For the Messenger.

A Peculiar People.

Dost remember brethren, that the Lord hath said, we are a peculiar people, exalted above all the nations of the earth; dost remember too, that we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present world that the heaven promised through Christ may be ours forever.

The words rang clear and earnest from the preacher's lips that December Sabbath morning, while the icicles were slowly melting from the eaves outside. The voice went on "as God's peculiar people, let us live soberly; from a theme so rich in thought I see open wide the arches crowned with temperance banners, through which we might wander and never grow weary, but I tarry only to beseech you as Christians never to touch the luring poison, that drives peace from the family, eats out the heart and gives to the devil the soul of its victim, whose example becomes a curse, and whose destruction at last a blessing to humanity.

As one of a peculiar people, the Christian should count it a shame to take a glass of wine, and a disgrace forever to tipple with the world behind a screen at a liquor dealer's counter. Not only avoid being dragged downward by intemperate habits, but practice sobriety in all things. Be not tempted to forsake thy duties as Dom Balaguere by two great big turkeys just crammed with truffles, but with reason on its throne, judgment at the helm, walk onward in the straight and narrow way that leadeth to eternal life.

Live righteously; do right unto thy fellow man and pray ever for strength to keep thy tongue from evil, for he that "openeth wide his lips shall have destruction." Say not to your neighbor on the hill, behold the fault of my brother in the valley, when your own sins are as scarlet, nor dare to speak of the flaw you detect in the character of a brother until you can boast even one day of your own without the blemish of foolish thoughts.

As a peculiar people you do not fall into the grosser errors of cheating and lying, but take heed how great a matter "a little fire kindleth among you, when the tongue full of deadly poison, set on fire of hell," insinuates a story of a brother's folly, that grows as it passes from lip to lip accompanied by shrugs and meaning looks, till it becomes a counterpart of the childish tale of three black crows, and the victim wonders uneasily at the averted heads and cold greetings of his neighbors upon the street. Is thy brother tried and proven guilty, then cast him from among you, but when ye have made him a pagan, forget not your instincts of kindliness and treat him still as a gentleman, for are you not as vile as he when from your lips again and again is told the slanderous story.

The fruits of righteous living is peace, but there can be no peace, till that unruly member which defileth the whole body is chained and denies utterance to the heart which is deceitful and desperately wicked.

Live godly; as near like God as there is the power in frail humanity, growing nearer day by day, till the mist rises and eyes grown dim to the beauties of this world see beyond the river that men call death, to the beautiful city built upon the everlasting hills that surround the throne of God."

The preacher's eyes grew moist with tears, while his longing for a place in that heavenly city gave his voice a pathos which stirred the hearts of his hearers to renewed promises of Christian forbearance, and passing out they breathed a reverent amen to the closing words of the morning lesson still sounding in their ears; "shall we not then, my brethren, strive to live soberly, righteously and godly, our few years upon the earth, speaking evil of no man, but looking forward always to that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of our Savior through whom we are to come into that celestial inheritance which fadeth not away forever."

For the Messenger.

Yule-tide.

Old-fashioned hospitality, warmth, and good cheer are all mingled in our thoughts with the words yule-tide and yule-logs. Yule and Christmas have long conveyed to us the same meaning, yet the sound of the words affect us differently. Christmas carries us back through the dim centuries to watch with the shepherds on the plains, to hear the angel chorus, to see the star of Bethlehem, and kneel with the wise men before the blessed babe in the manger; while Yule, with all its pleasant associations, has still lingering about it a faint, impalpable suggestion that sometime in its misty history it has been mixed up with druid-rites, dark incantations, and heathen ceremonies. The word is an heir-loom from our barbarous ancestors, which tells us that they bent the knee to Baal, or the sun, and, like the ancient Persians, were fire-worshipers.

Two popular observances belonging to Christmas—popular especially in England—are derived from our pagan forefathers—the hanging of the mistletoe and the burning of Yule-logs.

Yule-tide with the old Norsemen was the winter solstice when, beside decorating the rude dwellings with green boughs, and building great bonfires, the young men with loud cries rolled a burning wheel (Yule) down hill to indicate the death of the death of the old year and celebrate the birth of the new; a wheel being with them an emblem of the year and of the sun. The year had rolled round, the longest night had passed, and the sun would soon revive the sleeping earth.

After the introduction of christianity, the heathen and christian observances became curiously blended. Long after men had forgotten the significance of the ceremony they had wheel rollings, because it was a time honored custom of their fathers; but at length the practice came to be the simple burning of a great log on Christmas Eve, which is still observed in many parts of England, though sadly shorn of its ancient "pomp and circumstance."

In the old feudal times the bringing in of this venerable log was an occasion of great rejoicing. It was drawn in triumph from the wood and placed with ringing cheers upon the wide hearth of the old baronial hall. The wayfarer who chanced to pass it as it was drawn from its resting place to its destination, took off his hat to it, for it was a promise to him of cheer that would warm both his hands and heart. The ancient bards welcomed it with their sweetest minstrelsy, and the children danced about it in unrestrained glee. After the log was half consumed the rest was carefully placed in the cellar and the charred remains used to light the next Christmas log, its presence in the house being considered a security against fire. It was an ill omen if a squinting person looked at it while it was burning, or if a bare-footed person entered the hall, or worse than all a flat-footed woman.

The Yule candle, which was a candle of monstrous size, indeed, lighted the festive board, around which gathered master and servants, retainers and wayfaring strangers. Mirth ran riot, and the children were allowed to remain up till twelve o'clock, to take part in the noisy games—racing in sacks, diving in water for apples, and kissing under the mistletoe bough, which last in those days, perhaps, was noisy, too.

In early days, in some parts of the Old Dominion and the Carolinas, the burning of the Yule-log was a gracious ceremony. At this season the yoke of bondage did not press so heavily upon the bondman. Discipline was relaxed and when the Yule-log was lighted the slave was allowed a taste of liberty; for as long as it continued to burn he was allowed "the pursuit of happiness." In a sense, he was free—free to enjoy himrelf as he chose; so to him a Yule-log meant freedom,—it was freedom but for a day, yet it was freedom.

Now we have grown quiet in our observance of this season a little more refined perhaps. We listen to the merry chimes of the bells, pluck fruit from the wonderful Christmas tree, and peep into our stockings and under our plates for pleasant surprises, but heave a sigh when we think that our stores and furnaces are fast banishing forever that dear old relic of barbarism—the blazing, crackling, hospitable Yule log.

M.

For the Messenger.

A Year in Charleston.

Isn't it queer how much we don't know, and yet never think whether we know it or not. Which brilliant remark was suggested to me by the number of things I found out while I was South. It is strange to have things so different with only twenty-four hours ride between them: one day New England villages with their white churches, green blinded houses, libraries and school houses, tidy farm-buildings between, pine and fir and hemlock woods with woodbine just turned scarlet flaming out here and there; and the next the cross-roads such as Nasby has immortalized, a store, post office, two or three houses and a Negro cabin or two instead of villages, miles and miles of country with never a house instead of the cosy farms. Perhaps you would like the great plantations, but I don't, live oak trees with Spanish moss drapery, and great fields of cotton like soft white roses; then the queer little houses with chimneys of I don't know what; logs, I should think, standing outside at one end, as if they were waiting to be invited to walk in, and the wide porches about all the better houses are strange, to strangers.

But nonsense aside these days after I left you, the things that seemed strange to me were those that I had seen at the North. So much was different I expected it all to be so. Little darkies are cunning, very; they are more picturesque than white children, and almost always seem happy. I think they have a faculty for getting the most of enjoyment that comes in reach. I'd like to tell you about the first two of the houses of the colored people I visited in Charleston. There's quite a contrast. The people are full of contrasts. When you try to think of the Negro as a race you must have a remarkably broad mind, or you will think narrowly. Your thought must cover good people and bad, well off and poor, educated and ignorant, impulsive and quiet, and a thousand more differences. My first sight at the homes is not the sharpest contrast that there is in the homes of the colored people in Charleston, by any means, but there was a clearly defined difference. The first was the home of a widow who does washing. There were neatly papered walls, a rug in the middle of the floor, a little stand with a bright-chimneyed lamp on it, a kind of side-board with shining glasses set off with two or three red and white doylies and a gilt-edged cup and saucer. A heavy wide walnut bedstead stood in one corner, not shoved away close, but diagonally, with its foot pointing straight towards the middle of the room. It had the whitest of spreads tucked in, and big square pillows with ruffled shams that shone in the lamplight. That woman must have slept in that bed, but how she could get those shams on and off and not have a wrinkle in them is more than I know. There were a few pictures and bright cards on the wall, neat curtains at the windows, a little plaster statute of a shepherd boy, I believe, and other trifles on brackets. She had another room, where was her fireplace and other washing arrangements.

The other, well the woman who lived there was a widow, too, and had two pretty bright children. She was not quite as dark as the first, and the little ones were quite white. There was a bed with just masses of rags tumbled on it for a covering, one pillow had no case, and, I think, the case of the other had never been washed, there were no sign of sheets. The water "bucket," the box of shoe-blacking, and the little girls clean (?) stockings were under the bed. An old bureau held all that it could of the clothing of the family; the rest was piled in the corner or under the bed. The room never had been lathed or plastered; it had been white-washed; I do not think it was ever cleaned. There was for a window just a hole about two feet by three, and a shaky wooden shutter to coyer it; no glass or sash or frame even. The room was just large enough so that you could walk between the wall and the bed at one side and the foot. That was all. There was no place for a fire in this room, yet it was all the woman rented. She did her cooking over the fireplace of one of her neighbors. She had "no man to pervide," she said, and so she had to provide for herself and little ones with her own two hands unassisted. The children were beginning to be old enough to help. The little girl, eight years old, was hired out taking care of a baby almost as large as she was. The boy was eleven, but was in the street all the time except when he got lodged in jail for a while. He was a bright, wide awake, handsome little fellow, quick to learn, and, as the most that had come in his way, was bad; he had learned the bad. Neither of these children can read, and the mother is not able to teach them because she can't read herself. She can not keep the boy in school, for he plays truant, and runs about the street just the same when she tells him to go to school, as when she does not. I suppose she loves her children. She works for them, and their things are better than her own, but she gets mad and cuffs their ears and swears at them for things they are not one bit to blame about. She is nothing but a child herself.

There are a great many "street children" among the lower classes of the colored people in Charleston. Bright, active, cunning little things, from the time they can toddle about till they are almost grown, they run wild unless they have some one to care about them; and there are so many who have no real care. The father dies, perhaps, then the mother must go out to work for some family, going to her work before light and coming back late in the evening; the people who employ her, of course, do not want a tribe of children tagging at her heels; they must be left to get along as they can all day; most likely they get into jail for vagrancy, and come out to do something worse than wander about, till they get caught and sent back again. You would have to bite your lips to keep back the tears if you could go to the jail there and see little bright-eyed, round cheeked tots, of four or five years old, shut in with those who have grown old in wickedness, learning evil with all their bright powers, just because they find it, not because they love it, or seek for it. If the mother of a family dies the children are usually given away. Colored people are not received in the workhouse; somebody must take them, and so they go, likely enough to some one who takes them only from necessity, and who makes just drudges of them. They are often shamefully abused and taught to steal and do other wrong things to bring money to pay the cost of keeping them. It is dreadful to think of such things, but to see them would make your heart ache. When the children are once given away it is hard to get them again. If they have been only a trouble and expense, so far, they are kept in order to get pay for it all as they grow older; and if they are already useful of course they will not be given up. There was years ago an exchange for colored children in Charleston, but it had to be given up. Last winter we could not help thinking and talking about having another. And last spring, when four little children were left on the hands of our missionary, and when fifty dollars came, without anyone asking for it, "to help make a home" for just such little ones, we thought the Lord meant for us to begin; and we did. Shouldn't you? When I say we I mean the missionary, who did the work and helped about the planning, the minister, who did the planning and helped about the work, sundry others of the teachers who planned and worked more or less, and myself, who did nothing but cry when I was particularly sorry for them, and clap my hands when their good fortune came. I'm going to keep on saying "we" though. Now it remains to be seen whether we really were doing right in beginning this thing. The silver and gold are "His," and if he wants it he will send it support. We did not mean to "run before we were sent," and I can not help thinking that the Lord does care about this, and will not leave it to fail.

I'd like to tell you about the children, how they thought it was no use to try to be neat and nice: "I never be pretty, ma," said one, "I so black, taint, no use me try for keep clean." And then, oh, if you could have seen the getting them clean and dressed for the first time. The missionary got a big tub, a big pair of shears, a big towel, and a big piece of soap. Then she carried in warm water, enough to drown the poor little darkies, if she had been so disposed. Then she selected one darky and the clothing that we had got ready for it, and disappeared into the washroom and locked the door. It took about two hours to a child, I think, and when they came out they were clean, and neatly dressed, the little girl in a clean calico, the boys in gingham waist and short panties. Their heads had been shorn of all the dust-filled dirty wool, and rubbed with some kind of stuff to kill vernin; and they looked so kind of satisfied, and civilized that we did not know whether to laugh or cry. Oh, I do hope that they can be kept. I wish I had piles of money.

But I ought not to write so much, and yet I ought to tell you how quickly and naturally they seem to take to anything like refinement. The children who came to our school were, almost without exception, clean looking and well dressed. They learn of one another. If one comes at first dirty, he doesn't keep on so, because the rest are clean. In winter dark woolen dresses and white aprons make the girls look almost as if they were in uniform, and in the warm weather the white dresses, and light fluffy muslins gave them a kind of holiday appearance. In some of the homes you would find nice pictures, curtains, carpets, a piano perhaps, books, and a kind of eager politeness, that is very pleasant. You will find graduates of our school teaching all about there, others are in business, one, if not more, in the ministry, one at Oberlin preparing to go out as a foreign missionary, and very many in homes of their own, bringing up children who shall have a better start, and so climb higher than their fathers and mothers.

There, I will stop right here. If you want to ask any questions, I shall be glad to answer them, for I shall know then that you are interested.

NELLIE CLOUDMAN.

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