

CHRISTMAS IN BETHLEHEM.

Bethlehem is an almost entirely Christian city, of five thousand inhabitants; these Christians belonging to the Roman Catholic, Greek, and Armenian Churches, there being only about one hundred Protestants, who are converts from these churches.

As we near the town on Christmas Eve, we see the road from Jerusalem covered with hundreds of pedestrians and equestrians, in almost every imaginable costume. They are all bound for Bethlehem, as it is customary for great numbers of the residents of Jerusalem to spend Christmas there, where the Roman Catholic Church celebrates it with great ceremony. The Catholics go there as worshippers, while hundreds of others go as spectators of the ceremonies. There being no vehicles of any kind between these two places, people have to get there on horses, donkeys, mules, and camels. Numbers of people walk to Bethlehem, as it is only a distance of five miles. The road has a gay appearance on this December afternoon. The sun is shining brightly and the fields are covered with white and pink crocuses. There go a party of European ladies and gentlemen, mounted on horseback; a company of desert Arabs, with large yellow silk handkerchiefs on their heads, tied on with black rope, made of camel's hair; some Russian pilgrims, wearing sheepskin dresses, with the wool inside; then a large party of native men and women, astride donkeys, without stirrups, the saddles having a large cushion in front to keep the rider from flying over his head when the donkey stumbles, which is often, and some stubborn ones insist on trotting near the edge of a deep ravine, down a hill, or on slippery rocks. Every donkey has bells round his neck, and a boy to run behind and poke him up with a sharp stick or long needle.

Our notice is attracted to a long line of horsemen. It is the Catholic Patriarch of Jerusalem, going to Bethlehem. This procession is very grand, large, and variegated. A squad of mounted policemen, gayly attired, head the procession; cavalry; Bedouins, on their Arabian steeds. The Patriarch is clothed in his purple cloak and cardinal hat. A great company of bishops, priests and deacons are in his suite. Then follow a company of Jews, Turks, infidels, and heretics, dressed in fantastical Oriental garments, mounted on any beast they could get hold of.

Hundreds of Bethlehemites, of both sexes, all in gay holiday attire, now meet this procession, and salute them with songs, firing of guns, and drumming on drums, kettles, tin pans, and some bearing cymbals. They head the procession, dancing, singing, clapping their hands, till they enter Bethlehem; and as they pass through the streets they are greeted with cheers and with songs from the windows and house-tops, by the women and children.

The Catholic, Greek,

and Armenian monasteries and the great complex Church of the Nativity are all under one roof, which covers the supposed stable-cave where Christ was cradled. They all form a great fortress-like edifice, in front of which is a large open square, which is now crowded with people, almost of every description. Turkish soldiers, ranged in lines; and a procession of monks and priests, gorgeously attired—who meet the Jerusalem Patriarch with a great deal of ceremony. Then all the guests enter the convent, where they are hospitably received.

The Church of the Nativity was built by the Empress Helena, in the fourth century. In the fifth it was destroyed; then it was restored in A. D. 630, by the Emperor Justinian. It is a magnificent building, of very fine architecture. The grand service

begins about midnight, the church being brilliantly lit up. Flowers and evergreens adorn the altar, pillars, and chandeliers. The crowd is so great that there is barely standing room, and most of the people are holding lighted wax tapers, some of which are adorned with sprays of flowers. It is a marvel that they don't set fire to each other. The service is conducted by the Patriarch, during which several monks appear, dressed in furs, representing the shepherds. A song of glorious harmony suddenly bursts out from the hundreds of priests assembled, singing the "Gloria in Excelsis." It is caught up by the worshippers and the scene for a few moments is thrilling. The service continues till about three o'clock, when it is ended by a procession, in which the Patriarch carries a waxen image, representing Christ, in a

golden crib. It is taken down into the grotto or manger, which is hewn in the natural rock and supposed to be the manger in which Jesus was laid. Gold and silver lamps are suspended all over the place, which are kept burning night and day. Another ceremony is performed in the grotto, laying the image into the manger, and the Patriarch wraps it up in swaddling-clothes, after which a hymn of praise is sung, and the bells burst out in merry chimes, announcing the glad tidings. The monks and priests embrace each other, saying: "Peace, peace." The crowd of worshippers do the same, and amid songs of rejoicings, the chimes of bells, and the rich peals of the organ, the people disperse, wishing each other a Merry Christmas.

The Protestant community also have a service in their chapel, which is decorated with evergreens; and it is delightful to attend divine worship there on Christmas Day, and join with the congregation of natives in commemorating the birth of Christ in the very town he was born in, and sing with them the anthem "Hark! the herald angels sing," which is sung in Arabic. A great many people spend part of the morning at the Fields of the Shepherds and the "Glory to God in the Highest" is sung by the assembled worshippers. It is a charming picture, being a very tranquil and grassy spot, which aids the imagination to see the scene told in Luke ii.

But it is not only one Christmas that is commemorated in Bethlehem, for twelve days later the Greek church commemorates it, with perhaps even more pomp than the Catholic; then, two weeks later, the Armenians observe theirs; so that Bethlehem is crowded with thousands of spectators and worshippers for about four weeks.

—Lydell M. Finkelstein.

GOOD READING.

There is no matter of such importance to young men as the early acquirement of the taste for good reading. Sir John Herschell says: "If I were to pray for a taste which would stand me in stead under every variety of circumstances, and be a source of happiness and cheerfulness to me through life, and a shield against its ills, however things might go amiss and the world frown upon me, it would be a taste for reading. Give a man this taste and the means of gratifying it, and you can hardly fail of making a happy man. You place him in contact with the best society in every period of history, with the wisest, the wittiest, the tenderest, the bravest, and the purest characters who have adorned humanity. You make him a denizen of all nations, a contemporary of all ages.

AFRICA RATHER THAN HEAVEN.

AT THE AGE of sixty-seven years Bishop William Taylor says he would rather spend the next twenty years in Africa, among the savages, than in heaven, among the angels, so strong is his desire that the sable sons of Africa should be saved.



A TELEPHONE MESSAGE.

"Ah! Here's the little round thing my papa talks into To tell the folks down town what he wants to have them do. I'm going to try myself,—now let me get a chair, And then I'll stand on tiptoe so I can reach up there.

"Halloo!—(that's what they all say)—you dear old Santa Claus I'm going to have a little bit of talk with you, because I want to tell you all about a little girl I know Who never had a Christmas in her life—she told me so.

"I hardly could believe it, but she says 'tis really true, I'm sure your always very kind, but I'm surprised at you, That you should have forgotten such a little one! but still, You have, perhaps, already all the stockings you can fill.

"But, could you go to her house instead of coming here? For mamma says that Christmas is the time of all the year

For children to remember poor little girls and boys Who never hang their stockings up for picture-books and toys.

"I want you, please, to carry her a doll with shining curls And eyes that shut and open—that's the kind for little girls— And a muff to warm her fingers, and a cunning little ring, And a book with pretty verses—how she'll laugh, the little thing!

"And give her lots of goodies, too, because she's poor, you see, And ought to have more sugar-plums than you could bring to me. Now tell it on your fingers, and remember, as you go— Just pack her little stocking to the very, very top.

"That's all—only, Santa Claus, I just would like to say, If you should have more presents than you need on Christmas Day, And could leave me just a few as you pass the chimney—why, Of course—I would be very glad indeed. Good-bye! Good-bye!"

—Youth's Companion.