

Christmas Sonnets from Other Years

Helen Candland Stark

1937

Christ through a troubled world drags his cross,
Wishful that on this his birthday night
Someone gentle toward his message might
Offer him sanctuary. But in a lost
Cause his back breaks. Eyes stunned to stare
At brother's blood on brother will not see
His white hands of pity, nor will he
Whose gods are the steel nerves of electric air.

Fortunate those who by some chance of race
Or creed or accident of home, still know
The hope of cattle kneeling, and the glow
Of tranquil love, the quiet after grace.
Fortunate they whose fragrant hearths are blessed
By him who pauses weary there, for rest.

1940

Well, we know it now, the ultimate good,
Know for ourselves by tautening bowel and breath:
Refrain of Christmas song, half understood,
How it is beaten into life by death!
Stripped of its tinsel, it is all things dear:
Now it is song itself, and food and light,
Now it is safety and the anchoring year,
Sharing by day, and comfort in the night.

So we would wish you peace beside your fire,
Peace with your children, peace between you two,
Peace with your friends, and those you serve or hire,
Peace in your country — In warped hate they slew
Again the Prince of Peace, and in defeat
Flung Peace on Earth a shambles at his feet.

HELEN CANDLAND STARK, a BYU graduate, has contributed to Mormon periodicals for over fifty years from Delaware and, more recently, Salem and Provo, Utah. These sonnets are, she says, "a sampling of fifty years of assorted Christmas messages (some mailed in August of the following year) that have taken the form, not only of verse but also of letters, photographs, songs, and combinations thereof."

1944

The temple shafts are broken, and the rich
Brocade of ceremony, scattered threads.
In the dark earth the spent libation spreads.
Priestess and priest lie stolid in their niche.

But he goes to his grave still unfulfilled
Who never served before some altar stone;
And he goes unredeemed who has not known
The midnight incense and the offering spilled.

Ah then, be comforted while yet we raise
Shrines by the hearth, temples of pillared fir.
Priests let us be. Anoint our hands with myrrh.
"Jesus, our Lord, how marvelous are Thy ways,
So newly come from God, still free from sorrow,
Our treasured joy today, our hope tomorrow."