

Signs

OF THE
TIMES



DECEMBER 1968



Silent Night, Holy Night

Stille Nacht, Irregular

FRANZ GRÜNER, 1818

1. Sil - ent night, ho - ly night, All is calm, all is bright
2. Sil - ent night, ho - ly night, Dark - ness flies, all is light;
3. Sil - ent night, ho - ly night, Son of God, love's pure light;
4. Sil - ent night, ho - ly night, Wan - drous star, lend thy light;

Round you vir - gin moth - er and Child! Ho - ly In - fant, so ten - der and mild
Shep - herds hear the an - gels sing, 'Al - le - lu - ia! hail the King
di - ant beams from Thy ho - ly face, With the dawn of re - deem - ing grace
an - gels let us sing, Al - le - lu - ia in to our King

The Everlasting Song

*It must have been an awesome night
When the angel choir came
And lit the hills of Bethlehem
And sang His holy name.*

*And still that chorus echoes on—
His name rings round the earth—
As grateful voices sing again
The story of His birth.*

—D. J. Silver.

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

A family magazine dedicated to promoting evangelical Christianity, upholding Jesus Christ as man's only Saviour and soon-returning King, and presenting the Bible as the inspired Word of God and our only rule of faith.

VOLUME 83, NUMBER 12 :: DECEMBER, 1968

EDITOR --- Robert H. Parr

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR - Arthur S. Maxwell

OFFICE EDITOR - - - - - David L. Stokes

CIRCULATION MANAGER - - - Allan Maberly

LAYOUT - - - - - Howard G. Davis

HOMELY HOMILIES

The Mischief Maker

It was a particularly harrassing morning. We'd slept in, the porridge had burned, the children were unco-operative (or so I thought), and my usual household chores seemed sheer drudgery.

The house seemed unusually quiet. With startling suddenness I realized my three-year-old toddler was not around.

"Oh, dear!" I sighed, "more trouble." For, you see, "Master three" was the most mischievous child ever, of that I was sure! If there was something to be pulled off a shelf, or dragged out of a cupboard, or smashed to fragments, our fine young son was the one to do it. So on this nerve-racking morning, I was sure the silence spelt more mischief, and I tip-toed from room to room to catch him in the very act! And what a spanking was in store!

Then it was I came to the lounge room and peeped in. There were many things in there that he was forbidden to touch. What a surprise I had! For there on his knees my little boy was—"just talking to Jesus, Mummy."

*"Dear Lord and Father, help me—
Never critical of others be.
Help me pause midst toil and care
To speak a word to Thee in prayer."*

—Jean Bakker.

EDITORIALS

The Celebrators	2
"Sweet Jesus, Save Me"	3
The Great Illusion	5

ARTICLES

What to Give	L. Jayda	5
Phillips Brooks's Carol of Remembrance	Vincent Edwards	6
Mister, Jesus Is Coming Again!	Billy Graham	8
I Want a God of Justice	Connie J. French	12
The Stairway of the Sky	Pearl C. B. Ellison	16
How Phoney Is Your Christmas?	Dr. Lionel H. Turner	18
Why I Believe	George W. Rollo	22
An Editor Translates the Magna Carta of the Human Spirit	W. Austin Townsend	24
One Family's Christmas	Robert H. Parr	28

REGULAR FEATURES

Think on These		6
Seven Facts	Rex D. Edwards	10
A Word to Remember	Roy C. Naden	11
Bruce Johnston's Bible Crossword	Bruce Johnston	14
Lines That Linger		21
Ask Desmond Hills	Desmond B. Hills	26
Bible Questions Answered	Dr. Desmond Ford	30
A Story for the Children	Myrtle O'Hara	32

OUR COVER PICTURE

This scene of Mary and Joseph by the Bethlehem manger was painted by D. J. Silver of South Australia especially for us for this issue.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES:

Single Copies	20 cents
One-year subscriptions, paid in Australia for mailing to addresses in Australia, Mandated Territories, and Pacific Islands	\$2.00
British Commonwealth Countries	\$2.80
Foreign Countries	\$2.90
New Zealand (N.Z. Currency)	\$2.00
Single Copies	20

• A publication of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the SIGNS OF THE TIMES is printed and published monthly by the SIGNS PUBLISHING COMPANY (Australasian Conference Association Limited, Proprietors), Warburton, Victoria, Australia and is registered as a periodical in Victoria.

• All subscriptions should be accompanied by cash, such remittance being made payable to the Signs Publishing Company. All New Zealand remittances should be made by Money Order, as N.Z. Postal Notes or Stamps are not negotiable in Australia. Please notify changes of address promptly, stating both old and new addresses.



We are now entering the era of supersonic passenger travel. This is the first British-assembled version of the Anglo-French airliner the Concorde, emerging from its hangar at Filton, Bristol, England, recently.

editorial

interpreting **signs of the times**

The Celebraters

IT IS HARD not to be cynical about Christmas sometimes. Not that we mean to be so about the Christ child, the solemn enactment in tableau and pantomime as portrayed by little children, the holy joy of Christmas services in the churches, the happy good fellowship that the season engenders, the unselfish thought lavished upon others, the memory of angel choruses or the visit of the three wise men. But it is hard to be other than cynical when you observe some of the people who—for want of a better word—"celebrate" Christmas.

It is one thing to sing with meaning and zeal:

"Come and behold Him, born the King of angels!

O come, let us adore Him, O come, let us adore Him,

O come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord."

It is something else again to celebrate Christmas with the glasses clinking and the liquor flowing and the slurred singing of the partially inebriated. If this is celebrating Christmas, then we reverently say, God help us all!

Yet, unfortunately, this is increasingly the pattern. What is the greatest tragedy that can occur in December? A strike of the brewery workers! What is the calamity of all calamities at the yuletide season? Sobriety—at least in the thinking of some. And this, mark you, to celebrate the greatest and holiest event of history!

One cannot but wonder what Christ must think as He looks down upon the sons of men and observes their

celebration of His birth. He sees drunkenness, unbridled spending, rollicking parties and wild entertainments. These things celebrate the birth of the Saviour? These things! And the celebraters, who are they? Ask them and you will find out that they are nominal Christians. Aye, as Shakespeare said, there's the rub. That word "nominal." Can you be a "nominal Christian"? Is not this a negation of terms? Can anyone be nominal in his Christianity? Jesus didn't think so. He said, "He that is not with Me is against Me; and he that gathereth not with Me scattereth abroad." Matthew 12:30.

Could it not be that the way we celebrate Christmas might be a clear indication of our standing with the One who gives His name to this season? If you are for Him at Christmas time, you will be for Him throughout the year; and if you are for Him for fifty-one weeks of the year, Christmas week will not see you behaving other than as a Christian should. He (or she) who loves Christ will not behave himself (or herself) unseemly. But it is that strange being, the "nominal Christian," who will let go his standards, who will subscribe to the "just-this-once" theory, who will cast his principles overboard "because it's Christmas."

We believe, in our old fashioned, unsophisticated way, that an event to celebrate the birth of the Saviour should be celebrated with sobriety (in more than one sense) and with a pure joy—that does not come out of a bottle. We believe that this is a season in which, if the first advent of the Lord is to be celebrated, it should be a deep

and spiritual experience, a coming, spiritually, to the Bethlehem manger and bowing—at least in the heart—in adoration of the One who left the glories of heaven to come down and live and die among men. We cannot see that “making wassail and wild carousal” has any part in such deep things of the heart.

It matters not, for purposes of this thesis, whether December 25 is the actual birth date of our Saviour; it is universally agreed that it is not. But the principle remains inviolate: If I would celebrate the birth of Christ in Bethlehem, I must still come in the reverent spirit that was evident in the three kings from the Orient who sought Him with the words, “Where is He that is born . . . for we . . . are come to worship Him.” Matthew 2:2.

We are of the opinion that, even in sophisticated 1968, the old order has not changed and that our only acceptable celebration of Christmas is our joyful worship of Him who came. We cannot think that alcohol comes into the picture at all. But then, as we said before, we are old fashioned.

Robert H. Parr

“Sweet Jesus, Save Me”

BIAFRA! If we are looking for a tragedy-of-the-year we need look no further. The break-away Nigerian state has all the qualifications.

To portray the horror that is Biafra we could do no better than to quote the story of John Barnes. Joining the Nigerian Lagos troops in their “final offensive” against Biafra, Barnes found himself early in the day watching a battery of 105-mm. howitzers pounding the apparently undefended town of Oge. Later in the day he joined the troops as they entered the Biafran town. He recounts:

“There was no resistance as the commandos struggled into the town. As they nervously searched the thatched huts, however, an automatic rifle opened up somewhere and suddenly everyone was shooting. . . . As we reached the northern end of town, a triumphant cry rang across a football field and a Nigerian soldier emerged from the bush prodding a young Ibo tribesman ahead of him. The lad was about nineteen and wore only a pair of swimming trunks. Terrified and trembling, he said he had come back to look for his parents. ‘You are a rebel soldier,’ screamed Lt. Macauley Lamurde, slashing the boy across the chest with his long swagger stick. ‘My God, my God,’ moaned the lad, seeming to know what was in store for him. I asked the boy his name. He said it was Mathias and repeated that he was only looking for his parents. Hoping to save his life, I said to the lieutenant: ‘You cannot kill this man. Your code of conduct prohibits it. You will not kill him, will you, lieutenant?’ Lamurde replied:

‘No.’ But then he bellowed at the boy: ‘Stand to attention!’ And when the young Ibo did, he shrieked, ‘Look, he is obviously a rebel soldier!’

“Another officer tied Mathias’s hand to his leg and kicked him over. The boy pleaded: ‘I’m not a soldier. Sweet Jesus, save me!’ Leaning casually on his swagger stick, Lamurde pumped three bullets into the body, then another into his neck. Then one of Lamurde’s men dragged the corpse across the road and heaved it into the bushes.”—*Newsweek*, September 9, 1968.

To most of us to whom Christmas will mean relaxation, a well-prepared table of food, the comfort of a secure home, Biafra will seem far away. The troubles of the Ibos will be far from our minds. It is not important who is right or wrong in Nigeria, it only matters that in such a situation human life is cheap and the innocent suffer along with the involved. The need for political or moral justice is overshadowed by 6,000 men, women and children who die daily from starvation. While we live sumptuously and easily this Christmas, four million Biafrans are huddled in an area one-fifth the size of Tasmania—many of these will die from bullets, disease or starvation.

Let’s be honest. There is not a lot we can do at this stage, but there is a lot we can learn. Both Christmas and Biafra (as well as Vietnam, Prague and the Negro



This is a training ship of the Italian Navy built in Naples just before World War II. It is constructed along the same lines as a late eighteenth century vessel and has a crew of 500 among whom are 136 naval cadets.

ghettoes for that matter) are trying to teach us the same lesson. This lesson is far more important than the well-worn idea that Christmas is goodwill time so let's have peace on earth. Although we should encourage the plans and systems of relief for the suffering and war-torn parts of earth, never forget that all our community and civil aid projects will not avoid the Biafras and Vietnams of this world. You would think after thousands of years man would have learnt that such tragedies are inevitable where men put their own selfish ends before the interests of their fellow humans.

Let Christmas remind us that God has come into this world and as surely as He came once, He will return; let Biafra remind us that only He will ever "set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand for ever." Daniel 2:44, R.S.V.

David L. Stokes

The Great Illusion

MAN'S DESIRE for universal peace is so great, so deep-rooted, that he often thinks he sees it approaching when it is not there at all.

Over and over again down the years he has cried, "Peace, peace," when there was no peace. He was doing it even in Jeremiah's day, twenty-five centuries ago. (Jeremiah 6:14.)

When the twentieth century dawned it was hailed as "The Christian Century." There had not been a major war for thirty years, said the optimists, and there never would be another. After all, were not Christian principles more firmly implanted in people's minds than

ever before, thanks to a triumphant century of missionary advance?

It was all an illusion. A great illusion. Almost immediately the Boer War broke out, followed a few years later by World War I.

After 1918 there was much peace talk both before and after the founding of the League of Nations. Then came the treaty to outlaw war, signed by most of the nations of the world.

In the midst of this illusion Germany invaded Poland and Czechoslovakia and World War II blew the flimsy structure of world peace to smithereens.

It did not destroy the hope of peace, of course, and when the exhausted nations finally laid down their arms and buried their millions of dead, the peace builders started again, once more quoting the prophet Isaiah's familiar statement about people beating their swords into ploughshares and spears into pruning hooks. Then, out of the smoking ashes of the League of Nations arose, phoenix-like, the United Nations, "the last great hope of mankind" as its eager sponsors declared.

This was another illusion or, rather, another phase of the same great illusion which has haunted and frustrated mankind since the dawn of time.

True, for the past two decades there has been peace of a sort, but when one recalls the India-China struggle, the India-Afghanistan conflict, the Chinese invasion of Tibet, the Israel-Arab war, the Congo nightmare, the Biafran blood-bath, the Korean conflict, the Vietnam war, it is a sorry record indeed.

And now the wheel has come full circle with Russia's invasion of Czechoslovakia, just as Germany invaded that unhappy land thirty years ago.

Shock waves from this tragic event have spread to the ends of the earth and despite the recent splurge of treaty-signing for the improvement of international relations, despite the plethora of political addresses on peace, the great illusion is shattered once more.

The doves have fled to their dovecotes while the hawks have spread their wings anew. As for the United Nations, it is seen for what it really is, not a hope for mankind but an ideal built of sand which the onrushing tides of history will eventually sweep away.

One solid hope remains in this awesome and dangerous moment. It is the hope that has sustained Christians down the ages—the hope that Jesus Christ, the Lord of history, will return to set up His kingdom of righteousness and peace which shall never pass away.

There is no illusion about this. It may be a dream but, as the Bible says, it is certain and sure of realization. (Daniel 2:45.)

A. S. Maxwell



Summer is over in Austria, and the cattle have returned from the alpine pastures into the native stables. What better time for festivity! The cattle are adorned with flowers and garlands, and bells to announce their coming.



"UNTO US A SON IS BORN . . ."

So was the foundation unit of home life, father, mother and son, made glorious at the first Christmas.

Whatever our background, and however frail our affiliation with the church, most of us are prepared to admit that the celebration of Christmas has something to do with the birth of the Christ child.

For many, indeed, the whole essence of Christmas is just that, the birth of a Child, and everything revolves around that fact.

The practice of giving at Christmas is an accepted part of our way of life, a practice shared by the wealthy and the poor alike. Perhaps the custom stems from the story of the wise men, who travelled great distances to give to the Child; perhaps our gifts carry with them unvoiced recognition and appreciation of the gift of God to all mankind.

Whatever their source of origin, our thoughts and activities at Christmas time are very much bound up with our homes, our families and what we will give. How far our efforts extend to include those outside our immediate family circle in our Christmas preparations depends partly on our financial status, and partly on our individual concern for the needs of others.

We are each of us affected by the spirit of giving, whether or not we have material wealth to share with our fellow men. We give of ourselves more of our better qualities, which are too often submerged in the routine of our daily lives. It is a well-known fact that, at Christmas time, there is a spirit abroad which makes us more tolerant of each other, and more kindly disposed to accept, without censure, the irritations and annoyances of daily life.

If the spirit of Christmas could be extended throughout the year, much suffering could be prevented.

Let us think of that spirit of Christmas in relation to our homes; let us make a reappraisal of our position in the home, for the home is the basis of our society and the cradle of the nation.

Whether as child or parent, we each have much to give the other. We are each the product of our times, and none of us is given the choice of which era we are born into. Also, no two of us are alike, not even father and son, so we are bound to differ in our personal choices and opinions.

Tolerance is the key to sound relationship and outweighs even the bonds of flesh and blood. None of us is perfect, yet none is entirely worthless. Let us, therefore, give recognition to each other's value as a person, and to each other's role in our general scheme of things which have their roots in our homes. Let us encourage and foster all that is good, and accept that which does not conform to our own opinions, provided it does not trespass the boundaries of law and order.

If we of the "square" generation can give the gift of tolerance, based on our own example, to our children, they may not consider us quite so "square" after all. What is more important is the fact that, if by our giving we can make our homes a happier and healthier environment for all concerned, we will, at the same time, be making of this a better world, however small our contribution may seem to be.

What could we give at Christmas that would have greater value?

NOT GOLD, OR FRANKINCENSE, OR MYRRH . . .



What to Give?

By L. JAYDA

"O LITTLE TOWN OF
BETHLEHEM"
Is 100 Years Old
This Year



PHILLIPS BROOKS'S

Carol of Remembrance

☆ By VINCENT EDWARDS

WHEN Phillips Brooks wrote this familiar carol shortly before Christmas, 1868, the journey that he had made to the Holy Land only two years before was still a vivid memory. He had hardly started to travel through Palestine before there came to him an intimate sense of the presence of the Christ.

To his relatives back in America, the young rector wrote: "The whole country, every hill and valley, seemed marked with His footprints. . . . The hill of the Beatitudes; another hill where they say Christ fed the multitude. Another ridge climbed, and there was 'the sea of Galilee, which is the sea of Tiberias.' There it lay in the afternoon twilight, blue among the purple hills. There were the walks He walked, the shore where He taught, the mountains where He prayed."

Perhaps the climax of his tour was coming to Bethlehem in the evening when it lay bathed in moonlight. Phillips Brooks never forgot that spectacle, nor how

he looked up at the stars that stood out so brightly in the night sky.

When he returned to his work at the Church of the Holy Trinity, his visit to the scene of Jesus' nativity must have risen to his mind again and again. Now the friendly, big-hearted parson wished he might share that blessed remembrance with his parishioners!

Phillips Brooks did not do anything about it until two years after his journey. The children of his church were scheduled to sing at the Christmas service and suddenly the rector decided he could help out with a "special carol." The night he had spent at Bethlehem became more vivid than ever—all its magic silence and celestial beauty came alive again as the parson took his pen in hand. Of course, he must have been inspired; nobody can write such lovely verses on the spur of the moment without some sort of spiritual stirring from within. No other explanation is possible.

But once the lines were down on paper, Phillips Brooks realized his handicap. He had no music to match his words! It was only natural that, under the circumstances, he should turn to the handiest of musicians—his organist and choirmaster, Lewis Redner.

Mr. Redner was no ordinary person in the field of music. He had composed pieces for special occasions, and he must have been fairly adept at the business. In this case, he achieved immortality along with his rector. The story goes that after Phillips Brooks had shown him the words, some time passed until, on Christmas Eve, he went to bed and then woke up in the middle of the night with the beautiful tune "St. Louis" ringing in his mind. He got up in a hurry and put the notes down on paper.

He did not have much time left to drill his girls and boys, but he must have done a thorough job. When the children sang "O Little Town of Bethlehem" at that Christmas Day service exactly one hundred years ago, the carol was an immediate "hit" with the crowded church. There were no radios then to broadcast the programme, nor was anything known about making recordings. However, the words-and-music combination made such a happy impression on all listeners that that part of the service was long remembered.

Today, a century afterward, thousands upon thousands of people are familiar with Phillips Brooks's stanzas. In English-speaking lands throughout the world "O Little Town of Bethlehem" is always sung in the churches at Christmas time. When choirs make their annual rounds, singing to shut-ins, they seldom fail to include the beloved carol, since nowadays it is such a universal favourite.

If the author were alive today, how overjoyed he would be by this discovery! As a matter of fact, few men were ever in such an exultant mood at Christmas as the big, jolly parson. The season of gift-giving and carol-singing fairly enraptured him, realizing as he did the deep religious significance of it all. That he should have succeeded in making a lasting contribution to all the festivity and rejoicing would have afforded him the highest possible satisfaction. There can be no doubt but that "O Little Town of Bethlehem" will long remain Phillips Brooks's most enduring monument. In the year's joyous interlude, that carol, by some miraculous alchemy, seems to bring people of all races and colours and creeds into one common bond of love and understanding.

"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."

★★



Think on these ...

- "The gospel is not an old, old story, freshly told. It is a fire in the Spirit, fed by the flame of Immortal Love; and woe unto us if, through our negligence to stir up the Gift of God which is within us, that fire burns low."

—Dr. R. Moffat Gautrey.

- "I shall allow no man to belittle my soul by making me hate him."

—Booker T. Washington.

- "I don't want your sacrifices—I want your love; I don't want your offerings—I want you to know Me."

—Hosea 6:6 from "Living Prophecies."

- "If you stop to count the people who are fundamentally and consistently happy, I suspect you will recognize that they have two characteristics in common: they work hard at tasks that have meaning for them and they are essentially kind in their dealings with other people."

—Dr. John Howard,
President of Rockford College, U.S.A.

- "Politeness is to human nature what warmth is to wax."

—Arthur Schopenhauer.

- "If Christianity is losing its potency, it is because too many people in the churches live like the folk outside the church. So the outside folk don't see why it is so important to link up with the church that doesn't abide by and live up to its beliefs in everyday life. . . . Remember, if you want to count for Christianity, then stand up for it or against it, but don't just sit there."

—Perry E. Taylor in Tarrytown Tidings, Austin, Texas.

- "Life is not so short but that there is always time enough for courtesy."

—Emerson.



BY BILLY
GRAHAM

Mister, Jesus Is Coming Again!

GIGANTIC PROBLEMS face the world in the months ahead. South-east Asia is crumbling. The Middle East is filled with intrigue and hatred. Communist subversives are stepping up their activities all over the world. Their goal is still world revolution by 1972. But the real problem facing this world is sin; and until sin has been dealt with, we are in danger of the judgment of God. Our gigantic armies, navies and air forces will not save us. Our scientists cannot devise weapons powerful enough to save a nation that is in danger of moral corruption.

The Bible teaches, "There is none that doeth good." We are sinners in the sight of God, and sin always brings judgment. That is why Christ went to the cross, and His cross was a judgment. It was God putting on Christ the sins of the world. He paid the debt of sin at the cross, and until men come and identify themselves with Him on His cross, their sins cannot possibly be forgiven, nor can they be spared the judgment.

In talking with Christian leaders I feel a new sense of urgency among them. There is an air of expectancy and an awareness of impending crisis. Christians are becoming concerned. During the past year I have heard more discussion of the second coming of Jesus than in any other period of my ministry. Ministers who are liberal in their theological persuasion tell me that for the first time in their lives they are studying the Book of Revelation. All of this indicates a rapidly growing interest in the prophetic teachings of the Scriptures. World events are casting their shadow even in the study of the Bible.

There is a legend about an enchanted forest in which was a sundial bearing the strange inscription,

"IT IS LATER THAN YOU THINK"

Travellers in this forest often tarried long before the sundial to read its cryptic message and to meditate thereon.

In the wilderness of this world there is also a sundial—the Word of God. Genesis to Revelation it bears for us the timely warning: "It is later than you think." In these hectic times there are still a few who pause before this eternal timepiece to read its solemn message.

Writing to the Christians of his day, Paul said, "Now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light." Romans 13:11, 12.

Speaking to unbelievers who denied His first coming, Jesus declared, "When it is evening, ye say, It will be fair weather: for the sky is red. And in the morning, It will be foul weather today: for the sky is red and lowering. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?" Matthew 16:2, 3. Millions were blind

as to His first coming, and millions more are blind as to His second coming.

The subject of the coming again of Christ has never been popular to any but the true believer. We who believe in the return of Christ as taught in the Scriptures should not be surprised that we are unpopular with scoffers. We are warned in the Scriptures that in the last days scoffers will come, saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." 2 Peter 3:4. We must expect to be greeted in many quarters as representatives of an incredible world view. We must expect to be smiled at indulgently by many who consider us interesting cases of arrested development. However, regardless of the opinions of many, there are thousands of us in the world who take our Bibles seriously.

In the dome of the Capitol at Washington are inscribed these lines:

"One God, one law, one element,
And one far-off divine event,
To which the whole creation moves."

I have often wondered how many congressmen and senators who stand beneath that inscription sense its true interpretation. How perfectly it pictures the feeble efforts of men to rebuild this world according to their own patterns while ignoring God's plans, purposes, and programme.

Reading the newspapers and listening at random to the notes of disillusionment that sound out from everywhere—from the press, radio, and television, from world leaders, and from ordinary conversation—one must come to the overwhelming conviction that this vaunted civilization has reached its Saturday afternoon.

From the pen of one of America's most liberal clergymen comes this admission: "Neither Christian ministers nor anybody else may be able to do enough to save Western civilization from collapse. Surely our present civilization cannot survive, and ought not to survive as it is."

Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, "The lesson of life is . . . to believe what the years and the centuries say, against the hours."

If Christians judged by the hours, there are times when they might conclude that men could fashion by their own wit and ingenuity an enduring paradise. Certainly this is the goal and ambition of Communists; they intend to build a perfect kingdom—and to do it without God. But when we get the perspective of the ages from the viewpoint of the Scriptures and see that God's eternal purpose rules otherwise, we learn that men will someday raise their last Tower of Babel toward the skies and it will come clattering down upon their heads. God will bring in the ideal age in His own way. Utopia is coming, but it will come in God's way and will be brought about by God. Christ taught us to pray, "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in

heaven." Matthew 6:10. This prayer is going to be answered. Yes, the sands of the age are falling in the hourglass.

IT IS LATER THAN YOU THINK.

Revolution, restlessness, and lawlessness often flame so furiously throughout the world that many wonder how we move from week to week without world conflagration. The Scriptures teach that "He who restrains will restrain, until he be taken out of the way." If it were not for the hindering power of the Holy Spirit, we would be engulfed already in the floods of anarchy and corruption. We who trust in Jesus Christ for our salvation do not despair or panic in the face of these threatenings, for we believe that before the final storm breaks, the Lord will receive His own unto Himself.

I do not wish to be an alarmist. I know that the message of the second coming of Christ has been hindered by superficial verse jugglers who prey upon the distracted moods of many in these trying days and preach fantastic programmes of the future, too wild and weird to win the respect of any intelligent person. Yet this does not do away with the glorious hope of the coming again of Christ. The Scriptures have not left us in the dark. Amid the tangled modern wilderness the Scriptures tell us where we are in God's plan of the ages and remind us that it is later than most of us think.

There is a second sense in which it is later than we think. It is later in our lives than we think. The Scriptures teach that "we spend our years as a tale that is told. The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away." Psalm 90:9, 10.

James asked, "What is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." James 4:14.

We have grown familiar with the customary proverbs about the brevity of life, and familiarity often seems to have bred contempt. A sophisticated generation smiles nonchalantly when the minister points out how short is our earthly pilgrimage. In such a time as this it becomes increasingly difficult to impress upon people the value of the passing hours. Though today we see price instead of worth, God's standards have not changed. Contrary to popular notion, the younger we are the more keenly ought we to feel that it is already later than we think.

Considering, then, that it is later in the age and later in life than we think, how circumspectly ought Christians to walk, "redeeming the time, because the days are evil." Ephesians 5:16. Certainly "the night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wan-

tonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof." Romans 13:12-14.

Dr. Samuel Johnson wore engraved in his watch the words, "The night cometh," from John 9:4. We Christians ought to carry written in our hearts the solemn truth of how short is our opportunity to witness for God among men. What we are going to do for Christ we had better do now.

A dying Christian, who had been very reticent with his testimony all his life, said to Billy Bray, who sat beside him, "If I had the power, I'd shout 'Glory to God.'" Billy answered, "It's a pity you didn't shout 'Glory' when you had the power." We had better be about our testimony while we have the power.

"Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot and blameless." 2 Peter 3:11-14. There is no time to lose;

IT IS LATER THAN YOU THINK.

I could not end this message without seeking to impress upon you who have never known Christ that it is later than you think. "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon." Isaiah 55:6, 7. There is a clear implication in this passage of Scripture that there will come a time when the Lord may not be found, when He may not be near for salvation.

For you the harvest may soon be past, the summer ended, and you are still not saved. The sense of urgency in the light of approaching danger has disappeared from many pulpits; but it is still true that life is short, death is certain, eternity is endless, and judgment awaits you.

You say, "But what do I have to do?" Right now consider yourself a sinner because the Bible says you are a sinner. Take it by faith even if you do not feel like it. Do not rationalize and say that you are better than someone else. Recognize that you have sinned against God. Then confess your sins and turn from them. That is repentance. Turn by faith to Jesus Christ, go to the cross by faith and receive Him. You will never be able to come to Christ all the way with your mind. You must come by faith.

Will you come to Him today? Come to Christ now, before it is too late. There will be a day when it is too late. Receive Him today as your Saviour. ★★

REX D. EDWARDS presents

7 FACTS ABOUT Jesus Christ

"Christ built no church, wrote no book, left no money, and erected no monuments; yet show me ten square miles in the whole earth without Christianity where the life of man and the purity of women are respected, and I will give up Christianity."—Henry Drummond.

Of all men CHRIST stands unique because:

1. **CHRIST IS GOD—DIVINE.** John 1:1-3.
 - ★ Claimed equality with God. John 10:30.
 - ★ Divine titles ascribed to Him. Colossians 2:9.
 - ★ Pre-existed with the Father. John 17:5; 5:18.
 - ★ The active agent in creation. Ephesians 3:9; 1 Corinthians 8:6.
2. **CHRIST CAME—HUMAN.** Philippians 2:6, 7.
 - ★ Was born into the human family. Matthew 1:22, 23; Micah 5:2; Romans 8:3.
 - ★ The reason. Hebrews 2:14-18; 4:15.
 - ★ He experienced the normal instincts of humanity. Slept (Matthew 8:24), wept (John 11:35), thirsted (John 4:7), became weary (John 4:6).
3. **CHRIST LIVED—SINLESS.** Hebrews 4:15; 7:26.
 - ★ "Knew no sin." 2 Corinthians 5:21.
 - ★ "Did no sin." 1 Peter 2:22.
 - ★ "In Him was no sin." 1 John 3:5.
 - ★ The devil was unable to overcome Him. Matthew 4:1-11; John 14:30.
 - ★ Man's example. John 13:15; 1 Peter 2:21.
 - ★ "The genius of Christianity demands that its converts follow exactly in the path of its Founder, Christ. Only as they do so are they Christians."—Foakes-Jackson.
4. **CHRIST DIED—REDEEMER.** Titus 2:14.
 - ★ Supreme manifestation of God's love. 1 John 4:10; Romans 5:6-8.
 - ★ A voluntary sacrifice. John 10:11, 15.
 - ★ An atoning sacrifice. Hebrews 9:26; Ephesians 5:2.
 - ★ A substitutionary sacrifice. 1 Peter 3:18; Mark 10:45; 1 Timothy 2:6.
5. **CHRIST AROSE—CONQUEROR.** Revelation 1:18.
 - ★ He foretold He would. Matthew 16:21.
 - ★ He did. Luke 24:1-12.
 - ★ Assured men victory over sin and death. 1 Corinthians 15:14, 16-20.
6. **CHRIST ASCENDED—MEDIATOR.** 1 Peter 3:22.
 - ★ The time and place. Luke 24:50, 51.
 - ★ Our High Priest. Hebrews 8:1, 2; 4:14-16.
 - ★ Man's Advocate. 1 Timothy 2:5; 1 John 2:1.
7. **CHRIST WILL RETURN—COMING KING.** Hebrews 9:28.
 - ★ He promised He would. John 14:1-3.
 - ★ "Living He loved Me, dying He saved me, Buried, He carried my sins far away. Rising, He justified, freely for ever, One day He's coming, O glorious day."

—Dr. Wilbur Chapman.

WE LIVE in a time of change. In just over a hundred years the world has emerged from a creeping, snail-pace existence to the helter-skelter age of jumbo jets, world wars and automation. In the fields of morals and religion, too, there have been drastic changes as orthodoxy has given way to modernism. Undoubtedly, one of the most discussed subjects of Scripture these days is the record of the Lord's birth. People often ask if the idea of a "virgin birth" is relevant in the twentieth century. On the surface this might sound like an academic question, but a brief consideration reveals that it affects the validity of the entire gospel story!

The Bible's statements on the subject leave no room for uncertainty. It says our Lord was *conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary*. (Matthew 1:18-24.) Christ entered this world as a babe, it is true, but His conception was a miracle. This was a direct fulfilment of a prophecy made hundreds of years before even Mary herself was born! The Scriptures said, "The Lord Himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel," Isaiah 7:14. This is in perfect harmony with the words spoken by the angel Gabriel. The angel said to Mary, "Hail, thou that art highly favoured; the Lord is with thee." "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee: wherefore also that which is to be born shall be called holy, the *Son of God*." Luke 1:28, 35, Revised Version. Not the son of a mere man; rather the Son of God!

Interestingly enough, it was Luke who records many of these facts, and Luke was a doctor. In fact, his account reads something like a birth certificate! Jesus had a human mother, of course, but in a miraculous way Mary's child was the Son of God. He was both *man* and *God*. In John's Gospel twelve times we read the expression, "Son of man," and twelve times we read the expression, "Son of God."

In these modern times people say it does not matter, it is of little consequence, whether or not the story of Bethlehem has been recorded accurately. But let no one be deceived on this point! Both the Old and New Testaments declare that what transpired was a miracle; a miracle on which the plan of salvation depended.

Note also the words of Matthew 1:20. The angel spoke to Joseph in these words, "Fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost." I guess Joseph was staggered to find that Mary was to have a child, but God sent an angel from heaven to explain the situation.



A WORD TO REMEMBER

"VIRGIN"

by ROY C. NADEN

You see, this is a vital part of God's ordained plan. The death of a mere man could never pay the price of sin, or ransom any guilty person. Sin required the death of the God-man. If Jesus' birth was not a virgin birth, not a miraculous birth, then Jesus was merely human and not divine.

It is an indisputable fact that Christ was here on the earth. Even pagan historians admit that Christ lived on the earth. And during those first centuries Christians stood for Christ's deity, even to the death! Loose-living heathen slaves were transformed by the gospel of the God-man—Christ Jesus—into saints and martyrs. The transformation of life today, and the promise of life everlasting are both dependent on the God-man—Christ Jesus our Lord. What a condescension! The Prince of heaven, born with the flesh of the inhabitants of this planet! In the words of the Apostles' Creed, "I believe in Jesus Christ, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost."

★★

CONNIE J. FRENCH
SAYS . . .

WHY? What is my reason for wanting a God of justice? Simply that I believe that justice is intrinsically good. I can well believe that a state of ultimate goodness for mankind would be a state where justice would be realized. My observation of what other people think and desire leads me to believe that this idea of mine that justice is a good thing, is shared by them, too. Neither they nor I could call injustice, of itself, a good thing, without sheer hypocrisy. In fact, most people seem to think that justice being good is not just a personal taste, like liking bananas or disliking chokos, but that it is in fact a universally shared appreciation; that its value cannot be changed at will, but that it is a permanent principle of goodness to which we invariably pay homage.

The principle is, of course, expressed in different ways. Some people think that justice is robbing the rich to feed the poor; others think justice is universal freedom from coercion; yet both agree that they are respecting the principle of justice. We seem to be committed to a belief in the moral value of justice.

Therefore, since I am already mentally committed to this common permanent principle of justice, I cannot possibly admire injustice. Since I already pay homage to the



I want a God of justice

authority of justice, I could not worship an unjust God without sheer hypocrisy. Furthermore, since I am only a sample of the many beings who share this common belief in the value of justice, I may assume that they, too, are already committed to the authority of the goodness of justice to the extent where they, too, are unable to worship a God of injustice. The only God we *can* worship "in spirit and in truth" is a God of justice.

Now what a problem this poses! It was forced upon my thinking some years ago by the simplest incident. I was dozing off to sleep one night when I suddenly remembered that I had forgotten to put the net over the bassinet. Immediately I went in to rectify the matter, when to my horror, I saw those evil creatures called mosquitoes all over my baby's face! What an outrage! Then I realized that other children had been born blind and crippled—that in fact the whole world showed signs of tragedies. The problem was, of course, that I believed God to be all-powerful and hence able to avert disaster. Now if God is both all-powerful and just, I thought, surely He could stop a few miserable mosquitoes from putting ugly red spots all over my baby's face—to say nothing of averting other tragedies! Am I to suppose that injustice does not exist, or that it is good? I cannot.

Who is responsible for what I see as facts of existence? Who is responsible for what happens? I have heard it said that the devil is responsible for the existence of injustice. However, if God is all-powerful, then injustice exists by His permission. If I permit my children to do that which it is in my power to prevent them from doing, then I must be held responsible for what is being done. If they are being cruel and I do not stop them, then I am responsible for that cruelty existing. Therefore, even if God does not ini-

tiate injustice, He permits situations which appear to us to be unjust, and must therefore be responsible for their existence.

What, then, am I to believe? Does God expect me to believe that the sufferer does in fact deserve the suffering and that it is just? Much of what I observe certainly suggests otherwise. It is not conceivable that a tiny baby should deserve mosquito bites, or that a devoted man like the Biblical Job should deserve his suffering as a retribution. In fact Job is not condemned for calling his suffering unmerited; and Christ corrected the disciples for supposing that the blind man merited his blindness because of his sins. Neither reason nor revelation support the doctrine that all suffering is a payment for personal errors.

An alternative attitude is one which says, God must be just, but this experience is an expression of injustice on God's part, therefore He must have a reason for being unjust. In this we are trying to justify injustice. We are trying to convince ourselves that while justice is good, it is also not good at times: or that all injustice is bad but that some injustice is good. This is an obvious contradiction. We cannot justify injustice. We cannot call injustice, justice. We could not worship a God who was not at least as permanently committed to the principle of justice as are we.

Therefore I am left with the horrifying thought that God is unjust. Am I expected to worship an unjust God? But I cannot do this for I am already mentally committed to the moral value of justice. I have already paid my homage to the authority of justice. I already worship God in justice. To call a being unjust is to say that He is not my God. Therefore if I call God unjust, I am only able to say this because the God I already worship is just—the standard I already acknowledge is one of justice. I can only worship a just God. The God whom I worship can only be a God of justice.

My conclusion now must be, my God of justice permits what appears to me to be injustice. The Bible also proclaims a God of justice who permits what appears to me to be injustice. "The law of the Lord is perfect," yet it allows "my enemies to triumph over me." "Thy righteousness is righteous for ever," yet "He has delivered [His people] into the hand of the enemy." The Christ who died to vindicate God's justice refused to remove the "thorn in the flesh" of His apostle to the Gentiles.

However, there is one important fact I have overlooked. How am I to know whether or not what I claim to be justice is actually an expression of absolute injustice? How do I assess situations? The most I can say is that from all the facts at my disposal, this situation appears to be unjust. But do I know all the facts? Can I possibly know all the causes and effects operating through the universe? Only if I did could I authoritatively say, "This is an expression of absolute injustice."

Relative or apparent injustice is, even on our human level, often an expression of a higher justice. My children are obliged to believe this. From their limited viewpoint it appeared today to be an expression of absolute injustice for me to smack the hand of my three-year-old when she persisted in playing with the electricity plugs. All the facts of which they were aware suggested that innocent little three-year-olds should not be subjected to the physical suffering of chastisement. It was not retribution—or if so, out of all proportion to the small matter of touching an old plug! They could only see facts in the light of a moment of time; but I, from my vantage point of added knowledge, could see disastrous consequences. What sense of justice, knowing all the facts, would condone a mother who allowed her child to kill herself because of her ignorance? The children's opinion of injustice was relative to the facts at their disposal; I did not expect them to do away with their animosity against injustice, but simply to believe that the greater number of facts at my disposal would, if understood, reveal to them that my action was an expression of justice.

However, what if she—my three-year-old—had been entirely innocent? What if she had been smacked by her sister, for no reason at all? Even then, I could not (even if possible), make the younger child incapable of feeling pain to reverse the consequences of an evil action. To do this would be to lie to the children. I would be deceiving them into thinking that bad actions do not hurt other people, when they do. I could not be an instrument of deception. Because I am also committed to the concept that truth is intrinsically good, I have no choice but to allow the evil consequences of their evil actions to exist before their eyes. They must not be deceived. It would be unjust for me to be responsible for their being deceived. They have a right to expect me to tell them the truth, and not to allow them to believe a lie in their ignorance. Therefore, although I hate the apparently unjust consequences of evil and try to appeal to their minds to cease to cause it, yet it is quite just for me to allow those things to be, as a revelation of what is truth.

Now I find that this reasonable attitude, in similar circumstances, is the same as the position of God in relation to this world would suggest. To apply it to the practical situation: we, and God, hate the innocent suffering caused by men fighting each other in the situation we call war. We hate the unjust consequences. We can sincerely say that it is utterly unjust of man to inflict the horrors of war on innocent victims, but we must also say that it is utterly just of God to permit true consequences to follow causative factors. How could He be an instrument of deception?

How could we worship a God who told lies? In fact a concept of justice implies that it is truth in operation. The same sense of moral values which commits us to the worship of a God of justice, also demands that He be a God of truth.

That this attitude of commitment to a God of justice is not incompatible with the suffering of injustices, Christ Himself revealed. By sharing the injustices of humanity, and actually calling His suffering of them God's will—"Thy will be done"—He affirmed that God's permission of injustice is actually the expression of justice on a higher plane, an expression of justice which we would admit and admire as justice if we knew all the facts. It is even possible to see sufficient facts to call the sufferings and death of Christ an expression of God's justice. It is not God's justice which is our problem; it is our ignorance. It is still utterly just for Him to permit man's injustices if all the facts in His possession (and not ours) decree that their existence is an expression of absolute justice and an expression of His commitment to truth.

At this point we could ask, What advice did the innocent sufferer Job receive from Elihu, an interpreter who was not condemned for misrepresenting truth? He advised that Job had been wrong in saying that God had been unjust to him. This conception was an ignorant one. "Far be it from God, that He should do wickedness; and from the Almighty, that He should commit iniquity. . . . Yea, surely God will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert judgment. . . . He will not lay upon man more than right. . . . Job hath spoken without knowledge. . . . Thinkest thou this to be right, that thou saidst, My righteousness is more than God's? . . . judgment is before Him; *therefore trust thou in Him.*" Job 34:10-35:14.

Evidently God also believed that He could expect a rational being to acknowledge the limitations of his own knowledge, and to have confidence in the fact that He knows what He is doing—"Wilt thou also disannul My judgment? Wilt thou condemn Me, that thou mayest be righteous?" Job 40:8. And what was Job's response?

"Therefore have I uttered that I understood not. . . . I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth Thee." Job 42:3-5. Job saw God as God. It was, after all, only because he was committed to the worship of a just God, that he could even have a standard by which to assess injustice. By assessing injustice as evil, he was really paying homage to the God of justice whom he worshipped.

But we with Job, must face facts. We cannot live a contradiction. We cannot recognize the supreme homage of our minds as being devoted to a God of justice, and then call some of the things He permits unjust. In committing our allegiance to justice as being just, we are acknowledging a supreme authority of justice in our minds. If we call that authority God, then we are recognizing that God is just; we are ignorant. If then, our basic premises that God and all He does and permits is necessarily an expression of justice, then any particular experience, being an expression of part of what He does or permits, is also necessarily an expression of absolute justice.

Bruce Johnston's BIBLE CROSSWORD No. 4



ACROSS:

1. Corrupt ones cannot bear good fruit. (Matthew 7:15-20.)
4. Into what are we changed when we behold the glory of the Lord. (2 Corinthians 3:18.)
7. Because there was no room there, Jesus was born in a stable. (Luke 2:4-7.)
8. By being faithful and trustworthy, servants do this to the doctrine of God. (Titus 2:9, 10.)
10. Responsible for children until an appointed time. (Galatians 4:1, 2.)
12. One purpose for which the sun was placed in the heavens. (Genesis 1:14-19.)
14. Expression of horses indicating fearlessness in battle. (Job 39:25.)
16. Jeremiah's exclamation when asked to speak for God. (Jeremiah 1:6.)
17. Sent by apostles to Christians, and by men of goodwill at this time of the year. (Acts 15:23.)
18. After the angels announced Jesus' birth, the shepherds said, "Let us now ——— even unto Bethlehem." (Luke 2:15.)
19. A king, of Ethiopian descent, over the land to which Joseph later took Mary and the Christ child. (2 Kings 17:4.)
21. Judgment will come just as surely as weeds will grow "in the ——— of the field." (Hosea 10:4.)

25. What the words of the apostles do with the words of the Old Testament prophets. (Acts 15:13-15.)
26. Joseph fled into a foreign country (see 28 across) with Mary and Jesus, "And was there ——— the death of Herod." (Matthew 2:13-15.)
27. Title of respect used by certain Greeks who said, "We would see Jesus." (John 12:20, 21.)
28. Where Joseph took Mary and Jesus to escape from Herod's wrath. (Matthew 2:13-15.)
29. What Elisha's servant did to a wild vine, nearly bringing death to the sons of the prophets. (2 Kings 4:39.)

DOWN:

1. What the Holy Spirit will do for willing learners. (John 14:26.)
2. Son of Seth and grandson of Adam, mentioned as an early ancestor of Christ. (Luke 3:38.)
3. Mountain on which God spoke to Israel through Moses. (Irregular spelling.) (Acts 7:38.)
4. Preposition indicating where the wise men went in relation to the house where the Christ child was. (Matthew 2:11.)
5. What God has made known to the children of Israel. (Psalm 103:6, 7.)
6. The recipient of peace that was offered through the birth of Christ. (Luke 2:13, 14.)
9. Enemies of the Jews said this would be endangered if Artaxerxes allowed Jerusalem to be rebuilt after the Babylonian captivity. (Ezra 4:13.)
11. The God which Paul wished to make known to the Greeks in Athens. (Acts 17:23.)
13. Ancient word used for goats that would inhabit Babylon after her glory had faded. (Isaiah 13:21.)
15. Cornelius said to Peter, "Four days ——— I was fasting until this hour." (Acts 10:30.)
16. Animal on which Christ triumphantly entered Jerusalem. (Matthew 21:1-11.)
18. Jesus "grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the ——— of God was upon Him." (Luke 2:40.)
20. The kind of bread that was used by Israelite priests in the wave offering. (Exodus 29:23, 24.)
21. What some would do, metaphorically, to the enemies of God's people. (Zechariah 1:18-21.)
22. We will find this if we come to Christ. (Matthew 11:28-30.)
23. For whose sins did Christ suffer? (1 John 2:2.)
24. This led the wise men, seeking the Christ child, from the east to Jerusalem and Bethlehem. (Matthew 2:1-10.)

(FOR SOLUTION SEE PAGE 27)

At this point my small daughter brought me a piece of paper and asked me to make her a boat. As I started folding the paper she objected, "No, Mummy, that's not the way to make a boat." I assured her, "This is the way I make boats."

We say much the same kind of thing to God—"God, this is not the way to make eternally good results out of life." He assures us, "This is the way I make eternally good results." With our limited comprehension we do not need reasons so much as a reasoned faith.

This fact was brought home to me when I faced the possibility of losing my baby to the grim reaper.

A time of emotional crisis is not the best time to be able to appreciate reasons anyhow; but a rational faith in the justice of God can enable Him to inspire the prayer, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me, nevertheless not my will but Thine be done."

A belief in God as God is reasonable for a rational being, appropriate for a derived creature, and a practical attitude when facing problems. Above all the turmoil of trouble, we may have enshrined in the citadel of the mind, the assurance that "He that is perfect in knowledge is with thee." ★★

*The STAIRWAY of the SKY**

By PEARL C. B. ELLISON

HE IS COMING in unveiled splendour—

Past cherubim,

Past seraphim,

Past star-studded galaxies,

Through those vast immensities,

Passing by a million moons that in their glory lie,

As the Lord comes down the stairway of the sky.

HE IS COMING in unrivalled splendour—

No cross He bears,

No thorn-crown wears,

A mighty Conqueror soon He'll come

To take His blood-bought people home.

Oh, a time of such elation!

But some—eternal separation!

Some will live!

Some will die!

As He comes down the stairway of the sky.



HE IS COMING in unveiled splendour;

With God's mighty trumpet sounding

And with life His voice abounding,

"Awake, Awake! ye sleeping clay!"

He'll call the ransomed on that day.

A glorious change then there will be

When He gives immortality.

Resurrected they to meet Him in the air,

The righteous all caught up to meet Him there.

But those unready—there in death they'll lie,

When the Lord comes down the stairway of the sky.



★ Based on 1 Thessalonians 4: 16, 17.

Illustration: Spiral Nebula in Ursa Major



*AND THEN the wondrous journey going home!
Past cherubim,
Past seraphim,
Past star-studded galaxies,
Through those vast immensities,
Passing by a million moons that in their glory lie—
The day the Lord goes up the stairway of the sky.*



DR. LIONEL H. TURNER
ASKS . . .

How Phoney Is Your

FOR MANY OF US there are three Christmases. There is the one that is preoccupied with a list that seems to grow under social and business pressures with a kind of implacable insistence. It is smudged with the most un-Christmas-like emotion: reluctance, frustration, cynicism, shrewd attempts to wait, to anticipate, to gamble, and quite often it is characterized by a final burst of reckless, repetitive buying. Perhaps it is the most intelligent Christmas. It is certainly the only one with conscious goals, and it is entirely selfish.



Then there is that other Christmas with its ecstatic awakenings, the exotic papers ripped with unbearable eagerness to reveal treasures conceived in long moments of affectionate thought and kept with delicious secrecy, a Christmas where intimate glances meet above little bowed heads and probing fingers, a Christmas that has been bought in the relentless market of time as a day free from every pressure, so that lives can meet and mingle outside the prison of self, and families can pause in the midst of feasting, to know that life is good.

And there is that third Christmas, the Christmas of the Christ child, with its pictures of inns and shepherds and stars, the Christmas that is embroidered with carols, half sacred, half legend, and candles and holly and church bells.

But which of these is really Christmas? Have they anything in common? Is there any real value or any real meaning in this celebration that seems, in some ways, almost mediaeval? How do you feel about your Christmas? No doubt it is fun, no doubt the pleasure and the relaxation has been worth while, but are we kidding ourselves when we try to attach to it some mystic and religious meaning? And, if so, is the very nature of our behaviour out of touch with what we are trying to celebrate?



If we look clear-eyed at Christmas, and peer into its strangely incongruous traditions: its mistletoe, and its prayers, its hymns and its bells and its holly and its puddings sown with sixpences, its carol singing, its story-telling and its greetings so quaint and stereotyped, we cannot fail to admit to a feeling of something childlike and primitive. But that is as it should be. For the roots of Christmas reach down into those legendary times when religious men tried to give meaning to abstract ideas for the benefit of simple, hard-working and almost entirely ignorant people. And this festival, above all others, seems to have captured their hearts. So the years added traditions which the people reached for with eager hands, and each generation passed on these traditions with new and perhaps even more bizarre customs.

However, in all these traditions we can detect a spirit of thankfulness, a sense of mystery, a desire to live in a manner worthy of the Great Gift.

It is my conviction that we do very well to celebrate Christmas as we do. I say this for two reasons. I believe that Christmas celebrations are, in the main, quite salutary both in their matter and spirit. Furthermore, I believe that the nature of these celebrations is appropriate to the Great Occasion to which they turn. But if we can carve out for ourselves a little niche

from all the happy moments that go to build this day, and settle there to reflect ever so briefly, all our celebrations will be so much more rewarding.

Let me elaborate a little. In the first place, it is a good thing to pause, as we do almost universally, on this occasion, to become aware of each other, to turn off the noisy, grinding machinery of life and come out from the low ceilings of our private preoccupations and expose ourselves to the freshness and the richness of communal living. And everything about Christmas is calculated to take us back to this kind of living and feeling. Even the endlessly repeated greetings couched in expected words are good because they make us aware

of the universality of the experience. We are all in it together, for Christmas is a great equalizer.

And Christmas loses nothing of its force from the fact that it occupies only one day. To the end of our lives no Christmas quite forgets the Christmases of childhood. It is like awakening after a long illness to look out on the sunlit dews of a spring that has fully matured in leschenaultia, and hovea, and wattle and wild orchids and clematis. It is everywhere and it is so glad. For Christmas is the spring in the social world, and it does not wait upon the weather. It never fails.



But Christmas is worth while for another reason: it is shot through with the spirit of thankfulness. It is a very healthy thing to be thankful. Thankfulness is the most cleansing and revivifying of the emotions. It eats away negative emotions. Fretting, bitterness, envy, discontent are forgotten when the heart is thankful. It is a pity that we do not find more time to snuggle down warmly amongst our contentments. The fact is that most of us do not really enjoy the myriad things that are cause for self-congratulation. We seem to be so obstinately predisposed to concentrate our attention upon our misfortunes. Long after it has passed we remember a headache and realize that we have enjoyed no satisfaction in our freedom from pain. But at Christmas we spend one whole day living in the very atmosphere of thankfulness.

But all this social awareness and general thankfulness is superficial and unfocused unless we are vividly conscious of what we have to be thankful for. And this is where my few moments of quiet thought come in. I don't want to take you to the delightful stories of His birth at Bethlehem, for it is preoccupation with these that has kept us so immature in our attitudes to Christmas. I would like you to spend these minutes in recalling something of His life and His teachings, for that is really what Christmas is designed to remember.

Did you ever stop to think how different this world would be if Jesus of Nazareth had never lived, if His Great Ideas had not been preserved, if remnants of them were not spread to this day like Christmas tinsel through the darkest of our sprawling city jungles? Take

them away and we are left with very few concepts to humanize and civilize mankind.

Let us pause to remember some of them. At the very heart of Christ's philosophy is a startlingly new attitude to humanity at large. Instead of regarding others as potential enemies, or at best rivals, He saw a rich and varied array of individuals like a garden to be tended and enjoyed. He seemed to delight in the personalities of all whom He met, and what took His eye was not their excellencies or their deficiencies, but their need. He felt impelled to help men, not to exploit them. Class, nationality, potential, all seemed to be quite irrelevant to Him. As He said, He was there to seek and to save the lost. It followed that He rejected no one and He condemned no one. To sinners He was sympathetic and permissive; aggressiveness was met with forgiveness, enmity with friendship, persecution with acceptance. His own experience was proof of His teachings. Except where they seemed to menace established authority His words and ways stilled the multitudes as they did the waves of Galilee. Fear, suspicion, hostility melted away, and the people flocked to Him, eager to enter His kingdom of heaven.

He had a good deal, too, to say about the problem of achieving satisfaction in life. Here His conclusions were just as startling. He saw the almost universal goals of wealth and prestige as evidences of confused thinking, and His own judgment was heavily underlined in His magnificent contempt for both the material world and the world of officialdom. In His view these things were like heavy, clanking chains that impeded one's entry into life and handicapped one unnecessarily in one's service for mankind. He watched with deep distress the steady fouling of the currents in the lives of those who would turn everything into self-gratification. And He insisted that the currents of the soul must be turned outwards in concern for the welfare of others so that the soul could be cleansed. "It is a happier thing to give than to receive," He declared. He saw, too, that real mental health depends on the steady development of our capacities and the widening of our horizons, and His famous story of the talents demonstrates this idea perfectly.

The third great secret of happiness that He enunciated was His doctrine of freedom: freedom not from external pressures, but from the pressure of self.

So long as we live at the mercies of our capricious physical urges, we cannot be really free to see life whole or to fulfil our destinies.

We have to thank Christ, too, for so forcibly destroying some of the cruellest of our superstitions. There seems to be a wicked propensity in the darkest part of humanity to reject with the utmost callousness those who have undergone misfortune or those who have broken the laws of society. This kind of ostracism is usually made more final and more awful by allying with it the rejection of God and the sickening taint of sin.

(Concluded on page 31)

lines that linger

OUR SEEKING SAVIOUR

I sought the Lord, and afterwards I knew
He moved my soul to seek Him, seeking me;
It was not I that found, O Saviour true,
No, I was found of Thee.

Thou did'st reach forth Thy hand and mine enfold;
I walked and sank not on the storm-tossed sea—
'Twas not that I on Thee took hold,
As Thou, dear Lord, on me.

I find, I walk, I love; but oh, the whole
Of love is but my answer, Lord, to Thee;
For Thou wert long beforehand with my soul,
Always Thou lovedst me.

—Author unknown (Jack Hagen).

Gratitude

*I thank You for these gifts, dear God,
Upon Thanksgiving Day.
For love and laughter and the faith
That makes me kneel to pray.*

*For life that lends me happiness,
And sleep that gives me rest.
These are the gifts that keep my heart
Serene within my breast.*

*Love, laughter, faith and life and sleep—
We own them every one.
They carry us along the road
That leads from sun to sun.*

—Margaret E. Sangster (Mary Badcock).

VESTIGIA

I took a day to search for God,
And found Him not. But as I trod
By rocky ledge, through woods untamed,
Just where one scarlet lily flamed,
I saw His footprint in the sod.

Then suddenly, all unaware,
Far off in the deep shadows, where
A solitary hermit thrush
Sang through the holy twilight hush,
I heard His voice upon the air.

And even as I marvelled how
God gives us heaven here and now,
In a stir of wind that hardly shook
The poplar leaves, beside the brook,
His hand was light upon my brow.

At last with evening, as I turned
Homeward, and thought what I had learned,
And all that there was still to probe,
I caught the glory of His robe
Where the last fires of sunset burned.

Back to the world with quickening start
I looked, and longed for any part
In making saving beauty be;
And from that kindling ecstasy
I knew God dwelt within my heart.

—Bliss Carmen (Mrs. E. Culley).

Each month a selection is made from readers' favourite quotations. No original matter, please. Include source, author, and your own name.



Why I Believe

By GEORGE W. ROLLO

George W. Rollo is a minister, a youth leader and a psychological counsellor. He is a graduate of the University of Adelaide.

FOUR YEARS at theological college gave me no answer to the question. Books told me why others believed, and students who had a faith couldn't explain.

Four years at university showed me reasons why man did *not* believe. I met many students who had no faith and who knew why they had none.

But my best four years were spent in a simpler school. I read no books and met no students, but here I found the reason for my belief.

I was in attendance in the primary nine months before starting my extra-mural studies. Once I was born I was duly registered and the most important quadrennium of existence began.

Half a century of living has opened my eyes to greater realities, and each year as I drop a flower on a far-away grave I pause to think and know again why I believe.

What I believe about God has developed with experience and learning, but *why* I believe has impresishable roots penetrating to the bottom of a well fifty-four years deep that has never dried up and never will.

Already you are beginning to think: This writer's reason is more sentimental than rational. But tell me: What kind of reasoning did you do before you started to think?

Let's follow it along a little.

Firstly I believe in *food*. Why?

Within the first four hours of my life I was delighted with breakfast; the idea has persisted, and I still believe in it.

Now that I have been to a bigger school and can use heavy words like "vitamins," "carbohydrates" and "calories" it may seem that these are my reasons for my belief in breakfast. They are not. I believed in breakfast before I had a capacity for belief. My mo-

ther taught my first lessons in personal needs and the relationship to a source of supply.

Secondly, I believe in *love*. Why?

People have talked to me about it. I have read books on it and have fallen in it. But I knew most about it before I knew anything at all. I was a product of it. Wanted and held secure, my earliest thoughtless months were a warm trusting approach to all I have experienced since.

Psychologists, philosophers and physiologists have all added their page to the encyclopaedia of love, but no classification or elucidation in maturer years has surpassed my four-year course at Mother's school. She taught me love when I was too young to spell the word or explain its power.

Thirdly I believe in *discipline*. Why?

It was not because some schoolmaster caned me—not because a policeman cautioned me. No, but primarily because Mother, who had already established herself as a source of supply and an environment of warm security, taught me that certain states resulted from certain rules. And furthermore there was a constancy about rules and results. Her word was worth obeying. Already she was reliable in matters of food and love; her laws could be trusted, too. Mother thus established for me three important relationships—supply, love and discipline. I experienced them all fully and vitally before I had a rational moment. I believed in them implicitly, not because I understood them, but because I experienced them and lived by them.

Men of learning have since enlarged, categorized, legalized and in a thousand ways cluttered up the basic elements. In college and university, students and faculties debated the principles and practice of the beliefs of God and man—but Mother was the master.

I left the nest and sallied forth into the great unknown with a hungry mind and three utensils to serve up whatever offered. They were the tools my mother gave me—a belief in supply, love and discipline.

As I walked abroad I passed through three fields of observation. The first was the *world* of natural history. As I looked into the heavens and saw wonderful sights by day and night I asked Mother if she had put them there. Neither she nor her mother had—and it seemed they were there before the first mother came.

I now had to transfer from Mother to a Greater Supplier in whom she herself believed. It was not difficult. Telescope and microscope opened up millions of evidences that extended my once-embryonic capacity for belief to an infinite world.

The second field was the area of the *workings* of love. When I was in trouble, Mother was always a comforter. Stresses and problems were eased in her presence. But I now noticed that she, too, had problems. Who was her mother? I followed her to the place where she knelt in prayer. To my simple mind this was where she got her loveliness. Not knowing any better, I tried it and found it worked, too—so I

helped myself to a serving of the love of the Greater One. I found it easy to believe.

The third field was the territory of the written Word. I saw her regularly sitting with an open Book, which seemed to provide her with a set of directions for living. And what wonderful living it was! Just as she had guided me, and her word was truth, so now I saw her disciplines exposed. I joined her and found it easy to believe the Word of God.

My infantile non-rational belief in Mother as the sole supplier of food, comfort and guidance had graduated to a reasoning belief in her God as observed in His World, His Workings and His Word. It was an easy transition.

A young woman lay dying of an advanced incurable disease. Maybe twenty days—or twenty hours—to go; who knew? She called for help.

So I took the Word as my mother did. I prayed by the bed as Mother did, and whether by Law or by Love, a great Supplier moved in. Feet that had never touched the floor for two years rose and walked that day. The Creator of the world; the Writer of the Word, became the Worker of love. Academics and doctors have now had twenty years to find a reason for the miracle, but no answer comes—unless it be God.

If you who read think my mother is poor reason for my belief in God, then I am sorry you did not meet my mother. If some mothers *are* poor reasons, do not think God is in trouble. He loves more than any human, and can arrange a new birth any time.

Ask a newborn Christian why he believes in God. His answer will be neither theological, philosophical or scientific. To these he will resort when his experience is breaking down! Scientists, of course, do know.

Dr. Bowlby of England, in his study on child care, shows that babes deprived of mother love, although kept in excellent institutions with the latest science could offer, still died of a wasting disease.

Dr. Charles Bushnell says: "Let every Christian father and mother understand when a child is three years old that they have done more than half they ever will do for his character."

Ada Arlitt of Cincinnati University says: "The most important period of the child's life for all types of education is the period from birth to six years of age. This is particularly true of religious education. No matter what happens after that period the mental sets developed in early life will still influence the child and the adult."

Ellen G. White: "For the first three years the mother must be mind for her child. The lessons learned during the first seven years of life have more to do with forming his character than all that it learns in future years."

As I was saying—college and university did little. Mother knew why I believe! ★★



WE FIRST SEE Dr. E. V. Rieu presenting to the English-reading world a whole library of Greek classics bearing his editorial signature. No ordinary editor!

Single handed, he next goes to some more ancient documents—the Gospels—and, without reference to any other translations of them, he brings over from their original Greek to lively yet conservative English the messages, meanings and might of “the Magna Carta of the human spirit”—this being the definition of the Gospels he recorded after years spent in translating them.

Behind Rieu's version there lay “no denominational authority.” But he did have his own conclusions about the writings of Mark, Matthew, Luke, John—the order, by the way, in which he presents them as a Penguin Classic, published in 1952 by Penguin Books of England, with an Australian office in Mitcham, Victoria.

Like many other modern translators, Dr. Rieu highly respects the King James Version. This respect, however, does not hold him back from the following observation. “To judge by some comments which have already reached me, there are still people in this country who believe King James's Bible to be Holy Writ in a sense peculiar to itself. That is the highest praise that a committee of translators could receive, and it is by no means my intention to detract from it. But it does not prove that they did better than the Four Evangelists; and I think we have been far too ready to praise their work at the expense of Mark, Matthew, Luke and John.” He also believes the Greek gospels have a beauty that is “all their own.”

Attempting to define this unique beauty, Dr. Rieu uses words such as “sharper definition,” “greater speed,” “starkness,” “urgency,” “reality.”

Greek, the language in which the Roman world first received Christianity, “did all that was asked of it,” Rieu asserts. Note: “It enabled four men, undertaking the hardest task that ever faced a writer, to produce the four masterpieces which conquered the world.”

Unrealistic as is the woodcut depicting a lion with eagle's wings that adorns the first page of the book (Mark 1), the opening words themselves are indeed a realistic presentation of divine fact:

“The first word of the good tidings of Jesus Christ Son of God. In accordance with the Scripture in the Prophet Isaiah, Behold I send My Messenger ahead of Thee to prepare Thy way; the voice of one crying in the wilderness ‘Prepare the way of the Lord: make His paths straight,’ John the Baptizer appeared in the wilderness proclaiming, for the forgiveness of sins, a

Page Twenty-four

AN EDITOR
TRANSLATES

The
**Magna
Carta**
of the
**Human
Spirit**

By W. AUSTIN TOWNEND

baptism of repentance. All Judaea went out to him and all the people of Jerusalem. They openly confessed their sins and were baptized by him in the River Jordan.”

Our non-clerical scholar-editor, working from the Greek and with no other translations at hand, leaves us in no doubt whatsoever concerning the baptism of Jesus. It was neither a sprinkling nor a pouring on of water. Here is the record on the first page: “And now Jesus appeared, coming from Nazareth in Galilee, and

December 1, 1968 SIGNS OF THE TIMES

was baptized by immersion in the Jordan at the hands of John. He had no sooner come up out of the water . . ."

Beyond this good starting point, Dr. Rieu has done several things which make our reading both easy and interesting. There are no numbered verses, but chapters are numbered. All dialogue is within quotation marks. Old Testament sayings are presented in italics and in an old English fashion of speech, for, reasons Rieu, they would have sounded old-fashioned even to the original readers of the first century after Christ.

Scriptural prophecies, particularly those recorded in Matthew, make a deep impression on this translator. His summing up on the matter of Bible prophecies is well worth noting. "An event B does not occur and so fulfil a prophecy A; it occurs in order that A may be fulfilled. And the prophecies are not uttered by, but through the prophets. This is a stupendous conception."

Look now at some examples from Matthew 24, and having to do with the second coming of Christ, a topic in focus in the minds of Christians today.

"If anyone says to you then 'See, here is the Christ!' or 'He is there!' do not believe him. False Christs and false prophets will arise and produce great miracles and portents in order, if possible, to lead even the elect astray. But I have forewarned you. And therefore if they say to you 'See, He is in the desert!' do not go out, or 'He is hiding in our midst,' do not believe them; for as the lightning leaps across the sky from east to west, so will be the advent of the Son of Man."—Pages 100, 101.

No one who has a copy of "The Four Gospels" translated by E. V. Rieu should miss reading his impressions of Jesus as a man, impressions left on his mind after his thorough work of translating was completed, and recorded on pages 30-32 of his introduction. For your meditation I present a few of the learned doctor's thoughts about Jesus.

"Superimposed on all my previous impressions is one of power, tremendous power, utterly controlled. A strong wind swept through Palestine; but if it rooted up the rotten tree, it did not crush the injured reed. The eyes that carved a way for Jesus through a murderous crowd could also draw a tax-collector to abandon his profession.

"It was His eyes that seem to have impressed His followers most deeply."

"His voice was powerful. Sitting in an anchored boat He could make it carry across the water to a large crowd standing on the beach."

"Most of the sayings that have come down to us bear every sign of careful preparation. They have the qualities of poetry, and with the aid of paradox, exaggeration, or play on words were cast in such a shape as would enable them to find their way into the

dullest mind and stay there. His way of putting things was as original as the things themselves."

The divinity of Jesus was also clearly revealed to Dr. Rieu through the Greek manuscripts, for he said of them, "They bear the seal of the Son of man and God."

J. B. Phillips, who was translating while Dr. Rieu was similarly engaged, joined with Dr. Rieu in an English broadcast on the subject of Gospel translation, December 3, 1953, which was after Dr. Rieu's work had been completed. These two men told of translation points on which they agreed and disagreed. Each in friendly scholarly style criticized the other's efforts on particular verses.

During the broadcast both J. B. Phillips and C. V. Rieu admitted that their work with the Gospels had made a profound impression on them, Dr. Rieu declaring, "My work changed me."

Little wonder, in the light of those words, 'My work changed me,' that we find Dr. Rieu closing his introduction with this challenge to us today:

"Were we to devote to their [the Gospels] comprehension a little of the selfless enthusiasm that is now expended on the riddle of our physical surroundings, we should cease to say that Christianity is coming to an end—we might even feel that it had only just begun." ★★



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ASK...

Desmond Hills

YOUNG PEOPLE'S QUESTIONS ANSWERED



LEFT OUT

I do not seem to be able to mix very well with other young people. What can I do to help people to like me and want to include me in their groups for games and outings?

The formula for making friends has not changed in thousands of years. It was first recorded by Solomon when he said, "A man that hath friends must show himself friendly." Proverbs 18:24. If you find yourself "left out," the chances are that you have not gone out of your way to be friendly. There are not many people who can resist a cheerful smile and a friendly hello.

Here are some principles of friendliness that attract other people.

- Foster interest in others without being inquisitive.
- Return on time things that you borrow.
- Increase your knowledge of people and places.
- Endeavour to be a good loser.
- Notice opportunities to help others in a practical way.
- Demonstrate Christian courtesy at all times.
- Leave yourself out of the hero's role in your stories.
- Include casual acquaintances in your invitation lists.
- Never say things that would embarrass others.
- Eliminate from your life gossip, envy and exaggeration.
- Show genuine appreciation for a task well done.
- Speak distinctly and in a pleasant voice.

DREAMS

If we are accountable to God for our thoughts, are we accountable for that about which we dream?

There are apparently just three sources from which our dreams come:

1. God uses dreams and visions to enlighten the minds of men and women as to their future or the future of His people. (Numbers 12:6.)
2. It is possible for dreams to have demonic origin and the prophet Jeremiah speaks of false dreams. (Jeremiah 23:32; 29:8.)
3. The vast majority of dreams come as the result of natural mental processes.

FROM NEXT MONTH, these youth pages will have a new format. Desmond B. Hills will still be with us but he will present an up-to-the-minute featurette that became very popular with our readers in this age group. His series of two years ago is returning and will have all its former zest.

IF YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE QUESTIONS TO ASK, Gordon D. Box will be their man from January on. Gordon Box is a vigorous youth leader and counsellor and his answers are pertinent and pithy—we know because already we have some of them.

We must remember that our minds will be filled with what we think about most. The thoughts in our minds will obviously have some effect on our dreams. However, at times our dreams will surprise us, but provided we are endeavouring to live in accordance with God's plan we cannot be held accountable for our dreams.

POSITIVE THINKING

What do psychologists and preachers mean when they tell us to think positively? They say that there is power in positive thinking, but I have not sensed any power in my life by trying to think on positive things.

To understand the power of positive thinking it is helpful if we know some things about the structure of our brains. Listed below are some interesting facts about the brain and its power from the pen of a noted brain surgeon, J. DeWitt Fox, M.D., F.A.C.S.

"Deep in the centre of your brain is your subconscious mind. Your subconscious mind is connected with thirteen billion cells and countless nerve pathways to the conscious cortex of your brain. As the seat of your emotions, your subconscious mind automatically controls all bodily functions.

"The only power you exert over it is by the selection of thought—negative or positive, sad or happy. Your brain is capable of three dynamic powers, each positive in direction and action. They are

- (1) Willpower,
- (2) Prayer power, and
- (3) Have power.

"These three mighty powers working through your subconscious brain will help you accomplish anything you desire."

It is encouraging to learn from these statements that we have tremendous potential powers within our own lives. If we discipline our thoughts to think positively, claim God's ennobling power, and are loving and lovable Christians, we are possessors of the positive power necessary for successful living. Surely this underscores the necessity for us to be very careful in our choice of films, music, and companions. If we are to have the power for positive thinking, we must, in the

words of one youth counsellor, "guard well the avenues of the soul." Our minds need to dwell on those things that are uplifting and ennobling. We must choose to think thoughts that are happy, optimistic, honest, unselfish, complimentary, gentle and pleasant. As we accentuate the positive in our lives, we will eliminate the negative and we will have the promised power with God and power with our fellow young people.

YOUTH Answers

Heather Bench comes from Toowoomba, in Queensland, where she is employed as a domestic seamstress. Besides her interests in music and church youth activities, which she displayed recently by singing in the Billy Graham Crusade Choir, she enjoys reading and sewing. In the future she hopes to travel.



EACH MONTH we address a question to a young person and ask him or her to suggest an answer. This month we have asked Heather Bench to consider the following question:

PRAYER

What do we have to do in order to have our prayers answered? Are there any specific requirements listed in the Scriptures that we have to fulfil in order for God to answer our prayers?

Prayer is one of the most wonderful privileges which a Christian has in this life. You may ask, "What is prayer?" It is simply talking to God as one would talk to a close and personal friend. It is the confiding of one's joys, sorrows, frustrations, disappointments and other burdens we carry, to the most wonderful of all friends, our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

In order to have our prayers answered it is necessary to feel a complete dependence on divine grace, guidance and heavenly strength to do God's will, and to sense our need of power to overcome Satan's temptations. Our prayers to God must be simple and childlike in faith and unselfishness, i.e., thinking of the needs of others as well as the needs of ourselves. We must come to God believing with all our heart, mind and soul that He will answer them, even though it may not be straight away.

In praying we must not only talk to God, but we must then listen to Him speaking to us, i.e., we may receive an answer through a friend or our pastor or parents or by reading God's word in the Scriptures. The answer to our prayer may suddenly come through clear as a bright, shining light. Also we must come to God in praise and thanksgiving for blessings already received. When we acknowledge our sins and repent and ask forgiveness in continual prayer we will see our life take on a new transformation. Another important thing is to do God's will and not go our own way, but always depend upon divine guidance.

The answer to the second question is "yes." There are specific prayer requirements listed in Scripture. First, we must come and "Seek . . . first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." Matthew 6:33. This reminds us that our primary need is for spiritual blessings and we should ask for these first. In the Lord's prayer that Jesus taught His disciples, we note that all but one of the requests are for our spiritual needs. Then, too, when asking God for material or spiritual things, we must come with belief in our hearts, for as stated in Matthew 21:22, "All things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." We must never be afraid to ask

God, for Jesus has said, "Ask, and it shall be given you." Matthew 7:7. However, we must always remember that although God supplies all our needs, He does not necessarily grant all of our wants.

As a young person, I have strong personal belief that God does hear and answer prayer. Just recently my mother was seriously ill and I prayed to God and asked Him to heal my mother and He answered my prayer and my mother is now well. I have certainly proved the promise found in James 5:15: "The prayer of faith shall save the sick." I believe prayer and praying to God with sincerity changes and transforms one's whole life, so I encourage all young people to pray daily. He does hear our prayers and He will answer them.



ON THE TEAM

IT IS A GREAT MOMENT when a young man can say to his college coach, "You mean I made the team, coach?"

It is likewise a great moment when a Christian realizes that he has really made the Christian team—when he hears the Master say, "Well done; I have a greater task for you. You have come to the kingdom for such a time as this!" Paul the great apostle assures us we are on the team with the cheering message: "We are workers together with God."

Paul often used current phrases from the world of sports to stir the church members of his day. "Do you not know that in the foot-race, while the runners all run, only one gets the prize? Run so as to make sure. . . . They indeed do this to win a fading wreath, but we an unfading one. I, then, so run, as with no uncertain aim." 1 Corinthians 9:24,25, Weymouth.

The story is told of a mother who was being congratulated by her neighbours because her son had made the college football team. One of the neighbours asked, "What position on the team does your boy have?" The embarrassed mother replied, "I really don't know what position on the team he has, but I think he said that he was one of the drawbacks!"

It is quite possible. He could wear a uniform and still be a drawback. Wearing a uniform does not make a fullback or halfback out of any player.

Likewise, it takes more than merely joining a church to make us "labourers together with God." There are too many "drawbacks" on the Christian team. We need more teamwork in all our missionary enterprises. We do not need any "drawbacks" on our team!



SOLUTION TO BIBLE CROSSWORD

ACROSS: 1. Trees. 4. Image. 7. Inn. 8. Adorn. 10. Tutor. 12. Seasons. 14. Ha. 16. Ah. 17. Greetings. 18. Go. 19. So. 21. Furrows. 25. Agree. 26. Until. 27. Sir. 28. Egypt. 29. Shred.

DOWN: 1. Teach. 2. Enos. 3. Sina. 4. Into. 5. Acts. 6. Earth. 9. Revenue. 11. Unknown. 13. Satyr. 15. Ago. 16. Ass. 18. Grace. 20. Oiled. 21. Fray. 22. Rest. 23. Ours. 24. Star.



One Family's Christmas

I HAVE BEEN sitting on this story for two years, give or take a month or two. I could have used it last Christmas, but I wanted to make sure it worked the second time round. It did, and so here it is.

George and Frances Dean (not their real names, of course) are two ordinary people who might live in your suburb. They are, by their own standards, ordinary; by mine, they are extraordinary. True, they are good, run-of-the-mill citizens, with George working in an accountant's office and Frances doing her housewifely duties plus an occasional bit of sewing to help make ends meet and to pay for those little extras that make life sweeter and gayer.

They have, like so many other Mr. and Mrs. Suburbias, three children and a mortgage—how else would they have built their house? They like to go on family picnics at the week-ends and barbecue things for lunch in the wintertime; and they like to go down to the beach and soak up the sun, the sand and the surf in the summertime. George and Frances are pillars of their local Baptist church, and their children go along to Sunday school regularly. Frances is a very good neighbour and George will bend over backwards to lend anyone a hand. Good, honest, God-fearing people, the salt of the earth.

And comes Christmas time, they are like everyone else. They think up things to give each other, and

the youngsters (the two younger ones especially) enjoy the Santa Claus pantomime that goes on in ten million homes around the world. There is always great secrecy and much hiding of parcels and surreptitious wrapping of mysterious-looking objects around and about December 24, especially as darkness begins to gather.

That's the pattern of Christmases throughout the mainstream of Christendom, and that's how it was in the house of George and Frances Dean (so called in this story). Notice that. *Was*. Past tense. For that's not how it *is*. And that's not how it was last year or the year before. And that, I am assured, is not how it will be this year. Has George lost his good spirit? His faith? His generous outlook? No, none of these. What happened two years ago was this:

As the festive season drew near, George and Frances felt a very warm glow of gratitude to God that they had so much when so many people around the world had so little. They talked the matter over and they sensed almost a feeling of guilt that, when Christmas came around, they would lavish gifts on their children; their children would give them presents; they would agree that their cup of happiness was full to overflowing; they would thank God for His bounties and they would eat a Christmas dinner that a king would think a feast.

Their feelings did not get the better of them, however; that is to say, they did not allow the tiny feeling-akin-to-guilt to change their plans—until one November day at their church the service was taken by a returned missionary. He told of needs in his field; he painted a picture of squalor and sadness and want and woe that caused Frances and George to be very silent as they walked home. There, they sat down to an ample repast, but somehow Frances's best cooking stuck in George's throat. Even the children, so I am told, lacked their usual ebullience.

"You know," George said aloud when the last of the meal had been eaten, "we are among the luckiest people on the face of the earth. Here we have plenty of food and yet there are those people we heard about this morning. Soon we will be buying Christmas presents and giving lots of things to each other and to other people, and while it is very nice, I wonder if this is the best way to celebrate Christmas. I wonder if Jesus would want us to go to all this trouble and expense when there is so much want and misery."

This sparked off a rush of discussion. Everyone had his say, even young Peter, who was seven or thereabouts, and the least (chronologically) of his brethren, namely Anthony and Jane. No one seems to know who first thought of the idea; and no one can pinpoint the exact moment when the idea began to take shape. But this it did, and out of that dinner-table discussion (which I am informed went on until four o'clock in the afternoon) came a plan.

It was a simple enough plan, really. It was just that they would this year forgo buying gifts for each another and put the money, combined, into a specific missionary project. They selected the mission station of a missionary who had been their minister and with whom George and Frances had fitfully corresponded over the intervening years. Now George wrote to him in earnest excitement. He told the missionary of their plan and asked their friend what there was that his mission station lacked—within their means—and suggested that the Dean family would like to make it their project.

By return came a letter that set the family a-buzzing with excitement. The entire mission station, it seemed, had been praying that they would not, this year, be left without water as they had been last summer. If only they could get a pump and some piping, they would be able to pump water from a spring in a nearby ravine; but the site was virtually inaccessible for day-to-day use.

Moreover, a trader had offered the missionary a second-hand pump and piping to connect the mission with "real, live running water." But the lot would cost \$100. They would do the work themselves; labour costs would be nil; they were so excited.

George and Frances and the children were excited, too. True, they hadn't expected to spend \$100 on Christmas presents and extra food and etceteras during

the pre-Christmas buying spree. Still, they counted up costs and made estimates of what they would save by having no Christmas presents and cutting down their Christmas card list and making Christmas dinner just a very little more elaborate than an ordinary meal, and the whole savings came to something like \$75.00.

Now, I don't know whether you think that is meagre or handsome; but that is what they estimated they might have spent. Then they "passed the hat around again," and George, relying on his Christmas bonus somewhat, made it up to the exact \$100.00 and sent off the cheque to his friend. They had all contributed something, as Peter's empty money-box testified.

Frances and George were happy enough about it, but they wondered how the children would react when Christmas morning came and there were no presents, no tree, no bon-bons, no tinsel, no . . . nothing.

It was "just a bit different," George said; but no tears were shed—which speaks very well for a seven-year-old. And they tried to make up to the children in other ways—took them out, had a small family party that night and finished up singing around the piano and drinking lemonade and telling Christmas stories and all that kind of thing that somehow in its own magical and inexplicable way does more to weld a family together than anything you can name.

The test came last year; would they go back to the traditional Christmas with its mistletoe and holly and mince pies and plum pudding and . . . presents? Or would they find another project and finance that?

I record it as a matter of history now that they followed the latter course. This time their project was one nearer home; it was a woman whose truck-driver husband had been killed in a road accident when he went to sleep at the wheel of his truck in another state. While not exactly destitute, she was absolutely without ready cash at that time. And she had a family. But this time the Deans had been preparing all the year for their Christmas project. And when the disaster occurred in early November George was able to hold a family council and produce \$120 and some odd cents for this, their Christmas project.

And this year? Again the matter is well in hand to do something for another missionary—though this time it is to repair a tractor which has been lying idle all the year because funds just ran out.

I merely tell this story; I do not say, "Go thou and do likewise." This is not for everyone; that I readily concede. But I will venture the opinion that, if you are of the mettle that can move into such a programme; if your children are of such sterling stuff that they can cheerfully give up the delights of Christmas morning for a project that they are never likely to see, then God will richly and abundantly bless you. At least that's what George and Frances and their family say they have found from practical experience.

Robert H. Parr



BIBLE QUESTIONS ANSWERS

Readers Questions
Are Answered in These Columns by
DESMOND FORD, M.A., Ph.D.

The Strange Act

Is not the following account incompatible with the character of Christ? "And when He saw a fig tree in the way. He came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig tree withered away." Matthew 21:19. Please explain. K.T.

The meaning is beautifully summarized in the following quotation:

"The cursing of the fig tree was an acted parable. That barren tree, flaunting its pretentious foliage in the very face of Christ, was a symbol of the Jewish nation. The Saviour desired to make plain to His disciples the cause and the certainty of Israel's doom. For this purpose He invested the tree with moral qualities, and made it the expositor of divine truth. The Jews stood forth distinct from all other nations, professing allegiance to God. They had been specially favoured by Him, and they laid claim to righteousness above every other people. But they were corrupted by the love of the world and the greed of gain. . . . All the trees in the fig orchard were destitute of fruit; but the leafless trees raised no expectation, and caused no disappointment. By these trees the Gentiles were represented. . . . With them the times of figs was not yet. They were still waiting for a day which would bring them light and hope. The Jews, who had received greater blessings from God, were held accountable for their abuse of these gifts. . . .

"Jesus had come to the fig tree hungry to find food. So He had come to Israel, hungering to find in them the fruits of righteousness. . . . But love to God and man was eclipsed by pride and self-sufficiency. They brought ruin upon

themselves by refusing to minister to others. . . . In the barren tree they might read both their sin and its punishment. Withered beneath the Saviour's curse, standing forth sere and blasted, dried up by the roots, the fig tree showed what the Jewish people would be when the grace of God was removed from them. Refusing to impart blessing, they would no longer receive it."—E. G. White, "The Desire of Ages," pages 582, 583.

An Unusual Example

Would you please explain the parable of the unjust steward? Why did the Lord commend this rascal? G.D.K.

Parables teach by contrast as well as by comparison. Thus Christ on another occasion spoke of a householder who unwillingly left his bed at midnight to help an embarrassed friend, thus strongly contrasting with the One who is ever willing to answer prayer. See Luke 11:5-13. "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?" Similarly, if an unjust steward can exercise his brains in order to find a refuge by a well-planned handling of money matters, how much more should the Christian exercise a careful stewardship of the means entrusted to him by God? When verse 8 of Luke 16 declares that "the lord commended the unjust steward," the "lord" here referred to stands apart from the speaker in verse 9 where Christ says, "And I say unto you." By "lord" is meant the master of the steward who probably had a good eye for practising and recognizing shrewdness.

All Ministers?

Do you believe that the following warning in its reference to depending upon ministers applies even to ministers who are to be found within a church which believes the entire Bible, and which has an understanding to a large degree of its special message for these times?

Here is the passage to which I refer: "It is not enough to have good intentions; it is not enough to do what a man thinks is right, or what the minister tells him is right. His soul's salvation is at stake, and he should search the Scriptures for himself. However strong may be his convictions, however confident he may be that the minister knows what is truth, this is not his foundation. He has a chart pointing out every way-mark on the heavenward journey, and he ought not to guess at anything."—E. G. White, "The Great Controversy," page 598. A. H.

I believe the reference is to all ministers. However, inasmuch as I am one of them, you must not rely on my opinion, but from your own.

Two Witnesses

Who are the "two witnesses" referred to in Revelation, chapter 11? T.H.

The number "two" in Scripture frequently is symbolic of confirmed testimony. See 2 Corinthians 13:2; Numbers 35:30; Deuteronomy 19:15; Matthew 18:16; John 8:17. The other symbolism given in Revelation 11 makes it clear that God's testimony to truth as found in the Old and New Testaments and as presented by His church is here referred to. Compare Zechariah 4:2-14; Psalm 119:105; Revelation 22:18, 19. To understand Revelation 11, one needs to study the account of God's judgments upon those who persecuted His people in the days of the Exodus and the reformation under Elijah. Christ's Word and His church are presented in this chapter as having a similar experience to Christ Himself, who also prophesied for 1260 days, and was then oppressed and persecuted, preliminary to God's exaltation of Him to heaven.

Sabbath-keeping

My husband has a heavy study programme, and would rather not read on Sabbath afternoons. Would travelling into the country be appropriate for Sabbath-keeping? What other ways can you suggest for keeping holy the Sabbath? H.H.

True Sabbath rest will include cessation from what constitutes our normal weekly burdens. The manual labourer will find rest in spiritual reading, but the mental worker is wise who seeks rest by pleasant walks through country scenes with his family. No specific rule can be laid down regarding how far it would be right to travel to gain such country sites, but the principle is clear that the Sabbath hours are holy, and therefore it is not good to consume much time by unnecessary journeying. Sitting in a vehicle does not refresh most mental workers, but moderate physical activity in scenes reminiscent of Eden while conversing on holy themes can be greatly restorative. One purpose of the Sabbath is to provide time for more than usual association between the members of the family, and bush rambles, or something similar, offer much for all ages. The chief Scriptural passage offering guidance is the following:

"If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on My holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable; and shalt honour Him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." Isaiah 58:13, 14.

Can Law-keeping Save?

A recent edition of the "Signs of the Times" declared, "No informed Seventh-day Adventist believes that he can be saved by his works of law." But I have heard an Adventist preacher say, "If you keep the Ten Commandments you may be pretty sure to be saved." Was this man not an informed Seventh-day Adventist? P.S.

Much depends upon the context in which such a statement was uttered. Our Lord Himself said to one enquirer, "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments," and then proceeded to enunciate from the Decalogue. See Matthew 19:16-26. However, the context indicates that Christ was using the statement in the endeavour to convict this individual of his need of divine help. Describing the true condition of all who trust in anything or anyone other than God He said on the same occasion: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." And, "With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible." It is impossible for imperfect man to earn salvation, but provided he comes to acknowledge his helplessness, God will work in him a change of heart which will render him ready for the kingdom earned by Christ's obedience.

A Plainer Bible

Why was the Bible not written in a plainer manner so that all could readily understand it? H. H.

Those things essential for all to know in order to inherit eternal life are simply stated in Scripture. See, for example, John 3:16; Romans 10:9-11; Matthew, chapters 5, 6, 7; Exodus,

chapter 20; 1 John 4:8, 16. Our main difficulty is not in understanding the divine will, but in doing it. Or to put it another way, it is not so much the things in the Bible we don't understand that trouble us, but the things we do understand.

God has made His Word as a mine of precious things, and effort and perseverance are required to extricate its hidden treasures. Only in such a manner could He ensure that in our study of His Word we would feel our dependence upon Him and seek Him prayerfully for help. Otherwise Christian experience could become more a matter of the head than of the heart. Far more important than our mere knowing of truths is our knowing of Him who is the Truth, and this comes as the feelings and desires aspire heavenwards in prayer from an individual conscious of his own ignorance and weakness. Christian growth does not come through mere memorization, but through a maturing relationship with the divine Spirit.

Which Covenant?

What is the covenant referred to in the following verse, and who was the prince who confirmed it? Daniel 9:27. "And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate." C.

This is the concluding verse in the famous prophecy of the seventy weeks of years which Sir Isaac Newton declared to be "the foundation stone of the Christian religion." In the context, Daniel predicts that within 490 years from the commandment to restore the state of Jerusalem, the Messiah shall appear as the Prince of the everlasting

covenant, be rejected by His people, and "cut off" by civil decree, and thus the way shall be paved for Jerusalem to be overspread by abominations and finally destroyed.

The covenant referred to is the plan of redemption entrusted to our first parents, and later to Abraham and his descendants. Compare the following passages:

Behold, My covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. . . . And I will establish My covenant between Me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant. . . . And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God." Genesis 17:4-8.

"If ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people: for all the earth is Mine: and ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation." Exodus 19:5, 6.

"Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant. . . . I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be My people. . . . I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." Jeremiah 31:31-34.

"And He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is My blood of the new testament [covenant], which is shed for many for the remission of sins." Matthew 26:27, 28.

Christ confirmed the plan of salvation by His death for us, and thus made possible the change of heart whereby His will or law is loved by the forgiven sinner. Those who reject such great love become subject to Satanic abominations as did Israel, and thus to ultimate judgment.

HOW PHONEY IS YOUR CHRISTMAS?

(Concluded from page 20)

Jesus ridiculed these theories and accepted the blind and the crippled and the lepers before He healed them. His scathing criticism of the hypocrisy of those who rejected these people must have done much to bolster their wilting self-esteem. It has taken us many centuries to begin to catch up with some of these attitudes of His, but I wonder if we would have begun to do so without His lead.

Best of all, Jesus gave us reassurance about our attitude to the great universe of time and space which always seems to menace primitive man with its earthquakes, its storms, its pitiless suns and its frightening comets. He postulated a universe controlled by one God whose attitude to us all is as benign as that of

a father. More than this, He taught His followers how to make contact with this greater universe. Just as He scorned material possessions, so He tended to by-pass scholarship and intellect. Instead He taught us to believe in belief, belief that was founded neither on logic or sense impression, but on a kind of earthly intuition. Through such belief He showed men how to lay hold on God and win the hope of life after death. No one will ever know the final sum of happiness that hope has conferred upon man.

These are just a few of the ideas that changed the world. And if you have been charmed by only one or two of them, if you have tried and proved one here and there, you have, if you stop to think of it, a tremendous lot to be thankful for. And if any of this gratitude fills your heart, as you think it over, then Christmas will be for you a rich experience. ★★



A Story for
Boys and Girls
by
MYRTLE O'HARA

THEIR FIRST NOEL

THE POSTMAN'S WHISTLE sounded in the street and Chris ran to the letter box. He opened it and found a letter with a New Guinea stamp on it. "Mum, here's a letter from Aunt Doris," he called as he ran back inside. Jenny came hurrying in from the back yard.

"Open it quickly, Mum, and tell us the news," she said eagerly. A letter from Aunt Doris was always interesting.

"I had a very amusing experience this morning," Mother read. "'Amy's father came to take her away to his village and he gravely offered me one shilling in payment for looking after his daughter. Fancy working for a whole year, seven days a week and often in the nights, too, as well as feeding and clothing the baby, and being paid the sum of one shilling! Of course, I took the money and thanked him. I'm wondering where he got it, as he comes from an inland village where money is never seen. A shilling would represent almost a fortune to him.'"

"Oh, poor little Amy," Jenny said. "I hope her father will look after her properly and be kind to her."

"Of course," Mother continued reading, "'we were terribly sad to see Amy go, and the poor little thing cried. But babies soon forget, and before long I guess she will settle into her new life. When I took her from the village a year ago she was just skin stretched over tiny bones. Her fingers were no thicker than matches and she was too weak to cry. She went away a lovely, healthy, chubby little girl.'"

Aunt Doris went on to tell of twin boys that she was now looking after. "'They are about nine months old,' Mother read, 'but are so weak from starvation that they can't even sit up. Their legs are no thicker than my finger.'

"We are planning to have a celebration during Christmas time this year, and the school children are already practising for a concert. The people here have never heard of Christmas. I would love to give every one on the mission a present, and am wondering if you could help me. The parcels of clothing we receive from time to time contain dresses for the women and girls, but we desperately need shirts and shorts for the boys, as well as baby clothes. When the babies arrive here their mothers don't even possess a rag to wrap them in.'"

There was more news about the sick people that Aunt Doris and Uncle Joe were looking after in their little hospital,

and about the gardens they were making to feed the children in the school, and about the trips to other villages when they had to walk for days up and down the steep mountains in the steamy tropical heat and daily tropical rains, and many other items of news.

When Mother finished reading the letter she went on with her work and Jenny and Chris went outside to play. But instead of playing, they sat down and began to talk about the children in New Guinea.

"Imagine not having Christmas, and not even knowing about it," Jenny said.

"We've just got to do something for them," Chris said, "but what can we do? What we do wouldn't help much."

"It would be better than nothing," Jenny answered.

They sat silent for a while, then she said, "I know. We really don't need any presents for next Christmas. We could buy something with the money they would cost, and send it to Aunt Doris."

"Good. Let's go and tell Mum," Chris answered.

"I think that's a splendid idea," Mother said when she heard what the children had to say. "I don't need any presents either, so I'll come in on your plan." When Daddy came home they told him, and he also was enthusiastic to join with them. Grandma wanted to help, too. And so the idea spread. Friends, relations and neighbours all clubbed together to save the money they would have spent on Christmas presents and to buy things with it to send to Aunt Doris.

Mother said, "We must spend the money wisely," and then she prayed that God would direct her in her buying. She turned into a shop for no particular reason and as she entered the door a voice came over the loud speaker telling of boys' shorts that were being sold very cheaply on the third floor. She went up and found they were in colours of the brightest red, blue and yellow—just the thing for dark-skinned children.

"I'll take the lot," Mother told the salesman. He stared at her. She told him why she wanted them and he was amused, but very pleased that he had made such a good sale. Meanwhile Mother said a silent prayer of thankfulness.

In another shop she found racks of girls' school uniforms which were no longer required by a particular school, each selling for less than the cost of one yard of the material, and oddments of boys' shirts being sold for below cost price. In the baby wear department she was given many lovely garments that were not quite perfect. And so the surprises kept coming. "The Lord provided the very things I needed just when I looked for them," she told the family later.

A case filled with beautiful new clothes and some toys was sent to Aunt Doris, and everyone tried to imagine her surprise when she unpacked it. Soon after Christmas they received her letter. "I don't know how to thank you wonderful people," she wrote. "With what you sent and with gifts from other people, I had enough to give everyone on the mission a present. We told them the Christmas story and explained how people in Australia kept Christmas. Then, just for fun, and despite the heat, Uncle Joe dressed up as Father Christmas and distributed the presents. The natives were overjoyed. Some didn't know how to give expression to their happiness, so they just ran around as hard as they could and shouted at the tops of their voices. We will send you a picture of our Christmas party as soon as we can. I'm sure I've never before had such a happy Christmas in my life."

"I also enjoyed last Christmas more than any other," Jenny said, and Chris added, "So did I. Suppose we do the same thing next Christmas!"

"I think that would be lovely," Mother said.

Because two unselfish children in Australia decided to go without their Christmas presents, many people in New Guinea were made happy. And that, boys and girls, is the story of how Christmas first came to some of the people in New Guinea.

★★



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