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A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

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they should be scourged, not dismissed ; why, then, should Maximinus decree that they should not be allowed to leave the service ? The most important factor in the history of the whole period was the proportion of Christians and Pagans in the army. The words " having striven to quit the service," are intelligible only of military service ; the whole point of the Edict of Maximinus, as of these words of Eugenius, is that the persons concerned were under military discipline. "*Mὴ ἀπαλλάσσεσθαι τῆς στρατείας* in Maximinus' Edict is a clear echo of "ut . . . militia solverentur," in Galerius' Edict.

W. M. CALDER.

### *STUDIES IN CONVERSION.*

#### II. CONSTANTINE THE GREAT.

IN the thirty-third chapter of the Book of Job there is a lyric which can be lifted out of the surrounding context and enjoyed as a composition by itself. Its subject is conversion ; and it is interesting, both as proving that cases of conversion were numerous in the remote age of which the Book of Job is a monument<sup>1</sup> and as indicating the means through which they were brought about. These were three—dreams or visions,<sup>2</sup> bodily suffering<sup>3</sup> and testimony.<sup>4</sup>

The last of the three is represented as prevailing in cases

<sup>1</sup> "Lo, all these things worketh God oftentimes with man" (*v. 29*).

<sup>2</sup> "In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed, then He openeth the ears of men and sealeth their instruction" (*vv. 15, 16*).

<sup>3</sup> "He is chastened also with pain upon his bed, and the multitude of his bones with strong pain, so that his life abhorreth bread, and his soul dainty meat" (*vv. 19, 20*).

<sup>4</sup> "If there be a messenger with him, an interpreter, one among a thousand, to show unto man His uprightness, then He is gracious to him, and saith, Deliver him from going down to the pit, I have found a ransom" (*vv. 23, 24*).

where the first two had failed ;<sup>1</sup> and this accords with the efficacy recognised in modern times as belonging to the testimony of those who have experienced the power of God themselves. In both ancient and modern times great virtue has belonged to the second means—namely, bodily suffering. But the first—dreams or visions—would probably, at the first glance, be relegated to ancient history and not supposed to play any part in modern times. Any, however, who may think so must be either ignorant or forgetful of facts ; for, indeed, dreams and visions still play a part in the religious life, as all are aware who have any considerable acquaintance with the details of personal experience. In any hundred cases of conversion in a modern revival a considerable proportion would be found to have been connected with incidents of the nature of dreams or visions. In ancient times, nevertheless, the proportion was undoubtedly greater. In Scripture such cases as those of Jacob, Samuel, Isaiah and St. Paul spring at once to memory ; and in the early Christian centuries the same element is everywhere conspicuous. No case is, however, more famous than that of the Emperor Constantine, whose date is 274 to 337.

The conversion of this man filled the world at one time with its rumour. No wonder : up to the very day when it took place the Roman emperors had, at intervals, for more than two hundred years, been persecuting the Christian religion and inflicting on its professors every slight, injury and torture which the wit of man could invent ; and now, in a moment, the immense influence of the Empire was transferred to the opposite side, and, like nursing-fathers and nursing-mothers, imperial personages embraced the cause which their predecessors had treated with contumely and cruelty.

<sup>1</sup> “ God speaketh once, yea, twice, yet man perceiveth it not ” (v. 14).

Since then, in the lapse of time, even this event has shared the oblivion which is ever creeping over human things. To the average man history, unless there be some particular motive for keeping it in memory, is a record which quickly fades. In this case the religious interest might have been sufficient to keep the obscuring mists at a distance ; and it has proved so in the Eastern Church, where to this day the Great Emperor is a figure as distinct as the Reformers are to Protestants ; but the same cannot be said of the West.

Another influence which has helped to displace Constantine from the position he might have held in the Christian mind is the dubiety which, in the course of time, has gathered over the good he did. As it is usually expressed, he was the first to establish the Church ; and the number is daily increasing of those who are not sure if this was ever a real advantage or are even certain that it was always the reverse. Many know little more about Constantine than that Dante said of him,

Ah, Constantine ! to how much ill gave birth,  
Not thy conversion, but that plenteous dower  
Which the first wealthy Father gained from thee.<sup>1</sup>

But it ought to be noted that, while undervaluing the establishment of the Church, the poet does not speak lightly of the conversion, but the reverse. Constantine had to find out for himself how a convert to Christianity ought to act who occupied the very highest position in the world, and how such an one might best serve the cause he had embraced. It requires but little imagination to realise how difficult this must have been ; and, if he made mistakes, he erred with the best men of the age, which was by no means an age of little men. All his Christian contemporaries approved of what he did ; and, indeed, their own situation became so different from that of their predecessors that

<sup>1</sup> *Inferno*, xix.

it was no wonder if they seemed to themselves as men who dreamed and could find no fault with the conduct of their patron.

But, no doubt, the Christian mind has been prevented from dwelling with pleasure on this conversion chiefly by the backsliding of Constantine's later life. After he had done well for many years, there came a time when, for a little, he seemed to slip back into some of the worst practices by which the history of the Roman emperors has been made infamous, even a satirist of his own day suggesting a comparison with Nero. He caused his own eldest son, Crispus, to be put to death ; likewise his nephew, Licinius ; while the elder Licinius, his own brother-in-law, was dispatched in spite of a promise to spare his life ; and there is too much reason to fear that his own wife, Fausta, has to be added to this list. Of course it is possible that there may have been the best of reasons for all these executions, and very strong reasons indeed are whispered by antiquity in some of the cases ; but these incidents have, like the back-sliding of another pious king, given great cause to the enemy to speak reproachfully and have, in the same degree, chilled the enthusiasm of Christians. Against him a great deal has, further, been made of certain conformities to the old religion of which after his conversion he is accused. But, in his position, these were to some extent inevitable ; while the reality of some of them is doubtful. The use, for example, on one side of coins of representations of the Sun-god, while Christian symbols adorned the other, is capable of the interpretation that his intention was to represent God as the Sun of the soul or Christ as the Light of the world. To make an objection out of the postponing of his baptism till the very end of his life is to betray ignorance of the time ; for this was then common in the Church and recommended by teachers of eminence. Even the darker stains mentioned

above did not destroy the belief or pride in him of the most Christian of his contemporaries. Eusebius, his biographer, does not even mention them. But this reticence was the worst of all services to his hero. To posterity a frank statement of the entire case from the contemporary Christian point of view would have been invaluable.<sup>1</sup>

In spite, however, of some blemishes on the character of this man, his conversion cannot be omitted from any list of the historical conversions of the world, and its reality is not refuted by the record of the life that followed it, when this is judged fairly and as a whole.

The interest of the inhabitants of this country in Constantine used to be conciliated by the belief that he was born in our island ; and, although this is no longer credited, it is certain that his father died at the city of York in the arms of his son, and that Constantine was proclaimed Emperor by the army there. How near he was to the age of the persecutions is shown by the fact that Diocletian, the author of the severest of all these outbreaks, was his father's colleague. In fact, he himself had, in his youth, been on the staff of Diocletian, and he was present in Nicomedia when the fire of persecution broke out against the Christians. In order to secure the protection of the Empire from danger, threatening from the Persians and the Germans, Diocletian had arranged that there should be four joint-emperors, stationed at different centres of the vast Roman dominion ; and Constantine's father was one of these. The arrangement did not prove a lasting one ; but, for a considerable time,

<sup>1</sup> Zahn's estimate in *Skizzen aus dem Leben der Alten Kirche* is so severe and unsympathetic as to raise a suspicion that some modern political motive may be behind, as in Strauss' treatise on Julian ; and of what nature this is may perhaps be inferred from the note in the index after the name of the paper—“(Hanover, 1876).” At all events, with Zahn ought to be compared the sane and well-reasoned discussion by Dr. E. C. Richardson, which forms the introduction to the translation of Eusebius' *Life of Constantine* in *The Nicene and Postnicene Fathers*.

it was apt to recur when the rulers were weak, whereas a really strong ruler was apt to revert to the more natural plan of taking all the reins into his own hand. This Constantine did ; and it was in the process of fighting down his unworthy colleagues that he became a Christian. Apart from the persecution of the Christians in which some of them indulged, these were so profligate as men and so evil as rulers that it was a blessing to humanity to root them out, and the proceedings of Constantine assumed the character of a crusade against persecutors and evildoers.

In searching for the beginnings of Constantine's piety, we observe that Eusebius speaks of his father as having been a Christian. It would be probably more correct to say that he was a monotheist. Zahn conjectures that he may have been an adherent of Mithras, a Persian divinity, whose cult was at that time popular throughout the Roman Empire, and that this may account for the partiality of the son for sun-imagery in worship. At all events, the father kept entirely apart from the persecution practised by his colleagues, as well as from their other violent and oppressive proceedings, and was warmly loved by his subjects. As this was an age of good mothers, who won their sons to the faith, and as Helena, the mother of Constantine, is a saint in the calendar, it might be natural to look to her as the source of his religious impressions ; but the fact seems to be the other way : he seems to have been the source of hers.

Some have attempted to explain Constantine's change as a result of deep foresight and political calculation. The old religion was in the last stages of decrepitude ; its oracles were dumb ; its priests could only be impediments to any friend of progress ; but the new religion embraced the people of character ; its bishops held their adherents in the hollow of their hand ; to it the future belonged. Certainly this was

the actual situation ; and Constantine derived immense advantages as a statesman from his connexion with Christianity. But it does not follow that he foresaw these or chose his course with diplomatic skill with a view to them. On the contrary, the element of surprise, which always enters more or less into conversion, was conspicuous in his case. It was not he who sought Christ, but Christ who sought him. Indeed, so ignorant was he of Christ at the time when the signs of Him were presented to his apprehension that he had to go and ask who it was who had thus appeared to him. This he asked of the ministers of the Gospel, who thenceforward became his friends, and he asked it of the Word of God, of which he became for life a diligent student, often rising for its study while others were asleep. His biographer puts it as if, when setting out against Maxentius, the first of his colleagues who had become a foe, he had been in doubt under which divinity he should place his enterprise, when Christ appeared to him and offered His assistance. Others have represented the scene as taking place in the crisis of the battle at the Milvian Bridge, just outside Rome ; so it is depicted in the great picture by Raphael in the Vatican. An ancient authority places it two days before this battle. But the impression produced by Eusebius, who knew best, is that it took place earlier, at some place undetermined.

At all events, while his mind was bent on his enterprise and on the relation of Christianity to it, he saw at midday a great cross in the sky, with this motto, *Under this banner conquer* ; his men saw it too ; and that night he was commanded from the same quarter to adopt the cross as his motto and to put it on the shields of his army. But the incident is so important that it had better be given in the historian's own words : "A most marvellous sign appeared to him from heaven, the account of which it might have been hard to believe had it been related by any other person.

But, since the victorious emperor himself long afterwards declared it to the writer of this history, when he was honoured with his acquaintance and society, and confirmed his statement by an oath, who could hesitate to accredit the narration, especially since the testimony of aftertime has established its truth ? He said that about noon, when the day was already beginning to decline, he saw with his own eyes the trophy of a cross of light in the heavens, above the sun and bearing the inscription, *Conquer by this*. At this sight he himself was struck with amazement, and his whole army also, which followed him on this expedition and witnessed the miracle. He said, moreover, that he doubted within himself what the import of this apparition could be. And, while he continued to ponder and reason on its meaning, night suddenly came on ; then in his sleep the Christ of God appeared to him with the same sign which he had seen in the heavens, and commanded him to make a likeness of that sign which he had seen in the heavens and to use it as a safeguard in all engagements with his enemies.”<sup>1</sup>

This is an arresting testimony ; but it does not stand alone. It is certain that he caused the cross to be thenceforth impressed on the shields of his soldiers. He made it the standard, with the initial letters of the Saviour’s name at the top, round which his bodyguard was clustered, and he testified to Eusebius with what effect it had often been carried into the hottest part of the battle where his adherents were giving way. The same sign was painted on the outside of his palace, with a dragon beneath, to betoken the defeat of the Old Serpent by the Saviour ; and “ so large a measure of the divine love possessed the Emperor’s soul that, in the principal apartment of the imperial palace itself, on a vast tablet displayed in the centre of its gold-covered panelled ceiling, he caused the symbol of our Saviour’s passion to

<sup>1</sup> *Life*, i. 28, 29.

be fixed, composed of a variety of precious stones richly in-wrought with gold. This symbol he seemed to have intended to be as it were the safeguard of the Empire itself.”<sup>1</sup>

Of course, every conceivable explanation of the vision has been attempted, from the theory that it was a pure falsehood of the Emperor’s invention, up through all kinds of subjective impressions, magnified by rumour and tradition. But these look very poor beside the statements quoted above. The vital question is, whether we can assume a divine agency. Was this the gracious self-manifestation of Christ to a human soul ?

Many considerations may have to enter into the answer to be given to this question ; but the principal surely is the testimony borne by his subsequent life to the reality of the change through which he had passed.

As might have been expected, he immediately put a stop to persecution ; and he got his principal colleague in the East to consent to an edict of toleration by which freedom of belief and worship was accorded to all religions. When his colleague subsequently contravened this engagement and resumed persecution, Constantine advanced against him, and the campaign, in which he was completely successful, assumed the character of a conflict between paganism and Christianity. He invited the exiled Christians to return to their homes and compensated them for the losses they had incurred on account of their testimony. Having an imperial passion for building, he now caused churches in immense numbers and of great splendour to rise in every part of his dominions, while the temples of the heathen divinities were transmuted into Christian sanctuaries. He conferred on the Church and its officials ample privileges, delighting to call himself a bishop for the external, while Christian

<sup>1</sup> *Life*, iii. 49.

ministers were the bishops of the internal affairs of the Church. Yet he did not fail to manifest an interest also in the Church's spiritual welfare, as was proved, in more cases than one, by his efforts to efface differences and restore concord, his greatest effort in this direction being the calling of the ever-memorable Council of Nice, at which he not only presided but did not a little personally to secure the decision which has ever since expressed the faith of the Church on the greatest of all her dogmas. He was a man of prayer, taking about with him on his campaigns a tent for his private devotions. "He pitched the tabernacle of the cross outside and at a distance from his camp, and there passed his time in a pure and holy manner, offering up prayers to God, following thus the example of His ancient prophet, of whom the sacred oracles testify, that he pitched the tabernacle without the camp. And, making earnest supplications to God, he was always honoured, after a little, with a manifestation of His presence. And then, as if moved by a divine impulse, he would rush from the tabernacle, and suddenly give orders to his army to move at once without delay, and on the instant to draw their swords. On this they would immediately commence the attack, fight vigorously, so as with incredible celerity to secure the victory, and raise trophies over their enemies."<sup>1</sup> It is a much more striking evidence of the strength of his new convictions that he tried without ceasing to impart to others the experiences through which he had passed himself. Thus he taught his soldiers a prayer for daily use. "On one occasion he thus personally addressed one of his courtiers, 'How far, my friend, are we to carry our inordinate desires ?' Then, drawing the dimensions of a human figure with a lance, which he happened to have in his hand, he continued : 'Though thou couldst obtain the whole wealth of this world, yea, the whole world

<sup>1</sup> *Life*, ii. 12.

itself, thou wilt carry with thee at last no more than this little spot which I have marked out, if, indeed, even that be thine.''"<sup>1</sup> He even went so far as to preach, thus anticipating the practice of the present Emperor of Germany ; and Eusebius gives an admirable account of the general scope of his doctrine on such occasions.<sup>2</sup> He has also preserved for us an actual specimen of the Emperor's sacred oratory. This is generally printed at the close of the *Life* under the title of *To the Assembly of the Saints*, and, although it cannot be recommended as a sample of the highest pulpit eloquence, it is very good preaching for an emperor.

As a ruler, Constantine is not only praised by Eusebius and other Christian panegyrists, but ranked among the very foremost in history, as one equally great in the arts of war and the achievements of peace, who shed happiness on his subjects and, after uniting the empire in his own hand, bequeathed it to his sons. In his own day this was not the only estimate ; for some, who disapproved of the favour shown by him to Christianity, accused him of extravagance ; and there is no doubt that he was often taken in by hypocrites. In modern times estimates have gone to opposite extremes ; for any one who makes such an outspoken religious profession is sure to excite partisanship of both a favourable and a hostile description. It does not, however, admit of question that he was superior in every respect to the competitors whom he displaced ; he was conspicuously free from the grosser vices by which, in the imperial period, the highest place in the state was so often disgraced ; and he devoted his energies of mind and body unweariedly to the service of the position in which Providence had placed him. Eusebius, who saw him in youth, describes him as having been at that time tall and handsome, excelling in all manly exercises, and he testifies that at the Council of Nice, where he sat by his side, he,

<sup>1</sup> *Life*, iv. 30.

<sup>2</sup> *Life*, iv. 29.

in his maturity, bewitched all present by the dignity and graciousness of his manner.

His baptism, as has been already mentioned, was delayed to the very close of his life, not because he hesitated to confess himself a Christian, but on account of a superstition, common at the time, that this ordinance could wash away sin and secure a straight passage to glory. After the act he refused to clothe himself with the purple any more, and, in a few days, amidst many expressions of happiness and faith, he passed away. He was buried in a church which he had caused to be erected in Constantinople, to be his mausoleum. It contained twelve pillars, to represent the twelve apostles ; and he himself was interred, in an upright position, in a thirteenth pillar. This may explain the title given him in the calendar of the Eastern Church, "equal to the apostles," unless, indeed, the meaning of this title be "like to the Apostle"—that is, St. Paul—the reference being to the circumstances of his conversion, which bear not a little resemblance to the scene on the way to Damascus.

JAMES STALKER.

#### *STUDIES IN THE PAULINE THEOLOGY.*

##### V. THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD.

- (1) In the last Study the Need of Salvation was shown to be due both to the guilt and to the power of sin. Man's conscience witnesses against him that in his sin he is estranged from, and opposed to God, and that he, therefore, needs the forgiveness of God. He is also conscious of his weakness to withstand temptation, and to discharge duty, and seeks deliverance from the bondage of sin from God. It was argued, in criticism of current theological tendencies, that the one need is as real as the other. The sense of guilt is not an illusion, and the feeling of weakness only an actual-