

THE THIRD GIFT



He led the way, followed by his two companions. "He has been thoughtful and kind throughout this long and dangerous journey," Melchior mused aloud. "His steady eyes betoken a quiet heart. Nothing, I am certain, could shake his faith in the leading of the Star. He has no fears of Herod, and his heart is as simple and steadfast as a child's. Perhaps he is right and we are wrong."

Caspar, as he listened, had been looking down into the still, dark depths of the well.

"See, oh see!" he cried suddenly, pointing down. "The Star! It is mirrored here—as indeed it should be in my own heart. My brother, let us tell Balthazar, and hasten to Bethlehem to seek and find the King!"

Melchior needed no second bidding. Quickly they remounted, and set off at once, their eyes fixed eagerly once more upon the Star.

Clippety-clop, clip-clop, went the camels' feet once more, until they reached the inn.

And when Melchior, Caspar, and Balthazar knelt before the baby King, lying so happily in his gentle mother's arms, who shall say that the third gift—an understanding heart—was not most precious of them all.

—“London Lass,” Wellington.

THE SKYLARK

THE peace, beauty, and solitude of the open spaces will ever have a strong hold upon me. I have found the greatest satisfaction and contentment there and have no desire to spend my days in crowded areas. It often happens that if I care to listen I hear the skylark's song. This prose poem, written by George Johnstone, may appeal to some of you:—

"When the little skylark soars aloft towards the skies of blue; when it sings its cheery song as comes the dawn, its melodious, joyous carolling is sung for me and you, and it brings new cheer to those whose hopes have gone. For it nears the gates of heaven, where it seems to intercede for the lonely, and the weary ones on earth, and the tiny skylark's plea, be sure, is heard on high, indeed, by the great Creator there, who gave it birth.

"As it swiftly drops down earthwards to its lowly, humble nest, it anticipates the rest and joy of home. It has sung its hymn of gladness; it has given us of its best, as its joyful strains reached earth from heaven's dome.

"When the morning sun is shining, when we walk the busy street, there should be a song of gladness in each heart; we should welcome with a

genial smile each well-known friend we meet, so that we, too, like the skylark, may do our part. There are many who are lonely; there are those whose hearts are sad; and they love to see our smile and hear our song. Smiling eyes will give them courage; kindly words will make them glad as they face life's road and bravely trudge along.

"And at evening, when home returning to the mansion or the cot, like the little skylark, keep on singing still. Though the home be poor, you can still be contented with your lot; every soul can still be happy if it will.

"Keep on counting up your blessings, and a song your heart will know. They outnumber all your ills, though they are great. And the lark's song will be blended with your praises from below, and your carol will be heard at heaven's gate."

—“Skylark,” Ohakune Junction.

“The Sign of the Takaha”

WHILE I was on holiday in Christchurch I was taken for a delightful drive to the Cashmere Hills and up the Summit Road, 624ft. above sea-level. The late Hon. H. G. Ell wished to secure this very beautiful road “as a permanent asset for the common good and pleasure of the people of the city for all time; to ensure the preservation of the native bush through which the Summit Road passes; to protect the native bird life; and last, that the people using the road may have the pleasure of journeying in stages, to build up the roadside houses for the refreshment and accommodation of travellers.”

The road itself is 53 miles in length, rising to a height of 2,800ft. above sea-level, and reaches to Akaroa. The Christchurch starting point is the roadside house named “The Sign of the Takaha.” Built of stone it resembles an English castle. Coats of arms and heraldic designs adorned the walls of the room where we had tea and there was a handsome stone fireplace. From the quaint diamond-shaped windows we had a wonderful view of the Canterbury Plains, the Southern Alps, the Waimakariri River, and the city of Christchurch itself.

—“Cheerio,” Te Rore Bridge.

MORNING PICTURE

A FLOWERING cherry and a magnolia tree are in bloom in the front lawn of the garden opposite ours. Add to this loveliness the clearcut magnificence of Mount Egmont, which can be seen between the two trees from the angle of my bed, and you share my perfect morning picture—a delicate study in white against the pale blue sky of early spring.

—“Bry,” Eltham.

CLIPPETY-CLOP, clip-clop, sounded the feet of three camels making their way along the stony road down from Jerusalem. It would not have been so had it been but a short time before; in the trackless desert their tread had been almost noiseless—just a soft “pluff” in the sand as they kept their steady pace under the starlit sky.

Now, at a bend of the road, the riders of two of them, who had been in earnest conversation, paused to wait for their companion, who rode a little to the rear.

“Caspar, my friend, I have been thinking of our quest and am doubtful, after all, if it is worth pursuing. These many nights have we travelled, bearing our gifts—brought by nothing stronger than our faith in the leading of the Star. And before we have found the baby King we have seen King Herod, a cruel and suspicious man.

“Would it not be better to return to Jerusalem, give him the golden gift, and reach our own country while we are safe?” Melchior ceased, and nodded to Caspar to speak.

“I, too, am no longer as hopeful as I was,” he said. “My gift is frankincense—the desire to worship. Is it not foolish, grown men as we are, with all our wealth and power, to kneel to a Babe, however great the Scriptures say his life will be? Would it not be better to turn our backs upon the Star altogether?”

Balthazar's camel drew near, and before he replied he bade it kneel while he dismounted. Bewilderment, and then grief, showed in his eyes as he gathered the purport of their words.

“My brothers,” he said, “while these thoughts were in your minds, and my camel walked because of its slight lameness, my heart was warm with the thought that soon we should see the baby King and give Him our gifts. You are tired, I know. Yonder is a well, close to the village of Bethlehem. Will you not come and rest beside it, while I draw water for the camels?”