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CHRIST

IS



BORN.

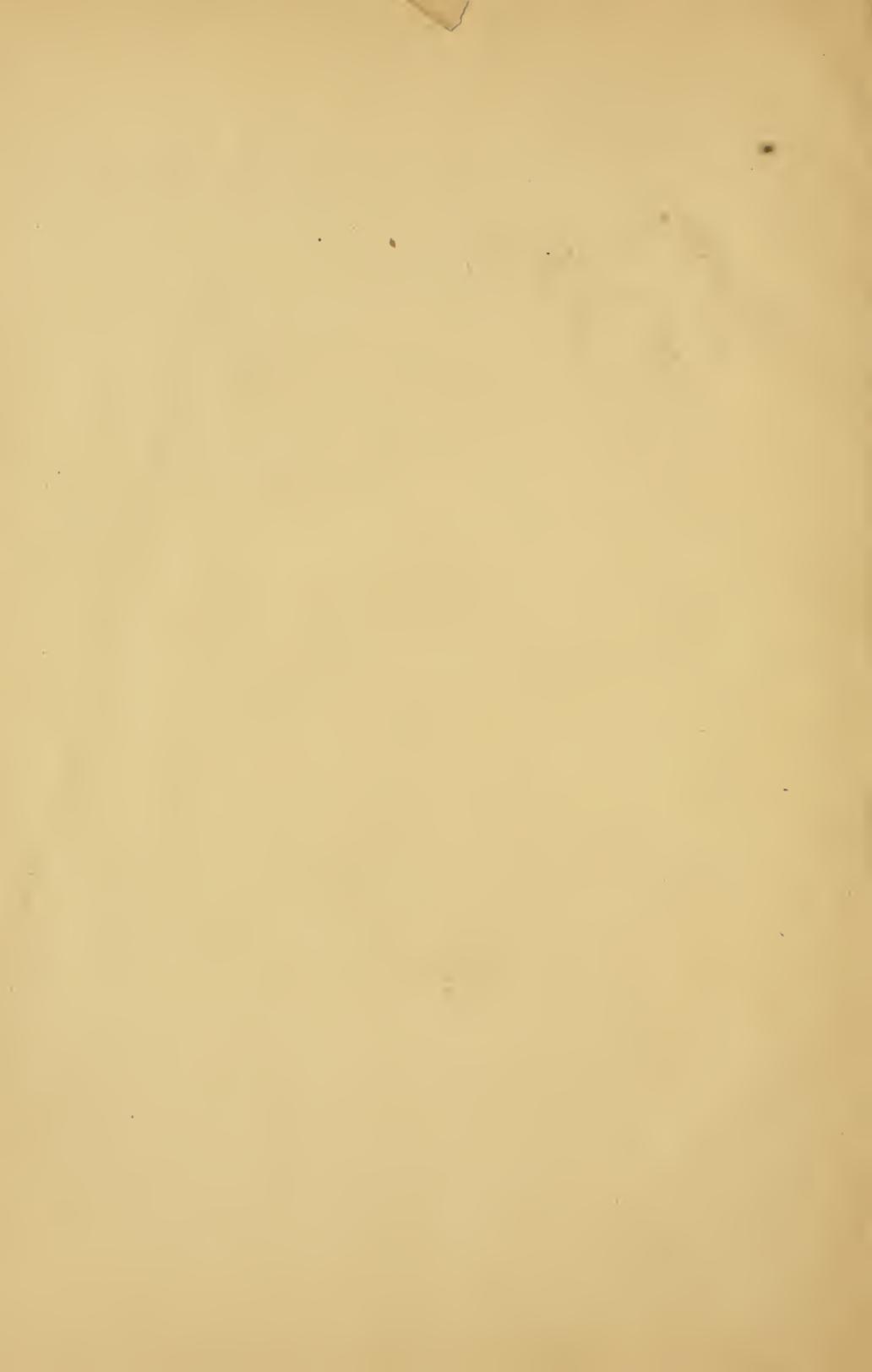
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CHRIST

IS

BORN

A MYSTERY.

a. B.



LOYOLA COLLEGE

BALTIMORE, MD.

1879.

PG 111 A
1879
1879

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WOODSTOCK COLLEGE PRESS,

WRITTEN FOR THE SUNDAY SCHOOL
OF SAINT IGNATIUS' CHURCH
BALTIMORE, MARYLAND.



TO BLESSED MARY
EVER VIRGIN
MOTHER OF JESUS CHRIST
TRUE GOD AND TRUE MAN
THIS LITTLE BOOK
IS HUMBLY OFFERED
IN HONOR OF
HER IMMACULATE CONCEPTION.

Christmas, 1879.

PERSONS REPRESENTED.

Persons Speaking.

DIONYSIUS, *a Grecian Philosopher.*

MAXIMUS, *a Roman General.*

NICODEMUS, *a Jewish Doctor.*

PHILOTAS, *Steward to Maximus.*

BENONI, }
SIMON, } *Shepherds.*
EBEN, }
DAVID, }

GABRIEL, }
MICHAEL, } *Archangels.*
RAPHAEL, }

ANGEL OF THE GROT.

SAINT ZACHARY.

MELCHIOR, }
GASPAR, } *Kings of the East.*
BALTHASAR, }

HEROD, *King of the Jews.*

GORGAS, *Chamberlain to King Herod.*

HIGH PRIEST.

PERSONS REPRESENTED.

Persons not Speaking.

THE INFANT SAVIOUR, *Son of God.*

THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY, *His Mother.*

SAINT JOSEPH.

SAINT JOHN, THE BAPTIST.

SAINT ELIZABETH, *Cousin of the Blessed Virgin.*

Angels, Priests, Soldiers, Shepherds and others.



PLAN OF THE PLAY.

ACT I.

The Birth of Christ is looked for by the whole world.

ACT II.

The Birth of Christ is made known to the Hebrews through the medium of the Shepherds.

ACT III.

The Shepherds adore the Infant Saviour.

ACT IV.

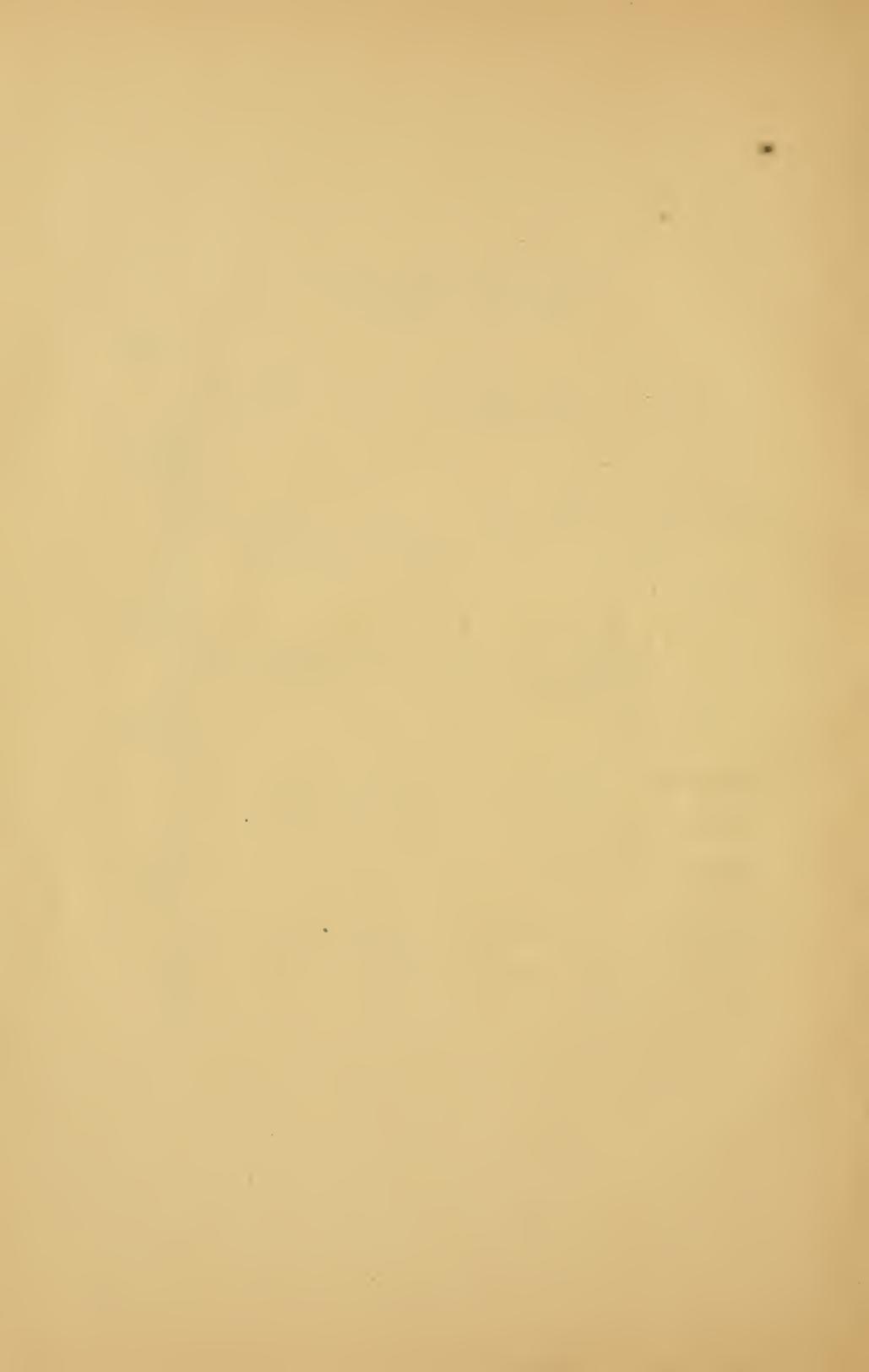
The Birth of Christ is made known to the Gentiles in the persons of the Magi.

ACT V.

The Infant Saviour is acknowledged as God and is adored by all the nations.

LIST OF SONGS.

PROPHECY OF BETHLEHEM	25
SONG OF PEACE	29
SHEPHERDS' CHORUS	33
FAIR DOVE	39
THE HALCYON	46
ANGELS' CHORUS	49
ANGELS' SEMICHORUS	49
CHAPLET SONG	71
GABRIEL'S HYMN	71
RAPHAEL'S HYMN	72
MICHAEL'S HYMN	72
MARCH	81
COUNTERMARCH	82
FINAL CHORUS	83



CHRIST IS BORN.

ALPHABETICAL



CHRIST IS BORN.

ACT I.

SCENE I.—The House of a Roman General at Bethlehem.

Maximus and Dionysius seated.

MAXIMUS.

How readily this nation of the Jews
Enroll themselves as vassals to Augustus!
Methinks the Emperor may well be pleased
To see this haughty race obey his call.

CHRIST IS BORN.

DIONYSIUS.

He may ; yet, Maximus, it seems to me
That for this loyal gathering there lies
A cause more cogent than great Cæsar's will :
Some Providence doth urge this race together
For purposes not yet declared to men.

MAXIMUS.

What, Dionysius talking superstition !

DIONYSIUS.

Not so, I speak what reason says is best.
Ah, Maximus, since last we met at Rome,
I've worried heart and brain in seeking out
Truth the divine ; for not Socratic lore
Nor Plato's wisdom hath unfolded it.

MAXIMUS.

'Tis strange thy quest for truth should call thee
hither,
To Bethlehem, remote from all the schools.

CHRIST IS BORN.

DIONYSIUS.

Yet, not so strange, my Maximus; for o'er
This Bethlehem, some fate mysterious,
Like pent up cloud, doth brood; and startling signs
Flash out with sudden light, and half reveal
A great event as looming o'er the world!

MAXIMUS.

You've caught, I think, infection from the Jews.
They hold that he they call Jehovah, God,
Will send a god-like being from heaven, to be
Their King; and make them masters of the world;
And bring the Golden Age to men once more.

DIONYSIUS.

And soon, they say, this Leader will be born
Here in this town, in human shape. When this
I learned, and had more deeply read the lore
Their sages had forespoken to the Jews,
I hastened hither, curious to see
A spot so storied, so marked out by fate.
And you? I had not thought to meet you here.

CHRIST IS BORN.

MAXIMUS.

In troth, I came not by my own sweet will,
But ordered by Quirinus; I am here
To oversee the taking of the census,
And with my troops to garrison the town,
Lest, from these ardent hopes among the Jews,
Some trouble may arise.

DIONYSIUS.

Do you not feel
Some sense of mystery that here doth breathe?

MAXIMUS.

I own I feel, at times, a touch of awe;
The superstition's catching.

DIONYSIUS.

Throughout the town
The word unconscious dropped seems to piece out
Some fragmentary truth, fulfil some promise
From heaven sent, or give new omens birth.

CHRIST IS BORN.

MAXIMUS.

Ay, and thou speakest true. Yet not alone
Among the Jews such expectation dwells ;
But even Rome seems wrapped in mystic feelings.
Thou knowest well what things, in olden days,
A Sibyl sang at Rome ; and how she told
Of other Golden Age that yet should dawn,
When heaven once more should converse hold with
men.

DIONYSIUS.

What think the Romans of the Sibyl's words ?

MAXIMUS.

Some laugh at them ; and some with thoughtful brow
Ponder them o'er ; and others have maintained
That great Augustus is the god foretold.

DIONYSIUS.

A hope that all men have must come from heaven :
I've traversed Egypt and Arabia ;
Seen all the wonders of the mouldering East ;

CHRIST IS BORN.

I've talked with sages and with peasantry ;
Yet, everywhere, the hope that One Divine
Will come, holds in men's minds its solemn reign.
Nay, even on India's farthest coasts, I've heard,
The tawny worshipper asks of his gods
This heaven-sent King of Virgin Mother born.

MAXIMUS.

Well, come he when, or come he where he will !
The world is Rome's ; he'll be a Roman subject ;
His glory will be Rome's !

(Enter the Steward of Maximus.)

What now, Philotas ?

PHILOTAS.

A citizen of Bethlehem doth crave
A moment's speech with you.

MAXIMUS.

Bid him to enter.

(Enter Nicodemus.)

It is the Jew, the doctor Nicodemus,

CHRIST IS BORN.

NICODEMUS.

I greet you well, good friends.

MAXIMUS.

Most welcome, Master!

Here's Dionysius, pride of Athens' schools ;
You've known his fame, and now you know the man.
Come, seat you, Nicodemus. We have here
A question to your liking : of this prince,
Or god, or hero, whom you look to see,
To be the Leader of your race to empire.

NICODEMUS.

And know you not the time is drawing near
When the Messiah, long expected, comes ;
He who shall spring from Juda's royal line,
And make us rulers of the rest of earth ?

DIONYSIUS.

Bright hopes, good Nicodemus. Know you not
That hopes like these have flattered many peoples ?

CHRIST IS BORN.

NICODEMUS.

A hope that lacks a warrant plays men false.

DIONYSIUS.

True ; and thy nation hath from heaven received
Some promise of this King that is to come.

NICODEMUS.

Ah, you have heard what things our prophets sang :
Masters, ere Rome's Æneas saw the light,
Ere infant Greece had yet begun to lisp,
My nation asked of heaven with outstretched hands
The Promised One that should redeem our race.

(Philotas and a servant enter with refreshments.)

MAXIMUS.

I've heard, indeed, of prophets, but their songs
In scanty store have fallen upon mine ears.

NICODEMUS.

These verses are well known in Bethlehem :

CHRIST IS BORN.

Before your stay is out, some village minstrel
Shall sing them for you.

PHILOTAS.

Even now, good sir,
There is within the court a shepherd lad,
Whom I have heard rehearse those mystic lays.

NICODEMUS.

Who is the shepherd lad?

MAXIMUS.

Let him be called.

(Philotas goes out.)

NICODEMUS.

(Looking off and seeing Benoni.)

It is Benoni: good; a gentle youth:
No tongue more faithful to repeat the words,
No voice more sweet to sing them than is his.
Come in, Benoni!

CHRIST IS BORN.

(Benoni enters.)

I would speak with you.
What talk through town to-day?

MAXIMUS.

More wonders, youth?

BENONI.

Yes, wonders that do enhance past wonders :
For did you mark, at setting of the sun,
How long he lingered back? The people said :
He's loth to go. To-morrow, may be born
A greater Sun that shall eclipse his light.

DIONYSIUS.

And I too marked his stay ; with noon-day strength
He shone, or ere he plunged beneath the west.

NICODEMUS.

But hast thou heard of other signs abroad?

BENONI.

'Tis said that in the shrine of Pagan Jove

CHRIST IS BORN.

Built by the Romans, from his base uplifted,
The god was hurled in fragments to the ground.
And round the gentile hearths the household gods
Totter from off their cherished standing place,
Totter and break, and no man knows the cause.

MAXIMUS.

Not so! By all the gods! It is not true!
Look you, how proud the god here holds his place!
O Mighty Jove!

(Laying his hand on a statue of Jupiter.)

Thus shalt thou reign supreme,
Till stronger arm shall push thee from thy throne!

DIONYSIUS.

But do the people note these wondrous signs?

BENONI.

Ay, and the whisper on some lips is breathed
That now hath dawned the day by prophets sung.

CHRIST IS BORN.

NICODEMUS.

Wilt sing, Benoni, what our prophets spoke
Foretelling of these days?

BENONI.

Scarce fit my voice
To chant those anthems mystical.

MAXIMUS.

Yet sing
Them for us, lad, that we may learn their nature.

DIONYSIUS.

And guess what truth there lieth in thy lays.

NICODEMUS.

Benoni, sing the prophecy,—that one
That Beth'lem builds its strongest hopes upon.

BENONI.

'Twas thus the prophet spoke in days of old;

CHRIST IS BORN.

(*Benoni sings.*)

PROPHECY OF BETHLEHEM.

Least of fair Juda's thousands thou,
Poor Bethlehem ; but all thy brow
 Resplendent lights adorn :

Thou, of fair Juda's princes, best,
Rich Bethlehem ; from out thy breast
 Hereafter shall be born

The king of Israel that is to be,
Whose coming is from out eternity.

A knocking at the door is heard, and the statue of Jupiter falls to the ground. Philotas hurries to the door ; the other persons gather round the fallen statue.

NICODEMUS.

A stronger arm *hath* pushed him from his throne!
A shattered mockery ! Ah fallen God !
Full sure thy reign is rushing to its close !

CHRIST IS BORN.

DIONYSIUS.

A mightier God hath ta'en the rule of earth,
Or rebel nature hath usurped Jove's power.

(Philotas enters.)

MAXIMUS.

Look, man, the statue of great Jupiter
Is fallen !

PHILOTAS.

Ah, enough of fallen gods !

MAXIMUS.

Speak, sir ; what means this sudden mood ?
Who knocked at yonder door ? or what strange sight
Hath served so soon to cool thy temper's heat ?

PHILOTAS.

Oh, sir, 'twas but a lowly twain ; a man
Already full of years, and by his side
A maiden. Oh, how fair and goddess-like !
Alas, that I should turn them from the door
Houseless, to bear the buffets of the wind !

CHRIST IS BORN.

MAXIMUS.

What, wanted they a shelter for the night ?

PHILOTAS.

Some place to shield them from the winter's cold.
They come from Nazareth, and in these parts
They had no friends.

MAXIMUS.

Did they revile our gods
When you refused them shelter ?

PHILOTAS.

Nay, not so ;
But, smiling as they turned them from the door,
Blessed me that gave them but a harsh refusal.

MAXIMUS.

(Musing.)

How passing strange !

(Aside.)

What made the statue fall ?

CHRIST IS BORN.

DIONYSIUS.

Surely, no shock from mortal hand could thus
Have cast' it to the ground. But whither turned
The old man and the maiden ?

PHILOTAS.

Towards the road
That leads into the woods without the town.

DIONYSIUS.

Seeking a shelter in the woods at night-fall !

MAXIMUS.

Ah! fallen Jove! And what if it were true
That one more strong than thou hath hurled thee
down ?

DIONYSIUS.

But come, good lad, I pray you sing what more
The prophet told forespeaking the Messiah.

CHRIST IS BORN.

BENONI.

(Sings.)

SONG OF PEACE.

When all the peaceful world around
Not trumpet's blare nor bugle sound
 Breaks o'er the jocund land ;
When all earth's cries of horror cease ;
When golden hope and smiling peace
 Go forward hand in hand ;
In Juda's midst a maiden shall appear,
Who unto earth the Saviour King shall bear.

DIONYSIUS.

Your song is sweet, good shepherd, and methinks
The time the prophet spoke of draweth near.

NICODEMUS.

Yea, even now 'tis come ; and Bethlehem,
Dear home, thou art the chosen spot of earth !

CHRIST IS BORN.

MAXIMUS.

Art sure, my lad, 'twas of this very town
The prophets spoke in their mysterious lays?

BENONI.

This is that Bethlehem, called Ephrata,
Where ruled King David in the olden days ;
And from his root th' Anointed shall be born.

MAXIMUS.

This King comes not at such a time as this :
Could Bethlehem a palace offer him,
Or fit abode? For if he come to rule,
Will he not come in kingly majesty?

NICODEMUS.

Ay, but he comes of God, who is well skilled
To temper all things by his godly wisdom.

DIONYSIUS.

Then, if he comes, 'twill be in lowliness.

CHRIST IS BORN.

NICODEMUS.

Or angels shall make up his royal train ;
Thus emptying heaven's dome of all its courtiers.

BENONI.

'Tis not his regal splendour makes the king ;
A royal heart can rule in meanest state. —
But look, kind friends, the moon is high and bright,
So bright, 'tis almost day ; and every star
Pulses with quickened splendour. Pageantry
Like this would grace a king's nativity.
When He shall come, of whom we spoke, all nature
Should meet Him thus, should thus be fair for Him,
As fair she was for God when first He praised
Her beauty. Friends, good rest. My pathway lies
Between the wooded hills. . So, fare ye well :
And if the Saviour come to earth this night,
Pray God, He bring the gift of peace to all.

DIONYSIUS.

The youth spoke true. All nature's powers are tense ;
She stands expectant of some marvellous deed.

CHRIST IS BORN.

NICODEMUS.

My heart beats quick ; my soul is bowed with awe ;
And all my faculties resistlessly
Are turned to prayer. O God ! when He shall come,
Give me to know my Saviour, thy loved One.

MAXIMUS.

(To Nicodemus.)

No more I marvel at thy faith, good friend ;
Yet mingle not thy hopes with anxious fears :
The morrow tells whate'er the morrow bears.

END OF ACT I.



ACT II.

SCENE I.—The hilly country near Bethlehem. David, Eben,
and other Shepherds singing.

SHEPHERDS' SONG.

DAVID.

Hark! how the love-lorn nightingale,
All in the silent night,
Softly from out the woodland vale
Calls to the moon's pale light:

(All sing.)

Break, silver moon, shed out thy ray
Bright o'er the shepherd's flock away;

CHRIST IS BORN.

Whisper sweet dreams
Adown thy beams,
Till comes the light of day!

EBEN.

O gladsome moon, to God so near,
What makes thy smile so bright?
Have angels whispered in thine ear
Some secret of delight?

(All sing.)

Speak, laughing moon, from thy bright
home;
Thou knowest Him that is to come;
Oh! tell to earth
His hour of birth:
When will th' Anointed come!

DAVID.

How late Benoni is.

EBEN.

But here he comes.

CHRIST IS BORN.

DAVID.

Oh, welcome back, Benoni.

EBEN.

We had thought
Thou would'st henceforth abide within the town,
Since to the hills thou came'st not all the day.

BENONI.

Not soon shall I forget these pleasant scenes.—
But where have wandered my neglected sheep?

DAVID.

Your flock, well fed, beneath yon spreading palm
Are nodding in their dreams unto the moon.

EBEN.

What gossip wags the tongues in Bethlehem?

BENONI.

Strange things I've seen, and yet more strange have
heard.

CHRIST IS BORN.

DAVID.

Benoni, we do miss thy merriment:
Hath the proud city mocked thy rustic gear?

BENONI.

Not so, good brother.

EBEN.

Come, we shall dispel
Thy moody thoughts with others not so sad:
Benoni, canst thou well interpret dreams?

BENONI.

That art my mother taught me long ago.

EBEN.

An't please thee I shall test thy skill. Last night
I had a dream: From places far and near
Great flocks of birds came winging towards the town;
Brave birds, of many kinds and plumage rare.
And with them flew two lovely snow-white doves

CHRIST IS BORN.

In close companionship. The other birds
All flouted these, and drove them from their cots ;
Till, finding not a nest nor place to perch,
Far out into the lonely woods they flew,
To seek a shelter in the leafless trees.
And as they flew—

BENONI.

I'll hear no more, good Eben ;
You surely have divined my inmost thoughts ;
But banter out of season causeth pain.

DAVID.

Nay, then, Benoni, you too had a dream ;
Recount it, come, and we shall read it clearly.

BENONI.

Ah no, with waking eyes I saw the birds
Which Eben only in a dream beheld.

CHRIST IS BORN.

DAVID.

But whither turn to find your two white doves?
Tell us. I'll take them home and shelter them.

BENONI.

Listen, and I shall tell you all. To-day
To Bethlehem came flocking in, like birds,
Great throngs of people, all of Juda's tribe,
To give their names as subjects of the Roman.
Among them came a pair of lowly mien;
I saw them roaming up and down the streets;
Vainly, for humble crests do gain few favours.
And when, an hour ago, I crossed the hills,
I met them wandering down the lonely road
That leads into the woods at Bethlehem.
And when the Lady asked where they could find
A shelter for the night, it seemed to me
As if an angel spoke, so sweet her voice:
Alas, I had no home to offer them.

DAVID.

My poor Benoni.

CHRIST IS BORN.

BENONI.

To the stable-cave
That lies beyond the hills I led them.

EBEN.

Come,
Away with saddening thoughts that hush
Your songs. And if you *will* be sad, then sing
To the fair Dove; and o'er the quiet hills
The winds may bear your song to please her ear.

BENONI.

Sing thou, good David, for I long to hear
Thy sweet voice mingling with the wind's low wail.

DAVID.

Fair Dove, you flutter in the wind,
Your pinions long for rest;
Can you no warmer shelter find
Than in the bleak wood's breast?
Where every wayward breeze
That rocks the naked trees
Pierces your lonely nest.

CHRIST IS BORN.

Oh, may the warmest blushes come
Over the peaceful wold,
And linger fondly round your home,
Chasing the winter's cold ;
So may the stars gleam bright
For you, when robes of night
The sleeping earth enfold.

BENONI.

Methought I heard from out the middle wood
A slender voice.

EBEN.

'Tis but the answering echo
Whom David has so sweetly called.

BENONI.

No, no,
Again I hear it growing nearer still,
Listen, it seems the bleating of a lamb,
And look ! a form emerges from the woods.
(Simon enters bearing a lamb on his shoulders.)

CHRIST IS BORN.

EBEN.

Yes, 'tis Simon.

DAVID.

Well met, good comrade.

SIMON.

David,

Thy voice is sweet, thy song doth please me well ;
But who is she for whom the song was sung ?

BENONI.

We know not, Simon, but no maid so fair
Hath ever beamed upon our hills before.
Alas! No roof-tree shelters her, her home
Is in the stable-cave.

SIMON.

What! have you seen
The Lady of the Grot?—for so we'll call her ;
She makes the cave a palace with her beauty,
And winning graciousness. I've come from thence
But now. My lamb has bleated all the way,
So loth she was to leave the maiden's side.

CHRIST IS BORN.

DAVID.

Sweet innocence was parted from her mate.

BENONI.

Who, think you Simon, can the Lady be ?

SIMON.

I know not ; but she's fair beyond all women ;
She's full of grace ; and queenly majesty
Doth hedge her round.

BENONI.

Upon her brow, methought,
I saw the twinkling of a coronal
Of living stars. The air that circles her
Doth breathe devotion. When the Christ shall come,
He will be born, I ween, of such a Mother.

DAVID.

An air of mystery doth haunt your words,
Benoni ; what, and thou speakest prophecy ?

CHRIST IS BORN.

BENONI.

An air of mystery doth haunt the night :
The Lady of the Grot is an enchantress,
And she hath woven spells on you and me,
On earth and sky, transforming and exalting.
My soul felt nearer God when she was nigh ;
My thoughts were calm and pure ; and tenderness
For slighted friends on tip-toe stole, and stood
A knocking at my heart. She brought me peace.

SIMON.

And not to you alone the maiden brought
Fair peace. Me too, the rapture of her presence
Did thrill ; it tuned anew my being ; and chords,
That jangled once, make sweetest music now.

EBEN.

Th' Enchantress of the Grot did wave her wand,
And lo ! the change.—I will be whimsical,
And give my fancy scope :—This princess fair,
Who bringeth peace, is Mother to the Prince
Of Peace. She bears him in her bosom's cells.

CHRIST IS BORN.

I do proclaim this Lady (if I dare
So to bespeak her, and yet save God's reverence)
The mother of th' Anointed One to come,
The mother of our King; and we shall walk,
By favour of our Lady of the Grot,
Brave captains foremost in her Son's bright train.

BENONI.

Ay, Prince of Peace: for peaceful must he come
Who comes from God. Before his face all strife
Will pause; his captains will win victories
O'er pain and wrong. Our prince will fight *for* men,
And not against them. Cometh he to lead
The hosts of Israel against the nations?
Or will he lead the world *to* Israel,
And make us one, one camp to war on sin,
And bruise the demon's head, and thus avenge
God's injury and man's? He comes, I ween,
For a vast purpose; not to aggrandize
One tribe, and make them despots o'er the rest;
But to redeem them, and all men that are
Or have been or will be; redeem them from

CHRIST IS BORN.

Their sins, worse tyrants than the task-masters
That make the body sweat. Our fettered souls
Are princes in captivity: the Christ
Will free us; and we'll walk, as Eben wished,
Brave captains, foremost in our emperor's train.

DAVID.

Is it not writ that He will come when war
Has ceased upon the earth? And now the Romans
Have closed the temple of their heathen Janus,
In token that the wars are ended.

SIMON.

True;

And even nature's self, the wide world over,
Has armistice proclaimed: no war between
Her elements.

DAVID.

How calm the night! The stars
Within their stilly homes scarce seem to twinkle;
No cloud is roaming; nay, the wind hath hushed
The leaves to sleep, and hums no lullaby.

CHRIST IS BORN.

EBEN.

The barren branched trees are stiffly pointing
Their fingers to the sky. On rock and sward
The fixed shadows show their outlines clear.

BENONI.

This is the season of the halcyon : meet time
To usher in God's Halcyon, who brings
Calm to the tossing currents of the soul ;
For even ocean stills his time-long moan,
When broods the fabled bird upon the wave.

DAVID.

Tell us, Benoni, of the halcyon ;
I never yet have heard thee sing the lay.

SONG OF THE HALCYON.

BENONI.

(Sings.)

When builds the Halcyon her nest,
She launches it upon the foam ;

CHRIST IS BORN.

A sailor skilled, o'er ocean's breast
 She fearless steers her fragile home.
The depths, enamoured, calmly flow :
 Then, seamen tempt the harmless wave ;
And balmy ocean breezes blow :
 Then, frolic birds their pinions lave.
So sails the Halcyon mariner ;
 So broods this mother on the sea ;
When fledgling Halcyons come to her,
 I trow, stout sailors they will be.
So heaven's Halcyon, Prince of Peace,
 O'er passion's sea his bark shall steer ;
The storm before his face shall cease ;
 His hardy brood shall know not fear.

DAVID.

It is a good conceit to make the ocean
Bend all its forces to the bold bird's will.

EBEN.

A heart that's brave may vanquish destiny.

CHRIST IS BORN.

SIMON.

The wind is freshening ; hark to its sobs of song.

(Low singing is heard.)

BENONI.

Oh no, not they the voices of the night ;

(The singing grows louder.)

Full sure, that melody is heaven-born !

Oh, never angels carolled hymn more sweet.

EBEN.

Nearer it comes ; and see, what floods of light

Roll o'er the hills ! The day dawns in mid sky.

SIMON.

Or heaven's gates have opened unto earth.

The Shepherds fall on their faces, Angels fly down and sing.

Among the angels are Gabriel, Michael and Raphael.

CHRIST IS BORN.

SEMICHORUS OF ANGELS.

Glory unto God most high !
 Heaven's eternal King ;
Sound God's praises, ransomed earth,
For the Infant Saviour's birth ;
 And ye heavens ring,
Echoing back a glad reply.

FULL CHORUS OF ANGELS.

Hail! hail! to God, to God on high ;
 And peace to men of holy will :
O Earth, thy long desired is nigh ;
 His presence doth thy borders fill.

SEMICHORUS.

Peace to men of holy will ;
 Peace to every land :
Lo, how in the silent night,
Unto earth comes heavens' might ;
 Lo, at His command
Balmy peace the world doth fill.

CHRIST IS BORN.

CHORUS.

Hail! hail to God, to God on high; *etc.*

GABRIEL.

Rise up, rise up, meek children of the hills.
Fear not; my tidings are of joy; to-day
Is born to you a Saviour, Christ, the Lord.

MICHAEL.

And hasten ye unto the hill-side cave;
For there his little heart doth throb; for you
It throbs. Its brightness doth eclipse the sun:
Your hearts shall be enkindled at its flame.

RAPHAEL.

And this shall be a sign to you: He's poor;
You'll find him in a manger laid. He's weak;
You'll find him wrapped in swaddling bands. Away!

The Shepherds make as if to speed away; but stand, when
they hear the angels again singing the Chorus.

CHRIST IS BORN.

FULL CHORUS OF ANGELS.

Glory to God! to God on high!
And peace to men of holy will!
O Earth! Thy long-desired is nigh!
His presence doth thy borders fill!

BENONI.

Speed, brothers, speed.

(The angels vanish.)

DAVID.

Oh, look, the startled night
Hath fled before the trail that marks the angels'
Pathway. On!

BENONI.

On to the grot. Oh, speed!

END OF ACT II.



ACT III.

SCENE I.—A wooded hillside near the Stable of Bethlehem.

(David, Eben, Benoni and Simon enter singing.)

DAVID.

Look, look, Benoni, there ; the burning star
That lit the heavens hath descended now,
And rests on yonder rock.

EBEN.

What King, Benoni,
Can this be that is born on these cold hills ?
Think you it is the Christ ?

CHRIST IS BORN.

BENONI.

I do believe it.

SIMON.

Oh ay, for more than earthly king is he
Whom angels bid us hasten to adore.

DAVID.

Shall we not give our finest lambs as tribute?

BENONI.

Our flocks and our whole hearts we'll offer him.

SIMON.

On our way back, we'll call our shepherd friends
To hasten and adore the Infant Saviour.

DAVID.

What tidings we shall bring!

BENONI.

Peace, peace; this is

CHRIST IS BORN.

A sacred spot ; for lo, the angels guard
Yon cavern door.

EBEN.

Shall we draw near ?

ANGEL OF THE GROT.

Fear not.

SIMON.

O Angel, thy bright comrades brought us tidings,
Good tidings of great joy to all the people ;
And bade us hither come to seek the Babe.

ANGEL OF THE GROT.

Come, follow me.

SCENE II.—The Stable of Bethlehem : a shed built before the entrance to a cave. A star is shining above it. Within, the Divine Infant, the Blessed Virgin and Saint Joseph. Groups of angels are singing ; Gabriel, Michael and Raphael are in the foreground. At intervals are heard the Songs of Shepherds approaching the scene.

CHRIST IS BORN.

*(Enter the Angel of the Grot, followed by Benoni, Simon,
Eben and David.)*

ANGEL OF THE GROT.

Enter. Lo, there upon the straw, your King,
Your God! Behold his maiden mother, queen
Of heaven. Behold his foster father Joseph,
The Just, chosen to guide his childhood's steps.
Approach the crib and reverently adore.

(The shepherds kneel in adoration.)

BENONI.

Sweet Babe, I know thee who thou art. My Lord,
My God. Oh, goodness infinite! The Christ
Is God's own self! God keeps his promises
With princely bounty, heaping copiously
The measure till it overflow. Oh, deign,
Sweet Babe, to look upon thy shepherd friends:
We offer thee our homage and our hearts.
O Mother of fair love, speak to thy child,
Entreat him to receive us as his own.

CHRIST IS BORN.

*(Enter Saint Zachary and Saint Elizabeth bearing
Saint John the Baptist.)*

SAINT ELIZABETH.

Hail, Infant Godhead! heaven's choicest gift!
Hail, Virgin Mother, blest among all women!

SAINT ZACHARY.

Hail, Holy Child, true Son of God! Thyself
Co-equal God! Hail, maiden queen of heaven!

SIMON.

Dear Babe, accept this flowering cross of thorn;
I've watched it grow: it ever kept its green;
Around it clung the sweetest warbling birds,
And piped in tenderest strains their evening songs;
And when the moon looked down, and saw the cross,
Large dew drops seemed to trickle down her beams
And nestle in its leaves, impearling its bright green.
This night it bloomed; I feel it bloomed, dear child,
For thee, to give thy birth a joyous welcome.

CHRIST IS BORN.

SAINT ZACHARY.

Another cross shall spring from that same root,
Of greater size, more beautiful than this ;
Upon whose breast the dews of grief shall flow ;
And in whose shade, shall men refreshment find.

And thou, who bearest him
This emblem at his birth,
Shalt bear for him, at death,
A cross of priceless worth.

SIMON.

At death—Howbeit, this I know :
That I shall bear
No other cross, dear child, but one
To thee most dear.

BENONI.

Comrades, away ; and speed you o'er the hills ;
And tell to all the wonders you have seen :
I will to Bethlehem, to Nicodemus.—

CHRIST IS BORN.

What joy will fill his heart when he shall know
That all he hoped hath fallen true this day.

(Going, but turning back.)

What! David, brothers! Ah, 'tis hard to go.

DAVID.

Oh, when I gaze upon that face divine,
I long to stay forever in the cave.

EBEN.

He cried not when the cold wind whistled by,
But smiled as though he wished to welcome it.

SIMON.

And saw you not what brightness lit his face
When first his eyes beheld my little cross?

BENONI.

And when our Lady of the Grot did press
The cross upon his lips, did she not weep
To see him smile upon it, and enfold it
So closely to his breast?

CHRIST IS BORN.

ANGEL OF THE GROT.

Oh, shepherds, speed!
Go, speed the tidings. Simple hearts, lead on
The wisdom of the Orient unto God.

END OF ACT III.





ACT IV.

SCENE I.—Herod's Court at Jerusalem. Herod and Courtiers.

HEROD.

My lords, thus far our reign hath lacked repose ;
Pretenders to our throne have robbed from us
Some sleep. But now they rest in sleep unbroken ;
And ours they break no more. These hands are
stained ;

But traitors must pay forfeit for their treason.
At last we wield our royalties in peace ;
For now we hold in firmer grasp the sceptre
That Juda's race once swayed. No jealousies
At Rome, nor treason here, can shake our kingdom.

(Enter Gorgias the Chamberlain)

CHRIST IS BORN.

GORGAS.

Look king, an embassy from foreign lands
Doth crave an audience.

HEROD.

Whence do they come?

GORGAS.

Your majesty, to judge from their apparel,
They come from out the East.

HEROD.

Lead them before us.

(Enter Melchior, Gaspar, Balthasar.)

MELCHIOR.

We greet you well, great prince.

HEROD.

My lords, you're welcome
To our poor court. If in our power it lies

CHRIST IS BORN.

To aid in aught your lordships, you are free
To name it.

MELCHIOR.

Prince, in our own several lands
We three are kings ; reputed wise ; are honoured ;
Called Magi, as being skilled to read
The stars. Upon one quest, with single purpose,
We left our homes. For guidance in this quest
We come to thee.—We ask thee, where is he
That has been born the ruler of the Jews ?

HEROD.

That king am I. By heaven's decree the sceptre
Hath passed from Juda to an alien born ;
And Herod, sometime called of Ascalon,
And sprung from lords of Idumea, reigns
O'er all Judea, holding from the Romans.

GASPAR.

We ask thee, Prince, where is the *new-born* king ?
For we have seen his star gleam in the East ;
And following it, have hastened to adore.

CHRIST IS BORN.

BALTHASAR.

Far over streams and rivers, sands and mountains,
We tracked the guiding star, and, hurrying on,
We reached thy city. Now the star hath vanished.

HEROD.

Now by our royalty! we fain would know,
Ourselves, this king, if such there be within
Our realm. Lord Chamberlain, we license you
To summon hither the chief priests and scribes.

(The chamberlain goes out.)

Some private entertainment, lords,

(To the courtiers.)

we'll have

With these, our sudden guests; you are dismissed.

(The lords depart.)

*(Herod much troubled leaves his throne, and muses apart
from the Magi.)*

Can this be the Messiah whom they seek?
What says the prophecy?—"He shall be born
When Juda's power is held by alien hand."
I've schemed to make this people look to me

CHRIST IS BORN.

As the messiah. Now this rival comes
To shake me from my dreams to living fears.
(*Enter the chief priests and scribes bearing volumes and
great scrolls ; Herod reascends the throne.*)
Most reverend doctors, tell us where is he,
This new-born king, called ruler of the Jews.

HIGH PRIEST.

Our nation has looked long for the Messiah ;
And now his time draws near ; for all the signs
Of which the prophets spake are being fulfilled.

MELCHIOR.

And is it written *where* he shall be born ?

HIGH PRIEST.

In Bethlehem : for thus the prophet spoke :
(*Reads from a scroll held by one of the Scribes.*)
“And thou, Bethlehem Ephrata art a little one among
the thousands of Juda : out of thee shall he come forth unto
me that is to be the ruler in Israel : and his going forth is
from the beginning, from the days of eternity.”

CHRIST IS BORN.

HEROD.

And can it be the Saviour now is here ;
And yet you slumber ignorant of his birth ?

HIGH PRIEST.

Nay, but he is not here ; else, long ere this,
Had trembling earth proclaimed his mighty name.

MELCHIOR.

Oh, surely, hath this king already come ;
His banner is a star outhung from heaven !

HIGH PRIEST.

When that our king shall come, all men shall know
him :
He comes with power and majesty from God ;
Yea, in the might of God's omnipotence
He comes, to lift fallen Israel to his feet
And robe him with dominion.

. CHRIST IS BORN.

HEROD.

Reverend pontiff,
We are your debtors ; but we shall devise
Some fair return.

HIGH PRIEST.

(Departing with his train.)
My lord, we are your servants.

HEROD.

(Leaving his throne.)
When saw ye first and where your wondrous comet
That heralded the birth of this new king ?

MELCHIOR.

Not twice six days have sped. Heaven's veil was
fissured,
And this bright star, like a new work of God,
Shot forth to human view, confounding science :
But ghost-like sounds, that fluttered on the gusts,
Like voices spoke from out the vacant air,
And bade us follow, follow and adore !

CHRIST IS BORN.

HEROD.

If in the East this magic lightning gleamed,
'Tis token he is born for nations there.

BALTHASAR.

Nay, nay, good prince ; for hither we are called ;
And we shall seek till life doth droop and fade,
Or find that one whom heaven bids us seek.

HEROD.

Go, then ; and follow out this holy quest ;
And when it is achieved, send tidings hither,
That I may also follow and adore.

MAGI.

(Departing.)

Farewell, great prince.

HEROD.

Fair speed, my lords !

(Alone.)

The dolts !

Star-gazers from the East, forsooth ! They've come,

CHRIST IS BORN.

The dupes of marsh-born glimmers of the night!
As if a star, that shines o'er all men's heads,
Could to the East be luminous, and dark
To all the West. Their minds are aged, doting!
(An acclaim is heard without.)
What means that shout?

CROWD.

All hail! all hail! all hail!

HEROD.

Ho there! Within! My guards! Lord Chamberlain!
*(The guards rush in on one side; the chamberlain on the
other. Confused cries are heard from the outside.)*
What means this tumult in the streets?

CROWD.

All hail!

GORGAS.

Flushed crowds are rushing by the palace gates,
With face and hand uplifted to the heavens:
A wondrous meteor hath cleft the sky:

CHRIST IS BORN.

Awhile it blazed above the court ; then sped
Beyond the city walls. Towards Bethlehem
It courses ; crowds salute it with, "all hail!"
Some follow ; others utter mutiny
Against your royal majesty.

HEROD.

The traitors !

But this accursed mob shall rue their treason.
Belike, they, too, would go a finding kings :
Their necks shall find that Herod is a king
When rebels grow too restless. Centurion,

(To the guards.)

Be ready with your men. These roving-kings—
God save the mark !—will send us messages
That they have found this nursling king of theirs :
Then, seek his root, and lop him ere he sprouts.
If he escape my cut-throat knaves, then he,
Not Herod, king of Israel shall be !

END OF ACT IV.



ACT V.

SCENE I.—The Stable of Bethlehem illuminated ;
a star shines over it.

(The Divine Infant is in the manger ; on the right are the Blessed Virgin and Saint Joseph ; on the left, Saint Elizabeth and Saint John the Baptist who holds in one hand the cross presented by Simon, and in the other, the hand of the Divine Infant. Saint Zachary and two shepherds kneel by the entrance to the stable. Groups of Angels are hovering about the scene. Singing is heard from a choir of Angels. In the foreground are Gabriel, Michael and Raphael, with other Angels, weaving a chaplet of flowers.)

CHRIST IS BORN.

CHAPLET SONG.

CHOIR OF ANGELS.

Weave we now a crown undying
For the Infant King :
Take the buds on earth low lying ;
Heaven's blossoms bring.

GABRIEL'S HYMN.

Here should, mid lily blossoms, shed her glow
Clear Chastity, that breasts angelic fills ;
That in the Paradise of God doth blow :
Oh, sweet to Christ the dew that she distils !

CHOIR OF ANGELS.

Weave we now a crown undying
For the Infant king :
Take the buds on earth low lying ;
Heaven's blossoms bring.

CHRIST IS BORN.

RAPHAEL'S HYMN.

Here should, mid shrinking violets, be seen
Fair Poverty, in dark dells pallid grown ;
She blooms on earth ; but Heaven loves her sheen :
To win her for his crown Christ left his throne !

CHOIR OF ANGELS.

Weave we now a crown undying, *etc.*

MICHAEL'S HYMN.

Here, too, obedience, the meek-eyed queen,
Should twine her tendrils ere the wreath be done ;
Captive, in fetters, lowly and unseen,
Her eager heart hath Christ's caresses won !

CHOIR OF ANGELS.

Weave we now a crown undying, *etc.*

GABRIEL.

And shall we weave some thorns among the flowers?

CHRIST IS BORN.

RAPHAEL.

Ah no, the thorns are for his crown at death.

MICHAEL.

He scarce will like the wreath without the thorns.
(They enter the stable and present the chaplet to the Blessed Virgin, who places it on the Divine Infant's head.)

FIRST SHEPHERD.

(Rising, and speaking to the other shepherd, who also rises.)
Hear you the sound that cometh o'er the hills?

SECOND SHEPHERD.

And hark, the tinkling bells a merry-making.

FIRST SHEPHERD.

They come this way; I hear men's voices.

SECOND SHEPHERD.

(Looking off.)

Look!

CHRIST IS BORN.

I see the bright coils of a kingly train
A winding through the glens and creeping hither.
(*The angels vanish, the star disappears, the stable-cave becomes
dark. Enter Eben, Simon, David, leading the Magi with
their attendants.*)

MELCHIOR.

(*To Eben.*)

Shepherd, where stands the palace of the king?

EBEN.

(*Pointing to the stable.*)

'Tis there the stable-grot.

MELCHIOR.

What! yon bleak cave!—
Its porch a struggling shed whose props scarce
stand.—
A search begun in light to end in darkness!
A cave! that opens not to light beyond,
Nor any hope!

CHRIST IS BORN.

GASPAR.

The guiding star hath fled,
And all the world seems darker than before !

SIMON.

Oh, sirs, within those craggy walls doth lie
A pearl more pure than any ever nursed
In hollowed shell by ocean's fondling waves :
Draw near, and look upon the Infant's face.

BALTHASAR.

For this we left our homes and happiness,
Alas ! to die upon these wind-swept hills !

MELCHIOR.

No, not to die ; nor yet in darkness wander :
O Infant king, wherever thou art born,
Call us to thee ere death hath closed the eyes
That longed to look upon thy sacred face !

(The Magi turn away.)

CHRIST IS BORN.

ANGEL OF THE GROT.

(Invisible.)

Turn, turn again; the light once more shall shine;
Oh, turn again; the weary search is o'er.

MELCHIOR.

(To Eben.)

Whence came that voice? Was it some shepherd's,
friend;
Or did an angel speak from out the sky?

EBEN.

(The star re-appearing.)

Look, look, great sirs, the light that in the East
Lit up your path, now bursts with sudden blaze
From yonder hollow rock.

THE MAGI.

(Kneeling.)

Hail holy light!

CHRIST IS BORN.

MELCHIOR.

And here, at last, the long, long quest hath end ;
Here, on these dreary hills in middle night.

GASPAR.

How great, O Infant king, thy majesty,
That, veiled in poverty and littleness,
Hath made majestic, things which seemed so mean.

BALTHASAR.

O heaven-sent guide, not unto palace halls
You beckoned us ; for there our God was not.

ANGEL OF THE GROT.

Expect not for your eyes, but for your souls :
No trappings here of earthly royalty ;
What flatters mortal sight, itself is mortal.
Draw near the Babe and reverently adore.

*(The kings adore ; while their heads are bowed low, the
cave is illuminated again ; the angels re-appear and sing. The
kings, after adoration made, offer their gifts, which they take*

CHRIST IS BORN.

from the hands of their attendants ; the Blessed Virgin receives the gifts in behalf of her child.)

MELCHIOR.

Hail Infant, Lord of heaven and earth,
Who ere the years of time didst reign :
We bring thee at thy human birth .
The golden sap of Orient vein :
Upon thy brow in radiance may it glow,
And gild thy darkling manger here below !

GASPAR.

God of all ages, lo, we bring
Sweet frankincense to offer thee,
Fit emblem of the God and king
That rules the heavens, the earth, the sea :
Oh, may its fragrant breathings linger long,
Inwoven with thy angels' wreaths of song !

BALTHASAR.

Saviour of men, the myrrh we bear
Doth not proclaim thee God and king ;

CHRIST IS BORN.

But in its bosom gleams a tear—

Ah, angel voices cèase to sing ;

Our hearts beat low ; but thou art smiling still,

Though on thy mother's cheek the tear drops trill.

*(Enter Benoni, followed by Nicodemus, Dionysius, Maximus,
and Philotas.)*

NICODEMUS.

My heart is beating 'gainst its cage's bars ;

The very earth seems trembling 'neath my feet,

As though its great breast throbb'd with quickened
joy

To bear this new-born Babe.

BENONI.

Here is the cave :

The maiden mother kneeleth by the crib.

PHILOTAS.

Master, 'tis true ; here are the lowly twain

That asked of me a shelter from the cold !

CHRIST IS BORN.

MAXIMUS.

Impostor Jove! full well I now know why
Thy fraudulent power was tumbled from its throne.

DIONYSIUS.

(While they approach the stable.)

Ye little minds of men! Thou weakling science!
How feeble are thy steps to travel o'er
The hidden pathways of the truths of God:
We looked for him to march in majesty;
And lo, a puling infant has he come.

(Kneels and adores.)

Incarnate God! I bow before thy feet,
And offer thee the powers of my soul.

MAXIMUS.

O heaven-sent boy, I called thee king ere yet
I looked upon thy brow: my king, my God!
Take up the rule of Rome, that rules the world;
Thine be the crown of universal reign.

CHRIST IS BORN.

NICODEMUS.

And thine to give the laws that govern men ;
To bring back justice and to keep it here ;
That earth may smile in peace and righteousness,
As with our fathers in the olden days.

The Angels led by Gabriel, Michael and Raphael, group themselves on the stage ; and, marching and countermarching in slow time, perform a solemn dance ; weaving and interweaving their lines, they form the figures of a circle, a triangle, and a cross. The words that follow are sung. The Angel of the Grot with a wand directs the singing and the movements.

MARCH.

Lo, a light in the dark hath arisen :
It shall grow till it banisheth night ;
It shall beam when the years have grown old ;
It shall beam when the sun hath grown cold ;
When time dies in his mouldering prison ;
It shall fill all the tribes with delight !

CHRIST IS BORN.

COUNTERMARCH.

And the earth hath been warmed by thy ray
 From its torpor, O Child of the Cave!
And the shapes have beheld Thee and fled,
That live in the land of the dead,
That lurk in the deep sombre way,
 That leads to the night of the grave!

MARCH.

And Darkness hath fled from His face,
 And Sorrow that dwells in the shade;
And Love hath ta'en up her old place
 In hearts where her throne first was made;
 For Enmities, Children of Night,
 And Discord and Wrath take affright;
And Friendship renews her embrace,
And her memories that never shall fade.

CHRIST IS BORN.

COUNTERMARCH.

And this Babe was the Light
That arose in the night ;
And this Babe was the Peace
That brought us from our sins a sweet release.

(While the above is being sung, the stable is growing brighter and brighter. During the singing of the following stanza, the stable is brilliantly illuminated. The angels stand, the shepherds and characters rise from their knees, and all sing :)

FINAL CHORUS.

Loud, oh, loud resound the lay
For the Godhead's human birth :
Lo, the holy Christmas day
Dawneth bright o'er all the earth !

AD MAJOREM DEI GLORIAM.







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