

Our Young People

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THE CHRISTMAS LIGHT.

"What means this glory round our feet,"

The magi mused, "more bright than morn?"

And voices chanted, clear and sweet,
"To-day the Prince of Peace is born!"

"What means this star," the shepherds said,

"That brightens through the rocky glen?"

And angels, answering, overhead,
Sang, "Peace on earth, good-will to men!"

'Tis eighteen hundred years and more
Since those sweet oracles were dumb;
We wait for him, like them of yore;
Alas! he seems so slow to come!

But it was said, in words of gold,
No time or sorrow e'er shall dim,
That little children might be told
In perfect trust to come to him.

All round our feet shall ever shine
A light like that the Wise Men saw,
If we our loving wills incline
To that sweet life which is the law.

So shall we learn to understand
The simple faith of shepherds then,
And kindly clasping hand in hand,
Sing, "Peace on earth, good-will to men!"

—James Russell Lowell.

THE CHRISTMAS SPIRIT.

The spirit of Christmas is joy and peace. There have been Christian wars, but Christianity is not warlike. Even its warfare on sin is waged in the spirit of love.

As to the joy, there is no denying it. It everywhere abounds. It expresses itself in gifts and good wishes and kindly thoughts. Not even a combination of zero weather and empty coal-bins could wholly eradicate it. Christ would remain. The beautiful things that he said and did and the new inspiration that he gave to humble life have enriched all life, and will continue to enrich it.

Where is the case of another man whose birthday is celebrated after two thousand years, with any approach to the universality and interest that characterize the Christmas festivities? That is because the Christ spirit appeals to the universal heart of man. The people

who reject him admire his spirit. Hear Rousseau, the high priest of French infidelity. "What sweetness," he exclaims, "what purity, in his manners! What affecting grace in his instructions! What elevation in his maxims! What profound wisdom in his discourses! What presence of mind, what delicacy, and what justness in his replies! What empire over his passions! Where is the man, where is the philosopher, who knows how to act, to suffer, and to die without weakness and without ostentation? . . . Yes; if the life and death of Socrates are those of a philosopher, the life and death of Jesus Christ are those of a God." And as though he would guard against any charge of comparison between the two, unfavorable to the Galilean, he adds, "What prejudices, what blindness must they have, who dare to draw a comparison between the son of Sophroniscus (Socrates) and the son of Mary! What distance is there between the one and the other!"

Think of the world into which Christ came. The old religions had become so corrupt that men were revolting against them. Froude tells us that the Romans had ceased to believe, and their higher society had become simply "powerful animals." Strabo says that the wealth of Corinth proceeded largely from the immoralities of the temple worship. Even women sold their virtue as an offering dear to a deity whose wrath they would appease. Children and all helpless classes had no friend where self-interest was not involved. There was no conception of public charity. The cities of refuge and the sanctuary of physical safety were only for those who could see, and could outrun their enemies. For the blind and halt there was no mercy, and no retreat.

Into such a world Christ came, and under his blessed example and teaching all things soon began to be new. He blessed the children, he exalted virtue, he honored womanhood, he had compassion on the weak and erring, he proclaimed a new law of life—the law of love—a law that has slowly been gaining supremacy as the ages have passed. It has been gaining supremacy slowly because of the method of extending it. It could not be extended by force. People cannot be made to love by compulsion. It must be a voluntary act, and that comes slowly. Certainly as many generations ought fairly to be allowed for man to outgrow the inheritance of "an eye for an eye," as passed while that law held sway. Even in one's own neighborhood he cannot see the changes for the better if he looks for them every morning. But if looks after a generation has passed he is sure to see some suggestions of "a new earth" and be enabled to await with increased confidence "a new heaven."

It is this "patient continuance in well-doing" that we wish especially for each of our readers, as each one's contribution to the great mission that Christ came to inaugurate. Christ's death means something just in proportion as he lives again in each human heart, prompting it to those acts of love that bring joy to the world. If he could save the world in a day, he evidently has not done it. And yet he has done it, so far as his part is concerned. He showed mankind what the saved life is like, and then put upon each the duty to work out his own salvation. This is not exclusively a Christmas command. It covers the whole year. But great inspiration for it may be gained by recalling, as vividly as

possible, this twenty-fifth of December, the brave, manly, and loving sacrifice of him who gave himself to the race.

Not only joy and peace characterize the Christmas spirit, but compassion, pity, self-denial, toil, and especially the love that converts all these states into joy. It is a simple thing to make a child happy by the gift of a toy at Christmas. It becomes a blessed act in proportion as it suggests the personal privilege of promoting universal happiness by the best use of all the powers that each possesses. Above all things, don't miss the significance of that first Christmas proclamation, "Peace on earth, good will to men."—Selected.

Prompt renewals are a great help to the publisher. Give us that help this week.

A PREVIOUS ENGAGEMENT.

BY HELEN A. WALKER.

"Well, I suppose Christmas will soon be here," sighed Miss Amos, who was flying through her forties, and to whom the years seemed swifter than a weaver's shuttle. "For me that means a dull day alone in the old house."

Miss Amos leaned back in her chair, and looked very disconsolate. Peter, the pug, vaguely feeling discomfort in the air, rose from his comfortable place on the hearth-rug and sat down close beside his mistress, so close indeed that as she rocked he swayed with the movement of her chair. Receiving no word or caress, he put his paws on her knee and looked into her eyes, with his little face full of sympathetic wrinkles.

"Yes, Peter, it's every bit as bad as that; you can't look too distressed; we are going to spend a dull, lonesome Christmas in the old house. And, what's worse, they come every six months now; when I was a child they only came once in a long time. If Charlotte hadn't moved to Colorado with her seven children, it wouldn't be so bad, because you can't help having a nice Christmas when there are children about, but—why, see here, Peter, there are plenty of children left in Newton if Charlotte and Brother Thomas have taken their family to Colorado. Doesn't the Bible say, 'The children always ye have with you?' Seems to me it does, and why shouldn't we make the day bright by inviting in some for the occasion? There, I'm glad to see your little face looking happy once more. But wait, Peter; Mrs. Pascal or some other good sister of faith, hope and charity may invite us to her house. Well, never mind if they do; we will plead a previous engagement. The idea of shutting up this helpless old house, and going off to a neighbor's, would never do in the world."

Miss Amos rose and hastily prepared to walk out. "Come, Peter." Peter, after the manner of his kind, gave a quick, sharp bark, and bounded after his mistress with great delight.

The result of that morning walk was that four little girls from the poor quarter of the town were invited to eat their Christmas dinner with Miss Amos.

"And, what is more, Zimrody," said she to the cook, "they will all be here; wild horses couldn't keep them away. We must have a good dinner and plenty of"—a knock at the door interrupted Miss Amos.

"Who is it, Zimrody?"

"A little girl to see you, ma'am."

Miss Amos stepped forward, and in the entry met Annie Teeters, one of the Christmas guests, leading another child smaller than herself.

"Well, Annie, what is it?"

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"Why, Miss Amos, it's me."

"Yes, Annie, it's you, and did you wish to speak with me?"

"Yes, ma'am. Why, here's Lovey Ransom, an' we thought maybe you'd let her come, too, 'cause her mother's sick, an' she don't hardly ever have a good time."

"Very well, Annie. I think it would be a good thing to have her come. Lovey, will you come with Annie to dinner?"

"Right now?"

"No, not to-day, but day after to-morrow, on Christmas."

Yes. Lovey thought she would come, and Miss Amos thought so, too.

The preparations for the dinner began at once. A turkey was secured—a fine one. Like the Queen of Sheba, he brought his train with him; gorgeous cranberries, a magnificent plum-pudding, a stately white mountain cake, and other more humble, but necessary attendants.

Sure enough, Mrs. Pascal came to invite Miss Amos to her house.

"It's very good of you, Mrs. Pascal, but you see I have a previous engagement and can't possibly come."

That previous engagement kept Miss Amos busy every minute until the guests arrived. They came promptly at the hour named, and little Lovey Ransom was accompanied by her twin brother.

"Oh, Miss Amos, he wouldn't stay at home, Martin Luther wouldn't."

Martin Luther received a right royal welcome, for, as Miss Amos said to herself, "it's of no use to try to excommunicate a boy with that name."

It was a delightful party, and when