

The Weekly Ontario

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EDITORIAL COMMENT

CHRISTMAS, 1913

While there are still many clouds on the Canadian financial horizon, yet the coming Christmas will generally be one of good cheer. The reports of unemployment that come to us from Toronto, Hamilton, Brantford, Winnipeg and Vancouver, indicate that in the larger centers a serious situation exists that will somewhat mar the joy that usually prevails at this festive season, and that has prevailed in Canada over an unprecedented period of time.

Unemployment fortunately does not obtain in this city to any more than a trifling extent. Belleville is not in any large sense an industrial center, and, with a population largely residential, local conditions of trade and general business are not subject to the acute fluctuations as is the case where great factories are established. We have in the past complained of our comparative lack of large industries but in times of depression we are not confronted with the problem of maintaining great numbers of workmen for whom there is no work.

We have therefore this Christmastide, special reason in this city and district, for congratulation and thankfulness. There is not the abounding prosperity that was previously ours, but there is nothing approaching real suffering or want.

These periods of depression, which always come sooner or later, are not unmixed evils. They at least serve to check crazy speculations, gluttonous extravagance and unsound methods of business.

And while providence has been wonderfully kind to the Canadian people, we must not forget that providence is also infinitely just. Plan as cunningly as we may we cannot defeat the stern decrees of nature. Many of us had come to believe that we could create wealth by sitting down and trading town lots with one another as boys trade jack-knives. We thought by devious speculation to land ourselves in that elysium where honest toil is no longer necessary. Our awakening has been somewhat rude, but the awakening had to come sooner or later, and in the end it will be better for us. The necessity for labor is one of the wisest provisions made by all-wise providence. Canadians, whether they live in Belleville or Saskatoon, will be all the better if they are compelled to do more work and less speculating.

WHAT OF YOUR CHRISTMAS SPIRIT?

The spirit of Christmas as the idealists have it, says one of our esteemed contemporaries, is not recognisable by the real thing, according to modern methods.

Theoretically everything is bright, gay, full of peace for oneself and good wishes for the rest of the world.

Actually Christmas may mean anything like this:

Grudging giving and discontented receiving.

Splurging on one's rich friends and stinting where it is not likely to count.

Overgenerosity to the point of extravagance.

Rushing until you detest Christmas and everything connected with it.

Overworked nerves and overwrought tempers from a false conception of Christmas giving.

A generous spirit for your own immediate circle and utter indifference to whether anyone else has a happy day.

Gorging oneself in the interest of Christmas cheer with no thought of a tortured digestion and rockiness the day after.

A Christmas with not one thought to the real meaning of the day and what the world would have been had there been no "birthday of a king" to celebrate.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHRISTMAS

Primarily, of course, Christmas is a religious festival. In the Christian, with a sincere belief in the Christ, who is the foundation rock of his religion, the words of priest and pastor, exhorting his flock to observe the day with ceremonial observance, find a fervent response. From every pulpit is told anew each year the story of him without whom Christmas had never been.

But Christmas appeals also to the non-believer in Christ, to the men and women who cannot subscribe conscientiously to the doctrine of his divinity. It is true, perhaps, to say that as Christmas approaches the Christian spirit is "in the air" but it is true none the less. "Peace and good will" pervade the air that is breathed alike by churchgoers and nonattendant.

In the big cities Christmas is celebrated by Christian and Jew and Mohammedan as well as by those with no religion. In the outermost corners of the earth, wherever men of Christian faith have borne the standard of civilisation, the native heathen in intimate contact with them feel the coming of the spirit and rejoice.

It is well that this should be so, for the spirit of Christmas is the spirit of belief not only in Christ, but in one's fellow men. Every one may share in it if he will. Every one may find in the story of the life that lived in Palestine nineteen centuries ago, of the death that was met on the cross and of the resurrection that followed some thing of personal application something of uplift.

Be sure to read that delightful story on another page of to-day's issue. "The Redemption of Ratty" by Mr. D. D. De Shane, Belleville's promising short-story writer. Mr. De Shane has exceptional gifts as an inventor of tales in which heart interest predominates. Mr. De Shane is able, by shifting and varying the action, to hold the reader's attention from first to last. The author reached a high plane in his story "Out of the Night" published in The Ontario last Christmas, but in "The Redemption of Ratty" his work shows even greater finish and a more ingenious conception of plot.

In your planning of gifts to those you love which kind of value are you figuring in—that which makes only a momentary appeal or the kind which endures?

No one seems yet to have thought of putting a sane and safe tag on Christmas. Perhaps because, once a year, at least, we rather like a big debauch of good will, even though some of its features are unwise.

But if you would buy more heavily, this year, of things of service, which would carry the memory of the day far into the coming year and with increasing satisfaction, we don't believe you'd regret it.

At Birmingham, England, recently a motor car killed a victim through high speed, and the coroner offered in consolation the remark that we used to fear bicycles just as we do motor cars now. He hinted that bicycle accidents proved fewer than anticipated and so will the automobile do less damage as the people become accustomed to it.

The motor car has had ten years of practice and accidents are increasing rather than diminishing. London statistics prove that accidents have trebled since the speed limit was raised.

There is the general statement that we must pay a certain price for speed and that is true. But it would carry more force if the owner of the car paid that price. Now it is the person who owns no car suffers the penalty of speed, while the owner is only discomforted when an accident occurs. Of the dozen cases of near accident which the foot passenger escapes, the owner suffers no particular discomfort.

While it is true that the public should learn to accommodate itself to the motor, it is true that the motor must learn to accommodate itself to the public.

The speed law is little heeded and its enforcement is left too often until death or disaster forces police action.

The time to arrest is when the speed limit is exceeded.

THE JOYS OF CHRISTMAS TIME

Hark! the merry chiming is warning us that this is Christmas morning.

And it's time that we were rising though the hour isn't late.

Still the kiddlets will be flocking each to overhaul his stocking.

And there's scads of things we've got to do that really cannot wait.

Yet before we kick the clothes off (quite determined not to doze off)

Let's indulge in dreamy musing on this joyous Christmastide;

Let us while the bells are pealing, get up some real Christmas feeling.
Fill ourselves with sweet emotions that are not quite cut and dried.
True, the minutes fast are gliding, but consarn 'em let 'em glide.

Think of these long weeks of waiting, all the glad anticipating
Of the gay and festive season that at last is here;

Never resting never stopping in our mad career of shopping,
Searching ever the ideal not too cheap and not too dear;

Crushed and elbowed in the reeking crowds, that like ourselves are seeking
Just the very thing of all things that their loved ones most desired.

Limp and dragged then emerging from the pushing, struggling surging
Mob, with parcels overladen, reaching home at last, dog tired.

Those experiences may be described as "most all-fired"

We have done with haste and flurry, no occasion now to worry,
Lest some sensitive relation may have been quite overlooked.

All the lists of names are checked and all the walls are decked, and
Now within a few short hours the Christmas dinner will be cooked.

Hail to Christmas! happy season!—There is some substantial reason
To be gleeful at thy advent—the beginning of the end.

As thou comest wreathed with holly, we can certainly be jolly,
Welcome thee with feast and wassail, and in general unbend,

For we know that we have spent for thee the last cent we spend!

Now the door bell will cease ringing to the people who were bringing
An endless string of packages from morn to dewy eve;

We no longer will be running to conceal things with cunning,
And we'll lose our wonted air of having something up our sleeve.

There will be a deuced litter, when the gewgaws gleam and glitter,
Of waste paper, string and cotton, from the kitchen to the hall;

But with consciences elastic, we will grow enthusiastic
And "wonder how they guessed", as on the donor's neck we fall,

Looking blissful over dewdads that we didn't want at all.

Ah, this blessed thing of giving! It is half the joy of living
To watch the looks of gratitude and pleasure and surprise

That, at least to outward seeming are upon loved faces beaming—
As the loved one opens his parcel and digs out his gaudy ties.

And the gentle wife and mother her emotions tried to smother
When conducted by her husband, to some secret corner, where,

As a proof of fond affection, he has hid from her detection,
His gift to her, a cozy, costly well upholstered chair

(Of whose comforts, in the future, you may bet he'll get his share.)

But away with sad reflection! This is no time for dejection.
Merry Christmas, happy Christmas, as we said, has come at last!

All the many tribulations, all the trials and vexations
That have crowded thick upon us for the last six weeks, are past,

Not a protest shall be uttered, though the house with toys is cluttered
And the kids are all parading to the sound of horn and drum,

Lusty lung and larynx voicing the extent of their rejoicing.
We will have to stand the racket now that Christmas day is come.

(Later tone our nervous system at some sanitarium).

Thank the Giver if we're able to sit 'round a well-spread table,
Where the plump white-bosomed turkey sheds its savour through the room,

And pudding comes on smoking, and there's no end to the joking
And no heart that harbors malice and no mind o'ercast with gloom

Let us be profoundly grateful that we have at least a plateful,
Grateful for the pepsin tablet that corrects our Christmas cheer;

Hold it as among our mercies if there's one coin in our purses,
Be thankful for those dear to us and those who hold us dear.
(And most supremely thankful, Christmas comes but once a year.)
—Kenneth Harr



XMAS SUGGESTIONS

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