

SIXTEENTH DAY.

The Star in the East.

"Behold the Lord the Ruler is come; and a kingdom is in his hand, and power and dominion. Give to the king thy judgment, O God; and to the king's son thy justice."—*Mal.*, iii.

TO-DAY a star instead of a flower for the crown of the Queen. To simple, humble shepherds near Bethlehem watching the flocks that belonged to the Temple came first the sign of the Messiah's birth. That sign was supernatural and angelic. The angels that sang the *Gloria* in the heavens that night were the first Apostles proclaiming the first visible Mystery of Jesus Christ. And that the gentle, humble and simple first heard the tidings presaged that in the new Kingdom simplicity and humility and poverty would gain the first and highest favors from the King whose palace, that night, was a stable.

But beyond the boundaries of Judea lay in darkness the great Gentile world. They too will have their sign and that in the heavens. Their hearts were hungry for God,—so hungry that they had thousands of gods from the stones beneath them to the stars above them.

The modern monster,—the atheist had not yet made his appearance. Their gods were material things—things to look upon with their eyes;—to kneel down before with their body—and to touch with their hands.

Their very idols,—Gods in material form curiously hinted at the true God's coming in visible form.

Throughout the East men studied the skies more than the earth, while in the West men gave more attention to the soil beneath their feet. Dreamers from the East,—practical people from the West.

Through those nations dim traditions had floated like fragments of a lost beautiful song—and one of those traditions, they knew not whence it came, was a prophecy that a wonderful star would rise in the heavens to herald the coming of the Expectation of the World. It was transmitted from generation to generation and from age to age. Those ancient peoples had marvellous memory. Their world moved slow. To forget is a signal trait of the busy Moderns.

They have no time to remember. They fling the yesterdays away as soon as the to-day dawns.

The predicted star at last rose in splendor in the heavens—a beacon light to guide the wise men to the crib. One from Persia,—one from Arabia and one from far Ethiopia. It must have appeared long before the angels sent the shepherds to the stable. When they approached Jerusalem the star vanished. Were they deceived? Was their long journey but a folly? Surrounded by their servants they entered Jerusalem in all their oriental splendor. The people gazed at them in wonder and admiration. "Where is he, they asked, who is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the East and have come to adore him?" Had they beside the sign in the sky to guide their way,—a revelation in their heart that the new-born king was God to be adored? Trouble in the heart of Herod,—and trouble in all Jerusalem. The

priests are assembled: Herod puts the question—"Where will He be born?" "In Bethlehem"—came the answer.

Leaving Jerusalem the star reappeared and gladness filled their hearts. From Jerusalem to Bethlehem only six miles. Did the three kings,—the shepherds of the people, pass, on their way to the crib, the shepherds of the Temple's flocks.

The star stopped over where the child was.

"And when they were come in they saw the child with Mary his Mother,—and they adored him and offered to him gold, frankincense and myrrh."

Was the child resting on the Mother's breast,—as on an altar?

Again Mother and child together. Through her they offered their symbolical gifts to the child. Were they wrong? Can we not offer our gifts through her to Him?

When a gift to a child passes across the palm of a mother's hand, it becomes more precious.

How Mary must have wondered at these men from the East? First came simplicity and humility in garb of shepherd. Her ancestor David was a shepherd and had fed his flocks nigh unto the very stable. But the Shepherd David became a King. The Kings came next to adore. They came with their riches, their culture, their power. And these three things which rule the world are still outstripped on the path to truth by simplicity and humility. And always shall be.

At both these comings to Christ, Mary preides. As the mother of the child-king she was queen in His palace-stable to the wise men as well as to the shepherds.

And when that stable shall be multiplied and transformed into countless temples, she still will be queen to the lofty as well as to the lowly. She still will preside as queen and the gold of all human gifts and the frankincense of prayer and the myrrh of all beautiful virtues will be presented through her to her Son. Kings will lay their crowns,—queens their jewels, soldiers their swords, scholars their culture, poets their songs, orators their eloquence for her Son's sake at her feet. And eyes will bring their tears, and lips will bring their sighs and feet will bring their thorns,—and souls will bring their sorrows, and hearts will bring their anxieties, and hope will bring her fears and love will bring her pangs to the feet of the queen for consolation and relief. The poverties and the royalties will walk side by side to her throne. Fame and failure will kneel together there like brothers. Learning and ignorance with interclasped hands will bow before her throne. The aged bishop and the bright young altar-boy will bend before her as equals. The veiled nun and the broken-hearted penitent will mingle their voices in one chord before her. All these varieties there become unity.

All these differences before her throne become a harmony. Ah—it is only at the feet of Jesus Christ and at the feet of His Mother that all this world's inequalities are transformed into a marvellous equality.

Listen in the evening time and you hear the sound of the blessed beads all around the earth as they pass through the fingers that touch them as gently as if every bead was a rose;—and the Rosary in its form of chain is not a symbol of slavery but a most beautiful sign of the perfect equality of all the children of God.

In the hands of the Supreme Pontiff and in the hands of the aged negro; in the hands of an Empress and in the hands of the poor, unlettered negro girl,—the same sign. Those beads—those Hail Mary's equalize us all and how? Why they lift us up above this world and they place us on the very same lofty plane of prayer. Blessed Beads! beautiful Hail Mary's! Ah the while you crown all the children of thy Son with a beautiful spiritual equality,—you chain us to His throne with better than golden chains.

And better than the gold of the Wise Men is the gold of every bead, and sweeter than the frankincense brought from the East is the precious incense of each Hail Mary.

Let the star of love of Jesus and Mary shine every day in the sky of our souls,—beckoning us to come to the place where the King is resting;—let us bring our beads as our gifts and we shall be sure to find, as the Wise Men did, Him with His Mother. They were told in dream to go back home by another way;—for the cruel and dangerous Herod was plotting against the Child. So from God's temple whither we bring our Rosaries as gifts,—we will always return home another way, with happier souls and more of grace in them and thus escape the spiritual snares which the Herod's of our passions are always planning in our hearts. The star that led the Magi to the Christ-crib has disappeared. But ah! another star hath taken its place,—shining forever in the heavens of Faith; Mary herself, with brightness ever increasing. Star of hope shed thy purest rays on the shadows that oftentimes gather around us, and we shall like the Wise Men, but with wisdom higher than theirs, follow thy guidance and

find the sweet Saviour whom they found a few years here below at the altars of Faith—but in heaven on His throne of glory.

ASPIRATION.

“WE have seen His star in the East and have come with gifts to adore Him.”—*Missal*.

PRAYER.

O GOD, who on this day by the leading of a star didst reveal thine only-begotten Son to the Gentiles; mercifully grant, that we who know thee now by faith may be brought to contemplate the beauty of thy majesty.



SEVENTEENTH DAY.

The Flower of the Purification.

"Now dost thou dismiss thy servant, O Lord, according to thy word, in peace. Because mine eyes have seen thy salvation. Which thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples. A light to the revelation of the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel."—*Luke, ii.*

FORTY days after the birth of Jesus, His blessed Mother accompanied by Joseph went up to the Temple for her purification and His presentation.

Sinless as Mary was there was no real need for her compliance with the ceremony of purification as there had been no need of our Lord's subjecting himself to the rite of circumcision. They complied with the requirements of the law in order to leave us an example of obedience. And besides the mystery of her Motherhood and the divinity of the child were in this way to remain unrevealed. Mary the child of the Temple re-enters its gates a Virgin Mother bearing in her arms the everlasting God. Joseph carried the turtle doves as humble offerings. Never had God received such homage in heaven or on earth as when Mary presented her child in the Temple. It was an infinite offering and the little Christ gave to His Father in that hour infinite homage.

Into the Temple, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit came the aged Simeon, a just man and devout, "who had been waiting for the consolation of Israel."

For it had been revealed to him that before death he would see with his own eyes the Lord's Christ. Mary he had known in the days of her childhood. He had been present at her presentation. A great joy filled his aged heart. He took the child in his trembling arms, and blest God. And then his voice arose in song: "Now thou dost dismiss thy servant, O Lord, according to thy word in peace. Because my eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples: A light to the revelation of the gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel."

Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary the Mother: "Behold this child is set up for the ruin and resurrection of many in Israel and for a sign that shall be contradicted; and thy own soul a sword shall pierce that out of many hearts thoughts may be revealed." Simeon read in prophetic vision the whole future history of the child and he tells it to the Mother; for she is to be involved in it,—to be part and portion of it. Anna the prophetess, also entered the Temple and gave thanks to the Lord. There were listeners in the Temple,—but they did not understand Simeon's song and prophecy and Anna's blessing. The wondrous beauty of the young mother, the resemblance between her face and that of the child a-nestling in her arms, the gentleness of Joseph;—all this attracted their attention; but though they were almost touching the mystery of mysteries they knew it not. How often we are face to face with the supernatural and it passes us by unheeded? Are we not surrounded by mysteries, sacraments, facts above nature filling all hours and somehow we seem blind to their presence. Are we not dwelling in the awful every-where-ness of God

from first to last of life half-the-while heedless of the mystery.

So they in the Temple,—the lookers-on in the day of Mary's purification and Christ's presentation stood in the shadow of the supernatural;—but they went their ways merely passing wondering remarks upon Mary and Joseph and the child.

And Mary went her way;—the sharp point of the sword of sorrow entering her heart; but as day follows day it will sink in deeper until her soul shall be transfixed with sorrow.

The Mother of the victim must also be a victim. "The Man of sorrow" must have a mother of sorrow. Few the joys of their lives,—but countless and intense the pangs

She saw, in spirit, every footstep of Christ until the nailing of the feet on Calvary.

No wonder that the sorrowful hasten to the Mother of sorrows! She can compassionate sorrow's every pang because she suffered them all.

And where the Mother of sorrow is with her will be found the Man of Sorrows;—Mother and child together. Seven great mysteries of sorrow divide the days of her life.

The world worships joy,—goes forth to meet it, welcomes it,—walks in its light;—but flies or tries to fly from grief. And yet after all that earth-joy is vain, fleeting and unsatisfying. A ghost of grief haunts the footsteps of every joy.

Only spiritual joys can satisfy the soul,—joys that spring from prayers, graces, sacraments, obediences to God's laws. And these fill the heart with that holy peace which this world can neither give nor take away.

For such souls beside the greatest earthly sorrows the highest spiritual joys can be found interclasping one another. Sorrow was to be one of the most powerful elements in the holiness of the Blessed Virgin. Remember that from the moment of her immaculate conception on up until the moment of her death, her life was ascensional. Every moment she rose higher in sanctity. Her graces and merits were constantly a-multiplying; until she reached heights to no other creature accessible and though finite manifested, more than all other beings combined, the awful sanctity of God himself.

As towards all other creatures her holiness was and is incommunicable. No being ever bore the image and likeness of God as Mary did and does now in heaven. We are His images but imperfect. But in Mary the divine image is perfectly mirrored. Omnipotence cannot create a more perfect spiritual work. And the sign of that spiritual work is sorrow. Her life before Calvary was a martyrdom of suspense and fear and expectation. Her martyrdom on Calvary is only surpassed by that of her Saviour-son. And after Calvary she suffered the martyrdom of waiting. And always in perfect conformity to the will of God.

Sweet is the spiritual fragrance of the flower of the purification. It is a mingling of obedience to the law—of joy in presenting such a child, God's own equal, to God himself and of sorrow for His foretold sufferings.

On the second day of February, Holy Church who is also a virgin mother, keeps the feast of Mary's purification. But all the days of all the years our beautiful Church holds festivals of Purification. The Bride

of the Lamb forever, her mission is to purify the world of error and sin. The gates of her temples are ever open that those who may need to be purified may enter and be cleansed. The ceremony of purification never ceases. At the baptismal font,—from the pulpit, in the confessional, on the altar the purifying power is always active.

Blessed are they who needing to be purified come in imitation of Mary, who, though not in need of it went up to the Temple in obedience to the law. And then to each of us the Saviour with the gentleness of a child and the mercy of a God will be presented. Once she presented Him to the Father;—but now her love is to present Him to sinners in the hours of their purification.

ASPIRATION.

"WE have received thy mercy, O God, in the midst of thy temple: according to thy name, O God, so also is thy praise, unto the ends of the earth: thy right hand is full of justice."—*Psalm*, xlvii.

"Great is the Lord, and exceedingly to be praised: in the city of our God, in his holy mountain."—*Ibid.*

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY everliving God, we humbly beseech thy Majesty, that as thine only-begotten Son was this day presented in the temple in the substance of our flesh; so we also may, with purified hearts, be presented unto thee.

EIGHTEENTH DAY.

The Flower of the Flight.

"Arise, and take the child and His mother and fly into Egypt, and be there until I shall tell thee."—*Math.*, ii.

IN Jerusalem Herod had heard from the wise men of the birth of the new-born King. He feared a rival. He had waited for the return of the men who had come from the East,—but he waited in vain. They had been admonished to return by a different way to their own countries. Jealousy is always cruel,—sometimes savage. Many children had been born in and around Bethlehem about the time of the birth of Christ. Baffled in his desire to discover the new-born King he would not be balked in his design to destroy him. Jealousy like his has patience to wait. He kept his secret. "I will slay all the children in Bethlehem and the coasts thereof, from two years of age and under," he said in his wicked heart. He bided his time. "I will send my soldiers to do the work," he said to himself. The day had not yet come; but an angel had come to Joseph in sleep and bade him to take the child and his mother and to go down into Egypt. In the night time he rose and took the child and his mother,—and hurried out towards the deserts.

The day of massacre came. Brutal soldiers tore the little children from their mothers' arms and heedless of their wild wailings and hardened against the innocent,

pleading faces of the poor infants put them mercilessly to death.

The law of sacrifice the shedding of the blood of Innocence began thus in the New Kingdom. The little King of Sacrifice is hurrying out to the great, bleak deserts,—driven from his home into exile. Joseph bears the frail burden, and carries his God. Mary, her heart overwhelmed with fear, startled by every sound, walks beside the foster father of her child. They are going to Egypt. The way is long and lone and drear. But God gives strength to all who fulfill His great designs. Day by day they traveled on. Across those same deserts from Egypt to Judea had come the Hebrews. In these deserts the Covenant had been made with them by the Lord. In those same deserts, in the first ages of the Church will live anchorites and monks without number,—exiles from the world where the child Christ passed an exile from His own Judea.

Full of memories of the old dispensation and full of memories of the new dispensation are those bleak deserts.

Amid those wildernesses will live men of loftiest lives. No wonder. Christ passed over them; and where He passes grace blossoms into beautiful virtues. In the night the sands of the deserts was their resting-place. Dangers lurked along all their way,—but there are no guardians like the angels. Day followed day and night followed night,—and still on traveled the three exiles to the land of Idolatry. In Egypt they worshipped the sun; and now the Sun of Justice in the wondrous eclipse of a Child's form is about to rise above the horizon of that land.

Hunger and thirst they often suffered. Did angels bring them manna? Their passage across the desert is

as silent as the desert itself. Tradition tells us of lofty trees that bent down to give them shade and shelter; and that when they entered Egypt many idols fell in the temples. At last they reached the "land of bondage;—and dwelt in or near Heliopolis. How long they remained in exile we do not know. Joseph the Carpenter worked at his trade procuring daily bread for the Child-God and His Mother.

Meanwhile the Child grew apace and Mary and Joseph rose higher and higher in Sanctity. What sufferings and privations they must have endured? What sorrow was theirs to live under the dark shadow of heathenism! He came unto His own and His own drove Him away. And now He hides in the home of idols. How strangely the first years of Christ are passing! But His Mother is with Him. Mother and Child together,—you cannot separate them without contradicting the closeness of their lives. What mighty adorations of the true God in Child-form came out of the hearts of Mary and Joseph in the land where the very memory and name of the true God had been lost! How the Flower of the Flight bloomed into wonderful spiritual beauties; and all in shadow and in sorrow.

Poor Egypt knew not the glory hidden near the banks of the Nile. How God does hide Himself, and for so long before He makes a sign of His presence and His power! Men are forward whose God is shy. Men are loud and proud whose God is still and humble.

Far away in Jerusalem, if Simeon were still living what must have been his thoughts?

Did he miss the Mother and the Child? Was he waiting for another glimpse of them to bless his eyes? In the Temple regular was the course and order of

sacrifice and ceremony. Daily on the altars came and went the shadows typical of the Messiah; while the shadow of the Child-Christ, already come and gone for awhile away was reflected on the waters of the Nile.

What spiritual work unknown to the Egyptians was the Christ doing in their land? From the first instant of His birth He was working His Father's will though not in a manifest way. And Mary!—did not virtue go out from her silently yet none the less really in that strange land?

Stars that are never seen are doing silent work all the while in this world of ours. The trees and flowers and fruits and seas know it and feel it. So in Egypt, Jesus, Mary and Joseph were, though hidden, doing wondrous work that will never be known.

Herod died and to Joseph came from heaven thro' an angel a message to return to Judea.

Obscure persons,—the Holy Family was not noticed when they entered Egypt, nor were they missed when they left the place of their exile. Baronius thinks that the flight into Egypt took place in Christ's first year and that He returned when He was nine years of age. Back across the deserts they came again,—enduring privations of hunger and hardship, of weary travel and thirst and of dangers of every kind. The tender feet of Christ are blistered by the scorching sands and for Him to suffer so was a part of the Martyrdom of His Mother; and Joseph suffered, as shall never be known in the charge which was his burden as well as his glory. How few ever travel in spirit those dreary wildernesses! Ah! blessed sands consecrated by the feet of Mary and Jesus and Joseph;—made holy by the passage of Holiness—cry out to the world the mystery of hate that

banished them from home, and the mystery of love that brought them back to Nazareth, where Joseph was to sink to rest after a little while, and where Mary was to watch over her child and our Saviour until the day of His manifestation when again human hate would face Divine Law and pursue and persecute the Christ until He would reach the cross on Calvary,—where He would be found with His Mother standing beside Him!

Hate exiled Him. Love brought Him back. Sin, which is hate, exiles us from God. Love brings us back to the Nazareth of grace where, side by side, we find Jesus and His Mother. Mary brought Him back; and ah! is she not forever and ever bringing us back to Him. Let us then fly to her protection and call on her name,—exiles as we are in this valley of tears and she, who brought Him to Nazareth for us, will bring us to His house of grace and to His home of glory in heaven.

ASPIRATION.

“FROM Egypt have I called thee.”

PRAYER.

O GOD, who wast pleased that thy Word, at the message of an angel, should take flesh in the womb of the blessed Virgin Mary: grant to us thy suppliants, that we who believe her to be truly the Mother of God may be assisted by her intercessions with thee.