

## BETHLEHEM IN BUCKFASTLEIGH.

It is the magic time of Christmas. Lovely memories of that glorious Eve crowd upon the mind, and the Spirit reacts gladly in anticipation of the Feast.

To Nurses in Hospitals, Christmas brings greatly increased labours, tired feet and often anxious thought. Decorations must go up, holly and mistletoe must grace the wards, and the patients' stockings (and tummies) must be filled. Parties, concerts, dances and visitors crowd the daylight hours, and by nightfall nurses experience the blessed relief of hot baths and a good night's sleep. In our anxiety to give our patients and others a good time, we often miss the true meaning of Christmas, which is, indeed, a great pity and a great loss.

Shall we snatch "this other Christmas" for a brief minute of our time? Let us hasten into the heart of glorious Devon and catch the peace and benediction of the widespread, frost-clad moors. The moon is full and bright. The air is keen as wine, and the stars shine like costly brilliants high in the winter's sky. Quietly we wend our way down the familiar, moon-lit lane, and lo! there stands revealed, bathed in amber light, the majesty and grandeur of Buckfast Abbey.

Christmas bells are pealing out their age-old message, away over the wildness of Dartmoor to the villages and hamlets beyond, and the air is music-laden.

Into the darkened Abbey Church we steal and take our places amongst a large, expectant congregation. The Organ Voluntary swells into the vast interior, when suddenly and silently, in perfect order, the black-robed Monks of St. Benedict file into the Abbey. Each carrying a lighted taper, which twinkles in the darkness, they enchant our senses by the strains of the lovely carol of "Silent Night, Holy Night." The melody is entrancing, and the joy of Christmas fills our whole being.

As the romantic hour of Midnight strikes, the church is flooded with light and the organ thunders a greeting to the gold-clad Priests. The solemn ceremony of Midnight Service is begun. Through its intricate and beautiful ceremonial we hear the music of the "Adeste Fidelis," and in spirit we are transported on the wings of imagination, far away, to a little old inn in Bethlehem, where, nearly two thousand years ago, a tiny friendless Babe was born in a stable.

What a strange event, what an everlasting mystery it is, that it should still have power to sway the whole wide world. In spite of wars, of pestilence, in spite of Atomic bombs and other ghastly horrors, the hope of the world is still enshrined in the Babe of that first Christmas, without whom all indeed would be lost.

The tinkling of the silver bells brings our wandering minds racing back from the Holy Land, over darkened Europe and other devastated countries, back into the Abbey Church of Buckfast. Slowly and with utmost reverence the Service flows gently to its close. The lights are dimmed, and silently as they came the Monks steal quietly back to their monastery to await the first light of dawn.

Outside once more, on all sides we hear the old familiar Christmas greetings: "Merry Christmas, Happy Christmas."

The walk home through the moorland in sparkling frost whets our jaded appetite and we long for a cup of tea and a warm bottle in bed. Truly Christmas is a wondrous festival and our brightest greetings go out to all our friends and readers at home and abroad in far-off lands. May 1947 bring us all our dearest wishes and health to all our patients.

G. M. H.

## WHAT TO READ.

### MEMOIRS AND BIOGRAPHY.

- "The Hooded Hawk." D. B. Wyndham Lewis.  
 "Montgomery." Alan Moorehead.

### FICTION.

- "No Proud Chivalry." Maurice Procter.  
 "Thieves in the Night." Arthur Koestler.  
 "Blessed Plot." Ernest Watkins.  
 "Pride's Way." Robert Molloy.  
 "Gone to the Pictures." Hilda Lewis.  
 "Morning Light." H. M. Tomlinson.  
 "Blind Mice." Eve Orme.

### MISCELLANEOUS.

- "The Turn of the Road." Bartimeus.  
 "St. Paul's Cathedral in Wartime." The Very Reverend W. R. Matthews, K.C.V.O., D.D., D.Litt., B.T.D., the Dean of St. Paul's. (Royalties from the sale of this book will be given to the Cathedral Restoration Fund.)  
 "The English Circus and Fair Ground." Sir Garrard Tyrwhitt-Drake.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

*Whilst cordially inviting communications upon all subjects for these columns, we wish it to be distinctly understood that we do not in ANY WAY hold ourselves responsible for the opinions expressed by our correspondents.*

### A MESSAGE TO THE "TOP GENERAL."

Fayetteville, Franklin County,

Penns., U.S.A.

October 17th, 1946.

DEAR OLD FRIENDS,—First of all, my constant love and admiration for our valiant leader and "Top General." I hope she will continue to improve and grow strong again.

Tell her that this old comrade is growing very tottery, forgetful and quite useless, though physically well.

I send my renewal for THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING by cheque, as the post-office tells me that is the best way.

With cordial regards to all of you.

Yours ever sincerely,

LAVINIA L. DOCK.

[How much we enjoy letters from our dear old friends. Words of wisdom from the pen of Lavinia L. Dock have frequently graced the columns of this journal. We send her greetings.—Ed.]

### A PROTEST AGAINST THE FILCHING OF OUR LIBERTY.

The Vicarage, London Colney,

St. Albans, Herts.

December 4th, 1946.

To the Editor of THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING.

DEAR MADAM,—I feel that I too must add my protest against this filching of our liberty and freedom after so many of our countrymen and women have given so much in this terrible war to preserve it.

The restrictions and controls practised to-day make one wonder why the war was fought at all. The dismissal of nurses (so badly needed) makes one tremble to think of what is to come in this once fair land. There is one thing only that makes life bearable in all this, and it is "that God is still in His heaven," although so few still worship and thank Him for the gift of life and freewill.

Yours faithfully,

MABEL C. BARBER,

S.R.N., R.M.N., D.N.Lond., F.B.C.N., R.M.P.A.

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