

THE STABLE DOOR

The first stars of that eastern night shown out diamond-like midst the blackness of the firmament, as the two weary travelers halted at a wayside Inn and made humble request for night shelter.

The city to which they journeyed was at last reached, but had it not been so it is doubtful whether another step could have been taken by the footsore ass or its anxious leader, who glanced continually at the pale, sweet face of his young wife, as she uncomplainingly endured the fatigue and suffering of that exceedingly trying and uneven journey. "No room in the Inn" was the gruff and impatient reply, for it was not the first refusal given that night; the little town of Bethlehem being over-crowded by strangers pouring into its quiet precincts to pay their registration dues. Whether it was a sense of compassion awakened by the patient face of the tired woman, or whether it was anxiety to ensure the small fee which the stable shelter could exact, which

PERMITTED MARY AND JOSEPH TO HOUSE WITH THE OXEN —

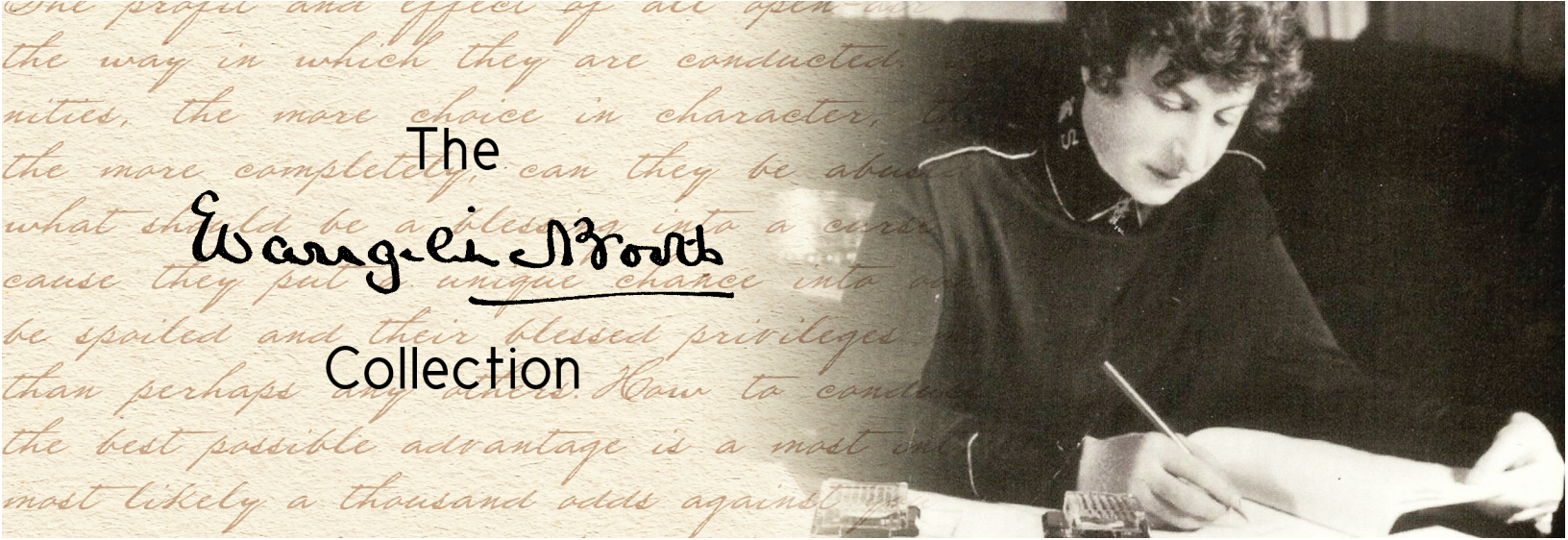
I am not prepared to say but I fancy I see her alight from the saddled ass, and with an expression of anxious wonderment enter "the stable door."

A stable contemptible in its meanness, degrading in its associations, forlorn in its appearance! By its rudeness of structure and separation from human inhabitants suggesting a significance of birthplace for one who was to become an outcast — "despised and rejected of men."

How prophetic is its rude interior! What

SYMBOLS OF MOMENTOUS AND ETERNAL
HAPPENINGS ARE ITS MISSHAPING FITTINGS!

The gnarled and noddled beams supporting the uneven roof throwing, in their distorted shadows, emblems that upon their like rugged forms was to be stretched this night's gift in the agonizing throws of the death of Jesus and the birth of a world's Redeemer. The unkempt shepherds hastening from the great flocks upon Bethlehem Hills are his first worshippers, significant of how the first place was ever given in the God-nature of Christ and the compassion of Jesus to the most lowly, the most poor and the most needy. Dare we not discover in the flinty composition all floors and walls (the stable being partially a cave cut out of a rock) the distant clatter of falling flints with which in manhood years they stone him? And was not the whole of his



first dark, inhospitable abode but a preliminary declaration of the whole life that was to follow, missioning the darker and poorer homes of sin and sorrow?

As I look upon this rough structure faint would I direct the whole world not to the star that guided the wise men from the east — not to the orchestra of angelic throng who caroled “goodwill on earth” — not to the vacant place in the Kingdom of light; but to the stable. In

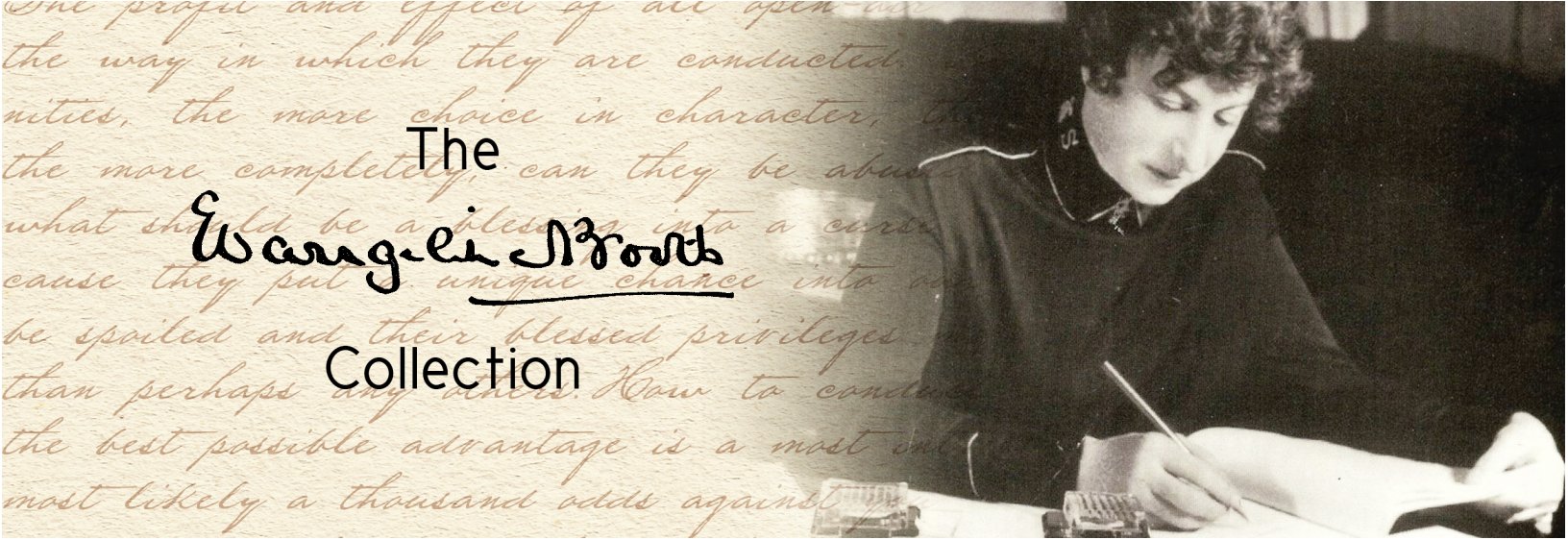
THIS DARK, UNIMPORTANT BY-WAY SHELTER

I find as hidden treasures lessons of vastest import, which it must ever repay our being at some trouble, if needs be, to discover amid, the unpretentiousness of their disguise.

First, I find from this stable scene that one can never tell what great events are in small beginnings — how that often those things which at their starting may appear the most insignificant hold issues of the greatest possibility either for good or evil. The amazed shepherds needed all the help that vision and voicings of angelic choir singing His birth could render, to enable them to believe that the tiny infant of the maiden-mother, wrapped in coarse linen, pillowed in an uncouth manger between ox and ass, was any other than an ordinary child, of ordinary parentage, born in unfortunate circumstances, to begin and conclude life in unrenowned obscurity. It would have been just as difficult to imagine that the babe, under sentence of death, taken from the bulrush cot by the daughter of Pharaoh, was destined to lead a nation from bondage and establish the law for the ages. Just as impossible a task for a people of another and later age to believe that in a small backroom of a low German saloon was born Martin Luther, the mightiest of the world's reformers, who's voice of thunder was to rock a world's foundation of unbelief, and lay low the bulwarks of a universal delusion. So it is

JUST AS IMPOSSIBLE TO KNOW WHAT LIE IN OUR COTS!

Mother, as you rock your babe to and fro, soothing it with gentle murmur, or hushing it by lullaby, in your arms of love you clasp infinite possibilities, everlasting consequences, eternities of blessings or woe. So watch your treasures as the holy mother watched her first born son. It is not of so much account whether the swaddling clothes be composed of coarse linen or fine cambric, the pillow of straw or down, but eternal importance is encased in the early aspirations and inspirations infused into infant hearts lending color and light for life long and eternal reflections. As the sun gives the violet its hue and the buttercup its gold even before it's budding, give one



half the virtuous endeavor and holy care to the cradles, nurseries and schoolrooms of our world which today is thrown out in ministerial effort for deliverance from sin and from crime in all their grown and monstrous proportions, and coming generations will show three parts of the evil of the universe thrown overboard, and the tramp of the advancing good will make the teeth of remaining iniquity to chatter. Don't wait until your child is of years before you introduce it to virtue. As soon as the natural eye can detect the shining of a star in the midnight sky, speak to it as to what is beyond. The stars will serve well to show the awakening intelligence how virtue and truth will shine all the brighter because of the black darkness of a world's sorrow and sin.

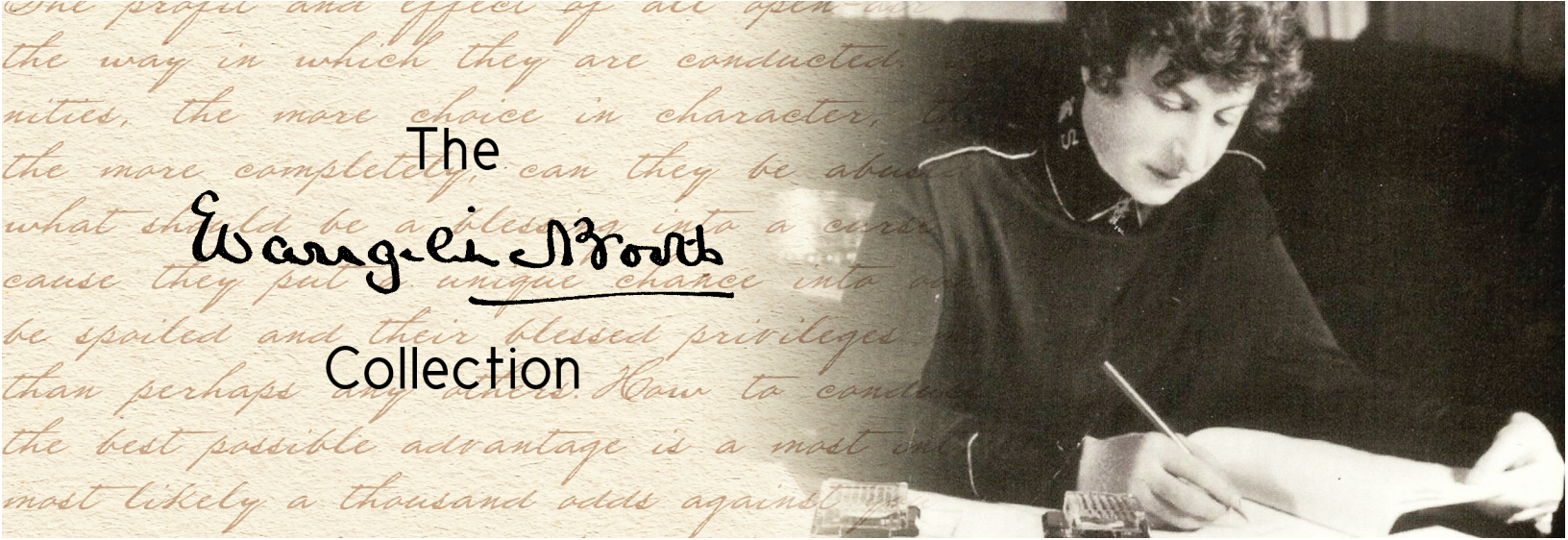
Then there are

OUR CRADLE OPPORTUNITIES

often coming to us so marked with poverty, and so closely surrounded by disadvantages, that in their natural infinitesimal proportions it is easy to treat them with indifference — lose sight of or abuse them — yes it is but the crowd of these beginnings which go to make up life, and tiny as they seem, in reality they are great infinities, characterizing the life, death and eternity of a soul surely nothing can be less than a magnitude that is an attribute to a soul's internal gain or internal loss!

If virtue, no matter how small at its out setting, or humble its birthplace, can grow so rapidly and travel so fast — then the value set up on its smallest and earliest expressions must be infinite.

Your opportunities for upholding the truth may not give you a bigger chance than that of a village street corner or of pointing a soul to heaven by a word at the kitchen back door — than of telling the children of Jesus before you kiss them all round for the night, or a prayer for God's blessing on a comrade whose burden is heavy to bear. All small, and even if well used scarcely worthy of mention, yet not smaller than the look which brought Peter too repentance, transforming the conquered to the Conqueror. Not more simple than the faltering words of the little servant lass leading to the healing of Naaman the leper. Not more insignificant to a world's bedimmed eye than that humble nurse-girl's endeavors to bless the little boy of eight who, when in his future a nation crowned him with honor and blessing, he crowned her before the nation as the instrument of his Salvation. What a returning of "the bread upon the waters" — how more than worth the waiting "how many days!" 'twas Lord Shaftesbury's nurse-girl's first chance of serving God — it



was but a cradle opportunity, but she used it so faithfully that God made her “a mother in Israel” and blessed her name among women.

Secondly, I learn from the uncouth cot which forms earth’s first resting place for our Lord and King, that unfitting and even unseemly circumstances can be made to render eternal profit to ourselves, and blessing and uplifting to others. You only want to put Jesus into them.

Could there be more ungainsayable proof that

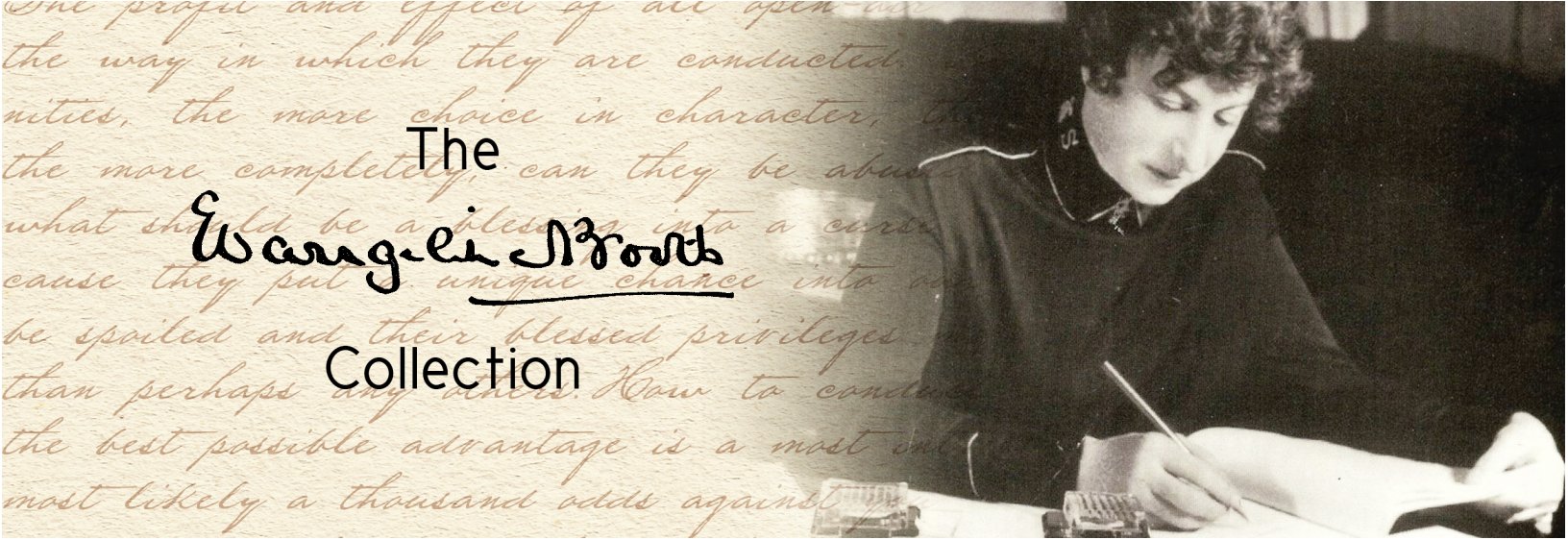
ADVERSITY HAS NO POWER TO HINDER THE PURPOSES
WHICH GOD HAS HIDDEN

in the different happenings of our lives? What potency had poverty or degradation, shame or ignominy, to detract from the future of the Christ-heart whose first breaths were drawn without the presence of a luxury and hardly the forthcoming of a necessity. all that could best have been done without was present — all that the occasion claimed was absent. The clattering of tongues without, the lowing of oxen within, the irregular and ill-sheltered walls through which the chill damp of the eastern night had no difficulty in penetrating the crackling, shifting, prickly straw, so unsuitable to be the resting place of any but the beasts of the field; the garish publicity of the unlocked door — not one inconvenience was wanting, nor discomfort lacking around the most sensitive and delicate of maiden dispositions.

That stable was but the forerunner of the crowd of adverse circumstances which thronged around His life. They pressed again upon Him in His infant days, in the hurried midnight flight into Egypt from an intent murderer — they centered in the constant privation and monotonous occupation of the carpenter’s daily toil — they fastened the continual discomfort and sorrow of homelessness upon one who had not where to lay his head — they clamored loudly after him in the starvation of the wilderness, in the grief and agony of his last days upon earth. But all these forces of evil held

NO POWER TO IMPEDE THE PROGRESS OF A WORLD’S BENEFACTOR.

The darkness, pain and sorrow of all these happenings attempting to eclipse the first rays of light divine only intensified its brightness, until its radiance was recognized by the whole world's millions as love, light and life.

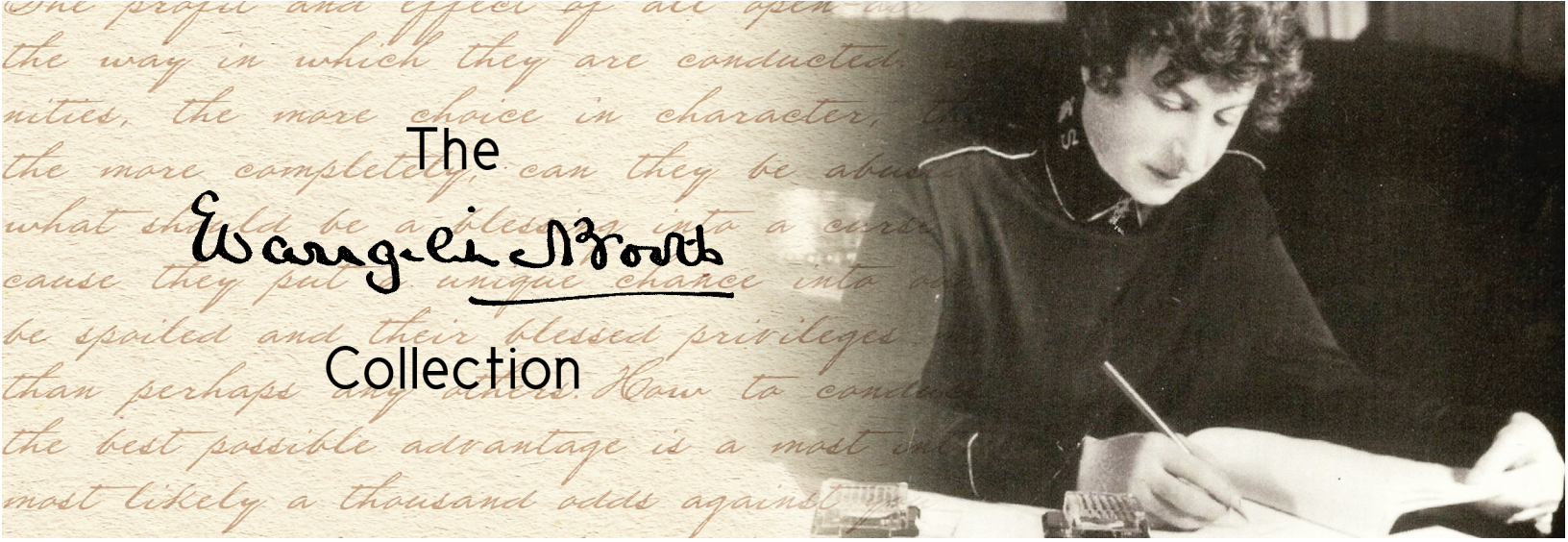


I see by this that adverse circumstances can never be blamed for an unsatisfactory state of the soul. They can only hinder insofar as you will let them do so, for God purposes that our seasons of adversity should be of eternal blessing. The grace of Jesus carried into trial makes it the school in which our most precious lessons are learned — lessons which all must master before they can attain their heavenly degree — lessons which alone can fit us to stand where Angels praise and martyrs sing. How we love to think about them — those gone on before. How patiently they endured the pain — how lovingly they treated those that hated them — how earnestly they prayed for those that murdered them — how they shone when the darkest shadow fell. Now none stand nearer the Master than this triumphant throng. Their reward glistens in crown, in robe, in song. maybe your mother is among them. It was the fire of loss of children, of husband, or of all, which purified the gold, or it was the slow, cruel process of hard daily toil and momentary cross bearing that trimmed the lamp, or the lifelong effort to do something for Jesus despite a weak crippled body that fitted the saint. It has always been so. As there are some crops only ripened through the seemingly destructive process of frost and rain, so there are many graces which can

ONLY BE BROUGHT TO MATURITY
BY THE STERN NURTURES OF HARDSHIP AND AFFLICTION,
or the fires of sorrow and persecution.

But the God of the Saints who have gone on before is your God, and will see you through all the trials and tribulations. Do not be discouraged. Look up, and press on. Then, if things should go hardly with you — if trials should come in like a flood — if the burden is heavy to carry — and the sky dark over your head, do not look for an easier path; do not say, as I have known so many, that you are not where God wants you, and seek for another to carry your cross. But remember all that the road from the Manger to Calvary brought to Jesus and to a poor, lost world, making forever circumstances, suffering, hardness and privation, death, and even the grave, but a golden staircase lifting to the highest development of character — the best experience of soul and at last to the bosom of God. Trial cannot hurt you — it can only bless you. So follow hard after Jesus, for their is laid up for the cross bearers a crown in glory.

Thirdly, I find that no words could express or mind well imagine the difference there was made in the stable by Jesus being there.



No comparison could be drawn between the manger holding the scanty allowance of food, for the over-taxed and exhausted ox, and the manger cradling its heavenly burden o'ershone by the light of a mother's first love and enhanced by a halo, telling of

GLORY FORSAKEN FOR A GREATER GLORY YET TO COME.

Might we not say that the gloomy and misshapen place of shelter held richer treasure than heaven itself contained? Had not the doer of the world of light opened to let pass out that which through an open stable door to the woe of earth passed in? Did not angelic host crowding battlements of glory and thronging shining portals find more of heaven housed within that rude cattle shed than was to be found amidst all the grandeur of the Jewish temple — that stupendous pile of pomp and magnificence — the pride of Jerusalem? Yes, I see the stable grander than the temple — its cramped space further-reaching than the corridors — its manger higher than the throne.

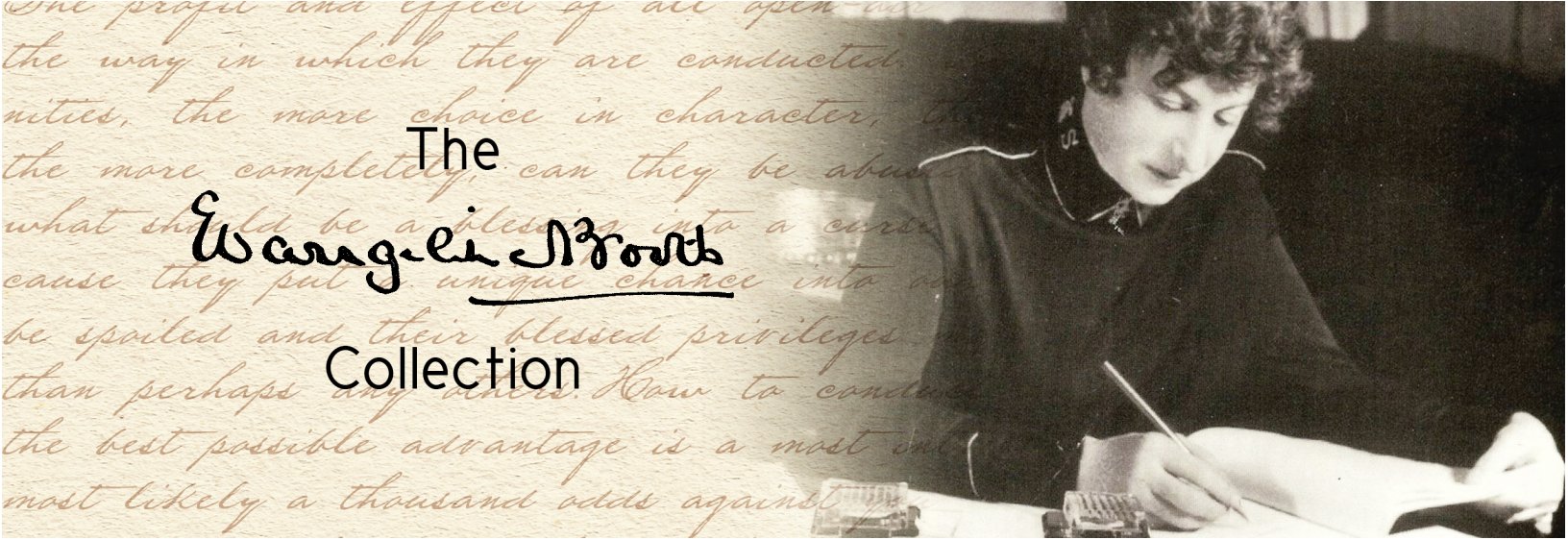
All the light come –
All the glory brought –
All the difference made – by Jesus being there!

Jesus on straw — taking out all the stiffness for saints who have no better bed to lie on. Jesus wrapped in coarse linen — making it of no matter of what poor stuff your coat is, but only of importance how rich in grace you are. Jesus in the dark — lighting a candle to brighten every shadow across the road from stable, store, carpenter's shop, fisherman's hut, window's cottage, toiling loom, and earth's saddest places, to Heaven. Jesus in a stable — making it happy and bright, and filling it with blessing for tired shepherds and seeking worshippers, so that He could come into your house and transform the gloom, and take out the cold, and light up the dark, and dry the tears, and save from wrong.

It was

JESUS MADE ALL THE DIFFERENCE!

Here is a home — I know its carpets our threadbare, and its table may be scantily spread, but it is not that which makes the trouble. The father has a bad temper; he professes to be a Christian, but is not converted; he keeps a good appearance and talks pleasantly to people with whom he transacts business at the office, but at home he is full of impatient complaint. He storms because



his slippers are lost — the meat is either cooked too much or too little — he declares the place is a Bedlam for the noise of the children. The mother always says her head aches — she means her heart does, because something goes wrong in every day. All life is a weary drag. There is competing with the neighbors — getting the children to school — soothing the sickly baby; and so with the tedious round of a purposeless life time rebounds into eternity. One night the father gets converted — his face is brighter than it has ever been seen.

THE CHILDREN ARE TOLD OF THE CHANGE,

the Bible is dusted and brought out, the mother breaks down in prayer as she says: "O Lord, forgive my sins, and save me too!" the children cry, and the father, with unusual hoarseness, pronounces the benediction, husband and wife kiss each other, children throw their arms around their parents' necks, and though there are many tears, it is "Peace on earth, goodwill towards men." Jesus has come in! Tradesman, office hands, neighbors and schoolmates all know well the difference and say, "Salvation has come to that home," throwing sunbeams from within, as from the stable — lifting first prayers as with the shepherds — offering incense and myrrh of holy living, as with the wise men. Have Jesus in your home.

Lastly, and perhaps that which the most strongly appeals to my heart as I look on this sacred hostelry of Bethlehem, is the open door — open in the darkness of an Eastern night to a weary traveler — open to the hungry gaze of crowding and eager spectators — open, awaiting the coming of worshippers from the East, the North, the South, In the West — for since that hour of heavenly carol and birth of Peace,

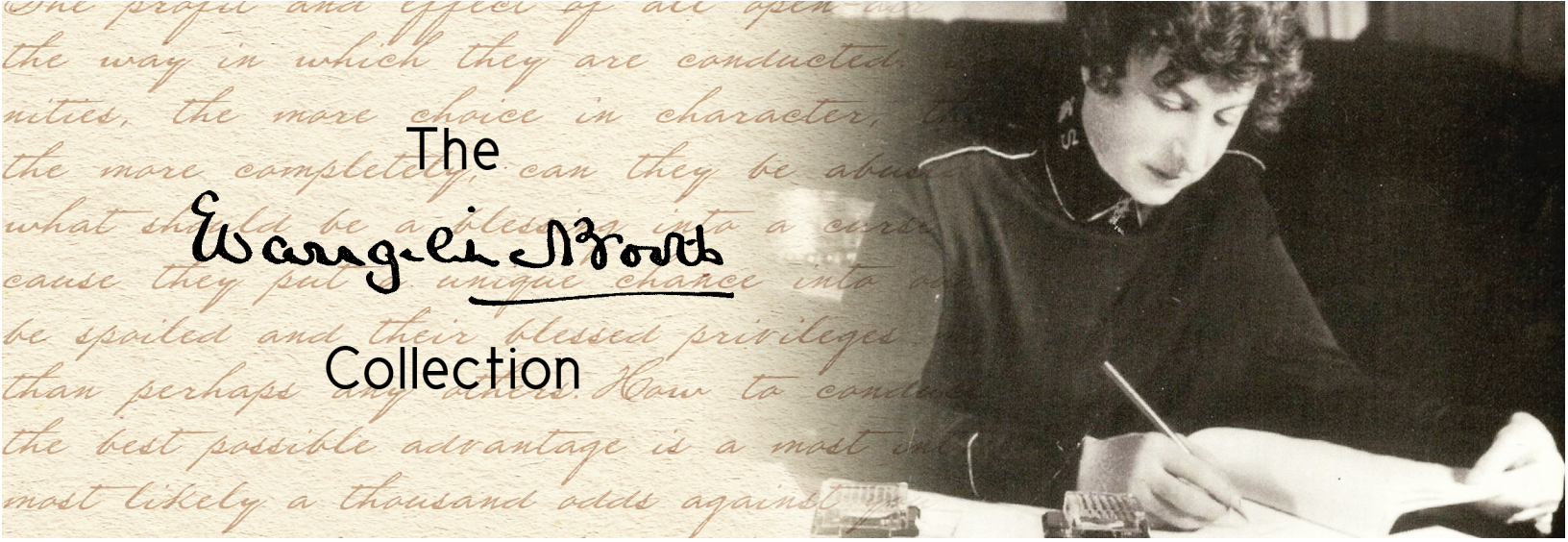
PILGRIMS FROM ALL PARTS OF THE UNIVERSE

have made their way in spirit and truth to the open "stable door."

No armed soldiers guarded the entrance — no double barred gateway protected his gentleness — no silken fringed curtain hid the countenance. It was just across an outer courtyard through a flung open door, two paces over a rude, uncarpeted floor, and one was close beside him, could kneel before, and look upon Him — could place the offering of gold or precious stone upon the infant lap. I see the coming Redeemer of the world —

EASY TO FIND — EASY TO BEHOLD — EASY TO REACH.

Pass the tidings through all the nations of the earth, an "open door" to Jesus.



I knew a gentleman who tried to get an interview with the late queen of England. the columns of this paper would not hold the names of all the magnates who had to be approached — the lengthy letters that were written, the persistent and elaborate explanation of the character of the business that was dispatched, the knots of red tape that were tied and retied, and the whole army of endeavors ending in but the gentleman being introduced to a noble nobody! But here is Jesus, the king of all kingdoms, the Prince of all nations, the Lord of all honor, and the song which first proclaimed His royal presence in the "unto you is born," carols a worldwide invitation to all who will to pass straight in — straight in. You need not wait to change your apparel — you need not be anxious as to the obeisance with which you approach Him — you need not strive to assume the attitude of any better person than the one you are, you can pass just as you are, straight in to Jesus — Jesus the Christ.

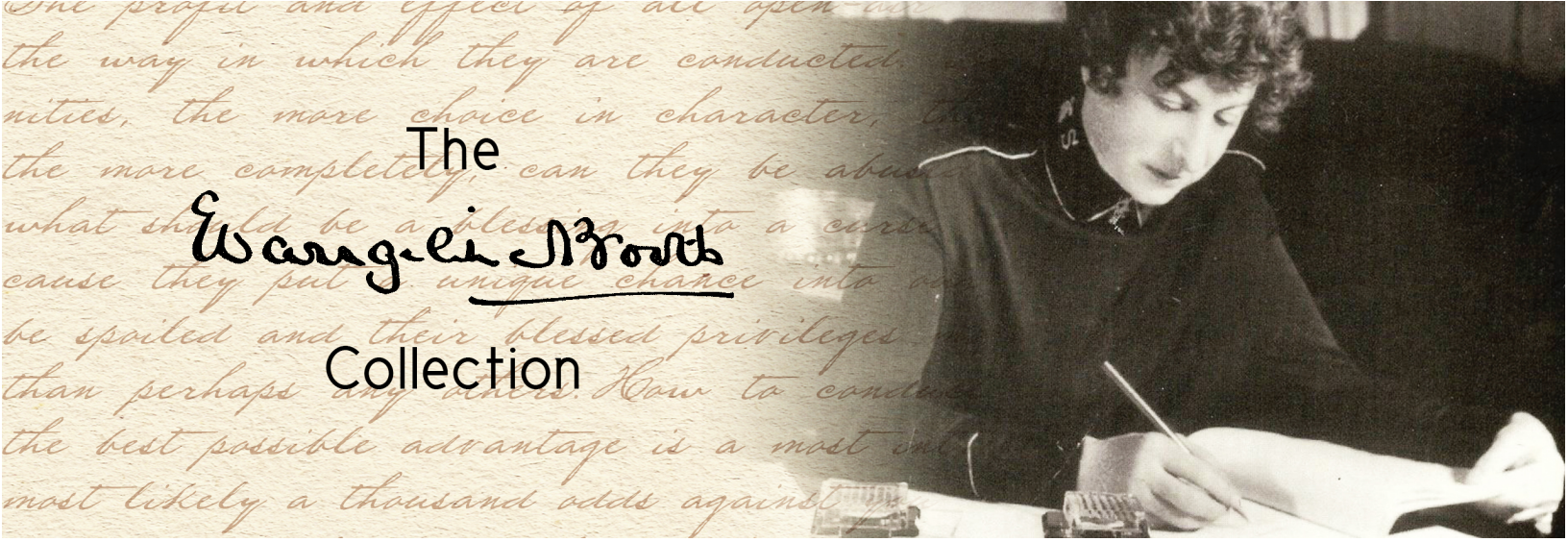
DO THE TROUBLED OF EARTH'S SORROWING PATHS KNOW

the door is open? Oh, what a dreary time the past has been carrying your bereavement all alone! God meant the taking of the breadwinner to do for you what it did to the widow of Nain — bring you in touch with Jesus. The promise made at the grave was in answer to his spirit, when you said with God's help you would make straight for the port into which the treasured loved one had gone. But love of the world and sin pressed you further from heaven, putting a bitterness into every tear dropped since that grave was opened — just the bitterness which Jesus and his Salvation would have taken out.

Now the best of your days are gone. It looks dark behind and darker before. You wish you were a Christian. You see how much better it would have been to love and to serve God! You feel so helpless. you are hedged in by evil influences, worldly associations and cruel circumstances. Yet does not this very hour, a guiding star shining in the darkness of your sky, throw its rays around an open door to Jesus?

I persuade you to

DO AT ONCE WHAT THE SHEPHERDS DID –



go straight in, tell him all the wrong of your past, all the sorrow of your heart, all the failings and defeats which crowd your experience. His love will receive you! His blood will cleanse you! His grace will be all sufficient for you!

No tears that he will not wipe — no burdens that he will not carry — no sorrows that he will not share — no weariness that he will not relieve.

Oh, blessed be God! And blessed be heaven! And how much more blessed is earth for an open door to Jesus!

Open to the blasphemer whose lips are filled with vile utterances!

OPEN TO THE BACKSLIDER,
whose feet are torn with sad wanderings! Open to the worldling whose soul is polluted with vanity! Open to the young and open to the old, open to the rich and open to the poor. None need go hungry, none need go sad, none need parish! Goodwill toward men — peace on earth and joy in heaven.

Let's every Angel sing it! Let every Bell peal it! Let the ransomed shout it! Let all the hosts of all worlds prove it!