

A MANHATTAN CHRISTMAS EVE
by Vincent G. Burns

(over)

You have heard the beautiful story
Of the blessed Saviour's birth,
How a choir of heavenly glory
Sang of peace, good will on
earth--

How the shepherds and wise men
gathered
From their fields and lands
afar

To discover the lowly manger
Underneath the shining star.
Sometimes it seems only a story,
Bethlehem is so far away,
But what would you say if I told
you
It happened right here today?

Down in the East Side of the city,
Where the Jewish people live,
I was bringing the Christmas bas-
kets

Which our kindly people give
To the sick and the poor and
needy,

And I trudged through sleet and
snow

While the lights of the great
black city

One by one began to glow
And spangle the gatering darkness

Like fairy stars in the sky,
When piercing the noise of the city

In the heart of the beautiful story
 of the blessed, about a night
 on a chair of heavenly glory
 and of peace, and will on
 next --
 on the other side of the
 doorway
 from their knees and
 at
 to discover the holy way
 underneath the shining stars
 sometimes it seems only a story
 of the day in so far as
 but what would you say if I told
 you
 I had not right here to
 you
 on the east side of the story
 where the Lord is now living
 I was thinking of the Christmas tree
 here
 that our kindly people give
 of the skin and the root and
 ready
 and I think through also and
 and
 the the light of the great
 from city
 and a beam to show
 my words to the children and
 like baby stars in the sky
 and of the city

There was heard a baby's cry.

Then a moment later a chorus
Sang the sweet "O Holy Night"--
I could tell they were children's
voices

But in the deceptive light
I could see but a disordered crowd
Where alleyways leave a wall--
Some happening gripped their
attention--

Men, women, children and all.

I saw as I came somewhat nearer
A sight I shall never forget--
A few humble household belongings,
A mattress ragged and wet,
And on it a babe and its mother
There in the snow and the sleet,
In the rainy and grimy gutter
Of a fifty East Side street.

A man standing near whispered to
me:

"Thrown out for not paying rent!
Poor folks are having hard times
this year!"

I nodded a grim assent.

I knew that throughout this land
of ours

Were many cases like this--
Destitute souls who had lost
the road

To prosperity's mocking bliss.

I have heard a baby's cry

then a strong light a change

and the sweet child's light

I could tell they were of the same

voice

but in the face the light

I could see but a flicker of a crowd

there all have leave a fall--

gone down and behind their

attention--

and, woman, child great fall,

I saw as I came somewhat nearer

A light I shall never forget--

A few words to himself he murmured

A woman passed and took

of her in a babe and its mother

There in the snow and the light

In the way of my own

of a little last of the

When standing near this one to

me:

throw out for not a word

you tell me having said these

the words

I had a cry

The mother was pitifully smiling
But filled with tears were her
eyes,

Her facing this crowd was a trial,
Stabs of pain her baby's cries.

A little lad laid his overcoat
Over the poor woman's form,

A girl wrapped the baby in her
shawl

And tucked him in tight and warm.

A rough workman pushed his way
forward,

And offered the father a job--

The man was struck dumb with ex-
citement,

His reply a heart-rending sob.

I went up and laid my basket down
With goodies, fruits, and honey,

Another man passed his hat around
Till it brimmed over with money.

The kindly heart of that city crowd

Was a stirring thing to see--

Their quick response to a brother's
need

Was a miracle to me.

I will always see that mother's
tears,

The father near her kneeling--

The baby clapping its little
hands,

The children sweetly singing.

The room was dimly lit
but filled with tears were her
eyes,
The mother wept, crowd her a
tale of pain her baby's cries,
In the last night his overcoat
Over the room to his form,
A girl wrapped the baby in her
arms
And tucked him in tight and warm
A rough doorway opened the boy
forward,
and offered the father a job--
The man was struck dumb with ex-
citement,
He took a hearty meal
I went in and laid my basket down
with coffee, fruit, and honey
Another man passed the hat around
This is printed over with
The kindly heart of that city crew
was a stirring vision to see--
Their quick response to a brother's
need
I will always see that noble
tears,
The father near her, wept--
The baby clung to the little
hand,
The mother sweetly smiled.

The Christmas tale was here once
more:

The angels were singing children
The shepherds the crowd that
gathered,

The gift-givers the Wise Men.
As I wended my long way homeward
My heart was thrilled through
and through

With a strange, deep sense of
God's nearness

For I knew that this was true:

The Holy Family is these three--
Father, mother, little son:
Wherever human love is set free
There God's holy will is done.

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Wherever a little child is born,
And a mother smiles through pain:
There is the eternal Christmas morn
And the miracle wrought again.
Wherever in woe and want and need
Some soul lifts a gift of grace
To lend a hand where stricken
hearts bleed
There our God unveils His face.

used:

Crosses Eye and Bright
Smith, Akron, Ohio,
1968.

9 a.m., June 13, 1961

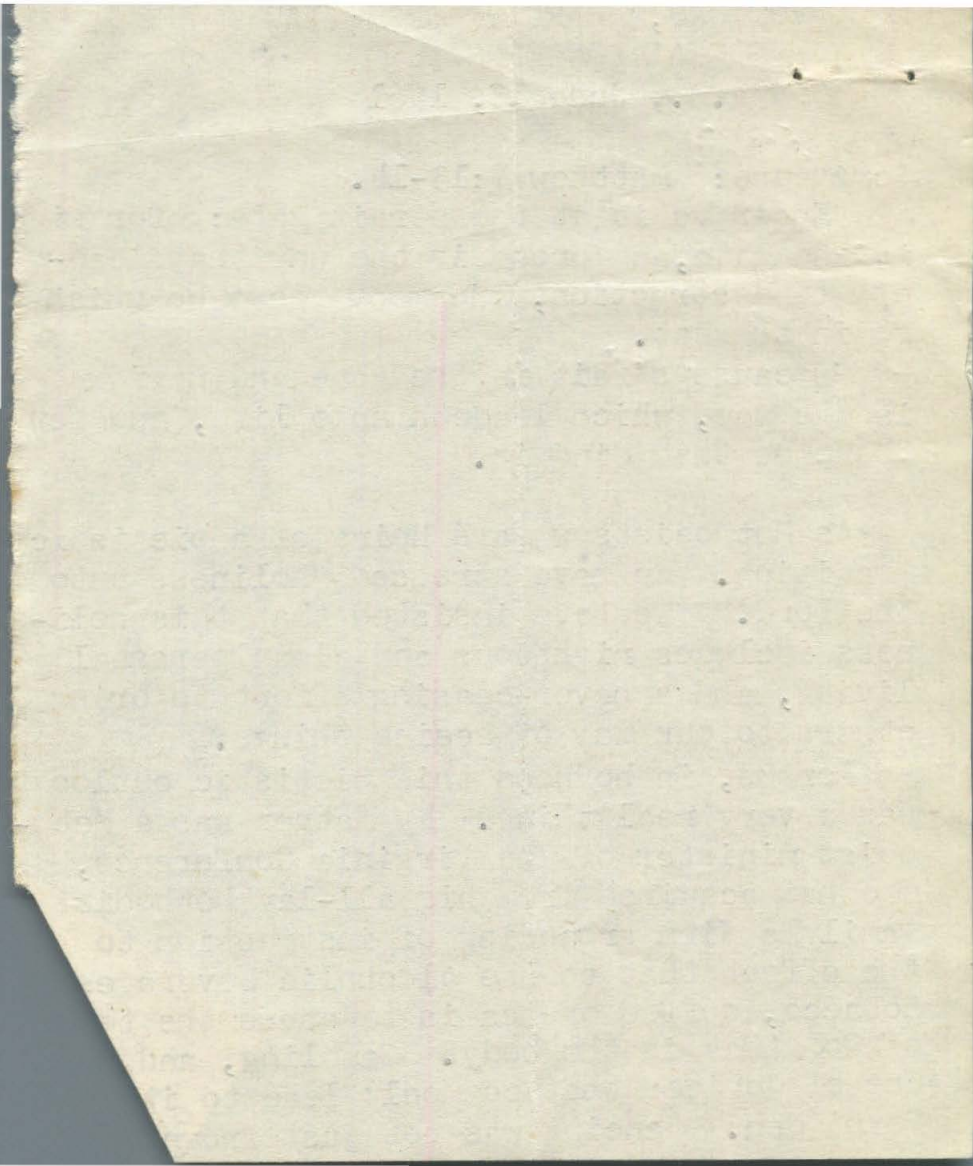
Scripture: Matthew 7:13-14.

"Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat.

"Because strait is the gate and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."

As Methodists we are heirs of a pietistic tradition. We have stressed "holiness unto the Lord." We have insisted that this holiness includes righteous and clean personal living, and a never-ceasing effort to bring others to our way of seeing things.

For me, in boyhood this pietistic outlook was a very real thing. My father was a Methodist minister of The Virginia Conference, who had acquired from his all-lay Methodist family a firm grounding of instruction to the effect that to use alcoholic beverages, tobacco, coffee or tea is to abuse the body of God that is the body. Gambling, use of devices that commonly lead to sin, were forbidden. Dancing was not just frowned

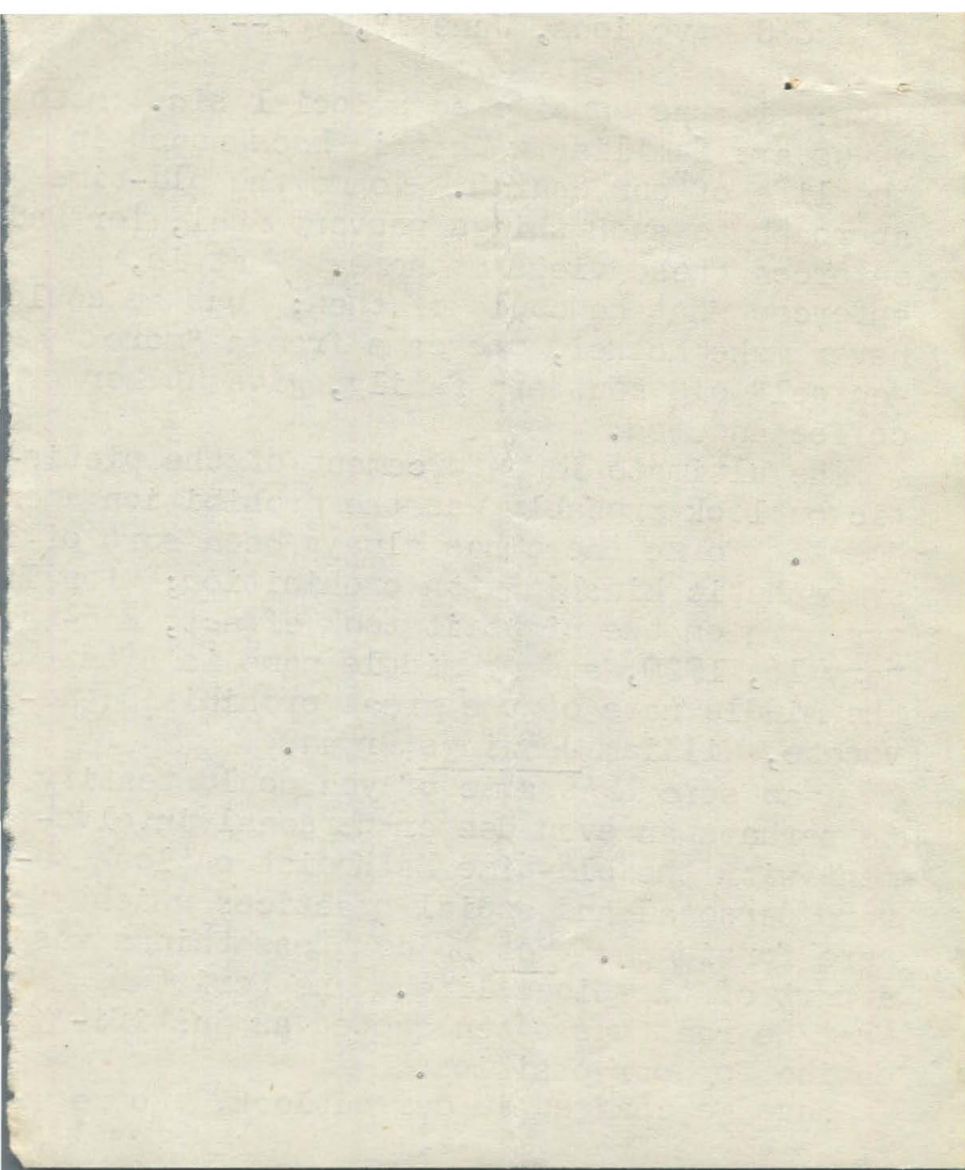


upon: it was considered a social sin. Most of us are familiar with this background in the life of our church. To me the old-time approach to such things was very real, for Dad enforced these views at home. That is, he enforced what he could of them; but he could never make Mother, who came from a "more genteel" old southern family, give up her coffee and tea.

The ultimate in enforcement of the pietistic outlook probably was the prohibition amendment. To me there has always been sort of a sympathetic kinship with prohibition; for I was born on the night it took effect, January 16, 1920, and my middle name is after the middle name of the great prohibition advocate, William Jennings Bryan.

I am sure that some of you could testify to perhaps an even deeper personal involvement with the old-time Methodist outlook toward personal and social practices which were forbidden. Not to do these things was a part of the pious life. The Scripture that we read was often quoted as justification for our position.

Have we changed in our outlook? Do we

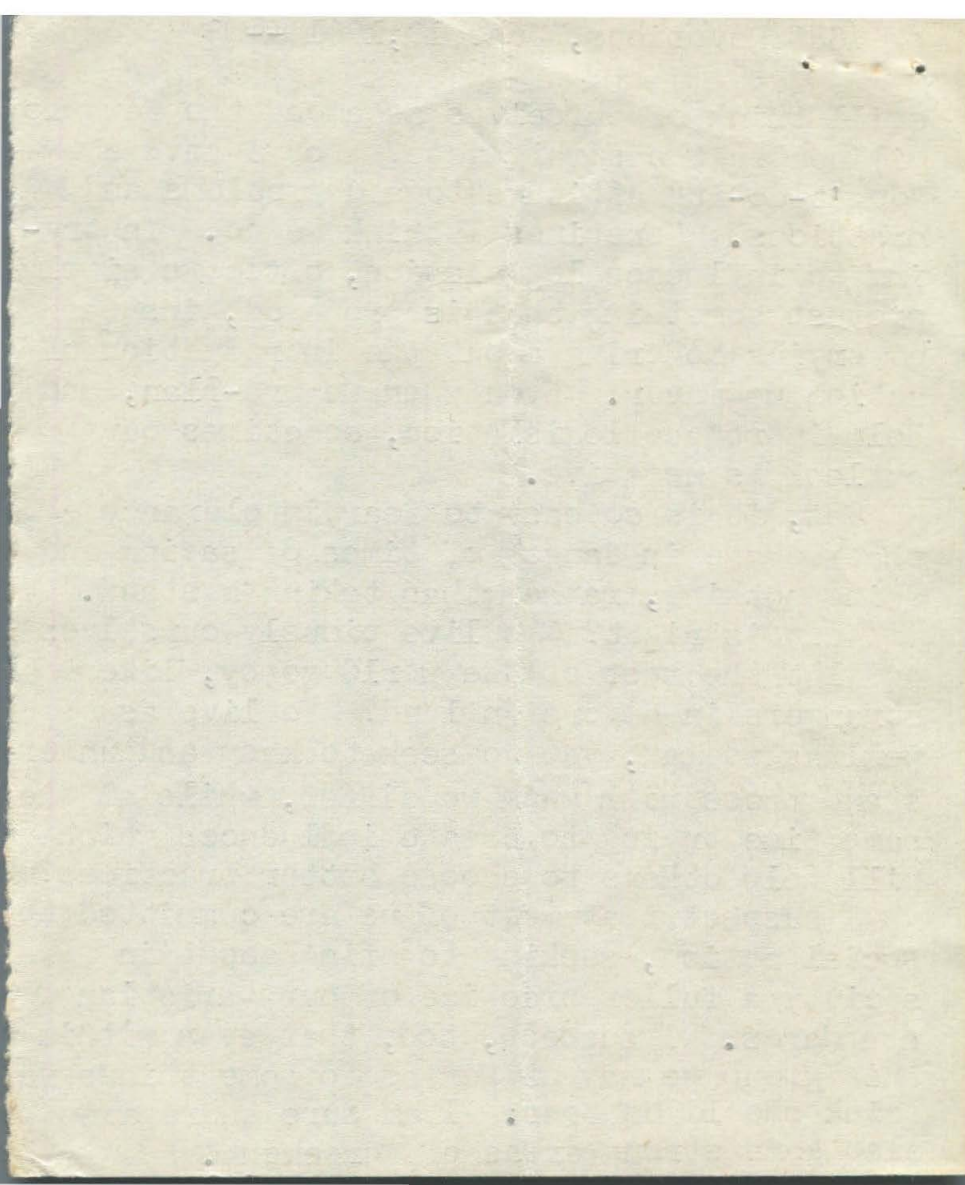


still think of ourselves as among the few who will enter the strait gate? Do we have a "don't-do-it" attitude toward problems and practices? Sometimes I think we do. In trying to influence legislation, often we simply protest something that is proposed, instead of trying to bring about the introduction of action we favor. Even when we pre-plan, and help introduce legislation, sometimes our outlook is negative.

Yet, it is so easy to fear intolerance that we are in danger of times of saying and doing nothing, rather than taking a stand.

What is right? To live piously ourselves and let the rest of the world go by, like strangers in a foreign land? To live as well as we can, yet to seek to know and understand those with whom we differ, while at the same time trying to create influences which will help others to choose better practices?

I suspect that most of us are committed to social action, seeking to bring about in society a fuller practice of our Christian standards. I suspect, too, that even within this group we may differ as to some things we think should be done. I am sure there are also some strong areas of agreement.

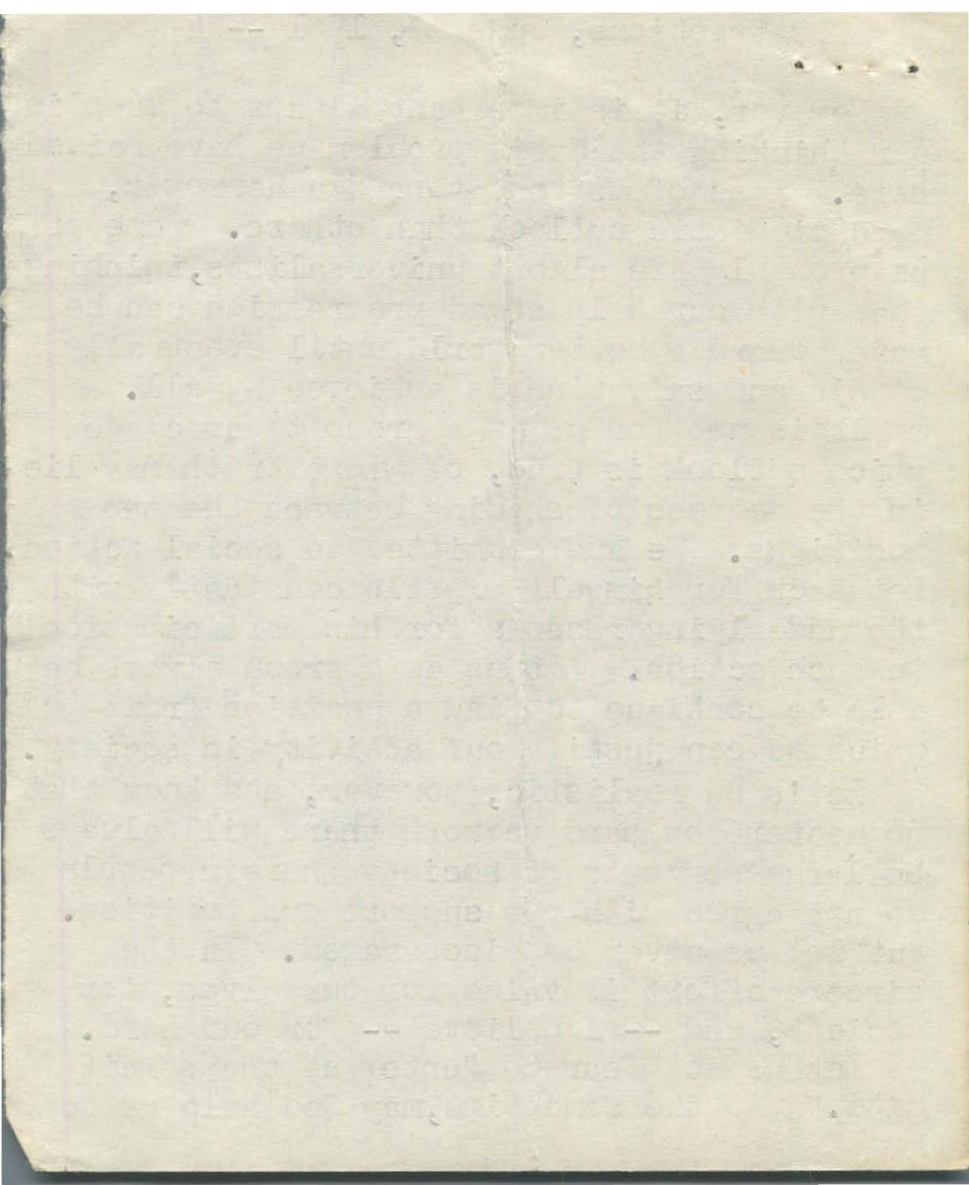


However, it is important always to keep in our thinking the basic problem we have raised here. Some of us tend toward a narrower, more pietistic outlook than others. Some of us probably are almost universalists, thinking that with our help steady progression can be made toward a better world until eventually utopia and salvation is achieved by all.

It is not for us as a group to conclude which outlook is true, or where truth may lie in the degrees of shading between the two positions. We are committed to social action. Let each for himself wrestle constantly with the underlying reasons for his participation in such action. Let us as a group always be able to continue to find a position from which we can justify our activity in society.

Let's be realistic, however, and know that no matter how hard we work there will always be large segments of society wherein people do not agree with nor support our position. But let us never be discouraged. In the sincere effort is value for ourselves, for society, and -- I believe -- for our Lord.

Let us not fear to "enter at the strait gate." At the same time, may God help us to
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love, respect and brotherhood for others who may not seem to use the entrance to his kingdom which we choose. Such love will keep us concerned and working, that others may yet choose what we believe to be the Master's way.

PRAYER: God, our Father, we thank Thee for Jesus our Master. We thank Thee that he was not a recluse, but that he was active in the life of his day. We are grateful for the social action he demmanstrated and for the teachings with which he undergirded his action. We are glad that we can still refer to many of his words and find in them a basis for our practices in this life.

Be with us now in our Board meeting. Keep before us your ultimate purposes through us, that we may arrive at decisions which are x right and which please thee.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

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The second part of the document is a paragraph of text, also very faint. It appears to be a description or a report of some event or activity.

The third part of the document is another paragraph of text, continuing the description or report.

The fourth part of the document is a list of names and dates, similar to the first part.

The fifth part of the document is a paragraph of text, possibly a conclusion or a summary.

The sixth part of the document is a list of names and dates, similar to the first and fourth parts.

The seventh part of the document is a paragraph of text, possibly a final note or a signature.