

VII.

THAT there were many evils in the pagan Empire, and great wrongs and flagrant vices, does not admit of doubt; but that they have been greatly exaggerated; "that in some instances vices and indulgences, which were confined chiefly to certain classes, and which were abhorred and condemned by the better class, as they are by the same class to-day, have been represented as the general practices of the age; that isolated cases of barbarity and anomalous features of society have been fastened upon to illustrate the general character and conduct of the Romans, while the better and brighter side of life in the pagan Empire has been almost wholly concealed by Christian writers, no one, I think, will deny who has carefully studied the history of Rome and is familiar with theological literature.

What a picture of *this* age could be presented, if some writer, two thousand years hence, should adopt the same method in forming an estimate of the character of the people of the United States in the nineteenth century!

Having noticed the condition of the world when Christianity appeared, and during the time it was extending its peaceful conquests, and preparing to mount the throne of the Cæsars and grasp from paganism the sceptre of imperial power, it is time to inquire whether the ascendancy of this religion was followed by a more brilliant genius, a purer morality and a higher civilization. If it were of divine origin, or if it were adapted to expand the mind and purify the heart, the Christians of the first few centuries had a right, looking forward, to expect and predict such grand and glorious results.

Although it had its origin in an obscure province of the Roman Empire, various causes, which it is no part of our present task to explain, contributed to the rapid progress of Christianity. "We are but of yesterday," exclaimed Tertullian, "and we fill all your cities, islands, forts, councils, even the camps themselves, the decuries, the palaces, the senate, and the forum." Its influence, as I have already remarked, in the latter part of the second century "was great and universally acknowledged." Early in the fourth century it was proclaimed the established religion of the Empire.

That the early devotees of the Christian religion were in some respects morally superior to the pagans around them, I am disposed to believe. It is not, however, necessary to suppose Christianity divine in its origin, or beneficent in its general tendency, to explain this fact. Attached to their faith with a devotion which new religions generally inspire in the hearts of their early converts, living apart, as far as possible, from the society of the pagans, believing that their forms and ceremonies, their customs, their pleasures, and even their learning were degrading in their tendency and displeasing in the sight of God, even if they lost much, they escaped many of the corrupting influences of the times; while such