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In David's Town

David James Burrell



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"A NEW LUMINARY WHEELED INTO VIEW AND SEEMED TO BECKON THEM."—Page 48.

In David's Town

By
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AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY

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*To you, in David's town, this day
Is born, of David's line,
A Saviour, who is Christ the Lord,
And this shall be the sign:
The heavenly Babe you there shall find,
To human view displayed,
All meanly wrapped in swathing bands
And in a manger laid.*

IN DAVID'S TOWN

I

NOEL

A TRAVELLER, climbing over the hills that skirt the Vale of Hebron, had grown weary of the monotonous landscape, when his muleteer turned and, pointing to a huddled throng of white buildings in the distance, said, "Behold, Effendi; it is Bethlehem!"

The star that, to complete the picture, should have been hovering over the village, was not there; the hot sun instead was blazing down upon it. A mosque stood in the foreground, beyond which was a convent, surmounted by a cross.

Thither the traveller turned his steps. As he appeared he heard the pealing of an organ and voices chanting "*Ave, Maria; ora pro nobis!*"

At the doorway an Italian monk, in the brown habit of the Capuchins with cowl and sandals and a hempen rope about his loins, bade him welcome. "But before you enter," he said, point-

ing to a grotto in the opposite rock, "observe where the virgin mother found refuge from the wrath of Herod before the flight into Egypt."

He led the way through the broad hall, the Chapel and the Reliquarium, where among other relics was a little brown and shrunken hand which the monk assured him had belonged to one of the infants slain in Herod's massacre. A stairway here descended into a large chamber where Jerome is believed to have written the Vulgate version of the Scriptures. Further to the left was the entrance to the Grotto of the Nativity, a semi-circular recess, illuminated by a score of pendent chandeliers and paved with mosaic, in the center of which was a golden star bearing the legend:

Hic natus est Jesu Christus de Virga.

The traveller stood at the threshold of this Grotto deeply moved by its sacred memories. He saw the altar at its further end, dimly lighted by five latticed lamps; over the altar a picture of the Nativity; on one side a hollowed slab of marble, the reputed "manger" of the Christ-child; on the other a stone *pric-dieu* where the three kings of the Orient sat while offering their gifts. As his eyes wandered from one object to another they rested at length on the low archway above him, where two Hebrew words had been



THE CHURCH OF THE NATIVITY, BETHLEHEM.
THE GROTTA OF THE NATIVITY.

graven so deeply in the stone that centuries had not obliterated them:

בֵּית בְּטָהֶם

He looked inquiringly at his companion, who beckoned toward the chapel.

A little later, as they sat together there, the monk explained: "The ancient name of this place was that which you saw engraven on the arch, 'The House of Chimham.' You remember, perhaps, that Chimham was the son of the aged Barzillai who befriended David on his flight from Absalom. On this parcel of ground, which the king bestowed upon him in consideration of his father's services, he built him a home. As years passed the home became a caravansary; and here—so runs the story—Joseph and Mary applied for shelter when, spent with their journey, they came to Bethlehem."

The monk's narrative was here interrupted by the clear stroke of a bell from the tower of the convent. He rose with a hasty apology and left the traveller sitting on the oaken bench alone. The bell presently ceased tolling, and the vesper-song in the chapel fell upon the traveller's ears. The tranquillizing influence of the place and the hour overpowered him.

An aged Jew standing beside him seemed to be saying, "I was once the landlord of this Inn."

"It must have been long ago," the traveller answered; "the monks have dwelt in this monastery since the Empress Helena founded it."

"Yes, I was here," he said, "at the time of the taxing under Cyrenius. That was the year the Messiah was born."

"Tell me, then," asked the traveller, "how it was that you did not entertain Joseph and Mary? Surely you knew the necessity was urgent. Could you not have made some provision for the man and his weary companion?"

"Alas, I did not know! The Hope of Israel was indeed about to be realized, but how should I have understood it? Our rulers themselves were blind. I, a mere inn-keeper, how was I to know?"

There was a tone of deep sadness and immeasurable regret in his voice as he proceeded: "I remember it all very clearly. It was at the close of a short winter's day that the pilgrims arrived. The Inn was overcrowded. That was the time of the census, you know; and the families of the lineage of David were all required to enroll here. They had been coming in for days, and every *lezwan* was full. And what was there to specially commend these pilgrims to me? It is true they were of royal descent, but of fallen fortunes, too. The man was a mere peas-

ant, a carpenter, as he told me, from the despised town of Nazareth. Which of the distinguished guests in my caravansary—priests, rabbis, wealthy traders—could I displace to make room for him? Had I realized what subsequently proved to be the fact I might have acted differently; but how was I to know?”

“Was it with your consent,” asked the traveller, “that they found shelter in the cave near by?”

“It was. That was all I could do. It was better for them than to rest under the open sky. There were cattle there and beasts of burden, so that the place afforded shelter from the wind; and there was barley-straw to rest on.”

“And the Messiah was born that night?”

“That very night. The first intimation we had of the Child’s birth was in the early twilight of the morning when a company of shepherds came to the Inn telling a wonderful tale: *‘We were in the fields, last night, keeping watch over our flocks, when lo, the angel of the Lord came upon us and the glory of the Lord shone round about us; and we were sore afraid. And the angel said, “Fear not; for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the*

Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you: Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling-clothes, lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will toward men!" And it came to pass that as the angels were gone away into heaven, we said one to another, "Let us go even unto Bethlehem and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath shewn unto us."'"

"Did you believe the story of the shepherds?" asked the traveller. "Was it not a mere figment of sleep and starlight and superstitious fancy?"

"At first I doubted; but when I brought them to the cave, the Child was there 'wrapped in swaddling-clothes and lying in a manger.' The shepherds said, 'This is surely the Christ, the long-looked-for Christ!' and they knelt and worshipped him. But how was I to know? I sought the rabbi of the village and asked him. He showed me the record where it was written that the Messiah was to be born of a Virgin at Bethlehem and at about this time. That was all I could find out."

"How long did the family remain at Bethlehem?"

“For many days. I would have removed them to better quarters, but they preferred to continue as they were. One of the homes in the village was presently opened to them: and it was while they were abiding there that the wise men came to offer gifts of gold and myrrh and frankincense. Had I needed further evidence as to the Wonderful Child, it was furnished in their story of the guiding star.”

“And is it true that Herod murdered the children of the village?”

“Quite true. He had conceived an insane jealousy of the Child, who, as he learned, was of the royal line of David. The homes of Bethlehem were filled with the voice of weeping, ‘Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted.’ I feared that the Christ-child had perished in the massacre, but fortunately Joseph and Mary had been warned and were gone. I saw them no more. I never saw the Holy Child again. And, in view of what I afterwards learned, I shall never cease to regret that, on that fateful night, when the two weary pilgrims stood at my door, I found no place for them in the Inn.”

A hand on the traveller’s shoulder awoke him from his revery. The sacristan stood beside

him, saying, "It is the hour of retiring. Will you share the hospitality of our convent for the night?" And consenting, the guest murmured to himself, "How much kinder men are to one another than to the Son of Man!"

In the watches of that wakeful night he meditated thus:

"How stands the case with me? Is it better than with the landlord of the Inn? Had I been there, would the carpenter and the peasant girl have met a warmer welcome? He says he knew them not; but Christ himself has long been knocking at my heart; and I know him. How should I not know him, with the Bible at hand and church bells echoing in my ears? His name has been familiar since I learned it at my mother's knee. The pages of history are full of it. The newspapers thrust it upon me. Oh, I know him,—but how little do I honor him!

"It is Christmas eve, the waiting night, when they say he calls, 'Behold I stand and knock! If any man will open unto me I will come in and sup with him and he with me.' I wonder, were I to open, what viands he would spread before me? Would he bring me peace of conscience and peace with God?

"But let me be frank with myself: I do not want him. My hospitality is not for guests in homespun. For me this Jesus has no form nor

comeliness. Were he clothed in purple and fine linen he should find my door on the latch; but there is no beauty in him that I should desire him.

“My heart, moreover, is preoccupied. Wealth, pleasure, passion for knowledge and ambition for power are comfortably housed under my roof. I will not turn them out. There are other guests, too, whose names are not to be blazoned abroad; they know me and I know them and many a merry hour we have passed together. I fear that Jesus and they could not abide comfortably under the same roof. A man must choose; and, to be honest, I choose my nameless guests. Yet there are times when they weary me. Perhaps it would be wise to hear this importunate caller who still cries ‘Open! and I will come in and sup with thee!’

“I will not be ungracious. There is a place near by. What? ‘He will not take it’? Then must he needs abide without. Yet it troubles me. I cannot keep him there.”

Then he remembered, faintly at first as something coming from afar, these lines which he had learned in his boyhood:

No room for Him in whose small hand
The troubled sea and mighty land
Lie cradled like a grain of sand!

And the words beat and beat and beat in his brain, like a throbbing pulse: "Emmanuel! Emmanuel! No room for him—no room for him!" And he found himself, on a sudden, standing by the door and drawing the bolt and saying, "Come in, thou blessed One! My heart is an hungered. Come in, and sup with me!"

Then did the heart of this traveller seem like a lighted house trimmed with holly. And he slept again and dreamed; and the waits were singing:

"God rest ye, all good people,
Upon this Christmas morn;
The God of all good Christians
Was of a woman born!

"God rest ye, merry gentlemen,
Let nothing you dismay;
For Jesus Christ, our Saviour,
Was born this Christmas day."

It is the night of Noel; when, alas, many a soul will drag the yule-log to the hearth and keep a Christless merry-making. Thus, long ago, as a belated Bethlehemite was going by the stable of the Inn, a streak of light from a lantern hanging in the doorway fell across his path. He looked and wondered—and passed on.

The path is sin, the light is heaven, to enter
is to live.

Noel! Noel! The voice at the door is call-
ing, "Open thy heart! Let Christ be born within
it!"

II

THE BELLS ARE RINGING



T is night, seven hundred years before the Advent. The people are walking in darkness; but, behold, suddenly a great light! And the bells begin to ring. Hear their five reverberating notes: "For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given, and his name shall be called:

WONDERFUL!

COUNSELLOR!

MIGHTY GOD!

EVERLASTING FATHER!

PRINCE OF PEACE!"

Down the centuries have come those clear prophetic notes, telling the Christmas story.

"His name shall be called Wonderful." And nineteen hundred years of progress echo, "Wonderful!" Never was truer prophecy, never clearer fulfillment; for Christ is the Wonder of all wonders. Touch his life at any point in its circumference and you touch a miracle.

He was wonderful in his birth: "Great is the mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh; angels desire to look into it!" He was wonderful in his life, in his death, in his resurrection; and wonderful is he in his abiding influence.

In the famous conversation of Napoleon with General Bertrand he said, "The spirit of Christ overawes me. His march across the ages and kingdoms is a mystery insoluble. You speak of the conquests of Cæsar and Alexander, and of the enthusiasms which they kindled in the hearts of their soldiers; but conceive of a dead man conquering by means of an army devoted to his memory! Cæsar and Alexander and myself have founded empires; but we rested the creations of our genius on force. Jesus alone has founded an empire on love; and at this hour millions would die for him!"

The bells ring forth a second note, and again the heart of the world throbs back to answer it: "His name shall be called Counsellor!"

Here is what men want—direction at the cross-roads of life. Two things they must know—Truth and the Way of Life. These they find in Christ. Never man spake like this man. He said, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life." He was the Way that spoke the Truth that leads to Life. He said, "No man cometh unto the

Father but by me"; wherefore, as the Counselor, he must needs add, "Follow me!"

The bells strike a third note, a stupendous note; hear it: "His name shall be called Mighty God!"

This rends the doubt and darkness of the ages. It answers that deepest longing in the soul of man, "Oh that I knew where I might find him!"

God is come down among men. This is the meaning of the Advent. He is no longer veiled in clouds and darkness. The curtain of the Holy of Holies is rent asunder, and whosoever will may enter and behold him.

Christ is God! We bend above the manger of the Holy Child and read upon his swaddling-bands the prophetic title which represents his constant claim, the claim for which he ultimately died: "Emmanuel; which, being interpreted, is God with us!"

The fourth stroke of the bells completes the unveiling of God: "His name shall be called Everlasting Father!"

In the Incarnation we have the going out of God to save men. He "so loved the world" that in the fulness of time he went out into the night, out upon the dark mountains, down into the very slums of sin and shame and despair, to seek and to save his wayward children. The

heart of the Father is in that little word "so." Wherefore the Son could say, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father. Believest thou not that I am in my Father and my Father in me?"

The bells swing once more and sound forth their final, sweetest note, "His name shall be called the Prince of Peace." And here the sound is lost in the swelling song of the angels, "Glory to God in the highest; peace on earth; good-will toward men."

His name is Shiloh, "Prince of Peace." His benediction is Salaam, "Peace be unto you." His gospel is "the gospel of reconciliation." His last bequest is, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you."

The closing of the Gates of Janus at the Advent was a prophecy of the Millennium, when swords shall be beaten into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks.

For, lo! the days are hastening on,
 By prophets bards foretold,
 When with the ever-circling years
 Comes round the Age of Gold:
 When peace shall over all the earth
 Its ancient splendors fling,
 And the whole world give back the song
 Which now the angels sing.

But there is more in this peace than the laying aside of garments rolled in blood. It means peace to the souls of the children of men; that is, peace between a man and God, between a man and his conscience, and between a man and his fellow-men. This is the "Truce of God."

Every bell has its "consonant," or keynote. The consonant of the Bells of Bethlehem is a personal message of grace: "For unto us a Child is born and unto us a Son is given"; that is, to you and me. The possessive pronoun brings the truth home to us. It makes a great difference whether a child is born in one's own home or next door. So let the Bells of Bethlehem ring for each of us.

When Dr. Guthrie was minister of the Barony Church in Glasgow a godless old woman living near by was troubled by the ringing of his bell. At length she presented herself at the minister's study and related this strange experience: "I am here not because of your preaching, Dr. Guthrie, but because of your bell. It always seemed to be saying, 'Come! Come! Come!' and I was angry and resented it. But the other night I dreamed. In my dream I was walking in a garden when you entered with a watering-pot; and, going about, you watered the plants one by one until, coming to a poor scrawny thing, you

passed it by. I remonstrated, saying, 'Water that too.' But you looked at me and answered, 'No, my good woman, it would be useless; for that has no root.' Then I awoke, and the bell was ringing and saying, 'Come! Come! Come!' And I wondered if it was true that I am a poor fruitless thing, and that the bell was God's voice to me. So I have come. Tell me, what shall I do?"

As a sound-wave moves outward from its center, in concentric circles, further and further until its vibrations touch the uttermost borders of infinite space, so ring the Bells of Bethlehem; and the sphere of their message grows wider and wider with the passing years until the Christ shall come again and speak peace to the children of men. Ring on, O bells of Bethlehem!

Ring out the old, ring in the new,
 Ring out the false, ring in the true!
 Ring out old shapes of fowl disease,
 Ring out the narrowing lust of gold,
 Ring out the thousand wars of old,
 Ring in the thousand years of peace!
 Ring in the valiant man and free,
 The larger heart, the kindlier hand!
 Ring out the darkness of the land;
 Ring in the Christ that is to be!

III

THE TIME IS AT HAND

AN imperial decree had been issued calling for an enrollment of all families in their ancestral cities; wherefore Joseph and Mary must needs go to Bethlehem.

The distance was about eighty miles. The roads, at all times difficult, were now almost impassable, and the travellers—a sturdy peasant with staff in hand, leading by the bridle a panniered mule whereon sat the muffled figure of a woman—were probably three days upon the journey. They entered the gates of Bethlehem on the fourth day and betook themselves to the Inn; but finding no room they were obliged to take shelter in a stable near by.

And there, in the night, the great mystery of life was enacted. The Prince was born, not in a chamber hung with purple tapestries, but in a

stall. There was no ringing of bells or crying of heralds to welcome him. The fierce winds howled without and earth was all unconscious of the coming of the Mighty One.

God had struck the hour!

The taxing under Cyrenius marked the fulness of time, and now the enrolment under the Roman authority gave token of the final departure of national power from Israel. The throne trembled, the sceptre fell; then Shiloh came.

The fulness of time was at hand, because the world had reached its climacteric of sin.

It is sometimes the case that a disease cannot be successfully treated until it has "come to a head." We find a curious commentary on the utter insufficiency of human culture as a panacea for spiritual need in the fact that the world's sin reached its full development in what is called the Golden Age. The court and people alike were steeped in luxury and licentiousness. Virgil was writing his *Eclogues*; Horace his *Odes*; Livy his *Annals*. What feasts there were! What glorious sports in the amphitheatre! Cæsar once gave an exhibition in which six hundred gladiators fought hand to hand; and Pompey, not to be outdone, brought five hundred lions into the arena. The women counted their divorces by rings upon their fingers. There

were fashionable dames of the Empire who asked for decrees of defamation, that they might mount the stage and exhibit themselves in lascivious dances in honor of the gods. If one would gain a just conception of the corruptness of those times, let him read the first chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Romans. There is nowhere else in literature such an indictment against the children of men.

In order to acquaint ourselves with the state of affairs at the time of the Advent let us visit some of the characteristic centers of life.

The standard of the Golden Eagle floats over the Capitol of Rome. What does that mean? All nations have been subjugated. It is a time of profound peace. They will tell us that the gates of the Temple of Janus are closed. Peace reigns; but it is the peace of stagnation and despair. The known world, a narrow strip of land around the Mediterranean with outlying provinces, has been brought into abject submission to the nondescript beast in Daniel's vision, the beast with iron teeth, "devouring and breaking in pieces." The golden milestone in the Forum is the world's center. The Orontes at length flows into the Tiber; and "all roads lead to Rome."

Let us enter the Pantheon. Here are multi-

tudinous gods; gods of the fields and forest, of the mountain and plain. They have eyes but they see not; ears have they but they hear not. It is all one to them whether there be light or darkness. How can they relieve the sufferings of humanity, when they themselves are but larger men and women projected on the skies? Wherefore their altars are forsaken. The people have found them out!

Let us visit the Schools of Philosophy by the Ilyssus. Here Zeno walks with his disciples in the Painted Porch, teaching the irresistibility of fate: "What is to be, must be." Here Plato, in his Academy, teaches truth with a peradventure and virtue with a mark of interrogation. Here Epicurus, in his Garden, argues that expediency is the test of action: "We are governed by chance; pleasure is the highest good; death ends all." Here Pyrrho, the father of agnosticism, glorifies doubt, saying, "We affirm nothing; no, not even that we affirm nothing." Sum them all up and you have the philosophy of despair. It finds its supreme expression in the lifted brows and curled lip of Pilate as he contemptuously asks, "What is truth?"

Let us now visit the Forum, the center of social life. Here are three classes: Patricians, Plebeians and Slaves. Of the Patricians there

are ten thousand in Rome; all wealth, culture and power are concentrated in their hands. The Plebeians are idlers, housed in tenements at the public cost; they hate work and love pleasure; their cry is, "Bread and games!" The great majority of the population are slaves, owing to the custom of reducing subjugated peoples to bondage. There are sixty millions of them. They live like beasts of burden, herded in stalls. Cato likens them to "cattle among the straw." All labor is performed by them and without wages; for the wage-system awaits the word of One who shall say with authority, "The laborer is worthy of his hire."

To the Palace next, where we shall observe the luxury of the time. Augustus is on the throne and is worshipped as a god. He is surrounded by courtiers who live in unspeakable extravagance. Pliny says that the betrothal robe of Lollia cost forty millions of sesterces. These aristocrats have apparently no thought above the sordid pleasures of life. Matthew Arnold draws the picture thus:

On that hard pagan world disgust
And secret loathing fell;
Deep weariness and sated lust
Made human life a hell.

In his cool hall, with haggard eyes,
The noble Roman lay,
Or drove abroad in furious guise
Along the Appian Way;
He made a feast, drank fierce and fast,
And crowned his hair with flowers—
No easier nor no quicker passed
The impracticable hours.

Thence to the Colosseum. Here are seats for a hundred thousand people. In yonder golden pavilion sit the Emperor and his knights. The lower galleries are set apart for Patricians and their households; then the vestal virgins; higher up on the stone seats come the Plebeians; and, last of all, freedmen and slaves. At the sound of the trumpet a troop of gladiators file in and salute the Emperor: *Morituri te salutamus!* They fight with one another and with wild beasts. The sand of the arena is stained with blood. The dead are dragged out. The wounded appeal for mercy; but there is no heart of mercy in the populace. To die, indeed, is better than to live; for life, except for the favored few, is not worth living in these days.

But if any survive the cruel ordeal of the Colosseum, where shall they be taken? To the hospitals? There is not one hospital in the Em-

pire! "The world before Christ," says Uhlhorn, "was a world without love." The fate of helpless age and unbefriended childhood is to be exposed to death. The one altar at the crossing of the ways inscribed "Misericordia" merely emphasizes the prevalent inhumanity. Lepers are thrust out beyond the gates to shift for themselves. Blind beggars sit at the entrance of the temples. The best that can befall the sick is to be laid in the porches of some wretched Bethesda to wait for the moving of the waters.

It remains only to visit the Necropolis, the City of the Dead. Here are gravestones inscribed "Dormit"; but this is the sleep that knows no awaking. Death ends all. Cicero goes to the tomb of his daughter Tullia and, kindling a lamp, mourns as he watches it expire, "O my daughter, is this like the quenching of thy life?" Socrates drinks his cup of hemlock, saying, "Whether to live again—I know not." Read on this tombstone dedicated "To the Eternal Sleep" the words:

"I was not and I became;
I was and am no more;
So much is true, all else is false;
Traveller, drink, play and come!"

The night had fallen; an unbroken night. The world was a world without God and without hope.

It was predicted that when the Messiah should come it would be as "the desire of all nations." To that end there must be a convincing exposure of the weakness of all other plans of deliverance. This had come to pass. The old religions were practically dead; they had no power to help or to satisfy the souls of men. The gods were impotent. The people had lost confidence in them.

The philosophers were helpless. Gibbon says, "All the prevailing systems were by the wise regarded as equally false, by the statesmen as equally necessary, and by the people as equally true."

The religion of the Jews had come to be a system of mere form. The temple itself was a whited sepulchre, fair without but within full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. The religious teachers wore broad phylacteries and made long prayers on the corners of the streets; but they stood in the doorway of heaven, neither entering in themselves nor suffering others to enter in.

The lights of the golden candlestick were extinguished. There was darkness everywhere,

darkness of sin, darkness of ignorance, darkness of despair; a darkness like that of Egypt which could be felt, so chill, so thick that artificial lights went out. It was darkness like the falling of a funeral pall. It was a night full of ghosts and spectres and base superstitions—a night of fear and trembling and crying, “Would God it were day!”

But the darkest hour is just before the dawn. The Messianic hope was abroad. Devout Jews like Simeon and Anna were waiting for the manifestation of the Hope of Israel. Devout pagans like the Magi were watching the stars. Devout Greeks were speaking of the coming of “the Just One.” There were voices asking, “Watchman, what of the night?” and through the darkness one great answering voice from Seir, “The morning cometh!”

The fulness of time had come, for the nations had completed their contribution to the great event.

The placard on the breast of Jesus as he bore his cross to Calvary was written in three languages—Hebrew, Latin, and Greek. At that period these were the tongues spoken by the three great nations of the earth.

The Jews were a chosen people. They had been chosen to a specific task, namely, to per-

petuate the worship of the one true God and to keep the oracles with their Messianic prophecies and pass them down along the coming ages. It was appropriate that now their sovereignty as a distinct people should pass from them, because they had finished their work.

The Greeks had contributed their part, in the formulation of a language which should serve as an invaluable vehicle for the expression of religious truth. It was no accident that the New Testament was written in Greek. The philosophic culture of that nation had necessitated the forming of a language which is, above all others, adapted to the use of spiritual truth.

And Rome had conquered the world. The decree calling for a universal enrolment was an announcement of this fact. All nations had passed under the yoke of the Empire. The Cæsars had built roads in every direction for the transporting of their legions to the remotest colonies. These roads were to serve for the propagation of the gospel. The king's heart is indeed in the hand of the Lord as the rivers of water. Could there be a more convincing proof of the divine wisdom than this, that he should so have subsidized the Cæsars in preparation for the coming of the Prince and for the spreading of the gospel of peace that the highways


which they built for their victorious armies should become thoroughfares for those whose feet are beautiful because they bring glad tidings of salvation?

Thus all things were ready. When the clock struck in heaven it was Cæsar Augustus that gave the signal. Then John the Baptist, last of the prophets, appeared as a pursuivant, calling, "Prepare ye, prepare ye the way of the Lord! For there cometh One after me whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose. Behold the Lamb of God!"

Prophecy is closed, history begins. Joy to the world, the Lord is come!

IV

THE SHEPHERDS SIT "CHATTING IN A RUSTIC ROW"

HE long-looked-for work of Redemption is about to begin; and a herald must be chosen to bear the message to the children of men. Fortunate angel! And fortunate those who bear him company as he sets forth, followed by the benisons of heaven, to assure the beleaguered race that the God of salvation is now to make bare his arm!

But who shall be chosen to receive the welcome news? The messengers as they speed on their beneficent mission pass over the cities of Egypt and tarry not; for on its tombs, its temples and its palaces is written, "The glory hath departed!" The Pharaohs sleep in their mummy crypts and the Sphinx looks on with dreamy eyes; while the people bow at the altars of gods whose liturgy is written in the Book

of the Dead. The message is not for worn-out dynasties or atrophied souls, but for such as have their eyes attent and their hearts attuned to the promise of brighter days.

Will the heralds pause, then, at Athens, "mother of arts and eloquence"? Here is, indeed, the intellectual center of the world. Zeuxis and Apelles, Phidias and Praxiteles adorn its temples and palaces with masterpieces destined to be the wonder of the ages. In the schools by the Ilyssus—the Grove, the Academy and the Painted Porch—philosophers in scholastic robes walk up and down discoursing to their pupils on the Reason of Things. But heaven has no message for pride of intellect; wherefore the angels still pursue their flight.

Now they are approaching Rome, the political center of the world. Cæsar, from his palace on the Capitoline, looks proudly down upon the Forum where trains of captives are passing under his yoke. He has realized the dream of universal empire, and the wealth of a thousand tributary nations is pouring into his exchequer. It is the Golden Age of luxury and vice. But there is leprosy in the mortar of this imperial structure. Heaven has no word of promise for pride of power.

The couriers at length have reached Jerusa-

lem. Here surely they will arrest their flight; for is not this the religious center of the world? Lights are burning in the temple and clouds of incense rise while worshippers chant, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord!" Priests with broad phylacteries are making long prayers at the corners of the streets; scribes and Pharisees display frontlets between their eyes, on which is written, "Holiness to the Lord." But all is pomp and circumstance. These are mask-wearers, who draw nigh unto God with their lips while their hearts are far from him. Heaven has no message of hope for self-righteousness.

The herald angels, still pursuing their course, have reached the hill country of Judea; and here they pause to deliver their message to a strange company, of whom Milton in his "Ode to the Nativity" sings on this wise:

The shepherds on the lawn,
Or e'er the point of dawn,
Sit simply chatting in a rustic row.

It is a still night. The air is heavy with the perfume of palm-groves and olive-yards. The stars hang low in the clear sky. Now and then the twittering of a bird as it flutters from its nest betokens the approach of day. The sheep are still reclining, save one here and there that

with drowsy zest nibbles the succulent grass freshened with the night dew. The silence of the closing night is over all.

The shepherds, early awake, are conversing in low voices. A torch thrust into the ground, in the center of the company, casts its flickering light upon a parchment spread before them. The theme of their conversation is the coming of Messiah, "the Hope of Israel." For there is a current rumor of his near approach and a prevalent feeling of expectancy.

But how and when and where will he come? To the Law and Testimony! How reads the parchment? It begins with the protevangel, "The seed of woman shall bruise the serpent's head." Has Moses aught to say? Ay. "A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up like unto me; him shall ye hear!" And Isaiah speaks yet more explicitly: "A virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Emmanuel"; which is, being interpreted, God with us; and again: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

Is there aught in the parchment as to his personal station? Yes. "He shall rule as a King

in righteousness; his kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and of his dominion there shall be no end." But how shall that be reconciled with this: "He is a man of sorrows and acquainted with griefs" ?

And what of his mission? "He shall break every chain and bid the oppressed go free." Will the deliverance be for the Jews only? "He shall call a nation that he knew not. Gentiles shall come to his light and kings to the brightness of his rising."

And when shall this be? It is recorded in the prophecy of Daniel that the Messiah shall come at the end of "seventy weeks of years." Is there a sign given? Yes; the sign of the falling scepter; as it is written in the blessing of Jacob, "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh come, and unto him shall the gathering of the nations be." Is the sign fulfilled? The scepter is trembling in Judah's hand! The census of Cyrenius has just been ordered, by which all Israel passes under the Roman yoke. A carpenter and his wife from the hill country of Galilee, who passed the shepherds last night on the highway, were on their way to enroll themselves in Bethlehem. Alas for the vanished glory of Israel!

But where shall this Messiah be born? In the very city to which those wayfarers were bound; as it is written in the prophecy of Micah, "But thou, Bethlehem, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, out of thee shall One come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel."

Thus the rustics commune with one another until, at length, they lapse into silence and the torch flickers and goes out.

On a sudden they awake and gaze wonderingly; for a strange light is shining among them. Had they known it, this is the Shekinah, the lost Glory, in which God had formerly been accustomed to reveal himself to men. It led the children of Israel through the wilderness as a luminous pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night. It hovered over the mercy-seat of the Ark of the Covenant from which God delivered his messages. It filled the temple of Solomon, at its dedication, with a golden haze. It had vanished with the waning loyalty of Israel, four hundred years before. And now it reappears in the midst of this group of shepherds, growing brighter and brighter, while the voices of the herald angels fill the air with a harmonious strain, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will toward men!" The shepherds are amazed, bewildered and afraid.

Can they be dreaming? In the midst of the Glory the elect angel leads the Advent song: "Be not afraid, for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy! For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour who is Christ the Lord." The chorus continues, in rising and falling cadences; three trumpet notes like the Trisagion of heaven, "Glory, peace, good-will!" It is the sweetest song ever heard on earth. And then the Glory fades, the vision is ended, the light of the morning glows upon the eastern hills.

But why was this message delivered to a company of shepherds rather than to the dreamers by the Nile, the philosophers of Athens, the world-conquerors or the pietists?

Because they were simple folk. This is in pursuance of a recognized law or principle of social science that the redemption of society is by a process not of leveling down but of leveling up. Who dreams of regenerating the world by bettering the condition of the aristocracy? As well might a housewife kindle the fire above the kettle of water she wishes to heat. Save the people, and kings will come trooping after them! It was for this reason that Christ addressed his teaching to the masses, whereof it is written, "The common people heard him

gladly." And of the composition of the apostolic church it is recorded, "Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called; but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and the weak things of the world to confound the mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are; that no flesh should glory in his presence."

The message came to the shepherds because they were busy folk. This also is in recognition of the fact that the true reformer is "the man with the hoe." Men of voluntary leisure, whether at the top or the bottom of the social ladder, get few messages from God. He gives his bread to bread-winners. He comes to the watcher who watches, not leaning out of his windows, but in the harvest with sleeves rolled up. He sends his evangel to Gideon threshing his wheat behind the wine-press, to Amos herding his cattle in Tekoa, to fishermen mending their nets on the lake shore, to Matthew at the receipt of customs.

The Syrians tell of a certain weaver of Damascus, who, longing for a heavenly vision, left his loom and betook himself to prayer in the

desert, where he dwelt in a hermit's cell. But no vision came. He returned to his housetop, where, kneeling, he watched the heavens by night and day; and still no vision came. Then back to his loom he went in despair; and, as he flung the shuttle to and fro, his Lord appeared to him!

Then, too, the message was delivered to the shepherds because they were thoughtful folk. This also is in pursuance of a law, namely, that truth comes in at open doors. It turns aside from the preoccupied and prejudiced, to find a welcome in responsive minds. "While I was musing," the Psalmist writes, "the fire burned." But musing is not dreaming; it is thinking outward and beckoning to truth.

"I was in the spirit," says the evangelist, "and I saw." Men in the spirit are always seers. They do not shut themselves apart in the coldness and bitterness and selfishness of life, but stand rather on tiptoe, listening for truth as for the footfall of God.

And thus it happens that "not many wise men after the flesh are called." While they are thinking their own thoughts and framing their commonplace prejudgments as to spiritual things there is many an aged saint, sitting in the chimney corner with the sacred scroll upon his knees,

who sees visions and communes face to face with God.

The shepherds, awaking from their bewilderment, look into each other's faces, saying, "The Consolation of Israel has come! Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this great thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us."

And here they are beside the manger. The two travellers whom perhaps they had seen the previous night on their way to Bethlehem are here, and with them the Christ-child. "Great is the mystery of godliness! God is manifest in flesh; the angels desire to look into it."

The answer to the shepherds' hopes and longings had come at last, because they were not disobedient to the heavenly vision.

It was in vain that Moses prayed, "O Lord, show me thy glory!" He caught a glimpse of that glory at the burning bush and heard a voice saying, "I AM THAT I AM," but that was all. And, later, hiding himself in a cleft of the rock, he heard the rustle of a garment and saw a passing light; but that was all. It was impossible that any man should see God in his glory and live; unless God should be pleased, in some extraordinary way, to bring himself within the apprehension of finite men. This is the thing that



"IN THE ARMS OF THE GREAT IMAGE THE MOTHER REPOSES."—Page 66.

has now come to pass. God has bowed the heavens to come down. The shepherds realize the fulfillment of the prayer of Moses; in the Christ-child they behold the Incarnation of the Glory of God.

“And they returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen. And they made known the saying which was spoken unto them.” As they journeyed, they told it to travellers on their way to the Holy City; and when they had reached home, other shepherds came from the neighboring fields and asked them concerning it. The light, the angels, the Child in the manger—could they describe them? Did they try to reproduce the wonderful song? Vain effort! These were incommunicable things. The joy of the Evangel is only for those who hear it.

But the shepherds never forgot. Their life thereafter was surely changed. The stars shone brighter, the very grass was greener, and the watching of their flocks was a finer task since they had seen the Christ-child. And the Advent song rang ever in their hearts, until, one by one, they laid down their shepherds' crooks and went to meet Christ and praise him in the new song, “Worthy art thou to receive honor and power and dominion forever and ever!”

THE STAR APPEARS

THE king of Judea was troubled. It was rumored that about this time a prince was to be born, in fulfillment of prophecy, who would ascend the Jewish throne. Tacitus speaks of a current opinion that the Messiah was near at hand. "The Hope of Israel" was in the air.

Herod was now an old man, but tenacious of his ill-gotten power. He was an apostate Jew, who had long since forsaken the religion of his fathers to enter the service of Rome. His career had been a brilliant one. As a *protégé* of Antony he had at a very early age been made governor of Galilee and afterward tetrarch of Judea. He is described as of vast ambition; shrewd, cunning, and of violent passions; possessed withal of considerable executive ability. To please his royal master, he built the splendid city of Cæsarea. To conciliate the Jews, whom he hated, he rebuilt their temple at Jerusalem and splendidly adorned it.

In the porch of this temple the old king was walking on a February morning. His purple robes sparkled with gems and precious stones; a glorious ruby blazed in his turban; but his restless eyes betrayed a troubled heart.

Off yonder, beyond the Kedron, a group of venerable strangers were drawing near, their long garments covered with dust. They would have attracted attention anywhere. Entering from the east at the Shushan gate, they climbed the marble stairway of the temple, entered Solomon's Porch, and would have passed on into the inner courts but for the admonition of a Levite, who pointed to an inscription on the middle wall of partition, LET NO GENTILE OR UNCLEAN PERSON ENTER HERE UNDER PENALTY OF DEATH. Arrested by this warning, they said, "We have come from the far East, seeking him who is born King of the Jews. Tell us where we may find him." A little later they were engaged in conversation with Herod.

"Whence come ye?"

"From the East."

"And your errand?"

"To find the promised King of the Jews."

"It is a fool's errand; I alone am King of the Jews."

“Nay, we cannot be mistaken; for we have come under divine guidance.”

Thereupon they told their story—how as they were watching the stars, according to their custom, and meditating on the promise of the coming Deliverer, a new luminary wheeled into view and seemed to beckon them. Was this a harbinger of the event for which they looked? While they wondered it moved on toward the west, and they arose and followed it. Their hope had been that the Jewish prince would be found in the Holy City, and they were amazed to find that nothing was here known of him.

The wise men were detained while, at Herod's order, the members of the Sanhedrin came together to consult as to the rumored birth of this prince. They were agreed concerning the prophecy; the event was to occur in Bethlehem; “And thou, Bethlehem, land of Judah, art in no wise least among the princes of Judah, for out of thee shall come forth a Governor who shall be Shepherd of my people Israel.”

The Magi were then permitted to resume their journey, with a parting injunction to return and report as to the success of their singular quest. As they left Jerusalem, lo, yonder in the heavens the star moved along before them, and they followed with great joy.

From time immemorial these pilgrims have been regarded as kings:

“We three kings of Orient are,
Bearing gifts, we traverse afar
Field and fountain, moor and mountain,
Following yonder star.”

In the Cathedral at Cologne there is a golden reliquary in which their relics are preserved in the odor of sanctity. I said to the aged monk in attendance, “Do you really believe that these are the bones of the Magi?” He replied, “Oh, yes. There is no question whatever as to their genuineness. We know their names: Gaspar, Melchior and Balthazar. The venerable Bede tells us all about them.” There is, however, a considerable doubt—to put it mildly—as to the trustworthiness of the legend. We have no reason to believe that they were kings; we do know that they were truth-seekers; and, as Cromwell said to his daughter, “To be a truth-seeker is to be one of the noblest sect next to a truth-finder.”

These men were searching, by the light given to them, for still greater light. In all the world there is no pursuit so ennobling, so inspiring and so gladdening as the pursuit of truth. This

holds in every province, but especially in that of spiritual things.

A man is in his noblest attitude when confronting the eternal verities. In this we are distinguished from the lower orders of life. As Kepler said, "We can think God's thoughts after him." We are able to touch tremendous problems and measurably to solve them; and herein is the sweetest of life's joys. Lord Bacon said, "It is a pleasure to stand upon the shore and see ships tossing far away upon the sea; it is a pleasure to stand in the castle window and look down upon the battle and the adventures thereof; but no pleasure is comparable to the standing upon the vantage-ground of truth and beholding spiritual things."

The wise men have reached their destination. All the divinely kindled stars lead to Bethlehem. Here is the end of the quest. The star that guided the Magi rested over a humble cottage. On entering they found the Christ-child—a child upon its mother's breast. Was that all? Ay, all—and everything! In this Child all the streams of prophecy converge. From this Child radiate all the glowing lines of history.

On the walls of the palace at Versailles, in a series of magnificent battle scenes, are portrayed the Glories of France. In this humble home at

Bethlehem the hopes of Abraham, the dreams of David and the visions of Isaiah are realized. This cottage is the center of the world.

The star that shone above it on that Advent night is the star that marks the course of empire, Illuminating the path of progress through the centuries, it has changed the aspect of the world.

Its light has fallen on our domestic life. The word *familia* used to mean a retinue of slaves and retainers; now it suggests a circle of tender ties; it speaks of parental love and filial devotion. If father and mother and brother and sister are names more sacred than of old it is because the name of Christ has sanctified them.

It has thrown its light into the work-shop. The "third estate" is the product of Christian civilization. The term "sweat-shop" suggests one of the modern evils of our municipal life. But there was a time when the whole industrial system of the civilized world was one great sweat-shop. There were no strikes, no labor guilds, no contests of labor with capital, because the handicraftsman was a hopeless serf. The Carpenter who toiled in the shop at Nazareth has dignified labor the whole world over. If it be true that "the heart of the toiler has throbbings that move not the bosom of kings," it is

due to Jesus, who was a fellow-craftsman with all who eat their bread by the sweat of their brows.

It has thrown its radiant influence into the larger forms of our commercial life. What could a man do with his savings nineteen hundred years ago but wrap them in a napkin and bury them in the earth? There was no confidence between man and man. There were no savings banks, because, as King Henry said, "oaths were straws, men's faith as wafer cakes." The banking system of to-day is a tribute to the power of the gospel; it is the logical sequence of the angels' song, "Good-will to men." The man who has saved a golden eagle may with reasonable confidence now commit it to the care of a trust company; or, if he prefer, can send it around the world to Hong Kong by a chain of connections every link of which speaks of mutual confidence and bears the name of the Lord Christ.

Its light has gleamed upon all the institutions of our political life. The man who most aptly represented the governmental system of the olden time was the publican sitting at the Receipt of Customs. He stood for extortion, for blackmail, for blood-money. Here and there the plague-spot still lingers; but we recognize it as a belated

barbarism and are moved to eradicate it. The words Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, which pass current as the shibboleths of popular government in our time, had little or no place in public affairs at the beginning of the Christian Era. The truth enunciated by St. Paul on Mars Hill, "God hath created of one blood all nations of men," has come to be a controlling influence among all nations lying within the charmed circle of what is significantly called "Christendom."

To what shall we attribute this onward movement of the years? To the fact that Jesus Christ came to dwell among men.

How far yon Star of Bethlehem casts its beams! Our Lord proclaimed his purpose in the synagogue when he opened the Book and read, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor; he hath sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised."

It was the Star of Empire. It foretokened a perpetual improvement in the affairs of nations and men. It prophesies for us that what our Lord has done for Christendom he will do for the world. The Star that "shook the corners of Moab" shall shake the remotest corners of the earth until, to use the Psalmist's figure, as

the house-wife shakes the crumbs from a napkin, all evil shall be shaken out of it.

Our Lord was born between the hemispheres. Tradition says that he was crucified with his face toward the west. "Westward the course of empire takes its way." He is the cosmopolitan Christ. His kingdom is from the river unto the ends of the earth.

A coin was found at Clunia, in Spain, bearing the image of Diocletian and the date Anno Domini 300. On the obverse was the hand of Hercules strangling a hydra, and over it the inscription, *Deleta Christianitas*. Thus to the mind of that haughty emperor the power of paganism was destined to strangle the gospel of Christ. Nay, rather strangle the sun! Strangle the atmosphere! Strangle the springs that gush out of the hills to feed the unfathomable sea! Christianity is an all-pervasive and universal power. The royal ensigns onward go!

All other stars shall fade. The sun shall be changed into darkness and the moon into blood, and the stars of heaven shall fall as when a fig-tree is shaken of its untimely figs. But the Star of Bethlehem shall shine on forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts shall perform it.

Somewhere, for every man, its light is shining. It may be in the memory of a face crowned

with silver and of hands now folded under the sod. The light of reason, of memory, of revelation, all point to Bethlehem. O foolish Magi, had they stayed in the fields doubting, wondering, hesitating and making excuses! It was a far journey from Chaldea to Bethlehem, requiring ten times as long as to cross the Atlantic in these days; but these were "wise men"; wherefore they said, "Arise, let us follow the star until we find him!"

WHAT THE WISE MEN SAW

IT is written, "When the wise men were come into the house they saw——"

Well, what did they see?

They had come a long way to see something—more than a thousand miles up hill and over dale, and probably afoot most of the way. And here they were, weary and dusty, at their journey's end. Was it worth while? If so, it must have been some wonderful sight that greeted their eyes.

They are standing at the door of the cottage in Bethlehem; but before they lift the latch to enter, we, who look back from the story's end, know that these men were destined to see what they wanted to see.

This holds as a rule; people see what they want to see.

Three men go down to Sandy Hook. One is a poet, who wants to see the ocean in its maj-

esty stretching afar; and he sees it. The next is a sightseer, who wants to see the lighthouse and the great guns and the barracks; and he sees them. The last is a lonely man who is looking for friends from beyond the water, and, shading his eyes, he, too, sees what he came to see. The ships are coming in!

Three men are searching the Scriptures. One is a lover of literature. He has heard that Milton wrote, "There are no songs like the songs of Zion," and that Webster said, "There is no eloquence like that of the Holy Writ." He is looking for poetry and eloquence; and he finds them. Another is a critic who has heard of "flaws" and "discrepancies." He takes his acid bottle with him in search of them, and sees, or imagines he sees, what he wants to see. But the last is in quest of life. He has heard the Master say, "Search the Scriptures, because ye think that in them ye have eternal life; and these are they which bear witness of me." He, too, discovers what he came to see.

No doubt there were other travellers, besides these Magi, on the highways leading to Bethlehem. Some of them were going to see the town; others to see merchants who were likely to purchase their wares; but the wise men wanted to see the Messiah; and along the way their

frequent inquiry was, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?"

Moreover, they were destined to see what they were willing to see.

To be willing is more than to want.

It is one thing to want gold, but quite another thing to be willing to undertake the hardships involved in getting it—a journey to the Klondike, the patient industry of years or the grapple in Wall Street.

It is one thing to want knowledge, but quite another to be willing to climb Parnassus after it; to pursue the weary quest—line upon line, precept on precept, here a little and there a little—from the alphabet to the University and then along the post-graduate curriculum that leads to the Pierian spring.

It is one thing to want to go to heaven and enjoy the felicities of the everlasting life, but quite another to be willing to plod on along the narrow road till one reaches the little wicket-gate through which all must pass in.

Jesus said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." He was the frankest teacher that ever lived. He never said that it was an easy matter to live a good life. He presented the difficulties so plainly that many of those who

followed him, being offended at his hard sayings, "went back and walked no more with him." All wanted to be saved, but not all were willing to meet the conditions affixed to the proffer of life.

Still further, these Magi were about to see what they had been directed to see.

The star went before them. It beckoned them; it spoke to them, saying, "Follow! Follow, and ye shall find him!" Let quaint Robert Herrick instruct us:

THE WISE MEN:

"Tell us, thou clear and heavenly tongue,
Where is the Babe but lately sprung?
Lies he the lily-banks among?
Declare to us, bright Star, if we shall seek
Him in the morning's blushing cheek,
Or search the beds of spices through,
To find him out?"

THE STAR:

"No, this ye need not do:
But only come, and see him rest
A princely Babe on 's Mother's breast."

There was nothing singular in this harbinger. Every man has his star. Napoleon was right in speaking of his "star of destiny"; for the issues of life are involved in our following the guidance which is divinely given us.

One man's star is the light of nature, another's the light of revelation; but for every man there is light enough if only he will follow it.

I have heard of a lad who ran away from home and during years of a seafaring life was haunted by the memory of his mother's voice as she knelt by his bedside on the last night. He heard that voice again and again as he swung in his hammock amid the storms. At length, grown and bearded, he presented himself at the doorway of the old home, saying, "Mother, you have prayed me back." He had followed his star.

The memory of a face, pure and sweet, crowned with orange blossoms and eloquent of love, or a book or a sermon, or the influence of a godly life shining through the journey of years like a patch of blue sky to one lost in the forest—any of these may be a guiding star, to follow which will bring one to Joseph's house and the vision of life. "Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom, lead thou me on!"

And, once more, these men were certain to see what they had determined to see.

For this also is true: "Ye shall seek me and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart."

If there was a Christ anywhere on earth, these Magi were firmly resolved to find him.

As soon as the star appeared they rose up, left their occupations, and set out. A great point is gained when a man, feeling his need of a Saviour, takes the first step toward him.

And they persisted in their quest. There were many difficulties; mountains to be climbed and wildernesses to be crossed. Doubtless their faith was sorely tried at times. It may be that they talked with other Magi on the way, who sought to persuade them that the star was only "a conjunction of planets" and therefore of no special significance. But their conviction was so deep that they could not be reasoned out of it.

Once, indeed, they paused to parley by the way; and the star vanished! But when they set forth again, still resolute and pressing on by a dead reckoning, as it were, lo, the star reappeared and went before them.

And their purpose was at length rewarded; for, "lo, the star came and stood over where the young child was." Thus perseverance wins. Be not weary, therefore, in well doing. These men were sure to see because they deserved to see.

Toil on! In hope o'ercome
The steps God set for thee;
For past the Alpine summits of great toil
Lieth thine Italy!

We left the Wise Men standing at the door of the cottage. They lift the latch and enter. What is here?

A child in a mother's arms to whom she sings a lullaby, "Sleep, my baby, sleep." Is this what the Wise Men came to see? Yes, and a full reward for all their toil and weariness.

This is the long-looked-for Messiah. In the person of this Child the warp and woof of Deity and humanity are interwoven in a pattern which baffles all mortal ken. The prophecy is fulfilled: "A virgin shall conceive and bear a child, and shall call his name Emmanuel; which, being interpreted, is God with us."

Yes, dearest Babe, those tiny hands,
That play with Mary's hair,
The weight of all the mighty world
This very moment bear!
While thou art clasping Mary's neck
In timid, tight embrace,
The boldest seraphs veil themselves
Before thine infant face!
When Mary hath appeased thy thirst
And hushed thy feeble cry,
The hearts of men lie open still
Before thy slumbering eye!

And what do the Wise Men do in the pres-

ence of this mystery? Do they, as might be expected of a company of Magi, institute a scientific investigation as to the rationale of the Incarnation? There is a time for logic, for psychology, for theological controversy; but not here or now. These men were competent to carry on a scientific argument in that manner, had they been so disposed; but in refraining, then and there, they showed themselves to be Wise Men.

When I go down into my garden to pluck a rose and enjoy its sweetness, I thank no botanist for insisting on tearing its leaves asunder to investigate the secret of its perfume.

When I go into the meadow to hear a skylark sing, I thank no anatomist for interrupting my rapt pleasure with a proposal to dissect its vocal apparatus in order that he may scrutinize the mystery of its song.

When I return from a weary absence and my old mother throws her arms about me and kisses me again and again on either cheek, I resent the science of the wisest psychologist who insists on a calculation, with the aid of mind-meters and logarithms, as to the number of mother's kisses it takes to prove a mother's love.

So here the Wise Men, who had set forth not on a philosophizing venture but to find a

Saviour, have fallen down before the Child and are worshipping him.

Thus led as blind men, by a way they knew not,
They journeyed till they saw the Light of men.
Offered their gifts, received eternal life,
Worshipped and went their way.

And the sight they saw was worth the journey from Chaldea to Bethlehem. For what says the Master? "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchantman seeking goodly pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it."



"SHALL I CRUCIFY YOUR KING!"—Page 72.

THE CHILD AND THE EMPEROR

THE Incarnation was an invasion. God crossed the border into the territory of Earthly Power. No trumpets were heard, no roar of artillery disturbed the quiet of the early morning. A mother sat crooning to an Infant in her arms. That was all; but it was the first note of the onset. What could be more helpless than the pink, dimpled hand that lay upon that mother's breast? Yet that hand was destined to cut the sinews of Roman supremacy and change the currents of history through the ages.

The arrival of the Magi at Jerusalem passing from door to door with the question, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?" threw the naturally suspicious Herod into a paroxysm of jealous fear. Well might he be troubled; old, feeble, bloody-minded, pursued by conscience, harried by the furies of his mislived past, this Idumean usurper, representing Cæsar's author-

ity in Judea, was ill prepared to meet a new disturbance of his provincial rule. And his fear was well grounded, since Jesus was really of the royal line. One can scarcely wonder, knowing how insecure was his hold on power, at the outburst of his wrath in the Slaughter of the Innocents. It was like the scream of a falcon in a dovecote, or the ravaging of a wolf among sheep. The man and the time must be borne in mind. As to the man, a lurid sidelight was thrown upon his character when the Emperor Augustus, on being informed that the infant son of Herod himself had perished in this massacre, observed, "It were better to be one of his swine than one of his children." As to the time, it makes a great difference whether an event is dated "B. C." or "A. D." This was before Christ. Life was cheap in those days. A placard may be seen on a ruined wall in Pompeii announcing an entertainment thus: "In the Arena a hundred men will fight with ferocious beasts." Line up the victims. Drag out the dead! Such was Paganism in its Golden Age.

The incident at Bethlehem, however, was a mere preliminary skirmish. The murder of a score of children was an episode of slight consequence in the royal policies of those days. And it failed to accomplish its purpose; for "Joseph

arose and took the young child and his mother by night and fled into Egypt."

The affair was shrewdly planned; but Herod reckoned without God. The futility of the bloody deed is set forth in two masterpieces of recent art. One of them is Holman Hunt's "Triumph of the Innocents," in which Joseph and the virgin mother and her Child are represented on their way to Egypt followed by the spirits of the slain innocents; one of them carrying a golden censer while the others come trooping after with palm branches. These are the vanguard of that noble army of martyrs who ever since have followed in his train. The other picture is "The Repose in Egypt" by Merson. It represents the dull-eyed, wondering Sphinx on the verge of the desert, between the world without hope and the world of progress. It is night. In the arms of the great image the mother reposes with the Child on her bosom; and from his face there radiates a light which penetrates the darkness of the surrounding wastes.

That was indeed a memorable flight, the first strategic move in the long campaign of centuries. It was a retreat preparatory to an advance all along the line.

We do not see the Child and the Emperor

face to face again until the Child has grown to manhood. His ministry is under way. He has gone up and down among the villages preaching, working wonders, troubling the corrupt times. His name is on every lip. He enters Jerusalem at length and begins to preach. Herod, desirous of making an end of his influence, presumes to threaten him.* His underlings come to Jesus, saying, "Get thee out and depart hence, for Herod will kill thee!" But Jesus sees through the shallow device of the intriguing court. Observe his calm disdain: "Go tell that fox, Behold I cast out devils and do cures to-day and to-morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected. Tell him, I must walk to-day and to-morrow and the day following; for it cannot be that a prophet shall perish out of Jerusalem." And the work goes on.

In vain does the earthworm lift its head against the chariot of the King. "I must walk!" The behest of divine duty is upon Jesus; and who or what shall prevent it? He must accomplish the mighty task which has brought him from heaven to earth. "The kings of the earth do set themselves and the rulers take counsel together, say-

* This is not the Herod of the massacre, but Herod Antipas, another of a smaller mould, who has been characterized by a distinguished historian as "the meanest thing the world ever saw."

ing, Let us break his bands asunder and cast his cords from us! He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision."

It is the story of the centuries. "Kindle the fagots! Sharpen the sword! Let loose the lions!" cries Cæsar. "We will make an end of the Nazarene and his religion!" But the blood of the martyrs is ever the seed of the Church. The royal standards onward go. "I must walk!" says the Master. "I must walk in majesty upon the heights of Bozrah with garments dyed red. I must walk in the glory of him who cometh from Teman with the pestilence before him."

"Herod will kill thee," forsooth. So they said in The Terror, when the streets of Paris were red and slippery with blood of the innocents. The image of the Virgin Mother was torn from its shrine in Notre Dame and supplanted by a notorious woman of the *demi-monde*, whom the mob worshipped as Goddess of Reason. Through the clash of arms and the shriek of the dying was heard the grim word of Voltaire, "Crush the Nazarene!" But calm over all rose the commanding voice of the Master, "I must walk to-day, to-morrow and the day following! I must lead my militant hosts until the tabernacle of God shall come down among men."

So runs the Parable of Progress: "For the kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field: which indeed is the least of all seeds; but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree."

The next meeting of Christ and Cæsar was on the last day of the public ministry, when Jesus was teaching in Solomon's Porch. The Herodians, representing the Roman Government in the Jewish Sanhedrin, sent a delegation to ensnare him. They said, "Master, we know that thou teachest truth and regardest not the person of men; tell us, therefore, what thinkest thou, Is it lawful to give tribute to Cæsar or not?" Observe again the calm disdain: "Why tempt ye me, ye mask-wearers? Show me the tribute money." They gave him a penny; and he said, "Whose is this image and superscription?" They answered, "Cæsar's." Then said he, "Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's and unto God the things that are God's."

This was "diplomacy" at its highest and best; an illustration of the truth that "peace hath its victories no less renowned than war." The conference on this occasion was of immeasurable importance not only because the parties con-

cerned were the authorities of earth and heaven, but because of the great principle which was evolved from it.

Once and again the world powers have met, in what are technically known as "conventions," for the distribution of spoils or the division of territory. Such was the Convention of 1572, when Catherine de' Medici and the Duke of Alva met on the borders of Spain to divide between them the Continent of Europe for the inquisition of faith. Conventions of like character have been held by the so-called Great Powers in recent years for the partition of China, of the Dark Continent, of Korea. For the most part, however, they have left out Christ, the King who sits supreme over all.

In the brief and inconspicuous "convention" in Solomon's Porch a principle was laid down which formulated for all time the right relations of civil and ecclesiastical authority. In the proposition, "Render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's and unto God the things which are God's," the fact is fairly stated that Church and State are co-ordinate powers; that they are interdependent, yet independent each of the other, since they proceed along distinct lines; that they rest on mutual support and are entitled

to loyal following, since both alike are ordained of God.

The last meeting of Christ and Cæsar was in the judgment hall. "And Pilate saith unto Jesus, Art thou a king? He answered, Thou sayest it; to this end was I born and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness of the truth. And Pilate brought Jesus forth and sat down in the judgment seat in the place that is called Gabbatha; and he said, Behold your king! But they cried out, Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him! Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your king? They answered, We have no king but Cæsar. Then delivered he him unto them to be crucified. And Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross, *Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.*"

Thus the issue was fairly drawn; they would have no king but Cæsar. And Jesus submitted. He bowed his head to the powers that be. For three mortal hours, hung up between heaven and earth, he bore the shame and agony; then with a fluttering sigh yielded up the ghost.

Defeat! Manifest defeat! Nay; he did but stoop to conquer. Had he not said, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth

much fruit"? Wait. To-day, to-morrow and the day following, and then he will be perfected! He breaks the bands of death and ascends on high, taking captivity captive. The veil is drawn and, lo, yonder he sits upon his throne high and lifted up, saying, "Fear not; I am he that liveth and was dead, and, behold, I am alive forevermore!" Alive? Ay, witness the nineteen centuries of Christian progress. He is alive, as no other historic personage is alive, in the councils of nations and of men. As the white plume of Henry of Navarre was ever to be seen in the forefront of battle, so are the presence and power of Jesus manifest in the conflicts of the ages.

And now at the end of the years we stand again at the watch-tower calling, "Watchman, what of the night?"

And the watchman answers, "The night lingers, but the shadows flee!"

"And what of Cæsar?"

"An empty name!"

"What of Rome and the Great Powers?"

"One by one they flourish and are gone!"

"What of the Church?"

"Glorious things of thee are spoken, Zion, city of our God!"

"And, watchman, what of Christ?"

“He goeth forth conquering and to conquer! The head that once was crowned with thorns is crowned with glory now. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and his dominion is forever and ever.”

The end should have been seen from the beginning. It is vain to fight against God. The Child sits upon his throne of power and the hearts of the mighties are in his hands as the rivers of water. He came to establish his kingdom on earth; and he will not forbear until he reigns universally.

Can we read history in the light of the Incarnation? If not, the lines are blurred before our eyes. The logic of events is as meaningless as were the scars and fissures on the rocks until a scientist came, saying, “Once upon a time a glacier passed this way.” So the philosophy of history clears up when men look toward Bethlehem and say, “Behold, the invasion!” In the light of that stupendous event we are able not only to read old chronicles, but to discern the signs of the times. All the incidents of these nineteen centuries array themselves in lines converging toward the final conquest of the world by Christ.

What then? The part of reason is manifestly to fall in with the advance. The silver trumpet

calls. The Rider on the white horse leads his militant host to victory. Armageddon is near. Gog and Magog to the fray! It is Christ against Cæsar. It is truth against error. It is light against darkness. It is freedom against tyranny. It is the Golden Age against the dark ages. It is heaven against hell.

Where do we stand? Under what King, the Child or the Emperor?

VIII

THE CLOSING HYMN



HE Bells of Isaiah find a fitting response in the Hymn of the Incarnation:

And without controversy,
Great is the mystery of godliness;
He who was manifested in the flesh,
Justified in the spirit,
Seen of angels,
Preached among the nations,
Believed on in the world,
Received up in glory.

Thus Prophet and Apostle join across the centuries to celebrate the Advent. For each reverberating note of the bells we shall find a corresponding strophe.

A singular interest attaches to this hymn for a number of reasons. It is not a mere product of genius, like Milton's Song of the Advent, but of inspiration, which is something vastly higher, as the word suggests, "breathed of God." It was probably used in the service of the early

church. Pliny says, "The Christians were wont to meet together on a stated day before it was light and sing among themselves alternately a hymn to Christ as to God." Its substance is identical with John 3:16: "God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." It is a formulated statement of the Incarnation, which lies at the center of the Christian system, or rather forms the foundation of it.

And the hymn was written by Paul. This is the more remarkable because he was so distinctly a dialectician. As a man of culture, however, he was not unfamiliar with the poetic art. The rhythmic movement of this paragraph is unmistakable. It consists of four stanzas, each of which is a couplet, after the manner of the parallelism in the Psalms. It is like a chain of double links. The whole proceeds in lyric cadences with a majestic swing, logical and progressive, to the ultimate climax, in which Christ is seen returning from his redemptive work to his throne in glory.

FIRST STROPIE:

And without controversy,
Great is the Mystery of Godliness.

By "godliness" in this instance we are to understand not distinctively a divine attribute nor yet a human grace, but a combination of both in the vital union of God with man.

The Apostle concedes this to be a mystery. As a rule, he was both ready and competent to hold his own in an argument; but here there was no occasion for it, because the mystery was "without controversy." Thus at the outset he provokes a disclaimer, since we are naturally averse to mysteries, particularly in the province of religious things.

But why should a fact be rejected because we are unable to comprehend it? Are we not compassed about by mysteries? We eat, drink and breathe them. They struggle for utterance in every heart-beat. We cannot put down our feet without treading on them or lift up our hands without grasping them. Science and philosophy, as well as theology, are full of them. He who refuses to accept a proposition because it is beyond his ken will find his creed dwindling to *nil*. It is not strange, therefore, that godliness, which is the very summit of truth—since it describes truth in its application to life—should baffle the apprehension of the physical senses. He who refuses to accept it by faith will never accept it at all.

SECOND STROPHE:

He who was manifested in the flesh,
Justified in the spirit.

The word "manifest" implies a previous concealment. Here is a reference to the pre-existence of Christ. He had been "in the bosom of the Father." He not infrequently refers to "the glory which he had with the Father before the world was." He came to manifest or reveal God to the children of men. The deepest longing of the average man is to know God. "Oh, that I knew," cries Job, "where I might find him! Behold I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: on the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him; he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him." It was to answer this yearning of the soul that God assumed flesh and dwelt among us. I do not believe that we shall ever see God except as we behold him in Christ, "in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily," the fulness of him that filleth all in all.

As such he is "justified in the spirit." The parallel here is between the flesh and the spirit. The manifestation of God in the flesh of Jesus was justified or authenticated by the spirit or manner of his life. In other words, his singular

humanity is the best proof of his divinity. This was what Theodore Parker meant when he said, "Measure Jesus by the shadow he has cast into the world, or rather by the light he has cast upon it. What man could have fabricated a Jesus? None but a Jesus." It is impossible to account for him otherwise than on the hypothesis that he was what he claimed to be, that is, very God of very God. His life was without sin; so blameless that he alone of all the children of men was able to utter the challenge, "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" The man who betrayed him said, "I have betrayed innocent blood!" The judge who sentenced him to death said: "Behold the man! I find no fault in him at all." The officer who had charge of his execution said, "Verily, this was a righteous man!" and again, "Verily, this was the Son of God!" His teaching was with such authority that his enemies were moved to exclaim, "Never man spake like this man!" His works were so beneficent that his biography was briefly comprehended in this monograph: "He went about doing good." His death was so remarkable that Rousseau, who wrote against him as an impostor, was moved to cry, "If Socrates died like a man, then Jesus died like a god!" So the spirit of the Man was the supreme justification of his Godhood.

THIRD STROPHE:

Seen of angels,
Preached unto the Gentiles.

It is a fact beyond all question that we make too little of the ministry of angels. The gross and grotesque perversion of the doctrine has driven us to the extreme of ignoring it. The plain teaching of the Scriptures is that angels and glorified saints take a profound interest in the affairs of this world. "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister unto them that are heirs of salvation?"

How oft do they their silver bowers leave,
To come to succor us that succor want!
How oft do they with golden pinions cleave
The flittering skies, like flying pursuivant,
Against foul fiends to aid us militant!
They for us fight; they watch, and duly ward,
And their bright squadrons round about us
plant;
And all for love and nothing for reward;
Oh, why should heavenly God to men have
such regard?

But if the angels are interested in our welfare, how much more in that of the divine Son of Man! He was seen of them when he went forth from heaven, as a knight errant, to the rescue

of our sin-stricken race. They sang his birth-song: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will toward men!" They were with him in his temptation in the wilderness and "ministered unto him." They were with him in the garden of Gethsemane, and when he sweated as it were great drops of blood, they again ministered unto him. As he hung upon the cross in mortal anguish, they hovered about him in legions, ready at a word to rescue him. They rolled away the stone from his sepulchre and announced to his bereaved disciples the glad tidings of his triumph over death. At his ascension they thronged his chariot wheels and bore him aloft to his throne, crying, "Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and the King of glory shall come in!"

And the Christ—thus manifest, justified and divinely attended—is "preached unto the Gentiles"; that is, unto all nations and the children of men. In this the religion of Christ stands solitary and alone. All other religions are ethnic; that is, conditioned by national limitations. Judaism itself was regarded as a religion for Jews only, all others being regarded as "afar off." So when Jesus was announced as a universal Saviour, it was enough to enlist the opposition of all loyal Jews.

Now Paul had been brought up in an atmosphere of Jewish prejudice. He was a Jew of the Jews, "of the strictest sect of the Pharisees." His whole life was lived after this manner until the memorable day when the truth came to him in a sunburst on the Damascus highway. There he received his commission, "I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles." His whole conception of religion was revolutionized by that word. The religion of Christ is a world-wide religion. He was lifted up that he might draw all men unto him. Here is a truth of tremendous import which the church has not yet fully comprehended. The middle wall of partition is broken down! In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free. There is "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all."

FOURTH STROPHE:

Believed on in the world,
Received up in glory.

We wonder sometimes, in view of the overwhelming testimony as to the character and mission of Christ, that any soul should reject him. But the real wonder is that any should receive him. For he is indeed "a root out of dry

ground"; and "there is no form or comeliness that we should desire him." So it is written, "He came unto his own and his own received him not"; but it is added, "To as many as received him to them gave he the right to become the sons of God."

Some did receive him. The first of believers was his mother, who cherished in her heart the fond secret of the Incarnation and pondered it. John the Baptist was also a believer; he confessed in the notable words, "Behold the Lamb of God!" One after another the thoughtful came to him; John and James and the others of the Twelve, the ministering women, and three thousand at Pentecost in a single day. As the years passed, the number increased in ever-widening circles until there are hundreds of millions who affix their faith to him.

Waft, waft, ye winds, his story,
And you, ye waters, roll,
Till, like a sea of glory,
It spreads from pole to pole!

And his work being finished, "He was received up in glory." The stranger having fulfilled his mission, having laid the foundation of a universal kingdom in his atoning blood, now returned to his throne.

The night before his crucifixion he held a farewell interview with his disciples in which he said to them, "I go away; and whither I go ye know, and the way ye know." In answer to their sorrowful questions he told them plainly that he was going back to "the glory which he had with the Father before the world was."

At the appointed time he met them on Mount Olivet and, having giving them his parting injunction, "All power is given unto me in heaven and on earth; go ye, therefore, preach the gospel unto the uttermost parts of the earth, and lo! I am with you always, even unto the end," he lifted his hands in blessing, ascended out of their midst, and the heavens opened to receive him.

Thus the incarnate God, having passed through the earth as a pilgrim and sojourner, went home. And his departure marked the beginning of a crusade which is destined to continue until every knee shall bow before him.

How different his career from that of the world's great men! At death they bid farewell to greatness, put off their purple robes and lay aside their crowns. The life of civic pomp, of coronations and processions, ends at death. But just there Christ's March to Victory begins.

The little wicket-gate in Joseph's garden is his triumphal arch; and the weeping friends who bear him to his tomb are the vanguard of a procession that passes up through the centuries, with ever-multiplying accessions, to heaven's gate, crying "Hosanna, Hosanna to the Son of David!"

The Fifth Strophe of this Hymn of the Incarnation has yet to be written; and history is writing it; to wit:

He shall triumph over all
And reign forever and ever.

This is the last of the double links in the golden chain which is "binding the whole round world about the feet of God." The Son of Man sits on his heavenly throne "expecting until his enemies be made his footstool."

He which testifieth these things saith, "Surely I come quickly." Amen. Even so come, Lord Jesus!

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

