

The Christian Messenger.

A RELIGIOUS AND GENERAL FAMILY NEWSPAPER.

NEW SERIES.
Vol. XXIV., No. 52.

Halifax, Nova Scotia, Wednesday, December 24, 1879.

WHOLE SERIES.
Vol. XLIII., No. 52.

Poetry.

For Christmas Day.

God comes to dwell in mortal flesh,
He comes in childhood's form;
Not with imperial pomp He comes,
Nor riding on the storm.

His mission is to save the world,
To comfort the forlorn,
Yet in no dazzling shape appears,
But as a Babe is born.

The light that shines o'er Bethlehem's plain
Is radiant, pure, and calm;
The heavenly host in softest strain
Sing forth the joyful psalm.

They tell of One of highest name
Whose wondrous choice is made
Of David's Son and David's Lor,
Now in a manger laid.

May we be like that Holy Child,
And lowly as was He,
That we God's children may be called,
His face in glory see!

DAWSON BURNS.

The Frost King.

From out his winter palace
The King has started forth;
The birds have left their summer
The wind is in the north.

The river and the mountain,
The brown and wrinkled sod,
Begin to show already where
His messengers have trod.

The clouds unroll their crimine,
O'er meadow, lane, and street,
Like courtiers, spread their mantles down
Before the royal feet.
Close to the friendly corners
The shining ivies cling,
And wear their emerald cloak despite
The coming of a King.

His mien and look are haughty,
His voice is cold and stern,
And yet his kisses on the cheek
Like crimson roses burn.

Down from the crested mountain,
With grandeur in his tread,
The Winter King is coming, with
A white crown on his head.

Not amid waving banners,
Or to the sound of drums
Beating their gladdest music,
This conquering hero comes;
But silently and solemnly
He enters his domain,
With twenty and a hundred good
Stout yeoman in his train.

Clasping the old earth tightly
Against his frozen breast,
As if she were his chosen Queen,
He says, "I bring thee rest.
Thou hast reigned long and nobly,
Thy virtues all are known,
And thou wilt not forgotten be,
Though I possess the throne!"

Contentedly resigning
Her sceptre and her crown,
Beneath a downy coverlet
The weary queen lay down,
To sleep with her companions,
Who at the touch of spring,
Shall rise again in time to see
The going of a King.

Harper's Weekly.

Religious.

Christmas Thoughts for the Dying.

The "times are hard," is the constantly reiterated plaint that one hears on all sides, even at this Christmas season, as he goes amongst the churches; and there is no doubt only too much truth in it. The last few months have been marked by much to depress even the stout-hearted; and yet it should not be forgotten that the darkest cloud may have a silver lining. Let us see if we can find one.

To be thankful is to be *thankful*. The old Saxon word "thanc" means think. We sometimes say, and rightly, there is immense sorrow in the world. We sometimes say, and wrongly, that the sorrow out-balances the joy.

Did you ever stop a moment to consider how even the common words we use assure us that in the large experience of the race the joy overmasters the sorrow? that, shot through the general mass of life; there is preponderating pleasure?

"Words are the sounds of the heart," says the Chinese proverb. "Words are but pictures of our thoughts," writes Dryden. "Thy speech bewrayeth thee,"

is but the enunciation of a profound principle. What words tell, they usually tell truly and unmistakably.

To be thankful means to be thankful. That is to say, whenever men have thought retrospectively, they have found in a large way and in the long run, so much more to be glad for than to be sad for, that the old Saxon word "thanc" originally meaning thought simply, has clothed itself with a garment of praise, and becomes flushed all through with an added significance of joy.

There have been clouds, and storms, and disasters lately, but Providence has not forgotten to somehow and somewhere bless. There has been some sunshine any way and many a patch of the deep blue sky. At this Christmas time if we are but *thankful*, I am sure we cannot help being *thankful*.

The True Ideal for Life.

It was not so wonderful that a babe should be born. Birth was already a mystery so common that it had been much stripped of its wonder. Birth—that strange advent of the child out of the unknown into this sad and wailing world—had been taking place ever since some four thousand years before Adam and Eve had bent in awe above their first-born.

Nor was it so uncommon that a babe should be born into poverty, and find a manger for a cradle. Caves are not rare in Palestine. Much of the rock of the country is soft and porous, and scooped out easily. It was quicker, easier, and cheaper to gouge out a cave than to build a barn. Caves in that country are sometimes dwellings, sometimes sepulchres, sometimes strongholds, sometimes tarrying places for the night when no better inn is to be had, sometimes stables. So it was no uncommon thing for people to be found abiding in such places.

Then as to the manger or crib. Dr. Thompson, in the "Land and the Book," tells us that "it is common to find two sides of the one room, where the native farmer resides with his cattle, fitted up with these mangers, and the remainder elevated about two feet higher for the accommodation of the family. The mangers are built of small stones and mortar in the shape of a box, or rather of a watering trough; and when cleaned up and whitewashed, as they often are in summer, they do very well to lay little babies in. Indeed," he says, "our own children have slept there in our rude retreats on the mountains."

So the fact that a babe should first open its eyes in a cave where they stabled cattle, or that he should find for a cradle the manger in which the oxen fed, must not be thought of as anything so extraordinary that it was never heard of before. It was something quite usual for life running on the lower levels. It only signified that this child began at the lowest; had his portion with the poorest; that there were no separations of wealth or palace between this child and the lowliest Hebrew baby anywhere in Palestine.

Nor was it such an unusual thing that this life beginning here in this manger at Bethlehem, as it grew into childhood, and strengthened into youthhood, and developed into manhood, should be smitten with much sorrow. Perhaps from the time of Adam's sin down to the birth-night of this babe in Bethlehem, there had never been a human life devoid of sorrow. This babe had but grown up to share in the human heritage. There had been poverty before he came. There had been breaking hearts before he came. There had been eyes blinded with tears before he came. There had been failure of friendship before he came. There had been weariness before he came. There had been scoffs, and scorn, and bitter words before they fell on him.

Nor was it an experience altogether so unique, that this life, beginning here in Bethlehem, should terminate on a cross and by it. Crosses were by no means uncommon in those days. Crucifixion was a very usual

method of Roman punishment. At certain times you could have seen the highways lined with them, clanking their victims in their horrid arms. Many a man had hung the weary hours through, while the blood flowed laboring, while the hot sun smote mercilessly upon the unclad body and the unprotected head, while fever scorched the brain and parched the throat and lips, while the death, so longed for, seemed so tardy in its coming—and did not come until at last hunger killed, or the vultures wheeling round and round over the victim's head, waiting for their prey, grew impatient, and, dashing at him, tore his vitals out. Crucifixion was something too terribly common then.

And yet there never was a birth or life or death so utterly uncommon, stupendously unique in its infinite wonder, as the birth which transpired on that night in Bethlehem, as the life which flowed out of it, as the death which found its consummation on the cross. Babes had been born and laid in mangers many times before, but never such a babe as this, over which the Virgin Mother hung in trembling joy and awe. Lives have been struck with sorrow often; but never with such sorrow, or for such reason as smote this life. Crosses had carried many victims; but never had cross brought death to such a victim. Beyond all births was this birth; beyond all deaths was this death.

And if you ask the reason for the infinite separateness between this and every other which has ever been or can ever be again, these verses, in some respects the most wonderful in the whole Scripture, shall declare the reason to you:—

"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, thought it no robbery to be equal with God (that is deemed not his equality with God a thing to grasp at), but emptied Himself, taking upon Him the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient even unto death, and that the death of the cross."

It was because that birth was the birth of one equal with Jehovah, yet who did not grasp at such equality; it was because that life was a life stooping from the throne of the Highest to share the sorrow which belonged to men, that thus it might become touched with all the feelings of our infirmities; it was because that death was a death to which the only-begotten Son humbled Himself, in order that tasting death for every man, men might be delivered from it—it is this which makes that birth and life and death so unique and singular.

The Creator descended into creaturehood there in Bethlehem. The King became the servant.

And the mainspring of such sacrifice the apostle discloses in another place:—"For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye, through His poverty might become rich." For our sakes. These are the words which sounding over the abyssal sacrifice of that birth, and life, and death, explain them all. The love of self in Deity was nothing; the love of others, everything.

And now the apostles, in the second chapter of the Epistle to the Philippians, gathers up all this magnificence of sacrificial display in Deity, and moulds it into a reason why every Christian should live the self-sacrificing life. He says, in substance, to these Philippians: Be not selfish people. Do not think that everything in the world must gravitate to the self-centre. Do not care simply for yourselves, and let everything else go. Do not look each of you on his own things, but each of you on the things of others also. And, if you want to know why you should do so, why then remember that you are Christians, and that therefore you ought to have the mind of Christ; and the mind of Christ was a mind of care for others, even to the extent of emptying Himself of the Divine glory.

The Original Form of the Gospel.

PRES'T. B. A. HINSDALE.

It is difficult for men now living, especially for those who have never studied the Gospel as a tradition, to picture to their minds the Church of the first age. To do so, we must lay aside some of our most familiar and best established ideas of teaching Christianity; and then that age cannot be brought before our minds, as it was, without much study and a free use of the historical imagination. Let us try to reproduce it in one of its principal features.

Christ delivered His message in oral, not in written words. In one instance only is He said to have written anything, and then "He stooped down, and with His finger, wrote on the ground." He belonged to the class of great oral teachers; men who leave no written memorials behind them, as Socrates and Confucius, and yet profoundly influence the world. Nor was he attended by a scribe who kept a record of his words and works. There is no reason to suppose that the four Gospels or any one of them, is composed in whole or in part of materials that were reduced to writing during His life. His apostles carried on the work of evangelization in the same way. Their commission was: "Preach the Gospel to every creature." Under this commission, "they went forth and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following." Aided by the Divine Spirit, they preached what they remembered of the life and teaching of Christ, and added what they were inspired to say in further development of the Gospel. In course of time, wherever they went, bishops or pastors were called upon to teach and rule the congregations of disciples that had been planted. Of course, these bishops employed the same oral method. Not only so, they were wholly dependent for the substance of their instruction upon what had been orally communicated to them. Again, the apostles called to their aid helpers named Evangelists, ministers, like Luke, Timothy, and Titus, who preached and taught orally, and were dependent upon what they had heard for their knowledge of the Gospel. These evangelists also ordained bishops, and raised up ministers like themselves, that the believers might be properly cared for and the world converted.

Paul said to Timothy: "Keep that which is committed to thy trust;" also, "Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us." And, "The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also."

The earliest canonical Christian writings were epistles, probably written by Paul. This class of writings began to appear about twenty years after the close of Christ's personal ministry. No one of these writings contains a particle of evidence showing that the gospel—the Evangelical tradition—was in existence in a written form. It was quite natural that Epistles should be written before Gospels. The principal Gospel facts and teachings could very well be propagated during one generation by a ministry whose leading members had accompanied with the Lord, and who, moreover, were inspired; but in the young churches, although their members had a firm grasp of the cardinal Gospel truths, questions of vital importance would constantly arise; questions of spiritual life, of ecclesiastical discipline, of gifts and ordinances, that only the authority of an Apostle could settle. So much doctrine as sufficed to convert men and qualify them for Church membership left a thousand things unsettled. Young Timothy was not the only disciple who needed to be instructed how to behave himself in the house of God. The relations of Christianity to Judaism and Pagan civilization had to be determined, and the law of love applied to the varied phases

of human life. No doubt the Apostles did much of this work in their personal ministrations; no doubt pastors and evangelists did a good deal more; but the evangelical work of the Apostles prevented their becoming ministers, and they were compelled to make up for their absence by writing letters. In these considerations, in great part, the Epistles find their explanation. From first to last, it is taken for granted, that the churches are in firm possession of the evangelical Tradition; so that the Epistles make no pretension to being the fundamental books of our religion. Nor must it be forgotten that writing letters was a small part of the Apostles' labors, much smaller than preaching the gospel.

When and by whom the first essays were made to reduce to writing the Evangelical Tradition, it is impossible to tell. It is probable, if not certain, that brief, fragmentary narratives were written, and to some extent circulated, before the appearance of our canonical Gospels. Nor is there anything violent in supposing that such writings were extant in the early part of the Apostolic age. At all events, before Luke wrote the third Gospel "many had taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which were most surely believed" by the Christians, "even as they delivered them" which from the beginning were eye witnesses and ministers of the world." The things "delivered" and "believed" were the primitive tradition; and the "declarations" mentioned by Luke, as well as his own narrative, were attempts to commit this tradition to writing. Luke continues: "It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee, in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty of those things wherein thou hast been instructed"—language which implies a recognition of the fact that, in the long run, overtake every system of teaching that is dependent on oral transmission, as well as the imperfection of the "declarations" previously mentioned. In reducing the Gospel to writing, the Holy Spirit employed in part the pens of men who had no original or personal knowledge of the facts. Neither Mark nor Luke, as far as we know, had ever known the Saviour while he went in and out among men. According to ancient traditions preserved by Eusebius, Mark got his information from Peter, while Luke "delivered in his own Gospel the certain account of those things which he himself had fully received from his intimacy with Paul, and also his intercourse with the other Apostles." There can be no doubt that the primitive tradition was slowly assuming form, or rather forms, long before our Gospels were composed. The words and works that entered into one Apostle's recital were not in all cases those set forth by another; something was left to individual tone of thought and mental habit. The Gospel according to Matthew is no doubt the Gospel as Matthew was accustomed to preach it; Mark's, the Gospel as preached by Peter; and Luke's, the Evangelical Tradition as that writer had learned it from Paul and the other Apostles. John's however, if we are to follow the Eusebian tradition, is supplementary to the other three, and not the full story of Christ as John was accustomed to tell it. The Acts of Apostles and Apocalypse complete the canon of New Testament Scripture, which we may naturally divide into four divisions: A personal history of Christ; a history of evangelization and organizations under the directions of the Apostles; a fuller unfolding and application of Christian doctrine; a map of the future history of the Church. I propose no theory of inspiration, but the Lord was with the authors of these writings; and the Holy Spirit, sent in His name, taught them all things, and brought all things to their remembrance, whatsoever He had said unto them.

Sabbath days are quiet islands on the tossing sea of life.