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either impersonal is to mar their wholesome efficacy. In the atonement God, as it were, through his Son, unbosoms himself completely, comes with all the charms of infinite loveliness and beauty, to bind the soul in golden chains.

We may safely conclude that, while the world stands, the church, as a body, will maintain and proclaim that the Son of God has made an atonement which does not make void the law, but establishes it in greater glory; that this atonement, naturally attracting all to Christ, effectually provides for the deliverance of all believing souls from the power of sin, securing in such souls the love and practice of righteousness; and that while it ultimately delivers believing penitents from the natural consequences of sin, it also provides for their legitimate complete pardon and justification, securing for them to all eternity the position and inheritance of children of God, through union with him who is the first born among many brethren.

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## ARTICLE VI.

### THE STAR OF THE EAST.

BY REV THEODORE APPEL, D.D., FORMERLY PROFESSOR OF ASTRONOMY IN  
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#### PART FIRST.

It is now generally conceded that the Saviour of the world was born at least four years before the beginning of the Christian era. The current chronology, introduced during the sixth century by the monk Dionysius, without much critical examination, and adopted by Archbishop Usher over two centuries ago, is therefore not less than four years in error. This has been satisfactorily demonstrated by the most careful investigation of the subject in more recent times. King Herod died in the year 749 of the founding of Rome according to one date of this event, or in 750 according to another; and of course Christ could not have been born

in the year 753 or 754, the time usually fixed for his birth. If, then we add four years — the difference most generally adopted — to the present year of our Lord, we have eighteen hundred and eighty-two years as the period which has elapsed since the incarnation.

In regard to the particular day of the year, however, when that event took place, there has been a vast amount of discussion, but without any reliable results. The early Christians, who might have ascertained the precise date, made more account of the event itself than of the day, and they have therefore left no references in their writings which would give the scholar a clew to the solution of the question. One of the oldest and best established traditions handed down in the church at Rome assigns it to the twenty-fifth of December — the day now generally adopted in Christian countries to commemorate the advent of our Saviour on earth. In modern times an objection has been urged against this date, because it occurs in the winter, when shepherds could not be supposed to be out in their fields watching their flocks by night. But it must be remembered that Palestine lies in a southern latitude, and that its winters differ materially from ours or those of northern Europe. With occasional snow or frosts that do not last long, the cold is not so intense or continuous as in more northern climes. The winter is prevailingly the rainy season; and the earth, which had been left dry and parched by the heat of summer, with scarcely any sign of vegetation left, is now clothed with a green verdure, while the grain-fields everywhere present a cheerful and flourishing appearance. As a general thing, shepherds have come home with their flocks from distant mountains and vallies, whither they led them during the summer for pasture, and have them safely inclosed in sheepfolds on account of the unpleasant state of the weather. But travellers inform us, just as we might expect, that there are always some intervals of fair weather during this rainy season, when shepherds lead out their flocks to the neighboring hills; and it is not at all improbable that in

some cases they may at times have kept them out in the field all night. Such periods occur, we are told, towards the end of December, after there has already been a considerable fall of rain, and when the flowers are all out in bloom.<sup>1</sup> The objection, therefore, to the twenty-fifth of December as the day on which Christ was born has in itself really no force. It is modern in origin, and was first urged only about a century ago by Dr. Lightfoot, and then under the influence of a theological bias. It was never thought of by the early Christian writers who lived near Palestine and were well acquainted with its climate. It would have doubtless occurred to them if it had had any good foundation in facts.

This, of course, does not establish the truth of the old Roman tradition; it simply leaves the question unsettled. We cannot, indeed, as it seems, prove that it was the identical day, nor, on the other hand, that it was not; and we are therefore simply left at liberty to regard the old tradition for what it is worth. It seems to be the oldest and the best accredited.

It is sometimes supposed that Christmas was an artificial arrangement, a kind of compromise entered into by the early church to get rid of certain heathen festivals which were celebrated at that season of the year in an uproarious and dissolute manner. Of this description were the Roman Saturnalia, when slaves enjoyed a brief respite from bondage, and society generally was very much demoralized. In order to correct these excesses, it is imagined that Christmas was instituted; so that heathen converts, who were accustomed from their youth upwards to such celebrations, might not be offended, but be better satisfied with Christianity, if they were allowed to have a feast of their own, freed from the gross sensuality of the heathen orgies. But the Saturnalia were celebrated at least a week prior to Christmas, and the whole temper of the early church showed no disposition to enter into any compromise with heathenism; on the contrary, it set itself in decided antagonism to everything of a

<sup>1</sup> See Lange's Commentary, in loco.

heathenish character. It possessed within itself a principle and a life that abundantly qualified it to create for itself its own festivals.

So far as Christmas connected itself with the history of the times, its origin was Jewish, rather than pagan. It synchronized with the Jewish feast of the dedication—the feast that celebrated the purification of the Temple under Judas Maccabaeus, which had been celebrated by the Jews for centuries, and which is still observed by them on the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth of December. As many of the first Christians were of Jewish origin, and still continued in the practice of Jewish customs after they were converted to Christianity, it is easy to see how an originally Jewish feast should in the course of time change its character, and be transformed into one that was purely Christian. So it was with the passover and the feast of pentecost. The great German philologist, Jacob Grimm, in this way accounts for the origin of the German name for Christmas, *Weihnachten*, which comes from the days of the early Goths, meaning *dedication night*, and contains a manifest reference to the original Jewish character of this festival. If our Saviour was born during this same night, it would be a remarkable coincidence, which could not be without a deep significance in the divine mind; if not, the origin and appropriateness of the day would still be accounted for.

The precise day in the year, however, on which Christ was born is a matter of comparatively small account. It is the great event itself which interests us most of all; for it is the pivot upon which all history revolves—the turning-point of its grand departure for a higher destination and a nobler consummation. It was an event of world-wide significance—the greatest which had occurred since the creation, rising also above that—one that was to be followed by a series of other grand events in history, until it results in the final victory of light over darkness in the restitution of all things. Touching the very life of history, it has sent out undulations over the whole surface of human society.

Now it was eminently proper that an event like this, so wide reaching in its scope, should in some way be heralded forth to the world, and be announced in some truly dramatic manner, in keeping with its remote, as well as its more immediate bearings. Appropriately it had to be announced first to the Jews, in a manner that was in harmony with their character and history. As a nation they were not distinguished for their progress in the arts, sciences, or in philosophy. It was only at a later day that they manifested anything like a high order of talent for speculation or human learning. In these respects they were excelled by other nations around them. But, on the other hand, they were distinguished above all other nations of antiquity for their sense of religion, of the supernatural, and (during their later history, especially) for their tenacity in holding to the idea of one Supreme Being in its purity. This was, indeed, their vocation, their mission, their high distinction in history; for which, however, they had to be trained and educated by a long series of the most wonderful and extraordinary events. To a people so peculiarly constituted revelations could be made, from time to time, directly and miraculously from a higher sphere, and they could also be intrusted with them for safe-keeping for the world at large. They believed in such manifestations, and were prepared not only to embrace them, but also to admit their true source in God. They also had a correct sense by means of which they were enabled to distinguish the true from the spurious in any professedly supernatural event. This, however, was not always true of the Scribes and Pharisees, nor of the mass generally, but of their prophets and of those among them who still retained the primitive piety of their forefathers.

To the Jews, therefore, the proclamation of the birth of a Saviour was made in a supernatural way. The veil that separates the natural from the supernatural was withdrawn for a moment, and through the open skies a choir of angels, looking down, made the great announcement in that never-dying song, "Peace on earth, good-will to men," whose grand

refrain has been returning back to heaven from human lips through all the ages since. As a general thing, the Jews had deteriorated very much from that lofty theocratic faith which had once distinguished them; they were for the most part mere formalists; but a pure and simple piety still lingered among the humbler classes of society. The shepherds at Bethlehem were of this description, and for them it was reserved to see the opening heavens and to hear the good news from angelic voices. Those in authority at Jerusalem were not in a condition to receive such a communication from the other world.

As, however, Christ was born for the whole family of man, it was necessary that the heathen world, on the outside of the church as then established, should also in some becoming way be apprized of this wonderful event; and this was accordingly accomplished by means of an extraordinary star, whose meaning was made known to the wise men of the East. The heathen world had renounced the knowledge of the true God, and, as a matter of course, the supernatural method of revelation was withheld from them, and restricted to the single nation of the Jews. But they were not left in total darkness, without any witness of God; they retained the light of nature and of reason, through which He continued to communicate with them. They were thrown in a measure upon their own resources; and it became their mission to cultivate science, to search the hidden depths of philosophy, and to give audience to the inward promptings of reason, of conscience, or of whatever faith or light they still retained. Comparatively considered, this was at best mere starlight; but it served an important purpose in enabling them to steer their frail bark over the dark and tempestuous seas, until the true light should shine down upon the darkness of earth, for which the light that was still in the heathen mind helped to prepare the way.

In keeping, therefore, with the constitution of heathen society, it would appear that the birth of Christ had to be announced not by a miracle, but by an occurrence in the

order of nature ; not by a direct revelation, but by science ; not by messengers from the spiritual world, but by a brilliant star.

In the first place, the illustrious personages to whom the star made the revelation demand attention. They were the elect from among the greatest and the best that could be found in the Gentile world. The magi, as we are told, hailed from the Orient, the land of the East and of the rising sun. As this language embraces a wide scope of country, they may have come from Arabia, as some suppose ; from Chaldea, from Persia, Media, or from the still more distant regions of India, as some have maintained. The evidence that we have seems to preponderate in favor of the Parthian empire, embracing ancient Media and Persia, as the proper home of the wise men. The term "magi" (or "magus," in the singular) is of Medo-Persian origin, and was first employed in Media to designate its priests, philosophers, or wise men as a class, just as "philosopher" was the term used in Greece and Rome, "rabbi" among the Jews, or "brahmin" among the Hindoos. It was, however, in the course of time, transplanted into other languages, with a corresponding degeneracy of meaning. Among the Greeks, and especially the Romans, it was synonymous with astrologer, enchanter, sorcerer, or imposter, and from it we have derived the words "magic" and "magician," which are suggestive of anything but honesty and truth. But we must not confound the more ancient and honorable order of the magi with their degenerate and dishonorable successors in the western world, who, under the cover of their fair fame, imposed on the credulity of men for the sake of lucre. As their title signifies, they were noble and influential ; they were the priests, the theologians, and philosophers of their nation ; and they were also, in the true sense of the word, the statesmen of their age ; for they were consulted on all points connected with the welfare of the nation, and in this way exerted a wide political influence. They were, accordingly, the highest authority in matters of religion ; they embodied the wisdom and knowledge of their times ; and they were especially distinguished for



their knowledge of medicine and astronomy. If they were addicted to divination, astrology, or other superstitions, as the learned were very generally in their days, it is not difficult for us to suppose that some of them, at least, should rise above these errors, and gain some glimpses of divine truth itself. This, as we take it, was the good fortune of the wise men of the East, who, like Melchisedec, Job and his companions, Socrates, Plato, and others, were in the kingdom of heaven, or not far from it, although on the outside of the visible church. This will become the more apparent, if we consider for a moment the comparatively pure form of religion in which they were trained and grew up.

The old Zend religion, as reformed by Zoroaster, still held its sway over the region of country from which they came. In the history of the world it recognized two principles, or creators, in opposition to the Monism of India, the principle of light and of darkness, of good and of evil, which are in continual conflict, each seeking for the victory over the world, giving rise to wars and the most fearful commotions in history. In the end the principle of light will gain the triumph over the principle of darkness, when there will be a general resurrection, a judgment day, and a final separation between the kingdoms of truth and error; the righteous shall dwell forever in a region of unadulterated light, whilst the wicked shall be confined forever in a region of perpetual darkness. Before this final victory, however, the principle of darkness will at times seem to carry everything before it, and threaten the overthrow of the kingdom of light; but in order to prevent such a catastrophe, Ormazd, the good principle, or being, will send a prophet, a deliverer, a Saviour called Sosiosh, who will turn the tide of victory, heal the world of its disorders, and reign a thousand years. This Sosiosh or Saviour, further, according to the Zendavesta, the sacred book of the Persians, was to be born of a virgin, out of the water of a running brook, in a supernatural way. The followers of this system were not idolaters in the ordinary sense of the term. They rejected idols, and worshipped

light, especially the light of the sun, as the symbol of their good Ormazd, in opposition to the wicked Ahriman, their Satan. These are some of the leading points of Parsism, the religion of the old Persians, as gathered from their sacred writings by the diligence of modern scholars. With much that is fanciful and purely speculative, it embodies some of the main doctrines of the Bible, and, as a system of heathen religion, approaches probably nearer to that of divine revelation than any other. It was no doubt a part of the primitive revelation obscured by its passage through earthen vessels.<sup>1</sup>

Trained in this sublime system of doctrines, it is easy to understand how the Persian magi could be brought to a knowledge of the true Messiah by their own study and reflection under the guidance of the Divine Spirit, aided as they doubtless were by some knowledge of Judaism, which at this time had spread over all the regions of the East. They were impelled to this very much by the circumstances in which they lived. The times were out of joint; confusion prevailed among the nations; the world lay prostrate and helpless under the iron hoof of the Roman colossus; and the time for the appearance of the Deliverer or Mediator must have seemed to them to be urgent. Pondering over the deep question of human destiny, and diligently watching the signs of the times, as they were required to do by their profession as well as by their inclination, they observe at length an extraordinary appearance in the heavens. Guided by light from without and from within, from above and from below, after long and wearisome watchings and searchings, they at length discover the true meaning of the star, and set out on their journey to see the new-born King of the Jews.

Tradition has it that there were three of them, Melchior, Caspar, and Baltasar; that one brought gold, another frankincense, and the third myrrh; and that these three were kings. The foundation of such a myth was probably nothing more than the illustrious birth and high rank of these magi.

<sup>1</sup> See Art. "Parsism," in Herzog's Real-Encyclopædie.

Quite likely there were more than three, who, with a retinue of servants, formed an imposing caravan, which may help to account for the profound sensation which they produced after they had entered the capital of the Jewish nation.

The sign in the heavens which had guided them on their long journey westward was, we are told, a star. Some have supposed it was a meteor, not higher up in the region of the air than the clouds; that it went before the magi, and moved with them all the way from the East to Jerusalem, and then became stationary when it arrived at the place where the young child lay. But meteors are now better understood than they were formerly. They are not formed out of exhalations in the air, as used to be supposed, but come down to us from the distant regions of space. They are, in fact, of the nature of planetary bodies, revolving around the sun in regular orbits, just as the planets themselves do; but some of them passing near the earth are drawn out of their course and either fall upon the earth, or dipping into its atmosphere and setting themselves on fire by friction, pass out beyond the earth's attraction on their long circuits through space. They never stand still, although sometimes they seem to do so, and are all characterized by the great rapidity of their motions, which of itself is sufficient to show that the star which the wise men saw every evening for many months could not have been one of our ordinary meteors.

Others have supposed that it was of the character of a meteor, created at the time expressly for the purpose of directing the magi, just as the pillar of cloud or the pillar of fire guided the Israelites through the wilderness, halting or advancing just as circumstances required. And still others have supposed that it was the cloudy pillar, or the Shekinah itself, which had once more returned to the earth to direct the wandering fortunes of the church. But such suppositions do not seem to have any solid foundation in the historical narrative, which speaks of the sign in the skies as one of the regular stars, and not as a body created for the purpose, or anything unlike a star. It does not imply or seek to impress

upon the mind of the reader that there was anything miraculous in its character. Miracles are usually spoken of in Scripture as miracles ; they were necessary in certain important junctures in history ; but it is not wise, as in this case, to multiply them where there is no necessity. Commiserating those empty, negative critics, who spend their time in vain in attempting to explain the sublime miracles of the Bible by natural causes, we believe that the resources of modern astronomy are amply sufficient to afford a satisfactory explanation of the mysterious star without recourse to a miracle. A rational and intelligent curiosity could ask for nothing more.

Origen, and others of the church fathers, without any critical examination, supposed that it was a comet that heralded the birth of Christ. But this could not have been the case, because at that period of history, as well as subsequently, comets were universally regarded with feelings of fear and dread, as harbingers of evil. Somehow or other, perhaps from their fiery appearance, they have always been looked upon as portending evil to the world, such as civil commotions and bloodshed ; and it is certainly a remarkable fact that in a number of cases, which we have on record, they seemed to justify this interpretation of their sudden appearance in the skies. One appeared at the time Julius Caesar was assassinated, seeming to portend the civil wars that followed ; and another is recorded by Josephus as appearing in the sky for a month over Jerusalem when it was besieged by the Romans. Many others have appeared during important crises in history. It is not likely, therefore, that the Eastern sages could have been led by a comet to set out on their journey to find their Sosiosh, their Saviour, or Prince of Peace. There was doubtless something extraordinary in the appearance of the star. St. Ignatius in the second century describes it as being very bright.<sup>1</sup>

No critical attempt was made to determine its precise character until the beginning of the seventeenth century.

<sup>1</sup> *Epis. ad Ephos.*

In the year 1604 there was a curious conjunction of the three planets, Jupiter, Saturn, Mars, which seemed to come from different parts of the heavens, and approach very near each other. At the same time, an entirely new star made its appearance in the right foot of the constellation Serpentarius, not far off, which shone with a splendor exceeding that of the planet Venus, for months, and then disappeared entirely from view. The great astronomer, Kepler, was an attentive observer of these strange phenomena, and wrote an elaborate work on the appearance of the new star. To his serious and thoughtful mind it occurred that such a conjunction of the planets might have been the star of the wise men; and he accordingly went to work and ascertained by a laborious calculation that there actually had been such a conjunction of the leading planets about the time of our Saviour's birth. He discovered, to his great surprise, that there had been no less than three conjunctions of the planets Jupiter and Saturn during the same year, and that in the spring following there was another conjunction of the three planets, Jupiter, Saturn, and Mars. With no very accurate knowledge of chronology he supposed that the conjunction of the three planets in the spring constituted the star that led the wise men from Jerusalem to Bethlehem.

Before we proceed to consider this hypothesis in detail, it is proper that we should explain for the benefit of the general reader the nature of these planetary conjunctions or constellations. We premise by stating that the planets are confined to a narrow belt or zone of the heavens, eight degrees on each side of the ecliptic, or the annual path of the sun through the skies. This is the far-famed zodiac. With the exception of a few of the smaller ones, they do not deviate to any considerable extent on either side from the solar track. Like the sun itself they generally travel eastward among the stars. As they move with different velocities, because they are at different distances from the centre of motion, it is easy to conceive how one of them should overtake another, pass close by it, or even go right over it. This

would be called a conjunction. As two of them may thus come together and, as it were, greet each other in the skies, and then travel onwards with varying speed in their respective orbits and separate, so three, four, or more may seem to converge, so as to get very near each other, or even to stand one above the other, so as to appear for a short time as one star. The Jewish rabbis have a tradition that at the birth of Abraham a certain star stood in the east in the morning which devoured four other stars. This refers unquestionably to a conjunction of the five planets, Jupiter, Saturn, Mars, Venus, and Mercury, in which all five came together, and, to an observer on the earth, appeared one above the other in the same straight line. As Mercury is comparatively near the sun, such a complete conjunction could occur only in the west, and early in the evening, or in the east at early dawn, according to the tradition. Whether such a conjunction as this took place at the birth of Abraham may be questioned, because it was an opinion among the Jews that planetary conjunctions appeared at the birth of Moses and other great men; yet the tradition is an interesting one as showing that such phenomena of planets coming together, and seeming to devour each other, must have been witnessed within the memory of man. Otherwise they could have hardly been thought of. Those most observant people, the Chinese, have, it is said, a record of a conjunction of no less than five of the planets.<sup>1</sup>

But let us now see how three conjunctions of two planets can take place in the same year. As already said, the planets, as a general thing, move from west to east along the signs of the zodiac in a direct motion. If they were viewed from the sun they would continue to pursue without interruption the same direct course; but as they are seen from the earth, which is itself in motion, moving during one

<sup>1</sup> The reader may call to mind the conjunction of Mars and Saturn in the eastern part of the skies, and a similar conjunction of Jupiter and Venus in the west, in the early part of November last. The two former made a very near approach to each other, whilst the two latter, more conspicuous, were further apart. When the sky was clear, these phenomena were objects singularly beautiful to behold, and well calculated to induce serious thought and reflection.

half of the year in one direction through space, and during the other half in the opposite direction, they appear at times to stop in their course, then retrograde for a while, and afterwards, turning around again, pursue their forward course. This will serve to explain the three conjunctions that took place during the same year about the commencement of the Christian era. The dates are given as corrected by Encke, the great mathematician and astronomer. The first occurred in the year 747 or 748 of the building of Rome, on the 24th of May; that is, at that time Jupiter, the inner planet, overtook Saturn moving more tardily along its outer orbit, and formed a conjunction; some time afterwards Jupiter commenced to retrograde, went back and met Saturn which had lagged behind, on the 27th of October. Then for a while Saturn was in advance, but Jupiter having described his arc of retrogradation, once more turned around and with his superior velocity passed Saturn a third time at a distance apparently no greater than that of a hand's breadth, on the 16th of November. The next conjunction in the year following, when Mars was added to the constellation, is to be accounted for in the same manner.

Kepler thought that these conjunctions, or at least one of the planets concerned, constituted the star of the east, in which he is followed by Ideler and some of the most distinguished theologians at the present day. The view is somewhat captivating, and hence, perhaps, imaginative theologians are so ready to adopt it. Dean Alford, in his commentary on the New Testament, seems to be carried away with it, without appearing to be annoyed by any of the difficulties in which it is involved. But the objections that can be urged against it are numerous, and, as we think, well grounded. A conjunction of stars is a constellation, not a star; and to suppose that the word star is to be understood in some "wider astrological meaning" is altogether gratuitous. The early church fathers did not so understand it. Following the tradition, that was not yet old, they spoke of it as a star, or a single body, and those who followed them

so understood it down to the time of Kepler. The Scripture says that the "star went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was." This means that it was vertical, that is, it must have appeared in the zenith. But neither Mars, Jupiter, or Saturn, as astronomy will teach us, could ever have been in the zenith of Bethlehem. None of them wander far from the ecliptic, not more than a few degrees, Saturn about two degrees and a half, Mars less, and Jupiter still less, only about a degree and a third. Now as the ecliptic is always south of Jerusalem, these planets can never approach nearer the vertical point of Bethlehem than from six to eight degrees, and this can occur very seldom. For the most part they are much further south, just as they always are in our latitude. In order that they might be in the zenith, Bethlehem ought to have been situated under the tropic of Cancer, somewhere in the heart of southern Arabia, some five or six hundred miles south of Arabia.

The chronological objection is also serious, and in our present state of knowledge insurmountable. The conjunctions made their appearance in the year of Rome 747 or 748. That is certain, because their discovery is the result of mathematical calculation; but the conclusions of chronology, which are also reliable, point to the year 749 or 750, as the year in which Christ was born. Those who regard the constellations as constituting the star of the wise men, of course do not feel the force of this difficulty. They settle the question of chronology by the star or conjunctions, and are obliged to maintain that Christ was born six years before the Christian era, and not four. But this does violence to history, and sets aside the results of faithful and learned investigations in the science of chronology. It cannot, therefore, be maintained on this ground, apart from the other improbabilities to which we have directed attention. Besides, it is evidently a far-fetched exposition of what is after all a very simple narrative in Scripture. We must therefore cast around, and ascertain whether astronomy has any other resources which will be of avail in determining the question before us. If the conjunc-



tions, we may say, were not the star of the magi, they were, no doubt, closely connected with it ; as we shall presently see, they were no doubt a link in the history or the *res gestae*, and performed an important part in inducing the wise men to undertake their journey to the West. They were not referred to directly by the sacred writer, who studied brevity, but seem to be implied in the fact that Herod slew all the young children that had been born at Bethlehem from the very time that they had made their appearance, "from two years and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men" (Matt. ii. 16).

As already remarked, a new star made its appearance in connection with the conjunction of 1604 in the constellation of Serpentarius, which shone with superior splendor for many months and then disappeared altogether. This throws light, as we think, upon the subject in hand, and relieves it materially of its difficulties. It seems to be just what is needed to complete the picture. New stars, such as had not been previously visible, though not numerous, are known to make their appearance in the skies from time to time. The annals of China report a goodly number of them. One of the most remarkable occurred in the year 1572, in the constellation of Cassiopeia, and was observed by Tycho Brahe, the astronomer, for many months. His attention was directed to it by a crowd of people in the open air who had been brought together to gaze at it on account of its remarkable brilliancy. It was brighter than any of the planets, cast a shadow, and was visible during daylight. It then gradually grew dimmer, and vanished altogether from sight at the end of sixteen months. Tycho wrote a full account of the changes of this star ; and it is said that it induced him to make astronomy his future vocation. The French reformer, Theodore Beza, maintained that it was the Star of Bethlehem, which had returned to our skies in order to announce to men a new era in the spread of Christianity.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It is possible that it was the star of the wise men. It has been supposed by some, with some show of plausibility, that the new stars which appeared in the

In regard to the cause of the remarkable brilliancy of these stars and then of their apparent extinction, astronomers are not agreed. As a general thing the fixed stars, to which they evidently belong, shine with an equable degree of splendor from age to age. But some of them are known to be subject to changes in this respect, whilst others disappear from view and are lost altogether. The former are called variable stars, and have their periods of maximum and minimum brightness, that are well known, varying from a few days to many years. What are called new stars probably belong to this class of bodies, and differ from them only in the fact that their periods are very long, and their diminution of light so great as to render them invisible to us for a longer period of time. It is said that there is such a star which flashes forth in great brilliancy only once in eight hundred years.

It has been supposed by some that the unusual brilliancy of such stars is owing to the fact that they are worlds on fire, or, in other words, that they are worlds undergoing their final conflagration. Religious writers have been naturally inclined to take this view, as it seems to favor the scriptural account of the destruction of all things in the fire of the last day; but it was held by La Place, who was never suspected of being under the influence of any religious bias. Others suppose that these stars move in very eccentric orbits, alternately approaching the earth, and then receding from it at regular intervals, thus varying in their brilliancy according to their distances from the observer. A very plausible supposition is, that

years 945, 1264, and 1572 were identical, with intervals of about 319 years between their successive appearances. As it is believed that such new stars are periodic, the supposition is not absurd, and it follows that some of us will live to see it appear again some time between the year 1890 and the end of the present century. It should be remarked, however, that others have claimed that Kepler's new star of the year 1604 was the star of Bethlehem returned, because it appeared about the time of the planetary conjunctions, of which we have already spoken as occurring about the same time as the wonderful star. No student well trained in astronomical science would risk his reputation by being positive or dogmatical in a matter of this kind. The data for a positive decision are lacking, and the principle of the sufficient reason is thus far wanting.

the variation of their light is owing to some cause in their physical constitutions, by virtue of which the combustion going forward on their surfaces is counteracted by some unknown cause for a while, and that this being at length overcome, they shine forth again with unwonted splendor. This would be something similar to what we witness sometimes in our terrestrial volcanoes, which slumber for a time, and then all of a sudden become intensely active. It is now a well established fact that our sun is nearly, if not quite, one of these variable stars. There are times when its surface is covered with dark spots, and its light is diminished ; this is followed by a period when it is comparatively free of spots, and its light is intensified. This occupies a period of from ten to twelve years. A recent writer thinks that their periodic character is most satisfactorily accounted for by supposing that during the period when they shine brightest they are passing through a meteoric ring, and are thus supplied with an increase of fuel from falling meteors, which increases their splendor. This last theory may turn out to be not the least plausible, but the whole subject is still involved in much mystery, which speculative astronomers are endeavoring with much zeal to dissipate.

Returning from this digression, we will now gather up the facts in the case on hand, and endeavor to connect them together in one and the same historical picture.

It may be taken for granted that the magi, those famous star-gazers of the East, most diligently observed the three conjunctions of Jupiter and Saturn in the same year, and the conjunction of the three planets during the following spring. We may also well imagine that they cast in their minds to know what these things meant. It was a problem which it was difficult for them to solve — one, too, that required time and patience for its solution. Throughout the Orient it was a general impression that a conjunction of planets indicated the birth of some illustrious personage. As already said, the Jewish rabbis had a tradition that planetary conjunctions announced the birth of Abraham and

Moses; and it was a belief among them that one of these conjunctions was to precede the birth of their expected Messiah. It was not difficult, therefore, as we conceive, for the magi to interpret in a general way the meaning of the conjunctions. To them it was a fixed fact that some illustrious person was to be born and to appear in the arena of history; but who he was or where he was to be found were questions which they were not prepared to answer. This required time and patient study. It is natural to suppose that they searched their sacred writings with new interest and relish, that they read everything which they could find about their Sosiosh, and that they extended their inquiries into the literature and traditions of other nations. There was a widespread opinion throughout the East that an illustrious individual was to go forth from Judea and attain to universal empire. This must have been general, and spoken of among all classes of society, or else such historians as Tacitus and Suetonius would not have deigned to notice it in their histories. Of course the magi had heard of it, and it contributed materially to the solution of the great question which had come to occupy their profoundest attention. Further, such earnest seekers after the truth in the darkness of heathen lands could not be left without the light and guidance of the Spirit of God, who in all nations sheds light upon the minds of those who love the truth. At length the light breaks in upon their thoughts; a brilliant star is seen from their watch-towers, rising in the evening above the eastern horizon; their minds are made up; local prejudices are thrown to the wind; each one takes up his pilgrim staff; and together they travel to the far West to worship the new-born King of the Jews. Travelling slowly over the burning plains of Persia, Mesopotamia, and Arabia, cheered each night by the bright star shining down upon them approvingly, like the eye of the good Ormazd, the source of all light, they arrive at last at their objective point, the capital of Judea.<sup>1</sup> Here king

<sup>1</sup> It is sometimes supposed that the star had become invisible during the journey, and then suddenly reappeared after the magi left the gates of Jerusalem on

Herod diligently inquires about the star and all the circumstances attending its appearance. They describe to him the appearance of the heavens for years past; they tell him of the conjunctions of the planets in the constellation of the Fish (a constellation sacred to the Jews), and of the wonderful star now blazing in the sky. That artful and crafty tyrant is himself convinced by the recital of such striking occurrences in the heavens; he believes that the old promise is about to go into fulfilment; but, bold and heaven-defiant, he takes counsel from his fears, and artfully lays his plans for the destruction of the young child. He takes in the whole field of view, knows nothing of the quite recent birth, but is certain that it had occurred some time during the two previous years. Such was his horoscope of the skies; and hence, when he was defeated in his malevolent designs by the warning of an angel, he slew all the children at Bethlehem under two years of age, lest by too narrow an interpretation of the sign in the heavens, he might fail to destroy the object of his fear and hatred.<sup>1</sup>

their way to Bethlehem. But there is nothing in the narrative that will justify such a supposition. It can be maintained only on the theory that the star was a subjective phenomenon, or that it was a luminary specially formed for the occasion.

<sup>1</sup> Ideler in his "Handbuch der Chronologie," Vol. ii., agrees with Kepler that the conjunctions of the planets constituted the star of the wise men, and seeks by means of it to fix the date of our Saviour's birth as having occurred six, instead of four, years before the common era. He does not suppose it likely that any new star made its appearance at the time of the conjunctions, although that was actually the case in Kepler's star of 1604. Ebrard differs from him in this latter point, and maintains that a star did appear, but thinks that it appeared at the time of the conjunctions. He does not see how there could have been two years between the conjunctions and the appearance of the star. The difficulty is not serious; as explained in the text, the magi needed time for reflection. At least, it is not so great as the chronological objection, which, according to the learned researches of Wiesler and others, fix the date of the Saviour's birth about four, and not six, years earlier than the common date. Olshausen thought at first that the language of the Scripture meant a star, and not a star-group; but after reading Ideler he became doubtful (*schwankend*) and regarded the Keplerian view as highly probable. None of these writers seem to make any account of two years preceding the coming of the magi to Jerusalem, over which Herod's mind wandered, and in regard to which he no doubt diligently inquired of the wise men concerning signs and portents in the skies.

The magi start out in the evening on their way to Bethlehem, and, according to the custom of the East, travel by night. The star which they had seen at home in the east — that is, as commentators say, in the eastern part of the sky — at its rising, had by this time (three or four months after it was seen rising in the evening) nearly reached its culmination in the zenith; and as they travel southward towards Bethlehem they see it before them, and a few hours still to the east of them. Verging near the zenith, it was an additional proof to them that they were nearing the place of their destination, and it is said that “they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.” It seems to move with them, and, advancing westward gradually with the other stars, it would reach the point immediately above them by the time their short journey came to an end, and to stand still with them over the place where the young child lay.

The appearance of an entirely new star in the heavens in connection with the preceding planetary phenomena we conceive to be by far the most satisfactory explanation of the star of the wise men. It is simple, and free from the difficulties with which the Keplerian theory of the conjunctions must continue to be invested. It is confirmed, we may add, by the records of the Chinese, which testify that a wonderful star was seen in the sky during the year in which Christ was born. It was, no doubt, the same that guided the wise men. There was an appropriateness in the sudden coming of such a visitant, preceded by extraordinary celestial phenomena in advance, with which no one can fail to be struck. Three conjunctions in the same year, forming a trinity, — a sacred number, — and a triple conjunction in the year following, forming another trinity, would be calculated to create wonder and to excite solemn reflection, even in our sceptical age. How much more must this have been the case when it was more fully believed than at present that there was a vital bond of connection between the natural and spiritual worlds. A new star, following in the wake of these conjunctions, would be still more expressive of some

great event taking place in the spiritual world. As already said, it had been apparently slumbering for ages; but whilst it thus seemed to be going out in darkness, it was, so to speak, only drawing in its energies and husbanding its resources until the time should come when its service should be called for by its Creator. Then its hidden energies revealed themselves, and it shone forth most brilliantly upon the world,—brighter, probably, than Sirius,—brighter than the planet Venus, or any other star,—so as to impress the minds of the magi with an idea of the greatness of that King that had been just born into the world.<sup>1</sup>

This is what we conceive to be the most satisfactory explanation of the star which guided the wise men. It was a natural star, but a truly wonderful one. It shows the prescience and wisdom of the Creator, who from all eternity holding the idea of our universe in his mind as one thought, so ordered it that when the greatest of all events took place in the history of man, the outward physical universe should be called into requisition to testify to its greatness and glory.

#### PART SECOND.

What has been said above constitutes what may be called the natural history of the star—the wonderful phenomenon viewed only from its natural side. This we regard as useful and proper in its place; for where the natural and supernatural come together and blend into one, as they do in the star of the wise men, a clear conception of the earthly may help us materially in embracing and apprehending the heavenly. The external or physical surroundings are, of

<sup>1</sup> The substance of this Article was embodied in a public lecture, which the writer delivered some five years ago on Christmas Eve, at Lancaster, Pa. Subsequently, he met with the interesting volume, entitled "The Wise Men of the East," by Francis W. Upham, LL.D., published in 1873. In regard to the star, and other points of interest, it is in harmony, we were glad to see, with the views advanced in the lecture. We freely commend Dr. Upham's book, written from a Christian standpoint, and embodying valuable erudition. It is a good book, one that can be read with profit during the Christmas festival, and subsequently.

course, not the main thing ; but, constituted as we are, we cannot dispense with any such helps of faith, which God himself has given us, even though they are external and subordinate. Besides, sceptics sometimes ask, contemptuously, the question, how a star could have led learned men, philosophers, to a distant land to bow in adoration at the feet of an infant child. A candid examination of all the facts in the case, with the help of science, may do much, as we think, in breaking the force of their negative criticism, and in showing that what some may be pleased to regard as an idle tale, a puerility engendered during a credulous age, or a mere subjective fancy, after all presents to our view one of the most beautiful and sublime pictures in the gallery of history.

There has, however, always been a feeling, a belief, or persuasion in the Christian church that the star of the east has a mystical, symbolical, or prophetic sense ; that is, that it was not only intended to announce the fact that Christ was born, and mechanically to guide the wise men to his place of abode, but that it had a wider and more comprehensive meaning. That comes out continually in our Christian literature, in thoughtful commentaries, in books of devotion, and in our hymns. To the great mass of devout believers it is still the star of the east—a perennial fact—a guide to all to the manger and the stall for homage and worship. We believe this to be eminently scriptural, and that the case in hand is only one instance of the sublime symbolism of divine revelation—one of the ensamples or types intended for us, upon whom the ends of the world have come, no less than it was for the Eastern sages. There is, of course, danger here, as well as elsewhere, of running into puerilities and one-sided excesses in the interpretation of the Scripture. Hence in interpreting the sublime scenery of the natural heavens as they appeared when the Lord of glory was born, we shall endeavor to be discreet, chaste, and reverential, as the word of God always demands of us when we seek to grasp its contents.



In the first place, the star is the representative of Christ himself, the eternal Logos, in the sphere of history. It announced his advent in our world. It was the first appearance of the star of Christianity and the gospel in our spiritual heavens. Naturally speaking, we have seen that it was new — one that had not been visible in the sky for a long time. For what we know, it may have shone down serenely upon primeval creation, and, with other stars, leaped for joy over a new-born world, and then faded away into darkness over the melancholy spectacle of man's ruin. We do not know certainly its history. But now it comes forth joyously from the dark depths of space, and shines again with its undimmed splendor. That is the nature of such stars. So the Logos, who was the morning star of the first creation, but who had withdrawn, as it were, and concealed himself from view in the depths of eternity when man fell, now comes forth as the true Light of the world. He appears in the very midst of the darkness of nature, in the depths of that moral night which had for ages brooded over the world. Here he shines with a serenity, a beauty, a splendor and glory compared with which all human lights or stars grow feeble and fade away. His advent on earth constitutes the gospel — the good news of salvation and eternal life. Next to the angelic hosts at Bethlehem, the star in the east was, therefore, the first preacher of the gospel, the first herald of salvation to the world. It was very meet and proper that this should be so. When the highest heavens through angels announced the glad tidings that God had come into the world, it was in perfect keeping with the sacred drama then enacted that the physical heavens should respond, catch up the song, and repeat the wondrous story.

Again, the star announced the advent of Christ in our flesh, the particular form under which he appears in history or the world of man — a region above the mere world of nature. It was, therefore, also the star of the incarnation. Man in himself constitutes a world of his own, better entitled to that name than the evanescent order of nature below him.

It is a universe of activities, which required greater wisdom and a finer skill in God to create and build up, and then when ruined to reconstruct, than were needed when he formed the earth and the heavens. It was also into this world of humanity the Son of God entered when he was born at Bethlehem. He could not be fully and sensibly in this kind of a world except by his birth of a virgin. It was only in this way, by veiling his divinity under a human form,—by his incarnation,—that he could become part and parcel of humanity. It brought him into vital relation to it, and constituted him a living factor in its onward historical progress. But being in our flesh, tabernacling in our human nature as a region of life, and dwelling among us, Christ, as the Logos or eternal Son of God, could not become nor remain a mere co-ordinate member or branch of the human family. In the nature of the case, he must become its reigning head; he was the fittest. It was something that was longed for—the desire of the nations. The world needed a head; but it could not find one; and this was the cause of the general confusion. It sought in empty and ineffectual struggles for such a headship; but it was all in vain. The only result was that many heads were set up to rule the world; but these, being without authority and without capacity for the power and the glory, only aggravated the misery of the situation. The world thus presented an abnormal or monstrous development; it became hydra-headed; and the confusion grew worse from day to day. As the heads were destroyed, one after another, others grew up in their place, as in the myth. The appearance, however, of the Son of God in history not as a mere virtue, but as a person, as a divine incarnation, gave him the pre-eminence in all things. He could not, in the nature of the case, be in our flesh or nature without becoming its ruling power, its head and centre. Joined with him in idea from all eternity, this humanity must gravitate toward him now when he appears in the midst of its disorderly elements and its scattered fragments. In his presence human sacrifices, the vain efforts of men to save themselves, ceased, and the

heathen oracles became dumb. The star in the east led the way to the King of the Jews and of the King of men.

// Further, the star not only announced the fact that Christ had come, but proclaimed it to the entire heathen world in its best representatives. It performed an actual part in the realization of salvation in the homage and worship of these good men. It was the star of the epiphany, or manifestation to the world at large of all that was involved in the advent and incarnation of Christ. As already said, he could not be in the world really without revealing himself and challenging the attention of men generally. As the true light of the world, all lands and nations must see it. The darkness could not obstruct such a light, falling upon it from the skies above. As well might the night strive to keep back the light of the rising sun. The actual manifestation, however, was gradual in its progress, and must extend over ages before it becomes complete. The first epiphany—the child Jesus lying in a manger—was to human eyes a feeble light, shining in a dark place. It was appropriately symbolized by the star in the far-off east, just rising above the horizon to the wise men, twinkling and struggling for expression amidst the surrounding mists of the night. And yet even in its first feeble beginnings it was seen and recognized by a few of the wisest and the best of earth. Subsequently the light became brighter. In the miracle at Cana Christ, it is said, began to show forth his glory in a public way. The multitudes glorified God, who had given to man such power to perform such miracles. His whole life indeed, his death, his resurrection and ascension to heaven, were simply a manifestation of his glory for the purpose of redeeming the world. It was the prayer of his life, which he was wont to offer up with much fervor, that the Father might manifest in him the glory which he had with the Father before the world began. It was on this principle that his divine-human life here on earth was unfolded; and now that he is gone up on high it is not otherwise. Having become invisible to mortal eye amidst the effulgence of light which he introduced into the world, he is

still its true light; and through his church, the means of grace, his word, the sacraments, and the ministry, he is still manifesting himself to the world in ever-widening circles of light and glory. As the epiphany expands in outward extent and in inward depth, it touches on his second coming in glory.

From this the vital character of all true Christianity will appear. It is essentially diffusive, aggressive, and world-wide in its operations. It cannot become local, or even exclusively national. Its field is the world, and its era all the ages that are still to come. It lives and flourishes in the world only as it is *missionary* in its character in the true sense of the word. Its objective point, which becomes clearer and clearer with each new conquest, is the evangelization of all nations. Divest it of this its aim, and its life is gone; its inmost spirit is grieved or quenched. It is no longer an epiphany, but darkness and confusion. The light that is in it is darkness. It has lost one of the first characteristics impressed upon it by the call which it addressed to the Eastern sages to come and see and accept the gift of heaven. Individuals, as well as churches, are smitten as it were with the malaria when they resist this opportunity to exercise themselves in the faith and hope of Christianity. So we are taught in a most graphic manner by the mystery of the star. It was the first to make known the gospel to the Gentile world at large. It passed over and destroyed that middle wall of partition which separated Jew and Gentile, and initiated that communion of saints in which there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek, the high and the low, the rich and the poor. It was, therefore, the first missionary of the cross to heathen nations. It is still to us the star of the world's evangelization.

In the next place, the star in the east was the symbol of the world's conversion, the prophecy of Christ's final victory over all the powers of darkness. So it doubtless appeared to the magi. They hailed the star with great joy, because in their minds it proclaimed the victory of light over dark-

ness. It announced a great deal more, which in their condition they were not as yet prepared to comprehend. The manifestation of Christ in history is no empty exhibition; it cannot be anything transient; it must become really historical, and be attended with results in human society corresponding to its divine nature. As already said, the mere existence or advent of Christ among men must arrest general attention. But how much more must this be the case when he begins to manifest himself in his proper glory — in the glory which he had with the Father from all eternity — among men, on the arena of history, amidst the darkness and confusion of earth. He comes to men as a prophet, it is true, revealing to them the will of God; but he is unspeakably more than a mere organ of another; Yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. He is the revelation of the great God himself in human flesh, the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person. As such Christ reveals to men just what they most need, just what they have been looking for and longing for, without knowing it and without being able to find it. In him are revealed infinite and imperishable riches, treasures of wisdom and knowledge, fountains of love and affection; in a word, a boundless supply of resources by which man as a whole or men as individuals may wage a successful war against the powers of darkness. Such an outward, historical epiphany of the glory of God in the person of his Son cannot remain only outward and objective. It must penetrate man, and become something subjective. A manifestation of divine power and glory like this, under the active presence of the Spirit of God, must become overwhelming wherever men are in any way open to these divine powers, and continually tend to bring them into subjection to what is so evidently heavenly and divine. There will be a response from the hearts of men somewhere, and a cheerful submission to the new authority established among them. This is taught practically, as well as prophetically, in the mystic scene in which the star of the east was a mute actor. It not only

affirmed the fact that Christ was born; but it actually brought the wise men, externally as well as internally, to bow in humble adoration at his feet. This was an actual fact—the conversion of these sages to the faith of Christ. So much Christ as an infant in the manger already accomplished. It was the beginning of all subsequent conversions in the Gentile world down to the present time, and at the same time a pledge, a sure prophecy of the future victories over the powers of darkness in this world.

But, lastly, the new star of victory and conquest, that rose up to view during the first Christmas season, was also the star of reconciliation and peace among men. The conquests which it foretold were not to be outward and enforced by an overwhelming power which it would be futile to attempt to resist, but inward, and cheerfully acquiesced in. The subjugation of man's refractory will was to be followed by his reconciliation with God and himself. After the conquest there was to follow the restoration or the thorough reorganization of human society on the basis of love and good will. The work just inaugurated at Bethlehem and announced to the world by the mystic star was one. The end already revealed itself in the beginning. The latter was the eloquent prophecy of the former. So it appeared in the revelations of the angels to the shepherds. The annunciation that a Saviour was born was made in close connection with the ultimate glory that would accrue to God on the one side, and final peace on earth and good will to men on the other side. The whole history of Immanuel, or God dwelling among men, becomes transparent in the song of the angels, in which the final consummation appears already as a reality. The *gloria in excelsis* is followed by the good news of peace on earth and good will from heaven towards men. So, no doubt, the mystery of the star revealed itself to the faith of the magi. They were earnest-minded men, who were concerned about the state of the world and longed for its redemption. When others of their class gave up the problem of human destiny in despair, and denied the existence of God or a hereafter, these men

hoped and longed for deliverance. Human society around them seemed to be tending rapidly towards its final dissolution. There was an external peace in the world; but the nations groaned without hope under the burdens of tyranny and oppression. Men said there was peace; but there was in fact no peace, no real unity, no harmony anywhere. No person could see better than the magi the internal strifes, conflicts, and antagonisms among men. When, therefore, it was revealed to them through the star, that a new prince was born in Judea, they understood its significance at once. Redemption was at hand, the victory of the good over the evil was announced, and the era of peace and harmony was to commence. The sign in the heavens which fixed their eye by night and engaged their attention by day was, with its mute surroundings, a most expressive symbol of the reign of peace. It was not a flashing comet, not an angry storm or tempest, not a display of meteors, or falling stars, not an earthquake, nor the floods of the great deep lifting up their voices, but a star, noiselessly appearing in the starry heavens in the silence and darkness of night. Shining down serenely from above upon this dark earth of ours, how expressive of peace and love! It was, as it were, a messenger that had come from some distant sphere, in which strife had never entered, in order to proclaim a truce to the strife and conflicts forever repeating themselves in this world of ours. It was the angel of peace and reconciliation.

When we speak of peace, the attention is naturally directed to the periods of war that have cursed our world, or to private feuds ever springing up between man and man; and we long for the time when these shall cease. Then the white-winged angels of peace shall come and reign. But the peace on earth, heralded forth by the celestial choir over the hills of Bethlehem when Christ was born, includes much more than the absence of strife among men. It implies the removal of the internal causes which produce the angry conflict or the bitter antagonism. It means the restoration of man with all his talents and faculties to right relationship with himself

and his Maker. Less than this admits room for jars and discords, and interrupts the general harmony which is the essence of peace.

True peace regards man as a unity, a totality, a kingdom, a constitution, or, as we should say, an organized world, in which there is one general life, that unfolds itself in diversity of operations, in diversity of organs or activities, all of which stand related to each other as parts of the same process. As such, it involves also many integral parts, subordinate worlds or spheres, such as the state, the arts, the sciences, philosophy, religion, and culture in all its ramifications. The reconciliation of the world, or peace on earth, accordingly, of necessity, must involve the proper relation of these different spheres of life not only to Christ, but to each other. They cannot be in conflict with each other, and cannot repudiate their subordination to God, their source, without self-destruction. Now all this is represented to us symbolically, prophetically, and in part actually, in the adoration of the wise men. They were representative men, representatives of the world under its best forms. They embodied in themselves its rank, its wealth, its wisdom, and its highest culture; for, as already said, in their native land they were princes, statesmen, priests, wise men, philosophers, and teachers. Most appropriately, therefore, were they selected by infinite wisdom as actors in a scene which was intended to teach in a figure the conversion of the world and its reconciliation to God. They bowed as individuals before the manger, but they brought with them the wisdom, the power, the rank, the honor, the science, and all other culture to which man may attain, and laid them freely as an offering before the Lord of glory. They prostrated themselves on the ground, thus acknowledging the insufficiency of human wisdom and humbly accepting of that which had descended from above. Aged and venerable sages, accustomed to teach and to rule in the affairs of men, they take the position of worshippers and disciples of the new-born King of glory. They also opened their treasures, representing the wealth and power of the world, and laid



them at the feet of their new Sovereign for his use. Whilst this is a real transaction it is prophetic, and looks to the future, when all science shall be reconciled with divine truth, and the wealth of the world shall be consecrated to the service of Christ.

The whole scene of the star and of the journey of the wise men is replete with instruction. For the times in which we live, it is the gospel of the day. We live in an age that is striving to be reconciled to itself, and that yearns for the unification of humanity; but strife and conflicts continue. Antagonisms everywhere abound; philosophy and theology clash; science and revelation contradict each other, and so the struggle goes on. There are two forms of evil which are a curse to our civilization, the one showing itself in the theoretical sphere, the other in the practical world, the pride of the human intellect and the love of money. Both spring from the same source in the natural selfishness of men, and both stand in the way of the world's progress in the peaceful solution of its own grand problem. How shall these evils be overcome, the world's fearful conflicts be brought to an end, and the now discordant elements be reconciled? Only, we answer, as the scene of the wise men of the East is continually re-enacted in the lives of individual men, and of communities generally. The light which guided them must be our light, and the light of our age. Their devotion must be ours, and that same star of hope, which led them in their long pilgrimage out of the darkness and selfishness of the natural world, must be the same star of hope to all alike. So we, and in the end the world, will be reconciled to God, and come and lay our offerings at the feet of His Son.