

## I

## THE ANGEL

THE day's work was done in Bethlehem. The sound of hammer and of loom, the cries of hawkers and of traders, the noises of the bustling crowds that thronged the tortuous streets were still. With the sunset, rest had come to the workers—not to all. In the little house of the Chief Shepherd in charge of the sacrificial flocks there was a stir, for he was about to depart for his nightly watch on the plains below the city.

Of the royal line of David, he bore in his face and carried in his mien the marks of his noble blood. His wife, also of this royal line, waited upon her lord at his evening meal, pausing now and then to hush the feeble wail of the babe she carried with her to and fro. Upon her husband's face a heavy shadow lay, for his heart was hot and his spirit bitter within him. Long before, his independent carriage and proud spirit had drawn the persecuting wrath of Herod, for no one of noble blood was safe from the fierce suspicions and savage jealousy of that Idumean usurper. His only safety had been in submission, bitter to his soul ;