

A Christmas Carol.

Everywhere, everywhere, Christmas to-night! Christmas in lands of fir tree and pine; Christmas in lands of palm tree and vine; Christmas where snow peaks stand solemn and white; Christmas where cornfields lie sunny and bright; Everywhere, everywhere, Christmas to-night!

—Phillips Brooks.

The Message of Christmas to Middle Age and Beyond.

BY THE REV. S. P. ROSE, D. D., IN THE WESTMINSTER.

To men and women whom the stream of time is rapidly bearing away from the sweet illusions and bright hopes of childhood, the return of the Christmas season may be the occasion of sober reflection rather than hilarity. Indeed, if it were not for the children whom God in His mercy has sent into their homes, it is possible that, apart from its purely religious significance, this glad festival of the Christian year might prove an unwelcome anniversary to some who must confess, however unwillingly, their first youth has past away.

To some extent this is inevitable. It is predestined that youth must daily travel westward, that the clouds of gray, which in life's morning tinged the horizon with rosy splendor, must lose much of their brilliance. The graver as well as the brighter lessons which experience teaches should affect judgment and conduct. We must not be too unwilling to study the sadder and soberer pictures which hang in memory's gallery.

But nothing is easier than to dwell too much in the past, to turn one's face too often towards the receding rather than the coming vision. The ghosts of the Christmas days that have been may impart a sense of unreality to the Christmas that now is. Memory may so possess the imagination that the dead alone shall seem living and the living alone seem dead.

Hence it may be argued that of all to whom Christmas has a message, by way of pre-eminence its message is addressed to men and women whose feet have travelled the greater part of the pilgrimage of life. For what is the chief message of the advent season? He is perhaps a bold man who attempts an answer, but with a courage which may transcend wisdom, I affirm its chief message to be that of hope.

Is it not the anniversary of a Birth we keep? And what sentiment, apart from love, so thrills the parent's heart, when a new-born babe is welcomed to the home, as hope? The father's career may be mildewed with failure, the mother's pathway may lie in the shadows, but Hope sings over the

cradle, and the hearts of the parents grow young again as they dream of the future of their unconscious offspring.

And so to a world gray with premature old age and fast sinking beneath the numbing, blighting power of despair, the Birth of Bethlehem brought a message of hope, which renewed the youth of humanity and taught men to reckon time henceforth as though there had never been a yesterday. The disciples on the way to Emmaus gave expression to the emotion which the Christ ever awakened, when they testified: "But we hoped it had been He which should have redeemed Israel."

Yes, the message of Christmas is a message of hope. It has other messages of priceless value, but they all gather their worth from this that they beget hope in the hearts of men.

Christian teaching has placed insufficient emphasis upon the ministry of hope. Faith has been eulogised, not too much, surely; charity has been praised, not enough, perhaps, and practised in a sadly indifferent measure.

But hope finds its home in the youthful heart. It cannot live in hearts that have grown cold and callous with age. It is because youth is hopeful that life's golden opportunities invite the young to embrace them.

Dr. George Matheson seems to have been compensated for the loss of the light of the body by a special gift of spiritual illumination. In his charming and invigorating work, "Studies of the Portrait of Christ," in writing of the formation of our Lord's League of Pity, he thus deals with the thought I am trying to present:

"We want to know why Jesus selected for His League of Pity men whose experience was yet to make, men who were standing only on the threshold of existence, and who had still to enter that world of which they were declared to be the light. And the answer is, because the measure of a man is not his experience but his hope. Experience is memory. Earthly memory presents, as a whole, a record of failures. No man guided by that alone will preach the gospel of moral renovation. The work of moral renovation is proportionate to the amount of hope, and in some measure to the discounting of memory.... That is why, in forming a league for the moral renovation of humanity, He drew its first disciples from the young. Nay, that is why in the centre of these disciples He placed a little child. It was a symbol of the truth that what He wanted first and foremost was hope—the power that could precede experience, the power that could survive experience, the power that could predict the advent of a new experience."

It therefore becomes any who are growing away from youth and youthful hopes to put themselves in the way of the regenerating influences of the advent season. Let them grasp the profound significance of the Master's word that membership in His kingdom is conditioned upon childlikeness, an essential characteristic of which is hopefulness. Let them worship the Babe for a little, kneeling in adoration with the wise men at the feet of the Infant Jesus, until their hearts become young again and they are saved through hope.

And never since Jesus was born was the message of hope proclaimed in clearer, more emphatic terms than by this last advent season of the nineteenth century. The Christmas morning of 1900 will smile upon a world nearer the realization of its Redeemer's hopes than ever before. It must be sadly confessed indeed that the goal of the Messiah's ambition is none too close. The most enthusiastic optimist must admit the existence of much even in Christian lands which is directly antagonistic to the spirit and doctrine of Jesus. It is evident that the light in which we walk at this hour is twilight, not the glory of noon-day. But, heaven be praised, it is morning twilight. The shadows that are about us are the lingering shadows of the darkness which preceded the rising of the Sun of Righteousness, and not the gathering gloom of the coming night. The darkness does not deepen, it is becoming less dense. "The world is gray," indeed, but it is gray "with morning light."

We shall better appreciate the fact that "The eternal step of Progress beats To that great anthem, calm and slow, Which God repeats,"

if we recall two or three signs of moral and religious progress upon which the Christmas of 1900 will look, as contrasted with the last days of 1800. The past one hundred years have given us a new Bible, not new as to contents, but new in the sense in which science has given us in the same

period of time, a new world, a new universe indeed. Timid, uneducated souls fear that the Bible of their fathers is lost. It is not lost but found. Nineteenth century scholarship has set the book free to do its divinely appointed work. The Protestant Revolution under Luther did for Holy Scripture what our Lord did for Lazarus when He raised him from the dead. It brought the book up from the grave in which ecclesiasticism had buried it. But it left the Bible as Lazarus was left, bound hand and foot by false theories of interpretation and even of purpose and history. But the much dreaded criticism has unbound the word, and never before was the apostle's prayer so truly answered, in that the glad evangel has free course that it may run and be glorified.

A saner theology brightens the horizon on which the Christmas of 1900 will smile. This is the natural, necessary outcome of a better known and better interpreted Bible. Biblical theology is the demand of intelligent modern Christian thought. We have still much to learn of God and truth, but we have at least escaped from some of the errors which held the intellect and lives of our fathers in sway. We no longer put the Most High far away from us. We recognize that all of God is everywhere, and that the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is the Father of all men, and that through His spirit He broods over the race and seeks and brings all wanderers home to His great heart of love.

The Christmas of 1900 will look upon a civilization somewhat conscious of its own defects. This is perhaps the best sign of progress that can be noted. It is consciousness of moral and spiritual bankruptcy which opens the door of the kingdom of heaven to the penitent seeker after life. So to the age which is conscious of its own sins the gospel of hope may be preached. Our optimism is not immortal, for it is not founded in ignorance. Comparative failure is confessed, but the Christmas hope thrills our hearts and we look forward to the new heaven and new earth, which shall testify to the complete victory of the Saviour of mankind.

"O backward looking son of Time! The new is old, the old is new, The cycle of a change sublime Is sweeping through."

Faith Tested.

People say, "It is easy to trust God when things are going well with us." That is quite true. But it is a great deal easier to stop trusting God, or thinking about Him, when things are going well with us and we do not seem to need Him so much as in the hours of darkness. You remember the old story about the traveler, when the sun and the wind tried which could make him take off his cloak; and the sun did it. Some of us, I dare say, have found out that the faith which gripped God when we felt we needed Him, because we had not anything else but Him, is but too apt to lose hold of Him when fleeting delights and apparent treasures come and whisper invitations in our hearts. There are diseases that are proper to the northern, dark, ice-bound regions of the earth. Yes, and there are a great many more that belong to the tropics; as there is such a thing as sunstroke, which is, perhaps, as dangerous as the cramping cold from the icebergs of the north. Some of us should understand what that Scripture means: "Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God." Prosperity, untroubled lives, lives even as the lives of those of the majority of my audience now, have their own most searching trials of faith.

But, on the other hand, if there are "ships that have gone down at sea, when heaven was all tranquility," there come also dark days and nights of wild tempest, when we have to lay to and ride out the gale with a tremendous strain on the cable. Our sorrows, our disappointments, our petty annoyances, and the great irrevocable griefs that sooner or later darken the very earth are all to be classified under this same purpose, "That the trial of your faith *** might be found unto praise and honor and glory." And so, I beseech you, open your eyes to the meaning of life, and do not suppose that you have found the last word to say about it when you say, "I am afflicted," or, "I am at ease." The affliction and the ease, like two wheels in some great machine working in opposite directions, fit with their cogs into one another, and move something beyond them in one uniform direction. And afflictions and ease co-operate to this end, that we might be partakers of His holiness.—The Rev. Alexander McLaren.

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Our Father's Will.

It does not seem to us that sorrow can be the bearer of blessing to us. Yet there is no doubt that every grief or pain brings a blessing wrapped in its dark folds. There is a marginal reading of one of the psalms which tells us that our burden is a gift—God's gift to us. Every burden that is laid upon us, however it may become ours, carries, folded up in it, a gift of God. God's gifts are always good. To refuse to accept the burden would be to reject a gift of love from our Father, and to thrust away a blessing sent for the enrichment of our life.

It is said that the first discovery of diamonds in South Africa was made by a gentleman who came upon some boys playing marbles. They were using large rough pebbles for marbles and one of these rolled to the tourist's feet. Something in the stone attracted his attention and picking it up he tested it, finding in the rough crust a diamond of great value. The stern and severe experiences which we call sorrows can call within their forbidding exterior diamonds of God's love and grace. We do not know how we are robbing ourselves when we refuse to accept the trials. Acquiescence in God's will is taking into our life the good which our Father is offering to us.

Or it may be that the will of God would take from us something which we would keep. We should always remember that God's love is the same whether He is putting new gifts into our hands or taking away those we have learned to cherish. The good things which are so dear to us for a time, and for a specific purpose. When their mission is finished God recalls them and we may be sure that there is blessing in the calling.—Dr. J. R. Miller.

What Does a Revival Mean?

It means: A deeper knowledge of God. A more perfect understanding of our relations to Him. A greater desire to do his holy will. A more intimate sense of the divine presence. A greater love for God's Word. A more thorough appreciation of its meaning. A stronger faith in its promises. More perfect submission to its teachings. A greater love for the means of grace.

A more intense desire to profit by them. Greater enjoyment in private devotions. More faith and liberty in prayer. A stronger sense of my obligations to the church. A greater willingness to do my whole duty in the church. A deeper love and closer fellowship with the church. A more perfect consecration of myself to the work of the church. A more solemn sense of my duty to the unconverted. A stronger desire for the coming of the kingdom of God. More earnest prayer for the baptism of the Holy Ghost. Greater love and zeal in the work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

A Cure for a Weak Heart.

Perhaps no minister ever experienced more deeply than Mr. Moody himself the anointing of power. Talking on this subject he once said: "I have in my mind a minister who said, 'I have heart disease, I can't preach more than once a week,' so he had a colleague to preach for him once a week and do the visiting. He had heard of the anointing with power, and he said, 'I would like to be anointed for my burial. I would like before I go hence to preach the Gospel with power.' He prayed that God would fill him with the Spirit, and I met him not long after that, and he said, 'I have preached on an average eight times a week, and I have had conversions all along.' The Spirit came on him. I don't believe that man broke down at first with hard work so much as using the machinery without oil, without lubrication. It is hard work that breaks down minister, but it is the toil of working without power. Oh, that God would anoint his people! N. C. Advocate.

Don't

Don't make any one feel self-conscious in your presence. It indicates that you are excessively self-conscious yourself. Be unconscious of yourself, and that will make people unconscious of themselves when with you. Don't expect too much from other people, but encourage other people to expect a great deal from you—and be sure that you fulfill their expectations. Don't make too much of your bodily ailments. It makes you tiresome to yourself.

Don't suppose that success comes by talent. It comes by plodding. Talent makes the best showing in early life; but the ability to plod makes the showing later on.

Don't be cynical. It indicates that you are very young or that you have never become mature.

Don't vent on one man the irritation caused by the mistake of another. Don't vent on others the irritation caused by your own mistakes. Don't vent your irritation on anybody.

Don't apply these "don'ts" to other people. Apply them to yourself, or else don't apply them at all.—W. L. Sheldon.

Revivals.

Genuine revivals are the operation of the Holy Spirit on the hearts of saints and sinners. No Holy Spirit's presence, no revival. The working presence of Holy Spirit, a genuine revival. Here, then, is the key to the lock which bars the door to a revival. Secure that key, and a great revival is assured. How can the key be secured? By devout, persistent prayer and fervent desire. The first pentecostal outpouring of the Holy Spirit was preceded by the disciples "all continuing with one accord in prayer and supplication" (see Acts 1: 13, 14). The Spirit is the same to-day. The same means that secured his mighty outpouring on the day of Pentecost will secure it to-day if used as fervently and persistently now as then. To your knees, O ye earnest souls who are pining for a genuine revival! Telescope.

Where the Devil Can Sleep.

A man dreamt he was traveling, and came to a little church, and on the cupola of that church there was a devil fast asleep. He went along further, and came to a log cabin, and it was surrounded by devils all wide awake. He asked one of them what it meant. Said the devil, "I will tell you. The fact is, that whole church is asleep and one devil can take care of all the people, but here are a man and woman who pray, and they have more power than the whole church." When God tells us to watch we must watch.—D. L. Moody.

Put a seal upon your lips, and forget what you have done. After you have been kind, after love has stolen forth into the world and done its beautiful work, go back into the shade again, and say nothing about it. Love hides even from itself.

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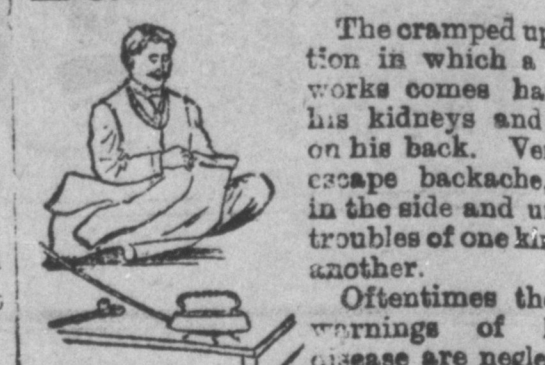
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