

gether that Christmas night. How can a Christian and separate a mother and her child at such a time? The old man was slowly descending the stairs. He forgot to salute the Duke of Wellington and he did not look like a veteran of Waterloo. Only a sad and tired old man.

That evening, Margie flew up to my room. "O, Eily! Eily!" she was half crying and half laughing. "Grandma says I am to go back to Kells with the carman; and when my mother is better I am to bring her back and we are to be together not only for Christmas but for all the time."

Next morning, I watched Margie as she mounted the jaunting car and rode away. On Christmas Eve she rode back in Col. Floyd's coach which had been sent for her and which was like a house on wheels. Her mother, pale and gentle but very pretty, was with her.

General Flint did not give any Christmas dinner to his distinguished friends. All the handsome people, however, were brought out, and Miss Martha wore her new red tulle and Miss Martha wore her new red tulle. I think that the dinner was a great success, for everybody seemed so happy. Margie's mother sat beside her little girl, and her eyes were bright and shining as the goblets that held the wine. Nothing would do but come in to the dessert, and the old General asked me if the plum pudding tasted all right now.

CHRISTMAS AT BETHLEHEM.

The celebration of the Vigil—Scenes at the Hour for Matins—the Patriarch's Mass—the Ceremony at the Grotto.

Christmas in Bethlehem! There is a strange fascination in the words. It awakens every thought that has to do with the happy season. We see, in the flash of an eye, the manger, the shepherd keeping night watches over their flocks, the brightness and splendor of the angelic host.

To spend Christmas in such a hallowed place is the desire of every pilgrim to the Holy Land, and when that time of the year draws near, they begin to fill the little towns whose names signify "The House of Bread," making sure that there is room for them, at least, in the inn.

As one journeys over the road the story of old and yet even newer, of that first holy night, comes into the mind with its many details. Perhaps it is the contrast with that which is today; the strange comparisons born of the centuries. One pictures the Holy Family wandering in the streets of Bethlehem. The inn is crowded. Light streams from the barred windows; the sounds of mirth are heard. But there is no room for a late comer.

Overhead the stars shine coldly; there is a chill in the air. The shepherds who are watching to-night draw their garments closer around them. And Herod is giving a banquet; his many friends are gathered in his palace, on a hill hard by, to do him honor. It is a night of festival, and those who are poor would have done better had they made some provision for their accommodation.

After all, what has it mattered? Only a Child born in a stable, a hidden cavern where the ox and the ass are sheltered! All Bethlehem has seen those lights that glow in the ruler's stronghold; but only a handful of shepherds have witnessed the glory of the night; a few simple men, Jesus to their toil in the fields, kneel before the Babe and salute Him King. But they are few and poor and despised.

Such thoughts come into the heart, as one prepares one's self for the ceremonies that are to mark the anniversary of this event. And every song which has brought us into the sight of the city of David. Those who have never yet beheld the town upon its cluster of hills, lean forward in their saddles and murmur: "Bethlehem!"

Every year the thoughts of the whole Christian family, no matter what may be its differences in creed or rite, turn to the little town of Bethlehem. Its name is on every lip; and every song which every word in honor of that day brings us into the spirit to the distant hills of Palestine.

In Bethlehem itself one is not surprised to find the Nativity observed as it could be in no other place. The gathering of pilgrims, the many colored costumes of the inhabitants rich in Oriental splendor, the costly vestments of the officiating priests, the thousands of lighted candles, the decorations, the solemn ceremonies, and the inspiring music of the Church—all these lend to the occasion a picturesque and an impressiveness that can scarcely be described to one who has not been present himself. The whole place gives itself up to rejoicing. The streets are thronged, bonfires are lit, and the bells of the Nativity are crowded from the beginning to the end of the services.

The French Consul, who always makes it a point to be present as official protector of the Church in Palestine, and the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem usually arrive a little after noon on the day before Christmas. Almost all the people of Bethlehem are Christians—there are only 100 Mussulmans in the whole 7000 inhabitants—and nearly all of them gather to welcome the Consul and the Latin Patriarch, who comes under the escort of that official. The gathering of the Turkish soldiery is the signal of their arrival. Then the house-tops are crowded with women while the men fill the narrow streets below. The Patriarch is received with loud cheers, and a military "Vivat!" rends the air as he passes along.

Behind the Patriarch ride the French Consul, his chancellor and dragoman, all mounted on magnificent horses. Then follows the crowds of pilgrims, gathered from the four quarters of the globe. They press onward with impetuosity, full of excitement and fervor;

for are they not to spend Christmas in Bethlehem? In the meantime the Patriarch is formally received at the Basilica by the Guardian. After he has blessed the people the chanters intone the Te Deum, and then he enters the Basilica, going immediately to the Church of St. Catherine, where having said the accustomed prayers, he admits the clergy and the faithful to kiss his hand. Then robing himself in pontifical vestments, he chants the first Vespers.

Complines are chanted by the religious of the Order of St. Francis, who are the guardians of this as well as of every other sanctuary in Palestine that the Catholic Church possesses. The Patriarch, who has taken advantage of the time to get a little rest, now returns at the close of Complines to take part in the daily procession to the sanctuaries connected with the Nativity.

Supper in the refectory follows, and there the Patriarch sits at the common table with the religious partaking with them of the same simple fare. By this time the convent has become a vast hostelry, so great is the number of pilgrims that it now shelters. They are in every conceivable place, in every possible corner. Here and there little groups sit around small stoves that they have lighted, contentedly warming their hands. Others calmly roll and smoke their cigarettes or have recourse to their chibouks. Every one is at ease, and makes himself perfectly at home, for the convent is, par excellence, the home of the poor.

Chimes of joyous bells soon tell that the hour for Matins has arrived. The church is crowded already for the people of Bethlehem would do anything rather than miss the ceremonies of this night. The women, gay in their bright colors, occupy the right side of the nave. It is not generally known that these people, who carry themselves with so much grace and display so much dignity of bearing, are lineal descendants from the Crusaders. They are proud of this fact, and treasure their parchment genealogies with the greatest care. Blue eyes and yellow hair and other traces of the Aryan type are common among them. As one sees them in the Basilica, however, their appearance is entirely Oriental. They wear a long gown without fastening at the waist and striped with red, yellow, green and blue. At the throat it is covered with fine embroidery, under which one may catch glimpses of a short reddish vest embroidered in jellow with Arabesque designs. Their head dress is equally strange; it consists of red cotton, spangled with pieces of silver, and these with necklaces made in a similar manner, form their dowries.

On the opposite side of the church are the men, whose costumes are scarcely less strange than those of the women. Among them are shepherds; and seeing them one cannot help going back through the centuries to that Holy Night, when, as here to-day the shepherds went before the princes to honor the new born Saviour. Matins finished, the Pontifical Mass is at once begun. The Patriarch and his assistants at the altar are arrayed in the vestments presented in the name of the Republic of France. The scene had not the greatest possible beauty, and at the same time, the highest solemnity. As soon as the ceremony ends a procession is formed, while throughout the Basilica the tapers held by the people are lighted and gleam like so many little stars. The crucifer walks in front of the procession, and then follow in order the Franciscans and the members of other religious orders, and after these, the Patriarch, escorted by his assisting priests. After the Patriarch and dressed in full uniform of their rank walk the French Consul and the various members of his suite. Then the laymen join in the long line which follows.

In his arms, with tender care, the Patriarch bears a cushion over-wrought with fine laces and rich ornaments of embroidery work, upon which rests a waxen figure of the Divine Infant. The features are most lifelike, and the tiny lips are arched as if about to break into a smile. Across the transept the line passes and through the lateral door into the ancient cloister of St. Jerome. This long gallery ends in the Church of St. Catherine. The procession crosses the aisle at present occupied by the Armenians, and descends by means of the stone stairway into the Sanctuary to get into the limited space of the grotto soon all the entire place. The hymns of joy suddenly cease, and the sounds of music are hushed.

The Patriarch, advancing to the altar of the Nativity, stands before the spot where, nineteen centuries ago, the infant Saviour was placed. Then the officiating Deacon begins to chant the gospel of the Nativity, beginning: "And it came to pass that when they were there, her days were accomplished that she should be delivered." At these words the Deacon approaches the Patriarch and takes up the figure of the Infant. "And here she brought forth her first-born Son," the Deacon chants, and as he does so places the image on the spot that marks where Christ was born. "And wrapped Him up in swaddling clothes," sings the Deacon, and the action is suited to the figure. The Patriarch kneels before the figure of Our Lord and tenderly covers the little limbs with delicate silks. "And here laid Him in a manger," continues the Deacon. The Patriarch goes with the little one in his arms and places Him in the crib or manger before which the shepherds and the Wise Men of the East knelt in silent adoration.

The Gospel ended, the Gloria is intoned and then the Te Deum. The procession returns to the upper church, where the Patriarch chants Ludes and then celebrates his second Mass, at which he gives the Holy Communion to those who wish to communicate.

From midnight until 5 o'clock Masses are celebrated in the Grotto of the Nativity by the Franciscan Fathers and other visiting priests. At that hour the Catholics give way to the schismatic Greeks. As soon as these services are over, the Latin priests re-

turn and Masses are celebrated in succession until sunset of Christmas day. This is a signal privilege granted only to Bethlehem for the feast of the Nativity and Epiphany.

At 1 o'clock on Christmas morning the Patriarch sings his third Mass, at which a congregation similar in its bright colors to that of the previous evening, assists.

The Grotto of the Nativity is small, and is partly natural and partly artificial. In order to preserve it from fire, the early Christians built a church over it, and probably made the stairway that we find to-day. The walls of the Grotto and the natural rocks are covered by rich tapestries, and from the ceiling hang a great number of memorial lamps that are kept burning night and day. The spot where the Nativity is marked by a silver star with the inscription, "Hic de Virgine Maria Jesus Christus natus est." ("Here Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary.") At the right-hand side is a sort of niche in the rock, where stood the manger from which the cattle fed, and in which His mother laid the infant in the inn. This place also contains an altar marking the spot where the Wise Kings knelt.

In the afternoon of Christmas day pilgrims to Bethlehem pay a visit to the Milk Grotto and to the Field of the Shepherds. The Milk Grotto is a natural cavern in the rock, and is the place of the Nativity. Tradition reports that Mary hid here while Joseph was making preparations for the flight into Egypt. While suckling her child a few drops of milk fell on the floor of the Grotto. The natives, even the Bedouins, have great faith in the efficacy of this stone, powdered and dissolved in water, as a remedy for infants in want of milk.

The Shepherd's Field is reached by a road leading by the Field of Boaz (or Boaz), where Ruth gleaned. A church was once built on the site where the angels made known to men the glad tidings of the birth of Our Lord. Of this and the monastery of hermits that once stood beside it little now remains save the crypt under the ancient chancel. This is reached by a stairway of twenty-one steps. It contains a little altar, the property of Greek schismatics. This the pilgrims decorate with candles brought from Bethlehem. Then they kneel in prayer, after which the gospel of the day is chanted. There is no other ceremony; and the pilgrims soon return to Bethlehem.

The solemnities at Bethlehem draw members of the Franciscan Order from all parts of Palestine, and every pilgrim, whether lay or cleric, who is attracted enough to the Holy Land at this season of the year makes it a point to be in attendance. The afternoon procession to the Shepherd's Field which has just been described, is always made with much pomp and order, and whenever the Latin Patriarch goes about formally while he is in Bethlehem he is escorted by a guard of Turkish soldiers furnished by the Pacha for the occasion.

Since the earliest days of Christianity the birthplace of our Lord has been held in high veneration. Heathen hatred, under Hadrian, tried to convert the place into a shrine of Venus and Adonis. But even this desecration did not make the Christians forgetful of the holy spot, and when the Empress Helena visited Palestine she had the temple destroyed, its idols cast out and in its place erected the great Church in its simplicity and grandeur in its architectural proportions of its architectural pure lines.

It is a strange fact, but this Church of the pious Empress which has come down to us to-day, of all the many churches erected by her orders in the Holy Land, alone has outlasted the storms of time and fanaticism, and remains very much as it was. The towers, its mighty porticoes are gone; the mosaics that shone in court and nave, transept and chancel have disappeared. Of the many paintings that decorated its walls, four alone remain, and of these one is scarcely more than a fragment. But the main features of the buildings are still intact. The three beautiful portals that formerly gave entrance to the Basilica have been walled up. A small square opening, about three feet high, serves not only to admit the pilgrim, but answers for solemn entrances, such as that of the Patriarch, as well.

These ceremonies at Bethlehem are only one parallel in the world and that is in America. At the Chapel of the Holy Land, in Brookland, near Washington, D. C., there are reproductions of the principal shrines of Palestine, and among them the grotto of Bethlehem. This has been reproduced in the Church in all its details, and at the Midnight Mass on Christmas at the Bethlehem, as mark the services in Bethlehem, as far as is possible, carried out.

As one who has beheld with his own eyes these glad rites in honor of the new-born Son of Man looks back over the years, they bring with them a spirit that could only spring from the lessons of the Christmas season. The lights gleamed brightly in the Palace of Herod, on the hill opposite Bethlehem, on the first of all Christmas nights, while in the lowly stable-cavern shone only a single flame. But the lights of Herod's banquet have been forever lost in the darkness of the Christ-child never ceases to fill the hearts of men with his heavenly message: "Glory to God in the highest; and on earth, peace to men of good will."—Rev. Godfrey Schilling, O. S. F.

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THE JOY OF FAITH.

The Blessedness Which This Firmest of Convictions Brings.

Baltimore, Md.

There is a blessedness which men of faith attain, and a happiness they enjoy, that is hidden from those who are to the senses given, writes Rev. C. F. Thomas in the Sun. And such is not at all strange if we remember that "the sensual man perceiveth not the things that are of the spirit of God." But "spiritual man judges all things," and he does not forget the words which the Saviour of mankind Himself did say when He rebuked the doubting and insincere disciple, "Blessed are they who have not seen and have believed."

What can be more blessed, what confers greater happiness, than the conscious possession of truth? The whole world seeks for truth, though some just like Pilate, as if it were chimerical; or recoil from it like Felix, as if it were something fearful; or like Agrippa, regard it with indifference and put it aside as of no importance. All men look for truth; what is truth for us is not a jest, nor an idle fancy, but an earnest query of the soul. A negative or an unsatisfactory answer causes us discontent and un-fathomable misery; an affirmative and satisfactory one thrills us with untold joyous emotion. All our joys, no matter how false or fleeting, are based on the assumption that the objects which occasion them are solid, true and real and sure. The moment the delusion vanishes or the suspicion arises that they are not what they seem, immediately sorrow seizes our hearts, and we relinquish them for something else. The gladness that something hovers over our lives like the brightest sunshine on a lovely day and communicates itself to our every deed and every word is but the product of an assurance that our affections are lavished upon a worthy object and our sense of beauty attracted by perfection. How dark the world becomes when that object reveals its unworthiness, and how hollow when that perfection manifests its imperfect lines! Nothing contents us but truth; nothing rejoices us but truth; in nothing are we blessed, save in the attainment of truth.

Truth is our soul's life, strength and peace. No wonder there is a tone of inexpressible sadness and weakness in the cry of every man the deeper he advances in science, when he finds a vaster abyss still unexplored and impenetrable before him. No wonder we discover on all sides and in every rank of society mighty protest and vain reflection against human littleness no wonder there are myriad eyes looking heavenward, inflamed by the fever of infinite and unsatisfied desires. For mankind is ever the sport or the victim of a perpetual warfare that arises between aspiration for the infinite and the present reality. The soul cries for peace, but there is no peace, as it wanders in the world through dry and arid places where truth blooms not and flourishes not.

From such despair and anxiety from such weakness and unhappiness, the man of faith is exempt; faith raises him above the world—enlarges the horizon of his vision—endows him with a contemplation of essential beauty and absolute truth in God—breaks from him the shackles of the limitations cast around him by his nature—remedies the inherent defects of his soul—instills new principles of life and new germs of action by which he can hear and distinguish the voice of infallible wisdom uncreated and profess unwavering allegiance to the manifestations vouchsafed; and instead of falling subdued by fatigue and exhaustion on a dry heap of illusions, he ascends with ever-widening spirit until he reaches the Almighty truth which gives him understanding. "In Whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." He has been conducted through the right ways and shown the kingdom of God and given the knowledge of the holy things and been made honorable in his labors, for his prayer has been: "Send forth Thy light and Thy truth. They have conducted me and brought me into Thy Holy Hill, and into Thy tabernacles." (Psalms xlii, 3). Truly that man is blessed and happy. By faith he is glad.

Wisdom has entered his house and he hath reposed himself with her; her conversation hath no bitterness, her company any tediousness, but joy and gladness. Say you that this certainty is flimsy and rests on no solid basis? Think you that the assent which he gives to the teachings of faith, or the assurance with which he cherishes his hopes, is not of greatest weight? The grace is the Most High Intuitions, the love of God communicates it; and under that heavenly influence the human will leads the mind before the throne of the Infinite, and accepts all the supernatural revelation. What higher de-

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gree of certainty can there be than that which originates in a divine principle? "I believe" is an act that comes not from me; labor and toil, study and reason as I may; be the natural light around me ever so bright, I cannot make the act of faith unless such be given me from above. The arguments may be strong and weighty; the chain of reasoning may seem to be well connected and conclusive; yet vain is the expected result if the grace of God be withheld. And when that grace comes, what can have more power to inspire absolute certainty in the truth of things I accept and profess? I may doubt my own existence; I may call in question the reality of the world around me; I may hesitate about the clearest human conclusions; but when I say, aided by the love and goodness of the Father above, I believe, I possess a conviction the highest and the greatest possible, because it originates in a divine principle.

The motive of faith is the veracity of God Who speaks. I believe because I hear and recognize the word of God. I examine the character of the message handed to me. I scrutinize the men who come to see me. I judge the trustworthiness of their testimony. I subject it all to valid, unflinching tests, and when I conclude that it is the voice of God, I cry out: "Speak, Lord, Thy servant heareth." Or "What wilt Thou have me do, Lord?"

Is there certainty greater than this? Natural wisdom may be illusive; earthly science may mistake; human reason is fallible and often built on unstable foundation. We may be justified in viewing with distrust whatever we hold on human and natural basis; but the word of God is eternal, immutable and infallible—endured forever. Heaven and earth may pass away, but My Word shall not pass away. Whatever rests on His Word partakes of like immutability, and its certainty is of highest possible grade. The testimony of men is great, but the testimony of God is greater. For God is not only infallible in His wisdom, in His knowledge, "His eyes are far brighter than the sun, beholding round about all the ways of men, and the bottom of the deep and looking into the hearts of men, into the most hidden parts." He is also not less infallible in manifesting that knowledge, and as He cannot be deceived, so neither can He deceive. And when we believe on His Word, because He hath revealed, nothing can equal the certainty we possess of the truth of the revelation.

Wherefore the Apostle St. Paul declares faith to be "the substance of things hoped for, and the conviction of things that appear not." And St. Peter: "We have the word of prophecy more firm." And St. Paul again in the exuberance of his joy and in the perfection of his spirit as he explained the grounds of Christian hopes and the unparalleled certainty of Christian convictions, exclaims: "I know in whom I have believed."

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