

THE ANGEL AND THE STAR

bow before Him.' If He be thy Messiah, then to-night is this Scripture fulfilled."

The Shepherd pondered. "Surely thou art no worshipper of false gods."

"Nay; I worship God," simply interposed the Man of the East.

"And more," continued the Shepherd, as if to himself, "the song said, 'Good-will to men.'"

"Tell me," entreated the stranger, his proud face softened by pain to humility, "for my heart is heavy from long years of agony."

But the age-long Jewish hate and jealous scorn of the Gentile held the Shepherd silent. To speak of Israel's Messiah to this alien and worshipper of stars, to him seemed sacrilege.

"Let me tell thee my story," said the Man of the East at length, "perhaps then thy hard heart shall melt." And to the shuddering ears of the Shepherd he told a tale of sin and lust and blood and treachery so terrible that it seemed to defile the very night.

"Then when I had drunk the dregs, my heart within me woke and cried for vengeance till I grew mad with desperate remorse. In vain I offered sacrifices upon the altars of the gods; in vain I poured forth treasure at the bidding of their priests. Deeply I studied, many lands I travelled seeking peace, but ever that cry of vengeance night and day echoed through the spaces of my soul, till life became one long agony. The mysteries of our religion I mastered, the wisdom of the heavens I searched, but found no help. At length to the wisest and the best of the priesthood