

poses of Omnipotence, and in harmony with its own principles. If, before, it had been hampered with forms, customs, and corruptions, at every effort which it now makes to move, some portion of these old incrustations of evil fall off; a desire to advance might send it to consult the word of God; a concern to retrieve its past indolence fills it with a zeal that calls on "all men everywhere to repent;" the conversions which ensue furnish it with the means of enlarging its sphere of activity. The existence of all this both proves the presence of the Divine Spirit in the midst of it, and leads it to earnest cries for still larger effusions of his influence; and thus, by action and reaction, an increase of its prosperity leads to importunate prayer for larger impartations of the Spirit, and larger impartations of the Spirit necessarily produce an increase of divine prosperity.

Brethren, look at the Christians and Christian denominations of Britain at present; and say, what but their activity for God, and the salutary effects of that activity on themselves, constitute the sign and means of their visible prosperity? Take away this, and what single feature would remain on which the spiritual eye could rest with pleasure? Their orthodoxy? That would be their condemnation; for, if their creed be scriptural, activity for God is necessary, if only to make them consistent with themselves. The numbers they include? The world outnumbers them; and it is only by their aggressive activity, blessed by God, that they can hope to keep their disproportion from increasing. Their liberality? Apart from this Christian activity, where would be the calls on that liberality? It is this which brings it into exercise, and by exercise augments it. Their union with each other? This activity for enlarging the kingdom of Christ is almost the only bond which, at present, does unite them; take away this, and almost the last ligament of their visible union would be snapped. Their spirit of prayer? That has been called into exercise almost entirely by means of their Christian activity; for, feeling the utter insufficiency of their own endeavours, they have earnestly entreated God to bare his arm in their behalf.

Their aggressive spirit, then, in the cause of human salvation, whether at home or abroad, forms, at present, the principle sign and means of their visible prosperity. Amidst scenes of political strife, it has brought to them visions of a kingdom which is not of this world. Amidst scenes of ecclesiastical discord, it has provided one standard, around which all can rally against the common foe. Amidst the icy selfishness of the world around, it has called forth warm streams of Christian liberality. It has given employment to energies which would otherwise have been wasted in the arena of angry controversy. It has given a heart to the church, stirred its deepest sympathies for the world, brought large accessions to its numbers, enlarged its views, and brightened its visions, of the reign of Christ, filled many of its members with a sense of self-dissatisfaction of utter dependence on God, of aching want and craving desire for something more, and something better, than it yet possesses; so that its loudest prayers are prayers for the promised outpouring of the Holy Spirit: from all of which we infer, that a full return in faith and prayer to the aggressive design of the Christian church, would be a full return to its first prosperity.

(To be continued.)

SCRIPTURE ILLUSTRATIONS.

CANA, a small town of Galilee, situated on a gentle eminence to the west of Capernaum. This circumstance distinctly proves how accurately the writings of the evangelists correspond with the geography and present appearance of the country. The ruler of Capernaum, whose child was dangerously ill, brought Jesus to *come down and heal his son.* (John iv. 47-51.) About a quarter of a mile from the small and poor village, (for such it now is,) on the road from Nazareth, there is a well of delicious water close to the road, whence all the water is taken for the supply of the inhabitants. At this well, which is supplied by springs from the mountains about two miles distant, it is usual for pilgrims to halt, as being the source of the water which our Saviour, by his first public miracle, converted into wine. (John ii. 11.) In consequence of this miracle, both the Christian and Turkish inhabitants of Cana cherish the sin-

gular notion that, by drinking copiously of the waters of this spring, intoxication is produced. This place is called Cana of Galilee, to distinguish it from Cana, or Kana, (Josh. xix. 28,) which belonged to the tribe of Asher, and was situated in the vicinity of Sidon. Here are seen the ruins of a church, which is said to have been erected by the Empress Helena, over the spot where the marriage feast was held.

ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY.

CHRISTIAN DISPENSATION.

[CONTINUED.]

THE accession of Constantine the Great to the throne of the Roman world, in A.D. 306, and his subsequent conversion to Christianity, terminated the pagan persecutions, and brought days of peace and security to the church. About this time (says Mosheim,) Constantine the Great, who had hitherto discovered no religious principles of any kind, embraced Christianity, in consequence, as it is said, of a miraculous cross, which appeared to him in the air, as he was marching towards Rome, to attack Maxentius. But that this extraordinary event was the reason of his conversion, is a matter that has never yet been placed in such a light, as to dispel all doubts and difficulties. For the first edict of Constantine in favour of the Christians, and many other circumstances that might be here alleged, show, indeed, that he was well disposed to them and to their worship, but are no proof that he looked upon Christianity as the only true religion: which, however, would have been the natural effect of a miraculous conversion. It appears evident, on the contrary, that this emperor consider the other religions, and particularly that which was handed down from the ancient Romans, as also true, and useful to mankind; and declared it as his intention and desire, that they should all be exercised and professed in the empire, leaving to each individual the liberty of adhering to that which he thought the best. Constantine, it is true, did not remain always in this state of indifference. In process of time, he acquired more extensive views of the excellence and importance of the Christian religion, and gradually arrived at an entire persuasion of its bearing, alone, the sacred marks of celestial truth, and of a divine origin. He was convinced of the falsehood and impiety of all other religious institutions; and, acting in consequence of this conviction, he exhorted earnestly all his subjects to embrace the gospel; and, at length, employed all the force of his authority in the abolition of the ancient superstition. It is not, indeed, easy, nor perhaps possible, to fix precisely the time when the religious sentiments of Constantine were so far changed as to render all religions but that of Christ, the objects of his aversion. All that we know, with certainty, concerning this matter, is, that this change was first published to the world by the laws and edicts which this emperor issued out in the year 324, when, after the defeat and death of Licinius, he reigned, without a colleague, sole lord of the Roman empire. His designs, however, with respect to the abolition of the ancient religion of the Romans, and the tolerating no other form of worship but the Christian, were only made known towards the latter part of his life, by the edicts he issued out for destroying the heathen temples, and prohibiting sacrifices.

The sincerity of Constantine's zeal for Christianity can scarcely be doubted, unless it be maintained that the outward actions of men are in no degree a proof of their inward sentiments. It must, indeed, be confessed, that the life and actions of this prince were not such as the Christian religion demands from those who profess to believe in its sublime doctrines. It is also certain that, from his conversion to the last period of his life, he continued in the state of a catechumen, and was not received by baptism into the number of the faithful, until a few days before his death, when that sacred rite was administered to him at Nicomedia, by Eusebius, bishop of that place. But neither of these circumstances are sufficient to prove that he was not entirely persuaded of the divinity of the Christian religion, or that his profession of the gospel was an act of pure dissimulation. For it was a custom with many, in this century, to put off their baptism to the last hour: that thus, immediately after receiving by this rite the remission of their sins, they might ascend,

pure and spotless, to the mansions of life and immortality. Nor are the crimes of Constantine any proof of the insincerity of his profession, since nothing is more evident, though it be strange and unaccountable, than that many who believe, in the firmest manner, the truth and divinity of the gospel, yet violate its laws by repeated transgressions, and live in contradiction to their own inward principles. Another question, of a different nature, might be proposed here, viz. Whether motives of a worldly kind did not contribute, in a certain measure, to give Christianity, in the esteem of Constantine, a preference to all other religious systems? It is, indeed, probable, that this prince perceived the admirable tendency of the Christian doctrine and precepts to promote the stability of government, by preserving the citizens in their obedience to the reigning powers, and in the practice of those virtues that render a state happy. And he must naturally have observed, how defective the Roman superstition was in this important point.

The doubts and difficulties that naturally arise in the mind concerning the miraculous cross that Constantine solemnly declared he had seen, about noon, in the air, are many and considerable. It is easy, indeed, to refute the opinion of those who look upon this prodigy as a cunning fiction, invented by the emperor to animate his troops in the ensuing battle, or who consider the narration as wholly fabulous. The sentiment, also, of those who imagine that this pretended cross was no more than a natural phenomenon in a solar halo, is perhaps more ingenious, than solid and convincing. Nor, in the third place, do we think it sufficiently proved, that the divine power interposed here to confirm the wavering faith of Constantine by a stupendous miracle. The only hypothesis, then, which remains, is, that we consider this famous cross as a vision presented to the emperor in a dream, with the remarkable inscription, *HAC VINCE, i. e. In this conquer*; and this latter opinion is maintained by authors of considerable weight.

After the death of Constantine, which happened in the year 337, his three sons, Constantine II. Constantius, and Constans, were, in consequence of his appointment, put in possession of the empire, and were all saluted as emperors and Augusti by the Roman senate. There were yet living two brothers of the late emperor, viz. Constantius Dalmatius and Julius Constantius, and they had several sons. These the sons of Constantine ordered to be put to death, lest their ambitious views should excite troubles in the empire; and they all fell victims to this barbarous order, except Gallus and Julian, the sons of Julius Constantius, the latter of whom rose afterwards to the imperial dignity. The dominions allotted to Constantine were Britain, Gaul, and Spain; but he did not possess them long—for, having made himself master, by force, of several places belonging to Constans, this occasioned a war between the two brothers, in the year 340, in which Constantine lost his life. Constans, who had received at first, for his portion, Illyricum, Italy, and Africa, added now the dominions of the deceased prince to his own, and thus became sole master of all the western provinces. He remained in possession of this vast territory until the year 350, when he was cruelly assassinated by the orders of Magnentius, one of his commanders, who had revolted, and declared himself emperor. Magnentius, in his turn, met with the fate he deserved; transported with rage and despair at his ill success in the war against Constantius, and apprehending the most terrible and ignominious death from the just resentment of the conqueror, he laid violent hands upon himself. Thus Constantius, who had, before this, possessed the provinces of Asia, Syria, and Egypt, became, in the year 353, sole lord of the Roman empire, which he ruled until the year 361, when he died at Mopsucene, on the borders of Cilicia, as he was marching against Julian. None of these three brothers possessed the spirit and genius of their father. They all, indeed, followed his example, in continuing to abrogate and efface the ancient superstitions of the Romans, and other idolatrous nations, and to accelerate the progress of the Christian religion throughout the empire. This zeal was, no doubt, laudable; its end was excellent; but, in the means used to accomplish it, there were many things worthy of blame.

The flourishing progress of the Christian religion was greatly interrupted, and the church re-