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Life in a Looking Glass.



CHRISTMAS this year is likely to be ushered in with an accompaniment of martial music and the tramp of armed men new to the ears of this generation. Two of the world's greatest powers—Great Britain and the United States—are engaged in war, each with a small but stubborn foe. Much blood has already been spilled, and much more must surely be spilled before the Christmas evangel of "peace on earth, good will to men!" is likely to be heard in South Africa and the Philippine Islands. This year the day we celebrate in commemoration of Him who told His disciple to put up his sword, for they that took the sword should perish by the sword, will witness at least 200,000 men under arms intent on slaying one another. For what? In order, they tell us, to establish righteousness and justice! The spectacle is new to this generation. Our fathers remember such sights and sounds—battles fought upon Christmas Day; homes with blinds drawn to shut out the joy of the Nativity; the noise of weeping substituted for the laughter and benedictions of family reunions!

IN the face of such conditions as obtain to-day throughout the civilized world and beset particularly the two peoples we are accustomed to regard as the most Christian and progressive, the candid man is forced to ask himself whether Christianity means anything to mankind after all. How is it possible, if Christ came to bring peace and good will, that 1,900 years after his incarnation, life and death, men should still fight and slay each other, with weapons more deadly and terrible as the years go by? The question is not easily answered, even by those whose faith is most simple and most strong. And yet, I think, most of us feel that it can be answered. Nineteen hundred years ago war was the normal condition of the world. The Roman Empire was cradled in the camp and nursed upon blood. No nation or tribe was secure from molestation except as the strong right arms of its men made it so. Bloodshed was the common remedy for both national and individual ills; in it was laundered the dirty linen of governments and of private citizens. Such a thing as international arbitration was unheard of. The slightest cause was sufficient to precipitate a conflict—a fancied slight to an ambassador, a thoughtless remark upon an emperor's figure or a tribune's beard. We who know how hardly the peace of the world is disrupted to-day—how all the resources of diplomacy, the conservatism of public opinion, and the tenderness of public conscience combine to hold back nations from each other's throats—must admit that peace and good will have triumphed to a marvelous degree, in international relations at all events.

BUT, how of personal and private relations? Is there more peace and good will as between man and man to-day than at the dawn of the Christian era? It is true, the master in this year of grace does not have his slave cut in pieces and

fed to the swans in his fountain; he merely takes his blood from him, drop by drop, through long years of sordid toil and helpless agony, in office, workshop, or factory. The slave does not lie in wait, with knife or poison, to assassinate his master; he merely gives him dishonest service, wastes his time, pilfers his goods, neglects his interests. We do not hear of human vultures from castle and keep swooping down upon the wives and daughters of humble and defenceless peasants and bearing them off to a life of shameful servitude, but those who know aught of the life of our great cities know that the modern world has discovered many a refined and circuitous way of doing ugly deeds. No, we have not got away very far, in our personal dealing, man with man, from the old faith that the weak not only must go to the wall but deserve to go. Every step forward in the industrial maze we call progress seems to intensify the bitterness of social warfare. The conflict between employers and employed, between the weak and the strong in a thousand avenues and relationships of life, was never so keen and relentless. And it is right here, rather than in international matters, that Christianity, doubtless, will be put to its supreme test. War may disappear, but, until the conduct of man toward man is sweetened and purified, the gospel of peace will not be realized, except in a very partial and, indeed, unimportant sense. What the world wants is not so much International Peace Congresses as the spirit of peace, which is the spirit of equity, between man and man.

WILL this spirit be ushered in with some future Christmas day? As wars have passed away, until the occasional conflicts we witness are regarded as recrudescences of barbarism, will private injustice, tyranny and aggression also fade and disappear? Without looking for any heaven upon earth, without expecting to gather figs from thistles, I do not believe we need despair of a better age. Human nature is capable of marvelous regeneration, as of marvelous degredation. Christmas day, with its sweet institutions and practices—largely conventional though they may be—is itself a proof that even sordid and calloused hearts can beat for others when they are expected to do so. There are very few, however selfish, who do not feel a generous warmth towards somebody at this season. The impulses of the moment may be fleeting and may be imperfectly expressed, but they exist—and that is sufficient to prove that humanity has within it the mysterious spark of divinity. And who shall say what generous flame may eventually come from the one tiny ember upon love's altar!

BUT I must not sermonize too long. At Christmastide all subjects but one recede into the background. I have, therefore, nothing to talk about this week except the day and the thoughts it suggests. I leave politics and kindred topics for a more convenient and appropriate season. And, having but one topic, I must have a care lest I write it threadbare. Therefore, I will simply close, with the hope that this old world may yet be purged of all hatefulness, all murderous spirit; and that until that blessed time arrive, every son of Adam may find at least once a year—at Christmas—surcease from the jarring sentiments and goading ambitions that too often "wither life and waste its little hour."

FELIX VANE.