



Wishing every reader of The Western Home Monthly a Merry Christmas, the Philosopher hopes with all his heart that each one of them will be able to welcome the kindly day in good health and happiness. There will be exceptions, the Philosopher knows and regrets; and he hopes that for these the drawbacks which circumstances may impose, will be tempered by the consolation of the message brought to earth by Him whose coming, nineteen hundred and twenty years ago, will be celebrated this month by the greatest anniversary in the calendar, the festival which crowns the year. This will be the seventh Christmas since the Great War broke upon the world, the most terrible disaster in all the history of humanity. It will be the third since the passing of the cataclysm in which so many things went down. Emperors have been hurled from their thrones, dynasties have been destroyed, empires have been shattered into fragments. But there is one Kingdom which has not been shaken—the Kingdom of the Child, the throne of which was established in Bethlehem. The vision of the Christ-child in the manger, brings the world back to the beginning of things, and every child's cot at this season becomes a symbol of peace and good-will, and the promise of a new world.

THE PROBLEMS OF OUR TROUBLED TIMES

At no season can it be more fitting and appropriate than it is in the Christmas season, to give thought to the necessity of bringing the spirit of the teachings of Jesus to bear on the social, economic, industrial and political problems of the troubled time through which we are living. Our ears are assailed every day by oracles, threats and warnings in reference to these problems. The passion for talking excitedly about these problems, is one of the marks of our time. Let us not forget that while we all have our duties as citizens, our primary duty is not to consider and decide what other people ought to do, but to do our own duty as individuals in this world. Let us not be too ready to feel ourselves called on to be reformers of the lives of others, and would be managers-in-general of society. Every man and woman has one big duty. That is, to take care of his, or her, own self, in accordance with the fundamental fact that this duty is not a selfishly individual matter, but is truly a social duty. The making the best of one's self individually, is not a separate thing from the duty of filling one's place and discharging rightly one's obligations as a member of human society. The two things are one; and the latter is accomplished in the working out of the former. To realize this is to realize the inner meaning of the teaching of Jesus.

AS WIDE AS HUMANITY

Milton, in his Hymn on the Morning of Christ's Nativity, sings of the snow upon the earth as a symbol of purity. He was thinking, of course, of Christmas in England, not Christmas in Palestine. And why not think of the great birth from which the Christian era dates as belonging not to Palestine, but to every land—to our own Western Canadian prairies, and Milton's England and every other country under the sun? While the children in Western Canada, deep in blankets, listen eagerly for the sleigh-bells of Santa Claus, and the patter of his reindeer's hoofs on the roof, their cousins in Australia and New Zealand, on the other side of the world, await just as eagerly the same legendary sounds and the tardy dawning of the happy morn; they are more restless and wakeful, it may well be, on account of the heat of the night. In Australia and New Zealand, as in Canada and in every other land in Christendom, Christmas is, above all things else, the children's day. It is a day when we can all be children, while at the same time, as mature men and women, realizing that all that is best in our civilization we owe to the Babe born in Bethlehem.

SOCIALISM vs. CHRISTIANITY

The core of the teaching of Jesus is that each one of us must be faithful to his, or her, conscience, and must as an individual work out the Golden Rule of doing unto others as we would have others do unto us, without looking into any State-system, to bring about results which cannot be brought about otherwise than by the operation of spiritual forces within us. This is where Socialism is fundamentally wrong in asserting the possibility of establishing a State-system with conscience, power and will, sublimated above human limitations, so that it control with supreme wisdom and beneficence, the entire life and work of each and every individual. The gospel of Karl Marx, the great prophet and preacher of Socialism, is directly opposed to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Lenin and Trotsky and their associates in the Bolshevik control of Russia, are high-priests of Marxism, and under their rule, labor in Russia is ruthlessly subjected to State-control more rigorous and tyrannical than the State-control in Germany ever was. Socialism, in a word, aims at reducing humanity to the conditions of the bee-hive, and making every worker a living machine and no more. It scornfully disregards the essentials of human individualities, which the teaching of Jesus has made the things of highest importance in the world. There is profound significance in the fact that the Bolshevik regime has banished every suggestion of Christianity from the schools in Russia. Christmas does not fit into Bolshevism.

The Philosopher

THE SPIRIT OF THE ANNIVERSARY

The spirit of the Christmas festival and its transforming effect upon humanity, find expression in the greeting which is now many centuries old, "A Merry Christmas." That greeting works its way even with the Scrooges of the world. It is for each of us to let the Christmas spirit take possession of us, even as it took possession of Scrooge. Who can ever forget Dicken's account of it? "Some people laughed," says that immortal chronicle, "to see the alteration in him; but he let them laugh, and little he heeded them. For he was wise enough to know that nothing ever happened on this globe for good, at which some people did not have their fill of laughter, in the outset. And knowing that such as these would be blind, anyway, he thought it quite as well they should wrinkle up their eyes in grins as have the malady in less attractive form. His own heart laughed, and that was quite enough for him." And whether we be Scrooges or Bob Cratchits, we can all take to heart the Christmas message of Robert Louis Stevenson, the finest ever penned by a man of understanding heart who had also the genius of mastery over the English language: "To be honest, to be kind, to earn a little, and to spend a little less; to make, upon the whole, a family happier for his presence; to renounce, when that shall be necessary, and not be embittered; to keep a few friends, but these without capitulation—above all, on the same terms, to keep friends with himself—here is a task for all that a man has of fortitude." That is a message which we can all carry with us, not only through the Christmastide, but throughout all the months which are to follow. It is a message in harmony with the old story—old, yet ever new—whose meaning is the central significance of the Christmas festival.

LAND, LABOR AND CAPITAL

Jesus made a great use of parables, by which in simple form he taught profound truths. There is an ancient Arab story which might well be applied today in the consideration of the economic problems which are the cause of so much turmoil. There was a man who desired to test which of his three sons loved him most. He sent them out into the world, his object being to find out which would bring him the most valuable present. The three brothers met in a distant city, and compared the gifts they had to take home to their father. The first had a magic carpet, on which he could transport himself and others whithersoever he would. The second had a medicine which would cure any disease. The third had a glass through which he could see what was going on in any place he might choose to name. The three brothers decided that the one with the magic glass should make use of it to see what was going on at home. He saw his father ill in bed, with the physicians standing by his bedside and despairing of his life. Immediately all three brothers stood upon the magic carpet; the one who owned it made it transport them to their father's bedside in the twinkling of an eye, whereupon the brother who possessed the medicine which would cure any disease, administered some of it to their father, and thereby their father's life was saved. The perplexity of the father, when he had to decide which son's gift had been of the most value to him, illustrates very fairly the difficulty of saying whether land, labor or capital is most essential to production. No production is possible without the co-operation of all three.

PRINCIPLES TO PUT IN PRACTICE

What is it that we do on Christmas Day? We commemorate the birth of the Divine Infant at Bethlehem. By devoting the day to peace and good-will, and by doing our most that the Christmas spirit may not be confined to that one day alone, we are endeavoring to fulfil the Gospel. The story of the herald angels' singing, is one of the most beautiful in all literature. The shepherds were watching their flocks in the field by night, when they heard "the multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace good-will towards men.'" Those who devote their thoughts and their acts to peace and good-will, and who plan how to make the blessed Christmas season one of happiness to others, illustrate in practice the principle underlying the whole Gospel, and in so doing, give glory to God in the highest, as mankind can best give glory to God in the highest. For it is not by words of prayer and praise that God is most truly glorified, but by words of kindness and by deeds done for others in accordance with the Divine will. The Christian, whose life is most truly in accord with the spirit of the teachings and the deeds of Christ himself, is the active Christian.

CHRIST'S TEACHING AND CITIZENSHIP

In nothing is it more necessary to be guided by the Golden Rule laid down by Jesus, than in our thinking about the State and what it owes to each of us as an individual, and to the class to which each individual of us happens to belong. We should think first, not of the duty of the State to us, but of our duty to the State. What is the State? The State is All-of-us. In actual practice—that is, in the operation of the State-system—it is only a little group of men, chosen in a very hap-hazard way by the majority of us, to perform certain services for all of us. The majority of us most often go about this choosing in a way that is not the best possible, and the most rational; and we are often disappointed by the results. Sometimes in the operation of the State-system it happens that something which quite seriously affects us, is done, not by any of the men elected by the majority of us, but by some official in a Government building. In ancient times it often happened that the operation of the State-system was controlled by a King's favorite—a fiddler, or a bad woman. In our day it is sometimes for the moment controlled by a little official, who finds his hand on a lever of the governmental machine. But what should be our attitude in regard to what we want the State to do for us? Here is where we should be guided by the Golden Rule. We should not want the State to grant any special, unjust privilege to any class or interest. That is to say, we should not want All-of-us to do something unjustly to the advantage of Some-of us, at the expense of the Rest-of-us.

GOOD CHEER AND INSPIRATION

The year has two Springs. One begins in April. The other blossoms in December. Christmas is a Springtime which touches with a renewal of life, many sleeping emotions. The recurrence of the festival which Christendom has for ages hallowed with rejoicing, not only reminds us of the centuries that have passed since Christianity came into the world, but stirs the heart with the happiest impulses. The young associate it with experience of the greatest delight; the old with hallowed recollections of their own childhood. No other season of the year brings to us all such newness of feeling. It is the season dominated by the higher and homelier sentiments, by worship, by joy, by charity, by good cheer. The good news heard by the shepherds has lost none of its power, but has, on the contrary, been many times multiplied. Ignorance; the foe of the race, must become an ever-narrowing factor in human affairs. There has been ebb and flow of human weal; but it is for every one of us to resolve to do his, and her, utmost to make each succeeding Christmas a better one. However sadly we have known human weal to ebb, we must always remember that its rise and fall have not been as those of the ocean tide, which recedes to where it began, but the rise and fall of a great stream, which always and ever pursues its way onwards towards the supreme fulfilment. While the earth endures the spirit of Christmas will continue to be the inspiration of the utmost greatness of soul, the basis of the best and truest brotherliness of men, the inmost secret of what is best in the life of the world. A great day, indeed, for humanity, is Christmas—the great day of all the year, to be honored by the bringing forth of the best that our hearts can give our neighbors.

CONFUSING HUMAN ILLS

The teachings of Jesus, unlike the teachings of Karl Marx, and of many of those who are loudest in the world today in their advocacy of schemes for bringing about the millenium overnight, make no confusion between two totally different classes of ills in the world. Certain ills belong to the hardships of human life. They are natural. They are part of the struggle with Nature for existence. We cannot blame our fellowmen for our share of these. Certain other ills are due to the greed and injustice of men, and to the imperfections or errors of our existing systems for the carrying on of human life and business. These ills are rightly made a subject of discussion; their removal is rightly made an object of agitation. The first mentioned class of ills is to be dealt with only by manly and womanly effort and courage and energy; the other class of ills is to be dealt with by associated effort. The great trouble with so many of the "reformers" with schemes for making the conditions of human life better, is that they do not distinguish between the two classes of ills, and proclaim that their schemes will cure both. They delude themselves into believing that State action can do more than it is possible for State action to do. In regard to certain ills, each and every individual must work out his, or her, own salvation, and so bring to realization human values which it is utterly beyond the power of any State-system to develop.

THE GREAT TURNING POINT

The birth which Christmas commemorates, is the greatest of all historical events, because it gave humanity a new idea and a new inspiration. It is the only birthday honored all the world over as a festival of joy and love, the anniversary of the greatest turning point in the record of humankind, from which we now date our every day. The Christmas festival was fixed many centuries ago, to coincide with an ancient pagan festival at the Solstice, when the days having reached their shortest, begin to lengthen, because the sun at that turning point of the year, swings back again in his course, rising higher in the heavens with each succeeding day. So the Sun of Righteousness, with an ideal appropriateness, is made to come in with the birth of the new solar year.