

PLEASANT HOURS

A PAPER FOR OUR YOUNG FOLK

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JESUS AMONG THE WISE MEN.

THE apocryphal legend says that on the journey from Jerusalem the boy Jesus left the caravan and returned to the Holy City. With far greater truth and simplicity St. Luke informs us that—absorbed in all probability in the rush of new and elevating emotions—he “was carried behind in Jerusalem.” A day elapsed before the parents discovered their loss; this they would not do until they arrived at the place of evening rendezvous, and all day long they would be free from all anxiety, supposing that the boy was with some other group of friends or relatives in that long caravan. But when evening came, and their diligent inquiries led to no trace of him, they would learn the bitter fact that he was altogether missing from the band of returning pilgrims. The next day, in alarm and anguish—perhaps, too, with some sense of self-reproach that they had not been more faithful to their sacred charge—they retraced their steps to Jerusalem. The country was in a wild and unsettled state. The ethnarch Archelaus, after ten years of a cruel and disgraceful reign, had recently been deposed by the Emperor, and banished to Vienna, in Gaul. The Romans had annexed the province over which he had ruled, and the introduction of their system of taxation by Coponius, the first procurator, had kindled the revolt which, under Judas of Gamala and the Pharisee Sadoc, was kindled the whole country in a storm of sword and flame. This disturbed state of the political world would not only render their journey more difficult when once they had left the shelter of the caravan, but would also intensify their dread lest, among all the wild elements of warring nationalities which at such a



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moment were assembled about the walls of Jerusalem, their Son should have met with harm. Truly on that day of misery and dread must the sword have pierced through the virgin mother's heart. Neither on that day, nor during the night, nor throughout a considerable part of the third day, did they discover him, till at last they found him in the place which, strangely enough, seems to have been the last where they searched for him—in the Temple, “sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them and asking them questions, and all that heard him were astonished at his understand-

ing and answers.” The last expression, no less than the entire context, and all that we know of the character of Jesus and the nature of the circumstances, shows that the Boy was there to inquire and learn—not, as the Arabic Gospel of the Infancy represents it, to cross-examine the doctors “each in turn”—not to expound the number of the spheres and celestial bodies, and their natures and operations—still less to “explain physics and metaphysics, hyperphysics and hypophysics” (!) All these are but the fictions of those who preferred their heretical fancies of what was fitting, to the simple truthfulness with which the Evangelist lets us see that Jesus, like other children, grew up in gradual knowledge, consistently with the natural course of human development. He was there, as St. Luke shows us, in all humility and reverence to his elders, as an eager-hearted and gifted learner, whose enthusiasm kindled their admiration, and whose bearing won their esteem and love. All tinge of arrogance and forwardness was utterly alien to his character, which, from his sweet childhood upward, was meek and lowly of heart. But though none might conjecture who was before them—and though hardly one of them lived to believe on him, and some to oppose him in years to come—which of them all would not have been charmed and astonished at a glorious and noble-hearted boy, in all the early beauty of his life, who, though he had never learned in the schools of the Rabbis, yet showed so marvellous a wisdom, and so deep a knowledge in all things Divine? Here, then, seated, but doubtless at the feet of his teachers, on the many-coloured mosaic which formed the floor, Joseph and Mary found the Divine Boy filled with that almost adoring spirit of reverence

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