

The Spirit of Christmas

By Charles G. Paterson, D.D., St. Stephens Church, Winnipeg



WINTER

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IN the course of a year we celebrate certain days, each of which brings its own message and produces its special effect. Easter makes us rejoice in the assurance of a larger life, to be entered through the portal of death. Empire Day fans into a blaze the sacred spark of patriotism which is ever glowing on the altar of the soul. Thanksgiving reminds us of the loving kindness and tender mercy of the Most High, and recalls us to reverential gratitude. And now Christmas once more draws near, its approach heralded by the stirring within us of memories, emotions and aspirations among the tenderest, purest and noblest of which we are ever possessed. What does its advent bring? What is the spirit of this season, that youth and age alike should tingle so in expectation of its re-appearance? It is the spirit that was voiced in the song of the angels that sang above Bethlehem's plain on that memorable night: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

The spirit of Christmas is the spirit of God's good-will to men. The gospel of Christmas is the good news, always new and only good, that every human being is more precious in the sight of the Supreme Being than all the suns and stars which He has made. The music of Christmas bells and greetings, of the laughter and shouts of the children when they discover their gifts, of the carols and hymns of the people assembled to worship—it is all but the reverberation of the music that ushered into our world the eternal lover and Savior of men. The light of Christmas candles and open hearths, of sparkling eyes and happy faces, of all the season's cheer and merriment—this is but the reflection of the glory of the Lord that shone round about when Mary received into her arms the little child named Jesus. And all Christmas light, and all Christmas music, as it was at first and as it has continued to be, is a sure, welcome witness to this supreme truth, that God is Love.

Christmas commemorates the greatest event in the history of earth or heaven, the incarnation of God as one of ourselves, the self-emptying of Deity in order that humanity might rise into newness of life. No wonder that Carpeggio in his painting of the Nativity makes all the light upon the scene to emanate from where the Child is lying. No wonder that even the careless tripper round the world feels, when he reaches Bethlehem, a strong impulse to kneel down beside the devout pilgrims and kiss the silver star let into the pavement where Jesus is supposed to have been born. No wonder that, one by one, the peoples of the earth, when they desire to take their place among the civilized, alter their mode of reckoning to read with reference to that event. For Christmas means just what Anselm of Canterbury wrote of old: "God Himself, through the mystery of the Incarnation, hath become thy brother." It means that the soul of the basest creature found in the ranks of our enemy is of more value than all the gold that would be needed to pay the costs of every war since the world began. Christmas proclaims that in the sight of God all the celestial spheres whose lights twinkle throughout infinite space are inferior in worth to one human spirit, dwelling perhaps in the body of some wretched victim of the temptations of our modern society. The message of Christmas is, "the love of God is broader than the measure of man's mind, and the heart of the Eternal is most wonderfully kind." The spirit of Christmas is that of the timeless and infinite good-will of Him who loves each one of us as though there were only one of us to love; the One who patiently seeks to draw us unto Himself, where only are to be had virtue and rest.

But that is not all. The good-will of God to men which is shed abroad in our hearts at the Christmas season is meant to increase within us good-will to one another. The former is actual and unchangeable; the latter is an ideal only partially realized. The recurrence of the anniversary of Jesus' birth helps on the movement mightily. The thermometer which registers human affection reaches then its highest mark; the tide of genuine benevolence is then most nearly at the flood. Not even the war can make this

Christmas an exception. The dawn of that blessed day will find in every heart a passion of devotion for our own, and a longing for their welfare, hardly paralleled in the years of peace. And they who have gone out from us to do what they can to make peace on earth, through armed resistance to armed attack on the fundamental principles of that righteousness which alone makes peace—they will direct toward home thoughts laden with good-will for all who love them; and distance and danger will unite us all in a bond more intimate than before.

Outside the Gospel, the most beautiful and helpful story for this time of year is Dickens' "Christmas Carol." We should turn to it again this season and read of the marvellous change wrought in Ebenezer Scrooge by the spirit of Christmas, whereby the crabbed and miserable old screw became one of the most generous and happy benefactors in good old London town. The spirit of Christmas present is a masterpiece, the genial, kindly giant. He was so tall; and yet he could stand with equal grace beneath the low roof of the cottage or the lofty ceiling of the palace. By preference he frequented the dwellings of the poor, such as the Cratchet home, where crippled Tiny Tim was his special favorite. And he had a wonderful torch from which he sprinkled incense on people quarrelling and made them cease, and on frugal Christmas dinners, making them a banquet, bringing wherever he went peace and good-will to men.

It is all a parable, setting forth the holy influence of the spirit of Him whose birth we celebrate. And we are under its influence once more. In the depths of the heart we feel good-will to all, even to our enemies. We wish their true well-being; we believe that we oppose them in as truly for their own good as for ours. We fight, and bear burdens, and pray not for ourselves alone, nor for our Empire only, but for the sake of that Humanity which Jesus came to save and bless, that universal Brotherhood which is one and indivisible, having the one Father God. For this is a civil war. Those whom we are resisting to the death are our erring, misled brothers, multitudes of whom know not what they do. We must continue to oppose them until we are completely triumphant; but when the end shall come may no pride or pomp of victory cause us to forget that the prostrate foe over whom we stand is still one of ourselves, our beaten brother. Meanwhile, as we twine our wreaths and ornament our trees, while we fill the little stockings and read the sweet evangel, may the spirit of Christmas, the spirit of the Christ, fully possess our hearts. May that beautiful spirit lead us away from the wastes of selfishness to the meadows of loving solicitude for others, back from the complexity and artificiality of maturity to the simplicity and sincerity of childhood. May it be ours this Christmas, as we rejoice in our knowledge of God's un-failing love, to be animated by a spirit of good-will such as was His whose name we bear, and whose Kingdom we in this war are striving to defend. "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will toward men." Amen and Amen!

Baths.

Everyday bathing is one of the necessities of reasonably good health in summer. The bath cleanses the skin, keeps the pores active and free from obstructions. It is stimulating to the circulation and tones up the skin generally. A cool bath in the morning, with a brisk rub afterward, acts as a tonic, and is a splendid nerve stimulant. A comfortably warm bath at night just before the child is put to bed, acts as a sedative. The bath is one of the principal preventive measures for the summer. Disease lurks at the doorstep, comes in at the windows in dust, invades our homes in such a variety of ways that the mother must needs be vigilant who would keep her children free from illnesses during the hot summer months. A bath in the morning before eating, or two hours after a meal at any time that is convenient, will prove beneficial.