

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

CRIMES
OF
CHRISTIANITY.

BY

G. W. FOOTE

AND

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P R E F A C E .

AN Irish orator was once protesting his immaculate honesty before a suspicious audience of his countrymen. "Gintlemin," he exclaimed, displaying his dexter palm, "thur's a hond that niver tuk a broibe." Whereupon a smart auditor cried, "How about the one behoid yer back?"

Our purpose is to show the hand behind the back. The task is by no means a pleasant one, but we sacrifice our feelings on the altar of liberty and progress.

Christianity is plausible and fair-spoken to-day, although it occasionally emits a fierce flash of its devilish old spirit. Its advocates are no longer able to crush opposition ; they are obliged to answer its arguments, or at least to make a show of defending their own doctrines. They scruple at damning heretics, and blandly expect a reciprocation of the courtesy. Feeling that the tendency of modern thought is against them, and afraid to resist it, they bend before it rather than break. Their only object is to weather the storm at any cost, even by sacrificing large quantities of their freightage.

We do not believe that Christianity will weather the storm ; in our opinion it is unrepealably doomed. Nevertheless, as earnest Freethinkers, we feel incumbent on us the duty of assisting in its destruction. We are anxious that, as religions die of being found out, Christianity shall be seen in its true light. We desire that it shall not be judged by its present promises, but by its past performance. We wish to show the people

what it was in the evil days of its supremacy, when opportunity matched inclination, and it acted according to the laws of its nature, unchecked by science, free-thought and humanity.

Adversity tries a man, says the proverb. True, but not like prosperity. No man is really known until he possesses power, and the same may be said of religions. They should be tested, not by what they pretend in their weakness, but by what they do in their strength.

American statesmen are expected to show a good "record;" the citizens judge them by their past. We want the same test applied to Christianity, and we publish the following treatise as a sample of its "record."

Eloquence is less our aim than truth. What we wish to be heard is, not our own voice, but the voice of history. We therefore let the historian speak whenever possible, and we always appeal to the best authorities, so that our little work may be a kind of text-book, trustworthy from title to imprint, and a guide to the student as well as instructive to the common reader. Eloquence is good in its way, but there is little need of it here, for Christianity is damned by facts; facts that are hard as adamant and unshakeable as an Alp.

G. W. FOOTE.

J. M. WHEELER.

May, 1885.

CHRIST TO CONSTANTINE.

WHEN Jesus Christ had disappeared from this world, in what manner it is beside our purpose to discuss, the Jewish sect he had founded continued to assemble at Jerusalem. They were not then called Christians, but we will anticipate history by giving them that designation. The infant Church was under the leadership of Simon Peter, and it observed the communistic maxims which Jesus had enjoined. Every member sold his property and paid the proceeds into the common exchequer.

One married couple, however, named Ananias and Sapphira, retained a portion of the price of their estate for their private use. This having come to the knowledge of Peter, he taxed them in succession with their offence, and each fell down dead in his presence. Their corpses were immediately buried by the godly young men who were waiting in the chamber of execution. No investigation into the affair appears to have been made by the authorities, but if such a thing had occurred in an age of coroner's inquests, it is possible that Peter would have met another fate than leaving the world with his head downwards.

Paul's treatment of dissentients was very similar. He smote Elymas with blindness as "a child of the devil," and charitably "delivered" Hymenæus and Alexander "unto Satan," perhaps with the opinion that only the Grand Inquisitor of the Universe could adequately punish them for blasphemy and backsliding.

The other apostles were imbued with the same amiable spirit. Even in the lifetime of their master they continually disputed who should be greatest, and were only pacified by his informing them that they should all occupy twelve equal thrones of judgment over Israel.

After his death their differences grew more acrimonious. John, in his Revelation, scowls at Paul and his Gentile following, who "say they are Jews and are not, but are of the synagogue of Satan." He denounces the doctrines of Nicolas, one of the seven first deacons of the Church, as hateful; and he expresses his detestation of the Laodiceans by saying that the Almighty would spue them out of his mouth. Paul returns the compliment by "withstanding" Peter, and sneering at James and John as "seeming to be pillars," the former of whom retorts that Paul is a "vain man." Paul vehemently tells the Galatians: "If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed." Even "the beloved disciple," in his second Epistle, manifests the same persecuting spirit:

"If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed. For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds."

In the very first century Christianity was split into many petty sects, each denouncing the other as teaching false doctrine. The early Nazarenes, who kept to the Jewish law, were called Ebionites, or contemptible people. The Ebionites denounced the Paulinists, and declared that Paul was an impostor who became a Christian because he was not allowed to marry a Jewish woman. In an epistle of Peter to James, prefixed to the Clementine Recognitions, and as genuine as any other portion of the writings ascribed to Peter, Paul is alluded to as "the enemy," and the author of lawless and foolish teachings. Of the Recognitions itself, a work ascribed to Clement, and undoubtedly belonging to the first era of Christian history, the author of "Supernatural Religion" says:

"There cannot be a doubt that the apostle Paul is attacked in it as the great enemy of the true faith, under the hated name of Simon, the magician, whom Peter followed everywhere for the purpose of unmasking and confuting him. He is robbed of the title of 'Apostle of the Gentiles,' which, together with the honor of founding the Churches of Antioch, of Laodicea, and of Rome, is ascribed to Peter. All that opposition to Paul which is implied in the Epistle to the Galatians and elsewhere (1 Cor. i, 11, 12; 2 Cor. xi, 13—20; Philip. i, 15, 16) is here realised and

exaggerated. and the personal difference with Peter to which Paul refers is widened into the most bitter animosity."*

Irenæus, in the second century, in his work against Heretics, stigmatises them with the most abusive epithets, and accuses them of the most abominable crimes. He calls them "thieves and robbers," "slippery serpents," "miserable little foxes," and so forth, and declares that they practise lewdness in their assemblies.

Tertullian, in the third century, displays a full measure of bigotry, with an added sense of exultation over the sufferings in reserve for his pagan opponents.

"How shall I admire, how laugh, how rejoice, how exult, when I behold so many proud monarchs and fancied gods groaning in the lowest abyss of darkness; so many magistrates who persecuted the name of the Lord, liquefying in fiercer fires than they ever kindled against the Christians; so many sage philosophers blushing in red-hot flames with their deluded scholars; so many celebrated poets trembling before the tribunal, not of Minos, but of Christ; so many tragedians, more tuneful in the expression of their own sufferings!" †

The pious Father continues at some length in the same strain.

Jerome, in the next century, exhibits a still more execrable spirit than Tertullian, exhorting the Christians to direct their bigotry against their dearest relations :

"If thy father lies down across thy threshold, if thy mother uncovers to thine eyes the bosom which suckled thee, trample on thy father's lifeless body, trample on thy mother's bosom, and, with eyes unmoistened and dry, fly to the Lord, who calleth thee."

This detestable advice, unfortunately, did not flow from Jerome's natural moroseness; it was the logical result of his Savior's command to the disciples to leave all and follow him.‡

* Vol. II., p. 34.

† Gibbon, chap. xv. See Tertullian's "De Spectaculis," chap. xxx.

‡ "If any man come unto me and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke xiv., 26).

The scope of our work does not permit a larger array of illustrations. We have, however, given enough to show that the hateful spirit of bigotry and persecution animated the Christian Church from the beginning. It gathered strength with the progress of time, and it was sufficiently developed, when Constantine and Theodosius sought the destruction of Paganism, to assist and applaud them in executing their design.

Our contention in this respect is powerfully supported by the following passage from Lecky :

“All that fierce hatred which, during the Arian and Donatist controversies, convulsed the Empire, and which in later times has deluged the world with blood, may be traced in the Church long before the conversion of Constantine. Already, in the second century, it was the rule that the orthodox Christian should hold no conversation, should interchange none of the ordinary courtesies of life, with the excommunicated or the heretic.”*

Long before Constantine, the Christian Church had employed all its resources against heretics. It possessed no power of punishing them by fines, torture or death, but it threatened them with hell in the next world and excommunicated them in this. “Heretics,” says Dr. Gieseler,† “were universally hated as men wholly corrupt and lost,” and the Church pronounced against them her sharpest penalties. These were indeed merely spiritual, but they were transformed into temporal punishments as soon as Christianity was able to effect the change. We shall have to treat this subject more fully when we deal with the rise of the Papacy.

Before exhibiting to our readers the first capital crime of Christianity, in establishing itself by the unscrupulous use of force on the ruins of Paganism, we think it necessary to refer to the Agapæ or Love-feasts, which appear to have disgraced the early Church. Even in the time of Paul the celebration of the Eucharist was the occasion of some scandal.‡ We learn from Justin Martyr, Minutius Felix and others, that the Pagans accused the Christians of indulging in orgies of

* “History of European Morals,” vol. i., p. 451.

† Gieseler’s “Ecclesiastical History,” sec. 74.

‡ 1 Cor. v., 1 ; xi., 21 ; Jude 12.

gross licentiousness in their secret festivals, which were held at night. Justin Martyr, while repudiating the charge on behalf of the orthodox, was careful to add of the heretics: "Whether or not these people commit those shameful and fabulous acts—the putting out the lights, indulging in promiscuous intercourse, and eating human flesh—I know not."* Theodoret, in his work on "Heretic Fables," charges them all with lewdness, "such that even stage-players were too modest to describe it, or to hear it described," and he asserts that they had exceeded and eclipsed the greatest proficients in wickedness. Eusebius says of the Carpocratians, that they gave occasion of reproach to the gospel, and that it was chiefly owing to them that Christians were charged with promiscuous lewdness and other crimes in their assemblies. Origen also puts the crimes with which Christians were charged to the account of the Ophites and Cainites. Yet the evidence of Justin Martyr proves that such charges were brought against the Christians before these sects existed. The accusations were made by those who had been Christians themselves, in places as far apart as Lyons, Rome, and Asia Minor. Trials took place before competent tribunals, and the Christians were punished. When we know that the Agapæ were prohibited by several Councils on account of the scandals to which they gave rise, it is difficult to exonerate the early Christians from these grave charges. Much of the persecution to which they are alleged to have been subject perhaps arose from these secret midnight meetings.

The sensuality of the early Christians sometimes mocked their ascetic doctrines. Gibbon remarks:

"Since desire was imputed as a crime and marriage was tolerated as a defect, it was consistent with the same principles to consider a state of celibacy as the nearest approach to the divine perfection. It was with the utmost difficulty that ancient Rome could support the institution of six vestals; but the primitive Church was filled with a greater number of persons of either sex who had devoted themselves to the profession of perpetual chastity. A few of these, among whom we may reckon the

* Justin Martyr, Apology i., 26.

learned Origen,* judged it most prudent to disarm the tempter. Some were insensible and some were invincible against the assaults of the flesh. Disdaining an ignominious flight, the virgins of the warm climate of Africa encountered the enemy in the closest engagement; they permitted priests and deacons to share their bed, and gloried amidst the flames of their unsullied purity. But insulted nature sometimes vindicated her rights, and this new species of martyrdom served only to introduce a new scandal into the Church."†

Following Gibbon, Mr. Lecky pens this delectable passage, which may be commended to the attention of the "unco guid":

"In the time of St. Cyprian, before the outbreak of the Decian persecution, it had been common to find clergy professing celibacy, but keeping, under various pretexts, their mistresses in their houses; and after Constantine, the complaints on this subject became loud and general. Evagrius describes with much admiration how certain monks of Palestine, by 'a life wholly excellent and divine, had so overcome their passions that they were accustomed to bathe with women.' Virgins and monks often lived together in the same house, and, with a curious audacity of hypocrisy, which is very frequently noticed, they professed to have so overcome the passions of their nature that they shared in chastity the same bed."‡

Dr. Todd, in his learned life of St. Patrick, quotes from the "Lives of the Irish Saints" the legend of a curious contest of chastity between St. Scathinus and St. Brendan, in which the former eventually triumphed. Jortin tells us of one Robert D'Arbrisselles, a wild enthusiast and field preacher of the twelfth century, who "drew after him a crowd of female saints with whom he used to lie in bed, but never touch them, by way of self-denial and mortification."§ The learned and sagacious Jortin remarks that "austerities of this kind seem to suit the fanatical taste." Modern history furnishes us with many examples. During the Reformation, for instance, the Anabaptists emulated the primitive costume of Adam and Eve.

* Origen, although fond of allegorising Scripture, followed literally the hint in Matthew xix., 12, and castrated himself to become a eunuch for the kingdom of heaven's sake.

† "Decline and Fall," chap. xv.

‡ Vol II., p. 159.

§ Jortin, "Remarks on Ecclesiastical History," vol. iii., p. 218.

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We now approach the most critical period of the history of Christianity, when through the patronage of Constantine it obtained the means of forcing itself upon mankind. Christianity took three centuries to convert a twentieth of the inhabitants of the Roman

* Chap. iii.

TO THE EDITORS OF THE "NATIONAL REFORMER".
THE STORY OF THE FALL.
There is a fundamental weakness in the story of the "Fall" of Adam which appears to merit more attention than it has received. The tree whose fruit Adam was forbidden to eat was "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil", and it is clear that if he had no knowledge of good and evil before he ate the forbidden fruit, he could not have known that it was evil to disobey the command not to eat it; and as a consequence the eating could not have involved a moral transgression, and the whole fabric which it is sought to build upon the supposed moral transgression must fall. It should be borne in mind that the restriction placed upon Adam in respect of the fruit of this tree was not supported by any moral considerations, but was an arbitrary command supported only by a threat. A. POMEROY.

learned Origen,* judged it most prudent to disarm the tempter. Some were insensible and some were invincible against the assaults of the flesh. Disdaining the warm climate of Africa, the closest engagement; they per share their bed, and gloried in purity. But insulted nature and this new species of martyrdom new scandal into the Church.†

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Dr. Todd, in his learned work which we apply it to such facts as the Jewish or the Christian Church? There are, he says, three ways of regarding the Bible, the Church, or any other institution held sacred by men. The first of these is inspired by the state of those who believe the book or revelation to have come direct from heaven; the second that of violent reaction, opposition, and denial. For the third it is necessary to accept "that great law of development which shows that the old fictitious beliefs followed a natural law of growth; that they contained in primitive shape, profound and permanent truths, and that they were proclaimed with the most absolute and entire sincerity by their founders; further, that the revolt against these beliefs followed also the same natural law of social growth; and that the principles on which the revolt was founded contained also permanent truth, though proclaimed in very transient and imperfect forms". The third stage is "that of patiently watching the facts of man's life, accepting

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† "Decline and Fall," chap. xv.

‡ Vol II., p. 159.

§ Jortin, "Remarks on Ecclesiastical History," vol. iii., p. 218.

While Christianity was slowly propagating itself among the Gentiles, after the fall of Jerusalem, the Pagan world did not exhibit any striking need of its salutary influence. Under a succession of wise rulers the Roman Empire flourished in peace and splendor. Gibbon justly remarks that :

“If a man were called to fix the period in the history of the world during which the condition of the human race was most happy and prosperous, he would without hesitation name that which elapsed from the death of Domitian to the accession of Commodus.”*

Now Domitian died A.D. 96 and Commodus succeeded to the purple in A.D. 180. It was during this very period that Christianity produced its Scriptures, and made its first conquests. How utterly false and absurd, then, is the orthodox plea that Christianity, with all its faults, came to redeem mankind from intellectual darkness and moral depravity !

Lecky observes that “from the death of Marcus Aurelius [A.D. 180], about which time Christianity assumed an important influence in the Roman world, the decadence of the Empire was rapid and almost uninterrupted.” We should like to know how this fact can be accounted for except on the theory that Christianity helped to destroy the existing civilisation. Metaphorically, if not literally, it made men eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven ; and the energy which should have been devoted to repelling barbarism and defending the Empire was wasted on frivolous theological disputes or expended in the pursuit of priestly ambition. Even at the time of Julian, vigorous and systematic efforts might have still saved the Empire from dissolution ; but the great “Apostate’s” glorious career came to an untimely end, and the Persian spear which drew his life-blood, ensured the triumph of the pale Galilean and the ruin of Rome.

We now approach the most critical period of the history of Christianity, when through the patronage of Constantine it obtained the means of forcing itself upon mankind. Christianity took three centuries to convert a twentieth of the inhabitants of the Roman

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Empire by the arts of persuasion ; but it converted the other nineteen-twentieths in less than a century by the unscrupulous use of bribery, imprisonment, torture and massacre.

Hobbes summarises this change quaintly but concisely in a few pregnant lines :

“ When Constantine the Great, made so by the assistance and valor of the Christian soldiers, had attained to be the only Roman Emperor, he also himself became a Christian, and caused the temples of the heathen gods to be demolished, and authorised Christian religion only to be public.”*

Cardinal Newman expresses the Catholic view of this momentous change with equal clearness and brevity. “ Constantine’s submission of his power to the Church,” he says, “ has been a pattern for all Christian monarchs since, and the commencement of her state establishment to this day.”†

Let the reader now follow us in investigating the character of Constantine, his conversion to Christianity, and the forcible imposition of his adopted creed upon his Pagan subjects.

The real founder of Christianity has been the subject of eulogy and reprobation, the former bestowed by the Christians whom he protected and favored, and the latter by the Pagans whom he deserted and oppressed. Our object will be to relate the truth, without extenuating his crimes or setting down aught in malice.

Before appealing to Gibbon, Mosheim, Jortin, Schlegel and other authorities, we may perhaps venture to give a rapid summary of Constantine’s worst characteristics by the master-hand of Voltaire :

“ He had a father-in-law, whom he impelled to hang himself ; he had a brother-in-law, whom he ordered to be strangled ; he had a nephew twelve or thirteen years old, whose throat he ordered to be cut ; he had an eldest son, whom he beheaded ; he had a wife, whom he ordered to be suffocated in a bath. An old Gallic author said that ‘ he loved to make a clear house.’ ”‡

* Works, vol. iv., p. 391.

† J. H. Newman, “ Two Essays on Miracles,” p. 273.

‡ Voltaire, “ Philosophical Dictionary,” article *Constantine*.

These atrocious crimes, which cannot be disputed, were perpetrated after Constantine became a Christian, or at least after he extended his patronage to the Church. Before he embraced or patronised Christianity, his character was less sullied, and he appeared incapable of such enormities. The following is Gibbon's description of Constantine at this period :

"The person, as well as the mind, of Constantine, had been enriched by nature with her choicest endowments. His stature was lofty, his countenance majestic, his deportment graceful; his strength and activity were displayed in every manly exercise, and, from his earliest youth to a very advanced season of life, he preserved the vigor of his constitution by a strict adherence to the domestic virtues of chastity and temperance. He delighted in the social intercourse of familiar conversation; and though he might sometimes indulge his disposition to raillery with less reserve than was required by the severe dignity of his station, the courtesy and liberality of his manners gained the hearts of all who approached him. . . . In the despatch of business his diligence was indefatigable. . . . In the field he infused his own intrepid spirit into the troops, whom he conducted with the talents of a consummate general."*

Let us now behold Gibbon's picture of the hero in his decline, after he had presided at Church councils and worshipped the divinity of Christ :

"In the life of Augustus we behold the tyrant of the republic covertly 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. The general peace which he maintained during the last fourteen years of his reign was a period of apparent splendor rather than of real prosperity; and the old age of Constantine was disgraced by the opposite yet reconcileable vices of rapaciousness and prodigality. The accumulated treasures found in the palaces of Maxentius and Licinius were lavishly consumed; the various innovations introduced by the conqueror were attended with an increasing expense; the cost of his buildings, his court and his festivals required an immediate and plentiful supply; and the oppression of the people was the only fund which could support the magnificence of the sovereign. His unworthy favorites, enriched by the boundless liberality of their master, usurped with impunity

* Chap. xviii.

the privilege of rapine and corruption. A secret but universal decay was felt in every part of the public administration, and the emperor himself, though he still retained the obedience, gradually lost the esteem, of his subjects. The dress and manners which, towards the decline of his life, he chose to affect, served only to degrade him in the eyes of mankind. The Asiatic pomp which had been adopted by the pride of Diocletian assumed an air of softness and effeminacy in the person of Constantine. He is represented with false hair of various colors, laboriously arranged by the skilful artists of the times; a diadem of a new and more expensive fashion; a profusion of gems and pearls, of collars and bracelets; and a variegated flowing robe of silk most curiously embroidered with flowers of gold. In such apparel, scarcely to be excused by the youth and folly of Elagabalus, we are at a loss to discover the wisdom of an aged monarch and the simplicity of a Roman veteran. A mind thus relaxed by prosperity and indulgence was incapable of rising to that magnanimity which disdains suspicion and dares to forgive. The deaths of Maximian and Licinius may perhaps be justified by the maxims of policy as they are taught in the schools of tyrants; but an impartial narrative of the executions, or rather murders, which sullied the declining age of Constantine, will suggest to our most candid thoughts the idea of a prince who could sacrifice, without reluctance, the laws of justice and the feelings of nature to the dictates either of his passions or of his interest." *

There can be no doubt that the character of Constantine deteriorated rather than improved under the influence of Christianity. Our greatest master of grave and temperate irony says that

"He pursued the great object of his ambition through the dark and bloody paths of war and policy; and, after the victory, he abandoned himself, without moderation, to the abuse of his fortune. Instead of asserting his vast superiority above the imperfect heroism and profane philosophy of Trajan and the Antonines, the mature age of Constantine forfeited the reputation which he had acquired in his youth. As he gradually advanced in the knowledge of truth, he proportionally declined in the practice of virtue; and the same year of his reign in which he convened the Council of Nice was polluted by the execution, or rather murder, of his eldest son." †

This is Gibbon's way of saying that as Constantine became a better Christian he became a worse criminal.

The reader is probably anxious to be informed of

* Chap. xviii.

† Gibbon, chap. xx.

the details of these crimes. The father-in-law that Constantine strangled was the emperor Maximian, whom, in February, A.D. 310, he defeated and captured at Marseilles. The brother-in-law whom he punished with the same fate was his rival Licinius, who fell into his hands after the siege of Byzantium, in A.D. 324, and who was secretly executed after being publicly pardoned. The deaths of these relatives may be explained by the rules of statecraft, but no such excuse can be offered with respect to the other victims of Constantine's cruelty. In July, A.D. 325, he publicly disgraced and privately murdered his eldest son Crispus, for no other crime than his virtues and his reputation. The Cæsar Licinius, a nephew of Constantine, was involved in the ruin of Crispus and shared his fate, notwithstanding his youth and amiable manners, and the tears and entreaties of his mother. The first Christian emperor soon afterwards completed the list of his domestic murders by suffocating his wife Fausta in "the steam of a bath, which, for that purpose, had been heated to an extraordinary degree." This unfortunate lady was accused of adultery, and "her condemnation and punishment," says Gibbon, "were the instant consequences of the charge." After the commission of these atrocious crimes, it is no wonder that the people were discontented, and that satirical verses were affixed to Constantine's palace-gate comparing him with the bloody and ferocious Nero.

If we have mainly relied on Gibbon for our portrait of Constantine, it is only because that greatest of historians was an artist as well as a scholar. Instead of presenting a mass of confused details, he gives us a finished picture; and his accuracy, no less than his skill, is the wonder and admiration of succeeding writers. Although he was himself a disbeliever in Christianity, his treatment of Constantine is "remarkably just, and he is more generous to the first Christian emperor than Niebuhr or Neander."* A hasty glance at the cruel and sanguinary laws which he introduced

* J. C. Morison, "Gibbon" (*English Men of Letters*) p. 127.

into the Roman code will prove that, however zealous for religion, the first Christian emperor showed a scandalous contempt for humanity.

Constantine made a law against the gladiatorial shows, which however continued until Honorius suppressed them in A.D. 403. We may well suspect his sincerity in enacting this law when we remember that during his administration in Gaul, after a signal victory over the Franks, he exposed several of their princes to the wild beasts in the amphitheatre of Treves. He also abolished the cruel punishment of breaking the legs of criminals and branding their faces; and he prohibited crucifixions, probably out of deference to the sentiment of his Christian subjects. But he ordered delators' tongues to be cut out, and molten lead to be poured down the throats of those who connived at the abduction of virgins, the principal offenders being cast to the beasts or burnt alive. "He appointed this punishment," says Jortin, "for various offences. To burn men alive became thenceforward a very common punishment, to the disgrace of Christianity. At last it was thought too cruel for traitors, murderers, poisoners, parricides, etc., and only fit for *heretics*."*

Never before had this devilish punishment been inflicted judicially. Tradition or legend affirmed that Phalaris roasted men in a brazen bull, but this was the act of a ferocious tyrant, who tortured men for his sport. It was reserved for the first Christian emperor to deliberately insert this cruelty in the Roman code. The Church in subsequent ages took ample advantage of the opportunity which Constantine created, and remorselessly burnt heretics at the stake for the glory and honor of God.

* Vol. II., p. 137.

CONSTANTINE TO JOVIAN.

CONSTANTINE'S conversion to Christianity has been fixed at various dates. Cardinal Newman rashly asserts that he was converted by his vision of the luminous cross on his march to Rome to attack Maxentius in A.D. 312, and his subsequent victory over the emperor at the Milvian Bridge. But this famous "vision" is merely a myth. It is derived from a doubtful work of Eusebius. That inventive father, in his *de Vita Constantini*, alleges that the emperor, in a private conversation, related to him the following story of this wonderful apparition, which he confirmed with an oath:—

"About the middle hours of the day, as the sun began to verge towards its setting, he saw in the heavens, with his own eyes, the sun surmounted with the trophy of the cross, which was composed of light, and had a legend annexed, saying, *By this conquer*. And amazement seized him and the whole army at the sight, and the beholders wondered as they accompanied him in the march. And he said he was at a loss what to make of this spectre, and as he pondered and reflected upon it long, night came upon him by surprise. After this, as he slept, the Christ of God appeared to him, together with the sign before seen in the heavens, and bade him make a representation of the sign that appeared in the heavens, and to use that as a protection against the onsets of his enemies. And as soon as it was day, he arose, related the wonder to his friends; and then assembling the workers in gold and precious stones, he seated himself in the midst of them, and describing the appearance of the sign, he bade them imitate it in gold and precious stones. This we were once so fortunate as to set our eyes upon."*

Eusebius then gives a full description of this sacred standard, called the Labarum. The shaft was a long spear, surmounted by a crown of gold, bearing "the mysterious monogram, at once expressive of the figure

* Murdoch, footnote to Mosheim, Vol. I., p. 289-290.

of the cross and the initial letters of the name of Christ ;” and the silken veil, depending from a transverse beam, “was curiously inwrought with the images of the reigning monarch and his children.”

According to Voltaire, some authors pretend that Constantine saw this vision at Besançon, others at Cologne, some at Treves, and others at Troyes. Cardinal Newman is silent on the matter, but he allows that there were disputes among early Christian writers whether the apparition was that of the monogram without the cross, or the cross without the monogram.

But more serious difficulties remain. Constantine’s “vision” is not mentioned by a single Father of the fourth and fifth centuries, none of whom appears to have been acquainted with the work in which Eusebius relates it. Eusebius himself says nothing about it in his Ecclesiastical History, written twelve years after the event. Why did Eusebius first hear of it in a private conversation with Constantine twenty-five years after it occurred, when it was seen by the whole army as well as by the emperor. And what necessity was there for Constantine to “confirm with an oath” a fact of such publicity ?

Gibbon justly remarks that “the nicest accuracy is required in tracing the slow and almost imperceptible gradations by which the monarch declared himself the protector, and at length the proselyte of the church.” It is certain that Constantine continued in the practice of Paganism until his fortieth year. He celebrated his victory over Maxentius at Rome according to the ancient rites ; and later still, as Gibbon ironically observes, “He artfully balanced the hopes and fears of his subjects, by publishing in the same year two edicts ; the first of which enjoined the solemn observance of Sunday,* and the second directed the regular consultation of the Aurspices.”

Constantine and Licinius, in their edict of Milan (A.D. 313), granted their subjects “the liberty of follow-

* It is remarkable that Constantine calls the Lord’s Day *dies solis*. He evidently wished to patronise Christianity as a powerful religion, without offending the ears of his Pagan subjects, who, although less admirably organised, were still more numerous.

ing whatever religion they please." They expressly included the Christians, but this was probably owing to their having been so recently persecuted by Diocletian.

Relying on Eusebius's questionable Life of Constantine, Gibbon says that after the defeat of Licinius (A.D. 324) the conqueror "immediately, by circular letters, exhorted all his subjects to imitate, without delay, the example of their sovereign, and to embrace the divine truth of Christianity."

Constantine's presiding at the Council of Nice (A.D. 325) does not prove that he was then a Christian. Zosimus relates that he asked the Pagan priests to absolve him from the guilt of murdering his son, his nephew and his wife, and that on their refusal he embraced the more accommodating creed of their rivals, and cleansed himself in the expiatory blood of Christ. Gibbon considers this an anachronism, but Schlegel says "there is, perhaps, some degree of truth in the story." It is certain that Constantine had curious notions of Christianity long after the Council of Nice, and in one of his discourses, as Gibbon remarks, "he dwells with peculiar complacency on the Sybilline verses and the fourth eclogue of Virgil." It is still more remarkable that the first Christian Emperor was not really a member of the Church until a few days before his death, when *for the first time* he received the sacrament of baptism. Constantine may have hesitated between Paganism and Christianity until then, or he may have deferred his baptism till he had no more occasion for sinning, in order to ensure a safe passage to heaven.

The motives which induced Constantine to protect the Christians, and afterwards to favor them, were such as usually animate the rulers of mankind. He first granted them toleration, as Schlegel remarks, "not from a sense of justice, or from magnanimity, and still less from any attachment to the Christian religion, but from principles of worldly prudence. He wished to attach the Christians to his party." The judicious Mosheim conjectures that "the emperor had discernment to see that Christianity possessed great efficacy, and idolatry none at all, to strengthen public authority

and to bind citizens to their duty."* Gibbon expresses the same opinion in his ironical manner. "The throne of the emperor," he says, "would be established on a fixed and permanent basis if all their subjects, embracing the Christian doctrine, should learn to suffer and to obey." Voltaire, in his most impious poem, charges Constantine with making the altars of the Church a convenient footstool to his throne. The Christians, it is true, "still bore a very inadequate proportion to the inhabitants of the empire; but among a degenerate people, who viewed the change of masters with the indifference of slaves, the spirit and union of a religious party might assist the popular leader, to whose service, from a principle of conscience, they had devoted their lives and fortunes."†

Voltaire's opinion is perhaps correct, that Constantine "put himself at the head of Christianity without being a Christian." He naturally patronised a religion which inculcated passive obedience to princes, and maintained his divine right to rule according to the principles of despotism. Paganism never lent itself in this manner to the ambition of tyrants; its Olympus was a kind of Republic, and it was always favorable to popular liberty. The literature of Greece and Rome breathed an unquenchable spirit of freedom, which ill suited the policy of an absolute despot in an empire which had lost every vestige of its ancient freedom. Constantine had the sagacity to perceive that Christianity was more adapted to his purpose. He patronised it, therefore, not as a philosopher, but as an emperor; and finding that it realised his most sanguine expectations, he eventually decided to impose it upon all his subjects and to extirpate every other faith.

It is a signal illustration of the persecuting spirit which is inherent in all theologies, that the Christian clergy, who had only a few years before bitterly complained of their proscription, joyously assisted Constantine in his suppression of Paganism. Their almost incredible arrogance is proved by the fact that Paganism was still the religion of the vast majority of their

* Vol. I., p. 288.

† Gibbon, chap. xx.

fellow-subjects. Gibbon's estimate of the number of Christians at this time, although nibbled at by Milman, has never been seriously impaired :

“According to the irreproachable testimony of Origen, the proportion of the faithful was very inconsiderable, when compared with the multitude of an unbelieving world ; but, as we are left without any distinct information, it is impossible to determine, and it is difficult even to conjecture, the real numbers of the primitive Christians. The most favorable calculation, however, that can be deduced from the examples of Antioch and of Rome will not permit us to imagine that more than a twentieth part of the subjects of the empire had enlisted themselves under the banner of the Cross before the important conversion of Constantine.*

What an edifying spectacle to the philosopher ! Behold the religion of the meek and lowly Jesus, whose yoke was easy and his burden light, forced by its professors down the throats of their Pagan neighbors, who outnumbered them by nearly twenty to one !

Let us also reflect that Christianity introduced the systematic persecution of heresy and unbelief. Such a principle was entirely foreign to Paganism. The Roman law tolerated every form of religion and every system of philosophy. Its impartiality was so absolute that the Pantheon of the eternal city afforded niches to all the gods of the empire ; yet when Tiberius was asked to allow the prosecution of a Roman citizen for blaspheming the gods he replied : “No, let the gods defend their own honour.” We do not deny that the Christians were persecuted, although we challenge their exaggerated account of their sufferings. But their partial and occasional persecutions were prompted by political motives. They were regarded as members of a secret society, at once offensive to their Pagan neighbors and dangerous to the State ; and although they were sometimes punished, their doctrines were never proscribed. The principle of persecution was first infused into the Roman law by Constantine. According to Rénan :

“We may search in vain the whole Roman law before Constantine for a single passage against freedom of thought, and the

* Chap. xv.

history of the imperial government furnishes no instance of a prosecution for entertaining an abstract doctrine."*

Christianity inaugurated a new era of mental slavery. By forcibly suppressing dissent and establishing an Inquisition for detecting heretics, she carried tyranny into the secret recesses of the mind. "She thus," as Draper says, "took a course which determined her whole future career, and she became a stumbling-block in the intellectual advancement of Europe for more than a thousand years."

Constantine's policy manufactured Christians wholesale, for the masses of such an age were easily seduced or driven. The discreet Mosheim, while not attributing "the extension of Christianity wholly to these causes," allows that "both the fear of punishment and the desire of pleasing the Roman emperors were cogent reasons, in the view of whole nations as well as of individuals, for embracing the Christian religion."† Jortin likewise remarks that "along with those who were sincere in their profession, there came a multitude of hypocrites and nominal Christians."‡ Gibbon tells us how the people were bribed :

"The hopes of wealth and honors, the example of an emperor, his exhortations, his irresistible smiles, diffused conviction among the venal and obsequious crowds which usually fill the apartments of a palace. The cities which signalised a forward zeal by the voluntary destruction of their temples were distinguished by municipal privileges and rewarded with popular donatives ; and the new capital of the East gloried in the singular advantage that Constantinople was never profaned by the worship of idols. As the lower ranks of society are governed by imitation, the conversion of those who possessed any eminence of birth, of power, or of riches, was soon followed by dependent multitudes. The salvation of the common people was purchased at an easy rate, if it be true that, in one year, twelve thousand men were baptised at Rome, besides a proportionable number of women and children, and that a white garment, with twenty pieces of gold, had been promised by the Emperor to every convert."§

Concurrently with these bribes, Constantine devoted much of his energy and wealth to increasing the power and splendor of the Church. "He gave to the clergy,"

* "Les Apôtres," first edition, p. 315.

† Vol. I., p. 305 ‡ Vol. II., p. 25. § Chap. xx.

says Schlegel, "the former privileges of the Pagan priests, and allowed legacies to be left to the churches, which were everywhere erected and enlarged. He was gratified with seeing the bisdops assume great state ; for he thought the more respect the bishops commanded, the more inclined the Pagans would be to embrace Christianity."* Jortin remarks that the Emperor was possessed with the *building spirit*, and spent immense sums on palaces and churches, which obliged him to burden his people with taxes.† Gibbon satirically says that "Constantine too easily believed that he should purchase the favor of Heaven if he maintained the idle at the expense of the industrious, and distributed among the saints the wealth of the republic."‡ He gave to the bishops the privilege of being tried by their peers, and their episcopal brethren were their judges, even when they were charged with a capital crime. He originated the notion that clerical impunity was better than a public scandal, and declared that if he surprised a bishop in the act of adultery, he should cast his imperial mantle over the holy sinner. Montesquieu alleges that Constantine even ordained that, in the legal courts the single testimony of a bishop should suffice, without hearing other witnesses.§

Constantine's penal laws in favor of Christianity were still more influential. He condemned those who should *should speak evil of Christ* to lose half their estate. His laws against various heresies may be seen in the Justinian code. So far did he advance in true godliness, under the inspiration of the bishops and clergy, that he issued a decree for the demolition of all heretical temples in the following elegant strain :

"Know ye, Moravians, Valentinians, Marcionites, Paulinians and Cataphrygians, that your doctrine is both vain and false. O ye enemies of truth, authors and counsellors of death, ye spread abroad lies, oppress the innocent, and hide from the faithful the light of truth. . . . That your pestilential errors may spread no further, we enact by this law that none of you dare hereafter to meet at your conventicles, nor keep any factious or superstitious meetings, either in public buildings or in private houses, or in

* Mosheim, Vol. I., p. 291. † Vol. II., p. 69. ‡ Chap xx.
§ "L'Esprit des Loix," Book 29, chap. xvi.

secret places ; but if any of you have a care for the true religion, let them return to the Catholic Church. . . . And that our careful providence for curing these errors may be effectual, we have commanded that all your superstitious places of meeting, your heretical temples (if I may so call them), shall be, without delay or contradiction, pulled down or confiscated to the Catholic Church."

Such is the language, and such are the acts, which made Constantine "a pattern to all succeeding monarchs."

The emperor's reign was distracted by the famous Arian controversy. Alexander, Bishop of Alexandria, and his presbyter Arius, had a fierce and bitter dispute about the Trinity, the former contending that the Son was equal, and the latter that he was inferior, to the Father. According to Jortin

"Alexander wrote a circular letter to all bishops, in which he represented Arius and his partisans as heretics, apostates, blasphemers, enemies of God, full of impudence and impiety, fore-runners of Antichrist, imitators of Judas, and men whom it was not lawful to salute, or bid God speed."*

This is merely the language of bigotry, for Sozomen acknowledges that these reprobates were learned, and to all appearance good men. As the quarrel grew inflamed, the soldiers and inhabitants joined in it, and much blood was shed in and about the city. Constantine wrote Alexander and Arius a long letter, bidding them be more peaceable. But as the controversy spread through the empire, he at length resolved (A.D. 325) to summon a Council of the Church at Nice in Bythnia to determine between them. After much wrangling, which Constantine peremptorily ended, the bishops and ecclesiastics discussed the subject of the Trinity. It was finally resolved by a majority that the Father and the Son were of the *same* substance, and not of *like* substance. The famous Nicene Creed was drawn up for subscription, with an addendum declaring that—

"The Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church anathematizes those who say there was a time when the Son of God was not, and that before he was begotten he was not, and that he was made out of another substance or essence, and is created or changeable or alterable."†

* Vol. II, p. 27.

† Jortin, Vol. II, p. 66.

The Council of Nice only envenomed the dispute, for, as Gibbon observes, the emperor "extinguished the hope of peace and toleration from the moment that he assembled three hundred bishops within the walls of the same palace." Constantine ratified the Nicene Creed, and issued the following decree against the minority :

"Since Arius hath imitated wicked and ungodly men, it is just that he should undergo the same infamy with them. As, therefore, Porphyrius, an enemy of godliness, for his having composed wicked books against Christianity, hath found a fitting recompense in being infamous and having all his impious writings quite destroyed, so also it is now my pleasure that Arius and those of his sentiments shall be called Porphyrians, so that they may have the appellation of those whose manners they have imitated. Moreover, if any book composed by Arius shall be found, it shall be delivered to the fire, that not only his evil doctrine may be destroyed, but that there may not be the least remembrance of it left. This also I enjoin, that if anyone shall be found to have concealed any writing composed by Arius, and shall not immediately bring it and consume it in the fire, death shall be his punishment: for as soon as ever he is taken in this crime, he shall suffer capital punishment. God preserve you."

God preserve you! is a fine piece of irony, coming after a menace of death for reading an heretical book. Let it also be noticed that the first great Council of the Christian Church resulted in the first promulgation of the death penalty against heretics.

Ten years afterwards Constantine veered round and favored the Arians. He repeatedly commanded Athanasius, the Archbishop of Alexandria, to receive Arius into the Catholic communion, but that extraordinary man refused to comply with the emperor's will. At the Council of Tyre (A.D. 335) an Arian majority condemned Athanasius to degradation and exile for having, as they alleged, whipped or imprisoned six bishops, and murdered or mutilated a seventh; and the great Archbishop found shelter for nearly two years in the court of Treves.

Meanwhile Arius came to an untimely end. Constantine ordered Alexander, the Athanasian bishop of the capital, to receive the heresiarch into communion

on the following Sunday. On the Saturday the bishop fasted and prayed, and in his church he besought God to avert the evil, even by taking Arius away.* The next day, as Arius was on his way to the church, he entered a house to attend to a call of nature, where, according to Athanasius, his bowels burst out. He was at any rate found dead, and the Athanasians saw a divine judgment in his sudden fate. "But when Alexander's party," says Draper, "proclaimed that his prayer had been answered, they forgot what that prayer must have been, and that the difference is little between praying for the death of a man and compassing it."†

Gibbon says that "those who press the literal narrative of the death of Arius must make their option between *poison* and *miracle*." He evidently inclines to the former choice, and he is followed in this by Draper. Cardinal Newman regards the death of Arius as a Church miracle. Jortin says, "surely it is not impossible that amongst his numerous enemies there might be one who would not scruple to give him a dose, and to send him out of the way."‡ The cautious Mosheim adopts the same view. "When I consider," he says, "all the circumstances of the case, I confess that to me it appears most probable, the unhappy man lost his life by the machinations of his enemies, being destroyed by poison. An indiscreet and blind zeal in religion has, in every age, led on to many crimes worse than this."§

Constantine himself died in the following year (May 22nd, A.D. 337) at Nicomedia. His body was laid in state for several days, and finally interred with gorgeous rites. According to Jortin, he had the honor of being the first Christian who was buried in a church. The true believers paid almost divine honor to his name, his tomb, and his statue, and called him a saint equal to the apostles. And as the clergy had bestowed upon him, during his life, the most fulsome praise

* Newman, "Two Essays on Miracles," p. 328.

† Draper's "Intellectual Development of Europe," Vol. I., p. 279.

‡ Vol. II., p. 63. § Vol. I., p. 396.

even when he was committing the most flagitious crimes, so now, after his death, they had the effrontery to declare that God had endued his urn and statue with miraculous powers, and that whosoever touched them were healed of all diseases and infirmities.*

On the death of Constantine, Athanasius was restored to his primacy by Constantine the younger. He immediately, says Moshem, began to expel the Arians and to restore the churches to the Catholic faith. Disturbances ensued, and Constantius (who, upon succeeding to the throne in the East, proceeded to walk in his father's footsteps by slaughtering his relations), being a semi-Arian, again expelled the primate of Alexandria. Constans, Emperor of the West, "who, in the indulgence of unlawful pleasures, still professed a lively regard for the orthodox faith,"† espoused his cause and threatened war upon his brother Constantius if Athanasius were not restored to his patriarchate. Constantius yielded, but on the death of his brother, two councils, at Arles (353) and Milan (355), confirmed the expulsion of Athanasius, all the bishops who refused to subscribe to the sentence being suspended from office and banished by the Emperor. Athanasius refused to abdicate, and his church was entered by the Duke of Egypt at the head of five thousand soldiers (February 9, 363).

"The doors of the sacred edifice yielded to the impetuosity of the attack, which was accompanied with every horrid circumstance of tumult and bloodshed; but as the bodies of the slain and the fragments of military weapons remained the next day an unexceptionable evidence in the possession of the Catholics, the enterprise of Syrianus may be considered as a successful irruption, rather than an absolute conquest. The other churches of the city were profaned by similar outrages; and, during at least four months, Alexandria was exposed to the insults of a licentious army, stimulated by the ecclesiastics of the hostile faction. Many of the faithful were killed, who may deserve the name of martyrs, if their deaths were neither provoked nor revenged; bishops and presbyters were treated with cruel ignominy; consecrated virgins were stripped naked, scourged and violated; the houses of wealthy citizens were plundered; and, under the mask of religious zeal, lust, avarice and private

* Jortin, Vol. II., p. 71.

† Gibbon, chap. xxi.

resentment were gratified with impunity, and even with applause."*

Athanasius escaped, but many of his adherents were tortured and killed in the hope of finding him. Constantius offered a reward for Athanasius, dead or alive, denouncing him as "an impostor, a corruptor of men's souls, a disturber of the city, a pernicious fellow, one convicted of the worst crimes, not to be expiated by his suffering death ten times over." Athanasius retorted that the Emperor was an Arian idolator, a hangman, and one capable of all kinds of rapine, violence and murder.

Liberius, the Bishop of Rome, who had refused to sanction the exile of Athanasius, was himself banished, and Felix put in his place. The people, however, demanded the return of Liberius, and, upon making his submission to the Emperor, he was restored. Gibbon says :

"After some ineffectual resistance, his rival was expelled from the city by the permission of the Emperor and the power of the opposite faction. The adherents of Felix were inhumanly murdered in the streets, in the public places, in the baths, and even in the churches; and the face of Rome, upon the return of a Christian bishop, renewed the horrid image of the massacres of Marius and the proscriptions of Sylla."†

In the archbishopric of Alexandria was placed George of Cappadocia, the person who, after an infamous career, became the patron saint of England. Emerson thus describes him :

"George of Cappadocia, born at Epiphany, in Cicilia, was a low parasite, who got a lucrative contract to supply the army with bacon. A rogue and informer, he got rich, and was forced to run from justice. He saved his money, embraced Arianism, collected a library, and got promoted by a faction to the episcopal throne of Alexandria. When Julian came, A.D. 361, George was dragged to prison; the prison was burst upon by the mob, and George was lynched, as he deserved. And this precious knave became, in good time, Saint George of England, patron of chivalry, emblem of victory and civility, and the pride of the best blood of the modern world."‡

* Gibbon, chap. xxi.

† Chap. xxi.

‡ Emerson's "English Traits," Works, vol. iv., p. 123.

Gibbon remarks :

"In the use, as well as in the acquisition, of power, the tyrant George disregarded the laws of religion, of justice and of humanity; and the same scenes of violence and scandal which had been exhibited in the capital were repeated in more than ninety episcopal cities of Egypt."*

This worthy, not satisfied with violence against the clergy of the opposing faction, caused the widows of the Athanasian party to be scourged on the soles of their feet, the virgins to be stripped naked and then flogged with the prickly branches of palm-trees, or to be slowly scorched over fires till they abjured their creed.†

Although St. Athanasius had reason to complain of persecution, he evidently thought it an excellent thing for others. In a letter to Epictetus, Bishop of Corinth, he says: "I wonder your piety suffers these heresies, and that you did not immediately put those heretics under restraint and propose the true faith to them; that if they would not forbear to contradict they might be declared heretics; for it is not to be endured that these things should be either said or heard amongst Christians." And in another place he says "that they ought to be held in universal hatred for opposing the truth;" and comforts himself that the emperor, upon due information would put a stop to their wickedness, and that they would not be long lived.

In Constantinople the triumph of Christianity ensured the same prevalence of fanaticism as at Rome and Alexandria. After the death of Alexander, the episcopal throne was disputed by Paul and Macedonius. In the space of fourteen years the former was five times driven from the throne. He was cast into prison, left six days without food, and eventually strangled.

The inauguration of Macedonius to the See of Constantinople was graced by the slaughter of about three thousand persons.‡ So great was his zeal that he not

* Chap. xxi.

† St. Athanasius, "Historical Treatises," Pusey's Library of the Fathers, pp. 192—284.

‡ Milman's "History of Latin Christianity," vol. ii, p. 422

only compelled the reluctant to attend church but gagged their mouths and compelled them to receive the sacrament.* As the civil and military forces were at the command of his cruelty it was under no restraint. "The delicacy of virgins, guilty of no crime but non-conformity, was not allowed to shield them from violence; they suffered for their obstinacy by having their breasts squeezed between heavy and sharp pieces of wood, or scorched by the application of heated irons and roasted eggs."†

Socrates, the Church historian, tells us that "by the intestine war among the Christians, Constantinople was kept in a state of perpetual turbulence, and the most atrocious outrages were perpetrated whereby many lives were lost."‡

Africa was equally disturbed by the factions between the rival bishops Cæcilian and Donatus, whose followers afflicted its provinces above three hundred years, the feud being only extinguished when Christianity was overcome by Mohammedanism. Excommunicated by the Church of Rome, the Donatists boldly excommunicated all other churches than their own.

"Whenever they acquired a proselyte, even from the distant provinces of the east, they carefully repeated the sacred rites of baptism and ordination; as they rejected the validity of those which he had already received from the hands of heretics or schismatics. Bishops, virgins, and even spotless infants, were subjected to the disgrace of a public penance before they could be admitted to the communion of the Donatists. If they obtained possession of a church which had been used by their Catholic adversaries, they purified the unhallowed building with the same jealous care which a temple of idols might have required. They washed the pavement, scraped the walls, burnt the altar, which was commonly of wood, melted the consecrated plate, and cast the holy Eucharist to the dogs, with every circumstance of ignominy which could provoke and perpetuate the animosity of religious factions."§

Among the Donatists, the Circumcelliones for a time abstained, in obedience to the evangelical command,

* Socrates, Ec. Hist. Book II., chap. xxx.

† Clarke, History of Intolerance, Vol. I., p. 303; 1820. Gibbon, chap. xxi.

‡ Hist. Ecclest., ii., 12 § Gibbon, chap. xxi.

from the use of the sword, beating to death those who differed from their theological opinions with massive clubs, to which they gave the significant name of Israelites,* and the well-known sound of "Praise be to God," which they used as their war-cry, diffused consternation over the unarmed provinces of Africa. Many of these fanatics were possessed with the desire of martyrdom, which, in common with most of the early Christians, they deemed the sure passport to eternal bliss. They would rudely disturb the festivals and profane the temples of Paganism in order to excite revenge. Gibbon rightly observes :

"In the actions of these desperate enthusiasts, who were admired by one party as the martyrs of God, and abhorred by the other as the victims of Satan, an impartial philosopher may discover the influence and the last abuse of that inflexible spirit, which was originally derived from the character and principles of the Jewish nation."†

The contrast between the reign of this emperor and that of his successor, the pagan Julian, forcibly suggests that Jesus indeed came to bring fire and sword. Julian decreed universal tolerance, nor did he visit a single Christian with punishment on account of his religion. The only means he used to combat the growing superstition was to write against it, and throughout his short but beneficent reign he afforded convincing proof of the superiority of his Paganism to the Christianity of his predecessors. No sooner however was the Christian Jovian on the throne than once more the spirit of bigotry burst into open violence. In Rome the rival bishops, Damasus and Ursinus, disputed by force of arms. Damasus, marching at the head of his own clergy and hired gladiators, prevailed, leaving one hundred and thirty-seven dead bodies in the church.‡ No wonder the famous Richard Baxter says of the bishops of this period :

"Their feuds and inhuman contentions were so many and so odious that it is a shame to read them. Multitudes of cities had bishops set up against bishops, and some cities more than two or three, the people reviling and hating each other and sometimes

* Tillemont, *Memoires d'Hist. Eccles.* Tome, VI., pp. 88—98

† Gibbon, chap. xxi.

‡ Gibbon, chap. xxv.

fighting tumultuously unto blood for their several prelates. The Christian world was made as a cock-pit and the Christian religion made a scorn by the contention of the bishops.*

Jovian made a disgraceful treaty with Persia, and retired to Antioch, where he indulged his disposition for pleasure. The contending leaders of various sects hastened to his court. Gibbon racily tells how

“The highways of the East were crowded with Homoousian, and Arian, and semi-Arian, and Eunomian bishops, who struggled to outstrip each other in the holy race; the apartments of the palace resounded with their clamors; and the ears of their prince were assaulted, and perhaps astonished, by the singular mixture of metaphysical argument and passionate invective.”†

The emperor declared for the orthodox doctrines established at the Council of Nice, and his decision carried with it the conversion of many Arian bishops. Although professing tolerance, he repealed the wise edicts of Julian which moderated the power of the clergy, and restored and enlarged their ecclesiastical immunities from the duties of citizenship. He re-established Athanasius on the archiepiscopal throne of Alexandria. In return he was promised by that prelate that his orthodox devotion would be rewarded with a long reign. The prophecy failed. Jovian died after reigning but seven months. Yet the success of Christianity was assured, and the emperors who succeeded him all continued, though with unequal zeal, the extirpation of Paganism. Gibbon tells us that already, in many cities, the temples were shut or deserted, and the philosophers who had taught in the reign of Julian “thought it prudent to shave their beards and disguise their profession.” The triumph of Christianity meant the fall of philosophy, the decline of civic spirit, and the long succeeding night of the Dark Ages.

* Treatise on Episcopacy, p. 24.

† Chap. xxv.

ATHANASIVS TO HYPATIA.

IN the reign of Valens, the Trinitarian party set up Evagrius as patriarch of Constantinople. The Arian party elected Demophilus. A contest ensued in which the Arians triumphed. Evagrius was driven out and his adherents were subjected to a variety of outrages. Eighty presbyters of the party went to carry a complaint to Valens, then in Nicomedia, but the ship they embarked in was purposely set on fire and deserted, and the whole company of ecclesiastics perished.*

About the same time, Gregory Nazianzen complained of being attacked by the Arians of Constantinople. Ancient women, he says, worse than Jezebels, young nuns, common beggars, and monks like old goats, issuing out of their monasteries, armed with clubs and stones, attacked him and his flock in their church, and did much mischief. He did not scruple to retaliate and advocate the persecution of the Arians. He also incited Nectarius to persecute the Apollinarists, which was done accordingly.†

Upon the ascension of Theodosius (379), the orthodox party again triumphed, Demophilus, the Arian patriarch of Constantinople, being then banished.

Theodosius convoked the Council of Constantinople, which admitted the Holy Ghost to all the honors of the Trinity, and anathematised all heretics, denouncing by name the Eunomians, the Anomians, the Arians, the Semi-Arians, the Eudoxians, the Marcellians, the Photinians, the Apollinarists, the Macedonians, the Sabbatians, the Novatians, the Montanists, the Quarto-decimani, the Tetratites, and the Sabellians.

* Socrates, Ec. Hist., Vol. IV., pp. 13—16; Milner's "History of the Church of Christ," Vol. I., p. 609.

† Jortin, Vol. II., pp. 317—319.

When the council was ended, the Emperor put forth two edicts against heretics, the first prohibiting their holding assemblies in public places or private houses, the second forbidding them to meet in fields or villages, and ordaining that the building or ground used for that purpose should be confiscated. Gibbon tells us :

“In the space of fifteen years, he promulgated at least fifteen severe edicts against the heretics, more especially against those who rejected the doctrine of the Trinity ; and to deprive them of every hope of escape, he sternly enacted that if any laws or rescripts should be alleged in their favor, the judges should consider them as the illegal productions either of fraud or forgery.”*

The penal statutes were directed both against heretical ministers and their congregations ; the former were exposed to the heavy penalties of exile and confiscation if they presumed to preach the doctrines or to practise the rites of their “accursed” sects, the latter were disqualified from the possession of honorable or lucrative employments. “Their religious meetings, whether public or secret, by day or by night, in cities or in the country, were equally proscribed by the edicts of Theodosius ; and the building or ground which had been used for that illegal purpose was forfeited to the Imperial domain.”†

All who did not agree with Damasus, the Bishop of Rome, and Peter the Bishop of Alexander, were ordered to be driven into exile and deprived of civil rights.

In Constantinople, where there were many Arians, especially among the Goths, who had been converted by the Arian Ulfilas, ‡ Gaina, one of the officers, petitioned for a church for his co-religionists. Saint Chrysostom bitterly inveighed against the tolerance of heresy, and urged the laws of Theodosius. The saint carried his point, and the consequence was an insurrection of the Goths in the city of Constanti-

* Chap. xxvii

† Gibbon, chap. xxvii.

‡ Ulfilas, surnamed by Constantius “the Moses of the Goths,” made for them a translation of the Scriptures from which he had the prudence to exclude the books of Samuel and Kings, lest their warlike contents should be found to stimulate the ferocity of the barbarians.

nople, which nearly ended in the burning of the imperial palace and the murder of the emperor, and actually led to the cutting off of all the Gothic soldiers and the burning of their church with great numbers of persons in it who fled thither for safety and were locked in to prevent their escape.

Similarly, at Milan, the empress Justina, a patroness of Arianism, and a Jezebel, as St. Ambrose calls her, interceded with her son, Valentinian II., to permit the Arians to have one church for worship in that city. St. Ambrose flatly refused, declaring that all the churches belonged to the bishop ; and, as the Christian populace threatened insurrection, the haughty prelate prevailed.

St. Epiphanius boasted of having caused by his information seventy women, some of high rank, to be sent into exile for their Gnostic heresies, from which he had himself recanted. He saved himself from the fate of his co-religionists by turning evidence against them on the outbreak of the persecution. When the empress Eudoxia recommended to his prayers her son Theodosius the younger, who was dangerously ill, this fanatical saint sent her word that the child should recover if she would get the Origenists and the works of Origen condemned.* St. Epiphanius pursued even the orthodox Saint Chrysostom with his malice, and piously wished that he might die in banishment, as indeed he did. St. Chrysostom was not behind him in Christian courtesy. "I hope you will not live to return to your own city," he declared ; and the kindly wish was equally fulfilled.

Theodosius ordered that the heretics called Encratites, Saccophori and Hydroparastatæ, should be punished *summo supplicio et inextinguibili pœna*. And for the detection of such persons he appointed Inquisitors, who were thus instituted for the first time.†

The guilt of the Quartodecimani, who perpetrated the atrocious crime of celebrating Easter on the day of the Jewish Passover, and of the Manichæans and Audians,

* Jortin, Vol. II., p. 326.

† Jortin, Vol. II., p. 320; Gibbon, chap. xxvii.

was esteemed of such magnitude that it could only be expiated by the death of the offender.

In the West, after the Council of Saragosa (381), had condemned the errors of Priscillian, Bishop of Avila, in Spain, he and his followers were prosecuted, chiefly at the instigation of Ithacius, Bishop of Sassuba, and charged with magic and numerous impieties. Priscillian and his friends went to Rome to justify themselves, but Damasus would not admit them even into his presence. They then repaired to Milan to beg the same favor of St. Ambrose. He also refused to give them a hearing. Ithacius, and other bishops of like mind, managed so well with the western usurper, Maximus, that he condemned Priscillian and his chief followers to be tortured and executed. Among these were Matronius (called Latronian by Sulpitius Severus and Gibbon), a poet who is said to have rivalled the fame of the ancients; Felicissimus, Julianus and a noble, learned lady, named Euchrotia. Others had their goods confiscated and were banished to the Scilly Islands.*

From this treatment of heretics we may infer the sentiments held towards Jews and Pagans. St. Ambrose, who by his zeal and inflexibility acquired supremacy over the mind of Theodosius, induced that monarch to abolish the altar of Victory which remained the symbol of Paganism in the hall of the Roman Senate.

Symmachus, the Pagan who opposed him, was disgraced and banished. Theodosius then proposed to the Senate, according to the forms of the republic, the important question whether the worship of Jupiter or that of Christ should be the religion of the Romans. Gibbon says—

“The liberty of suffrages, which he affected to allow, was destroyed by the hopes and fears that his presence inspired; and the arbitrary exile of Symmachus was a recent admonition that it might be dangerous to oppose the wishes of the monarch. On a regular division of the Senate, Jupiter was condemned and de-

* Dupin, “Ecclesiastical Writers, Priscillian.” Neander, Vol. IV., p. 505

graded by the sense of a very large majority; and it is rather surprising that any members should be found bold enough to declare by their speeches and votes that they were still attached to the interest of an abdicated deity."*

The proof of the ascendancy of St. Ambrose over Theodosius was seen not only in his making him do penance for the wanton massacre of seven thousand persons at Thessalonica, but in a matter much less to the Father's credit. The Governor of the East reported to Theodosius that a synagogue of the Jews and a church of the Valentinians had been burnt by the Christian populace at the instigation of the bishop. Theodosius gave orders that the synagogue should be rebuilt at the bishop's charge. Thereupon St. Ambrose wrote to him a letter which is still extant,† declaring that the order was not consistent with the emperor's piety, defending the action of the bishop and those who burnt the synagogue and maintaining the unlawfulness of rebuilding it. He further declared that he would have done the same thing at Milan if God had not anticipated him by burning the Jewish synagogue himself, and even threatened to deprive the emperor of communion if he did not recall the order. The pious monarch complied with the will of the inflexible ecclesiastic and excused the incendiaries from making restitution.‡ The same saint, in advocating the plunder of the vestal virgins and the Pagan priests, maintained the doctrine that it is criminal for a Christian state to grant any endowment to the ministers of any but the orthodox religion,§ and he expressly praised and recommended the zeal of Josiah in the destruction of idolatry.

Dean Milman, in his "History of Latin Christianity," gives to St. Ambrose all the credit or discredit of extinguishing Paganism. He says :

"It was Ambrose, the Bishop of Milan, who enforced the final sentence of condemnation against Paganism; asserted the sin, in

* Chap. xxviii.

† Epistle XL.

‡ Jortin, Vol. II., p. 226, and Dupin, "History of Ecclesiastical Writers: Ambrose."

§ Epistle XVIII.

a Christian Emperor, of assuming any Imperial title connected with Pagan worship; and of permitting any portion of the public revenue to be expended on the rites of idolatry. It was Ambrose who forbade the last marks of respect to the tutelary divinities of Rome in the public ceremonies.*

When Theodosius had become sole master of the Roman empire, after the death of Valentinian II., he proceeded with the utmost zeal to extirpate the Pagan religion. At first the inspection of the entrails of victims and magical rites had been made capital offences, but now (in A.D. 391) he issued an edict forbidding all sacrifices by the most severe punishment, and even prohibiting the entering into the Temple. In A.D. 392 all immolations were forbidden to any person of whatever rank, under pain of death, and all other acts of idolatry under forfeiture of the house or land in which the offence was committed. Even the use of harmless garlands, frankincense and libations of wine was condemned. To hang up a simple chaplet was to incur the forfeiture of an estate. Worse still, the Lares and Penates, the household gods, around which clustered the tender ancestral associations of Paganism, were included in these rigorous proscriptions, and those who failed to reveal offenders and bring them to punishment were threatened with penalties.† Jortin candidly remarks :

“One would think that the Emperor intended to turn all his Christian subjects into informers and pettifoggers, and to set them, like so many spies and eavesdroppers, to peep into the dwellings of the Pagans, and to see whether they paid any religious honors to their household gods.”‡

If the French Freethinkers were not only to close the churches and proscribe the performance of mass as a penal offence, but were also to punish the private use of rosaries and relics, and the hanging up of religious pictures in the home, we should have a parallel to the high-handed proceedings of Christians

* Vol. I., p. 101.

† Milman's "History of Christianity," Vol. III., 64. Gibbon, chap. xxviii.

‡ Vol. II., p. 339

towards their opponents as soon as ever they found themselves invested with power.

Christians universally deemed it their duty to suppress and destroy idolatry, and the sanguinary laws of the Jews, and the example of their dealing with idolators, were frequently held up as the models for Christian conduct. Lecky, in his "History of European Morals," observes that :

"A large portion of theological ethics was derived from writings in which religious massacres, on the whole the most ruthless and sanguinary upon record, were said to have been directly enjoined by the deity, in which the duty of suppressing idolatry by force was given a greater prominence than any article of the moral code, and in which the spirit of intolerance has found its most eloquent and most passionate expressions.* Besides this the destiny theologians represented as awaiting the misbeliever was so ghastly and so appalling as to render it almost childish to lay any stress upon the earthly suffering that might be inflicted in the extirpation of error."

"The new religion, unlike that which was disappearing, claimed to dictate the opinions as well as the actions of men, and its teachers stigmatised as an atrocious crime the free expression of every opinion on religious matters diverging from them."†

In the reign of Valens laws had been published ostensibly against sorcery, but really directed against Pagan philosophy and learning. Dean Milman tells us :—

"So severe an inquisition was instituted into the possession of magical books, that, in order to justify their sanguinary proceedings, vast heaps of manuscripts relating to law and general literature were publicly burned, as if they contained unlawful matter. Many men of letters throughout the East, in their terror, destroyed their whole libraries, lest some innocent or unsuspected work should be seized by the ignorant or malicious informer, and bring them unknowingly within the relentless penalties of the law."‡

Theodosius also decreed that "all writings whatever which Porphyry or anyone else has written against

* "Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee? yea, I hate them with a perfect hatred."

† Vol. I., pp 420, 454.

‡ "History of Christianity," Book III., Vol. III., chap. vii., p. 43.

the Christian religion, in the possession of whomsoever they shall be found, shall be committed to the fire." Thus were the evidences of Christianity effectually established, and the opposition of learned and philosophical Pagans overcome. Draper says of the ecclesiastics of that time :

"A burning zeal rather than the possession of profound learning animated them. But, eminent position once attained, none stood more in need of the appearance of wisdom. Under such circumstances, they were tempted to set up their own notions as final and unimpeachable truth, and to denounce as magic, or the sinful pursuit of vain trifling, all the learning that stood in the way. In this the hand of the civil power assisted. It was intended to cut off every philosopher. Every manuscript that could be seized was forthwith burned. Throughout the East, men in terror destroyed their libraries, for fear that some unfortunate sentence contained in any of the books should involve them and their families in destruction. The universal opinion was that it was right to compel men to believe what the majority of society had now accepted as the truth, and, if they refused, it was right to punish them. No one was heard in the dominating party to raise his voice on behalf of intellectual liberty."*

Draper also remarks : "Impartial history is obliged to impute the origin of these tyrannical and scandalous acts of the civil power to the influence of the clergy, and to hold them responsible for the crimes."

St. Augustine was the most renowned theologian of that age, and of him Mr. Lecky observes :

"For a time he shrank from, and even condemned, persecution ; but he soon perceived in it the necessary consequence of his principles. He recanted his condemnation ; he flung his whole genius into the cause ; he recurred to it again and again, and he became the framer and the representative of the theology of intolerance.

"The arguments by which Augustine supported persecution were, for the most part, those which I have already stated. Some of them were drawn from the doctrine of exclusive salvation, and others from the precedents of the Old Testament. It was merciful, he contended, to punish heretics, even by death, if this could save them or others from the eternal suffering that awaited the unconverted. Heresy was described in Scripture as a kind of adultery ; it was the worst species of murder, being the murder

* Vol. I., pp. 301, 302.

of souls ; it was a form of blasphemy, and on all these grounds, might justly be punished. If the New Testament contained no examples of the apostles employing force, this was simply because in their time no priest had embraced Christianity. But had not Elijah slaughtered with his own hand the prophets of Baal? Did not Hezekiah and Josiah, and the king of Nineveh, and Nebuchadnezzar, after his conversion, destroy by force idolatry within their dominions, and were they not expressly commended for this piety? St. Augustine also seems to have originated the application of the words 'Compel them to come in' to religious persecution."*

Of St. Jerome, Jortin remarks :

"If we should say that Jerome was a persecutor, we should do him no wrong ; we have it under his own hand."†

With these views animating their ablest men, and with a bigoted and priest-led emperor upon the throne, the Christians felt themselves authorised to avenge on the Pagan edifices any infraction of the persecuting imperial edicts. Theodosius authorised Cynegius, Prefect of the East, to shut the temples, to seize or destroy the instruments of idolatry, to abolish the privileges of the priests, and to confiscate the consecrated property, for the benefit of the emperor, of the Church and of the army.‡ He further decreed that, if any of the Governors of Egypt so much as entered a temple, he should be fined fifteen pounds of gold. The Christians were not satisfied with this. As long as the temples remained, the Pagan fondly cherished the secret hope that an auspicious revolution, a second Julian, might again restore the altars of the gods ; and the earnestness with which they addressed their unavailing prayers to the throne increased the zeal of Christians to extirpate without mercy the root of superstition. Moreover, as Dean Milman observes :

"The Christians believed in the existence of the heathen deities, with, perhaps, more undoubting faith than the heathens themselves. The demons who inhabited the temples were spirits of malignant and pernicious power, which it was no less the in-

* "History of Rationalism in Europe," Vol. II., p. 23—25.

† Vol. II., p. 324.

‡ Gibbon, chap. xxviii. ; Etienne Chastel, "Histoire de la Destruction du Paganisme dans l'Empire du Orient. Ouvrage couronné par l'Académie," p. 190 ; Paris, 1856.

terest than the duty of the Christian to expel from their proud and attractive mansions."*

The canons of Gregory and Basil, as well as the severe edicts of Theodosius against apostacy, by which all who, having once become Christians, afterwards returned to Paganism, were made outlaws, show that Paganism was often secretly cherished by converts.†

Dean Milman proceeds to relate how,

"Soon after the accession of Theodosius, the Pagans, particularly in the East, saw the storm gathering in the horizon. The monks, with perfect impunity, traversed the rural districts, demolishing all the unprotected edifices. In vain did the Pagans appeal to the episcopal authority; the bishops declined to repress the over-active, perhaps, but pious zeal of their adherents.‡

In Gaul, the celebrated St. Martin of Tours went from place to place, with a band of faithful monks, burning temples and destroying the sacred places.§ Tillemont tells us "he was persuaded, as almost all the saints were, that the end of the world was at hand."|| His life was speedily regarded as a model for the imitation of all devout Christians.¶ In Syria the divine and excellent Marcellus, as the Bishop of Apamea is styled by the church historian, Theodoret, resolved to level with the ground the Pagan temples within his diocese. He himself set fire to one temple, but, while his followers went to burn another, a band of rustics caught and burnt him.** Gibbon tells us that "the synod of the province pronounced, without hesitation, that the holy Marcellus had sacrificed his life in the cause of God." The stately temple at Edessa, one of the most magnificent edifices in the world, was seized by a troop of monks and soldiers and completely destroyed. The Pagan orator, Libanius, who, as the minister of Julian

* "History of Christianity," Book III., chap. viii., Vol. III., p. 62.

† Fleury, "Histoire du Christianisme," Book XIX., chap. xxxiii.; Chastel, p. 184.

‡ "History of Christianity," Vol. III., p. 65.

§ Gibbon, chap. xxviii.; Count A. A. Beugnot, "Histoire de la Destruction du Paganisme en Occident, Vol. I., p. 299.

|| Chap. x., p. 340.

¶ Beugnot, p. 363

** Et. Chastel, p. 200; Gibbon, chap. xxviii

had exhibited a spirit of tolerance even more remarkable than that of his master, in a letter to the emperor, pleaded the peasants' cause with courage, dignity and pathos.* He recalled the illustrious origin and association of the temples which were, he said, to the peasants the symbol and manifestation of religion—the solace of their troubles, the most sacred of their joys. To destroy their temples was to annihilate their dearest associations; the tie that linked them to the dead would be severed; the poetry of life, the consolation of labor, the source of faith, would be destroyed. Conversions, as the result of such persecution, were but acts of hypocrisy. Libanius even condescended to appeal to motives of taste to save the gorgeous and artistic monuments of antiquity, and he suggested that, if alienated from religious uses and let for profane purposes, they might be a productive source of revenue. But the eloquence and arguments of the Pagan orator were wasted on unheeding ears. Although the emperor at first did not direct the destruction of the temples, the monks were permitted to take the law in their own hands with impunity.

Gibbon tells us :

“In almost every province of the Roman world an army of fanatics, without authority and without discipline, invaded the peaceful inhabitants; and the ruin of the fairest structures of antiquity still displays the ravages of *those* barbarians, who alone had time and inclination to execute such laborious destruction.”

The Christian barbarians went to work in a spirit of ferocity, regardless of all that had made Pagan civilisation valuable. They denied not only liberty of worship, but what they had been allowed to the full by Paganism—liberty of thought and expression. They have ever since denied it, and not even yet is the freedom that was lost by the triumph of Christianity fully recovered. To the true believer objects of art and culture were but vanities, seducing from the claims of another world. Eunapius informs us that the monks led the Goths through Thermopylæ into Greece, and

* Libanius pro Templis. (See Lecky, “History of Rationalism in Europe,” ii., 20)

rejoiced in their devastation of the classic monuments of Greek art.*

"After the edicts of Theodosius," says Gibbon, "had severely prohibited the sacrifices of the Pagans, they were still tolerated in the city and temple of Serapis." The ruins of this noble edifice may still be distinguished at Alexandria. It "rivalled the pride and magnificence of the Capitol," and "its stately halls and exquisite statues displayed the triumph of the arts." The great Museum within its precincts became the favored seat of science and learning, to which philosophers flocked from all parts of the world. Botanical gardens, zoological menageries, anatomical and astronomical schools, and chemical laboratories, afforded ample provision for study. There were also two splendid libraries, containing over seven hundred thousand volumes, which had been collected at immense labour and expense. The Alexandrine school produced some of the most distinguished men in the history of science; such as Euclid the geometer, Archimedes the mechanist, Eratosthenes the astronomer, Apollonius who is said to have invented the first clock, Hero who seems to have invented the first steam-engine, and Hippocrates the father of medicine. But this great scientific school had expired before the age of Theodosius, although Alexandria still sheltered the relics of Greek philosophy, and the Serapion preserved the learning of antiquity upon its shelves.

The Archbishop of Alexandria at this period was Theophilus, who is described by Gibbon as "the perpetual enemy of peace and virtue; a bold, bad man, whose hands were alternately polluted with gold and with blood."† Jortin says that "he was a man of parts, and a consummate knave." "Socrates, Palladius, and other writers," he adds, "agree in describing Theophilus as a prelate guilty of perjury, calumny, violence, persecution, lying, cheating, robbing, bearing false witness."‡ Jortin elsewhere describes him as a "covetous and violent prelate," who "employed the basest

* Chastel, p. 215.

† Chap. xxviii.

‡ Vol. III., pp. 48, 67

ingenuity and the most scandalous tricks to revenge himself" on those who "could not approve his vile behavior;" and, indeed, "there was nothing of which he was not capable." As a persecutor, he was exceedingly active and unscrupulous. He assembled a council at Alexandria in A.D. 399, and procured the condemnation of the works of Origen. He then ordered the excommunication of all who approved them, and with an armed force drove the monks from the mountains of Nitria.* His malice was also directed against Chrysostom. By the private invitation of the empress Eudoxia, whom the great preacher had reviled as Jezebel, "Theophilus landed at Constantinople, with a stout body of Egyptian mariners, to encounter the populace; and a train of dependent bishops, to secure, by their voices, the majority of a synod."† Chrysostom was summoned to the Council of Chalcedon, but he "refused to trust either his person, or his reputation, in the hands of his implacable enemies." He was therefore condemned as contumacious and deposed from his archbishopric. His arrest and banishment were the result of this sentence. But he was soon recalled and avenged. "The first astonishment of his faithful people," says Gibbon, "had been mute and passive: they suddenly rose with unanimous and irresistible fury. Theophilus escaped; but the promiscuous crowd of monks and Egyptian mariners were slaughtered without pity in the streets of Constantinople."‡

It was reserved for this fighting prelate to destroy the Alexandrine library in the name of Christ. After a bloody dispute between the Christians and the Pagans, in which the latter defended their temple with desperate courage, an imperial rescript of Theodosius ordered the immediate destruction of the idols of Alexandria. Headed by their archbishop, the Chris-

* Jortin Vol. III, p. 84; Mosheim, Vol. I., p. 368. The decision of Theophilus was supported by the Catholic Church, and the writings of Origen are still of disputed authority. According to Bayle, many Romish divines believe this Father is in hell, while others maintain that he is in heaven.

† Gibbon, chap. xxxii.

‡ Chap. xxxii.

tians began the holy enterprise. The great temple of Serapis was reduced to a heap of rubbish, and the battle-axe of a Christian soldier shattered the huge idol, whose limbs were ignominiously dragged through the streets.* Not content with this ravage, the archbishop turned his attention to the library, which "was pillaged or destroyed; and nearly twenty years afterwards the appearance of the empty shelves excited the regret and indignation of every spectator whose mind was not totally darkened by religious prejudice."†

Dr. Smith seeks to exonerate Theophilus and his pious-rabble from this crime. "It would appear," he says, "that it was only the *sanctuary* of the god that was levelled with the ground, and that the library, the halls, and other buildings in the consecrated ground, remained standing long afterwards." He "concludes" that the library "existed down to A.D. 638," when, according to Amrou, it was burnt by the order of the caliph Omar.‡ But Gibbon easily disposes of this fabulous story. The destruction of books is repugnant to the spirit and the precepts of Mohammedanism, and the early historians of the Saracenic capture of Alexandria do not allude to such an incident.

Theophilus was succeeded in the see of Alexandria by his nephew Cyril, who flourished from A.D. 412 to A.D. 444. His first exploit was characteristic of his family and his profession. "He immediately," says Socrates, "shut up all the Novatian churches in Alexandria, took away all their plate and furniture, and all the goods and chattels of their bishop, Theopemptus."§

He next attacked the Jews, who numbered forty thousand.

* Gibbon cites from Pliny a story which is too good to be missed. "Is it true" (said Augustus to a veteran of Italy, at whose house he supped) "that the man who gave the first blow to the golden statue of Anaitis was instantly deprived of his eyes and his life?" "I was that man" (replied the clear-sighted veteran), "and you now sup on one of the legs of the goddess."

† Gibbon, chap. xxviii.

‡ Milman's "Gibbon," Dr. Smith's edition: Editor's notes, Vol. III p. 419, and Vol. VI., pp. 337—338.

§ Book VII., chap. vii.

"Without any legal sentence, without any royal mandate, the patriarch, at the dawn of day, led a seditious multitude to the attack of the synagogues. Unarmed and unprepared, the Jews were incapable of resistance: their houses of prayer were levelled with the ground, and the episcopal warrior, after rewarding his troops with the plunder of their goods, expelled from the city the remnant of the unbelieving nation."*

Jortin alleges that the Jews began the quarrel, but he censures, no less severely than Gibbon, the "insolent behavior" of this soldier of the cross.

Orestes, the Roman governor, who protested against Cyril's usurpation of the secular power, was assaulted in the streets by "wild beasts of the desert" in the form of Christian monks. His face was wounded by a stone, but the monk who cast it was seized and executed. Cyril buried him with great honor, preached his funeral sermon, changed his name from Ammonius to Thaumasius, the *wonderful*, and elevated a rebel and an assassin into a martyr and a saint.

Cyril was by no means a man of genius. He held that "Christians ought to believe without inquiring too curiously, and that a man must be a Jew to insist upon reasons and to ask *how* on mysterious subjects, and that the same *how* would bring him to the gallows."† According to Jortin, "his writings overflow with trash," and "his sermons are flat and tiresome to the last degree."‡ Yet a comely person and a musical voice acquired for him the fame of a popular preacher; and his reputation was heightened by a "band of parasites, who used to praise him and clap him when he preached."§ His pride was incensed, however, by the fame of a Pagan rival, whom he removed by the method of assassination.

"Hypatia, the daughter of Theon the mathematician, was initiated in her father's studies; her learned comments have elucidated the geometry of Apollonius and Diophantus, and she publicly taught, both at Athens and Alexandria, the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle. In the bloom of beauty, and in the

* Gibbon, chap. xlvi.

† Bibliothèque Universelle, vii., 54.

‡ Vol. III., p. 107.

§ Jortin, Vol. III., p. 107; Gibbon, chap. xlvi.

maturity of wisdom, the modest maid refused her lovers and instructed her disciples; the persons most illustrious for their rank or merit were impatient to visit the female philosopher; and Cyril beheld, with jealous eye, the gorgeous train of horses and slaves who crowded the door of her academy. A rumour was spread among the Christians, that the daughter of Theon was the only obstacle to the reconciliation of the præfect and the archbishop; and that obstacle was speedily removed. On a fatal day, in the holy season of Lent, Hypatia was torn from her chariot, stripped naked, dragged to the church, and inhumanly butchered by the hands of Peter the reader, and a troop of savage and merciless fanatics: her flesh was scraped from her bones with sharp oyster-shells, and her quivering limbs were delivered to the flames. The just progress of inquiry and punishment was stopped by seasonable gifts; but the murder of Hypatia has imprinted an indelible stain on the character and religion of Cyril of Alexandria.*

Dr. Smith accuses Gibbon of exaggeration, and says that "her throat was probably cut with an oyster-shell," as though the supposition diminished the heinousness of her murder. Jortin says that "Cyril was strongly suspected of being an instigator of this iniquity," and that "neither Socrates nor Valesius has dropped one word in his vindication," while Damascius openly accuses him of the crime.†

So perished this young and beautiful woman, a victim to the envy and bigotry of a Christian priest, who was unworthy to touch the hem of her garment. She typified in her own sweet person the witchery and the magic of Greece. With Hypatia philosophy itself expired in the intellectual metropolis of the world. There was henceforth no shelter for the lovers of wisdom; the world was prostrate at the feet of the Church; and the Dark Ages, swiftly approaching, buried almost every memory of what was once noble and lovely in the antiquity of thought.

* Gibbon, chap. xlvi.

† Vol. III., p. 106, 107.