

CHRISTMAS.

"Old, good old Christmas has gone! Nothing but the hair of his good grey old head and beard left! Well, I will have that, seeing that I cannot have more of him." So says Washington Irving in his Sketch-book. Of modern authors, Irving, Dickens and Thackeray introduced Christmas to us; that is, they recalled and vividly reproduced the spirit of heartiness, of universal hilarity, hospitality and good feeling which are traditionally associated with the good old Christmas to which they appealed.

In this work-day world of ours, in the jar and crash of business and bargaining, it is good for humanity that we have this recurring festival to remind us of our duties to our fellow-men, and to inspire us with that touch of Nature which makes the whole world kin.

There are many amongst us who have plenty and to spare, but unfortunately there are also many in this favoured land whose prospects are very dark. It would be but a half-hearted Christianity which would overlook the poor at this season, and all would enjoy their own holiday the better with the knowledge that they have helped others to do likewise.

It is our great and universal holiday, the happiest of the year. It is the feast of brotherly love, which is the essential doctrine of the religion it commemorates. Through all the festivities of the season, the thought of HIM in whose honour we observe the day should not be lost. It should be the undertone in the music of our gladness—the key-note of all our rejoicing.

But it is not alone as a religious holiday that we should keep the feast; Christmas ought to be a family holiday. It is pre-eminently the Children's Day. We are so busy in helping on the work of the world that we can hardly afford the time for little home holidays. So it comes to pass that our family ties are loosened and too often our children are glad to go out from under the roofs which have been to them only a shelter rather than a home. Christmas, therefore, of all days in the year, ought to be made so merry, by every device within our reach, that in years to come, whenever the day dawns they will look back with loving tears in their eyes, and with longings in their hearts, for the better home where those who once made the earthly home so dear are waiting to receive them.

It is a good thing that the world has not outlived this festival. That in all Christian lands it is clear that the anniversary of the birth of the founder of Christianity should be celebrated, not less natural does it appear that the celebration should assume a joyful and benevolent character. Surveyed from every point of view, the birth of Christ is seen to be a joyful and joy-inspiring event. The event was suggestive of all sorts of generous and kindly thoughts and deeds. It spake of forgiveness of injuries, sympathies with suffering, compassion for wretchedness, pity for the erring, and active interposition to save the perishing. It has come once more, as it always comes—may it ever come so—with its own brilliant associations undimmed; nevertheless we may well ask ourselves whether we are even at this day enjoying the fulness of the message of blessing given to the world. And, we are forced to answer, that there is still much to hope for. We have need for the exercise of faith and patience, and for the cultivation of the true spirit of the festival and of the religion which appoints it.

And so Christmas has been kept with bright merriment, and song, and dance, and cheerfulness. And they are welcome. Innocent and welcome be they ever held, beneath the blessed influence of Christmas, which casts no gloomy shadow! But as it fades from our presence, may we hear a voice whispering to our hearts, "This, in commemoration of the law of love and kindness, mercy and compassion. This, in remembrance of ME!"

Sweet to behold thy influence o'er all the Christian world;
To see the banner of "Good-will" spontaneously unfurled;
To find our daily fears forgot, our enmities forgiven,
And hearts grow nearer each to each, and nearer unto heaven;
To know that midst the multitudes one simultaneous tone
Of joyance and benevolence respondeth to our own.
Hail to thy coming once again, thou humanizing time!
Morn of a mighty mystery, soul-saving and sublime!

In crowded cities men forego their wretchedness and wrongs,
New pleasure lighteth up their eyes and leapeth from their tongues;
In palaces and cottage homes one sentiment is rife;
On mountain slopes, in lonely glens, awakes more buoyant life;
In stern, unpeopled forest glooms, on 'wilderling seas and wide,
Hand claspeth hand, and clings to soul, and care is cast aside.
Hail to thy coming once again, thou sympathetic time!
Morn of a mighty mystery, soul-saving and sublime!

Blest season! yet not blest to all, save in the holy sense
Of sweet salvation, and the power of high omnipotence;
How many at this festal time confront the coming year
With desperate hearts, upbraiding eyes, and souls which know no cheer.
Oh! that the human family could each and all partake
One creed, one comfort, and one joy, blythe Christmas! for thy sake.
Hail to thy coming once again, thou meditative time!
Morn of a mighty mystery, soul-saving and sublime!

"A CHRISTMAS PARABLE."

It is recorded that "the trees went to anoint a king over them, and said to the olive, Reign thou over us; but the olive said, Shall I make my oil to cease which God and man honour in me and go to move myself above the trees? And the trees said to the fig-tree, Go thou, reign over us; but the fig-tree said to them, Shall I make my sweetness to cease and my good produce and go to move myself above the trees? Then the trees said to the vine, Go thou reign over us; but the vine said, Shall I make my new wine to cease which gladdens God and men and go to move myself over the trees? And all the trees said to the bramble, Go thou, reign over us, and the bramble said to the trees If in truth you urge *me* to be a king over you, come and confide in my shade; but if not let fire go forth from the bramble and devour the cedars of Libanus."

All ancient wisdom would seem naturally to have taken the form of parables in which the symbols of things as they appear in the external world were used to represent things as they actually are in the mental world within man.

Trees, here and elsewhere, correspond to the perception of truth, or the knowledge of God. The olive is the perception of the love of God; the fig-tree, the perception of the external form which such love ever assumes,—viz., the love of the neighbour; the vine is the perception of the beauty of absolute truth—truth for its own sake, and for its usefulness to others. The bramble is the perception only of such truth and such goodness as can be perverted to serve and preserve self, regardless of injury to others. The fire of love, or desire, that goes forth from *it* consumes all perception of truth, which aims at usefulness, or the doing of good to others. The cedars of Libanus are the perception of truth that leads to goodness, and therefore are destroyed by fire, or love, that burns only to lay waste a place in which self alone may reign.

Thus it is evident why each of the trees except the bramble refused to reign. Love to God, love to man, affection for truth, each and all, live only in, and by, usefulness to others. Each reigns only and best within its special use, and must ever refuse to rule over others for the sake of self; and so, all the other perceptions and knowledges within man's mental being, when they seek any of these faculties to lead them like an earthly king to conquest and victory for self and not to bloodless conquest and rivalries in usefulness, meet no response. Only the bramble can listen to their cry, while, with external semblance of perception of truth, it leads them to their, and its, destruction. Thus a spurious goodness—goodness towards self alone and not towards others—came to exist in the mighty forest of perceptions of natural truth and spiritual, within man, till every growth became perverted, and life itself a wilderness overrun with error, superstition and sensuality among the simple, while the bramble of hypocrisy and Pharisaism in those wise and powerful only in a self-derived and self-centred intelligence crushed out and pierced its fellows.

Then, as now, how to cure and how to restore is ever the thought and will of God toward man. Self and selfishness, pleasure and sensuality had taken the first place; love toward others and love toward God had been given the last. The material things of time and sense were all that man's will knew or desired for self. Hence all the disorder of creation. Divine order, which is human order also, for man is made in the image of God, requires that the spiritual being of man should rule the natural,—that Heaven should infuse life into earth,—that the love of others and the love of God should be joined with the intellectual power given to man, and together direct his physical nature to usefulness to all the human race. It is *not* a law of man's being that usefulness to "number one" should blind the intellect and occupy the heart to the utter exclusion of all the needs of other men and the hunger of man's own nature for communion with one higher, purer, holier than himself. To restore this Divine order and make Himself again the centre of new Life and Light to the world, Jehovah came to earth in human form, and that first Christmas morn beheld the first realization of perfect "peace on earth" and the Divine "good will toward men" in that Humanity with which He clothed Himself as a covering for His Divinity.

In that age—aye, and largely still—it was man's very life, will or love-power, which man himself had perverted to that most debased of uses,—to live, and will and strive for self alone. All truth and intellectual light had been bent and distorted to save only that end. How touch and save that centre of life, the *will* of man? only by drawing that love, that will, *away* from self, and *toward* another by a Divine Love displayed toward him and acting on those very physical senses by which alone the race was still accessible; and so God clothed Himself with like physical senses. To heal the sick, to cast out demons, to give sight to the blind, a new clothing of physical flesh, pure and clean, to the leper, to raise the dead to life again, were works of love unmistakable to the needs of those bound by the physical effects of a long ancestral course of sinful disregard of the laws, physical and spiritual, by which the being of man is framed. Many a heart besides that of the relieved sufferer must have been touched and waked to the possibility of a love other than self-love, not only by the good that lived in the deed done, but by the ineffable compassion in the glance, voice and touch of Him whose 'mercies