

with the waning moon. Venus, like a lamp; Jupiter, with a rivalling brilliancy; Mars, with its ruddy glow; Saturn, shining steadily; and the Moon, a silver crescent. We now know that Jupiter, Saturn, and Mars were in peculiar combination about the time that Christ was born. Was that the star? or is it more than a coincidence that Chinese astronomical tables record about this same period the appearance of a new star in the heavens? Such appearances have from time to time been noted: one, for instance, by Tycho, which suddenly burst upon view (November, 1572), shone as a star of the first magnitude for about a year, and then gradually faded out of sight. And in the seventeenth century another star appeared, when the planets were in the same conjunction as they were at the period in which the Saviour was born. We are, however, left in doubt as to the "star," whether strictly supernatural or an astrological sign. Our leanings are decidedly towards the latter.

The term "magi" (Matt. ii. 1), as coming through the Greek, indicated a priestly caste of Persians, but evidently has a wider range of meaning, if indeed the Persian magicians are to be included in the term as used in our gospels. Jeremiah xxxix. 3, 13, contains a proper name, "Rab-mag." There is reason to believe that the Hebrew word really means the prince of the Magi, or chief Chaldean or astrologer. It is more than probable that the word here denotes Eastern astrologers, though their home is to us shrouded in mystery. "Superstition often paves the way for faith;" and as alchemy led to chemistry, astrology gave energy to astronomy. So the earnest seeking of these wise men, under superstition, for Him of whose coming the entire Orient was expectant, was allowed in the providence of God to lead them to the object of their search.

But Herod was ill at ease when the King of the Jews, now infant, was enquired for. Intrigue and crime are poor foundations on which to erect a throne, or, indeed, anything that must stand the test of eternity's storm.

"The thief doth fear each bush an officer."

We need not tarry on the well-known story of the slaughter at Bethlehem, which, though not mentioned by other historians, is in such strict keeping with all we know of Herod, that we have no hesitancy in accept-

ing the record; nor how the tyrant was quietly baffled by Him whose "dreams" can thwart a conqueror's energy as they can sorely affright a guilty soul.

But what life did the Christ live until the time of His shewing unto Israel? John and Mark pass over the thirty years in absolute silence, not even giving a hint. Matthew relates the visit of the Magi, the flight into Egypt, and the return to Nazareth, and then his silence is as absolute as the others. Luke supplies a hint or two—nothing more. He was circumcised (Luke ii. 21), presented at the temple (verse 22); at twelve years old accompanied his parents to the Passover—shewed precocity in his converse with the rabbis—returned meekly home—was subject to his parents—advanced in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men (verse 51). From the fact that Joseph's name no more appears in the history, it has been inferred that he died during the early youth of Jesus—a probable inference, nothing more. So far, however, as home training entered into the Saviour's character, the mother's influence must have been felt; and she who could say the "Magnificat" was certainly no common woman. The history of the race told, commented on, by such a teacher, must have been fraught with spiritual power. Evidently from those circumstances related in Luke, the presentation, the Passover when the child was twelve years old, indicate a thorough religious training, in this case we know removed from formalism, and therefore well fitted to nurture growth in the favour of God and the respect of man—for even vice does respect virtue. The age of twelve was of special import to a Jewish boy. Up till then he was absolutely his parents'; he now became a son of the law—could no longer be sold as a slave by his father, and must begin to learn a trade. That the Christ did thus conform to the laws of His nation is plain from the question, "Is not this the carpenter?" (Mark vi. 3). In late MSS., all cursive, the addition is sometimes found, "*the son of the carpenter*"—not the only time Christianity has been ashamed of its Christ, and presented a character more after its own heart. Tennyson's reproof is not without ground—

"The churchmen would kill their church as the churches have killed their Christ."