

Chapter XVI: Conduct Towards The Christians, From Nero To  
Constantine.--Part II.

History, which undertakes to record the transactions of the past, for the instruction of future ages, would ill deserve that honorable office, if she condescended to plead the cause of tyrants, or to justify the maxims of persecution. It must, however, be acknowledged, that the conduct of the emperors who appeared the least favorable to the primitive church, is by no means so criminal as that of modern sovereigns, who have employed the arm of violence and terror against the religious opinions of any part of their subjects. From their reflections, or even from their own feelings, a Charles V. or a Lewis XIV. might have acquired a just knowledge of the rights of conscience, of the obligation of faith, and of the innocence of error. But the princes and magistrates of ancient Rome were strangers to those principles which inspired and authorized the inflexible obstinacy of the Christians in the cause of truth, nor could they themselves discover in their own breasts any motive which would have prompted them to refuse a legal, and as it were a natural, submission to the sacred institutions of their country. The same reason which contributes to alleviate the guilt, must have tended to abate the vigor, of their persecutions. As they were actuated, not by the furious zeal of bigots, but by the temperate policy of legislators, contempt must often have relaxed, and humanity must frequently have suspended, the execution of those laws which they enacted against the humble and obscure followers of Christ. From the general view of their character and motives we might naturally

conclude: I. That a considerable time elapsed before they considered the new sectaries as an object deserving of the attention of government. II. That in the conviction of any of their subjects who were accused of so very singular a crime, they proceeded with caution and reluctance. III. That they were moderate in the use of punishments; and, IV. That the afflicted church enjoyed many intervals of peace and tranquility.

Notwithstanding the careless indifference which the most copious and the most minute of the Pagan writers have shown to the affairs of the Christians, [24] it may still be in our power to confirm each of these probable suppositions, by the evidence of authentic facts.

[Footnote 24: In the various compilation of the Augustan History, (a part of which was composed under the reign of Constantine,) there are not six lines which relate to the Christians; nor has the diligence of Xiphilin discovered their name in the large history of Dion Cassius.

\* Note: The greater part of the Augustan History is dedicated to Diocletian. This may account for the silence of its authors concerning Christianity. The notices that occur are almost all in the lives composed under the reign of Constantine. It may fairly be concluded, from the language which he had into the mouth of Maecenas, that Dion was an enemy to all innovations in religion. (See Gibbon, *infra*, note 105.) In fact, when the silence of Pagan historians is noticed, it should be remembered how meagre and mutilated are all the extant histories of the period--M.]

1. By the wise dispensation of Providence, a mysterious veil was cast

over the infancy of the church, which, till the faith of the Christians was matured, and their numbers were multiplied, served to protect them not only from the malice but even from the knowledge of the Pagan world. The slow and gradual abolition of the Mosaic ceremonies afforded a safe and innocent disguise to the more early proselytes of the gospel. As they were, for the greater part, of the race of Abraham, they were distinguished by the peculiar mark of circumcision, offered up their devotions in the Temple of Jerusalem till its final destruction, and received both the Law and the Prophets as the genuine inspirations of the Deity. The Gentile converts, who by a spiritual adoption had been associated to the hope of Israel, were likewise confounded under the garb and appearance of Jews, [25] and as the Polytheists paid less regard to articles of faith than to the external worship, the new sect, which carefully concealed, or faintly announced, its future greatness and ambition, was permitted to shelter itself under the general toleration which was granted to an ancient and celebrated people in the Roman empire. It was not long, perhaps, before the Jews themselves, animated with a fiercer zeal and a more jealous faith, perceived the gradual separation of their Nazarene brethren from the doctrine of the synagogue; and they would gladly have extinguished the dangerous heresy in the blood of its adherents. But the decrees of Heaven had already disarmed their malice; and though they might sometimes exert the licentious privilege of sedition, they no longer possessed the administration of criminal justice; nor did they find it easy to infuse into the calm breast of a Roman magistrate the rancor of their own zeal and prejudice. The provincial governors declared themselves ready to

listen to any accusation that might affect the public safety; but as soon as they were informed that it was a question not of facts but of words, a dispute relating only to the interpretation of the Jewish laws and prophecies, they deemed it unworthy of the majesty of Rome seriously to discuss the obscure differences which might arise among a barbarous and superstitious people. The innocence of the first Christians was protected by ignorance and contempt; and the tribunal of the Pagan magistrate often proved their most assured refuge against the fury of the synagogue. [26] If indeed we were disposed to adopt the traditions of a too credulous antiquity, we might relate the distant peregrinations, the wonderful achievements, and the various deaths of the twelve apostles: but a more accurate inquiry will induce us to doubt, whether any of those persons who had been witnesses to the miracles of Christ were permitted, beyond the limits of Palestine, to seal with their blood the truth of their testimony. [27] From the ordinary term of human life, it may very naturally be presumed that most of them were deceased before the discontent of the Jews broke out into that furious war, which was terminated only by the ruin of Jerusalem. During a long period, from the death of Christ to that memorable rebellion, we cannot discover any traces of Roman intolerance, unless they are to be found in the sudden, the transient, but the cruel persecution, which was exercised by Nero against the Christians of the capital, thirty-five years after the former, and only two years before the latter, of those great events. The character of the philosophic historian, to whom we are principally indebted for the knowledge of this singular transaction, would alone be sufficient to recommend it to our

most attentive consideration.

[Footnote 25: An obscure passage of Suetonius (in Claud. c. 25) may seem to offer a proof how strangely the Jews and Christians of Rome were confounded with each other.]

[Footnote 26: See, in the xviii<sup>th</sup> and xxv<sup>th</sup> chapters of the Acts of the Apostles, the behavior of Gallio, proconsul of Achaia, and of Festus, procurator of Judea.]

[Footnote 27: In the time of Tertullian and Clemens of Alexandria, the glory of martyrdom was confined to St. Peter, St. Paul, and St. James. It was gradually bestowed on the rest of the apostles, by the more recent Greeks, who prudently selected for the theatre of their preaching and sufferings some remote country beyond the limits of the Roman empire. See Mosheim, p. 81; and Tillemont, *Memoires Ecclesiastiques*, tom. i. part iii.]

In the tenth year of the reign of Nero, the capital of the empire was afflicted by a fire which raged beyond the memory or example of former ages. [28] The monuments of Grecian art and of Roman virtue, the trophies of the Punic and Gallic wars, the most holy temples, and the most splendid palaces, were involved in one common destruction. Of the fourteen regions or quarters into which Rome was divided, four only subsisted entire, three were levelled with the ground, and the remaining seven, which had experienced the fury of the flames, displayed a

melancholy prospect of ruin and desolation. The vigilance of government appears not to have neglected any of the precautions which might alleviate the sense of so dreadful a calamity. The Imperial gardens were thrown open to the distressed multitude, temporary buildings were erected for their accommodation, and a plentiful supply of corn and provisions was distributed at a very moderate price. [29] The most generous policy seemed to have dictated the edicts which regulated the disposition of the streets and the construction of private houses; and as it usually happens, in an age of prosperity, the conflagration of Rome, in the course of a few years, produced a new city, more regular and more beautiful than the former. But all the prudence and humanity affected by Nero on this occasion were insufficient to preserve him from the popular suspicion. Every crime might be imputed to the assassin of his wife and mother; nor could the prince who prostituted his person and dignity on the theatre be deemed incapable of the most extravagant folly. The voice of rumor accused the emperor as the incendiary of his own capital; and as the most incredible stories are the best adapted to the genius of an enraged people, it was gravely reported, and firmly believed, that Nero, enjoying the calamity which he had occasioned, amused himself with singing to his lyre the destruction of ancient Troy. [30] To divert a suspicion, which the power of despotism was unable to suppress, the emperor resolved to substitute in his own place some fictitious criminals. "With this view," continues Tacitus, "he inflicted the most exquisite tortures on those men, who, under the vulgar appellation of Christians, were already branded with deserved infamy. They derived their name and origin from Christ, who in the reign of

Tiberius had suffered death by the sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilate. [31] For a while this dire superstition was checked; but it again burst forth; [31a] and not only spread itself over Judaea, the first seat of this mischievous sect, but was even introduced into Rome, the common asylum which receives and protects whatever is impure, whatever is atrocious. The confessions of those who were seized discovered a great multitude of their accomplices, and they were all convicted, not so much for the crime of setting fire to the city, as for their hatred of human kind. [32] They died in torments, and their torments were imbibtered by insult and derision. Some were nailed on crosses; others sewn up in the skins of wild beasts, and exposed to the fury of dogs; others again, smeared over with combustible materials, were used as torches to illuminate the darkness of the night. The gardens of Nero were destined for the melancholy spectacle, which was accompanied with a horse-race and honored with the presence of the emperor, who mingled with the populace in the dress and attitude of a charioteer. The guilt of the Christians deserved indeed the most exemplary punishment, but the public abhorrence was changed into commiseration, from the opinion that those unhappy wretches were sacrificed, not so much to the public welfare, as to the cruelty of a jealous tyrant." [33] Those who survey with a curious eye the revolutions of mankind, may observe, that the gardens and circus of Nero on the Vatican, which were polluted with the blood of the first Christians, have been rendered still more famous by the triumph and by the abuse of the persecuted religion. On the same spot, [34] a temple, which far surpasses the ancient glories of the Capitol, has been

since erected by the Christian Pontiffs, who, deriving their claim of universal dominion from an humble fisherman of Galilee, have succeeded to the throne of the Caesars, given laws to the barbarian conquerors of Rome, and extended their spiritual jurisdiction from the coast of the Baltic to the shores of the Pacific Ocean.

[Footnote 28: Tacit. Annal. xv. 38--44. Sueton in Neron. c. 38. Dion Cassius, l. lxii. p. 1014. Orosius, vii. 7.]

[Footnote 29: The price of wheat (probably of the modius,) was reduced as low as terni Nummi; which would be equivalent to about fifteen shillings the English quarter.]

[Footnote 30: We may observe, that the rumor is mentioned by Tacitus with a very becoming distrust and hesitation, whilst it is greedily transcribed by Suetonius, and solemnly confirmed by Dion.]

[Footnote 31: This testimony is alone sufficient to expose the anachronism of the Jews, who place the birth of Christ near a century sooner. (Basnage, Histoire des Juifs, l. v. c. 14, 15.) We may learn from Josephus, (Antiquitat. xviii. 3,) that the procuratorship of Pilate corresponded with the last ten years of Tiberius, A. D. 27--37. As to the particular time of the death of Christ, a very early tradition fixed it to the 25th of March, A. D. 29, under the consulship of the two Gemini. (Tertullian adv. Judaeos, c. 8.) This date, which is adopted by Pagi, Cardinal Norris, and Le Clerc, seems at least as probable as the



vulgar aera, which is placed (I know not from what conjectures) four years later.]

[Footnote 31a: This single phrase, *Repressa in praesens exitiabilis superstitio rursus erumpebat*, proves that the Christians had already attracted the attention of the government; and that Nero was not the first to persecute them. I am surprised that more stress has not been laid on the confirmation which the Acts of the Apostles derive from these words of Tacitus, *Repressa in praesens*, and *rursus erumpebat*.--G. ---I have been unwilling to suppress this note, but surely the expression of Tacitus refers to the expected extirpation of the religion by the death of its founder, Christ.--M.]

[Footnote 32: *Odio humani generis convicti*. These words may either signify the hatred of mankind towards the Christians, or the hatred of the Christians towards mankind. I have preferred the latter sense, as the most agreeable to the style of Tacitus, and to the popular error, of which a precept of the gospel (see Luke xiv. 26) had been, perhaps, the innocent occasion. My interpretation is justified by the authority of Lipsius; of the Italian, the French, and the English translators of Tacitus; of Mosheim, (p. 102,) of Le Clerc, (*Historia Ecclesiast.* p. 427,) of Dr. Lardner, (*Testimonies*, vol. i. p. 345,) and of the Bishop of Gloucester, (*Divine Legation*, vol. iii. p. 38.) But as the word *convicti* does not unite very happily with the rest of the sentence, James Gronovius has preferred the reading of *conjuncti*, which is authorized by the valuable MS. of Florence.]

[Footnote 33: Tacit. Annal xv. 44.]

[Footnote 34: Nardini Roma Antica, p. 487. Donatus de Roma Antiqua, l. iii. p. 449.]

But it would be improper to dismiss this account of Nero's persecution, till we have made some observations that may serve to remove the difficulties with which it is perplexed, and to throw some light on the subsequent history of the church.

1. The most sceptical criticism is obliged to respect the truth of this extraordinary fact, and the integrity of this celebrated passage of Tacitus. The former is confirmed by the diligent and accurate Suetonius, who mentions the punishment which Nero inflicted on the Christians, a sect of men who had embraced a new and criminal superstition. [35] The latter may be proved by the consent of the most ancient manuscripts; by the inimitable character of the style of Tacitus by his reputation, which guarded his text from the interpolations of pious fraud; and by the purport of his narration, which accused the first Christians of the most atrocious crimes, without insinuating that they possessed any miraculous or even magical powers above the rest of mankind. [36] 2. Notwithstanding it is probable that Tacitus was born some years before the fire of Rome, [37] he could derive only from reading and conversation the knowledge of an event which happened during his infancy. Before he gave himself to the public, he calmly waited till his

genius had attained its full maturity, and he was more than forty years of age, when a grateful regard for the memory of the virtuous Agricola extorted from him the most early of those historical compositions which will delight and instruct the most distant posterity. After making a trial of his strength in the life of Agricola and the description of Germany, he conceived, and at length executed, a more arduous work; the history of Rome, in thirty books, from the fall of Nero to the accession of Nerva. The administration of Nerva introduced an age of justice and propriety, which Tacitus had destined for the occupation of his old age; [38] but when he took a nearer view of his subject, judging, perhaps, that it was a more honorable or a less invidious office to record the vices of past tyrants, than to celebrate the virtues of a reigning monarch, he chose rather to relate, under the form of annals, the actions of the four immediate successors of Augustus. To collect, to dispose, and to adorn a series of fourscore years, in an immortal work, every sentence of which is pregnant with the deepest observations and the most lively images, was an undertaking sufficient to exercise the genius of Tacitus himself during the greatest part of his life. In the last years of the reign of Trajan, whilst the victorious monarch extended the power of Rome beyond its ancient limits, the historian was describing, in the second and fourth books of his annals, the tyranny of Tiberius; [39] and the emperor Hadrian must have succeeded to the throne, before Tacitus, in the regular prosecution of his work, could relate the fire of the capital, and the cruelty of Nero towards the unfortunate Christians. At the distance of sixty years, it was the duty of the annalist to adopt the narratives of contemporaries; but it was

natural for the philosopher to indulge himself in the description of the origin, the progress, and the character of the new sect, not so much according to the knowledge or prejudices of the age of Nero, as according to those of the time of Hadrian. 3 Tacitus very frequently trusts to the curiosity or reflection of his readers to supply those intermediate circumstances and ideas, which, in his extreme conciseness, he has thought proper to suppress. We may therefore presume to imagine some probable cause which could direct the cruelty of Nero against the Christians of Rome, whose obscurity, as well as innocence, should have shielded them from his indignation, and even from his notice. The Jews, who were numerous in the capital, and oppressed in their own country, were a much fitter object for the suspicions of the emperor and of the people: nor did it seem unlikely that a vanquished nation, who already discovered their abhorrence of the Roman yoke, might have recourse to the most atrocious means of gratifying their implacable revenge. But the Jews possessed very powerful advocates in the palace, and even in the heart of the tyrant; his wife and mistress, the beautiful Poppaea, and a favorite player of the race of Abraham, who had already employed their intercession in behalf of the obnoxious people. [40] In their room it was necessary to offer some other victims, and it might easily be suggested that, although the genuine followers of Moses were innocent of the fire of Rome, there had arisen among them a new and pernicious sect of Galilaeans, which was capable of the most horrid crimes. Under the appellation of Galilaeans, two distinctions of men were confounded, the most opposite to each other in their manners and principles; the disciples who had embraced the faith of Jesus of Nazareth, [41] and the

zealots who had followed the standard of Judas the Gaulonite. [42] The former were the friends, the latter were the enemies, of human kind; and the only resemblance between them consisted in the same inflexible constancy, which, in the defence of their cause, rendered them insensible of death and tortures. The followers of Judas, who impelled their countrymen into rebellion, were soon buried under the ruins of Jerusalem; whilst those of Jesus, known by the more celebrated name of Christians, diffused themselves over the Roman empire. How natural was it for Tacitus, in the time of Hadrian, to appropriate to the Christians the guilt and the sufferings, [42a] which he might, with far greater truth and justice, have attributed to a sect whose odious memory was almost extinguished! 4. Whatever opinion may be entertained of this conjecture, (for it is no more than a conjecture,) it is evident that the effect, as well as the cause, of Nero's persecution, was confined to the walls of Rome, [43] [43a] that the religious tenets of the Galilaeans or Christians, were never made a subject of punishment, or even of inquiry; and that, as the idea of their sufferings was for a long time connected with the idea of cruelty and injustice, the moderation of succeeding princes inclined them to spare a sect, oppressed by a tyrant, whose rage had been usually directed against virtue and innocence.

[Footnote 35: Sueton. in Nerone, c. 16. The epithet of malefica, which some sagacious commentators have translated magical, is considered by the more rational Mosheim as only synonymous to the exitiabilis of Tacitus.]

[Footnote 36: The passage concerning Jesus Christ, which was inserted into the text of Josephus, between the time of Origen and that of Eusebius, may furnish an example of no vulgar forgery. The accomplishment of the prophecies, the virtues, miracles, and resurrection of Jesus, are distinctly related. Josephus acknowledges that he was the Messiah, and hesitates whether he should call him a man. If any doubt can still remain concerning this celebrated passage, the reader may examine the pointed objections of Le Fevre, (Havercamp. Joseph. tom. ii. p. 267-273), the labored answers of Daubuz, (p. 187-232, and the masterly reply (Bibliothèque Ancienne et Moderne, tom. vii. p. 237-288) of an anonymous critic, whom I believe to have been the learned Abbe de Longuerue. \* Note: The modern editor of Eusebius, Heinichen, has adopted, and ably supported, a notion, which had before suggested itself to the editor, that this passage is not altogether a forgery, but interpolated with many additional clauses. Heinichen has endeavored to disengage the original text from the foreign and more recent matter.--M.]

[Footnote 37: See the lives of Tacitus by Lipsius and the Abbe de la Bleterie, Dictionnaire de Bayle a l'article Particle Tacite, and Fabricius, Biblioth. Latin tem. Latin. tom. ii. p. 386, edit. Ernest. Ernst.]

[Footnote 38: Principatum Divi Nervae, et imperium Trajani, uberiolem, securiolemque materiam senectuti seposui. Tacit. Hist. i.]

[Footnote 39: See Tacit. Annal. ii. 61, iv. 4. \* Note: The perusal of this passage of Tacitus alone is sufficient, as I have already said, to show that the Christian sect was not so obscure as not already to have been repressed, (repressa,) and that it did not pass for innocent in the eyes of the Romans.--G.]

[Footnote 40: The player's name was Aliturus. Through the same channel, Josephus, (de vita sua, c. 2,) about two years before, had obtained the pardon and release of some Jewish priests, who were prisoners at Rome.]

[Footnote 41: The learned Dr. Lardner (Jewish and Heathen Testimonies, vol ii. p. 102, 103) has proved that the name of Galilaeans was a very ancient, and perhaps the primitive appellation of the Christians.]

[Footnote 42: Joseph. Antiquitat. xviii. 1, 2. Tillemont, Ruine des Juifs, p. 742 The sons of Judas were crucified in the time of Claudius. His grandson Eleazar, after Jerusalem was taken, defended a strong fortress with 960 of his most desperate followers. When the battering ram had made a breach, they turned their swords against their wives their children, and at length against their own breasts. They dies to the last man.]

[Footnote 42a: This conjecture is entirely devoid, not merely of verisimilitude, but even of possibility. Tacitus could not be deceived in appropriating to the Christians of Rome the guilt and the sufferings

which he might have attributed with far greater truth to the followers of Judas the Gaulonite, for the latter never went to Rome. Their revolt, their attempts, their opinions, their wars, their punishment, had no other theatre but Judaea (Basn. Hist. des. Juifs, t. i. p. 491.) Moreover the name of Christians had long been given in Rome to the disciples of Jesus; and Tacitus affirms too positively, refers too distinctly to its etymology, to allow us to suspect any mistake on his part.--G. ----M. Guizot's expressions are not in the least too strong against this strange imagination of Gibbon; it may be doubted whether the followers of Judas were known as a sect under the name of Galilaeans.--M.]

[Footnote 43: See Dodwell. Paucitat. Mart. l. xiii. The Spanish Inscription in Gruter. p. 238, No. 9, is a manifest and acknowledged forgery contrived by that noted imposter. Cyriacus of Ancona, to flatter the pride and prejudices of the Spaniards. See Ferreras, Histoire D'Espagne, tom. i. p. 192.]

[Footnote 43a: M. Guizot, on the authority of Sulpicius Severus, ii. 37, and of Orosius, viii. 5, inclines to the opinion of those who extend the persecution to the provinces. Mosheim rather leans to that side on this much disputed question, (c. xxxv.) Neander takes the view of Gibbon, which is in general that of the most learned writers. There is indeed no evidence, which I can discover, of its reaching the provinces; and the apparent security, at least as regards his life, with which St. Paul pursued his travels during this period, affords at least a strong



inference against a rigid and general inquisition against the Christians in other parts of the empire.--M.]

It is somewhat remarkable that the flames of war consumed, almost at the same time, the temple of Jerusalem and the Capitol of Rome; [44] and it appears no less singular, that the tribute which devotion had destined to the former, should have been converted by the power of an assaulting victor to restore and adorn the splendor of the latter. [45] The emperors levied a general capitation tax on the Jewish people; and although the sum assessed on the head of each individual was inconsiderable, the use for which it was designed, and the severity with which it was exacted, were considered as an intolerable grievance. [46] Since the officers of the revenue extended their unjust claim to many persons who were strangers to the blood or religion of the Jews, it was impossible that the Christians, who had so often sheltered themselves under the shade of the synagogue, should now escape this rapacious persecution. Anxious as they were to avoid the slightest infection of idolatry, their conscience forbade them to contribute to the honor of that daemon who had assumed the character of the Capitoline Jupiter. As a very numerous though declining party among the Christians still adhered to the law of Moses, their efforts to dissemble their Jewish origin were detected by the decisive test of circumcision; [47] nor were the Roman magistrates at leisure to inquire into the difference of their religious tenets. Among the Christians who were brought before the tribunal of the emperor, or, as it seems more probable, before that of the procurator of Judaea, two persons are said to have appeared,

distinguished by their extraction, which was more truly noble than that of the greatest monarchs. These were the grandsons of St. Jude the apostle, who himself was the brother of Jesus Christ. [48] Their natural pretensions to the throne of David might perhaps attract the respect of the people, and excite the jealousy of the governor; but the meanness of their garb, and the simplicity of their answers, soon convinced him that they were neither desirous nor capable of disturbing the peace of the Roman empire. They frankly confessed their royal origin, and their near relation to the Messiah; but they disclaimed any temporal views, and professed that his kingdom, which they devoutly expected, was purely of a spiritual and angelic nature. When they were examined concerning their fortune and occupation, they showed their hands, hardened with daily labor, and declared that they derived their whole subsistence from the cultivation of a farm near the village of Cocaba, of the extent of about twenty-four English acres, [49] and of the value of nine thousand drachms, or three hundred pounds sterling. The grandsons of St. Jude were dismissed with compassion and contempt. [50]

[Footnote 44: The Capitol was burnt during the civil war between Vitellius and Vespasian, the 19th of December, A. D. 69. On the 10th of August, A. D. 70, the temple of Jerusalem was destroyed by the hands of the Jews themselves, rather than by those of the Romans.]

[Footnote 45: The new Capitol was dedicated by Domitian. Sueton. in Domitian. c. 5. Plutarch in Poplicola, tom. i. p. 230, edit. Bryant. The gilding alone cost 12,000 talents (above two millions and a half.) It

was the opinion of Martial, (l. ix. Epigram 3,) that if the emperor had called in his debts, Jupiter himself, even though he had made a general auction of Olympus, would have been unable to pay two shillings in the pound.]

[Footnote 46: With regard to the tribute, see Dion Cassius, l. lxvi. p. 1082, with Reimarus's notes. Spanheim, de Usu Numismatum, tom. ii. p. 571; and Basnage, Histoire des Juifs, l. vii. c. 2.]

[Footnote 47: Suetonius (in Domitian. c. 12) had seen an old man of ninety publicly examined before the procurator's tribunal. This is what Martial calls, *Mentula tributis damnata*.]

[Footnote 48: This appellation was at first understood in the most obvious sense, and it was supposed, that the brothers of Jesus were the lawful issue of Joseph and Mary. A devout respect for the virginity of the mother of God suggested to the Gnostics, and afterwards to the orthodox Greeks, the expedient of bestowing a second wife on Joseph. The Latins (from the time of Jerome) improved on that hint, asserted the perpetual celibacy of Joseph, and justified by many similar examples the new interpretation that Jude, as well as Simon and James, who were styled the brothers of Jesus Christ, were only his first cousins. See Tillemont, Mem. Ecclesiast. tom. i. part iii.: and Beausobre, Hist. Critique du Manicheisme, l. ii. c. 2.]

[Footnote 49: Thirty-nine, squares of a hundred feet each, which, if

strictly computed, would scarcely amount to nine acres.]

[Footnote 50: Eusebius, iii. 20. The story is taken from Hegesippus.]

But although the obscurity of the house of David might protect them from the suspicions of a tyrant, the present greatness of his own family alarmed the pusillanimous temper of Domitian, which could only be appeased by the blood of those Romans whom he either feared, or hated, or esteemed. Of the two sons of his uncle Flavius Sabinus, [51] the elder was soon convicted of treasonable intentions, and the younger, who bore the name of Flavius Clemens, was indebted for his safety to his want of courage and ability. [52] The emperor for a long time, distinguished so harmless a kinsman by his favor and protection, bestowed on him his own niece Domitilla, adopted the children of that marriage to the hope of the succession, and invested their father with the honors of the consulship.

[Footnote 51: See the death and character of Sabinus in Tacitus, (Hist. iii. 74 ) Sabinus was the elder brother, and, till the accession of Vespasian, had been considered as the principal support of the Flavium family]

[Footnote 52: Flavium Clementem patrualem suum contemptissimoe inertice.. ex tenuissima suspicione interemit. Sueton. in Domitian. c. 15.]

But he had scarcely finished the term of his annual magistracy, when, on a slight pretence, he was condemned and executed; Domitilla was banished to a desolate island on the coast of Campania; [53] and sentences either of death or of confiscation were pronounced against a great number of who were involved in the same accusation. The guilt imputed to their charge was that of Atheism and Jewish manners; [54] a singular association of ideas, which cannot with any propriety be applied except to the Christians, as they were obscurely and imperfectly viewed by the magistrates and by the writers of that period. On the strength of so probable an interpretation, and too eagerly admitting the suspicions of a tyrant as an evidence of their honorable crime, the church has placed both Clemens and Domitilla among its first martyrs, and has branded the cruelty of Domitian with the name of the second persecution. But this persecution (if it deserves that epithet) was of no long duration. A few months after the death of Clemens, and the banishment of Domitilla, Stephen, a freedman belonging to the latter, who had enjoyed the favor, but who had not surely embraced the faith, of his mistress, [54a] assassinated the emperor in his palace. [55] The memory of Domitian was condemned by the senate; his acts were rescinded; his exiles recalled; and under the gentle administration of Nerva, while the innocent were restored to their rank and fortunes, even the most guilty either obtained pardon or escaped punishment. [56]

[Footnote 53: The Isle of Pandataria, according to Dion. Bruttius Praesens (apud Euseb. iii. 18) banishes her to that of Pontia, which was not far distant from the other. That difference, and a mistake, either

of Eusebius or of his transcribers, have given occasion to suppose two Domitillas, the wife and the niece of Clemens. See Tillemont, *Memoires Ecclesiastiques*, tom. ii. p. 224.]

[Footnote 54: Dion. l. lxxvii. p. 1112. If the Bruttius Praesens, from whom it is probable that he collected this account, was the correspondent of Pliny, (Epistol. vii. 3,) we may consider him as a contemporary writer.]

[Footnote 54a: This is an uncandid sarcasm. There is nothing to connect Stephen with the religion of Domitilla. He was a knave detected in the malversation of money--*interceptorum pecuniaram reus*.--M.]

[Footnote 55: Suet. in Domit. c. 17. Philostratus in Vit. Apollon. l. viii.]

[Footnote 56: Dion. l. lxxviii. p. 1118. Plin. Epistol. iv. 22.]

II. About ten years afterwards, under the reign of Trajan, the younger Pliny was intrusted by his friend and master with the government of Bithynia and Pontus. He soon found himself at a loss to determine by what rule of justice or of law he should direct his conduct in the execution of an office the most repugnant to his humanity. Pliny had never assisted at any judicial proceedings against the Christians, with whose name alone he seems to be acquainted; and he was totally

uninformed with regard to the nature of their guilt, the method of their conviction, and the degree of their punishment. In this perplexity he had recourse to his usual expedient, of submitting to the wisdom of Trajan an impartial, and, in some respects, a favorable account of the new superstition, requesting the emperor, that he would condescend to resolve his doubts, and to instruct his ignorance. [57] The life of Pliny had been employed in the acquisition of learning, and in the business of the world.

Since the age of nineteen he had pleaded with distinction in the tribunals of Rome, [58] filled a place in the senate, had been invested with the honors of the consulship, and had formed very numerous connections with every order of men, both in Italy and in the provinces. From his ignorance therefore we may derive some useful information. We may assure ourselves, that when he accepted the government of Bithynia, there were no general laws or decrees of the senate in force against the Christians; that neither Trajan nor any of his virtuous predecessors, whose edicts were received into the civil and criminal jurisprudence, had publicly declared their intentions concerning the new sect; and that whatever proceedings had been carried on against the Christians, there were none of sufficient weight and authority to establish a precedent for the conduct of a Roman magistrate.

[Footnote 57: Plin. Epistol. x. 97. The learned Mosheim expresses himself (p. 147, 232) with the highest approbation of Pliny's moderate and candid temper. Notwithstanding Dr. Lardner's suspicions (see Jewish

and Heathen Testimonies, vol. ii. p. 46,) I am unable to discover any bigotry in his language or proceedings. \* Note: Yet the humane Pliny put two female attendants, probably deaconesses to the torture, in order to ascertain the real nature of these suspicious meetings: *necessarium credidi, ex duabus ancillis, quae ministrae dicebantur quid asset veri et per tormenta quaerere.--M.*]

[Footnote 58: Plin. Epist. v. 8. He pleaded his first cause A. D. 81; the year after the famous eruptions of Mount Vesuvius, in which his uncle lost his life.]