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THE BABES
of
BETHLEHEM.



— BY —

CHARLES A. HOBBS, D D,

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THE

Babes of Bethlehem :

A POEM

2249

BY

CHARLES A. HOBES, D. D.,

Author of

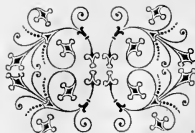
"VICKSBURG." "THE RIDE IN THE VALLEY OF
THE CONNEMAUGH." ETC.

ENTERPRISE PRINT,
DEHAVAN, : : WIS.
1891.



PS 1929

A 84 B 3





The Babes of Bethlehem.



And thou Bethelam, in the land of Juda, art not least among the princes of Juda; for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.—Matt. 2; 6.

The swift years come, the swift years go,
They bring their gladness and their woe ;
But once they stop upon the way,
To leave for all one happy day.
More happy—if our hearts are glad,
Less sorrowful—if hearts are sad ;
'Tis when, with joy in every chime,
The bells ring out the Christmas time.

For He, the Bethlehem baby boy
Can give glad hearts a deeper joy ;—
For He who came so long ago
Can soothe the aching heart of woe !

And so the year's best gift always
Must ever be the Christmas day !

And in the light of this fair morn
We think of Him in Bethlehem born,
And thinking thus, behold a vision,
That kinship claims with realms Elysian.

We see small faces fair and sweet,
We hear the sound of little feet,
—The voice of children at their play,
In Bethlehem ere the Christmas day.

So fair, so bright the vision seems,
Oh, that it lived in else than dreams !
So bright, I venture,—daring much—
Its outlines, tho' with rudest touch.

And may the curtain of the years
 Be lifted where each form appears,
 And as its darkened folds uprise,
 Live the sweet babes before our eyes !

For now we fain would tell their story,
 Till fades their beauty in His glory,—
 The Babe in Bethlehem's stable born,
 The Babe that brought the Christmas morn !

I.

THE FIRST BABE OF BETHLEHEM.

Where Bethlehem's slopes in beauty lie
 Beneath the perfect, Orient sky,
 Go, note amid the fragrant air
 Of opening blossoms rich and rare,
 By soft spring breezes kissed and fanned,
 The happiest home in all the land !

Go, watch yon child, as well, in truth,
 You may delighted. Buoyant youth
 Not yet hath hushed the childish joy
 Of this, fair Bethlehem's baby boy—
 The first of all the princely line
 With record plain in Word divine.

What name is his who led afar
 The baby host to Bethlehem's Star ?

For answer, note yon peaceful sight
 While shadows deepen into night,
 And list the Child whose growing speech
 Oft questions of his parents each,
 —What seems a charmed mystery—
 Their youthful life and history,
 Mayhap if we but pause to hear,
 The name and lineage will appear.

First bids the child the father tell
 Of that strange past where shadows dwell ;

And all his early line to trace
Of his illustrious, ancient race,
But most describe the famous day
Where once he fought with Joshua,
'Till came the hour in foeman's land
He won the loving mother's hand.

THE FATHER'S STORY.

And he, the father, spoke and told
His story, as speaks warrior bold
Whose speech is harder far than deed,
And finds for ending early need.

He told of Egypt, story bright
'Till came the time of sorrows blight.
The mother of the mighty Hur
Most seemed his heart to touch and stir,
For in the far and silent years
'Twas said that Bethlehem's home was hers.
And Ephrath she, whose fairest fame
Was to bestow its honored name.

Perchance her happy baby eyes
Looked out upon these sunny skies.
Perhaps in Egypt's bondage stern
She longed, and often, to return.

He did not know.

But this he knew,
Her kin were of the great and true.
As Caleb's wife, so! And whose son
Placed this grand name his child upon,—
Spy in the wilderness.

If he,
The Hur of Moses, came to be
Great in the Lord, so Aaron's wife
Held kinship close from Ephrath's life.
This was his line.

Bezaleel, too,

The tent of God had woven new;
Most skillful was his touch. This one
His father had called father. What was done
By these was known of all. They failed
Sometimes, but ne'er their faces paled
Before an earthly foe, and God was good,
And human weakness ever understood.

Here had he stayed his speech, but no!
The child would hear of Jericho.
For this one tale, tho' often told,
To his young ears could ne'er grow old.

"Well, that great city in our path,
Fell, aye, but by Jehovah's wrath.
A spy, I saw its mighty towers
Unyielding to such strength as ours,
But chiefest worthy, that I name
Was one whose eyes were radiant flame.
Ah, I was young then, but today
I see and feel their potent sway.
She helped us, and she lived.

The rest
Your mother, she can tell the best!"

And straight the boy her speech demands,
Nor takes refusal at her hands.

THE MOTHER'S STORY.

I lived where Jordan's waters sweep
Beneath the high hills rough and steep,
Upon whose summit strong and calm,
Long ruled the city of the Palm.
There once within the armored gate
I saw two strangers enter late,
And seeing, knew them as the foe
Of our proud city Jericho;

For by their foreign air and face
They showed the blood of Israel's race.

Long had we in the city, feared
This nation, of whose God we heard,
A God so mighty, none could stand
Before the sweep of His dread hand.

We spoke, and played the hero's part,
Yet knew how faint was every heart.
Our only hope of safety,—they
Had made so long a strange delay,
As if perchance their God no more
Their banners on to victory bore.
That hope at last forever died,
For lo, beyond the Jordan's tide
Far as the searching eye might go
Stood the white tents of Canaan's foe.

Then fear held sway in every breast,—
Nay, not in mine as of the rest,
For,—how it came I scarcely knew,
I longed this God to worship too.
A sinner I,—nor yet with stain
Of guilt deliberate, and profane,
For ne'er before 'twas given to see
How white the human heart should be.

Thus felt I, when in Jericho
I saw these warriors' come and go,
And mark our bulwarks with the eye
Of soldier trained each point to spy.
The weakness here,—the rugged might,
—The foeman armed for fiercest fight.—
I did not tell the guards I knew,
—As loyal, it was mine to do,—
How danger threatened near and dread:—
“These men my people are,” I said.

But what is that rings sharp and high?
 "Death to the Hebrew spies!"—the cry!

They fly, yet foes are close behind,—
 What refuge may these warriors find?

'Tis then they reach my open door
 And danger for the time is o'er.

'Tis then I look into the face
 And note of one the manly grace,
 That quickened all my pulses through
 With feelings strong and strangely new.

I know him now as warrior true
 E'en such as Israel had but few,
 Trusted of Joshua for his might
 When came the close and deadly fight,
 Trusted of Joshua as men prize,
 Friends that are brave and grandly wise;
 E'en then I thought, of brave youths seen,
 No Youth so goodly e'er had been.

Short was the time, yet more I heard
 Of that great God I loved and feared;
 Short was the time that they must wait
 Nor pass again the guarded gate.

When came the gloom of midnight's hour
 I helped them down the rugged tower,
 And knew amid the overthrow
 Of proud, yet fated Jericho,
 That I should live;—the scarlet cord
 Should save me, servant of the Lord.

And came our doom!

Strange was the form
 Of war that breathes of fire and storm!
 The awful sense of something dread
 O'er all the city seemed to spread.
 No need more urgent could appear

And waited with increasing dread
The doom to fall upon its head.

And swift it came.

The trumpet sound
Of priest rang high and far around.
A sudden tremor shook the wall
And battlement and tower fall !

And dread was now the onward charge
If Israel in the vantage large.
Amid the cloud of rising dust
Was gleam of sword, and sharp spear thrust,
For they the Chiefs of Jericho
Woke to the fight against the foe ;—
Few, few indeed, yet grandly brave
They sought the fight to find a grave.
For tho' my heart its choice had made
Of Israel's future unafraid,
I could but feel a joy to know
They perished worthy of their foe.

Now where I stood the great wall rose
Above the fierce contending foes,
There had I stretched the scarlet cord
And faithful proved the promised word.
My friends stood with me, and the grace
Of Israel's God was o'er the place.

There watched I in the battle storm
Of Israel's host, for one tall form.
I knew he would not fail the fight
Where stood the foeman's men of might,
And feared lest somewhere on the plain
My hero should himself be slain.
But when the task at last was done,
And the great victory was won,
He came.

Among his people blest
He gave us home, and care, and rest.
'Twas thus we met long years ago
Amid the towers of Jericho."—

The Mother paused. The words had brought
Fair memories that held her thought.
And in this silence shall we tell
What in the after years befell?
At last the borders of the land
Were held by Joshua's iron hand.
Now might the host, the conflict done
Possess the fields their swords had won.
Now make, since they had ceased to roam,
Each for himself a happy home.

What wonder then amid the charm
Of peace afar from war's alarm,
Where skies are sunny and the green
Of spring-time clothes each wondrous scene,
And flowers blossom in the dells,
We hear the sound of marriage bells?

What wonder if the lovely face
Of Rahab, adding to its grace
And piquant, changing lines of light,
—The play of morning and of night—
A purer beauty only given
To those whose thoughts are born of heaven,
Had won the heart of Warrior tried,
Brave Salmon, come to claim his bride !

And where beneath that wondrous sky
Fair Bethlehem's slopes in beauty lie,—
The home ancestral, gained anew,
Stern valor's mead for warrior true,—
There Salmon brought his wedded wife
And love and duty made their life.

And there, awakening hearts to joy
Came Bethlehem's earliest baby boy,
And life took on a meaning new
While Boaz—Strength, in stature grew.

THE LIFE OF BOAZ.

A sturdy boy was Boaz, first to see,
Of all the children it may be
That o'er the sunny slopes should roam,
How pleasant was the Bethlehem home.
'Twas Boaz knew and best could tell
How sweet the water from the well,
In whose deep bosom always lay
The stars of Heaven at full noon-day.
'Twas Boaz knew the pastures fair
And flocks beneath the shepherd's care,
And sometimes when the stars were bright
He watched with them the flocks by night.
'Twas Boaz led his playmates down
Where yonder harvest's golden crown
Of ripened barley filled the field,
The certain pledge of ample yield.
And when some gleaner toiled in vain
To gather of the scattered grain
The needed portion, Boaz knew,
And lo! her golden harvest grew —
Thus passed the years of childish joy
With Boaz but a happy boy.
Yet off his thoughts would wandering go
To that strange scene in Jericho—
The safety in the scarlet cord
That brought protection from the Lord.
And often taught, he learned to prize
The blood-red truth of sacrifice,
And dimly saw the hope within,
—Atonement made for human sin.

At last it was he stood before
Fair manhood's open wider door,
And stood alone, for they who gave
His life, lay silent in the grave.

Yet faithful stood. If honor came
Of Judgeship, Boaz was the same,
The strong calm man before the sight
Of all, who sought the truth and right.

O ye who think the quiet hour
Of faithful life hath naught of power,
Where comes not fame of bloody war
Nor statesman's name that shines afar—
Know that thy thoughts are all astray
As darkness is apart from day.

Go forth and turn thy searching eye
About thee. Is there color nigh
Of this the living ambient air,
That gives its blessing everywhere ?
Nay! If at hand you seek to view
Its charming wondrous touch of blue.

But to the far off bending sky,
Lift now thy curious searching eye ;
How bright, how blue it trembles there
This same unseen and vital air.
So measured at the end of years
The quiet, faithful life appears.

Thus Boaz lived ; a life whose touch
Bettered the people ; sweetened much
His world, and made it good to live,—
A help that every life may give !

Nor this was his alone. Tho' he
Knew not the glory yet to be,
He had his place in that long line
That held at last the child divine.

Ah, if for us such high estate
Of future greatness does not wait,
Yet never shall we live in vain
For others, somewhere in our chain,—
Of blood, or human brotherhood,—
If in God's sight our lives are good.

A place hath Boaz in God's chain
And he must find it. On yon plain
Have gone the reapers, and this day
Shall duty meet him in the way.

O Ruth is fair amid the grain
That with her tresses all in vain
Would match its gold! The speaking eye
Hath gray of morn and blue of sky.

The sunshine with its finger tips
Touches the rose bloom of her lips,
And tho' dark sorrow hath its trace,
Finds hidden sunbeams in her face ;
The while a wonder in what bower
Hath blossomed forth so bright a flower ;
The graceful form the eye to please,
Bends, like the barley in the breeze.
And tho' the outward form is fair,
More fair the spirit nestling there.

Ah, happy Boaz thus to see
So bright, so glad a destiny !
What wonder now 'mid Bethlehem's bowers
Where blossom all the spring-time flowers,
And slopes are green, and green the dells
We hear the sound of marriage bells !

O home ! of Paradise the heart,
Not all was lost when man did part
With Eden, for thou camest fair
To be his blessing everywhere !

And happier none may be beside
Than Boaz's home with Ruth for bride.

II.

OBED.

What mean Naomi's happy smiles,
—The joy that from her face beguiles
To day the shadows oft and deep
That mark the soul where sorrows sleep!

Well may her aged heart rejoice
And thrill to hear that baby voice
That brings again her vanished youth,
—First born of Boaz and of Ruth.

He lived,—this Bethlehem baby boy,
He lived, and wrought in God's employ,
And Obed did not live in vain,
If but a link in God's great chain.

III.

JESSE.

And o'er the pleasant fields away
Young Jesse played for many a day.
—To manhood come, he took his place
With those who weighty duties face,
For David long upon his throne,
Is "Jesse's son"—the man well known.

Here rocks the cradle to and fro,
And seven strong sons to manhood grow.
The eighth,—ah, welcome him with joy,
—Thus far the brightest Bethlehem boy!

XI.

DAVID.

O David of the golden hair,
O David ruddy cheeked and fair

And beautiful as once was Ruth
In all thy glorious buoyant youth,—
To thee the past has onward led
And glory great shall crown thy head !

Behold him on the Bethlehem plain
Where Boaz reaped the golden grain,
Behold him yonder by the well
Its wonderous story yet to tell.

Behold him with his father's sheev
Where strong his good right arm doth keep
The reckless raging foe at bay,
And bear and lion dares to slay.
See, swift as arrow's speed he flies,—
And equal strength within him lies.

Mark how across this deep abyss
He hurls the stone that will not miss,
And by long practice,—strength or speed—
Is cool in danger, skilled in deed.
Ah well he learns these things this hour,
The days to come will tax his power !
Ah well he shepherds now the sheep
Who Israel's fold shall sometime keep !

And tho' in Jesse's home 'tis he
Held back from larger destiny,
Happy the duties of such state
That fit the heart for things that wait.
In God's good time the gate will ope
To all the larger life and hope,
And burning word and daring deed
Shall grow from the long hidden seed.

To David comes the moment grand,
Rise, Jesse's son, 'tis God's command !

DEATH OF GOLIATH.

War's stern alarm had sounded.

From the west
And southward came the brawny warriors on,
The old time foe, the brave, the pitiless
Philistine.

Israel must meet this host
With troop untried in battle. Warriors few
Saul rallied, but with skillful march he threw
His untrained army straight across the path
Of foe, with vantage great ; a plan that marked
The general wise in strategy.

Between
The hosts yawned rough and wide a deep abyss,
And at its bottom still a deep trench ran
Where rushing flood sometimes its current swept.
On this side cliff abrupt, and that, uprose,
Making a wall no human foot could climb.
There lay no way for the Philistine march
Save o'er the chasm, with death to him who tried.
Well might they pause ; but if they paused they
found
Sure means to hurl their insult on the foe.

Forth from the hillside camp a warrior strode
Whose height shamed towering Saul's uplifted
head,—
—A span beyond six cubits,—half score feet
Or near.

Armored he was, but all the weight
So heavy, lay upon his brawny breast
And massive shoulders as a thing of straw.
His spear was like a weaver's beam.

His shield
Taxed full the strength of warrior strong to bear
But one did bear it, strongest next of foe.
Thus moving forth he seemed a mountain mass
Of iron.

On the thither side of chasm
 So deep, he stayed his steps, nor even he
 Dared try its crossing.
 But there his awful voice the challenge sent
 Like thunder hoarse o'er trembling Israel,
 Demanding one to fight.

For forty days
 Did Israel endure the shame, nor dared
 The mighty Saul the test, nor brothers tall
 Of David, nor the lesser men of war.

'Twas then that David came on peaceful quest,
 Seeking his brethren, from their father sent;—
 David, who oft on Bethlehem's plain had mused
 Of God with poet's heart, and felt his power.
 Now David saw, and felt dishonor keen,
 As loud the challenge and the curses rang.

Swift falls his question:

Is there none to fight?
 And sharp rebuked, yet ever answer sought,
 And finding none, himself the conflict dares.

Ah, David's heart hath changed the measure-
 ment,
 For they have stood Goliath up with man,
 And David measures him with God!

How great
 He seemed when with Eliab matched, or Saul:
 How shrunk, how small when measured up with
 Him

Whom Israel worshipped, the Almighty Lord!
 No armor David wears. He takes his sling
 So often in his hand. 'Tis this and—God!
 And thus the fight shall wage!

But David's eye
 Had marked the distance, trained of old, where
 stood

Goliath when he spoke; had seen the brow
By visor unprotected then, and formed
His daring plan.

Now from the sight of friends
He disappears, but soon he climbs the side
Where the great giant mocking, rises up
To gain as suits his ease, the victory.
Soon will he take the shield, the visor close,
But not just yet, so scorns he yonder foe.
Ah, David haste thee!

Now thy skillful hand
Be strong and true, thine eye be clear to see!
Haste David, fleet of foot as frightened hart,
Bring foot and hand and eye to highest power,
And reach the line where thou canst hurl thy
stone

With hair breadth certainty upon the brow
Ere he, thy foe, shall hide it from thy hand
Or take the heavy shield before his face!
Haste, David, haste, for now he lifts his hand
Upon his visor.

Ah, proud foe, too late!
The shepherd boy has not his cunning lost
And knows the moment for his weapon tried;
Swift flies the stone, the tottering giant dies
His forehead crushed ere yet the visor fell!

O David of the golden hair.
O David ruddy cheeked and fair.
To thee the past has onward led
And glory great has crowned thy head!
O David, greater yet to be,
For He thy God hath chosen thee!

To be a King hath not sufficed,
Thou too art ever type of Christ,
Thou, best of Bethlehem's children born,
Save Him who brought the Christmas morn!

XII.

CHRIST.

Of Him the last is now our speech,
Of Him the twelfth ; but if of each
Few words and weak we could but say
How shall we hail His natal day ?

How tell the story of His birth
That brought glad hope to all the earth,—
Of that fair mother in her youth
More pure and beautiful than Ruth ;—
Of angel song whose heavenly strain
The shepherds heard on Bethlehem's plain ?

How tell of orient kings afar
Who followed Bethlehem's rising star,
Or speak of Herod's hatred dread
That left the babes of Bethlehem dead ?

How tell where record none appears
The story of the silent years,
Till He who came the world to save
Seeks Jordan's swift baptismal wave ?

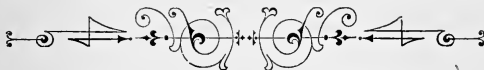
Fails then the heart the record new
The deeds of might to bring to view.
The words of fire, the heart of love,
These need the touch from heaven above ;
To seek to show would be but loss
From cradle low to lofty cross.


But when we know He lived and died
For us, this Savior crucified,
Then to our hearts the words belong
Of that sweet prayer in sacred song,
 " Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
 Let me hide myself in Thee !"

And when we know in that bright hour
Of life, He broke the grave's dark power,
And gave His people, e'er to be,
Triumphant, glorious victory,
With joy untold we hail the morn
That saw the Babe of Bethlehem born !
And looking through the mist of years
Sing with the heart of worshippers,—

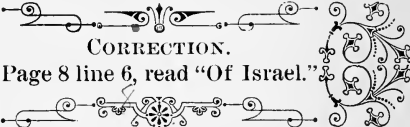
“ O that with yonder sacred throng
We at His feet may fall.

We'll join the everlasting song,
And crown Him Lord of all !”





CORRECTION.
Page 8 line 6, read "Of Israel."



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