

THE DIVINE CHALLENGE

stood. The Gods themselves were the incarnation of human vices as well as virtues, for the Greek had his God of cunning, and his God of lying, as well as his Gods of music, chastity, and wisdom.

And among the Romans the breakdown of religion was even more disastrous, and it took a form absolutely appalling. That form was the worship of Cæsar as God. When Herod received the worship of the people as a God and not as a man; when Paul spoke of the "man of sin who sitteth in the temple of God shewing himself that he is God," Herod simply emulated the Cæsars in claiming divine honours, and Paul directly refers to this impious worship of Cæsar. To the reigning Cæsar, temples were built, sacrifices were offered, and divine honours were paid. To us such an impiety seems incredible, especially among a people so robust in mind and masculine in temper as the Roman. But there was a reason for it. Faith in any external government of the universe had wholly failed. Madness and corruption had seized upon every class of society. There was neither justice, virtue, nor morality left — all had been dissolved with a dissolving faith in a divine government. Then came Julius Cæsar, and, by what is the greatest miracle of secular history, arrested the decay of society, imposed upon it a military despotism which was at least just and powerful, combined its scattered forces, gave Rome a new lease of life, and established once more the supremacy