

rule, interfered with. There are, accordingly, no traces of persecution in Britain during the reign of Adrian, although he took active measures to suppress the new faith in other parts of the Empire, where either the numbers or the attitude of the Christians were deemed formidable. We have an intimation, but no more,* of disquiet in the British Church, in the reign of M. Aurelius, from which time it appears to have enjoyed uninterrupted tranquility, down to the time of Diocletian; and it is between these two periods that its most rapid development may be supposed to have taken place. The last named Emperor, besides being no less intolerant of Christianity on its own account, in Britain than in the other Provinces, was, no doubt, especially incensed against the British, on account of a revolt having recently broken out among them, under the leadership of Carausius, who, with his rival and successor, Allectus, successfully resisted the Roman arms for ten years (A. D. 287—296). For Carausius, a man of low birth,† and dependent for popularity solely on his military talents, would, doubtless, on a matter so indifferent to him as the merits or demerits of rival forms of religious belief, have supported Christianity if its adherents were numerous, or tolerated it under any circumstances. The persecution which followed the suppression, by the Romans, of this insurrection, warrants us in believing that Christianity was widely professed in Britain at the time, whether or not the Emperor regarded that form of superstition parallel to Druidism in a past generation, as the stronghold of rebellion. An extensive defection had taken place amongst the British; large numbers of them professed the Christian faith, the professors of which had long been regarded in high quarters as the bitterest enemies of the human race; therefore, let them suffer, at least, in common with their pagan brethren, whose religion, at any rate, could not have led them into rebellion. And so the remonstrances of kind-hearted Constantius, against this act of wanton cruelty, were unavailing; the edict for extirpation was passed, and must be carried into effect. This great persecution, which spared neither age nor sex, though its date is not accurately fixed,‡ seems to have lasted a considerable time. At its cessation, the British Church

* Bede, i, 4.

† Gibbon's Decline and Fall, c. 13.

‡ It has been placed by some authorities during the alienation of Britain from the Romans above noticed; but, as the Island was recovered before Diocletian's first edict against the Christians at Rome, and the persecution is always associated with his name, so early a date seems hardly probable. For the chronology of St. Alban's martyrdom, consult the History of the Abbey, by Dr. Nicolson, late Rector of St. Albans.