Constantine turned the tide of persecution of the Christians in the Roman Empire

Constantine, who was at this time defending his own frontier against the Germans, had taken no part in the quarrels of the other claimants to the throne. But when, in 311, Galerius , the eldest Augustus and the most v iolent persecutor of the Christians, had died a miserable death, after cancelling his edicts against the Christians, and when Maxentius , after throwing down Constantine's statues, proclaimed him a tyrant, the latter saw that war was inevitable. Though his army was far inferior to that of Maxentius, numbering according to various statements from 25,000 to 100,000 men, while Maxentius disposed of fully 190,000, he did not hesitate to march rapidly into Italy (spring of 312). After storming Susa and almost annihilating a powerful army near Turin, he continued his march southward. At Verona he met a hostile army under the prefect of Maxentius' guard, Ruricius, who shut himself up in the fortress. While besieging the city Constantine, with a detachment of his army, boldly assailed a fresh force of the enemy coming to the relief of the besieged fortress and completely defeated it. The surrender of Verona was the consequence. In spite of the overwhelming numbers of his enemy (an estimated 100,000 in Maxentius' army against 20,000 in Constantine's army) the emperor confidently marched forward to Rome .

A vision had assured him that he should conquer in the sign of the Christ , and his warriors carried Christ's monogram on their shields, though the majority of them were pagans . The opposing forces met near the bridge over the Tiber called the Milvian Bridge, and here Maxentius' troops suffered a complete defeat, the tyrant himself losing his life in the Tiber (28 October, 312). Of his gratitude to the God of the Christians the victor immediately gave convincing proof ; the

Christian worship
was henceforth tolerated throughout the empire (Edict of Milan, early in 313).
His enemies he treated with the greatest magnanimity; no bloody executions followed the victory of the Milvian Bridge. Constantine stayed in Rome but a short time after his victory. Proceeding to Milan (end of 312, or beginning of 313) he met his colleague the Augustus Licinius, married his sister to him, secured his protection for the Christians in the East, and promised him support against Maximinus Daia. The last, a bigoted pagan and a cruel tyrant, who persecuted the Christians even after Galerius' death, was now defeated by Licinius, whose soldiers, by his orders, had invoked the God of the Christians on the battle-field (30 April, 313). Maximinus, in his turn, implored the God of the Christians, but died of a painful disease in the following autumn.

Of all Diocletian's tetrarchs Licinius was now the only survivor. His treachery soon compelled Constantine to make war on him. Pushing forward with his wonted impetuosity, the emperor struck him a decisive blow at Cibalae (8 October, 314). But Licinius was able to recover himself, and the battle fought between the two rivals at Castra Jarba (November, 314) left the two armies in such a position that both parties thought it best to make peace. For ten years the peace lasted, but when, about 322, Licinius, not content with openly professing paganism, began to persecute the Christians, while at the same time he treated with contempt Constantine's undoubted rights and privileges, the outbreak of

war was certain, and Constantine gathered an army of 125,000 infantry and 10,000 cavalry, besides a fleet of 200 vessels to gain control of the Bosporus. Licinius, on the other hand, by leaving the eastern boundaries of the empire undefended succeeded in collecting an even more numerous army, made up of 150,000 infantry and 15,000 cavalry, while his fleet consisted of no fewer than 350 ships. The opposing armies met at Adrianople, 3 July, 324, and Constantine's well-disciplined troops defeated and put to flight the less disciplined forces of Licinius. Licinius strengthened the garrison of Byzantium so that an attack seemed likely to result in failure and the only hope of taking the fortress lay in a blockade and famine. This required the assistance of Constantine's fleet, but his opponent's ships barred the way. A sea fight at the entrance to the Dardanelles was indecisive, and Constantine's detachment retired to Elains, where it joined the bulk of his fleet. When the fleet of the Licinian admiral Abantus pursued on the following day, it was overtaken by a violent storm which destroyed 130 ships and 5000 men. Constantine crossed the Bosporus, leaving a sufficient corps to maintain the blockade of Byzantium, and overtook his opponent's main body at Chrysopolis, near Chalcedon. Again he inflicted on him a crushing defeat, killing 25,000 men and scattering the greater part of the remainder. Licinius with 30,000 men escaped to Nicomedia. But he now saw that further resistance was useless. He surrendered at discretion, and his noble-hearted conqueror spared his life. But when, in the following year (325), Licinius renewed his treacherous practices he was condemned to death by the Roman Senate and executed.

Henceforth, Constantine was sole master of the Roman Empire. Shortly after the defeat of Licinius, Constantine determined to make Constantinople the future capital of the empire, and with his usual energy he took every measure to enlarge, strengthen, and beautify it. For the next ten years of his reign he devoted himself to promoting the moral, political, and economical welfare of his possessions and made dispositions for the future government of the empire. While he placed his nephews, Dalmatius and Hannibalianus in charge of lesser provinces, he designated his sons Constantius, Constantine, and Constans as the future rulers of the empire. Not long before his end, the hostile movement of the Persian king, Shâpûr, again summoned him into the field. When he was about to march against the enemy he was seized with an illness of which he died in May, 337, after receiving baptism.