

### Christmas at Home: A Sermon to Children.

BY BISHOP ARTHUR CLEVELAND COXE.

David earnestly asked leave of me that he might run to Bethlehem his city; for there is a yearly sacrifice there for all the family. — 1 Sam. xx. 6.

It is now going on towards two thousand years since our dear Saviour came into the world to live and die for us poor sinners. And the text tells us of something that was done in the house of one of his forefathers—a thousand years before Christ came; so we may justly say that it carries us back to three thousand years ago. Is it not wonderful that we in America should have any knowledge of the private life of a family in Asia, after so many hundreds of years? And is it not more wonderful that their story has something to do with our own lives, and with all that Christians throughout the world are thinking of at this joyous Christmas season? You know that Christ was the son of David; that is to say, one of David's descendants; and David was the son of Jesse, who lived in Bethlehem. You see, at once, then, my dear children, that the text has something to do with Bethlehem, and so with our thoughts and our rejoicings at Christmas.

There is a great deal that is very interesting about the text, and, if you will listen to me, I think you will say so too. In the first place, I have told you about David and Jesse, and now let me tell you about Bethlehem. This place may still be seen, though it is very poor and miserable now, perched on a height of the hill-country of Judea. Its name means the *house of bread*; and who can doubt that it was so named because from the house of Jesse, and the city of David, was to come forth the Bread of Life for the world. So it was written by the prophets: "Thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda; for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel." Matt. ii. 6.

And next, how interesting it is to observe that there was a family gathering there once a year, for all the children of Jesse. And it was a religious festival, you see; it was a family sacrifice, and all the sacrifices of Israel looked forward to Christ's sacrifice; to the breaking of that Bread of Life of which Bethlehem was a pledge and a promise. Now, dear children, when you put all these things together—the yearly family gathering and sacrifice, at Bethlehem, in the house of Jesse; and with David, the son of Jesse, to make it specially a token of the promised Son of David,—doesn't it all look as if it were a sort of Christmas that was kept there; looking forward, just as we look back to the time when angels chanted amid the hills of Bethlehem, and said, "To you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord?"

Well, if so, then Christmas is a feast which is already three thousand years old, and here is Bible warrant, or good reason, for something very much like it: A yearly sacrifice it was in honor of "the Lamb of God that was slain from the foundation of the world," and with it there was a delightful home feast and family gathering; just such as we have now at Christmas all over the earth wherever the Sun of Righteousness has risen upon the people that sat in darkness and the shadow of death.

Now let us see what the old Israelites did at these yearly feasts. In the first place, all the family had to be present, if possible. David says to Jonathan, in the story of which the text is part (1 Sam. xx. 29), "My brother hath commanded me to be there . . . let me go away, I pray thee, and see my brethren." It is very pretty to observe how this brother was anxious to please his old father, and so had sent a message to David not to be absent, even though he was now in the service of King

Saul. Nothing must keep him from coming and gladdening the heart of their dear old father, who wanted to see all his children—just as your fathers and mothers want to see you all at home, and to make you all happy at this season, in our days.

Then, you will wonder whether they had Christmas-trees there in Jesse's house: and I answer that they had something like it, in all probability; for how did those old Israelites keep their feast-days? They had a feast of tabernacles, answering in many respects to our Christmas, when they were commanded to make booths, or little tents out of the branches of trees, and to keep the feast in them. "And thou shalt rejoice in thy feast" says the law. "And ye shall take you on the first day the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm-trees, and the boughs of thick-trees, and willows of the brook, and ye shall rejoice before the Lord your God." Lev. xxiii. 40. Now I am sure you will say all this looks very much like Christmas, and if that was the way Jesse kept his holidays with his family, they had something like a Christmas-tree there in Bethlehem, three thousand years ago.

But did they have innocent sports in those holiday times, so long ago? I think they did; for, in the Book of Judges we have another reference to the very same sort of festival in Shiloh (Judg. xxi. 19). Now Shiloh is a name of Christ. The Hebrews looked for Christ by that name: for Jacob, their father, had said, "until Shiloh come," and Shiloh means the Prince of Peace. It also means the *One who shall be sent* (Gen. xl. 10). There was a place named Shiloh, then; and it is a little singular that Bethlehem and Shiloh—just the two places which kept the Hebrews in mind of a promised Saviour—are the places marked in the Scripture story by a yearly festival of the kind we have been considering. And, it seems, at Shiloh they kept the holiday with sports among the young; for the Lord who made little birds to sing among the branches, and little lambs to frisk about the meadows, made little girls and boys to enjoy themselves in the same way. "And there is no harm in it, but much good, provided always it is moderate and decorous, for the Bible gives no countenance to the very indecent dancing and romping which, I am, sorry to say, many who ought to know better—even among Christians—practice to their shame.

I need not say that they had also plentiful tables at these feasts; tables loaded with good things; the bounties of him "who giveth us richly all things to enjoy." 1 Tim. vi. 17. And for the poor who had not, they were commanded to provide liberally, as God had provided for them. They were to make them (Neh. viii. 15; Esther ix. 22.) "days of feasting and joy, and of sending portions one to another, and gifts to the poor." So you see just where all our Christmas ideas come from, and how happy we are in knowing the Gospel which teaches us (Psa. ii. 11.) how to "rejoice with trembling;" that is, not like heathen, who make themselves brute-beasts in their festivals, but with a holy fear lest we should forget to behave like the children of God. Old Job (Job i. 5.) as we read in his marvelous history, was very anxious about his children, lest in their feasting they should forget their Father in heaven, or even take his holy name in vain.

And this leads me to two things which I wish to say as ending my sermon; one is, that we learn by all this the beauty and the happiness of every family that is truly Christian; and the other is, that all our joy and happiness come only from the holy Son of David, the Shiloh of Bethlehem. And just another idea, on which I shall not dwell, chimes in with these two: it is that the Old Testament is full of Christ to those who "search

the Scriptures," and that all these old stories were meant to teach us that Christ and Christmas times were always kept in view among good Hebrews, for God "spake unto them by the prophets." So, also, we see how true it is, as St. James has reminded us that "known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world." Acts xv. 18.

But I say, remember all I have told you, and all your life long recall, at this happy season, the family feast at Bethlehem, and learn how to make home happy by being good children to your fathers and mothers, and loving to all your sisters and brothers. What a glorious sight is a truly Christian home! In fact, there is no such thing as a true home on earth where people forget to live together so as to be sure of an eternal home in heaven.

And again, how is it that you have so many blessings in your homes, and in the house of God, where we are all one family around Christ's holy table? Only a few hundred years ago, on this very spot stood the huts of savages, who knew not God; and it makes one shudder to think of their wretched lives, and of all their neglect of their miserable wives and children, especially at this terrible winter season. And now see what a difference there is; how the wilderness is made "to blossom as the rose." Yes, and see how the cold, dark winter, too, is made to shine by these festivals, and to be as cheerful as any days of the summer: all because it reminds us of the promise: "Unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in his wings." Mal. iv. 2. You will find it is all because we know "the true God, and Jesus Christ whom he has sent." The more you think of it, then, the more you will see the truth that there is no happiness apart from the Gospel of Christ; and may he be the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls, dear children, and lead you into the green pastures and by the still waters of Christian comfort and Christian hope, till you come to the better country, where the Son of David gathers all his children into an eternal home.—S. S. Times.

Besides his school for girls at Northfield, Mr. Moody is to start a school for boys at his Massachusetts home. He has bought three hundred acres of land for a farm, and he purposes work and play and study for the boys whom he undertakes to educate. The new farm school is to be on the family plan—a group of a dozen boys or so in a family home, instead of on the dormitory plan. It is not to be a reformatory institution, "My plan is," says Mr. Moody, "to take boys of unfortunate parents who are not able to educate them; but the boys shall be promising ones, and such as, if educated, would make good preachers and missionaries." The tuition bills are to be graduated according to circumstances. When it seems necessary, the boys will be taken without cost to themselves or their friends. About fifty thousand dollars for this enterprise is already in hand—two or five thousand dollars of this being from Mr. Hiram Camp, of New Haven, Connecticut. There will be no debts incurred in building or managing the institution. When Mr. Moody was asked if he thought a school of this kind was needed in this country, his characteristic answer was "Yes, ten thousand of them. What is more needed than religious, moral, and intellectual training for boys who would not otherwise get it?" The first family home is to be ready for boys about the first of the new year. The idea is a good one, and it bids fair to be well carried out.—Sunday School Times.

A man who is sixty years old has spent twenty years of his life in sleep unless he is a laborer on a morning newspaper, when he, probably, has been awake sixty-five years.

### Bible Study.

BY REV. J. REID.

Continual, systematic Bible study is common in Britain among all classes of the Christian people. Even those in the highest positions in the land are known to spend a portion of their busiest days in prayerfully reading God's word. Among the numerous Scripture students in the highest ranks of society may be named the Earl of Shaftsbury, the Lord Chamberlain of the City of London; and Her Majesty's Prime Minister, W. E. Gladstone, who is a distinguished classical scholar, but still more famous as an earnest Christian man, who devoutly sets apart a time for the daily private study of the Bible, and who does much to encourage and assist those near his home to "search the Scriptures." So much so, that the farmers and servants on his estate almost grudge his absence, when from home on state duties. But even when most busy with Parliamentary duties, he is known, (in spite of his care to avoid publicity in such matters) to visit sick and poor people, comforting them with lessons from the Book of books.

Soon after his wonderful political campaign in Scotland, and just when Her Majesty had called him to be Prime Minister of the Nation, he found time to seek out a poor, aged man, who used to earn his bread by sweeping the street-crossings near the House of Commons, and who had been missed from his place by the keen eye of the First Ruler of the land under the Queen, and visited with so much benefit that when the city missionary called, he found the old man's room made comfortable by medical attendance, nursing, etc.; and also that the evening of the old pilgrim's days had been made brighter than his morning by the blessing of God to his soul, through means of the living word of God as read to him by W. E. Gladstone.

But in the humbler walks of life, I know young Christian women who have to earn their own living by the labor of their hands, who have taken the first prizes offered for Bible knowledge, ranking them above many noble theological students in the competition for the best of honors.—Pacine.

### The Oleander.

Mr. Shirley Hibbard says: "This handsome shrub is one of the most poisonous of its class, and therefore should be handled with care, for if the hand is cut when pruning it a dangerous wound may be the result. In Dr. Hogg's Vegetable Kingdom occurs the following respecting it: 'It is one of the most beautiful window plants when covered with its large rose-like blossoms; but in these blossoms the weapon of death resides. During the Peninsular war a number of French soldiers who went out foraging near Madrid returned laden with the fruits of their search. One of the number, with the view of securing some wood to make skewers for the meat, cut a quantity of oleander boughs, and having stripped them of their bark, used the wood in the meat. The result was that out of twelve who ate of the roast seven died, and the rest were dangerously ill. The poisonous principle is so subtle that its exhalations alone are sufficient to cause serious accident, and even death to those who recline or sleep for any time under their influence.'

It may be added to what Mr. Hibbard says, that the stories, in all modern botanical works about Azalea and Rhododendron of modern botany yielding poisonous honey, are purely fictitious. The Oleander was the Rhododendron of the ancients, and when the name was transferred to our present plants, the poisonous reputation went with the name.—Gardener's Monthly.

### Religious Grumblers.

Everybody thinks himself a judge of a sermon, but nine out of ten might as well pretend to weigh the moon. I believe that at bottom most people think it an uncommonly easy thing to preach, and that they could do it amazingly well themselves.

Every donkey thinks itself worthy to stand with the king's horses; every girl thinks she could keep house better than her mother; but thoughts are not facts, for the sprat thought itself a herring, but the fisherman knew better. I try my hand at preaching myself, and in my poor way I find it no easy thing to give the folks something worth hearing, and if the fine critics who reckon us off on their thumbs would but try their own hands at it they might be a little more quiet. Dogs, however, always will bark, and what is worse, some of them will bite, too; but let decent people do all they can, if not to muzzle them, yet to prevent their doing any great mischief.

It is a dreadful thing to see a happy family of Christians broken up by talkative fault-finders, and all about nothing, or less than nothing. Small is the edge of the wedge, but when the devil handles the beetle, churches are soon split to pieces, and men wonder why. The fact is the worst wheel of the cart creaks most, and one fool makes many, and thus many a congregation is set at ears with a good and faithful minister who would have been a lasting blessing to them if they had not chased away their best friend. Those who are at the bottom of the mischief have generally no part or lot in the matter of true godliness, but, like sparrows, light over corn which is not their own, and like jack-daws pull to pieces what they never helped to build.

From mad dogs and grumbling professors may we all be delivered, and may we never take the complaint from either of them.—Spurgeon.

### Disease Produced by Sleeping Together.

During the night there is considerable exhalation from our bodies, and at the same time we absorb a large quantity of the surrounding air. Two healthy young children sleeping together will mutually give and receive healthy exhalations; but the old, weak person near a child will, in exchange for health, return weakness. A sick mother near her daughter communicates sickly emanations to her; if the mother has a cough of long duration, the daughter will sometimes cough and suffer by it; if the mother has pulmonary consumption, it will ultimately be communicated to her child. It is known that the bed of a consumptive is a powerful and sure source of contagion, as well for men as for women, and the more so for young persons. Parents and friends ought to oppose as much as is in their power the sleeping together of old and young persons, of the sick and of the healthy. Another reason ought to forbid every mother and nurse keeping small children with them in bed; notwithstanding the advice of prudence, no year passes that we do not hear of a new involuntary infanticide. A baby full of life, health and vigor in the evening, is found the next morning suffocated by its parents or nurse.—Ee.

Malaria has at length aroused the citizens of Washington, D. C., to take decided action. A delegation of prominent men have waited on President Hayes a few days ago, asking that he would again call attention of Congress to the feverish-morass which partially fills the channel of the Potomac in front of the city. It is believed that the malaria which prevails in Washington much of the time is due to this foul marsh.

What a relief it is to turn from the political editorials in exchanges, to the calm, dignified statements to be found in the local notices of potent medicines! There is no lying in patent medicine advertisements.