

and finally devastated by the tyranny of Maxentius. Parents were impelled by poverty to sell their infants or to destroy them.

Constantine the Great was the first Christian emperor. He was proclaimed at York, A.D. 306. He defeated Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge, and thus acquired the control of Italy in 312, and his conversion dates from this time. The edict of Milan, granting toleration to the Christians was issued in 313. His character has been the subject of much difference of opinion. By one class of writers he has been represented as a sanguinary hypocrite, stained with the worst crimes, and only at the point of death becoming a member of the church by baptism, so as to make the best of both worlds. Others speak of him in terms of adulation. In truth he had a difficult part to play. The greater number of his subjects must have been Pagans. To have forced his own belief on them might have led to rebellion. It was the part of a wise statesman to hasten slowly, and not by undue precipitance to embitter the majority of his subjects, but to modify by degrees the defects in their manners and customs. He was also probably not entirely free himself from the prejudices of early education. But the best evidence of his character is to be found in his laws, and these form a lasting monument to his fame.

Three years after defeating Maxentius he enacted a law, and amended it seven years later, (315-322), with the view of deterring parents from destroying their offspring. It authorized poor parents, suffering for want of food and clothing and unable through poverty to rear their children, to procure food and clothing and necessaries from the public funds and from the private fortune of the Emperor without distinction. Enabled thus to escape the sufferings of extreme poverty, they might gratify parental affection by keeping their children at home without the hazard of seeing them die of hunger. This law as well as several others promulgated the same year, are usually supposed to have been suggested by Lactantius, a christian of great eminence for his learning and eloquence, and then the tutor of Crispus the son of the Emperor.

A custom prevailed extensively in Constantine's time of exposing, killing, selling, and pledging *new born* infants, and with the view of protecting them, if their father chose to exercise his paternal power, and not to seek the assistance he might obtain for the support of his children under the provisions of the constitution of 315, Constantine in 318 enacted that he who killed a parent or a son should be guilty of parricide. This put an end to any legal exercise of the most odious part of the paternal authority. A parent could no longer claim the right to avenge his wounded affections or honor by the infliction of the last punishment on an offending son or relative under his power. And a