



NOTES



The First Christmas

Mary and Joseph were refused lodging in the inns. They sought shelter in a stable. There, in a manger from which an ox and an ass had fed shortly before, Jesus was born. The Prince of Peace had no cradle of gold. His mother had no silken swaddling clothes in which to wrap him. He was born in poverty to teach millions in later ages that wealth is a poor thing and that poverty may be the richest thing on earth. We make a crib every year in order to commemorate the Birth of Jesus Christ; but how few of us make of it a message of comfort and courage! In Catholic lands children are brought to the Crib, and it is one of the most interesting things in Rome during Christmas week to hear the little ones recite their artless addresses to the Divine Child, in the church of Ara Coeli. Christmas is the festival of the poor, but it is also the children's feast. Already, from the manger, He says: "Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not, for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven." From the manger, too, He warns us all that unless we become like those little ones we shall not be His friends hereafter. Therefore, at Yuletide, it is right to cultivate the old simplicities, to cherish the spirit of hilarity, and loving-kindness, and benevolence towards all men; it is right to rejoice and be glad, and to give freely, just as children will give before they have learned to set their hearts on earthly treasures. The halo and romance of Christmas, the holly and ivy hung in the hall, the cheery exchange of good wishes which are the spontaneous expression of good will, are all in keeping with the childlike spirit which the Crib teaches us.

No Room

In His mother's womb, almost at the moment He was born, Jesus was rejected by men. His own received Him not; He came to save them; but they had no room for Him. Thus began that series of rejections which lasted all His life, and is perpetuated every day in the lives of the men and women who in every clime succeeded those who refused to receive Him on that Christmas Eve. It is a pitiful and a moving thing to contemplate how Mary and Joseph had to turn their backs on the town, face the cold night in the anxiety that was then on them, and at length find shelter in a cave which was warmed somewhat by the breath of an ox and an ass. Even the animals were kinder than men! It is well to think on the pity of it when we visit the Crib in our parish church. And it is better to think of how often we have rejected Him and refused Him shelter in the hostel of our hearts. Surely, there have been times when we felt angry with the hard-hearted people who drove Him away that night. But we ought not to forget to feel angry with ourselves who have likewise driven Him away as really and as cruelly as they did. Pleasure, social engagements, money-making have filled our hearts and kept Him out. He has knocked and knocked

in vain. There was no room for Him. He had to turn away just as Mary and Joseph did on the night of His birth. The Crib ought to teach us that it is a mistake to set much store on comfort or riches; the thought of His rejection ought to teach us how terrible it is when we allow business and amusement to make us reject Him.

The Shepherds

"There were shepherds in the country, dwelling out in the fields, and keeping the night watches over their flocks. And, lo! an angel of the Lord stood by them, and the glory of the Lord shone round them; and they were sorely afraid. And the angel said to them: 'Fear not, for behold, I bring you tidings of great joy which shall be to all the people, for there is born to you to-day in the city of David a Saviour who is Christ the Lord.' . . . And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying:

*Glory to God in the highest
And on earth peace to men of good will."*

The first revelation of the Nativity was made to the shepherds, not to kings or statesmen or capitalists. He was born in poverty and humility, and He wished that His first adorers should be poor and humble. Already He was preaching that divine lesson:

*Learn of Me because I am meek and humble
of heart!*

Surely that was an effective reprobation of the world's standard of values! He was teaching all of us who were to be born in later ages how to value things. But nothing in its setting can take from the dignity and majesty of that birth. He was the King. The angels came down from Heaven to adore Him. The air was full of their songs of joy. Poor in outward seeming, but noble in the true sense of the word, the shepherds were His courtiers. They were simple people; they were free from guile and double-dealing; they received the message of the angel gladly: like children they came and knelt before the Child who was God. Like children we too must go to find Him.

In the field and with their flocks abiding,
They lay on the dewy ground;
And glimmering under the starlight
The sheep lay white around.
When the Light of the Lord streamed o'er
them,
And, lo! from the heavens above,
An angel leaned from the glory
And sang his song of love:

"To you in the city of David,
A Saviour is born to-day!"
And sudden a host of the heavenly ones
Flashed forth to join the lay!
O never hath sweeter message
Thrilled home to the souls of men,
And the heavens themselves had never heard
A gladder choir till then.

"The figures of the shepherds," says Father Faber, "have grown to look so natural to us in our thought-pictures of Bethlehem that it almost seems now as if they were indispensable from it and inseparable from the mystery. What a beautiful congruity there is between the part they play and their occupation! The very contrasts are congruities. Heaven opens and reveals itself to earth, making itself but one side of the choir to sing the office of the Nativity, while earth is to be the other; and earth's answer to the open heavens is the pastoral gentleness of those simple-minded watchmen. She sets her shepherds to match the heavenly singers, and counts their simplicity her most harmonious response to angelical intelligence. Truly earth was wise in this her deed, and teaches her sons philosophy. It was congruous too that simplicity should be the first worship that simplicity sent into the stable of Bethlehem. For what is the grace of simplicity but a permanent childhood of the soul, fixed there by a special operation of the Holy Ghost, and therefore a fitting worship for the Holy Child Himself. Their infant-like heavenly-mindedness suited His infantile condition, as well as it suited the purity of the heavenly hosts that were singing in the upper air. Beautiful figures! on whom God's light rested for a moment and then all was dark again! They were not mere shapes of light, golden imaginings, ideal forms, that filled in the Divine Artist's picture. They were living souls, tender yet not faultless men, with inequalities in the monotony of their human lot that often lowered them in temper and in repining to the level of those around them."

Such were the shepherds; such, too, were the men whom He later called to leave their nets beside the lake and follow Him. Note that all of them—both shepherds and apostles—came quickly. There was no bargaining, no excuse, no reluctance to leave anything or anybody. They came at His word, as children come at their father's. And, when all was over, they went away glorifying God. Like children let us also approach Christmas, and from it let us face the new year glorifying God.

IRISH HISTORY

Two papers have been sent to the Editor (instead of to the examiners). As they had neither the name of the school nor the names of the candidates as means of identification the Editor would be pleased to know these particulars immediately.

ARCHDEACON DEVROY

Archdeacon Devroy, who has been ailing for some time past, went down to the Lewis-Ham Hospital, Christchurch, a fortnight ago for treatment. We are pleased to hear that he has returned to Island Bay much improved in health, owing to the care and attention of the devoted Sisters of that grand institution.

Charity is the bond of brotherhood, the foundation of peace, the link and strength of unity: it is greater than both hope and faith.—St Cyprian.

No Rubbing Laundry Help

FOR WASHING CLOTHES