

divine Providence did not cast them away forever, but when the plenitude of time came, sent them a Redeemer. To His chosen people an angel bore the happy tidings of His birth, to the nations a star proclaimed that the light and the revelation of the Gentiles was born. Whether it was an ordinary star that God made use of on that occasion, or whether it was a mere column of light, such as the pillar of fire that went before the Israelites in the days of Moses, or whether it was an angel illuminating the firmament, is a mere matter of conjecture among the learned. But, however that may be, there is one fact certain, that it was a sign sent by God to call the Gentiles, in the persons of the Magi, to the true faith, and to guide them to where the Saviour of the world was born, that they might offer to Him their gifts and the homage of their adoration, in the name of a people who were chosen to become the faithful children of the Church. There can be no doubt, that they knew the star to be such a sign from Divine inspiration, but it is more than probable that they expected about that time the coming of the Messiah, and that they had heard from the prophet of the star that was to rise out of Jacob, and the scepter that was to spring from Israel. For at that period the expectation of the promised Messiah and the golden age that He was to inaugurate, was not confined to the Jewish people alone. The nations of the earth expected His coming, as a fragmentary tradition, however distorted, of a promised Redeemer obtained among the Gentiles, and that such was the prevailing belief of the nations of the East, Tacitus and Suetonius leave no doubt. In the West, Virgil sang of the golden age in his Fourth Eclogue, and that pro-

duction so closely resembles Isaiah, that many are of the opinion that the prediction of the great prophet was the source of his inspiration, but he himself would lead us to believe that his knowledge on that subject was derived from the prophetic words of the Cumæan Sibyl. However, these are facts that we will not dispute about, for we have the main fact, that, through the unutterable goodness and mercy of God, our fathers were called to the true faith by the intervention of a miraculous star.

The poor shepherds, keeping the night watches over their flocks, were called first, and not through the intervention of a star, but by the good offices of an angel. They represented up to that time the chosen people of God, and as such were honored with a celestial intelligence as the medium of revelation. But to the nations who turned away from God, and lived not according to reason, but according to the senses, was sent an irrational guide, being more in accordance with their lives than a celestial intelligence would be, and thus it was a star that led them to the feet of the Divine Redeemer. But, as St. Gregory remarks, "not only intelligent beings bore witness to the Divinity of our Lord, but all the inanimate elements of nature during the periods of His birth, life and death." At His birth, the angelic host proclaimed, in their glorious canticle of praise, Glory to God and peace to men," and the heavenly star, as though it were conscious of its Creator's birth, leads men to their Redeemer's feet. The sea acknowledged its Divine Master, as it afforded Him a solid footing on its gentle bosom and rolling billows, and the storm and the ocean in its anger, as though conscious of His presence, obeyed His commands,