

bitterly opposed the Roman Emperors were to the Christian religion and how cruelly they persecuted all Christians. In the year 298 the Roman Emperor, Diocletian, issued an edict that all Christians who refused to worship idols should be put to death and their churches burnt to the ground; and in consequence of this cruel edict many suffered martyrdom rather than deny Christ. Few, however, in Britain were called upon to do so: it was a land so far off and little known, and the means of communication so difficult that the edict was scarcely heard of. There is a name associated with the early history of the Church in England that I must not pass over, it is that of St. Alban, the first English martyr. St. Alban was a soldier in the Roman army, under the Emperor Diocletian. When he came to Britain with his legion, he was greatly struck with the contrast between his own cruel religion and the patience and holiness of those who had become Christians, and he secretly believed in the truth. We are told that it was the example of a poor Christian priest, whom he had kindly sheltered beneath his roof, that brought him openly to confess his faith. This priest was persecuted for righteousness' sake when he asked and received the protection of the Roman soldier. The house was searched in order to discover him, and Alban nobly exchanged clothes with the priest that he might be able more easily to escape from his enemies. This kind act led to the discovery of Alban; he was dragged away to torture, and then he boldly declared before the army that he believed in Christ, and would worship only the one God. His fate was sealed, and the Saviour he refused to deny on earth admitted him to the home prepared for those who confess Him, in heaven. The Abbey of St. Alban, in Hertfordshire, is named after our first Christian martyr. He suffered about 1,600 years ago, and his name lives, and will live in the memory of English Churchmen as long as time lasts. How much more noble a thing it is to be remembered as a poor Christian who was not ashamed to confess Christ, even though in doing so he laid down his life, than as the Emperor of Rome, who persecuted the followers of Jesus.

Most men admit that God exercises a general control over the events of this world, but comparatively few believe that all events, small as well as great, are under His direction, and yet no Christian can read history and not be struck with the fact that He always guides the affairs of this world so as to bring about the ultimate good of his Church. When things seem to be most dark, and evil appears all but to overpower the good, He raises up some holy man to do the work He has in hand, and to protect what is true. So it was at the period of which I am now writing. At

York the spot is still shown where the Empress Helena, a British lady, is supposed to have given birth to the first Christian Emperor of Rome. The walls of the Prætorium at York rang with shouts of joy when Constantine the Great was proclaimed Emperor of the world. Just at the moment when the Christian spark of hope seemed to be put out, and the heathen religion to prevail, God raised up Constantine to cherish the spark till it became a great and living flame. It was during the reign of Diocletian, who issued the wicked edict to which I have just referred, commanding all Christians, upon penalty of death, to worship the Gods of the heathen, that Constantius, the father of Constantine, was appointed Governor of Britain, and this, together with the other causes I have mentioned, will account for the comparative exemption enjoyed by the Britons from the operation of the edict. In the year 306 Constantine enters Rome in triumph as Emperor, and all cruelties against the followers of Christ cease. Christians are favored and their religion is encouraged throughout the world. Britain shares in the general joy; churches spring up everywhere and the sun of prosperity shines. Eusebius, in his Ecclesiastical history, describes things as they now were. After speaking of the virtues and goodness of Constantine, he adds: "The Christians now no longer feared those who had so cruelly used them; they celebrated splendid and festive days with the utmost joy; all things were filled with light, and those who before were sunk in sorrow looked at each other with smiling and cheerful faces. With choirs and hymns in the cities and villages they praised God, the universal King, and extolled the pious Emperor. Edicts were published and issued by the victorious Constantine full of clemency, and laws were made full of charity and true religion." It is very interesting to notice as we look back upon the rules which were laid down for the British church that in many important points it is very like our own church of to-day. First we find that there were Bishops at its head. There can be no doubt upon this point, for in the year 314 there was an important general assembly, or council, of bishops, held at Arles, in France, and we find that there were three British bishops present. This council was summoned by the Emperor Constantine, and not by the bishop of Rome. Duties pertaining to the office of a bishop were the same then as now, namely, to watch over the members of the church of Christ committed to them, to ordain priests and deacons who should preside over the several congregations, exactly as I told you the Apostles did in their day, to settle disputes between the clergy and people, to confirm and consecrate, in fact to do just what our bishops now do in their several dioceses.