

THE DIVINE CHALLENGE

of virtue. What wonder that Cæsar was soon regarded as more than mortal man? What wonder that the hope of mankind clung with frantic, and then with adoring passion to this new Saviour of society? Something man must worship, and the Gods being gone, soon man began to worship his fellow man as God. And this was the state of religious thought when Christ came — the Jew worshipping before an empty shrine on which the flame of sincerity had died, the Greek delighting in a brutally corrupt mythology, the Roman worshipping Augustus Cæsar as the one puissant and active deity in the world.

And now consider the challenge of this text. This youth, growing up in a tiny Syrian town, where not only the Roman or the Greek but the leaders of His own nation never came, begins to speak certain words about God. The only conception of God left to the Jews is an exclusive tribal deity who cares only for the sons of Abraham; this youth speaks of the Father in heaven, who has an equal love of all men. The Greek looking with impure eyes into the mystery of things invents deities even more corrupt than man; this youth says, "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God." The Roman, bankrupt in all faith in any divine power outside the earth, sacrifices to Cæsar as the only power he knows; this youth draws back the veil of the infinite, and reveals the ever-living Judge of quick