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A Christmas Carol.

MARGARET SYDNEY.

THE golden gleam of Bethlehem's star,
That o'er the Christ-child fell,
With ceaseless light our pathway fills,
The same dear nows to tell:
"Peace—peace on earth, goodwill to men,"
The message bright and clear,
"Good tidings of bright joy I bring,
For Christ the Lord is here."

Those silent rays of gleaming light,
Unerring, clear and swift,
Flash radiance o'er the dull, cold earth,
Our colder hearts to lift;
"To God the highest glory,"
We cry in glad acclaim,
"Peace—peace on earth, goodwill to men,
Comes in the Christ-child's name."

The same pure train of heavenly light
Each Christmastide descends,
And with sweet music of the night
Celestial radiance blends,
That whispers soft on every breeze:
"Good tidings now I bring;
Peace—peace on earth, goodwill to men,
For Jesus Christ is King!"

It brightens all the children's glee,
It beams in every home
It shines around the Christmas-tree,
Proclaiming joy has come.
"To God the highest glory,"
We cry in glad acclaim,
"Peace—peace on earth, goodwill to men,
Comes in the Christ-child's name."

The Christmas Cult and the Christmas Spirit.

BY CELIA PARKER WOOLLEY.

THE present age of theological controversy has witnessed the destruction of many religious beliefs and customs, and is destined to witness greater changes to come, but the Christmas festival promises to hold itself intact for all time, both as an occasion of religious and social celebration. This thought is one to impart cheer and excite reflection. It is one more desired evidence of the fact that the spirit of modern rationalism, so far from destroying certain dear and time-honoured customs, aims only to put them to more high and intelligent use; that nineteenth century science and criticism are not foes of the religious life but powerful allies and helpers.

The Christmas cult has changed somewhat with the growth of time, taking to itself new forms, and modifying itself to suit the conditions of different climes and ages; but the Christmas spirit remains the same, in kind, from one period of time to another, though growing always in degree, and thus establishing anew from year to year its right to man's recognition and regard.

Even if it were not so easy to prove that our Christmas festival antedates, in its main features, the Christian era by many centuries, it could readily be shown that in the present age it has become far more universal in its character than sectarian or even purely Christian. Literary students understand very well that there was a Shakespearean age before there was a Shakespeare, that in the works of Marlowe and other earlier representatives of that great era we have the dawn of the day of which the author of Hamlet was the risen luminary. So the student of comparative religion has learned that that expression of

religious faith and devotion, united to a glowing moral ideal, called Christianity, had manifested itself to the world, in more or less tentative fashion, long before the birth of Mary's Child; and that it continues to move and inspire many hearts which ignore or wholly reject the name.

The world will keep its Christmas festival, not because of its regard for the Christmas cult, but because the Christmas spirit is one that belongs to no age or people, only intensified in expression at this particular season of the year, and entering more and more into the hearts of men as common daily motive. The human significance of Christmas is far deeper than the religious; and when we have learned to use terms more carefully, and to estimate values more intelligently, we shall know that it is this human significance which imparts and explains the religious. The Christmas cult celebrates an event to which a mass of traditional lore, impossible to separate from it, must always impart a more mythical than real character, but the Christmas spirit has as little necessary connection with that cult, as the fragrance of a rose-bush with the paling which the gardener has built to enclose it and other treasures in his keeping.

It is the Christmas spirit which in time will save the world, not in any theological sense, but in the widening away which it demonstrates anew every year, of the principle of human brotherhood. Christianity embodies more perfectly than any other form of faith the idea of democracy in religion; and the Christmas season reiterates this thought in a hundred ways, compelling new and stronger belief in it. All the kindlier feelings of the heart are then aroused, crowding out the old assumptions of worth and difference based on the artificial and extrinsic.

Doubtless the great ideals of human freedom and progress would continue to advance without these recurring tidal seasons of special joy and thanksgiving, but it would be in a cold and spiritless fashion; as the rose-tree would doubtless grow and blossom under a mean temperature of seventy degrees, without the help of those days of intense vibrating heat middle July brings, when the earth reels as if intoxicated with the great drafts of the strong sunshine she has imbibed;—but the ecstasy of being, when fulfillment is reached in a day, this the rose-tree would miss entirely.

No! Life would be a dull and plain affair without that adornment, social and moral, which it receives in these holiday seasons. And the most prized holiday of all the year will continue to be that which not only re-consecrates the ties of home and friendship, but adds the element of religious worship. To the rationalist,—by this I do not mean the man of clear, courageous intellect alone, but the man whose religious and philosophical creed is based on that consensus of testimony offered in his whole being, the emotional and active sides of his nature as well as logical—to the rationalist, then, the element of religious faith is not lost with those theological conceptions that once seemed its final expression. The spirit of worship—and the Christmas festival is but one expression of this spirit—will remain as long as the heart finds something outside or within itself worthy to trust and adore.