

I find a book unreadable, it need not follow that no one else can read it. And if a possible reader of a seemingly unreadable book looms miraculously upon my horizon, my path is clear before me. If I know a spinster who likes to read about the duties and consolations of spinsterhood, or a mother who likes to read about maternal responsibilities, or an overworked man who likes to read about the strenuous life, I may with a clean conscience rid myself of books which have no message for me. If my friend is about to take an ocean voyage, I may load him down with novels which otherwise I should blush to present. He will receive them gratefully read them on the steamer when he lands, and forget them by the time he reaches Paris or London. It may even happen that a book of travels will supplement usefully his Baedeker, but this is a doubtful chance; while for most current poetry I frankly confess I can find no place at all. Hospitals, college settlements and country libraries offer asylums to all books, without regard to qualifications. They have the forlorn hospitality of a provincial museum which harbors all the discarded relics of the town, saving them from ignominy and the ash barrel. But it is not well to take advantage of our brother's poverty.

And if we give, as we should, intelligently and generously, bearing mind our friend's appreciations—and his limitations—what can be so excellent as a book. Let us not offer it in the spirit of remonstrance against his ignorance or his prejudices, for this is an unlively thing to do. It is well to like the book we give, but it is essential to give the book our friend likes. It is chances that our tastes and his agree, that we are fortunate enough to share the pleasures of reading, then the happiness of giving and receiving is for once equal; then the little volume traveling over land and sea is a link, exquisite and adequate, between mind and mind. "The right book," says the author of Elizabeth and Her German Garden, "sent me by my friend who loves it too, is a little bridge flung over space by him to me, across which his soul and mine go gaily to our silent merry meetings."

NOT FAR AWAY.

The country where no sorrows ever come—
The land of sweet release, the land of endless peace,
The heavenly home.

Look not so far for streets all paved with gold,
For happiness untold,
For softly-swinging pearly gates,
That stood ajar to let our loved ones in;
For heaven is nearer to us, every one,
Than we can know.

THE NATIVITY.

Augustine deemed the festival of Christmas as being of later origin and lesser authority than those of Easter, the Ascension, and Whitsuntide. When efforts were first made to fix the exact date of the Advent there were, as stated by Clement of Alexandria, some who advocated the 20th of May, and others who contended for the 20th or 21st of April. The Oriental Christians were very generally of opinion that both the birth and baptism of Jesus took place on the 6th of January. Julian I., Bishop of Rome, from the year 337 to 362, inclined to the belief that the Saviour's birth took place on the 25th of December, and held out until the Eastern Churches adopted the same view. It having been the custom of various nations to observe a season of rejoicing when the shortest day had passed, they very readily adopted the Christmas festival as fixed for December 25. Roman converts soon introduced into the keeping of Christmas the customs of the Saturnalia, which, in modified form, survives even to this day.

MEXICO.

Great interest is now being taken in the development of trade in Mexico, and capitalists are looking towards that country and its resources and development with greater interest each year. Not only is Mexico attractive from a trade standpoint, but as is well known, it is one of the most interesting countries in the world to visit during the winter months. To give all those who contemplate a trip to this wonderful southern country, (which any one who can afford the time and expense should do) the Grand Trunk Railway System are organizing a special excursion that will give the best opportunity to tourists and business men to cover the whole of Mexico.

This tour will leave Montreal in special Pullman sleeping cars on the morning of January 29th, connecting at Chicago with the special Pullman train that will leave there at 10.00 a.m., January 30th, proceeding south through St. Louis, San Antonio and Laredo into Mexico. The itinerary is made to include all of Mexico that is of interest to the traveler for pleasure and extending the scope and times far beyond the line and dates of the ordinary tour, making leisurely stays here and there in the Capital and other important cities.

The tour will be under special escort and in charge of Mr. René Campbell, General Manager of the American Tourist Association, who is the best posted authority on Mexico in America and who has accompanied like parties to that country every year for the past twenty-five years.

Great interest is being taken throughout the country regarding these special excursions and there is no doubt that a representative party will leave for the first of these tours. Another tour is in contemplation for the latter part of February. Write to J. Quinlan, Bonaventure Station, Montreal, and secure free literature, rates, etc.

THREE PLANS FOR GIVING.

A good Christmas plan is for two friends to agree to give each other presents that shall cost a certain amount each year and to keep within that amount if possible. Where friendship is of the right kind an unexpected present on Christmas does not necessitate hurried shopping before New Year's in order that the social accounts may be at once balanced.

One young woman made a list of presents to be given, setting down a certain amount to be expended against each name—the total of these amounts corresponding with the sum she had set aside to devote to the purpose. Then with this list in hand she made her shopping round, selecting in every case a gift that cost just one-half of the price allowed for it. She found the plan successful in the way of keeping her expenditures within bounds and leaving the surplus for the eleventh hour emergencies that the festival is sure to bring.

A third plan is to study out the things one would like to buy or make one's friends; then give up a day or two to a round of shopping to see how possibilities compare with expectations and then a readjustment of the list on the basis of knowledge acquired. Finally, the buying proper.

One family sets aside a certain sum to be spent on each of its immediate members, the same amount for each one, and buys joint Christmas gifts. In this way each receives a single handsome present from the family instead of a number of less valuable articles from the various members individually.

I have read somewhere that "the deepest need of Christmas is Thanksgiving." In this way the two happiest holidays of the year, Christmas and Thanksgiving Day, are bound closely together.

CHRISTMASTIDE.

The Christmas tide is always a season of good cheer and joy, and when it returns it is like the replenishing of the gladsome well-springs in the desert of life's sullen and beautiful journey. But all this good cheer and joy and replenishing is traceable to the significance of that title bestowed upon the child of Mary and Son of God, and which, more than any other, is descriptive of his characteristic work and serves most to endure him to his people. His name was called Jesus because he should "save his people from their sins." The Hebrew "Messiah" and the Greek "Christ" are names that represent our Lord's offices as the anointed prophet, priest and king; but "Jesus," the personal name announced by the command of the angel Gabriel, is the name which more than any other makes the Christmas tide the season of surpassing affection and joy. It is not strange, accordingly, as Julian admitted, that the heroic Child of the Bethlehem manger is constantly winning his battle. Like the sea, that divine Child "kisses the feet of the Gibraltar of fact, yet keeps pure and progressive because he never stands still." On the one hand, he holds us fast to the logic of ascertained realities; on the other, he is the most superb fact of these latest Christian times, and the one overshadowing and aggressive influence for righteousness in the whole earth. The Babe of Bethlehem is winning his battle with sin, not by pomp and pride, but because of his constant and unique influence in the warp and woof of human well-being; not by force, or craft, or magic, but by the intrinsic force of the trust and hope and love that centers in him, and which constitute the trinity of all that is good in character and achievement. The divine Child has already leavened the government, the society, the learning, the literature, the life of all that is worthy of being called decent and righteous on this planet. In the ends of the earth and the isles of the sea, if there be a place where vice, ignorance and superstition languish, and where virtue, intelligence and spirituality flourish, it is because of the authority and influence of his sweet name and blessed life. The waiting world that has come under the dominion of our King can never be the same as before. The touching and charming story of this Christmas time is constantly doing its benign work. As in Hawthorne's fable of "The Great Stone Face," men and governments and affairs are, unconsciously even, coming under the dominion of the child Jesus, and being transformed into his image.

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