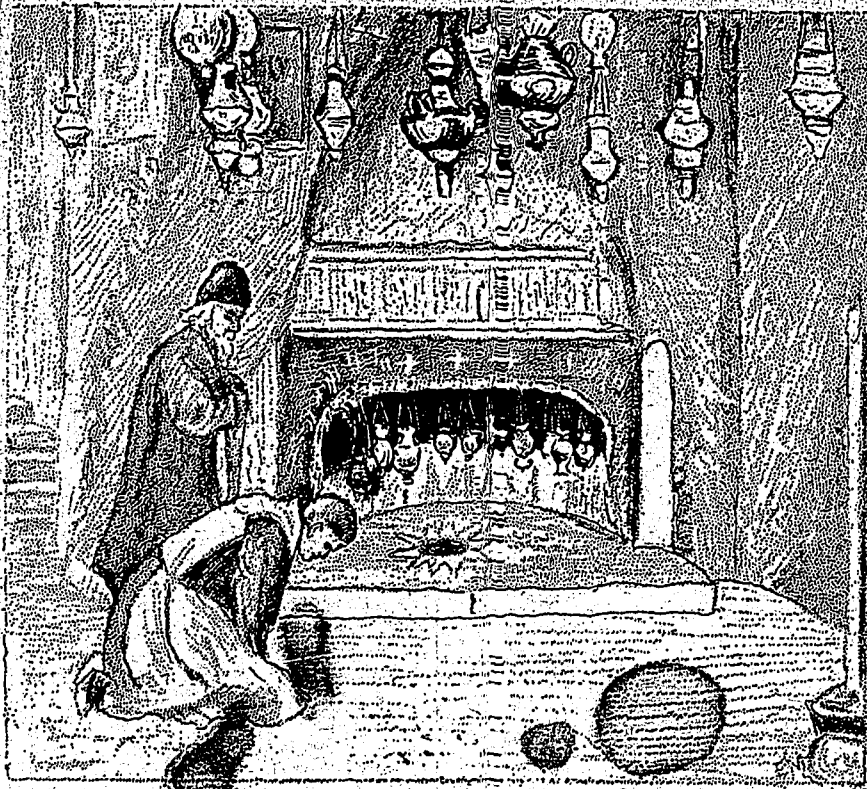




'HERE CHRIST JESUS WAS BORN OF THE VIRGIN MARY.'—See preceding page.

THE MARK BY WHICH HE WAS TO BE KNOWN.

BY BISHOP CHENEY.

How was the Christmas Babe to be distinguished from all other children? The angels who announced the tidings to the shepherds would have these humble seekers for the Messiah make no blunder. The Divine Child must have an infallible mark.

It is easy to imagine what the shepherds themselves would have expected the sign to be. These peasants were Jews. They had heard of the kingly splendors of Herod's palace. They knew that all the prophets had foretold that the coming King was to eclipse all earthly monarchs in glory. Naturally they would expect to find the new-born heir of Judah's throne in some grand apartment of a regal palace, His cradle of ivory or gold, His baby-garments of delicate fabrics fit for the prospective king.

Perhaps it was a disappointment to these simple-minded men when they learned from angelic lips what the mark of the new-born Messiah was. They will know Him by this sign—that he is a child of the poor, sheltered in a stable, cradled in a manger and swathed in the same coarse wrappings as the babes of the poorest in Israel.

We cannot make too much of that fact at Christmastide. It is a key to explain the success of the Gospel in the old Roman days. It suggests why the catacombs bear rude inscriptions to the memory of mechanics and hunted slaves who lived and died in the joy of Christian faith.

In a European capital I once saw a man move through a crowd, which parted to the right and left to let him pass, wearing on his breast a jewelled order. It was 'a sign with them'—a sign that this man did not belong to the common herd. It was the badge of the elect minority—the noble-born few. But at His very birth Christ wore the badge of the immense majority in this world—the poor.

His whole ministry was in keeping with the sign that marked Him the Messiah. He lived among the poor. He had compassion on their sorrows. He shared all their privations in His own personal experience of poverty.

For the majority of men in this world are poor. What is more: the rich are going to be poor. One of our modern pet expressions represents dying under the euphemistic phrase, 'joining the majority.' It is only another way of saying that the living inhabitants of the globe are few as compared with the countless millions who have passed away. But in another sense the dying man 'joins the majority.' He may live a millionaire but he dies a pauper. In that hour the richest is as poor as Lazarus at the gate. From his birth Christ was marked as belonging to this commonalty of mankind.

Modern quackery has two different remedies for the ills of poverty.

The Socialist agitator says that poverty is an unnatural and artificial thing. It grows out of cruel laws which capital has enacted for its own advantage. The only remedy is in breaking up modern society and reconstructing it. Property must be wrested from its possessors and redistributed. Here is a coin which glitters like gold. But it is not gold—only some baser metal. Break it up. Melt it over. Recast it in the die. Stamp it with a new image and superscription. Does that process change the base metal into gold? Just as little will the breaking up of society by revolution change the material of which society is made—our selfish human nature.

But modern Philosophy thinks that it has a better remedy. The Socialist is wrong. Poverty is not unnatural. It is natural because the result of inevitable law. 'The fittest survive.' The weak perish. The strong live. That may seem hard to you poor people. But then let it console you that it constitutes a beautiful instance of the working of the great law of our beneficent Mother Nature—'The survival of the fittest.' As though an inquisitor said to the victim on the rack, 'It ought to comfort you in your agony to notice with what wonderful accuracy and certainty this machine operates.'

The Christmas bells are ringing. In every pealing note they say to the poor, 'Jesus was one with you. He chose to share your lot because it was that of the majority. In all that you have to bear, you are a brother to Jesus Christ.' Christ never took on His blessed lips the philosopher's cant. He never said that misery, poverty, disease and death were natural results of a Divine law. They were as unnatural as hateful. But for them all He has a remedy—'That ye love one another as I have loved you.'

CHRISTMAS LEGENDS

The first manifestation of our Saviour was His birth, the second His baptism, the third the marriage at Cana. The Christian Church consolidated these three manifestations into one festival, and all along the first centuries this festival was observed on Christmas day. His baptism was supposed to confer wonderful medicinal properties to water, which must be obtained at midnight on the day of the nativity from a running stream. St. Chrysostom, in the fourth century, preached at Antioch a sermon in which mention is made of this peculiar belief. This water Grimm thinks was used for thaumaturgical purposes. One obtained it would keep pure and fresh indefinitely. In honor of the marriage at Cana, the common people used to believe that between eleven and twelve of this holy night all spring water turned to wine.

Of the numerous Christian legends in circulation during the mediæval ages, Karl von Bulow has preserved one of the three wise kings who brought presents and laid them at the feet of the divine infant. After Balaam's prophecy that a star gleaming forth from Jacob should illuminate the whole world, through all the east the potentates kept for centuries the wisest masters in astronomy on Fons, the highest mountain in India, watching night and day for the miraculous star. At last it burst upon their straining eyes, dimming the sun at midday with its unwonted brilliancy, and from its blinding rays a voice proceeded, saying: 'A man the king and Lord of the Jews, for whom the whole world has been yearning, at last is born. Him seek ye and adore.'

Three kings of India whose territories lay so wide apart that they had never heard of each other's existence, rejoiced over this message, and its miraculous import was confirmed to them by wonderful signs. To the first, Casper of Tharsis, an ostrich hatched from two eggs a lion and a lamb, thus signifying the mission of the Prince of Peace. To the second, Melchior of Nubia, a beautiful bird flying from his garden announced in a human voice that the Saviour of the world was born. To the third, Balthasar of Gadolia, a child was born who prophesied the moment he saw the light that from a pure virgin a son had been born who was doomed to die at the age of three and thirty years, as he was doomed to die at the age of three and thirty days, which latter prophecy came true.

Then the three wise kings, gathering together their most precious treasures, set forth to find this divine child, guided on their way by the wonderful star, which led them night and day with its unwonted light, and during all their journey not once did they rest, nor eat or drink, either they or the beasts which carried them. After thirteen days' continuous journeying the three holy kings arrived simultaneously at Jerusalem, coming from different points, and, though unknown, each recognized the other's mission, and they all embraced and understood each other, though speaking different and unknown languages.

Then, still guided by the star, they made their way to Bethlehem, meeting the shepherds to whom the angels of the Lord had announced the birth of the Saviour. At last the star paused over the stable in which the divine infant lay, and the wise kings, putting on their royal robes, entered and, bowing until their lips touched the earth, they laid their priceless gifts at the feet of the virgin.

Then, after due time, they returned to their kingdoms, and that they might know the difference between God's ways and man's ways, it took them two years to retrace the ground over which they had come in thirteen days.—R. A. Oakes.

THE SUN OF MY SOUL.

One of Tennyson's visitors once ventured to ask him what he thought of Jesus Christ. They were walking in the garden and for a minute Tennyson said nothing, then he stopped by some beautiful flower and said, simply, 'What the sun is to that flower, Jesus Christ is to my soul. He is the sun of my soul.' Tennyson was a man of deep reserve, but only the more significant on that account is such a revelation as this of his inner life. Though not a religious poet in the technical sense, he brings into his poetry more of the tender sympathy, the infinite kindness of Christ than any other great poet.

TWO STOCKINGS.

In her little stocking
Betty Baby found,
First, a tiny golden ring
Set with rubies round,
Then a lovely dolly,
Bonbons, cakes and sugar toys,
Happy Baby she!

In her little stocking
Polly Baby found,
First, a stick of candy,
Then an apple round,
Then a pair of mittens,
Fitting perfectly;
That was all, but none the less,
Happy Baby she!

—Youth's Companion.

O'ER THE DISTANT MOUNTAINS BREAKING.

O'er the distant mountains breaking,
Comes the redd'ning dawn of day;
Rise, my soul, from sleep awaking;
Rise and sing, and watch and pray;
'Tis thy Saviour
On His bright returning way.
O Thou long-expected, weary
Waits mine anxious soul for Thee;
Life is dark, and earth is dreary
Where Thy light I do not see;
O my Saviour!
When wilt Thou return to me?
Long, too long in sin and sadness,
Far away from Thee, I pine,
When, oh, when, shall I the gladness
Of Thy Spirit feel in mine?
O my Saviour!
When shall I be wholly Thine?
Nearer is my soul's salvation,
Spent the night, the day at hand;
Keep me in my lowly station,
Watching for Thee, till I stand;
O my Saviour!
In Thy bright and promised land.
With my lamp well trimmed and burning
Swift to hear, and slow to roam,
Watch I for Thy glad returning
To restore me to my home.
Come, my Saviour!
O my Saviour! quickly come!

MONSELL.

THE ART OF CHRISTMAS GIVING.

It has been nearly two thousand years ago since the first beautiful Christmas gift came on earth, and it was received with gladness and joy by shepherd and king alike. To-day, in memory of that, I give you some little trifle, because I love you, but I give it so ungraciously you scarcely like to take it.

Give with a loving and full heart, and never, under any circumstances, give that which you begrudge. Such a gift will bear no fruit for you, not even the honest fruit of thanks. You can quote as many times as you want that 'Unto him that hath shall be given,' and so it shall, because it is just this way, my friend: You possess the gifts of gentleness and graciousness, of politeness and of goodness and these are gifts that call others to them. If people are cross and disagreeable there is very slight inclination to wish them A Merry Christmas; if they are irritable and snappish nobody cares whether they are blessed with a Christmas present or not, but unto her who hath the graces that I have cited, will certainly come a basket full of good gifts, 'pressed down, shaken together and running over.'—Ruth Ashmore.

'DIVVY.'

At a Christmas entertainment last year the superintendent, a Western man newly elected to the office, made a little speech before the gifts upon the tree were distributed to the children. During his remarks he said, 'Suppose when we come to give out these bags of candy, some boy or girl doesn't get any. Suppose there are more boys and girls than there are bags of candy, I hope that any child who gets a bag will do, as we say out West, will "divvy".'

There was a great silence over the room, and one of the older church-members sitting on the platform thought the children didn't understand the superintendent's remarks. He twitched his coat and whispered:

'Brother, they don't know what you mean by "divvy".'

'What!' exclaimed the superintendent, in astonishment. 'Oh, yes they do.' And he turned to the school. 'How many boys here know what it means to "divvy"?'

A forest of hands went up.
'You tell,' said the superintendent, pointing at the smallest boy on the front seat. 'Means to make two equal halves, and keep the smallest yourself!'

Blessed spirit of Christmas! A definition of 'divvy' like that applied to all man's needed sharing with his brother would bring the Christ-child nearer to us all.

A MISSIONARY in Singapore was one day surprised to find his church freshly whitewashed. He discovered that a new convert, a Chinese, had done it as a labor of love. 'I did it,' said the Chinaman, 'to thank God.'