



AN EASTERN SCENE.

promised himself to study the Christian creed and records, but never found time to fulfil his promise. He was put to death amid the disasters which soon fell upon Palmyra; but in his death he still held firmly to his ideas regarding the immortality of man. What a pity he had not the privilege of Christianity which would have suited him so well! What a flood of light would have been let in upon his noble mind by the authoritative declarations of revealed truth,—“I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord. He that believeth on me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.”

On reading the records of those early days one is struck with the strange mingling among the people of excellent refinement of thought together with mental brutality. The former is seen in the many and unmistakable signs of a high civilization and in the knowledge possessed of literary and scientific subjects, and the latter in the passion for shows and the terrible power placed in the hands of the master over the slave. Men of the highest refinement of mind and feelings, ladies modest and retiring, full of ordinary feminine compassion and sympathy for the distressed seemed not only content but even eager to attend the shows of the amphitheater and witness continued scenes of cruelty and bloodshed,—wild beasts contending with one another in savage fight, and gladiators, short sword in hand, butchering their fellow creatures. By what process of reasoning was the cultured mind led to enjoy such distressing and sanguinary scenes? Mr. Ware thus represents the statement of the case on the part of a scholarly and refined gentleman of the day:—

“I see in it,” he says, “so far as the beasts are concerned, but a lawful source of pleasure. If they tore not one another in pieces for our enter-

tainment they would still do it for their own, in their native forests, and if it must be done, it were a pity none enjoyed it. Such exhibitions help to render men insensible to danger, suffering and death; and as we are so often called upon to fight each other, and die in defence of our liberties, it seems to me that we are in need of some such initiatory process in the art of seeing bloodshed unmoved and of some lessons which shall diminish our love and regard for life. As for the gladiators they are wretches who are better dead than alive, and to die in the excitement of a combat is not worse, perhaps, than to expire through the slow and lingering assaults of a painful disease. It is all honorable fighting and honorable killing. What, moreover, shall be done to entertain the people? We must feed them with some such spectacles, or I verily think they would turn upon each other for amusement in civil broil and slaughter!”

How easily can even a well trained mind arrive at a false and pernicious conclusion! It was the same with slavery. Young men in the heat of passion thought nothing of striking a slave dead on the spot, even in the presence of ladies, leaving the poor wretch unpitied to welter in his gore.

At such a time as this (the middle of the third century), in Palmyra, and, indeed, all the cities of the old world, the voice of Christianity had made itself firmly and distinctly heard. It was the topic of conversation in all circles of society; it was preached on the streets and in public halls. All the cruelties and abuses of society were denounced. Something tangible was held before thirsty souls as to the life beyond the grave. It came to a people who had gained all they could gain from their own resources of wealth, refinement (as it was then understood) and mental culture,—it came as a voice