

so far to seek, for they were his own people.

(4) *"Of times those who are nearest in place are furthest in affection."*—*M. Henry.* **Born king of the Jews.** They looked for one who, of Jewish race, should become the ruler of all the nations. The secular historians of that time say that there was an expectation over all Asia that one coming from Judea should rule the world. This probably arose from the Jews, who were dispersed everywhere, and who cherished the hope of Messiah's coming to deliver their nation. **His star in the east.** There are two theories concerning this star. One is that it was a luminous, starlike body, of miraculous origin, seen, perhaps, by the magi alone; the other (first suggested by the astronomer Kepler), that it was a conjunction of three planets, Jupiter, Saturn, and Mars, which took place about that time and formed an appearance as of one heavenly body. This would receive special notice from a people who were students of the heavens, and were wont to interpret their appearances as prophetic. **To worship him.** To do him homage as a prince, and perhaps to adore him as God. There is no warrant for the current tradition that these magi were three kings, named Gaspar, Melchior, and Balthazar, and that they came from Europe, Asia, and Africa. The tradition is wrought into a fascinating story in the book *Ben-Hur*.

3. Herod the king had heard. Either the magi came directly to him or the report of their inquiries reached his ear. **He was troubled.** He was an old tyrant, hated by his people, tormented by a remorseful conscience, and in dread of approaching death. As a foreigner and usurper, too, he naturally feared one who was born king. **All Jerusalem with him.** The court and the capital alike dreaded the disturbance of a revolution and feared the justice of a heavenly king even more than Herod's cruelties. (5) *Kings have greater troubles than cottagers.* (6) *If men knew that Christ was coming now would they not be troubled?* (7) *Christ will come at some time, and may come at any time; let us make friendship with him!*

4. Gathered all the chief priests and scribes. The great council of the Jews, containing the heads of the twenty-four priestly courses and the leading teachers of the law. **Demanded of them.** His object was to ascertain where the one born king was to be looked for, that he might destroy him. **Where Christ should be born.** The prophecy of "the Christ," or the Messiah, was the great thought of the Old Testament, and was the confident expectation of all the Jews. That he was coming none doubted, and that he was near at hand many believed.

5. And they said. Without hesitation, as it was well understood by the interpreters of prophecy. But notice how different was their spirit from that of the magi. They had knowledge, but at heart were indifferent, while the magi were earnest seek-

ers after the truth. (8) *One man may perish with the Bible, and another may find God without it.* **In Bethlehem.** The prophecy is found in Micah 5. 2. **Written by the prophet.** The prediction is not quoted precisely, but as was usual among the Jews, when citing well-known Scripture, with such a variation as would present more clearly the speaker's purpose in the quotation.

6. Bethlehem in the land of Judah. "In" is not a part of the original, which is "Bethlehem, land of Judah," as we say. "Toronto, Ont." **Princes of Juda.** In Micah 5. 2, "thousands of Judah." The "thousands" were the divisions of the tribe, corresponding to our townships, and each had its prince or ruler. **A Governor.** Jesus Christ, the Ruler of the world. **Rule my people.** Revised Version, "Shepherd of my people Israel;" one who feeds as well as governs his people.

7. 8. Privily. Secretly, so that his purpose might not become known. **What time.** He wished to know as nearly as possible the age of the child he purposed to slay. **The young child.** Perhaps he was unwilling to give him his royal title. **That I may come and worship him.** To his crimes he adds hypocrisy. He would kiss, like Judas, that he might betray. (9) *There is no villainy so great but that it will mask itself under a show of piety.*

9, 10. They departed. Taking their journey in the night, perhaps because cooler than in daytime, perhaps because they could not wait for the morning. (10) *The king's business requireth haste.* **Lo, the star.** It had disappeared after starting them on their journey, but now it appeared once more. **Went before them.** Seeming to travel through the heavens. **They rejoiced.** How different their enthusiasm from the cold scholarship of the Jewish rabbis, who knew but cared not to seek the birthplace of their king!

11. Into the house. The temporary shelter of the stable had been exchanged for a more permanent home. **Mary his mother.** She was a maiden of Nazareth, of lowly station, though a descendant of King David. **Presented unto him gifts.** The orientals always bring gifts when they visit kings or great personages. Some have found symbolical meanings in these gifts: "as to a king, the gold; as to one who was to die, the myrrh; as to a God, the frankincense."—*Origen.* **Frankincense.** A fragrant gum, used in sacrifices. **Myrrh.** A gum obtained by cutting a thorny tree in Arabia; used for incense, as an anodyne (Mark 15. 23), and in embalming the dead (John 19. 39).

12. Warned of God in a dream. When men were without the light of Scripture, God gave to some on important occasions the guidance of a supernatural dream or vision. **Into their own country.** Probably Persia, beyond the Persian Gulf. **Another way.** Perhaps they went directly to the Jordan, leaving Jerusalem to the north,