

pious journalists expatiate *ad nauseam* on the immorality and brutality of pre-Christian civilization, and the goodness and tenderness which have gradually crept over the world as Christianity has advanced. Fortunately for these professional apologists, they can presume on the most utter ignorance of their readers and hearers, and, neglecting history and the logic of facts, they are able to give a free reign to their cheap and tawdry rhetoric. Nor does it in the least interfere with their periodical jubilations that while they praise their perfect system, which has had eighteen centuries to produce its perfect fruit, they are obliged to bewail the ghastly diseases of Christian civilization; its chronic pauperism, its rampant vices, its wide-spread drunkenness, its criminality, its costly military systems, outvieing anything which even Rome ever witnessed, and the frightful scale of its wars, as well as of its warlike preparations, which are a strange commentary on the gospel of peace. True, there are some dissonant voices in this well-practised chorus, but they are nearly lost in the swelling volume of sound. A Shelley sings of "the Galilean serpent," and a Swinburne of "the poison of the crucifix." Such voices, however, are only audible to discriminating ears, and so the sweet songsters of orthodoxy keep the concert pretty much to themselves.

Glancing back over eighteen centuries of history with a free and fearless eye, who can truthfully assert that the Star of Bethlehem *was* the herald of a better day? It is quite obvious to the candid student that Christianity wrought no practical improvement on the great body of the Roman Empire, either before or after it secured the patronage of Constantine. The early Christian Emperors were not a whit more moral than the pagan Cæsars. They were simply pale copies of great originals; and if their vices were less flagrant and monstrous than those of a Nero or a Caligula, their virtues were insignificant beside those of an Augustus or an Antoninus. Nor is it easy to see in what respect the gladiatorial shows at Rome were worse than the faction-fights at Constantinople. Still less is it easy to see how the burning and torturing of Christians by pagans were any worse than the burnings and torturings of heretics by their fellow Christians.

Intellectually, Christianity merely substituted a new and vigorous superstition for an old and dying one, which was gradually being supplanted among the educated classes by a prudent, though spirited, philosophy. The gods of Olympus gave place to the Trinity and the Devil, who wielded all the arbitrary power of their predecessors without exhibiting any of their grace or *bonhomie*. The national religions succumbed to one of universal pretensions, and their spirit of mutual toleration was succeeded by a malignant fanaticism which regarded every difference of opinion as a crime. And while the national religions were always more or less subservient to temporal welfare, the new religion dwarfed this world into the mere vestibule of heaven or hell.

Borrowing the bigotry of Judaism, exalting faith as the supreme virtue, and