perhaps, too, it was not surprising that when the error had once been made it should have found many advocates. Still the mistake is obvious when once pointed out, for the full phrase, *bono reipublicae nato* is found on an inscription in honour of Constantine, and suits the device which represents the Emperor leaning on a spear and holding a globe.

Band. ii. p. 522.

Band. ii. p. 260 n.

In these rare instances the confession of the Christian faith is made with something of reserve and cautiously; but the sons of Constantine were withheld by no such reserve. On a coin of Constans struck after his father's death the new[1] legend, *felix temporum reparatio*, is joined with the significant device of the Emperor holding in his right hand a labarum with the sacred monogram, and in the left a globe having a phoenix, while he stands upon a trireme steered by Victory. The words, *Hoc signo victor eris*, and the monogram between *α* and *ω* are first found on coins of

Band. ii. p. 357.

[1] Coin of Constantine probably wrongly named. — Banduri, ii. p. 271.

Constantine. In the former case the device represents Victory crowning the Emperor who holds the inscribed labarum.

Two other types of the coins of Constantine deserve notice. In one of these the head of the Emperor is represented as uplifted, "looking at the moon" in the mocking words of Julian.[1] No inscription occurs round it. There can be little doubt that these coins furnished the occasion for the remark of Eusebius that "any one might learn how deeply the divine faith was fixed in his soul from the fact that he himself caused his likeness to be represented on his gold pieces in the attitude of prayer, looking upwards intently to God." The mode of representation is the more remarkable as it never occurs again in the Roman coinage.

*V.C.* iv. 15. ἀνατεταμένος.

The last type to be mentioned is even more interesting, for it commemorates the transfiguration of a heathen rite. It was common to celebrate the consecration of the Emperor in posthumous coins. In the cases of Constantius (the father of Constantine), Galerius, and Maximian, the old emblems are preserved, a temple to show the divine honours due to the deceased, an eagle to suggest the flight of his soul to heaven. But on the coins of Constantine a new and beautiful image is introduced. The emperor stands upon a chariot with his hand stretched out towards heaven, and from the clouds another hand, far

[1] Julian, *Caes.*, e.g. p. 92 ἐρωτικῶς οὖν εἶχεν αὐτῆς καὶ ὅλως πρὸς ἐκείνην βλέπων . . .

greater, is extended to welcome and raise him. The deification which before had been regarded as the natural close of the life of him in whom the idea of the State was embodied, is at last connected with the personal love of a supreme Sovereign. The thought was once shadowed out, and from the time of Constantine no more coins of consecration were struck.

# XII

## DISSENSIONS AMONG CHRISTIANS

CONSTANTINE had scarcely assumed the sole sovereignty of the empire before he was made aware of the grave dissensions which troubled the Christian body and weakened the force to which he looked for the spiritual unity of the state. The Arian controversy had already agitated the Church of Alexandria for about five years at the time of the overthrow of Licinius, and there were no signs of its abatement. The emperor, if he could not fully appreciate the gravity of the issue involved in the debate, felt keenly the perils which it brought to his scheme for the pacification of the world; and he gave expression to his hopes, his disappointment, and his counsels in a letter which he addressed to Alexander and Arius. In this he called God to witness that he had proposed two objects to himself in the prosecution of his policy, the establishment of religious concord throughout all nations, and the removal of external disorders of the empire. The second result depended for its stability upon the attainment of

*V.C.* ii. 64 *ff.* (*Cf.* Socr. i. 7.)

the first. "I knew," he writes, "that if I could bring about general agreement among all the servants of God in answer to my prayers the direction of public affairs would happily enjoy a change consonant with the pious feelings of the population." Vexatious disputes in the West and the rivalry of Licinius had for a time hindered his success. But he had looked to his conquest of the East as placing the end within his reach. He thought that peace at length would dawn upon the world from the same region of light from which the Faith itself had spread. But, he goes on to say, "to mark the strange and glorious providence of God, what fatal tidings wounded my ears, yea rather my very heart, when I learnt that the division which found place among you was far more grievous than those divisions which I had left in the West, so that for the moment your quarters of the world required more anxious attention, though I hoped to find in them ready to my hands the healing power for my other subjects." . . . "Give me back then," he concludes, "days of tranquillity and nights untroubled by care, that henceforth it may be my lot to know some pleasure in unclouded light, some gladness in a peaceful life. If you will not, I must give myself up to sorrow and be wholly lost in tears. I cannot even support with calmness the course of life. For if the people of God, I mean my fellow-servants, are divided by such an unjust and harmful contention, how is it possible that my thoughts and purposes can for the future

be clear and consistent. You can perceive from what I am about to say, the excess of my grief at this. When I came quite lately to Nicomedia, I had the intention of hastening immediately to the East. While then I was hurrying to visit you and in spirit already with you, the news of this matter suddenly changed my design. I shrank from being forced actually to look on that which I thought it impossible to hear of with patience. Open then, I pray you, by your harmony the road to the East, which you have closed by your mutual contentions, and grant me to see without delay your joy and the joy of all people, and to render to the Supreme Power with the glad voice of thanksgiving due return of gratitude for the general concord and freedom of all."

The letter produced no good effect. "The question," Eusebius adds, "was too great to be dealt with in such a way, so that the strife of the contending parties was only intensified [by the attempted mediation] and the evil grew and spread through all the Eastern provinces. Such was the working of some envious and evil spirit who was maliciously bent against the blessings of the Church." From the teachers the controversy spread to the congregations. Everywhere there was confusion and violence. Christianity was made a public object of ridicule and even exposed to derision upon the stage. Socr. i. 6 § 35.

The external victory of Christianity was thus coincident with a trial which shook the Faith to its foundations. Constantine found that the com-

mand of the entire resources of the empire brought with it a revelation of unexpected difficulties. As long as he was only emperor of the West, his action had seemed crippled. He could not, as he believed, use the most effectual forces to check the disciplinary schisms which distracted the African Christians. When at last he was in a position to employ the collected power of the whole Catholic Church, he found that the body was agitated by more serious disputes than questions of order; that it was something far greater than an organization; that it was inspired by thoughts which reached beyond the control of imperial authority; that his own measurement of great and small did not correspond with the standard of believers; that problems were raised which he could hardly understand; that he must in some way evoke the unity which he did not find, as he had expected, waiting ready for his recognition, and which he could not create.

This strange surprise, as it must have seemed, was inevitable. However natural and however keen the disappointment of the emperor may have been, it was impossible that the wide spread of Christianity should not involve the development of divergent tendencies, and that these should issue in divisions through individual perversity and narrowness. Not only were the generic differences of the Eastern and Western characters sharply reflected in the characteristic forms of Greek and Latin Christianity, but those universal types of mind which may be said to

incline respectively to rigorism, to rationalism, and to dogmatism, are shaping for themselves special embodiments which at the beginning of the third century portended serious conflicts. The adoption of Christianity by the emperor, bringing with it the necessary endeavour to fuse all Christian elements into one mass, made differences which had been half-hidden by isolation sensibly felt.

The three chief questions which were proposed for decision to the Council of Nicaea, however unequal in importance they may appear, correspond with the tendencies which have been indicated: the celebration of Easter, the principle of the Meletian schism, the Divine Nature of Christ They sprang respectively out of the three distinct regions of Christian controversy—worship, discipline, dogma. They offered scope for the development of the different modes of thinking which were current in the East and West. They still enable us to appreciate the divergences of feeling which threatened then, and threaten at all times, the unity of the Church.

Several collateral circumstances have invested the controversy on the celebration of Easter with considerable interest. The festival was the most signal point of connexion between the forms of worship under the Old and New Covenants. It had special points of connexion with both. By the death of Christ it was united with the Jewish sacrifice of the Paschal lamb; by the Resurrection it was united with the earliest Christian holy day,

the first day of the week. The former thought was for a time predominant. Even in apostolic times the commemoration of the death of Christ was marked as the Christian Passover; and the literal reverence for the old ritual, when it found no other refuge in the Church, lingered still for a long time in this part of the Christian service. It was natural that this should be the case in the Jewish congregations: it was not less natural that in Gentile congregations the celebration of the Feast should assume a more independent type. In this way the fundamental difference of observance arose. But there is one point of agreement between the early Churches which must be noticed. All the most ancient writers both in the East and West identify the death of Christ with the sacrifice of the Paschal Lamb. In other words, the Christian Passover was not regarded as the commemoration of the Lord's Supper, which was no true Passover; but while they were agreed upon this, against much later opinion, in the Judaic group of churches the commemoration of the death of Christ—the antitypal Paschal Lamb—was made to coincide with Jewish sacrifice of the Passover, the 14th of Nisan, on whatever day of the week this might fall, from which they gained the title "Quartodeciman": in the Gentile group it was placed on the Friday which either fell on this date or followed first after it. With the Jewish Churches the power of the old faith so far prevailed that the Christian Festival seemed to perpetuate that

1 Cor. v. 7.

ancient rite of which it was the fulfilment, though in an infinitely higher form: the continuity of celebration was not broken. With the Gentile Churches the unique fact in which the early type was realized was the single point to which they looked: from this a fresh age took its course. It followed from this difference of view that in the one case the same day of the lunar month was always observed; in the other case the same day of the week. Or, to put the matter in another light, the Gentile Churches started from the new Festival of the Resurrection, the first day of the week, as their fixed measure; the Judaic Churches started from the old Festival of the Passover. And the contrast of feeling was so complete that for some time the Quartodecimans seem to have commemorated the Resurrection on the 16th of Nisan without any regard to the day of the week with which that date might coincide. Here, however, a Christian instinct interposed, and in the second century "a majority of the Christian bishops decided that the mystery of the Resurrection should be celebrated only on a Sunday." Euseb. *H.E.* v. 23. Another remarkable indication of the same variation in the aspect of the Festival appears in the different senses given to the word Pascha. The whole Easter Festival, the Festival of Redempton, included the commemoration of the Death and of the Rising of the Lord. The Jewish interest so to speak, was centred in the Death, which coincided with the Festival of their national deliverance, and Pascha, as interpreted by that

was the πάσχα σταυρώσιμον (Passover of the Cross), or the commemoration of Christ's death. When this had been commemorated, the period of fasting was over: the feast began. The Gentile interest, uninfluenced by Jewish usages, was centred in the Resurrection, which fixed the weekly feast, and Pascha interpreted by that was the πάσχα ἀναστάσιμον (Passover of the Resurrection), the commemoration of Christ's victory. Till that day came round the time of fasting was not closed. The idea of the Christian Passover, to borrow our modern term, was identified on the one side with that of Good Friday, and on the other with that of Easter Day.

From what has been said, it is easy to understand the simplest form of the Paschal controversy. The Asiatic churches, which followed the tradition of St. John, were Quartodeciman. They fixed their Christian Passover in memory of Christ's death, on the 14th of Nisan. The Western churches and others, in which the yearly commemoration of the Passion and Resurrection of Christ had taken shape less under Jewish influence, so far followed old customs as to determine their Good Friday by the 14th of Nisan, but they treated the week-day and not the month-day as unchangeable. Other complications were afterwards introduced into this intelligible divergence. The position of the lunar month of Nisan in the solar year was not absolutely fixed. It is said that up to apostolic times the full moon of Nisan was always that which

first followed the vernal equinox, and this was the reckoning adopted generally in the Christian Church. But afterwards the Jews took in some cases the full moon next before the vernal equinox for the full moon of Nisan, and thus there might be a difference of a month in the calculation of the time of Easter, according as it was determined by the Christian or by the Jewish mode of computation.

Yet further difficulties arose from disagreement as to the true date of the vernal equinox. This was fixed by Roman authorities on the 18th of March, by the Alexandrians on the 21st. It was possible, therefore, that in this way again the Alexandrian and Roman dates of Easter might differ by a whole month, though they were professedly fixed upon the same principle.

But it is unnecessary to pursue these details. The general divergence is that in which we are chiefly interested. This involved a distinct principle, and was a striking memorial of the early history of Christianity; and the mode in which the question was treated in the Eastern and Western Churches illustrates some of their characteristic traits. The Greeks clung with resolute tenacity to the customs which they had received: the Latins treated difference of practice in such a case as a scandal. On the one side stress was laid upon the historical unity of the old and new: on the other the truth of Christian independence was strenuously affirmed. To set the question in the broadest light the Quartodecimans

represented the party of tradition and immobility; those who followed the Western usage, the party of originality and action.

*Cf.* Socr. *H.E.* v. 22.

The divergence came to light in the first intercourse between Asia and Rome after apostolic times of which we have any record. When Polycarp visited Anicetus early in the second half of the second century the two bishops maintained their respective usages and separated in peace. A generation afterwards the controversy took a more violent form. Victor, the Bishop of Rome, wished to force the Western practice upon the Asiatic Church, and was scarcely persuaded by Irenaeus to refrain from excommunicating all who refused to adopt it. The reason for this extreme measure is probably to be found in a serious difference among the Quartodecimans which had in the meantime come to light in Asia. There was a party among them who not only observed the 14th of Nisan, but who actually celebrated the Jewish Passover on that day. This heresy, for it was no less, threw grave suspicion upon the Quartodeciman usage altogether in spite of the zeal with which orthodox Quartodecimans, like Melito and Apollinaris, opposed it ; and it may well have appeared of great importance to put an end to a mode of celebrating the Christian Passover which opened the way to this corruption. But though the Western usage gained ground the dissidents were an important and resolute body.

Euseb. *H.E.* v. 24.

Before the Council of Nicaea, however, a remarkable change had taken place. The usage of

the Christians of proconsular Asia had become conformable to that of the West; and the usage of the province of Antioch, on the other hand, had apparently become Quartodeciman. At that date the Western usage, which was popularly referred to the Apostles St. Peter and St. Paul, prevailed all through the Christian world except in Phrygia and some contiguous districts of Asia Minor, Syria, and Mesopotamia. Socr. v. 22 § 28.

But the extent of the divergence, though circumscribed, was sufficient to create serious trouble. Even if communion was not interrupted by the variety of usage, sympathy was disturbed and injured by it. The disagreement was one which found a striking outward expression, and could not but occasion a feeling of disunion greater than that which it really represented. It clouded the brightest Christian festival. At the same time the point at issue was not wholly trivial. It involved at least the decision of the true independence of the Christian ritual. And the prominence which the question assumed at the Council of Arles is a signal proof of the magnitude of the practical evils which flowed from it. The very first canon prescribed that "the Passover should be celebrated on one day and time," that is, apparently always on the same day of the week (Friday), and that day everywhere determined by the same cycle. Socr. i. 8 § 3. Socr. i. 7 § 3.

But it was not to be expected that the decrees of a Western Synod should find acceptance in Asia, and the resolution of the whole question

was proposed to the Council of Nicaea, where, as we shall see, all that was distinctively Jewish in the observance of the Festival was done away, while at the same time the connexion of the Festival with the Passover was not wholly broken. So much at least of the Passover ritual remains to the present day that our Easter depends upon the full moon, which is supposed to coincide with the true date of the Passover.

The Paschal controversy which was submitted to the Council of Nicaea carries us back to the earliest age. In that we see the last trace of the Judaizing tendencies which had agitated the apostolic Church, though they were at last reduced to a sentiment and a tradition and destitute of all directly dogmatic importance. A second principal subject which was brought before the Council sprang out of the recent troubles of the last persecution. This was the Melitian schism. The accounts of it which have been preserved are singularly conflicting, and agree only in the fact that Melitius, bishop of Lycopolis, the second see in Egypt, had entered into other dioceses and ordained three bishops and priests, who continued after his death to maintain a separate society. The special grounds of the dispute between Melitius and Peter, the bishop of Alexandria, cannot be certainly discovered, but a reasonable conjecture can be made as to their character. Two remarkable letters have been preserved in a rude Latin translation, which date from the beginning of the schism. One of these is a stern remon-

strance addressed to Melitius by four imprisoned bishops, who were soon afterwards martyred. In this he is accused of having entered ito districts under the jurisdiction of Peter and ordained them without his sanction. Peter himself was absent from his diocese and yet not in prison, so that it is likely that he had retired from the storm and left his church to the care of circuit-ministers (*περιοδευταί*), who would be less likely to attract attention. By this apparent desertion of his post, Peter gave occasion to Melitius to assert his supremacy as next in dignity of the Egyptian bishops, and a schism was commenced under the plea of zeal. The remonstrance of the confessors produced no effect upon him, and not long afterwards Peter wrote to the Alexandrine Church and forbade the members of it to communicate with Melitius. The narrative in Epiphanius, which contains many unquestionable errors, seems to preserve some details which belong to a later date. According to this Peter and Melitius were confined in prison together. During their confinement a discussion arose between them as to the treatment of the lapsed. Peter inclined to the most merciful course, which was vehemently opposed by Melitius. The controversy grew so sharp that at last Peter hung up his mantle across the prison as a curtain of separation, and ordered his deacon to proclaim, "Let those who are of the opinion of Peter go to the side of Peter and the party of Melitius to Melitius." But in that time of trial the spirit of severity prevailed, and few only of the confessors

Routh, iv. 91 *ff.*

*Haer.* lxviii. 1 *ff.*

ranged themselves on the side of mercy. Yet Peter nobly vindicated his unselfish courage shortly afterwards, and died a martyr. Melitius escaped with his life, and at a later time joined with the Arians in intrigue against successive bishops of Alexandria, although it does not appear that he lapsed into heresy.

Dark and complicated as the details of this schism are, they fill an important page in the history of the time. Melitius stands out as a representative of that restless, presumptuous, hard temper, which, supported by unquestionable zeal and vehement though fitful devotion, makes disastrous evils in the Church in all ages. In some form or other "a Church of the Martyrs" is set up in every great crisis of trial against "the Catholic Church," and there is a power of seductiveness in the title which repeated failure cannot deprive of its attraction. The spirit of self-assertion which finds expression in this form is the very life of schism. And the questions in which it was introduced at Alexandria were not unworthy of being debated in the first great council of Christendom.

*Cf.* Epiph. *Haer.* lxix. 3; ἐθελοδικαιοσύνη.

Of the three principal topics decided at Nicaea the Paschal controversy was a typical example of traditional ritualism; the Melitian schism was a typical example of disciplinary separatism; the remaining topic, the heresy of Arius, was a typical example of dogmatic ritualism. For us this last topic has practically obliterated the remembrance of the other two, and yet at the time all these

were regarded as involving in not very unequal degrees serious perils to the unity of the Church. A controversy of fifty years marked afterwards the vital and unalterable importance of the true doctrine of the Divinity of Christ. Outward changes have obscured the great principles which lay in the concrete questions of the celebration of Easter and irregular ordination. But if we would try to understand the Council of Nicaea we must for the time forget the lifelong battle of Athanasius, the retrograde reign of Constantius, the vacillation of later councils in the East and West; we must forget glosses and compromises and intrigues; we must forget all that we have learnt by later experience and thought, which for the moment no prophetic foresight anticipated. We must endeavour to look at the teaching of Arius as it was first presented, vague, undefined, negative; we must place it in relation to earlier modes of thought, if we would rightly measure the extent of our debt to the Nicene Fathers, and rightly interpret the lessons which they teach us.

The accounts of the character of the doctrine of Arius which have been preserved are almost exclusively contained in the writings of his opponents. Of his own writings two letters and a few fragments alone remain. And the meagre remains of later Arian authors add little to these scanty memorials of his work. But though this is so, it is not difficult to realise what he was. There is no reason to think that the great out-

lines of his character have been distorted. He stands out clearly and intelligibly as the interpreter of views which, we may venture to say, must have presented themselves necessarily to many in the crisis at which he lived. The external traits of his bearing and his life correspond with the part which he filled. No charge is brought against him which is inconsistent with the personal influence which he exercised. He was endowed with the gifts which make a great leader; he was inspired with the impatient self-confidence which makes a heresiarch.

*Haer.* lxix. 3 The well-known description of Epiphanius has preserved a life-like portrait of Arius. In figure he was very tall. His eyes were bent to the ground. He had, as it appears, a conspicuous stoop, which suggested the image of a snake to the historian of heresies, as aptly describing his power to deceive any guileless soul by his wily manners. His dress was severely simple. He wore a sleeveless tunic (*κολόβιον*), and a thin and scanty cloak (*ἡμιφόριον*). His address was distinguished by a winning kindness. He was equally powerful in the use of argument and of influence. His sympathies were with asceticism; and Epiphanius adds that seven hundred virgins, carried away by him from the Church, witnessed to his authority. If we add to these traits the peculiarities which belonged to his Libyan descent, and his training in the school of Antioch, the pale, emaciated features, the shaggy mass of hair which shaded his brow, the

Gelas. *Hist. C. N.* iii. 1.

keen impetuous nature flashing out in passionate bursts of feeling, and then relapsing into a sad melancholy, the eager reliance upon argument, we shall be able to see him as he appeared at Alexandria, the presbyter in charge of the oldest church in the city (that of Baucalis), already famous for his abilities, and spoken of as a claimant for the Episcopate, at the time when Alexander succeeded to the see about 312.

The immediate occasion of the Arian controversy is recorded well and simply by Socrates. "When Alexander succeeded to the bishopric of Alexandria after the close of the persecution he devoted himself with especial zeal to the subject of the Holy Trinity, arguing in a philosophical fashion that there was a unity (μονάς) in the Trinity. Thereupon Arius, who was gifted with dialectical power, supposing that the bishop was introducing the doctrine of Sabellius, in a spirit of contentiousness diverged to the exact opposite of the opinion of Sabellius, and, as it appeared, fiercely controverted what was said by the bishop. If, said he, the Father begot the Son, He that was begotten had a beginning of existence; and from this it is clear (so he continued) that there was when the Son was not, and it follows of necessity that He had His subsistence (ὑπόστασις) from things which were not." Socr. i. 5.

The boldness and plausibility of the reasoning of Arius excited general attention. From a little spark, to use the figure of Socrates, a great fire was kindled. The controversy spread through

Egypt, Libya, and the Upper Thebaid, and soon afterwards to Syria and Asia Minor. For a time Alexander endeavoured to avert an open rupture in the Church, so that he appeared to some to lack vigour and decision. He invited the disputants to a conference and acted as mediator between them. But all attempt at conciliation proved ineffectual, and Arius and his principal adherents were excommunicated by the Egyptian Synod about the year 320.

Soz. i. 15.

Athan. *Ep. ad Ep. Aeg. et Lyb.* 22.

The excommunication of Arius gave occasion to three letters written by the principal actors in the scene—two circular letters addressed by Alexander of Alexandria to foreign bishops, and a third addressed by Arius to his old fellow-student in the school of Lucian, Eusebius bishop of Nicomedia. These letters are the true foundation of the whole later controversy, and leave little to be desired for the understanding of the first phase through which it passed.

In the first and most elaborate letter Alexander gathers up the false teaching of Arius under three heads.[1] He maintained that:

1. There was once (ἦν ποτε) when the Son of God was not, and He who before was not (μὴ ὑπάρχων) afterwards came into being.

*Theod.* i. 4.

2. When He did come into being He was such as every man is by nature, for He is included in the statement that God made all things of nothing (ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων).

[1] The order of these letters is somewhat uncertain. The copy of the first letter contained in Theodoret's *Church History* is addressed to Alexander, bishop of Constantinople.

3. Consequently the Son is of a nature liable to change, admitting the possibility of virtue and vice, so that His sonship did not differ in essence from that which (for example) Peter or Paul might have realized, though God foreknew and foresaw that He would not fall away, and so chose Him out of all created beings.

These errors Alexander meets in succession; and at the same time he lays down rightly that the subsistence of the God-Word (ἡ τοῦ θεοῦ λόγου ὑπόστασις) was not a proper subject for curious speculation. Perhaps it was of this, he characteristically adds, that the Father spoke when he said "My mystery is for Me and for Mine."

§ 21.

Is. xxiv. 16, LXX.

The general course of his argument is that which was pursued afterwards, but in one or two phrases he uses language which shews that the technical definition of the true doctrine was as yet undetermined. He speaks, for example, of the sentence, "I and my Father are one" not being intended to declare that "the *natures* which are two in subsistence are one" (τὰς τῇ ὑποστάσει δύο φύσεις μίαν εἶναι); and again he says that "a one only nature (φύσις μονογενής) mediating between the Father and creation was begotten from the absolute Father Himself, through which the Father of the God-Word made the universe (τὰ ὅλα) out of nothing." In both these cases the word "nature" (φύσις) is used for "person." And it will also be observed that the sense of ὑπόστασις wavers between that which is essential and that

§ 38.

§ 45.

§§ 28, 29, 19.

which is characteristic, so that it does not always cover the same extent of thought.

The second letter of Alexander,[1] addressed to "his beloved and most honoured fellow-servants everywhere throughout the Catholic Church," is somewhat more detailed in the exposition of the errors of Arius, but much briefer in the answers to them. The errors fall under the same divisions as before, and involve the denial of the truths that the Son is coeternal and coessential with the Father, and in Himself immutable.

1. God was not always Father: there was when God was not Father: there was when the Word was not.

2. The Son is a creature and a production (*κτίσμα καὶ ποίημα*). He is not like in essence (*ὅμοιος κατ' οὐσίαν*) to the Father. He is not by nature the Word of the Father: nor yet the true (*ἀληθινός*) Word and the true Wisdom, but only so called by a figure (*καταχρηστικῶς*), whereas He was Himself brought into being by the word and wisdom of God (which were essential attributes of God).

3. He is changeable in nature. He does not know the Father perfectly, nor yet His own essence. He was made (*πεποιημένος*) for us; and He would not have subsisted unless God had wished to make us through Him. He might have fallen as the devil fell.

The account which Arius gives of the con-

[1] Alexander caused his clergy to sign this letter. It is signed by Athanasius as a deacon.

troversy agrees in the main with the accounts of Alexander. "The bishop [Alexander]," he writes, "greatly harasses and persecutes us, and strains every nerve against us, so as even to drive us from the city as godless men, because we do not agree with him when he says publicly "God was always, the Son was always; the Father and the Son are at once absolutely and undistinguishably coexistent (ἅμα πατήρ, ἅμα υἱός); the Son coexists with God ingenerately; He is everborn, ingenerately-born (ἀγεννητογενής); God does not precede the Son by a thought or an atom; God was always, the Son was always. The Son is out of (ἐξ) God Himself." . . . "These impieties," he goes on to say, "we cannot endure to hear, even if the heretics should threaten us with a thousand deaths"; and then adds, "What are our own statements and opinions, our past teaching and our present teaching? that the Son is not unbegotten, nor a part of the Unbegotten in any way, nor [formed] out of any existing element (ἐξ ὑποκειμένου τινός); but that He subsisted (ὑπέστη) by the will and counsel [of God], before times and before ages, complete God (πλήρης θεός), one only one, unchangeable;[1] and before He was begotten, or created, or defined, or founded He was not; for while unbegotten He was not. We are persecuted because we said the Son has a beginning, but God is without beginning. For this reason we are persecuted, and because we said that He is from things which were not (ἐξ οὐκ

Theod. i. 5. Epiph. lxix. 6.

[1] Differs here, *i.e.* unchangeable in fact, not in *essence*.

ὄντων ἐστί); but we used this phrase in so far as He is not a part of God, nor [formed] out of any existing element."

In this first outline, thus roughly drawn, the essential points of the whole controversy come to light. Alexander and Arius agree in speaking of the Son as "begotten," but they differ in this, that the word suggested to Alexander the idea of an eternal relation, to Arius that of priority and succession. The Fatherhood of God in relation to the Son, to put the doctrine in another light, was something essential to His Nature according to Alexander, and something accidental according to Arius. With the one the personality of the Son, was an absolute Truth in the Being of God; with the other it was (so to speak) a fact dependent on the manifestation of God. Alexander insists exclusively on the essential Deity of the Son, and excluding, even at the risk of a paradoxical phrase (ἀγεννητογενής), every term which might seem to suggest any distinction in this respect between the Father and the Son. Arius, on the other side, fixing his thoughts on the Eastern dogma that the Father was the one fountain of Godhead, pressed the truth to consequences which would be logically inevitable in the case of finite existences, but which were at variance with the inherent idea of the infinite subject to which he applied his method. Already Arius, as we shall see more fully afterwards, takes the letter of Scripture and presses it literally. The son, he argues, was begotten; we must then

*Cf.* Theod. i. 2 § 9.

be able to conceive that "there was"—not "there was a time," for this he denied since the conception belonged to a state before time, but that "there was"—when "the Son was not." And again, since God is infinite and indivisible, the Son must have come into being from nothing, for He could not be a part of the Father, to whom all idea of "part" is essentially foreign, and he could not have been formed from that which was pre-existent.

Not to enter now in detail upon the fallacies which led Arius astray, we may notice shortly that they all may be reduced to this fatal fault. He used modes of deduction which are relative as if they were absolute. He extended conclusions which are true of the conditioned to the unconditioned. He applied ideas derived from time to the eternal, even when he professed to exclude the conception of time. He could not rest in that mysterious region where all the highest thoughts of men offer themselves in the form of a final antithesis. He pressed on to rigid definition, boldly dogmatizing when orthodoxy was contented to pause in awe and adoration. He thrust forward his reasonings publicly before all, as if they could be judged by the rude, unchastened methods of ordinary discourse, and did not deal with subjects which must be tried by some more delicate test, and which answer to other parts of our nature than the understanding. A single illustration will be sufficient to indicate the inherent invalidity of his process. He starts from

the assumption that the Son is truly a Son; he ends by the assertion that the Son is not a Son. He presses the idea of succession, which he considers to be involved in the idea of Sonship; and then he deduces that the Son was made out of nothing.

It is uncertain how long Arius remained in Alexandria after his condemnation. He probably found his position there untenable without some stronger external support. To obtain this he visited Palestine and Asia Minor. His chief hope lay in Eusebius, bishop of Nicomedia, who who had already taken some steps in his defence. Accordingly Arius went to Nicomedia,[1] and there he wrote a letter to Alexander in the name of the clergy who had been excommunicated with him, in which he sets forth with elaborate moderation the outlines of their common creed. This letter is the authoritative confession of the Arian faith. As such it is given twice by Hilary in his treatise *On The Trinity*, and for the same reason it formed the basis of the debates at the Synod of Aquileia (381).

Athan. *de Syn.* 16. Epiph. lxix. 7.

*de Trin.* iv. 12 *f.*; vi. 5 *f.*

"To our blessed pope and bishop Alexander, the elders and deacons, greeting in the Lord.

"Our faith which he have [received] from our forefathers, which also we have learnt from thee, blessed pope, is this:—

"We acknowledge (*οἴδαμεν, novimus*), one God, alone unbegotten, alone eternal (*ἀΐδιον*), alone without beginning, alone true (*ἀληθινόν*),

[1] See letter to Paulinus, *Theod.* i. 6.

alone having immortality, alone wise, alone good, alone sovereign (*δυνάστην*), the Judge,[1] Governor, Disposer of all things, unconvertible and unchangeable (*ἄτρεπτον καὶ ἀναλλοίωτον*), just and good, the God at once of the Law, the Prophets, and the New Testament; who begat a Son, one only one, before time began (*πρὸ χρόνων αἰωνίων*), through whom also He made the ages and all things; who begat Him, not figuratively (*δοκήσει, putatione*), but truly; who by His own will caused Him to subsist (*ὑποστήσαντα*), unconvertible and unchangeable, a perfect creature of God, but not as one of the creatures; an offspring (*γέννημα, facturam*), but not as one of things brought into being (*γεγεννημένων*); nor [is it true], as Valentinus laid down, that the offspring of the Father was an Emanation (*προβολή*); nor, as Manichaeus introduced the idea, that the offspring was a part of the Father of the same essence with Him (*ὁμοούσιος, unius substantiae*); nor as Sabellius [taught, when] dividing the unity (*τὴν μονάδα διαιρῶν*) he used the term Son-Father (*υἱοπάτωρ*), nor as Hieracas [taught by the image of] a lamp from a lamp, or as a torch (*λαμπάς*) divided into two; nor [is the Son] one who existed before, [and] was afterwards begotten, or subsequently created (*ἐπικτισθέντα, supercreatum*) a Son; [and] thou also thyself, blessed pope, in the open church and in conclave (*ἐν συνεδρίῳ*) oftentimes stopped those who introduced such doctrines; but, as we assert, he was created (*κτισθέντα*) by the will of

[1] (? *κτίστην*, so Hil. but not *Conc. Aqui.*).

God before times and before ages, and received life and being (*τὸ εἶναι, esse*) from the Father, while the Father caused His glories also to subsist in Him too (*τὰς δόξας συνυποστήσαντος αὐτῷ*). For the Father, when He gave Him the inheritance of all things, did not deprive Himself of that which He has in Himself in a manner underived (*ἀγεννήτως*); for He is fountain of all things.

"So there are three subsistences (*ὑποστάσεις, substantiae*). And God, who is the cause of all things, is without beginning, absolutely alone (*μονώτατος*). The Son who was begotten by the Father, not in time (*ἀχρόνως*), and created and founded before the ages, was not before He was begotten, but being begotten before all things, not in time, was alone made to subsist (*ὑπέστη*) by the Father. For He is not eternal, or coeternal, or co-unbegotten with the Father; nor has He His being together with the Father, as some interpret the doctrine of related conceptions, introducing the doctrine of two co-unoriginated principles (*δύο ἀγεννητοὺς ἀρχάς*); but as God is unity (*μονάς*) and the beginning of all things, so is He before all things. Wherefore also He is before the Son, as we have learnt in fact from your preaching in the open Church. In so far then as [the Son] has His being from God and His glories and His life, and all things were delivered to Him, so far God is His beginning. For God is above Him (*ἄρχει*) as being His God and being before Him. But if the phrases *from Him* . . . (Rom. xi. 36), and *from the womb* . . . (Ps. cix. (cx.) 3), and *I came out*

*from the Father and am come* . . . (John x. 28), are understood by some as [teaching that He is] a part of Him, being of the same essence (*μέρος αὐτοῦ ὁμοουσίου*) and an emanation (*προβολή*); the Father will be compounded and divisible, and convertible, and will be according to such teachers a body, and as far as rests with them subject to the affections which attend a body (*τὰ ἀκόλουθα σώματι πάσχων*) [the Father, I say], who is the Incorporeal God."

Several subjects of remark are suggested by this memorable document. It is found to include, if carefully examined, a complete epitome of the arguments and of the teaching of Arius. The statements are more carefully expressed than in the letter to Eusebius, and with a more studious adoption of the language of Scripture. At the same time they leave the differences between the Arian and the Catholic faith quite untouched.

It is characteristic of the phase which the controversy on the Holy Trinity had reached that the confession is substantially confined to an exposition of the nature and the relations of the Father and of the Son. It affirms, indeed, that there are three "subsistences" (*ὑποστάσεις*), to which later copies add the gloss, "the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit," but no definition is given on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. This doctrine was really included in the doctrine of the Son. The true divinity of the Spirit depended upon the true divinity of the Son, and was involved in it. For the time this part of the

Ath. c. Ar. iii. 15.

controversy was left out of sight. It was easily understood that if the Son was from nothing, then also the Spirit was from nothing.

The doctrine of the Father lies in the partial development of the orthodox ideas that the Father is "the Fountain (πηγή) and origin (ἀρχή) of all things," and that "He is absolutely one (μονάς)." From the first it is concluded that He alone is eternal, and that by His will all things else came into being in such a sense that He is prior to all. From the second, that it is impossible to conceive that any Being can be co-essential with Him, inasmuch as that conception would require either the division of what is inherently indivisible or the substitution of a compound notion for the simple notion of the Godhead.

These conclusions being laid down, the doctrine of the Son followed necessarily. He was, according to Arius, subsequent to the Father and inferior to Him, having been created by Him. But this creation was not in time, and the creation of all other things depended upon it. The Son alone was directly called into being by the Father before time, and the universe in time through Him. He was a creature, yet different from all other creatures in His essential nature. He was placed, as it were, midway between God and the universe, truly perfect, truly divine, and yet divine only in a secondary order.

Such a conception of the Son was in some degree a consequence of the endeavour to realize distinctly His personal nature, His subsistence

(ὑπόστασις), which underlies the conception of the Incarnation. Sabellianism had obscured this aspect of His being. There was consequently a widespread danger lest the historic work of the Incarnation should be undervalued. Arius strove to bring back this idea to its true place in the Christian economy; but in the effort to restore it to clear apprehension he failed to see that a plurality of persons equal in Godhead could be reconciled with the unity *of the divine* nature. He clung rightly to the absolute reality of the personal manifestation of the Son. He clung rightly to the central revelation of the oneness of the Godhead. But he lost the truth when he concluded hastily that these two facts led to such a subordination of the Son to the Father as involved a difference of essence.

At the same time Arius studiously borrowed isolated phrases of Scripture to express his thoughts. The fundamental title *the fountain* was drawn from Baruch: "*Thou* [Israel] *hast forsaken the Fountain of Wisdom*"; the title *only true God* from St. John; *only wise, alone having immortality, alone sovereign*, from St. Paul; *alone good* from St. Matthew. So, again, the phrase used to define the generation of the Son *before time began* was taken from St. Paul; that used to define His unique relationship to the Father, *one only one*, from St. John; that used to define His work, *through whom also He made the ages*, from the Epistle to the Hebrews. Even the word *created* was taken from a false LXX. rendering, and

iii. 12.
Joh. xvii. 3.
Rom. xvi. 27.
1 Tim. vi. 16.
1 Tim. vi. 15.
Matt. xix. 17.
2 Tim. i. 9.
Joh. i. 14, etc.
Heb. i. 2.
Prov. viii. 22.

no passage perhaps exerted a more disastrous influence upon the controversy than this, which is a simple blunder.

But the usage of Scriptural language cannot hide the fact that the Arian Creed, as expressed in this fundamental confession, brings back polytheism. It interposes a new Being between God and Creation, who is not truly one in essence with either, and cannot therefore really unite them. It appears, but appears only, to lessen the chasm between the infinite and the finite, because there can be no true middle term between them. It moves only in the realm of phrases, and does not even aspire to that loftier sphere where faith loses itself in the light of a Divine Presence, which it feels and yet cannot define.

There is still one other point in the teaching of Arius which must be noticed. He erred, as we have seen, in applying strictly human analogies to an Infinite Being. He erred in introducing as a mediator between God and man a Son who was not truly divine. He erred also, and this was a necessary consequence, in pronouncing that all knowledge of God was impossible for man. This is expressed very forcibly in a passage of the *Thalia*: "To speak summarily, God is inherently (ὑπάρχει) ineffable by the Son. For He is to Himself what He is, that is unspeakable: and so the Son has not the knowledge to express anything said with sure comprehension. For it is impossible for Him to trace out the Being of the Father, who is by Himself. For the Son Himself

Athan. *de Syn.* § 15.

knows not His own Being, for being Son He existed at first (ὑπῆρξεν) truly by the will of the Father. How then is it consistent that He who is Himself from the Father should know with certain comprehension Him who begat Him? For it is clear that it is not possible that that which had a beginning should embrace in thought or grasp the essential nature of that which is without beginning."

The reasoning itself is intelligible and sound. Perfect knowledge involves community of nature. The Son could know the Father only by being One with the Father. If He were a creature His revelation could not be complete. And at the same time no complete revelation could be given if the Incarnation were illusory. Man would thus be condemned to final ignorance of God.

# CHAPTER XIII

## THE COUNCIL OF NICAEA

### (1) *Circumstances of the Council*

WE must now examine the circumstances, the character, and the results of the first general Council of Nicaea. The Council of Nicaea marks a crisis in the history of the Empire no less than in the history of the Church. It was the result of important political, ecclesiastical, and theological conflicts; it became the foundation of a new era in the constitution of the State, in the organization of the Christian Body, and in the development of dogma. But the great ideas which then found embodiment and acceptance have always been familiar to us. We are tempted to interpret the earlier age through them. It is very difficult for us to apprehend that they were not distinctly present to the minds of the great masters of the third and fourth centuries. It requires a serious effort that we may realize the struggle through which they passed to a final acknowledgment. We shall see that the gathering of the Council was a necessary part of the policy of Constantine for the consolidation of the Empire. We shall see that the condition

of the Church called for some great movement towards unity. We shall see that the essence of Christianity was involved in the long controversies which were finally decided by the fathers of Nicaea. The expectations with which the assembly was gathered may have failed, and even necessarily failed, but it is something to recall the enthusiasm with which its conclusion was welcomed as the inauguration of a new era. It is something to learn that when the Imperial system to which men then looked with confident hope has passed away, when the methods of reasoning which they followed have been greatly modified, the abiding work of the Council, the Nicene Creed, is still the widest and strongest bond of Christendom, the sure sign that the Spirit of God still speaks through His Church.

With these larger aims before us it will be necessary that we should go back so far as to enable us to trace the general character of those conflicts, those modes of thought and action, those discussions which found their issues in the Council. In the course of twenty years (303-323) the Church passed from a state of fierce persecution to a state of victorious ascendancy. Differences of ritual which had divided believers even from the apostolic age were removed by a decree which was all but universally admitted. A word which had once been rejected by orthodox theologians as dangerous, if not misleading, was made at last the test-word of orthodoxy. Such changes are signs of a vigorous and intense activity. They

show the inherent strength and elasticity of the Faith. They show not only its power to meet outward opposition, but also its power to meet new wants. They warn us against a desponding acquiescence in divisions, and they warn us also against a superstitious distrust of new forms of speech corresponding to new phases of thought. Such lessons are greatly needed now, when once again we find ourselves in a crisis of transition. We doubt whether any true Catholicity is possible, we doubt whether any Divine Presence is effectual among us, because we do not rightly understand the character of those ages in which, when now we count the prizes of victory without the turmoil of the conflict, we can see most clearly the strengthening of unity and the working of God. At all times Christianity is a power of intellectual and social life, no less than of individual life; and we must understand in some degree what this manifold life was at the beginning of the fourth century, if we would understand the Council which was the fullest expression of it, and draw from it the inspiration of hope which it can still give.

Thus several subjects will pass in rapid review before us which may appear at first sight to be remote from our special purpose. We shall have to consider, before we enter upon the history of the Council itself, the external condition of Christianity in the first quarter of the fourth century, its extension and political relations, and the general design of Constantine to unite and quicken the broken and exhausted members of

the State. We shall also have to consider some of the practical and speculative problems which had arisen among Christians from the time when they had reckoned among them philosophers and statesmen. And these introductory inquiries will contribute to our main object if they enable us to appreciate the position which Christians occupied in the civilized world at the time when they obtained a recognized supremacy, to see that the old power of the Empire was exhausted, and to distinguish the tendencies which were astir within the Church. We shall then be prepared to examine with a clearer insight the records of the Council which have been preserved to us, and to investigate in detail its constitution, its debates, its canons, its creed.

If we turn to the writings of Eusebius, to the close of his *History*, or to the *Life* and *Panegyric of Constantine*, we shall see how Christians interpreted the position and prospects of Christianity in the early part of the fourth century. Nothing could give a more direct or vivid reflection of the hopes by which the age was brightened than the language which they contain. Eusebius had lived through the terrible scenes of the persecutions of Diocletian and Maximin. He knew the power of the Christian faith. And so when he saw this power leagued with the power of the Empire, he surrendered himself to visions of lasting joy and peace, which repeated disappointments were unable to destroy or dim. The common victories of Licinius and Constantine, the overthrow of Licinius,

*H.E.* x. 9. the *Tricennalia* of Constantine, inspired him with the same thoughts. "There was," as he writes, on the eve of the Council of Nicaea, "oblivion of old evils: all impiety was forgotten: men enjoyed present blessings, and still further indulged in varied expectations of blessings to come."

*Cf. L.C.* 16. *V.C.* ii. 19.

The course of events soon falsified the anticipations which these words express; but there was much to justify the confidence which breathes through them. Christianity had at last been recognized as a great power in the State. Experience had shown that it was stronger than any force which could be brought against it. Systematic persecution had revealed the extension and the invincibility of the faith. The Christians were widespread throughout the Empire and beyond it. They were numerous and influential. Above all, they were bound together by a powerful organization.

Tert. *adv. Jud.* 7. Iren. i. 10, 2.

As early as at the close of the second century Christianity appears to have penetrated to every Roman province. In the period which followed, the work thus begun, was deepened and strengthened. From the great cities missionaries passed to the villages and homesteads. When the last times of trial came every part of the Empire was consecrated to Christ by the death of martyrs, who revealed the silent progress which their Faith had made. To take one instance only: the first clear record of the presence of Christianity in Vindelicia is found in the touching narrative of the martyrdom of Afra at Augsburg.

Orig. *c. Cels.* iii. 9.

Ruinart, p. 482.

Beyond the limits of the Empire Christianity had spread widely in the East; and it had found an entrance among the Scythians and Goths. Persia and Armenia come especially into notice at the beginning of the fourth century. In Persia the Christians were as yet untroubled, and Constantine took occasion from an embassy of Sapor II. to commend them to his protection and care, in a characteristic letter written not long after the Council of Nicaea. To Armenia, on the other hand, belongs the glory of having first accepted Christianity as the national religion. The romantic history of Gregory the Illuminator, its royal apostle, corresponds in its close with the reign of Constantine; and Etchmiadzin—"the descent of the Only-begotten"—which he founded, has a better claim than Constantinople to be considered as the earliest Christian city.

Arnob. i. 16. Soz. ii. 6. Socr. ii. 41 *f.*

*V.C.* iv. 9 *ff.*

But the more remote triumphs of Christianity can be best illustrated by the origin of two other Churches which were founded in the time of Constantine, those of Georgia and Abyssinia. The circumstances out of which these Churches sprang are so remarkable, the narratives in which they are recorded are so closely connected with the chief actors, and they present so clearly the startling vicissitudes of the life of that old world and the propagative energy of the Truth, that they may be noticed somewhat more in detail.

Socr. i. 20. Rufi. *H.E.* i. 10. Soz. ii. 7.

Both the narratives are given in their original form by Rufinus; and from him they have been transferred to the histories of Socrates and Sozomen.

*H.E.* i. 10. Socr. i. 20. Soz. ii. 7.

The conversion of Georgia, Rufinus writes, was due to a captive woman, whose faithfulness and purity and devotion attracted the attention of the barbarians. They asked her the meaning of her protracted prayers. She replied that in such a way she worshipped Christ who was God. For the time no more notice was taken of her. But the people had a custom of carrying any child who fell ill from house to house, in the hope of learning some method of relief. So it fell out that a mother brought her boy to the captive when she had sought help in vain elsewhere, and asked for aid. She replied that she knew no human remedy, but professed that her God, Christ whom she worshipped, could save when all human means failed. She placed the child on her coarse rug, prayed to the Lord, and restored him whole to his mother. The Queen, who was grievously ill, heard of the cure, and had herself conveyed to the cabin of the captive. She also lay down upon the rug, and after prayer and calling on the name of Christ she too was restored. When presents were offered to the captive by the King, she replied that the service of Christ as God, was alone of value in her eyes. Shortly after the King, while hunting, was surprised by a profound darkness, which filled him with alarm and turned his thoughts to Christ. He then vowed that if he were delivered from this emergency he would walk before God and worship Him. Whereupon the darkness was immediately dissipated, and the King, in fulfilment of his vow, sent for the captive

and learned the Christian faith, which he embraced and expounded to his chief men. The whole nation followed the example of the King and their rulers, and began with joy to build a church. Their faith was confirmed by miraculous aid supplied, in answer to the captive woman's prayer, in the building of this church, and ambassadors were sent to Constantine requesting that priests might be sent to them. To this request the Emperor joyfully acceded.

There is much in this narrative which we cannot explain, and which must be left in its legendary form, but the account of the introduction of Christianity into Abyssinia has been preserved in perfect simplicity.

Rufinus, who himself became acquainted with one of the heroes of his narrative, and received it from his lips, relates that a Tyrian philosopher, by name Meropius, voyaged to India, having in his company two youths whom he was instructing in the liberal arts. The elder of these youths was called Frumentius, and the younger Aedesius. The ship in which they travelled having called at a port for food and water was attacked by the barbarians, who had recently thrown off their alliance with the the Romans, and the whole ship's crew with the philosopher were murdered. The barbarians, however, had pity on the lads and brought them to the King. The King being pleased with them chose Aedesius to be his cup-bearer, and appointed Frumentius his secretary. They served the King faithfully for many years,

Ruf. i. 9. Socr. i. 15. Soz. ii. 24. Theod. i. 22.

and the grateful monarch, as he felt his end approaching, rewarded their services by giving them their liberty. They proposed, therefore, to return to Tyre, but the Queen begged them to remain and manage the affairs of the state, as the late King's son was still a minor. So they yielded to her entreaties and remained to direct the management of the kingdom. But Frumentius was impelled by some divine impulse to seek out Christian poor among the Roman merchants who visited the country, and to encourage them to build houses of prayer and to further the progress of Christianity in the land. Afterwards, when in due course the royal youth attained to man's estate, Frumentius and Aedesius, in spite of the urgent entreaties of the King and his mother to remain with them, resolved to return to their own country. So Aedesius went to Tyre, where he was shortly afterwards ordained a priest. But Frumentius, being intent on the Lord's work, went to Alexandria to set before the bishop Athanasius the case of the Christians in Aethiopia. After considering what Frumentius had told him, Athanasius declared in a council of clergy that none was fitter than Frumentius to discharge the duties of a bishop in that land. Accordingly Frumentius returned to Aethiopia as bishop of Auxume, and won the reverence due to an apostle from the people, who were converted in great numbers to the faith.

The scattered notices of the extension of Christianity which remain give us no satisfactory

information as to the real number of the Christians at the accession or at the death of Constantine. It is wholly impossible to form any accurate estimate even of the proportion which they bore to the heathen population, either generally or in particular districts. Various guesses have been hazarded, but these are simply the numerical rendering of loose phrases which do not properly admit of any such interpretation. In some places the Christians may have been "almost a majority,"[1] as Tertullian says. They may have been, on the whole, one-twentieth or one-fifth of the inhabitants of the Empire. But this uncertainty is of little moment; for their actual numbers would not correspond with their relative influence in the State.

But while it is admitted that the Christians were a very marked minority in the Empire at the beginning of the fourth century, rising to ascendancy by their moral characteristics, their numbers were certainly considerable. One or two illustrations will set this in a clear light. We may gather how influential the Christians were in the West from a strange anecdote of Constantius Chlorus, the father of Constantine. In the time of Diocletian's persecution Constantius offered, it is said, to those who were attached to his Court the choice of sacrificing or leaving his service. *V.C.* i. 16. His officers were soon divided according to their faith or their constancy. Whereupon the Emperor declared that those who were traitors to their

[1] "Pars pene major cujusque civitatis," *ad Scap.* ii.

God could not be fit servants of the king, and ordered all who had offered sacrifice to be driven from the palace. At the same time he appointed those whose devotion to the truth had been established by their confession to guard his own person, saying that men who were true to God would be true to their sovereign.

The incident has probably been embellished by Eusebius, who appears to extend to the whole Court what applied only to those members of the household who professed Christianity; but the canons of the earliest Western Councils in Spain and Gaul show incidentally that important public duties often fell to the Christians, and that they were perplexed by the apparent conflict of the claims of the Church and the State. Thus it was ordered by the Council of Elvira (A.D. 305) that "whoever held the office of duumvir"—of consul, so to speak, in the municipal towns—"should be excluded from the Church during his year of office." This ordinance expresses the first stern judgment of men who had felt the perilous temptations of idolatry. In a few years the independence of Christians was more assured, and the rule was wisely modified. By a canon of the Council of Arles (314), it was provided that Christians who were appointed to civil offices or who engaged in public business should be commended to the special charge of the bishops within whose jurisdiction they lived, and should then only be excluded from communion when they acted against Church discipline.

Canon 56.

Canon 7.

One other sign of the spread of Christianity in Italy may be noticed. When Maxentius (306) seized upon the Imperial power "he affected to favour the Christian Faith to please and flatter the Roman commons, and ordered his subjects to stay the persecution against them." His subsequent conduct belied his professions, and then Christians withstood even to death the profligacy which cost him his throne.

Euseb. *H.E.* viii. 14.

Euseb. *l.c.* *V.C.* i. 33-4.

If we turn to the East the importance of the Christian population is shown not less distinctly. Maximin, who would not be likely to exaggerate the importance of the Christian body, gives a striking testimony both to their numbers and to their position in Syria about the year 312. "Diocletian and Maximian, our fathers," he writes, "when they saw that almost all men had abandoned the worship of the gods, and joined themselves to the tribe of the Christians, rightly ordered that all persons who had withdrawn from the worship of the immortal gods should be recalled to the worship of the gods by open correction and penalties. But I [adopted another policy] when I had the happiness first to come into the East, and perceived that in some places very many who were able to do good service to the State were banished by the judges for the cause I have mentioned. I gave instructions to the judges severally that no one of them for the future should act with severity to the inhabitants of his province, but rather recall [the Christians] to the worship of the

*H.E.* ix. 9.

*Cf.* Euseb. *H.E.* ix. 7 § 7.

gods by flattering attentions and inducements of interest."

Euseb. *H.E.* viii. 1, 6.

The early councils of Asia Minor throw no light upon this subject, but the general description of the state of the East given by Eusebius shows that the Christians occupied there the same position in the Imperial service as they did in Syria and Gaul. "It was impossible," he says, "to relate the glory and the freedom (παρρησίας) which Christians enjoyed before the last persecution. The princes placed the government of heathen [populations] in their hands, and released them from the painful trial of sacrificing for the great goodwill which they preserved towards the doctrine [of Christ]. Why should I speak of those who were engaged in the palace, and those who were in the position of supreme authority [the Emperors] . . . who allowed the members of their households, their wives and children and domestics, openly to confess their faith in God in word and life, and almost permitted them to exult in the freedom of their faith, and to these [latter] they showed greater favour than to their fellow-servants? Such as, for example, was the noble Dorotheus, their devoted and faithful officer of the Court, who for this reason was held in highest honour beyond those who filled the most honourable magistracies and governments." Even the family of the Emperor seems to have fallen under the influence of the faith. The obscure language of Eusebius is illustrated by another independent statement of a contemporary. At

Euseb. *H.E.* viii. 1.

the beginning of the persecution Diocletian first compelled his daughter and his wife to offer sacrifice, as if they had at least fallen under suspicion, and then put to death some chamberlains who had once exercised the greatest influence and been the mainstays of his palace and his person.

Lact. *de M.P.* 15.

It was natural that the Christians should use their social elevation for the advancement of the faith. One very life-like illustration of their policy has been preserved in a letter of a bishop, Theonas, in which he gives instruction to Lucianus, "the Emperor's chief chamberlain" (*praepositus cubiculariorum invictissimi principis nostri*). The Emperor, it is said, was not yet a Christian, but still he had entrusted the care of his person to Christians, as believing them to be more trustworthy than others; and from such evidence as is available there is little doubt that the bishop was Theonas, bishop of Alexandria, who died just at the close of the third century, and that the letter was addressed to an officer of the Court of Diocletian, in which the Christians, as we have just seen, had great power up to the time of the last persecution. The letter gives a simple and apostolic outline of the manner in which the several subordinates were to fulfil their respective duties. The exact clearness and precision of the keeper of the purse, the diligence and neatness of the keeper of the wardrobe, the jewels, and the plate are carefully enforced. Nothing was so trivial that the name of Christ might not

Euseb. *H.E.* vii. 32 *f.*

Routh, *Rell. Sac.* iii. 307 *ff.*

§ 7. win praise in it. "But," the bishop goes on to say, "he will be chief among you and most zealous to whom the Emperor has committed his library. . . . If then it happen that a believer in Christ is appointed to this charge, I advise that he should not neglect secular literature and the great works of Gentile authors, which give the Emperor pleasure. He will praise the poets for the grandeur of their genius, the subtilty of their imagination, the exquisite fitness and eloquence of their language; he will praise the orators and philosophers, each in their own sphere; he will praise the historians who unfold to us the order of past events, the character and institutions of our forefathers, who show to us the rule of life from the achievements of antiquity. Sometimes also he will endeavour to win praise for the divine Scriptures, which Ptolemaeus Philadelphus had translated into our tongue with marvellous care and at enormous expense. Occasion will also be given for the praise of the Gospel and the Apostle (Paul) as divine oracles; it will be possible for the mention of Christ to arise, and little by little His sole divinity will be unfolded. All this can come happily to pass with the help of Christ." Other instructions to the like effect follow; and then at last Theonas adds, addressing the Christian courtiers, "Let not a day pass on which you do not give some time, as opportunity offers, to sacred reading and meditation; do not neglect (*prorsus abjiciatis*) the writings of Holy Scripture; nothing so feeds the soul, nothing so enriches the

understanding, as does the reading of the sacred books."

The power of Christianity through civil offices was supplemented by its spread in the army. The writings of Tertullian show that there had been many Christian soldiers from the first age, and their number grew proportionately with the increase of the Church,[1] though some confessors sharing his judgment chose death in preference to the profession of arms. But whether the Christians embraced the service or refused it, their example might seem equally perilous to a Roman officer.

*Acta Maximiniani*, R. p. 340, *Acta Tarachi*, R. p. 45. Ruinart.

Even during the intervals of peace the army had continued to suffer from the zeal of isolated persecutors. The noble story of the martyrdom of Marinus at Caesarea in the time of Gallienus is a type of what must have happened frequently elsewhere. At the beginning of the fourth century the difficulty was too great to be disguised. Large numbers of Christians, as Eusebius writes of the time before the last persecution, abandoned the service because they would not accept the promotion which was their due at the price of apostacy. Some few, he adds, gave up not only their commands but also their lives for the faith. No reorganization of the Empire could be complete which did not deal with these facts, and there is good reason to think that it was this military difficulty

Euseb. *H.E.* vii. 15.

*H.E.* viii. 4. Cf. *Acta Marcelli*, Ruinart, p. 343.

[1] The stories of the Thundering Legion in the time of Marcus Aurelius, and of the Theban Legion in the time of Diocletian, at least bear witness to the popular belief in the extension of Christianity in the army.

which finally led Diocletian to consent to a general persecution. He felt that such an element as the Christians introduced into the State, if allowed to develop itself freely, must modify the constitution of the Empire. If the Christians could decline to serve with impunity, the army would be deprived of an important source of recruits; if being soldiers, they refused to conform to established usages, the sovereignty of the Emperor was impaired. It seems as if the first occasion of the persecution was given at some military ceremony. When a sacrifice was being offered some of the attendants made the sign of the cross upon their foreheads. Upon that the victims were found without the signs of good omen. The priests denounced the Christians as the cause of their repeated failure. The Emperor immediately commanded all the attendants and all in the palace to offer sacrifice, and scourged those who refused. He then issued orders to the provincial governors that the soldiers should be compelled to sacrifice, and if they declined then he discharged them from the service. When Galerius shortly afterwards urged him to more sweeping measures, he replied that such bloodshed was at once disastrous and unavailing; that it was sufficient if the officers of the Court and the soldiers were forbidden to be Christians. At last, however, he yielded to the opinion of high military authorities, and the persecution was begun.

Lact. *de M.P.* 10.

Lact. *de M.P.* 10, 11.

Once again: the Christians in the time of Constantine were a powerful body socially. They

were wealthy and they were liberal. Their strength lay probably in what we should call now the lower middle class; but the writings of Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria show that at the close of the second century there were many persons of rank and fortune among them. The very institutions of the Church witness to the means and the munificence of its members. Public provision was made for the bishop and clergy. Large sums were devoted to the support of the poor and the sick, to the relief of confessors in prison or in the mines, and to the redemption of captives. Even the widespread scandal of the *libellatici*, who purchased exemption from persecution by obtaining a false certificate, shows that the Christians of the third century were not as a rule indigent. And if we descend to a later time, the picture which Eusebius draws of the state of the Eastern Church on the eve of the persecution of Diocletian, chequered as it is by many dark shadows, is that of a society not only wealthy, but also suffering from the evils of wealth, vanity, display, rivalry.

Blunt *on the Fathers*, Second Series, 2.

Euseb. *H.E.* viii. 1; Lact. *de M.P.* 12.

By this time, too, the separate Christian churches were possessed of valuable buildings and land and vessels. As early as the time of Alexander Severus the Christians could hold corporate property; and when once a beginning of endowments was made, the chief danger of the Church lay in the indiscreet liberality of benefactors. All experience shows with what rapidity wealth is accumulated for religious purposes; and

Lampr. *Vit. Alex. Sev.* c. 49.

*Syn. Anc.* can. 15. See Amm. Marcell. xxvii. 3.

in another century the riches of the churches became a grievous evil. One important enactment of Constantine must have contributed greatly to this result. In the year 321 he conferred upon the several Christian bodies the right of receiving legacies. The edict was published at Rome, and was evidently the answer to previous disputes. "Let every one," he writes, "have licence at his decease to leave whatever of his goods he pleases to the most holy and venerable body of the Catholic Church (*sanctissimo Ecclesiae Catholicae venerabilique concilio*). Let not such dispositions (*judicia*) be void. There is nothing which is more due to men than that they should have free power to express their last will when no later expression of will is possible, and that the exercise of choice should be unfettered when it does not return."

*Cod. Theod.* xvi. 2. 4.

The enactment was an epoch in the history of the Church. The changes which it necessarily brought with it were not less momentous than those which were afterwards attached to his legendary "Donation."

One point still remains to be noticed which is more important than all that have gone before—the constitution of the Christian society increased enormously the advantages which it derived from the numbers, the position, and the wealth of its members. The power of organization is greater than any material power; and as soon as freedom was given for the collective action of the Church, its representatives were found prepared to use

their new opportunity. Bishops came together from the remotest districts to offer their experience and judgment for the common good. Through them the several districts, almost each congregation, found the means of conveying their views to larger divisions of the whole body. Experience had already shaped the mode of action. Even in the second and third centuries Synods had been constantly held in spite of the difficulties by which such gatherings were attended. Distant dioceses became familiar with the ideas of conference and co-operation. The leaders of the Church were trained to deal with the larger problems of government and life. And, when the occasion came, the fuller records which preserve the detailed results of the Synods held at the beginning of the fourth century, both in the East and in the West, reveal the completeness of the ecclesiastical system thus slowly shaped. The conception of such gatherings was indeed characteristic of the idea and of the action of the Catholic Church. They belonged to the fulness of that wider life in which differences of race and station were absorbed. Their judgments were felt to be given, according to the language of the council of Arles, "in the presence of the Holy Spirit and His angels." *Ep. Syn. Arel.*

If, now, we put together these external traits of the Christian Church; if we take account of the wide dispersion and numbers of its members, of the position which they occupied in the various parts of the public service, of the funds which

they could command for the furtherance of popular objects, of the matchless organization by which they were disciplined for combined efforts—we shall be able to imagine what an imposing spectacle it must have presented to a Roman statesman who could bear to contemplate it impartially. Then let the great organization be inspired with the power of the Christian Faith, and it will be felt that it was irresistible. The number of the Christians, however great it may have been, was no index of their might. They were multiplied a thousandfold by the life which was within them. Christians, before Constantine openly favoured the profession of the Faith, were, for the most part men of strong personal convictions, resolute and energetic in extending their opinions. The precepts of the Gospel made them good servants and good soldiers. They were constrained to cultivate the personal and social virtues which in time win lasting influence. Their constancy moved even the sympathy of their adversaries, and not unfrequently won for them partners in their death. And on the other side, there was no stable power of resistance to the Faith. The mass of the heathen were polytheists by tradition and not by reflection, caring little for their creed, if indeed they could be said to have one. The rude and ignorant, in whom the old religions were still living, were separated from one another by local or special forms of worship. The philosophers shrank from the popular beliefs, and had nothing to offer to the popular aspira-

Euseb. *De Mart. Pal.* ix. 3. *Acta Tarachi* § 10, Ruinart, p. 473. *Acta S. Cassiani*, Ruinart, p. 345.

tions. Indifference, fanaticism, scepticism, the rival powers with which the Faith had to contend, might make a temporary league against it, but their forces were necessarily divided and dissolved by the unbroken permanence of its vital energies.

The life of the old Empire was departed before the Government entered on the final struggle with Christianity. Its doom was sealed by Diocletian himself. When he divided the Imperial power and abandoned Rome, he destroyed what still lingered of the belief in the divinity of the State. It was impossible to transfer to Nicomedia or Milan the associations which had grown up with the old capital. It was impossible to regard a prince who professed no regard for the ancient institutions as the representative embodiment of that spirit. The true religion of the Empire was, as we saw on a former occasion, the worship of the commonwealth in the person of the Emperor, and Diocletian destroyed the idol. In its place he established a new form of government with marvellous skill; but it was a government (so to speak) without a religious sanction. He assumed the loftiest titles; he surrounded himself with new bodies of attendants; he affected the seclusion of Eastern monarchs; he symbolized the unique dignity of the sovereign by stately ceremonial; but that which had made the Emperor divine was gone. No devotion to any form of paganism could restore that which was lost. The majesty of Rome was the one universal force which had constrained the homage of the world. When that

was fatally impaired nothing remained in the circle of old beliefs which could take its place. But there was a new power, which Diocletian only vaguely apprehended as a dangerous rival, a power absolute, catholic, spiritual, able to do that which the power of Rome had dimly shadowed out in temporal forms. The conflict of the two Empires—the Empire of Caesar and the Empire of Christ—was well-nigh ended. It remained only that Roman emperors themselves should solemnly record the victory of the faith with which Roman emperors had for three centuries vainly contended.

# CHAPTER XIV

## THE COUNCIL OF NICAEA

### (2) *Character of the Council*

CONSTANTINE, as we have seen, unable to appreciate the importance of the matter at issue, had sent a letter to Alexander and Arius, hoping thereby to promote religious concord. He had charged Hosius, the venerable bishop of Cordova, with the delivery of this letter; but the mission of Hosius to Alexandria wholly failed to allay the fierceness of the controversy which raged there. On the contrary, the efforts which he made to place the contrast between the orthodox and the Sabellian doctrine in a clearer light appear to have furnished the disputants with fresh elements of discussion, and the characteristic violence of an Alexandrian mob found vent in insults offered to the statues of the Emperor. Under these circumstances Constantine, still acting, as it is said, under the advice of Hosius[1] resolved to summon an "œcumenical council" (σύνοδος οἰκουμενική)[2] consisting of repre-

Socr. i. 8.

Socr. iii. 7, 12.

Euseb. *V.C.* iii. 4.

Sulp. Sev. ii. 55.

*Cf.* Euseb. *V.C.* iii. 6.

[1] *Ex sacerdotum sententia*, Ruff. i. 1.

[2] The term οἰκουμενικός properly describes that which includes the whole οἰκουμένη, or civilized world, which was practically identified

sentatives from all parts of the Christian world. In doing this he carried out to its legitimate fulfilment a principle which had been already adopted. Provincial and diocesan Synods are known to have been called together from about the middle of the second century. These at first were necessarily limited in range from the political relations of Christianity, but grew in dignity and importance as the Church obtained greater freedom of action. Soon after Constantine gained the Empire of the West he called together the Synod of Arles (314), which included members from all parts of Western Christendom; and now that the whole Empire was brought under his sway, he looked for the establishment of lasting religious concord through the deliberations of representatives of the Universal Church.

*Ep. ad Chrestum*, Migne, p. 485.

When the design was once adopted the Emperor neglected nothing which could give dignity to the future assembly. The invitations which he addressed to the bishops were expressed in terms of marked respect; and at the same time he made ample provision to meet the diffi-

*V. C.* iii. 6.

with the Roman world. The phrase *σύνοδος οἰκουμενική* does not appear to occur before the Council of Nicaea.

The earlier technical use of the word *οἰκουμενικός* illustrates its ecclesiastical use. Games open to all comers, without distinction of race, were called *ἆθλοι οἰκουμενικοί* as distinguished from local or national games. A very fine adaptation of this idea occurs in the Sibylline poems (ii. 39 *ff.*) in reference to the second coming of the Lord:—

*ἀγὼν ἐσελαστικὸς ἔσται*
*εἰς πόλιν οὐράνιον, οἰκουμενικὸς δέ τε πᾶσιν*
*ἔσσεται ἀνθρώποισιν, ἔχων κλέος ἀθανασίας.*

culties of their journey. The government posts[1] along the great roads were placed at their disposal. Carriages and porters, mules, asses, and horses were supplied in liberal profusion, both for the bishops and for those who attended them. The same plan had been followed before on the occasion of the Synod of Arles; and the episcopal retinues were properly organized at Nicaea on the same scale as was fixed then, when each bishop was directed to bring with him two presbyters (*duo secundae sedis*) of his own choice, and three servants (*famulis*) to attend him on the way.

*V.C.* iii. 6.

Theod. *H.E.* i. 7, 2.

*Ep. Const. ad Chrestum* (Migne, p. 485).

The summons to the Council was issued by the Emperor upon his own authority. One of the several letters of invitation has been lately recovered in a Syriac translation. Some details in the text are not without difficulty, but there appears to be no sufficient reason for questioning the authenticity of the document and its substantial accuracy.[2] It runs as follows:—

[1] See Gibbon, c. 2, 100 miles a day. A curious itinerary of Bordeaux pilgrims, A.D. 333, from Bordeaux to Jerusalem, will be found in Migne, pp. 783 *ff.*

[2] The letter is given in Mr. B. H. Cowper's *Analecta Nicaeana* (translated in *Syriac Miscellanies*, pp. 1 *f.*, 5 *f.*). Dr. Broglie has thrown doubts on its authenticity, but his arguments are based on the assumption that one identical summons was issued to all the provinces, and that this letter is obviously local in its allusions and destination. The parallel of the letters relative to the Council of Arles shows that this assumption is false. The letters to Aelafius (or Ablavius) and Chrestus, bishop of Syracuse, are distinctly personal.

For the rest it is extremely probable that the Synod of Ancyra, to which reference is made, was some recent gathering in reference to the points afterwards debated at Nicaea. It certainly cannot be the Synod held at Ancyra eleven years before (314). The bishops to whom the letter is addressed were evidently acquainted with the objects for which they were called to Nicaea; and there were frequent gatherings in Asia Minor on the Arian controversy before the Nicene Council.

"That there is nothing more honourable in my sight than the fear of God, is, I believe, manifest to every man. Now because the Synod of bishops at Ancyra, of Galatia, consented at first that it should be so, it now seems on many accounts that it would be well for a Synod to assemble at Nicaea, a city of Bithynia, both because the bishops of Italy and the rest of the countries of Europe are coming, and also because of the excellent temperature of the air, and also because I shall be present as a spectator and participator of what is done. Wherefore I signify to you, my beloved brethren, that I earnestly wish all of you to assemble at this city which is named, that is, at Nicaea. Let every one of you therefore, considering that which is best, as I before said, be diligent without any delay speedily to come, that he may be present in his own person as a spectator of what is done. God keep you, my beloved brethren."

The chief importance of the letter lies in the clear statement which it contains of the relation of Constantine to the Council. He proposes to be present not only as a spectator, but also as a participator in what is done. And this language is perfectly consistent with all other contemporary or trustworthy evidence. But though the Emperor alone convoked the Council, he seems to have fortified himself by ecclesiastical opinion before he did so. There is not, however, any ground for supposing that he specially consulted the Roman See; and the idea that Pope Silvester was joined

with him in issuing the summons rests on no substantial authority, is at open variance with the precedent set at the Council of Arles, and is not found till the end of the seventh century (680).

The exact date of the meeting of the Council cannot be certainly determined. All authors agree upon the year A.D. 325, but they are apparently divided as to the day and month, though their vague statements are not absolutely irreconcilable. The dates given for the Council are May 20, June 14, and June 19, and it is quite possible that the first is the date of the assembly of the bishops, the second that of the arrival of the Emperor and the formal opening of the Council, and the third that of the adoption of the Creed with which it is expressly connected. However this may be, there can be no great error in following the popular Greek tradition which names the Sunday after Ascension Day (that is the Sunday before Whitsun Day)[1] "the Sunday of the Holy Fathers," or "of the holy 318 Inspired Fathers (θεοφόροι) of Nicaea."

Socr. i. 13

The place of assembly was in some sense an indication of the plans which were already taking shape in the mind of Constantine. A new capital was a necessity for the new empire which he designed to found; and even before he fixed upon Byzantium, his thoughts had rested upon the shores of the Propontis. Here lay the true centre of the civilized world; and it was natural that he should seek in this region the meeting-

[1] Whitsun Day was on June 6 in the year 325.

place for the Council by which he hoped to consolidate the unity of his dominion. Nicaea (*Isnik*) was singularly suited for the purpose. Built at the head of a long lake opening into the Propontis, it was easily accessible from all the provinces of the Mediterranean. It was within an easy distance of Nicomedia, the actual capital of the Eastern Empire; and the good omen of its name—"the city of victory"—is especially noticed
*V.C.* iii. 6. by Eusebius as marking its fitness to become the scene of the Council.

The bishops hastened to Nicaea in answer to the emperor's invitation, and the snowy heights of the Homeric Olympus looked down on an
*V.C.* iii. 6. assembly such as the world had never before seen, composed of men differing most widely in person, race, and character. About three hundred bishops, representing almost all the provinces of the empire and some regions beyond its limits, met together with an enthusiasm of hope which
*V.C.* iii. 6. answered to the novelty of the occasion.[1] Their

[1] The number of bishops present may have varied from time to time. Eusebius says that there "were more than 250" (*V.C.* iii. 8). Athanasius several times spoke of the number as about 300 (*τριακόσιοι πλεῖον ἢ ἔλαττον*, *Hist. Ar. ad Mon.* 66), or as "the three hundred" (*De Syn.* 43, *Apol. c. Arian.* 23, 25). But in one place he gives the sum as 318 (*Ep. ad Apos.* 2), and this number was almost universally adopted afterwards for the sake of its mystical significance, so that the common title of the Council is "the 318 fathers" (Socr. i. 8, 31; Theod. i. 7, 32, etc.). The number 318 had received a symbolic value in the narrative of the rescue by the servants of Abraham (Gen. xiv. 14) as prefiguring redemption by the cross (T) of Jesus (I H) (Cf. *Ep. Barn.* 9); and it was natural to transfer the interpretation to the action of the Council (Ambr. *de Fid.* i. 1: Trecenti decem et octo sacerdotes, tanquam Abrahae electi judicio, consona fidei virtute victores, velut tropaeum toto orbe subactis perfidis extulerunt: ut mihi

attendant clergy and servants must have been little less than fifteen hundred; and public provision was made for the entertainment of all during their attendance on the Council. It is difficult for us, who are familiar now with cosmopolitan gatherings, to realize the impressiveness of the spectacle which was then offered to men for the first time. There is probably little exaggeration in the words of Eusebius when he speaks of it as recalling on a larger scale the scene of the Day of Pentecost. The motley assembly seemed to him like a mighty chaplet of priests cunningly woven, as it were, of flowers gathered in their season, and united by the emperor "in the bond of peace, as a divine thank-offering to his Saviour for his victory over every foe, an image of the apostolic company" (χορείας). Some

*V.C.* iii. 9.

*V.C.* iii. 8.

videatur hoc esse divinum, quod eodem numero in conciliis fidei haberemus oraculum quo in historia habemus exemplum.

The lists of subscriptions, which are obviously corrupt and imperfect, though derived from one source, give 220-227 names.

Socrates speaks of the names of those present at the council as being still contained in the *Synodicon* of Athanasius (i. 13, 12); and Epiphanius says more definitely that the names of the 318 bishops were still preserved in his time (*Haer.* lxix. 11).

Hil. *De Syn.* § 86: Mihi quidem ipse ille numerus hic sanctus est, in quo Abraham victor regum impiorum ab eo qui aeterni sacerdotii est forma benedicitur.

So also Liberius in his letter to the Macedonians (Soz. iv. 12, 26).

One legend as to the number of the Fathers, which is preserved in the Coptic fragments on the Council (Pitra, *Spicil. Solesm.* i. 523) is too remarkable to be omitted. Some of the members of the court, it is said, related that when the bishops were seated they were 318 in number, but when they stood up they were found to be 319. This discrepancy was for a time quite inexplicable. When they came to the strange member, as they thought, he assumed the appearance of his neighbour. At last the revelation was made to some that the Holy Spirit was the 319th person, who aided them in establishing the right faith. And so it came to pass that the members of the Council were said to be more than 318.

of the body, he says, were conspicuous for wisdom and eloquence (σοφίας λόγῳ), some for the severity of their life and their courageous endurance, some for the even balance of their character. There were old men honoured for their age, young men in the full vigour of physical and mental power, and others who had only just entered upon the course of the ministry.

*V.C.* iii. 9.

In one respect this Council differed from all those of later time. It was composed of men who had lived through the last and bitterest age of persecution, and witnessed in their own persons to the triumph of the faith. Several shewed the glorious scars of their sufferings for Christ, "bearing in their bodies," as Theodoret writes, "the mark of the Lord Jesus," and the very spot in which they were met was rich in the annals of martyrdom. Bithynia was the scene of the first systematic persecution in the time of Trajan, when for a time the severity and the policy of the younger Pliny filled again the pagan temples. And one striking incident of the Decian persecution is placed at Nicaea, where Tryphon and Respicius, two young men of good station, are said to have endured the most cruel tortures and death for their unshaken confession.

*H.E.* i. 7. 3.

Ruinart, pp. 208 *ff.*

The assembled fathers may indeed fairly be called "an army of martyrs" (δῆμος μαρτύρων). And it is important to regard them in this light. They represented the faith, the tradition, the organization, in a word the whole complex life and not only the thought of the Catholic Church;

Theod. i. 7. 6.

and there is no reason to question the accuracy of the description of their general character which is given by a writer of the fourth century, when he speaks of them as "men without special education and simple-minded," though he unjustly uses the statement to depreciate the value of their judgment.

Socr. i. 8. 24 *f.* i. 9, 28.

For among these men of simple and childlike faith, who could witness at least to what they had received, were others qualified by power and experience to guide the counsels of the Church. Foremost among these in reputation and influence at the time, though not afterwards, was Hosius, bishop of Cordova, the confidential and honoured friend of the emperor. The pagan courtiers of Constantine seem to have explained his favour by supposing that he was a sorcerer. Athanasius speaks of him as "the father of bishops," "a man who guided (*καθηγήσατο*) every Council,[1] who persuaded every audience, who left in every church noble memorials of his influence." In every list of signatures his name stands first. In later times it was supposed that he owed his precedence to the fact that he was a representative of the pope. But this conjecture is not supported by any early evidence;[3] and the position which he occupied can be fully accounted for by his

Quoted by Theod. *H.E.* ii. 15.

Ath. *Hist. Ar. ad Mon.* 42.[2] *Ap. de Fuga*, § 5.

[1] Hosius presided at Sardica (347). See circular epistle of the Council, Theod. ii. 8; Athanasius, *c. Ar.* 50.

[2] Cf. *Ad Mon.* 15.

[3] The phrase of Gelasius (ii. 5), *ἐπέχων τὸν τόπον τοῦ τῆς μεγίστης Ῥώμης ἐπισκόπου Σιλβέστρου* does not perhaps mean more than that Hosius occupied a place which Silvester, if he had been present, would naturally have occupied.

personal relations to the emperor, and by the part which he had taken in the negotiations before the Council.

Athan. *Hist. Ar. ad Mon.* 42.

Of the birthplace and early life of Hosius we know nothing.[1] He died about 359, when he had been for more than sixty years bishop of Cordova. He must have attracted attention early in his episcopate, for he was thrown into prison under Maximinian, and at the Synod of Elvira (305) he stands second in the list of bishops. From the time when Constantine embraced Christianity, Hosius appears as his trusted counsellor.[2] Though his name does not appear among the signitaries of the Synod of Arles (314) he took an active part in the controversy with the Donatists, and is said to have ruled the emperor's policy. From the time when the Arian controversy became a question for the whole Church, his history is identified with it. The key-word of the Nicene Creed (ὁμοούσιος) is referred to his advice. Athanasius speaks of him as being popularly regarded as the propounder of the Creed itself, and its invincible champion, who could by his single voice command allegiance to

*Ibid.* 44.

*Hist. Ar. ad Mon.* 42.

[1] There seems to be no reason to doubt that Hosius was "the Egyptian from Spain," who, according to Zosimus (ii. p. 104), came with the leaders of the imperial court, gained influence, and referred Constantine to Christianity for forgiveness of his guilt in the death of Crispus and Fausta, which the heathen priests had decided to be inexpiable. If so, we may suppose that he had Eastern connexions, as is suggested by his Greek name. And there can be no doubt that there was much Eastern blood in that part of Spain—a fact to be remembered in estimating the character and opinions of Seneca.

[2] In 321 Constantine addressed a rescript to him giving privilege of manumission in church (M. p. 215).

its terms. But his pre-eminence made him the object of constant attacks, and a dark shadow fell upon his latest years. He was brought from Spain to Sirmium by the Emperor Constantius when now a hundred years old, and forced to subscribe an Arian Confession (357), or perhaps only to communicate with the Arian leaders Ursacius and Valens.[1] The lapse was but for a brief space. Before his death, which followed shortly after his return to Spain, Hosius solemnly recorded that his subscription was obtained by violence, and again condemned the heresy which he had spent his life in combating.

Socr. ii. 31.

Athan. *l.c*

One other representative of the Western Church was, so to speak, the embodiment of a great controversy—Caecilian, bishop of Carthage.[2] The election of Caecilian to the bishopric had given occasion to the Donatist schism, which, though it turned on points of far less importance than Arianism, was scarcely less ruinous to the churches of North Africa than Arianism to the churches of the East. The accusations brought against Caecilian of personal misconduct in harshly repressing the devotion of Christians, and of irregular consecration, were authoritatively dismissed by the Synod of Arles. And the same result followed when the emperor most reluctantly undertook a

[1] Hilary, who judges him harshly (*De Syn.* §§ 3, 63) gives as a pathetic reason for his fall, that he could not bear the thought of a grave in a strange land (*nimium sepulcri sui amans*) (*De Syn.* § 87).

[2] His name occurs in the subscriptions; and his presence is attested by *Conc. Carth.* v. c. 9. He was the only bishop of N. Africa present. One from Tripoli.

fresh inquiry when an appeal was made to him from this decision. Outside the limits of Africa Caecilian was everywhere acknowledged as the rightful bishop. Constantine communicated with the African churches through him. But the schism still continued, and in our picture of the council of Nicaea we must not omit the sad figure of Caecilian. He was a confessor even in a truer sense than the maimed and scarred companions by whom he was surrounded. They bore witness to the personal trials of persecution, but Caecilian bore witness to the more grievous and more enduring evils which flow from that undisciplined and intolerant zeal which affects the name of strictness and purity. Sylvester, the bishop of Rome, was unable to be present at the Council from his age. But he was represented, as he had been at the Synod of Arles, by two presbyters, Vitus (Victor) and Vincentius, who were commissioned to subscribe the decrees of Council in his name.[1]

Theod. i. 7, 3.

Euseb. *V.C.* iii. 7.

In the lists of subscriptions fifteen (Syriac), sixteen, or seventeen (Latin) other bishops of Western Europe are enumerated, no one of whom is otherwise famous, except Protogenes of Sardica, in Dacia.[2] But it is expressly stated that the names of the Western bishops were not all written, "because in the West there were not, as with the Orientals, disputations concerning heresies, or con-

Socr. ii. 20, 8.

Co. *Just.* i. 13, 1.

*Syriac. Misc.* p. 3. *Cf.* pp. 5, 13.

[1] Theod. i. 7, 3.

[2] Probably some of the bishops mentioned by Athanasius (*Ep. ad episc. Aeg.* 8)—as Eustorgius of Milan—were present at the Council, though their names do not occur in the lists.

cerning the decision and disagreement about the Passover."

Among the representatives of the East were many men with whose names we are familiar. First among these, if not in power, yet as the chief actor in the controversy, was Alexander, the aged patriarch of Alexandria, whose unguarded language and subsequent weakness seemed to many to have occasioned and then aggravated the conflict. He was now too infirm to take a vigorous part in the debates, and survived the close of the Council only five months. But by his side was the young deacon (or archdeacon) Athanasius,[1] in whose childish play he had seen the foreshadowing of a divine call. Nor was the sign unfulfilled. For nearly fifty years of an almost continual martyrdom (325-373) Athanasius maintained the truth which the Council affirmed with a power, a courage, a grandeur of self-sacrifice, an elevation of thought and purpose, which moved even Gibbon to admiration. In appearance he was a strange contrast to the gaunt, weird, unwieldy figure of Arius. He was singularly small, "not even a man, but a poor mannikin" (εἰ δὲ μηδὲ ἀνήρ, ἀλλ' ἀνθρώπισκος εὐτελής), as Julian contemptuously called him, with a slight stoop, if we may trust the details of the later tradition, light hair (*subflavus*), a short beard, a small and firm mouth, and a hooked nose. But, as we can well believe, his spiritual dignity amply compensated

Athan. *Ap. c. Ar.* 59.

Ruff. i. 14. Soz. ii. 17.

Jul. *Ep.* 51.

*Acta Sanct. Mag.* 2. *Vit. Ath.* c. 33.

[1] Theod. i. 27, 15 (πάνυ νέος ὢν τὴν ἡλικίαν τοῦ χόρου δὲ τῶν διακόνων ἡγούμενος).

for his outward insignificance. In the words of Gregory of Nazianzus, "He was sublime in action, but lowly in spirit: unapproachable in virtue, but most easy of approach in common life: . . . sweet in word, sweeter in manner: angelic in look, more angelic in thought: calm in reproof, and one whose praise was a lesson . . ." (ἐπαινέσαι παιδευτικός).

Greg. Naz. *In laud. Athan.* xxi. 9.

But at the time the attention of the assembly was probably diverted to other champions of the orthodox faith, who, like Hosius, had already become famous. Such were Eustathius of Antioch, whose zeal exposed him afterwards to the most cruel persecution of the Arians, and Marcellus of Ancyra, who, by his incautious exposition of one side of the truth, fell at last into the Sabellian heresy, and Macarius of Jerusalem, and Asclepas of Gaza, and Alexander, a presbyter, who appeared as the representative of the aged bishop of Byzantium.

Fragm. in Theod. i. 8, i. 21.

Theod. i. 4 (letter of Alex.).

Strong as the orthodox party was, Arius was not without powerful supporters. Foremost among those in position and firmness was Eusebius of Nicomedia. Others who ranged themselves at first on the same side were Theognius (or Theognis), the bishop of Nicaea itself, Menophantus of Ephesus, Narcissus of Neronias in Cilicia, Maris of Chalcedon, and several Syrian and Egyptian bishops, about seventeen in all. Most of these appear afterwards in history only as the relentless enemies of Athanasius; but Eusebius was a more remarkable character. He was a scholar of Lucian of Antioch, like Arius himself and others of his

Theod. *H.E.* i. 7. Socr. i. 8, 13. Ruff. i. 5.

Theod. i. 5, 4. Philostorg. ii. 14, 15.

adherents, and carried to an extreme the rationalizing methods of the school. His influence with Constantia, the sister of Constantine and wife of Licinius, gave him great power. This must have been in abeyance for some time after the fall of Licinius, till the emperor, touched with remorse for the deaths of Crispus and Fausta in 326, took Constantine again into favour. From this time Eusebius gradually gained an ascendancy over Constantine, and at last baptized him upon his deathbed.

A third section in the Council was represented by Eusebius of Caesarea, who was claimed as an adherent by both sides. Perhaps it may be more truly said that he belonged to neither. If he scrupled to admit the new phrase which was made the watchward of the orthodox, he rejected, undoubtedly, the bold deductions of Arius. His modes of thinking, like his studies, belonged to the ante-Nicene age. His spirit was critical and historical, rather than theological. Like great scholars in other periods of transition—like Erasmus in the crisis of the Reformation—he treads with trembling feet along new paths, uncertain whither they might lead him. Such men cannot be heroes, and yet our own weakness will not allow us to judge them harshly. Their very infirmities and exaggerations seem to bring them nearer to us; and we can acknowledge thankfully that God is pleased to use them for His service in a ministry which greater and nobler natures could not fulfil.

But far more conspicuous even than these rival theologians were those bishops to whom rumour attributed supernatural powers. Of these, perhaps the most renowned was Jacob, or James, of Nisibis. Theodoret, writing about a century afterwards at Cyrus in Syria, has left a strange picture of his person and miracles as they were represented in the current tradition of the district. Till he became bishop, Jacob lived alone upon the mountains, with no shelter in winter but a cave. His food was undressed fruits and herbs. His dress was the roughest hair-cloth. Even when he was called to the episcopate, he changed nothing in his manner of life except his place of abode. His former severities were only aggravated by the burden of cares which he undertook for others. He appeared to be a new Elijah, though he was touched by the gentler spirit of the Gospel, and the miracles attributed to him have a certain grotesque likeness to those of the prophet. Of these, one example may suffice. Shortly before the death of the bishop, Nisibis was besieged by Sapor. When everything was prepared for the last assault, Jacob, moved by the prayers of his countrymen, mounted the walls, and having looked on the hosts of the enemy, prayed to God to send a plague of gnats upon them. Straightway the elephants and horses were made ungovernable by the stings of countless insects, and the king, struck by the wonder, desisted from the attack.

Theod. *H.E.* i. 7. 4.

Theod. *H.E.* ii. 30.

The other stories of Jacob's wonder-working are even more strange, but we must remember

that the atmosphere of wonders was still hanging over the world. A miracle is said to have occurred on the eve of the Council. For, as James of Nisibis was travelling to Nicaea in company with four other representatives of the Far East he fell in with Leontius of Caesarea, who in obedience, as it seems, to a divine sign, was on the point of baptizing Gregory, the father of Gregory of Nazianzus. When the newly-baptized convert came out from the water a bright light shone round about him, which was seen by the five chance witnesses. These for a time said nothing of this vision, but the bishop who had baptized him could not conceal the revelation, and cried out that he had anointed with the spirit his own successor.[1]

Theod. i. 7. 5.

Greg. Naz. *in Patr.* xviii. 12, 13.

This incident is singularly characteristic of the spirit of the time, and it would be impossible to gain a true conception of the Council of Nicaea if we were to strip away the mysterious halo of miracle and confessorship which rests upon its members. Socrates is singularly jealous for the intellectual reputation of the assembly, and yet he has himself instinctively neglected the popular feeling in his choice of representative characters. "Two among the bishops," he says, "were strikingly conspicuous, 'Paphnutius of the Upper Thebais and Spiridion of Cyprus.' Both of these were certainly 'unlearned and simple men,'

i. 8, 2.

[1] The story is given most completely in Moses Chorenensis (ii. 80), who says expressly that Leontius was the bishop who baptized Gregory. The narrative of Gregory of Nazianzus leaves this fact in doubt, and differs in some other details.

according to the criticism of Sabinus, and yet their influence was not undeserved. 'Paphnutius,' he goes on to say, 'was bishop of a city of Upper Thebes. He was a man beloved of God (θεοφιλής), so that miracles were done by him. In the time of the persecution his eye was put out. The king (Constantine) greatly honoured him, and constantly sent for him to the palace, and used to kiss his destroyed eye." When, at the time of the Council, it was proposed to pass a canon forbidding clerics to have intercourse with the wives they had married when laymen, Paphnutius stood up and in a loud voice protested against laying this heavy yoke upon the clergy, and he advised the Council not to frame a law which would be difficult to observe, and might lead to scandals. The words of Paphnutius, who was himself unmarried and famed for his ascetic life, prevailed, and no more was said about the matter.

Soc. *H.E.* i. 11. Ruff. *H.E.* i. 4. Soz. *H.E.* i. 23.

The stories about Spiridion are far more romantic;[1] and they are said still to linger about the island of Corfu, where his body is still preserved in the Cathedral.

Ruff. i. 5. Socr. i. 12.

Other strange figures also there were in the assembly, which, like James of Nisibis, Paphnutius, and Spiridion, must have moved the childlike awe

[1] One of the miracles of Spiridion, related by Ruffinus, says that he had a daughter named Irene, who died young. After her death a man declared that he had committed a treasure to her charge. Spiridion knew nothing of the matter. The claimant, however, persisted, and threatened to kill himself unless he received back his deposit. Spiridion, therefore, hastened to his daughter's tomb and called to her by name. Then she from the tomb says, "What dost thou wish, father?" She then told him where to find the buried treasure, which was accordingly recovered.

of the spectators. Among these were Potammon, the friend of Antony, the greatest of the hermits, a bishop of Heraclea on the Nile, who had lost an eye in the persecution of Diocletian; and Paul of Neocaesarea on the Euphrates, who had had the muscles of his wrists burnt through in the last persecution of Licinius. Aristaces, an envoy from the King of Armenia, the first Christian state; John, the Persian, and Theophilus, the Goth, represented nations beyond the circle of the empire. To these, though there is no authentic record of their presence, tradition has added Nicolas of Myra, the patron of children, whose name has been preserved only in late and inconsistent legends, which witness at least to the affectionate tenderness with which his memory was cherished; and Hypatius of Gangra, who became the subject of marvellous stories, and is said to have been murdered by the Novatians.

Still one other person must be mentioned who was present at the Council by the invitation of the Emperor, Acesius, a bishop of the Novatian schismatics. Socr. i. 10.

If now we endeavour to bring together the manifold traits of life and character and tendency which we have been able to distinguish, we shall have before us a vivid portraiture of the Christian Church at the beginning of the fourth century. The monotonous uniformity of life and opinion with which we invest the vast divine society which had grown up silently under the shelter of the Empire wholly disappears. For the first time

scholars, ascetics, emperors, mystics meet together and discover at once their differences and their unity. What had been regarded before from partial or local points of sight was seen in its widest range; and the decisions of the Council are the more precious because they are in a great measure the spontaneous expression of an inherited faith. When the question of the divine nature of the Son became afterwards a topic of scholastic discussion the opinions of theologians were not unequally divided for half a century. But the confession of Catholic Christendom once given remained sure and in the end triumphed. The question was one for life and experience and not for thought only. And we may well rejoice that the first voice of the universal Church—a voice which can never be heard again under like conditions—affirmed the Truth which includes the sum of our Faith.

# XV

## THE COUNCIL OF NICAEA

### (3) *Result of the Council*

WHEN the Council was assembled some time was occupied in preliminary discussions. The Emperor had not yet arrived to take his place at the meeting. He had been at Nicaea on May 23, and then he appears to have returned to Nicomedia, where he was occupied for some days with the celebration of a festival in honour of the defeat of Licinius, so the formal opening of the Council was deferred till he could be present. During this interval we must suppose that the debates were held in which it is said that heathen philosophers took part. For the assembly was not wholly clerical nor even wholly Christian. There were many laymen ranged on both sides, eager to offer their practised advocacy to the cause which they favoured, and though the presence of philosophers may cause some surprise, it is quite intelligible that the hope of learning more of the real doctrine of the Christians, or of checking the progress of the new faith by an opportune display

Socr. i. 8. 13.

of superior power, may have brought them to what they could not but regard as a contest of intelligence.

A single incident has been preserved in detail, which gives a lively image of these open disputations. Among the chief actors was one of singular skill who engaged day after day in argument with the bishops. The discussion thus prolonged became a popular spectacle, and no advantage could be gained over the opponent of the truth. At last the objector was met by a new adversary. One of the confessors who was seated among the bishops—he is said to have been a layman—a man of the most childlike nature, who knew nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified, asked to be allowed to enter the field.

Socr. i. 8. 15. Ruff. i. 3. *Cf.* Soz. i. 18.

Although many were rather ashamed of such an unlearned champion, and feared that his simple piety would only raise a laugh,[1] the old man insisted and thus began: "In the name of Jesus Christ hear, O philosopher, the truth. There is one God who made heaven and earth, and who gave breath to man whom He had formed of the dust of the earth. He created all things which are seen, and which are not seen, by the power of His Word, and strengthened them by the sanctification of His Spirit. This Word and Wisdom, whom we call the Son, having pity on the sins of men, was born of a virgin, and through the suffering of death freed us from everlasting death, and by rising again brought to us eternal life. And

[1] Ne forte apud callidos homines risui efficeretur sancta simplicitas. —Ruffinus.

we look for Him to come as Judge of all that we do. Believest thou that this is so, O philosopher?" The philosopher finding himself powerless to gainsay this speech, filled with astonishment and dumb to all else, replied that it was true. "Then the old man said, 'If thou believest this, rise and follow me to the Church (*Dominicum*) and receive the sign (*Signaculum*) of this faith.' And the philosopher turning to his disciples, or to those who had come for the sake of hearing, said, 'Hear, O learned man; so long as it was a matter of words, I opposed words to words, and by art of speech subverted what was spoken; but when instead of words, power proceeded from the mouth of the speaker, words could not resist power, nor man oppose God. So if any of you feel what I felt in what has been said, let him believe Christ and follow this old man in whom God has spoken.'"

The exquisite simplicity of the narrative is a guarantee of its substantial truth. Even if some of the details have been filled in by imagination, it is difficult to believe that a later age would have invented a scene which realizes so vividly as this the spirit of the Nicene Council. The long interrogatory is only a practical transcription of the words in which Socrates sums up the argument i. 8. 15.
of the martyr apologist: "Christ and the Apostles committed to us no art of dialectics or empty deceit, but a simple judgment (γυμνὴν γνώμην) ever guarded by faith and good works."

As much as three weeks may have been already

spent in these irregular discussions when the day appointed for the solemn opening of the Council arrived. The bishops assembled in a hall of the great Basilica of the city—this at least appears to be the most natural interpretation of the vague language of Eusebius—and took their appointed places on the benches which were arranged along the sides of the chamber. Then followed a space of silent expectation. First one and then another officer of the Court appeared. At last, at a given signal, the whole meeting arose, and the Emperor entered with all the splendour of an Eastern monarch. But in place of his usual bodyguard he was attended only by a group of Christian friends. His purple robes sparkled with gold and jewels. The consciousness of his victorious career added fresh dignity to his commanding figure. But it was observed that he was not unmoved by the stately and significant scene. With downcast eyes, and flushed face, and quickened step he moved through the lines of ecclesiastics to the modest golden throne placed for him at the head of the hall, as one whose soul was filled with reverent and pious fear. Then he paused for a moment, and if we can in any degree realize the spectacle, magnificent in all its accessories and rich in boundless promise, we shall understand how those who looked upon it likened the Emperor to an angel from heaven. The moment was unique in the whole history of Christendom. The Empire and the Church met face to face for the first time, with power untried

*V.C.* iii. 10.
*Cf.* Theod. i. 7 9.

and unknown, and such a meeting could never be repeated when they had once been joined in conflict or alliance. The first incident illustrates the prevailing sentiment of mutual awe. Constantine remained standing till he was invited by a sign from the bishops to take his seat. After this the members of the Council also seated themselves, and a short address was made to the Emperor by the bishop—probably Eustathius of Antioch—who was upon his right hand.[1] When the address was ended the eyes of all were fixed in silence upon Constantine. He was seen to look round upon the Council with an expression of calm satisfaction, and then stopping for a brief space to collect his thoughts he said: That he had now gained the end of his prayers, and thanked God for this crowning blessing which he recognized in the fact of their meeting and the signs of their general unanimity. In his opinion the dissensions in the Church were really more terrible than the open strife of civil war, and he prayed that as he had overcome his foes in the field, the great adversary might find no fresh occasion for triumph. "When then," he continues, "I heard of your unexpected dissension, I considered that the tidings called for my most urgent attention, and in the earnest desire that this evil

*V.C.* iii. 12.

[1] So Theodoret says (*H.E.* i. 6); but Sozomen (i. 19) says that Eusebius addressed the King and added "a hymn of thanksgiving to God for him." The text of Eusebius (*V.C.* iii. 11) is vague, though the heading of the chapter assigns the speech to him. Eusebius certainly did address a complimentary speech to the Emperor on his *vicennalia*, but this was probably at the close of the Council, and it is likely that the two occasions have been confused (Praef. *V.C.*).

might be cured by my intervention, I called you all together without delay. And I rejoice to see your assembly, and I believe that I shall be most likely to obtain the end which I desire, if I see you all united in harmony of soul, and swayed by one common feeling for peace and concord, which you ought to recommend to the world, since you have been consecrated to the service of God. I beg you then, my friends, as ministers of God and servants of our common Lord and Saviour, to begin without further delay from this moment to bear patiently the causes of your dissension, and to resolve the tangled meshes of controversy by the rules of peace. By doing this you will achieve what is pleasing to Almighty God, and confer on me your fellow-servant an overwhelming obligation."

*V.C.* iii. 13.

The effect of the address was probably enhanced at the moment by the form in which it was delivered. Constantine spoke in Latin, and his words must therefore have been quite unintelligible to most of his audience. But they were at once interpreted, and the importance of his speech was indicated by the fact that it was delivered in the official language of the Empire. When the speech was ended, Constantine committed the conduct of the debates to "the presidents of the Council" (*τοῖς τῆς συνόδου προέδροις*). Unhappily this vague phrase has no contemporary explanation, and the usage of later times is an unsafe guide. It is most natural to suppose that Alexander and Eustathius, the

representatives of the patriarchal sees, occupied this position, and the Patriarch of Rome probably shared the honour in the persons of the two presbyters by whom he was represented. Perhaps Hosius also, not as the official representative of the Pope, but as the representative of the Western Church, may have been added to their number.[1]

The work of the Council was now begun, and it is a sad revelation of human weakness that even at this supreme crisis matters of private interest took precedence over the great questions which the assembly was summoned to decide. Many of the ecclesiastics found themselves for the first time in the presence of the Emperor, and seized the opportunity of obtaining his personal interference in their favour. Petitions and complaints, the sad yet natural fruits of times of persecution and disorder, were pressed upon his notice, and it seemed as if the main object of the meeting was forgotten. The Emperor with a wise forbearance found a remedy for the scandal. He invited the bishops to bring all their grievances before him on a fixed day. At the appointed time he received all papers which were presented to him, and then addressing the suitors reminded them that it did not become him to enter upon such controversies between the ministers of God. "Think no more of these," he added, "but turn your minds to the subjects which belong to the faith with a candid desire to obtain the truth."

Ruff. i. 2.
Socr. i. 8.

Ruff. i. 2.

[1] Notice that *Moses Choron.* (ii. 86) gives the representatives of the patriarchal sees only, placing Vitus and Vincentius first as the representatives of Silvester.

Socr. i. 8. "Christ commanded the man who is anxious to obtain forgiveness for himself to forgive his brother." He then ordered the papers to be burnt unread and unopened, lest the infirmities of the clergy should be exposed to public criticism. "For my own part," he is reported to have said, "if I were to detect a bishop in a flagrant crime I would throw my Imperial mantle over him, that the sight of the offence might not hurt the consciences of those who looked upon it."

Theod. i. 11.

After this melancholy episode the real debates of the Council began. Differences of temperament which are found in every large assembly soon manifested themselves in this. There was a large body of the members who were contented with the simple voice of tradition, and refused to discuss what they regarded as axioms of faith. Some, on the other hand, pressed the duty of bringing every opinion to the test of a critical inquiry, and the judgment of this minority so far prevailed that perfect freedom of speech was allowed in the course of the discussions. Arius himself was frequently invited before the Council to plead his cause, and his arguments were weighed with careful deliberation by his trained opponents. It was but natural, however, that the more ardent among the orthodox were impatient at this tolerance, and stopped their ears when Arius openly maintained his opinions. But the solemn dignity of the Council was not disturbed by any of those scenes of violence and tumult which disgraced the later Councils of Con-

Ruff. i. 5.

*Cf.* Athan. *Ep. ad Episc. Aeg.* 13.

stantinople, Ephesus, and Chalcedon. The reverent awe which belongs to the inauguration of a new era served to keep down vulgar passion, and the presence of the Emperor, who brought with him the hope of indefinite and untried services to the truth, could not fail to calm the fiercer spirits in the assembly.

No details remain of the debates on the Paschal Controversy or on the Melitian Schism. The former was settled with general satisfaction according to the Western usage, so that Easter Day should always be the first Sunday after the full moon (or, strictly speaking, the 14th day of the calendar moon), which happens upon or next after the vernal equinox (March 21). But in this decision a compliment was paid to the East: the privilege of determining the date of the vernal equinox was reserved for the Church of Alexandria. It had been the custom, even from early times, for the Patriarch of Alexandria to announce to all the Egyptian congregations the date of Easter in the current year immediately after the Epiphany. It was now prescribed that this date should be communicated to the Roman See, and then promulgated by the Roman Pope throughout the West.

The Melitian schism was dealt with by a compromise which became afterwards a fruitful source of trouble. Melitius was allowed to retain the title of bishop and to continue in his own city, but without the power of ordaining or nominating (*προχειρίζεσθαι*) clergy there or elsewhere. The clergy Socr. i. 9.

who had been ordained by him were to be allowed to exercise their functions after admission to the Church by imposition of hands, but they were required to take rank after the other clergy, and fill up their places as vacancies might occur, if they were chosen by the people and admitted by the Bishop of Alexandria.

But we turn with something of impatience from these trivial questions (as they seem to us) to the central subject of the Nicene Council. Yet here again our expectation is doomed to disappointment. If the records of the Council so far have preserved no traces of the proceedings, the glimpses which can be gained of the discussions on Arianism are few and unsatisfactory. It is clear, however, that the discussions turned upon the exact form which should be given to some one authoritative baptismal creed. Hitherto the baptismal creeds of the different Churches had presented considerable variations in detail, and the orthodox party seem to have lost no time in declaring their intention to press the universal adoption of a form of creed which should express their opinion unequivocally. Perhaps it was known from the first that if no other guarantee could be found, a proposition would be made to introduce into the formula the word *homoousius*, which is said to have been chosen before as a test-word in an earlier synod.

Philost. i. 7.

However this may be, no proposition to this effect was made till other measures had failed. The first distinct move appears to have been

made by the Arian party. If Theodoret may be trusted, they offered an exposition of faith (πίστεως διδασκαλία) to the Council, which was received at once with almost unanimous reprobation. The paper, which was subscribed by a number of bishops (it is uncertain how many), was torn in pieces, and the extreme Arian section of the assembly was forced to surrender their position.

Theod. i. 7. (May only refer to Euseb. Creed?) *cf.* Creed of Arius, Socr. i. 26 (obviously imperfect).

At this juncture Eusebius of Caesarea endeavoured to establish a compromise between the disputants. He urged the adoption of the Creed of his own Church. It was the Creed, he argued, which he had received from his predecessors in the see, in which he had been instructed as a catechumen, which he had repeated at his baptism, which he had held and taught as presbyter and bishop. Such an ancient and well-tried symbol might serve the needs of the Universal Church as it had served from immemorial time the needs of his own.

Socr. *H. E.* i. 8.

The Creed was expressed in the following terms:

1. We believe in One God (the Father Almighty), the Maker of all things both visible and invisible;
2. And in one Lord Jesus Christ,
   The Word of God,
   God of God,
   Light of Light,
   Life of Life,
   The only-begotten Son,
   The first-born of all creation,
   Begotten before all ages of [God] the Father.
3. Through whom also all things were made.

4. Who for our salvation was Incarnate and lived among men;
5. And suffered;
6. And rose again the third day;
7. And ascended to the Father;
8. And shall come again in glory to judge the quick and the dead.
9. We believe also in One Holy Spirit.

It was admitted on all sides that this Creed was unquestionably orthodox, but at the same time it was urged that it was not a safeguard of orthodoxy: that the language used of the Son was capable of being interpreted in an Arian sense: that what had once been adequate for the exposition of the faith was no longer adequate under changed circumstances: that doubts had arisen and that they must be decided: that the real question was not the use of primitive language but the meaning of primitive language: that some distinct term must be found, even though it might not happen to be a scriptural term, which should express the catholic faith without the possibility of debate.

The force of this reasoning was indefinitely increased by the action of the Arianising party of Eusebius of Nicomedia, which now came into prominence. These conferred with one another and agreed to accept the proposed Creed, but when a question arose as to the meaning of the first debatable phrase in it, a fundamental difference of opinion was revealed between them and the orthodox. They admitted that the Son was

See Ath. *de Decr. Syn. Nic.* 19 *f.*

"God," and "God of God," but when they were pressed to explain "of God," it appeared that they regarded the relation of origin as being, in this case also, the same as that in which "all things" are said to be "of God." The same ambiguity remained when other Scriptural phrases were added describing the Word as the True Power, and Image of the Father, like to the Father in all things and invariable. It became clear that all these terms could be applied to men, and that they were insufficient to describe the co-essential Deity of the Son with the Father.

1 Cor. viii. 6.
2 Cor. v. 17.
Ath. *de dea S.N.* 20.

Thus the vocabulary of Scripture was seen to fail in excluding the possibility of grievous error. The Council therefore was driven to abandon the intention, which they seem to have cherished at first, of keeping to "the acknowledged terms of the Scriptures," and to look elsewhere for the definition which they required. Such a definition, as we have seen, was already in existence. They proposed then to amend the symbol which had been submitted to them, by adding to the words "of God" an explanation, "that is of the essence of God," and by inserting the phrases "begotten not made" and "co-essential with the Father" to the description of the Person of the Son. In other respects the general type of the Palestinian Creed was preserved unchanged, though perhaps the exact form adopted was that of Antioch and not that of Caesarea.

It was in vain that the Arianising prelates objected that these expressions were strange and

Socr. i. 8.

unscriptural, and materialistic: that co-essentiality as applied to origin included the physical notions of separation, or efflux, or development: that they represented the Divine Nature as subject to division and change, or, again, that they led to Sabellianism. They preserved, as it was felt by the great majority of the Council, the reality of the Incarnation, as the union of perfect God and perfect man, and no other terms had been found able to do this. Even the Emperor, who had approved of the Creed of Eusebius, recommended the addition of the disputed words. And when a division was taken, all the bishops except seventeen were found to have adopted the amended
Soz. i. 20. symbol. Many of the small minority paused with a view to obtaining some further explanation of the novel terms which had been introduced into the old symbol. Such was the case with Eusebius of Caesarea; and according to his narrative there was no unwillingness on the part of the
Socr. i. 8. Fathers to give the satisfaction which he required. It was made clear to him that no division of the Divine Essence was implied in the words "of the essence of the Father": that the addition "begotten not made" was designed to distinguish the Son from all creation which came into being through Him: that the term "co-essential" did not carry with it any material idea, so that the essence of the Father unbegotten suffered any change or diminution through the being of the Son. And thus after the fullest discussion he accepted the formula which the majority had

sanctioned, "having regard," as he says, "to two great principles, the preservation of peace, and the preservation of the true conception of the Faith." The example of Eusebius was followed by the greater part of those who had shared his misgivings at the first; and five only still withheld their signatures: Eusebius of Nicomedia, Theognius of Nicaea, Maris of Chalcedon, and the two Egyptian bishops, Theonas and Secundus.

One further step was taken. There was appended to the Creed a distinct recitation and condemnation of the false positions maintained by Arius. "Those that say 'There was once when He was not,' and 'Before He was begotten He was not,' and 'He came into being from that which was not,' or who affirm that the Son of God is of another subsistence or essence, or created, or alterable or variable, the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church anathematizes." Eusebius adds that he found no difficulty in accepting this decision, which "forbade the use of unscriptural language, a practice which might almost be said to be the cause of all the confusion and disorder in the Churches." Socr. i. 8. 52.

Athanasius adds one significant detail on the form of the symbol. The Creed was not dated. The Fathers, he argues, shrank from affixing any note of time to that which belonged to every age of the Catholic Church and could not be said to have a point of origin. Heresy only ventured to fix the chronology of its belief; and so the Council of Ariminum sealed its own condem- Dec. *de Syn. N.* 3 *ff.* Socr. ii. 37. 31 *ff.*

nation. The Creed of the Arians, Hilary writes, is made "a faith of dates rather than of the Gospels, while it is characterized according to years and not held according to the confession at baptism." The interpretation may seem to us to be forced, but it is no less significant as a mark of contemporary opinion on the essential antiquity of the Nicene formula.

*Ad Const.* ii. 4.

The exact phraseology of the Creed will come under our consideration somewhat later; but three general reflections are suggested by the mode in which the controversy was determined. The terms used in the decision do not go beyond those essential limits which it was necessary to define. They show the independence of the Council. They exhibit scrupulous care in avoiding, as far as possible, the appearance of innovation.

The phrases "of the essence," "co-essential" were not, as has been seen, introduced till it had become evident from successive failures that no other words were able to present without ambiguity the idea which the large majority of the Council held to be the immemorial doctrine of the Catholic Church. And these terms which express the truth in its purest and loftiest shape contrast most favourably with the hasty and even perilous language of earlier controversialists. They belong to the vocabulary of philosophy, but they do not affect to render an explanation of that which can only be grasped in its simplest enunciation. The paradoxical language of Alex-

ander, which moved the opposition of Arius, created difficulties when it seemed to meet them. To speak of the Son as "co-existing as it were unbegotten" with God (συνυπάρχει ἀγεννήτως ὁ Υἱὸς τῷ Θεῷ), or as a being "at once unbegotten and born" (ἀγεννητογενής), is simply to perplex thought. The faith, which is the life of the Christian, rests on a firmer basis. It may not be possible to form a clear conception of the Being of God, but at least the idea of co-essentiality leaves the conception in its mysterious grandeur, and preserves Unity without destroying Personality.

Theod. i. 5.

The novel words are a proof of the independence of the Council. Eusebius indeed states that Constantine himself recommended their adoption, but if we admit the fact, as we may do reasonably, it points distinctly to the conclusion which has been indicated. It is unnatural to suppose that Constantine was able to form an independent judgment upon a question of technical theology though he took part in the discussions. His letter to Alexander and Arius shows that a short time before the Council was summoned he could not even rightly appreciate the character of the points at issue. His one object, as appears from all his recorded words, was to secure a general agreement in the Church. With this end in view his policy was to obtain a compromise if possible, and if not, to throw the weight of his influence upon the stronger side. This appears to have been, in fact, the course which he followed. At first he favoured the

Socr. i. 8. 41.

Socr. i. 9. 19.

Socr. i. 8. 37.

decision of the controversy by the solution which was proposed by Eusebius of Caesarea. But when this failed unmistakably, he accepted with a statesman's instinct the judgment of the majority, and pressed that upon the remainder. Yet it is evident that nothing less than the certainty that the debatable terms alone would satisfy the chief body of the Council can explain his readiness to adopt an addition to the language of the old Creeds, which could not fail, as was apparent from the case of Eusebius of Caesarea, to occasion scruples in some minds. In other words, he was forced by the clear expression of the will of the Fathers to take a side in a debate which his own inclination prompted him to quash. So far from directing the deliberations of the Council he was himself constrained to shape his own conduct by their course.

Scanty as the records of the Council are, they exhibit with adequate clearness the scope of the debaters. It is evident that the Nicene Fathers had no intention of adding any new dogmas to the sum of the Christian Faith, or even of bringing out into fresh prominence a truth which was included implicitly in earlier formularies. Their object was to express unequivocally what the Catholic Church held actually and consciously if not articulately. To this end appeal was made to antiquity for the substance of the Faith, and to Scripture for the means of presenting it authoritatively in language. Scripture was regarded not so much as the source of the

confession as the test of it. There was no intention on either side of constructing afresh a new symbol on a Scriptural basis and with Scriptural materials. The object of the Council was to try with the most scrupulous and anxious care by the standard of Scripture the terms in which the faith of the Church was to be set forth in a written shape. But in the conduct of the scriptural argument one most important fact has been universally overlooked. The Scriptures which were appealed to on both sides were the Scriptures of the Greek Bible. There is not, as far as I have noticed, any reference to the Hebrew text of the Old Testament as the final authority in the whole course of the controversy, nor is there any scruple on the part of Athanasius in using without apology or explanation passages from books which are not contained in the Hebrew Canon. The latter point is not of considerable moment. Athanasius at a later time (367 A.D.) expressed his views on the Canon very distinctly; and yet it is not without interest to observe that in his writings on the Arian question he quotes the books of *Wisdom*, *Ecclesiasticus*, *Baruch*, the *Additions to Daniel*, and *Esdras*, without distinguishing them in any way from the acknowledged books. On the other hand, when the Arians quoted from the *Shepherd* of Hermas he remarked that the book was "not of the Canon," though he elsewhere recognises its value.

*c. Ar.* ii. 5; *id.* 79; *id.* i. 12; *id.* l.c.; *id.* ii. 20.

*De decr. S. N.* 18; *id.* 4; *de Incarn. Verbi*, 3.

The use of the LXX. text as an authoritative standard opens a question of far wider significance.

The practice, from obvious causes, had grown so universal in the Church, that controversialists when they quote the Greek of the Old Testament betray no consciousness that they are dealing with a translation. The received legend of the production of the LXX. no doubt contributed to the prevalence of this implicit trust in its accuracy; but the result was in the main due to unreflecting habit, to long familiarity, to the persuasiveness of use; and it would not be difficult to show that the Latin and English Vulgates have occupied a corresponding place in discussions of later times.

It would be impossible for me to sketch now even roughly the cause of this habit in the ante-Nicene age. The influence of the LXX. upon the apostolic quotations has been frequently considered; but this inquiry is, in one aspect, only preliminary to a much larger one.[1]

[1] I have set down two or three examples, taken almost at random from common patristic quotations:—

(1) Gen. iv. 8. *διέλθωμεν (δὴ) εἰς τὸ πεδίον.* Clem. R. 4. *eamus (transeamus) in campum.* Tert. Ambr. Lucif.

Jerome rejects and yet in Vulg. we read *Egrediamur foras.* This LXX. reading is found also in the Samaritan and Syriac versions. *Cf.* Lftt ad Cl. R.

(2) Is. vii. 9. *ἐὰν μὴ πιστεύσητε οὐδὲ μὴ συνῆτε.* Basil. Did.
*Si non (nisi) credideritis neque (non) intellegetis.* Tert. Ambr. Aug.

(3) Is. ix. 5. *καλεῖται τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ μεγάλης βουλῆς ἄγγελος,* *Ep. Synod. Ant.* Routh, iii. 294.
*Magni consilii nuncius, magni consilii angelus, magnae cogitationis nuncius.* Tert. Cypr. Novat.

(4) Jer. xi. 19. *ἐμβάλωμεν ξύλον εἰς τὸν ἄρτον αὐτοῦ.* Just. M., *Dial.* 72.
*Mittamus lignum in panem ejus.* Tert. Ambr. Ruff.

It is of course impossible to affirm positively that any particular passage of Holy Scripture was pressed in the debate at Nicæa; but there are a few quotations from the Old Testament which recur so constantly in the Arian discussions both before and after the Council that there can be no reasonable doubt that they were brought forward there. It is to some of these that I desire to direct attention, for they will show how potent an influence the Septuagint version exercised on the phraseology of the controversy, and they will show—what is of far more momentous importance—what difficulties, nay, even what perils might have been avoided, if only the original text of the Old Testament had been open to the investigation of a champion like Athanasius.

Perhaps the most famous passage in the whole controversy is that taken from Proverbs viii. 22, when the writer, speaking in the name of Wisdom, says יְהוָה קָנָנִי רֵאשִׁית דַּרְכּוֹ: Everything turns upon the sense of the verb קָנָה, which admits two renderings: (1) *created*, and (2) *possessed* (*acquired*).

(5) Lam. iv. 20. πνεῦμα προσώπου ἡμῶν $\overline{\text{ΧΣ}}$. *Ep. Syn. Ant.*, Routh, iii. p. 298.

(6) Hab. ii. 11. κάνθαρος ἐκ ξύλου φθέγξεται αὐτά.
*Scarabaeus* (*vermis*) *de ligno loquetur ea.* Ambr. Greg. M.

(7) Ps. xcvi. (xcv.) 10. ἐβασίλευσεν ἀπὸ τοῦ ξύλου. Some MSS. only preserve the reading in the form ἀπὸ τῷ ξύλῳ.
Just. M., *Dial.* 73. *Dominus regnavit a ligno.* Tert. Aug. Ambrtr.

The hymn, "Vexilla regis," perpetuates the same reading:

Dicens in nationibus
Regnavit a ligno Deus.

(8) Ps. lxviii. (lxvii.) 6. κατοικίζει μονοτρόπους ἐν οἴκῳ, *inhabitare facit unanimes in domo.* Cypr. Aug.

The latter rendering is that adopted in the English Version:[1] *The Lord possessed me in the beginning of His way*, and this is also the rendering of Jerome[2] (*Deus possedit me in initio viarum suarum*), of Aquila (κύριος ἐκτήσατό με κεφάλαιον ὁδοῦ αὐτοῦ), of Symmachus (κύριος ἐκτήσατό με ἀρχὴν ὁδῶν αὐτοῦ), and of Theodotion (κύριος ἐκτήσατό με ἀρχὴν ὁδοῦ αὐτοῦ). The LXX., on the other hand, prefer the second rendering, and translate the passage κύριος ἔκτισέ με ἀρχὴν ὁδῶν αὐτοῦ (*The Lord created me as the beginning of His ways*), agreeing in this with the Syriac Peshitta and the Targum. The result was obvious. In consequence of the use of the word κτίζω (*create*) in the current Greek Bible, the term κτίσμα (*creature*) was applied to the Son, who was identified with Wisdom, and the full force of this name was pressed against the orthodox.[3]

Athanasius felt the importance of the argument, and spared no pains to refute the conclusions of his opponents. With the most delicate subtlety and the finest grasp on the general teaching of Scripture, he shows that the Son cannot be called a "creature" in the proper sense of the word, and that there is no being intermediate in essence between God and the Creation of God.[4] But he

[1] The R.V. margin reads "formed," and "as the beginning."

[2] The old Latin varies between *condidit* and *creavit*. Jerome says expressly several times that the Hebrew is *possedit* not *creavit*. Philo Judaeus has ἐκτήσατο.

[3] Comp. Dion. Rom. ap. Ath. *De decr. Syn. Nic.* 26. The "Macrostichos" (345 A.D.) ap. Ath. *De Syn.* 26. Euseb. Nic. ap. Theod. i. 6, 4 *f.*

[4] *De decr. Syn. Nic.* 13 *f.*; *Or. c. Ar.* ii. 18 *ff.* Eustath.; Ant. ap. Theodor. i. 7 8. He interprets the words of the Lord's human nature,

never (as far as I have noticed) even alludes to the uncertainty of the meaning of the original word, which he found represented by ἔκτισε; he never quotes the rendering of the other Greek interpreters;[1] he never indicates the least perception of the necessity of seeking the true sense of the phrase by the examination of the usage of the principal term in other places. The phrase is taken absolutely alone; the language is accepted without inquiry as finally authoritative. All that belongs to a critical or historical investigation of the text is not so much set aside as never taken into account. Even if the example were a single one, it would be sufficient to enable us to feel by what a profound difference of method and feeling we are separated from the Fathers of the fourth century in dealing with Holy Scripture. And may I not go one step further, and say that it enables us to estimate in some degree the treasures which are placed within our reach which they could not use?

Another example scarcely less interesting is found in the use made of the Septuagint rendering of the difficult phrase in Psalm cx. (cix.) 3, with which we are familiar in the melodious but not very intelligible rendering in the Prayer-Book

and in this interpretation he is followed by later writers. Comp. Petav. *Theol. Dogm.*, *De Inc.* vii. 6, 4; ii. 17, 9 and particularly *De Trin.* ii. 1, 1 *ff.* (Newman's Translation of Ath. p. 343, n. 2). The various rendering is discussed by Eusebius *c. Marcellum* [*de Eccles. Theol.*] iii. 2. Epiph. *Haer.* 69, 25. Hieron. *Ep.* 140, § 6.

[1] Athanasius does quote Aquila a few times. Cf. *Expos. Fid.* § 3 (where κτίζειν occurs, Jer. xxxi. 22). Expos. in Ps. xxx. 12; lix. 5; lxv. 18. (He does not appear to use Symm. or Theod.)

Psalter: *The dew of thy birth is of the womb of the morning.* The original words (מֵרֶחֶם מִשְׁחָר לְךָ טַל יַלְדֻתֶךָ) describe the gathering of the youthful flock to their king—fresh, sparkling, innumerable, like the dewdrops in the early dawn; but the LXX., following apparently a mutilated text, give as a rendering: *ἐκ γαστρὸς πρὸ ἑωσφόρου ἐγέννησά σε.*[1] It was impossible that such a clause standing in the connexion in which it does should not be applied to the generation of the Son. It was in fact so applied by Cyprian and Dionysius of Rome; and Athanasius constantly insists upon it. The words "from the womb" became a conventional phrase in the discussions from the first, and coloured the later controversy; and yet it is not too much to say that the original text has no true reference whatever to the great mystery which it was thus forced to illustrate.

Dion. ap. Ath. *De decr. S. N.* 21; *c. Ar.* iv. 24, 27 *f.*[2] *Cf. De decr. S. N.* 16.

The application of the first words of Psalm xlv. (xliv.) 1, *ἐξηρεύξατο ἡ καρδία μου λόγον ἀγαθόν,*[3] furnishes another instructive example of the way in which a Greek phrase, not indeed in this case resting on a mistranslation, but wholly separated from its meaning and context, influ-

[1] The other Greek versions are very different. Cf. *Epiph. Haer.* lxv. 4, who boldly gives the Hebr. as obviously agreeing with LXX. The old Latin is *ex utero ante Luciferum generavi (genui) te.* Tert. Cypr. Hil. Amb.

[2] Comp. Ath. in Ps. cix. 3: *ὅρα πῶς οἰκειοῦται τὴν κατὰ σάρκα γέννησιν τοῦ Μονογενοῦς ὁ πατήρ. φησὶ γὰρ ὁ πατὴρ πρὸς τὸν Υἱόν· Πρὸ γὰρ τοῦ ὁρωμένου κόσμου τούτου καὶ διαυγοῦς φωτὸς γεννήσεως ἐγώ γεγέννηκά σε, οὐχ ὅτι γαστέρα ἔχει ὁ θέος, ἀλλ' ἐπειδὴ τὰ γνήσια καὶ οὐ νόθα ἐκ γαστρὸς πρωτοτοκίων πεφύκασιν.*

[3] Vulg. *Eructavit cor meum verbum bonum.* "My heart overfloweth with a good matter," R.V.

enced a theological debate.[1] The occurrence of the term λόγος in this passage was sufficient to fix upon the clause a sense which it cannot bear, and controversialists were bold enough to interpret these words also of the generation of the Son. At an early stage of the controversy Arius charged some of the orthodox bishops (probably Philogonius) with venturing to speak of the Son as ἐρυγή; but in spite of the reproach thus drawn (not unjustly) from the Greek version of the verse, it maintained its place in later discussions; and Athanasius quotes the words repeatedly without showing the least trace of misgiving as to the cogency of the argument which he draws from them.

Theod. i. 5, 2.

*De decr. S. N.* 26; *Or. c. Ar.* ii. 57; iii. 59, 367; iv. 24.

Equally erroneous is the interpretation which he gives to the incorrect septuagintal heading of Ps. ix., ὑπὲρ τῶν κρυφίων τοῦ υἱοῦ, as if the Psalm was a thanksgiving for the mysterious Birth and Life and Passion and Resurrection of Christ.

*c. Ar.* iv. 24. *cf. In. Ps.* ix.

This straining of single words without any regard to the obvious scope of the passage in which they are found is perhaps even more startling to us now than the exclusive use of a secondary and imperfect text. Another instance of the fault occurs in the conclusions which Athanasius often draws from the first clause of Ps. xxxiii. 6, *By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth.*[2] It is possible, indeed, to connect

Athan. *Or. c. Ar.* iii. 65; iv. 24; ii. 31.

[1] The translation of Symmachus excludes the false use.

[2] Cf. *Expos. in Ps.* xliv.: τοῦτό φησιν ὁ πατὴρ περὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ·

such language with the fuller revelation of the Divine teaching made to us through the Incarnation, but the language itself is not adequate to furnish any valid argument for the truth which can be read into it. Still more surprising is the manner in which Athanasius transfers to the Son what is said of the *Hand* of God, as the organ whereby He acts, or of *Wisdom* as one of His attributes. Nothing can be further from the original sense of Ps. lxxiv. (lxxiii.), 12, *Why withdrawest Thou Thy hand, even Thy right hand? Pluck it out of Thy bosom* (or rather *take it* from Thy bosom [where it rests inactive], and destroy [our enemies]), than the gloss which he affixes to it: "Whom John calls Son, Him David mentions in the Psalm as God's Hand, saying, *Why stretchest Thou not forth Thy right hand from Thy bosom?* "This my Hand," then, is equivalent to "This my Son." "The Lord's hand was nothing else than Wisdom," he says in another place, "as David says in the Psalm, *In Wisdom hast Thou made them all* . . . and Solomon, *The Lord by Wisdom founded the earth.* . . ."

*Or. c. Ar.* iv. 26. *Cf.* Newm. p. 323 *n.*

*Cf.* Is. xlviii. 13; li. 16, ap. *De decr. S. N.* 17. *Cf. Or. c. Ar.* i. 19; ii. 50, 73; iii. 65, etc.

It would be easy to pursue this question in greater detail, but the samples of interpretation which have been already quoted will bring into sufficiently clear light the essential fault which underlies the method by which Athanasius, as the champion of the Nicene faith, deals with the Old Testament. In this respect he does not differ from

γεγέννηται γὰρ θεὸς ἐκ θεοῦ. Other passages are: Is. xxxviii. 19, Jer. xxxi. 22, Ps. ii. 6 (*c. Ar.* ii. 4, 46, 52).

his contemporaries, but the error is made more glaring by the grandeur of his character, and if it be recognised in him as a grievous blemish it will not be likely to appear attractive in inferior writers. Nothing, indeed, can be farther from my wish than to detract from his almost unrivalled merits. He simply yielded to a fashion of the time, and found no leisure or inclination to inquire whether the fashion was defensible. Even if he had felt that it was wrong he could not have commanded the means for entering on a better course. But that which we may be inclined to regard as venial in Athanasius would be criminal in us. The materials for ascertaining the true sense of Holy Scripture are scattered about us profusely on every side. There is no excuse now if false texts, false renderings, false connexions, are used to support our cause. The most anxious investigation, the clearest apprehension of the primary sense of the inspired record, will not interfere with, nay rather, will quicken and illuminate the spiritual lessons which underlie it. Some familiar phrases, it may be, will be robbed of their traditional force, but such a loss will be compensated a thousandfold by the perception of the vital continuity of the Bible. The book will become not a curious mosaic of divine sayings, but a living whole, contemplated in the fulness of its life.

There is undoubtedly a strange charm in the mystical use of Scripture; but right mysticism rests upon the sure basis of criticism and history, and cannot supersede them. The first thing here,

as everywhere, is the simple objective truth, and the truth once found will be a guide to feeling and insight.

And this reflection brings us back to the Nicene fathers. They may have unanimously misunderstood and misused passages of the Old Testament; they may have erred completely in their method of dealing with it in itself; but they held firmly a truth which they desired to illustrate, to support, to test by Holy Scripture, and not to educe from it for the first time. In this aspect the very misapplication of phrases of the LXX. became a singular testimony to the force of the belief which seized upon them. The conception must have been definite and energetic when it forced even alien passages into its service. Thus once again the great fact is presented to us that the Council of Nicæa did no more than guard by necessary defences what had been committed to its charge. The new forms which were adopted there, were adopted because the bishops found in them the guarantee of the faith which they had received "of old even from the first, from apostolic times." They set these down as "an outwork to repress all heresy."[1] They discovered nothing, and added nothing to the meaning of the creed in which they had been trained. "Our faith," Athanasius writes nearly fifty years afterwards, "is right, proceeding from the teaching of the apostles and the tradition of the fathers, confirmed by the New and the Old Testaments."

Socr. i. 10. 2.

*Ep. ad Adelph.* 6 (*c.* 371).

[1] ἐπιτείχισμα κατὰ πάσης ἀσεβοῦς ἐπινοίας, Athan. *de Syn.* 45.

"The faith," he says elsewhere, "did not begin just now, but hath come down from the Lord through the disciples unto us." And in a still more remarkable passage, with a direct reference to the Nicene Council: "The fathers wrote on the subject of the Passover, 'the following rules were decreed (ἔδοξεν),' for it was then decreed that all should obey; but on the subject of the faith they wrote not 'It was decreed,' but 'Thus the Catholic Church believes'; and at once confessed how they believe, in order that they might show that their opinions are not novel, but apostolic, and that what they wrote was not discovered by them, but was just that which the apostles taught."

*Ep. Encycl.* I (341).

*De Syn.* 5 *f.*

The close of the Council coincided by a happy concurrence with the *Vicennalia* of the emperor, and many of those who were present must have recalled with strange feelings the last occasion on which such a festival had been celebrated. It was at the *Vicennalia* of Diocletian, celebrated in the neighbouring city of Nicomedia, that the last and most systematic persecution of the Christians had been undertaken. Now, after an interval of twenty-two years, a Christian emperor was entertaining an assembly of bishops as the acknowledged representatives of a power to which he looked for the unity and permanence of his dominion. The suddenness and completeness of the change invested the scene with an almost miraculous atmosphere. Soldiers, we are told, with drawn swords kept guard at the royal gates,

July 25, 325.

*V.C.* iii. 15.

but now their weapons were harmless, and "the men of God walked without fear between them into the palace. Some sat with the emperor at a high table; the rest on couches ranged on either side. It would have been easy," so Eusebius writes, "for any one to suppose that he beheld an image of the kingdom of Christ, and that all was a dream and not a reality."

Once again, before the assembly dispersed, the emperor called the bishops together and addressed them in the same spirit as at the opening of the Council. He begged them to strive earnestly for peace and avoid the strife of parties: superiority in wisdom, he said, ought to excite no envy and inspire no disdain: God alone could judge of real excellence, and the general infirmity of our nature claimed consideration for the failings of the weak: the dissensions of Christians could not but excite the mockery of unbelievers, who might be brought to salvation by the spectacle of Catholic concord. "You are aware," he added, "that argument is not availing in all cases. Some men are won by alms; others by the attention of men of rank; others by kindly courtesy; others by presents. And we must adapt ourselves to all, treating each case as a physician might do with the appropriate remedies, that the teaching of salvation may by all means be glorified among all men."

*V.C.* iii. 21.

Constantine himself adopted the policy which he recommended to others. He crowned his royal hospitality by appropriate gifts, and commended the bishops on their departure to the

*V.C.* iii. 16.

liberality of the provinces, which could thus do honour to his *Vicennalia*. To these marks of personal favour he added another more enduring privilege. He gave instructions that a yearly allowance of corn should be given in every city to the virgins and widows and ordained ministers, fixing the amount by his own generosity rather than by their need. When Theodoret wrote the third of the original amount was still distributed, and that, he adds, was a present testimony to the munificence of the emperor.

ii. 22.

i. 11. *Cf.* Soz. i. 8.

But even in the midst of these general rejoicings there were some murmurs of discontent, some ominous warnings of a coming storm. Egypt, Eusebius significantly adds, was an exception to the prevalent tranquillity, and none of the imperial remedies seemed to take effect upon the turbulent and excited population of that province. But the immediate causes of alarm were nearer at hand. A very small but yet powerful minority still ventured to oppose the decisions of the Council. The two Egyptian bishops refused to make any concession. Eusebius of Nicomedia and Theognius signed the Confession of Faith, but refused to sign the condemnation of Arius. Arius himself, though anathematised by the Council, seems to have found shelter and support in his banishment to Illyria. The original elements of discord were suppressed for a time, but neither destroyed nor modified. But Constantine for the time was resolute in enforcing subscription to the creed and to the anathemas appended to it. The recusant bishops

*V.C.* iii. 33.

Socr. i. 9.

Theod. i. 20.

were deposed from their sees. And in three letters which have been preserved the emperor completely identifies himself with the Council. In two of these he speaks as a churchman who had taken part in the debates; in the third he threatens the disobedient with the utmost terrors of the imperial power.

Socr. i. 9. The first letter was addressed "to the Catholic Church of Alexandria," where he foresaw the prospect of serious opposition. In this he explains afresh his object in convening the Council, and presses upon the whole Christian body the duty of unanimously accepting its decision. "It was," he says, "with a view to secure perfect agreement in worship and faith that I called together, by divine suggestion (ὑπομνήσει θεοῦ), the assembly of bishops, with whom as one of you I, who rejoice exceedingly to be your fellow-servant, myself also undertook the examination of the truth. All points which seemed likely to produce ambiguity or give occasion for diversity of opinion were tested and have been accurately examined." Arius, he goes on to say with some exaggeration, was found alone on one side with his strange and unscriptural novelties and more than three hundred bishops on the other. "The opinions of the three hundred bishops is then nothing else than the judgment of God, especially when the Holy Spirit seated in the minds of such men brought to light the divine purpose. So let there be no doubt or delay, but let all with ready zeal return to the way of most certain truth."

The second letter was directed generally "to the Churches." The main purport of it is to explain the grounds of the decision upon the Paschal controversy. Among these one of the most prominent is that Christians ought "to have nothing in common with their bitterest enemies, the Jews"; the crowning festival of the faith ought not, the emperor argues at length, to be made dependent upon Jewish usage. "Receive then," he concludes, "the heavenly and truly divine command, for everything that is done in the holy assemblies of bishops must be referred to the divine will."

Socr. i. 9. Euseb. *V. C.* iii. 17 *ff.*

The third letter, "to bishops and people," is more personal and characteristic. Here the absolute monarch speaks with no uncertain voice, and the sarcastic title which Constantine affixes to the Arians is in complete harmony with his temper. "Arius," he writes, "since he imitated the wicked and impious deserves to undergo the same punishment with them: as therefore Porphyry . . . gained an evil reputation for all time . . . and his impious writings were destroyed,[1] so now also it is determined that Arius and those who share the opinions of Arius shall be called Porphyrians, that they may bear the title of the men whose ways they have imitated; and, further, that if any writing composed by Arius be found it be consigned to the fire. . . . And if any one conceals a

Socr. i. 9.

Ath. *ad Mon.* 51.

[1] There is no independent record of this edict. The younger Theodosius in 449 issued an edict for the burning of Porphyry's writings and other writings against Christianity.—Cod. i. 1-3.

writing of Arius and does not at once bring it to be burnt, he shall be punished with death."

So the Council was broken up, and its decisions imposed by the civil power. It does not fall within my scope to consider the rapid and unexpected changes of fortune and opinion which followed shortly after: the domestic tragedies of Constantine, the exile of Athanasius, the triumph of Arius, the restless convocation of Synods, the temporary apostacy of the West, the imperial adoption of Arianism. These were the episodes of half a century. But the creed of Nicæa lived on. This, which was the natural experience of the Christian consciousness, survived discussion, explanation, change. It was, as Athanasius truly says, not the creed of a particular day or month, but of all time. It was not the discovery of subtle disputants, but the revelation of an inherited treasure. It was a result of life and instinct with life; and after fifteen hundred years it furnishes the characteristic groundwork of the surest and widest union of Catholic Christendom.

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