

**THE STAR OF BETHLEHEM AND THE MAGI
FROM THE EAST; A SERMON PREACHED
ON THE OCCASION OF THE BAPTISM OF
A PARSI YOUTH, AUGUST 31, 1856, WITH
SUPPLEMENTAL DOCUMENTS**

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The Star of Bethlehem and the Magi from the East; A Sermon Preached on the Occasion of the Baptism of a Parsi Youth, August 31, 1856, with Supplemental Documents by John Wilson

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JOHN WILSON

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THE STAR OF BETHLEHEM

AND

THE MAGI FROM THE EAST

A SERMON

PREACHED ON THE OCCASION OF THE BAPTISM OF A PARSII
YOUTH, AUGUST 31, 1856,

WITH SUPPLEMENTAL DOCUMENTS,

BY JOHN WILSON, D.D., F.R.S.,

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INTRODUCTION.

THIS little volume is designed at once to elucidate and to assist an important movement towards Christianity on the part of a number of educated youths in Bombay, connected with the Pársí, Muhammadan, and Hindu portions of the community. To the native students at present, or lately, attending the Government, Missionary, or Private Educational Seminaries, it is specially inscribed.

The appearance of a number of candidates for admission into the Christian Church from the Government Educational Institutions is a novelty in Bombay, though not in some other parts of India. In the fact, however, there is nothing peculiarly wonderful. The impartial study of English literature, as such, has an enlightening and salutary tendency. Some of the missionaries of the locality have, for many years, by lectures, discussions, conferences, private classes, public preaching, and the dissemination of the Bible, and other Christian publications, expository both of Christian truth and Gentile error, done much to supplement and qualify this study. In this good work, they have been aided by Christian

converts of character and intelligence. Libraries, containing useful and instructive works, have been founded in many districts of the city; and to them serious and inquisitive youth have had easy access. The desires of many members of European society for the best interests of the natives have not been unnoticed and unimproved. Considerable inquiry and research have from time to time appeared in the native community.

Of the young men who have lately attracted public notice, it is frankly admitted that they had but little direct intercourse with missionaries,—though they were in frequent communication with those who had enjoyed such intercourse,—before they declared that their convictions were in favour of the religion of the Bible. Their case is viewed as not the less interesting and encouraging on this account. The Bible is both self-explanatory and self-defensive; and its glorious truths are at work both in the world and in the Church, enlightening and impressing the world, and strengthening and enlarging the Church by accessions from the world. Both the providence and Spirit of God are on the side of His Word, and render it instrumental in effecting these results.

The actual intercourse of the students, to whom reference is here made, with the missionaries of the Free Church of Scotland, was, in the first instance, what is intimated in the following brief statement, signed by the Rev. Dr. Wilson, and the Rev. Adam White, and published on the 24th of June last:—

On the 14th June 1856, the following letter was put into the hands of "the Rev. Dr. Wilson and the Rev. Adam White," to whom it was addressed, by the parties whose names it bears:—

BOMBAY, 13th June 1856.

REVEREND SIRs,—We the undersigned, young men attending the Elphinstone Institution, take (the) liberty to express to you our sentiments relating (to) the PARSİ RELİGİON and CHRISTIANITY.

We are fully convinced, by the grace of God, that Parsism is a *false* religion; and it consists of VAGUE and EXTRAVAGANT principles. It is the INVENTION of MAN; not the REVELATION of God. We have found out, after inquiring nearly two or three years after the TRUE RELİGİON, that every comfort, joy, hope, success, and every good thing in this world, as well as in the world to come, are concentrated in the Lord Jesus. We have now the greatest pleasure to inform you, that as we are fully convinced of the TRUTH of CHRISTIANITY, we wish to be baptized, and to be admitted into the visible Church of Christ. It gives us the greatest pleasure, by the grace of God, to say that we have resolved to come out in the light, which enlightens the heart and comforts the soul. We are now in a position where SALVATION is at hand and very near to us. We have resolved to come in(to) a religion which is revealed to us by the only-begotten Son of God. Up to this time, Dear Sirs, we were so blind, that although we had eyes to see, we did not know the way of Righteousness and Truth. We are prepared, by God's help, to suffer the hardship and trials that await us for the sake of our Lord. Whatever sufferings we may have to undergo—whether the want of our daily food and clothing, or the separation from our dear relatives and friends, or shame and persecution, whatsoever,—we, trusting in God, and having him on our right hand, shall, we pray and hope, be able "to follow the Lord fully." We are much moved by the sorrows and sufferings which shall befall our parents by this public step of ours; but what can we do?

Salvation we *must* have. We leave them to God, and pray to him to support them in the midst of their afflictions, and open their eyes to know that what we have done is nothing but right. If we stay with our parents, we are sure we shall not be able to walk according to our conscience.

We therefore humbly beg of you to give us shelter in your house, and defend us from the hand of our relations. Nothing has led us to join the Christian Church but the pure hope and desire of the salvation of our souls. We know and are sure that "there is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved."—We remain, Reverend and Dear Sirs, yours obediently,

•
BEHRAMJÍ KERBASJÍ.
DARASHA RATTONJÍ.
BHUKAJÍ ARDASERJÍ.
NASSARWANJÍ BARJORJÍ.

The antecedents of the delivery of this letter, as far as the missionaries are concerned, were as follows :—BehramjÍ called upon Dr. Wilson, in the commencement of November 1855, when he stated that he was desirous of making his acquaintance, and obtaining from him some information and books of which he stood in need. He particularly mentioned, that, as he was expected to deliver an essay before a students' literary society, he felt desirous of treating of some *moral* subject, which, he was sure, would excite more attention than any scientific subject of which he could treat, as he had seen on the occasion of one of his friends delivering an essay on the "Omnipresence of God." He added, that he wished to borrow a volume of "Sermons," which might suggest some theme which might be suitable for his treatment in the essay which he intended to prepare. Dr. Wilson promised to look through his library, with a view to the selection for him of such a volume of discourses as he had indicated ; and, in the meantime, after holding with him some general and religious conversation, presented him with a copy of his own sermon to the

Pársis,* and invited him to repeat his visits to the mission-house, whenever he might find it convenient. Behrámjí returned to Dr. Wilson on the 24th November, when he said he had felt much interested in the perusal of the sermon to the Pársis, a brief outline of which he readily repeated, as an introduction to the conversation which followed. On leaving the mission-house, he received in loan the fifth volume of Saurin's Sermons, which, he said, after glancing at its contents and reading a portion of it, was exactly such a work as he had been in search of. This book, with marks of some of the more notable passages which had attracted his attention, he duly returned on a subsequent visit to Ambrolie. On the 18th March, Behrámjí attended a public lecture delivered by Dr. Wilson, on the Six Philosophical Schools of the Hindus. Owing to Dr. W.'s journey from Bombay to Mahábaleshwar and back again, this young man had no further intercourse with him till the 14th of June, the day after Dr. W.'s return to Bombay. Having procured, however, from a native friend, an introduction to the Rev. J. Murray Mitchell, he had three or four interviews with him, when he read with him a portion of Mr. Mitchell's Letters to Indian Youth, and another publication. Towards the end of May, the three other Pársi students, as well as Behrámjí, made the acquaintance, on the shores of Back Bay, of Hají Ghulám Masih, a zealous and judicious Christian convert of the Free Church Mission, who is accustomed occasionally to repair to that locality, with the view of imparting Christian instruction to such natives as may be disposed to enter into conversation with him. They had only a few meetings with him, when they expressed a wish to make the acquaintance, through him, of a missionary at Ambrolie. They were introduced by Hají to the Rev. Adam White, there residing, on or about the 29th May, when they began to attend him for conference and religious instruction, holding with him altogether eight or ten meetings for this purpose. Behrámjí, also, soon joined their circle. They had several interviews,

* Behrámjí now states, that he had long previously found access to this discourse at the house of a Pársi friend.

also, with the Rev. Hormazdjí Pestonjí, and attended several public services in the mission-house. On the 9th of June, Mr. White wrote thus respecting them to Dr. Wilson:—"There are three or four Pársís belonging to the Elphinstone Institution, who came to me lately seeking instruction, but whose minds had previously been impressed, partly by reading and partly by conversation with the converts, or at least the convinced, [who have not yet joined the Christian Church,] who are just on the point of forsaking all to follow Christ. They do not wish it to be known before they have taken the step, lest they should be put under bodily restraint. They are earnestly bent, to all appearance, on coming out from their people and seeking instruction with a view to baptism. They wish to take this step without delay. I have advised them to wait until your return, as I should not be able to speak to their friends,* from whom much disturbance is to be feared. I told them that you would be here on Wednesday." Dr. Wilson's first interview with three of the youths was on Friday the 13th of June, the day after his return to Bombay, on which occasion he renewed his acquaintance with Behrámjí. The whole of them he recommended, as, indeed, Mr. White had done before, to stay with their relatives during their further religious inquiries, if they could obtain liberty of conscience, and would be permitted to abstain from all heathen rites and ceremonies, of which before God they disapproved. They repeatedly assured the missionaries that liberty of conscience would not be accorded them among the Pársís, and besought them to give them protection, in the terms employed in the letter with which this document commences. The missionaries finally informed them that they could and would give them due protection; but that everything would depend on their own willingness to remain with them, for the enjoyment of the religious instruction of which they stood in need. They were told that the question of their baptism would be

* Mr. White, having but lately arrived in India, has not yet been able to study the Gujarátí, the language of the Pársís.