

and gentle spirit who brought into the world of human suffering, for its redemption. heaven's King of Glory, who watched and cared for Him in the helpless days of infancy, and through childhood's hours until she saw His warfare all accomplished and His divinely planned work done!

But the true song of Mary's inner life was not the Magnificat. It is the tragedy of the Stabat Mater, adorned and enriched by all that musical utterance and expression can offer, which shows the Virgin mother's broken-heart:

"By the cross sad vigil keeping,
Stood the mournful mother weeping,
While on it the Saviour hung;
In that hour of deep distress
Pierced the sword of bitterness,
Through her heart with sorrow wrung."

It had come at last. Years before, no doubt, in growing childhood, the mother had told her Son of the vision of the angels, and the presentation in the temple, and the cruel prophecy of Simeon. As the boy Jesus had grown into manhood, caring for His widowed mother, guarding her and supporting her, they had talked, no doubt, of the strange past and the mysterious future.

Better than Monica with her restored Augustine on the blue plains of Lombardy was the Virgin Mother with her sinless Son in the hill-country of Galilee. What would we not give for the privilege of lifting back the veil of silence which covers these memorable years! What would we not give for the pen of the evangelist or the brush of an inspired painter to reveal to us that quiet home at Nazareth, with Mary walking with her Son at evening time over those familiar hills to see the neighbors and cousins of her family, or caressing the tired brow of her darling one after some hard day's long stretch of toil! Who would not give all the other knowledge he possessed for one long and true description of the Saviour's boy life with his dearest mother in their humble home at Nazareth?

III.

THE MYSTERY OF CHRISTMAS.

"Hail, Mary! That holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." That is what we mean when we say, in the Apostles' Creed, "I believe in Jesus Christ His only son our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, was crucified, dead, and buried."

We mean that the divine wholeness or completeness of God's nature was in Christ. God was in human life in His own world as He had never been before. The divine wealth and largeness of hope was contained in the angel's salutation to this humble Jewish maiden.

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This divine power of God was given to the world in the birth of Jesus; His divine character reached its human culmination in the tragedy of the crucifixion; His superhuman life showed itself at the triumph of the Resurrection and the Ascension; His divineness was manifest in the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, as the verdict of God to the meaning of His life. And thus every step in the Christian year makes emphatic that central fact of Christianity which shines forth resplendent at Christmas time Emmanuel, God with us.

But the mystery of Christmas is in human life only the mystery of God's incarnation in material life. God is conceived in nature every springtime; God is conceived in humanity again every Christmas time?

IV.

CHRISTENDOM'S HYMNS TO CHRIST.

Martin Luther sang his Christmas carols in the streets of Eisenach and in the home of Conrad and Ursula Cotta. Milton has given us his matchless ode on "The Morning of Christ's nativity." Mrs. Browning has enriched English literature with the song of the "Virgin Mother to the Child Jesus." The many holiday books at this season give us many rare and exquisite selections from the poets of Christendom on the birthday of Christ. The Latin hymn, the "Adeste Fideles," is a hymn of triumph. Dr. Sear's wonderful hymn "It Came upon the Midnight Clear," is a revelation of the human heart's hope and bewilderment in the midst of life's burdens. But was anything ever written more full of childhood's spirit at this happy season than the "Child's Hymn to Christ," by Francis Turner Palgrave.

"Thou that once on mother's knee
Wert a little one like me,
When I wake or go to bed,
Lay Thy hands about my head;
Let me feel Thee very near,
Jesus Christ, our Saviour dear.

"Be beside me in the light,
Close by me through all the night;
Make me gentle, kind, and true—
Do what mother bids me do;
Help and cheer me when I fret,
And forgive when I forget.

"Once wert Thou in cradle laid—
Baby bright in manger shade,
With the oxen and the cows,
And the lambs outside the house;
Now Thou art above the sky;
Canst Thou hear Thy children cry?

"Thou art nearer when we pray,
Since Thou art so far away;
Thou my little hymn wilt hear,
Jesus Christ our Saviour dear,
Thou that once on mother's knee
Wert a little one like me.