

# The STAR OF BETHLEHEM

WALDEMAR KAEMPFERT

THE reign of Herod had nearly ended when the Magi arrived in Jerusalem and asked: "Where is he that is born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him."

The news that a true "king of the Jews," a possible rival, was born, and that his birth had been heralded by celestial phenomena, caused Herod much concern. He summoned to him the scribes and learned men. When they were questioned where the king was to be born they answered: "In Bethlehem of Judea; for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou, Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda; for out of thee shall come a governor, that shall rule my people Israel." According to the authorized version it is then stated in the New Testament that "Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also. When they had heard the king, they departed; and lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy."

That is the whole story of the Star of Bethlehem as it is simply and directly told in the second chapter of the gospel according to St. Matthew.

It was a cloister fancy of the dark ages, handed down through centuries, that led the Christian world to regard the Star of the East as a miraculous luminary, akin to the pillar of fire that guided the children of Israel in the wilderness—a luminary especially created for the sole purpose of leading the Magi to the birthplace of Christ. The modern Christian is more apt to regard the star as a natural phenomenon and



to seek a scientific explanation of its sudden appearance, not for the purpose of casting doubt upon the narrative of Matthew, but of giving it astronomical support.

Who were these wise men, these Magi, of whom St. Matthew speaks? They came from the east, they said, and the east, according to the geographical knowledge of Matthew's day, was Chaldaea, Persia, and that Arabian desert where the sons of Ismael roamed. In that case of which they spoke, star-gazing was to some nations a religious observation, to others a mystical traditional rite. The pseudo-science of astrology out of which our modern science of astronomy was slowly evolved was thus engendered. Exegetes of the New Testament narrative hold these Magi to have been astrologers, members of that strange, non-national, privileged priesthood whose office it was to watch the sky each day and each night, to note the position and apparent motion of the sun from dawn to dusk, and to predict those changes in planetary positions which, in that day of astrological superstition, were supposed to shape and reveal the destinies of kings and nations. In their science came an early worshipper at the feet of Christ.

To ancient as well as mediaeval astrologers, certain groupings of the stars and planets had a fixed prophetic significance. The planets were named in accordance with their supposed influence. Mercury, always lurking near the sun, furtively gleaming in the morning or evening, was the patron of tricksters, knaves, and thieves. Mars, flaming in red, was the symbol of war, the guardian of heroes and warriors. If the Magi were astrologers who believed in stellar influences, the apparition of the Star of Bethlehem must have been an astronomical phenomenon. But no ordinary astronomical phenomenon could have enticed these practiced star-gazers from their temples. We must, therefore, find some celestial event sufficiently extraordinary to warrant a journey from Chaldaea or Persia to Bethlehem.

When the Magi arrived in Jerusalem, Herod was within a few weeks of his death. The massacre of the babes of Bethlehem was one of his last cruel deeds. When he inquired diligently what time the star appeared, the reply was evidently such that he felt it necessary to kill all male infants "from two years old and under." It is probable, therefore, that the Magi first saw the star two years before their arrival in Jerusalem. Herod died in B. C. 4. Hence the Star of Bethlehem must have appeared about two years before that date. We must discover, if we

can, an exceptional stellar event near B. C. 6 with which it may be identified.

Johann Kepler, in his peculiar genius (for he showed that the births of Enoch, Moses, Cyrus, Caesar, Charlemagne, and Luther were preceded by important astrological events), led the way in calling attention to the astronomical phenomena that preceded the birth of Christ. He pointed out that there must have been a conjunction of the planets Jupiter and Saturn at about the time of Christ's birth, and even made a few preliminary calculations to prove his case. The conjunction occurred in the sign Pisces, from time immemorial identified with the destinies of Israel. A conjunction in that sign always signified the rising of some mighty master of the Jewish race. Such a conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn occurs once in about 800 years. It was, therefore, sufficiently extraordinary in Kepler's eyes to herald the birth of a Messiah.

Not until 1826 was Kepler's suggestion seriously considered by astronomers. In that year Professor Ideler, of Berlin, computed the positions of Jupiter and Saturn and proved that they were actually in conjunction in 7 B. C. His calculations showed that they at no time overlapped to form a single star, but that they were separated by a distance equal to the apparent diameter of the moon. Accordingly, Ideler had the temerity to suppose that the wise men saw the two planets as one star, because they were miraculously near-sighted. In justice to Ideler, it must be stated that he abandoned his theory when Encke, in 1831, repeated the calculations and found that the actual distance between Jupiter and Saturn, when nearest each other in B. C. 7, was more than the apparent diameter of the moon.

Apart from the fact that Jupiter and Saturn were never sufficiently near each other to be seen as one body, two planets in conjunction can hardly be called a star. Nor is it likely that experienced Chaldaean astrologers would so regard it. Moreover, there were other planetary conjunctions at about the same time. Professor Stockwell has demonstrated that a conjunction of Venus and Mars occurred on May 8th, B. C. 6, about fifty days less than two years before Herod's death. Because the mandate for the

slaughter of the infants was issued some time before Herod's death, Professor Stockwell advances the supposition that this conjunction was the Star of Bethlehem. Since conjunctions occurred so frequently, it is difficult to understand why more of them did not call forth Chaldaean or Persian deputations.

Because of these fatal objections to any theory which regarded the Star of Bethlehem merely as a conjunction of two planets, the late Prof. R. A. Proctor cast about for other celestial phenomena and finally decided that the wise men might have been guided by a comet. There is much to be said in favor of the supposition. Comets are discovered nowadays at the rate of two or three a year. Not all of them are particularly brilliant; but it is not inconceivable that in Biblical times comets occasionally appeared that were brilliant enough to strike terror into superstitious hearts. Indeed, before Edmund Halley proved that the law of gravitation applied to the comet which bears his name and which has revisited the earth at intervals of seventy-one and one-half to seventy-nine years, comets were regarded as divine messengers, as omens

of good or evil, and particularly as harbingers of pestilence and war. To a poetic eastern people who revered the stars as symbols especially set in the heavens for the guidance of men, comets were undoubtedly awesome visitors. The Chaldeans, Persians and Jews were astronomically no more enlightened than the mediaeval Christians, and if at the fall of Constantinople in 1453 all Christendom was alarmed at the appearance of a comet (a comet which we now know to have been Halley's), it is highly probable that the Orient was no less impressed by these sudden visitations. Comprising, as it does, a nucleus, a "coma" or envelope surrounding the nucleus and measuring from twenty thousand to one million miles in diameter, and a long tail which streams behind the nucleus for sixty to a hundred million miles or more, a comet is one of the most mysteriously beautiful celestial apparitions that ever meets the eye. But whether or not the Star of Bethlehem really was such an apparition no one can affirm with certainty. An astronomer can merely state that the idea is not untenable and that it is less objectionable than the conjunction hypothesis.

Lastly, the theory has been proposed that the Star of Bethlehem was what is called a "new" star or "nova," a star which suddenly flares up in the heavens and fades away again to its former magnitude after the lapse of weeks or months. Such new stars are not altogether rare. Ten appeared between B. C. 134 and the end of the fifteenth century. Since the fifteenth century no less than sixteen have been recorded. In our own time they are discovered with fair frequency.

Even before the invention of the telescope such new stars were studied by astronomers. Apart from the astronomical evidence in favor of the theory that the Star of Bethlehem was a nova, poetically, at least, it seems singularly fitting that a matchless orb blazing forth in sudden magnificence should have marked not only the birth of a Messiah whose destiny it was to save mankind by his own suffering and to make the birth of a new world by purging it of evil, but also the birth of a new sun with embryonic planets wheeling about it in shining clouds of gas and stellar dust.

## LIKE HAWAII AS STRONGHOLD

Experts Satisfied That Outpost May Be Relied Upon to Hold Its Own in Conflict.

After five weeks spent in testing the big guns of the various forts and posts on the island of Honolulu, the ordnance experts are pleased, and are declaring among themselves that as an outpost of the nation Hawaii is really beginning to merit the title of

"the Gibraltar of the Pacific." The tests were conducted by the most important board of experts ever assembled to consider the military defenses of the islands, a letter to the New York Sun says.

It has been ascertained that the big guns so far in place are not only superbly situated for purposes of defense against all naval attacks, and particularly with reference to the great dry

docks and naval station at Pearl harbor, now the greatest of its kind in all the Pacific, but the city of Honolulu. From all sea directions these important points are covered from attack.

But it is found that other guns and mortars must be implanted to secure these places against successful attack from the land side in the doubtful event of an enemy in any considerable numbers being able to effect a landing upon the coast outside the range of the big seven, eight and ten-

inch guns, and recommendation for and increase in the number of batteries will be made.

The board of experts was composed of the following officers: Brig. Gen. M. M. Macomb, Lieut. Col. John F. Morrison, Maj. George Blakeson and Maj. W. P. Wooten.

"Genuine Antiques" Scarce. Buyers of antique furniture are advised by House and Garden that it is now almost impossible to "pick up" genuine antiques in this country.

## CHINCHBUGS ROUTED

Fire as Pest Destroyer Advocated in Agricultural Fable.

Firebug in the Person of a Scientific Farmer Wrought Havoc With Pestiferous Family Who Had Moved Into Winter Home.

Atchison, Kan.—Gen. Pestiferous Chinch Bug, Jr., and family of Kansas have gone to their winter home in the bunch grass and blue stem. The Kansas Industrialist a few weeks ago said the news of their departure was brought to the agricultural college by J. W. McCulloch, a special field agent for the entomology department of the Kansas Agricultural college. So it's official and authoritative.

McCulloch also gave out the information here that there is considerable uneasiness in the C. B. household on account of the many incendiary fires that destroyed blue stem and bunch grass winter homes. In fact, it was only after several days of arguing and promising that Mrs. C. Bug and the girls consented to leave the family's summer place on the old cornstalk. And they wouldn't have gone at all had not the general agreed, finally, to crawl to the top of the winter home twice a day and look for firebugs. It was also told here by a neighbor of the Chinch Bugs that Mrs. C. B. ordered fire extinguishers for the winter home before she left.

Trouble for the Chinch Bug family began when a firebug, thought to be Scientific Farmer, came to the blue stem and bunch grass home and burned it nearly to the ground. Young Pestiferous, his bride and his brother were the only ones of a family of sixty-five that escaped. And that was the mortality among most of the other families, Mrs. Pestiferous said.

And then that cold winter in only a makeshift for a home. It was too much for brother. He died. But the general and Mrs. Pestiferous survived somehow and reared a large family on the cornstalk.

"I think we made a good move when we came to this side of the road," General Pestiferous told his wife. "I understand that there have been no firebugs in this community for years. This is the place we should have lighted in instead of that farm

## WAR'S TERRIBLE DEVASTATION



This photograph of one of the streets of Kirk Kilisesh was taken after the capture of that city by the Bulgarians, and shows the awful devastation wrought by the bombardment.

across the divide. Over there it seemed as if all the eggs on that section combined forces against us. Every grove of blue stem and bunch grass in sight went up in smoke. And you know as well as I that if our grove had been burned a little closer to the ground we'd have perished with the rest of them."

"Yes, I know that only too well, Pest, but I'm worried about the smell of smoke in the air this morning. I wish you'd forget the past long enough to go on the roof and

squint around a little. You've been up this morning. And you know what you promised."

The special field agent believes fears of the Chinch Bugs are grounded. The success with the family of Gen. Pestiferous was routed has convinced Scientific Farmer that the winter house plan is the best yet for fighting his old enemy. His torch is in hand and he's only waiting now till the last of the Chinch Bugs are in winter homes.

## MONTENEGRINS LONG VICTORS

They Are Reckless at Play and at Arms, but Honorable, Says a London Letter.

London.—It was Mr. Gladstone who once described Montenegro—the black mountain—as the shore where, after bloody Kossovo, the wreckage of old Serbia was washed by the oncoming Turkish tide, says a London letter. They who escaped into these fastnesses were families of caste, chieftains and nobles, who for five centuries and more have remained unconquered.

Their very vices show breeding, a recklessness at play and an extravagance in dress. Yet gamblers though they are and dandies, they are honest as to cash, and if a purse of gold be dropped by accident upon the highway it will be discovered by its rightful possessor.

Prison life itself is ruled by honor, for convicts who may have pulled a trigger wander abroad, meet their friends, join in festivals, and are known only by the dull music of a clanking chain.

The Montenegrin is not devoid of education. He has his school in every hamlet, and there is an amazing story of the great Ivan, the prince who burned his capital Zabljak to save it from the Turk, setting up a printing press in Obod just twenty years after Caxton had begun his enterprise at Westminster. The machine vanished amid the chaos, but it revealed an instinct.

It is an armed man that the Montenegrins now interest us. When they go marketing to the Austrian coast town of Cattaro they are required by the authorities to rob their belts of the mighty pistol, but at the frontier they resume it, and it is the symbol of their liberty.

Humble homage to the queen is rigidly exacted by King Nicholas, and in the palace of Cetinje, princesses, so far from being disdained, are described, paternally, as "my country's most valuable export."

To behead one's enemy is the final joy of the Montenegrins, who, therefore, dislike long range artillery and the modern rifles which are received from Russia as Christmas presents for the reigning houses.

## WILL SELL CHINESE ART

Imperial Family of New Republic Has Plan to Dispose of Palace Treasures.

New York.—Art connoisseurs from all parts of the world are looking forward to an auction sale which probably will be held in London next year, and which should prove the most wonderful disposal of art treasures in history. The articles to be offered to bidders are nothing less than the treasures of the imperial palaces of China.

The collection, which includes the finest specimens of every form of Chinese porcelains and ceramics, is unique and its value is enormous. It is said that the disposal of the treasures practically has been decided upon by the imperial family.

## TOY DOG SCARES ELEPHANT

Stamped by Black and Tan About the Size of Kitten, Beast Creates Havoc.

Paris, France.—Stamped by a toy black and tan about the size of a small kitten, one of the hugest elephants Paris has ever seen did \$1,000 worth of damage the other night in the traffic-thronged Boulevard Beaumarchais.

The elephant was shuffling along

## MAKE BRIDEGROOM CAPTIVE

Bound and Gagged, West Orange, N. J., Man Sees Tormentors Eat Wedding Feast.

West Orange, N. J.—Bound and gagged, Bernard Cunningham, a young business man of this town, was forced to sit a wrathful witness at a feast which he himself had prepared, but which he was not permitted to share. The feast in question was the victim's wedding supper, and had been spread in the dining room of his new home, at 4 Main street. Mr. Cunningham was married to Miss Mary Brennan of this city, the ceremony being held at the home of the bride, 105 Alden street. A wedding breakfast was served, and it had been planned by the bridegroom to invite a few intimate friends to a supper in the evening before starting with his wife on their honeymoon journey.

During the afternoon a party of friends called with a carriage at the home of the bride and enticed the bridegroom to go for a short ride. Once in the carriage he was bound and gagged and was taken a prisoner to his new home, where his captors made short work of the good things prepared for the supper that night. After they had completed their repast they released Cunningham, but not until he had been detained long enough to necessitate a postponement

## LAYS FAILURE TO "MOVIE"

California Bandit Makes Court Plea for Clemency—Auto, His Specialty.

Los Angeles, Cal.—Moving pictures shows caused his downfall, according to Cornelius Hadsacker, who pleaded guilty to highway robbery, which he made a pathetic appeal for probation.

## LIONS ARE GIVEN TUNING

Kings of New York Zoo Get Taste of Our "National Bird" and Like It.

New York.—The lions in the New York zoo has a taste of turkey for the first time in their life. They have been brought up on beef ever since they left a diet. Keeper Snyder bought a turkey for each of the ten. The animals' suspicious of the new food at first, a few sniffs convinced them that it was all right, and when they had through not even a wishbone left.

## "BROADWAY BOB" IS HELD

Fashion-Plate Crook Picked Up in New York as He Is About to Dine in Restaurant.

New York.—Following complaints from Broadway restaurants and hotels that the pockets of patrons had been picked, Detective McGee came to the conclusion that clever enough for such work was Walter Henry, a crook of international reputation, a fashion plate and as agreeable a companion as one could find.

Henry also is known as Bob Hart, Walter Hogan, Big Bob, "the Doctor," "Big English Bob" and "Broadway Bob."

McGee was in Rector's when Henry strolled in.

"Where have you been?" asked McGee, as Henry tossed his coat and hat to a boy.

"I've had great trouble," replied Henry. "My father has just died in Brooklyn. That accounts for the mourning band on my hat."

"Well, come to the station house with me," said McGee. "You are wanted for that little trick pulled off on Nov. 9th in the Kaiserkeller."

The affair referred to by the detective was the robbery of Albert M. Markler of 555 West 158th street, who is connected with a Wall street bank. On Saturday Markler got from Marsello Pitt & Co., 170 Broadway, a diamond cluster valued at \$800; a diamond ring set with rubies, \$500; a diamond bar ring, \$300; a valet's, \$500; a small diamond ring, \$100; a gold cigarette case, \$100, making a total of \$2,900.

On his way home Markler stopped at the Kaiserkeller to have dinner. There he was joined by two disagreeable strangers, who insisted he dine with them. He consented and on starting for home noticed the larger of the men brushed against him. Then suddenly he discovered his jewelry was gone, but the man was gone, too.

Markler identified Henry through his rogues' gallery picture.

## COURT DEFIED BY A CONVICT

California Prisoner, in Contempt of Court, Refused to Punish Himself—Sent Back to Jail.

Sacramento, Cal.—"You are in contempt of court," Superior Judge Hughes exclaimed to a witness named Jordan. "Suppose I am, what are you going to do about it?" coolly replied the witness, who was a convict brought from Folsom prison to testify regarding a stabbing affair within the prison.

"If you can add any to my contempt, go to it," he added.

Although Jordan refused to testify against the prisoner on trial, by withholding his own given name, sneering at his examiners, the court was helpless, and in the end Jordan was allowed to go back to prison.

## SHOWCASES CRASHED

Shoppers went over and over the floor and customers piled themselves in heaps in an effort to escape being flattened. The elephant had little time to waste on them, however. He merely tore down the rear wall and rushed into a back yard where he finally, the mahout caught and held him. Under cover of the confusion the dog vanished.