

6 CHRIST IN THE MANGER

their homes is a sacramental experience, bringing them into immediate relations with the unseen. It is said that when Origen was an infant in his cradle his father would sometimes stoop to impress a kiss upon his breast and to say, "This is a temple of the Holy Ghost." There may be something more than poetic fancy or a reminiscence of Platonic philosophy even in Mrs. Browning's quaint thought of—

"The murmur of that outer Infinite
Which unweaned babies smile at in their sleep
When wondered at for smiling."

Then, too, the love begotten by the birth of children is one of the most powerful instruments of soul culture. Parental love is the most unselfish, the most sacrificial, the most spiritual of all human affections. Out of that, as we know it in ourselves and in those who have fathered and mothered us, we best know God. A world without a child would be a world with its windows closed and curtained against the light of heaven. The graves of the children, too, as well as their cradles, link us with the spirit-world.

"There's a narrow ridge in the graveyard
Would scarce stay a child in its race;
But to me and my thought it is wider
Than the star-sown vagues of space."