

## **THE AGE OF MARTYRS**



GIUSEPPE RICCIOTTI

THE  
AGE OF MARTYRS

*CHRISTIANITY*

*from*

*DIOCLETIAN to CONSTANTINE*

TRANSLATED BY

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## PREFACE

Before it was the general custom to count the years from the birth of Christ many Christian communities used a system which reckoned from the age of the martyrs — beginning with the first year of Diocletian's rule. Though this system was found especially in the East many other learned writers used it, among them Ambrose and Bede. It is said that among certain communities of the Copts in Upper Egypt this system is still in use. The choice of such a name for the period was most suitable, for under Diocletian the *Great Persecution* raged. This was the last and most cruel of the sufferings of the Christians, and the innumerable victims who fell in those years claim for the era without any rival the description of *the martyrs*.

The usual reaction followed the persecution. Calm came after the storm, liberty and triumph succeeded oppression, Diocletian changed for Constantine.

This is the period about which this book is written.

The book is not intended to be a critical study but a critical narration of the facts. The bases of the story are those historical documents which will stand careful and impartial examination. The method used is that of exposition after the example of the ancient masters of history writing. There are many critical researches today and many of them are very learned and acute, but they are of interest usually only to the specialists for they do not present the over-all development of the story.

This book is intended for historians and generally educated people, and so the author is sure they will welcome the absence of footnotes which allows the book to be read continuously. The rights of criticism have been respected and the documents on which the story is based will be found listed at the end of the book. Only occasional references will be found in the body of the work.

The cross references of paragraphs will help the reader to connect persons and facts as they reoccur in the story.

It is my happy duty to express my gratitude to the Very Rev. Antonio Casamassa, O.E.S.A., for the useful advice he gave me after reading the manuscript.

G. R.

Rome, October 15, 1953

## TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

It was a great honor when Abbot Ricciotti asked me to translate his *Era dei Martiri* and I hope that the version I have made takes as little as possible from the quality of the original. A long time ago, however, I spent four pleasant years in his community and I know that Don Giuseppe will view any blunders of mine with a kindly eye.

I should like to thank those who have helped me in various ways especially my colleague Fr. George Rowe, C.R.L., who corrected the proofs and Fr. Francis Wharton, C.R.L., for his considerable assistance in finding English versions of obscure places in North Africa.

# CONTENTS

PREFACE . . . . .	v
TRANSLATOR'S NOTE . . . . .	vi
I PROLOGUE . . . . .	5
1. POLITICS . . . . .	5
2. RELIGION . . . . .	25
3. THE STORM GATHERS . . . . .	30
4. THE STORM BREAKS . . . . .	41
5. CHANGES IN THE TETRARCHY . . . . .	51
II THE GREAT PERSECUTION . . . . .	63
1. HISTORICAL SOURCES . . . . .	63
Eusebius . . . . .	65
Lactantius . . . . .	68
Acts and <i>Passions</i> of the Martyrs . . . . .	69
2. DURING THE STORM . . . . .	72
The <i>Traditores</i> . . . . .	72
The <i>Confessores</i> . . . . .	77
The <i>Lapsi</i> . . . . .	84
3. "FLOWER FROM FLOWER" . . . . .	90
Mauretania, Numidia, Proconsular Africa . . . . .	91
Egypt and the Thebaid . . . . .	100
Palestine, Phoenicia, and Syria . . . . .	109
Asia Minor . . . . .	120
Macedonia, Thrace, Illyricum, Rhaetia . . . . .	122
Italy and the Rest of Western Europe . . . . .	144
III FINAL STAGES OF THE PERSECUTION . . . . .	150
1. END OF THE TETRARCHY AND THE EDICT OF TOLERATION . . . . .	150
2. "INSTINCTU DIVINITATIS" . . . . .	159
3. SAXA RUBRA . . . . .	167

4. CONSTANTINE IN ROME . . . . .	174
5. PERSECUTION OF MAXIMIN — HIS DEATH . . . . .	177
IV THE TWILIGHT OF THE GODS . . . . .	189
1. "WE HAVING MET UNDER FAVORABLE AUSPICES AT MILAN" . . . . .	189
2. CONSTANTINE IN THE GUISE OF CHRISTIAN LEGISLATOR . . . . .	195
3. CONSTANTINE AND LICINIUS: THE FORTY MARTYRS: DEATH OF LICINIUS . . . . .	208
The Forty Martyrs . . . . .	211
4. FOUNDATION OF CONSTANTINOPLE — BUILDING IN PALESTINE . . . . .	215
V SCHISMS AND HERESIES . . . . .	228
1. DONATISM . . . . .	228
The Synod of Rome . . . . .	234
The Council of Arles . . . . .	238
After Arles . . . . .	242
2. ARIANISM . . . . .	246
The Beginnings of Arius . . . . .	248
The Council of Nicaea . . . . .	257
After Nicaea . . . . .	273
The Council of Tyre . . . . .	276
The Death of Arius . . . . .	278
VI THE DEATH OF THE NEOPHYTE . . . . .	282
SOURCES . . . . .	292
BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTES . . . . .	296
INDEX . . . . .	297

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

The Roman Empire During the First Tetrarchy . . . . .	2-3
Saxa Rubra (map) . . . . .	168
Milvian Bridge (map) . . . . .	169
Early Constantinople (map) . . . . .	218
The Constantinian Basilica of the Holy Sepulcher . . . . .	225



## **THE AGE OF MARTYRS**



# I. PROLOGUE

## 1. *Politics*

1. During the third century after Christ the Roman Empire was a ship without a pilot in a storm. The storm had started inside the Empire with the revolts of legionaries and praetorians and with the struggles of rivals for the imperial throne, while from outside the imperial boundaries wave after wave of barbarians flung themselves on badly defended frontiers. Despite the great number of emperors during this century, capable pilots of the battered ship had been very few. In the 92 years from the death of Commodus (A.D. 192) to the coming of Diocletian (A.D. 284) the throne of the Caesars had been occupied by no less than 28 emperors without counting shadowy competitors of no importance. These latter were very numerous under the rule of Gallienus (260-268) which was called the period of the "Thirty Tyrants." Of 28 emperors, 22 or more were murdered. The few worthy emperors of the period were almost all Illyrians by birth (Claudius II, Aurelianus, Probus). This was almost inevitable since, as the legionaries of Latin or Italian blood were frequently in revolt, they were being replaced by provincials who sought to make their fortune in the armies of the Empire.

2. Perhaps Carus was an Illyrian. A prefect of the praetorian guard, he was proclaimed emperor (282) after the murder of Probus. To assure for himself some friends in his government, he nominated as "Caesars" his two sons, Carinus and Numerianus. Leaving the first to govern the West, he set out for the East to fight against the Persians taking with him his other son, Numerianus. This campaign went on quite successfully and the final victory was very near when Carus was killed by a thunderbolt (283). This was the story at any rate, though treachery probably figured somewhere. Numerianus then suspended operations against the Persians and began a weary retreat, during which he contracted a disease of the eyes which forced him to travel in a

closed litter. By the time the army reached the Bosphorus the litter contained a corpse.

The soldiers were fond of their leader and when they learned of his death, they blamed it on Aper, prefect of the praetorian guard and brother-in-law of the dead man. Since he was thought to have committed the crime with the intention of taking Numerianus' place they immediately elected, in Chalcedon, a new emperor. He was an official called Diocletian. Aper was put in chains and the soldiers demanded a court-martial. It was held before the whole army but was very short: Diocletian took his place as the judge, called on the god Sol to witness his personal innocence in the matter of the death of Numerianus, and, having announced Aper as the murderer, he drew his sword and killed him.

It was not certain that Aper was guilty; on the other hand, all the soldiers laid the crime at his door, perhaps because they suspected that he was in secret accord with Carinus, ruler in the West, whom they did not like. With this support from the army the deed of Diocletian did not bring with it any of the dangers that would normally be expected in those times, while he gained even more favor from the soldiers by a show of apparent justice. For the rest, people could already see a divine predisposition in what had happened. In fact, it is told—rather later—that a druid priestess of Gaul had already predicted imperial dignity for Diocletian, on condition that he should have killed a boar: it happens that this is the meaning of the Latin word *aper*.

3. Carinus remained in the West although he had great resources and, a large army. He does not seem, however, to have been so unwarlike or so attached to pleasure as ancient tradition says, for in the following spring he was already leading a strong army against the troops who supported Diocletian. On his way he put down, near Verona, another pretender, Aurelius Julianus; in Moesia he had a number of successful engagements with Diocletian's troops; finally, in a battle near Viminacium, everything was again going well for Carinus until a tribune he had offended killed him, and left Diocletian without a rival.

And so Diocletian found himself at the head of the Roman Empire. He was of very humble origins. Son of a freedman of the Senator Anulinus, he was born in Dalmatia, perhaps in the neighborhood of Salona, where he retired after his abdication. Like so many of his countrymen in search of their fortune, he had taken up a military

career as a young man. His true name was Diocle, but according to the custom of the time he lengthened and decorated it, calling himself Marcus Valerius Diocletianus. Entirely dedicated to his military service, he took part in the campaigns of Aurelianus, Probus, and Carus where he showed how valuable he could be to a general. At the time of his election as emperor he had reached the high position of Comes Domesticorum — Commander of the Imperial Guard.

Although without cultural background, Diocletian was intelligent in affairs and had plenty of common sense. Everything he did was motivated by a profound veneration for the majesty of the Roman Empire which he, as a provincial from Dalmatia, regarded in an almost religious light. In any case, it is apparent from many of his acts that he was neither greedy for power nor a lover of quarreling and war. His final abdication and the fact that even before this he had shared his rule with others show that he was not really a fanatical lover of power.

Even his killing of Aper was probably prompted more by a veneration for the majesty of the Empire than by personal ambition. Diocletian was intelligent and had certainly been convinced for some time that even if the Empire were not gravely threatened by barbarians from the outside, it was gravely injured within by the incessant struggles of claimants to the imperial throne. The first of these claimants which came to his hand was Aper and he treated him in the summary manner we have seen — a manner which showed up both his natural rusticity and his loyalty to the Empire.

4. When his only competitor, Carinus, had been eliminated for him, Diocletian began to carry out his plan of protecting the Empire from both internal and external dangers. As a matter of fact, the two were often closely connected. One emperor alone was not enough to defend such immense frontiers, and the supreme commander of the Empire was practically forced to select faithful helpers as Valerian and Carus had done. Such assistants must share in the imperial power; otherwise it might well happen that a general victorious in some campaign against the barbarians would become, almost without realizing it, a rival merely because his army acclaimed him.

Once Diocletian had formed his plan, he began to act. First he chose an assistant called Marcus Aurelius Maximian on whom he placed the duty of defending the frontiers. He was an old companion at arms of Diocletian who had been helped and protected by him, and was therefore very attached to him. Maximian was the son of

country tradespeople in Pannonia. Though he had no culture or spiritual formation, he had acquired a reputation for military efficiency and organizing power. Ancient authors, generally unfavorable to him, show him as a man of unclean habits, violent, cruel, and ambitious. Diocletian, who had weighed him well, knew how to use his qualities, bad as well as good, to best advantage. Above all he knew that he was absolutely loyal. In 285 Diocletian nominated him "Caesar" which meant that he was worthy of the supreme command but not yet decorated with it. Soon afterward, when Maximian had again proved his value in the campaigns in Gaul, on April 1, 286, the Emperor nominated him "Augustus" associating him with himself in the government of the Empire. In theory Diocletian and Maximian had equal powers, dividing supreme rule between them. In practice Diocletian was the elder Augustus and his new colleague continued to show him that careful deference which had proved so useful in the past.

In this way the first step toward the *restauratio imperii* in Roman territories was made. The second step was still to be made. A rule must be fixed for the succession to the two Augusti, thus putting a stop to revolutions and competition. For this, however, there was no hurry, and Diocletian postponed a decision until more experience should give him a better idea of how it should be made (par. 11). 5. There is no record that the Roman Senate was consulted about these steps or that it gave its approbation. Even so, Senate approval would have been a pure formality with no influence on the course of events. Instead, right from the beginning one can see evidence of Roman religiosity guiding the decisions of Diocletian.

When in 286 Diocletian made Maximian Augustus, he took for himself the name of Jupiter and called his colleague Hercules. Jupiter and Hercules, divinities of Ancient Roman veneration, were mirrored now in the two Augusti who labored to restore the Empire. The elder Augustus was Jupiter, father of the gods, and the younger was Hercules, who labored at the orders of Jupiter. Curiously more than two centuries before this something similar had happened to the Apostles Barnabas and Paul when, during their stay at Lystra in Lycaonia, they had been taken by the people of the town as Zeus (Jupiter) and Hermes (Mercury) respectively (Acts 14:11-12).

It was at this time that there began in the court of the Augustus the rather foolish imperial ceremonial, which later became much more involved. This ceremonial, though abhorrent to ancient Roman

tradition, fitted in quite well with the mentality of Orientals who had always been accustomed to see their monarch surrounded by divine light (par. 13).

6. Maximian's first task as Caesar was to solve a problem which had existed for a long time. Gaul had been in a state of the utmost desolation for many years; the large country estates had become so unproductive that they barely sustained a few small holders. Periodic attacks by barbarians from across the Rhine thinned out the scanty harvests, while along the coast of the English channel German pirates cut off communications with Britain. The populations of the north, who in the past had been looked after by Rome for economic and strategic reasons, were now left to their own resources because of the instability of the central government. Meanwhile, more and more tribute was demanded. Degradation and hunger, only a step from despair and rebellion, resulted from this action.

Among these unfortunate people, shepherds without flocks and peasants without land, revolt now broke out. It was to be a grim contest, for they had everything to gain and nothing to lose, except their lives. They quite quickly formed a *multitudo*, and by this name which in the Celtic language is *Bagad* or *Bagat*, the rebels came to be called. They are the Bagauds of contemporary documents. But the movement, although very large, was not organized or even united; and its leaders were inefficient. Bravery and individual valor were not wanting, however, and two rebels, Aelianus and Amandus, were elected as Augusti. Even with the imperial cloak on their shoulders, however, they lacked the power to transform the *multitudo* into an efficient army.

To put down this insurrection Diocletian sent Maximian from Nicomedia in all haste, since although the rebellion was dangerous the news from the East was even more alarming. When Maximian arrived on the scene he soon saw that the opposing rabble could be easily broken and dispersed by his disciplined veterans. Between the last months of 285 and the first of 286 the rebellion was more or less crushed, though many parties who had fled from military defeats and routs temporarily prolonged the hardly glorious campaign of the Caesar. Along the imperial roads gloomy reports usually became gloomier; this time a few skirmishes became a victory, and by the time the news got to Nicomedia, people were talking of a glorious lightning campaign which could only hasten the day when the conqueror would be named an Augustus.

7. To put down the insurrection Maximian had gathered his forces not from the legions guarding the German borders but from those in the districts north of the Po and around the Alps where detached sections of larger formations could be stationed. These troops were not likely to have been weakened by the war of nerves which was always alive along the frontiers.

With this is connected the martyrdom of the Theban Legion according to the *Passio* which was written in the seventh century, probably by a monk of that region (Saint-Maurice). According to this document, before Maximian set off against the Bagauds, he assembled at Octodurium (today Martigny in the Swiss Vallais) either other troops or a Theban legion brought from the East and then stationed at Agaunum (today Saint-Maurice, also in the Vallais) and commanded all the soldiers to share in the pagan sacrifices, demanding also their oath that they would fight against the Bagauds and the Christians. They refused to obey this order, and after having suffered decimation they were all slaughtered at Agaunum.

More ancient is the story of Eucherius of Lyons (first half of the fifth century) who made detailed investigations and seems to have visited the church which had been erected over the tombs of the martyrs as early as the fourth century. According to this story the martyrdom took place during the persecution of Diocletian but the exact date is not given. The whole Christian Theban legion was executed at Agaunum. Their highest officers were Maurice (who had the rank of *primicerius*), Esuperius (*campiductor*), and Candidus (*senator militum*). He relates that these Christian legionaries quite naturally refused to join in a general persecution of the Christians; and that they were therefore twice decimated; and that when they still persisted in their refusal, they were all executed.

8. There are some discrepancies between the two stories and both of them contradict, here and there, known historical facts. From the chronological standpoint, the later *Passio* seems more authoritative. This places the martyrdom under Maximian on the occasion of the campaign against the Bagauds and not under Diocletian who, at that time, was favorable to the Christians and who began his persecution of them only later. Maximian was indeed quite entitled to act as he did against Christian soldiers, not by right of any anti-Christian edict, but in support of general military discipline. Since he was due to go into action against the Bagauds, he might quite easily have suspected



some sympathy for the rebels among his soldiers, and therefore required from them participation in pagan sacrifices and oaths just as had been done on other occasions in like situations. If this is the kernel of truth in the matter, it is easy to see how the oral tradition on which Eucherius depends should have confounded the provisions of Maximian with the later well-known persecution of Diocletian, mixing up the dates and making the usual amplification of the facts.

Certainly the entire legion was not slaughtered. And only a small number of Christians belonging to a legion was martyred. In reality the oral tradition which came to Eucherius, one hundred and fifty years later, has not been repeated in other sixth-century Romano-Gallic writers such as Avitus of Vienna, Gregory of Tours, and Venantius Fortunatus. These knew all about the veneration given to the martyrs at the place of their sufferings, but they never spoke of Thebans and they expressed themselves so vaguely that they obviously lack real information. In conclusion it can be said that we have an event which without doubt has historical foundation but which has in its relation suffered some chronological changes and some exaggerations, none of which are unusual in popular legends.

9. Though Gaul was now pacified, many other territories of the Empire were in danger. The North Sea and the English Channel were infested with pirates who brought ruin to the coast of Gaul and Britain and made communication difficult. Therefore, according to the plans of Diocletian, the fleet in those parts was strengthened and concentrated at Gesoriacum (Boulogne-sur-Mer) under the command of a valiant Gallo-Roman, Carausius. He was most capable; not indeed of dislodging the pirates from their strongholds but of feathering his own nest, for he hoped eventually to make himself independent of Rome and to set up his own kingdom on both sides of the Channel. He got on the right side of the local population, especially of the Franks, fought those pirates who were not favorable to his plans, and, after detaching a good share for himself, handed out the booty thus acquired to his allies. His center of operations was Gesoriacum whence he maintained undisturbed relations with the Britons whom he controlled absolutely.

His game was soon discovered by Maximian who had direct responsibility for those regions, and sicarii were sent to dispose of the traitor. But Carausius was not asleep. He cut off all approach to the harbor of Gesoriacum, left a powerful garrison there, and sailed with his faithful

rabble to Britain where he was proclaimed emperor at the beginning of 287.

Since he lacked sufficient naval forces to pursue and punish the rebel, Maximian had a fleet constructed. This came into action in 289; it had no great success and Carausius remained unpunished. Diocletian and Maximian by now were faced by other dangers and so they recognized the usurper and gave him the government of Britain. On this occasion Carausius took the names of Marcus Aurelius Valerius to show himself the brother of Maximian and struck money showing three Augusti with the inscription *Pax Auggg., Laetitia Auggg., Carausius et fratres sui*. But the *Pax* was obviously a fictitious peace and the two first Augusti only tolerated their new colleague. An occasion to get rid of him came within a few years (par. 14).

10. Although the quarrel with Carausius was suspended for the moment, the rest of the Empire was by no means quiet. Barbarian pressure on the German frontiers had been increased by the treachery of Carausius. Over the whole of northern Africa, from Egypt in the east to Mauretania in the extreme west, there passed a shudder of rebellion. The economic restrictions on a once prosperous Egypt, the turbulent character of the multiracial population of Alexandria brought about a rebellion led by another would-be Augustus — one Achilleus who took the name of Lucius Domitius Domitianus. (It may be that there were really two leaders whose names have somehow fused into one.) In upper Egypt south of the delta, the savage tribes of the Blemmyes made their way into the country around the cataracts of the Nile. To the west of the delta, riots broke out at Carthage and even further west, while the *Quinquegentiani* and other barbarian nations threatened the rest of the Mediterranean coast as far as Mauretania. To the east lived the traditional enemy of Rome — the Persians. There the Sassanian dynasty which had succeeded the Parthian Arsacids in 227 had had its last conflict with Rome a few years before in the time of Carus (par. 2) and the sudden death of this emperor had left affairs as they were for the time being. There was neither legal peace nor actual war. But the Sassanian kings cherished great ambitions and especially planned to take back from Rome the lands which had been occupied during the late war. The most contested region was Armenia which lay to the east of the Roman Empire and to the north of Persia. This mountainous and almost impassable country was of great strategic importance for both powers. As long

as it was in the grasp of the Roman legions, Rome was able to menace Persia from the north and to take in the rear Persian armies which might have advanced against Roman Syria; on the other hand, if it were occupied by the Persian "King of Kings" this would protect the right flank and the rear of his armies in any operations against the Roman Empire. Augustus had already put a high value on possession of Armenia; and Trajan had conquered it and made it a province; Hadrian allowed the Armenians to choose a king for themselves. He turned out to be a devoted client of Rome. After the defeat and capture of Valerian in 260, however, Armenia fell into the hands of the Persians who killed King Chosroes. His son, Tiridates, was able to flee and take refuge in Rome where, in the shelter of the Empire, he prepared for revenge. He was sent back secretly to Armenia and profited from the discontent of the people, whose religious susceptibilities were offended by the intolerant Persian magians, besides being burdened by ruinous taxation. Tiridates raised his banner, and the Armenian nobility who had taken refuge in the mountains flocked to his side; favored by good fortune, he won back his own kingdom and then invaded Persia. After all this success, however, he could not withstand the counterattack of Narse, the Persian king, who drove him once more from Armenia. Naturally he again took refuge with the Romans where he did his best to increase the hostility between Rome and the "King of Kings." The matter would have to come to a head sooner or later.

11. This threat, coupled with the weakness of the eastern frontiers of the Danube, made Diocletian decide to continue the *restauratio imperii* which he had already begun with the nomination of Maximian as Augustus. By now, however, the two Augusti were not sufficient and needed other active helpers. Indeed, it was now possible to provide a stable norm for their succession so as to stop usurpations. This was part of the original plan of the far-seeing Diocletian (par. 4).

In the first months of 291, the Augusti had met at Milan and probably the principal lines of action were decided at that time. These arrangements were made public on March 1, 293. The two Augusti each elected a Caesar of their own (Maximian had begun as a Caesar; par. 4). Gaius Valerius Galerius Maximinianus was chosen by Diocletian and Gaius Flavius Valerius Constantius by Maximian.

Galerius had begun his active life as a plowman in his native Illyria, a task for which he had all the physical and mental requirements. He

was of enormous size and even when he became an important official in the Empire remained a brutal and ignorant man. He was well supplied with courage and practical sagacity and was particularly expert in Persian affairs, so much so that in concert with King Tiridates, once again under Roman protection, he had prepared a possible plan to restore him his kingdom.

Constantius, surnamed Chlorus (green face or pallid), was also an Illyrian, and according to the authorities seems to have been a descendant of Emperor Claudius II, the Goth; but it may be that such descent was a complacent invention in honor of his celebrated son, Constantine. He was a brave officer and prefect of the praetorian guard under Maximian; his character was mild and his constitution weak. This ill-health led to his surname.

The two new Caesars were under the strong influence of two women. Galerius was guided by his mother Romula, a priestess of mountain gods imported probably from Germany and a fanatical enemy of Christianity. Constantius was influenced by Helena, the woman with whom he lived before he was elected Caesar and by whom he had had a son, Constantine, in 280 or a little earlier. Helena did not come from the top of the social ladder. St. Ambrose (cf. *De obitu Theodos.*, 42) says that she was a *stabularia*, that is, she kept a "hostelry." Remembering the customs of the period this was probably not a very honorable occupation. After his election as Caesar, Constantius was forced to put her away to uphold his new dignity which carried with it an implication of relationship to his Augustus. He now married Theodora, Maximian's stepdaughter.

Although Constantius was a pagan tending toward a rather vague monotheism, Helena even at the time of her association with Constantius felt some sympathy for Christianity; we do not know, however, when she finally did embrace it. The assertion of Eusebius (cf. *De Vita Constantini III*, 47) that Helena was led by Constantine to the adoration of the true God whom she had not known before is certainly worthless flattery. On the other hand, not much faith can be attached to the contrary statement of Theodoretus (cf. *Hist. Eccl.*, i. 18) according to which after Helena had brought Constantine into the world, she administered to him the "food of piety." In any case, however, Helena certainly had great influence on the mind of Constantine who honored her until her death and gave her the title of "Augusta."

12. By a kind of  *fictio iuris*  a relationship arose among the four rulers: the two Augusti were brothers and the two Caesars were their respective sons. Thus the succession was assured since each "son" automatically succeeded his "father," while the two "fathers" were linked in "brotherhood." In their turn, each of the Caesars, when they had become Augusti, would choose a new Caesar as his "son." By this, the supreme power would be transmitted peacefully without any of the disturbances and rivalries which had so disturbed the Empire during the century just ending. Under this system, the praetorian guard, who too often in the past had decided on the next emperor, lost all importance. The Roman Senate was deprived of its powers both of nomination and of confirmation, and remained an empty symbol of its glorious past.

The "tetrarchy" thus brought into being seemed to suit the changed times with its new dangers, but later experience showed that it was only a happy theoretical dream with no connection with reality. The succeeding Augusti and Caesars were not the impersonal and impassive beings that Diocletian dreamed of, but men of flesh and bones with all their passions and egotistic propensities. These qualities made a peaceful continuance of the tetrarchy impossible. But even aside from this fact, there were many forces outside this system of succession which would one day or another threaten its existence. At the beginning, the tetrarchy bore good fruit precisely because it was intended as a cure for the actual dangers of the time.

13. As was to be expected from the religious mentality of Diocletian the tetrarchy thus constituted was surrounded by an aura of religiosity and clothed with a substantially religious ceremonial. The Augustus — especially Diocletian who was held unanimously to be the head of the tetrarchy — was invested with sacred majesty. He thus moved away from the true Roman tradition and approached the Oriental. The first sovereigns to receive divine honors were in the East — the Seleucids and the Lagidae, while in Rome during the first years of the Empire the Quirites were disturbed by the idea of an emperor being given divine honor while he was still alive. The prudent Augustus had in *Urbe quidem pertinacissime* refused the honor of temples and altars (cf. Suetonius, *Divus August.*, 52); he had thrust away even the title of *dominus* (cf. *ibid.*, 53), which in Rome meant the "master" of slaves, but which in the East was also valid as an epithet of divinity, while, for the Christians, the essence of the Christian confession consisted

in applying this title to Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 8:5-6; 12:3; Rom. 10:9, etc.). Diocletian, however, played heavily on his concept of the sacred and divine Emperor. The Augustus had the official title of *dominus* over all; he was draped in rich purple edged with gold, wore precious slippers on his feet, and on his head bore the sacred diadem sparkling with gems. In his presence a subject — who was granted an audience only for very special reasons — had to prostrate himself and adore the divine majesty. Very detailed regulations governed the ceremonial of the court and an interminable hierarchy of officials and courtiers trailed down from the sacred throne until they finally reached the common mortals.

We must, however, discount any consideration that Diocletian acted thus through vanity or personal ambition; he wished to magnify the four dynasts in the eyes of his subjects so that even the external apparatus might inspire a trembling veneration.

As a common man, Diocletian could laugh at all this. He showed his true nature clearly a few years later when he had abdicated and retired to Salona; when urged to take back his power he would remark that no one would wish him to do this if they had seen the magnificent cabbages he grew. For Diocletian, the man, the magnificence of the imperial court was worth less than his beloved cabbages.

The immense Empire was divided between the four dynasts and each one chose a place of residence for himself suitable for the territories he governed. The Caesar Constantius had Britain, Gaul, and perhaps also Spain (some authorities give this last to Maximian), and his residence was among the Treveri. His Augustus, Maximinian, kept for himself Raetia, Italy with its islands, Africa (and perhaps also Spain), and placed his court at Milan. The Caesar Galerius received the regions below the Danube, Illyria, Macedonia, Greece with Crete, and lived at Sirmium in Pannonia. His Augustus, Diocletian, retained the eastern regions, that is Thrace, the whole of Asia Minor with Syria and Palestine, and Egypt with Libya; his palace was at Nicomedia in Bithynia.

14. After the division of the Empire each dynast had a great deal to do in his own territory, since for five or six years afterward there was continual war along all the frontiers.

On the German frontier the barbarians were being urged on by Carausius who felt that his fictitious peace with the continent was nearly at an end (par. 9). Hordes of Alemanni broke into Gaul

and Constantius met and defeated them time after time. Then came the campaign in Frisia—the coastlands between the mouths of the Scheldt and the Rhine. This campaign was very grueling because the terrain was marshy and broken by canals and, too, the dogged resistance of the fierce inhabitants led them to set ambushes for the Romans at every step. With equal tenacity, however, Constantius managed to make himself master of all Frisia and with the prisoners he had taken he attempted a repopulation of the deserted regions of Gaul.

Having secured his eastern flank, Constantius concentrated his forces on Gesoriacum, the fortress of Carausius and his bridgehead on the continent. Carausius' fleet was gathered in the port of this city, and Constantius tried to bottle it up by closing the entrance to the port. In this he was not successful and the fleet sailed for Britain. Nonetheless Constantius continued his work of blocking the entrance, since he saw that the city would not be able to hold out against a land siege if reinforcements could not come in by sea. At the same time, he prepared a strong fleet to attack Britain. At this moment Carausius was assassinated by an official, Allectus, who may have been the prefect of his praetorian guard and who now took the place of his victim. Gesoriacum was finally taken by storm. But before Constantius began operations against Britain he asked Maximian, who was carrying on a campaign in Africa (par. 10), to occupy Gaul so that he could not be attacked in the rear.

When Maximian arrived, Constantius divided his fleet into two squadrons which were to act independently and make landings in two different places. The first squadron, which was grouped at the mouth of the Seine, was commanded by a valiant admiral, Asclepiodatus; the second, based at Gesoriacum, was commanded by Constantius himself. The enemy fleet under Allectus formed up before the Isle of Vectis (Wight), more or less in the middle of the southern coast of Britain from where it could keep guard on both sections of the coast. When one of the usual channel fogs occurred, Asclepiodatus weighed anchor and, escaping the notice of enemy lookouts, managed to make a landing, although a tempest carried him rather more to the west than he had intended. He burned his boats on the shore and marched quickly toward London. Allectus was taken aback by a landing in the west when he had expected one in the east and, seeing all his plans go wrong, rushed in disorder to meet Asclepiodatus. Allectus was defeated and killed in the encounter. In the meantime, Constantius, although he

was delayed and troubled by the storm, had landed on the southeastern corner of Britain. He advanced without encountering resistance. In fact, he was received with joy by the people who lamented the once all-powerful Roman dominion. In this way, the island returned wholeheartedly to the Empire.

15. From Gaul, Maximian now returned in haste to Africa to finish the pacification of the western regions which he had almost completed. Here also the campaign was quick, thanks to the energy and single-mindedness of the Augustus; thus only a little while after the restoration of Britain to the Empire this part of Africa gave no cause for preoccupation to the Romans.

But there remained the opposite side of Africa — Alexandria with Egypt and the neighboring regions to the west and south (par. 10). Since the chief Augustus, Diocletian, considered these territories of particular importance, he kept their control in his own hands; he therefore directed a personal campaign which did not end until 298. Two cities were destroyed. Alexandria resisted a siege for eight months, and when the town was finally taken by storm it experienced Diocletian's full severity. Against Upper Egypt, he acted differently, inviting the peoples of the Nobatae, barbarians from Nubia, to fight against the Blemmyes who had invaded their country. The old Roman maxim — divide and rule — proved its value once again. The Nobatae expelled most of their invaders and received in compensation a permanent home around the first cataract of the Nile. They had the duty of keeping guard on those borders of their country which were also borders of the Empire. Egypt was now divided into three provinces which from north to south were Jovia, Herculea, and Thebais.

16. Despite all these successes on the frontiers of the Empire there still remained the menace of Persia which was very serious (par. 10), and threatened not just the frontiers but the Empire itself.

For some time Diocletian had been worried by the growth of Manichaeism in Roman territories, especially in Egypt and neighboring lands. In general Rome had been tolerant toward foreign religious trends, though she did practice a prudent vigilance over them. This new religion, however, could hardly be tolerated, for not only did it teach a corrupt doctrine, but it took its origin from Persia, the eternal enemy of Rome. By means of active word-of-mouth and written propaganda it diffused a dangerous doctrine and also — it was commonly believed — disgusting rites and immoral habits. It was sufficient



to consider the bloody disorders in Egypt in recent times; quite probably these had been provoked by secret Manichaean agitators who were working for Persia against Rome. Diocletian, therefore, decided to promote the internal health of the Empire by curing it of the disease of the Manichaeans.

When his war in Egypt was nearly over, probably in 296, Diocletian published an edict against the Manichaeans. This document has special value since it allows us to understand Diocletian's attitude toward matters which concerned both politics and religion. This question was to arise again in the case of the Christians. The edict (cf. *Codex Gregorian.*, xiv. 4) proposed to safeguard the ancient religion given by the gods from the corrupting touch of new sects coming from the Persians, the enemies of Rome. "Therefore," he says, "we command that the authors and leaders together with their abominable writings be punished severely by being burnt in flaming fires: Those, however, who are members of the sect and those who rebel against the gods are to be executed and we decree that their possessions be forfeited to the treasury. And if any well-known people of whatever dignity or excellence should have passed to this unspeakable, filthy and infamous sect or to the doctrine of the Persians, you (the governor) shall confiscate their possessions for the benefit of our treasury and send such criminals to the mines of Phoenice and Proconnesus. So that therefore this wicked evil may be uprooted from our most blessed time we expect that your devotion will urge you to uphold these commands with your own orders and statutes thereby bringing peace to Us. Given on the day before the Kalends of April at Alexandria."

17. Immediately after Diocletian had thus provided for the internal security of the Empire he began war against the Persians. Since he was still occupied in Egypt he put Galerius at the head of the expedition who was his own Caesar and expert in Persian affairs (par. 11). Diocletian had great faith in him, and Galerius accepted the difficult task quite happily, for up to now he had been occupied in secondary ventures along the frontier of the Danube while Constantius, the Caesar of Maximian, had made a great name for himself in his campaign in Gaul and Britain.

Unfortunately his impetuous daring led him to forget prudence — a virtue particularly required in this insidious war. After some secondary engagements of doubtful result, Galerius fell into precisely the same fatal error as Crassus, who in 53 B.C., in this very region, had lost his

army and his life. Starting from Syria, Galerius, instead of crossing the mountains of Armenia and falling from there in all safety on the rear of the Persians, made his way directly across the Euphrates and penetrated into Mesopotamia, plunging farther and farther into the interminable and waterless plains on the other side of the Roman frontier. Here the enemy cavalry found themselves in their element. Rank after rank of deadly Persian bowmen swept down time after time on the Roman infantry which was already exhausted by long marches. Before a counterattack could be launched they disappeared on their fast horses. Before long the legions found themselves cut off; the faithful Tiridates who fought *pro domo sua* with the Romans saved himself with difficulty by swimming the Euphrates in full armor. As soon as the Romans tried to withdraw other grave losses were added to the initial defeat. A few survivors, led by Galerius, reached Antioch where Diocletian was waiting with reserve troops.

18. The anger of the Augustus was terrible. Almost three centuries earlier after the defeat of *Saltus Teutoburgensis*, Octavianus Augustus had shouted frenziedly that Varus should give him back his destroyed legions; but Varus had died in the battle and could neither hear the shouts nor justify himself. Here, however, Galerius, the responsible one, was alive and in retreat and Diocletian was no less angry than Octavian had been.

Galerius asked for an audience, but this was refused by Diocletian. He was met by the Augustus riding in his carriage through the street and the defeated Caesar knelt on the ground and implored a hearing. But the Augustus did not stop or show by any sign that he had noticed him. To the wonder of the spectators Galerius followed him doggedly for an hour and the dust from the carriage covered his purple cloak. Finally, Diocletian did hear the humbled and degraded suppliant and, after long consideration, made a decision which was worthy of his intuition and full of psychological wisdom. He judged that a leader who had suffered so great a disaster now possessed a precious experience which would keep him from further imprudent action. He kept him in his command, and, ordering him to reorganize the army, he allowed him to take men from the legions who were guarding the Danube, and who had already been under his command.

This new expeditionary force of 25,000 men left, but followed another route. This time Galerius, keeping clear of the plains which still bore the mementos of his defeat, climbed the mountain paths

of Armenia and then, turning on his right, came down along the bank of the Euphrates. This time he was very prudent and was favored also by fortune. He was almost in contact with the enemy before their suspicions were aroused. In a night attack he penetrated the enemy camp before the Persian cavalry had time to seize their arms and mount their horses. The Persians were slaughtered by the Roman legions; the sons, wives, and sisters of King Narse were found and captured in the royal tent. The King himself was wounded and barely managed to escape to safety in Media.

19. Imitating the celebrated gesture of Alexander the Great, Galerius ordered that the King's relatives should be respected. The distinguished prisoners of the royal family might prove to be valuable hostages in Roman hands. All treasure, however, came to the victor and the rest of the camp was sacked by the legionaries. Galerius advanced as far as Nisibis where he was joined by Diocletian with another army as reinforcement. With these troops, and after so devastating a victory, it was possible to think of occupying Persia and reducing it to a Roman province. But the prudent Diocletian discarded this idea immediately. When an embassy from Narse arrived to sue for peace he decided to impose hard conditions but to leave the monarchy of the King of Kings still on its feet.

Since Narse could not do otherwise he accepted the conditions. Five districts of the Upper Tigris were to pass to the Roman Empire whose boundary with Persia was fixed as the river Araxes; the faithful Tiridates got his Armenia back with the addition of some territories taken from Media. Thus Tiridates again took on his office as the alert sentinel of Rome toward the east. It was the year 297.

When the embassy of the King of Kings was presented to Galerius, one of the Persian chiefs gave a long discourse which began by praising the magnanimity of the conqueror who had respected the royal relatives of the conquered one. Galerius, still a plowman at heart and no diplomat, replied by recording the disaster suffered by the Romans not forty years before and by pointing out the bestial manner in which the Persians had treated the Emperor Valerian who had been taken prisoner by them. This memory, evoked by a ploughman diplomat and conqueror, had great influence on the outcome of the negotiations.

20. At this point if we wished to weigh the results of the institution of the tetrarchy — that is, from the year 293 (par. 11) — we should have to recognize that in the politico-military field the program ar-

ranged by Diocletian had been carried out extraordinarily well. No usurpers worthy of serious attention had challenged the imperial authority. That very Carausius who had forced his way into the company of the two Augusti, and whose presence had been tolerated by them, had finally been removed. The frontiers of the Empire were a great deal safer now than they had been only a few years before; Persia was in no condition to cause trouble for many years to come; Britain had returned to tranquil reliance on Rome; the barbarians across the Rhine and the Danube had lost some of their ferocity; the whole of North Africa was under efficient control.

Meanwhile magnificent public works and buildings needed for the new regime had been begun and in many cases were nearing completion. The four cities of the dynasts — Trier, Milan, Sirmium, and Nicomedia — were enlarged and worthily ornamented; the greatest care was lavished on Nicomedia, from which Diocletian ruled and which he destined to be another Rome. But even old Rome was not forgotten. Among the many works executed there, it is sufficient to recall what had the highest value for morale, the reconstruction of the Curia Iulia, the home of the Roman Senate, destroyed by the fire of 283. The largest and most grandiose work in Rome was the construction of the baths on the Viminal which had been begun by Maximian on his return from the campaigns in North Africa (par. 15), but which were called the Baths of Diocletian since they were built in honor of the latter. The work lasted from 298 to 306, and the vast building which resulted was worthy of Rome in every way. Even the ruins of the baths remaining today are, as everyone knows, among the greatest and the most impressive of the city and can be compared to the monuments of the Egypt of the Pharaohs.

Many centuries after Diocletian, a giant who was also a genius came to the ruins. His task was to put them in order and preserve them for posterity. Michelangelo found himself in his element among the colossal walls and giant columns and worked alongside his equals.

21. The industry of Constantius merits particular mention. Since this Caesar found that his distant territories were somewhat cut off from the vital center of the Empire, he worked fervently for the economic and cultural welfare of his people. He was refined and cultured himself, and he liked the company of learned men whom he used to consult even in political matters. Under him the local schools of rhetoric multiplied and the Gallo-Roman youth thronged their

lecture halls. In the past one of the principal centers of culture had been the city of Augustodunum (Autun) but during the rising of the Bagauds it had been almost destroyed. Constantius rebuilt the city placing in the center a great edifice destined to be the school of rhetoric; his secretary, Eumenius, was put in charge of the school which was inaugurated in 297. A similar school was founded at Trier.

This material building did not hinder a serious attempt to solve long-standing and grave social questions in the rest of the Empire. Diocletian had found the Empire in the throes of monetary confusion, which had been created by past governments and which ruined commercial exchange; some coins were refused because they had no intrinsic value; others brought only half or a third of their nominal worth, and so on. Coins were now struck which were worth their face value, and which were intended gradually to take the place of the earlier coinage. This process was rather slow, however, and the difficulty continued. Years later, Constantine had to occupy himself with the same problem.

22. Then came the *edictum de pretiis*. This was a law which fixed the highest price of various goods and the highest wages which could be paid—a maximum which could never be exceeded. With the tetrarchy, State expenses were increased beyond measure since the four courts of the four dynasts had to be maintained together with their armies and a great crowd of clerks and officials in newly created posts. Taxes were overwhelming since, as the tax collectors were always increasing in number, they found great difficulty in discovering persons to pay the tax; “There were more tax collectors than taxpayers,” said a witness of the times (Lactantius, *De Mortibus Persecutorum*, 7). Naturally in such conditions prices both of goods and of labor were reaching for the stars, especially since production was down in some regions. The government tried to standardize the duties and taxes which differed from region to region, in the course of which ancient privileges were suppressed and an entirely new fiscal partition of the Empire was introduced. But even this remedy, which in any case was hardly efficacious, brought with it an inevitable increase in the number of bureaucrats and therefore of expenses.

It was hoped that the *edictum de pretiis* would remedy the prohibitive height of prices. This edict had a military objective as well, for the troops which were continually being posted from one part of the Empire to another were finding the high prices a great burden since

they had to buy their victuals on the public markets. The *edictum de pretiis*, which is preserved only in fairly large fragments, was for the whole of the Empire and contained detailed lists of goods and types of labor for all of which a maximum price was given. It was a very severe law, contravention of its orders being punished by death.

From our experience of modern times we could have told Diocletian what would happen. In those regions where the prices were lower than the maximum, they were raised immediately; where, on the other hand, current prices were actually higher than the maximum, goods quickly disappeared from the shops and were taken over by that intangible institution — the “black market.” The good intentions which inspired the edict were totally frustrated by the inexperience on which it was based, and also by a certain military rigidity derived from its author. After a little while the edict was to all intents and purposes abandoned.

23. Provisions of a purely moral nature were not lacking. Besides the rescript published in Egypt against the Manichaeans (par. 16), Diocletian during his stay in Egypt caused all books of alchemy and magic to be burned. The authors say that they were Egyptian books and it is quite possible that they were actually written in Egypt. Diocletian, however, considered the origin of the doctrines rather than the authors. Anything to do with magic or occult knowledge came — according to the Romans — from Persia and Chaldea. Even in the time of the republic the Romans had said, “*Chaldaeos ne consulito.*” Since these teachings came from the same countries as Manichacism, and since also Rome and Persia were eternal enemies, magic doctrine shared the flames with the works of Mani.

To this same period belongs a noble edict on marriage. Just as the first Augustus had taken care to restore the tarnished honor of matrimony, so now did Diocletian, basing his action on religious principles and maintaining that pious and chaste conduct would bring down the protection of the gods of Rome.

And it was this Emperor, fired with such clear pagan piety, who was to pass into history as the author of the most cruel persecution suffered by Christianity.

## 2. Religion

24. Toward the end of the third century after Christ the Roman Empire, so far as religion was concerned, resembled the crater of a volcano in eruption. There was a mixture of highly heterogeneous elements which combined in various ways to form a thousand different substances. The old form of the Latin Roman religion had been preserved especially in Italian regions, but this had been overlaid by many elements which had come from Greece. Greek divinities were identified with Roman and the names of the former used for the latter. Later still, Oriental gods were imported from Asia Minor and from other Semitic countries. Over all this mixture great influence was exerted by philosophical doctrines, especially in later years when people had begun to analyze and explain in a rational way the principles held by the various religions.

But now for three centuries Christianity had been in the field and its appearance had been very disturbing. Because of the enormous distance in morality between the pagan Greek or Roman religions and itself, Christianity had little appreciable influence on their natural evolution. To the pagan thinkers who were investigating the religious facts, however, Christianity seemed a very important phenomenon, greater than any in the past and worthy of a large place in their investigation. This did not mean that these thinkers became Christians or were powerless in face of its teaching. On the contrary, their enmity was constantly in evidence and they indulged in polemics, trying to demonstrate what was wanting in this new doctrine, and what good there was in the pagan religions. This very attitude, nevertheless, showed that they recognized implicitly the superiority of Christianity, for such polemics had not been resorted to in the face of other new religions.

25. This reaction to Christianity was not purely religious. In it was the note also of political expediency. All around the Empire crowded the threatening barbarian hordes, awaiting an opportunity to throw down the sacred institution which had been created and had grown up under the protection of traditional gods. Was it not therefore necessary, once and for all, to defend these gods desperately so that Rome could be saved from ruin? On the other hand, although the God Christ had never allowed himself to be allied with any of the usual gods, his followers were constantly growing in numbers despite

the cruelest persecution, until the Christians now represented a more or less high percentage — according to the region — of the population of the Empire. Now, if the twenty or thirty or more millions of Christians living in the Empire at the end of the third century were to return to the worship of the old gods and stop weakening with their new doctrines the religion which had been handed down through the generations, how much more compact would the Empire be in itself and how much stronger would be its resistance against the barbarians! 26. This practical thesis was expounded in full precisely at the end of the third century by the Neoplatonist Porphyry, heir to the teachings of Plotinus, less subtle than he but more pragmatic and particularly interested in Christianity. His fifteen books "against the Christians," little of which is extant, did not pretend to be either a blind denial such as that of the ancient Celsus nor a collection of gratuitous assertions. Rather, he wished his work to be a calm and penetrating discussion of the basic principles of Christianity so as to show up their deficiencies and absurdities. Porphyry was obviously informed on Sacred Scripture and on the various ways in which the Christians interpreted it. He also recognized that Jesus was a most noble figure and that some of his opinions were worthy of being received by all men (this led some ancient writers, without any real proof, to see in Porphyry an apostate Christian). When he passed to criticism, however, he attacked the foundations of Christianity by historical or philosophical arguments.

This writing of Porphyry made a great impression on the Christians and he was answered by numerous writers, who quoted him freely, and thus made up to us, to some extent, for the loss of the actual fifteen books. The pagans were also greatly impressed, though in another way. Porphyry, however, never achieved what he had set out to do — to bring Christians and pagans into one religion which would show a united front against the barbarian menace. With all his philosophical acumen Porphyry failed to realize that such a fusion was absurd and that the new wine would not go into the old bottles. 27. Some restatement of the old pagan religion seemed necessary. When the Christians wanted to attack the current polytheism, it was easy for them to expose its absurdities and contradictions as Tertullian and Minucius Felix had already done. In fact, many of the arguments used by the Christians had been provided for them by earlier pagan philosophers. Because of this and for practical reasons, the whole of



polytheistic teaching was being transformed. Already some fifty years before Diocletian, a kind of hierarchical confederation had unconsciously been made which collected the innumerable deities in one list and put them all under one supreme god. People were asking what all these gods and goddesses, so various and often so contradictory, did really add up to? Were they a great crowd of deities who ruled the universe, each one independent of the other? Or was there perhaps a *quid unum* which was common to all of them? If there was, then maybe they could all be reduced to such an all-embracing supreme principle? Such questions did not really lead to monotheism. Philosophers sought to fit all these deities into a system which was reasonable, compact, and harmonious. They were trying to build a solid pyramid with one apex only.

In this way, all the gods could most certainly remain and in fact there was room for others to be brought in; but all of them must become natural parts of the pyramid, sections of the sloping sides which supported the apex.

28. There were many who received this solution gratefully, and added proof and example from nature itself. It was sufficient to raise the eyes to the sky and to consider the function of the sun in the material world. Did it not animate everything? — Was it not the great giver of light and life? Other founts of life and energy were to be found in nature, but these were all derived from the supreme source of the sun without which everything would fall into inertia, into darkness and death. These lesser sources were subordinate to the highest source and acted as so many mirrors reflecting more or less faithfully the greatest light and did not differ from it substantially.

The same thing was true, they said, in the world of the gods. There were many gods and goddesses, but they were all partial reflections of the highest god Sol and whatever could be predicated of them could in the ultimate analysis also be predicated of Sol.

The Emperor Aurelian had been an enthusiastic supporter of the cult of Sol. The son of a priestess of Sol, he had constructed in Rome, in 274, a sumptuous temple to *Deus Sol dominus imperii Romani*, uniting in this god the different sun gods of the Greeks and the Orientals (Helios, Baal) and placing them in the official Roman pantheon. He himself, as the emperor, was the representative of this god with the title *Deus et Dominus* and was shown on coins in the act of receiving a globe from Sol, to indicate his world-wide rule.

This linking up of the Emperor with the sun-god — often identified or confused with Apollo — went on for a long time; even Diocletian, when he killed Aper, called the god Sol as a witness of his own innocence (par. 2). In doing so he did not deny the Roman gods headed by Jupiter. Jupiter seemed more suited to political affairs and Diocletian himself later chose the name of Jupiter (par. 5), whereas the judicial business of the condemnation of Aper was better suited to Sol, the source of all light. The two gods, in any case, were very much alike and the greatest star in nature corresponded with the greatest god in the Roman pantheon.

29. This syncretic process culminating in the god Sol seemed to many pagan philosophers to be not only natural and spontaneous but even worthy of acceptance by Christianity. Had not the Evangelist called Christ “the true light which enlighteneth every man” (Jn. 1:9) which after all is the work of the Sun? Had not the Messias been called by the Hebrew writings “the sun of justice” (Mal. 4:2; cf. Lk. 1:78)?

There seemed to be, therefore, some common ground on which both Christians and pagans could meet. The Christians could continue to adore their Christ in peace since this god was no more than an emanation of the god Sol and before the latter the pagans were quite willing to prostrate themselves. Jupiter, Apollo, Mars, and all the others in the pagan pantheon could still be venerated since they were only other emanations of the sun-god. The adoration of both Christians and pagans was, in the sum, directed toward one object, the god Sol; both sides, therefore (said the philosophers), were in complete agreement.

30. It is superfluous to say that even if this suggestion seemed quite reasonable to the pagan syncretism of the day, it could not be considered by Christian monotheism for whom Christ was a “jealous” God; the same could be said of the God of the Old Testament (cf. the considerations of St. Augustine in *De Consensu evangel.*, i. 12, 18). Given this intransigent “jealousy” of the God of the Christians toward every pagan divinity, there was nothing left but to watch the two currents flow separately and see which one of the two would dry up first. It was quite impossible that both should continue for long even if the unexpected should occur and there should not be violent shocks for one or the other as there had been in the past. Actually, it was the very nature of things that a steady progress of Christianity should

dry up the founts of paganism and, from the opposite viewpoint, that the continued resistance of paganism should bring about the arrest and death of Christianity. For the present, one could only go on with the existing unstable balance of power.

It was the government of Diocletian, rather than his personal character, which finally upset this balance. During the early years of his rule he had no hostility toward religions which were not Roman and, in fact, regarded them with that ancient Roman tolerance which derived partly from theoretical skepticism and partly from practical prudence. Naturally when political expedience was involved he turned to legal repression. This had happened in the case of the Manichaeans, as we have already seen (par. 16). Christianity raised no political difficulty — or at least it did not seem to, and, in any case, Diocletian knew quite well the result of persecutions of Christians in the past by Septimius Severus, Maximinian, Decius, Valerian, and Aurelian; the persecuted sect, instead of disappearing, had increased in numbers and had given occasion to the aphorism of Tertullian that the blood of the martyrs was the seed of new Christians. This consideration and the desire not to disturb the peace of the Empire was going to have the greatest influence on Diocletian's mind on the eve of the new persecution.

31. Diocletian was a singular man. He was a soldier in upbringing and habit, but was not really inclined to violence and blood. He was courageous in war, but is frequently shown as hesitating and timorous when others were urging him to persecute the Christians. In his superstitious pagan mind he found something mysterious in that paradoxical sect which, struck down by deathblows, raised itself more alive than before and found victory in defeat. Perhaps this Christ was the last and most powerful of the emanations of the sun-god (par. 28) against which any hostility would be useless and even dangerous! Far better to avoid this peril. It would be much more prudent to allow the Christians the same consideration which was given to those who worshiped Jupiter, Mithras, Serapis, and other gods and allow them their freedom. He had found this had worked quite well for eighteen years (cf. Lactantius, *De mortibus persecut.*, 11) so why should he now try something else?

A glance into his court, and indeed into his own family, would show him every motive for not disturbing the Christians but rather for being pleased with them. His wife Prisca and his daughter,

Valeria, were certainly favorably inclined to Christianity and may perhaps have been catechumens (cf. Lactantius, *op. cit.*, 15). In the court, functionaries and officers who were openly Christians had been appointed by Diocletian himself and the most delicate office of chamberlain (*cubicularius*) or "eunuch" in which direct contact with the sacred majesty of the Augustus was allowed, had been held by Christians such as Gorgonius and Peter; the head of these dignitaries, Dorotheus, was a Christian (cf. Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.*, viii, 1, 4; 6, 1-5). Besides this, various Christians had been appointed as governors of provinces and given important posts in the government by Diocletian personally, who had considered their conscience sufficiently to dispense them from the pagan sacrifices which would normally be required from them in their official capacities (cf. Eusebius, *op. cit.*, viii, 1-2). In the imperial city, Nicomedia itself, the Christians were numerous and their principal church was within sight of the imperial palace (cf. Lactantius, *De mortibus persec.*, 12).

Of all this Diocletian was perfectly aware and he gave due weight to facts which would seem to confirm him in his old method of tolerance. But against all this other forces were gradually breaking down his resistance and in time were to turn him into a persecutor of Christianity.

### 3. *The Storm Gathers*

32. In the tetrarchy the authority of Galerius was increasing greatly although he was still only a Caesar. Diocletian's faith in him, shaken by the sad result of his first campaign against the Persians, had been completely restored by his final victory (par. 19), and Galerius had by now become his right-hand man. His marriage with Valeria, Diocletian's daughter, bound the fortunate Caesar even more closely to the omnipotent Augustus and the latter came more and more under his influence and, in the end, saw everything with the eyes of Galerius.

It was precisely in the character of Galerius that all the motives could be found for a persecution of the Christians and for disposing of Diocletian's resistance to this action. The first motive was the Caesar's mentality which had conceived a profound hatred for Christianity under the influence of his mother, the Corybantic priestess. Other motives could be found in the frequent complaints of pagan priests and haruspices whose business had been damaged by the growth of

Christianity. Finally, to all this should be added the open encouragement of pagan polemic writers who, either by natural inclination or with the desire of gain and honor, put their hopes in Galerius. At first, the work of these intellectual auxiliaries had to be oral and private; but when not long afterwards, the persecution broke out, they began to circulate their writings to support and justify the campaign. It seems that among them we shall now find apostate Christians.

33. We have the vague mention of an anonymous pamphleteer who, after the first edict of persecution in 303, published three books against the Christians (cf. Lactantius, *Divin. instit.*, v. 2). In ancient times, students believed that the author was Porphyry (par. 26), but from the little we know this pamphleteer was very much inferior to Porphyry in intellectual and moral stature. His sole intent seems to have been to make money and to attract the attention of those in power. He, therefore, praised the wisdom of those who had decreed the persecution and exalted their virtues in terms of venal adulation. The part of his book devoted to argument seems to have been very small if it existed at all; it certainly contained an exhortation to the Christians to repent for their own sakes and to return to the traditional gods, abandoning the stupidities of a religion which had brought so much trouble to them. Such a writer, it would seem, would make no impression even on pagans.

34. Much more effective was the work of Hierocles. It is not certain that he was an apostate Christian. During the first campaign of Galerius against the Persians, he was governor of Palmyra on the edge of the deserts leading to Persia and, quite possibly, the two met there and exchanged ideas about Christianity. Also, possibly at this time, Hierocles was already collecting material for his later work.

Rejoicing in such protection, it is not surprising to find him promoted later from the governorship of Palmyra to the prefecture of Bithynia which contained Nicomedia, the seat of Diocletian. He succeeded the Prefect Flaccinus who had shown himself very severe against the Christians in the new persecution and probably Hierocles, to prove that he was not inferior to his predecessor, published his work on the occasion of his promotion to office. His book was entitled *A Friendly Discourse on Truth* (directed) to the Christians (*Λόγος φιλαλήθης πρὸς τοὺς χριστιανούς*). The work was not a fierce, death-dealing attack, but an attempt by friendly persuasion to invite Christians to conform to the official beliefs of the Empire. This method had been common

from the time of Porphyry. Considerable knowledge of Christian doctrine is shown in the book which, according to Eusebius (cf. *Contra Hieroclen*, 1), was derived from earlier anti-Christian polemics rather than from the immediate consultation of Christian writings. This had been the method followed a couple of centuries earlier by Flavius Josephus in his *Contra Apionem* in regard to Judaism.

35. The way had largely been prepared for Hierocles in the well-known biography of Apollonius of Tyana written by Philostratus a century earlier. This biography—which was more of a novel—showed that the favorites of the Empress Julia Domna, the wife of Septimius Severus, favored the cult of the god Sol (par. 28). From this work Hierocles took the foundation of his own book, for it presented Apollonius as a kind of Christ, giving him similar qualities and attributes, and crediting him with miracles and discourses like those found in the canonical and apocryphal Gospels. Without difficulty Hierocles followed the same path presenting the two figures as parallel; at the same time he was careful to add to the picture of Christ some points taken from legends which contemporary Judaism had circulated to bring Christ into disrepute.

Hierocles' book was, no doubt, a cause of great alarm for the Christians who, at this very time, were undergoing the worst of the persecution. For its author it was a help in his career, since as a reward for his zeal he was made governor of Egypt (cf. *De Martyribus Palaest.*, v. 3, larger edition). Later, after the persecution was over, Eusebius of Caesarea took on himself the work of confuting him with his *Liber contra Hieroclen, animadversiones in Philostrati de Apollonio Tyanensi commentarios ob institutam cum illo ab Hierocle Christi comparationem adornatae*. As is evident from the title, Eusebius was more interested in Apollonius of Tyana than in Hierocles because he was disturbed by the artificial parallel made between Apollonius and Christ. In later times this distress was shared by other Christian writers who returned to the argument for apologetic reasons.

It was an exaggerated fear, however, and the polemic writings against Apollonius of Tyana had the undesired effect of spreading the fame of a mythical personage with whom the contemporary Neoplatonic philosophers did not bother themselves. After the victory of Christianity, Apollonius was completely forgotten by the pagans and did not come out of his obscurity until many centuries later when he was brought out into the light again at the Renaissance.

36. Encouraged by all these supporters of a persecution of the Christians, Galerius was ready to move to the attack. But against which sector of the enemy should he launch his first blow? It was important to choose a place where the enemy were most vulnerable and where the attacker had the greatest advantage. This sector was, without any doubt, the army.

At this time the Christians were numerous in the Roman armies, especially because the young men from the provinces tried to alleviate their impoverished condition by enrolling (par. 1). For the Christians, however, there was a grave question of conscience. Should a follower of Christ kill his neighbor? Could he swear loyalty to emperors hostile to Christ and use idolatrous and impious expressions in his army oath. This delicate question had been explicitly discussed more than a century before. Christians had been in the Roman armies from the earliest times (cf. Acts. 10:1 sqq.), but they had adopted a working compromise without any deep consideration of the matter. From the few references that we have, it would seem that the great majority of Christians held military service to be licit, while a few were either dubious or condemned it.

In 197, Tertullian with some exaggerated pride stated that Christians had filled all the various posts of the Empire where soldiers were stationed, including the *Castella* and the *Castra Ipsa* (cf. *Apologet.*, xxxvii, 4). Fifteen years later, he had become a Montanist and defended in his book *De Corona Militis* a Christian soldier who had not wished to receive a laurel crown in an investiture ceremony, although this laid him open to disciplinary action and the displeasure of his Christian colleagues. This idea was confirmed a little later in his writing — *De Idololatria* — where Tertullian declared that a Christian was not allowed to enroll as a soldier. The same ideas continued through the third century, and are found in Origen and Lactantius, even appearing in some of the *Acta Martyrum* which are historically accurate. Without doubt, such theories represented the conscience of a notable minority.

This attitude toward military service by Christians can also be connected with certain apocalyptic visions which saw the imminent collapse of the pagan empire; and are to be found in writers such as Commodianus, Arnobius, and Lactantius. Such visions were shared by a considerable minority of Christians.

37. All this was certainly known to Galerius and to those who were persuading him to persecute. They saw that the first attack must be

directed against the Christianity which had crept into the army; thus the untrustworthy and perjured soldiers and the cunning traitors who were forecasting political disaster would be removed. Galerius would be regarded as the defender of the Empire and the patron *pro aris et focis* of the majestic Roman traditions. Action must be prudent and gradual, however, for there had been no recent legislation against the Christians, and in his desire for peace within the Empire the Augustus Diocletian did not approve of laws which would lead to bloodshed. On the other hand, normal military discipline revolved around the pagan religion and this would allow dispersed but general pressure to be applied, as it had been by Maximian in the affairs of the martyrs of Agaunum (par. 7).

There was, therefore, a first period of sporadic persecution of Christian soldiers before the great official persecution of 303. Eusebius refers to this period in two passages. The first (in *Hist. Eccl.*, viii, 1, 7) reads: "when (the Christians) were still holding their meetings . . . persecution began against those brethren who were in the army." In a later passage he says, "One could tell of thousands (of martyrs) who showed admirable zeal for the religion of God of the universe not only from the time of the general persecution but also before this when there was peace; for he (the enemy) did not declare war against all of us at once but attempted to shake first those who were in military stations; he thought that the rest would be conquered more easily if they were put down to begin with. It was given them to see very many (*πλείστον*) soldiers prefer a private life rather than become renegades of the Maker of the Universe" (*op. cit.*, viii, 4, 1-2). In these two passages Galerius is not named as the author of the persecution in the army, but he is definitely named as such in a third passage which some manuscripts give as an appendix to the eighth book of Eusebius' work, and which probably comes from an earlier edition. Even from what Lactantius says of events a little before the general persecution (cf. *De mortibus persecut.*, 10-11), one gathers that it was Galerius who was the instigator of the persecution in the army and that Diocletian surrendered to his insistence only gradually and against his will.

38. The theory put forward by some modern students, that the pretext for the persecution was the refusal by Christians to perform the "adoration" of the Emperor required by court etiquette, has no real foundation (par. 13). This adoration (*προσκύνησις*), whatever may have been its original intention, had become part of a simple court ceremony



which could be interpreted as harmless by the Christian conscience. Indeed, the ceremony continued in the imperial court after Christianity had become the official religion.

The spread of persecution in the army had been connected with two different incidents. According to Lactantius (cf. *De mortibus persecut.*, 10), while Diocletian was in the East he was carrying out sacrifices of animals from whose entrails the haruspices were to foretell the future. Some Christians who were assisting at the sacrifices as court officials made the sign of the cross; the chief of the haruspices, who had been unable to foretell anything from the entrails, attributed this lapse to the presence of profane persons who were not pleasing to the gods. Diocletian became angry and ordered that the officials and everybody else present should immediately sacrifice to the gods under pain of flagellation. Orders were sent also to senior officers of the army that all soldiers should offer sacrifice or be expelled from the army. It seems that the matter ended there, for Lactantius himself adds that Diocletian "offended no further against the divine law and religion." 39. The story of Eusebius is a little different. "When he who was the commander of the soldiers (ὁ στρατοπεδάρχης ὅστις ποτὲ ἦν ἐκεῖνος) began the persecution in the army, he mustered and purged his forces by giving them the choice of obeying and thus keeping their rank or of disobeying and being deprived of it. Very many of them who were soldiers of the kingdom of Christ preferred without delay to confess him clearly rather than have apparent glory and well-being. Of these latter, however, it was rare that one or two should endure not only the loss of rank, but also the punishment of death, for he who directed this action was proceeding slowly and dared to shed the blood only of a few; it seems he feared the numbers of the faithful and did not wish to declare war on them all together" (*Hist. Eccl.*, viii, 4, 3-4).

The stories of Eusebius and Lactantius are not contradictory but complementary. Diocletian's act seems to have been an isolated one unless it was influenced by what Galerius had been doing in the meantime, for the chief Augustus was coming gradually under the influence of his Caesar. No dates are given to their relations by either author. According to the *Chronicle of Eusebius*, the "commander of the soldiers," not named by him in the text we have quoted, was Veturius, the *magister militiae*; but the year differs with the different manuscripts. It is assigned to the "year of Abraham," 2319, and the 270th Olympiad (cf. *Eusebii Chronicon*, Schoene edition, p. 187; *Dic*

*Chronik des Hieronymus*, Helm edition, p. 277) and seems to fit best with the year 301 of our era.

40. The activities of Veturius made few martyrs as Eusebius said and these few may have owed their fate to particular circumstances and not to the new laws which attempted to clear the army of Christians — at least in those divisions under the command of Galerius. Very many, on the other hand, were expelled from the army and lost their social position. Officers were punished by the *gradus deiectio* — reduction to the ranks; private soldiers were given the *ignominiosa missio*, that is, discharge with ignominy, which brought with it the loss of the title of “veteran” and the advantages which went with it; in both cases there came out men who had been cast off by society and economically ruined. Despite all this, as Eusebius says, there were very many (*πλείστοι*) who resisted.

But their number may have been greatly increased if we suppose that the purge of the army carried out by Galerius, and referred to by Eusebius, was quickly imitated in the territories governed by Maximian, the other Augustus. The very character of Maximian, his jealousy of the all-powerful Caesar Galerius, the general dispositions which predominated among the high dignitaries of the court of the first Augustus of Nicomedia, all seem to make it correct to suppose that Maximian also acted against the Christians of his armies if only to put himself in line with what was happening elsewhere. We must, however, confess that this suggestion is supported only by a few historical facts found in the *Acts of the Martyrs*.

41. It is difficult to learn very much about the period immediately preceding the great official persecution from the insufficiently explored *Acts of the Martyrs and Passions* (par. 75 ff.).

Putting aside those Acts which are obviously legendary or else so touched up that it is difficult to find the inner core of truth, there is no doubt about the historicity of the Acts of the conscript Maximilian and of those of the centurian Marcellus and of Cassianus, all three of whom were put to death in Africa — the territory of Maximian. It is to be noted that the first two, Maximilian and Marcellus, were condemned on the plea of military discipline. Julius, Marcian, and Nicander were also soldiers and, perhaps, Polycrates and Valentian and some others who were all killed in the Moesia, that is, in the territories of the Caesar Galerius; the Acts of this last group of martyrs contain good historical material which, nonetheless, must be used with caution since

a secure chronological basis is often lacking. To give an idea of the situation in which these soldier-martyrs found themselves, it will be better to give a summary of the Acts of Maximilian and those of Marcellus and Cassian.

42. Maximilian is a typical case of the conscientious objector. He was not yet a soldier, but since he was the son of a veteran called Fabius Victor he could be called on officially to enlist. At the age of 21 on March 12, 295, he was called up, and together with his father he reported at Theveste in Numidia before the proconsul Cassius Dio. Although he was the son of a soldier, he was of the opinion of the Montanist Tertullian and others (par. 36), who held that it was wrong for a Christian to serve in the army. Either the son disagreed with his father or more probably, the father had changed his opinion after his service was finished. The Proconsul began the interrogation by asking Maximilian his name.

"Why do you ask my name? I cannot be a soldier for I am a Christian."

The Proconsul took no notice and ordered that he should be inspected medically and measured to see if he was suitable as a recruit.

"I cannot be a soldier; I cannot do evil; I am a Christian."

The Proconsul repeated the order to measure him. It was done and an assistant announced — "Five feet and ten inches."

"Mark him," continued the Proconsul. A conscript, when he had been accepted, was stamped on the flesh with a red-hot iron with the initial of the emperor, and a leaden seal carrying the imperial effigy was hung around his neck.

Maximilian only replied, "I cannot be a soldier."

Marveling at his obstinate refusal, the Proconsul became angry.

"Be a soldier, or die."

"I cannot be a soldier. Cut off my head; I cannot be a soldier of this world. I must serve only under my God."

"Who has given you these ideas?"

"My soul and he who has called me."

The Proconsul then turned to the boy's father: "Persuade your son," he ordered. But the father did not want to enter into the matter for, almost certainly, he approved of his son's resolution.

He replied, "He has a mind of his own; he knows what he is doing."

The Proconsul turned once more to the son.

"You must be a soldier and accept the seal" (of the emperor).

"I will not accept it. I already have the seal of Christ, my God."

"I will send you straight to your Christ."

"Do it immediately. It will be my glory."

"Mark him," ordered the Proconsul. The assistants took hold of him but he fought back shouting:

"I will not receive the seal of the world. If you put it around my neck I will break it, for I put no value on it. I am a Christian; I cannot carry a leaden seal at my neck for I already carry the sacred seal of Christ."

The Proconsul continued to insist and urged that many of the soldiers were Christians.

"In the sacred company of our lords Diocletian and Maximian, Constantius and Maximus [i.e., Galerius] there are Christian soldiers and they are not afraid to fight."

"They do what they think is right. As far as I am concerned I am a Christian and cannot do evil."

"Do those who fight in our armies do evil therefore?"

"You know what they do."

Further persuasion and threats of death failed to move the conscript. The Proconsul then had his name canceled on the register and turning to him pronounced sentence:

"Since *indevoto animo* [with disloyal spirit] you have refused military service you will be punished as an example to others."

He then read the sentence from the book — "Maximilian, who has been found guilty of insubordination by not accepting military service, will be punished by the sword."

Maximilian replied, "*Deo gratias.*"

He was taken immediately to the place of execution and when he arrived there turned to the other Christians and said: "My dearest brethren, hasten with all your strength and desire to gain the vision of God and to merit a similar crown." Then smiling, he asked his father to give his new uniform as a conscript to the executioner. He was immediately beheaded. A matron called Pompeiana had the body transported on her own litter to Carthage where it was buried near the tomb of St. Cyprian. His father, Victor, returned home full of joy and thanking God for what had happened.

43. The martyrdom of Marcellus took place in Mauretania Tingitana at the extreme west of Mediterranean Africa. There, in a year which is doubtful but probably around 298, in the city of Tingis (Tangiers)

the birthday of Maximian was being celebrated. It was a good opportunity for bringing the hidden Christians into the open and presenting them with the alternative of adoring the gods or abandoning their military careers; this "screening" of the army had now made it obligatory for all soldiers to take part in the normal pagan functions on such occasions, whereas before little importance had been given to such participation (par. 31). Unlike Maximilian who had not yet been enrolled, Marcellus had been a soldier for many years and had become a centurion in the Trajan legion. (This legion was garrisoned in Egypt but Marcellus had probably been seconded for service in Mauretania.) In the midst of the adoration of the idols and the sacrificial banquets, Marcellus, instead of offering incense in the tripods, flung his belt to the ground before the legionary eagles exclaiming, "I am a soldier of Jesus Christ." He then threw away his staff of vine plant which was the insignia of a centurion declaring: "If to be a soldier means sacrificing to gods and emperors, behold I cast away my staff and belt and do not wish to serve." This was a serious act, both because of Marcellus' rank and because of its public nature. He was conducted to the prefect of the legion, Fortunatus, who put him under arrest and when the festivities were over sent him to Agricolanus, vicar of the prefects of the praetorian guard. The trial was not held until later, for the offense occurred at the beginning of August whereas the interrogation did not take place until October 30.

The trial, presided over by Agricolanus, began with the reading of the details of the offense sent in by Fortunatus.

"This soldier, throwing away his military belt declared himself a Christian and uttered many blasphemies against the gods and against Caesar. . . ."

When the charge had been read, Agricolanus turned to the accused: "Did you say the words reported by the Prefect in his letter?"

"I did."

"You serve as an ordinary centurion?"

"I do."

"What madness was it that made you refuse the military oath and speak in such a way?"

"Among those who fear the Lord there is no madness."

"Did you say all those things which are mentioned in this report?"

"I did."

"Did you throw away your arms?"

"I did. It is not right for a Christian who serves in the army of the Lord Christ to serve also in worldly armies (or troubles)."

The interrogation was thus ended and Agricolanus concluded by saying, "The conduct of Marcellus must be punished according to military law."

The sentence followed. "Marcellus who served as an ordinary centurion publicly refused to take the oath; said that it was foul and has uttered other words full of madness referred to in the report of the Prefect; we order that he be executed by the sword."

44. But this was not all, for the trial had a sequel. The secretary of the tribunal was a certain Cassian who was probably a Christian. The calm, serene replies of the accused disturbed the secretary and when he heard the sentence he was so moved that he flung down his tablet and pencil. He was immediately rebuked by Agricolanus for his action; he replied:

"You have pronounced an unjust sentence."

Marcellus was taken to execution; and as he passed in front of Agricolanus he said to him: "*Deus tibi bene faciat.*" He was martyred on the same day, October 30.

Cassian was put in prison and remained there until December 3 when he was taken before the same Agricolanus, tried and executed.

Cassian was mentioned also by Prudentius (*Peristephanon*, iv, 45), but the story of his martyrdom was probably written later than that of Marcellus and by a different author who noticed the absence of any mention of the secretary in the story of the centurion and wished to remedy this.

45. No lawyer of the times would have regarded the sentences against Maximilian the conscript, Marcellus the centurion, or Cassian the secretary as illegal. A judge who gives sentence does not make the law but applies it. Undoubtedly the military laws under which these judgments were given were of great age. But the legal saying — *Summum ius, summa iniuria* — still had force. The real *iniuria* — the moral offense — had been committed by him who only a little before had made obligatory the participation of all soldiers in idolatrous ceremonies so that Christian soldiers could be discovered and punished. The obligation of such participation, which was quite reasonable in the days of a completely pagan republic, was an immoral stricture when the army was full of Christians, and this immorality was so obvious that enforcement of the obligation had been relaxed (par. 31). The

reimposition of this old custom was a step backward, not forward, in the development of the law, for it took no account of the present situation and attempted a government with the uses and laws of some centuries before. The supreme author of this tragic anachronism was, without doubt, Galerius, the instigator of the persecution. But even he in the last months of his life realized his dreadful mistake and rather tardily attempted to put matters right (pars. 153-155).

#### 4. *The Storm Breaks*

46. Galerius had now begun his persecution, but in his opinion it was going too slowly and the results were not very striking. The screening of the army had led to the expulsion of only some of the Christians, for no purge had been ordered in the territories of Constantius Chlorus, and there was little being done in the other regions. Besides this, those who had been expelled or degraded were generally very good soldiers and the worst effects of this injustice were felt by the Army and, ultimately, the Empire. The persecution must, therefore, dig deeper and put the ax to the root, taking the life from the tree of Christianity so completely that it could never live again.

Diocletian was opposed to doing this and Galerius knew it. The chief Augustus was extremely reluctant to pass laws which would entail wholesale bloodshed, and although he had issued some anti-Christian edicts, their effect was limited to his court and army, and the punishment of death was never envisaged (par. 38). Until Galerius could overcome this reluctance of Diocletian the extermination of Christianity was impossible. It was necessary, therefore, to work on his master, to bypass his authority when possible, and, finally, to persuade him to conquer his foolish sentiments.

On his return from the East, Diocletian passed the winter, 302-303, in his beloved Nicomedia; there Galerius joined him and immediately got to work on him. Their discussion was very secret and it was lengthened by a grim desire to prevail on the one side and a firm resolve not to give in on the other. During these weeks Lactantius was in Nicomedia and he describes what was going on in the following words:

“The rulers deliberated between themselves the whole of the winter and since no audiences were granted whatever, the general opinion

was that some very important imperial matter was being discussed. The old man Diocletian fought back against the hatred (of Christians) in the heart of the other, making clear how great a disaster this disturbance of the world and shedding of blood would be. He insisted that it would be enough to ban this religion for officials in the court and for the Army. He did not manage, however, to break down the obstinacy of that furious man and finally decided to seek further advice from his friends. . . . A few magistrates and soldiers were therefore invited and their opinion asked in their order. Some were filled with hate and urged that the enemies of the gods and of the religion of the State should be destroyed, while others, although they did not share this hate, since they wished to please the Emperor or because they were afraid, advised the general persecution" (*De mortibus persecut.*, 11).

47. Diocletian was still undecided and after this consultation insisted on consulting the oracle of Apollo Didymoeus at Miletus. An haruspeus was sent off and since the god Apollo was aware of the opinion of the all-powerful Galerius, the forthcoming oracle was hostile to the Christians (cf. Lactantius, *op. cit.*; Eusebius, *De Vita Constantini*, 11, 50-51). But even then Diocletian continued with his moderate policy; there was persecution indeed but no blood was shed. Galerius, however, wanted "all those who refused to sacrifice to be burnt alive" (Lactantius, *op. cit.*).

An edict was prepared reflecting the desires of Diocletian and, for the moment, Galerius was satisfied knowing that with this beginning other provisions would be issued more in accordance with his own wishes. The edict affected churches, writings, and the Christian people, but did not contain any penalty of death. Christians, even if they held important posts, were to be stripped of all their privileges and put to the torture. They were forbidden to defend themselves on any charge in the public courts or to make official complaints of injuries, adultery, or theft. If they were slaves, they lost the right of emancipation. The churches were to be demolished and the sacred books burned.

The edict was posted up in Nicomedia on February 24, but its execution began the day before. This was a day of good fortune and it could not be missed — the celebration in honor of the god Terminus who held sway over the boundaries of fields and properties and therefore was a good symbol of the end of Christianity, now shut in by the boundaries of death. Very early in the morning a strong force



of troops with tribunes and officials of the Treasury attacked the church of Nicomedia; they broke down the doors and burst in where "they burned all the books of the scriptures they could find and, ranging over the whole of the building, ravaged and looted everything. Diocletian and Galerius were watching all this from a high window — for the church was in sight of the royal palace — and they discussed whether to set the church on fire or not, but Diocletian feared that so great a fire might spread to other buildings" (Lactantius, *op. cit.*, 12). The praetorian guard came, therefore, and with picks and axes leveled the whole edifice in a few hours.

48. On the following day the edict was published giving legal backing to the events of the day before.

The edict had not been up for long when a Christian pulled it down and tore it in pieces. This was certainly a courageous deed — as Lactantius rightly observes — but it did not even serve to show what Christians thought about the new law for this was already general knowledge. The daring Christian — whose name remains unknown — was arrested and tortured over a slow fire; he was finally burned alive. He bore his sufferings with great courage. The heads of the Christian community, however, did not approve of what he had done. Remembering earlier persecutions, they urged the people to remain calm and either to hide or to seek safety in flight. They realized only too well how foolish and dangerous it would be to meet force with force and they feared that many of their people might not be ready to face the heroic death of a martyr.

A little later a curious thing happened. Part of the imperial palace was destroyed by fire. Eusebius cannot tell us the cause of the fire (cf. *Hist. Eccl.*, viii, 6, 6); Constantine speaks of a "thunderbolt" and "heavenly fire" (*Ad sanctorum coetum*, 25); Lactantius has no hesitation in accusing Galerius of ordering his men to start the fire so that the Christians could be blamed for it (cf. *De mortibus persecut.*, 14). If the usual judicial rule — that the unknown author of a crime must have some motive for his act (*is fecit cui prodest*) — is valid in this case, then Galerius cannot be exonerated. Whatever may have been the truth of the affair, he certainly made the best of it and accused the Christians of plotting with the palace servants to start the fire. The old Augustus was terror-stricken and accepted the explanation of his Caesar; he ordered a strict inquiry to be instituted with free use of rack and fire. Diocletian himself examined and gave judgment from

the tribunal and ordered the same to be done by other magistrates. Nevertheless, "nothing was discovered for none of the servants of the Caesar were condemned (to the torture)" (cf. Lactantius, *ibid.*). These servants of Galerius probably knew quite a lot and were in danger of betraying their master if they were tortured; quite prudently, therefore, they were exempted from this.

Another very providential happening saved this inquiry from petering out; the imperial palace was on fire once more and, as before, no cause could be determined. Galerius, who meanwhile "had not ceased to inflame the madness of the unthinking old man [Diocletian]" (*ibid.*), made a great show of how frightened he himself was and, although it was the middle of winter, left the same day to find somewhere where he would be safe. This had the double advantage of making a vigorous impression on Diocletian and giving Galerius a perfectly reasonable excuse to remove his personal servants whose tongues might have wagged — especially under torture.

49. This time the plans of Galerius succeeded. Left alone in his palace, Diocletian was filled with terror and eyed everyone with the utmost suspicion. Wherever he went he saw plots and intrigue and everyone around him was viewed as a possible traitor. To defend himself, he fell back on cruelty and torture. His wife Prisca and Valeria his daughter, who were at least sympathetic toward the Christians (par. 31), were the first to be faced with the grim alternative of either sacrificing to the gods or dying; they chose the first and lived.

No surrender was given by Dorotheus and Gorgonius (par. 31), and they were executed. Peter, the trusted chamberlain, died a terrible death. It is described by Eusebius: "Since he had refused [to sacrifice] he was hung up naked and whipped on all parts of his body so that he might consent even though such surrender was against his will. The executioners were unable to shake his constancy and they then poured salt and vinegar over his torn body in many parts of which the bones were now protruding. Peter was still immovable in his decision and so they dragged a cooking stove under him and began to roast what was left of his body over a slow fire. They did this so that the torture would be even more prolonged and thus a chance given him to surrender. To enhance their chances still further, they roasted only a small part of him at a time giving him plenty of time to consider his position. Those who were torturing him were ordered to continue until he surrendered. He conquered these dreadful torments

however and gave up his spirit without once being shaken in his fortitude. Such was the death of one of the imperial servants. He was indeed worthy of his name — Peter” (*Hist. Eccl.*, viii, 6, 2-4).

50. Once the cataracts were opened, the flood of persecution poured through the city and its territories. One of the first to suffer was Anthimus, Bishop of Nicomedia, who was beheaded (*ibid.*, viii, 6, 6). A great part of his flock followed the pastor; here also we can listen to contemporary testimony: “Priests and ministers were arrested and without any crime or confession were condemned and taken with all their families to execution. People of both sexes and of all ages were cast into fire; not one at a time but whole groups of them were bound together and burned; slaves were flung into the sea with a great stone tied to their necks. The persecution raged with no less violence over the other citizens. The magistrates were positioned in the various temples and everyone was forced to offer sacrifice. The prisons were full to overflowing while new kinds of torture were an hourly invention. Lest justice should be inadvertently administered to a Christian, altars were put up in the law courts and before the tribunals so that the participants in trials could offer sacrifice before their causes were discussed” (Lactantius, *De mortibus persecut.*, 15).

Those who had been executed were not forgotten by the law. By Roman law even criminals were allowed to be buried in tombs, but since in this case such burial places might become objects of veneration for their coreligionists, even the bodies of the high officials of the court who had recently been executed and buried, were exhumed and flung into the sea (cf. Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.*, viii, 6, 7).

51. Diocletian did not confine his precautions to his own territories and those of his Caesar Galerius but sent letters to the other Augustus, Maximinian, and his Caesar, Constantius, ordering them to follow his example. Maximinian had already begun to persecute on his own authority (par. 40) and now merely intensified his drive against the Christians. Constantius, however, was a mild man and not given to pagan fanaticism (par. 11), and so under his rule affairs were quite different. He read the letters of Diocletian with the air of a junior officer receiving unpleasant orders from his colonel; he could not very well disobey openly but found means to avoid imposing the worst strictures. As Lactantius says: “Constantius did not wish to seem to be opposed to the orders of his superior and so allowed buildings to be destroyed which could be built again but did not destroy Chris-

tians who were the true temples of God" (*De mortibus persecut.*, 15).

Eusebius goes further than this and denies that Constantius pulled down churches (cf. *Hist. Eccl.*, viii, 13, 13; cf. Appendix 4), but here the imperial historian shows himself overkind or less informed for it seems that martyrs were not lacking even in Gaul; violence toward Christians and their churches, however, was probably isolated and sporadic arising from the enthusiasm of local governors, whom Constantius for the sake of good relations with his Augustus, would have notified of the edict of Nicomedia without pressing for its execution. It is fairly certain that no official searches for the Sacred Scriptures were made and no copies were destroyed.

52. The persecution, in full swing, was indirectly influenced by certain political events. Eusebius says rather briefly that very soon after the beginning of the persecution in Nicomedia, two attempts were made to usurp the imperial power, one in the region called Melitene, in Cappadocia, and the other in Syria (cf. *Hist. Eccl.*, viii, 6, 8).

The Melitene mentioned by Eusebius is Armenia Minor which stretched to the east of Cappadocia. No other contemporary writer speaks of a revolution there during this period. The revolt in Syria was led by Eugenius, a tribune who was in command of the soldiers working on the port of Seleucia. They were exhausted with their labors and urged Eugenius to take on the purple and proclaim himself emperor; a threat of instant death was needed before Eugenius agreed. His empire did not last very long. When he had taken rather unwilling residence in the imperial palace of Antioch, the people of the town, who did not approve of mutiny, rose up against him and his small bodyguard and killed them.

We have no ground for supposing that the revolt in Syria — much less so than that in Melitene — arose from the exasperation of Christians with the persecution. The quick and harsh reaction of Diocletian, in which all the magistrates of Antioch and Seleucia lost their heads, shows that the Emperor made no distinction of religion, for most of the victims were pagans. Diocletian, however, who was still suffering from fright after the double arson in the palace of Nicomedia, soon saw the hand of the Christians in these new troubles and decided to intensify the persecution.

In that same year, 303, two new edicts were published at Nicomedia, which brought fresh troubles on the Christians. The first ordered that all heads of churches should be imprisoned; the second allowed them

their freedom if they would sacrifice to the gods and commanded that all kinds of tortures should be inflicted on those who refused (Eusebius, *op. cit.*, viii, 6, 8–10).

These new edicts did not simply remain on the statute book but were rigorously applied. Eusebius, speaking about territories he knew well — Nicomedia, Syria, Phoenicia, and Egypt — said: “Everywhere numberless people were imprisoned; jails which had been built for murderers and violators of tombs were now so full of bishops, priests, deacons, lectors and exorcists that there was no longer room for common criminals. . . . No one can say how many suffered martyrdom in the various provinces. The persecution was especially severe in Africa and Mauretania, in the Thebaid and in Egypt. From this last place some moved on to other cities and became famous in their death” (*ibid.*, viii, 6, 9–10).

53. If we are to be impartial, however, we must not just describe the highlights. There were thousands of heroes. There were also many weakhearted renegades.

Eusebius spoke of this only in passing, since his object was not to tell everything in detail but to show the splendors of Christianity without the miseries of the Christians. “We have decided not to mention those who failed the test of persecution nor those who made a total shipwreck of their salvation and of their own will were buried in the depth of the abyss” (*ibid.*, viii, 2, 3).

Speaking of the heads of churches — that is the bishops — Eusebius says that very many (*πλείστοι*) conducted themselves heroically but that a large number of the others (*μυρίοι δ’ ἄλλοι*), weakened by the spirit of sloth, surrendered at the first difficulty (cf. *ibid.*, viii, 3–1).

These defections were to be expected psychologically and are not unexpected historically when their causes are inspected more fully; many Oriental Christian communities were in a sad condition of decadence. This also is noted briefly by Eusebius:

“As always happens when there is abundance of liberty our lives became indolent and careless; we envied one another and did harm to our brethren; any wretched excuse was sufficient to start a war of arms — as it were — with the spearthrust of words; leaders poured ill fame on other leaders; nation rose against nation; pretence and damned hypocrisy seemed to reach the limit of their evil height. . . . Like senseless people we did not trouble to make our God propitious and benevolent toward us but like certain atheists who consider that human

affairs are neither guided nor watched over (by God) we piled wickedness on wickedness. Those who were supposed to be our pastors disdained the paths of divine piety and inflamed their hearts in contests one with another, only adding thus to the quarrels and threats, the rivalry, the envies and hates of the times. They filled their time in striving for position in no different a manner from the princes of this world" (*ibid.*, viii, 1, 7-8).

Eusebius refers elsewhere to the bad behavior of the bishops but in a rather vague way and thereby he annoys his modern reader. He says, for example, that certain pastors of souls having neglected their spiritual flocks were given by the justice of God to feed the camels and keep the horses of the imperial posthouses (cf. *De martyrib. Palaest.*, xii). From what one can gather from such sibylline words it seems that there were bishops who had been unworthy of their position before the persecution and who had fallen when it broke out; in this way they saved their necks but were despised by their judges as worthless renegades and were given the wretched jobs of camel-keepers, ostlers, and the like. Eusebius in the same place makes other references to various abuses which happened before and during the persecution — illegitimate ordinations, schisms, arbitrary innovations, and so on — but once more he restricts himself to the narration of worthy deeds and refuses to expose the full nakedness of such shame.

54. Clearly, these disorders in the churches and the negligence of their pastors were really graver than would appear from the reluctant admission of Eusebius. For once further information can be obtained from the disciplinary canons decreed by the council held at Elvira (Elliberis) near Granada in Spain about the year 300 just before the persecution began. We can discover quite a deal about the abuses current in the churches by the remedies proposed by this council for the Iberian peninsula.

Turning over the pages of the decrees we find that bishops, priests, and deacons are forbidden to leave their residences for the sake of commerce or to frequent public markets; clerics must not practice usury; no women must live in the houses of bishops or clerics except for a sister or a daughter who must be virgins consecrated to the Lord; idolatrous worship may not be offered by the baptized faithful; Christians are not allowed to place money *ad aleam id est tabulam*, that is, on games of chance; the Christian woman who has separated from her husband because of his adultery may not marry another;

the wife who in the absence of her husband has conceived in adultery and then committed infanticide is to be punished very severely for her double crime; young Christians guilty of fornication must do adequate penance before they marry; the daughters of Christians must not be given in marriage to pagan priests.

This list could be continued but what we have mentioned is sufficient to show how far from the Christian ideal both bishops and people had fallen. The cause of this cannot be other than the long peace which had been enjoyed by Christianity — the same easy circumstances which, according to Eusebius, had been the reason for slackness in the East. True, the canons of Elvira were intended to meet a situation in the extreme West, but in view of the information given us by Eusebius about the East, the difference between the two regions was probably very small. In fact, the West was probably in better heart, for the Spanish provisions seemed to be aiming for a severity which could not even be hoped for in the East.

We cannot be surprised, therefore, that under these conditions the number of waverers and apostates was large when a cruel persecution suddenly overwhelmed them.

55. The third edict of 303 was not the last. This dreadful year for the Christians was drawing to a close when on September 17 Diocletian entered on the twentieth year of his rule. To last for twenty years as emperor was an extraordinary achievement in those times when everyone could remember the dreadful years of the "thirty tyrants" (par. 1), and it was decided to mark the day with special celebrations — that is, by the "vicennials." Diocletian decided to combine these festivities with his own triumph and that of his colleague Maximian and further decreed that all this should take place at Rome. Some years before this, the Senate had traveled to Milan to pay their respects to Diocletian and to invite him to conduct his triumph in their city, but nothing had come of this for the chief Augustus had always disliked the city of the seven hills. Now he seems to have overcome his feelings and the solemn celebration was held on November 20 (cf. Lactantius, *De mortibus persecut.*, 17).

The military procession to the capitol was very impressive. Great enthusiasm was evoked by the trophies of Diocletian's victorious campaigns in all parts of the Empire; from Persia to Africa; from Egypt to the Rhine; from the Rhine to Britain. There were representations of territories and cities conquered by the armies of the two Augusti,

and hard on these came important citizens of those countries now in the chains of slavery or else typical representatives of the races of different lands. Veterans of the principal campaigns marched on both sides of the procession which was closed by the two Augusti themselves clothed in purple and flashing their jewels in the clear Roman air. To the spectators they seemed like two divinities on a visit from Mount Olympus.

One of the two divinities was tired and unhappy. Diocletian was visibly out of sorts.

The inevitable games in the circus followed, presided over by Diocletian, but the Roman people did not think them as sumptuous as usual; the chief Augustus was indeed saving money. This economy did not please them since it was a tradition that no money should be spared in the entertainments of the circus, and their discontent was soon communicated to Diocletian who became more depressed than ever and soon found living in Rome unbearable. Probably because of his indifferent health, his depression began to show symptoms of madness and though only thirteen days lacked to his formal acceptance of the ninth consulate, on January 1, 304, he left without warning for Ravenna, although by now it was the depth of winter and very cold and wet (Lactantius, *op. cit.*, 17). Although he made most of the journey in a litter, his health deteriorated and he contracted an incurable — but not serious — disease. In Ravenna he accepted his ninth consulate and then began his travels again. Very slowly, with many halts, he came down the coast of Dalmatia and at the end of the following summer he arrived at Nicomedia where he finally fell gravely ill.

56. Very solemn celebrations such as the vicennials usually included a general amnesty and according to the testimony of Eusebius (*De Martyrib. Palaest*, ii, 4) liberty was given on this occasion also "to all captives everywhere." The literal meaning of these words would mean that even the Christians who had been imprisoned for their faith were released. It may be, however, that Eusebius means that mercy was shown to prisoners who had been found guilty of common crimes and not to the Christians who in the eyes of the law were traitors who undermined the authority of the State — delinquents not yet sentenced and still perpetrating their crime. As it is, Eusebius mentions the amnesty and then immediately continues with a description of the imprisonment and martyrdom of the deacon Romanus.



Hence, even if the amnesty was applied to the Christians, it is certain that it did not last very long and the persecution was resumed with more ferocity than before.

Behind all this was Galerius, who had really begun the persecution in the first place. From the time of his departure from Ravenna, Diocletian had had little to do with the government of the empire because of his bad health and the length of his time on the road. For this reason, the direction of affairs passed into the hands of his Caesar Galerius, who needed no prompting to attempt to increase his own powers in the tetrarchy and the evidences of his hate for the Christians. The ferocious Caesar now became the most important ruler of the Empire *de facto* and it was not to be long before this post was his *de iure*.

His hand can be seen in the new edict of persecution issued in the spring of 304 for it was the expression of what he had obviously long wanted to do. This edict was even more severe than those of the year before and seemed to draw its inspiration from the bloody decrees of Decius. While the earlier edicts had dealt only with certain categories of persons, this law of 304 was directed against all Christians without distinction. Any Christian, whatever his age, sex, or position, was now obliged to offer sacrifice to the gods. The infamous sect of the Christians which threatened the Empire and despised the gods must now be seen no more and die; in the whole of the Roman Empire there was to be no person who had not sacrificed to its gods.

The execution of the edict began immediately in all the provinces of the Empire except in those ruled by Constantius where, as before (par. 51), little or no attention was paid to the now fashionable terror and bloodshed. While the Empire was busy killing its own citizens with Galerius as butcher-in-chief, the latter did not forget his personal aspirations. He had destined himself to be the first among the dynasts of the tetrarchy.

## 5. *Changes in the Tetrarchy*

57. When Diocletian finally got to Nicomedia he was only a shadow of his real self; he was sick in body and in mind. During the autumn he grew worse. In December he was carried to the inauguration of the grandiose circus which he had built to add to the beauties of the

city, but the ceremonial of the formal opening was too much for him and he was taken back to his palace a dying man. News went around that he was actually dead and, despite frequent official denials, many believed that the news was being kept back to avoid trouble in the army and to allow Galerius time to get to Nicomedia whither he had been called. Suspicions did not finally clear until the beginning of March, 305, when the old Augustus once more appeared in public. He had been so changed by the year of sickness that he was recognized with difficulty. Diocletian was still a very sick man. Lactantius says that he was "so weak that at times he was really insane, and at other times was master of his senses" (*De mortibus persecut.*, 17).

A man in such a condition would not put up much of a fight against his eager Caesar whose only interest in his master was the way in which he could take his place. Galerius paid him a visit and, having congratulated him on his recovery, began to lead the conversation toward a possible abdication. Here again Lactantius (*op. cit.*, 18) gives us some interesting details. Galerius apparently had already informed the other Augustus, Maximian, that in the event of Diocletian's abdication he would be expected to do the same, adding that Maximian would probably prefer this to civil war. He spoke gently to Diocletian pointing out that he was getting on in years, had lost his physical powers, and was really incapable of keeping the reins of government in his own hands; he ended his talk with a suggestion that the Augustus could do with a well-merited rest.

The Augustus objected that to put away his high dignity would not only be indecorous, but also dangerous since after so long a rule there were many who hated him and would seek their revenge. In an attempt to conciliate the ambition of his Caesar, he showed himself willing to concede the title of Augustus to him and, therefore, also to Constantius, the other Caesar. But Galerius was not simply looking for titles and insisted that the distinction between Augusti and Caesars should be retained according to the system which had already been set up. He added that whereas two people could usually manage to agree, this would become impossible if there were four dynasts with equal powers. The old Augustus was not to be persuaded in this way and so Galerius changed tactics and began to threaten; he would soon find a way of not remaining the least important of all despite his having spent fifteen years fighting the barbarians in Illyria and along the Danube while others were governing rich and tranquil territories

at their ease. Diocletian was horrified at such threats, especially as they confirmed letters he had received recently from Maximian, telling him that Galerius was building up his army with the intention of forcing the abdication of the two Augusti. The old man was weak and wandering; he burst into tears and agreed to everything.

58. Arrangements for the take-over of power were made with every secrecy. Diocletian and Maximian were to abdicate at the same time and their places — according to the constitutional rules of the tetrarchy (par. 12) — would be taken by their respective Caesars, Galerius and Constantius. But when it came to choosing the new Caesars, Galerius already had candidates for both places. By the rules, the office of Caesar should have been given to Maxentius, the son of Maximian and son-in-law of Galerius, and to Constantine, the son of Constantius; but for different reasons neither of these young men was acceptable to Galerius who wanted members of his own gang for Caesars. He, therefore, forced through the nomination of Severus, a general who was much attached to him and even more to wine and debauchery; and of his own nephew, a certain Daia or Daza, a great beast of a barbarian who had lately begun calling himself Maximin so as to have something Roman about him. Severus was to be the Caesar of Constantius, and Maximin Daia, that of Galerius. Diocletian was horrified at these nominations and complained to Galerius: "You have not proposed men worthy of governing the state." Galerius reassured him: "I know them better than you do." Diocletian's eyes filled with tears and he replied, "You will soon know more when you have taken supreme power. I have labored long and done all I could to keep the Empire together during my office. If things go wrong now, the fault will be all yours."

These words were a kind of prophecy. The old Augustus, at the point of relinquishing the power which later he was to refuse to take on again, feared for the stability of the building he had erected with such loving care. Despite his mistakes — and the greatest of those was that he had been persuaded against his will to persecute the Christians — Diocletian had restored the Empire to its old unity with a loyal and sincere heart; now the whole edifice was rocking on its foundations and he was fearful of the future. What was to happen shows that this was no empty fear, even though things could not have turned out any other way, for his construction lacked a really solid foundation and would have stayed up only in the very unlikely case

that all the subjects of the Empire were as loyal and sincere as Diocletian himself.

59. The change-over took place at the beginning of May, until which time the affair remained secret. Very much against his will, Maximian abdicated in Milan and Constantius became the new Augustus of the West. The abdication of Diocletian took place on the same day with a certain solemnity on a little hill three miles from the city of Nicomedia; on this same hill nineteen years before Maximian had received the purple from the hands of Diocletian (par. 5). Among the soldiers and their officers present at the ceremony was Constantine (par. 11), the son of Constantius, who resided in the court of the chief Augustus as a kind of hostage. This pleased the troops, who liked him for his bravery and nobility of manner. He was also appreciated by Diocletian who had elected him a tribune of the first order.

The old Augustus spoke briefly with tears in his eyes to the soldiers and announced that since he felt old and weary, he was now passing the burden of the Empire to stronger shoulders and that he would also elect new Caesars; the latter statement caused great excitement along the lines of troops and everybody looked at Constantine, expecting that he would be chosen as the Caesar of his father. To the general amazement, Severus and Daia were named as the new Caesars. Galerius moved smartly forward, bringing Daia with him and, in the sight of all, removed the garment of a private citizen from his Caesar's shoulders. In his turn, Diocletian took off his purple robe, threw it over the shoulders of Daia and, now as a common citizen, drove off in his coach to Salona, the town of his boyhood (305). There he built a magnificent villa and having cultivated the affairs of the Empire with loving care, now in his retirement, he transferred this care to growing cabbages.

Galerius had won, and to all intents and purposes he was now the master of the Empire. The new Caesars were his own men and the other Augustus, Constantius, did not give him much cause for worry for he lived a long way away in Britain and, in any case, had no grand ambitions. Constantius was in poor health and the kind fates would soon be at work with the shears, so that Galerius could put one of his own gang in his place.

60. Things did not work out quite so smoothly as Galerius had expected, for neither Constantine, the son of Constantius, nor

Maxentius, the son of Maximian, were particularly satisfied by the new arrangements which excluded them so completely.

After a little while, the illness of Constantius suddenly grew worse and he wrote to Galerius asking him to send Constantine to Britain so that he could see him for the last time. This put Galerius in a difficult position for he not only regarded the young man as a valuable hostage but saw in him the possibility of a dangerous rival. He had indeed tried on various occasions to dispose of him. Lactantius tells us (cf. *De mortibus persecut.*, 24) that with the excuse of providing exercise and diversion, Galerius had urged Constantine to pit himself against wild beasts in the public circus; and other historians speak of the singular feats of bravery and endurance performed by Constantine in military campaigns. There can be no doubt that Galerius would have liked to see the last of his young guest provided he did not go to live with his father. He therefore resorted to various stratagems to prevent his departure but a rapid turn for the worse in Constantius — and perhaps a certain sagacity in Constantine — made it impossible for Galerius to stop him. In a very short time Constantine was at his father's bedside (Lactantius, *ibid.*).

On July 25, 306, Constantius died at Eboracum (York). He left his wife, Theodora (par. 11), and, besides Constantine, six other children, three girls and three boys; the last, Julius Constantius, Dalmatius, and Hannibalianus, were still children. On his deathbed Constantius recommended his eldest son to the army where the gifted young man already enjoyed cordial sympathy. When the matter of succession arose, Constantine did not show himself eager but played the careful diplomat. He called a council of high-ranking officers to sound their opinions. They urged him to take on the purple left by his father and though this undoubtedly fitted in well with what he himself wanted, it would not have been legal, for by the rule of succession established by the tetrarchy, the Caesar should succeed the Augustus and Severus was the Caesar. Constantine put these difficulties to the meeting and sent the officers home without making any decision.

On the day of the funeral the dead father and living son were associated in the acclamations of the people, especially as the latter saw the features of the father in the son and were in admiration of his broader muscles. The soldiers, almost it seemed in obedience to some secret order, acclaimed him vigorously, the German auxiliaries

under the command of Crocus shouted themselves hoarse; in the midst of all the shouting and huzzas, the bereaved son followed his father's coffin apparently thinking of nothing else. After the funeral he had to give in to the wishes of all, if only not to run the risk of being killed by the soldiers, as had happened before in the case of reluctant nominees (par. 52). Constantine now could maintain that he had been elected against his will and had accepted only to avoid disturbance and sedition. The army gave him the title of Augustus.

As a matter of practical wisdom, Constantine sent Galerius his effigy crowned with a laurel wreath to inform him of his election and to seek his recognition as an Augustus.

Galerius' first impulse was to burn the statue with its wreath and bearers, but he could not help noticing that his soldiers were already very discontented at the election of the two Caesars, Severus and Maximin Daia, and that they would be quite likely to side with Constantine in the event of war. So he was forced to disguise his anger and to content himself with the appointment of Severus as Augustus with Constantine as his Caesar. Constantine showed himself very diplomatic once more; he was not bothered over mere names. The question of what he should call himself could be settled at a more suitable time.

61. Like Constantine, Maxentius had been forgotten and he was very anxious to put this right when he saw that Constantine had got substantially what he wanted. A magnificent opportunity was put in his way by new and very severe fiscal provisions made by Galerius to fill the empty coffers of the Empire. Until now Rome had been exempted from such taxation but the new provisions applied to the whole of the Empire and were enforced rigidly and without exception. When the news got around that agents of the imperial treasury were on their way to Rome to make a census, the people of the city became angry and restive.

This was Maxentius' opportunity — he could put himself forward as the protector of the people and they would all support him. He won over Lucianus who supervised the distribution of victuals in the city and arranged a conspiracy for his own advancement, among members of the praetorian guard. In the streets the people began the riot and Abellius, the underprefect of the praetorians who was faithful to Severus, put up what resistance he could. He was murdered by some of his own men who were in the plot with Maxentius, and with the support of the rest of the praetorian guard Maxentius was pro-

claimed emperor immediately on October 27, 306. He quickly made it clear that so far as he was concerned the tetrarchy ceased to exist. The Roman Senate, which had allowed nominations of Augusti and Caesars to pass over its sleepy head, suddenly came to life once more and confirmed the proclamation of Maxentius with rather dusty pomp.

The assent of the Conscript Fathers was little help to Maxentius, if he could not offer some legal front to the tetrarchy. He decided to turn to his father Maximian who, after his unwilling abdication, had retired to a sumptuous villa of Lucania. There had been grave quarrels between father and son but in the present situation they could help each other; they both wanted power, and if they stood together one or other of them would get it. The son offered the purple officially to his father, and Maximian grasped at it, calling himself *bis Augustus* (Augustus for the second time). This intervention of Diocletian's old colleague was very valuable not only because by it Maxentius acknowledged the existence of the tetrarchy once more but also because Maximian still enjoyed great authority among the veterans. This influence was soon found useful.

62. Severus had been sent off with all speed by Galerius and he advanced on Rome by forced marches with an army formed mainly of Maximian's veterans. His object was to dispose of the usurper Maxentius and occupy Rome. The outcome was laughable. When the army reached the walls of the city, all the veterans deserted and joined the defenders — some out of respect for Maximian; and others out of love for the gold Maxentius had paid them. None would fight against their old leader and his bribe-dispensing son. Severus was left with only a few soldiers and he hurried off to shut himself up in Ravenna. Even there things went badly for him; by means of secret agents Maximian got him to believe that what soldiers he had left were plotting to betray him and hand him over to his enemies, and that he had better forestall them and give himself up on his own accord. This Severus finally did and was at first treated well by Maximian; when it became evident, however, that Galerius was going to take a personal hand in the affair, Severus committed suicide in February, 307. Thus departed one of the two official Augusti of the tetrarchy.

Galerius, the remaining Augustus, was furious at the turn events had taken and with a strong force of Illyrian troops moved off to finish the affair once and for all in person, to punish the traitors and

save the threatened tetrarchy. The outcome of the campaign was as laughable as that of Severus. Galerius advanced into Italy avoiding strong points to save time and men and got as far as Terni before realizing that he had walked into a trap. The lands he had passed through were hostile and his lines of communication with bases in the East were almost nonexistent. Besides this, his Illyrian troops were deserting in greater numbers the nearer they approached the cause of their desertion — Maxentius' money. Galerius tried to treat with the enemy, but his message was dismissed in contempt. His soldiers began to desert in companies; he lost his nerve and, to avoid Severus' fate, began to retreat. During this retreat he allowed every excess to his men, both to retain their loyalty and to leave no supplies for a pursuing army. "That part of Italy where this wicked army passed was completely ruined. They stole everything, seduced the women and violated young girls; they forced fathers and husbands to hand over their daughters and wives and their property. Like the barbarians, they drove before them flocks and herds as booty." Such is the description of Lactantius (cf. *De mortibus*, 27).

63. Meanwhile, Maximian was looking to his own affairs. He had never really trusted his son and he paid a visit to Constantine in Gaul on the pretext of giving him his daughter Fausta in marriage. While there he signed an alliance with his proposed son-in-law. In his own territories Constantine was bent on strengthening his position. Along the Rhine he had beaten back the Franks and the Alemanni and to celebrate the victory he held for several days the so-called "Frankish Games" where the principal spectacle was a meal made by wild beasts in the public circus of hundreds of gladiators who had been forcibly enrolled from barbarian prisoners. He kept a watchful neutrality in relation to the various dynasts of the tetrarchy. The Augusti, the Caesars, and the usurpers were fighting among themselves, making themselves weaker and Constantine relatively stronger.

Keeping in mind both this and the political authority still enjoyed by the onetime colleague of Diocletian, Constantine agreed to the treaty Maximian offered him. In order to marry Fausta, Constantine had to abandon a certain Minervina, the mother of his eldest son, Crispus. The marriage was celebrated with great solemnity and, after signing the treaty, the bridegroom received from his father-in-law the title of Augustus which had been denied him by Galerius (par. 60). Everything was now in legal order, for this nomination was from the



man who had been Augustus when Galerius was only a Caesar. After this satisfactory settlement of affairs for both sides, Maximian returned to Rome.

Feeling that he was now in a stronger position he began to undermine, as far as he could, the authority of his son Maxentius. The old antipathy between father and son, forgotten for a time in the rush of events, now showed itself once more and increased daily. Jealousy hastened its growth, for both army and people preferred the son. Although he was dissolute in his habits Maxentius had labored hard to give Rome back some of her ancient glory. Without persecuting the Christians he reinstated some of the ancient local cults of paganism, restored buildings in the Forum and along the Via Sacra, and by the side of this famous road constructed the basilica whose remains are still admired (and serve excellently as a stage for symphonic concerts). Maximian was greatly angered by the popularity of his son and finally, at a public audience, he came to blows with him and tore off his purple garment. Maxentius managed to get away with the help of his faithful soldiers whose services he had retained by all kinds of bribery. The army were making plans to revenge the insult, when Maximian, seeing his danger, fled from Rome. Since Maxentius was now free of his father and since the Augustus Severus had conveniently died, he proclaimed himself Augustus on the anniversary of his nomination by the soldiers on October 27, 307.

64. With the increase in numbers of dynasts in the tetarchy, confusion also increased. Hardly two years had passed since the abdication of Diocletian and there were already four Augusti — Galerius, Maximian, Constantine, Maxentius — and one Caesar (Maximin) all more or less hostile to one another. It became clear that it was Diocletian who had held the tetrarchy together and instinctively, like bewildered orphans, some of the dynasts called on him to act as father once more. A meeting was held at Carnuntum in Pannonia attended by Galerius, Maximian, and Diocletian.

Diocletian had been won over by the persistent pleas of Galerius and had agreed for the present to leave his retreat at Salona. But he would have nothing to do with the suggestion that he should take on his old post as Augustus to re-establish the tetrarchy in its old strength. He advised, however, that an intimate friend of Galerius, called Licinius, should be made Augustus in place of the dead Severus, and that Constantine and Maximin should be given the title of "Sons

of Augusti." Maxentius as a rebel and usurper was left out altogether. Maximian had to give up the purple and as a small compensation was designated consul for the following year. With these decisions the meeting of Carnuntum closed on November 11, 308. As a result of these arrangements there was now another Augustus, Licinius, who ruled over Pannonia and nominally over Italy (this country was really dominated by Maxentius) but pretensions and rivalries were as plentiful as before.

Maxentius, who had been ignored at Carnuntum, also had his troubles. Rome depended on Africa for its supplies and now rebellion broke out there under a Phrygian general called Alexander; he proclaimed himself emperor and offered stout resistance to Maxentius (par. 156).

65. The restless Maximian was hardly content with second place and soon began to look for ways in which he could restore himself to his original position as Augustus. Quite naturally he turned to treachery. While he was thinking out ways and means he returned to Constantine, his son-in-law, by whom he was treated with respect and trust.

Constantine had to leave for the northeastern frontiers to hold off an invasion of the Franks; while he was away, Maximian attempted, by means of gifts paid for out of the imperial treasury, to win over the soldiers who had been left as a garrison. He was not very successful for the army was very devoted to Constantine and did not believe Maximian's rumors of Constantine's defeat on the borders. Constantine soon heard of this treachery, and breaking off his campaign returned with all his army before Maximian was ready for him. The latter, taken aback by the speed of Constantine's return, retired hurriedly to Arelate (Arles). Constantine was not satisfied and hurried on to Cabillonum (Châlons-sur-Saône) where he had already arranged transport for his army down the Saône and Rhone, and thus arrived before Arelate. Maximian equaled Constantine's speed by the haste in which he left Arelate and shut himself up in Massilia (Marseilles). Constantine soon arrived there too but found that he had to fall back on a siege of the town, for his army had no means of scaling the powerful walls.

Constantine now decided that in the absence of ladders he would scale the walls by psychology. The soldiers serving under Maximian were really in favor of Constantine and the latter spoke frequently with the men on the walls pointing out the foolishness and injustice of their conduct and exhorting them to be wise once more. The

father-in-law also appeared on the parapets and Constantine invited him to reflect how completely unprovoked his treachery had been. While Maximian replied only with abuse, Constantine's words had an effect on the soldiers; they repented of their desertion and came out of the city gates as one man, acclaiming their old commander and assuring him of their future loyalty. Maximian was handed over to Constantine, who kept him with honor in his court but saw that his movements were carefully watched.

66. The claws of Maximian were not all blunted as yet. Immediately after the affair at Massilia, Constantine returned to fight the barbarians on the Rhine. On his way he stopped at Augustodunum (Autun) which had been highly esteemed by his father (par. 21) but which, with the surrounding country, had fallen into the utmost poverty through the cruel taxation policy of Galerius (par. 61). There he held a meeting of the principal people of the city to find some way of permanently improving the conditions of the region. After this had been settled satisfactorily he offered sacrifice in the temple of Apollo (Sol) so that the god would look kindly on his approaching campaign and then set off for the Rhine. Maximian took advantage of his absence, and this time tried to draw Fausta, Constantine's wife, into his plans.

According to Lactantius (cf. *De mortibus persecut.*, 30), Maximian, who promised his daughter a more likable husband, thought he had persuaded her to help him against Constantine who once again had suddenly appeared back from the frontier. All she had to do was to leave his bedroom door open and entice some of the guards away; Maximian would see to the rest. Fausta, however, informed her husband of the plan and between them they concerted a scheme which would bring Maximian's plotting out into the open. Fausta followed Maximian's suggestions, but a eunuch of little value took Constantine's place in her bed. In the middle of the night, Maximian passing through the depleted guard approached the bed and killed what he thought was his son-in-law. When he rushed out noisily proclaiming his success, Constantine with a body of soldiers took him prisoner. The body of the eunuch was brought out and the self-proclaimed murderer was allowed to choose the manner in which he would like to die. It appears he chose the gallows. It was February in the year 310.

67. This was the official story of the end of Maximian which is given

by Lactantius and repeated in other records. How far it is really true and how much was fabricated to conceal the facts is not known. Quite a few of these carefully arranged stories circulated later in the court of Constantine; they cover such important matters as the disappearance of his son Crispus, and also that of the lady who played so great a part in the story we have related — his wife, Fausta.

After his death, Constantine decreed the *damnatio memoriae* of Maximian; this brought with it the destruction of anything which might recall the criminal, of statues, paintings, and inscriptions. But since Maximian had been the first colleague of Diocletian, the latter also appeared on many of the monuments scheduled for destruction and so Diocletian became involved in this condemnation. After his return to Salona, although he was still in retirement, he followed with understandable interest the fortunes of the Empire and his "tetrarchy" and when he heard that his own statues, pictures, and inscriptions were being destroyed he was distressed that, unlike any other emperors, he was forced to see in life the destruction of his own monuments. When this disgrace was added to the loss of Maximian — the only one who had remained faithful to him — the solitary of Salona seemed to lose his mind; he wept and raved, tossed on his couch and rolled on the floor, implored justice and the release of death (cf. Lactantius, *De mortibus persecut.*, 42). But the unfortunate old man was denied the peace of death for some years yet (par. 194).

## II. THE GREAT PERSECUTION

### 1. *Historical Sources*

68. While the events of the preceding chapter were taking place the persecution had become even more oppressive. The three edicts of 303 (pars. 47, 52) had been supported and their application made wider and more cruel by the edict of 304 (par. 56), which decreed the punishment of death for all Christians without distinction. In practice — except for the territories of Constantius which had now passed to his son, Constantine, by whom the persecution was not really enforced (par. 51) — the carrying out of the edicts was backed by a severity which was more or less ruthless according to the character of the local governors.

The short accounts by Eusebius and Lactantius, which we have already seen, refer either to the purge in the army (par. 37 ff.) or to the effect of the first edicts (pars. 47 ff., 56). To know more we shall have to visit the different regions of the Empire and see what has been happening in them; in this long journey we must be guided by trustworthy historical documents. Many stories of what happened during this persecution have indeed come down to us through the centuries, but great trust cannot always be put in their veracity. They sound very much like the stories put out by the Roman *ciceroni* who until the end of the past century used to take foreign visitors around their city and give vibrant descriptions of the slaughter of the early Christians which were unhistorical and highly imaginative. We must, therefore, make a careful examination of the documents which have come down to us and separate those which are at least substantially historical from those which have little or no value.

Apart from secondary sources which give us some information on isolated incidents in the Great Persecution, the principal historical sources are Eusebius of Caesarea, Lactantius, and the *Acts or Passions of the Martyrs*. We shall deal with these sources in this chapter.

69. We can assume a priori that an upheaval such as a great persecution would have led to many written accounts, put down either at the time or shortly after it. A Christian venerated by his brethren for his sanctity or honored for his learning by the pagans suffers martyrdom. Important officials in the civil government or members of illustrious families well known for their liberality and goodness shed their blood under the cruel edicts; and it would be only natural that their sad death should be celebrated by Christians with some account of their end to keep their memory alive among their friends and fellow Christians.

Very often, indeed, the nucleus of these short accounts already existed in the word-for-word transcription of the interrogation which the martyr underwent before the pagan judge. According to Roman procedure, this transcription was deposited in the archives of the court where it would not have been difficult to obtain a copy either by knowing the right people or by greasing the palm of some favorable civil servant. At the beginning of one *Passion* we read that the unknown author got a copy of the interrogation for two hundred silver pence (cf. *Acta SS. Tarachi, Probi et Andronici*, preface; cf. however par. 133). On other occasions the trial could be given with substantial fidelity from the information obtained from those who actually assisted at it.

When the public confession which the martyr had made of Christ had been obtained in one way or another, other information could be added by the author—the tortures to which he was subjected, his manner of death and burial, how he came to be arrested in the first place, the length or the cruelty of his imprisonment, and so on. The narration which resulted from all this was of interest not only to the relatives and friends of the martyr, but also to the Christian community or “church” to which he belonged. These communities kept such accounts with great care and much pride, and gave them their official approval. In some of the African churches the public liturgy included reading from some such *Acts* or *Passions* after the reading of Sacred Scripture; the result was that since these *Acts* of the martyrs of Africa were supervised by the church authorities from the beginning they have a much greater historical value than *Acts* written in other parts of the Empire.

70. Clearly, the authors of these writings had not only to be animated by a deep interest in their subject, but to be persons of culture and

ability. Speaking in general, the ideal would have been that each church or group of churches should have chosen a suitable writer and given him the task of drawing up the Acts of his own region. During the heat of the persecution, however, this would have been impossible and when the persecution was over, other interests — not all spiritual and otherworldly — grew large and damped down the old enthusiasm for the fallen heroes.

There were some willing scribes, however, among whom first place must be given to Eusebius of Caesarea. When he was explaining the scope of his work he first mentioned the martyrs of Egypt and the Thebaid and then continued as follows: "To put down in writing the battles of those who in all parts of the world have fought their way by piety toward divine things and to give an accurate account of the several incidents in their struggle is not my task but that of those who were actual witnesses of the events. In regard to those, however, at whose side I stood I shall write another book which will describe their courage even to another generation" (*Hist. Eccl.*, viii, 13, 7).

Eusebius kept this promise in his *Historia Ecclesiastica* by his next work — *The Martyrs of Palestine* — where he fulfills excellently his self-imposed role as historian of the persecution.

The program suggested here by Eusebius was as serious as it was honest. Everybody should, in the interest of his own region, write down what he had seen with his own eyes and in this way historically accurate stories would be available. The union of all these particular narratives into a general history of the persecution would provide something which was impossible for any single author. Unfortunately, though the program was carried out by Eusebius for his own area, no volunteers came forward anywhere else.

## EUSEBIUS

71. Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea, was born in Palestine about the year 265 and passed the first forty years of his life in that peace which the Church enjoyed toward the end of the third century. He liked study, especially of history, and found copious material for his researches in the very well-stocked library of Caesarea which had been started by Origen and of which Pamphilus was the curator. Of the latter he became the disciple and collaborator as well as a spiritual son;

Eusebius joined his name to his master's and called himself Eusebius of Pamphilus.

He was buried in such studies when the great persecution broke out. He was present when the churches were destroyed, at the burning of the Sacred Scriptures, at single and collective martyrdoms in Palestine and Phoenicia, in Egypt and the Thebaid. When Pamphilus was imprisoned at Caesarea in November, 307, Eusebius was by his side and collaborated with his imprisoned master in his *Apologia of Origen* which was cut short by the execution of Pamphilus on February 16, 310 (pars. 120–122).

To save himself from the persecution, Eusebius now took refuge in Phoenicia at Tyre and in Egypt in the Thebaid. Though the persecution was raging in these places, Eusebius himself was not known so well there. He somehow managed to escape any grave ill-treatment and when the persecution was over his enemies accused him of apostatizing to save his life. This was without doubt a calumny invented by his theological opponents, for his election as bishop of Caesarea in 313, or just after, could never have taken place had he been an apostate. He was highly esteemed by Constantine for his erudition and he took part in the Council of Nicaea, allying himself with the opponents of the term "consubstantial." When the word was accepted and canonized by the Council Eusebius gave in and with some distaste accepted the decision. Later, however, he maintained close relations with the enemies of the definitions of Nicaea, accepted and protected Arius before and after his condemnation by the same Council, and opposed Arius' great opponent, Athanasius. In doctrine Eusebius was not a complete follower of Arius but believed a rather similar theory; he represented a current of belief between heresy and orthodoxy which has been called "semi-arianism."

He entered more and more into the good graces of Constantine who was now all-powerful in the Empire and became a kind of court prelate. He gained the confidence of the Emperor who gave him personal accounts of various events in his life. This must have been very gratifying for Eusebius but unfortunately it tended to affect his judgment and appreciation of historical values.

72. A most diligent and indefatigable collector of manuscripts, Eusebius wrote a great deal. Of his works which have come down to us, those which concern themselves with the great persecution are the last three books (VIII, IX, X) of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* written from



312 onward, the *Martyrs of Palestine* written about 313 (which is extant also in a shorter form), and *The Life of Constantine* in four books. This last was completed about 339.

We need not spend time here on the first seven books of the *Historia* for it is well known what precious treasures they are of the deeds and writings of the first three centuries of Christianity. Without such a collection our knowledge of those three centuries would be insignificant. The last three books, which were added a little at a time from about 312–324, tell the story of the great persecution and were written in accordance with the program and intention previously mentioned (par. 70). In them, Eusebius speaks of events in Palestine and neighboring regions (Phoenicia and Egypt) but gives only a few isolated references to more distant lands. The narration of *The Martyrs of Palestine* is conducted with the same criteria but at greater length; the people spoken of were friends of the author and he was an eyewitness of the events described. The authenticity of these two works leaves nothing to be desired.

73. *The Life of Constantine* is quite another matter. It is not really a biography in the modern sense of the word but a panegyric which shows all the good points of its subject and omits everything which might be to its detriment. It was a common literary form of the times called an *encomium*, ἐγκώμιον, and *The Life of Constantine* was regarded as such by the ancient Greek writers such as Socrates the Scholastic and Photius. Obviously writings of this kind, although they tell nothing but the truth, give a very false impression; in them the position taken by the author leaves many details of his subject in shadow; and though he displays isolated features with all exactness, the general picture is not a true one for the highlights are exaggerated by the surrounding darkness. But custom allowed works of this kind and Eusebius followed the custom. After all, in modern times the same kind of thing is taken for granted for inscriptions on tombs where it is allowed to say good — but no evil — about the deceased.

In any case Eusebius could have justified himself with an example of the highest authority — Sacred Scripture itself. The biblical books of *Chronicles* (*Paralipomenon*), in telling the story of King David, leave out his adultery and consequent act of murder although these two crimes had already been described in detail in the books of Samuel. But since the *Chronicles* are intended to be an *encomium* of the great King of Israel these two offenses are left out because they would

have cast a shadow over the shining figure of their hero. Constantine, who gave peace to the Church, is for Eusebius a new David; at times he compares him to Moses (*De vita Constant.*, i, 20). Eusebius, therefore, has no place in his work to mention that Constantine executed both his son, Crispus, and his wife, Fausta, and he manages to talk about the Council of Nicaea and the Synod of Tyre without referring to the heretic Arius or the orthodox Athanasius. This last omission is clearly attributable to the author's semi-Arian propensities.

In conclusion, even if the reader accepts the documents in the *Life of Constantine* as genuine and the statements in it as true, he must remember that the moral figure shown in the book is false because of omissions and dissimulations expressly intended by Eusebius.

Besides this, many objections have been raised against the authenticity of the documents transcribed in this work — about 15 letters or edicts of Constantine. Doubts on certain of them were aired by Baronius and by Tillemont but a skeptical approach to all of them was popular in the last twenty years of the nineteenth century. Many students of different schools, however, defended their authenticity — among them Harnack who in 1904 considered the matter as settled. In more recent years other students have again rejected them, at least in part, although their defenders are still in a majority.

## LACTANTIUS

74. After Eusebius, the historian who offers the greatest abundance of material on the great persecution is Lactantius. L. Caecilius Firmianus Lactantius was born in Africa about 250 and studied under the rhetorician Arnobius. He began teaching in Africa but was then called to Nicomedia by Diocletian who liked to bring illustrious masters to his capital. In the Greek world of Nicomedia the teacher of Latin rhetoric did not find his fortune; indeed, instead of the expected honors and life of ease he found only oblivion and poverty. He began to write and became a convert to Christianity at about the same time as his master Arnobius in Africa. As a Christian he still continued to teach until after the persecution broke out, but was forced to leave this work on the abdication of Diocletian in 305. He left the capital and did not return until after the Edict of Tolerance promulgated by Galerius in 311. Later, about 317, he went to the court of Con-

stantine at Trier where he had been called to take over the education of his son, Crispus. We know no more about his life after this — he probably died at Trier at an advanced age.

The work of Lactantius which concerns itself with the great persecution is the *De mortibus persecutorum* written in 314 or soon after, certainly before the persecution of Licinius in 321. The general thesis of the book is that those who persecute Christianity always suffer a wretched end as a punishment from God. Earlier persecutors from Nero to Aurelian are dismissed briefly in the first six chapters, while from the seventh chapter to the fifty-second he treats in detail the acts of Severus, Maximian, Galerius, Diocletian, and Maximin Daia. Licinius is not mentioned.

The book is written with deep feeling and passion, which explains why its style is so different from that of the author's other works, such as the seven books of *Divinarum institutionum* where the treatment is logical and philosophical. In *De mortibus persecutorum* the immediate impression is that the tragic events are described by one who actually saw them and who throughout was in continual danger of death. In the past some students have pointed to the difference in style as a proof that the book is not from the pen of Lactantius; but the passionate and agitated manner of writing seems to confirm his authorship, for it would be surprising if one who had been so tragic a witness could write in a calm and composed style. Every now and then, indeed, the professional teacher of rhetoric appears in classical references and quotations and especially in certain dialogues which according to the custom of other historians of the time are carefully dramatized. The substantial content of these conversations was certainly known to Lactantius during his stay at Nicomedia and when later he was a member of the court of Constantine at Trier.

Even though he differs in small matters from other historians and the conversations he reports make no pretense at verbal fidelity, Lactantius can be regarded as a first-class historical source in whom complete trust may be placed.

## ACTS AND PASSIONS OF THE MARTYRS

75. The historical and psychological circumstances which led to the composition of the first Acts or Passions of the martyrs have been

described in paragraph 69. Unfortunately those old stories, simple, clear, and without the slightest touch of rhetorical decoration, which give the plain facts without any comment even pious or seemingly justified, were too beautiful in their simplicity to be properly appreciated by later generations when the heroic age was quickly passing into ancient history. These foolish people were not content with a story of the heroic sacrifice of life for an ideal but looked for wonders and magic, for childish miracles; foolish students did not look at the massive eloquence of a silent martyr, but wanted turgid oratory and a wordy exposition of some doctrine or pious thought. Such expositions could just as easily be heretical as orthodox and opponents of Christianity were able to put into the mouth of a martyr speeches which assisted their own heterodox teachings. In the apocryphal gospels heretical ideas are based on supposed teachings and deeds of Christ, and if this happened to him we cannot be surprised that the same should be inflicted on his martyrs.

These two muddy streams (of amplification and bias) polluted very many Acts of martyrs and only a little later there began to flow yet another — that of fantastic invention rising in the first place from curiosity. Where a martyr had been venerated in a certain place from time immemorial it was but natural that people should want to know the particulars of his death, especially if they possessed his tomb as well. To satisfy this natural desire the best procedure, of course, would have been to search out reliable information on the matter and to draw up a trustworthy story of the martyrdom. Very often, however, such information could not be found. Sometimes it was not even sought — invention was less trouble. The passion of some unknown martyr came to be based on the facts of some other Passion or on no facts at all, while the resulting narration was accepted as true; sometimes it was substantially so, but more often than not it was completely fictitious. These three streams mixing one with the other finally reached the clear waters of the authentic Acts and having fouled some of the clear water with their own muddy inventions created around the Acts a great stagnant pool of useless and unreliable stories.

76. Attempting some kind of classification of these sources, it is possible to have in regard to any one martyr the following:

1. A verbal transcript of his interrogation with or without a few descriptive details of his imprisonment, tortures, manner of death, and so on.

2. A *Passion* composed by an eyewitness or by a writer who has gathered his information from eyewitnesses. Such a writer often speaks in the name of a whole Christian community, hence his narrative is guaranteed by that community.

3. Narratives put together a good while after the events they describe but based on documents of some value; such narratives usually have additions and explanatory passages of various kinds.

4. Narratives which have some elements of truth but which are otherwise quite fictitious in plot and character. Examples of this species in profane letters are novels such as *I Promessi Sposi* and *Quo Vadis* which represent some historical scenes and persons but where plot and everything else has been supplied by the imagination of the author.

5. Completely imaginary stories made up by the author either from his own fancy or from pagan, Greek, Latin, or even Buddhist tales.

Only stories under the first three headings can be even considered by the historian. In fact, the third kind — the later *Passions* — requires careful examination before it is possible to learn which parts are acceptable and trustworthy and which are without foundation, imaginary, and plainly untrue. Little or no information can be obtained from the fourth kind — none whatsoever from the fifth.

77. The fact that a certain *Passion* contains little or no historical truth is no proof that the martyr was not an historical personage. The actual existence of the martyr can be proved from archaeological sources or other ancient testimonies, though these are usually not very informative and give little more than the name and fact of martyrdom. As we have noted it was precisely to provide the missing information that the later *Passions* were written. Their authority varies greatly. Even when the whole *Passion* is obviously imaginary, the martyr's existence is not denied. This is true even if the fact that he lived and suffered is proved by ancient — albeit uninformative — sources. The fact that there were martyrs at Agaunum (pars. 7-8) about whom little is known is an example of this.

Though it is rather off the point, we must concede here that among the vast congeries of these writings true literary masterpieces are often to be found. Renan was exaggerating somewhat when he said that the cell of a scholar condemned to imprisonment could be changed to a pleasant retreat if he had in it the immense collection of the *Acta Sanctorum* which contains precisely these Acts and *Passions*. Though an exaggeration, this statement is based on reality — always, of course,

from the point of view of a literary scholar. For an historian, the situation is quite different.

78. Another difficulty which lies in the path of the historian wishing to make use of the Acts and Passions of the martyrs is that these narratives often give no geographical or chronological references. Even in the optimistic hypothesis that the Passion of a certain martyr is substantially accurate, the document will frequently make no reference to the time or place of the events recorded. The martyr may have suffered in the last great persecution or in one of the earlier ones; his city or province may have been anywhere in the Roman world. Open contradictions are not wanting between old records; for example, according to her Passion, the Sicilian martyr Agatha suffered under Decius while other narratives say she was executed during the persecution of Diocletian; according to the best documents her native land was Catania, but there are later assertions that she came from Palermo (par. 149). Modern students will attempt to solve this contradiction between documents with ingenious conjectures, but this often leads to worse confusion. According to a recent theory, for example, in the case of the Roman martyr Agnes, two persons of the same name can be distinguished; there is no foundation for this hypothesis and it has been generally rejected; because of it, however, there is no reason to doubt the actual existence of St. Agnes (par. 148).

The story of the last persecution suffers most from chronological and geographical vagueness in its records. The four principal persecutors — Diocletian, Maximian, Galerius, and Maximin (without mentioning Licinius) — had their own regions of jurisdiction. But, unfortunately, they are frequently not named or else they are confused one with another so that there is no way in which the year or the place of a martyr's death can be discovered.

## 2. *During the Storm*

### THE TRADITORES

79. The first edict ordered the churches and the Sacred Scriptures to be destroyed (par. 47). For the persecutor it was a clever move to attack the Christians through their sacred books for it became a matter of honor to save their books even at the cost of their lives. The edict

commanded them to surrender (*tradere*) them to the authorities. Any person who obeyed this order was "one who surrendered" (*traditor*); he was favored by the persecutor and hated by the Christians who called him precisely what he was — a *traditor* — traitor. Though Christians generally did their utmost to save the Sacred Scriptures there were many *traditores* among them. The resulting destruction of the Scriptures was not complete but it was very extensive — this is shown by the fact that none of the great uncial codices of Scripture which exist in modern times dates any farther back than the fourth century. This century with its hecatombs of manuscripts marks a real break in the transmission of the text. Daring Christians hid the sacred rolls or carried them on their persons to distant places. When the persecution broke out in Thessalonica, some women made it their special work to preserve the Scriptures (par. 136), carrying on in some way the ancient office of the deaconess Phebe who brought from Corinth to Rome the original of the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans (16:1-2). Under the edict the libraries and archives of many local churches and those of Rome were destroyed. In the sequestration, the political authorities were sometimes not particularly thorough and obviously rather ashamed of themselves, but more frequently a hatred of Christians urged them to implacable efficiency. The written accounts of such searches and confiscations were kept by those involved for a long time and those referring to the Church at Rome were used during the violent disputes of the later Donatist controversy. Good fortune has preserved for us the account of what happened to the Christians in Cirta (Constantine) in Numidia where all the members of the clergy from the bishop to the lowest cleric were *traditores*. This is what happened.

80. On May 19, 303, Munatius Felix, the "curator" of Cirta — in charge of public order — arrived before the meeting house of the Christians and said to the Bishop Paul: "Bring out the writings of your law and any other religious objects you may have; thus will you obey the precept and command of the Emperor." The Bishop Paul said: "The lectors have them; we will give you what we have here." Felix said: "Show me the lectors or send for them." The Bishop Paul said: "You know them all." Felix said: "We shall see later those lectors brought in by my men; meanwhile hand over whatever you have." The Bishop Paul sat down as did also the priests, Montanus and Victor, etc.; the deacons, Mars, Aelius; the subdeacons, Marcoelius,

Catullinus, Silvanus, etc.; the fossores (gravediggers), Januarius, Meraculus, etc., and the following inventory was drawn up: two gold chalices, six silver ones, six silver cruets, etc. Felix said to the fossores Marcoclius, Silvanus, and Carosus: "Bring here whatever you have." They replied: "We have brought out everything." Felix said: "Your reply has been recorded." They then went into the library where the shelves were found to be empty. Here Silvanus handed over a *capitulata* (box) of silver and a lamp of the same metal which he said that he had found behind a chest. One of the officers, Victor, said to Silvanus: "If you had not found it you would have been put to death." Felix said to Silvanus: "Look more carefully in case there are more." Silvanus replied: "There is nothing else. We have brought out everything." Felix said: "Bring whatever writings you possess in obedience to the imperial command." Catullinus then handed him a very large codex. Felix said to Marcoclius and Silvanus: "Why have you handed us but one codex? Bring the rest." They replied: "We have no others for we are subdeacons: it is the lectors who have the codices." Felix then said: "Point out to us these lectors." Marcoclius and Catullinus replied: "We do not know where they live." Felix said to Catullinus and Marcoclius: "If you do not know where they live you can tell us their names." Catullinus and Marcoclius replied: "We are not traitors (*proditores*). If you wish to execute us we are here." Felix said, "Arrest them."

At this point some explanation is necessary. The reply of the two subdeacons — the only bit of courage in this story of abject servility — uses the term "traitors" in the sense of "spies."

The next council of Arles, A.D. 314 (par. 241), in its discussion on Christians who had surrendered during the persecution, distinguished three classes of "traitors": those who had handed over the Sacred Scriptures, those who had surrendered the sacred vessels, and those who had revealed the names of the Christians who had such things in their possession (Canon 13). Clearly the two subdeacons used the word in this last sense — they did not wish to sink so low as to be spies and informers on their brethren although they had already handed over their books and sacred vessels. The subdeacon Silvanus appears later in the same town, Cirta, as its Donatist bishop (par. 246). We now continue with the story.

81. When Felix had arrived at the house of Eugenius the lector, he said: "Hand over the writings that you have in obedience to the



official command." He brought four codices. Felix said to Silvanus and Carosus: "Show me where the other lectors live." They replied: "The bishop has already said that the chancellors Eudoxius and Junius know them all. They will show you their houses." Eudoxius and Junius said: "We will show you them, excellency." When they arrived at the house of Felix the mosaic worker, five more codices were surrendered; at their arrival at the house of Projectus they were given five large codices and two small ones. When they got to the house of Victor the grammarian, Felix said to him: "Surrender the codices in your possession in obedience to the official command." Victor offered him two codices and four bundles of quinions (gatherings of five leaves). Felix said to Victor: "Bring out the rest for you have more." The grammarian Victor replied: "If I had had any more I would have given them to you." When he got to the house of Euticius of Caesarea, Felix said to him: "Surrender the codices in your possession in obedience to the official command." Euticius said: "I have none." Felix said: "Your reply has been recorded." When he arrived at the house of Coddeo, his wife brought six codices. Felix said: "Look around and see if there are any more and bring them also." The woman replied: "I have no others." Felix said to Bovus, a municipal slave: "Go into the house and search." The public slave then said: "I have searched but have found none." Felix said to Victorinus, Silvanus, and Carosus: "If you have not done your whole duty you will be held responsible."

The sequestration had been very successful for the pagan authorities. They had seized about thirty-five volumes large and small of which the greater part were certainly Sacred Scripture. They were all burned. To think that such manuscripts were of earlier date or at least the same as those which were used later by Jerome and Augustine for their biblical studies! What value they would have today if they had been preserved for modern students of textual criticism! But as always, fanaticism could see its way only by the light of such bonfires.

82. The Christians remembered this destruction of the Sacred Scriptures for a long time. Augustine speaks of it as the "persecution by the surrender of books" (*persecutio tradendorum codicum*) or the "days of the surrender" (*dies traditionis*). He distinguished them from the "days of incense burning" (*dies thurificationis*) when the Christians were commanded to offer incense to idols.

In the "days of the surrendering" not all the Christians were as

pusillanimous as those of Cirta. There were many martyrs and among them were representatives of the extreme right — the fanatics. The latter were inspired by Montanism which was popular in Northern Africa and had even won over Tertullian. These fanatics presented themselves to the police and boasted that they possessed copies of the Sacred Scriptures but that they would rather suffer death than hand them over. And, in fact, many of them did die but the ecclesiastical authorities — remembering without doubt that our Lord had warned the devil not to tempt God (cf. Mt. 4:7) — did not consider their death as a martyrdom but rather as a natural punishment for fanatical provocation. This was the opinion of Mensurius, bishop of Carthage, and the Council of Elvira decreed about the same time in its Canon 60 — referring to the Gospels and the practice of the Apostles — that the title of martyr should not be given to anyone who suffered for throwing down idols.

83. This Mensurius was a man of good judgment who knew how to square the requirements of his conscience with the difficulties of life. He even knew how to get rid of unwelcome visitors. One day the police arrived at his house to confiscate his books and without any delay he ushered them into the library. The officers were not theologians and so did not notice that he had replaced his own books with shelf after shelf of heretical works. They worked very hard to load this great library on to a cart and they handed in their booty at the proconsul's office (very pleased with themselves and boasting of their great haul). Rather later in some way or another, some well-known pagans of Carthage got to know or suspect what Mensurius had done and told the proconsul. But Anulinus, the proconsul, showed that he did not lack good judgment either for he would neither listen to their complaints nor order another search of the Bishop's house. After all, he might find what his own officers had missed.

As usual there were fanatics who accused Mensurius of equivocation and of giving scandal to the faithful (par. 232). But he had not surrendered the Sacred Scriptures and no Christian should have indulged in scandal before finding out what the Bishop had actually done. In any case, it is certain that such tricks were frequently played in other places. In Africa, Donatus the bishop of Calama gave in medical treatises (*codices medicinales*); at Aptonga where Felix (pars. 233, 234) was the bishop nothing was found in his house but some

personal letters. At Aquae Tibilitanae the bishop Marinus surrendered his archives but managed to save the Scriptures.

84. There were some who did not wish to use such stratagems and simply refused to surrender the Scriptures — they were executed. Such was the end of Felix, bishop of Tibiuca in proconsular Africa, whose trial lasted for a long time and ended with his decapitation (not in Italy as is asserted by a later addition to his *Passion*).

Some bishops, however, were real *traditores*. Purpurius of Limata, a violent man of bad reputation, was one (pars. 232, 235); Donatus of Mascula, Victor of Rusicade in Numidia were others. The last of these burned a codex of the Gospels with his own hands when ordered to do so by the magistrate and explained to his people afterward that it was after all only a worn copy. The conduct of Secundus, bishop of Tigisi, was very much discussed at the beginning of the Donatist schism. He was commanded to surrender the Scriptures but — according to what he wrote to Mensurius, perhaps to embarrass him — he flatly refused to do so without resorting to any tricks of substitution. There were some who did not believe the Bishop of Tigisi (par. 232).

In certain parts of Africa no great significance was attached to the surrender of sacred books; it was considered that since they were only material objects they could sooner or later be replaced (par. 138).

### THE CONFESSORES

85. After the “days of the surrender” came the “days of incense burning” (par. 82). These were begun by the second and third edicts of 303 and continued by the even crueller one of 304 (pars. 52, 56). Scriptures were burned, churches destroyed, and bishops killed; the Christians could not meet for services and all they could do was to wait for the time when they would be called upon to offer incense to the idols under pain of death. At Nicomedia the reign of terror had begun right from the beginning of the persecution, not because of the first edict of 303 which was comparatively mild, but because of Diocletian’s excitement at the incendiarism in his palace. In other places, the persecution gradually became more and more harsh and extreme severity became the law with the edict of 304 — we must except always the territories ruled over by Constantius and then later

by Constantine. Life and Christianity were not compatible — one or the other had to be sacrificed. There seemed little safety in flight when the Roman Empire extended over almost the whole world.

Many did abandon everything and turned fugitives. Some went into the deserts, some to the mountains or to the forests, some even left the Empire and found a more civilized home among the barbarians. St. Basil and his younger brother Gregory of Nyssa, both of Caesarea in Cappadocia, had as their paternal grandmother a certain Macrina who had been born in Neocaesarea in Pontus. When the great persecution broke out she fled with her husband and other Christians into the forest of Pontus where they spent a most unpleasant seven years. It must have been a great trial for Macrina and her husband, for until then they had lived a life of ease and comfort. Others sought safety in the deserts of the Thebaid and of Arabia where they wandered until the Roman authorities or death caught up with them. Among the barbarians who gave a kind reception to fugitives (cf. *De Vita Constant.*, ii, 53), a special place should be given to the people on the other side of the Euphrates. During the persecution of Maximin Christians fled in great numbers toward the five districts of the Upper Tigris which bordered on Armenia Minor. These had passed to the Roman Empire after the victory of Galerius over the Persians (par. 19), but local governors still ruled the land. Here the Christians had increased greatly in numbers (cf. Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.*, ix, 8, 2) and were not molested in any way. The Armenian Christians received with open arms their brethren who fled from Roman persecution. This annoyed Maximin and later led to war (par. 184).

86. Probably parties of Christian fugitives found their way to the border of Persia; some possibly found refuge in Persia itself where Christianity had already arrived by the middle of the second century. At the end of that century we have reason to believe that Abgar IX, king of Edessa, was a Christian. In his city was a church where lay the bones which tradition says were those of the Apostle Thomas. Many bishops came to the Council of Nicaea from Roman territories which bordered on Persia; and a little afterward, catechetical schools were founded at Edessa and at Nisibis where Ephraem taught. All this shows that the fleeing Christians were given as warm a welcome in Persia as their brethren had received from the Armenian Christians.

Those who did not leave the Empire and did not hide themselves defended themselves and their faith as best they could. Some resorted

to trickery of varying degrees of courage to deceive the police. The simplest method was to buy a witnessed document (*libellus*) which testified that they had duly offered incense to the idols. The officials, however, did not often allow these documents to be sold. Another way was for the Christian to send a pagan slave or friend to offer the incense for him, but this worked only when the magistrates affected short sight or a bad memory. Many of these magistrates were most severe and, either to cut a good figure before their superiors or out of native zeal, were even more oppressive than the already oppressive edicts (cf. Lactantius, *Divin. institution*, v, 11).

There was a little town in Phrygia where the whole population including the "curator" and the municipal magistrates were all Christians. Everyone refused to offer incense and they fled to the shelter of their church. This made it simpler for the Roman officers to dispose of them — they burned the church with the Christians, men, women, and children inside (cf. Lactantius, *op. cit.* Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.*, viii, 11, 1-2). Such methods, as Eusebius quite rightly observes, could be expected during war but did not seem an essential part of the ordinary administration of justice. Since the story of Eusebius continues without any break it would seem that among this multitude of martyrs was found a certain Adauctus of Italian origin who had held a high position in the administration of the privy purse of the Emperor and was then attached to the Treasury. This last office did not prevent his sharing the flames with the rest of the Christians in the church.

During the persecution of Maximin it was the custom to go along the streets calling the people out of their houses according to a prepared list and then to put out search parties for those who did not answer the call. When the roll call was finished everyone was taken off to the nearest pagan temple to offer incense. Such wholesale methods are still favored by tyrants.

87. Some magistrates were more interested in making apostates than in destruction and death. They are mentioned by Lactantius as being apparently milder and more persuasive. They put their victims to the torture but in small doses over a long period in the hope that this painful repetition would sap the moral strength of the patient and lead him to surrender; they cared for the wounds and bruises of one day so that the pain of their opening again the following day would be more excruciating. One of these magistrates boasted that in many years of office he had not executed a single Christian, but had always

aimed at breaking down the constancy of his victims. A governor of Bithynia was filled with happiness when one day he saw signs of weakening in a Christian who had been receiving measured treatment for two years. Sometimes magistrates claimed a victory where there had been none; sometimes the intervention of relatives and friends of the victim made what would in other circumstances have been an amusing scene. The accused proclaimed his Christian faith in a loud voice while his friends shouted him down asserting that the magistrate must not listen to him and assuring the bystanders that he had already offered sacrifice or was willing to do so. In order to gain another victory the magistrate would listen to those who shouted the loudest and write down the accused as an apostate. Scuffles sometimes took place between the Christian and his friends. The latter, to save him from the death to which his obstinacy would condemn him, would carry him bodily to the altar; sometimes they would gag him to avoid any contradiction; having tied his hands they would put some incense in his palm and hold it over the tripod; in the scuffle some of the incense would fall into it and behold the poor man had sacrificed. It was quite useless to attempt to explain things to magistrates later for retractions were not accepted. Here is a description of such a scene by Eusebius:

“A certain Christian who had been forced bodily to offer impure and filthy sacrifices was then dismissed as if he had really sacrificed although this had not been the case. Another one who had not been anywhere near or touched anything impure was said to have sacrificed. Since he heard calumny in silence, he was allowed to go away. Yet another was taken up half dead and flung to one side as if he were a corpse. Another lying on the ground was dragged by his feet for a long distance and was counted among those who had sacrificed. One made a great commotion and shouted out in a loud voice that he refused to sacrifice and another proclaimed himself a Christian, boasting in his confession of the life-giving name; another asserted with vigor that he had not sacrificed and would never do so. These also were struck on the mouth frequently by soldiers who gathered to torment them, and reduced to silence, bleeding on their mouths and faces, they were violently thrown out” (*Hist. Eccl.*, viii, 3, 2-4: cf. *De Mart. Palaest.*, i, 4).

88. As time went on the Christians for the most part showed no signs of giving in and since even the pagans began to be heartily sick of the continual slaughter, the penalty of death was frequently com-

muted to that of forced labor in the mines. In this way at any rate, the Christians would help the treasury. There were copper mines at Phoen in Palestine (to the south of the Dead Sea) and others in Cyprus. Porphyry was quarried in the Thebaid alongside the Red Sea and marble at Sirmium in Pannonia (par. 144) and in Cilicia. By sending the condemned Christians to mines and quarries instead of killing them off, the treasury found a ready made labor force for this exhausting work. These Christians were called "miner (mining) confessors" (*confessores metallici*) by the Church because they were condemned to the mines (*ad metalla*) where they worked in groups under the direction of engineers (*Philosophi*).

Their life of bestial labor was of a horrifying severity which is difficult to conceive in our time and was no less than martyrdom extended to months and years. The mines were always in desolate country and the prisoners got nothing more than the bare necessities of life. Christians sentenced to the mines were mutilated in various ways. The tendon of their left foot was usually cauterized so that any escape they made would have to be a slow one; their right eye was cut out with a knife and the wound burned with a hot iron; some youngsters were castrated (cf. Eusebius, *De Mart. Palaest.*, vii, 3-4, etc.; *Hist. Eccl.*, viii, 12, 10, etc.). The substitution of forced labor for the death penalty — a supposedly lenient policy — became quite usual after some years of persecution, perhaps even before the year 307.

From that time long files of "mining confessors" could be seen on their weary journey northward or southward — transferred from the mines of the Thebaid to those of Palestine or of Cilicia or of somewhere else. These human skeletons trudged under the burning sun for hundreds of miles through the desert under the watchful eyes of their guards. Many fell exhausted along the route and served to feed the jackals — only a comparatively small number reached their destination. Wives and children, even those of tender age, went with them and in these long journeys were expected to keep up with them (cf. *De Mart. Palaest.*, viii, 1).

89. But even under these terrible conditions the "mining confessors" did not lose their spirit and kept up their religious practices as far as they could. In the marble quarries of Pannonia Christianity made proselytes, especially through the efforts of Bishop Cyril of Antioch who had been condemned to forced labor already in 303. Though they did their work without complaint, the deported Christians are recorded

not to have answered the call of the superintendent of the works for men to carve idols for temples (par. 144).

More than this happened in the copper mines of Phoenice where there were very many Christians who had come originally from Palestine and Egypt. Also a large group had been transported to Phoenice from Gaza in Palestine where all the Christians had been surprised at one of their meetings when they were listening to the Sacred Scriptures (cf. *De Mart. Palaest.*, viii, 4). Periodically, other groups of condemned Christians arrived from Egypt. The large number of workers in the mines led to the putting up of all kinds of sheds and huts and the Christians profited by this by adding another shed for a church. The clergy who served the Church were numerous and included bishops, priests, and lectors. The superintendent of the mine got to know about this, but surprisingly allowed the building to be used provided the day's work was finished. Among the bishops were the Egyptians Nilus and Peleus; and another active bishop was Meletius who later was to take a large part in the religious affairs of Egypt (par. 95). Eusebius also highly praised Silvanus, who was first a priest at Gaza and then consecrated bishop by Meletius. He did an immense amount of work among the prisoners at Phoenice, and was finally beheaded — the last martyr of Palestine (cf. *Mist. Eccl.* viii, 13, 5; *De Mart. Palaest.*, vii, 3; xiii, 4-5).

90. But the most marvelous figure at Phoenice was the lector John. He was totally blind, but in accordance with the regulations he had not only been lamed in the left leg, but his useless right eye had been burned out with a hot iron. Like others in the East, especially the blind, John had a prodigious memory. He could recite from memory whole books of Sacred Scripture both of the New and Old Testaments in such a way that it seemed that he was reading them from the text. Eusebius was an eyewitness of this:

"I was much struck the first time I saw this man standing erect in the midst of a great crowd at a meeting and reading part of the Sacred Scriptures. While I could only hear his voice, I imagined that he was one reading to the people as was customary in meetings but when I got nearer I saw the situation. Those who had the use of their eyes crowded around him in a circle and he using only the eyes of his mind, spoke simply and like a prophet far better than those who are whole in body" (*De Mart. Palaest.*, xiii, 8).

Finally a governor came to inspect the mines at Phoenice, and the



conditions of the prisoners seemed too easy to him. Maximin himself was informed and gave new orders which were carried out immediately. The Christians were transferred elsewhere; some to Cyprus, some to Lebanon, and some to other places in Palestine. Four of the most important among them were burned alive, among whom were the bishops Nilus and Peleus. Thirty-nine others who were too weak to work and had been spending their time in prayer and pious exercises were beheaded on the same day. Among these were the lector, John, and the bishop, Silvanus (cf. *De Mart. Palaest.*, xiii, 10).

91. The lot of the "mining confessors" was followed with affectionate anxiety by those Christians who were still at large and they tried to convey secretly material help and words of comfort. This was especially done by the Christians who lived near the mines, but help came from a distance as well. It had always been the custom of the Roman Church from ancient times to help persecuted brethren in distant lands as Eusebius points out (cf. *Hist. Eccl.*, iv, 23, 9); and this is proved by a letter of Dionysius of Corinth to Pope Soter toward the year 170 (cf. *ibid.*, iv, 10).

The Christian who visited the mines was in great danger of discovery and arrest. With freemen working alongside the prisoners, a visiting Christian could pretend that he had come to see one of them. He had to keep his wits about him, however, for the smallest slip might be his downfall; or perhaps carried away by the pitiful sights of suffering fellow Christians he might openly announce his faith. In such cases there was a new prisoner for the guards who patrolled the mines and even the roads leading to them.

In December, 308, a party of brave Christians left Egypt to carry assistance to their brethren confined in the mines of Cilicia. They journeyed along the seacoast and got as far as Ascalon where they were arrested by the guards at the gates of the city. They were lamed and blinded in one eye and continued on their journey to Cilicia to join their fellows in forced labor. Three of them who showed some resistance were put in chains and executed at Ascalon. One called Ares was burned alive and the other two, Promus and Elias, were beheaded (cf. *De Mart. Palaest.*, x, 1).

92. Little more than a year later, in February, 310, a similar affair occurred. Five Egyptian Christians who had been keeping company with prisoners on their way to the mines of Cilicia were arrested at the port of Caesarea on their return. When they were interrogated