

# Legends of the Boy Christ

ONE bright, sunny morning in the month of Adar, at the end of winter, shortly after the little town of Nazareth, in Judea, was astir, there trooped from the village a crowd of merry children, laughing for sheer happiness, as if their hearts sang with the song of dancing sunbeams.

Running and skipping along the road they went, blithe and gay, until they came to a great tree by the roadside, where they stopped, and clustering about a child in their midst, proceeded to do a strange thing.

They cast their mantles and tunics from them to the ground and prostrated themselves before the one in their midst; then left him, and, running into a field, gathered flowers. He that sat alone, a pensive look upon his youthful face, had the appearance of an angel.

Soon the little playmates, their arms laden with blossoms, returned, and weaving a wreath of glory flowers, crowned his head.

Into his hands they placed a scepter of burning gladiolus. And about him they joyously scattered the fresh, odorous blooms, and while he smiled upon them they proclaimed the little playmate, Jesus, the son of the village carpenter, their king.

While they delighted in their worship of their little playmate, along the road in the distance could be seen two men coming, with heads sorrowfully bent, carrying between them the dead body of a boy.

"What has happened?" the children cried.

"Alas!" responded one of the men, the child was playing in the forests yonder and methinks, like many boys, robbed the nests of some little birds.

"Presently, climbing a tree, he did put his hand into the nest, and lo! there was hidden a poisonous serpent, that sank its fangs into his flesh. He suffered terrible agony and, sliding from the tree, by until he died. There we found him."

"Come," the boys said, "and tell our king."

Before the crowned one they paused and told the story.

Rising, he said: "Follow me."

Silently they wended their way back to the woods. "Lead us to the tree," said the child king. And there he passed.

"Oh, treacherous serpent, I command thee to come down," he called. And lo! above the nest appeared a venomous head, and soon the long, glistening body of a deadly snake came writhing down the trunk.

"Go, suck from that child's hand all the poison thou didst place therein from thy fangs."

To the amazement of the beholders, who sank on their knees, the serpent obeyed. Then, drawing away, it writhed in the agony of its own poison and shivered to death.

"Arise," said the child, laying his soft hand on the face of the one who seemed dead.

A moment passed. Those nearby looked on breathlessly. Then the face of the dead boy broke into a smile, as though he were having pleasant dreams, and he opened his eyes.

It is related in the Arabic Gospel of the Infancy that afterward the boy, Simon Zelotes, became one of the disciples of Jesus.

Of the days and doings of the boy Jesus in Nazareth the four gospels tell us comparatively little. It was natural, therefore, that about this unknown existence of the Adorable Child the Christians of the early church deeply pondered and that the rich imaginations of medieval times should have woven a vesture of traditional lore.

The holy family returned from Egypt when Jesus was old enough to walk. In many of the old pictures we see the Divine Child leading a mule or clinging close to his mother. Of that early life in the land of the Pyramids, too, early tradition has woven a pleasing fabric of legends.

Among the oldest of these is the ancient belief that whenever the blessed Mary placed the clothing of the holy babe upon trees to dry the barren limbs burst into bloom.

Another is that when the child wandered into the forest, where lions and panthers and all manner of wild beasts lived, they came forth to do him homage.

Still another, that, during the flight from Bethlehem, when Herod pursued them, mountains opened to receive Joseph and Mary and the holy babe into a secure refuge; that on hot days, as they reposed under trees, the boughs bent over to shield them from the sun, and that as they passed along flowers sprang up in their pathway from the arid sand, and that the barren desert bloomed where they passed it.

It is told that when they journeyed through a forest all the trees bowed low in worship of the Holy One that passed by, and that only one tree—the aspen—held aloof, proud and scornful. It is also related that the babe gazed upon the tree and that, overcome with terror, it began to tremble, and was trembled ever since.

Only the aspen stood erect and free, Scorning to join the voiceless worship pure; But see, he cast one look upon the tree, Struck to the heart she trembled overmore.

It is also told that when the holy family came in sight of the sphinx the great beast told the eternal secret, and as they passed the temples the old gods fell from their thrones.

And, coming nigh to On, Where stands the house of Ra, its mighty god, Cut in black porphyry, prodigious, feared, Fell from his seat.

Some writers of old say that the holy child never went to school. They love to write of his wandering alone into the forests and talking to the birds and insects. And they tell how dumb beasts were endowed with speech when he was with them.

Many old legends concern the early schooling of the boy Christ. It is related that when a child he was taken to Zaccheus, who began to try to teach him the alphabet.

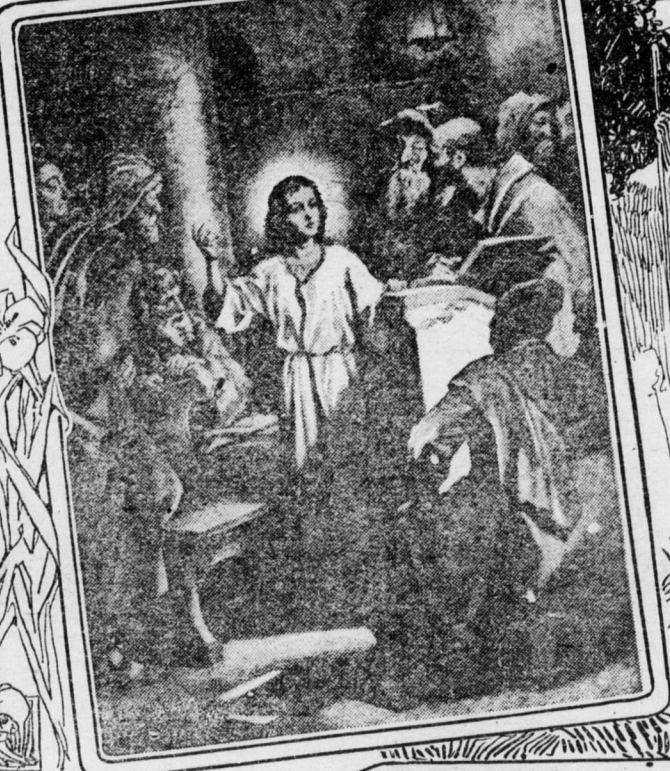
"My teacher," the marvelous boy is said to have uttered, "thou wouldst teach me, but I shall teach thee." And then, while the old man listened, thunderstruck, he repeated an alphabet which the other had never



JESUS' FIRST VIEW OF JERUSALEM (Painting by NEUWELBERG)



CHRIST AND JOHN (Painting by WENTWORTH)



CHRIST IN THE TEMPLE WITH THE DOCTORS (Painting by BOGHEAN)

learned. He told Zaccheus he had lived from all time and knew all things. Zaccheus, amazed, declared he could teach the child nothing.

Some of the legends, as unworthy as the minds that created them, tell that the child struck his teacher dead. Others tell of his inflicting playmates with death and blindness. In the world of legendary lore, where one finds stories ingeniously simple and charming, it is to be expected, also, that there are crude and cruel traditions.

According to some stories, the children of Nazareth must have found Jesus a wonderful playmate. There was hardly any wish of theirs which he did not fulfill. One day, it is told, some of the little ones wished for fruit.

"Oh, how I would like an apple!" said one.

"And I some figs!" rejoined another.

"How I would love some citron and grapes!" quoth a third.

Jesus looked upon them and they all seemed so hungry and so anxious that he made a sign in the air and spoke a mystic word. And lo!

A green sprout curled from the ground. Pale green leaves burst forth. The plant rose up and up and up.

"Oh!" gasped all the children with great wonder, as before their gaze the plant rose, higher and higher, spreading out limbs—growing larger and stronger, and blooming with flowers. Then the tree, as they looked, bore fruit—apples and citrons, and grapes and figs and whatever their hearts wished.

Here is another story of those childhood days: A house was being built near the small and modest home of the holy family. One day a great uproar arose and Joseph, stepping from his carpenter shop, saw that a man had fallen from the roof and had been killed.

"Alas! Mary," he said, entering the shop, where Jesus was playing, "a man has fallen and broken his limbs; methinks he is dead."

Springing from the floor, the child, with an expression of great solicitude on his face, rushed into the street. The little crowd parted before him.

He peered into the white face of the dead man. Then his voice rang clear and sweet:

"I say unto thee, arise and do thy work."

The dead man's eyes opened, the blood disappeared from his face and his injuries healed. And he arose and went back to his task.

At another time Jesus was playing with some children on a roof—one of those simple, childish games like that of "tag" to-day. The children were very happy until one, falling at full length, went tumbling over the parapet. A cry arose. Peering over the stone wall, the face of Jesus turned white—his little playmate was dead.

Imagine his distress when the parents of the child appeared and accused Jesus of having pushed the little playmate over the wall! Imagine the anguish of Joseph and Mary at the grave accusation! Then Jesus, turning to the dead child, called:

"Zeno! Zeno! Arise! Arise, Zeno, and tell them if I cast thee down."

And Zeno arose, laughing, clasping and kissing the hand of Jesus, murmuring tenderly, gratefully:

"No, no! Thou didst not cast me down."

Until his manhood, when he began his mission, it is believed he pined the trade of carpenter. Many, indeed, are the stories of his life in the carpenter shop of Nazareth.



THE CHRIST CHILD (From painting by WENTWORTH)



"But why weepest thou?" asked Jesus, who was with him. "This is readily amended. Be at peace."

Then he directed Joseph to hold one end of the throne, while he took hold of the other. Both pulled, and behold! the throne assumed the proper size.

One Sabbath morning, with a half-dozen playmates, the child Jesus, one old legend runs, went to play by the banks of the River Jordan. There had been a heavy rain the night before, and the tall trees were still dripping and the sand was wet.

Sitting on the sand, the little ones began to fashion, children-wise, animals of various kinds. Jesus, fashioning dogs and cats and all manner of wild things, raised his hand and spoke—and, lo, the animals of sand lived and moved.

The children shouted. Their laughter of delight rang through the fresh morning air. Some of the animals ran away, others were changed into sand again.

Then digging his small hands into the sand, the child said:

"I'll make 12 sparrows."

And he sat them in a row before him.

By this time several Pharisees, who had seen the children playing happily on the Sabbath, returned with Joseph, whom they said should censure Jesus.

"Thou art breaking the Sabbath my child," said the old man.

The child pondered, looked at the birds of his creation, then rising, he

Clapped His hands and lo! They chirruped, spread their wings and flew away.

In these old legends there is a great deal of the fanciful, the legend of the boy and the animals of sand shows the quaint conceits of the early Christians, who delighted in miracles and whose imagination was excited by this unknown period of the Saviour's life.

One can well imagine him as a child wandering away from Nazareth, all alone, and sitting by the Jordan or forest streams and communing of the great things that came to him.

He could not have been like other children, for he was wise beyond his years. One can see him, as fair as the lilies and roses themselves, caressing the flowers as he passed by in the meadows of Judea, and of his sitting crowned in an aureole of sunbeams, listening to the divine rapture of the birds singing their morning hymns.

He must often have been alone for with the petty quarrels of the other children of the town, with the little rivalries of his relatives, he could have had little sympathy. Doubtless as a child, his poet's soul soared into the skies, and his seer's vision saw the future in the cumulus clouds. All great souls live alone, and are lonely in the midst of men. About a beautiful life humanity loves to build legends, and the simple life which leads to spiritual greatness must to men be made unusual with a halo of miracles.

Many stories are told of the child Jesus having raised people from the dead in the little known days of his childhood. It is related, too, that when his parents took him to Jerusalem—on the same journey when he had the famous discussion with the learned doctors in the temple—he paused at the sight of Jerusalem, and a spirit of prophecy revealed to him its doom.

Prophetic Beethoven.

Has anyone remarked on the startling resemblance to the sharp toot of a motor horn of those four-times repeated double notes in Beethoven's "Second Symphony," which demonstrates how a great imaginative genius may be far ahead of his contemporaries? The classic example is Shakespeare and the telegraph. When these familiar notes are heard in the symphony the audience may be seen to look anxiously over the shoulder and prepare to cut and run.—London Chronicle.

All Going Out.

Judge (sternly)—Three times in a month! What do you make of this, sir?

Rastus (apologetically)—Deed I doan make nuffin'. You fellows up here seem to be de only ones dat get any 'cuminary profit out of hauling me up.—Puck.



THE CHILDHOOD OF CHRIST (Painting by KONIGSBERG)

Many are the tales they tell of the wonderful things he made when he was but a little boy. Precocious he must have been, and early he became indispensable to his foster father, Joseph.

Joseph, we learn, from these legends, was none too good a carpenter—that is, judged by the modern standards of carpentering. Often he would cut pieces of wood that were too long or too short; for his means of measurement were faulty. What, then, did Jesus do but take the wood and stretch it or shorten it to the desired length.

People told Strange tales of those hid days—now, at his toil, Touching a plank, it stretched to rightful length, Or shortened at his will—the dead wood quick To live again and serve him.

In those days, it is related, Joseph was awarded a commission to make a throne for a king at Jerusalem. It was to be an elaborate affair, as all thrones are, with great arms and twisted legs and grotesque carvings—one of those things only kings like to sit in.

Jesus spent much time watching Joseph hewing and carving the wood. Joseph worked patiently from morning until night and the work required two whole years. And then, imagine the poor carpenter's disappointment when it was taken to Jerusalem and he discovered that it was too small for its place.

Alas! he had made a grave error. Yes, they had given him the right dimensions, but, as it often happened, and carpenters do still, he made the mistake. Two entire years of labor wasted! The poor man was disappointed.