

## A Christmas Eve Reverie

READERS of Charles Dickens will recall at this season, his exquisite "Christmas Carol" with its pathetic account of Tiny Tim, and the mysterious visits of the three ghosts of Christmas past, present and future, which effected such a happy transformation of character in the miser Scrooge. Such ghostly visitations are not purely fictional for I find, especially of late years, that as Christmas Eve come around, the ghost of Christmas past, knocks at memory's door for admittance. I hasten to open it. "Enter old friend, may God bless you."

"Your benignant countenance and expansive smile is as welcome now as in bygone years." I am accused of being a "laudator temporis acti." The experience of life shows that "the old order changes, yielding place to the new," and we who belong to the former must change and yield with it with good or bad grace. So we cry: 'The King is dead, long live the King!' Hail, Christmas present! Come and fill the hearts of the young with joy and gladness, and we their elders will rejoice with them. You bear the same blessed message as that of your forerunners, of a 'peace on earth, goodwill toward men.' May you imbue our hearts with the true spirit of the season. May they be filled with charity towards all; the charity which suffereth long and is kind; which envieth not, which vaunteth not itself and is not puffed up; which doeth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; which rejoiceth not in iniquity but rejoiceth in the truth; which beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things."

Do we realize what a blessing to humanity is the Christmas season? It is like a warm, vigorous, healthy breeze of loving kindness sweeping over the land, dispersing the chilling, poisonous miasmas of envy, hatred and uncharitableness. Borne upon its wings, the mercy-freighted clouds of Providence arise to descend in refreshing showers of brotherly love. For one day at least in the year swords are turned into ploughshares, and we perceive the earnest of the time foretold by the prophet. A little child shall lead us, and on this day our feet are guided by the Babe of Bethlehem into the way of peace.

Whether December 25th was the actual date of this event is an open question. Some authorities place it in the spring-time and others in the autumn. But the weight of authority remains on the side of the traditional date. Ebersheim states: "There is no adequate reason for questioning the historical accuracy of this date." The matter is not important in itself, but if December 25th be the real day, it is singularly appropriate and beautifully significant. One would fain not have it otherwise, as it then coincides with the ancient celebration by the Northmen of the winter solstice. As they rejoiced for the return of the sun to cheer the wintry earth, so Christians rejoice for the return of the Sun of Righteousness rising with healing in His wings.

I was brought up to go to church on Christmas Day. This is only meet and right, for Christmas is essentially a religious festival. Though it may have displaced it, yet it is not the saturnalia of the ancient Romans in another form. I deem the maintenance of its religious observance to be most important, otherwise it may degenerate into a saturnalia. Indications of this possibility unfortunately are not wanting. I love the Christmas service, and some of my most pleasant recollections are associated with it. How willing we were to gather the holly and greens for decorations; to weave festoons and fashion various appropriate emblems and oversee their hanging and arrangement! Though this required much time and thought, we felt well repaid, when everything was finished and the church stood arrayed in festal dress. The choir also, diligently practicing, would enliven the time for those working at the rear of the church with carol, anthem and hymn. Then, when the morning came, a goodly congregation assembled for the "Christmass," to worship and adore the original Christmas Giver and His Unspeakable Gift. After which they departed to their homes, carrying with them to augment the joys of the day, the blessing and peace of God, which passeth all understanding. Surely something must be missed, unless Christmas is thus hallowed, because it is meaningless if it be not a holy day and kept as such.

Many years have passed since I made one of a band of waifs, in a village where I formerly lived. How pleasant it was to tramp through the snow in the crisp, frosty air, to serenade our friends and receive at each stopping place a warm Christmas greeting and welcome. But when I recall these times a feeling of sadness comes over me as I think how many of those whose joyful voices broke on the stillness of the night are now silent forever on earth. While a shadow is thus cast over the former merry party, how much darker would it be were it not for the light of the Star of Bethlehem. Yes, Christmas night brings peace to all those who are any ways afflicted or distressed, in mind, body, or estate. To them, as to the shepherds of old, for comfort and for hope, is given the sign of the Babe, who is the earnest of a new and a more abundant life, the bringer of sweetness and light. In the babe all things are become new. He is the fulfillment of the past and the golden promise of the future. His very helplessness endows him with the peculiar property of capturing the affections and enlisting the services of men. He persuasively appeals to the whole of humanity. All sorts and conditions of men respond to the cry of the babe. He lays hold of their hearts, exercising a purifying and elevating influence over them. It is a babe who causes the mother and father love to spring up and blossom as the rose. And none, no matter how rough and ignorant, but such love refines, making them less brutish and sottish and raising them to a higher level. The force which thus the babe exerts is manifestly not physical neither is it intellectual. It can only be spiritual, coming down from that God who is love, light and life. Let us accept the sign with thankfulness and in faith that there shall be "no gloom to her that was in anguish. For unto us a child is born and unto us a son is given."

"O holy Child of Bethlehem!

Descend on us, we pray,

Cast out our sin and enter in,

Be born in us today.

We hear the Christmas angels!

The great glad tidings tell

O, come to us, abide with us,

Our Lord Emmanuel!"

One! Two! Three! Four! Five! Six! Seven! Eight! Nine!  
Ten! Eleven! Twelve! Midnight! A happy and a merry Christmas to all!  
God bless us every one!



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