

Nearly ten years of unceasing effort to root out Christianity failed to accomplish the task. Even the heathen leaders came to see that it had grown too strong to be destroyed, unless the empire itself were to be dissolved into chaos. So the pagan leadership that had come to the fore after the resignation of Diocletian gave up the struggle, and ordered the persecution stopped. The surviving Christians saw not only a cessation of persecution; they witnessed the rise to imperial^{al} power of one who favored Christianity, and found the new emperor, Constantine, giving constant imperial support to Christianity.

It seemed as if a new age had dawned. Instead of being at times a persecuted religion and at other times a merely tolerated one, Christianity was now the most popular religion in the empire, with every reason to expect that it would eventually become the supreme one. Many ceased to look with longing for the return of their Saviour; instead they began to rejoice in the favor of the supreme earthly ruler, and to look forward to the making of a Christian world with imperial help. Under these circumstances it was very natural that men should begin to trace the steps by which Christianity had grown and spread during the three centuries that had passed. Writers carefully gathered the facts that had been passed on by word of mouth, and searched through earlier Christian writings to find additional information regarding the history of the church. The first three volumes of The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series consist almost entirely of histories, ~~following~~^{presenting} the story of the Christian leaders since the time of the apostles. Without these writings our knowledge of the history of the ante-Nicene period would be extremely fragmentary.

Yet the century that began with the accession of Constantine did not prove to be one of quiet progress. Almost immediately