

Messenger and Visitor

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Christmas—The Coming of the Christ.

The Christmas season has come again with its gladness and its merry-making, its holiday from study and work, its festivities and its mirth, its home gatherings, family reunions and its exchange of gifts in token of friendship and goodwill. To many it is a bright and glad season,—to many but not to all, for this is a world of sunshine and of shadow, and while some rejoice in all the brightness of the Christmas season, there are those whose poverty or pain or griefs or losses seem to be but accentuated and made more sensibly acute by the tides of Christmas merriment and good cheer which flow around them—touching without penetrating their own sad lives. Yet the heart that responds to the thought of Christmas is on that account the happier, even though the season sometimes comes laden with memories which do but emphasize the fact of bitter loss or pain; the people which knows the meaning of Christmas is a better and a happier people, though into many of its homes there may come little of the brightness and the joy of the Christmas season, and this whole round world of ours is infinitely richer in happiness and hope because of its Christmas day, though upon so many of its millions no thought of that day and its meaning has ever yet dawned.

What then is the real meaning of the Christmas day, with its brightness and good cheer and kindly sentiments. Its source is to be traced to the coming into the world, some nineteen hundred years ago, of a babe of whom it is written that he was found "wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger." And to that same source—that babe in the manger at Bethlehem—must we trace all of human hope and happiness that has any imperishable ground and justification. Supreme among the events of time stands the advent of Jesus as the source of joy and blessing for our sinful world, and therefore that fact can never cease to be for increasing millions of the human family a matter of profoundest interest. It is certainly the wonder of all history that the birth of Jesus of Nazareth should have come to seem to the world a matter of such transcendent importance. How has it come to pass that this man of a despised and hated race is accorded, in all the foremost nations of the earth, a place of eminence incomparably above that to which any other among the sons of men dare aspire? If we speak of Jesus as historians are accustomed to speak of men, we must say that he was of humble origin, his home and his people were among the peasants of Galilee, and among them for the most part his life was spent. Until he was about thirty years of age even the little world of Palestine had heard nothing of him. After this he lived but three years, and though his teachings and works made a profound impression in Galilee and Judea, the common people hearing him gladly—many counting him as a prophet and a few regarding him as the Christ,—yet the few men who were closely associated with him were simple and unlearned men, of humble station and destitute of worldly influence, while the effect of his teaching upon the ruling men and ruling classes among the Jews was to arouse them to bitter enmity and opposition. And after those three short years the malice of his enemies triumphed. Accused of heresy and blasphemy and denounced as an enemy of the State, he was condemned, and amid the execrations of rulers and rabble died the death of a common criminal on the cross.

But the story does not end here, and why not? Why did not this incident in Jewish history—this story of Jesus of Nazareth, his teaching, his wonders, his tragic death, gradually fade from the memory of men, and lose itself like a mere bubble on the stream of history? How has it come to pass that the name of Jesus, the Nazarene, is written so large across the face of the centuries, so that the name of a Jewish peasant who was crucified as a criminal stands in dignity and glory unapproachable above all the greatest names in human history? Why is it that men—the simple and the learned—are ever studying so earnestly and devoutly his life and words and works, while the literature which finds in him its subject and its inspiration grows constantly vaster, and every succeeding year draws from the scholars of the age new commentaries upon his sayings, new histories of his life? The name of the lowly-born Nazarene who was despised and rejected by the rulers of his own people and was put to death by the Roman governor has become so great that the nations do him reverence, numbering the years and the centuries from his birth, while millions of the sons of men bow in worship at his feet, adoring him as their Saviour and their Lord!

This unique personality of Jesus the Son of Mary, the place which he has come to occupy in the world's best religious life and in its profoundest thought, and his transcendent influence in shaping the destinies of men, of nations and civilizations are surely facts of which the skeptic and the unbeliever are bound to take account. And how indeed shall anyone account for Jesus Christ in history and for the power of his name in the hearts and lives of men to-day but by accepting Paul's conclusion, that he is "declared to be the Son of God with power by his resurrection from the dead"?

Quite in harmony with the supremely exalted position which the name of Jesus occupies in the consciousness of the Christian world today is his character as set forth in the opening passage of the Epistle to the Hebrews. There he is represented as the Son of God, the begotten of the Father, the shining forth of the Father's glory, the true impress of his substance, the heir of all things and the upholder of all things. It is through him God speaks his consummate word, through him the ages are fashioned, through him there is made the one effectual offering for sin. He is the Great High Priest of humanity, whose place is at the right hand of God, whose throne is the throne of the Most High whom all the angels worship and whose joy is God-given and supreme. It is through him that in these last times God has spoken to the world. God has indeed spoken to the world in many ways, in many places and through many voices. He has spoken through inarticulate voices of nature and more distinctly by the tongue of man; he has spoken by lawgivers and prophets, by lives of holy men and women, by father's counsel and mother's love, but through none nor all of these has he spoken so distinctly, with so full expression of his compassion and his love and with such fullness of authority and power, as in this consummate, final manifestation given through him who is himself the ever-living "Word"—that Word which is ever finding utterance through every voice which declares the truth of God.

Editorial Notes.

—The new editor of the *Westeyan* is at his post. The issue of the 17th inst., the first under his control, bears evidence that a vigorous and industrious hand is driving the editorial pen. THE MESSENGER AND VISITOR very heartily welcomes Dr. Maclean to the East and as a confederate in the work of religious journalism, and wishes the *Westeyan* and its new editor a Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year!

—Dr. Maclaren of Manchester has been of late in a weak condition of health, and up to the end of November had not been able to meet his pulpit appointments for several Sundays. He hoped to be able to resume his ministration with the first Sunday in December, but whether or not his hope was realized we have not heard. It is sadly evident that the physical force of the great preacher is declining, but his recent sermons bear convincing testimony to the fact that intellectually and spiritually he is still wonderfully rich and vigorous.

—The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (Congregational) has recently published its ninety-second annual report, which shows that the re-

ceipts for the year have been \$845,105. The report states that the indemnities for property destroyed in China in 1900 have been paid and adjusted under conditions satisfactory to the missionaries and in most cases satisfactory also to the native Christians. The payment of these indemnities makes it possible to reopen missionary work in all forms. Mention is made of the enormous demand among the Chinese for the Bible and translations of all kinds of western books. This demand is so great that it cannot be easily supplied.

—It is gratifying to observe that the temperance people of Ontario are alive to the importance of taking advantage of the moral victory they have achieved in the referendum campaign to place as effective restrictions as possible upon the liquor traffic. A large and representative conference of temperance workers met in Toronto last week, and after long deliberation over the situation and discussion as to the best policy to pursue united unanimously in the following resolution:

"That in view of the recent expression by the electors of the Province of Ontario in favor of the liquor act, 1902, we deem it advisable to appoint a deputation to wait upon the Government and request that effect be given to said vote by the abolition of the public bar, the trading system and drinking in clubs, and the imposition of such other restrictions on the liquor traffic as shall most effectually curtail its operation and remedy its evil."

—The reporters for the daily papers are like men casting nets into the sea and bringing together a great multitude of fishes, good and bad. Unfortunately the reporter, unlike the man in the parable, is not wont to give himself much concern about sorting the fish which he lands, but dumps his catch, good, bad and indifferent, upon our tables. And so it happens that a certain percentage of the daily mental pabulum served up to us by the gatherers of news is not of a wholesome and edifying character. It is gratifying, however, to know that much that is really wholesome and edifying does come to us through the labors of the news gatherers. And among the wholesome and ennobling things are to be noted the reports of acts of heroism occurring in daily life. Dr. S. Weir Mitchell has been moved to make a record of the reported instances, and he tells us in the *Century Magazine* of 1163 cases of persons who risked their lives to save others. These instances were secured by clipping agencies in ten months. Of these instances 717 were of persons who sought to rescue from death by drowning or fire or other perils others who were in no way related to them and most of whom were strangers, while one in every eleven lost his life in trying to save others. Surely such acts are no less heroic than the bravest demonstrations against the enemy on the battlefield. They are greatly worthy of being recorded and honored and the frequency with which they occur would seem to show that life in its every-day currents is not so altogether selfish and sordid as we are sometimes tempted to think.

—By a recently published encyclical, entitled "The Study of the Scriptures," Pope Leo XIII. has established a Council of Commissioners who are to sit in Rome and "devote their entire energy to insure that the Divine words may receive that more minute explanation of them demanded by the time and may not only be preserved from all taint of error, but even raised above rash opinions." The Commissioners, we are told, are carefully to investigate the modern trend of thought as regards Bible study and deem nothing discovered by modern research as foreign to their purpose, but are to use the utmost diligence and promptitude in taking up and turning to public use whatever may from day to day be discovered new for Biblical exegesis. It is not however to be supposed that the Commissioners are permitted to interpret the Scriptures as men directly guided and illuminated by the Holy Spirit and in the light of all the learning of the age. They are never to forget that they are under authority. "In matters of faith and morals relating to the formation of Christian doctrine, that must be held to be the true sense of sacred Scripture, which has been held and is held by holy mother church, to whom it belongs to judge of the true sense and interpretation of Holy Scripture; and so no one may lawfully interpret holy Scripture contrary to this sense or even in opposition to the unanimous consensus of the fathers." There are, however, certain passages the meaning of which has not been definitely fixed by any ex-cathedra utterance, and here the Commissioners are permitted a freer hand, provided however, that they follow the analogy of faith and Catholic teaching as a guiding principle.

—The commission in the matter of the great Anthracite coal strike is now receiving evidence from the coal companies, showing that the conduct of some of the union miners during the strike was most reprehensible. Evidence on the part of the miners previously taken by the commission had gone to show that the treatment accorded to their employes by some of the coal companies has been of a brutally heartless character. The following is given as a sample of many such testimonies: An old miner, named Coll, who had been maimed and re-