

domiciles of three different orders, and known as the Convent of the Nativity. In the centre of this group is the Church of St. Helena. Of this the only part of the original basilica remaining is the nave, common to all the sects, and for that very reason deserted, bare and wanting in tokens of devotion, but commanding our interest as being in all probability the most ancient monument of Christian architecture in the world. The long double lines of Corinthian pillars, the faded mosaics dimly visible on the walls above, and the rough ceiling of cedar-wood, dingy and neglected as they now appear, still preserve the outlines of the Church once blazing with gold and marble, and rich with offerings from princes and people far and wide. It is interesting to us as Englishmen to note that when the roof of this Church was last repaired, the rafters were not hewn from the forests of Lebanon, but were gifts from our own oaks by King Edward IV.

Under the Church, and reached by means of a marble staircase and a long winding passage, is a cave or grotto dimly lighted with silver lamps, which travellers are told is the actual site of the Nativity, a marble slab and the rays of a brilliant silver star marking the spot which is supposed to have been occupied by the manger in which the Holy Child was laid.

Writers differ very much as to the credence they give to the tradition, and the evidence adduced for fixing upon this particular site as the "stable" of the Gospel narrative. In favor of it is urged the well-known fact that caves often were, and still are, used as stables, and the passage from the prophet Isaiah (ch. xxxiii. 16), which in the Septuagint version runs—"He shall dwell on high; His place of defence shall be a lofty *cave* of the strong rock," is applied to the birth of Christ. Moreover, the tradition is one of the most ancient attaching to any of the holy places in Palestine, and certainly dates back beyond the time of Constantine. On the other hand it is contended that in the account given by St. Matthew, he expressly says that the Magi came "into the *house*." Also that at the time of the Captivity we know that there was a large Caravanserai or inn existing at Bethlehem, the recognized point of departure for travellers to Egypt (see Jer. xli. 17), it is more than probable that this was the very one existing there at the time of our Lord's birth, and the one in which, already over-crowded with guests, Joseph and Mary could find "no room." During the subsequent disturbances of the Jewish war, no doubt this Caravanserai was swept away, and thus the tradition of the place was in danger of being lost; what more natural, therefore, than that the inhabitants of Bethlehem, wishing to retain a local habitation to the event which made their village illustrious,

should fix upon some strongly marked natural feature such as this cave in which to preserve it permanently, safe from the accidents of war, or the slower destruction of time?

But "house" or "cave" makes little difference to our veneration for the sacredness of the place. There can be no doubt that in Bethlehem, and probably near to, if not on, that exact spot, there took place that stupendous Event with the glory of which all Christendom rings, and which we are once more about to commemorate in our joyous Christmastide services and festivities.—*Selected*.

EVERY LAYMAN'S DUTY.



THE recent Church Congress at Nottingham, the Dean of Norwich (Dr. Lefroy), in his paper on "The Queen Victoria Sustentation Fund," said:

"In the name of God and His Christ I believe it to be the individual, abiding, and imperative obligation of every adult layman to contribute to the support of the clergy. This is the conviction by which the whole Church is to be inspired. Nothing short of this will suffice. This principle, Divine in its origin, individual in its application, perpetual in its rule, must be proved, asserted, vindicated, until it is accepted. Let the truth be told. The clergy are, by the thousand, unwilling to advocate it. They consider its enforcement equivalent to pleading for themselves, which it is not; but whether it is or not, it is an essential portion of the deposit of truth entrusted to them to publish. The burden of publication ought to be willingly borne by such of us as have no share in the result. My hope is that the members of every cathedral chapter in the land will place themselves, as far as possible, at the service of the local or central bodies, and, aiding the parochial clergy, who may do much by interchange of pulpit, work and teach until this individual obligation becomes an individual conviction. Knowing, as everyone knows, the difficulty of impressing the public mind with a principle which has been allowed to lie latent and lifeless for centuries, it is obvious that its revival, presentation, and acceptance is no easy task. But the task must be faced. Upon its adoption nearly every other branch of work depends. Upon the adequate maintenance of those who preach the Gospel depends, partly, ministerial capacity, efficiency, supply. Upon these depend missionary work at home and abroad, educational advancement, parochial organization of all sorts, and the social influence of religion. The moral side of national life is conditioned by the