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An Hour with the Editor

CHRISTMAS.

Not very many people will trouble themselves today about the origin of Christmas or how the date corresponds with the probable season of the year when Jesus was born, and least of all the children to whose pleasure most of us devote the day. The great thing is not what Christmas was, but what it is. It may be, as the wise people tell us, only an adaptation of an ancient heathen holiday to the purposes of the Christian Church, whose leaders felt it wise to engraft some of the old practices of heathendom, which were in themselves harmless, upon the new religion, and devote the occasion to the commemoration of the birth of its Founder, than to antagonize their new converts altogether. It may be that these early fathers were not especially careful to be exact in fixing the date of the event. These things are proper enough for discussion at other times, but not at Christmas Day. They do not make the least bit of difference one way or the other, but there are a lot of super-excellent folk, who are never quite satisfied unless they have everything drawn with a straight-edge and all the angles exact. They have no use for curves in history or religion, but just as Hogarth told us that in art the curve was the emblem of beauty, although everybody knew it before he said so, so also in those things which make for our happiness we must make use of "curves" if we want the best results. In long centuries the angles have been taken out of things. Doubtless it is a very wavy line that we would have to follow, if we would trace Christmas back to the day, when there was born in the stable in Bethlehem a Baby Boy, whose influence is the most potent factor in the world today; but that makes it all the more beautiful, for wherever we trace it, we would find lying along its course the sentiment of "Glory to God in the Highest, and on Earth Peace, Good Will to Men." Even in the rugged days of old, when our rude, but virile ancestors drank deep of nut-brown ale, while the Yule log blazed upon the hearth; or in later days when the Crusaders, with clanging of shields and shouts of frenzy, hurled defiance at the Saracen foe, from whom they sought to rescue the place where the Child of Bethlehem was buried; even yet later, when monasticism and later still, Puritanism had robbed the day of many of its outward evidences of joy, it was the same. Perhaps there were times when the sunlight of love found the dark clouds hanging over humanity difficult to penetrate; but ever the sun was there; ever its beams were directed earthwards, and ever in men's hearts there was a glow of its divine fire. And in these latter days, when the anthem of the Angel Choir finds an echo in the breasts of us all, Christmas Day is the season of Love Triumphant. To be sure there is sorrow, suffering, hate, envy, and malice in the world; but like the mists, which fly before the splendour of the dawn, they are rolling away. The divine sunshine is illuminating more and more of the dark places as the years roll on, and we look forward with confidence to the glory of midday, when the principle for which Christmas Day stands will rule the world.

Christmas Day is a day of memories. Some of them are sad, but most of them are joyous. Even with the former there is a little brightness, for when on this day we remember those who have left us forever, we recall only what was good about them. The world is better for our memory of our sorrows; if the rain of grief never fell into our lives they might be barren. Christmas Day bids us sorrow "not as men without hope;" for no matter what our religious faith may be, or if we have no particular religious faith at all, there is something in the atmosphere at this season, which touches and sanctifies everything, even if we are unconscious of its influence. We are learning nowadays many things that to a former generation would have seemed foolish imaginings. We know that there are occult forces. We may not try to name them, and it is just as well that we should not; but we know that they are active forces. We know there is a wireless telegraphy between human hearts; that there is a spiritual hypnotism that sways human minds. We have learned that nothing dies; that the conservation of energy is not confined to inanimate things; and we are beginning to realize that the forces of the human soul are as real, as efficient, and as eternal as the forces that control the material world. So we are justified in assuming that the sentiment that inspires the rejoicings of Christmas is having a permanent influence upon mankind, and that the world, because of it, is steadily growing better. Perhaps the improvement may not be as rapid as some of us would like it to be, but there is one infallible rule whereby its progress can be accelerated, namely, that each of us will do what in him or her lies to make Christmas what it ought to be and to keep its fires alight in our hearts until the next season comes round.

There are some people, one is sorry to say, to whom Christmas means but very little. They are not so numerous as they used to be; but they are too numerous yet. They are chiefly people who have forgotten that they were once children. They miss so much that they provide their own punishment for their foolishness in refusing to believe in the spirit of Santa Claus. But the most of us believe in Christmas, and you good sir, who will sit in your club today, and vote the rest of us absurd, as you light your cigar and look into the fire, just let your memory go back to a day long before the first grey hair showed itself in your head, long before you knew anything about those matters, to which you look for your pleasures nowadays, and recall a little fellow you used to know. Fine little chap he was. He did not know much, but he believed a great deal. He was only certain of a few things. One was that Father was much the greatest man in all the world; another was that angels must be something like Mother, only not quite so good, another was that there was a good spirit called Santa Claus, whose performances were a thousand times more wonderful than all the marvels of modern science about which you read in the papers and magazines. You remember that little chap. You remember how he could hardly go to sleep on Christmas Eve, so full his heart was of what tomorrow would bring forth, and yet feared to stay awake lest he might see something that he ought not to. You remember with what tremors of the heart (tremors of joy of course), he went downstairs in the morning, to see what the glorious night had brought forth. You remember the little chap wanted to love everyone, and that for the time being the world was resonant with joy. That little chap was you; yes, sir! You, who now sit over the fire and watch the smoke as it curls from your cigar. Now, be honest with yourself, and confess if all you have done and got and learned since then make up for what you have lost because you have let the spirit of Christmas die out of your heart. But this is not all there is to say to you; for you will not have learned the lesson of memory aright if you do not feel within you a glow of something like that which made all the world seem bright in those far off times.

There is no need to say anything to parents and children who make of Christmas what it ought to be. They know more about it than words can put on paper. They know that of all our institutions Christmas is the one that could be least spared, not only for what it is, but for what it implies. They know that in proportion as they enter into the spirit of the day, they become more like Him, whose nativity it commemorates. They will join with us in saying, Long live Christmas; may its hold upon the hearts of the people grow stronger and stronger until the time shall come when its message will be the greatest influence upon all our lives.

THE CHRISTIAN ERA.

The Christian Era was established in Italy sometime in the Sixth Century, by Dionysius the Little, a Roman Abbot. It did not come into general use in Christendom until a century or more afterwards. Dionysius reckoned backward to fix the year of the birth of Christ, and his investigations led him to the conclusion that this took place in the twelvemonth beginning on January 1st, in the fourth year of the 194th Olympiad, which corresponded with the 753rd year after the legendary founding of Rome, and the 4714th year of the Julian period. It is hardly necessary to say that the Olympiads were the periods between the Olympic games. The Julian period was devised by a statistician named Scalizer, in 1582. It is based on certain astronomical facts. Previous to the institution of the Christian Era, and after the disuse of the Olympiad and the Roman system, dates in Latin countries were fixed by what was known as in the Cycle of Indiction, which was a period fixed for the performance of certain judicial acts by the Emperors at Constantinople. This was not established until the year 313. Therefore, it follows, that there is no measure of time previous to the Sixth Century of our era, by which dates can be settled without more or less calculation.

Indeed, for a very long period after the invention of the Christian Era a great deal of disagreement existed as to when it ought to be considered as beginning. Dionysius, its inventor, fixed the beginning at the Feast of the Annunciation, which was March 25. This prevailed universally for some time, and in some parts of Italy it was followed as late as 1745. Other ecclesiastical authorities held that the year ought to begin at Easter, others preferred March 1st. In France Easter was regarded as the beginning of the year as late as the Sixteenth Century. In Germany and in some parts of Italy the year was regarded as beginning at Christmas as late in some places as the Fifteenth Century. In England Christmas was regarded as the beginning of the year up to the Thirteenth Century, when Annunciation Day was established as the beginning, and it was so continued until 1752, when January 1st was fixed as the time. A relic of the ancient practice in regard to the beginning of the year is shown by the fact that the Church of England dates its ecclesiastical year from the First Sunday in Advent. English historians always have reckoned the year as beginning on January 1st. An illustration of the confusion arising out of this uncertainty as to when the year begun is afforded by the invasion of England by William of Orange. This is popularly called the Revolution of 1688. Stated in terms of our existing chronology, it took place in 1689.

The Christian Era had not been long in use before it was observed that the Equinoxes did not always fall on the same dates. Pope Sextus IV commissioned an astronomer to adjust the Calendar, so as to make the years coincide with the Equinoxes, but the latter died before he completed his work, which remained in abeyance until Pope Gregory XIII. appointed Aloysius Lilius, an astronomer and physician, to complete it. The result was the establishment of the Gregorian Calendar, which is that now in use in Christendom.

Gregory, after the necessary calculations had been completed, ordered that October 5, 1582, should be considered to be October 15. The Gregorian Calendar is a very remarkable piece of work. It provides for leap year, so as to adjust dates to astronomical events; but this leaves a margin of error, and to obviate this, certain years, which would otherwise be leap years, only have 365 days. The year 1900 was one of these. The next will be 2100.

Other eras than those above mentioned have been used. Among them are:

The Era of Creation, which has been arbitrarily fixed at 4004 B.C. There is not the slightest reason for supposing this to be correct. Over two hundred separate calculations have been made from Biblical records, and they vary from 3483 years before Christ to 6984 years.

The Jewish Era begins from a date assigned to the Creation, which was 3760 years before Christ. This calculation was made in the Fifteenth Century.

The Era of Constantinople, which is the ecclesiastical year of the Greek Church, and was the civil year in Russia until the time of Peter the Great, begins at the supposed time of the Creation, which for the purposes of this era was estimated to have occurred 5509 years before Christ.

The Era of Alexandria was that used by the Alexandrian Christians, and dated from what they supposed was the time of Creation, or 5503 years before Christ.

The Mundane Era of Antioch was of the same nature, but it placed Creation in 5492 B. C.

The Era of Nabonassar, was of ancient origin. It began on Wednesday, February 26, 747 B. C. It was a scientific Era, based on astronomy.

The Macedonian Era dated from 311 B. C., with the Macedonian Seleucus conquered Babylon.

The Era of Alexander, that of Tyre, the Caesarian Era of Antioch, the Caesarian Era of Spain, the Era of Actum, the Augustan Era the Era of Diocletian, and of the Armenians have all had a temporary vogue.

The Mohammedan Era dates from the flight of the Prophet from Mecca to Medina in A.D. 622. The Era of Yezdegard, in use in Persia, dates from June 16, A.D. 632.

Chinese definite Chromology begun in 2000 B. C., they measure time by astronomical cycles of sixty years each. This cycle has also been used in India since 3185 B. C.

TO THE LONELY ONES

Contributed.

A Happy Christmas to "You." . . . "You" may only have arrived in this big, sparsely populated country within the last few weeks, and have not yet found your niche among your "own kind." To "You," a Canadian born and bred gives hearty greeting. . . . Would that life was so ordered that one might seek "you" out in your lonely lodging or shack, as the case might be—and say "come and have your Christmas dinner with us, and talk about" my people "to your heart's content."

There is an elment of sadness in Christmas in this new land, so engrossed are its people in the process of building. . . . Why can't one fling convention to the winds, and seek out those who are lonely and friendless! Perhaps you are here because you "made a mess of things, at home," but if we could unearth the story which led to the migration to Canada of some of our own ancestors we might find that the finest among them, the men who struggled against overwhelming odds, through loneliness and discouragement, and who won our heritage for us, were the scape-graces of some English county family, who had been "sent down" from Oxford, only to be sent out to Canada! Don't pay any attention to the arrant nonsense that is talked about the prejudice against Englishman in Canada . . . for the truth is that Canada is not only the smelting-pot of Nations but the forge where conflicting elments in the way of social castes are moulded into one . . . and the process is rather trying to the material under the anvil, at times! but it all resolves itself into the good old maxim, "a Man is a Man, whatever his class." . . . To misquote a Scotch saying . . .

Will "you" believe that in one home at least, the toast of the "lonely one" is given, by a Canadian who realises what the making of our country exacts from individuals? If "you" are the lonely one, this Christmas, know that a greeting, sincere and tender, is wining its way to "You."

One knows that it has taken a pretty stiff resolve on your part to come all this way from the old home and family ties, to start out on "Your own." Luck may appear to be against you at the start, and you may think that you are nothing but a round peg, trying to fit into an extraordinary square hole! But pluck up courage. "Right Oh!" is the word, your niche will be found before long, another Christmas and you will be the welcome guest, of those, whose only regret will be that it was not your first Christmas in Canada which was spent in their home.

Perhaps you are expecting letters which have not arrived, but they are on their way—and they have many miles to travel and many hands to pass through. Sweethearts and mothers don't forget. Your tobacco may have an acrid flavor, and the chimney may smoke as hard as you do! Rations may be scanty and thoughts of other Christmas days many. Never mind, it will all be over in a day or two, and in the rough and tumble of the fight you will forget. Here in this far outpost of a great Empire a prayer goes heavenward, from one who has seen "your sort win out in the end, that strength may be given you also, to conquer in the manly fight for independence."

"Stick it out." "You" are not forgotten, you are only ungetatable.

A Century of Fiction

XIII.

(N. de Bertrand Lugrin)

CHARLES DICKENS.

Many of us believe that the personality of a strong man or woman can have no real death, but must continue to exist as a potential agency in some form or another long after the body has been buried and reduced to dust. To us it seems an incredible, nay, more, an impossible thing, for death to end the almost unlimited energy that animates the mind and the body of the greatest of our thinkers and actors; and we feel sure that the energy, which during the lifetime of the body that contained it wielded an influence upon the world, must still hold a place in it. The stronger, the nobler the personality, the more deeply and for the greater length of time must this influence last.

This is true of all the leaders of the various great religious cults. To their followers, in many cases, the master still exists; and, because the disciples have felt the nameless force of a personality, the likeness of which has long since vanished, they implicitly and unquestionably believe in the existence of him they reverence, though they have no proof that they are right beyond that furnished by the undeniable force of their own convictions. For example those of us who have taken Jesus Christ as the model by which we try to pattern our lives, can say, without compromising ourselves in the least, that Jesus lives, for to us he does live, inasmuch as the influence he exerted while alive has grown steadily wider and stronger.

While this is true of the greatest of our teachers, the wisest of our leaders, it is no less true of those, who, if of not quite so mighty a calibre, nevertheless stand out from among the enormous rank and file of humanity in the white light of justly earned fame. Among those we number our famous composers, our soul-stirring musicians, our statesmen, our poets, our painters and our novelists. In this latter class there is one the spirit of whom, to those who know his works well, seems to especially preside over some of the simplest, the holiest, the best of our pleasures, and of those pleasures we, who though old in years can yet thank God for the youth in our hearts, number Christmas time as the happiest, the brightest, the merriest of them all.

There have been greater writers than Charles Dickens, more scholarly, more rhetorical writers; but among the scores of them there is not one who has succeded in touching our hearts quite so surely, as this man who wrote only of sane, simple everyday affairs, and sane, simple everyday people; and never forgot for a moment that heaven-born faculty of us all to see the humorous side of things, the faculty that helps to carry us over the roughest places in life. Moreover he showed the just balance that always exists between happiness and sadness, between smiles and tears, helping us to believe the very best of our fellow-men, and inspiring us with a stronger desire to trust in God.

Dickens did not write of sex problems, probably never thought of them. His characters had no complex emotions, that led to inextricable complications. His stories are stories of real life, as happily the most of us know it, and his characters are real men and women with feelings and instincts totally unperverted by abnormal desires; quite unlike those men and women with whom we meet in our modern novels, who, satiated by sensations, rack their bodies and brains to find a new one at the cost of health and sanity.

So we choose Dickens today as the one writer among the many who has best typified the Christmas spirit, who, in fact, has been given the credit of inventing the modern Christmas, such a lover was he of little children, such a sympathetic brother to the suffering, such a believer in the innate kindliness and goodliness of everybody. "Half an hour of him," said an able critic, "is worth a lifetime of his self-conscious analyzers, and the world is a more cheerful and sympathetic world, because of the loving and lovable presence in it of Charles Dickens." And the time of the great novelist's death some one wrote in the public press in regard to his Christmas tales as follows: "He has not only pleased us—he has softened the hearts of a whole generation. He made charity fashionable; he awakened pity in the heart of sixty millions of people. He made a whole generation keep Christmas with acts of helpfulness to the poor; and every barefooted boy and girl in the streets of England and America today fares a little better, gets fewer cuffs and more pudding, because Charles Dickens wrote." Surely no epitaph could be better than this.

Dickens was born at Landport, in Portsea, in February, 1812. It was of his own unhappy childhood that he wrote when he described the sorrows of little David Copperfield. In fact, most of his characters were drawn from real life, his own father and and mother and his wife figuring in many of them. His descriptions of Marshalsea prison were taken from his own experience while his father was imprisoned there for debt. Those were very hard times for the Dickens family, and Charles, who was a delicate, sensitive lad, felt the disgrace and the humiliation very poignantly. They lived in a miserable quarter of the town, and the boy used to wait on his father in prison. These words from David Copperfield exactly describe the conditions of the young Dickens:

"No words can express the secret agony of my soul as I sunk into this companionship—would not be here to spin the yarn to incredulous shore folk. When it cleared we found and felt my early hopes growing up to be a learned and distinguished man crushed in my breast. The deep remembrance of the sense I had of being utterly neglected and hopeless, of the shame I felt in my position; of the misery it was to my young heart to believe that, day by day, what I had learned, and thought, and delighted in, and raised my fancy and my emulation up by, was passing away from me, never to be brought back again, cannot be written. My whole nature was so penetrated with the grief and humiliation of such considerations, that even now, famous and caressed and happy, I often forget in my dreams, that I have a dear wife and children; even that I am a man; and I wander desolately back to that time of my life."

But good fortune came to him later, and when he was nineteen he began his career as a journalist. Four years after this he published his "Sketches by Boz," which won him instant recognition; and when two years later his "Pickwick Papers" appeared, it brought fame to its author and a goodly sum of money as well. The year previous he had married Miss Catherine Hogarth, who was the original Dora in David Copperfield, and in later years became the Flora in "Little Dorrit." From this period for forty-three years Dickens never ceased to write until his death, which occurred very suddenly, without the least warning, on the 9th of June, 1870. He left behind him an uncompleted novel, "The Mystery of Edwin Drood."

On page 3 will be found some quotations from the writings of this master appropriate to the day.

THE COSMOPOLITAN SANTA.

By C. L. Armstrong.

Now children, gather near the fire
And I will tell you how
Old Santa Claus goes 'round the world
And makes his merry bow
In ev'ry land where boys and girls
Are good as they can be;
For this old saint speaks ev'ry tongue
Unknown to you and me.
In Germany, the Fatherland,
"Kriss Kringle," he is called.
'Tis there his toys are made for him
Which 'round the world are hauled.
In Holland, where the children wear
Queer Sabots, made of wood,
They call him "Sunder Klass" and old
"Sint Nikalaas" the good.
In Switzerland, where mountains high
Are piled, all topped with snow,
They speak of "Samilklaus" and hang
Thick stockings in a row.
Heligoland knows "Sonner Klas,"
Voralberg "Zemmnglas" knows,
While "Elka" (fir tree) is his name
Amid the Russian snows.
Alsace-Lorraine—a funny name—
Refers to "Knect Duprect."
Bohemian children know him, too;
They call him "Jericek."
In La Belle France, "Le Bon Papa"
Brings toys, and good things, too.,
In Austria he is "Niklo,"
Which sometimes is "Nigloo."
In Italy, where sun and flow'rs
Enrich the Christmas cheer,
They hail him as "Babino" and
Watch for him ev'ry year.
'Giviaska" (little star)
By Polish babes is seen;
While Scandinavian boys and girls
Are watchful for "Kristine.",
'Juuenissen" in Denmark gives
The youngsters joyful cause
For merrymaking. Irish children
Know "Niamb Nicklause."
And thus, you see, the good saint all
About the world doth run,
Dispensing Christmas cheer; and now
My little tale is done.

THINK BEFORE YOU STRIKE.

Many are familiar with an old story of a merchant travelling on horseback, accompanied by his dog. He dismounted, and accidentally dropped a package of money. The dog saw it, the man did not. The dog barked to stop him, and as he rode farther, bounded in front of the horse and barked louder and louder. The merchant thought he had gone mad and shot him. The wounded dog crawled back to the package, and when the merchant discovered his loss and rode back, he found the dying dog beside the package. Another tale is told which adds force to the thought—Think before you strike any creature that cannot speak.

When I was young and lived up in the mountains of New Hampshire, says the narrator, I worked for a farmer who gave me a span of horses to plow with. One of them was a four-year old colt.

The colt, after walking a few steps, would lie down in the furrow. The farmer was provoked, and told me to sit on the colt's head, to keep him from rising while he whipped him "to break him off that notion," as he said.

But just then a neighbor came by. He said, "There is something wrong here. Let him get up and let us find out what is the matter."

He patted the colt, looked at the harness, and then said, "Look at this collar. It is so long and narrow, and carries the harness so high, that when he begins to pull it slips back and chokes him so that he can't breathe."

So it was; and but for that neighbor we should have whipped as good a creature as we had on the farm, because he lay down when he could not breathe.