

CHRISTMAS—THE CHILD'S DAY

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MONG the days of the year, none is dearer to the heart of the child than Christmas day. None brings more genuine joy; none strews life's journey with more delightful memories. No day, briefly, is more patently the child's day than is Christmas day. Parents go to much bother to make this day a memorable one for the child. There is the story of the open-hearted Santa and his rain of gifts on good boys and girls. The exact location of the Christmas tree, kept strictly from the child, is decided upon so that its fragile beauty might be shown at its best. Nature makes of Christmas an unusually pretty sight, ermining all the trees and hedges. The toys, games and books, especially Grimm's tales are an all important feature of every child's Christmas. On Christmas morning, every parlor takes on the aura of fairyland. Every memory is centered round the tinsel, ornamented tree with its overflow of gifts at its snowy base. Atop the tree gleams the star, significant of the light which led the Magi to the stable of Bethlehem. In the flood of presents and the hearty exchange of greetings, the whimper of the Babe, the Founder of the feast, goes unheard in many a parlor.

But if the tree is intended to thrill the heart of the child, how much more do his presents excite him. Not only are the books, with their stories of heroes and their masterful pictures, a source of enchantment, but more so are the toys and games. The shining sleigh, the trim bicycle, the glittering train, all make the child giddy with pleasure. And these little things cheer not only the child. Often the grown-ups take more pleasure from them on Christmas day than does the child. Christmas is a day of memories, and on that day the grown-ups have the privilege of becoming children once again. Memories and changes of this kind are offered rarely enough in this world of realism. If Christmas can supply them, then eternal blessings on the day.

No one questions the fact that the trees and the toys are for the child, but they might question the statement that the *dinner* is for the child, too. It is the child's meal. Parents, uncles, aunts and other grown-ups never enjoy a dinner as a child does. A child makes it interesting by using his imagination. For older people dinners are so many routine affairs to be followed by a glass of bicarbonate of

soda. The grown-up would rather talk than eat. When a child eats, that is all he does. Christmas dinners are some of the big events in a child's existence. An idea of the child's attitude towards the Christmas dinner may be gathered from Dickens' description of the two young Cratchits anticipating a gastronomic delight of unusual proportions for them: ". . . the two young Cratchits set chairs for everybody, not forgetting themselves, and mounting guard upon their posts, crammed spoons in their mouths, lest they should shriek for goose before their turn came to be helped."

Undoubtedly, Christmas day is an even greater day for the child than is his own birthday, but for a different reason than the child might assign. On his birthday, true, he receives a few presents, but the glamor of Christmas is missing. The important reason for the feast of Christmas being greater than any child's, or, for that matter, any grown-up's birthday is that it is the birthday of God upon earth. God became man, was born of a Virgin, and the world shall always celebrate His nativity.

All the undue emphasis on material things at Christmas time is bound to give the child the wrong notion concerning the true meaning of Christmas. His Christmases are filled with trees, toys and taste. He cannot know at his age the true meaning of Christmas, but there must come a time when he should know. Some have never reached this knowledge. Some do not want this knowledge. The whole of the modern, pagan world does not recognize this day as the day on which the Son of God came into the world. This pagan world of ours has taken the fact of Christmas—the Incarnation of the Son of God—and has hidden it away in a remote corner. In its stead, they attempt to sell a fiction labelled "Christmas" which is apart from Christ. The new idea of Christmas is a business man's dream. Buying, selling, cash registers clanging, crowds of shoppers with full purses and infinite wants, that is the pre-Christmas scene. The day itself has become a stuffing and sleeping day. The early part of the afternoon is given over to getting outside of an enormous amount of confections, cookies, pies and turkey. The rest of the afternoon is given over to "sleeping it off." Christmas day was chosen as a substitute for a pagan feast day according to Funk. "December 25 seems to have been chosen on account of the Roman custom of keeping this day as the festival of *Sol Invictus* i. e. of the re-birth of the sun; it was judged fitting to substitute for the pagan feast a Christian one commemorating the birth of the true Sun of the world and the Redeemer of mankind."¹ The moderns seem to have as their

¹ Funk, Manual of Church History, Vol. I, p. 199, Herder.

goal the reversion to the pagan practice, all the while holding to the Christian name. They have tried to make a pagan holiday out of a Catholic holy day.

The promoters of this materialistic outlook on Christmas are many. Those who want to put Christ out of the picture but keep the pleasant, nostalgic memories of other Christmases lead the parade. The true meaning of Christmas was tossed aside after the Reformation. This meaning has never been fully recovered by those who claim the name of Christian and do not follow Christ. Only true Christians can appreciate what Christmas means. Writers have done much to muddle the idea of Christmas. Dickens leads these with the charm and pale beauty of his "Christmas Carol." Everyone knows this story. It has appeal, sense appeal. It touches the heart. It makes one laugh and cry. It makes our mouths water and our minds go back to the days that were. Truly, it deserves the name of masterpiece, but where in the whole piece can the spirit of Christmas be found? It is true that the nephew of Scrooge says: "But I am sure I have always thought of Christmas time, when it has come round—apart from the veneration due to its scared name and origin, if anything belonging to it can be apart from that—as a good time; a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time; the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they really were fellow-passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys." No one can find fault with these sentiments, but we might ask what was Dickens' view of Christ? He was a man of his age. Rationalism was rife and the concept of Christ was that He was human as the rest of us. How "sacred," we dare ask, were the name and origin of Christmas, then, for Dickens?

Dickens has his followers, no doubt. An increasing number of people have convinced themselves that it is useless to try to get into the "Christmas spirit" without reading the Carol at least once before each Christmas day. What is this "Christmas spirit," anyway? It has to be more than watery eyes and a drooling mouth. That can spring from sheer sentimentality alone. The true "Christmas spirit" has to be something strong and abiding. It ought not be something we can dust off for the occasion like a top hat. And the true "spirit of Christmas" is firm and it is lasting. What is it? It is simply a recognition of God's boundless love for man, so boundless that He sent His Son into the world to redeem it. This will not be found in Dickens' stories, nor in any other who writes of the materials of the

feast. This is something higher, something spiritual, and there is only one place to go for this. That one place is where the Spirit of God has whispered to His Prophets and His Evangelists, namely, the Bible.

The following quotations will bear out the above statement. These selections are merely the meaty part of each chapter. The reader will do well if he acquaints himself with the whole chapter. He will find not only words that shall stir within the dormant "Christmas spirit," but also some of the most forceful passages in Holy Writ. In Isaias we find: "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign. Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel." (Is. 7:14). "And there shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse, and a flower shall rise up out of his root." (Is. 11:1). "For a CHILD IS BORN to us, and a son is given to us, and the government is upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called, Wonderful, Counsellor, God the Mighty, the Father of the world to come, the Prince of Peace." (Is. 9:6). "Drop down dew, ye heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain the just: let the earth be opened, and bud forth a saviour." (Is. 45:8). "Thus saith the Lord: In an acceptable time I have heard thee, and in the day of salvation I have helped thee: and I have preserved thee, and given thee to be a covenant of the people, that thou mightest raise up the earth, and possess the inheritances that were destroyed." (Is. 49:8). "My just one is near at hand, my saviour is gone forth, and my arms shall judge the people." (Is. 51:5). "He put on justice as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation upon his head." (Is. 59:17). "And the Gentiles shall walk in thy light, and kings in the brightness of thy rising." (Is. 60:3). "For Sion's sake I will not hold my peace, and for the sake of Jerusalem, I will not rest till her just one come forth as brightness, and her saviour be lighted as a lamp." "Behold the Lord hath made it to be heard in the ends of the earth, tell the daughter of Sion: Behold thy Saviour cometh: behold his reward is with him, and his work before him." (Is. 62:1, 11). In Micheas, "AND THOU, BETHLEHEM Ephrata, art a little one among the thousands of Juda; out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be the ruler in Israel; and his going forth is from the beginning, from the days of eternity." (Mich. 5:2). In the Gospel according to St. Matthew: "But while he thought on these things, behold the angel of the Lord appeared to him in his sleep, saying: Joseph, son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife, for that which is conceived in her, is of the Holy Ghost." (Matt. 1:20). In the Gospel of St. Luke, known as the Infancy Gospel, enough mat-

ter should be found in the first and second chapters to stir up the "Christmas spirit" of any man.

It is the privilege of man to become like a child at Christmas. In the early part of this article it was pointed out that the trees, toys and taste bring back memories of days long past, childhood days and the man relives them. In this section, we can point to another way of becoming like a child. This is in a spiritual way. The kind of child of whom Christ spoke, when He said: "Suffer the little children, and forbid them not to come to me: for the kingdom of heaven is for such."² All children are innocent. It is for us to try to become like them. Christmas is surely the day of the child, when all of us become like a child, but it is eminently the Child's day, Who has the power to make us children once again.

² Matt. 19: 14.