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Editorial.

The Sign.

“And this shall be a sign unto you. You shall find the infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger.”

IT IS ALMOST UNBELIEVABLE that Christmas is with us once again! Yule-logs will soon be burning brightly; holly and mistletoe will take pride of place; carollers singing at our doors and all the time-honoured customs of the Season will be upon us. Most of us hope to have a white Christmas, a very happy Christmas and one full of peace and plenty.

Of all our Christian festivals Christmas fills us most nearly with a spirit of mysticism. One needs only to think quietly of that night of miraculous happenings in a far Eastern country, nearly two thousand years ago, to recapture the wonder of that first Christmas Eve.

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With our mystical insight we can plainly visualise the powerful Emperor, Caesar Augustus, proclaiming his edict that all men must be enrolled in the city of their birth. In obedience to this command vast multitudes of people are taking long journeys into far distant countries hampered by the impedimenta of travel. Somewhat apart from the crowd we notice two dim figures—one, a young maiden of great beauty, very pregnant and near her time, riding a mule. Beside her walks an older man, deep in thought and very anxious. As he is of the Royal House of David, he is making for Bethlehem of Judea. The two travellers hasten their pace as night falls gently and swiftly, for it grows colder and the moment is urgent!

The night is strangely quiet, clear and beautiful. An air of expectancy, of mystery and even of awe is abroad. Glorious stars stud the night sky, yet even their glory is paled into insignificance by the splendour of one great radiant star, which glows brightly in prophetic omen.

It is a night of great portents, too. Shepherds keeping watch by their flocks are disturbed and uneasy. Their restlessness is communicated to their flocks who cannot settle down to sleep. There is an unearthly lightness and brightness in the atmosphere, not normally connected with the night's dark hours. The shepherds question one another, and wonder anxiously!

Suddenly into the profound quiet is poured most heavenly music. Angel voices fill the air with their celestial melody, such as was never before heard by mortal man! Surrounded by dazzling brightness an angel brings comfort to the fear-stricken shepherds, and

bids them not to be afraid. He brings them good tidings of great joy and reveals to them the secret of the Holy Night. They learn from him of the miraculous birth of a wondrous child and of the details of how to find Him.

Still in mystical mood we see how the fear of the shepherds is turned to exceeding great joy, and note how eagerly and trustfully they follow the guiding star, until it rests in ever-growing brilliance over a stable! Cautiously we enter with them, but our earth-bound eyes are dazzled and almost blinded by a soft ethereal light. Slowly, as our eyes become accustomed to the brightness, we discern within the radiance a new-born Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger! An adoring young mother kneels beside her child and we instantly recognise her as the young maiden riding on a mule who was accompanied by her protector on the road to Bethlehem. St. Joseph is standing quietly in the background in an attitude of reverence and joy. Faithful animals bask contentedly and dream drowsily in the unexpected warmth and light.

Such an old, old story, fascinating and tender and loved more and more as year succeeds year.

In our present day rush to decorate our homes and hospitals, and to provide for the enjoyment of our patients and staffs, we cannot find much time to meditate on the wondrous happenings of that long-ago night. Yet in our futile attempts to make twenty shillings stretch into twenty pounds, and in our obvious joy in packing our gaily be-ribboned Christmas parcels, and as we vainly try to stuff the last unprotesting Teddy Bear into an already overful child's stocking, we somehow feel the watchful eyes of a very Special Baby upon us.

When we suffer ourselves to look ridiculous in party caps and enter wholeheartedly into the abandon and noise of Staff parties; when we pull crackers, blow tin whistles and allow the propinquity of others under the mistletoe bunches; and when we fall exhausted into bed, with feet swollen and tired with unaccustomed strain, then all is well, if our efforts in bringing happiness to others were in honour of a glorious anniversary! We do many things on this very happy day, that we couldn't do at any other time—which is perhaps as well.

And so to all our readers young and old, in Britain and across the mighty seas, we send the hoary greeting, and wish you every blessing both special and general, this Christmas time. A very happy Christmas to you all and a prosperous New Year and joy throughout 1953.

G.M.H.

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