

ment, and some of their efforts to construct scientific spectres are melancholy enough. Dickens set the fashion, I imagine, and succeeded in it, which ought to be enough to deter any sane writer from taking it up. Dickens is not forthcoming every year, but other people are; more's the pity. The result is that reading a few British Christmas numbers, makes your head ache, upsets your digestion, unsettles your mind, and awakens thoughts of self-destruction. The Americans, on the other hand, sound an appropriate note of joyousness, and do not let us forget what the first Christmas meant. Tale, and poem and picture ring the changes on the winsome theme, "Peace and good-will to all mankind." There can be no question which is the more excellent way.

The rivalry of the different journalistic firms has resulted in another absurdity. In order to catch the public eye early, the Christmas numbers are prepared about midsummer, and weeks before December twenty-fifth, they flood all the markets. By the time Christmas Day comes they are all hackneyed and read to pieces. I know of wise persons who leave their *Graphic* and *News* unopened till they look in their stockings to see what Santa Claus has brought them. But such self-repression is very rare. The French manage these things better. As they know how to wait, their publications fit in with the holiday season, after everyone is tired of the rest. As usual, *Figaro* is first, and the rest nowhere. The illustrations had some of them, the effect of paintings of the Spanish school, brilliant but clear and precise. Not that it is faultless. The Parisian angels with "fringes" and modish gowns must give us pause. But what a contrast is the wrapper with its single well-drawn figure, its harmony of dove-colour and gray, to the rainbow-hues and florid designs of most English publications. The bowing little dancer is la vie parisienne in person, a white foam-fleck not yet dissolved in the torrent of mud on which it travels.

One does not look for tenderness or purity in *Figaro*, but there I found both in a tale by Guy de Maupassant, of all men. Such a story as "Après" ought to blot out the memory of much vileness. If he had only written more like it! The theme is simplicity itself. A priest tells an old friend why he decided to enter the church. As a lonely boy, he had a pet dog on which he lavished all his unspent stores of affection. His pet is killed before his eyes, and his grief instructs him in coming sorrows of ordinary life. Therefore he renounces it. Apart from the deep human interests, the tale is a masterpiece of narration. Every word is simply right. There is no straining after effect, and the pathos is irresistible. Beside this, the other tales seem the efforts of bunglers, confused and over-loaded with ornament. Nothing shows the master-hand better than the last touch of all. The old priest leaves the château, and the chatelaine sees him to the door. "Puis elle revint s'asseoir devant son feu et elle songea à bien des choses auxquelles on ne pense pas quand on est jeune."

The funniest thing in the Christmas numbers was Barnard's drawing of the boys' school meeting the girls' school on the morning promenade. It had nothing to do with Christmas; but every square inch of it held the raw material of a laugh. My admiration was equally distributed between the sly-boots with the note, her Byronic, long-haired lover, the openly flirtatious friend and the gorgon of a school-mistress. Mr. Lampman's poem in *Scribner's* had nothing to do with Christmas either, but it interpreted the woodman's winter in the Canadian forest, with his characteristic tenderness and flashes of insight. I note with pleasure that his name appears among other lures to subscribers in the prospectus of the great *Atlantic*. Our men are beginning to take their proper place.

What the Christmas number would do without Mr. Kipling is another serious question. He appears in no fewer than five separate places, and to omit his contributions would be dropping the hero out of *Hamlet*. Far and away the best thing, to my mind, is the dramatic monologue in *Scribner's*. At first glance it strikes one, no doubt, as being rather anorphous; but when you try to decide what lines ought to be excised, in every case, some telling phrase, some flash of humour, some touch of nature, pleads against its taking-off. Who else could have shown us the soul of that dour old struggler, its tenderness and its strength, the veins of pure

gold in the splintered rock? Who else could have put into words the Song of Steam? This poem is as far above the sealing ballad of 1893 as a star is above a bog. "The Walking Delegate" is a deservedly acrid parable of last summer's railway strike, but even Mr. Kipling's love of horses and genius for dramatic characterization cannot redeem the Yankee dialect from its inherent vulgarity. Lowell could not. It is a distinct relief to leave the Green Mountain farm for the Indian jungle and the society of God Almighty's gentlemen, Mowgli, and Bagheera and Baloo, who do not talk a bastard language through the nose. "Letting in the Jungle" is nearly as good as "Tiger, Tiger," which is not slight praise. On the other hand "An Error of the Fourth Dimension" is what the first part of the title proclaims it to be. My sympathies are all with the transplanted American. It is nothing to stop a train. I have stopped the Congressional Express myself, *moi qui parle*. "To board a train" is a fine, bold metaphor which should have been instantly understood even by a British railway director. The Englishmen who thought Wilton mad displayed a most un-English alacrity in jumping at conclusions. It is not scientific to form a theory on insufficient data. However Nemeses was at hand in the shape of an "illustrator," and I am sure that when Mr. Kipling saw the cheap and nasty process "pictures" he wished he had not done it, and vowed never to do it again. They were calculated to mar the telling of a curious tale, almost as effectually as the cartoons of the "Jungle Book."

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The Latest News From Paris.

(By Our Special Correspondent.)

EXCEPTING always the Colonial Expansionist School, opinion is at sea respecting the Franco-Belgian Congo. It is foggy and dangerous. The studied silence of England is suspicious, and may arise from her counting upon the East African company's officious explorers, marching to take up position, "Westward Ho!" and ignore the Belgian grab, that the Berlin Congress never sanctioned—altogether. France has so far converted Belgian Congo into a French protectorate. What does she give England in the way of hush hinterland? The grave question, however, is this: the neutrality of Belgium is guaranteed by the great powers; she cannot add to her area, or part with a morsel of it without the sanction of her guarantors, and now she is *en train* to involve her home existence by adding to her liabilities, a Colonial Kingdom by her own free will. Once make a breach in the neutral existence of Belgium and Germany and France, when it suits their strategic combinations, can logically laugh at the guarantee of the great powers. Therein lies the great danger, and which is becoming a source of uneasiness. The old diplomatic "Joka," is rumored as engaging serious attention, that of creating a "buffer hinterland" between the Franco-Belgium Protectorate and the Soudan Anglo-Egyptian Nile. Bufferism is the *dernière creation* of diplomatists when they come to a deadlock, just as a parliamentary commission is the infallible solution for shelving an embarrassing motion.

Deputy Lockroy, whether grave or gay on public questions, is always worth reading. If he could get rid of the British navy, European politics would remain all serene till the Day of Judgment. It is useless fighting England in a pitched naval battle; she would be sure to win. The only way to cripple her is, to destroy her commerce by a return to privateering. But that is full of risks for the power resorting to it, and is not very easy in these days of "greyhound cruisers." The latter must have plenty of coaling stations and shelter ports for prizes. The Alabama decision will make neutrals look sharp, and the little bill a privateering practising power would have to pay in the long run, might involve its very existence. Privateers can be now matched and watched by private, but legalized fighting yachts. Japan has shown that navies rather than armies, are the most offensive resources of warfare. No one can predict, in the case of a general war, how the powers would be exactly ranged. But a powerful navy, crashing and smashing in the course of a week, could change all the best laid schemes of men. As to starving England, so long as sixteen different countries supply her with food, and she has protected harbours with railways communicating inland, the power that could supply war ships to do police-beat duty round her islands, has