

THE MIDNIGHT CAVE

A SPIRITUAL VISION OF THE FIRST CHRISTMAS EVE

There has been many wonderful pictures on this earth. The sorrows and the joys of men have brought about many pathetic occurrences, while their virtues and their vices have led to many catastrophes of the most thrilling dramatic interest.

But earth has seldom witnessed such a scene as Mary, and Joseph, and the Eternal Word, in the streets of Bethlehem at nightfall. The cold, early evenings of winter are closing in. Mary and Joseph had striven vainly to get a lodging.

The village was occupied with other things, more important according to the world's estimate of what is important. The imperial officers of the census were the great men there. Rich visitors would naturally claim the best which the inns could give.

Here in Bethlehem is the true Caesar come, the Monarch of all the Roman Caesar, and there is no room for Him, no recognition of Him. It is His own fault, the world will say. He comes in an undignified manner. He makes no authentic assertions of His claims.

There was even a shadow of Calvary in the twilight which gathered around Bethlehem that night. Just as no one in Jerusalem would take Him in during Holy Week, or give Him food, so that He had each night to retire to Bethany, in like manner no one in Bethlehem would take Him in, or give Him a shelter beneath which He may be born.

To all but His Creator the world makes no difficulty of at least a two-fold hospitality—to be born and to die, to come into the world and to go out of it. Yet how did it treat Him in both these respects. He was driven among the animals and beasts to be born. That little village of the least of tribes said truly, it had no room for the immense and incomprehensible Bethlehem could not indeed hold her who held within herself the Creator of the world.

So far as men were concerned, it was as much as He could do to get born, and obtain a visible foothold on the earth. So He was not allowed to die a natural death. His life was trampled out of Him, as something tiresome and reproachful, or rather dishonorable and ignominious. He was buried swiftly, that His body might not be cumbering the earth, polluting the sunshine, or offending the gay city on the national festival.

And all the while He was God! Alas! the spirit of Bethlehem is but the spirit of a world that has forgotten God. How often has it been our own spirits also! How are we through childish ignorance forever shutting out from our doors heavenly blessings! Thus it is that we mismanage all our sorrows, not recognizing their heavenly character, although it is blazoned after their own peculiar fashion upon their brows. God comes to us repeatedly in life; but we do not know His full face. We only know Him when His back is turned, and He is departing from our repulse. Why is it that with a theory almost always right our practice should be so often wrong? It is not so much from a

want of courage to do what we know to be our duty, although nature may rebel against it. It is rather from a want of spiritual discernment. We do not sufficiently, or of set purpose, accustom our minds to supernatural principles. The world's figures are easier to count by, the world's measures the most handy to measure by. It is a tiresome work to be always looking at things from a different point of view from those around us; and, when this effort is to be lifelong, it becomes a strain which cannot be continuous; and it only ceases to be a strain by our becoming thoroughly supernaturalized. Thus it is a Christian life, which has not made a perfect revolution in a man's worldly life, becomes no Christian life at all, but only an incommensurable unreality, which gets into our way in the life without helping us in the life to come. Hence it is that we do not know God when we see Him. Hence it is that we so often find ourselves on the wrong side, without knowing how we got there. Hence it is that our instincts so seldom grasp what they are feeling after, our prophecies so often come untrue, our aims so constantly miss their ends. God is always taking us by surprise, when we have no business to be surprised at all. Bethlehem did not in the least mean what it was doing. No one means half the evil which he does.

The twilight deepens. Mary and Joseph descend the hill. They find the Cave—a Stable Cave—a sort of grotto, with an erection before it, so common in those lands, by which depth and coolness are both attained. The Arab builds by preference in front of a cave, because half his dwelling is thus built for him from the best material. Souls are strangely drawn, and to strangest things and places, when once they are within the vortex of a divine vocation. There are the lights and songs of the crowded village above them, turning into festival the civil obligation which has brought such unwonted numbers thither. Beneath that gay street a poor couple from Nazareth have sought refuge with the ox and the ass in a stable.

What is to happen here? It must be differently described according to the points of view from which we consider it. Angels would say that some of God's decrees were on the eve of being accomplished in the most divine and beautiful of ways, and that the invisible King was about to come forth and take possession of a kingdom not narrower than a universe with such pomp as the spiritual and Godlike angels most affect. The magistrate in Bethlehem would say that, at the time of the census, a pagan child had been added to the population by a houseless couple who had come from Nazareth—noting, perhaps, that the couple were of a good family but fallen into poverty. This would be the way in which the world would register the advent of its Maker. It is a consistent world—only an unteachable one. It has learned nothing by experience. It registers Him in the same manner this very day.

Let us go forth upon the slopes, and watch the night darkening, and think of the great earth that lies both near and far away from this new and obscure sanctuary, which God is about to hallow with such an authentic consecration. Much of the earth is occupied with human business. Couriers are hastening and fro upon the highways of the empire. The affairs of the vast colonies are giving employment and concern to many statesmen and governors. The great city of Rome itself is the centre of an intellectual and practical activity which makes itself felt at the farthest extremities of the empire. Upon some minds and especially those of a more philosophical cast, the growth of moral corruption, and other great social questions, are weighing heavily. There are lawyers also, intent upon their pleading. Huge armies, which are republics in themselves, are fast rising to be the lawless masters of the world. But nowhere in the vast world of Roman politics does there seem to be a trace of the Cave of Bethlehem. No prophetic shadows are cast visibly on the scene. All things wear a look of stability. The system ponderous as it is, works like a well-constructed machine. No one is suspecting anything. It would not be easy for the world to be making less reference to God than it was making then. No one was on the lookout for a divine interference, unless it was that here and there some truth-stammering oracle perturbed a narrow circle, whose superstition was the thing likeliest religion of all things in the heathen world. In the palace of the Caesars, who suspected that unborn Caesar in His Cave? How often God seems to give nations a soporific just when He is about to visit them, and the appearance of it is not so much that of a judgment upon them as of a jealous desire to secure His own concealment!

There is a Greek world also lying within that Roman world. It is a world of intellect and thought and disputation—the honorable trifling of the conquered, the refuge of those whose natural independence has passed away. Many a brain is spinning systems there. Many find life full and satisfactory in the interest of a barren eclecticism. There is a populous world of countless thoughts, and yet how few of them for God! Everywhere is there a grandeur of disfigured truth, everywhere magnificent tokens of what reason can achieve coupled

with sad indications of what it fails to do. But the strongest systems are to be broken into a thousand pieces by the unborn Sage Who is hidden in that Cave. His philosophy will be antagonistic to theirs. The Christian child of modern Bethlehem has more in his catechism than Plato ever could divine, together with a practical wisdom which the Stoic might envy and admire. The world of philosophy needed the Babe of Bethlehem. But it was not conscious of its need; neither did it suspect His coming; neither, though it has sought truth these hundreds of years, would it know Truth when He came and looked it in the face. The wind is sighing through the leafless plains on the borders of the Ulyssus; but who dreams there that when midnight comes the Unknown God of the dispirited school of Athens will send a speechless Child upon the earth.

A DESIRE

O, to have dwelt in Bethlehem When the star of the Lord shone bright! To have sheltered the holy wanderers On the blessed Christmas night; To have kissed the tender wayworn feet Of the Mother undefiled, And, with reverent wonder and deep delight, To have tended the Holy Child!

Hush! such a glory was not for thee; But that our may still be thine; For are there not little ones still to aid For the sake of the Child divine? Are there no wandering Pilgrims now, To thy heart and thy home to take? And are there no mothers whose weary hearts You can comfort for Mary's sake?

O to have knelt at Jesus' feet, And to have learnt this heavenly lore! To have listened the gentle lessons He taught On the mountain, and sea, and shore! While the rich and the mighty kneel Him not, To have meekly done His will—Hush! for the worldly reject Him yet.

You can serve and love Him still. Time cannot silence His mighty words, And though ages have fled away, His gentle accents of love divine Speak to your soul today.

O to have solaced the weeping one Whom the righteous dared despise! To have tenderly bound up her scattered hair, And have dried her tearful eyes! Hush! there are broken hearts to soothe, And penitent tears to dry, While Magdalen prays for you and them, From her home in the starry sky.

O to have followed the mournful way Of those faithful few forlorn! And grace, beyond even an angel's hope, The Cross for our Lord have borne! To have shared in His tender mother's grief, To have wept at Mary's side, To have lived as a child in her home, and have then In her loving care have died!

Hush! and with reverent sorrow still, Mary's great anguish share; And learn, for the sake of her Son divine, Thy cross, like His, to bear. The sorrows that weigh on thy soul unite With those which thy Lord has borne, And Mary will comfort thy dying hour, Nor leave thy soul forlorn.

O to have seen what we now adore, And, though veiled to faithless sight, To have known, in the form that Jesus wore, The Lord of Life and Light! Hush! for He dwells among us still, And a grace can yet be thine that Which the scoffer and doubter can never know— The Presence of the Divine. Jesus is with His children yet, For His word can never deceive; Go where His lowly altars rise, And worship and believe.

—ADELAIDE A. PROCTER.

CHRISTMAS LESSON OF HUMILITY

What is the lesson, among other lessons, that we learn from our Divine Lord's coming at Christmas? Does not the Holy Child teach us that lesson, so hard to learn, that all true attainment is based on humility?

The Child teaches the lesson, so hard to learn, that all true attainment is based on humility. "He humbled Himself. . . wherefore God hath highly exalted Him." It is neither sentiment nor fancy that draws the lessons from the Manger. Coming as a baby, born in a stable, wrapped in swaddling clothes, laid in a manger, no room in the inn, attended by cattle, worshipped by shepherds—what are all these but mystical symbols of the greatness of our King, showing that earth has no honors to bestow that are worth while to God; teaching us in this age of sordid wealth, that kindliness lies in character alone; that no ladder can ever reach to heaven that

is not planted lowly on the ground? How great the contrast when Christ was born between Caesar Augustus and that little Babe; but mark the difference now. The name and empire of Christ are glorious in living power. "His birth into the world has forever exalted the spiritual above the material, the empire of love above the empire of power."—Sacred Heart Review.

APOSTOLICITY

THE FINAL TEST OF THE TRUE CHURCH

By Floyd Keeler in The Lamp

"The meaning of the word Apostolicity as applied to the Church is that the Church has Mission, that is, it is authoritatively sent." This definition, to which no Catholic believer can take exception, is from Dr. Darwell Stone, one of the foremost Anglican theologians of the present day. It is self-evident that the true Church must be the Church which is sent by Christ's Authority; that it must be able to teach in His Name and with His power. His own Dr. Stone says elsewhere in discussing this "note" that "the ideal of Apostolicity is the complete organization of the ministry of the Church" and this point we shall also consider presently.

If these things are true, Apostolicity must be the final test of the True Church for a body which possessed unity, some measure of sanctifying power and Catholic extent might exist, but unless it had some proof of its being the Church which Christ has founded, unless it could exhibit its lineage with an unbroken recognition of its claims and thus could show some authority for its acting in His name, it could not make a valid claim to be His Church.

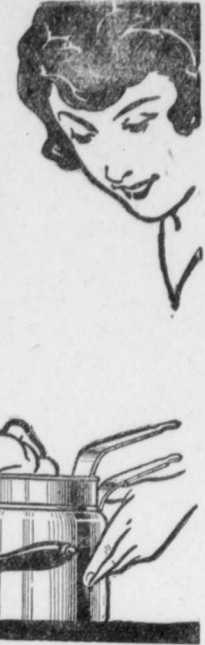
The question of the Church's Authority and consequently of its Mission, for Mission is but one of the means of its exercising its Authority, is one on which the Catholic and the Protestant find themselves in complete disagreement. The first Protestants sought to justify their separation from the Church by their denying the very things which make Mission possible, namely, by saying that the Authority which sent them had become so corrupt that it could no longer act in Christ's name or else that they had some sort of interior authority which could be determined only by themselves. Either of these suppositions proves too much, for on the first of them we would find that the Church having become corrupt to the point of losing its Authority must also have lost its indefeasible character and thus Our Lord's promise to be with the Church "unto the end," and that the Holy Ghost would guide it "into all truth" has failed. This would mean that the Christian religion was a false thing, for its Founder made promises concerning it which He has not fulfilled.

On the second hypothesis each individual is left to form his own "church," and all organization thus necessarily ends, religious anarchy takes its place, and at best the promise of Christ's presence is His interest in the individual; there is no Church left in which He can abide and with which He can continue throughout the ages. Thus either we can have no Church at all, or else we must have a Church which knows itself to be the true Church, which knows itself to be authoritatively sent and which exercises this authority in sending out its representatives. To revert to Dr. Stone's statement that "the ideal of Apostolicity is the complete organization of the ministry of the Church," if we can see that this can only be fulfilled in one Church, and yet actually is fulfilled in one, then that one alone is truly and fully Apostolic. Even if his other statement that "the minimum is episcopal ordination" be accepted there could be no excuse for being satisfied with the minimum when the fullness of Apostolicity can be had.

There must be some guide, some norm by which to test Apostolicity, and that can only be in an Apostolic body which has a consciousness of its being such. According to the Eastern and Anglican views there is no such norm now active, for on their theory of a lost unity which makes impossible the corporate expression of the Church's mind, no exercise of its defining power can take place. Thus we are unable to distinguish the true from the false, and we are left little better off than though we felt back upon the baldest Protestant theory, for although there is postulated a real Church, we are left without means of identifying it and it has no means of identifying itself. This, however, is impossible in any living thing, and the Church is a living thing, it is the Body of Christ "Who is alive forevermore," and being filled with His Spirit must be conscious of its own existence and be able to identify itself. Nothing but the Church of Rome possesses this Catholic consciousness in full and sufficient measure. The Eastern Churches feel themselves to be but four of the five patriarchates and admit that communion with Rome is necessary to "the complete organization of the ministry of the Church" and the full ability to exercise it in Unity. Catholic-minded Anglicans believe that reunion with Rome is included in the ideal, whilst Rome proclaims the truth that union with her and authority from her are needed. All agree therefore in ascribing to Rome a unique position and all bear testimony, however unwillingly or unwittingly, that the key to the situation is the restoration of com-

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munion with her. In other words that the "ideal of Apostolicity" has for its culmination the recognition of Rome's position, and with her position must go her claims.

It was the pursuit of this line of thought amongst others as outlined in my previous articles that led me to take the step of uniting myself with the ideal. Why should one be satisfied with less than the best? If one has been in error hitherto, is that an excuse for continuing therein when one recognizes it? Likely it will cost something to make the break with the past of one's associations. It certainly will be a blow to one's pride, but what place has pride the sin of the devil, in determining a soul's relationship with God? The true Church must be the one which "possesses the ideal." Its unity must be complete and manifest, its holiness must be present and powerful, its Catholicity world-wide, generally recognized and known, and finally, its Apostolicity the unquestioned ability to say "to this man, Go, and be goeth," the possession of a supreme Authority, visible, conscious of its power. Such is the

Church of Christ on earth. Such is no other than the Church which centers in and radiates from Rome, the Mistress and Mother of Churches. She is ready with her loving arms to enfold all who seek her shelter and she has the comfort and assurance of the living truth to offer those who come. Why delay?

THE ONLY WAY TO CHURCH UNITY

The Lamp points the only way to church unity in these words: "Those of our Anglican brethren who sincerely pray and long for the Peace of Jerusalem will save themselves from everlasting disappointment and the premature death of every fond hope which sprang from the grave of its predecessor, if they will only open their eyes to see that our Blessed Lord and Saviour united St. Peter with Himself as the foundation-rock on which He built His Church, and followship with that Rock is the divine and only way to realize Church Unity."

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