

The Christian.

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EDITORIAL.

THE ANGELS' CONCERT.

Long and cold were the lonely nights through which the shepherds of Bethiehem kept watch over their sheep. While other men slept, these humble toilers abode in the fields, and in turn guarded their flock from thieves and beasts of prey.

This night the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, "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 and lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host," joining in what may be called

THE ANGELS' CONCERT.

Let us inquire—

- I. Who gave the concert?
- II. When and where it was given?
- III. What is its theme?

I. *Who gave the concert?* It was the Lord's angels. No other voice than theirs was heard. The angels who live in heaven and constantly behold the face of God, had often come to earth on divine business. Sometimes the errand was to punish the guilty, but on such occasions one angel comes alone. He has no company with him and no music.

In one night a strong, swift angel passed through the whole land of Egypt, and slew the first born of every family, but there was no music. Angels do not sing over men's lamentations. But now the angel comes from God with good tidings of great joy for all people, and his message is caught up by a multitude of the heavenly host, who, as suddenly as the lightning's flash, were in their places to turn the tidings unto song.

Sometimes the angels are numbered by thousands, and sometimes by millions; on this occasion they are unnumbered, and may be the very company Paul mentions in Heb. xii. 22, to which New Testament saints have come, as they sang both of the redeemed and their Redeemer. Although this company is unnumbered, its vast magnitude is expressed by "a multitude of the heavenly host," or heavenly army, showing how deeply interested this "innumerable company" is in our salvation. Angels are more anxious for our salvation than we are ourselves. God is more anxious that we should be saved than we are to be saved, and in no place is there greater joy than among the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth; and this explains their united and rapturous song of praise when man's Redeemer was born.

II. *When and where was the concert given?* God's presence on earth had at times past been manifest by the Shechinah or cloud of glory. It led Israel in their journey from Egypt to Canaan by day and by night, and dwelt in the holiest of all in the tabernacle and in the temple, but had now for long centuries disappeared from the earth. When the angel came with the good tidings the glory of the Lord came with him in all its brightness, and shone around these humble shepherds. For now God in very deed came to dwell with men, was actually manifest in flesh, and instead of the glory shining in the temple, it shone in the fields. Had the angel told the priests and scribes of the Saviour's birth, they would not believe him, much less go to the manger to seek him who was born King of the Jews. But the glory of the Lord was not for one nation only, but, like the tidings, for all people. He had come who was the true light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world. When the angel of the Lord came with the good tidings, there the excellent glory of the Lord shone forth, and then and there the multitude of the heavenly host joined in glorious praise. One angel made the announcement, but a whole multitude joined in praising God. There is no meeting on earth more suitable for the praise of God, than where His gospel is proclaimed.

As the twenty-fifth of December was a suitable season in Palestine for shepherds to keep watch over their flock at night, and no day of the year has higher claims, it is well to accept of the generally received opinion, that it was early on this morning that the Saviour was born, and that the angels sang their sweetest song which leads us to consider:

III. *The theme*, which was "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will to men." What can equal the angels' theme, singing of God surrounded by the highest, brightest glory, and men purified and pardoned, peacefully basking in its beams?

The wonder of the incarnation is that he who thought it not robbery to be equal with God took upon him the form of a servant (slave), and especially how he took that form. Had he, when stepping down from his lofty throne, appeared in the full form of manhood, that step would have astonished angels, but how much more when he emptied himself of his powers and faculties to become a helpless infant and to wait and be trained and creep up to man's estate as infants do! What sacrifice would any man find equal to that of giving up his powers of body and mind to become a helpless, ignorant babe? Jesus did all this. We find it hard to empty our pockets for him; he emptied himself for us. When the angel broke the good news to the shepherds, BORN was the emphatic word, "To you is BORN," etc., and it was that birth which filled with rapture the singing host.

We see how completely the angels testimony accords with the angels' song: "Good tidings to all people," he said; "Good will

to men" they sang. Not a hint that any people or any man was left out. So stood matters when Jesus left his Father and came into the world.

Again, when he had finished his work and was leaving the world to go unto his Father, he gave his last commission, charging his disciples to go and tell all men, in all the world, what he had done for all, and what he would do to every obedient believer. Some men hesitate to obey the first part of the commission—to go into all the world and preach to all. Others hesitate to tell plainly the last part of the commission. How blessed it is to be as free to believe and obey it all as the dear Saviour was to give it. The shepherds gladly told their story. So will the true disciple tell his story.

Correspondence.

NEWS FROM AFAR.

After a lengthened silence I again take pen in hand to write you. The many topics which interest us here may not have equal interest for your readers, yet I hope my writing may not be in vain. I regret that I cannot report much in the way of progress in church matters, in fact I feel constrained to say that in New Zealand, as a whole, it is as much as can be said that the church here is holding its own. While on the other hand if the increase of population which is steadily going on is taken into account, I do not think that we are keeping pace with it. We have a large number of small meetings, scattered over a large area, with indifferent means of communication and very few preachers. In the whole of New Zealand at the present time there are, I believe, only three preachers who are being paid for their services. In consequence most of the preaching is done by the "great unpaid" section of the churches. Much of it under great disadvantages, but still on the whole fairly well done by a number of self-sacrificing individuals, who many times feel that honor, or, at all events, satisfactory results, do not come to the prophet in his own country.

There is one point on which the churches here differ greatly from our churches in America, in that they will receive contributions towards the support of the preachers from church members only. With most of the brethren, both here and in Australia, this is made a fundamental question, and whether right or wrong there can be no doubt that it has the effect of limiting the number of preachers who can devote all their time to the work of preaching the gospel. I remember an instance where a good brother, who was also a good preacher, had been for some months holding services in a country place, being offered a donation by those who had very regularly attended the meetings, declining to accept the same, notwithstanding that he was a poor man and had to discontinue holding the meetings because he could not afford to keep a horse to go the