

THE CHURCH MILITANT.

Each man is a "microcosm," a little universe, an epitome of the great world. Every christian is a "microcosm," a little picture, of the Church of Christ. In how many christian souls do we find reproduced the story of bitter Egyptian bondage, the triumphant passage of the Red Sea, the wanderings in the dreary desert, the thunder and lightning of Sinai, the backslidings and the revivals, the judgments and the mercies of those marvellous forty years! The history of the past is typical of the future. The same foe, the same leaders and allies, the same armour and arms, are to be found through all the ages. Essentially the same principles are manifested in God's dealings with the individual christian and the whole church. If therefore we find the christian's career varied with joy and sorrow, if he has his days of sunshine and of shadows and gloomy clouds,—of Sabbath repose and fiery struggles,—may we not expect similar phenomena on a greater scale in the history of the Church as a whole? We find that it has been even so.

The Lord brought a Vine out of Egypt, planted it in a goodly land, and tenderly cared for it. But the wild beasts broke down its hedges, trod in the mire its branches, and devoured its precious fruit. Often was the heritage of Jehovah left forlorn and desolate. Christ came and watered the roots of that Vine with his own blood and bedewed its branches with the gentle baptisms of His Spirit. Since then that Vine has grown, and spread its branches, so that multitudes in every land have found in it their shelter, food and healing.

There can be no truce between Christ and Anti-Christ. The Church and the kingdom of Satan must ever be at deadly feud. When Jesus gave the Gospel orders to His disciples, He warned them of the antagonism of the "gates of hell." He equipped them for the conflict and sent them forward to the battle field. The weapon which they must wield was (and ever is) the Word of Truth, the sharp two-edged sword whose piercing stroke no helmet or shield or breastplate of satan's devising can withstand.

With this sharp sword the messengers of Christ attacked Jupiter, Mars, Bacchus, Venus, Diana,—all the gods of the Pantheon, all the prejudices, superstitions and lies of Jew and Greek and Roman. War was proclaimed against every rival and foe of Jesus Christ, "the crucified Jew!" He was the only Saviour. And to prove that their words were no vain babbling, His disciples were willing to die for the Saviour whom they announced.

The time came when they had so to die. The world hated the Church and her Head. Had the Church knocked for admission as one of the religions of the Roman Empire, had she been content to live side by side with all the idolatries, she would have met the amplest toleration. She might have the pleasant smile of princes, but her noble army of martyrs would then be missing. Her mission would be a sad mistake: She would not in truth be the Church of the God-Man! As it was, Christ's people, like Himself, had to tread the path of tears and of blood; and often was the air dark with the smoke of their burning, and often were wild beasts weary with tearing their flesh. In death they conquered. The truth cannot be burned, or crucified, or torn by wild beasts. Glorious victories for Christ and His Church were won amid the fiercest fires of persecution. The blood of the martyrs proved the seed of the Church. Christ went forth conquering the world's strength through weakness, and putting to shame the world's wisdom by the "foolishness" of the story of the cross.

Ten times was the Church tried in the furnace of persecution. Ten times the old Roman power was put forth to crush her. She came through the ordeal fair as the moon, clear as the sun, terrible as an army with banners. At the close of those terrific assaults upon her life, the Church found her own children in actual possession of the civil sword,—able and willing to protect her.

But now came a time of greatest peril. Foes from within began to mar her beauty and plot against her life. When the Holy Spirit fills the heart of the church, and the flame of divine love burns brightly, then