

THE CONTINENT

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The Christmas Song in Spirit and Service

With the Judean shepherds on the first Christmas morning it was a critical moment when the angels' song had died away in the solemn silence and left them alone in their fields. Would they follow the vision and transmute it into spirit and service? Or would they let it pass into oblivion and themselves relapse into the same old uninspired routine of their lives? Ah, they translated song into service, vision into victory; and presently they were climbing the rocky slopes up to Bethlehem, where they saw the Child and whence they returned, praising and glorifying God. Life never could be the same to them again.

We hear divine messages. We see heavenly visions. But too often we let them merge into the light of the common day and fade into forgetfulness. Yet the grandest vision that ever swept through a brain or illuminated a personal sky leaves no vestige of verity and worth unless it is transmuted into conduct and character.

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What has become of the Christmas song in our world? Remains any syllable or echo of it in the world today? After nineteen hundred years has it made any difference? Can it make good any claim to truth and usefulness before our pragmatic tests?

A world just struggling out of the greatest war of history, which killed twenty millions of people and left the world a smoking heap of ruins—and still a scene of wreckage seven years after its guns were stopped—would seem to afford no worthy answer, no hope of one, in this Christmas season of 1925. Man evidently still is closer to the ape and tiger than we had supposed; a scratch on his skin reveals barbaric blood that is ready on apparently slightest provocation to leap hot with anger into a fight.

Yet the night cometh and also the morning. Hot blood cools, reason begins to speak and even the angels' song begins to be heard. We may set it down as a law of history that there is enough method in the madness of war to work out some results which contribute to the increasing purpose that runs through the ages.

What has been the problem and peril of Europe for a thousand years? And what has been its cancer? The Rhine probably has been crimsoned with more human blood than any other stream on the planet; Alsace Lorraine has been a root of con-

temption and bitterness between Germany and France for centuries. This was the deepest root of the war.

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What has come out of the war? Locarno! This, the greatest result of the conflict, goes far toward guaranteeing the peace of Europe and even of the world for centuries to come. By solemn pact, freely entered into by Germany and France and backed by Belgium, England and Italy, the Rhine now will flow unstained and unvexed to the sea; and this river, the world's most important frontier, no more will be crossed by hostile armies. Here is the greatest single instance in the world today of fulfillment of the angels' song. Ring out the thousand wars of old, ring in the thousand years of peace!

Locarno, with all other such public events, after all, is only a drop in the great sea of good will which must fill all our hearts and flow around the world before the song of peace among men can be fully and permanently realized. First of all, and supremely above all, should Christians take the message home to themselves; they should experience and exhibit it in their own spirit and speech, character and conduct. The pulpits of the churches will ring out this Christmas message, and the day will be celebrated with music and gladness; but are the churches themselves transmuting this song into spirit and service? Does the spirit of good will control our religious discussions? Vainly shall we repeat the angels' song unless we exhibit a full-brotherly spirit even in our church life.

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Greatest things are always simply the summation of the smallest, and the glory of the sun reaches us reflected and diffused by countless invisible particles in the air. So the glory of God, manifested in peace among men of good will, can be diffused through the world as a spirit of good will only as it is reflected by each one of us. If the Christmas song is anything more than beautiful myth and sentiment—and, thank God, it is—it will prove its reality by repeating itself in and transmuting its music into our Christian spirit, our Christian service.

Let each of us now go unto Bethlehem, while the Christmas song is in the air, and let us return with a new spirit, praising and glorifying God.

The Little White Town of Bethlehem

TODAY IT LIES there, still the little white town of Bethlehem.

By CLELAND B. McAFEE

It stands just off the road, the home of frugal folk many of whom live by making the mementoes which bear its name. The gardens and little fields, the small flocks and herds, the tiny shops and the venturesome stores, are there as you read these lines.

The boys and girls are playing around the streets, begging from travelers, chattering with each other, going alone or with their parents into the sacred places to kneel down and kiss the sacred spots or to join in the chanting of the services. They will not celebrate the great event of their city's history when we of the west celebrate it, but some days later there will be ceremonies and processions in its honor. Mission school children in Bethlehem will be told the story, however, and there will be candles and carols and gifts. Meanwhile, from all around the world the minds of believing men will turn toward the little place, not for any merit of its own but because once a Child was born there.

Not exactly a "little town" is Bethlehem, and yet it seems nothing but a white village perched on a limestone shoulder that juts out eastward from the hills of Judea. In its latest census the United States called any place of 8,000 inhabitants a "city," and that reckoning just admits Bethlehem. The road that takes one five miles south from Jerusalem to the small place is interesting throughout, partly for the people in their picturesque garb and at their unfamiliar occupations, partly for the caravans of camels and donkeys and horses that creep along from the southern market places toward the great market at Jerusalem or who are returning from Jerusalem, and partly for the landscape, rugged and severe except when the verdure creeps up from the valleys over the hills, but always beautiful if one has eyes to see.

The place is redolent with history. There was a town here before Bethlehem. It was called Ephrath, and the old name or else the name of the section in which it is located led to the name of Bethlehem-Ephrath to distinguish it from other Bethlehems in other parts of the land. For the name is attractive and natural—"the House of Bread." Possibly it was the place where grain was gathered for bread, possibly it was the center of food supply in case of need or famine. The early Christian fathers did not miss the significance, be sure of that! Where could he who is called "the Bread of Life" more naturally appear than in "the House of Bread"? In our own day some one has suggested another origin for the name, connecting it with a heathen divinity, Lahm, but there is no sufficient reason for supposing that such a divinity was ever honored there. When the people of Israel were settled in the land the village was the center of much interest. This was natural because near the town is the tomb of Jacob's beloved Rachel, where caravans still stop and where prayer is offered by Jews and Arabs as well.

One of the judges of the troublous period after Joshua lived and died at Bethlehem. No doubt Ibzan and his thirty sons and thirty daughters supposed his seven years of rule were critical in history, but everything is gone except the fact that all his sixty children were married. One wonders how that fact came to be preserved. And here also was the Jewish home of Ruth, the Moabitish maiden who came back with Naomi. One can stand now in Bethlehem, looking across to the hills of Moab, and trace the way whereby the two lonely women plodded along in hope of friendship and a home. Visitors there only a year ago observed a similar pair toiling along over the same path, an older and a younger, with a burro loaded with poor household effects. One may hope that they, too, came to some generous-hearted Boaz and a rich happiness.

Bethlehem became a factor in world interest when a "ruddy,"

perhaps red-haired, lad was born into the home of Ruth's grandson Jesse, well known as "the Bethlehemite," and the place was ever afterward to be associated with this lad. Many a small town would be immensely astonished if it knew what its boys are yet to be; possibly it would pay more heed to them if it knew!

As one drives into Bethlehem in these modern days one sees "David's well." It has its place in history. Most of us have a few early memories of places and experiences which we long for in times of crisis. David had foregathered with other lads around this well at the end of long, hot days, when the water tasted as no other water could quite taste, clearing a dusty throat and laving a soiled face. He had stopped there as an older boy and as a young man, finding neighbors and friends to make the stopping delightful. When, therefore, far away from it, unrefreshed and downcast, he realized that it was held by the Philistines, enemies of his people, it is no wonder he burst out in the hearing of some of his friends: "O that I had a drink of the water of the well at Bethlehem!" He had no more thought of having his wish fulfilled than any of us would have when we express similar desires regarding places and experiences long gone. But his three mighty men laid out their lives in terms of their leader's desire, as a later Leader who is himself

"the Water of Life" desires his followers to do, and they dashed through the bands of enemies by sheer audacity and skill and brought away water from the old well for their young leader. The gift was too precious to use commonly, so it was used sacredly. David counted it bought with blood. So was that other "Water of Life" who later appeared in Palestine.

Perhaps Bethlehem was not much of a town at this time, for the grandson of David, Rehoboam, made it part of his program to rebuild it. He had need of a program surely, for he had made a great political blunder and had lost the larger part of the kingdom which his fathers had won so laboriously. But he gave Bethlehem of Judea a new start as a center of life. Long afterward, as the groups of exiles strayed back from distant places under guidance of Ezra and Nehemiah, it is noted that some of the groups were reckoned from this city of David and Rehoboam. In the meantime Micah the prophet had seen in a flash of revelation that another King, more than David the Great, a Ruler for Israel, was to come out of this "tiniest of townships in Judah." It does not take a large space for the be-

ginning of the large purposes of God. Those purposes do not ask place for themselves; they make their own places when the time comes.

At last the time of the city came, when a pair of travelers from the north came back to the ancestral home for official enrollment under authority of a power which had not been in existence when Bethlehem began its history. For years there had been an inn there, known as "the lodging-place of Chimham," where a frightened body of people had taken their stand in the days of Jeremiah as they fled toward Egypt. It was here they waited until Jeremiah could inquire of Jehovah whether they should continue their flight, and when he brought a contrary command of Jehovah, it was from this point that they set out rebelliously on their flight, carrying with them the unwilling prophet.

One cannot help thinking of the quiet man of the later day who set out, not against the commands of God but because of them, on another flight into Egypt with the most valuable life the world has ever known. But in the inn of that enrollment day no space was left, so overcrowded does life become at times, and the pair of travelers went to the place of second resort—a cave or else a lean-to where cattle were sheltered. There the Son of David, the King of Micah's vision, the Suffering Servant of Isaiah's chapter, was born. And the site of that

MEMORIES

By Alice E. Allen

I sought the old, old homestead
To light its Christmas tree,
And merry little memories
Were waiting there for me.

Some lingered in the doorway
Some sprang up from the chairs,
Some sat about the fireplace,
Some climbed the quiet stairs.

The music of their footfalls
Filled every empty room,
The fragrance of their presence
Warmed all the wintry gloom.

O, merry little memories,
Of Christmastide a part,
I would not miss your laughter
Although you break my heart!

birth, with a chapel on Olivet, is the only sacred site mentioned in post-biblical Christian literature until after the time of Constantine. From the side of the church that marks the manger-cradle one can look out over the plain where the shepherds saw their vision and can see the road along which the Magi came in later months. And as one walks the narrow streets one can imagine the agony of anxious mothers when Herod's decree for the massacre of the innocents was issued.

But the history of Bethlehem does not end with the birth of Christ, its greatest event. Strangely enough there is no record of his having gone there during his ministry nor of any use of the fact of his birth in the town. And because some wise men are sure they would have used the fact if they had been he or his disciples they are uncertain whether he was actually born there or not. But any one who visits the place now and sees what earnest but ignorant and superstitious devotion makes of it will not wonder that the Christian faith has made an almost complete clearance of its connection with geographical or local sites. A spiritual faith cannot allow itself to be too much handicapped by material tethers. Yet it was here that the faithful Jerome came when he was eager to put the Scripture into the "vulgar" tongue, giving the world the Latin Vulgate, still the authoritative version of the Bible for the Roman Church. His cave is showed to all visitors, near the cave of the manger, as the place where he translated "the written word of God regarding the living Word of God."

Latin, Greek and Armenian chapels share the honor of the nativity site and in the past have been the scenes of so much strife that neutral guards were stationed close by, formerly Turkish, now British. And this place of the birth of the Prince of

Peace was a provoking cause of the Crimean war. The story is tragical. Turkey was strongly Moslem and had great veneration for sacred sites. An agreement was reached that France, as representing the Roman Church, should have the heavy hand in the care of Christian sites in Palestine. Russia as the representative of the Greek Orthodox Church was to have privileges at the same points. Gradually the privileges of Russia expanded while France, struggling through the revolution, was paying little heed. At last, however, devotees in France claimed the privilege of placing in the manger-cradle a silver star inscribed according to their wishes. This was refused by the Russian authorities and an issue was revealed which involved the place of these two powers in the near east. Russia refused to recognize a "convention" proposed by Turkey and the two nations entered into war. Presently France and Great Britain joined the forces on the side of Turkey, and Sevastopol, Balaclava, with its "Charge of the Light Brigade," and other historic struggles came into being. The darkness is somewhat relieved when we recall that through Florence Nightingale modern army nursing and indirectly the Red Cross came out of the experience. As the Child born in Bethlehem went on to the cross and made it the salvation of the world, so the strife born again at his manger-cradle moved on to the beautiful cross-marked movement of modern life.

And when the country passed into new controlling hands at the close of our own great war, every effort was made to shield the sacred places. General Allenby and his men endured much in order not to outrage their own sense of piety and the sentiments of the Christian world. Bethlehem bears few scars. Today it lies there—still the little white town.

Brotherhood Grows in British Churches

By J. R. FLEMING

CONFERENCES that have been going on in England between the Anglican and Nonconformist Churches in connection with the Lambeth proposals of 1920 have come to an end. This is not due to any unfriendly rupture but to the simple fact that neither side can as yet see its way past the obstacle of reordination. The great point gained has been the frank acknowledgment by the Anglicans that Free Church ministries are spiritually efficacious, to which even stiff high churchmen have been driven by the plain teaching of experience. But they will not advance farther and accept these ministries as ecclesiastically valid.

Their offer to receive some sort of commission from Nonconformists, if Nonconformists in return agree to be reordained by Episcopal hands, has not been regarded as at all a solution of the difficulty, seeing that no such commission is required to enable Anglicans to officiate in Free Churches, and Free Churchmen are naturally unwilling to consent to any rite that implies invalidity of their previous ordination.

Yet considerable progress has been made in arriving at a mutual understanding, and the documents about to be published under the editorship of the dean of Canterbury will show that the Lambeth appeal has not been altogether futile. It has certainly led to what would have been impossible twenty years ago—the appearance of distinguished Free Church ministers in the pulpits of Anglican cathedrals as well as of Church of England dignitaries in not a few Nonconformist sanctuaries. A better atmosphere has been created which will lead to further advances in a not far distant future. Liberal evangelicals in the Anglican Church are drawing closer to Presbyterians, Methodists and Congregationalists, and even Anglo-Catholics are less standoffish than of yore.

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It is expected that the revised hymnary which has been in preparation during the past three or four years for the Presbyterian Churches on the European side of the Atlantic will be ready in May next. The Welsh and English have cooperated with the Scottish churches for the first time in this department of worship. Dr. David Evans of Cardiff, a distinguished Welsh musician, is likely to be musical editor. The book, which has been submitted in draft form to presbyteries for their consideration, has received a good deal of not always intelligent criticism. One result will probably be the restoration of certain "old favorites" which the committee desired to exclude as having served their day, but the inclusion of a large number of fine

hymns of a modern type will balance any undue conservatism in that respect.

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The Pan-Presbyterian Council at Cardiff has yielded a good financial surplus, of which 100 pounds is to be devoted to the relief of the distressed continental Reformed Churches. The eastern section of the committee on preparation of a common statement of faith, authorized by the council, has now been set up with two such experts as Professor W. A. Curtis and Professor H. R. Mackintosh as chairmen. The western branch of the alliance will in February appoint its quota. It is proposed to hold at Geneva in 1926 a group conference of the continental churches, and a year later a larger gathering at Budapest.

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The United Free Church of Scotland has been celebrating its semi-jubilee (it came into existence by union between the Free and United Presbyterian Churches in 1900) by raising a thanksgiving fund of 100,000 pounds. Already nearly half that sum has been obtained, and by May next it is hoped to report that the desired total has been reached. The object of the fund is to remove all deficits from the church's schemes in view of the anticipated union, and to increase, if possible, the minimum salary of ministers to 300 pounds and a manse. Laymen are taking the lead in raising the money, headed by William Walker, a minister's son, who is one of the most generous givers in the church.

WHO THEY ARE

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