

The Star of Bethlehem

THE story of the star of Bethlehem has ever been a favorite one with painters and poets and has been a subject of serious study by theologians and scientists. Many astronomers have asserted that the heavenly visitant was a comet and have even sought to identify it with some of the comets now known. Churchmen, on the other hand, have combated these attempts to ascribe a natural cause to the phenomenon and have contended that the gospel text shows the star to have been sent by a miracle to guide the wise men to the Christ Child. One of the favorite theo-

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

Nineteen hundred years have passed, and the Child has become the leader of the nations. Only three important countries are now outside of Christian rule. Of these Turkey is being dismembered, Japan is seriously considering the inclusion of a large part of Christianity in her state religion, and China has gone through a revolution many of the leaders of which were Christian converts and which resulted in establishing a republic after the model of our own.

Not only is the whole earth being brought under Christian domination, but the Christian nations themselves are finding new depths of meaning in the Master's utterances, and new cults are springing into life to carry into effect some of his neglected teachings. Never in history has there been found a word so vital that important new movements for humanity were found-

The Madonna

By WALTON WILLIAMS
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WITH the painters of the middle ages the Madonna was the most popular subject. This was especially true of that supremely great school that flourished during the Italian renaissance period. In earlier Christian art the Virgin did not so largely figure. It was only with the council of Ephesus and its glorification of Mary as the "mother of God" and the development of the doctrine of the immaculate conception—not only as to the birth of Jesus, but as to that of Mary herself—that the ascendancy of the Virgin both in the church and in church art was established.

It was not till the wonderful renaissance of Italy, the golden age of art, however, that the Madonna became the favorite theme of painters. The vogue started with Fra Angelico, Fra Bartolommeo and others of the first painters of the era and reached its height under Raphael. The three great figures of the renaissance period in art were Raphael himself, Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci. Angelo painted a few Madonnas, some of them unfinished, but they do not rank with most of his work. Da Vinci has one or two Madonnas that are up to his other great paintings. But it was Raphael of angelic face and character; Raphael, the prince of painters of all ages, whose Madonnas, both in number and quality, outrank those of any other painter, ancient or modern.

Raphael's "Sistine Madonna" is not only his own masterpiece, but by universal consent ranks as the greatest painting in the world. Only less famous than this is his "Madonna of the Chair," while his "La Jardiniere," "Madonna of the Finger" and many more are celebrated.

Raphael Sanzio or Santi was born in 1483 and died of a fever at Rome when thirty-seven. He was the son of a painter and studied at one time under Perugino. His first work to become famous was "The Coronation of the Virgin," which appeared in 1503. "The Marriage of the Virgin" was painted the next year, shortly after which Raphael went to live in Florence, where most of his Madonnas were finished. His fame had now become so great that he was called to Rome to decorate the Vatican. It was not till toward the end of his life that Raphael developed his own style and did his greatest work, the "Sistine Madonna" being his last great painting. He was also an architect and was appointed the chief architect of St. Peter's in Rome.

Another Madonna, a reproduction of which is here shown, is a detail of the painting by Hans Holbein the younger, known as the "Madonna of the Meyer Family." It represents the Virgin and the child Jesus being worshiped by Burgomaster Meyer, his two wives (one deceased) and some of his children. Just why Burgomaster Meyer, his two wives and children should be immortalized in this holy company is not apparent. The burgomaster paid for the picture. Members of the family are omitted in the reproduction.

There were two Hans Holbeins, father and son, both painters. The younger was practically a contemporary of Raphael, being born in Bavaria in 1497. One of his best known portraits is that of Erasmus. Several of his religious pictures are also celebrated.

The painting of the "Madonna and Child" by C. von Bodenhausen, here shown, is more modern.



in the early days of the church that a luminous angel shining like a star led the magi on their way. An explanation was that the Holy Spirit took the form of a star, as he did that of a dove at the baptism of Jesus by John. The beautiful tale of the star of Bethlehem is contained in the second chapter of Matthew:

"Now, when Jesus was born in Bethlehem, in Judaea, in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east and are come to worship him."

Herod is troubled on hearing this and calls in his chief priests and scribes to learn where Christ should be born. They told him in Bethlehem. His account goes on:

"When Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, inquired of them what time the star appeared, and he sent them into Bethlehem, saying, Go and search diligently for the young child, and when ye have found him bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also."

"When they had heard the king they departed, and lo, the star which they saw in the east went before them, and came and stood over where the young child was."

"When they saw the star they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. They did not return to Herod, howbeit were warned in a dream."

"Another story of the Nativity that made an equal appeal to artists is the story of the shepherds. This occurs in the second chapter of Luke:

"There were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, watching over their flock by night."

"Lo, the angel of the Lord appeared upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them, and they were sore afraid."

"The angel said unto them, Fear not, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all men."

"Unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord."

"This shall be a sign unto you; ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger."

"Suddenly there was with the multitude of the heavenly host a great noise, and saying:

ed on it so long after its first promulgation.

Now for the first time in history there is a real and tangible hope that universal peace may come, thus fulfilling the angelic prophecy made to the shepherds.

Still the star shines across the ages, and still is heard the heavenly voice of "Peace on earth, good will toward men."

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