

THE CONTINENT

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A Song of the Whole Gospel

THE ANGELIC CHORUS on the plains of Bethlehem was more than a lyric ecstasy. It was a mighty and profound gospel proclamation. The choirs of heaven, one may judge, are trained not only to "make a joyful noise" but likewise to "sing with the spirit and with the understanding also."

Who was the author of that memorable carol no mortal has ever been told. But plainly, whether glowing archangel, sainted prophet or ransomed sinner, he was one who knew the measure of the will of God.

To later ages it might be left to dispute whether it was an individual or a social redemption that the Son came from the Father to perfect for lost mankind—whether it was to a regenerate spiritual experience or to an unselfish social service that Christ desired to call men.

But there was no misunderstanding among those happy singers of the "heavenly host" to whom the wondering shepherds listened.

Come from the presence of God with a music attuned to the Heavenly Father's all comprehending thought of good, they burdened their hymning tongues with no dubious half-gospel. They sang all the story of the divine intent, hallowing equally the evangel of personal devotion to God and the evangel of social good will among men:

"Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth peace among men of good
pleasure."

Thus these chorusing angels rose in their song high above a hundred questions with which men have troubled themselves in the centuries since.

Men have made doubt, as these angels never could have done, whether the infinite Creator in his all-sufficiency could care for the fellowship of insignificant humans; whether the humble worship of men and women lifted from this tiny planet off in a corner of the universe could ever reach the distant throne of omnipotent Sovereignty; whether there was any gain or good for mere man in worshipping the exalted Majesty of the skies; whether in the moral order of creation anything more can be open to the human soul than simply to be honest, faithful and compassionate toward one's neighbors; whether indeed—so daring is the skepticism of human ignorance—there is a God at all to whom the offer of worship can be more than a farcical superstition.

But the choir of the night-watches out on Bethlehem's sheepfolds knew better. They not only knew God but they believed in a glory which was to be added even to the majestic excellencies of heaven by the sacrificial incarnation of God's Son for redemption.

The angels knew that the miracle of spiritual rebirth in creatures "dead in trespasses and sins" would shine out in the universe more glorious than the loftiest celestial grandeur.

And that is why they sang:

"Glory to God in the highest!"

And certainly they never dreamed of men who could be so dull of apprehension as to suppose God did not care for friendship, affection and comradely trust from souls on earth.

Another mystery, however, might perhaps have worse puzzled these angelic singers if they could have looked from the fields by Bethlehem across the centuries to this present generation.

For in every century they would have beheld multitudes so wholly absorbed in their own spiritual content that the sins and cares of an unregenerate society surrounding them concerned them imperceptibly if at all.

Even to this comparatively enlightened day they would have noted Christians resisting the "social gospel" for fear a zeal to end "man's inhumanity to man" might subtract from the worship, adoration and obedience owing to God.

But angels could not foresee these blind blunderings, and exultingly they sang the second movement of their sublime oratorio:

"On earth peace!"

Their prophecy indeed has been but lamentably fulfilled. But that is not the fault of the angels, not the fault of the Christ Child, not the fault of "the Father of lights."

It is the fault of men who, though they bear the name of Christians, have not yet learned the Christmas carol in both its parts.

They have either not sought with all their hearts to exalt the glory of God or else they have not tried with true earnestness for Christ's sake to keep peace, do justice and work helpfulness among men.

And the happiest thing about the Christmas just at hand is that men and nations are more eager today than in all the Christian era hitherto for the peace the angels prophesied—that, in a word, there were never before in the world so many "men of good pleasure."

CHRISTMAS

The Great Mothers' Day

BY CLELAND B. McAFEE

IN ALL THE LONG dispute about the birth of our Lord no question has been raised about the fact of his mother. Mary of Nazareth mothered him—of this the world has been sure, to this scholarship has testified. All else has been debated; mists have formed about other features of the scene; but the Babe and the mother have broken through all mists.

Mary "Blessed Among Women"

So Christmas is the day of the great mother, greatest in history because humanity welcomed through her its greatest son. Sharp warfare has been waged around her place in the plan of God. Lifting her up out of human range, making her sinless and immaculately conceived, the Roman Catholic teachers have gone where Protestants cannot follow. And fear of this excess has sometimes prevented realization of the beauty of the mother of our Lord among Protestants. The solemn awe of her own appreciation of the great experience, the equal solemnity of Elizabeth as she welcomed "the mother of my Lord," the blessing of the aged Simeon, all combine to sustain the exclamation: "Blessed art thou among women!" Mary of Nazareth stands as the great woman among women, the great mother among mothers. No miracle of her own birth raises her to such heights; it is the miracle of her motherhood on which she rises.

Most of the story of her years of motherhood is left to the imagination. Only once in a while can we see her and her Son. In his tender years we know what she did, the training she gave him, the grounding in the law and the purpose of God. At the cross she heard him rest his soul on the words of the 22d psalm which she had taught him in his boyhood. Many times she must have recalled her own burden during his youth. In the temple at Jerusalem, when he is a lad of 12, it is she who speaks, as a mother should when it is from her that the lessons of duty are mainly learned, and it is to her that he replies in a phrase which she had taught him. As the public life begins, it is she who calls him to the service of social need at Cana; it is she who bids others obey him, as she withdraws from control.

Mother of the Burdened Man of Galilee

We get some hint of what those mystifying years of his ministry meant when we see her with her other children trying to call him away from the strenuous labor to which he had committed himself. The scene has often troubled faith, for it would seem strange that those long months of waiting for his coming could have been forgotten or that she could doubt his greater wisdom. But the case is not so difficult. She was still his mother. She had watched him growing before her own eyes and under her own training. She knew what he was to be, but she had no more reason than others for knowing the way of his coming to God's place for him. It is not easy for mother hands to relax and for mother control to be released. She would fear that perhaps she had yet other duty to him, that she might still guide him away from an unwise course. And the reply of Jesus is not severe. It does not shut her out from her place as his mother; it merely deepens the relationship into a spiritual one. But it utterly precludes lifting her into a place of worship—our adoration is not for Mary.

Then the cross! The lifelong habit of worship has brought her into presence of the tragedy. One of the words of the cross provides for her continued care, giving her a new son, born of a love toward the Son whose cross seemed to be killing her. And after the cross and the amazing story of the resurrection comes one more glimpse of this mother of the greatest Son: The disciples gathered around her, sharing her love while she shared their prayers, in obedience to the resurrected and ascended Christ.

Here the sacred record closes, and no reliable tradition completes the story. As happens so often with mothers, Mary disappears in the glory of her Son. Not Easter nor Ascension day nor any other day of the church, but Christmas—this is the day of the great mother.

And Christmas is the great day for all mothers. It is the day when the dignity of mother-



"THE ARRIVAL AT BETHLEHEM"—LUC-OLIVIER MERSON

hood is emphasized. To a Jewish woman it was no new idea that she might be the mother of the Coming One, some such hope often sustained a woman in the trying hours of the great experience. But it is a high thought that easily slips from consciousness. It is easy to overlook the marvel of being the instrument whereby a human life gets its beginning in the world.

Every Benefactor Is Some Mother's Gift

Tennyson admired the Sistine Madonna, saying that "the child seems to me the furthest reach of human art. His attitude is a man's; his countenance a Jupiter's—perhaps too much so." But when there came to Tennyson a child of his own he changed his thought, writing to a friend: "I am afraid of him; babies have an expression of grandeur which children lose, a look of awe and wonder. I used to think the old painters overdid the expression and dignity of their infant Christs, but I see they didn't." But are there not potential mothers who flippantly lay aside so great a dignity?

A mother of four children writes of feeling the adverse force of public and social opinion and of finding mothers of larger families almost ashamed of their enriched lives. Christian mothers have more reason than the old Roman matron to count their children their treasures, for besides the gift of their own lives to them they have given them opportunity to take part in an enterprise of such dignity as the kingdom of God. Every hero of faith that stars history is the gift of a mother to the world; his worth a mother's contribution. Even the Saviour of the world came to his mission by way of a mother.

Women who despise motherhood are casting away their chief crown of glory. But women who glory in their motherhood have right to Christmas day in all its meaning. Their fellowship is with the mother of their Lord.

Christmas, moreover, is the day when the sorrows of motherhood are revealed. By a true insight Simeon warned the young mother that while her Son would furnish the measure of

(Continued on page 1449)

**"Unto us a Child
is born, unto us a Son
is given. And the
government shall be
upon his shoulder.
And his name shall
be called Wonderful,
Counsellor, Mighty
God, Everlasting
Father, Prince of
Peace."**

Christmas the Great Mothers' Day

(Continued from page 1431)

life for the world, yet in the process a sword should pierce through her own soul. No son comes to greatness without mother-pain. For mothers know the price that sons are paying for their progress. The world counts it all a smooth advance; "nothing ever goes wrong with him," the world says. It is mothers who know better; it is mothers who share the strain, feeling it often more keenly than sons.

Let no one think of motherhood, then, without courage to think also of the sword at the heart. The real pain is not in the travail of birth, for that is, as the scripture says, forgotten in the joy of the new life that is begun. The deeper pain, the concern for growth and progress, the helpless knowledge of struggle and danger, the ceaseless thought and anxiety that are relieved only by trust in a loving God—this is the thing that makes motherhood so august a reality. But it is this also that makes mothers God's best representatives in the lives of men, that makes struggling men sure of the outcome, that supplies to a drab world its hue of heroism. And if any mother be unwilling to bear the sorrows of motherhood, she may not have the fellowship of the mother of her Lord.

In a monastery on the White sea a precious ikon is kept in memory of a bombardment by the British in 1854. Firing lasted nine hours, yet no one was even injured, "not even a seagull in the monastery court." But the last shot went straight through the heart of a figure of the virgin Mary over the door of the cathedral, and brought it down with a crash. Superstition leaped at once to the incident: The image had been protecting the city, and Mary had received in her own bosom the death which she had averted from others. In any event, it remains true that there are no human wounds deeper than those of a mother, and that mother-wounds do carry with them, so far as man can do, the healing of the wounds of the world.

Christmas reveals furthermore the ministry of motherhood. It is the forward-moving fact of human society. The future is bound up in motherhood. As redemption came to the world through a mother, no new life can come to it in any other way. And

this new life is committed to mother care as to none other. The lines by Brian Hooker, nobly set to music in Horatio Parker's "A. D. 1919," hardly cover the truth:

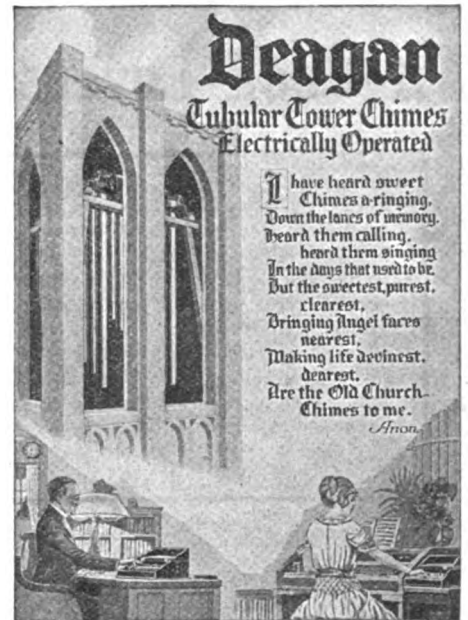
"As a woman bears her children—
Not that their loves atone,
But only to look upon them
And know them for her own."

The ministry of motherhood has far richer compensations than that. Its joy strikes deeper roots. Every mother knows, if she has entered the fellowship of the mother of her Lord, that the world is to be better for this service of her life, that she is giving the world its best gift, a life to match its need. Christmas is a day when mothers have a right to rejoice in the sacrifice they have been called to make, because of the ministry they have rendered. Many of them will rejoice so greatly in the ministry that they will share Livingstone's repudiation of sacrifice: "I do not know the meaning of the word." But the sacrifice is real, for all that. And the ministry of true motherhood crowns it as it crowned the sacrifice of the first Christmas day.

WANTS RELIGIOUS EDUCATION BODY

CINCINNATI—Cincinnati Presbytery recently adopted a resolution asking the governor of Ohio to appoint a commission on religious education to ascertain what "may be done in this direction without coming in conflict with the constitution of the United States guarding religious liberty." The resolution was proposed as a result of present interest in religious education in public schools, and suggested that all religious bodies be represented on the proposed commission. Presbytery also approved the destruction of "the machinery of war" as proposed by the American delegation at the limitation of arms conference at Washington. It disapproved the overture on Assembly commissioners.

Dr. J. D. Williamson, for many years pastor of Cleveland Beckwith church and chairman of the church extension committee of Cleveland Presbytery, has been named acting president of Western Reserve University, from which Dr. Charles F. Thwing recently retired.

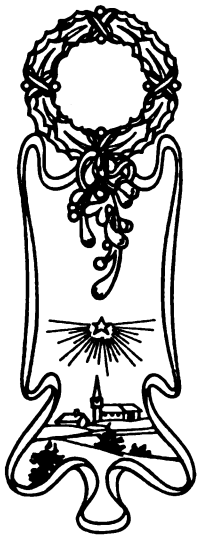


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