


The Bethlehem of Today.

ETHLEHEM ! The mere name awakens loving thoughts and high aspirations.

Even hearts who deny the divinity of the Babe born there cast their inward glance toward the Child in the manger as His birthday comes yearly around. The influence of the all-holy Little One overshadows them in their own despite, touching with pleading grace all that is gentlest and best within them. The tiny King of Judea, at least at Yule-tide, sways the world from His cradle of straw. Little children echo the "*Gloria in Excelsis*" of the angels and its sweet spirit creeps into the darkest places. Good-will breathes everywhere. Merriment and gracious sweetness reign. The "Little Flower that bloomed in the midnight" long ago fills all things with its fragrance of innocence and peace and tells us that we too must become "as a little child." Thus the lowliness of Bethlehem triumphs.

But the lowliness of the altar pleads alas ! in vain. The species of bread are less fitting clothing for the "Word made flesh" than even the swaddling clothes, the tabernacle a deeper humiliation than the manger wherein He lay amid the dumb brutes, their meek eyes gleaming through the darkness at the tiny form upon the straw as though their instincts divined in some mysterious way the presence of their Master. Ah, had we been in Bethlehem, we sometimes think, on that Christmas Eve, the Virgin Mother would not have been forced to seek shelter with beasts for her child. Yet when He pleads in the little Host for refuge in our unworthy hearts from the coldness of the world, which has no room for Him, we do not heed the cry. Blinded by earthly cares and pleasures we do not penetrate the veil, and falling down, adore as did the humble shepherds. His Magi knelt but once before their infant King but we may kneel at His feet daily if we will, and offer the frankincense of a love more precious than gold to him.
