

diligently into the meaning of this strange appearance, as though he wished to add his homage to this new wonder from Heaven. But far otherwise were his thoughts. He who had extirpated by cruel murder the last of the As-moneans was not likely to spare a descendant of the house of David whose birth had been heralded in such an extraordinary manner, and who had appeared at a time when the whole world—great Pan being dead—was looking for some emancipator from philosophers which had revealed their utter weakness and governments which had degenerated into ruthless tyranny. The Magi did not return to minister to the hypocrisy of the royal barbarian. They departed to their own country another way. And when their mission was fulfilled in the finding of the Christ, Joseph took the young Child and His mother and fled into the land of Egypt. How long this exile lasted and what are its profound suggestions, we need not now inquire. At length the tyrant died: the soul of the wretched old man, who had been styled the Great, devising cruelties even in his last agony, stung by remorse and fear, consumed by his own debauches, went forth with a shudder into the awful darkness. Men breathed more freely now that he was gone, and the day of his death became a national festival. God spoke by His angel to the exile in that hostile land, bidding him return again to his native country: "Arise, and take the young child and his mother and go into the land of Israel, for they are dead which sought the young child's life."

In the stirring events of this piece of history we have mirrored the two opposing spirits which seek for admiration in the hearts of men. The message of the angel is not only a statement of what is past, but a prophecy of what is to come in the ultimate overthrow of everything which seeks to destroy Christ and His Gospel and the ultimate triumph of the Babe of Bethlehem over the whole wide world. In sharp antagonism we have presented the two claimants for kingly sway,—the false king tottering to his overthrow in the splendid palace, the true King whose kingdom shall have no end, cradled in the lowly manger. Either Herod or Christ must rule the world and rule our hearts to-day. There is no room for compromise or divided mastership. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.

We need not be surprised that the advent of Christ should produce a stormy conflict of thought and action which in different forms has continued to manifest itself at every period of the world's history. Evil is not a necessary part of human development. It is absolutely unauthorized in the creation of God, and should have slept forever "in the night of possibility." But all its latent powers which had seemed to grow torpid in the congenial atmosphere of a universal corruption were roused to life by the appearance of the Christ, and the eternal antagonism between good and evil made sharply manifest. It was impossible that a new religion claiming such absolute authority over the heart and conscience of men should make its entry into the world unchallenged, or should maintain itself through all the successive changes of human thought without undergoing the most rigid investigation. The history of Christianity is a history of unending strife. When we remember the fierce and persistent opposition which it has encountered in a thousand different forms at the various epochs of its first beginnings and the strength of the Empire which was arrayed against it; the enticements which threatened internal weakness and seemed to leave it an easy prey to designing rulers; the intolerant ecclesiasticism of a later time working in the name of Christianity and yet striking a blow at every one of its essential principles; the coarse effrontery and blatant atheism of the last century; the covert sneer, the open reviling, the sad denial which are the Herods of the present time,—when we

remember these things, and behold the Kingdom of the Christ still flourishing and growing upon the earth, we echo the language of the wise Rabbi uttered more than eighteen hundred years ago: "If this counsel or this work be of man, it will come to nought; but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it, lest haply ye be found to fight against God!"

In order to see the verification of the angel's word in the course of human events, it will be necessary to trace in brief the history of Christianity in the world, and so exhibit some of the leading forms in which the Herod-spirit of extermination has made itself manifest. At the very outset we are forced to notice the wonderful growth of the new religion in the face of the most unfavourable circumstances. It came into a world full of all the abominable impurities of heathenism, and had to contend not merely with the opposition of unregenerate hearts, but with the new intellect of a critical and investigating age. We see Christianity, like the bright star which was its herald, dawning in the midst of a universal darkness. The birth of Christ is revealed first of all to humble shepherds, and His Gospel at once allies itself with the weak and feeble things of the world so that not many wise, not many noble, not many mighty are called, but such as the Philippian jailor, the slave of Colossæ, the humble fishermen of Genneseret. It has no strength of armies, no glittering splendour, no earthly reward. It is lighted only by the light which comes from heaven, and speaks of new hopes, new joys, new ambitions, a new kingdom of which the world had never dreamed before. Imperial Rome arose to crush the nascent heresy. The record of the early Christians might be written in blood. Nearly all the original propagators of the new faith perished by unnatural deaths. Persecution followed persecution through all quarters of the vast empire whither the hated sect had made its way. The sting of satire and the voice of calumny were added to the under force of arms, and to name the name of Christ became an insult to the mighty Pantheon only to be avenged by a dark cell in the Mamertine or a cruel death in the arena. Yet in spite of the unwearied opposition of the mistress of the world, Christianity continued to spread and the history of its growing influence became in effect the history of the progress of mankind. Even the literary efforts of its first opponents obtain an undeserved remembrance only as they are quoted in the triumphant reputations which were called forth against them. At length no later than the fourth century, Christianity became the recognized and established religion of the Roman Empire and the last cry of expiring heathenism is heard in the well-known confession of the Emperor Julian: "Thou hast conquered, O Galilean!" And here another form of trial ensued. By the unnatural union of church and state enfeeblement began gradually to manifest itself. The stalwart heroism of earlier times seemed to be in danger of passing away, and *would* have passed away had not renewed opposition called it into fresh life. For it is profoundly true of that period as of many subsequent ones, that Christianity has suffered more from the hypocrisy and diffidence of its professed friends than from the strength and malice of its enemies. It was by the kiss of Judas that the Son of Man was betrayed. The religion of the lowly Nazarene whose kingdom was not of this world seemed ill-attired in the robes of purple and fine linen which adorned the royal palaces. Internal controversy disturbed the church and finally rent it asunder. Elaborate theologies were formulated and then quarreled over as though they had been the very bread of life, and hierarchical pretensions gradually developed till the whole church was under the bondage of a rigid ecclesiasticism. The Herod-spirit of extermination seemed to have passed over to those who professed to