

PACIFIC CHRISTIAN MESSENGER.

"GO YE, THEREFORE, TEACH ALL NATIONS."

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Christmas and its Follies.

It has come to us again, the 25th of December, chronicled, calendared, celebrated *Christmas*. The day with its superstition, its follies and vices is time honored, and that is all the honor it has. In truth the manner of Christmas celebration by the masses in our land partakes more of heathenism than of civilization, and has less of religion in it than has a Sunday in Italy. The day should not be regarded as any more holy than any other day simply for the reason that the word of God does not make it so. In brief, the Bible says nothing about Christmas. Yet, I insist that it should not be singled out and made more *holy* than other days. It is but fair to state, however, that few religions outside of the Papacy itself enact any scenes commemorative of the Saviour's birth, and that the masses think less of the Redeemer on Christmas, than during any other season of the year. The demonstrations made spring not from faith in Christ.

An Indian asked some white men why they fired so many guns and made such an uproar. "O, this is Christmas!" "Well, what is Christmas?" "Why, the day Christ was born." "Then," asked the Indian, "Who is Christ? Is he some great warrior?"

While I would join with all good men and women in deprecating the drunkenness and varied licentiousness which find vent during Christmas holiday throughout our land, and in every land that claims to recognize Jesus as the Christ, I wish to emphasize the shocking truth that these Christmas follies are confined to those countries whose inhabitants profess to believe in Christ. The Hindoo, or the Chinaman, or the North American Indian would not think of getting drunk, or of acting the simpleton on Christmas day any more than any other day. The truth is that the poor heathen whose untutored mind and benighted soul we pity, would not get drunk at all nor indulge in our Christmas follies did not those who have their Bibles and profess to be civilized introduce the evils among them.

In my travels through Egypt, Palestine, Italy and France, from the time I left the English ship at Suez till I arrived in Paris, I never saw a drunken man.

To me it is humiliating enough to know that on this day or on any other day Christ is so shamefully dishonored and that too by those who owe all they know and enjoy of civilization and refinement to the fact that the Gospel of Christ has been preached and believed among them.

The popular idea of Christmas revelry got its rise and a great deal of

its license from the mischievous traditions of the Roman Catholic church, which have made their impress through a time-honored custom, upon even those who do not believe the traditions of the Papacy. I am convinced that the popular notions of Christmas have grown out of an effort (made in early times) to commemorate an event which God never intended should be commemorated. And Christmas is a fair sample of what any commemoration or any observance of anything which God does not require in his word will come to.

The more I think of it the more I am convinced that the invention of men to commemorate the birth of Christ has been swept from our minds if we would think aright of Jesus partaking of our nature. His whole life and his humiliation unto death are in perfect harmony with his birth. Hence Christians are taught in the word of God to commemorate his death and his resurrection as the summing up of all. I have no more respect for Christmas day than for any other day, and can not have, because God has not taught that I should have, but I have too much respect for myself and for Him whose holy name I wear, to engage in the popular Christmas amusements.

The working of the mystery of iniquity from the early days of the Christian religion made (and still maintains the making of) a fair show in the flesh, a pompous display, under the pretence of celebrating Christ's birth. Untaught in the word of God, and a strange contradiction of the circumstances attending the birth and life of Christ, this which is called Christmas had a hard struggle for even a place in the Calendar, as also Lent, Easter, Epiphany and various other commemorations of Popish origin which have been copied from the Papacy by some Protestant churches.

Lent, for instance, with its Ash Wednesday and Shrove Tuesday—a season of fasting preparatory to Easter—embraced originally 36 days, to which four days were added, because it was remembered that Jesus fasted 40 days. But who would imagine that the modern Lent commemorates or has any reference to the 40 days fasting of Christ?

The time of Lent was not fixed, because Easter was uncertain as to time—and Lent was designed to immediately precede Easter. Bishops and Councils contended over the time when Easter should come. Thinking it not sufficient to have "the first day of the week" to commemorate the resurrection of Christ, they must have a grand display once a year. The contention waxed warm until Victor Bishop of Rome denounced the whole Eastern Church for opposing him in the date of the feast. Constantine, in the Council of Nice, A. D. 325, decreed that Easter should be the first Sunday after the first new moon, which comes on or after the 21st of March.

No one knows whether Epiphany, which means "the appearance," refers to the appearance of the Magi or to our Saviour's manifestation to Israel at his baptism. Epiphany was, for a long time, confounded with Christmas, and both celebrated in April or May and the figuring of Chrysostom makes it pretty clear that Jesus was born April 20th.

Pope Julius first ordered investigation and it was decided that Christ-

mas should come on Dec. 25th.

From the first the day was distinguished by religious ceremonies, cessation from business, and by merriment. During the middle ages it was celebrated by the gay, fantastic spectacle of dramatic mysteries performed by persons in grotesque masks and singular costume. The scenery usually represented an infant in a cradle surrounded by Joseph and Mary, bulls heads, cherubim and manifold ornament, enlivened by dances and by music of tambours, guitars, violins and organs.

An old English tradition has it that the oxen fell on their knees Christmas Eve, as if in the act of devotion, imitating the ox at Bethlehem, which, as was supposed, knelt in adoration with the shepherds, but after the change of date as to Christmas Eve, the ox refused to change his time of kneeling (just like an ox).

Neander thought that Christmas was appointed for Dec. 25th, to counteract the Saturnalian revelry revived in Italy by Tullus Hostilius. It may be that from the Saturnalian debauchery Christmas derived some of its drunkenness.

Having its origin in the great Apostasy the observance of Christmas came over into England, and through our English ancestors to us in the following manner. The licentious, unprincipled and murderous king Henry VIII. of England, who was the first "head of the Church of England," and who was at heart a Roman Catholic, applied to the Pope for a divorce from Catharine of Aragon, that he might marry Anne Boleyn, of whom he was enamoured. The Pope refused or delayed it. He got the divorce from Bishop Cranmer. The Pope rescinded it and excommunicated Henry VIII. Whereupon, Henry, through his parliament, passed an act abolishing the Pope's power in England and constituting himself "the head of the Church of England" (Episcopal). Becoming jealous of Anne Boleyn's attachment to the Protestant King Henry (this head of the church) had her beheaded, and the next day married Jane Seymour.

Edward VI. and his parliament did something towards improving the Church of England, but "Bloody Mary" put Bishop Cranmer to death and restored the reign of her father, and afterwards Queen Elizabeth became the first female Pope of England. It was during these bloody times that the Episcopal doctrine was made, or rather, taken from Popery, and along with it the rite of infant baptism, dedication of meeting houses, bells and graveyards, and the observance of Christmas as a religious festival.

Dr. Mosheim says of the 16th century: "The progress of morality was neglected amidst the tumult of controversy, and while every pen was drawn to maintain certain systems of doctrine, few were employed in cultivating that noblest of all sciences which has virtue, life and manners for its object."

To give an idea of Christmas in England I quote the following written by Geo. Wither in 16th century:

"So now is come our joyful feast, let every man be folly.
Each room with ivy leaves is dressed, and every post with holly.
Though some churls at our mirth repine, round your foreheads garlands twine,
Drown sorrow in a cup of wine, and let us all be merry."

Now Kings and Queens poor sheep cotes have, and mate with every body,
The honest now may play the knave, and wise men play the noddy,
Some youths will now a murmuring go, some others play at Roland bo,
And twenty other games boys mo, because they will be merry."

At that time when English clergy men delighted in the sports, kept their hounds, and had their cellars well filled with wine, they made Christmas a suitable festival for a corrupt religion. The Roman Catholic mode of observing Christmas, together with its superstitions was copied into the Episcopal ritual, where it remains to this day—all except the mass.

When I pronounce that word *Christmas*, and find in it the name of my Savior rounded with the term "mass," and think of its conventional and ecclesiastical import; when I recall that song of pure devotion from a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good will to men," and contrast it with the modern "gloria in excelsis Deo," the bounding heavenly joy in the one; the pomp, display, tinsel and mock solemnity of the other; when I think of the Redeemer's lowly cradle, and the stall where the ox did feed, the plain, honest men who were shepherds, the unassuming Mary and Joseph the carpenter, I am disgusted with any attempt to reproduce the scene. And strangely unlike any lessons which we learn from the humble Savior are the shows, decorations, and performances ecclesiastical which are meant to commemorate the birth of Christ and enacted in our cities. But chiefly the reins given to folly and immorality—the heathenish customs that have crept into civilized life under Christmas license make me wish the day had never been appointed.

It is very plain that the manner of observing Christmas is not even suggestive of, much less commemorative of the birth of Christ. Whose mind would pass in contemplation from decorated church buildings, from attempts at display of music and art to a manger in a stable at Bethlehem? Who would think of what will be done to-day all over the land and at the same time think of Christ, but for the name given to it all—*Christmas*? The lack of harmony here is striking. Would it not be better to call it all Devilmas?

Somehow people have received the impression that sin is less sinful at this season than at any other time, that there is some excuse for a person overstepping the bounds of morality and propriety during Christmas holiday. Surely such idea was never formed while contemplating the advent of Christ. To put it in the mildest form I would say that thoughts of our Savior are rather hindered than promoted during the holiday. The season is characterized by a general religious stagnation. This queer manner of hailing "the auspicious day" drives the people away from Christ.

In offering my strictures I do not demur against the people being joyful, but I would have that joy come from the consciousness of good deeds done, from thoughts of sins forgiven and the hope of heaven—such merriment as will not end in headaches and heart aches—the Christian's legitimate merriment. I do not say that gift should not be bestowed on Christ-

mas day, or on any other day. I would only (if I had the power) change the nature of the gifts and the manner of giving. I would not take the fruitless task of computing how much money might be saved and devoted to better purposes by withholding toys from children, for, as a rule, a man who is too stingy to buy his boy a whistle or a hobby-horse, would not be apt to give to the poor, or put the price of a toy into the church treasury; but what I do insist upon with a whole heart is that the church receive our first outlay. The church is more important than Christmas. Yet, to the shame of Christians, how many of them spend more money in sensual enjoyment during Christmas week, than they put into the Lord's treasury during the whole year? How many Christians lay up money to spend in a Christmas frolic, who positively make no effort during the entire year to lay up money to give to the church?

If we have more pleasure in self-indulgence in conformity to the ways of the world, than we have doing our duty and enjoying our privileges as Christians, our heart is in the wrong place, and our profession of love to Christ is a hollow pretence.

If we would have a true and lasting pleasure from our contemplation of Christ's advent we must rise above the follies of the season and go by faith even to Bethlehem. The star of hope will guide you there, and though it conduct you to a stable, hesitate not, but enter in, and behold him who, though he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor that we, through his poverty might be made rich. Ye who are rich, and who, if there be any so unrighteous, delight more especially in worldly show and external grandeur, with whom wealth is every thing and character nothing; from whose eyes poverty would hide the fires of genius, the glory of a fame untarnished and a name in heaven. Go to Bethlehem and learn, if you may yet learn, that poverty is forever rescued from contempt, that lowliness of birth and of circumstances may be connected with the highest nobility.

Ye who are poor, and whose lives are a struggle against poverty—who have not the comfort that wealth might purchase—go to Bethlehem and see him who had not where to lay his head, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. There learn that poverty is no disgrace, there learn to be content. Your Savior was poor.

With trembling wonder let us all draw near the mystery of God manifest in the flesh. This babe is the expectation of nations; that manger contains the last hope of fallen humanity. "This child is set for the rise and fall again of many in Israel and for a sign that shall be spoken against."

With him are linked the destinies of a world. He is the peaceful revolutionist, the world conquerer who subdues the heart, and founds his empire in his own blood.

His career on earth though brief, was eventful, and the story of his life simple though it be, has changed the religion, literature, sentiments and customs of untold millions of earth's best inhabitants. To-day an infant, stranger—the dew drops glitter on his lowly cradle. A few years are passed and a man of sorrows, he hangs upon the cross and is numbered with trans-

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