

The Quiet Hour

GOD WITH US.

But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth?—2 Chron. vi.: 18.

Immanuel! God with us in His meekness,

Immanuel! God with us in His might,

To bind our wounds, to gift with strength our weakness,

To bring us, angels, to the home of light!

SHILOH is come; His feet our earth have trod;

Now thanks and glory to the CHILD our God!

How quickly the Christmas season comes round—are you glad? If I asked that question of the children, there would be little hesitation about the answer, but their elders may not feel quite so sure. Of course, we all ought to be glad when Christmas is rising like a glorious sun to brighten all the land, but with many of us the season has got out of joint, somehow, and joy and peace are scattered by the rush and turmoil and fuss of preparation. Even the giving of presents is too often ruined by false motives. If everyone spoke frankly would not some such words as these be heard pretty frequently: "Oh, dear, I must give a handsome present to Miss— for she always gives me one, and I don't like to appear stingy. I have to get about fifty Christmas gifts ready. What a bother Christmas is, anyway."

Don't let us allow the happy Christmas time to be marred by fret and fuss, or ruined by the petty bartering of "Christmas presents"—falsely so-called! Let us make some attempt to live the "simple life," which is nowadays talked about so much and practised so little. We are a little apt to confuse necessities and luxuries in our minds. There are people who think an automobile or a yacht almost a necessity—for them. Yet we know it is possible

to be happy without such things. Are not many of the things we call "necessities" looked upon as luxuries by others? Of course, we are not called upon to forego all luxuries, but a true soldier of Christ does not want to enervate himself by choosing a soft and easy existence. And those who are spoiling Christmas by working too hard may be injuring those they love rather than helping them; just as a mother injures her daughter if she lets her lie around and read novels while she herself is slaving to make life easy for the family. A little hardness is wholesome, and it is a great mistake for parents to be very indulgent. Even in Christmas charities there is great danger of losing Christmas peace. A few days ago a friend of mine, who is engaged in looking after poor children all the year round, told me that she and those who were working with her were busy getting gifts ready for 650 children. "And," she remarked, "we don't give the things haphazard, we find out first what each child needs most." That involves a great deal of work and thought, doesn't it? I am not asking you to give up the extra work Christmas brings. Work is a very good thing—in reason. But we can be very busy in preparation for the great feast, without allowing ourselves to lose our quiet peace—the "peace on earth" which is a Christmas gift from God. It is not easy in these days when everyone seems to be living at high pressure, but it is possible. One of the outside ways of avoiding unrest is to make our gifts to our nearest and dearest very simple and inexpensive. Those who love us only want some sign of remembrance—a sacramental love-token. A few lines of greeting often go to the heart and make the recipient more glad than an expensive present. It is very important to keep the spring from which the Christmas gifts flow, clear and pure, if we wish to greet the Day with the fresh gladness of a child-like heart. Put love into the stitches,

make the puddings and cakes for love's sake, and the season will no longer be a time of sordid worry and fuss—though it may be just as busy as ever. And, under all the rush of the busy days, let the peace of God stand as a sentinel, keeping the heart and mind. The peace of God must rule, if we keep always in sight the real meaning of Christmas: "Immanuel—God with us." The remembrance of His presence is peace—the peace which passeth all understanding. When Solomon dedicated the Temple, he asked: "Will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth?" The more we find out about the infinity of the universe, and the comparative smallness of this earth on which we live, the more impossible it seems. The glad tidings of great joy, which have brightened the earth for about 2,000 years, can never be an old story to us if we enter into the tremendous meaning of the good news.

Each little child, each man and woman is, by the wonderful Incarnation of the Son of God, drawn up to an infinite height of glory. The little Child who lay in that lowly manger-bed brought heaven down to earth and lifted up earth to heaven. No wonder we date our years from that Event—the grandest in history. Our Divine Brother is one with us for evermore. He is guiding our steps, inspiring our hearts, protecting us from unseen foes, making all things work together for our eternal good. Best of all, He is loving us with a tender, individual affection. How strange it is that we allow ourselves to be worried and anxious, when God is close at hand all day long. How strange that we should be faithless enough to be disappointed when He is planning so carefully the most trivial details of our daily warfare and daily journey.

This Christianity of ours is so grand and glorious, so almost unbelievable, that we may well be thrilled with awful joy when we consider the continual indwelling and never-failing sympathy of the All-Mighty, Ever-Loving God. But we have grown used to the thought, and may have lost some of its wonderful freshness. Stop right here, and remember that the God of all the ages is here, thinking of you, loving you as though there were no other being in the universe

for Him to concentrate His love upon. Is it not a thought which fills the soul with an awful joy, and an awful peace?

Think for a moment how dreadful it would be to be deprived of this constant presence of God, think what our condition would be if God did not dwell with men on the earth. What if everything happened by blind chance! Then those who went on wilfully in a career of sin might be happy and light-hearted, and those who lived pure and noble lives might find no joy in their work. Pain would then come by accident, and the most we could do would be to bear it bravely—our souls would not be as gold, precious in the sight of an all-wise Refiner, but would be tossed carelessly into the fire of meaningless sorrow to be destroyed as refuse. Then we should be walking in the darkness, we should be afraid of future troubles, and have no confidence in the lasting property of present happiness. Death would then be a horror, a going out into black uncertainty, helpless and alone, instead of a glad stepping out into the full light of day with hand clasped tenderly in the warm human clasp of our Divine Brother. Love would then make life almost unbearable, for death must one day part the truest lovers; and, if God were not with us, there could be no reality in any communion of saints. While He holds my hand and the hand of the one I love, parting—in any real sense—is impossible. If God were far away in heaven, we might be swept away in myriads—and who would care! But now we know that He cares for every sparrow that is lonely upon the housetop, and that He watches over us, His dear children, with such particular care that even the very hairs of our head are numbered.

This flesh of ours is sacred, and must be kept with all reverence, because He has taken it and will wear it for all eternity. Every blade of grass, each flower that is hidden out of sight in the woods is dear to the Father.

Those who have wandered far away into evil paths may be sad at heart, but they never need despair. God is always at hand, His love is infinite. I never understand how men can declare that one who dies apparently impenitent has gone at once and forever outside the in-



"Daffodils, that come before the swallow dares,
And take the winds of march with beauty."—SHAKESPEARE.