

THE NATIVITY.



PEACE on earth to men of good-will;" the long dismal night of weary waiting and expectation was at last giving place to the first glimmerings of morn; the period of heart sick longing was fast drawing to a close, sin and death which, for so long a time, had held the world in their agonizing clasp, were soon to be conquered; the spirits of peace and joy had once more returned to the abode of man, though, as yet, he knew it not. Many long ages previous, by the command of the incensed Most High, had they gone hence, speaking their last sad farewell in the cars of that guilty, fugitive pair, as they stood gazing in piteous woe upon the gates of Eden just closed forever against them. And with them went all that was bright and gladdening on the earth, leaving naught in the heart of man but that aching void which was destined never to be filled until their return. Then, indeed, tear-stained sorrow would have become his constant companion and soon have sunk him into the slough of despond, had not Joy, departing, left behind Hope, her first born, to buoy him up and to be an earnest of her ultimate return. But, how long to him had been the time of waiting and how heavy the burden with which sorrow had loaded him! Yea, in his inmost soul was burned in fiery characters. "Man was born to work and woman to weep," In mad frenzy had he rushed to alluring Pleasure for relief, but the sweets she gave soon turned to bitterest gall to corrode his very vitals. Then had he besought Knowledge, but in response to his appeal for bread she had given him a stone. In vain had he attempted to satisfy his hungered heart with the "flesh-pots of Egypt"; it would not cease its aching, and now, maddened with longing, from the burning sands of Africa to the ice-chained regions of the

north, he sent up one prolonged, agonized groan for deliverance. And lo! it was at hand. That craving which neither the magnificence of Imperial Rome, the literature of classic Greece, nor the voluptuousness of the luxurious East could satisfy, found wherewith it was appeased amongst the bleak hills of Judea. There, in the lowly stable of Bethlehem, on that first Christmas eve, lay the Babe, "the newborn being," who was to be the Deliverer of Nations. With him peace and joy had returned to the world, though his surroundings were far more indicative of trouble and sorrow, for that which man had forfeited by his fault had to be bought back at great price. Overhead, in the heavens, hung that mystic star heralding to the nations his advent to their midst. Yet, how few understood that joyful message! Verily "He had come unto His own and His own had received Him not." A few shepherds only, join their voices to the celestial choir and sing "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men of good will." But as ages roll by, other voices take up the celestial chorus; it rolls over the hills of Judea, across the blue waters of the Mediterranean, and enters Rome. A fierce struggle, and, then, it sounds forth from the very palace of the Cæsars bearing the "tidings of great joy" to the uttermost corners of the world, everywhere filling the hearts of men with a bliss which is not of earth. Yea, the spirit of Christmas gladness is abroad; let us not coldly close the doors of our hearts upon it, but let us take it in and listen to its small still voice; let us, at its victory, hush for a time the world's fierce strife; let us draw closer the bonds of our common humanity; for, are we not all brothers, heirs of the self-same heritage, children of the self-same God, and let us join our hearts, as well as our voices, to that heavenly chorus and sing in all earnestness "Glory be to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will."