

in the immense desert of which they were the centre and the life. The gorgeous palaces and temples, which gave it the appearance of an enchanted land—the intense devotion of the people to the beautiful but warlike Zenobia, who is herself introduced into the living drama, in which she enacts her part as becomes one of the most wonderful women the world ever saw—the fierce ambition of the Roman emperor—every thing is drawn with a striking vividness which imparts to it a character for truth which not even the knowledge that fifteen centuries have elapsed since the time of which it treats, can diminish or dispel.

There is one feature of these Letters which imparts to them a peculiar value. They afford what may be taken as a very correct picture of mankind at the period of which they treat. The darkness of paganism is broken in upon by the light of Christianity, which then had begun to acquire strength to battle against the influences which superstition brought to bear against it. Several of the most beautifully drawn characters are disciples of what was then the “new religion,” and the sublime simplicity of the pure doctrines of Christ, finds in them advocates worthy as any human advocate may be, of enforcing its godlike precepts. We quote here, from the book itself, a description of the feelings of the Roman, on entering for the first time a place of Christian worship:—

I cannot doubt that you are repelled, my Curtius, by this account of a worship of such simplicity as to amount almost to poverty. But I must tell you that never have I been so overwhelmed by emotions of the noblest kind, as when sitting in the midst of these despised Nazarenes, and joining in their devotions; for to sit neuter in such a scene, it was not in my nature to do, nor would it have been in yours, much as you affect to despise this “superstitious race.” This was indeed worship. It was a true communion of the creature with the Creator. Never before had I heard a prayer. How different from the loud and declamatory harangues of our priests! The full and rich tones of the voice of Probus, expressive of deepest reverence of the Being he addressed, and of profoundest humility on the part of the worshipper, seeming, too, as if uttered in no part by the usual organs of speech, but as if pronounced by the very heart itself, fell upon the charmed ear like notes from another world. There was a new and strange union, both in the manner of the Christian, and in the sentiments he expressed, of an awe such as I never before witnessed in man towards the gods, and familiarity and child-like confidence, that made me feel as if the God to whom he prayed was a father and a friend, in a much higher sense than we are accustomed to regard the Creator of the universe. It was a child soliciting mercies from a kind and considerate parent—conscious of much frailty and ill desert, but relying, too, with a perfect trust, both upon the equity and benignity of the God of his faith. I received an impression, too, from the quiet and breathless silence of the apartment, from the low and but just audible voice of the preacher, of the near neighbourhood of gods and men—of the universal presence of the infinite spirit of the Deity—which certainly I had never received before. I could hardly divest myself of the feeling, that the God addressed, was, in truth, in the midst of the temple; and I found my eye turning to the ceiling, as if there must be some visible manifestation of his presence. I wish you could have been there. I am sure that after witnessing such devotions, contempt or ridicule would be the last emotions you would ever entertain towards this people. Neither could you any longer apply to them the terms fanatic, enthusiast, or superstitious. You would have seen a calmness, a sobriety, a decency, so remarkable; you would have heard sentiments so rational, so instructive, so exalted, that you would have felt your prejudices breaking away and disappearing, without any volition or act of your own. Nay, against your will, they would have fallen; and nothing would have been left but the naked question—not is this faith beautiful and worthy, but is this religion true or false?

What struck me most, after having listened to the discourse of Probus to the end, was the practical aim and character of the religion he preached. It was no fanciful speculation or airy dream. It was not a plaything of the imagination he had been holding up to our contemplation, but a series of truths and doctrines, bearing with eminent directness, and with a perfect adaptation, upon human life, the effect and issue of which, widely and cordially received, must be to give birth to a condition of humanity not now any where to be found on earth. I was startled by no confounding and overwhelming mysteries; neither my faith nor my reason was burdened or offended; but I was shown, as by a light from heaven, how truly the path which leads to the possession and enjoyment of a future existence, coincides with that which conducts to the best happiness of earth. It was a religion addressed to the reason and the affections; and evidence enough was afforded in the representations given of its more important truths, that it was furnished with ample power to convince and exalt the reason—to satisfy and fill the affections.

In another strain, and shewing the character of Zenobia, as in the day of her glory she may have appeared, is the following extract from the book. It is the Queen’s Address to her Council, when consulting on the demand of Rome, to yield up her right to certain Provinces, formerly Roman, but which she had, by conquest, won to herself the right to rule:—

“It was my wish,” said Zenobia, answering the general expectation, “before the final decision of the senate and the council, to receive from my friends, in social confidence, a full expression of their feelings their opinions, their hopes, and their fears, concerning the present posture of our affairs. My wish has been gratified, and I truly thank you all, and not least those my friends—as a philosopher, should I not term them my best friends?—who, with a generous trust in me and in you who are on my part, have not shrunk