

had proved its utter weakness, and had vainly striven to find a place in the heart and conscience of mankind.

These Anti-Christian efforts have been unavailing because of the character of Christ Himself.

No one in all the range of history has ever been subjected to such keen and relentless criticism, or has endured so much calumny and misrepresentation. Blinded by prejudice and hatred his own countrymen accused him of blasphemy and the whole Roman world was prepared to take arms against his system as a rank profanation and a political heresy. Writers of many shades of thought employed themselves in minimizing all His beneficent actions and reducing His unique virtue to a mere matter of expediency. Scurrilous insinuations followed one upon another, and the life the pure man was presented through the haze of impurity in which it was regarded. Later still a series of Christs were given to the world; a mythical Christ, a rationalistic Christ, an intellectual Christ, a perfect-man Christ. Here He is shadowy and afar off; there we almost seem to see him, now we have just touched the hem of His garment. Yet amid all these phases of thought and feeling, Christ remained unchanging, the one luminous figure in the middle of the deepening gloom. Even scepticism has now confessed what it must long have felt, that whatever Christ may or may not be He is not guilty of conscious fraud. He could not have built up on immortal foundation a principle of morality from which the regeneration of the world proceeds, nor could a number of ignorant, untruthful men have fabricated the details of a life which in its unique sublimity transcends the wildest visions of the facts, the noblest thought of the philosophers. The character of Christ is untouched by all the centuries of rebuke and criticism. Pilate's confession has become universal, "We find no fault in Him." He is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners. Looking along the low plane of their restricted vision, it may be enough for some forgetting their hostility in genuine admiration to cry, "Ecce Homo!" "Lo! the man!" Be it ours reverently raising a grateful eye to Heaven to cry, "Ecce Deo!" "Lo, the God!" Anti-Christian efforts have been unavailing also because the evidences of the Truth are found on examination to be satisfactory and convincing. The wise men who laid their treasures at the feet of the wondrous Babe are but a type of those who in every age have looked and wondered and adored. Christianity has commended itself to the most enlightened understandings. It gives no encouragement to ignorant superstition or base credulity. It stands forth in the full sunshine, challenging investigation and bidding all men behold its majestic proportions and its lofty aim. The great Apostle of the Gentiles, keen in intellect, warm in heart, is but the first of that countless list of noble men who discerning the life of Christ have known in whom they have believed. All the influences of early training may have been unfavorable, prejudice and bigotry may have opposed for a long time the entrance of the light; but in spite of these things the world's giant minds have confessed the transcendent power of the Man of sorrows, and have entered the kingdom of heaven with the simple yet sublime faith of a little child. The efforts of criticism to break down the evidences of Christianity are like the efforts of pygmies to overthrow the everlasting hills. With foolish glee they may hold up a little fragment—a temporary accretion upon the surface of the solid rock—and imagine forsooth! that they have made a splendid conquest; but the towering mountain rising high into the clouds above, mocks them with the majesty of its awful silence.

But the most conspicuous failure of anti-christian thought is in the attempt to construct something which shall take the place of Christianity in human life. Sup-

posing the murderous designs of Herod-faction could be successful and the young child's life destroyed, what King and Hero shall we have in His stead? Where shall we look for another Gospel of hope and inspiration? To this question so fair and natural, no adequate answer has been returned. We wait in vain for something which shall supplant the monstrous superstition of Christendom. Remove the Divine ideal of the Gospel, and the constant and painful search after another has proved itself an utterly futile one. To all the eager cries of the heart of men, to all their infinite yearnings after the unseen and eternal anti-christian thought has little to say. There is power of destruction as it seems—fierce, blustering power, working often aimlessly and without avail. But there is no verifying power—no power to build up and to save. In this regard, of a truth, "They are dead who sought the young child's life." And the anti-christian thought of to-day virtually recognizes this utter impotence. The loud shout of ignorant triumph with which the world echoed in the past, is being succeeded by tones of sadness and often of despair. The Macbeth of unbelief hath murdered sleep. The scepticism of our time is essentially pessimistic, and it can only emerge from its position by ignoring those solemn truths which are written deep in the universal conscience of mankind. Disappointment in the present if not counteracted by hope for the future may settle into the conviction that the world is but

"One desert

Barren and cold, on which the wild waves break,  
But nothing rests save carcasses and wrecks,  
Rocks and the salt-surf weeds of bitterness,"

and O, we cannot believe even if we would, that sin is merely a misfortune resulting from environment, or the abnormal action of molecular forces in beings who are pure automata. We cannot believe that the thought of a Nemesis of evil, slow-footed but sure,—the dread of something after death—is the wild fiction of a diseased understanding. We cannot believe that the appointed goal of mankind is a Nirvana of oblivion where conscious personality shall be forever destroyed. August prophecies arise within us,—prophecies of immortality and eternal life. The pessimism of Herod can be cured only by the optimism of Christ who without deluding by false hopes lays down the truth of two stupendous facts; the sin of man, and the salvation of God.

"They are *dead* which sought the young child's life." That is the ending of wickedness now and always. Great armies have come against the young child filled with boastful pride and confidence of victory. By the breath of the Lord they have perished in a night; and in the morning the angels have cried: "They are *dead* which sought the young child's life." Infidel books have come forth to refute christianity, to show its absurdities, to sweep it away from the face of the earth, and soon their weapons have grown rusty from disuse, while the angels have cried: "They are *dead* which sought the young child's life." Critics have advanced with keen, malignant eye, and bitter hatred rankling in their hearts determined to hunt down this monstrous superstition and reveal some better Gospel to mankind. But they have only cut themselves with their own weapons and have found no grateful converts to share their sad oblivion. Again the angel-voice has cried: "They are *dead* that sought the young child's life." And it is not reversed for the scientific enlightenment and literary research of the present day to accomplish a task which has been hitherto impossible. Christianity has everything to hope for by the gradual diffusion of knowledge in regard to the great world of nature and the smaller but sublimer world of man. It cannot be long before the knell of defeat shall be sounded for those who are lifting their voices *now* against the Eternal Son, when