

"WHEN will he come?" was the question people were always asking one another, in the land of Palestine. People were waiting for something to happen — or, really, were waiting for some one to come! Will he come in five years? Next year? Or, he is already on his way? They were waiting for someone, and when he came they would call him "the Messiah". If he spoke in Greek, they would call him "Christ", the "Saviour". The people were waiting for a mighty King.

They had one king already. His name was Herod the Great. But Herod was not the kind of kings they wanted. Herod was hard and cruel. He poisoned and beheaded those who made him angry. The Messiah, when he came, would be a good king. One of the prophets said he would be like the shepherds of Palestine, who watched their sheep night and day, and carried the small lambs in their arms.

But the most important thing about the Messiah was that he would drive Caesar and his armies out of the country. Well, the Messiah would take care of the Romans. He would gather an army from east and west and north and south, and the Messiah would be King of all the nations of the earth. If only he would come!

It was hard to wait so long. They had waited for him a long time, and their fathers and grandfathers had waited for him too. Sometimes word would go around that he had finally arrived, in great excitement some of the Jews would get ready to drive the Romans out of Palestine. But always it turned out to be a mistake, and the people would be disappointed, and shake their heads, and say, "Will he ever come?"

And so it went on, month after month, year after year. The people worked, and dreamed, and hoped, and prayed. The rains would fall in monsoon and soften the hard, dry soil after the heat of summer, so that the farmer could do his ploughing. And as he ploughed the land, the farmer thought about the Messiah, and wondered if he would come before the harvest in the spring. Then spring would come, and the wheat and rice would be growing up in the smiling fields, and all down the hillside the trees would be full of fruit. The Romans were still marching through the country, and still there was no Messiah. But the farmer thought that may be he would come before the next rains fall.

The fisherman would go sailing across the deep-blue sea, and while he waited for the fish to come into his net, he thought of how long people had waited for the Messiah to come. The beggars in the city streets, who were deaf, or blind, or crippled, would sit at the corners and ask for money to buy food. They were wondering too if the Messiah would ever come and help the poor folk.

Farmers, fishermen, shepherds — these were not only people who were thinking of the Messiah. Sometimes along the hot, lonely roads of Palestine, where robbers and wild animals were hiding, a traveler would have dreams.

And the dream would be that the sky opened, and a great light blazed down from the heaven. An army came marching down out of the sky, led by a shining warrior whose face was bright as lightning. From his eyes shot flames of fire. His arms and feet shone like polished brass or gold, and when he spoke his voice was like the shouting of ten thousand men. It was king Messiah! "Destroy the Romans!" he would cry. "Burn up their armies! Let not single one escape!"

Then the dream would fade away, the dreamer would just be trudging along the dusty road, or watching the camel caravans go by, or standing in the Temple with the crowds of unhappy people pushing all around him.

But one night, when winter was in the air, some shepherds were huddled together on a stony field not far from the town of Bethlehem. Not many miles to the north lay

The King Nobody Wanted

by Isaac Baroi

Jerusalem, the capital city of Palestine. But here in the fields it was quite, and lonely, and cold. Suddenly, without any warning, the sky was flooded with light from beyond the clouds. Everything had been dark a minute before, but now every stone and tree and hillock in the field showed up bright as in day! The shepherds jumped to their feet. Some were too frightened to speak, and others cried out in terror.

"What is it?"
"It's the glory of the Lord," one called out.
"Lord, have mercy upon us! Suddenly they heard a loud, clear voice.

"Shepherds! Silence fell upon the group.
"Shepherds, do not be afraid. I bring you the good news which all the people have waited so long to hear. This very day, Christ, you Saviour, has been born in the city of David. And this is how you will know him: you will find him as a baby, wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger."

The voice broke off, and a great chorus began to sing. The sky rang with music, and these were the words of the song:

"Glory to God in the highest
And on earth peace, good will toward men."

As quickly as they had come, the light and the singing were gone. There was just the darkness again, and the far-off howling of wild beasts. Everything was the same as before, except that the shepherds' eyes were still blinded by the light, and their ears were full of music.

For the first time in their lives, the shepherds left their sheep to look after themselves. Across the hills and stone fences and the rocky fields the shepherds scrambled, and hardly stopped for breath till they reached the edge of the town. Everything in Bethlehem was dark as night can be. But no — not everything. A speck of light was flickering in the darkness.

"It must be where the light

is," said one of the poor shepherds.
Down the street they ran, and through a door. They were standing in a stable. There were no angels there. Instead the shepherds saw cows and donkeys eating hay. A cold draft of air was blowing in around the cracks of the door and over the dirt floor. Beside one of the mangers they saw a man standing. A young woman was resting close by. She was watching a baby who lay in the straw.

"We came to see the Messiah," one of the shepherds stammered.



The baby cried. The animals munched their food.

There was some explaining to do. The shepherds told the story of what had happened in the field.

The young man beside the manger did not have anything very exciting to tell the shepherds.

"My name," he said, "is Joseph. This is my wife Mary. We used to live here in Bethlehem, but no one remembers us now. I've been working in Galilee for years. I have a small carpenter shop there. The only reason we came back to Bethlehem was to have our names entered in the government records."

for us with all the important people here. They said we could sleep in the stable. The baby came tonight. Here he is, if you would like to see him".

The shepherds looked at the baby. They hoped that they would see something unusual about him, but he looked just like any other baby.

Then they remembered the angels' song.

Outside again, the shepherds looked up and saw a faint gray light streaking the darkness in the east. Morning was coming. Soon the people of the countryside would be getting up.

What a story the shepherds were going to tell them! Who would have thought of looking for the Messiah, the Christ in the manger! The shepherds were the first to learn the secret. This is the secret of a Messiah. He came with love and compassion as one of the most lowest of human beings, teaches us these days that the kingdom of God is something different. We need to open all our inward eyes to realise this. God suffers with those who suffer on this earth. God is not separated from human's everyday reality. Jesus teaches that God is much more nearer to our heart than we imagine through the religious doctrines, dogmas and so-called fanatic laws and or rules.

God proclaimed his oneness with the people whose he was unwanted, sleeping in slums, roadsides and people those who have no hope in present or in future. And thus through his poorness he makes us rich — richness, as the wind blows, from where it's coming and going we do not know; such as human life on earth, this is the reality of our life. And so that we start to born and reborn again and again with this value of life, not in illusion, but in the very reality of life. Because, God is not busy with the heaven and hell all the time, God is life, and the message of Christmas is this: Jesus as the eternal Word of God, "became a human being and lived among us".

"Before the World was created, the World already existed; he was with God, and he was the same as God. Through him God made all things; not one thing in all creation was made without Him. The World was the source of life, and this life brought light to mankind — the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never put it out.... the Word was in the world, and though God made the world through him, yet the world did not recognize him. He came to his own country, but his own people did not receive him". This is the story of the King nobody wanted.

The Christmas, No More I Seek the Naivety

by Hubert Francis Sarkar

In great earnest, I make a plea to the Resurrected Jesus To come back as the Conqueror, the rishi must not overshadow the Invincible King, And to mercifully redeem us From all these sinister things.

No more that crucifixion.
No more we want to see him crowned with thorns.
No more the jubilant outbursts of Pharisees, no more the cruel self-abnegation.

No more the grueling barn-storming.
No more any outcry for a fall-out, a free-loader's salvation.
Instead, I love to hear the Gospel that commences from each morn.

Sadly, triumph is gradually vanishing from our vocabulary.
We hear a lot of idolatry of the ruthless hyenas of the neighbourhood.

Dreams of a resurrection we are busy to bury.
Upon a scenery from the Inferno, our gaze is glued.

Nascent love thus is extinguished.
Halting the gunning down of an innocent million,
they begin a danse macabre.

All over dreamers are anguished.
And, instigators of mayhem still haunt the terrains here.

This Christmas, no more I seek the naivety.
No more I ask for a fragile, a short-lived re-union with those who cherished to give me a heavy cross.

I must adjourn all this one-sided treaty.
My Kismet I myself must toss.

This Christmas I tell him, the Resurrected Jesus
To come back as the Conqueror, the rishi must not overshadow the Invincible King,
And to mercifully redeem us
From all these sinister things.

A Christmas Story

by John Hastings

ON December 10th a boy was born in Tangra, an industrial slum of Calcutta, behind the screen of a soiled red and green sari held up by his father and two women. Born at home, but home was a small heap of broken tiles. No roof, or walls like a stable would have. Born in a space. His mother lay on a sack in the ashes, and she was delivered of her first-born son. Not even a manger to lay him in.

She had spent the previous night a quarter of a mile away in an abattoir, called Killkhana, with 15,000 others who had fled in terror when their homes were torched by hoodlums. She decided against having her child in the over-powering stench of the slaughterhouse, equipped with only four toilets. Dead-cattle sheds don't even have mangers. She preferred her child to be born at home, so her husband cleared a space in the rubble and the still-smouldering remains of rafters.

As darkness came, it grew cold. All her bedding, clothes and other possessions had been looted, and the goondas from across the canal were still shouting threat at every-

It was also a week of disbelief. West Bengal has a deserved reputation for the lack of communal violence. In the horrors of 1947-8, people had learned the grim lesson of the stupidity and sinfulness of inter-religious attack and counter-attack. Though there was rioting with anti-Pakistan foundations in 1964 and on a few other occasions, the serious incidents were confined to a few places.

For every atrocity there was also a story of courageous self-sacrifice. A Hindu sheltering a Muslim. An imam giving his life as he stood at his door trying to prevent a mob from murdering his hidden Hindu-guest. Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists sometimes playing costly reconciling roles. In this week of advent 1992 also there were similar acts that gave the lie to endemic sectarianism. One damaged mosque was being repaired by Hindus and Muslims working together.

It may have been different in some other cities of this sub-continent, but in Calcutta there was no inter-community

the 400 people sheltering in the Phulbagun Anjuman School said the same to me about Mouljheel.

On Monday the 15th there was a great procession of men and women, three miles long. It reflected the spirit of Calcutta. It was lively and joyful. It re-affirmed people's commitment to each other across all divides. It demanded only the punishment of the violent opportunists who for personal gain had been prepared to sacrifice their fellow-citizens.

A new generation in India should have got the message too from this costly expose of the horror and futility of extremism. The ranks of fundamentalists are ultimately decimated by acts of violent bigotry. So there can be good born out of this tragedy. The rest of the world might also reflect that for all the outrage generated by India's week of agony there might yet be more racial and religious extremism in Europe than there is in India. Intolerant fundamentalists of any religion are not in fact religious at all.

So where are the wise men bringing their gifts to Fatema's



Dhobipara, Tangra: Humanism must rise from the ruins of barbarism.

Photo: Courtesy — The Statesman, Calcutta

one who tried to stay around in the ashes of their homes. So — there being no donkey to carry her — she walked back to the warmer abattoir.

An army unit was sent to protect the refugee families. All was quiet at 3 am so the jawans led to get some sleep. The hoodlums' scouts spread the word and by dawn they were re-organised, advancing with guns and hand-bombs on Killkhana. Fortunately the jawans got the alarm in time to get to the gates of the slaughter-house first.

The tired mother and child, not yet 18 hours old, slept through the din of the ensuing explosions and gun-shots and shouting. Four days later, I met them at the birth-place. The mother was smiling. She was proud. She was terrific.

The week that followed the destruction of the Babri Mosque at Ayodhya by paid mobs of Hindu extremists was a terrible one for India. Its image has been badly tarnished. Besides 75 major Indian towns, violence erupted in Bangladesh, in Pakistan and in Britain, in the name of "religion". The fatalities in India are numbered in four figures, the seriously injured, maimed and blinded in five. The organisers were rich, remote and untouched. The victims were the poorest and most vulnerable, living in peace across religious boundaries for which they care nothing. Their humanity and godliness marks them out as the salt of the earth.

For Calcutta it was a week of agony. Along with the semicircle of blazing fires around the chosen bastions in the east, the night air was rent with explosions and gun-fire. Thousands of families were suddenly without homes or possessions who had made their homes here and worked for decades to increase the city's prosper-

hostility. West Bengal is secular and tolerant, as is the constitution and ideal of India as a whole nation. Curfew seemed a nonsense, except that it restricted the planning of the arsonists. We were supposed to remain indoors except for a few hours of four days. If we ventured out we had to walk with our hands above our heads. With the Army in trigger-happy control there was nothing we could do, though Mother Teresa had me available as an emergency night driver. She delighted in looking up from her rosary into the face of a jawan pointing his rifle at her: whereupon he recognised her, lowered his weapon and saluted her apologetically instead.

The black flags were out in all Muslim-majority areas of the city after the incredible folly of the destruction of the Babri Mosque of December 6th. It became an excuse and an opportunity for land-owners and land-grabbers to put their plan into operation. They organised their henchmen — some Hindus, some Muslims — to fire and loot and terrorise the selected areas. There isn't the slightest doubt in the minds of journalists or any of us who went to talk to victims in the affected places that the motive was not sectarian reprisal, that many of the goondas were in the favour of political leaders, that local police had been bought to lend a hand in eviction by assault and terror, and that the goal was to construct markets, factories and high-rise flats in the place of the demolished homes.

As people in the ruins of their houses beside the Metiabruz mosque said, "We are fine. We are at peace here. We have no enemies. Here, Muslims and Hindus are sisters and brothers." And all of

A Christmas Reflection

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merely a wish that Christians extend to friends and acquaintances. The joy is also the reward for living as Jesus did. Those who strive to imitate Jesus' profound concern for the welfare of others, and his forgiveness of enemies, receive now — in this life and not only in the next — the joy and peace which only God can give. Christmas joy is more satisfying than the pleasure that comes to us from delicious food, fine clothes, or the acquisition of money, power, and fame. This joy springs up within women and men — no matter what their religions are — whenever they imitate the large heartedness of Him who was born on that first Christmas.



Christmas 1992: A Prayer for 1993

by Andrew D' Costa

Christmas knocks at the door
Christmas is for all: the rich and the poor
On this day we shall hear the voice —
Love, Justice and Peace among the people of God.
The people of God are divided among themselves
Violating the simple command:
"Do to the other people that you would them do unto you."
May the Christmas of 1992 bring the good sense —
Love, Justice and Peace are facing the Traffic Jam
As the poor sleep in the open air of
Kamapur station, Sadarghat terminal of Dhaka city
So the evicted and the displaced all over the world
On the cold wintry night of December.
May the Love, Justice and Peace blossom through 1993
New Year.



Dhaka Street Scene

Sketch by Jeremy Traynor

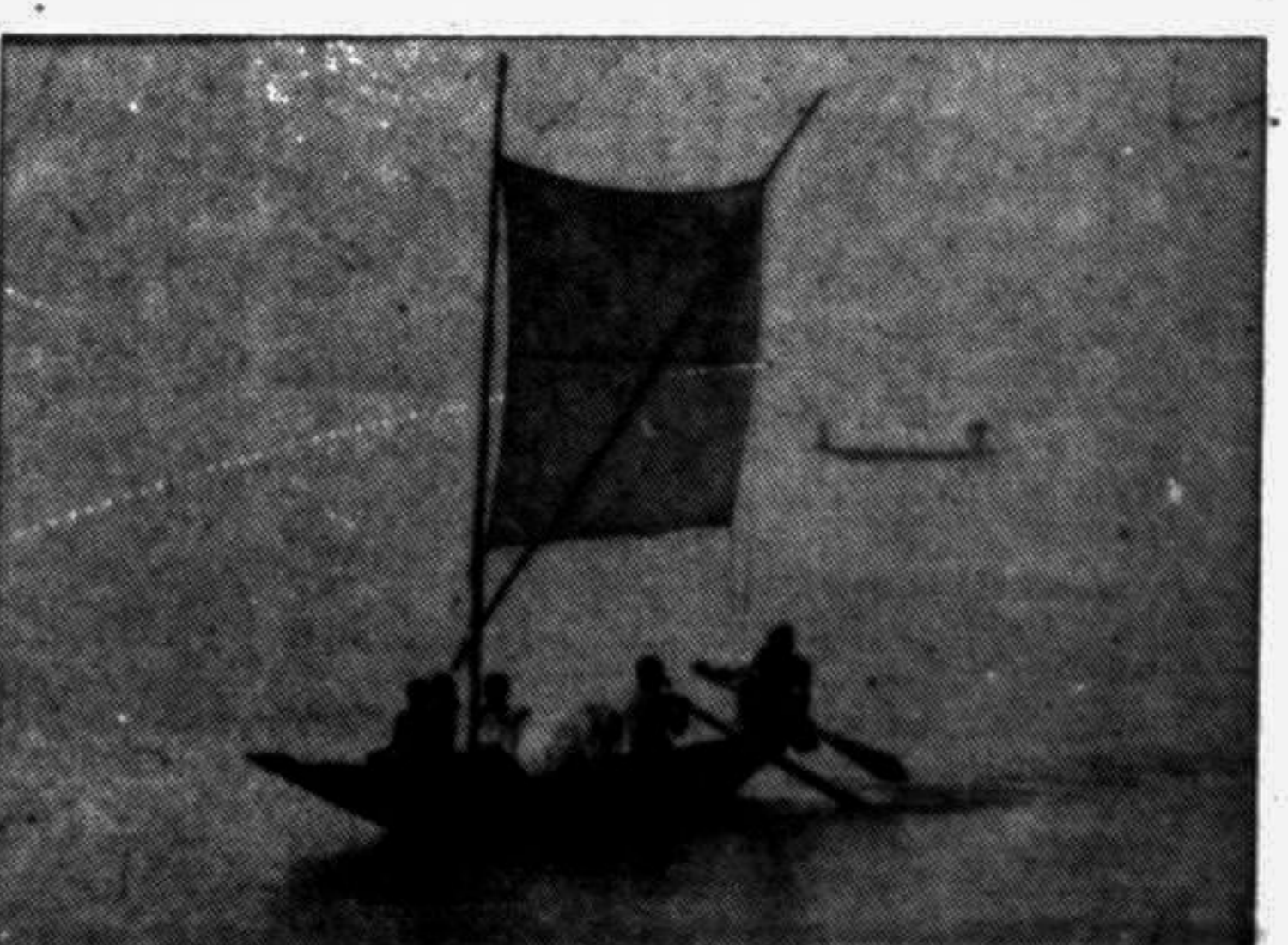
Down the Memory Lane

Continued from page 9
On 27.4.70 I saw the DPI and submitted my application for voluntary retirement. Prof. Azizun-Nesa who was my classmate in Dhaka University, was then the Joint DPI. Both were surprised and felt embarrassed. They wanted me to be a DPI. I said 'no' and left them with thanks.
Alas! What an irony of fate! After I left the residence for the Directorate, 15 to 20 students from different hostels assembled on the campus and were furious when they heard of my voluntary retirement, long before it was due. They rushed to the Directorate and went on putting pressure on the DPI to have my transfer

order cancelled. But the DPI, naturally and lightly, did not yield. Two or three chaps started breaking glass panes of some windows of DPI's office rooms, but others stopped them and all left.
Some time after I came back to my residence, three students rushed in and told me gleefully that they damaged DPI's office to have my transfer order cancelled. I was so shocked that I felt like beating them and kicking them out of the room. But I paused and pitied them, thinking what was play to them was death to me. I remembered the words of Sir Isaac Newton, "Oh Diamond, little do you know what damage you have done!" I rang up the DPI but there was no reply.

Later I told him that I was handing over the charge of the College to the Vice-Principal, Mr. ANM Bazul Rahman, and left the college, on May 10, 1970.
In conclusion, may I draw the attention of the readers to the danger of our using students for political gains. Can we not, in the present predicament, have a national consensus to have the student fronts of all the political parties disbanded? What we hated during Ayub-Monem-Ershad regimes is allowed to continue in its worst and most dangerous form. It appears we are heading towards total collapse of all that we have been cherishing and fighting for. How long will this disgraceful state of affairs continue?
The untipolar world of today has made other countries

move fast to adapt and adjust to changes for their survival. Already backward in every respect, lowest even in the list of the Third World countries by all counts, we cannot and must not waste any more time in quarrelling with, fighting and killing, one another. Experienced men of ability and character, vision and imagination, idealism, seasoned with pragmatic outlook, must be chosen and put at the helm of our educational affairs to sort out and clean the atmosphere on our campuses, so that fools do not rush in where angels fear to tread.



Boatmen of Bangladesh

Photo by Trygve Holstad

WRITE TO MITA, the regular weekly column, is held over for next week for reason of space.