

popular rage by the milder interventions of law. Marcus Aurelius, with all his stoical repugnance to the enthusiasm of the first Christian converts, would have willingly seen the new system reconciled to the old, according to that feeble neo-Platonic syncretism which was coming into vogue.

He was even then too ignorant of the real nature of the Christian scheme to perceive that it was wholly incompatible with any form of Paganism, either the most elevated or the most debased; for the difference between it and Paganism was not a difference of merely national worship; it was a profound, essential, ineradicable difference. It was the difference between the one true God and thirty thousand spurious gods; between a morality founded upon divine and spiritual love and a morality derived from intellectual deductions and prudential maxims; between a sentiment of universal humanity, which acknowledged no distinctions among men, and a sentiment almost wholly composed of intense and bitter prejudices of race, cast, and selfish personality; and between the hope of a heaven freely opened to all mankind, and a heaven to which heroes, and demi-gods, and favoured individuals could alone aspire. In any encounter between two such religions the battle must be internecine, and the victory accrue only at the cost of the life of the vanquished.

The spirit of the encounter was illustrated in the first experiences of Christianity in Gaul. A few Asiatic teachers from the Church of Smyrna, headed by Pothinus, who had prayed with Polycarp, a beloved companion of the beloved disciple of John, and either following the routes of commerce, or perhaps, invited by Jews who had accompanied Herod or Pilate in their exile, were the earthly instruments of its advent. A small circle of believers which they gathered at Lyons soon became a considerable religious community. The register still preserves to us the names of fifty members, while those of others, says the pious chronicler, "Are written in the pages of the Book of Life." But in those days success was sorrow. The lofty tone which the new religion hastened to assume with its growth in numbers, the diffusion of an opinion that with the fall of the ancient religion of Rome the temporal dominion would also fall, together with the un-

usual occurrence of natural calamities, which awoke superstitious fears, and the rumor of new barbaric invasions, conspired to arouse the heathen against it with an almost fanatical fury. Their zeal soon passed from rancorous reproaches into personal violence.

The Christians were stoned in the streets; they were chased from the baths and the forum; they were shut up in their houses; they were denounced to the tribunals as incestuous and atheistical; and the slaves were suborned to proclaim their simple *agapæ* Thyestian feasts, and their fraternal assemblies Œdipodean marriages. Arraigned before the authorities they were tortured by all those horrible methods which Roman barbarity well knew, in order to induce them to retract their confessions or to accuse their fellows. Some relapsed under the severity of the inflictions, but the majority of the confessors stood firm. A man of rank and wealth, Vettius Apagathus, who came forth to defend them, being himself denounced a Christian, eagerly avowed the offence. Many perished in the noisome air of the dungeons to which they were committed; others had their limbs dislocated in the stocks; while the more detested among them were slowly burned by the application of hot irons to the sensitive parts of the body. By a peculiar refinement of cruelty the Romans contrived to inflict these punishments on the occasions of their public festivals. Crowded amphitheatres shouted when some tender and delicate woman was torn by the wild beasts, or an aged and venerable man was stretched bleeding upon the cross.

Among the victims of this hellish rage was the Bishop Pothinus, then ninety years of age, whose feeble body sank beneath its pains, but whose mind gathered serenity and firmness from them. Another victim, whose appearance on the scene was more characteristic of the great social revolution Christianity was effecting, was Blandina,—a woman and a slave. Through all the excruciating agonies of the torture, her mistress, herself a confessor, watched her in trembling anxiety lest she should be betrayed into some weak concession. But Christianity possessed a living power then which could lift even the lowly slave into a sublimity of heroism. From the cross where, like her heavenly Master, she hung,