

Bellefonte, Pa., December 21, 1928.

# O LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM

O little town of Bethlehem,  
How still we see thee lie!  
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep  
The silent stars go by;  
Yet in thy dark streets shineth  
The everlasting light,  
The hopes and fears of all the years  
Are met in thee tonight.

For Christ is born of Mary,  
And gathered all above,  
While mortals sleep, the angels keep  
Their watch of wondering love.  
O morning star together,  
Proclaim the holy birth,  
And praises sing to God the King,  
And peace to men on earth.  
  
How silently, how silently,  
The wondrous gift is given!  
So God imparts to human hearts,  
The blessings of His heaven.  
No ear may hear His coming,  
But in this world of sin,  
Where meek souls will receive Him still,  
The dear Christ enters in.  
  
O Holy Child of Bethlehem,  
Descend to us, we pray;  
Cast out our sin and enter in,  
Be born in us today.  
We hear the Christmas angels  
The great glad tidings tell,  
O come to us, abide with us,  
Our Lord Emmanuel!

## THE SHEPHERD OF BETH.

Far up the side of a Bethlehem hill stood a quaint shepherd's cot, with the sheepfold nestled near. Along the slopes were little terraced gardens, shaded by olive orchards and fig trees, while at irregular intervals were tenaciously clinging vineyards. The fields adjacent, though rough and stony, were productive of much grain under the constant industry of busy hands.

Some of this group of hills were so rugged that they seemed valueless, but for pasture. And even then there was danger to shepherd and to sheep because of narrow gorges and steep declines.

The town of Bethlehem was situated at the extreme end of the most important of these hills. Toward the sunset it looked abruptly down upon an extended plain where, more than twelve hundred years before, Ruth, the beautiful Moabitess, gleaned in the fields of Boaz. The other end of this long gray hill graduated into the lovely vale of the sunrise, while toward Jerusalem on the other, the descents were steep and the valleys deep.

There was no road leading to this secluded shepherd's home, but plain paths beaten hard by numberless tiny feet, winding in and out to the pasture fields and to the not far distant village.

"Mother, I am lonesome for father today," said the lad as he entered the little home and came near to where Melretha was preparing a lunch of dried grapes, bread and butter.

"I want to go over the pastures where father and I have strolled so often together and watched the flocks. I wish to visit the places where he used to tell me over and over again, and I never grew tired of hearing them, the stories of how David, the shepherd boy, slew the lion and the bear that attacked his flocks. I have been with father even down in the valleys where the grass is green and the water is sweet and still, and over the rugged hills and into the gorges where the shadows of night seem ever to hang, along the slippery paths where David used to lead his sheep. All of these stories come up fresh in my mind today, and make me think of my father, my kind and noble sire."

"I shall not forget that one night I was with him tending the flock when we came across a little crippled lamb. Nothing would do but that I must carry it. Father lifted us up into his bosom. It was so good to be there. I was soon asleep. When I awoke his pillow and his coat overspread me. The tiny sheep was still in my arms. In a moment, as soon as I could think, I was not afraid; I knew father was not far away, for he would never neglect his lambs."

"The very fact that your father kept the sheep that were to be sacrificed in the temple may be why he loved them so. You remember he would talk of the paschal lamb, in the paschal season, and how he would rejoice over the springtime birth of the flock," she responded.

"Yes, mother, and it is fresh in my mind how he would hide within his bosom the first to be born, calling it the 'dear little lamb of God.' He seemed to feel about it in a peculiar fashion. And while I may not know just what, still I fancy I have a kindred feeling in my own heart."

"And would you not love to hear him talk of the King whom he said would one day sit upon the throne of David? Mother, father believed that the King would not long delay his coming."

"His conversations made us eager for the coming of the King," she said.

"And, mother, there were times when he seemed to be with someone whom I could not see. You remember the evening he went away, never to return, as we bent over him we heard him say, 'Jehovah is my shepherd, I do not want.' And as father grew his voice, he whispered, 'Thy rod and thy shepherd's crook they comfort me. Even if I walk in the gorge dark with the gloom of death, I fear no evil, for thou art with me.'"

"Yes, my son," replied his mother, as she dried her cheeks, "I shall never forget his smile and the light in his eyes as he exclaimed with his last breath, 'and I shall dwell in Jehovah's house forever.'"

"Oh, mother, I am not complaining that the Shepherd led him away; but I am so hungry to see him again, to hear his words and to listen to him play on his harp once more."

"My son, no lad ever had so noble a sire. You should never forget his words of counsel, the truth of the wonderful stories he told you. Cher-

ish them always, my boy, for he repeated them to you as he learned them out of that one Book Jehovah handed down to His people. And ever remember as the son of your father, you are the descendant of the shepherd king, and that you are living among those hills over which he led his sheep, and that you have tending his flock when the prophet Samuel called Jesse and his sons to sacrifice, at the time the ruddy lad was anointed king. And you should always be as kind, as faithful and as brave as that singing shepherd prince."

"God grant that I may," answered the boy as he arose and took the lunch his mother had just finished wrapping in a clean white napkin. With a kiss of thanks he passed through the door. As he left the house he paused a moment and said, "Mother, I wish the King would make haste and come, for the world is in need of him. And when he comes, as He is to sit upon David's throne, surely He will visit the city of David, and then maybe I shall see Him."

The sun moved farther and farther downward as he roamed over the hills again, with lunch and sling, doing as he imagined the boy David had done in days so long gone by.

The last rays of sunlight were shot as shining arrows from the golden bow of the west as the lad reached the top of the hill that overlooked the entire region. Bethlehem and the steep declivity that leads into the valley below were clearly visible. And standing there the words of the prophet came strongly to his mind: "But thou Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that shall be ruler in Israel; whose going forth have been from of old, from everlasting."

"My father used to say," he mused half aloud, "that the importance of a city is not dependent upon the number of its inhabitants, the size of its buildings, the height and circumference of its walls, but rather upon the character of its people; that one truly great man with heart stronger than the brass that bars its gates, and head towering above its battlements, will lend luster to its memory when all other glory fades."

His dream was suddenly interrupted; turning he saw slowly approaching down the narrow, winding road, a man from the mountain country, leading an ass upon whose back sat a young and most beautiful woman. The tired beast made poor headway. "We must reach the city before the night grows dark," said the weary, but resolute man. "I fear the inn will be crowded and food and shelter scarce, while already you are hungry and worn," with a tender anxiety in his voice.

"Surely, you have come on a long journey," said the boy with an interested politeness; "will you not accept this?" said he, stepping toward them and holding forth his lunch.

"For her sake, I will," answered the man, in kindly tone, as he received it from the outstretched hand of the generous lad.

"You are very kind," spoke up the woman; "what is your name and where do you live, my noble child?" "Thank you," answered he. "They call me the Shepherd of Beth, and my home is here among the hills of David."

"What a rare and beautiful name, and how charming are these hills as a dwelling place—these hills of David. Yes, these are his hills and yonder is the city of the King. We, too, are of the house and lineage of David. That is why we are come."

Then looking intently at the town beyond, she murmured softly, while a mysterious light shone in her wonderful eyes: "But thou Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me, that shall be ruler in Israel."

And stretching forth her arms, like a mother toward her child, she exclaimed: "Oh, thou dear little Bethlehem town, I greet thee, I love thee, I embrace thee this night!"

The boy's quick ear caught the inspiring words and eagerly he answered, "Oh, that he would hasten, that I might see him, the King in his beauty."

"Yes, he will come." (With the chime of bells in her voice). "Yes, he will come. He may be nearer, even now than you think."

The man urged the slowly moving animal onward. The boy stood gazing as one transfixed, watching their retreating forms wind down the path and up the side of the adjacent hill.

As one enraptured, he became aware of the wonders of the evening. Great streamers of light shone upon welling along the sundown slopes, running along the sky, reaching to the zenith, while the shadows from the valleys crept upward and upward, standing out in bold relief was the sacred town, until at last between the purple of the east and the crimson of the west, the gloom of the earth and the glow of heaven, Bethlehem seemed like a city suspended.

Homeward strolled the boy under the charm of the enchanted evening, while the stars one by one slipping their silver sheaths, ran their long, brilliant blades downward, piercing the blue.

On reaching home he related to his mother, in animated words, the things he had seen and heard, as she urged him to partake of his belated meal. Long they talked until at last he said: "Mother, the paschal season is very near, and the shepherds must, right now, be keeping their upward watches lest something happen to the young lambs. May I go out and be with them, as I used to do when father was here?"

"My child, it is night," said Melretha.

"But, mother, while it is night, yet I do not mind it. I do not want to say every day has its night but I like to think every night has its morning. If the evening and the morning made the first day, will not the evening and the morning make every day? And as night has settled down upon our beloved country, is it not true that the glorious morning will soon dawn? And if Herod is the last king, is it not time for Him to

come whose right it is to reign?" His interest was so pronounced, and his persuasion so persistent that at last with his assurance of returning before the middle watch, she allowed him to go.

Restored and refreshed by his stay at home, he hastened and ere long reached the white patches of sheep gently huddled together beneath the glistening stars. Nearby was the darker group of the watching shepherds, who listened to the lad's voice as he talked kindly to the drowsy flock. They heard his joyous exclamation, "Oh, you dear little lamb of God!"

And they called to him, saying, "Shepherd of Beth, we are glad to see you coming!"

In another moment he was before them holding fondly in his arms a tiny lamb, while the young mother followed close at his heels.

"See! See!" he almost shouted. "It is the paschal lamb, and I am first to find it."

Every shepherd had to come and touch the wee creature and to stroke the anxious, gentle mother. And then they wrapped it carefully in a blanket that it might not chill.

"We have been speaking of Tim-mai, your father," said Beneli, of the number, as at last they turned from the object of so much interest and care. "He was with us last paschal season. We remember how he always carried the Book as well as the staff. He seemed to know in his heart all the pastoral psalms and the prophecies concerning the Messiah. We miss him much tonight. So thrice welcome are you, our fine little Shepherd of Beth."

And thus they talked far on toward midnight of the One by Pro-

sunshine, moonbeam and stargleam were kneaded together in the golden bowl of heaven and poured out by angel hands from a silver chalice to anoint the jeweled bosom of the night.

The boy paused on his homeward way and gazed upon the shimmering fields, while from over the radiant hills came strange music, the newest and sweetest ever heard. It was a solo and a chorus.

"Good tidings of great joy!" rang out the triumphant voice. "For there is born this day in the city of David a Savior which is Christ, the Lord!"

"Glory to God!" shouted back the might chorus from the seraphic squadrons, encircling with their linked wings the joy-smitten summits.

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace and good will to men!"

How long he looked and listened he never knew. His eyes followed the glow as it receded from the love-touched hills, ascending with the song that fainter and fainter grew, until at last nothing was seen in the deep of heaven but one glorious star, before whose brightness all others paled. How near it seemed, this new and wondrous luminary, pulsing with liquid beams which dropped in limpid splendor from its shining points. Had the Angel Heralds set this flaming taper in its crystal socket gleaming down upon sleeping Bethlehem?

At his mother's call he hastened into the house. Would he ever cease his purring converse? Is there any language comparable to the mystic prattle of a heaven-brushed child?

Did he sleep? Through the later watches. But it was to dream of a woman with wondrous eyes stretching out her loving arms toward beautiful Bethlehem, to dream of shep-

behold more closely. He felt like calling to them, like running after them. They had passed so near and yet in their eagerness had not seen him. The Shepherd of Beth stood alone watching and waiting for the star which appeared not that night, and never again upon Bethlehem town and Judean plains did that strange celestial visitant ever shine.

Fear and foreboding struggled in his heart, as at last he turned from his disappointed watchings to enter his cot. His sleep was disturbed by fitful dreams.

The next day it was reported that the eager man and the beautiful woman with the wonderful babe were gone. They were there at sundown, but at sunrise no one knew where they were. As to the Magi it was said they went away rather hurriedly in the early morning toward the fords of the Jordan and were seen no more.

The following day a number of shepherds who had been to take some of the flock to the sacrifice, returned from Jerusalem with reports that brought terror to the inhabitants of Bethlehem. It was that Herod had one of his moods. And when that brutish king, that stranger of human-ity, had one of his moods no one was safe. For it was when he was in one of his moods that all the Sanhedrin were executed save two; in one of his moods Hyrcanus, his wife's grandfather, was killed; it was in one of his jealous fits that his best loved wife, Mariamne, was slain, and his sons murdered, and the High Priest, Aristobulus, was drowned in his bath.

And now that this old diseased and fiendish monarch, green with hate, had one of his moods, it was no wonder Jerusalem and the country round about were agitated.

The unexpected cry checked the blow, but did not entirely stop it. The blade came down with the flat side striking the heroic boy across his radiant forehead, and he sank beneath the stroke.

A scream brought the astonished mother from the door with the swift-ness of the wind and, snatching up her unharmed child, she dashed down the slope of the hill.

The soldier made no attempt to follow, but stood as one turned to stone. He gazed down upon the smitten boy as he muttered under his clinched teeth: "How horrible! Am I commissioned to wage war on defenseless women and helpless children, rather than against tyrants? Coward!"

He snapped as he turned his eyes toward Jerusalem. "I am done!" And he flung down his polluted sword. Then tenderly he bent over the stricken lad.

Three or four furlongs from David's well, which is by the Bethlehem gate, situated on Ramah's crest on the way to Jerusalem, is the tomb of Rachel who mourned for her children unborn, and for whom her children, Joseph and Benjamin, wept because of her untimely going.

And now that hilltop was crowded with heartbroken mothers. And the prolonged wail of lamentation and great mourning was heard as the voice of one, Rachel weeping for her children and would not be comforted because they were not.

And has it not always been thus, childhood and motherhood each grieving for the other?

The young moon hung low and red beyond the hills, as the straggling stars pinned down the curtains of night upon that scene of tears.

Through anxious days and sleepless nights his mother watched beside and tenderly nursed the wounded Shepherd of Beth, while his heroic young life fluttered 'twixt the staying and the going.

But at last the fever left him and he slept. In the morning he stirred; he spoke his first articulate words during all that dreadful time.

"Mother, it seems that I have passed through a long and terrible night," he said.

"Yes, but it is morning now, thank heaven, and you are better, my child."

"And is it morning? It seems that it should be. Please, mother, move my couch before the open door, for I cannot see back here in this dark corner."

"You are in front of the door, my darling," she gently coaxed.

"Mother, I hear your sweet voice and feel your kind hand, but I cannot see your dear face, my plaintively pleaded."

With a fearful eagerness she bent over him and looked into his expressionless eyes. An unbearable pain seized her heart and gripped it till she gasped in anguish. She staggered backward against the lintel which alone kept her from falling. Her nails bit deep into her palms.

"Mother, what's the matter?" he exclaimed. "What hurts you? What horrible monster is dragging you from me? Why is it, I can hear and feel, but cannot see? Why the morning turned to night? Oh, mother, I am afraid! Speak to me touch me, kiss me or I shall die!"

Strength came into her praying soul. She knelt beside the little bed. Gently she stroked his nervous hands; lovingly she caressed the shining scar upon his forehead; fondly she placed her cheeks upon his sightless eyes and sweetly soothed him as only a mother can, as she whispered his own dear words back into his brave, true heart: "I love to think every true night will have its morning."

It was known that a soldier's complete accoutrement was picked up near by where the boy was struck. A strangely silent man took up his dwelling among the fastnesses of the hills, and did many kindnesses to women and children, and who seemed never to tire in his service to the Shepherd of Beth and his mother. And one of the things he often did was to lead the lad over the fields and over the hills while he listened to the sacred history so beautifully and lovingly repeated.

Sometimes at his request the lad was left alone to sit and think as he would wish. One evening Melretha found him in the early twilight, with the soft traces of tears upon his cheeks. And in response to her gentle inquiry, he said: "Mother, I had hoped to see the King one day. Does everyone have a grave in his heart where the fondest dream lies buried?"

"I am inclined to think so my son," she answered. "Yet one should not linger so long at the graveside as to carry the chill of the tomb away with him."

"But to make an occasional visit and to lay there a few memory flowers is not wrong, is it mother? I am not grieving, but I sometimes live to dream beside the grave of my dream." Then he added in a slow and mystical tone, "And if the dead live not whence then the whisperings of the voices I hear? Mother, it is good to turn my face toward heaven, though my eyes cannot see."

Many changes came and went in Bethlehem and the country surrounding. Children grew to manhood those in middle life became old, and the aged fell asleep beneath the snow. The years blushed and paled as they played hide-and-seek with the faces that passed beyond the skyline down into memory's dim vale.

Marvelous stories reached Bethlehem and the hills surrounding, stories concerning an austere man clothed in rough apparel abiding much in the wilderness, whose food was dried locusts dipped in wild honey. Vast multitudes from Jerusalem, Judeah and the land adjacent to the Jordan were attracted to this son of the former High Priest, Zacharias, who came not only with the authority of a high priest, but also in the power of a prophet, proclaiming "the kingdom of heaven stands on the threshold."

Near the close of his few short months of public ministration, there came to this rugged messenger a young man matchless in his comeliness, holding converse with him and demanding his priestly anointing.

(Continued on page 7, Col. 1.)

