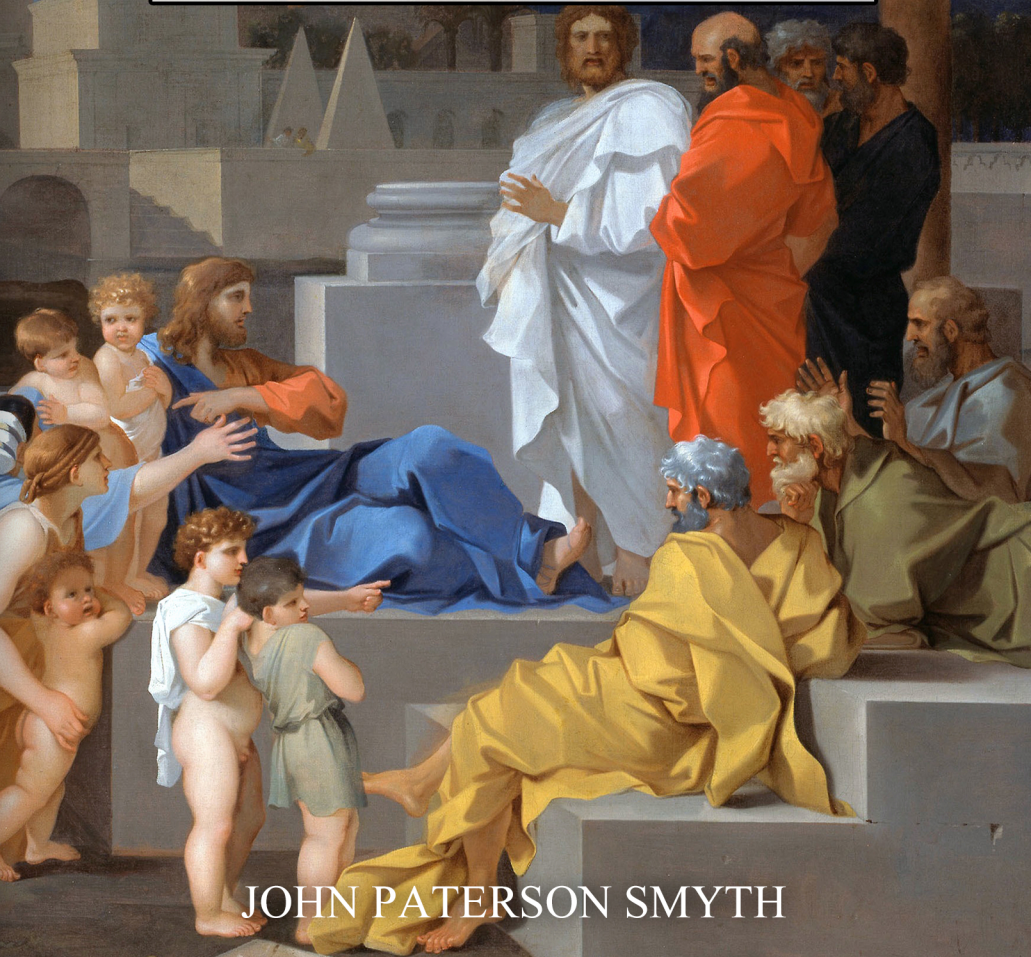


The Bible for Home and School

A BOYS AND GIRLS
**LIFE OF
CHRIST**



JOHN PATERSON SMYTH

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A Boys and Girls Life of Christ

by

JOHN PATERSON SMYTH



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From the Author

BOYS AND GIRLS,—

I am trying to tell you the most wonderful story in the whole world.

But I warn you beforehand that you have got to help me. For I want to write not a simple little story for small children, but a real full Life of Christ for thoughtful boys and girls who are willing to think and use their brains. I have a high opinion of your brains if you will only use them, and I have no intention of writing you a mere childish book. You are fit for better things than that.

I have tried to make the chapters short so as not to tire you. Sometimes I cannot do that without spoiling the story, but any longer chapters are divided into parts so that you can stop anywhere whenever you have read enough.

Now, mind, I am trusting you. I cannot tell the story as I want to without your help.

J.P.S.

The Château, Montreal.

Christmas, 1928.

THE FIRST BOOK

TELLING HOW THE LORD JESUS CAME FROM HEAVEN TO
VISIT THIS WORLD, WHICH HE HAD MADE LONG AGO.



WRITING THE GOSPEL STORY.

Stories of Wonder and Romance

ONCE upon a time (it was the year A.D. 1630) a strong, rough-looking young foreigner was working in the great shipbuilding yard in Deptford, England. Every day he worked at his bench, every night he slept in the big dormitory shed. He walked and talked and played games with his English comrades as one of themselves. Then one day, when he had thoroughly learned his business, he went home, and the others forgot him.

But later on, there came one day to the shipyard a romantic story of a great prince holding court in a foreign land, and later still of a powerful king whose name was famous in Europe. And they learned that this was that young foreigner who had come to learn shipbuilding to teach his people—that he was really a prince of royal blood in disguise, and now sat on the throne of the proudest kingdom in the world, the Emperor of All the Russias. I don't know if he ever came back to visit them again, but I feel sure that they were proud of that romantic story and that old workers in the shipyard would often in their old age boast that they had worked at the bench side by side with the disguised lord of Russia.

There are several stories like this in history of kings and princes going about amongst the people in romantic adventure disguised as ordinary men. We call them “Stories of Wonder

and Romance.” But, after all, there is not so much of wonder in them. For these disguised kings and princes, when they went home to their palaces, were still but ordinary men like ourselves, only living in palaces and wearing grand clothing. Young Peter of Russia, with his robes and palaces, was still just an ordinary man, little better than his old comrades in the shipyard.

Just once in the world’s history—only once, 1,900 years ago—there was a real, startling “Story of Wonder and Romance,” the story of an adventure that has stirred the whole world to its depths. It is the *one central wonder-story of the world*.

In a warm, sunny land beyond the sea, two weeks’ journey from England, there was a little country boy playing with his comrades on the village green, and afterwards working as a carpenter to support his mother, and afterwards murdered by wicked men because of his brave opposition to their wickedness. And then, when they buried Him in a tomb, He rose up from the dead.

And so there came the most startling discovery in all history: that this was really the Lord from Heaven in disguise—come down from beyond the stars on a visit to this earth, which He Himself had made long ago! If you want a real story of wonder and romance, you surely have it here. It is almost too wonderful for anyone to believe.

I have been asked to try to tell you that story. I refused at first, for I am so afraid of spoiling it. I don’t think anyone could tell it properly. But I will try to tell it as well as I can, trusting you to help me.

In telling of His life, I ought, of course, to begin at the beginning. But where is the beginning? If I were writing the life, say, of Prince Peter who worked in the shipyard, I should begin at his birth. That is his beginning. But that is not at all the beginning here. In the life of this village Boy (Jesus of Nazareth, He was

called), our thought must go back to the eternal World from which He came—the World where He belongs. You know that beyond this world which we see, beyond the blue sky, beyond the stars and planets, is the Real World—the World of Eternities, the World of God and of the holy angels, the World from which this and all worlds come. We cannot see that World. We cannot map out its continents and shores. No gleam of its golden cities has ever touched our eyes. But we believe that it is above us and around us always.

From that unknown World above the sky, Jesus came for the great adventure. In that great central Heaven He had always lived. From His home there in the far-back eternities, He had made this world and all the worlds that you see floating in the skies at night. So you see, you could never get back to any beginning of His life, even if you went back ages and ages before the Genesis story when “in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,” ages and ages before He appeared on earth as a little baby when “Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king.” But I have only to tell the story of His visit to earth. And since He began His life on earth as a little baby, we have to begin our story there.

II

The World from Which He Came

IT will help you to understand that story better if you think for a little while about that world from which He came. He has told us some lovely things about it. Before He came, people down here used to wonder about that unknown world above them and often they were frightened about it. When they heard the thunder rolling in the sky, and the fierce storms smashing the trees, and the wild beasts raging in the forest, they would cry to the powers above not to hurt them. And sometimes when they were not frightened—when the sun shone and the world looked beautiful—they would look out on the glory of the sunset like a golden gate of Heaven and wonder what the great God above was like. Did He ever know when they were in trouble? Did He ever care when their child died? Did He ever think about them at all? They did not know.

So they made images to pray to—ugly wooden idols and big golden images—to protect them from dangers that might come from that mysterious world. That was the kind of religion they had, not a happy religion—a religion that kept them rather frightened and uneasy.

Think of the delightful surprise when Jesus came down. “Oh, you are all wrong,” He said, “about our World above. Wait till I tell you what it really is like.” So as He talked to them day by day,

they learned very delightful things about that World that He came from.

He told them that it is a very wonderful and glorious World—a World of wonder and romance and beauty—where everyone is happy and nobody does wrong. And especially He told them what they loved best of all to hear: that it is an infinitely kindly, friendly World, that they on that side are all keenly interested in us on this side. The galleries of that World are crowded with friendly faces watching with deep interest our lives on earth, wanting to make us happy, wanting to make us good.

“You are never to be afraid of our World,” said Jesus. “You are never to be afraid of God except when you are doing wrong. For God is the kindest, tenderest friend you have. Never think of Him as cruel or unkind. When you think of Him, think of the friend who is so interested in you, who cares for you more than a father cares for his child. Whenever you pray to Him always call Him ‘Our Father.’”

One day, for instance, He was talking to some people who had been wicked and were sorry for it and afraid that God would not forgive them. So He told them a story of a boy here on earth—a bad boy who ran away from home and nearly broke his father’s heart by his wicked life in a big city far away. When all his money was spent and he was starving, he began to be sorry and to long for his old happy home, but he was afraid to go back to face his angry father. At last he ventured timidly to go back—and there on the road back he got the surprise of his life! Instead of the angry father that he expected, lo and behold! at a turning of the road he saw that dear old father hurrying to meet him with a great joy in his heart at getting back his boy from that wicked life.

And Jesus said, That is just like God when you do wrong and are sorry. That is how God feels. That is how our great World above the sky feels. There is pain in God’s heart when any of you

do wicked things, but “there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repents of doing wrong”

Another day He was sitting with children around Him and a little boy standing at His knee, and He said to the big people there: Do you know what important people these children are? That in our great World above there are angels watching over these boys and girls down here on earth—guardian angels “who always behold the face of the Father who is in Heaven.”

Was not that a wonderful thing to learn about those boys and girls—and about you boys and girls who are reading this story now? That in that wondrous World of love and light and glory they are watching over you as if you were young princes—and making delightful romantic plans for you?

I know the romantic dreams you youngsters have of exciting adventures. How in your play you dress up and imagine yourselves princes and princesses and warriors and Indian chiefs and travellers and all sorts of things—and the stupid big people tell you such things will never happen.

Don't you believe them. Jesus said that in that World above far more wonderful and exciting things are planned for you. And they will all come true one day. All the lovely adventures that you dream of are not half as exciting as the adventures that will come to you some day in that World. Some of your comrades who have died and gone there are in the midst of those wonders now. Oh, you are pretty wonderful beings, you boys and girls.

Jesus just loved to tell things like that about that kindly World—so different from what people thought—so deeply interested in this poor world down here. It is because of that deep interest, He said, that I have come down to tell you the good news about our Kingdom and the Father's love for you, and to help you to get to it yourselves by and by.



JEWISH HOUSE WITH A CHAMBER ON THE ROOF.

III

Before He Came

PEOPLE had been a long time living in this world before Jesus came. I don't know why He did not come earlier, for I know surely that this poor world always needed Him. But I know there must have been some good reason. And I know that long before they thought of Him, He had been thinking of them and planning to come to them.

You know that our Bible has two parts: the Old Testament, which belongs to the time before He came, and the New Testament, which belongs to the time after He came. And in that Old Testament before He came, we can read of things happening which were really to prepare for His coming—though the people who did those things did not know that at the time.

For instance, a long time before He came we read of a great shepherd camp in a hot Eastern land, and ignorant people who worshipped idols, and a thoughtful boy named Abram who was puzzling himself thinking about the idols and about God. The Jews had some queer stories about that boy. That one day he went into the idols' room and smashed some of them with a big club and put the club into the hands of the big idol at the back. By and by, his father came in a rage about his broken gods. "Who broke my gods?" he cried. And the boy said: "Father, look at the big idol with the club." "How could a wooden image do

that?" cried his father. "Well, father," said the boy, "if these gods cannot do anything, why should we pray to them?"

They said, too, that he used to lie in the fields puzzling to find God. When he saw the glorious sun lightening the world, he would wonder, Can this be God? When he saw the moon sailing in the midnight sky he thought, Can that be God? But the sun passed away every evening, and the moon vanished at dawn, and the boy said, No, these are not God. I must still seek for the God who made all things.

These stories are not in the Bible, so I don't know if they are true or not. But all the rest of the stories about him are in the Bible, and we believe that they are all true. Evidently the boy was thinking hard, and God put it into his mind when he grew up that he should go away from that land of idols and start a new life in a land that God would show him. So a new people grew up in that new land that we call Palestine and became a nation. They were called Hebrews or Jews. They were kept by themselves and trained to learn real religion, and God told Abram, perhaps in a dream, that through this new people one day all the families of the earth should be blessed.

Then among these Jews, God put it into the minds of prophets and holy men that some Great One was some day to come, and they wrote down strange things about Him which God had put into their minds, such as this: "He shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace, and of His government there shall be no end." And again: "Surely He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. He is wounded for our wickedness and bruised for our sins, and by His stripes we shall be healed."

I don't think the people understood what all this meant, but at any rate it set them thinking and wondering and expecting. It was preparing the world for the coming of Jesus. But for hun-

dreds of years, things went on as before. Nothing happened. God still kept silence.

At last one day, “in the fulness of the time,” God sent forth His Son! Jesus came. Born into the world as a little helpless baby! Should you ever have thought that the Lord of Heaven would come in that simple way?

IV The Angel's Message

HERE is the story of how Jesus came.

Of course I had known this story since I was a child, but somehow, because it was in the Bible, I had a queer child notion that the place where these things happened was somewhere away out of the world. But as I grew up, I knew better—that I could get into a train in my own town and then into a ship and sail away to the place where Jesus had lived long ago. All my life I had wanted to go. But I could not get away. But in beginning to write this story for you, I felt that I must go and see the place for myself and try to see in my mind the things as they happened.

So I started to sail from Canada across the ocean. I sailed past England and, after many days, came to the sunny Mediterranean Sea. (Look in the map for that.) Then, at the far end of that great sea, I saw before me the shores of Palestine and landed in Jesus' country. There I travelled about with Jesus' story always in my mind, walking where Jesus had walked long ago, seeing what Jesus had seen. And the story became very real to me until at times I felt as if I were back in those wonderful old days with Jesus and His friends.

You know that on earth He was always called Jesus of Nazareth. Well, one day I was up among the hills of Galilee in Nazareth, the village where He lived the most of His life, where He had played

as a child in the village street and worked in the carpenter's shop to support His mother; the village where His mother had lived as a girl. And there, walking in the very streets where Jesus had walked, I was thinking of what happened there 1,900 years ago.

What I saw was only a plain little town on the hillside, but the lovely memories of the places made it all—wonderful for me. The shabby little street was wonderful to me because Jesus had walked there, and the Nazareth boys on the roads set me picturing that Nazareth Boy of old walking on those self-same roads. There is a carpenter's shop there where a carpenter was making furniture and cattle yokes for the people, and near it is an old village well which has existed for ages and which must have been the very same well from which His mother drew the water for her home.

I felt as if I were back in the old Nazareth, with the carpenter's shop in the village street and a strong country carpenter working at his bench with saw and chisel and hammer, making chairs and tables and cattle yokes for the country people, with the happy thought in his heart of his coming marriage and the home that he was preparing for his young bride. His name was Joseph. Somewhere down the village before me lived the girl whom he loved—Mary, the daughter of Anne—a simple country girl working in her home, spinning and breadmaking and drawing water from the village well with the other girls in the evening.

It all seemed so real to me as I moved on to the well, that very same well, and watched the village girls filling their stone water-pots as those other girls did long ago when Mary was with them. I could imagine her there laughing and talking with the others, a girl gracious and modest, with a beautiful face to match her beautiful soul.

And I thought of Joseph the carpenter who loved her. He was older than she was, and I am sure he loved to watch her passing and to dream of their coming life together and to meet her in the

evenings after his work and tell her of his plans and hopes. I feel sure they sometimes talked of greater things too. They were not careless lovers thinking only about themselves. They were religious people who loved God. Joseph, we are told, was "a righteous man," and Mary was a thoughtful, loving-hearted girl, fit to be chosen for God's great purpose.

Surely they would sometimes talk of what many religious Jews were thinking just then—the Great Hope of Israel, the Great Someone who was some day to come. And I could imagine the girl going home down that street after these meetings to pray for her lover's life and her own, and the Great World above listening to her prayers and thinking of their wonderful secret the wonderful surprise they were preparing for her and for the world.

Of course she knew nothing about it. She never thought in her village home of the excitement above the bright blue sky, where the glorious inhabitants of that World above were preparing just then for their Lord's visit to this earth. But already some of them were preparing to come down and tell her. So the quiet days passed in Nazareth. Then—one night at her prayers—came suddenly on the girl a stirring of her whole being, a feeling of awe and wonder, and a lovely white angel stood before her with his message from the World above:

"HAIL THOU THAT ART HIGHLY FAVORED,
THE LORD IS WITH THEE."

And as she bowed there, frightened and astonished, came to her the tremendous message that the great hope of Israel, the hope of the long ages, was to be fulfilled at last.

"FEAR NOT MARY, THOU HAST FOUND FAVOR WITH GOD.
FOR BEHOLD, THOU SHALT CONCEIVE AND BRING FORTH A
SON, AND THOU SHALT CALL HIS NAME JESUS."

OF HIS KINGDOM THERE SHALL BE NO END.
WHEREFORE THAT HOLY ONE THAT SHALL BE BORN OF
THEE SHALL BE CALLED THE SON OF GOD.”

Did ever any other girl in the whole world get such a surprise as that! How could she sleep that night! How could she bear alone in her heart that exciting secret!

The angel had told her that another baby boy was coming to her cousin Elizabeth, the wife of a country priest down in the south country, the hills of Hebron, and that this boy was to prepare the way for Jesus. We shall hear a good deal about this other boy later on. So Mary, all wondering and excited, hurried away to tell Elizabeth and to talk with her about God's great plans for their boys. Then, with the great wonder in her heart, she came home to Nazareth to wait.

Two rather exciting things happened soon after. The first was her marriage day, when she became the wife of Joseph the carpenter and went to her new home beside the carpenter's shop. Joseph knew the great secret of the Angel's message and the Divine Child that was to be born of her. And scarce was she settled in her new home when one day the royal messengers went through the villages declaring the Emperor's orders that there should be what we call a Census, such as we have in our own country every ten years, to find out how many people there are in the country and to learn all about them. They were all to go back to their own towns where they were born and write down their names in the big Government book. So Joseph had to go a three days' journey to his native town, Bethlehem, the town where King David had lived in olden days. And he took Mary with him. That is how it happened that "Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the King."

How Jesus Came

AS I thought there in Nazareth about that ancient story, and how Joseph and Mary started on their journey to Bethlehem, I thought I would go to Bethlehem too, and see the very place where Jesus was born long ago. So I started from Nazareth in the early morning down the road where they had gone—100 miles of hills and valleys where great things had happened long before their day in Old Testament stories—and I arrived in Bethlehem on Christmas Day, on Jesus' birthday!

Bethlehem is far down in the south, about five miles from Jerusalem. (Look at the map.) Those last five miles as I came near to Bethlehem were very interesting to me. For I could see in my mind that day long ago, when on that very bit of road was passing a straggling procession of travellers for the Census, some on foot, some on donkeys and camels, and amongst them a young countrywoman wearily riding, with her husband beside her leading the ass. And all around were more of the interesting places where things had happened in the Old Testament stories. Joseph, of course, knew all about them. He had walked and played all around there when he was a boy. And I think he would point them out to Mary as they passed.

As I thought of Joseph pointing them out to Mary, I looked around to see them for myself. And I saw just where Joseph