

"At Christmas play, and make good cheer,  
For Christmas comes but once a year."  
—Tusser.



"Heap on more wood! the wind is chill;  
But let it whistle as it will,  
We'll keep our Christmas merry still."  
—Scott.

## DECEMBER

### The "Goodwill" Month

ONCE again is December with us. Think of it, not as a month of gloom and dullness, of cutting winds and nipping frosts, of driving rain and blinding sleet, of roughened roads and icy walks, and a hundred other such physical inconveniences; but rather as a time wherein we may provide some measure of compensation for these and associated disagreeable things.

Not the cold of the weather, but the chilly temperature of the heart is most to be deplored. Not in hard external circumstances, so much as in inward hardness of spirit, lies the chief danger before us all.

While the forces of Nature combine to make December a month of hardening on all without, the forces of Grace, working within, unite to make it a time of gracious softening to all who would hear and heed the angels' song of "Goodwill toward men." Thank God that the gracious sentiments of that celestial chorus find echo in an increasing number of human breasts as the years go by, and that to-day more hearts beat in harmony with its heaven-born music than ever before.

But we must stoutly keep our spirits attuned to the song of the angels here, if we would spread abroad its sweet melody, until all mankind bursts forth in loud Hosannas to the King, and clasps glad hands together in one universal shout of thanksgiving and joy.

And of all the months in the year, December most appeals to us to seek this spiritual concord. It is the Christmas month, and what that really means they best know who most fully catch the spirit of the Child, and who most thoroughly reflect His motive on all about them. To attain such knowledge is not hard. If we but guard against the withering influences of selfishness, which, left unchecked, do shrivel the finer sensibilities of the soul, and rob us of life's chief glory and charm.

These consist, not of the disposition to get and hoard what we possess, but of the spirit that prompts us to get, that we may give of what we possess, and, so giving, add to the durable riches of those to whom we thus minister. Not what one has, but what one becomes, because of what he does with what he has, is the true measure of his worth. Poor old Scrooge; how one pities him! And yet, even as he saw himself in his dream, fettered by the chain he had forged in life, we, too, may become shackled by the bonds with which a self-seeking disposition will surely bind us if we give it right of way in our daily habits and practices. But we, like Scrooge, may be transformed. How? As he was. There was

everything unlovely in him, when, in answer to his nephew's cheery "Merry Christmas, uncle!" he snapped out, surly as a sulky dog, "Bah! Humbug with your Merry Christmas! What is Christmas but a time for paying bills without money, a time to find yourself a year older, not an hour richer? If I could work my will, every idiot who goes about with Merry Christmas on his tongue should be boiled with his own pudding, and buried with a stake of holly through his heart! To Bedlam with Christmas, man. Go home!" But see him later, as he has caught the spirit of the Christmas yet to be. All is lovely now. Why? Because he has breathed the spirit of Love within. No turkey

is too big for the Cratchits, no feast too sumptuous, no expense too lavish. Tiny Tim may well rejoice, and with him all and sundry unite to make abounding merriment, and it is "poor old Scrooge" no more. Rich as he never dreamed of being, the joy of ministering to others has transformed him, as it has many another since Dickens wrote his immortal Carol, and as it will enrich and beautify you and me, dear soul, if we but give it full away in our lives.

Happy indeed shall we be, and true happiness shall we bring into other hearts and homes, if we resolve to spend the goodwill month as He who gave Himself for us has set us the fair example, and in all our efforts to emulate Him, surely, I may say, as did Tiny Tim, "God bless us every one."

### The Epworth League, or, Something Better

IF national destiny is determined by the character of the people, a solemn obligation rests upon those who have charge of the culture of the young. The citizens of to-morrow are the children of to-day, and what they shall be depends very largely on what their elders help them to become. A boy is one for a short time only, and the kind of man he shall grow to be is determined, in large measure, by the influences that surround him in the growing.

Leave a boy alone, and he will not only prove the proverb true, "a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame," but he will exert a more or less disastrous present influence on others, and become, by and by, a damage, rather than a blessing to the state. When he should be a source of manly strength to the nation and a minister of daily good to his fellow-men, he will be to an incubus on society, and, by personal character and example, add to the elements that work moral ruin and social disaster.

The care and culture of young lives is a present work that calls for the most intelligent and painstaking processes on the part of all who are concerned for them personally, and who, at the same time, seek the growth and well-being of the nation in all that makes for abiding prosperity as the generations pass by. If the child is taught according to low standards of life, the adult will hardly rise above the practices of what is base. If high ideals are inculcated in the heart of the boy, and held before his mind as his years progress, the growing youth will hardly develop into vile or sordid habits as a man.

What is true of one boy is true of the whole class of boys. Exceptions there ever have been, and still shall be, but the ancient truth still operates: "Tram up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it." We may scarcely expect our children to be more pure in character or noble in conduct than we teach them to become. He, therefore, who helps a child towards the achievement of a right life, affects both the present and the future, for in influencing the child of to-day, he impresses the man of to-morrow, and, through him, the whole body of men whom he eventually touches in constant daily intercourse.

Such a thought should effectively destroy the all too common and popular fallacy that it is but a trifling or insignificant thing to deal with a child, and properly understood, it will arouse all possible enthusiasm in the practical performance of the Church's imperative duty to make the most of her little children and growing youth.

And the "most" is not attained when we have simply taught them how to be good, and they must be trained to do good. This is, in general, the province of all young people's societies, and, in Methodism, is the particular aim and purpose of the Epworth League.

Looked at in its connexion relation, the Epworth League seeks to effect the same end for the whole youth of Methodism as the local society does for the young people of the individual community in which it operates. These ends are briefly two-fold—(1) To help each young person attain the New Testament standard of personal character, as set