

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

The apology of Tertullian contains two very ancient, very singular, but at the same time very suspicious, instances of Imperial clemency; the edicts published by Tiberius, and by Marcus Antoninus, and designed not only to protect the innocence of the Christians, but even to proclaim those stupendous miracles which had attested the truth of their doctrine. The first of these examples is attended with some difficulties which might perplex a sceptical mind. [105] We are required to believe, that Pontius Pilate informed the emperor of the unjust sentence of death which he had pronounced against an innocent, and, as it appeared, a divine, person; and that, without acquiring the merit, he exposed himself to the danger of martyrdom; that Tiberius, who avowed his contempt for all religion, immediately conceived the design of placing the Jewish Messiah among the gods of Rome; that his servile senate ventured to disobey the commands of their master; that Tiberius, instead of resenting their refusal, contented himself with protecting the Christians from the severity of the laws, many years before such laws were enacted, or before the church had assumed any distinct name or existence; and lastly, that the memory of this extraordinary transaction was preserved in the most public and authentic records, which escaped the knowledge of the historians of Greece and Rome, and were only visible to the eyes of an African Christian, who composed his apology one hundred and sixty years after the death of Tiberius. The edict of Marcus Antoninus is supposed to have been the effect of his devotion and

gratitude for the miraculous deliverance which he had obtained in the Marcomannic war. The distress of the legions, the seasonable tempest of rain and hail, of thunder and of lightning, and the dismay and defeat of the barbarians, have been celebrated by the eloquence of several Pagan writers. If there were any Christians in that army, it was natural that they should ascribe some merit to the fervent prayers, which, in the moment of danger, they had offered up for their own and the public safety. But we are still assured by monuments of brass and marble, by the Imperial medals, and by the Antonine column, that neither the prince nor the people entertained any sense of this signal obligation, since they unanimously attribute their deliverance to the providence of Jupiter, and to the interposition of Mercury. During the whole course of his reign, Marcus despised the Christians as a philosopher, and punished them as a sovereign. [106] [106a]

[Footnote 105: The testimony given by Pontius Pilate is first mentioned by Justin. The successive improvements which the story acquired (as if has passed through the hands of Tertullian, Eusebius, Epiphanius, Chrysostom, Orosius, Gregory of Tours, and the authors of the several editions of the acts of Pilate) are very fairly stated by Dom Calmet *Dissertat. sur l'Ecriture*, tom. iii. p. 651, &c.]

[Footnote 106: On this miracle, as it is commonly called, of the thundering legion, see the admirable criticism of Mr. Moyle, in his *Works*, vol. ii. p. 81--390.]

[Footnote 106a]: Gibbon, with this phrase, and that below, which admits the injustice of Marcus, has dexterously glossed over one of the most remarkable facts in the early Christian history, that the reign of the wisest and most humane of the heathen emperors was the most fatal to the Christians. Most writers have ascribed the persecutions under Marcus to the latent bigotry of his character; Mosheim, to the influence of the philosophic party; but the fact is admitted by all. A late writer (Mr. Waddington, *Hist. of the Church*, p. 47) has not scrupled to assert, that "this prince polluted every year of a long reign with innocent blood;" but the causes as well as the date of the persecutions authorized or permitted by Marcus are equally uncertain. Of the Asiatic edict recorded by Melito. the date is unknown, nor is it quite clear that it was an Imperial edict. If it was the act under which Polycarp suffered, his martyrdom is placed by Ruinart in the sixth, by Mosheim in the ninth, year of the reign of Marcus. The martyrs of Vienne and Lyons are assigned by Dodwell to the seventh, by most writers to the seventeenth. In fact, the commencement of the persecutions of the Christians appears to synchronize exactly with the period of the breaking out of the Marcomannic war, which seems to have alarmed the whole empire, and the emperor himself, into a paroxysm of returning piety to their gods, of which the Christians were the victims. See *Jul, Capit. Script. Hist August.* p. 181, edit. 1661. It is remarkable that Tertullian (*Apologet. c. v.*) distinctly asserts that Verus (M. Aurelius) issued no edicts against the Christians, and almost positively exempts him from the charge of persecution.--M. This remarkable synchronism, which explains the persecutions under M Aurelius, is shown at length in Milman's

History of Christianity, book ii. v.--M. 1845.]

By a singular fatality, the hardships which they had endured under the government of a virtuous prince, immediately ceased on the accession of a tyrant; and as none except themselves had experienced the injustice of Marcus, so they alone were protected by the lenity of Commodus. The celebrated Marcia, the most favored of his concubines, and who at length contrived the murder of her Imperial lover, entertained a singular affection for the oppressed church; and though it was impossible that she could reconcile the practice of vice with the precepts of the gospel, she might hope to atone for the frailties of her sex and profession by declaring herself the patroness of the Christians. [107]

Under the gracious protection of Marcia, they passed in safety the thirteen years of a cruel tyranny; and when the empire was established in the house of Severus, they formed a domestic but more honorable connection with the new court. The emperor was persuaded, that in a dangerous sickness, he had derived some benefit, either spiritual or physical, from the holy oil, with which one of his slaves had anointed him. He always treated with peculiar distinction several persons of both sexes who had embraced the new religion. The nurse as well as the preceptor of Caracalla were Christians; [107a] and if that young prince ever betrayed a sentiment of humanity, it was occasioned by an incident, which, however trifling, bore some relation to the cause of Christianity. [108] Under the reign of Severus, the fury of the populace was checked; the rigor of ancient laws was for some time suspended; and the provincial governors were satisfied with receiving an annual present

from the churches within their jurisdiction, as the price, or as the reward, of their moderation. [109] The controversy concerning the precise time of the celebration of Easter, armed the bishops of Asia and Italy against each other, and was considered as the most important business of this period of leisure and tranquillity. [110] Nor was the peace of the church interrupted, till the increasing numbers of proselytes seem at length to have attracted the attention, and to have alienated the mind of Severus. With the design of restraining the progress of Christianity, he published an edict, which, though it was designed to affect only the new converts, could not be carried into strict execution, without exposing to danger and punishment the most zealous of their teachers and missionaries. In this mitigated persecution we may still discover the indulgent spirit of Rome and of Polytheism, which so readily admitted every excuse in favor of those who practised the religious ceremonies of their fathers. [111]

[Footnote 107: Dion Cassius, or rather his abbreviator Xiphilin, 1. lxxii. p. 1206. Mr. Moyle (p. 266) has explained the condition of the church under the reign of Commodus.]

[Footnote 107a: The Jews and Christians contest the honor of having furnished a nurse to the fratricide son of Severus Caracalla. Hist. of Jews, iii. 158.--M.]

[Footnote 108: Compare the life of Caracalla in the Augustan History, with the epistle of Tertullian to Scapula. Dr. Jortin (Remarks on

Ecclesiastical History, vol. ii. p. 5, &c.) considers the cure of Severus by the means of holy oil, with a strong desire to convert it into a miracle.]

[Footnote 109: Tertullian de Fuga, c. 13. The present was made during the feast of the Saturnalia; and it is a matter of serious concern to Tertullian, that the faithful should be confounded with the most infamous professions which purchased the connivance of the government.]

[Footnote 110: Euseb. l. v. c. 23, 24. Mosheim, p. 435--447.]

[Footnote 111: *Judaeos fieri sub gravi poena vetuit. Idem etiam de Christianis sanxit.* Hist. August. p. 70.]

But the laws which Severus had enacted soon expired with the authority of that emperor; and the Christians, after this accidental tempest, enjoyed a calm of thirty-eight years. [112] Till this period they had usually held their assemblies in private houses and sequestered places. They were now permitted to erect and consecrate convenient edifices for the purpose of religious worship; [113] to purchase lands, even at Rome itself, for the use of the community; and to conduct the elections of their ecclesiastical ministers in so public, but at the same time in so exemplary a manner, as to deserve the respectful attention of the Gentiles. [114] This long repose of the church was accompanied with dignity. The reigns of those princes who derived their extraction from the Asiatic provinces, proved the most favorable to the Christians; the

eminent persons of the sect, instead of being reduced to implore the protection of a slave or concubine, were admitted into the palace in the honorable characters of priests and philosophers; and their mysterious doctrines, which were already diffused among the people, insensibly attracted the curiosity of their sovereign. When the empress Mammaea passed through Antioch, she expressed a desire of conversing with the celebrated Origen, the fame of whose piety and learning was spread over the East. Origen obeyed so flattering an invitation, and though he could not expect to succeed in the conversion of an artful and ambitious woman, she listened with pleasure to his eloquent exhortations, and honorably dismissed him to his retirement in Palestine. [115] The sentiments of Mammaea were adopted by her son Alexander, and the philosophic devotion of that emperor was marked by a singular but injudicious regard for the Christian religion. In his domestic chapel he placed the statues of Abraham, of Orpheus, of Apollonius, and of Christ, as an honor justly due to those respectable sages who had instructed mankind in the various modes of addressing their homage to the supreme and universal Deity. [116] A purer faith, as well as worship, was openly professed and practised among his household. Bishops, perhaps for the first time, were seen at court; and, after the death of Alexander, when the inhuman Maximin discharged his fury on the favorites and servants of his unfortunate benefactor, a great number of Christians of every rank and of both sexes, were involved in the promiscuous massacre, which, on their account, has improperly received the name of Persecution. [117]

[117a]

[Footnote 112: Sulpicius Severus, l. ii. p. 384. This computation (allowing for a single exception) is confirmed by the history of Eusebius, and by the writings of Cyprian.]

[Footnote 113: The antiquity of Christian churches is discussed by Tillemont, (*Memoires Ecclesiastiques*, tom. iii. part ii. p. 68-72,) and by Mr. Moyle, (vol. i. p. 378-398.) The former refers the first construction of them to the peace of Alexander Severus; the latter, to the peace of Gallienus.]

[Footnote 114: See the Augustan History, p. 130. The emperor Alexander adopted their method of publicly proposing the names of those persons who were candidates for ordination. It is true that the honor of this practice is likewise attributed to the Jews.]

[Footnote 115: Euseb. Hist. Ecclesiast. l. vi. c. 21. Hieronym. de Script. Eccles. c. 54. Mammaea was styled a holy and pious woman, both by the Christians and the Pagans. From the former, therefore, it was impossible that she should deserve that honorable epithet.]

[Footnote 116: See the Augustan History, p. 123. Mosheim (p. 465) seems to refine too much on the domestic religion of Alexander. His design of building a public temple to Christ, (*Hist. August.* p. 129,) and the objection which was suggested either to him, or in similar circumstances to Hadrian, appear to have no other foundation than an improbable report, invented by the Christians, and credulously adopted by an



historian of the age of Constantine.]

[Footnote 117: Euseb. l. vi. c. 28. It may be presumed that the success of the Christians had exasperated the increasing bigotry of the Pagans. Dion Cassius, who composed his history under the former reign, had most probably intended for the use of his master those counsels of persecution, which he ascribes to a better age, and to and to the favorite of Augustus. Concerning this oration of Maecenas, or rather of Dion, I may refer to my own unbiased opinion, (vol. i. c. 1, note 25,) and to the Abbe de la Bleterie (Memoires de l'Academie, tom. xxiv. p. 303 tom xxv. p. 432.) \* Note: If this be the case, Dion Cassius must have known the Christians they must have been the subject of his particular attention, since the author supposes that he wished his master to profit by these "counsels of persecution." How are we to reconcile this necessary consequence with what Gibbon has said of the ignorance of Dion Cassius even of the name of the Christians? (c. xvi. n. 24.) (Gibbon speaks of Dion's silence, not of his ignorance.--M) The supposition in this note is supported by no proof; it is probable that Dion Cassius has often designated the Christians by the name of Jews. See Dion Cassius, l. lxxvii. c 14, lxxviii. 1--G. On this point I should adopt the view of Gibbon rather than that of M Guizot.--M]

[Footnote 107a: It is with good reason that this massacre has been called a persecution, for it lasted during the whole reign of Maximin, as may be seen in Eusebius. (l. vi. c. 28.) Rufinus expressly confirms it: Tribus annis a Maximino persecutione commota, in quibus finem et

persecutionis fecit et vitas Hist. l. vi. c. 19.--G.]

Notwithstanding the cruel disposition of Maximin, the effects of his resentment against the Christians were of a very local and temporary nature, and the pious Origen, who had been proscribed as a devoted victim, was still reserved to convey the truths of the gospel to the ear of monarchs. [118] He addressed several edifying letters to the emperor Philip, to his wife, and to his mother; and as soon as that prince, who was born in the neighborhood of Palestine, had usurped the Imperial sceptre, the Christians acquired a friend and a protector. The public and even partial favor of Philip towards the sectaries of the new religion, and his constant reverence for the ministers of the church, gave some color to the suspicion, which prevailed in his own times, that the emperor himself was become a convert to the faith; [119] and afforded some grounds for a fable which was afterwards invented, that he had been purified by confession and penance from the guilt contracted by the murder of his innocent predecessor. [120] The fall of Philip introduced, with the change of masters, a new system of government, so oppressive to the Christians, that their former condition, ever since the time of Domitian, was represented as a state of perfect freedom and security, if compared with the rigorous treatment which they experienced under the short reign of Decius. [121] The virtues of that prince will scarcely allow us to suspect that he was actuated by a mean resentment against the favorites of his predecessor; and it is more reasonable to believe, that in the prosecution of his general design to restore the purity of Roman manners, he was desirous of delivering the empire from

what he condemned as a recent and criminal superstition. The bishops of the most considerable cities were removed by exile or death: the vigilance of the magistrates prevented the clergy of Rome during sixteen months from proceeding to a new election; and it was the opinion of the Christians, that the emperor would more patiently endure a competitor for the purple, than a bishop in the capital. [122] Were it possible to suppose that the penetration of Decius had discovered pride under the disguise of humility, or that he could foresee the temporal dominion which might insensibly arise from the claims of spiritual authority, we might be less surprised, that he should consider the successors of St. Peter, as the most formidable rivals to those of Augustus.

[Footnote 118: Orosius, l. vii. c. 19, mentions Origen as the object of Maximin's resentment; and Firmilianus, a Cappadocian bishop of that age, gives a just and confined idea of this persecution, (apud Cyprian Epist. 75.)]

[Footnote 119: The mention of those princes who were publicly supposed to be Christians, as we find it in an epistle of Dionysius of Alexandria, (ap. Euseb. l. vii. c. 10,) evidently alludes to Philip and his family, and forms a contemporary evidence, that such a report had prevailed; but the Egyptian bishop, who lived at an humble distance from the court of Rome, expresses himself with a becoming diffidence concerning the truth of the fact. The epistles of Origen (which were extant in the time of Eusebius, see l. vi. c. 36) would most probably decide this curious rather than important question.]

[Footnote 120: Euseb. 1. vi. c. 34. The story, as is usual, has been embellished by succeeding writers, and is confuted, with much superfluous learning, by Frederick Spanheim, (Opera Varia, tom. ii. p. 400, &c.)]

[Footnote 121: Lactantius, de Mortibus Persecutorum, c. 3, 4. After celebrating the felicity and increase of the church, under a long succession of good princes, he adds, "Extitit post annos plurimos, execrabile animal, Decius, qui vexaret Ecclesiam."]

[Footnote 122: Euseb. 1. vi. c. 39. Cyprian. Epistol. 55. The see of Rome remained vacant from the martyrdom of Fabianus, the 20th of January, A. D. 259, till the election of Cornelius, the 4th of June, A. D. 251 Decius had probably left Rome, since he was killed before the end of that year.]

The administration of Valerian was distinguished by a levity and inconstancy ill suited to the gravity of the Roman Censor. In the first part of his reign, he surpassed in clemency those princes who had been suspected of an attachment to the Christian faith. In the last three years and a half, listening to the insinuations of a minister addicted to the superstitions of Egypt, he adopted the maxims, and imitated the severity, of his predecessor Decius. [123] The accession of Gallienus, which increased the calamities of the empire, restored peace to the church; and the Christians obtained the free exercise of their religion

by an edict addressed to the bishops, and conceived in such terms as seemed to acknowledge their office and public character. [124] The ancient laws, without being formally repealed, were suffered to sink into oblivion; and (excepting only some hostile intentions which are attributed to the emperor Aurelian [125] the disciples of Christ passed above forty years in a state of prosperity, far more dangerous to their virtue than the severest trials of persecution.

[Footnote 123: Euseb. l. vii. c. 10. Mosheim (p. 548) has very clearly shown that the praefect Macrianus, and the Egyptian Magus, are one and the same person.]

[Footnote 124: Eusebius (l. vii. c. 13) gives us a Greek version of this Latin edict, which seems to have been very concise. By another edict, he directed that the Coemeteria should be restored to the Christians.]

[Footnote 125: Euseb. l. vii. c. 30. Lactantius de M. P. c. 6. Hieronym. in Chron. p. 177. Orosius, l. vii. c. 23. Their language is in general so ambiguous and incorrect, that we are at a loss to determine how far Aurelian had carried his intentions before he was assassinated. Most of the moderns (except Dodwell, Dissertat. Cyprian. vi. 64) have seized the occasion of gaining a few extraordinary martyrs. \* Note: Dr. Lardner has detailed, with his usual impartiality, all that has come down to us relating to the persecution of Aurelian, and concludes by saying, "Upon more carefully examining the words of Eusebius, and observing the accounts of other authors, learned men have generally, and, as I think,

very judiciously, determined, that Aurelian not only intended, but did actually persecute: but his persecution was short, he having died soon after the publication of his edicts." Heathen Test. c. xxxvi.--Basmage positively pronounces the same opinion: Non intentatum modo, sed executum quoque brevissimo tempore mandatum, nobis infixum est in aniasis. Basn. Ann. 275, No. 2 and compare Pagi Ann. 272, Nos. 4, 12, 27--G.]

The story of Paul of Samosata, who filled the metropolitan see of Antioch, while the East was in the hands of Odenathus and Zenobia, may serve to illustrate the condition and character of the times. The wealth of that prelate was a sufficient evidence of his guilt, since it was neither derived from the inheritance of his fathers, nor acquired by the arts of honest industry. But Paul considered the service of the church as a very lucrative profession. [126] His ecclesiastical jurisdiction was venal and rapacious; he extorted frequent contributions from the most opulent of the faithful, and converted to his own use a considerable part of the public revenue. By his pride and luxury, the Christian religion was rendered odious in the eyes of the Gentiles. His council chamber and his throne, the splendor with which he appeared in public, the suppliant crowd who solicited his attention, the multitude of letters and petitions to which he dictated his answers, and the perpetual hurry of business in which he was involved, were circumstances much better suited to the state of a civil magistrate, [127] than to the humility of a primitive bishop. When he harangued his people from the pulpit, Paul affected the figurative style and the theatrical gestures

of an Asiatic sophist, while the cathedral resounded with the loudest and most extravagant acclamations in the praise of his divine eloquence. Against those who resisted his power, or refused to flatter his vanity, the prelate of Antioch was arrogant, rigid, and inexorable; but he relaxed the discipline, and lavished the treasures of the church on his dependent clergy, who were permitted to imitate their master in the gratification of every sensual appetite. For Paul indulged himself very freely in the pleasures of the table, and he had received into the episcopal palace two young and beautiful women as the constant companions of his leisure moments. [128]

[Footnote 126: Paul was better pleased with the title of Ducenarius, than with that of bishop. The Ducenarius was an Imperial procurator, so called from his salary of two hundred Sestertia, or 1600*l.* a year. (See Salmatius ad Hist. August. p. 124.) Some critics suppose that the bishop of Antioch had actually obtained such an office from Zenobia, while others consider it only as a figurative expression of his pomp and insolence.]

[Footnote 127: Simony was not unknown in those times; and the clergy some times bought what they intended to sell. It appears that the bishopric of Carthage was purchased by a wealthy matron, named Lucilla, for her servant Majorinus. The price was 400 Folles. (Monument. Antiq. ad calcem Optati, p. 263.) Every Follis contained 125 pieces of silver, and the whole sum may be computed at about 2400*l.*]

[Footnote 128: If we are desirous of extenuating the vices of Paul, we must suspect the assembled bishops of the East of publishing the most malicious calumnies in circular epistles addressed to all the churches of the empire, (ap. Euseb. l. vii. c. 30.)]

Notwithstanding these scandalous vices, if Paul of Samosata had preserved the purity of the orthodox faith, his reign over the capital of Syria would have ended only with his life; and had a seasonable persecution intervened, an effort of courage might perhaps have placed him in the rank of saints and martyrs. [128a]

Some nice and subtle errors, which he imprudently adopted and obstinately maintained, concerning the doctrine of the Trinity, excited the zeal and indignation of the Eastern churches. [129]

From Egypt to the Euxine Sea, the bishops were in arms and in motion. Several councils were held, confutations were published, excommunications were pronounced, ambiguous explanations were by turns accepted and refused, treaties were concluded and violated, and at length Paul of Samosata was degraded from his episcopal character, by the sentence of seventy or eighty bishops, who assembled for that purpose at Antioch, and who, without consulting the rights of the clergy or people, appointed a successor by their own authority. The manifest irregularity of this proceeding increased the numbers of the discontented faction; and as Paul, who was no stranger to the arts of courts, had insinuated himself into the favor of Zenobia, he maintained



above four years the possession of the episcopal house and office.

[129a] The victory of Aurelian changed the face of the East, and the two contending parties, who applied to each other the epithets of schism and heresy, were either commanded or permitted to plead their cause before the tribunal of the conqueror. This public and very singular trial affords a convincing proof that the existence, the property, the privileges, and the internal policy of the Christians, were acknowledged, if not by the laws, at least by the magistrates, of the empire. As a Pagan and as a soldier, it could scarcely be expected that Aurelian should enter into the discussion, whether the sentiments of Paul or those of his adversaries were most agreeable to the true standard of the orthodox faith. His determination, however, was founded on the general principles of equity and reason. He considered the bishops of Italy as the most impartial and respectable judges among the Christians, and as soon as he was informed that they had unanimously approved the sentence of the council, he acquiesced in their opinion, and immediately gave orders that Paul should be compelled to relinquish the temporal possessions belonging to an office, of which, in the judgment of his brethren, he had been regularly deprived. But while we applaud the justice, we should not overlook the policy, of Aurelian, who was desirous of restoring and cementing the dependence of the provinces on the capital, by every means which could bind the interest or prejudices of any part of his subjects. [130]

[Footnote 128a: It appears, nevertheless, that the vices and immoralities of Paul of Samosata had much weight in the sentence

pronounced against him by the bishops. The object of the letter, addressed by the synod to the bishops of Rome and Alexandria, was to inform them of the change in the faith of Paul, the altercations and discussions to which it had given rise, as well as of his morals and the whole of his conduct. Euseb. Hist. Eccl. l. vii c. xxx--G.]

[Footnote 129: His heresy (like those of Noetus and Sabellius, in the same century) tended to confound the mysterious distinction of the divine persons. See Mosheim, p. 702, &c.]

[Footnote 129a: "Her favorite, (Zenobia's,) Paul of Samosata, seems to have entertained some views of attempting a union between Judaism and Christianity; both parties rejected the unnatural alliance." Hist. of Jews, iii. 175, and Jost. Geschichte der Israeliter, iv. 167. The protection of the severe Zenobia is the only circumstance which may raise a doubt of the notorious immorality of Paul.--M.]

[Footnote 130: Euseb. Hist. Ecclesiast. l. vii. c. 30. We are entirely indebted to him for the curious story of Paul of Samosata.]

Amidst the frequent revolutions of the empire, the Christians still flourished in peace and prosperity; and notwithstanding a celebrated aera of martyrs has been deduced from the accession of Diocletian, [131] the new system of policy, introduced and maintained by the wisdom of that prince, continued, during more than eighteen years, to breathe the mildest and most liberal spirit of religious toleration. The mind of

Diocletian himself was less adapted indeed to speculative inquiries, than to the active labors of war and government. His prudence rendered him averse to any great innovation, and though his temper was not very susceptible of zeal or enthusiasm, he always maintained an habitual regard for the ancient deities of the empire. But the leisure of the two empresses, of his wife Prisca, and of Valeria, his daughter, permitted them to listen with more attention and respect to the truths of Christianity, which in every age has acknowledged its important obligations to female devotion. [132] The principal eunuchs, Lucian [133] and Dorotheus, Gorgonius and Andrew, who attended the person, possessed the favor, and governed the household of Diocletian, protected by their powerful influence the faith which they had embraced. Their example was imitated by many of the most considerable officers of the palace, who, in their respective stations, had the care of the Imperial ornaments, of the robes, of the furniture, of the jewels, and even of the private treasury; and, though it might sometimes be incumbent on them to accompany the emperor when he sacrificed in the temple, [134] they enjoyed, with their wives, their children, and their slaves, the free exercise of the Christian religion. Diocletian and his colleagues frequently conferred the most important offices on those persons who avowed their abhorrence for the worship of the gods, but who had displayed abilities proper for the service of the state. The bishops held an honorable rank in their respective provinces, and were treated with distinction and respect, not only by the people, but by the magistrates themselves. Almost in every city, the ancient churches were found insufficient to contain the increasing multitude of proselytes;

and in their place more stately and capacious edifices were erected for the public worship of the faithful. The corruption of manners and principles, so forcibly lamented by Eusebius, [135] may be considered, not only as a consequence, but as a proof, of the liberty which the Christians enjoyed and abused under the reign of Diocletian. Prosperity had relaxed the nerves of discipline. Fraud, envy, and malice prevailed in every congregation. The presbyters aspired to the episcopal office, which every day became an object more worthy of their ambition. The bishops, who contended with each other for ecclesiastical preeminence, appeared by their conduct to claim a secular and tyrannical power in the church; and the lively faith which still distinguished the Christians from the Gentiles, was shown much less in their lives, than in their controversial writings.

[Footnote 131: The Aera of Martyrs, which is still in use among the Copts and the Abyssinians, must be reckoned from the 29th of August, A. D. 284; as the beginning of the Egyptian year was nineteen days earlier than the real accession of Diocletian. See Dissertation Preliminaire a l'Art de verifier les Dates. \* Note: On the aera of martyrs see the very curious dissertations of Mons Letronne on some recently discovered inscriptions in Egypt and Nubis, p. 102, &c.--M.]

[Footnote 132: The expression of Lactantius, (de M. P. c. 15,) "sacrificio pollui coegit," implies their antecedent conversion to the faith, but does not seem to justify the assertion of Mosheim, (p. 912,) that they had been privately baptized.]

[Footnote 133: M. de Tillemont (*Memoires Ecclesiastiques*, tom. v. part i. p. 11, 12) has quoted from the *Spicilegium* of Dom Luc d'Archeri a very curious instruction which Bishop Theonas composed for the use of Lucian.]

[Footnote 134: Lactantius, *de M. P.* c. 10.]

[Footnote 135: Eusebius, *Hist. Ecclesiast.* l. viii. c. 1. The reader who consults the original will not accuse me of heightening the picture. Eusebius was about sixteen years of age at the accession of the emperor Diocletian.]

Notwithstanding this seeming security, an attentive observer might discern some symptoms that threatened the church with a more violent persecution than any which she had yet endured. The zeal and rapid progress of the Christians awakened the Polytheists from their supine indifference in the cause of those deities, whom custom and education had taught them to revere. The mutual provocations of a religious war, which had already continued above two hundred years, exasperated the animosity of the contending parties. The Pagans were incensed at the rashness of a recent and obscure sect, which presumed to accuse their countrymen of error, and to devote their ancestors to eternal misery. The habits of justifying the popular mythology against the invectives of an implacable enemy, produced in their minds some sentiments of faith and reverence for a system which they had been accustomed to consider

with the most careless levity. The supernatural powers assumed by the church inspired at the same time terror and emulation. The followers of the established religion intrenched themselves behind a similar fortification of prodigies; invented new modes of sacrifice, of expiation, and of initiation; [136] attempted to revive the credit of their expiring oracles; [137] and listened with eager credulity to every impostor, who flattered their prejudices by a tale of wonders. [138] Both parties seemed to acknowledge the truth of those miracles which were claimed by their adversaries; and while they were contented with ascribing them to the arts of magic, and to the power of daemons, they mutually concurred in restoring and establishing the reign of superstition. [139] Philosophy, her most dangerous enemy, was now converted into her most useful ally. The groves of the academy, the gardens of Epicurus, and even the portico of the Stoics, were almost deserted, as so many different schools of scepticism or impiety; [140] and many among the Romans were desirous that the writings of Cicero should be condemned and suppressed by the authority of the senate. [141] The prevailing sect of the new Platonicians judged it prudent to connect themselves with the priests, whom perhaps they despised, against the Christians, whom they had reason to fear. These fashionable Philosophers prosecuted the design of extracting allegorical wisdom from the fictions of the Greek poets; instituted mysterious rites of devotion for the use of their chosen disciples; recommended the worship of the ancient gods as the emblems or ministers of the Supreme Deity, and composed against the faith of the gospel many elaborate treatises, [142] which have since been committed to the flames by the prudence of orthodox emperors. [143]

[Footnote 136: We might quote, among a great number of instances, the mysterious worship of Mythras, and the Taurobolia; the latter of which became fashionable in the time of the Antonines, (see a Dissertation of M. de Boze, in the Memoires de l'Academie des Inscriptions, tom. ii. p. 443.) The romance of Apuleius is as full of devotion as of satire. \*  
Note: On the extraordinary progress of the Mahriac rites, in the West, see De Guigniaud's translation of Creuzer, vol. i. p. 365, and Note 9, tom. i. part 2, p. 738, &c.--M.]

[Footnote 137: The impostor Alexander very strongly recommended the oracle of Trophonius at Mallos, and those of Apollo at Claros and Miletus, (Lucian, tom. ii. p. 236, edit. Reitz.) The last of these, whose singular history would furnish a very curious episode, was consulted by Diocletian before he published his edicts of persecution, (Lactantius, de M. P. c. 11.)]

[Footnote 138: Besides the ancient stories of Pythagoras and Aristeas, the cures performed at the shrine of Aesculapius, and the fables related of Apollonius of Tyana, were frequently opposed to the miracles of Christ; though I agree with Dr. Lardner, (see Testimonies, vol. iii. p. 253, 352,) that when Philostratus composed the life of Apollonius, he had no such intention.]

[Footnote 139: It is seriously to be lamented, that the Christian fathers, by acknowledging the supernatural, or, as they deem it, the

infernal part of Paganism, destroy with their own hands the great advantage which we might otherwise derive from the liberal concessions of our adversaries.]

[Footnote 140: Julian (p. 301, edit. Spanheim) expresses a pious joy, that the providence of the gods had extinguished the impious sects, and for the most part destroyed the books of the Pyrrhonians and Epicuræans, which had been very numerous, since Epicurus himself composed no less than 300 volumes. See Diogenes Laertius, l. x. c. 26.]

[Footnote 141: Cumque alios audiam mussitare indignanter, et dicere oportere statui per Senatum, aboleantur ut haec scripta, quibus Christiana Religio comprobetur, et vetustatis opprimatur auctoritas. Arnobius adversus Gentes, l. iii. p. 103, 104. He adds very properly, Erroris convincite Ciceronem... nam intercipere scripta, et publicatam velle submergere lectionem, non est Deum defendere sed veritatis testificationem timere.]

[Footnote 142: Lactantius (Divin. Institut. l. v. c. 2, 3) gives a very clear and spirited account of two of these philosophic adversaries of the faith. The large treatise of Porphyry against the Christians consisted of thirty books, and was composed in Sicily about the year 270.]

[Footnote 143: See Socrates, Hist. Ecclesiast. l. i. c. 9, and Codex Justinian. l. i. i. l. s.]