

The Christmas Lesson

Who knows what is the longest day in the year? Who knows what is the shortest? The ancients said that on these two days, the Sun stands still and trembles in the balance, before it turns on its journey, whether to the north or south again. So, we have the word from them in the Latin language, solstice. (sol — sun; sistere — to stand) Of course, the Sun doesn't ever really stand still, but seems to, as we watch it from the earth. So, also, the sun does not move at the rate it seems to us each day across the sky. It is the earth's turning on its axis every twenty- four hours that gives the appearance of the sun's moving.

During the year, the sun's path changes in the sky. Now — north of the equator, of course — the sun is rising on the eastern horizon way down in the south, and shines in our south windows almost all day, because it sets far down south on the western horizon. Comes the winter solstice, December 21st, and first thing we know, the sun begins to climb up the sky. In the spring-time, it makes its circuit from east to west at the very top of the sky. For three months, it moves by degrees up to the north. On what day, then, would you be expecting to see it rise farthest north, bringing light even into some of our north windows all the day? Here, comes the summer solstice; the sun "stands still," and then moves on toward the south, in its risings and settings. 'When the sun rises midway of the horizon, and high in the sky, comes autumn, with its equinoctial storms. Farther down to the south, moves the sun, till it can go no farther; again we have come to December 21st, to begin the real New Year, according to Nature's clock! Then it is, the seeds beneath the earth get a message from the sun to germinate, although it will be months yet before the plants will venture forth above the soil.

Most people celebrate the New Year according to men's "clocks," or calendars, on the first day of January, but the real New Year is on December 21st, as we have seen. Two weeks after that — fourteen days — is another kind of New Year, said the great Teacher of Theosophy, H. P. B. This was the Day when the great host of Shining Monads incarnated on earth, in the beginning, she said.