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CURRENT TOPICS.

"Christmas comes but once a year." Who is not glad and grateful that it comes once a year? Apart from the unique event, the event of events in all the world's history, which it is designed to commemorate, and apart from all the sacred associations which cluster around it, there is always something peculiarly mellowing and elevating in the influences of the day as a time of universal well-wishing and gift-giving. In addition to its higher religious uses, which are for the behoof of the individual, the day comes to people of all classes and climes, as an annual invitation to forget self for a little, and take thought for the happiness of others. It gives everyone who is not in absolute destitution an opportunity to make a practical test of the truthfulness

of the words, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." It is a day specially consecrated to the children of the household and, though we fear in a very much diminished degree, to the poor and afflicted of the community. The man or woman who suffers the day to pass without having done something to make someone without the home happier and better, misses the higher meaning and usefulness of the glad holiday. At its approach every generous mind must feel that nice questions of chronology, or of "the Higher Criticism," are out of place. To introduce them would be little less than sacrilege. The man who cannot enter into the spirit of the day, opening his heart to the sunshine of its gladness, and doing what he can to reflect some glints of that sunshine into the hearts of others, is to be pitied. Let the spectres of dull care and business worry be for once banished from over-wrought brains! Let the windows of the soul be thrown wide open that the invigorating breezes from the heights of Christmas thoughts and joys and aspirations may sweep away the year's accumulations of dust and cobweb. Why not? Who will not be the better for it for days and weeks to come? This is the best advice which THE WEEK has to offer to all its friends and patrons, as it wishes each and everyone A MERRY CHRISTMAS!

A curious statement is that made by the London *Chronicle's* Moscow correspondent, to the effect that Russia has declined France's offer of a naval station in the Mediterranean because Admiral Avelan has told the Czar that he could not guarantee the loyalty of the officers and men if they were to be permitted to visit French ports regularly. The statement seems too uncomplimentary to the Russian navy to be true, or to be likely to be made public if true. One can but wonder what is the nature of the peculiar temptation to which frequent association with the citizens of a friendly and allied nation would subject the loyalty of the officers and men of the Russian navy. That must be a strangely superficial loyalty that has to be so carefully guarded from contact with the outside world. Can it be that it is the spirit of Republican freedom of which the Admiral stands so much in dread? Is the taint of Nihilism, which is, we suppose, but a popular reaction against an iron despotism, so widespread, even in the Russian navy, that, the chief officer himself being judge, safety is to be found only in the complete isola-

tion of officers and men, lest the very atmosphere of freedom should intoxicate them. The danger must be regarded as very serious indeed, when it compels the renunciation of so great an advantage as the possession of a coaling station in the Mediterranean would be to Russia.

If one might judge from certain facts touching the family connections of employees in the public service in Ontario, which have lately been made the theme of party controversy, the Province has not even yet, after so many years of Liberal administration, completely escaped from the regime of family compacts. The *Globe's* defence of the Premier from the charge of nepotism, while relieving Sir Oliver himself from the suspicion of being personally the prime mover in the appointments in question, causes astonishment at the peculiar aptitude for the public service which seems to run through a wide circle of his family connections. The law of heredity cannot explain the facts, seeing that many of the names on the list are not related by blood, but merely by family connection. Surely those whose prerogative it is to make or suggest these appointments would spare the feelings of their honoured chief if they clearly understood that anything savoring of nepotism was highly repugnant to his feelings and wishes. The matter is, in some respects, a small one for newspaper comment. Yet it is a fact but too obvious that on the civil-service lists both at Toronto and at Ottawa, the families and connections of Cabinet Ministers are represented on a scale quite inexplicable by any theory of chance, and quite out of taste, to say the least, in a democratic country, where all such appointments should be made with the strictest impartiality, on grounds of merit alone.

On the principle that the weaker goes to the wall, there is reason to fear that Italy will be the first to give way under the crushing burden imposed by the Triple Alliance. Indications are already apparent that the Crispi Cabinet, formed with so much difficulty, cannot long survive the strain of unpopularity resulting from the necessity for increased taxation. A writer in the *Review of Reviews* interprets the situation to mean that the Italians are becoming tired of the monarchy, and that in particular discontent is rapidly spreading among the moderate Liberals, who have hitherto been its staunchest supporters. On the other hand, there are evident tendencies toward an understanding, if not a fusion, of the