

## A PARSON'S PONDERINGS.

CONCERNING THE "WISE MEN FROM THE EAST."

THE Festival of the Epiphany memorializes an incident which is related by only one Evangelist, and by him in few words. "There came wise men from the East to Jerusalem" in search of the Christ-child. But, brief as the story is, it has ever captivated the heart of Christendom; for it recorded the first manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles, it indicated the Catholicity of His kingdom, it foreshadowed the mighty influence which the Christ-child was to wield over all the human race.

It is no wonder that this event, so briefly sketched by the Evangelist, should have become a subject of curious though devout speculation in the early church. "Who were these magi? Whence did they come? How many were there? What were their names, and ranks?" And it is no wonder that Christian Imagination and Christian Art and Christian Poetry should have endeavoured to supply an answer to the eager questionings of the Christian Heart, and that their answer took the shape it did. These magi were three in number, as their gifts—"gold and frankincense and myrrh"—indicated. They were kings; for had not the prophet said: "Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising"? They were representatives of all nations, for the Psalmist sang: "The Kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents, the Kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts."

And so at last the pretty legend was evolved. There were three kings of Orient, one was fair, a descendant of Japheth; one was olive-brown, of the race of Shem; and one black, a son of Ham. One was young, one middle-aged, and one old. Nay, we even know their names: Caspar, Melchior and Balthazar. Have not the three stars of Orion's belt been named after them?

And now this allegorical legend, which not long ago was by many Protestants decried as "superstitious" and "unwarranted by Scripture" is taking hold of all Christian minds as if it were history, thanks to the romance of "Ben Hur," which has had its legions of readers. And we are still further familiarized with it by the Spectacular Representation which was lately denounced by the divines of Hamilton, and yet witnessed by crowded houses there and elsewhere. And here I must make a confession. I myself have witnessed that Spectacle. "Spectacle" is the only appropriate name for it. Drama it is not; for there is no speaking. It cannot be called a series of "Tableaux vivants;" for many of the scenes were altogether too "vivants"—especially the dances. It would be an indignity to call it a Pantomime; so "Spectacle" let it be. I say I witnessed that spectacle, not in Hamilton, but—no matter where. And I may add, I was not the only person present—by a good many. I was disappointed, however. Not but that it was gorgeous, beyond all expectation. But I went there (and I am sure my brother parsons all did too) thinking I should see tableaux which would elucidate passages of Scripture more accurately than most of the pictures in our illustrated Bibles. But, ah me! instead of suggesting Scripture texts, those scenes far often recalled to my mind lines of Horace, such as:—

Jam Cytherea choros ducit venus imminente Luna,  
Junctaque Nymphis Gratiae deceat, etc., (Ode I., 4.)

and again—

Sunt quos curricula pulverem Olympicum  
Collegisse juvat, etc., (I., I.)

as I gazed on those bewitching marches and dances of those lovely nymphs, priestesses, and what not. And then the Chariot race!

Terrarum dominos evehit ad Deos!

To be sure, after one of those fascinating or spirit-stirring scenes, the mind of the spectator would be sobered by a vision of "Lepers on a Judean Highway," or something of that kind. But, I fear, the moral effect on the average youth, as he looked on that picture and on this, would not be as evangelical as the author probably intended.

However, that spectacle opened with "The Meeting of the Three Magi." So, now that Romance and Art have reproduced so graphically the ancient legend (such is the perversity of human nature), it is likely to be henceforth considered by the multitude as a matter of history. We must, however, bear in mind that these interesting legends were worked out by the Christian Imagination of the Middle Ages, by those who knew nothing whatever of the ways of the East. To them Oriental Literature was a blank. But, as the revival of classical learning at the time of the Reformation caused much mental readjustment, so the introduction (we cannot say the revival) of Oriental Literature into our modern seats of learning has made us readjust our ideas of the Eastern world. What did our fathers know of the Zeud-avesta or of the Rig-Vedas, or all those other mysterious volumes? Men of the new culture, however, are supposed to know all about them—like the modern Major-General of the "Pirates of Penzance." In olden times a parson might have become a D.D. although he were in blissful ignorance of the Rig-Vedas and the Zeud-avesta and all the rest of them. Not so now, thanks to the labours of Professors Max Müller, Monier Williams, Sayce and others. Every aspirant for honours in divinity must now know something at least of the teachings of these Eastern sages, and be able to form some theory as to whether or not those teachings influenced the Jews during the exile, or at any other period. So it strikes me that we moderns, too, may give the reins to our imagination in filling up the outline given by Scrip-

ture as to these "wise men of the East"; and I think we can make an Idyll, probably more true to facts, and quite as edifying as the mediæval legend of the "Three Kings of Orient." So I am going to try:—

There were three wise men of the East (to be sure there were many more; but I am going to stick to the orthodox number; and there were three preëminently wise men). They flourished long before the birth of the Christ-child, and their influence even to-day is incalculable. Wise men they were, and kings they were—for what earthly potentate that ever lived exercised such power over the minds and souls of men as those three wielded millenniums ago, and still wield, though so long dead? These three were: Confucius, the wise man of China, who flourished about 500 years B.C.; Zoroaster, the wise man of Persia, who flourished about 600 years B.C.; Buddha, the wise man of India, who flourished about 1000 years B.C. (I keep to the old-fashioned spelling of the names of these worthies, for really there are so many new ways that I am not altogether certain which is the very latest style; and the chances are that before long somebody else will take out an orthographical patent for a still newer mode.) Of these three—

1. Confucius was the father of Agnosticism, Positivism and Secularism; for though he was a great ritualist and performed his rites most punctiliously, yet his religious opinions were very hazy, and "One world at a time" was his motto.

2. Zoroaster was the apostle of Dualism. His system was a connecting link between Polytheism and Monotheism. He propounded the doctrine of two gods—one good and one bad—perpetually fighting each other, with a forecast that ultimately the good god would prevail. We may think that this doctrine has no counterpart amongst us of the enlightened West; but is it so? I fear too many Christians degrade their religion into a sort of dualism: they talk and think of the Evil One as if his power were almost equal to that of the Most High. Indeed, I fancy that a good part of Milton's "Paradise Lost," if we only changed the name of Satan into that of Ahri-man, would be accepted as fairly orthodox by the pious Parsee.

3. Buddha was the father of Pantheism, of whom it seems to me Spinoza and other moderns are but feeble imitators.

These three wise men of the East were all dead centuries before the birth of "The Light of the World." But though dead they yet speak, and countless millions hear and obey. They were, in a sense, "Lights of Asia"—not that Light, but may we not say harbingers of that Light? Their writings are full of lofty thoughts, righteous ethics, noble aspirations. They were not idolaters, they did not in their blindness "bow down to wood and stone." They were, each in his own way, "seekers after God, if haply they might feel after Him and find Him." "And the times of this ignorance God winked at" (condoned), says St. Paul (Acts xvii. 20)—even the God "who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways."—(Acts xv. 16.) By the way, what large-heartedness, what allowance for unavoidable ignorance, what tenderness St. Paul showed when he preached to the heathen! Nay, may we not go further and say that all the noble aspirations, all the righteous ethics, all the lofty ideals of these wise men of the East came from Him "from whom all holy desires, all good counsels and all just works do proceed"? The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who only partially enlightened those patriarchs, reserving the full light for us in these last days, is the "God of the spirits of all flesh."

Suppose, then, we imagine that these "wise men that came from the East to Jerusalem" were the representatives, or hierophants, or delegates of these three systems—the Secularist, the Dualist, the Pantheist—seeking more light, and drawn by the guidance of heaven to the manger of Bethlehem—the Lights of Asia wending their way to the Light of the World? The Mongolian asking, "Is there another life beyond the grave?" to learn from Him, "I am the Resurrection and the Life"; the Iranian asking, "Shall Evil be overcome at last by Good, and if so how?" to be taught, "For this purpose was the Son of God manifested that He might destroy the works of the Devil"; the Hindoo asking, "Where shall rest be found?" to hear the words, "Come unto Me and I will give you rest!" So the Epiphany becomes a pledge and seal of that future time when the Incarnate, the Crucified, the Risen Lord will fulfil His word, "I will draw all men unto Me."

"So runs my dream"—but, alas! in these days we behold a strange phenomenon. We see quondam disciples of the Christ deserting Him, and going for light to the wise men of the East! We see ex-Christians becoming occult philosophers, Theosophists, Buddhists! Is this the irony of history? Is this a rude awakening from our dream? Surely not. Let us take heart and enlarge our field of vision. Let us view the whole battle-ground and not gauge the issue by the loss of a picket here and there. Let us not mistake the course of an eddy for the flow and trend of the great river of Christian history. For the day is fast coming—and there are plenty of indications thereof—when all Asia, which has sat so long under the partial light of these wise men of the East, shall respond to the summons, "Arise! shine! for thy Light is come!"

Almonte, Ont.

GEO. J. LOW.

EXIGENCIES create the necessary ability to meet and to conquer them.—Wendell Phillips.

## LE FEU SACRÉ.

O LIGHT of life! O thought of a moment,  
Blending together all hopes and fears!  
Star of the night-time, hope of the day—  
Wilt thou but end in sorrow and tears?

It is but once in the chaos of life  
One feels a spark of the golden ray—  
It is but once that the soul illumined  
Passes from night-time into the day.

It is but once that the rose in beauty  
Is fairest of all 'neath summer sky;  
Its leaves soon wither, its lustre fadeth,  
Beauty and Passion live but to die!

And e'en in the midst of dreams of fire,  
Wilder and fiercer than men may know,  
Foster child of genius immortal,  
Thou yieldest to the pitiless foe.

It is but once, in the hour of triumph  
That mocks the gasp of the short'ning breath—  
'Tis only once—and alas, my lost one,  
Thou hast it but in the arms of Death!

JOHN A. T. LLOYD.

## THE RAMBLER.

PROPOS of Paderewski, the American musical critic has been "at it again." Oh! that there were no such thing as the divine art, nor one critic in the whole length and breadth of the Republic! More hysterical, puerile, absurd writing it is impossible to conceive of. The adjective "feminine," which, as we all know, is sometimes used to designate hyperbolic expressions and a general running riot of gush, is nowhere in it. C. L. Capen in a special to the Boston Post says:—

"True, it was a performance all too utterly sweet and cloying to have been soberly pronounced *un fait* by serious artists, but even they in generous numbers, evidently recognizing something infinitely higher than technical law, were seen applauding just as though it were a performance of the most scholastic description. Now Paderewski is not a scholastic interpreter. In this respect either our own Baermann, Faelton or Bussoni might well bear the relation to him of instructors or professors. On the other hand, either one of them would probably be foremost in admiring his genius, for he is certainly a piano singer as seldom man has yet sung at the piano."

It is probable of course that the writer of this curious English may be a foreigner, not yet thoroughly naturalized. Here we have him again in a still choicer paragraph:—

"Paderewski's fortissimos it is true are occasionally somewhat harsh and bawdily. On the other hand, such perfectly clear, limpid, far reaching and ethereal pianissimi were probably never heard in a Boston music hall as on Saturday evening, not even from Thalberg. An inexplicable feature of his success, too, is that his virtuosic resources are on such intimate terms with his will. Yes, his pearly, drop-like whispering touch often responds with ethereal effect to the delicately fine and artistic feeling of the singing artist that he unquestionably is."

Mr. or Madame Capen evidently believes in discovering to the world what he (or she) knows. Allusions to Josh Billings, James Russell Lowell, and the "hypercritical Heraclitus of old" jostle each other in this new form of critical writing. And who can say what these sentences mean?—they are beyond me.

"Not to be too paradoxical the fault of the Paderewski of the first occasion seemed with just such individualism for Bach, Beethoven, and Schumann as was then both superfluous and inartistic, but that for Paderewski, the composer, and Chopin and Liszt on Saturday evening was superbly meritorious."

"Quite to the reverse, there will abundantly be found in the work that was performed on Saturday evening just such art-contents, as in the proper adjustment of the high and the low, the long and the short tones of music is a charming masterpiece."

In another place we are informed that Paderewski is an "androgynal pianist," that he has "a feline step and bearing" and that his "fiery temperament seems to have been poured into a frail body as a dangerous liquid into a Venetian glass." This offender is Mr. Philip Hale, and I pity him when the *Musical Times* reads his notices.

Brainy artist is another choice epithet. It makes me "go crinkle all up and down my back" as children say. Why brainy? Why not thoughtful, or intellectual or profound or anything else that is an existing and accepted word. I object, too, very much to the use of that word *bright* as applied to men and women. We apply it to children, distinguishing between a *bright* child and an *idiotic* child, or at least, something of that kind. But papers like the Boston *Home Journal et hoc genus omne* give us "Mr. So-and-So, one of our very brightest men, and Dr. Mary Something-or-Other, our brightest female physician, etc., etc."

I must not encroach, I know, upon the musical column, but there appears to be a great deal of interest in that direction just now. The newest departure is at the