

CHRISTMAS DAY, AND HOW TO KEEP IT.

Christmas Day is perhaps the one Festival in the whole year which all unite to keep; and in some way or other it will be kept by every reader of these lines.

But even with Christmas Day there are right ways and wrong ways of keeping it; and our way will depend very much on our way of thinking of it.

How do you mean to keep it? O, you will say, Christmas is a very happy and joyful time; and I shall put away all angry and revengeful thoughts, and I will try to cherish feelings of kindness and love towards my neighbors, and feelings of compassion for those who are poorer or less happy than myself; and I will try that my friends and especially my own family shall be the happier for my endeavors at this happy time.

Yes! I believe there are hundreds and thousands of men and women throughout Canada who will have thoughts like these at Christmas time, and who do their best to carry them out. You will hear their cheery, hearty voices wishing their neighbor a "happy Christmas" and a "merry Christmas" on Christmas Eve and Christmas Morning; and they evidently mean it, and say it with all their hearts.

God be thanked for this blessing! I am not going to speak lightly of it. May the time never come in this dear land of ours when Christmas greetings of kindness and love shall cease!

But we must go deeper than this. We must ask what is our reason for keeping Christmas Day—why we bid each other be happy, and merry, and kind, and forgiving, and compassionate. And then, when we are sure that we think rightly of Christmas, we shall be more likely to keep it properly.

CHRISTMAS COMMUNION.

It is a very curious thing; but a great many people would shrink away from you if you told them that they ought not only to go to Church on Christmas Day, but also to the Holy Communion. O yes, it is all very well to go to Church, they would say. I should not like to miss the Christmas Hymn and the evergreens and the decorations of the Church. They help me to feel that it is Christmas Day. But I don't feel that I can go to the Lord's Table.

Why not? Ah, that is a very solemn thing; and then, I am so light-hearted and merry at Christmas that I should feel as though I was profaning the Sacrament.

But why should you not be light-hearted and merry at this blessed time? our Lord Himself took part in a marriage feast; and I am sure that a man who carried about a gloomy face at Christmas, when all his neighbors were merry, would not be a better Christian for that reason. No! It is a time of joy, and we ought to rejoice with those who are now rejoicing.

But surely this is not a reason for refusing to come to the Table of the Lord. Why is it that Christmas is a time for joy? The answer is given in one of our hymns:

"This day has God fulfilled His promised word,
This day is born a Saviour, Christ the Lord."

Yes, my dear friend, there would be no joy or gladness for mankind, but for Christmas Day, and Christmas Day—the Day of Christ—tells us that we are at peace,—there is "peace on earth,"—and are thankful, and are joyful, and are merry, because God has come to dwell with us, His fallen creatures, and to make us His children again, in a new and a better sense.

Is that the meaning of Christmas Day? Is it not? Do you doubt it for a moment? This little Child, who lies to-day in the manger, is "Emmanuel, God with us."

But, if we rejoice to know that God is come to us in His Son, surely we should rejoice to go to Him in His sacrament.

There is hardly a more beautiful sight in the world than that which I have often seen at an early celebration of the Holy Communion—the father and mother and those of the children who were confirmed all coming together to the Lord's Table. I was sure I should see them, and the smaller children with them at the forenoon service.

I was quite sure that when they sat down to their Christmas dinner, and wished each other many a happy Christmas, and thought of absent friends and blessed them, and thought perhaps of some who could never spend Christmas with them again—I was quite sure they would be all the happier and the more joyful, because they had begun Christ's Day at His Table, and were not afraid to think that He was with them at their Feast.

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FIGHT A GOOD FIGHT.

A stingy Christian was listening to a charity sermon. He was nearly deaf, and was accustomed to sit facing the congregation, right under the pulpit, with his ear-trumpet directed upward toward the preacher. The sermon moved him considerably. At one time he said to himself, "I'll give \$10;" again he said, "I'll give \$15." At the close of the appeal he was very much moved, and thought he would give \$50. Now the boxes were passed. As they moved along his charity began to ooze out. He came down from fifty to twenty, to ten, to five, to zero. He concluded that he would not give anything. "Yet," said he, "this won't do—I am in a bad fix. This covetousness will be my ruin." The boxes were getting nearer and nearer. The crisis was upon him. What should he do? The box was now under his chin—all the congregation were looking. He had been holding his pocket-book in his hand during this soliloquy, which was half audible though in his deafness he did not know that he was heard. In the agony of the final moment he took his pocket-book and laid it in the box, saying to himself as he did it, "Now squirm, old natur'!"

Here is a key to the problem of covetousness. Old natur' must go under. It will take great giving to put stinginess down. A few experiments of putting in the whole pocket-book may, by-and-by, get the heart into the charity-box, and then the cure is reached. All honour to the deaf old gentleman. He did a magnificent thing for himself, and gave an example worth imitating, besides pointing a paragraph for the students of human nature.

WHAT WE MAY DO.

No human being can be isolated and self-sustained. The strongest and bravest and most helpful have yet, acknowledged or unacknowledged to themselves, moments of hungry soul-yearnings for companionship and sympathy. For the want of this, what wrecks of humanity lie strewn about us—youth wasted for the mocking semblance of friendship; adrift at the mercy of chance, for the grasp of a true firm hand, and a kindly, loving heart, to counsel. It is affecting to see how strong is this yearning, so fatal to its possessor if not guided rightly, such a life-anchor if safely palmed! "Friendless!" What tragedy there may be hidden in that one little word! None to labour for: none to weep or smile with; none to care whether we lose or win in life's struggle! A kind word or smile, coming to such a one unexpectedly at some such crisis of life, how often has it been like the plank to the drowning man!—lacking which he must surely have perished. These, surely, we may bestow as we pass those less favoured than ourselves, whose souls are waiting for our sympathetic recognition.

WORKING FOR GOOD.

It is only in the Word of God that we learn to consider affliction as a blessing. The utmost which the most refined philosophy can effect is to remove from our sorrows that which is imaginary, to divert the attention from the cause of distress, and to produce a sullen and stoical resignation, more like despair than hope. The religion of the Gospel grapples with the evil itself, overcomes it, and transforms it into a blessing. It is by no means included in the promises made to true Christians that they shall be exempt from suffering. On the contrary, chastisement forms a necessary part of that paternal discipline by which

our Heavenly Father fits His children for their eternal rest in glory. The Psalmist asserts the blessedness of the man who is chastened by the Lord, with this qualification, as necessary to constitute it a blessing, that he is also instructed in divine truth. By this we understand that the influence of chastisement is not physical; that mere suffering has no inherent efficacy; but that the afflictions of this life are, in the hand of God, instrumental in impressing divine truth upon the heart, awakening the attention to the consideration of his own character and situation, the promises of the gospel and the rewards of heaven. The child of God is assured that all things work together for his good; in this is plainly included the pledge, that chastisements and affliction shall eventually prove a blessing; and this is verified by the experience of the whole Church.

Were every dewdrop a diamond, every atom a world, and every world filled with gold, all would not satisfy the boundless desires of the immortal soul.

Men trust rather to their eyes than to their ears; the effect of precepts is, therefore, slow and tedious, while that of examples is summary and effectual.

Joy has swift wings, and but briefly tarries with us ere she resumes her flight, but sorrow, with plumage black and wearying, long delays her departure.

As sins proceed they ever multiply; like figures in arithmetic, the last on the left stands for more than all that went before it.—Sir Thomas Browne.

Where one burglar has been justifiably shot, or one life saved by means of a pistol, a hundred "accidents," some of them fatal, have occurred.

ONTARIO.—The following was omitted in its proper place:—

CHRISTMAS PASTORAL.—*My Dear Brethren*—As the Festival of Christmas is approaching, I feel it my duty to call your attention to the excellent rule in force in our Diocese, "That the offertory of the respective congregations of the Church throughout the Diocese on Christmas Day, every year, shall be devoted to the sole use of the Incumbent of the Church in which the offertory is made." (Canon xxiii.) No doubt, at this time the minds of many amongst us are filled with anticipations of pleasures—some, with hearts subdued with the services and thoughts suggested by the Advent season, will rejoice with a sobered Christian joy; while others, basking in the sunshine of worldly prosperity and surrounded with luxury, will have in its fullest worldly sense "A Merry Christmas." At such a season, when your hearts are enlarged and you are permitted to rejoice with those who are dear to you, should you not remember those who are set over you in the Lord—those who have, in most instances, denied themselves of much of this world's goods, that they might give themselves to the work of the ministry? Permit me, then, to earnestly exhort you, while you hail with Christian exultation the birth of the Saviour, and with temperate rejoicing "keep the feast," not to be forgetful of "those who have rule over you and who have spoken unto you the word of God." Remember that "If they have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great matter if they reap your worldly things?" and the injunction on all professing Christians stands on record, "Let him that is taught in the Word minister unto him that teacheth in all good things." There are, doubtless, many persons who will not have it in their power to contribute to the Offertory on Christmas Day as much as they would wish. To such I would suggest that their offering in money might be supplemented by an offertory in kind of what will be quite as useful in meeting the necessities of a family. Commending the matter to your loving Christian sympathy, believe me, your faithful Bishop,

J. T. ONTARIO.

Ottawa, Advent, 1879.