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Our Curbstone Observer ON CHRISTMAS BOXES.

It is the privilege of one whose writings are as eccentric as mine to intrude his peculiar views, even at a season of general rejoicing, and at some times strike a chord that is not entirely in harmony with the music of the hours. Still it is not to criticize that I come this week, but merely to record a few of my observations. I am perfectly aware that they will be thought, by some people, to be inopportune; but I am equally confident that they will find a responsive echo in the breasts of thousands, who would not, themselves, care to give expression to them. As a rule, we are all too delicate about matters that should be treated openly and frankly, while we are dogmatic and bold when there is no necessity for such an attitude. No persons like to be the one who gets credit for disturbing the feast, or for raising the discordant voice. Yet there are times when this species of fear prevents people speaking their true sentiments, or by their reserve, or silence, allowing others to go on deceiving their own hearts while knowing perfectly well that they are doing so. This not by way of excuse for my special observations concerning Christmas Boxes, and the time-honored custom of exchanging presents at Christmas and New Year, rather is it to draw the attention of many who might read this column without asking themselves how its expressions really affect their own situation.

AN OLDEN CUSTOM.—We are all loath to interfere with or undermine in any way, a custom that time, tradition, and loving associations have consecrated. There is none more general, and few more admirable, in a sense, than that of sending presents, at certain seasons, to friends, absent ones, or near relatives. I am not here referring to the visits of Santa Claus, nor the delightful custom of hanging up the children's stockings; these belong to another realm entirely. I am merely writing about the Christmas Boxes that the older members of the family send to others with whom they are connected by either ties of relationship, gratitude, or some kindred sentiment. It is certainly Christmas that brings the "brightest cheer"; it is decidedly the season of peace and goodwill, in every acceptance of the term; and each one looks to it for joys and pleasures that no other portion, or period of the year can afford. Nor is it confined to any one class or grade of society. The very poor, whose misery we pity, and whom we are accustomed to consider as suffering intensely while their more fortunate fellow-citizens rejoice and make merry, are actually more anxious for Christmas than we imagine—for this season brings them relief and charities that at other times they do not expect. Not that many of them are not disappointed unhappily, but they all have hopes, expectations, bright anticipations, real day dreams of something good when Christmas comes. And it is a pity that any of those hopes should ever be crushed by the hand of neglect, or that any of those dreams should be allowed to vanish unrealized. When the season of Christmas Boxes is at hand it is always an act in accord with the spirit of the day to relieve the needy and to bring light, warmth and plenty to the abode of misery and indigence. With this reflection, I return to the theme of Christmas presents. In some circles the Christmas box, the unfulfilling annual reminder, is the only link connecting those who spend their entire year moving along different paths. The anticipations, in the family, of the accustomed presents, the innocent speculations on the subject of this one's or of that one's expected gift, are all so many incidents in life that tend to make Christmas the great domestic, as well as religious festival of the year. The olden customs are rapidly disappearing; the yule log, the boar's head, the mistle-toe, the frolics and gambols, the familiar grouping around the hearth-fire, the Christmas stories told by the old for the edification of the young, these are all picturesque in print, but rare in reality. Macaulay's lines, in that beautiful picture of ancient domestic bliss, when "Romans were like brothers," if applied to our modern Christmas scenes would be meaningless, for we no longer behold such gatherings as

"When the oldest cask was open,
And the largest lamp was lit;
When the chestnuts glow on embers,
And the kid turns on the spit;
When the young and old, in circle,

Around the fire-brands close,
And the girls are weaving baskets,
And the lads are shaping bows;
When the old man mends his armor,
And trims his helmet-plume,
And the good wife's shuttle merrily
Goes flashing through the loom."

AN IMPOSITION.—If I continue on, in this strain, I will never reach my criticisms and observations. The main object of this article on the subject of Christmas Boxes is to call attention to the abuse, rather than to the practice of that olden custom. In fact, I will go so far as to say that many instances it constitutes an imposition, and is the terror as well as the perplexity of hundreds of good citizens. A friend sends you a card for Christmas, you return the compliment; another sends you a toy for your child, you buy a toy equally if not more expensive and send it in return; another sends you a costly book, you must return either an equally costly one, or something else proportionately; ten people send you presents, and you must buy the presents to send to these people. Last year a dozen friends remembered you at Christmas, and your table was loaded with a heap of bri-a-brac and generally ornamental, but rare useful objects. This year you are bound, by a kind of code of honor, to remember each one of the dozen, to recall what each sent, and to select something more expensive to forward to each of them this year. It does not matter how limited your income, nor how taxed it is to procure the various little necessary extras of the season for your own home; if it be even necessary to go without your turkey, or to deprive your children of a Christmas tree, or of some expected toys, you must return the compliments of last year, or risk the forfeiture of friendships or to say the least, the goodwill of would-be friends. It is a terrible ordeal for some people. In fact, I have noted, in my years of observation, how the question of Christmas presents affected many poor mothers of families. For half a month before Christmas they are on the rack, suffering untold tortures of calculation, of misgivings, of selections, of economies to meet the imperative demands of the season. Yet it is the custom, and they must follow it to the letter or else bear the dire consequences for the next year. They do their best; they give every penny they can afford; they sometimes go without necessities, let alone any luxuries, in order to meet this social demand; and they know, in their hearts, that their efforts will not only be unappreciated, but will be criticised, and compared, and contrasted, and ridiculed, by those who imposed the obligation upon them, and who, perhaps were better able to afford the outlay. Does any one of the readers agree with me? Have any of you ever felt what I am attempting to describe? I am not talking against the custom of Christmas presents, but against the lack of consideration in those who make them.

BE CONSIDERATE.—I would like to give a word of advice to the person who finds himself, or herself, in a dilemma, between sending or not sending a Christmas Box to a friend. Before doing so take into consideration that friend's position, means, and various circumstances. Ask yourself how the reception of your present will affect that person. If it strikes you that he, or she, is not honestly able to afford the pleasure of returning your gift, then either refrain from sending it, or send something of such a small value—a card, a picture, or some such trifle—that will not tax your poor friend when called upon by social and friendly etiquette to return the compliment. Don't imagine that your humble gift be unappreciated. Ten to one you will be blessed and thanked the more in proportion as your Christmas Box is small and uncostly. It will be a relief to the one, who certainly appreciates your friendship, but who does not feel able to give it the same form of expression as you have given to it. It is not necessary that I should dwell any longer on this phase of the subject; but, I have seen so much of that anxiety and that worry on account of Christmas Boxes, that I am actually afraid to send even the slightest token to persons for whom I have the kindest feeling; but I know by refraining from so doing I am conferring a greater favor upon them, and one they will fully appreciate, while they cannot express that appreciation.

The Luxurious Homes Of the Rich.

The New York "Sun" tells, in an elaborate article, of the extremes to which luxury is carried in certain homes—and they are not few—in the millionaire quarters of that immense city. To read the account given of the modes of living in those palaces, one would suppose that Sardanapalus had come back to earth and was taking advantages of our twentieth century improvements to add to the extravagances that marked his few years of life towards the sunset of the Roman Empire. They tell of private houses that may cost over three million dollars, and of State apartments in hotels, at \$1,000 per week, and of other apartments that cost from three to twenty thousand dollars per year. We will select one instance, for we cannot go through the entire list, nor have we space to comment upon the numberless examples of extreme luxury that can be found in American's large centres.

"Fancy a house standing upon a boldly swelling corner where a cross-way makes into the drive proper. It is tall, it is wide, it is big everywhere, but so fine in line and proportion that it takes study to realize the mass of it. Strong but light and beautifully wrought iron grill-work guards the open space round about.

Broad, easy marble steps go up the ramp, leading to a pillared entrance. Behind the pillars one catches the gleaming of bronze doors cunningly wrought.

They open upon a great hall, floored with the costliest mosaic and set round with antique columns. The big fireplace has a mantel, also antique, plundered from a ruined palace across the sea.

The great staircase came from another palace, but somehow the architect has managed it so the two shall not war with each other. Perhaps they dare not quarrel in presence of the rugs which lie between.

Some of the rugs are three hundred years old and simply priceless—Eastern fabrics without a duplicate anywhere in the world. They set the pace in furnishing—all else is in keeping.

Each of the five occupants of the house has a separate suite—bath, bedroom, sitting-room, dressing-room and snuggery, for playing at work, or working at special play. Some of the baths have tubs with silver-gilt fittings; others have marble pools big enough to swim in, with marble divans running round the edges of the room.

The dressing-rooms are all in silver, silver-gilt and rare odoriferous woods, each so treated as to bring out every detail of its natural beauty. Cedar, camphor, sandal—each and all are preservative. The clothes presses have drawers of camphor wood, and the closets are supplied with electric lights automatically turned on by the opening of a door.

There is also, of course, a library, a dining room, a breakfast room, a drawing room, and a cosy parlor, but no ball room, for the master of all this is austere. Still, austerity does not forbid a billiard room, nor a music room, richly harmonious, whose frescoed ceiling alone represents a tidy fortune.

Every manner of musical instrument sanctioned by classic taste harbors there, along with the objects of art, pictures, bronzes, engraved gems and antique gold plate, whose cost would endow a hospital. There is a small conservatory whose flowers appear shamefaced, as though they felt themselves somewhat put out of court by the bronze and jewel-glass inclosing them.

The building is about an open court glass-roofed in winter. It has, besides the great state stairway, back stairs and two electric elevators—one for the master, one for the servants.

In the basement there is a complete electric plant for lighting, laundry work, some special cooking and the recharging of automobile batteries. There is also an automobile room, big enough to hold a dozen machines. It is below the street level, and the gay-colored monsters ride up and down upon a special lift all their own.

The big kitchen, which matches and balances, in a way, the electric plant, has a cold storage chamber attached, and is floored with tiles, walled with vitrified brick and furnished throughout in real black English oak. The cooking vessels are of brass, copper, silver or vitrified china.

To make use of them there are a chef whose salary approaches that of a diplomat, two masculine under-cooks—one especially for bread and pastry—a woman vegetable cook, a

kitchen housekeeper, and a brace of scullery maids.

Altogether the number of servants is between thirty and forty, without counting the companion, two private secretaries, and the almoner, who dispenses charity and investigates such appeals for aid as are not upon the surface fraudulent. The electric engineer lives outside, although his helper is reckoned among the household staff.

This is the merest outline of a few salient points. The house, with its furnishings, represents an investment of a little beyond three million dollars.

All this is like a fairy tale, yet it is exact in its every detail. We can imagine the envy that such extreme luxury and ostentation of wealth must create in the breasts the less-very much less-fortunate members of the human family. Still, if we look the situation squarely in the face, we see nothing to excite either envy or jealousy in all this display of wealth and evidence of ease.

Take, for example, the owner and occupant of such a mansion. He is certainly beyond the reach of all chances of want or necessity. He is morally certain to end his days in surroundings of this class. He is in mid-life, or he has already commenced to descend the slope of age. What must not be his reflections, if he ever reflects? If he had any positive assurance that his years of enjoyment and life would be counted by the score, there might be cause for self-satisfaction, perfect ease, and absolute contentment. But all his wealth, even if multiplied by a billion times cannot purchase for him one moment of life. He can have the consolation of knowing that, after twenty, or ten, or five, or less years, when he is summoned to leave all this behind him, he will be deposited in a mausoleum that will cost thousands of dollars; but that is a very poor consolation. Once the fatal and inevitable end comes, it will matter very little to him whether he is laid to rest in a structure of marble, or in a tombless grave. In either his fate will be the same—oblivion. He will not be missed, not even by those who subsist on his bounty.

It must be a fearful and chilling thought to know that one owns and enjoys such unbounded luxury and that no amount of wealth can insure its continuation beyond a very brief period. To think that he must inevitably, and so very soon, step out of that mansion—or rather be carried out of it—and leave it for others to enjoy, is enough to mar the greatest degree of happiness and contentment that man can know on earth. Ah! we do not envy the possessor of such luxury! Rather do we pity him; for he is destined to know, in a few days, or few years, the bitterness of all pangs, that of separation for all time from the pleasures which make life a glorious possession. In that one dreary hour he expires every keen enjoyment that his millions have purchased.

What Has Protestantism Done?

The Rev. Father Day, S.J., has been preaching at St. Francis Xavier's, Liverpool, on Sunday evenings a series of sermons on "The Empire of the Popes." Under the sub-title of "The Revolt of the Nations," the fourth of the series was delivered on Sunday evening to a large congregation. The rev. gentleman dealt ably with the rise of Protestantism, and proceeding, asked what in contrast with the Empire of the Popes had the Protestant sects achieved. What had collective Protestantism done for the religious world to compare with the works of the Church it had basely deserted and vilely attacked? He knew little of what it had done, but he did know a great deal of what it had undone. It had undone the Catholic Faith of thousands of the population of Germany, which up to the beginning of the eighteenth century was the most Catholic country of Europe. It had caused the secession from Rome of half the cantons of Switzerland. In the year 1540 it extended its ravages to Sweden, Denmark, and Norway, and one hundred years later to Holland. The sad story of England's loss of the Faith, which began with the just and pride of Henry VIII, supported by the unchastity and faithlessness of Cranmer, consummated by the worldly pride of Elizabeth, was too well known to need rehearsal. Scotland also later lost its Faith. Such was the story of Protestant undoing. But what had it done? It had sown he-

resy and discord in a few countries of kindred race in Northern Europe. But beyond this what had it done? It had never borne the brunt of the fierce persecution of the world, but had been the world's spoiled child—the world's pet. The world had known it and loved it. Protestantism had opened its ranks to every heresy, so that it now counted over two hundred sects in England and Wales alone. In dealing with human passions it had offered an easy path and given to the halt the crutch of the imputation of the merits of Christ in place of the works of virtue. But it had done more and worse than this. It had betrayed the most sacred cause of the essential morality of Christ. Pagan-like, it had opened its courts of divorce, broken the bonds of marriage, and sanctioned infidelity and lust. Again what had it done? Had it advanced its flag beyond the barriers of civilization into the midst of savage peoples and proclaimed at any time a universal sway over the nations? Where were its missionary champions, its saintly apostles, and the signs of life of a universal religion? It followed the flag of England, its defenders said, all over the world. Yes, but that was not enough for him (the preacher). He wanted to see the Cross in advance and before the Union Jack of England, as it used to be in the Catholic days of yore. Eight centuries ago and before the "glorious epoch" of the "Reformation," England produced apostles, mighty men strong in the spirit of God, who converted distant nations and peoples. The same was true of Scotland, of Switzerland, of Germany, and of Holland. Where were the men now, and where were their works? Where were the Calvinist Churches established in China and Korea? Where were the Lutheran missions in Japan? England, it was true, had established Bishops in her vast Indian possessions, but she established them in the same way as she had established her soldiers, her consuls, her bankers, and her houses of business. It was not the Church of England which had gained ground, it was the British Empire. Show him an Anglican Bishop who had preached the Gospel at the peril of his life. Find him a single one who had given his life for Jesus Christ. Tell him of any good Anglican shepherd who had died not fighting in a rabble riot or struck down in a disgraceful rout, but giving his life calmly, with the grace and spirit of a martyr, for the cause of Christ and for the sake of the sheep. Oh! what a contrast to the Catholic Church of Rome. From the sixteenth century to the twentieth that stately church mistress of all the nations, had carried on her brow, however tarnished, the tiara of imperial sway and of universal dominion. The ranks of her confessors, apostles, and martyrs had never thinned. The present century had seen a prodigious progress of the Church, especially in English-speaking countries. Where were Catholics in England a hundred years ago? They were a witte and a strong party to-day. In the United States of America in 1800 there was but one bishop: to-day he believed there were 115. Missions continued to be founded and to make progress in China, Korea, and Japan, whilst Northern, Southern, and Central Africa, as well as Australia and New Zealand and other remote portions of the globe, had their flourishing churches. In Liverpool only forty years ago there were but 40,000 Catholics; the number of Catholics there at the present day was 200,000. Speaking in conclusion of the destiny of Protestantism, the preacher said the seed of corruption and death was latent in the breast of Protestant sects. The principle of private judgment and the negation of all authority formed a cancer in the very vitals of the "Reformed" religion which was eating away its life. The lawlessness of the Church of England to-day was proverbial. Only the other day, in that city a respected and he believed a very respectable vicar opened, defied and flouted his Bishop, appealing from him to a Catholic power which neither existed for him or his Bishop. How long would a house divided against itself stand? He left the answer to his hearers. The authority of the State was human; it was a shifting sand, and the tide of time would wash over the ruins of the Church that was built thereon. In England to-day and in other European countries the Governments were beginning to reject all care and responsibility of the churches. "What is this to us? Look you to it." The nemesis was approaching. Anglicanism was drawing near to its end. Heresy would divide itself. What was best of it would be infidel. And the great Empire of the Church would go on fighting its way, resisting encroachment, and always advancing, even till the consummation should come and peace should shine over the universal dominion of the Kingdom of God.