

THE
MERCERSBURG REVIEW.

APRIL, 1860.

ART. I.—CONSTANTINE THE GREAT.

The name of Constantine the Great is identified with one of the most important epochs in the history of Christianity, when it ceased to be an oppressed and persecuted sect, and became the established religion of the Roman empire. A grateful posterity has given him the surname of the Great, and he may be said to be fully entitled to it, not, indeed, by his moral character which is far from approaching the ideal of a truly Christian ruler, but by his military and political ability, his far sighted statesmanship, and especially his liberal protection of the Church which he raised from a state of depression to well deserved honor and power.

Constantine, the first Christian Cæsar, the founder of Constantinople and the Byzantine empire and one of the most gifted, energetic, and successful of the Roman emperors, was the first representative of the imposing idea of a Christian theocracy, which assumes all subjects to be Christians, connects civil and religious rights and regards Church and State the two arms of one and the same divine government on earth. This idea was more fully developed by his successors, it animated the whole middle age, and is yet working under various forms in these latest times; though it has never been fully realized, whether in the Byzantine, the German, or the Russian empire, the Roman Church-State, the Calvinistic republic of Geneva, or the early Puritanic colonies of New England. At the same time, however, Constantine stands also as the type of

an indiscriminating and harmful conjunction of Christianity with politics, of the holy symbol of peace with the honors of war, of the spiritual interests of the kingdom of heaven with the earthly interests of a despotic monarchy.

In judging of this remarkable man and his reign, we must by all means keep to the great historical principle, that all representative characters act consciously or unconsciously as the free and responsible organs of the spirit of their age which moulds them first before they can mould it in turn, and that the spirit of the age itself whether good or bad or mixed, is but an instrument in the hands of divine Providence which rules and overrules all the actions and motives of men. Through a history of three centuries Christianity had already inwardly overcome the world, and thus had made such an outward revolution as has attached itself to the name of this prince both possible and unavoidable. It were extremely superficial, to refer so thorough and momentous a change to the personal motives of an individual, be they motives of policy, of piety, or of superstition. But unquestionably every age produces and shapes its own organs, as its own purposes require. So in the case of Constantine. He was distinguished by that genuine political wisdom, which, putting itself at the head of the age, clearly saw, that heathenism had outlived itself in the Roman empire, and that Christianity alone could breathe new vigor into it and furnish its moral support. Especially on the point of the external catholic unity his monarchical politics accorded with the hierarchical episcopacy of the Church. Hence from the year 313 he placed himself in close connection with the bishops, made peace and harmony his first object in the Donatist and Arian controversies, applied the predicate "catholic" to the Church in all official documents, and as his predecessors were supreme pontiffs of the heathen religions of the empire, so he desired to be looked upon as a sort of bishop, as universal bishop of the external affairs of the Church.*

* Ἐπίσκοπος τῶν ἐκτὸς (πραγμάτων) τῆς ἐκκλησίας; in distinction from the proper bishops the ἐπίσκοποι τῶν εἰσὼ τῆς ἐκκλησίας. Vid. Eus. Vit. Const. IV, 24.

All this by no means from mere self-interest, but for the good of the empire, which, now shaken to its foundations and threatened by barbarians on every side, could only by some new bond of unity be consolidated and upheld until at last the seeds of Christianity and civilization should be planted among the barbarians themselves, the representatives of the future. His personal policy thus coincided with the interests of the State.

But with the political he united also a religious motive, not clear and deep indeed, yet honest, and strongly infused with the superstitious disposition to judge of a religion by its outward success and to ascribe a magical virtue to signs and ceremonies. He adopted Christianity first as a superstition, and put it by the side of his heathen superstition, till finally the Christian vanquished the pagan, though without itself developing into a pure and enlightened faith. §

At first Constantine, like his father, in the spirit of the Neo-Platonic syncretism of dying heathendom, revered all the gods as mysterious powers; especially Apollo, the god of the sun, to whom in the year 308 he presented magnificent gifts. Nay, so late as the year 321 he enjoined regular consultation of the soothsayers* in public misfortunes, according to ancient heathen usage; even later, he placed his new residence, Byzantium, under the protection of the God of the Martyrs and the heathen goddess of Fortune; † and down to the end of his life he retained the title and the dignity of a Pontifex Maximus, or high-priest of the heathen hierarchy. ‡ Of course these inconsistencies

§ Mosheim, in his work on the first three centuries p. 965 sqq. (Murdock's transl. II. 460 sqq.) labors to prove at length that Constantine was no hypocrite, but sincerely believed, during the greater part of his life, that the Christian religion was the only true religion.

* The *haruspices* or interpreters of sacrifices who foretold future events from the entrails of victims.

† According to Eusebius (Vit. Const. l. III, c. 48) he dedicated Constantinople to "the God of the martyrs," but according to Zosimus (Hist. II, c. 31), to two goddesses. Subsequently the city stood under the special protection of the Virgin Mary.

‡ His successors also did the same, down to Gratian, 375, who renounced the title then become quiet empty.

may be referred also to policy and accomodation to the toleration edict of 313. But with his every victory over his pagan rivals, Galerius, Maxentius, and Licinius, his personal leaning to Christianity and his confidence in the magic power of the sign of the cross increased ; though he did not formally renounce heathenism, and did not receive baptism until, in 337, he was laid upon the bed of death.

He had an imposing and winning person. His moral character was not without noble traits, among which temperance, a chastity rare for the time, and a liberality and beneficence bordering on wastefulness were prominent. Many of his laws and regulations breathe the spirit of Christian justice and humanity, promoted the elevation of the female sex, improved the condition of slaves and of unfortunates and gave free play to the efficiency of the Church throughout the whole empire. Altogether he was one of the best, the most fortunate, and the most influential of the Roman emperors. Yet he had great faults. He was far from being so pure and so venerable as Eusebius, blinded by his favor to the Church, depicts him. It must, with all regret, be conceded, that his progress in the knowledge of Christianity was not a progress in the practice of its virtues. His love of display and his prodigality, his suspiciousness and his despotism, increased with his power. The very brightest period of his reign is stained with gross crimes, which even the spirit of the age and the policy of an absolute monarch cannot excuse. After having reached, upon the bloody path of war, the goal of his ambition, the sole possession of the empire, yea, in the very year in which he summoned the great council of Nice he ordered the execution of his conquered rival and brother-in-law, Licinius, in breach of a solemn promise of mercy.* Still later, in 326, he caused the death of his eldest son Crispus, who had incurred suspicion of conspiracy and of adulterous and incestuous purposes towards his step-mother, Fausta, but is

* Eusebius justifies this procedure towards an enemy of the Christians by the laws of war. But what becomes of the breach of a solemn pledge? The murder of Crispus, he passes over in prudent silence in violation of the highest duty of the historian to relate the truth and the whole truth.

generally regarded as innocent. Later authors assert, though gratuitously, that the emperor, like David, bitterly repented of this sin. He has been frequently charged besides, though it would seem altogether unjustly, with the death of his second wife Fausta (326 ?), who, after twenty years of happy wedlock, is said to have been convicted of slandering her step-son, Crispus, and of adultery with a slave, and then to have been suffocated in the vapor of an over-heated bath.†

At all events Christianity did not produce in Constantine a thorough moral transformation. He was concerned more to advance the outward, social position of the Christian religion, than to further its inward mission. Not a decided, pure, and consistent character, he stands on the line of transition between two ages and two religions; and his life bears plain marks of both.‡

† This is doubted even by Gibbon, who bears generally no special favor to Constantine; and still more decidedly by Niebuhr (*Vorträge über röm. Gesch.*, v. Iserl. Berl. 1848, III, 302), who is also inclined to think, that Crispus deserved death. As to the alleged murder of Fausta, the accounts are rather late and discordant; Zosimus, certainly in heathen prejudice and slanderous extravagance, ascribing to Constantine the death of two women, the innocent Fausta, and an adulteress, the supposed mother of his three successors; Philostorgius, on the contrary, declaring Fausta guilty (*H. E.* II, 4; only fragmentary). Then again older witnesses indirectly contradict this view; two orations, namely, of the next following reign, which imply, that Fausta survived the death of her son, the younger Constantine, who outlived his father by three years. *Comp.* Julian. *Orat.* I, and Monod in *Const. Jun.* c. 4, ad *Calcem Eutrop.*, cited by Gibbon, c. XVIII, notes 25 and 26. Evagrius denies both the murder of Crispus and of Fausta, though only on account of the silence of Eusebius which proves no more than the inexcusable partiality of this distinguished historian for his imperial friend.

‡ The heathen historians extol the earlier part of his reign, and depreciate the later. Thus Eutropius, X, 6: *In primo imperii tempore optimis principibus, ultimo mediis comparandus.* With this judgment Gibbon agrees (c. XVIII), presenting in Constantine an inverted Augustus: "In the life of Augustus we behold the tyrant of the republic, converted, almost by imperceptible degrees, into the father of his country and of human kind. In that of Constantine, we may contemplate a hero, who had so long inspired his subjects with love, and his enemies with terror, degenerating into a cruel and dissolute monarch, corrupted by his fortune, or raised by conquest above the necessity of dissimulation." But this theory of progressive degeneracy, adopted also by F. C. Schlosser in his *Weltgeschichte*, while ecclesiastical historians, e. g., Mosheim, generally hold the opposite view of a progressive improvement, is hardly tenable. For, on the one hand, the earlier life of Constantine has such features of cruelty as the surrender of the conquered barbarian kings to the wild beasts in the amphitheatre at Trier in 310 or 311, for which he was lauded by a heathen orator, the ungenerous conduct

From these general remarks we turn to the leading features of his life and reign, so far as they bear upon the history of the Church.

Constantine, son of the co-emperor Constantius Chlorus, who reigned over Gaul, Spain, and Britain till his death in 306, was born probably at Naissus in Dacia, in the year 272. His mother was Helena, daughter of an inn-keeper, the first wife of Constantius, afterwards divorced. Constantine distinguished himself in the service of Diocletian in the Egyptian and Persian wars; went afterwards to Gaul and Britain, and at York was proclaimed Emperor by his dying father and by the Roman troops. His father before him held a favorable opinion of the Christians as peaceable and honorable citizens, and protected them in the West, during the Diocletian persecution in the East. This respectful tolerant regard descended to Constantine, and the good effect of it, compared with the evil results of the opposite course of his antagonist Galerius, could but encourage him to pursue it. He reasoned, as Eusebius reports from his own mouth, in the following manner: My father revered the Christian God and uniformly prospered, while the emperors who worshipped the heathen gods died a miserable death; therefore, that I may enjoy a happy life and reign, I will imitate the example of my father and join myself to the cause of the Christians, who are growing daily, while the heathen are diminishing. This low utilitarian consideration weighed heavily in the mind of an ambitious captain who looked forward to the highest seat of power within the gift of his age. Whether his mother, whom he always revered, and who made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem in her eightieth year, planted the germ of the Christian faith in her son, as Theodoret supposes, or herself became a Christian through his influence, as Eusebius asserts, must remain undecided. According to the heathen Zosimus, whose statement is unquestionably false and

toward Hercules his father-in-law, the murder of the infant son of Maxentius, and the triumphal exhibition of the head of Maxentius on his entrance into Rome in 312. On the other hand his most humane laws, such as the abolition of the gladiatorial shows, date from his later reign.

malicious, an Egyptian, who came out of Spain (probably the bishop Hosius of Cordova, a native of Egypt, is intended), persuaded him, after the murder of Crispus, (which did not occur before 326), that by converting to Christianity he might obtain forgiveness of his sins.

The first public evidence of a positive leaning towards the Christian religion, he gave in his contest with the pagan Maxentius, who had usurped the government of Italy and Africa, and is universally represented as a cruel, dissolute tyrant, hated by heathens and Christians alike.* Called by the Roman people to their aid, Constantine marched from Gaul across the Alps with an army of ninety-eight thousand soldiers of every nationality, and defeated Maxentius in three battles; the last in October, 312, at the Milvian bridge near Rome, where Maxentius found a disgraceful death in the waters of the Tiber.

Before this victory belongs the familiar story of the miraculous cross, which marks for us on the one hand the victory of Christianity, and on the other the ominous admixture of foreign political and military interests with it. The occurrence, however, is variously described. Lactantius, the earliest witness, some three years after the battle, speaks only of a dream by night, in which the emperor was directed (it is not stated by whom, whether by Christ, or by an angel) to stamp on the shields of his soldiers "the heavenly sign of God," that is. the cross with the name of Christ, and thus to go forth against his enemy.† Eusebius, on the contrary, gives the more minute account, and gives it on the authority of a subsequent statement of Constantine himself under oath—not, however, till the year 338,

* Even Zosimus gives the most unfavorable account of him.

† De mort. perseec. c. 44. p. 278 sq. : "Commonitus est in quiete Constantinus, ut coeleste signum Dei notaret in scutis, atque ita proelium committeret. Fecit ut jussus est, et transversa X litera, summo capite circumflexo (the *labarum*, as it was called under the successors of Constantine) Christum in sentis notat. Quo signo armatus exercitus capit ferrum." This work is indeed by many denied to Lactantius, but was at all events composed soon after the event, perhaps about 315, while Constantine was as yet on good terms with Licinius, to whom the author, c. 46, ascribes a similar vision of an angel, who is said to have taught him a form of prayer on his expedition against the heathen tyrant Maximin.

a year after the death of the Emperor, his only witness, and twenty-six years after the event†—that to him (and to his army also)§ on his march from Gaul to Italy (the spot is not specified), in clear noon-day, while at prayer, therefore awake, there appeared a shining cross in the heavens with the inscription : “By this conquer,”|| and in the following night Christ himself, directing him to have a standard prepared in the form of this sign of the cross, and with that to proceed against Maxentius and all other enemies. According to Rufinus,¶ a later writer, the sign of the cross appeared to Constantine in a dream (which agrees with the account of Lactantius), and upon his awaking in terror, an angel exclaimed to him : “Hoc vince.”

The skeptical question might here arise : What has the sacred symbol of redemption to do with the bloody standard of war, the gentle Prince of peace with the god of battle? But there was nothing in this unnatural union offensive to the religious character of Constantine and his age. The miraculous element of the phenomenon agrees likewise very well with the prevailing idea of antiquity respecting the supernatural origin of dreams and visions. The pagan Julian was much more superstitious in this matter, than his Christian uncle, and on his expedition to the Persians he was supposed by Libanius to have been accompanied by a host of gods, which, however, in the view of Gregory of Nazianzen was rather an army of demons. Besides, to deny the whole event and to resolve it either into a mere military stratagem, or a pious fraud,* would compel us either to impute to the emperor, at a ven-

† In his *Vita Constant.* (composed about 338) I, 27–30. But in his *Church History* (written after 324), though he has good occasion (l. IX, c. 8, 9), Eusebius says nothing of the occurrence, whether through oversight or ignorance, or of purpose, it is hard to decide. In any case the silence casts suspicion on the details of his subsequent story.

‡ This is certainly a mistake. For if a whole army consisting of more than ninety thousand soldiers of every nation had seen the vision of the cross, Eusebius might have cited many witnesses, and Constantine might have dispensed with a solemn oath.

|| Τοῦτο (τῷ σημείῳ) νικᾷ; Hac (or Hoc, sc. signo) vince, or vinctes.

¶ *Hist. eccl.* IX, 9.

* As Hornebeck, Thomacius, Arnold, Gibbon(?) and Manso did.

erable age, willful falsehood and solemn perjury, or to refuse all credibility to the celebrated Church historian and bishop of Caesarea. Somewhat of fact must, therefore, no doubt be supposed. The more so as the testimony of Lactantius is independent both of Constantine and Eusebius. But then we have still the choice between a proper miracle, † a natural phenomenon or optical illusion, ‡ and a nocturnal dream or psychological illusion. † A divine miracle of the kind described by Eusebius is hardly worthy of the character of Christ who, if he had actually appeared to Constantine either personally (according to Eusebius), or through an angel (as Rufinus has it), would have revealed to him the saving truth and directed him to repent and be baptized rather than to construct a military banner for a bloody battle. In no case can we ascribe to this experience, as Eusebius does, the character of a sudden and thorough conversion, as to Paul's vision on the way to Damascus. For, on the one hand, Constantine was never hostile to Christianity, but most probably favorable to it from early youth; and on the other, he put off full conversion and baptism quite five and twenty years, almost to the very hour of death. A natural phenomenon in the skies, a solar halo around the sun, or a peculiar formation of the clouds, such as would answer the case in hand, has no parallel in the annals of astronomy and would not explain at all the inscription: "Hoc vince." The facts in the case will, therefore, probably resolve themselves into this: that before the battle he prayed earnestly to the God of the Christians for assistance, while Maxentius, as Zosimus also testifies,* sacrificed to the heathen gods, and placed his

† This is the view generally entertained by the older and the Roman Catholic historians.

‡ So Fabricius. Schroeckh (vol. V. p. 83) Gieseler (1 ¶ 56 note 29 where he refers us to similar cross-like clouds in 1517 and 1552, which were mistaken by the cötemporary Lutherans for supernatural signs), and even Neander.

† Mosheim (although after a lengthy discussion in his large work he comes to no definite conclusion), and more recent writers, also Neander, who thinks that the natural phenomenon in the skies was perhaps followed by a dream.

* Histor. II, 16.

superstitious trust in them ; and that Constantine, already familiar with the general use of the sign of the cross among the Christians and with their faith in its protecting power, on this occasion first used, with superstitious trust, the *Labarum*, † afterwards so called : that is the sacred standard of the Christian cross with the Greek monogram of the name of Christ. ‡ Probably this was suggested, not by a visible figure in the heavens (which rests merely on the testimony of Eusebius and may be a subsequent exaggeration or mistake), but as all other authorities suggest, by a dream or inward vision which took in Constantine's view, especially after his happy success, the character of a supernatural revelation. To this cross-standard he attributed his victory over his heathen enemies.

After his triumphant entrance into Rome, he had his statue erected upon the forum with the *Labarum* in his right hand, and the inscription beneath : "By this saving sign, the true token of bravery, I have delivered your city from the yoke of the tyrant." § Three years afterwards the senate erected to him a triumphal arch of marble, which, to this day, within sight of the sublime views of

† *Λαβάρου*, also *Λαβάρου* ; derived not from *labor*, nor from *λάζαρον*, nor from *λασάν*, but probably from a barbarian root, otherwise unknown, and introduced into the Roman terminology, even before Constantine, by the Celtic or Germanic recruits. Comp. Du Cange, *Glossar.*, and Suicer, *Thesaur.*, s. h. v.

‡ XP, the first two letters of the name of Christ, so written upon one another as to make the form of the cross, of which Münter (*Sinnbilder der alten Christen*, p. 36 sqq.) has collected from ancient coins, vessels, and tombstones more than twenty different forms. The monogram, as well as the sign of the cross, was in use among the Christians long before Constantine, probably as early as the Antonines and Hadrian. Yea, the standards and trophies of victory generally had the appearance of a cross, as Minucius Felix, Tertullian, Justin and other apologists of the second century told the heathens. According to Killen (*Ancient Church*, p. 317, note) who quotes Aringhus, *Roma subterranea II* p. 567, as his authority, the famous monogram (of course in a different sense) is found already before Christ on coins of the Ptolemies. The only thing new, therefore, is the union of this symbol in its Christian sense and application with the Roman *military standard*, which was richly adorned, besides, with the crown and the likeness of the emperor, and with gold and precious stones.

§ Eus. H. E. IX, 9 : Τοῦτο τῷ σωτηριᾷ (salutari, not singulari, as Rufinus has it) σημείῳ, τῷ ἀληθινῷ ἐλίχῳ τῆς ἀνθρώπου, τὴν πόλιν ἑμῶν ἀπὸ ζυγοῦ τοῦ τυραννοῦ διασωθέντων ἐλευθέρωσα, κ. τ. λ. Gibbon, however, thinks it more probable, that at last the *labarum* and the inscription date only from the second or third visit of Constantine to Rome.

the pagan Colosseum, indicates at once the decay of ancient art, and the downfall of heathenism; as the neighboring arch of Titus commemorates the downfall of Judaism and the destruction of the temple. The inscription on this arch of Constantine, however, ascribes his victory over the hated tyrant, not only to his master mind, but indefinitely also to the impulse of Deity (*instinctu Divinitatis*); by which a Christian would naturally understand the true God, while a heathen, like the orator Nazarius, in a eulogy pronounced on Constantine in the year 321, might take it for the celestial guardian power of the "urbs aeterna."

At all events the victory of Constantine over Maxentius was a military and political victory of Christianity over heathenism. The emblem of ignominy and oppression* became thenceforward the badge of honor and dominion, and was invested, in the emperor's view, according to the spirit of the Church of his day, with a magic virtue.† It now took the place of the eagle and other field-badges, under which the heathen Romans had conquered the world. It was stamped on the imperial coin, and on the standards, helmets, and shields of the soldiers. Among the standards the *labarum* shone above all in the richest decorations of gold and gems; was entrusted to the truest and bravest fifty of the body-guard; filled the Christians with the spirit of victory, and spread fear and terror among their enemies; until, under the weak successors of Theo-

* Cicero says, *pro Raberio*, c. 5: *Nomen ipsum crucis absit non modo a corpore civium Romanorum, sed etiam a cogitatione, oculis, auribus.* With other ancient heathens, however, the Egyptians, the Buddhists, and even the Aborigines of Mexico the cross seems to have been in use as a religious symbol. Socrates relates (*H. E. V. 1717*) that at the destruction of the temple of Serapis among the hieroglyphic inscriptions forms of crosses were found which pagans and Christians alike referred to their respective religions. According to Prescott (*Conquest of Mexico*, III, 338-340) the Spaniards found the cross among the objects of worship in the idol temples of Anahuac.

† Even church teachers, long before Constantine, Justin, Tertullian, Minucius Felix in downright opposition to this pagan antipathy, had found the sign of the cross everywhere on the face of nature and of human life: in the military banners and trophies of victory, in the ship with swelling sails and extended oars, in the plow, in the flying bird, in man swimming or praying, in the features of the face and the form of the body with outstretched arms. Hence the daily use of the sign of the cross by the early Christians.

dosius II., it fell out of use, and was lodged as a venerable relic in the imperial palace at Constantinople.

Before this victory at Rome, either in the spring or summer of 312, Constantine, in conjunction with his Eastern colleague, Licinius, had published an edict of religious toleration, now not extant, but probably a step beyond the edict of the still anti-Christian Galerius in 311, which was likewise subscribed by Constantine and Licinius, as co-regents. Soon after, in January, 313, the two emperors issued from Milan a new edict (the third) on religion, in which, in the spirit of religious eclecticism, they granted full freedom to all existing forms of worship with special reference to the Christian. This religion the edict not only recognized in its existing limits, but also—what neither the first nor perhaps the second edict had done—allowed every heathen subject to adopt it with impunity.* At the same time the church buildings and property confiscated in the Diocletian persecution were ordered to be restored, and private property-owners to be indemnified from the imperial treasury.

In this notable edict, however, we should look in vain for the modern Protestant and Anglo-American theory of religious liberty as one of the universal, inalienable rights of man. Sundry voices, it is true, in the Christian Church itself, at that time and even before, declared firmly against all compulsion in religion.† But the spirit of the Roman

* *Hæc ordinanda esse credidimus, ut daremus et Christianis et omnibus liberam potestatem sequendi religionem, quam quisque voluisset . . . ut nulli omnino facultatem obnegandam putarem, qui vel observationi Christianorum, vel ei religioni mentem suam dederet, quam ipse sibi aptissimam esse sentiret . . . ut amotis omnibus omnino conditionibus (by which are meant, no doubt, the restrictions of toleration in the two former edicts)—nunc libere ac simpliciter unusquisque eorum qui eandem observandæ religionis Christianorum gerunt voluntatem, citra ullam inquietudinem et molestiam sui ad ipsum observare contendant. Lact. : De mort. persec. c. 48 (p. 282 ed. Fritzsche). Eusebius gives the edict in a stiff and and obscure Greek translation, with some variations, H. E. X, 5. Comp. also Niceph. H. E. VIII, 41.*

† Here comes in some remarkable passages of Tertullian, and Justin Martyr. Lactantius likewise, in the beginning of the fourth century, says, *Instit. div. l. V, c. 19* (I, p. 267 sq. ed. Lips) : *Non est opus vi et injuria, quia religio cogi non potest; verbis potius, quam verberibus res agenda est, ut sit voluntas. . . Defendenda religio est, non occidendo, sed moriendo; non sævitia,*

empire was too absolutistic to abandon the prerogative of a supervision of public worship. The Constantinian toleration was a temporary measure of state policy which, as indeed the edict expressly states the motive, promised the greatest security to the public peace and the protection of all the heavenly powers for emperor and empire. It was, as the result teaches, but the necessary transition-step to a new order of things. It opened the door to the elevation of Christianity, and specifically of Catholic hierachical Christianity, with its exclusiveness towards heretical and schismatic sects, to be the religion of the State. For, once put on equal footing with heathenism, it must soon, in spite of numerical minority, bear away the victory from a religion, which had already inwardly outlived itself.

From this time Constantine decidedly favored the Church, though without persecuting or forbidding the pagan religions. He always mentions the Christian Church with reverence in his imperial edicts, and uniformly applies to it, as we have already observed, the predicate of catholic. For only as a catholic, thoroughly organized, firmly compacted, and conservative institution did it meet his rigid monarchical interest, and afford the splendid state and court dress he wished for his empire. So early as the year 313 we find the bishop Hosius of Cordova among his counsellors, and heathen writers ascribe to the bishop even a magical influence over the emperor. Lactantius, also, and Eusebius of Caesarea belonged to his confidential circle. He exempted the Christian clergy from military and municipal duty (March, 313); abolished various customs and ordinances offensive to the Christians (315); facilitated the emancipation of Christian slaves (before 316); legalized bequests to Catholic churches (321); enjoined the civil observance of Sunday, though not as *dies Domini*, but as *dies Solis*, in conformity to his worship of Apollo, and in

sed patientia ; non scelere, sed fide. . . Nam si sanguine, si tormentis, si malo religionem defendere velis, jam non defendetur illa, sed polluetur atque violabitur. Nihil est enim tam voluntarium, quam religio, in qua si animus sacrificantis aversus est, jam sublata, jam nulla est. Comp. c. 20.

company with an ordinance for the regular consulting of the *haruspex* (321); contributed liberally to the building of churches and the support of the clergy; erased the heathen symbols of Jupiter and Apollo, Mars and Hercules from the imperial coins (323); and gave his sons a Christian education. This mighty example was followed, as might be expected, by a general transition of those subjects, who were more influenced in their conduct by outward circumstances, than by inward conviction and principle. The story that in one year (324) twelve thousand men, with women and children in proportion, were baptized in Rome, and that the emperor had promised to each convert a white garment and twenty pieces of gold, is at least in accordance with the spirit of that reign, though the fact itself, in all probability, is greatly exaggerated.*

Constantine came out with still greater decision when, by his victory over his Eastern colleague and brother-in-law, Licinius, he became sole head of the whole Roman empire. To strengthen his position, Licinius had gradually placed himself at the head of the heathen party, still very numerous and had vexed the Christians first with wanton ridicule,† then with exclusion from civil and military office, with banishment, and in some instances perhaps even with bloody persecution. This gave the political strife for the monarchy, between himself and Constantine, the character also of a war of religions; and the defeat of Licinius in the battle of Adrianople in July, 324, and at Chalcedon in September, was a new triumph of the standard of the cross over the sacrifices of the gods. Save that Constantine dishonored himself and his cause by the execution of Licinius and his son.

The emperor now issued a general exhortation to his subjects to embrace the Christian religion, still leaving them, however, to their own free conviction. In the year 325,

* For the *Acta S. Silvestri* and the *H. Eccl. of Nicephorus Callist.* VII, 34 (in *Baronius. ad ann. 324*) are of course not reliable authority on this point.

† He commanded the Christians, for example, to hold their large assemblies in open fields, instead of in the churches, because the fresh air was more wholesome for them than the close atmosphere in a building.

as patron of the Church, he summoned the council of Nice, and himself attended it; banished the Arians, though he afterwards recalled them; and, in his monarchical spirit of uniformity, showed great zeal for the settlement of all theological disputes, while he was blind to their deep significance. In the year 325–329, in connection with his mother, Helena, he erected magnificent Churches on the sacred spots in Jerusalem.

As heathenism had still the preponderance in Rome, where it was hallowed by its great traditions, Constantine, by divine command as he supposed,* in the year 330 transferred the seat of his government to Byzantium, and thus fixed the policy, already initiated by Domitian, of orientalizing and dividing the empire. With incredible rapidity, and by all the means within reach of an absolute monarch, he turned this nobly situated town, connecting two seas and two continents, into a splendid residence and a new Christian Rome, “for which now,” as Gregory of Nazianzen expresses it, “sea and land emulate each other, to load it with their treasures, and crown it queen of cities.” Here instead of idol temples and altars, churches and crucifixes rose; though among them the statues of patron deities from all over Greece, mutilated by all sorts of tasteless adaptations, were also gathered in the new metropolis.† The main hall in the palace was adorned with representations of the crucifixion and other biblical scenes. The gladiatorial shows, so popular in Rome, were forbidden here, though theatres, amphitheatres, and hippodromes kept their place. It could nowhere be mistaken, that the

* “*Jubente Deo*,” says he in one of his laws. *Cod. Theodos. l. XIII. tit. V. leg. 7.* Later writers ascribe the founding of Constantinople to a nocturnal vision of the emperor, and an injunction of the Virgin Mary, who was revered as patroness, one might almost suppose as goddess, of the city.

† The most offensive of these is the colossal bronze statue of Apollo, pretended to be the work of Phidias, which Constantine set up in the middle of the forum on a pillar of porphyry, a hundred and twenty feet high, and which, at least, according to later interpretations, served to represent the emperor himself with the attributes of Christ and the god of the sun! So says the author of *Antiquit. Constant. in Banduri*, and *J. v. Hammer: Constantinopolis u. der Bosphorus*, I, 162 (cited by Milman on Gibbon). Nothing now remains of the pillar, but a mutilated piece.

new imperial residence was as to all outward appearances a Christian city.

The emperor diligently attended divine worship, and is portrayed upon medals in the posture of prayer. He kept the Easter vigils with great devotion. He would stand during the longest sermons of his bishops, who always surrounded him, and unfortunately flattered him only too much. And he even himself composed and delivered discourses to his court. One of these productions is still extant, † in which he recommends Christianity in a characteristic strain and in proof of its divine origin cites especially the fulfillment of prophecy, including the Sibylline books and the Fourth Eclogue of Virgil, with the contrast between his own happy and brilliant reign and the tragical fate of his persecuting predecessors and colleagues.

Nevertheless he continued in his later years quite true to the toleration principles of the edict of 313, protected the pagan priests and temples in their privileges, and wisely abstained from all violent measures against heathenism, in the persuasion, that it would in time die out. Save that he prohibited idolatry, in cases where it sanctioned scandalous immorality, as in the obscene worship of Venus in Phenicia; or in places, which were specially sacred to the Christians, as the sepulchre of Christ and the grove of Manire; and he caused a number of deserted temples and images to be destroyed or turned into Christian Churches. Though he loved to promote Christians to honorable positions, yet he retained many heathens at court and in public office. In his later years he seems, indeed, to have issued a general prohibition of idolatrous sacrifice; his sons in 341 refer to such an edict; but the repetition of it by his successors proves, that, if issued, it was not carried into execution under his reign.

With this shrewd, cautious, and moderate policy of Constantine, which contrasts well with the violent fanaticism of his sons, accords perhaps his postponement of his

† Const. Oratio ad sanctos.

own baptism to his last sickness. § For this he had the further motives of a superstitious desire, which he himself expresses, to be baptized in the Jordan, whose waters were sanctified by the Saviour, and no doubt also a fear, that he might by relapse forfeit the sacramental remission of sins. It is therefore the more striking, that the court bishops, from false prudence, relaxed in his favor the otherwise strict discipline of the Church and admitted him, at least tacitly, to the enjoyment of nearly all the privileges of believers, before he had taken upon himself even a single obligation of a catechumen. But when after a life of almost uninterrupted health, he felt the approach of death, he was received into the number of catechumens by laying on of hands, and then formally admitted by baptism into the full communion of the Church in the year 337, the sixty-fifth year of his age, by the Arian (or properly Semi-Arian) bishop Eusebius of Nicomedia. || He promised to live thenceforth worthily of a disciple of Jesus; refused to wear again the imperial mantle of cunningly woven silk richly ornamented with gold; retained the white baptismal robe; and died a few days after, on Pentecost (May 22, 337), trusting in the mercy of God, and leaving a long, a fortunate, and a brilliant reign, such as none but Augustus of all his predecessors had enjoyed. His remains were

§ The pretended baptism of Constantine by the Roman bishop Sylvester in 324, and his bestowment of lands on the pope in connection with it, is a mediæval fiction, still unblushingly defended indeed by Baronius (ad ann. 324, No. 43-49), but long since given up by other Roman Catholic historians, such as Noris, Tillemont, and Valesius. It is sufficiently refuted by the contemporary testimony of Eusebius alone [Vit. Const. IV, 61, 62] who places the baptism of Constantine at the end of his life, and minutely describes it; and Socrates, Sozomen, Ambrose and Jerome coincide with him.

|| Hence Jerome says, Constantine was baptized into Arianism. But Eusebius [not the Church historian] was probably the nearest bishop, and acted here not as a party leader; Constantine, too, in spite of the influence, which the Arians had over him in his later years, considered himself constantly a true adherent of the Nicene faith. The deeper significance of the dogmatic controversy was entirely beyond his sphere. Gibbon is right in this matter: "The credulous monarch, unskilled in the stratagems of theological warfare, might be deceived by the modest and specious professions of the heretics, whose sentiments he never perfectly understood; and while he protected Arius, and persecuted Athanasius, he still considered the council of Nice as the bulwark of the Christian faith, and the peculiar glory of his own reign." C. XXI.

removed from Nicomedia to Constantinople, and deposited, with the highest Christian honors, in the Church of the Apostles, while the Roman senate, after its ancient pagan custom, enrolled him among the gods. Soon after his death, Eusebius set him above the greatest princes of all times; from the fifth century he began to be recognized in the East as a saint; and the Greek and Russian Church to this day celebrates his memory under the extravagant title of the "equal of the apostles."¶ The Latin Church, on the contrary, with truer tact, has never placed him among the saints, but has been content with naming him "the Great."

P. S.

ART. II.—THE OLD DOCTRINE OF CHRISTIAN BAPTISM.

I. *An Extract from the Twelfth Homily of St. John Chrysostom on the Gospel of St. Matthew.*

"And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straight-way out of the water; and lo, the heavens were opened unto him." Why were the heavens opened? In order that thou mightest learn, that when thou also art baptized the same thing takes place, God calling thee to the country above and urging thee to forsake the fellowship of earth. That thou seest it not, is no reason why thou shouldst not believe it. For it is the general rule, that in the beginning of extraordinary spiritual dispensations such sensible visions and signs should appear, because men are so slow to perceive spiritual realities, and require to have their attention roused by things which strike the senses; in order that even without the same signs afterwards, the

¶ Comp. the Acta Sanct. ad 21 Maii, p. 13 sq.