

The Kings Before Herod

The caravan of the Kings took about a quarter of an hour to pass any given point. When it halted before Jerusalem, the star had become invisible; consequently, the travelers were very much troubled. The Kings rode upon dromedaries, and three other dromedaries were laden with the baggage. The rest of the cavalcade were mounted upon nimble animals of a yellowish color with small heads,

I know not whether they were horses or asses, but they were very different in appearance from our horses. The animals upon which the nobles rode were very handsomely caparisoned and hung with

golden stars and little chains. Some of the followers went to the gate of the city, and returned with officers and soldiers. The arrival of the Kings at that time when no feast was being celebrated, when no special commercial interest seemed to bring them, and also by that particular road, was something remarkable. They explained to the officials why they had come, and spoke of the star and the Child. But their hearers were ignorant on the subject, and so the Kings began again to think that they had surely erred, since they could not find one person who looked as if he knew anything connected with the Redemption of the world. The people gazed at them in wonder, unable to conceive what they wanted. The Kings explained that they were ready to pay for whatever they got from them, and that they wished to confer with their King. And now arose great hurrying to and fro, the travelers meantime interchanging questions and answers with the crowd gathered around them. Some had indeed heard of a child that was to be born at Bethlehem; but they were poor, ignorant people, and their words had no weight. Others laughed derisively and the Kings grew troubled and disheartened; and then they perceived by the expressions of the people that Herod knew nothing of what they sought and that he was by no means beloved by his subjects. They became anxious as to how they should address him. They had recourse to prayer, their courage revived, and they said to one another: "He who has brought us so quickly here by means of the star, will also lead us home in safety." They now led the caravan around the city and brought it in at the side nearer Mount Calvary. Not far from the fish market, they and their animals were conducted into a circular court, which was



surrounded by halls and dwellings, and before whose gates guards were standing. In the middle of the court was a well, at which they watered the beasts, and all found quarters in the stalls and places under the arches. On one side of the court arose the mountain on which it lay; on the other, it was free and shaded by trees. I saw people coming with torches and examining the baggage.

Herod's palace stood higher up the mountain not far from this court. I saw the road leading to it lighted up by torches and lanterns hung on poles. I saw officials going down from the palace and conducting thither Theokeno, the eldest of the Kings. He was received under an archway and ushered into a hall. There he made known his errand to a courtier, who reported it to Herod. Herod became almost insane at the news, and gave orders for the Kings to present themselves before him on the following morning. He also sent word to them to rest while he made inquiries, and he would inform them of the result.

When Theokeno returned, he and his two royal companions became still more uneasy, and ordered the baggage that had been unpacked to be packed again. They slept none that night. I saw some of them going around the city with guides. It seemed to me that they suspected Herod of knowing all, but of being unwilling to disclose the truth to them. They still sought the star. In Jerusalem itself all was quiet, but there was much running to and fro and questioning among the sentinels at the court.

It may have been about eleven o'clock at night when Theokeno was sent for by Herod. There appeared to be some kind of festivity going on, for the palace was ablaze with lights, and I saw females in it. The news brought by Theokeno threw Herod into the greatest terror. He dispatched servants to the Temple and also into the city, and I saw priests and scribes and aged Jews going to him with rolls of writings under their arms. They wore their priestly garments, also their breastplates, and their girdles on which letters were inscribed. There were about twenty around him, expounding the writings. I saw them also mounting with him to the roof of the palace and gazing at the stars. Herod was very uneasy and perplexed. But the scribes tried to divert him, by endeavoring to prove that there was nothing in the talk of the Kings; that those Eastern people were always superstitiously raving about the stars; and that, if there was any truth in what they said, surely the priests of the Temple and the dwellers in the Holy City would have known it long ago.

Next morning at daybreak, I saw one of the courtiers going down to the caravan and bringing up all three of the Kings to Herod's palace. They were ushered into an apartment around which were pots of foliage and bushes.

Refreshments were spread at the entrance. But the Kings declined the

proffered food, and remained standing until Herod entered. They approached him with an obeisance, and without preamble put to him the question as to where they should find the newborn King of the Jews, for they had seen His star and they were come to do Him homage. Herod was very much troubled, but he concealed his fears. Some of the scribes were still with him. He questioned the Kings closely concerning the star, and told them that of Bethlehem Ephrata ran the Promise. But Mensor related to him the last vision they had seen in the star, whereupon Herod's anxiety became almost too great for concealment. Mensor said that they had seen a Virgin with a Child lying before her. From the right side of the Child issued a branch formed of light, upon which stood a tower with many gates, which tower increased in size until it became a city. The Child appeared standing above it with sword and scepter; and they had seen not only them-selves, but all the kings of the earth, coming to bow down before and adore that Child, for Its kingdom was to vanquish all other kingdoms. Herod advised them to go quietly and without delay to Bethlehem, and when they had found the Child to return and inform him that he too might go and adore Him. I saw the Kings going down from the palace, and leaving Jerusalem at once. The day was dawning, and the lights on the way leading up to the palace were still burning. The crowd that had followed the royal caravan had passed the night in the city.

Herod who, about the time of Christ's birth, had gone to his palace at Jericho, had been even before the coming of the Kings very restless and uneasy. Two of his illegitimate sons had been raised by him to high positions in the Temple. They were Sadducees, and by them he was kept informed of all that transpired, as well as of all who were opposed to his designs. Among these he was told of one, a man good and upright, a distinguished functionary of the Temple. Herod sent him a courteous and friendly invitation to come to him in Jericho. When the good man was on his way to comply with the invitation, Herod's creatures fell upon him and murdered him in the desert, making it appear as if robbers had perpetrated the awful deed. Some days later, Herod returned to Jerusalem, in order to take part in the Feast of the Consecration of the Temple. Then he thought he would, in his own way, give pleasure to the Jews and show them honor. He caused to be made a golden figure something like a lamb, though still more like a goat, for it had horns. This figure was to be erected above the gate leading from the outer court of the women into the court of sacrifice. Herod insisted upon this and, moreover, expected to be thanked for what he had done. But the priests resisted. Herod threatened them with a fine. They replied that the fine indeed they would pay; but that the figure, according to

their Law, they could never accept. Herod fell into a rage, and ordered it to be set up secretly. Thereupon, one of the officers of the Temple, fired with zeal, seized it as it was being brought in, cleft it in twain, and hurled it to the ground. This gave rise to a tumult, and Herod ordered the offender to be imprisoned. Herod was, on account of this affair, extremely displeased, and regretted having come to the feast; but his courtiers sought by all kinds of diversions to remove the impression from his mind.

There was among some pious people in Judea the expectation of the near advent of the Messiah, and the circumstances attendant on the birth of Jesus had been noised abroad by the shepherds. Herod had heard all and had at Bethlehem made secret inquiries into it. His spies, however, having found only poor Joseph, and having besides orders not to attract attention, reported that it was nothing, that they had found only a poor family buried in a cave, and the whole affair not worth talking about. But now, all of a sudden, appeared the great caravan of the Kings. Their questioning after the King of Judah was marked by such confidence and precision, they spoke with such certainty of the star, that Herod could scarcely hide his anxious perplexity. He hoped to learn the particulars of the affair from the Kings themselves, and then take measures accordingly. But when the Kings, warned by God, did not return, he explained their flight as a consequence of their falsehood and disappointment; they were, he thought, ashamed to come back and be looked upon as fools. He therefore caused to be proclaimed in Bethlehem and in a general way, that the people should have nothing to do with the strangers. When he thought to make away with Jesus, he found that He was no longer in Nazareth. He caused search to be made after Him for a long time. When he had to give up all hope of finding Him and his anxiety was, in consequence, so much the more increased, he took the desperate resolution to murder all the children. He was so cautious in executing his measures that he transported his troops beforehand, in order to avoid any insurrection.