

too weak to reach the multitude or even to sway the few ; and as for the *Enneads* of Plotinus, and the *Commentaries* of Proclus, with all their gorgeous invocations and voluminous mysticism, they have ever been to mankind but as the small dust of the balance compared to one verse of the Sermon on the Mount.

But, though argument and philosophy failed, though revivals and eclecticism failed, Pagans might always rely for victory upon brute force and crushing violence. Even Nero had driven through the gardens of his Golden House between lines of torches of which each one was a martyr in his shirt of fire ; but Nero's assault was as nothing in extent or virulence compared with those of a Decius or a Diocletian. Christianity spent her first three centuries in one long, legalized, almost unbroken persecution. Some of her holiest bishops—an Ignatius, a Polycarp, an Hippolytus ; some of her greatest writers—a Justin, an Athanasius, an Origen ; even her poor female slaves—a Blandina, a Felicitas, a Potamiana, endured the rack or the prison, perished by the sword or flame. "Yet they stood safe," said Cyprian, "stronger than their conquerors ; the beaten and lacerated members conquered the beating and lacerating hooks." "The nearer I am to the sword," said Ignatius, "the nearer to God." "We were condemned to the wild beasts," wrote the youthful St. Perpetua, "and with hearts full of joy returned to our prison." "Call us," said the fervent Tertullian, "call us *Sarmenticii* and *Semarii*, names derived from the wood wherewith we are burned, and the stakes to

which we are bound ; this is the garment of our victory, our embroidered robe, our triumphal chariot." Such was their "tremendous spirit ;" and when the very executioners were weary, when vast holocausts had been offered to the expiring divinities, then finding, as has been finely said, that she had to deal with "a host of Scaevolas," "the proudest of earthly powers arrayed in the plentitude of material resources humbled herself before a power founded on a mere sense of the unseen."

Yes, it was of God, and they could not overthrow it : the catacomb triumphed over the Grecian temple ; the Cross of shame over the wine-cup and the Salian banquet, the song of the siren and the wreath of rose. These obscure sectaries,—barbarians, orientals, Jews as they were,—fought against the indignant world and won. "Not by power, nor by might, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts ;" by heroic endurance, by stainless innocence, by burning zeal, by inviolable truthfulness, by boundless love. The world's seductive ideals and intoxicating joys, the world's enchanting mythologies and dissolute religions—
young Dionysius,

"As he burst upon the East
A jocund and a welcome conqueror,
And Aphrodite, sweet as from the sea
She rose, and floated in her pearly shell
A laughing girl!"

all fled before a Cross of wood !
Yes, my brethren, because that Cross
was held by the bleeding hands of the
world's true King, who perfected the
strength of His followers in weak-
ness ; and, having been lifted up,
drew all men unto Him.