

The Child Jesus.

At this season we look again at the dramatic scenes of the early Gospel narrative, and again we are struck with the extraordinary beauty and simplicity and wonder of the Epiphany of the Wise Men. We return to the familiar tale which is always haunting us, which means so much, which so fastened on the imagination of Christendom through the fascination of St. Francis, that it became an ideal of dramatic representation in art, picture after picture recalling the beauty of the scene. Still we see the Shpherds running, and the Wise Men, and the Kings clothed in Wisdom, drawing near to the Babe. For us it always means the response of God to all effort of the human brain—the sign of God appearing along the lines of daily work to those who toil in the way of knowledge. It was the answer to all in them of human curiosity, human faculties spent on the secrets of life, of nature, of the stars, of the human soul. They had been moving along ways they knew not; knowledge itself, straining its eyes, guided them blindfold to that which they had never anticipated, yet which all their work had foretold—to the star that mingled with the stars that they had always watched and studied. It was the response of God breaking out in the very heart of their intellectual pre-occupation. What was their work and their study? Fantastic enough it would seem to us, if we had the chance of poring over their strange scrolls, their odd bits of magic, the old charts and diagrams by the help of which they watched the moving heavens, puzzling out their secrets. Yet amid all the strange fantastic allegorizing, the mathematical crudities, there did still come out a strange accumulation of knowledge, a wonderful accuracy, a power that found the solstices, the equinoxes, and had insight into times and seasons; a power to cover long periods of years, to watch the routine and rhythm of the great heavens above us—futilities, childish fancies, all mingling with real intellectual foresight and long accurate calculation.

So may our knowledge of to-day seem to future centuries, and after us men may wonder in very much the same fashion at the childish fancies of our science which seem so wise and great to-day, and marvel that in spite of them we yet did arrive at results, did travel along the lines of great nature, God being with us. Anyhow, there were these Men; they nursed the great thirst and passion in the soul for knowledge, and carried on the line of those who gave themselves up to the fascination of intellectual curiosity. They held the great tradition, they had the tenacity to carry forward on their own account the labors of the past, dealing thoroughly with the facts open to them. Still they cherished the unconquerable hope that the human soul is made to see the great vision of God; still they were true to the great cause, and night after night they were still out there on the watch. Then again, not only had they the tenacity,