

THE DIVINE CHALLENGE

almost always be traced to motives in themselves profoundly religious, or the offspring of religion. Perhaps the greatest empire the world has ever known was the Roman, and in the earlier stages of their history the Romans were not less religious than the Israelites. Horace was by no means a religious man, yet he was constrained to admit that Rome could not endure without religious convictions, and he warns his countrymen that all their sorrows spring from forgetfulness of God. Voltaire spoke in precisely the same spirit when he said that if there were no God it would be necessary to invent a God, because without belief in God the fabric of society could not be held together. So far as English domestic history is concerned, there has not been a single great struggle on English soil which has not been dominated by religious ideas, and the whole story of the national development expresses the enormous effect of religious ideas on practical conduct. So then the first thing which we are constrained to admit is the enormous importance of religion in personal and national life, and this is something which only the grossly ignorant or entirely foolish and thoughtless will think of doubting.

It was one of the earliest sayings of Jesus Christ that the practical virtue of any system of faith lay in its effect on conduct, "by their fruits ye shall know them." It is this principle which He applies now to Himself and His teaching. He submits Himself to