

Lucretius boasted, had dethroned the gods. Yet this victory had been for nought if the old Olympus was to see enthroned a dead Christ in the place of a pros'rate Jupiter. Moreover, philosophy was in a place of power. Oracles had grown dumb, it is true, but there was still a potent voice in the earth claiming to speak with wisdom and authority. Lucretius brought to its help the greatest poetic genius which Rome can boast. Seneca and Juvenal, Agricola and Tacitus, statesman and poet, soldier and historian, openly avowed their allegiance to it and clung to its precepts in a kind of wild despair. It had its plans of reform and its systems of morality; it had its defenders, whose influence and very means of subsistence were involved in its supremacy. St. Paul could no more escape conflict with the Stoicism and the Epicureanism of his time than he could have escaped the Mediterranean moisture in the air he breathed. But he neither compromised with them or attempted to out-argue them. The holy man, speaking as he was moved by the Holy Ghost, lived them out of countenance. He saw the hopelessness of trying to build a system of morality upon speculative quicksands. The principles of such a system he perceived could at best be accessible only to the instructed few, and moral elevation must in that case wait on intellectual culture. He saw with equal clearness that there is no necessary connection between knowledge and conduct; that there is indeed an irreconcilable conflict between what I do and what I would, that man's lack of power is even greater than his lack of moral ideals; he saw that these philosophical systems were destitute of both, destitute of any central personal figure, divine embodiment of all its aspirations and destitute of any central personal force strong enough to seize and tear the soul from its entanglements and to transform it with the glow of spiritual energy. The highest possible reach of these systems he saw to be a refined and elegant selfishness, cold and incommunicative, powerless to purify and powerless to inspire: hence he lost no time in argument. He came not with the enticing words of any man's philosophy; his word was in the demonstration of the spirit and with power. A faith that claims to be a new energy among men must establish itself by new miracles every day, and the one miracle that no logic could dispute away was the triumphant splendour of Christian virtue. The records of the early church are monotonous in the recurrence of the same experience. "I was won from my philosophy by the invincible patience and the indomitable courage of the Lord's disciples." Tacitus might give credence to the wretched slanders hawked about Rome to extenuate the devilish ingenuity of Nero's torture; but later students of philosophy, like Justin Martyr, who had wandered from school to school in search of peace and power, were astonished to find both in such intensity among the despised and persecuted Christians. True, not every student of philosophy had Justin's candour and the early opposition to the Gospel from the philosophic side has never been surpassed for malignity and strength. To read the fragments of Celsus yet extant is like reading the pages of Voltaire. All the secrets of dialectic skill were exhausted by this early writer to distil a criticism sharp enough to eat into the very heart of the new faith. And had the Christianity of Celsus' time possessed no more life and power than the French caricature thereof, upon whose head Voltaire poured his scalding satire, it is hard to imagine how it could have survived hostilities so terrible. But so long as Christ was lifted up, so long as witnesses testified to the Law of the Spirit of Life which was in Christ Jesus, so long no hostility however virulent, no criticism however malignant, could keep back the increasing multitude of those who sought the secret of this power.

Incidentally I have mentioned Tacitus the historian, and the reproach so often urged against him that he, the first thinker of his time, should have had no presentiment of the power of Christianity, that superstition which he dismisses with so slight a notice that he should have accepted vulgar rumour for his description of the Christians, and have made no effort to discover for