

nature which produced it, and thanking the tree on which it grew."

Both Greek and Roman Stoicism taught that death was not to be feared, as it was either a transformation into a state of happiness, or it was *nothing*; but their arguments wanted conclusiveness and power, and were incapable of satisfying the popular mind. The great mass stood aghast at the thoughts of death and "the shades of Pluto's gloomy halls." Hence Epicureanism was eagerly received, as freeing the mind from the thralldom of this fear; for death, to the Epicurean, was the mere extinction of all consciousness.

A striking antithesis exists here between both these systems of Philosophy and the truth as revealed in Christianity. The former held that death was a natural law; the latter a punishment for sin. The unbending Stoic viewed death as a liberator, a remedy for the diseases and ills of life, a refuge from its storms. Accordingly, he shrank not, in extreme cases, from the grave of the suicide; it was a power granted him to control life, a natural escape from pain and suffering and ignominy,—however vague, indefinite, and undetermined were the final issues.

Epicureanism calmed men's passions, allayed their sorrows, and drew them by a gentle suasion into the paths of virtue; Stoicism was the roar of cannon and clang of bayonets, which kindled in the heart unbending patriotism and heroic bravery. The latter fortified the timid soul against the relentless cannonading of adversity, by the majesty of virtue and some hope of its reward; the former may have soothed a weeping mother, whose first blossom death had blighted, by the calm enumeration of other joys.

Stoicism always tended toward nobility of character; while the natural tendency of Epicureanism, verging in the direction of indulgence and earthly pleasure, sank finally into corruption and vice.

But there were causes of the depression of morals in the Roman Empire, against which principles of Philosophy could not struggle. Among others were the Imperial absolutism,

often the worst form of tyranny; the detestable system of slavery; the annual distribution of corn, which gave idleness a premium and made labor disgraceful; and especially the gladiatorial games, where 80,000 men and women looked on complacently while human blood flowed like water through the gateways of the Coliseum. The morals of the nation rapidly became diseased, and rotten to the core. Ancient Philosophy, cold, selfish, proud or indulgent, left even the noblest minds sensible of some great, mysterious want. Christianity alone could meet and satisfy that want. It came down upon the world like a flash from Heaven, placing all men on one common platform, rescuing the world from Polytheism, establishing the monotheistic faith, declaring one Father for the human family, and clearly revealing the all-powerful doctrine of the immortality of the soul.

The Stoic or the Epicurean cared little for the outcast, the degraded of humanity; while Christianity teaches that the vilest savage has an immortal soul. Those philosophers would behold unmoved the most infamous spectacles of human depravity. Thus did one philosophically muse over the fate of some wretched being: "Poor idiot, poor sot, poor devil; with his little feeble flame of smoky light which he calls life, let him flicker on another moment, or let him be snuffed out, the surface of the waters and the mighty ocean of cosmic vitality flows on as full, and as free, and as fathomless as before."

Under the sunny skies of Greece the Stoic and Epicurean philosophies were born. Four centuries swept by, and fully revealed their incompleteness; but the close of this period heralded the auspicious inception of Christian ethics, a system lofty, far-reaching, cosmopolitan, complete.

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