

From The Pulpit

by Rev. Donald M. Clark

THE CHARACTERS OF CHRISTMAS
(The Inn Keeper, Who Had No Room)

TRAVELING IN A TRAIN, at night, we have all had the experience of viewing a kaleidoscopic series of brief scenes, as the light from the coaches reveals here a station, a water-tower, a farmhouse with a man trudging toward the barn...

Somewhat similarly, the light of history flashes briefly to illuminate characters and scenes which would otherwise remain in the limbo of the forgotten. So it was with One who lighted up into immortality a host of common-place people... Andrew and Bartimaeus, Mary and Martha, the thieves on their crosses, and the men who drove the nails.

Thus He saved for our Christmas study a certain ancient tavern and its much berated keeper. Perhaps it would be kinder to leave them unremembered; we are so prone to tell what others ought to have done under certain conditions.



REV. D. M. CLARK

As in the case of an English woman who, one day, in the presence of Thomas Carlisle, poured forth upon the contemporaries of Jesus the vials of her scorn. How different her reception of Him would have been had she been given the chance! Unfortunately she pressed the gruff old Scot for an answer, and this is what she got: "Madam, if Jesus had come to England, rebuking our sins and exposing our hypocrisies, we should have cried, "Take Him to Newgate and hang Him!"

In the spirit of that caution, let us study the man who, according to the Scriptures, found "no room in the inn" for Mary and her Boy. Frankly, we do not know anything about him, not even his name. I cannot prove that this world-famous little hostelry had a proprietor or manager, in any modern sense of the words. But somehow, in the passing radiance of the light that is dimly revealed, we seem to catch glimpses of him.

THE FIRST THING to say about him is that he was a plain tavern-keeper as we are plain business men, or teachers, or housewives. If anybody ever criticized him to his face for his inhospitality on the first Christmas Eve, I am sure we can sympathize with his reply. He was neither saint nor prophet. He was merely an inn-keeper earning his living. How could he be expected to foresee the glory of the place where a certain Babe should be born? It is natural and human to fall back on our personal limitations -- just as Moses did when God called HIM to a larger field. Just as Isaiah did when God challenged him with a great commission. Just as most of our brothers do when we face them with a great spiritual challenge. Some of the most eloquent speeches I have ever heard were made by men and women in defense of their own limitations. We are constantly telling others what we cannot be expected to do. If we were as wealthy as Rockefeller, what would we not do with our money? If we were as talented as a Grenfell, what good would we not do? Yes, we would be saints--IF. We would be glad to sponsor the young people's society--IF we had the time. We would be glad to usher at church--IF we did not have to be at church every Sunday.

We forget that God does not call us for any service for which He fails to qualify us. The wonders of His power and skill are revealed when we give Him a chance to work upon our own limitations. Peter was a born coward; John was a natural fire-eater; Zacchaeus was in a bad business. Luther was narrow, Lincoln was a raw backwoodsman; Carey was just a poor shoe-cobbler, Billy Sunday was just a ball player. What all these men did was give God a chance!

But back to the inn-keeper of Bethlehem. Honestly, I don't think he was a monster of indifference. Instead of telling each other how much better we could have done in his place,

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Presently, applications are being accepted, with no closing date for filing period yet announced, for the following positions:

ACCOUNT CLERK--Salary \$348 to start. Merit Increases to \$422. . .Minimum Qualifications--Graduation from high school or equivalent education and one year of accounts maintenance experience. One year of college or business school training may be substituted for one year of experience. Successful completion of a recognized accounts maintenance program approved by the State Board for Vocational Education may be substituted for six months of the required experience.

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suppose we ask each other how much better we do, considering how much more light we have than he had? After all, he did no worse than we constantly do when we decline to make room for Jesus. He was a hotel-keeper. His business was to make his tavern the best-known and most popular in the countryside. There were many wealthy patrons seeking shelter, and he could hardly be expected to turn aside from his care of them just to look after a poor family. Business is business, after all!

OF COURSE, THE THING he forgot was that our main business is NOT making a living, or accumulating wealth. Many will deny this, but it is so. Gladstone's business was statecraft but we remember him more tenderly by the visit he made to a poor streetsweeper who was in need. Grant was a soldier, but we remember him more for his gracious courtesy when he declined to accept Lee's sword, and for his tenderness when he entered Richmond holding a little child by the hand. Paul was a tentmaker, and a preacher, and great theologian but we remember him most by his tender shepherding of his flock.

If you are a lawyer, be a good lawyer; if you are a doctor, be a good doctor; if you are a business-man, be a good business-man. . .but carry the marks of Christ with you! Be watchful, lest, some day, in your devotion to your profession you close your door against Jesus.

I suspect that the innkeeper ran his business to make money, just as you or I run our business, or engage in our profession, to make a living. But there is a vicious circle there that should be avoided. We make money to buy food and clothes, so that tomorrow we may be able to go to town and make more money to buy more food and clothes, and so it goes on, endlessly. We do not live to make money and to buy! These things are important--indeed, they are essential--but our main business is to serve God in making ourselves helpful to others.

When all is said and done, all that we know about this incident is that Jesus was crowded out. Nothing worse and nothing better than that --He was just crowded out. And so it is today. Men do not DENY Jesus Christ. Most men respect Him. I could quote you pages of tributes to Jesus by skeptics and atheists. No, we do not deny Him--we just crowd Him out of our lives. Our interests are so many, the claims upon us are so varied and so great. One of these days we will find room for Him. . .but tomorrow never comes!

Ewing-Brown Nuptials



MR. AND MRS. HOLLIS BROWN--About to cut the first slice of the wedding cake after their November 27 marriage which took place in the home of Rev. V. C. L. Coleman. Brother-in-law of the groom, Mr. Elmore Terry served as best man--Mrs. Barbara Currie of Los Angeles, the groom's niece, was bridesmaid. Immediately following the wedding ceremony, a reception with 28 guests attending, was hosted by Mr. and Mrs. Fred Brown and Mrs. Elmore Terry at the North 'L' street home of Reverend Coleman.

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St. James Catholic Church Hosts

Senator Howard Cannon

THE PUBLIC IS INVITED to attend St. James, 'H' & Morgan streets, at 12 o'clock (noon) Sunday, December 12, when Senator Cannon will meet with the Altar Society, The Holy Name Society and the Pal organization.

- Mrs. Jaunita Smith Chr., Altar Society PAL organization.
- George Barton Chr., Holy Name Society