

THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT.

Marvelous Stories Found in the "Gospel of the Infancy."

It was not possible for the active imagination of the early Christians to rest content with St. Matthew's short and plain record of the Flight. They must know more about it—how the pilgrimage was made, through what places the Holy Family passed, what marvels and portents happened by the way, and where they found a resting-place. And so the process of myth-making and legend-building began in answer to the questions of naïve and childish curiosity. The brief record of the fact was enlarged and embellished and embroidered with fancies. The literature of the Flight unfolded itself in the apocryphal gospels of the second and third centuries, and continued its growth through the poems and chronicles of the Middle Ages. Nothing can be more clear than the difference between the simple statement of St. Matthew that the journey was made—a statement which bears every mark of being historical, and reads as if it were merely a transcript of the Virgin Mary's remembrances of that hurried and dream-like episode—and the

WILD, FANTASTIC FABLES

of later times. And yet I think these fanciful stories, which were told so often at the fireside, in the tent, at the resting-place of the respite, and by the camp fires of the caravan, are worth reading, because they are so fresh and childlike, and sometimes so pretty, and because they have had such an influence upon art.

But the greatest fund of marvellous stories about the Flight is found in the "Arabian Gospel of the Infancy," which was current among the Christians of the East, and was undoubtedly used by Mohammed in the composition of the Koran. It is an Oriental variation upon a sacred theme—an Asiatic embroidery, full of all kinds of strange beasts, a sanctified Arabian Nights. Entertainment! It tells of a dumb bride restored to speech by taking the infant Jesus in her arms; and a crazy woman who would not wear any clothes, brought to her right mind by the compassionate look of the Lady Mary; and a girl with the leprosy cleaned by washing in the water in which the child had been bathed; and sundry other household miracles even more.

INGENUOUS AND ASTONISHING.

It describes the dwelling-place of the Holy Family at Matares, a town a little to the northeast of Cairo, where any sceptical person may still see the aged sycamore which sheltered them, and the "fountain of Mary," in which she washed her child's coat. But the most wonderful tale of all is the story of the enchanted mule, which runs on this wise:

"As the Holy Family were entering into a certain city they saw three women coming out of a cemetery, and weeping. And when the Lady Mary saw them, she said to the girl who accompanied her (the same who had been cleansed of her leprosy): 'Ask them what calamity has befallen them.' But they made no reply to the girl's questions, asking her in their turn: 'Whence are you? and whither are you going?' For the day is spent, and night is coming on space.' 'We are travellers,' said the girl, 'and are seeking a house of entertainment.' They said: 'Go with us, and spend the night with us.' Accordingly the travellers accepted the courteous invitation, and were brought into a new house, richly furnished. Now, it was winter, and the girl going into the apartment of the women, found them again weeping and lamenting. Beside them stood a mule, covered with hangings of cloth of gold, and saffron was put before him, and the women were kissing him and feeding him. And the girl said: 'What is all this ado, my ladies, about this mule?' They replied, with tears: 'This mule, which thou seest, was our brother, born of the same mother with ourselves. When our father died he left us great wealth, and this only brother. We did our best to get him married, and were preparing his nuptials after the fashion of our country. But some women, moved by jealousy, bewitched him, unknown to us; and one night

A LITTLE BEFORE DAYBREAK.

When the door of our house was shut, we saw that this our brother had been turned into a mule, as thou now beholdest him. And we are sorrowful, as thou seest, having no father to comfort us; and there is no wise man or magician in the world that we have omitted to send for, but nothing has done us any good.' And when the girl heard this, she said: 'Be of good courage, ladies, and weep no more; for the cure of your calamity is near; yes, it is presently in your own house.' For I also was a leper." But when I saw that woman, and along with her, that young child, whose name is Jesus, I sprinkled my body with the water wherein his mother had washed him, and I was cured. I know that he can deliver you from your affliction also. But arise, go to Mary, my mistress, bring her into your own apartment, tell her your secret, and supplicate her to have pity upon you.' When the woman had listened to the girl's words, they hastened to the Lady Mary, and brought her into their chamber, and sat down before her, weeping and saying: "Our mistress, Lady Mary, have pity upon thy servants, for no one older than ourselves, no head of our family, is left."

NETHER PATHER NOR BROTHER—

to live with us; but this mule which thou seest was our brother, whom women have bewitched into this condition. We beseech thee, therefore, to have pity upon us." Then grieving at their misfortune, the Lady Mary took up the Lord Jesus and put him on the mule's back, and she wpt with the women, and said to Jesus Christ: "Aha! my man, heal this mule by thy mighty power, and make him a reasonable man as he was before. And when these words were spoken, the shape of the mule was changed, and he became a young man of engaging appearance. Whereupon there was great joy in the household, and the grateful sisters immediately concluded to marry their brother to the girl who had been the means of bringing him so great a benefit.

All this, especially the happy marriage, is quite in the style of Scheherezade. It is no more like the sober records of the evangelists than a display of fireworks is like the silent stars; and the very contrast goes far to prove, or at least to illustrate the historical character of our gospel. —[Henry van Dyke, in Harper's Magazine for December.]

CHRISTMAS STORYBITES.

HIS PRESENT.

Charley wanted to give Clara a Christmas present, but could not make up his mind as to what it should be; so the next time he called he frankly told her of the difficulty under which he was laboring.

"Want to make me a present, Charley?" Clara exclaimed in well-disguised astonishment.

"Why, Charley, you forget yourself!"

He took the delicate hint and offered himself then and there.

CHRISTMAS SHOPPING.

Never mind, ladies. The Christmas shopping does not come out of your pocket. It is your annual opportunity to get more than even with the men, that's all.

And really, they are so good-natured just before Christmas that no one may be pardoned for expressing the wish that the holiday season might last all the year round.

CHRISTMAS PRESENTS.

"The Christmas season's at the door. And through the air the snowflakes whirl; The dude now seeks the dollar store To buy a present for his girl."

Which reminds us to suggest that if you received any presents last Christmas that you do not fancy, this is a good time of the year to dispose of them.

WE DON'T BUY THEM.

"Buy your Christmas presents now!" is the legend that meets us in the window of an up-town store.

"Thank you for the advice—but we won't do any such a thing, oh, no!

We always kindly permit our friends to buy them for us.

CHRISTMAS SLIPPERS.

This is the time of the year when useless girls derive exquisite pleasure in getting up slippers, the cost of which is out of all proportion to their value, and then think it's a good joke, to tell their shoemakers to "send the bill to me—but be sure and not send it until after Christmas."

"It is a perfectly safe wager that there is not a 'pa' in the land will see where the joke comes in."

CHRISTMAS DEFINITIONS.

The English girl's favorite toe: misfortune.

The key to the joys of Christmas: turkey.

A Christmas present: December 25, 1889. (Last Christmas is a Christmas past. See it.)

CHRISTMAS STOCKINGS.

The old saying that "hanging is too good for them" is never understood to apply to the Christmas stockings.

And talking about stockings—"Stockings be hanged!" says the St. Louis girl. "It is only the Chicago bell who expects to find a grand piano in a sock."

HER CHRISTMAS GOOSE.

Mrs. A.: Are you going to have a goose this Christmas?

Mrs. B.: I have cooked my Christmas goose already.

Mrs. A.: Why—you don't tell me so!

Mrs. B.: Yes, I badgered my dear husband out of a seal-skin coating worth four hundred dollars!

HER CHRISTMAS PRESENT.

A gentleman sauntered into a large dry-goods store, a few days before Christmas and remarked: "I want something for a Christmas present for my wife." The clerk suggested various things, but the customs seemed not quite satisfied. At last he asked: "Have you cotton cloth?" "Certainly, sir." "I want eight new shirts." Eight times four are thirty-two." I'll take thirty-two yards." The gratitude of the wife at receiving as a Christmas present the cloth for eight new shirts for her husband can be imagined.

TOO MUCH TURKEY.

Little Frank, having eaten more turkey on Christmas than was good for him, complained bitterly. On being asked where the pain was, he answered with great seriousness, pressing his thin hand upon his chest: "I think, papa, it must be in my wish bone, 'cause it's right here." "I am not so sure about that," replied the man who was occupying the seat with him. "I have here"—and he opened his own valise and took out a bottle. "A tonic called Dr. Rybold's Extract," which I have used for several years and consider the best preparation ever made. "No man ought ever to—"

"I have no doubt it is a fairy good medicine in its way," broke in the other, "but if you had ever tasted Dr. Jenkins' Indispensable you would think that was just away."

"I know all about Dr. Jenkins' nostrum, and I know exactly what it's made of," said the man who was occupying the seat with him. "You do, eh?"

"Yes, sir, and I know Dr. Rybold's extract is made from precisely the same formula, only from pure materials instead of the vile and adulterated ingredients old Jenkins uses."

"It's made from the same formula, is it?"

"Exactly the same."

"You lying old ignoramus, how do you know what it's made of?"

"How do I know, you ignorant old scoundrel? I'm Dr. Rybold, sir?"

"I am glad I have found you out, you infernal villain. I am Dr. Jenkins."

Framed for Admission to the Bar.

Examiner—"Can you give me an instance of a person inciting another to perjury?"

Candidate—"Yes; when the court asks a female witness how old she is.—Texas Sifting."

"At all events my temper, but here—"

"At all events my temper, but here—"