

Where can it be?

A baby in a manger!

That must mean a stable.

Ah, here is one—not a very nice place—just a cave in the hillside, maybe—but the angel said babe in a manger, and it will do no harm to look inside this stable.

The door is gently pressed ajar, and in they peep!

What is the matter with the man at the front?

He has turned, and such excitement is in his face! He beckons with his hands and his eyes, and every feature, indeed!

I hear him whisper, "A baby is here!"

Such an excitement, and yet a cautious pressing forward, one looking past the form of another, all anxious to get in, yet going softly, stepping reverently, and there is the sweetest baby in the world, tucked away in a manger! There are cows close by, asses, perhaps a camel half raising his eyes in supercilious wonder, while by the manger is Joseph with anxious look, and there, her face so tired and yet so heavenly, is Mary, the mother of our Lord!

Those shepherds—how they must fall about that manger, look into it wonderingly, and then gaze to heaven thankfully! Such a story, too, as they have to tell of an angel making his proclamation, and of an angel choir singing! Then they go out everywhere to tell the wonderful news.

People marvel, then talk; talk, and then marvel. One person does more thinking than talking. All these strange things she lays away in a safe; a safe that has walls stronger than those of steel and more beautiful than any of gold. It is deep and capacious, and she alone carries the key. The safe is a mother's heart, and the key is a mother's love.

Orientalisms of the Lesson.

Shepherds in some parts of the East lead a nomadic life, moving about with their flocks from place to place, according as they can find water and pasture for them, having no settled abode whatever; but in the more civilized countries the community is settled and the flocks are herded and put in the care of some one to take them out during the day, bringing them back at night. In the Himalaya Mountains, however, shepherds move in the mountains far away from the settled portion of the population for several months together, returning only before the snow fall closes up the passes and the verdure is destroyed by frosts. In some places it is still true, as it was in the days of the patriarchs, that flocks are grazed without any relation to the question of ownership of the lands. Even in the more settled conditions of society, sheep are grazed by the wayside and on what we might call the commons.

Shepherds are a class by themselves, who may or may not own sheep, generally, however, being

only hired for this work, though the sons and daughters of the owners, in ancient times as well as now. Shepherds became owners by being paid for the tending of flocks, not in money, but in a proportion of the lambs reared. It is not at all uncommon for several shepherds to conduct their separate flocks over the same district, and in dangerous regions, where they remain day and night in the open air, to share the watch care by taking turns in guarding the joint flock; and sometimes they have to combine to guard against robbers who would steal from the fold, as well as against wild beasts which would destroy them, and for this purpose they often erect watchtowers from which they can overlook their flocks. They called these "towers of the flock." Sheep are still found wild in the high mountain regions of Persia. The shepherds to whom the angels appeared were probably herdsmen hired by the priests of the temple at Jerusalem to graze the sheep required for sacrifice, from which those without blemish were selected and driven into the court of the temple for sale to the tens of thousands of Hebrews who came from the ends of the earth to present the offerings required by the Jewish ritual.

It is interesting to know that the general location of Bethlehem has never been disputed, so that one may wander to-day among the simple inhabitants, making beads, crosses, and other relics for sale to visitors, and readily imagine the environment of the Babe of Bethlehem. The houses with domed roofs are oriental enough, though they may not have been all of this form in Christ's day. Here Jesus was wrapped in swaddling clothes after being bathed and rubbed with salt. The bandages were drawn tightly to prevent the distortions of the body to which infants are liable, and this is the general custom yet in the East. This custom of swathing the infant has not so long since disappeared from European countries as to make it seem strictly an oriental usage only.

By Way of Illustration.

Verses 8 and 9. The shepherds were representatives of the common people. But perhaps the chief reason why the angel brought his message to shepherds was that the babe they were to find in the manger was to be a shepherd too. The prophecy which the wise men bring Herod is that out of Bethlehem "shall come forth a governor which shall be shepherd of my people Israel." The figure was dear to the prophets. It was dear to Christ. The words which told their business told his—seeking, finding, calling, leading, keeping, saving. Did they guard from danger? The good Shepherd would lay down his life for his sheep. Did they care for their flock and know each one? Even more would this Babe care for them, the shepherds' Shepherd. As we watch