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## A Christmas Carol.

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[There is a legend to the effect that if an innocent young child should find himself alone in a church at midnight on Christmas Eve, he will see the chancel suddenly filled by the angelic host, and will hear their song of welcome to the Blessed Babe.]

Beneath a load of holly, through the snow  
A little lad toiled wearily along,  
Past homes with lamp and firelight all aglow,  
And gay with children's merriment and song.  
'Twas Christmas Eve—the church was full of light—  
He stood a moment at the open door  
To watch the workers, when a girl caught sight  
Of the bright-buried burden that he bore;

And soon the ruddy treasure wreathed the aisle,  
While silver glittered in the orphan's palm;  
Later—when silence filled the sacred pile,  
And the fair, white-robed world lay still and calm

Down came the angels at the midnight hour  
Into the chancel in a radiant throng;  
'Tis then that childhood's purity hath power  
To hear (the legend says) their Christmas song.

The waif forlorn who in the gloom had crept  
Into a corner, when the girlish band  
Closed up the church, and there had softly slept,  
Woke to the harmony of Heaven's own land.

And in the wondrous welcome of the strain,  
The little listener his woes forgot,  
The pangs of poverty, the piteous pain,  
The sorrow of his low and lonely lot.

The morrow morn revealed a moving sight,  
As streaming through the lofty, hallowed dome  
The sunlight fell across the features white,  
Of the dead child by angels taken home.

## Christmas Comes But Once a Year!

*For the Review.*

AND does it ever come aniss? Do we ever grow tired of Christmas, with the brightness and stir that it brings into our dull winter days, just at their dullest and shortest, with its family re-unions, gifts, and all the other gentle influences which it exercises on our hard work-a-day world? No! We can no more grow tired of Christmas than we can of spring! No healthy soul yet grew tired of the sweet monotony of the bursting buds and opening bloom, of the pure fragrance of the first violet, and the delicate aroma of the waking woods. And, like those vernal days—Christmas is a sort of moral and spiritual springtide, the hope and promise of the full power of that evangel of peace and good-will to many, which, proclaimed to the world nineteen centuries ago—is still so far from having attained its full maturity of power and blessing.

Yet, undoubtedly, there are moods and minds which are only too ready to realize the truth of some words of the good and wise Dr. Holland: "There is something very like mockery in the permanent youth of nature and its frictionless routine of change. We only, who are capable of observing and measuring the phenomena around us, are conscious of the wear and tear of life. We count our own heart-beat, and note their faltering rhythm, until they cease." And when recurring Christmas-tides bring with them inevitably the renewed

sense of locks in the circle of our life, and the pain "of remembering happier things," it is not strange that there should be for many, a shrinking from the associations that Christmas brings! Yet for this there is a balm in recognizing that the spirit which blesses Christmas is, after all, the only perennial, immortal power, of which we are conscious. "The Spirit of the Lord abideth forever," and so far as we enter into it, we not only abide forever, but have such a consciousness of it, for ourselves and for those we love, as bears us up above "the chances and changes of this mortal life." Thus, even for the mourner, if he will see it aright, Christmas has its message of comfort and cheer.

But *does* its Spirit "abide" in this distracted world? If the man of Nazareth returned to walk on earth as He did so many centuries ago, how far would He find the world governed by the spirit of His second great commandment, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself?" How would He look upon the destructive and barbarous war now being waged between the two great heathen nations which should have been Christian long ago, if His Church had been true to her high mission, instead of wasting time and strength in petty bickerings at home? "If Christ came" to England or America how would He look upon all the class oppression, the undisguised hostility between capital and labor, employer and employed, the gross selfishness which has prevailed in these professedly Christian countries, until it has created on the one hand a heartless and self-indulgent plutocracy, surrounding itself with an extravagant luxury which saps the moral and spiritual as well as the physical life, and, on the other, a mass of grinding poverty and misery, in which men, with all the divine possibilities of humanity in them, become little better than beasts of burden? How would He look upon the crying sins of cruelty to helpless children,—to the still more helpless brute creation,—inflicted too often from both want of thought and want of heart. Even in our own Canada, as some of us know only too well, He would find, nay He *does* find, too many of these abuses which His eye surely marks, though His Church too often seems never to heed! For, after all, He does come; "the Judge does stand at the door, and see, and heart! But if the Church too often refuses to bestir herself against abuses, at least the work is taken up by outside organizations, working in the Spirit of the Lord, which is eternal!"

But in this "winter of our discontent," Christmas is at least a promise and an emblem of a better time, of that true Golden Age which lies before us, and not behind! A distinguished agnostic naturalist lately observed that the latter part of this century will be chiefly remarkable for the gradual waking up of the more privileged classes of society, to the hard and narrow lives, grinding and incessant toil, restricted