

he had declared war on Constantine, as though he were going to vindicate the death of his father. From this, the suspicion had arisen<sup>2</sup> that the old man had feigned the fatal discord with his son, so as to make way for himself for getting rid of the others and to claim for himself and his son the empire of the whole world when those others had been removed. But that was false.<sup>3</sup> He had this purpose, that after his son and the others had been removed, he would restore himself and Diocletian to power.

#### Chapter 44

Civil warfare had already been stirred up between them.<sup>1</sup> And although Maxentius kept himself at Rome, because he had received a warning that he would perish if he went outside the gates of the city, war was being waged, however, by capable leaders. Maxentius had the greater strength, because he had received his father's army from Severus and he had recently drawn out one of his own from the Moors and the Gaetulians.

The struggle went on, and the Maxentian forces were gaining until after Constantine, with strengthened courage and prepared for both outcomes,<sup>2</sup> moved all his troops closer to the city and settled at the region of the Milvian Bridge.<sup>3</sup> The day was approaching on which Maxentius had taken command, that is, the sixth day before the November Kalends, and the fifth anniversary celebration was being ended. Constantine

<sup>2</sup> There was a tradition to the effect that the quarrel was feigned. Cf. Eutropius 10.3.1-2; Orosius 7.28.9; and John of Antioch, frg. 169 (Müller).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. ch. 29.1. Lactantius strives to blacken the reputation of Maximian and thereby excuse and exalt Constantine the more.

<sup>1</sup> The campaigns must have begun in 311. Cf. W. Seston, 'Recherches sur la chronologie du regne de Constantine le Grand,' *Revue des Études Anciennes* 39 (1937) 211ff.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Vergil, *Aeneid* 2.61.

<sup>3</sup> This part of Lactantius' account is the source of much later writing on Constantine, legendary even more than factual. Cf. N. H. Baynes' treatment in the *Cambridge Ancient History*, Vol. 12, pp. 681-683; Holsapple, *Constantine the Great*, pp. 149-193.

was warned in quiet to mark the celestial sign of God on his shields and thus to engage in battle.<sup>4</sup> He did as he was ordered. He inscribed the name of Christ on the shields, using the initial letter X, crossed by the letter I with its top portion bent.<sup>5</sup> Armed with this sign, the army took the sword.<sup>6</sup> It proceeded against the enemy without any commander and crossed the bridge. The lines clashed on equal fronts; the battle raged on both sides with the greatest violence: 'Flight was unheard of for the one and the other.'<sup>7</sup>

There was a sedition in the city, and the leader was charged with being a deserter of the public safety, and when he was seen—for he was holding a circus in honor of his anniversary—the people with one accord suddenly shouted that Constantine could not be conquered. Upset by this shout, he left, and, calling certain senators, ordered them to consult the Sibylline Books. In them, it was discovered that on that day the enemy of the Romans was to perish. He was led on to hope of victory by this oracle, and set out and came to the line of battle.

The bridge was cut down behind him.<sup>8</sup> When he was seen, the fighting grew more intense, and the hand of God was over the battle line. The Maxentian line was routed, and he himself turned to flee and hastened toward the bridge which had

<sup>4</sup> Cf. ch. 46.3. Perhaps the recitation of the battle prayer was influenced by that of Judas Maccabaeus (2 Mach. 15.12-17).

<sup>5</sup> Throughout the writings of Lactantius, it is evident that to him the words *Caeleste signum* signify 'the sign of the cross' (*Inst.* 4.26, 27; *De mort.* 10.2). The words used alone, however, cannot signify the monogram of Christ, but the use of the verb *notare*, 'to mark or express an idea by means of an abbreviation,' helps to give us this notion. There is vast literature on the exact sign that Constantine used. It is excellently summarized in Moreau's *Commentary*, pp. 433ff. The monogrammatic cross of definitely cruciform style, ✠, did not appear until the middle of the fourth century. The form then was probably the simplest of the classical monograms for Christ, ☩, or ☩.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Eusebius, *History of the Church* 9.11; *Vita Constantini* 1.29.

<sup>7</sup> Vergil, *Aeneid* 10.757.

<sup>8</sup> Lactantius is the only source for this detail. It is not known whether this was Maxentius' snare for Constantine. If so, he fell into the trap himself.

been demolished. Overwhelmed by the rush of those fleeing, he was drowned in the Tiber.<sup>9</sup>

When this most bitter of wars was over and Constantine was received as emperor with the great rejoicing of the Senate and the Roman people, he learned of the perfidy of Maximin; he seized letters and came upon the statues and images.<sup>10</sup> The Senate decreed to Constantine, by reason of his virtue, the title of first name [i.e., the Senior Augustus]. Maximin was claiming this for himself. When news of the victory of the liberated city had been brought to Maximin, he received it no differently than if he himself had been conquered. Then, when he learned of the decree of the Senate, he so chafed with anger and hurt that he openly expressed his enmity and uttered imprecations mixed with jokes against the 'Great Emperor.'<sup>11</sup>

#### Chapter 45

When affairs had been arranged in the city, Constantine went the next winter to Milan. Licinius came there to receive his bride.<sup>1</sup> When Maximin understood that they were engaged in solemn nuptials, he moved his army from Syria and, with the winter raging as fiercely as possible and his delay doubled, he rushed into Bithynia with weakened troops. For, because of the great storms and snow and mud and cold and labor, the beasts of every kind were lost. The lamentable loss of these animals along the way was already announcing what would be the prospect of the war that was coming, a like destruction for the soldiers.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Eusebius, *History of the Church* 9.9.7; *Vita Constantini* 1.38; *Epitome de Caesaribus* 40.7, Zonaras 13.1.12. The body was recovered and the head brought to Rome and then to Africa to assure the people there of the death of their emperor.

<sup>10</sup> It must be remembered that Lactantius was writing this account during the years 318-320, several years after the events described.

<sup>11</sup> 'Maximus Augustus' was Constantine's title from his entry to Rome.

<sup>1</sup> The stay of Constantine and Licinius at Milan was from January to March. Cf. the words of the Edict in ch. 48.

He did not delay within his own territory, but, crossing the strait at once, he approached the gates of Byzantium in arms. Praesidiary soldiers were there, stationed by Licinius in case of an event of this kind. He tried to bribe these, at first, with gifts and promises and, later, to frighten them by the force of an attack, but neither violence nor promise had any effect. Eleven days had been spent now,<sup>2</sup> during which there was time for sending messengers and letters to the emperor, when the soldiers, despairing not from lack of faith, but from scarcity of numbers, gave themselves over. From here, he moved on to Heraclea, and there, being detained for the same reason, he lost several days' time.

Now Licinius, having quickened his march, had come to Adrianople with a few troops, when that other,<sup>3</sup> delaying awhile and receiving Perinth in surrender, advanced eighteen miles to a stopping place.<sup>4</sup> He was able to go no farther, for the second place<sup>5</sup> was being held by Licinius, and it was the same number of miles distant. That one had collected as many soldiers as he could from the nearest places and was continuing on the way toward Maximin, rather to delay him than with the intention of a struggle or the hope of victory, because Maximin had an army of seventy thousand armed men, whereas he himself had collected scarcely thirty thousand. For his soldiers had been scattered throughout different regions, and the scarcity of the time did not allow them all to get together.<sup>6</sup>

#### Chapter 46

As the armies were drawing very near now, it was evident that the battle would be very soon. Then, Maximin made a

<sup>2</sup> This precise detail shows the extent of Lactantius' information on this campaign; the other sources deal with generalities (Eusebius 9.10.2; *Epitome de Caesaribus* 40.8, etc.).

<sup>3</sup> Maximin.

<sup>4</sup> This was Tzurulum (Corbu).

<sup>5</sup> Drusipara.

<sup>6</sup> These details of the position and preparedness of Licinius emphasize the miraculous nature of the victory.