

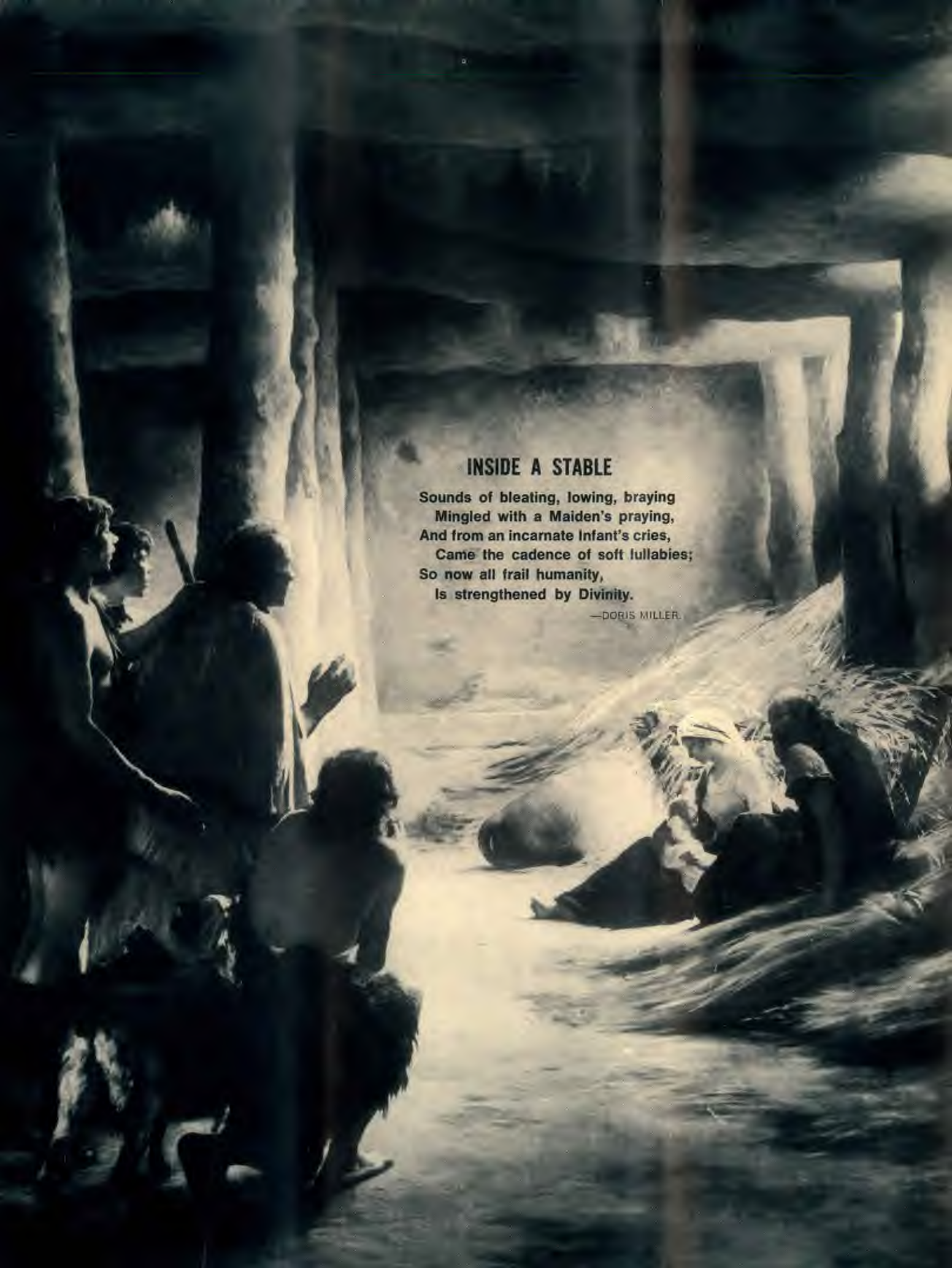
signs

OF THE TIMES



Christ is coming soon! - PAGE 22

December 1974



INSIDE A STABLE

Sounds of bleating, lowing, braying
Mingled with a Maiden's praying,
And from an incarnate Infant's cries,
Came the cadence of soft lullabies;
So now all frail humanity,
Is strengthened by Divinity.

—DORIS MILLER.



"I--I wish..."

A PROFESSIONAL MAN in San Antonio, Texas, parked his new car on the street, and after returning from a business call, he saw a little street urchin looking at and studying the new features of the

car. Here, in his own words, is the story of what followed:

When I put the key in the car door, the little boy asked:

"Is this your car, mister?"

I replied, "It sure is."

"How much did it cost, mister?"

"Sonny, I don't know what it cost."

"You mean it's yours, and you don't know what it cost?"

"That's right, it is mine and I don't know what it cost."

"Well, mister, you don't look like a man that would steal a car. Where did you get it?"

"My brother gave it to me."

"You mean, your brother gave it to you and it didn't cost you anything?"

"That's right."

"I—I wish . . ."

I thought I knew what he was going to wish—that he had a brother like that, but when he finished that sentence I was jarred to the soles of my feet.

"I wish I could be a brother like that."

When I had regained my composure, I asked the little boy to take a ride with me; but the poor kid said, "I'll dirty up your car."

I thought to myself, Your clothes may be dirty, but your heart is white as snow.

So I insisted, and when we had ridden just a few minutes, he asked: "Mister, would you mind driving in front of my house?"

When I stopped in front of a flight of inside stairs on a back street, he bounded up them, and in a few minutes came back slowly, carrying his little brother all crippled up with infantile paralysis. Tenderly he placed his brother on the bottom step and, pointing to the new car, he said:

"There she is, Bud. His brother gave it to him, and one day I'm going to give you one just like it and then you can see all of the Christmas windows for yourself."

I said, choking up, "Buddy, you are going to see them all today, this minute, and both of you are going to pick out what you want and have it."

Taking the crippled boy in my arms I placed him in the front seat of my car along with his brother, and we drove to the biggest toy department in town. The next few hours were the happiest of my life!

Do you want a foretaste of heaven? Be a big brother to someone in need.

—Selected.


OUR COVER PICTURE: Art Director Alan Holman gives us the Christmas theme, which sets the atmosphere for this issue.

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You know something? Some people don't even have a BIBLE at Christmas. They are too poor to buy one for themselves. Because it's Christmas, how about sending us a dollar, and we'll send all of your dollars to the Bible Society so that someone who can't afford a Bible can have one. Maybe the Bible Society can even get it to them for Christmas! Address your letter: The Editor, Signs Publishing Company, Warburton, Victoria, 3799, Australia. We'll pass on every cent we get. And fast.





Ted Pettit asks, Have we lost the true meaning of the day that celebrates the birth of Christ?

CHRISTMAS is the singing of carols, the glitter of Christmas trees, the giving and receiving of presents, and the time when people eat all sorts of good things that go with this festive season.

On Christmas Eve, children put up their stockings for presents, parents hang holly, mistletoe and decorations; bright lights wink from Christmas trees; Dad puts on his Santa Claus outfit to distribute presents to the family. It is the season of goodwill.

Yet, strangely, though this holiday celebrates the birth of Christ, could some first-century Christians witness all this, they would wonder what on earth was going on!

"What has holly, mistletoe and Santa Claus got to do with Jesus?" they would query.

Furthermore, they would inform us that, in any case, we've got the wrong date!

When Was Jesus Born?

Anyone who knows anything about the climatic conditions of the Holy Land, knows that shepherds would not be outside watching their flocks, as the Christmas story

tells us, on the night of December 25—it's far too cold. After October, shepherds herd their flocks indoors at night. Also, mid-winter would hardly have been a time suitable for Mary to have journeyed with Joseph from Nazareth to Bethlehem to pay their taxes.

Consequently, this date for Christ's birthday cannot be the correct one. And though some scholars have said Christ was born in April, and others have asserted that October is more correct, the plain fact is that we simply do not know exactly **when** Christ was born, because the Bible gives us no such indication.

All we can say is that Jesus was indeed a real historical figure, born around this time. We know He grew up in Nazareth, that He lived

Ted Pettit is the assistant editor of "The Signs of the Times," our sister-journal which is published in Britain.

The Strange Story of Santa Claus

Why was December 25 known as a festive season long before the birth of Christ? Who was the real Santa Claus? Why Christmas trees, holly, candles and mistletoe?

and preached a world-revolutionizing message, that He was crucified, but was resurrected on the third day, and now lives as our Saviour and Lord. There is no doubt about any of this. We may be sure that there is a real historical basis for the existence of Jesus Christ, though we don't know the precise date of His birth.

Did the Early Christians Celebrate Christmas?

Actually, first-century Christians did not seem too bothered about Christ's birthday. They were so captivated with the knowledge that Jesus had come, that He was the Messiah, that He was their risen Lord, and that His gospel had to be preached in all the world, that the actual date of His birth never figured prominently among them.

Dr. Augustus Neander has stated: "The idea of a birthday festival was far from the minds of the Christians generally at this period" (A.D. 346-399).¹

Clement of Rome, famed Church Father, believed all such speculations concerning the date of Christ's birth "idle and unprofitable." The earliest mention of Christmas as a feast was in A.D. 354 in the Philocalian calendar.²

In fact, Christmas was not introduced until after the last great persecution of the church by Diocletian. It was adopted as a feast in Rome when Constantine, the first emperor of Rome to accept the Christian religion, came to power.³ And it was not until the fifth century that the Western church ordered Christmas to be for ever celebrated on this day.

Consequently, it was not until hundreds of years after Christ had died on the cross, that Christmas became universally recognized.

Constantine's Motives

Why did Constantine give weight to the establishment of Christmas? Leonard Verduin has summed this

matter up very well in these words:

"The facts are that Constantine was a worried statesman, as well he might have been. The empire he had inherited was coming apart at the seams. . . . How could he bind the sprawling domains together again? How regain the ancient stability and inner cohesion? . . . Make the religion of Jesus the religion of the empire."

It was a bold and imaginative scheme, and Constantine brilliantly succeeded. So successful was his work of amalgamating Christianity with paganism, that the edifice he created lasted for over a thousand years.

When Constantine the Great espoused the cause of Christianity, a new spirit was infused into the church. Constantine attempted to conciliate his pagan and his Christian subjects with the respect which he appeared to entertain for both, so that his empire might be unified and strengthened. He was particularly devoted to Apollo, god of the sun; and among his many edicts, he enforced the observance of Sunday, the pagan day of the sun, rather than the Bible Sabbath, Saturday.

Constantine was exceedingly fond of display, and incorporated many of his pagan ideas into the observance of Christmas. Many church leaders agreed with him that to gain converts from paganism, it would be better to acquiesce to their former customs. In fact, when Pope Gregory sent Augustine to convert Saxon England, he told him "to accommodate, as far as possible, Christian to heathen ceremonies, that the people might not be startled." Naturally, little opposition was aroused when Christmas was celebrated with pomp and ceremony.

Christmas Before Christ

Centuries before the birth of Christ, the pagans celebrated the

twenty-fifth day of December as the birthday of the sun. It was a day of revelry and feasting, because the days lengthened after the sun had passed the winter solstice. The ancient people burned fires of yule logs to their gods for having returned the sun to them.

The Romans also celebrated this day. In A.D. 275, the emperor Aurelian commanded that the feast of the sun god, the *Sol Invictus*, "unconquered sun," should be celebrated throughout the empire. As the cult of Mithraism, which centred around the worship of the sun, was widespread throughout Europe, this festival was being observed by thousands.⁴

Unbelievably, however, the festival goes back thousands of years before pagan Rome. The names of pagan gods that were worshipped change from era to era, but the same concepts of ritual remain. Furthermore, there seems to be an uncanny parallel between these false religious ideas and that of the gospel story of the virgin Mary and her child Jesus.

In ancient Egypt, the "son" of "Isis, mother of the gods," was "born" on December 25.

In ancient Babylon, "Yule" was the Chaldean name for an "infant" or "little child," and December 25 was known as "Yule day," or the day the "great Deliverer" was born.⁵

The north Arabic race that lived in the "lost city" of Petra—rediscovered in the 19th century—was influenced by these Babylonian myths. They worshipped Dusura, who corresponded to Dionysus, Tammuz or Bacchus—the "great Deliverer" and god of the sun. Tammuz had a virgin mother Dusares, queen of the gods, and also known as the earth-goddess. Dusura was "born" in December, and his birthday was celebrated at Petra with games and festivities.

Later, in Alexandria, the Greek city of Egypt, the image of this babe was taken from the temple and acclaimed throughout the city with the words: "The virgin hath begotten"—on December 25.⁷

Roman Saturnalia

It was thus that this festival came down to the Romans, who celebrated in December their mid-winter holiday with the **Saturnalia**. This began on December 17, and lasted for seven days. It was a period of indulgence in eating, drinking, and gambling. Gifts were exchanged, such as candles, which symbolized the increasing power of the sun after the winter solstice. It was a season of hilarity and goodwill.⁸

Seeing the strange parallels between Christianity and these ancient customs, the Popes of Rome and the emperor transformed this mid-winter festival into a Christian feast. This was a compromise the church made with paganism, one among many, the results of which linger today. The reasoning was that this compromise would turn people from worshipping the sun to worshipping the light of the world.

The Holly and the Ivy

Still later, the Germano-Celtic tribes of Europe introduced into the Christmas festival their own ceremonies—ones that had also been derived from ancient pagan beliefs: the Yule-log, fires, lights, feasting, the Christmas tree, dishes such as boar's-head and roast goose, and decorations such as holly, mistletoe and ivy. Such things signified warmth and life, and depicted the increasing power of the sun after the winter solstice.

Should We Observe Christmas Today?

Much of the foregoing could be construed as deprecating the Christian festival of Christmas. One could well assume that in the light of these facts, an air of critical cynicism should surround this celebration.

We believe this would be an unfortunate mistake. Obviously, sincere Christians cannot unite in the objectionable features of Christmas as it is popularly celebrated today, but they need not frown upon the holiday because of its background of paganism.

WILL THE REAL SANTA CLAUS PLEASE STAND UP?

Behind the name Santa Claus, actually stands the figure of the pagan Germanic god Thor (after whom Thursday is named). Some details about Thor from ancient German mythology will show the origin of the modern Santa Claus tale:

Thor was the god of the peasants and the common people. He was represented as an elderly man, jovial and friendly, of heavy build, with a long white beard. His element was the fire, his colour red. The rumble and roar of thunder were said to be caused by the rolling of his chariot, for he alone among the gods never rode on horseback, but drove in a chariot drawn by two white goats (called Cracker and Gnasher). He was fighting the giants of ice and snow, and thus became the Yule-god. He was said to live in the "Northland," where he had his palace among icebergs. He was considered as the cheerful and friendly god by our pagan forefathers, never harming the humans, but rather helping and protecting them. The fire-place in every home was especially sacred to him, and he was said to come down through the chimney into his element, the fire. (Note 70: H. A. Grueber, "Myths of Northern Lands," Vol. 1, New York, 1895, page 61ff.)

After all, a Christmas tree is simply another beautiful part of God's creation, and can just as easily be used as a vehicle of veneration for the true God. Giving gifts to those we love is simply a way of expressing that love. Many of these things, despite their pagan connections, are in themselves quite innocent. It would therefore be unreasonable and immature to suppress them entirely.

Though December 25 is not the actual birthday of Christ, we can welcome the emphasis Christmas gives to kindness and Christian charity, especially to the poor and unfortunate. Also we do well to consider, in a special sense, the deeper implications of the celebrations.

True Meaning Obscured

It may well be that due to the pagan influence over this festival and the irreligion of our times, the true meaning of Christmas has become obscured. As we see the confusing results of amalgamating pagan ideas with Christian principles, surely the old cry of the Protestant reformers should not go unheeded. What the church urgently needs today is a thorough work of reformation that will lead us back to sound and basic Bible truths, and away from man-made traditions that contradict Scripture.

Paradoxically, as soon as Christmas is divested of these falsehoods, and seen in its true Biblical

perspective, such fundamental verities that would cleanse, establish, and empower the church, immediately come into focus.

The Realities of Christmas

Christmas teaches four great facts of the Christian faith that are really the greatest gifts God ever gave to man.

★ First, it tells us that **Christ has come**. For "when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman." Galatians 4: 4. This historic reality of Christ is irrefragable. We may have undoubted assurance that this is so.

★ Second, the Son who came was indeed, as was seen in the faint adumbrations of pagan myths, **the great Deliverer**. To Mary it was said, His name shall be called Jesus (Matthew 1: 21), which means, Saviour—one who can deliver His people from their sins. It is for this reason that all who celebrate Christmas this year can have a fresh start, can have their sins forgiven and their lives renewed through faith in Jesus Christ.

★ Third, Joseph was told this child would be called "Emmanuel," a name which means "God with us" (Matthew 1: 23). God is now "with man." For many, at the close of 1974, the outlook is gloomy. Problems confront man on every hand, economic problems, pollution, nuclear war, violence and evil, crime and immoral-

ity. Many hearts are fearful as they contemplate the future. We should remember, "God is with us," the future is in His hand, we can trust Him.

★ Fourth, the promises of this one who was the Saviour reveal how this is to be. Before leaving this earth, Jesus said, "I will come again." John 14:3. Soon this promise is to be fulfilled. Then, as was foretold at the Saviour's birth, "the morning sun from heaven will rise upon us, to shine on those who live in darkness, under the cloud of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace." Luke 1:78, 79, N.E.B. Christmas makes us certain that Jesus will come the second time—not as a babe, but as King of kings.

The True and the Counterfeit

How can we explain the uncanny resemblance the old pagan rituals had with the gospel story of the virgin Mary and her child? Alexander Hislop, who made an extensive study of this topic, may well have been correct when he observed:

"Babylon was, at that time, the centre of the civilized world; and thus paganism, corrupting the divine symbol, had opportunities of sending forth its debased counterfeit of the truth to all the ends of the earth, through the mysteries that were affiliated with the great central system in Babylon. Thus the very customs of Christmas still existent cast surprising light at once on the revelations of grace made to all the earth, and the ef-

forts made by Satan . . . to degrade them."

These old pagan myths and superstitions were but perverted copies of the truth. Satan has been unsuccessful. The glorious gospel of Jesus Christ has come, and the way of salvation has been opened up for man.

At this Christmas season, let us take this opportunity to reaffirm our belief in Jesus Christ as the great Deliverer, the One who is soon to come and whose reign will never end. Let us invite our loved ones, our friends and our neigh-

bours to share this faith, this blessing, and this joy with us. ★★

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MEMO NEW READER . . .

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IN OUR JANUARY ISSUE . . .

"The bubble of fantasy has burst. The age of Pop has swung to a stop." So writes Russell Kranz, an Australian presently living in England, where he lectures at the New Gallery, Regent Street, London. He should know; he lives in the middle of the action in London. You will read his conclusions in "When Enough's Enough."

Satisfied with yourself as you are? Or would you like to change your whole personality? Then you will find some rather interesting facts and figures in "Prayer Can Change Your Personality," by Leo Van Dolson.

And seeing it is New Year next month (although we'll mail the January issue to you before Christmas), we give you, "How to Make a Wish Come True" by John Knight. It's a kind of "Resolutions-with-a-difference."

All of these and lots more in the January **SIGNS**.

STACKED AWAY inconspicuously in a small book of the Old Testament, we find a gem among parables. It revolves around the chief figures of the universe and YOU. The story points to the solution of the greatest problem of Mr. Everyman, and thus in turn to the solving of all his lesser problems as well.

The three characters sketched, live and move against the backdrop of a darkened temple. Here is the summary picture:

"Then he showed me Joshua . . . standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. And the Lord said to Satan, 'The Lord rebuke you, O Satan! . . . Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?' Now Joshua was standing before the angel, clothed with filthy garments. And the angel said to those standing before him, 'Remove the filthy garments from him.' And to him he said, 'Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with rich apparel.' And I said, 'Let them put a clean turban on his head.' So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with garments; and the angel of the Lord was standing by." Zechariah 3: 1-5, R.S.V.

No mistaking the one on the left—the accuser. It is just not true that he looks after his own. He does not care about his own. Once his tremendous maw envelops the prey, he is content. On the extreme right is his adversary—here called the angel of the Lord. This face reveals not the contortions of



by Gillian Ford

Gillian Ford is a free-lance writer who combines home-making with country living—and, of course, writing.

SIR, YOUR SUIT!

hate and spite, but the beaming of tenderness and pity.

Between the two stands a miserable figure. He wears a priest's garment which is both plain and strangely grubby. To the accuser on the left, this central figure is but a pawn in the game of life. The devil, aiming to checkmate the King, casts the shadow of hatred across the path of all who claim to be the latter's loyal subjects. The filthy garment of Joshua betokens the defective character of the professing Christian. And the great accuser speaks the truth. Joshua is wearing the garments and they are filthy—his "goodness," like that of those whom he represents, is defective.

It was Isaiah who said, "We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment." Isaiah 64:6, R.S.V.

David constantly reiterated the same thought throughout the Psalms: "Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin! For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me." Psalm 51:2, 3, R.S.V.

Thus Jeremiah also, after loyally fulfilling a broken-hearted ministry to a corrupt people, wept with the confession, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt; who can understand it?" Jeremiah 17:9, R.S.V.

Yes, Satan's accusation is seemingly valid, but what audacity he manifests! It was he who broke

the primeval peace by his disobedience to God's law, yet now he ushers forth this same law to indict Joshua and all the people of God.

No One Is Worthy

The accuser claims that the divine law (or its Author) cannot be just if, on the one hand, the accused is to be denounced, and yet, on the other, these earthly transgressors forgiven. Sin is sin; how can there be two classifications: forgivable and unforgivable?

But look again at Joshua. Is he crushed under the burden, or lying on his face in contrition? No; it is stated that Joshua was "standing before the angel of the Lord." The hymn asks, "How shall we stand in that great day?" How comforting to know that Joshua stood in his filthy garments. Defenceless, head bared, he could make no claim of worthiness. He just stood; not on his own, but facing Christ. In repentance and humiliation he had cast himself on the sin-pardoning Redeemer.

When Satan's accusations of our unworthiness make life hardly worth living, then there is but one refuge. None of us is clean. None is worthy. Yet the offer of redemption is for all. Spurgeon, commenting on this passage, advised: "You have filthy garments on? Do not try to wash them. Don't try to patch or stitch or mend—confess they are too bad to be mended, too filthy to be washed. Turn your eyes to Christ and pray He will speak the word."

We need to remember that as for Satan the law is the tool of accusation, so for Christ the law is a tool, but in His hands it ministers salvation. He uses it to reveal our utter helplessness. Then as a tottering calf turns to its mother for sustenance, so we, rendered aware of our weakness, are inclined to turn to Christ for our every need. Our first need is that of forgiveness.

Note Christ's answer to the accuser: "The Lord rebuke you. . . . Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?" Cracked, charred and burnt as we are with sin, the Lord has chosen us. In the redemption that is in Christ, He has already legally plucked us from the fires of condemnation. We need but to accept His gifts. Read also of the command, "Remove the filthy garments from him." Righteousness is given freely.

The story of Esther is a wonderful parallel to this experience of Joshua. Haman plotted with diabolical cunning for the destruction of Mordecai and the Jews—but he did not reckon on the fact that the Jews had a friend at court who lay in the bosom of the king. Satan, as Haman, accuses the people of God—but we have a Friend at court. Christ, who lies in the bosom of the Eternal King, pleads for us.

Put yourself in the picture. There are three figures in the gloom and shadow of the temple. One is Satan. One is Christ. One is you. But your suit, Sir, what are you wearing today? ★★



Norma O'Hara is a free-lance writer (part-time) and the mother of two lively boys (full-time). She and her husband make their home in Perth.

Can I Overcome Temper?

By Norma O'Hara

Grandma had auburn hair, and father had ginger eyebrows. Therein lay my downfall. The colour of my ancestors' hair provided me with a foolproof excuse for justifying my temper. If I felt particularly wretched or ashamed after unnecessarily "seeing red," I would feel a little more comfortable if I could say with a shrug of the shoulders, "Oh, well, I can't really help it. It runs in the family."

I even kidded myself into thinking that the Lord smiled rather compassionately on my weaknesses, excusing this particular sin because it was such a deeply ingrained characteristic, destined to be part of my make-up from the generations before I even existed.

Then I found it! A little statement that shattered my peace of mind, laid bare my delusions, and brought me back from my evasions. It read: "Satan is jubilant when he hears the professed followers of Christ making excuses for their deformities of character. . . . There is no excuse for sinning. A holy temper, a Christlike life, is accessible to every repenting, believing child of God."—"The Desire of Ages," by E. G. White, page 311.

Strong words that hit hard!

How often have we limited God's power by believing that the promise to "save to the uttermost" stops short at those ugly characteristics that have been so much part and parcel of us since birth? Does temper rob us of the happiness we so much seek in the here and now? And will it rule out the possibility of entrance into the desirable hereafter? Jesus qualified, "He that OVERCOMETH shall inherit all things." Revelation 21:7.

What to do? Can we find ten rules for overcoming temper?

1. First, we can recognize temper for its ugliness. Many secretly believe that being "hot-headed" means that they have strength of character. You may have heard the boastful claim, "I really let him have it. I'll show him that he can't walk over me!"

In truth, the rash words spoken in anger cause untold misery. Love is turned to hate; friendships are broken; children and youth rebel in discouragement; divorces become inevitable; murder and war are used as weapons of revenge.

Temper is ugly. When next you become angry, look at yourself in the mirror. Does anger become you? Hardly!

2. Then admire the quality of gentleness. Read the Gospels, or books on the life of Christ. You cannot help but admire the sweetness of One who graciously and tenderly met every form of human tragedy

and affliction. Read on until your heart is softened and you find yourself longing for the same beautiful character. Covet the spirit of gentleness as a most desirable possession.

Gentleness will touch hearts and win friends. David said, "Thy gentleness" (as a characteristic) "hath made me great." Psalm 18:35.

Remember the story of the wind, rain and sun who argued that each was more powerful than the other? They decided to settle the argument once and for all by seeing who could make a man take off his coat. The wind furiously tore at the coat, trying to rip it from the man's body, while the rain lashed in his face and angrily beat upon him. The man only wrapped his coat more firmly around him. When the wind and the rain were exhausted, it was the sun's turn. It simply shone gently until the man mopped his brow, loosened his hold and finally took off his coat. You see, gentleness, too, is power.

3. Watch for the danger signals. You may never have been aware of these before, but now watch yourself until you recognize certain unmistakable first signs that foretell that an eruption is about to occur. Your signs may be different from those of someone else. It may be an involuntary twitching of the right ear, or probably more commonly a clenching of the teeth or fists. For most people, however, it is a tension that gradually builds up until boiling point is reached.

Your red lights are flashing! Take heed now before you accelerate into a situation you might later come to regret.

Try to change your activity. If at all possible, go out and chop some wood or dig the garden or even run around it! Use exercise and deep, diaphragmatic breathing as safety valves. If it is impractical to go outside, then walk into another room and just look out of the window until you are more calm. Whatever, get away from the person or thing or situation that is causing the tension, immediately if not sooner. While you are collecting your thoughts and your equilibrium in another atmosphere, ask God to help your anger and impatience to melt away.

Go out of your way to avoid situations where tension and annoyances are likely to occur. Avoid long hours of close, tedious work, such as study, office work or sewing, unless you can take regular breaks and rests away from your task. And beware the late rising and morning rush before you set off to work.

4. Learn to relax. Relaxation is almost a forgotten art. If we learned to relax more throughout the day, much of our irritability would disappear.

One doesn't necessarily have to lie flat out on a bed. Even when you are in your car at the stop lights you can let yourself go limp all over. "Unhunch" your shoulders. "Ungrit" your teeth. Loosen that tense jaw. Close your eyes. Get rid of tension in every muscle. Feel like a rag doll.

Then dream up some calm, peaceful place and let your imagination transport you there if only for a minute. Try these . . .

Lying on a soft rug in front of a fire, with the lights out.

Lazing on warm sand while waves lap gently on the shore.

Lying in the grass on a summer's day, while the bees hum by.

Drumming your fingers on the steering-wheel or tapping your foot impatiently while you fume inside is wasting precious energy that should be conserved for far more important things.

Wherever you find yourself, teach yourself to be a calmer, more relaxed you. Take yourself in hand. Start now.

"In stillness and in staying quiet, there lies your strength." Isaiah 30: 15, N.E.B.

5. Obey nature's laws. Never underestimate the importance of keeping the body in good running order. The body affects the mind. If you have been in an ugly, cross mood today, the chances are fairly high that you have had a series of late nights, that you are swamped with too much work or that you are out of sorts because you have eaten intemperately. Someone has wisely said, "People who have a sour stomach are very often of a sour disposition." If you would be a more peaceful person, make peace with your stomach!

6. Watch that voice. Anger does strange things to your voice. It becomes louder, sharper and higher pitched. Words come more quickly and sometimes tumble over each other incoherently. Your own words and tone of voice react upon you, goading you on to further fury.

Purposely choose to speak quietly and lower the pitch. Force yourself to speak slowly and calmly. This has a soothing effect on your own nerves. Said Solomon, "A soft answer turneth away wrath" (Proverbs 15: 1)—meaning your own as well as that of the person to whom you are speaking.

Many of us have yet to learn the power of silence. A friend of mine recently became so angry with a rebellious teenage music pupil that she could not even speak. Before she had time to utter the first scathing word there was a flood of penitent tears.

7. Don't show it. Grandpa put me wise on this one. When number one son was being not a little irritating one day, he said wisely, "There will probably be lots of times you will feel nettled and irritated inside, but you mustn't show it."

Sometimes we confuse the **feeling** of anger with the **action** of anger. We sin when we translate the feeling into the action by harsh words, a blow, a kick or a push. As long as we are human, and because we are human, we will probably **feel** provoked and rattled many times. The sinning comes in not controlling the urge, and in flying off the handle.

The lesson to learn is self-control. It is the highest evidence of nobility in a Christian. And it is far "better [to] govern one's temper than capture a city." Proverbs 16: 32, N.E.B.

8. Read the Bible. Its grand thoughts are peace-inducing. Use the Bible as a tranquilizer before you sleep. It is physically and mentally damaging to nurse angry thoughts at bedtime. The Bible's sound advice will leave you with a more balanced outlook, taking away thoughts of vengeance and annoyance. It will soften and bring out the gentler side of your nature.

It is useless to read the Bible when you are all churned up and your mind is in a whirl of angry and bitter thoughts. Far better to use it as a preventative rather than a cure.

9. Thank the Lord. Thank Him for any victories over your temper, no matter how seemingly small. Each victory, inconsequential at the time though it may seem, is helping you to establish the habit of self-control, and is gradually building up a sweeter-tempered person.

Have you prayed for serenity and patience? Don't expect them to be handed to you on a silver plate. Rather expect to be placed in extremely irritating circumstances, among the most provoking people. Thank God for answering your prayer and for providing opportunity after opportunity for you to overcome and develop. Practice—though painful—makes perfect!

10. Don't be discouraged! It seems that our biggest failure is not in the failure itself, but in our attitude to failure. The usual reaction to failure is . . .

"It's no use. I'm a dyed-in-the-wool temper-addict," or "Failed again. I don't really care anyway," or "Might just as well mess up the rest of the day [or week] now."

Remember, two wrongs don't make a right. Get back into step with Christ immediately, before you allow yourself to sink into discouragement. Ask for forgiveness and the Spirit-filled life again. Then claim both by faith.

But a word of warning! The moment you decide to make a definite effort to overcome your bad temper you will very shortly lose it, and great will be the explosion thereof! It is the devil's old ruse to get you to give up before you've hardly begun. He uses it every time because it meets with so much success. Determine not to wallow in self-pity or self-analysis. Ignore your failures and concentrate on the present.

Too timid to begin? We need not be.

We have wonderful encouragement—that there is actual evidence of the Holy Spirit working in our lives, by convicting us of our sin and impressing us of the need to overcome.

We have strong incentive—a heaven to win and the wonderful opportunity of meeting face to face the Man we worship.

We have promise—that the powers of the Godhead and all the agencies of heaven are fighting the battle with us.

We have comforting assurance—that though we fail, for the mere asking we can be covered with the robe of Christ's righteousness again and are as if sinless in the Father's eyes.

And, furthermore, we have only to live one minute at a time!

★★



TELEVISION'S IMPACT



TELEVISION, once invited into the lounge, never wants to leave. As the media's most powerful instrument, TV's impact on the family is tremendous. Some families spend up to six and a half hours every day before the screen.

A spokesman for the Australian Children's Television Action Committee says he would like to see the Federal Government limit the screening of violence during peak viewing time for nine to fourteen-year-olds. He stated, "Children are having adult values thrust upon them with these programmes and it is showing in their physical aggression."

Surveys indicate that before children start kindergarten they have spent more time viewing TV than college students are required to spend in classes in a four-year course.

Writing in the Canadian magazine, "Vanguard," media expert John R. Hamilton, outlines what TV provides as a mental diet. His illu-

minating article is entitled, "What the TV Gods Are Teaching Your Children." For the Christian there are seven issues.

1. Life on the screen is subtly distorted. All those happy TV families never have time to be concerned about salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ. The focus is on secular humanism.

2. Television either unduly glamorizes occupations or makes them appear to be a drudgery. Is it any wonder then that youth find life's real role frustrating and unsatisfying?

3. Television cheapens love. Our sons learn that "Falling in love at first sight is based on a girl's natural-looking eye shadow. Our daughters are taught that passionate love is found before and outside of marriage."

4. Television conditions children to seek "quickie" solutions to life's problems. On the screen, problems are created and solved in thirty minutes. Real-life difficulties just will not disappear quite so

quickly. Some authorities believe that violent youthful demonstrations are the result of impatience with slow-moving machinery of administrations after years of TV conditioning that life's problems can be instantly solved.

5. Television induces an artificial level of excitement which is maintained by fast pace, sudden changes, with music to match the tempo. Real life moves at a more leisurely rate. Reality therefore seems dull and uninteresting by comparison.

6. Television programmes encourage greed. One reviewer saw 306 advertisements during thirteen hours of watching children's television. He summed up the advertisements in two words, "greed and materialism." Those commercials were designed so that children would say, "I want that."

7. Television features phoney families. Fathers are incompetent, while mothers are indifferent. Parents are "hapless buffoons" often outwitted by their children. All this sly sniping at parents takes place while mother is busy and the children are being "entertained" by the families' wonderful pacifier.

Christian parents, concerned about the moulding of their children's characters by the mass media, should be alert to the dangers of uncontrolled viewing of the box. Fortunate is the parent who benefits by possessing two things: a consecrated hand, ever ready to turn the dial, and a will to match that terminates undesirable programmes. How rare they are!

In these last days we must be preparing to meet our Lord when He returns. To the point is this scripture: "Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God re-mould your minds from within, so that you may prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good. . . ." Romans 12: 2, Phillips.

It is the Christian's duty to resist the squeeze of the world. Preparation to be ready to meet Jesus will take time and effort. Let us determine to find time daily to permit God to mould our lives into His likeness. We must maintain a strong devotional life, even if we must miss our favourite TV programme. Into whose mould are you being squeezed? ★★

why are we so soft



A FEW MONTHS ago, I was watching a television programme, and suddenly, in a surge of indignation and disgust, I turned it off with a snap that might well have broken the knob. A police surgeon was inveighing against the drinker who drives. He did not pull his punches. He made it perfectly clear that drink causes a great many more road deaths than can be proved against it. And then he said the thing that infuriated me: "Now I want to make it clear that I am no wowser. I am a social drinker, and I would not like to give the impression. . . ." That is where his image and his voice disappeared out of my life.

What this generation needs is the gigantic figure of a Jonathan Swift to reveal us to ourselves as six-inch-high Lilliputians who can be made to writhe under the deliberately imposed connotations of a word like "wowser." What does the word imply? It suggests that anyone who has the strength of character and good sense to go against the foolish and illogical social pressures to take just a little poison that slows our reactions just a little, and impairs our organs just a little—that such a man is a weakling, an ugly character, a rabid evangelist who sees nothing but sin in his fellows, and a person utterly unworthy to be accepted into the society of "nice people."

I am not, as you have probably guessed, a social drinker. I am an unrepentant non-conformist, and the rush of indignation that I referred to earlier is a little out of character. For the most part, I find the whole ritual of social drinking delightfully ridiculous. I love the spectacle of the host in a restaurant party fanning his nose with a glass into which something has

By Dr. Lionel Turner

on hard drink?

been splashed. I love the thoughtful air with which he sips it, and the confident nod that he gives the impassive waiter. I love it because I believe with all my heart that the average man has a nose and palate that convey nothing to warrant the performance.

I delight no less in the conversation of those who have nothing but an academic knowledge of what is good and what is not so good in wines, the comfort that seems to buttress one's confidence when one knows assuredly what kind of drink is right for each occasion. I love the solemn puerility of toasting. I love the way the ritual of drinking is associated with a sense of aristocracy that is beyond our reach. And it positively intrigues me that all this is done at the bidding of clever advertisers who seem to find it so easy to lead a bemused world to their piping—so many of them to a cavern from which only the one or two return.

Can We Afford It?

However, I would not like you to think that I enjoy my own ignorance. I even wish I knew whether I am committing the greater social crime when I offer guests non-alcoholic apple cider as an after-dinner drink, or whether it is more crude of me to refuse any of the drinks with which my hosts would ply me. Why is it such an ungentlemanly thing to refuse a drink? I could understand it if my hosts took a dim view of me if I remonstrated with them for drinking, but . . . once, I remember, it was almost put into words for me that I could best make amends for my refusal to drink anything, by shortening my visit.

I think it is about time we dropped all this ritual, and stopped giv-



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ing rightness and glamour to precise drinking formulae. We cannot afford to defend alcohol, let alone apotheosize it. The nation is simply not rich enough to add the burden of fifty years of drinking and carry it on its back.

I once saw a television camera panning round a football audience in a Victorian football game. It looked to me like a very impressive crowd. "This is the number of people who will be hurt in some way in motor accidents in Australia this year," said a voice. Of course, this number could include scratched arms and barked shins, but it made a vivid and frightening illustration. No one has computed the cost of this kind of road toll. In terms of dollars alone, it must soon become insupportable. Next year's paraplegics, and next year's vegetables with massive brain damage will soon be added to this year's. And then will come the victims of 1976, and so on and on. And no one will ever know in how many cases it was alcohol that was the ultimate cause.

One needs only a television set and a very slight tendency to reflection to be mightily scared by the prospects of a society more orientated to the consumption of alcohol than it already is. And that, of course, is the aim of the liquor business. We have become used to the programme that seeks to get behind the news and highlight the fortunes of anyone who seems to be carrying more than his share of suffering and misfortune. It is remarkable how often such programmes seem to stumble over the problem of liquor.

What the Interviewers Find

Let me remind you of some that we have seen in the not-too-distant past.

Do you remember the three cheerful souls with Irish accents talking with a reporter who was probing their experiences? With thick-speeched enthusiasm they delighted in the opportunity of recounting all the lock-ups they had recently occupied for being drunk and disorderly. They almost made it sound like good fun. But they were drunk. They had forgotten about the hangovers, the humiliation, the poverty, and the deep inroads made on their earning capa-

cities. They had forgotten the blank, resigned faces of deprived families, and the bitter knowledge that they were drifting through life in a daze of good fellowship followed by the hard light of tomorrow without hope.

Then there was the programme about the kind of men who brutally beat their wives and children. We saw women who stayed with their men because they did not know what else to do. And we saw men who confessed to their sadistic behaviour with a strange mixture of frankness and bewilderment that they were what they were. They had such faded and lifeless hopes that things might be better if only they could keep off the drink. Not one of the men or women interviewed blamed anything else but alcohol for their predicament.

Then there were the gamblers who, in spite of talent and decent jobs had reduced their families to penury. We watched them at poker machines where most of them had engineered space for a glass. "Would you describe yourself as a compulsive gambler?" as the microphone slid across the screen. "No, not really."

"But you do lose a lot of money?"

"It's a relaxation. After a few drinks, it doesn't bother me. Nothing seems to matter. You have to be relaxed to enjoy it. I can win or lose. It's fun."

On another occasion, we were introduced to the subject of child-beating. We heard horrible stories of what can happen to little children, and we met bewildered parents who could not explain or understand their sudden fearful impulses. Life seemed full of failure and resentment. Unaccountably, and even irrelevantly, it seemed there was always drink.

We also had an evening with the derelicts who frequent the Salvation Army homes, and often enough have to resort to park benches. They had drunk themselves out of all hope of employment and family life, and the only kind of heaven they could hope for was the state of muddled awareness that dulled their misery a little.

In their restless search for news material in morbid areas, the media have certainly put the problem of

excessive drinking in a very frightening perspective. But the horror of accidents on and off the road is the most dramatic and the most urgent of all. There is no way of knowing how many of them are caused by just a little alcohol.

That One Drink!

In a recent issue of one of the best-known motoring periodicals, a thoughtful and wise man recorded his near brush with death in order that others might be warned. He and his wife had a long trip to make, and it was a hot day. They stopped for lunch. They shared some sandwiches and a single bottle of beer. No one could say they were intoxicated, but they had enough poison to drug them on such a still, hot afternoon. Suddenly the driver was aware of an unpleasantly loud horn very close to his rear. He was jerked back to consciousness to find that he had veered on to the wrong side of the road. About one hundred yards ahead an oncoming car was devouring the space between them. His wife opened her eyes at the same moment, and her high-pitched scream seemed to chord hideously with the horn. They were both tremendously grateful to an alert driver, and both very anxious to point out the danger of just one glass to occupants of a car.

Who knows in how many cases people would be out of wheelchairs and braces and even coffins today if that one drink had not relaxed a driver too much, caused him to misjudge a curve, to go faster than he thought he was going, to yield to a sudden lunatic impulse to belligerence, to find his hands full and feet moving sluggishly? For some strange reason we do not give alcohol the credit for any tragedy on the road unless the blood-alcohol count is high enough to make the accident almost inevitable, not merely probable.

How come, I ask—and I ask it with indignation and scorn—how come people who ought to know better, do their bit to perpetrate the absurdity that, whereas the moderately drunk at the wheel is a menace, and an alcoholic is a tragedy and a drag on the resources of the nation, a social drinker is a gentleman, and a total abstainer is anti-social and not quite nice? ★★

POEMS WITH POWER

GALILEE

There is no peace in Galilee,
Where the hillside holds the sea
As the mother holds the infant
That lingers on her knee.
Where smoke troubles the waters
As anger the foeman's eye,
And day drips from the candles
That flicker a memory.

No peace there is in Galilee,
Yet peace grows in the hills
Where the way is old, and the ass is old
And the sound of shepherd bells;
And the signposts beckon backwards,
And the names ring in the heart,
Waking the morning echoes
Where joy and morning part.

They say God walked in Galilee
Once when the day was dark,
And greeted men in brotherhood
And left on them His mark.
I cannot say if so it was
But this I know and see—
If God ever walked the earth,
He walked in Galilee.

Where the hills regard the heavens,
And the valleys spread their arms
Expecting or remembering
The speed of God's alarms;
Where the soldiers watch at night
And call the herds at rise
Lest the coming of the Lord
Should take them by surprise.

There is no peace in Galilee
But peace will surely flow
When the Lord mans His chariot
On the road from Jericho.
And when His star approaches
Then only this I pray,
When God alights in Galilee
I be not far away.

Lewis Sowden (James Harvey)

WORKING TOGETHER

Someone will blend the plaster,
Someone will carry the stone—
Neither the man nor the master
Ever can build alone.

Making a roof from the weather,
Building a house for the king
Only by working together
Can men accomplish a thing.

All have a share in the beauty,
All have a part in the plan—
What does it matter what duty
Falls to the lot of a man?

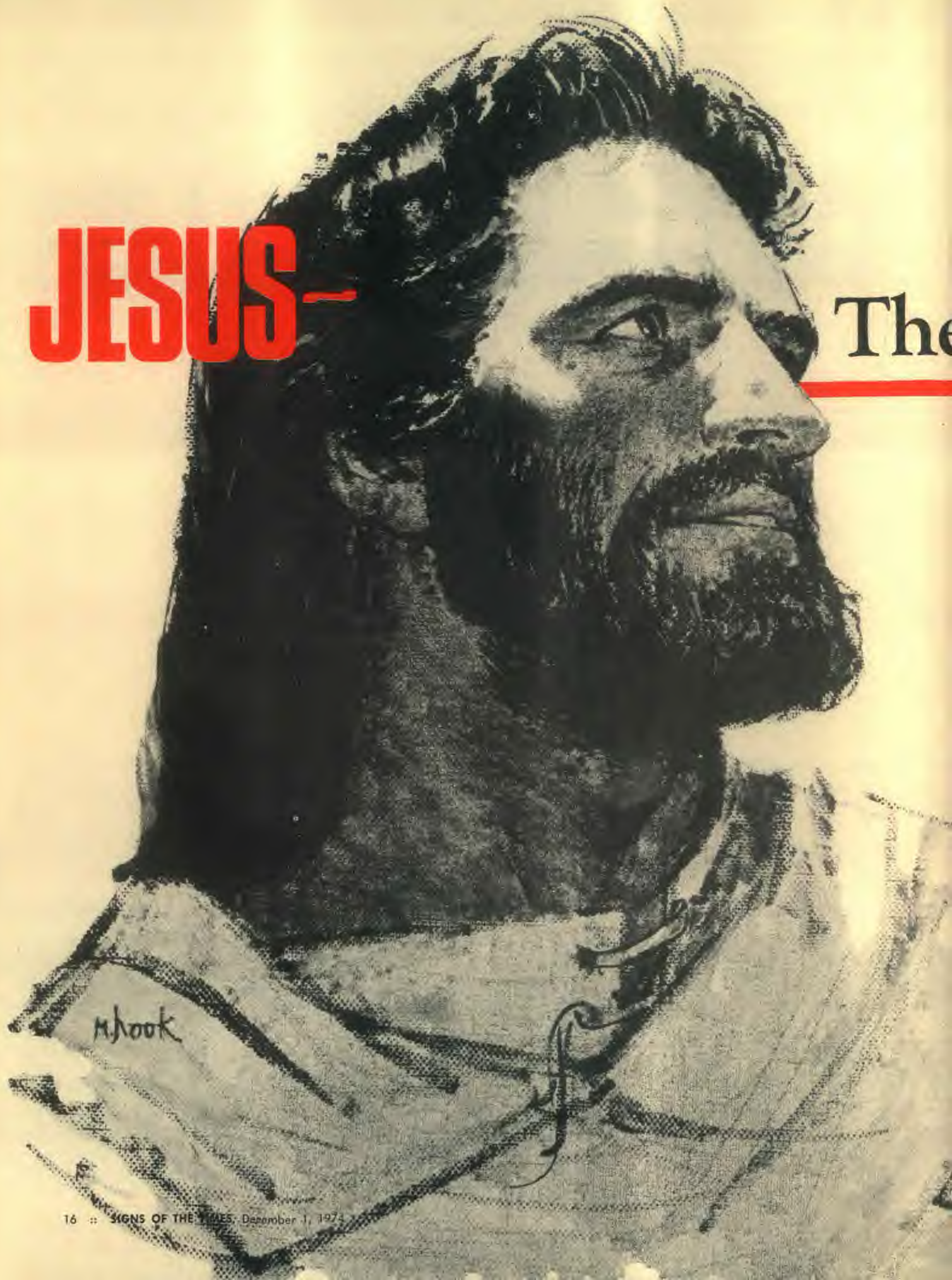
Each has a hand in the building,
No one has builded alone—
Whether the cross He was gilding
Or whether He carried the stone.

—Author Unknown (Mrs. E. M. Alnnworth).



JESUS—

The



M. Hook

Wonder Man of the Ages

He wrote His name into time itself. He split time in two. This is 1974. Nineteen hundred and seventy-four years from what? From the birth of a Jew in a stable. The years are dated before and after His birth. He split time. Shakespeare, Newton, Cæsar could not do it. The sword was powerless. Science could try in vain, and Genius failed. Consider:

1. **Jesus is the Lord of time**—He is the Wonder Man of the ages. He was "God manifest in the flesh." 1 Timothy 3:16.
2. **He is the world's best-known man.** It is estimated that 65,000 different volumes have been written on the life of Christ.
3. **He is the only One who existed before He was born.** Micah 5:2.
4. **He is the only One who was born of a virgin.** Isaiah 7:14.
5. **He is the only One who had His whole life story written hundreds of years before He was born.**
6. **He is the only One truly named Emmanuel**—"God with us." Matthew 1:23.
7. **He is the only One who was born to die for mankind.** Hebrews 2:9. He lived that He might die, and He died that we might live.
8. **He is the only One who rose from the dead.** "I am He that . . . was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore." Revelation 1:18.
9. **He is the only religious leader of all time who was big enough and great enough to say, "I will come again."** John 14:1-3.
10. **He is the only One who promised to come again to "receive you."** John 14:3. He is the only One who places value on you—and backed that value with His life.

On January 21, 1924, the Soviet Congress issued a public declaration at the death of Lenin that said, "His vision **was** colossal; his intelligence in organizing the masses **was** beyond belief. He **was** lord of humanity, the saviour of the world."

Note carefully that that little word "**was**" wrote an end to the life of Nikolai Lenin. Recently, I stood by his lifeless body as it lay cold and still under glass in Moscow's Red Square.

Nineteen hundred years ago, an angel at the door of Christ's tomb proclaimed, "**He is risen.**" Matthew 28:6. Not "**was**," but "**is**." He **is** "alive for evermore." Revelation 1:18. Christ **was**, **is**, and ever shall be, Lord. The difference between "**was**" and "**is**," is the difference between death and life.

He split time in two. All history is dated either B.C. or A.D.—before Christ or after Christ. He broke the back of history. He wrote His name in time itself. He is the Wonder Man of the Ages.

His name is the greatest in history, and that name will grow greater, for "God . . . hath . . . given Him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow." Philippians 2:9, 10.

He was born in a small village, worked as a carpenter until He was thirty, and then spent three years as a travelling preacher. As far as records go, He never wrote a book, never owned a home. He never went to College or received a degree, yet He became the Wonder Man of the Ages and at His name every knee shall bow, because He was God manifest in the flesh.

—GEORGE BURNSIDE.



Do Signs Indicate 1914 ?

by G. Rogerson

IT HAS BEEN said, with at least a modicum of substance, that deep faith requires but shallow evidence to support it. In previous articles in this series, we have reviewed the prophetic and chronological features of the case for 1914 being an outstanding prophetically indicated date, and found it to be signally deficient on both these counts. From a purely logical viewpoint, the matter could be safely left here, since the hypothesis clearly has no basis in reality. However, deep faith can, in practice, overcome the

hazards of shallow or even non-existent evidence.

It is claimed, in spite of the short-falls which can be detected in the prophetic and chronological aspects of the case for 1914, that it is still a prophetically identified date being attested by signs which accompanied and followed the arrival of that exalted year. To quote a representative statement: "We do not ask you to accept the mere date of 1914. . . . There is more to the matter than the mere date. We ask you to accept what came with

that date and what therefore confirms that date. When prophesying the world's end Jesus gave no date. He gave what was more convincing than a date . . . Jesus foretold world happenings and conditions."

Accordingly, without prejudice to our stand as to the logic (or rather the illogic) of the matter, we will devote this final article to a consideration of these signs and what they do or do not indicate.

Before discussing the various signs, let us bring into focus the point at issue. The question is not whether signs have or have not been apparent in recent times. We, in fact, recognize that they have been and are ever-increasingly so. Rather, the question is whether they indicate, to the exclusion of all others, the specific year of 1914. No generalizations or approximations will suffice. The evidence must be specific and clear-cut.

The signs or "world happenings and conditions" said to point so unmistakably to 1914 are, in particular, those mentioned by Jesus in His prophecy of His second advent: "You will hear of wars and common talk about wars. . . . For nation shall rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom; and there will be famines and earthquakes in many places. . . ." They are interpreted to mean that there would be distress of nations and global war in 1914; pestilences and famine notably evident since 1914, and earthquakes, storms and floods as well as other disastrous disturbances of nature in increasing number and violence following the arrival of that year. In addition, world-wide proclamation of Christ's present "kingdom" since 1914 by those who discern its existence, is regarded as being outstandingly significant.³

World War I

Though all the signs are aggregated to form a composite sign—apparently the whole being far greater in significance than the sum of the parts—the most outstanding single pointer confirming 1914 is said to be the outbreak of World War I, with its concomitants, in that year. This is the trump card, as it were, which is played over all other evidence.

We concede—again without compromising our stand as to the

illogic of this subjective reasoning—that there is some appearance of support offered by this occurrence, at least in the way it is presented.

World War I did, almost (but that is another story), begin on time to fit into the plan (which it was subsequently necessary to modify), and it was, up till then, the greatest war ever fought in terms of nations engaged, involvement of civilians as well as armed forces, lives lost and material destruction and cost. Many notable statesmen and writers have expressed their convictions that the war of 1914-18 was different in character from all previous conflicts and that it ushered in a new era in warfare. When judiciously presented, this is admittedly quite an imposing and persuasive argument. However, against this there are substantial debits to be weighed.

The words of Jesus' prophecy, used as the basis for the contention, are found in the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew, verses six and seven: "You are going to hear of wars and reports of wars . . . for nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom" (N.W.T.).

It will be noticed that there is no hint that Jesus had His prophetic eye on a particular war beginning in a specified year. This was not a mathematically computable time prophecy. Rather, the prophecy fits the ever-increasing number of wars which have been waged since well before the 1914 outbreak and which have occurred so often following it. The use of the plural "wars" surely points this way.

"Nation Against Nation"

But it is urged that the specification, "nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom," exclusively describes the global conflict which began in 1914 and involved whole nations, including civilians. However, such expressions do not necessarily limit the fulfilment to world-wide conflict in which nations are totally involved; neither are they reserved to describe modern conflicts. These expressions are quite appropriate to any international war and one of them is, in fact, used in Scripture of Old Testament conflicts which were not global in extent. Thus the expression, "nation shall rise against nation," is synonymous with war, and can include wars of

all descriptions, as undoubtedly it does in the passage under scrutiny.

Storms, Earthquakes, Famines and Plagues

Storms, earthquakes, famines and plagues are all listed as adding weight and proof as to the importance of 1914, and of confirming that it was the year on which Jesus was focusing attention in His great prophecy of the second Advent.

It is not denied that some of the most notable and disastrous of these occurrences have been witnessed since 1914. However, it is one thing to recognize the occurrence of notable events **since** a certain year, but quite another to say they **began** with and therefore point to that date as being especially marked out. A study of all relevant records shows that it is only by arbitrary selection of such occurrences with their location in respect to that chosen date as the criterion by which their significance is noted (an example of circular reasoning) that a case can be plausibly made out. When the total pattern is viewed in proper perspective, no distinct pattern centring on any particular year emerges.

For example, the great bubonic plague of 1896-1922, global in extent and claiming nearly 10,000,000 lives, reached its peak in 1907, in which year it accounted for 1,315,892 deaths in India alone. By 1914 the incidence was actually on the downward course.⁴

We do not minimize the severity of the 1918 influenza pandemic so frequently cited as evidence for 1914. This was a major disaster by any standard. But we do question any suggestion that it points exclusively to 1914.

What can be discerned in the plague incidence pattern also holds good for famines. Those that occurred in disastrous magnitude prior to 1914, in the nineteenth century and first decade of the twentieth, taking toll of millions, would constitute too long a list for this study. But according to one authority, the worst famine the world has ever seen in recorded time was the great famine of northern China in 1877-78 which carried off 9,500,000 souls in a period of about eighteen months.⁵ Incidentally, about the same time and partly overlapping it, a famine in India accounted

for another 5,000,000 deaths making a total in excess of 14,000,000 fatalities from this cause in less than two years.

Again, while not depreciating the importance of post-1914 disasters we, in view of the verifiable facts, have some reservations about them making good the chronological and prophetic deficiencies regarding the significance of that year.

As for earthquakes indicating anything startling about 1914, we find the records just as unconvincing. Close to our day, but still occurring before 1914, were such tragedies as that which struck Lisbon in 1755, for which the estimated death toll is sometimes placed as high as 80,000 for that city alone;¹ Krakatoa (1883) with some estimates of the death toll at 200,000,² and the earthquake of central India (1905) in which four villages were razed and no less than 370,000 persons were wiped out in an area of 1,000,000 square miles.³

These were not minor happenings and they do not by any measure exhaust the list of major, disastrous tectonic disturbances which occurred prior to 1914.

Proclaiming the "Good News"

The final sign on which we offer comment concerns the proclamation of the "good news of the kingdom" (Matthew 24: 14, N.W.T.). A very imposing set of figures is advanced as evidence that this specification of our Lord's prophecy has been markedly fulfilled by the or-

ganization promoting 1914. In 1963 it was published: "Today, after forty-one years of activity this good news of the kingdom is being preached by word of mouth and in printed page in 189 lands, territories, provinces, colonies and island groups in 162 languages."⁴

We do not question these figures, but modestly draw attention to the fact that, impressive though they be, they were actually exceeded by the organization represented by this journal. In his book, "The Truth About Seventh-day Adventists," the Baptist apologist, Walter Martin, says: "The Adventists have forty-four publishing houses producing literature in about 220 languages and dialects. They publish 385 periodicals and more than sixty new books yearly, and have enrolled more than 3,000,000 persons in their Bible study courses offered over the radio. . . . Though a relatively small denomination, the Seventh-day Adventists are said to have actually more missionaries active on foreign fields than any other mission body except Methodists, who have a few over 1,500; the Adventists in excess of 1,400." These figures were published in 1960 and we have no reason to believe the ratio has significantly changed since that year.

And so we could go on multiplying evidence. Though not covering it exhaustively, we consider we have offered enough data to make the point that the evidence of the signs falls far short of that which could—no matter how unreasonable such a procedure would be—

possibly validate the claim that "in the events foretold to take place from 1914 onward we find confirmed beyond all doubt that 1914 was the beginning of the end for this system."⁵ Rather, an analysis of the facts reveals that complete detachment from reality and deep faith in a theory is required to accommodate it.

We recognize that signs have been increasingly in evidence in this modern age. As Adventists we expect them because the most natural understanding of our Lord's prophecy requires them. These evidences confirm our confidence that they herald His early second advent:

"Learn the lesson of the fig tree: when its branch becomes soft and puts out leaves, you know that summer is near. So when you see all these things, know that He is near, at the very door." (Matthew 24: 32, 33, Williams.)⁶ ★★

REFERENCES:

- ¹ "God's Kingdom Rules—Is the World's End Near?" page 23. (The printed form of an address delivered by the president of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society to the world convention of Jehovah's Witnesses in 1958.)
- ² Matthew 24: 6, 7 (refer note 12).
- ³ "God's Kingdom Rules . . .," pages 24-26, etc.
- ⁴ 2 Chronicles 15: 6 of the New World Translation reads: "And they were crushed to pieces, nation against nation and city against city, because God Himself kept them in disorder with every sort of distress."
- ⁵ Encyclopædia Britannica (1961), Vol. 9, page 83.
- ⁶ The Guinness Book of Records, 11th edition (1964), page 225.
- ⁷ Earthquake (Allen Andrews). Some estimates are higher.
- ⁸ Collier's Encyclopædia (1962), Vol. 8, pages 251-260.
- ⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰ "Babylon the Great Has Fallen" (1963), pages 464, 465.
- ¹¹ Awake!, October 8, 1968, page 6.
- ¹² The New Testament. A Translation in Plain English, by Charles Kingsley Williams.



Christmas Wishes

I wish there were enough real joy
To go around this year,
That every heart might have a bit
Of precious Christmas cheer;
That every home might have its share
Of happy mystery,
That every face might wear a smile,
And each child have a tree.

But most of all, I wish the world
Might find the road to peace,
That all this wicked, cruel strife
And bickering would cease.
That faith and hope and kindness
Would kindle such a flame
That greed and hate and selfishness
Would slink away in shame.

I wish distress and suffering
Might somehow be allayed;
That men would seek to know God's law,
And keep it, unafraid;
That poor, storm-tossed humanity
Would learn the better way;
That love would clasp the nation's hands,
This glad, glad Christmas Day.

—Myrtle Aldrich.

"When I survey the wondrous cross"

WE WERE TALKING about hymns that recall special memories. First to speak was a silver-haired saint. "I was just a little girl and not yet started school," she began in a gentle Scottish accent, as her eyes misted and seemed to span many years. "I lived in the little village of Musselburgh, five miles from Edinburgh, and our home was across the road from a Salvation Army meeting hall. Every Sunday I would run to the gate and press my nose hard against it as I watched the Salvationists assemble for their march of witness to the town square. Brass instruments shone in the musician's hands as they lined up at the start of the parade. Then came the big bass drum, followed by girls and women with brightly ribboned tambourines. They made a wonderful tinkle-tinkle! But at the front, upheld by the Major, was the most impressive sight of all. It was a flag, a large red flag fringed with gleaming gold, and in one corner was emblazoned a golden cross. I fixed my eyes on that cross as it used to flutter in the sea breeze. It held me spell-bound.

"When the band and its supporters were assembled, the major would give a firm command. Then the trumpets and horns began a stirring melody, the big drum boomed, tambourines tinkle-tinkled and the singers sang. Away marched the parade with the blood-red flag and its shining cross leading them on. I have never forgotten the sight, nor one hymn they always sang." We waited, wondering what hymn she would name. Then she began to repeat:

"When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory
died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my
pride."



Marye Trim is the wife of a minister. She and her husband were missionaries in India until about three years ago. They now live in Sydney, New South Wales.

Hymn of special memory indeed! As the speaker continued, we seemed to sense a chilly wind sweeping over the Firth of Forth—even over a garden called Gethsemane; a stinging blast that brought salt to the eyes but upheld a golden cross. "Yes, whenever I sing that hymn today I picture the cross. When I was a child, I really believed the cross on the flag was the very one where Jesus died for me, but my father explained it was only a shining symbol. Later I understood better, and I accepted Jesus fully. Through the ups and downs of life I have remembered Calvary and said, 'Thy will be done.'"

"See, from His head, His hands,
His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled
down;
Did e'er such love and sorrow
meet?
Or thorns compose so rich a
crown?"

The hymn was composed in 1707 by hymn-writer Isaac Watts, based on Galatians 6: 14: "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."

Charles Wesley, a contemporary hymn-writer of Isaac Watts, gave the hymn great praise, saying he would gladly exchange all the hymns he had ever written for this matchless one.

Thus for nearly 270 years its message has held meaning and memory for countless Christian believers. Especially moving—and challenging—is the last verse:

"Were the whole realm of nature
mine,
That were a tribute far too
small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my life, my soul, my
all."

★★



Christ Is Coming Soon!



A. DEVANEY, HAROLD M. LAWBERT, ERIC KREYE, A. DEVANEY

HOW DO WE KNOW JESUS WILL COME AGAIN?

The angels said so: "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven." Acts 1:11.

John said so: "Behold, He is coming." Revelation 1:7, NEB.

David said so: "Our God shall come." Psalm 50:3.

Paul said so: "From heaven we expect our Deliverer to come, the Lord Jesus Christ." Philippians 3:20, NEB.

Jesus Himself said so: "I will come again." John 14:3.

CAN WE TELL THE EXACT TIME WHEN JESUS WILL COME?

No. Jesus said: "About that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven . . . ; only the Father." Matthew 24:36, NEB.

CAN WE TELL WHEN HIS COMING IS NEAR?

Yes. The Bible gives many signs. Among these are—

Setting up new moral standards: "In the last days" men will be "without any regard for what their parents taught them." They will be "utterly lacking in gratitude [and] purity." 2 Timothy 3:1, 2, Phillips.

Repeated attempts (like the Common Market) to unite Europe: The nations and kingdoms of Europe "shall mingle themselves . . . ; but they shall not cleave one to another. . . . And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed." Daniel 2:43, 44.

Pseudo-Christian movements: "False christs and false prophets will arise." Mark 13:22; Phillips.

True gospel will be preached everywhere: "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world . . . ; and then shall the end come." Matthew 24:14.

All these signs—and many more—are being fulfilled now. Jesus said, "When you see all these things happening you may know that He is near, at your very door!" Matthew 24:33, Phillips.

HOW WILL HE COME?

Publicly: "Every eye shall see Him." Revelation 1:7.

Noisily: "With a shout, with the voice of the Archangel, and with the trump of God." 1 Thessalonians 4:16.

Visibly: "As the lightning." Matthew 24:22.

With a vast company of heavenly beings: "The armies which were in heaven followed Him." Revelation 19:14.

In person: "This very Jesus . . . will come back." Acts 1:11, Phillips.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN WHEN HE COMES?

The dead who loved Jesus during their lives will be raised from their graves, to live again: "The dead in Christ shall rise." 1 Thessalonians 4:16.

The living who love Jesus will be gathered up, to be with Him forever: "Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." 1 Thessalonians 4:17.

WHY HAS JESUS NOT COME YET?

So that we can get ready to meet Him. Peter wrote: "It is not that the Lord is slow in fulfilling His promise, as some suppose, but that He is very patient with you, because it is not His will for any to be lost, but for all to come to repentance." 2 Peter 3:9, NEB.

WHAT SHOULD WE BE DOING NOW?

Separating from sinful habits: "Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure." 1 John 3:3.

Demonstrating God's goodness in our lives: "It is for you now to demonstrate the goodness of Him who has called you out of darkness into His amazing light." 1 Peter 2:9, Phillips.

Obedying God day by day: "Happy that servant who is found at his task when his master comes!" Matthew 24:46, NEB.

Completely dedicated to Him, doing all we can to bring Him back sooner: "Think what sort of people you ought to be, what devout and dedicated lives you should live! Look eagerly for the coming of the day of God and work to hasten it on." 2 Peter 3:11, 12, NEB.



W.A. TOWNEND

here's a promise for you

CHRISTMAS was coming, and cartoonist Vaughan Shoemaker knew it only too well. His was the job of doing a cartoon for the Christmas issue of the big Chicago "Daily News."

Walking into the newspaper's office, he made straight for the editor's desk. And there he spread it out—his rough sketch captioned "The First Christmas Gift." There was a big shining star beaming its light down on to a manger. Above the star were the words of John 3:16. For a city daily newspaper! "No," said the editors, "not with that Bible text there—you will

offend too many of our readers."

Shoemaker held out. The cartoon would appear with John 3:16 or not at all.

Then the publisher, the famous Colonel Frank Knox, came into the scene with his typical publisher's last word, "Let's be sensible. If it weren't for John 3:16 there wouldn't be any Christmas," he declared, adding the assurance his editors needed, "It's a good cartoon. Run it," and winding up with "We need more like it in the 'News.'"

I don't know if the "News" ever did run more like it, but I do know that Shoemaker's "The First Christmas Gift" was repeated yearly. In fact, readers used to look out for it. They expected it. It became part of Christmas for them.

This Christmas, let's make the twenty-five words of John 3:16 part of our Christmas. Let's have this as our Christmas promise:

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Centre word of the twenty-five is **Son**, spelt, you notice, with a capital S. And that's where the strength of the promise lies, in the Son—in the centre, mark you. That's where the joy comes in, and as Robert Louis Stevenson wrote of

Christmas, "It is a season, from all its associations, whether domestic or religious, suggesting thoughts of joy."

Joy-packs.

The promise of John 3:16 has plenty of them, so appropriate to a genuinely merry Christmas.

There's the joy-pack labelled "love." It's God's love—love that's always expressed in giving—to us.

There's the joy-pack labelled "heir." You are that heir. God gave His Son for you. And with His Son He gave you the Son's heirship.

There's the joy-pack labelled "faith." This faith in Jesus is itself a gift to you from Jesus and His Father. Faith is the assurance of things we cannot see. We cannot see Jesus, but we surely do believe in Him.

There's the joy-pack labelled "life." No sane person is interested in having life's opposite—death. And we needn't. Everlasting life sees to that.

Joy-packs—so suitable for this time of year—John 3:16 abounds in them. What a glorious Christmas we can surely have!

"I rest upon Thy word;

The promise is for me;
My succour and salvation, Lord,
Shall surely come from Thee."

★★

W. Austin Townend is a church administrator. A New Zealander, he now lives in Adelaide, South Australia.

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A Christmas Story

IT WAS CHRISTMAS time, and the children were busy decorating their Christmas tree. Each year Mother got it out of the storeroom and bought a few more decorations to add to those that were saved over the years. Carmen was the smallest member of the family, and there wasn't much she could do to help, so she sat down beside Grandma to watch the others. In a few minutes she said: "Grandma, tell me about the Christmas when you sat up all night making presents."

Grandma smiled, and her eyes held a far-away look as she said: "I was twelve years old at the time." Before she could get any further with her story, all the children stopped what they were doing and came to listen, too. They had heard the story before, but they never tired of hearing it again, and besides, Grandma might add something she had forgotten at other times.

"We lived in the Blue Mountains in New South Wales," Grandma continued. "Just two days before Christmas, rain began to fall in torrents, and then snow fell on the mountains. It was bitterly cold, and the next day it rained harder than ever. Then we heard a great roar from the granite gorge past Marsden's Rock, and we knew that God's River was coming down in a burst of fury with a solid wall of water twenty feet deep. The water always came down that way, faster than a man could run. All the streams from the mountains were pouring into it and adding to its volume every minute."

"If anyone happened to be in the gorge he would get drowned, wouldn't he, Grandma?" Gary asked.

"Yes, there was no way out, and the water would be upon him before he could run a few steps. It had been a grey, terrible day, with sodden earth and sodden sky and a fierce wind, and always the pelting, stinging rain and the river racing and roaring madly. To make matters worse, Mother was sick. As long as she was able to look after us, we children didn't mind very much what happened, but now that she was lying helpless in her room, the house seemed desolate, and we were all afraid."

"Dad was away working in the country. He had planned to come home for Christmas, but would not now be able to reach us till the floods went down, and we didn't know how long the rain would continue. Our three big brothers were working hundreds of miles away and sending their wages home to help feed and clothe us younger children."

"Our eldest sister had as much as she could do to look after Mother and keep house and feed the little ones. There were farm animals to care for, and cows to be milked, and we all did what we could, but oh, we were so miserable! There would be no Christmas pudding and nothing special to eat, and worst of all, there would be no toys for the three little children."

"Our Christmas food and presents were still in the shop in Blackheath, and all the roads were flooded and there was no way at all to get to the town. It was as

much as we could do to struggle around the yard. Night came on, and we faced an unhappy, miserable Christmas Day. If only our Mother had been well she would have done something about it. And to make matters worse, my two little brothers and sister had hung their stockings on the foot of their beds and had gone happily to sleep feeling sure that Santa Claus would somehow get to our place during the night, and that when they woke in the morning they would find the presents they had asked for."

Grandma stopped for a moment as she remembered that unhappy night, and the children waited breathlessly for the rest of the story.

"I just HAD to do something about it," Grandma said. "I went from room to room looking in cupboards and drawers. I gathered up old toys and painted them in pretty colours. I cut the beads off milk-jug covers and made bangles and necklaces. I painted old balls with gay stripes and spots. The night got colder as I continued to work by the light of a smoky kerosene lamp. I put more wood on the fire and made toffee and wrapped it in pretty paper."

"One o'clock came," Grandma continued, "and I felt terribly tired. At two o'clock I felt as if I couldn't possibly keep going. But at three o'clock I felt I **must** have a little sleep. I knew, though, that if I did I would sleep heavily till the morning. So I went outside in the bitterly cold air and walked about for a few minutes. Then I went back into the kitchen, had a hot drink and something to eat, and went on with my work. I don't think I had ever stayed up later than eleven o'clock in my life. Usually I was in bed by half past nine at the latest, and the night seemed endless."

"I don't know how you did it, Grandma," Mavis said. "I'm sure I couldn't have kept awake."

"Well, I fashioned little toys and covered them with silver paper, and just before dawn I crept in and filled the children's stockings. Not long afterwards they woke up and fumbled for their presents in the dim light. They found their stockings full of mysterious things, and although they weren't what they had expected, they were perfectly happy, and I was happier than if I had received the nicest presents for myself."

"A week later, on New Year's day," Grandma said, "the river had gone down and the flats were drying up. Mother was well again, and Dad came home with all the things we had ordered from the shop. Then we had a real celebration, and although the children received their toys, they still liked mine just as much. I've had many different kinds of Christmases," Grandma said, "but the one when I was twelve years old is the one I remember more than any other."

The children sat thinking for a while, then got up quietly and finished decorating their tree. "I suppose there are many children in the world who won't have a happy Christmas this year," Gary said, "and I think we are very fortunate." ★★

Straight from the shoulder



ARCH HEFREN TALKS TO YOUNG PEOPLE

The Cross in Xmas

I DO NOT KNOW how the abbreviation of Christmas to Xmas came about. The insertion of the cross for Christ, at first sight, seems out of place, but it seems to me to reflect a text in the gospel of Luke.

I want you to let your imagination take you back to the morning when Jesus is presented at the temple to conform with the tradition of His people. It is a touching sight. There stands the virgin mother, Mary, with mingled awe, joy and dreaming peace in her eyes. Her older husband stands at her side protectively, as the aged priest Simeon takes from Mary's arms the tiny baby, Jesus, who was yet God incarnate.

The past nine months had been a troubled pregnancy for this village girl. She was well aware of the covert glances and the not-so-covert sneers of her fellow women. She had pondered often in her heart, in the silent hours, the message of the angel; she had known the lyrical joy of the Magnificat, but she had also known the anxiety of Joseph's renunciation, even though it was followed by reconciliation.

Now as she stood before Simeon, a message came to her from the Lord that would trouble her for thirty years. The glorious prophecy of the destiny of the royal Christ was repeated, but with it came the dread words, "Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also." Luke 2: 35. No explanation was given, no hint of how the words would be fulfilled, but the chill shadow of the cross must have dimmed Mary's joyful pride that morning. Calvary was foreshadowed only eight days after Xmas.

Perhaps she did not understand the force of an earlier prophecy given in the Garden of Eden, but which had come down to every girl in Israel hoping to be the mother of the promised Messiah.

"Thou shalt bruise His heel." Genesis 3: 15. She knew of it, but did not know what it meant. Now she had been told that the baby she had conceived was the Messiah, and that His life would pierce her heart with sorrow.

Within hours of the message the first fulfilment came, as she and Joseph were instructed to make their hasty escape to Egypt to avoid the murderous purpose of Herod. Not only was it a personal threat, but there was the harrowing experience of knowing the grief-stricken cries, the lonely lamentings of hundreds of mothers whose baby boys below the age of two years were butchered by the lust of the Idumean

for continued power. It was the first stroke of the sword.

Many times during the ministry of Christ she must have seen the hate in the eyes of the priests as they were confronted with unassailable evidences of Christ's divinity and with the sure destruction of their political and social power.

The cross began at Xmas and was never thereafter missing from Mary's heart. She knew little of the peaceful, dreaming joys of motherhood. Her Son was marked for death. The crucifixion was not an isolated event, but rather the final deepest plunging of the sword into her mother heart.

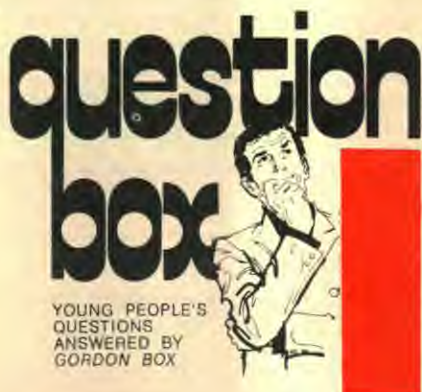
She stood and watched the soldiers gambling for Christ's garments, heedless of the expiring life, in agony, of the Christ above them. Hearing with an intolerable pain the sneers of the priests, "He saved others, Himself He cannot save," Mary stood there at the cross (John 19: 25) and knew that the sword not only plunged into her heart, but twisted.

She probably heard only confusedly the dying injunction of her Son, "Woman, behold thy son. . . . Behold thy mother." The words, "Behold thy son," must have had a terrible, double significance for her. She beheld her own Son indeed in the hour of death, and Xmas morning must have seemed very far away and desperately futile. She could not see through the gates of the grave to the glory of Sunday morning. For her, it seemed the end; and the only thing left to do was to die herself.

As you listen to the cash registers jingling to the canned, endless repetition of "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing" this Xmas, will you stop to think of the significance of the cross at the beginning of the word? Will you realize the vital meaning of the message, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given"? Not "unto her," but "unto US." Given, not lent; given for all eternity. The cross in Christmas is an assurance that if you will but look to Christ and take Him as your Saviour, there can be no ultimate loss. He will go down through the gates of death with you, for He has first gone there FOR you. He will bring you up from the other side of these dread portals, because He has risen in the might and power of eternal life.

Let this Xmas celebrate not only the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, but His birth in your heart to transform your life and to make death the small thing it really is.

★★



Why Do They?

Why should Christians sit down and judge others when they are not perfect themselves?

Presumably you mean, Why do Christians do this kind of thing! The word "should" implies that they have an obligation to do this work (or pleasure, however it appeals to you).

First, let it be made clear that Christians are not the only ones who judge others. One look at the media will tell you that nearly everyone is bent on telling his neighbour "how to do it right." Unions, management, governments and talk-back radio programmes all have the answers to other people's misbehaviour. Well, one thing is clear: all the advice seems to be falling on deaf ears, doesn't it?

Criticizing people never seems to do any good, but we must try here to distinguish between judging people and judging actions. And here is the difference. To judge a person is to judge not only what he or she is doing, but also **why** he is doing it. This means, of course, claiming to have the ability to see into the deepest chasms of the heart and soul. This no man can do, and no one should attempt to do.

However, this must be separated from judging actions. This we must do in the interests of sanity and the well-being of ourselves and the community. Child bashing, rape, theft, racism, prejudices and a thousand other deplorable actions must be judged for what they are. But when a person is found guilty of these misdemeanours, responsible members of the community must make it their business to do everything possible to restore the individual to a way of life that is profitable to the rest of society and fulfilling to himself. It was all said very well by Brother Paul in the first century in his letter to the Christians who lived in Galatia: "My brothers, if someone is caught in any kind of wrongdoing, those of you who are spiritual should set him right; but you must do it in a gentle way. And keep an eye on yourself, so that you will not be tempted, too. Help carry one another's burdens, and in this way you will obey the law of Christ. If someone thinks he is something, when he really is nothing, he is only fooling himself." Galatians 6: 1-3, T.E.V.

Trust and Respect

Which do you consider the greater virtue: 1. Respect for another person's feelings; or 2. Completely trusting ALL people, especially friends?

Well, I've never thought of trust as a virtue, really. Respect, yes, but trust seems to me to come into another category. But first a word about respect.

This attitude in a person is probably the most important anyone could have if he wants to get along with other people, and more than this, it is required by any sort of moral code for the simple reason that the human race cannot exist unless it is put into practice. Children are told to respect their parents and their elders in general, and there is hardly anything more difficult to endure than a rude or cheeky child.

However, children, too, have rights, and respect is their due, just as much as those who are older; in fact more so in that they are comparatively defenceless and can learn to respect only by example. Their rights are different from adults, but just as important. So

every man, be he criminal or prime minister, is due respect because from the Christian viewpoint he is one of God's children and is made in the image of God, even though that image may be so blurred that it is hardly recognizable. In fact, one of the first steps to restoration and rehabilitation is to restore a man's dignity and self-respect. A delinquent will never respect others in society until he has learned to respect himself.

It may be important to point out that self-respect is not allied to pride or selfishness. It will, in fact, keep a man from both these vices because he will not wish to lower himself to become a slave to either. So often Jesus gave men this sort of standing and hope. (E.g., "Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more." John 8: 11.)

Now about trust. Even when applied to trusting God, it doesn't seem to be a virtue. We trust only those who have demonstrated that they are worthy of trust. To trust every person you meet would be very unwise. We are, of course, speaking about the really important things in life, and not trivial matters like asking the direction to the local post office if we are in a strange town.

There would be two extremes in this business as in every other. One would be to trust everyone. The other would be to doubt everyone. The true and proper attitude obviously lies somewhere in between these two points. However, in the really important issues of life, wisdom suggests that we trust those who have **demonstrated** their worth and honesty.

It follows that we cannot really trust God until we have had some sort of experience with Him. As we get to know Him better, and understand His purposes even slightly, we will find it easier to have confidence in the things He says in His Book and through those who are His genuine followers.

In a sense, God has put Himself on trial, and one of the main questions is whether or not we can safely trust Him. As with people, those who know Him best are the ones who can best answer the question. One such person stated very clearly: "God . . . cannot lie" and "He is faithful that promised." (Titus 1: 2; Hebrews 10: 23.) ★★

editorials

STRANDED!

IT IS AN unpleasant feeling to be stranded in a foreign country with an uncertain hope of release. It happened to us recently, and an insecurity seeps into the soul, you sense the utter frailty of human devices, and you know first-hand the knife-edge man walks when he depends on his fellow humans for peace and safety.

We flew into Israel a couple of months back to "walk where Jesus walked," and mistimed our arrival rather badly. Two days after we landed at Tel Aviv and took the service car to Jerusalem and settled in there, the war on Cyprus broke out. Now it so happens that the only radar beacon for the eastern Mediterranean is situated on Cyprus, and that went out, so pilots, quite understandably, would not jeopardize their passengers, their aircraft and themselves by flying without the magic assurance of radar.

Thus we were stranded! No planes were flying in; none flew out. We were at the mercy of the Turkish and the Grecian skirmishers who were battling it out on Cyprian fields and mountain-sides. Accommodation was no problem; money was no immediate problem, thanks to traveller's cheques; safety was no problem. But there is a strangely insecure feeling when you are bluntly told that your stay could be indefinite and that no one knew when flights would be resumed. We were booked for India; we were destined to spend not more than an hour there (belatedly) as we eventually passed on our way.

Eventually, El Al, the Israeli airline, announced that it would airlift stranded passengers to Teheran, Iran. Thus it was that, at 1.30 a.m., some days later, after a most exacting search of our persons and our luggage, we boarded a Boeing 707 for Teheran, and made contact again with the rest of the world. But those few days when we were stranded we shall not soon forget, for we felt as though we were cut off from the rest of the world. And this feeling gives you a queasy feeling in the pit of the stomach.

As with the physical, so with the spiritual. Warfare—the conflict between Christ and Satan—has stranded mankind on this little planet. However, his individual and collective plight is far worse than ours was in Israel. Mankind's problem is that he is doomed never to leave this sin-cursed planet unless . . . UNLESS! That is the magic proviso! . . . Unless some force outside himself lifts him out of his sticky environment and brings him to the security of contact, and put him in touch with the Infinite God.

We are prone, those of a Christian background, to think of that wonderful provision at Christmas time. We remember that Jesus Christ was born a babe in Bethlehem, and that He lived and died among men so that He could one day lift them out of the land of the

enemy and place them upon a footing of eternal security. That is what the plan of salvation is all about. Just as we could do nothing ourselves to ameliorate our situation by our own efforts (except that we made sure that we had our booking on El Al), so stranded man can do nothing of himself to get himself into the environment of heaven (except, again, he makes sure that he has a "booking"). But Christ's sacrifice for us provides the escape clause. Because He died, we may live. Not just a handful of years on this dreary planet, but an eternity of timelessness can be ours in a land that is fairer than a summer's day, and brighter than the splendour of the noonday sun . . . if we will accept it.

What does it mean to accept this provision; what does it entail to have a part in the plan of salvation? First and foremost, we must accept the Babe of the Bethlehem manger as our Saviour. Then we must acknowledge Him Lord of our lives and make Him the constant guest in our lives. We must believe that His death covers our sins, and by faith in Him alone (as opposed to our own merits and good works) believe that we may be among those to whom He will one day say, "Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

So the choice is yours. You can stay on this planet of shame and sorrow, or there is an escape route open to you. You can stay, or you can be assured of a passage to a land where no one shall ever be sick, where misery and heartache are unknown elements, where burdens are unheard of, and happiness is quite without a blemish.

The Babe of Bethlehem was not just another infant born to a humble peasant woman. He was God Incarnate, the Leader of the hosts of heaven, come down in human form to be the Saviour of whoever will accept Him. And one day He will come again, and those who are ready to go with Him will have a wonderful part in fulfilling the climax of His promise to those who love Him: "I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." John 14:3.

Will you accept this marvellous provision? Or do you prefer to remain STRANDED!? These are the only alternatives.

ROBERT H. PARR.

THE TWO BEST-SELLERS

A MILLIONAIRE novelist, Frederick Forsyth, was asked what he thought were the most important qualities a man should possess. He wrote these words: "Strength without brutality, Honesty without priggishness, Courage without recklessness, Humour without frivolity, Humanity without sentimentality, Intelligence

without deviousness, Scepticism without cynicism."—"The Age," October 5, 1974.

Even as we wonder why a best-selling writer of fiction should be considered an authority on what is needed for moral strength of character, we acknowledge that any one person who possessed these excellent qualities he mentions would be a man far above the ordinary. Frederick Forsyth claimed the privilege of knowing a man who had these attributes in full measure.

The appealing feature of the list is the built-in safeguards. There is an implied guarantee that the virtues named will not make such a person tiresome or sanctimonious. Anyone who has ever claimed to be an observer of human nature would readily agree that there must be a balance in these things. Generalizations on human behaviour, whether well-founded or inaccurate, come to mind in support of this belief. The ideal nature that does not permit even a good quality to develop an imbalance seems a sound and desirable thing.

Probably a Christian would take the list one step further to include "Faith without presumption." Now the composite picture indeed seems to present a well-rounded personality, a man on whom we could rely implicitly for a predictable response in any situation. He would be calm, tolerant, strong, kind and perceptive. And having tidied up the list and smoothed the edges, how is it that we are left with a feeling of unreality, a product that is "too good to be true"?

The difficulty seems to be that no trait of character or gift of God has been refined and developed so perfectly that it can be seen in full measure in any person. Also, our fallible minds are apt to misjudge gifts that are present. A sense of humour seems to us to need some element of the absurd or frivolous. Courage that does not include a dash of recklessness seems unimaginative. Humanity is sometimes most appealing when it has ventured over the very fine line bordering it and sentimentality. Intelligence is mistakenly praised as though the intelligent person had done something noteworthy just by being intelligent. What appears to be straightforward honesty to one will look like priggishness to another.

Perhaps the only way we can escape from this maze is to consider the words contained in another, older best-seller. The Apostle Peter gave his ideas on character development thus: "And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." 2 Peter 1:5-8.

In direct contrast to the ideas of the modern best-seller, the apostle does not stress the danger of overstepping the mark in any of the spiritual graces he enumerates. He is rather saying that because God has given us a measure of faith, and His divine power provides all things pertaining to life and godliness, we are to add to and build upon each grace, using it as a stepping-stone to the next.

A commentary on this passage makes the point that faith and love are interchangeable cornerstones in the process of character building: "In a retrograde order, he who has love will exercise brotherly kindness; he who has brotherly kindness will feel godliness needful; the godly will mix nothing stoical with his patience; to the patient, temperance is easy; the temperate weighs things well, and so has knowledge; knowledge guards against sudden impulse carrying away its virtue."—"Commentary on the Whole Bible," Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, page 517.

It seems then that the limiting factor in our character development could be our fear that we will somehow gain too much of virtue and thus become misfits. Our approach lacks the positive thinking laid down in the New Testament. We can accept the formula that favours hesitancy and a policy of minimal risk only by ignoring the admonition to add to and build upon our faith.

"Be ye therefore perfect" (Matthew 5:48) is the instruction Christ gave to His disciples. He urged upon them, as He does on His followers in the twentieth century, the duty and privilege of completeness in Him. As sons and daughters of God we cannot be satisfied with a degree of excellence that complacently proclaims it has accepted the ideas of a modern millionaire writer in preference to the rich counsel that strengthened the apostolic church. Christian maturity, the goal of every believer, is a completeness that needs no qualifying expressions, no "withouts."

Faith and love provide the only safeguards necessary. When God tells us that He doesn't want just so much of our time and so much of our resources, but that He wants all there is of us in total commitment, the only danger of unbalanced development is that of attempting to apply human restraints, and human logic, and trying to keep just a little back. When we surrender to Him whose very nature is love, that love, temperance, godliness, brotherly kindness, patience and knowledge, as well as the peace and joy of the Holy Spirit, can become ours in a way that seems beyond our understanding. The message of the oldest best-seller is that all this is possible, that God will recreate our hearts and lives so that there will be no idleness or unfruitfulness, that in our more perfect knowledge of the Lord our lives may become the dwelling place of His Spirit.

JAMES H. RABE.

Bible questions answered

READERS' QUESTIONS ANSWERED

BY DESMOND FORD, M.A., Ph.D.

DAUGHTER OF ZION

Who was "the daughter of Zion" so often spoken of in the prophets? I.M.

Zion was the name originally given to the south-eastern hill of the city which became known as Jerusalem. Later, the term was used for the hill in the north-east where Solomon built the Temple. In poetic and prophetic writings Zion, or "daughter of Zion," is used for the whole city, or even the nation of Israel which looked to Zion as its capital. (See Psalm 48: 11, 12; Isaiah 1: 8; 10: 32; Joel 2: 23; Zechariah 9: 13.) In the study of the Old Testament, it should be kept in mind that the terms "Zion" and "daughter of Zion" are frequently interchangeable, and not meant to be distinguished in meaning from each other.

WITHOUT SPOT OR BLEMISH

One of my sons passed away in a cruel accident some weeks ago. I have heard it said that one must be "without spot or blemish" in order to face the judgment, and I am concerned about my boy. He was a good lad, but certainly not without spot or blemish. Will he be lost? M.R.

If he is lost on the basis that he was not without spot or blemish, all of us will go with him. The gospel is better news than that. In ourselves we are never without sin, but if we have made Christ our true Lord, then in Him we are accounted sinless. This is the good news brought to us by Christ and the New Testament. Note how the Living Bible expresses this truth:

"... all the world stands hushed and guilty before Almighty God. Now do you see it? No one can ever be made right in God's sight by doing what the law commands. For the more we know of God's laws, the clearer it becomes that we aren't obeying them; His laws serve only to make us see that we are sinners."

"But now God has shown us a different way to heaven—not by 'being good enough' and trying to keep His laws, but by a new way (though not new, really, for the Scriptures told about it long ago). Now God says He will accept and acquit us—declare us 'not guilty'—if we trust Jesus Christ to take away our sins. And we all can be saved in this same way, by coming to Christ, no matter who we are or what we have been like. Yes, all have sinned; all fall short of God's glorious ideal; yet now God declares us 'not guilty,' of offending Him if we trust in Jesus Christ, who in His kindness freely takes away our sins."

"For God sent Christ Jesus to take the punishment for our sins and to end all God's anger against us. He used Christ's blood and our faith as the means of saving us from His wrath." Romans 3: 19-25.

"... being saved is a gift; if a person could earn it by being good, then it wouldn't be free—but it is! It is given to those who do not work for it. For God de-

clares sinners to be good in His sight if they have faith in Christ to save them." Romans 4: 4, 5.

Christ, as our Representative, kept the Law perfectly. Also as our Representative He paid an infinite price to atone for our guilt. Both His obedience and His payment of sin's debt is put to our account once we commit our lives to Him. Thus God is both "just, and the justifier" of those who truly believe. (See 2 Corinthians 5: 14, 21 and Romans 3: 26.)

However, there is another aspect of truth which we should not forget. All that takes place on this earth is permitted by God as a lesson-book to the universe. Just before He comes, there is to be a time of trouble "such as never was" and there will be a "hot-housing" of both the good and evil elements of our world. We will see both aspects fully developed as never before in history. At that time God will have a company of believers from every nation of earth prepared to die rather than knowingly violate His commandments. The special endowment of the Holy Spirit in the final world-wide Pentecost and the complete unveiling of the nature of evil will mature this company till they reflect Christ more fully than any other world-wide group have ever done.

Some writers viewing the eschatological climax have used such expressions as "without spot and blemish" to describe those who, as a result of the imputed and imparted righteousness of Christ, will glorify Him upon the earth at the last day by reflecting His image to the universe.

INTERPRETING DANIEL

I have heard more than one interpretation of Daniel 11: 36-45 by Seventh-day Adventist preachers. Is there an official position? I.W.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church does not legislate on the minutiae of prophetic interpretation. Nevertheless, the following statement is authoritative as the most recent pronouncement of the church on this matter:

"The New Testament teaches the consistent Christological application—including its ecclesiological aspect—of the whole covenant terminology and imagery of the old dispensation as far as it applies to the time after the first advent of Christ. The hermeneutical consequences of the gospel of Christ for Daniel's outline prophecies may now become evident. They would require that the theological meaning of such terms as Israel, Judah, Holy Land, Mount Zion, sanctuary, saints, little horn, king of the north, and king of the south would be applied Christologically and ecclesologically from the point at which an outline series moves into the new era. When Christ thus becomes the hermeneutical key to unlock the mysteries of Daniel's apocalyptic, its profound eschatolo-

gical message can be unsealed for the Christian Church without arbitrary interpretations or unspiritual Middle-East speculations. . . .

"The traditional interpretation by the Christian Church has applied the blasphemous king of Daniel 11:36ff. to the antichrist, whom the Apostle Paul saw taking his seat within 'the temple of God' (2 Thessalonians 2:4)—that is, within the Christian Church (cf. Ephesians 2:20-22; 2 Corinthians 6:16) (see Fromm, 'The Prophetic Faith,' Vol. 2, pages 529-531, 793). This Christological-ecclesiological interpretation of Daniel 11:31-39 was continued in the prophetic expositions of the Millerites (from 1831-1844), and in those of the principal Sabbatarian Adventists (from 1844-1875). The critical issue, however, has to do with the interpretation of the final portion of Daniel 11, verses 40-45; 12:1, 2; for this part is commonly recognized as still unfulfilled prophecy. Here everything depends on one's Christocentric hermeneutical principles of apocalyptic interpretation and their consistent application. But at best, there is room for tentativeness when moving beyond inspired interpretation of unfulfilled prophecy.

"As soon as Christ and His true covenant people are ignored at the heart and centre of apocalyptic, immediately and necessarily the focus of attention seems to be directed to such unspiritual matters as territory and race by themselves, separate from Christ and His people. Thus Christ and the New Testament are subordinated to the Old Testament and consequently rejected as the superior and decisive norm of apocalyptic interpretation. Neither the Jewish race or kings as such, nor any Middle-East territory, nor some ancient national enemy of the Jewish nation such as Babylon or Egypt were ever at the heart of God's covenant with the patriarchs and with Israel. The God of the Old Testament Himself is the centre of all the promises that He will dwell among His people. . . .

"The imagery of a faithful remnant gathered together on Mount Zion in Jerusalem surrounded by confederated enemies in the 'valley of Jehoshaphat' as pictured in Joel, Ezekiel, Zechariah, and Daniel (11:40-45), is not spiritualized away in Revelation 14, but extended and universalized to encompass the whole world (see Revelation 16:14). The matter at issue in this apocalyptic cosmic war is not race or territory but the name of God, the truth of His covenant, and the vindication of His covenant people (see Joel 3:2, 3; Ezekiel 38:16; 39:22, 25-29; Zechariah 12:5-8; Revelation 12:17; 14:12)."

—"A Symposium on Biblical Hermeneutics," edited by G. Hyde, pages 243, 244, 245.

ADAM'S RIB

How is it that, if Adam lost a rib in order that Eve might be formed, women still have the same number of ribs as men? P.E.

Those who, after having experienced surgical removals today, become parents, never pass on their loss. There is no genetic change as a result of physical trauma to any part of the body. There have been some fathers with only one leg who have begotten children perfectly equipped for natural carriage and propulsion! ★★

SIGNS

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Little Acorns and Mighty Oaks

SOMETIMES I find it hard to believe that a person who professes the beliefs I do, can pull some of the stunts I pull. Today I became angry with my wife over a matter of minor consequence and started sulking around the house.

There is in my life a phenomenon I call the snowball effect, in which a trivial emotion or facet of character is humoured, rolled along through the day until, like a snowball rolled over more snow, it increases in size and soon is bigger than I am.

Here this snowball effect found application—the more self-pity and righteous indignation I felt, the more sullen and withdrawn I became until finally, without a word to anyone, I left the house and went out to the golf course for the afternoon. When I returned, I expected my wife to be upset, and in anticipation of that I was even less communicative than before. In fact, I experienced a certain feeling of helplessness, of being caught up in something I had let get the best of me.

There is a lesson to be learned here for one such as I. If the snowball effect works in such a negative fashion, it is imperative that we catch it before it really gets operating, because later on it may be too big for us to handle.

Second, why not apply the same principle on the positive side and allow the snowball effect to work good within us? By doing little things for others, love for them begins to grow. By reading God's Word and praying daily, strong and uplifting faith begins.

Love and faith seldom spring up in an instant, but come from an accumulation of good things. Murderous hate and jealousy are accumulations of thoughts which would have little effect in isolation from one another and would never have become central in our thinking if not nurtured, encouraged, and repeated until they took over the brain.

—Jim Pruitt.

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