

Second Period of the Devotion to Mary.

FROM CONSTANTINE TO THE MIDDLE AGES.

CHAPTER IV.

THE EAST.—THE ICONOCLASTS.

ON the delightful banks of the Bosphorus, in Thrace, within sight of the distant mountains of Asia Minor, whose lofty summits are at evening tinged with the richest gold and carmine, the coast of Europe is indented by a large bay of incomparable beauty, and over its sheet of bright blue waters rises a vast city, all white and all Christian;* it is Constantinople, which the son of Helena and of Constantius-Chloris had solemnly dedicated to Mary; for the master of the world, still treated as a God in idolatrous Rome, belongs himself to Jesus Christ; and the cross whereby he has conquered decorates his banners, glitters on his coin, and surmounts the sumptuous basilic which he has placed under the invocation of St. Sophia, the Virgin, and the twelve Apostles.

Idolatry is still erect, but it is a withered palm-tree, whose lofty branches are already lifeless. Its altars are still seen, but over their deserted stand reptiles crawl to and fro; birds begin to nestle in the arches of the temples where spiders spin their webs; the wild vine spreads its green branches over their walls of polished marble, and the traveller profanely cuts a walking-stick in those sacred groves from which it was, formerly, death to pull a single branch. The ceremonies of pagan worship have ceased in Greece; the most venerated idols serve only for ornament in the public places of Constantinople; but no one is forced to enter the church; for, though polytheism be a religion essentially bad and supremely

* Constantine would have it so that there was not a single idolater in Constantinople; he left idols only in profane places, to serve as ornaments. (*Eccles. Hist.*, vol. i. p. 523.)