

political system, which had absorbed so much refinement and imbibed so much philosophy, ever sank so deeply and debased itself so utterly in secularism, selfishness, sensuality, and servility. But besides all this, there reigned in all classes, as evinced by their ruling passion of gladiatorial games, a public gluttony of blood. Gibbon's golden age of the Antonines did nothing to temper this. The influence of the personal character of those emperors perished with them, nay, probably left the Empire, through their long spell of peace, more steeped in effeminacy than they found it. Never were the words which Shakspeare has put into the funeral oration over the first Cæsar more amply verified—

"The evil that men do lives after them ;
The good is oft interred with their bones"—

than in the case of these specimens of paganized perfection, the Antonine Cæsars. They had done nothing to educate the Senate and people to higher aspirations, as shown by the fact that the Roman world presently resigned itself to such a trio of outrages on humanity as is presented in Commodus, Caracalla, and Heliogabalus. It is true that the vigorous personality of Septimius Severus breaks the downward drag between the first and second of these. But he again was a "barrack" Cæsar, and found campaigns in the East the only antidote to decay. And if he was one of the best, what can be said of the worst?

These remarks are in close relation to the condition of Church life depicted in several of these "Lives," notably in that of Jerome. He is the satirist (in prose) of his age. The parade of wealth, vice, and folly, made splendid in the public eye by every refined device of ostentatious effeminacy, has Jerome for its chief exponent in A.D. 390. It shows that old Roman society, debauched for three centuries by many a Cæsar, Senator, and Consular, poisoning and corrupting the Church by being transferred to her bosom under conditions of nominal conversion. From that poison the Roman Church has never really recovered. A vigorous Pope may turn moral sanitor. He purges it awhile—*tamen usque recurrit*, being a bane bred in the soil and nurtured in the air.