

CHRISTMAS TIDE.

Although Christmas falls within the traditional mild, halcyon days, we always associate it in our minds with clear, frosty weather, spotless snows, sparkling stars, and bells that chime with as frosty a tinkle as the sparkle of the stars. Yet, of course, the weather has nothing whatever to do with our real acceptance of the day, since it has been celebrated all around the year, in March and in September, and since in equatorial regions it has to be accompanied by fans and coolers, and ices are more grateful there than the necessary because historic plum-pudding at its banquet table.

For Christmas, after all, has to find its best atmosphere in the heart; and whether it falls under the patronage of good old generous St. Nicholas or under that of the Christ Child—the Christ-Kindlein that has become Kris Kringle—the acknowledgment of its beauty and preciousness has to spring out spontaneously, as the blossoms of that Glastonbury thorn which is said to be the staff of Joseph of Arimathea used to do when the time of the year came round to the sacred birth, and aroused in it the blossoming impulse. Wherever the heart itself welcomes the coming of Christmas it makes no odds whether the day is ushered in with the singing of carols or with the burning of gunpowder, as the habit is in some portions of our Southern country.

And who is there that has not a welcome for Christmas? Even he who considers religion as belonging to the region of the unknowable, and disregards all religious events, must feel the contagion of the general joyfulness, and be glad, one would think, of the day. If he is not, let him pause and think of what it is that the influence of the day has brought about and established. Let him picture the state of the world before the dawn of that first Christmas Day of all—its oppressions, its barbarity, its slavery, its poverty beyond speech here, its wealth beyond dreams there, its indifference to human life and distress; its cruelty, its ignorance, its sin; and then let him look at it now, with its concern for the race, its outlook for the poor, its enthusiasm for humanity, its freedom for nations, its alleviations of suffering, its vast enlightenment, its penetration into the great secrets of the cosmos, its endeavor after righteousness; let him remember that where we did not know so much as the nature of the cloud, now we know that of the stars; where we wallowed in the senses, now we search the mystery of life; where we grovelled, now we fly; let him remember all this, and then ask if this day and its cause is not one of those gifts concerning which the apostle said, "Every good gift and every perfect gift cometh from above."

One of the great scientists of the period has said that when he attempts to give the power manifested in the universe a name, it evades him, declines to be made objective, and he is overshadowed by its mystery. But in the same way, it has been pointed out, the beloved disciple said, "The light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not." And they who hold with St. John, feel that this light, this power, this being, does not evade search or decline recognition, but taking on human life has given us reason for rejoicing in the gift of Christmas Day, finding that there is no greater miracle in that act of taking on human life than in the fact of the existence of life itself—life, of which a great religious thinker has said: "We know not what it is, how it comes or goes, and most imperfectly has the keenest and most patient human scrutiny been able to trace even the mode of operation. In itself and all the varied modes of its operation it is the standing miracle of the universe, the most wonderful of all the forces working in the realm of nature." And thinking thus of the day as the one that marks and accentuates the great gift of life and being to every individual, as well as of the holy life and being in whose remembrance it is instituted, they would keep it in a selfish seclusion who were not glad to have humanity of all nations and of every belief recognize whatever they can in the day, welcoming them to it as they would welcome all people to one hospitable hearth. The very fact of the custom that has been chosen for one of the chief secular features of the day's observance—the making of gifts, the relieving of want, the carrying to each other all the gladness the earth has to offer—shows the feeling which offers the freedom of the day to all who will join in its festive spirit.

Let Christmas come how and where it will, it speaks of the value of life, and so of humanity; to the believer, of the value of that humanity for which the great author and principle of life could leave the heaven of heavens, and into which he could stoop; to the unbeliever, at least of the value of that humanity for which Christianity has done so much more than any other known agency, and he need not hesitate to celebrate the day as that of the birth, if not of the great precept "that ye love one another," yet of the great forceful application of the precept, and he can let the wreath adorn his window, the garland be hung above his door, and he can load his children with gifts, and help on the joy of the day with the best of them. We have heard it said that of late many newsboys celebrate Christmas; and we do not know why they should find that difficult to-day, were it only regard for

their own race from which such great things sprang. It is perhaps an acknowledgment of this mystery and principle of life, especially as Christ's acceptance and experience of human life presents it, that we dress our churches and houses with wreaths and garlands of evergreen—symbols of life and of deathless life—excluding no other green than that ivy which belongs to Bacchus and to drunken delirium and excess, and the mistletoe, which belongs to the Druidic worship and to scenes of gayer and lighter cheer; those being generally chosen, too, like the holly, the laurel, the spruce, and hemlock, that are perennially green and fresh. It is in no want of reverence for the day that this custom was borrowed from the worship of other so-called deities; for the Christmas modes of celebration were largely derived from and in-kneaded with the ways of observing the old Saturnalia, which came at this period of the sun's course, and marked some traditional era resembling its own, when golden Saturn reigned in piping times of peace, when all men loved each other, and sin and suffering were unknown on earth, and in whose festivities tapers were lighted, evergreens were hung, slaves assumed purple tunics and white togas and caps of freedom, and masters waited on them, and all was good-will and good cheer.

It is in this spirit and atmosphere of good-will and good cheer that our Christmas greetings and our Christmas gifts are made. And while we make them, do we never pause and reflect as to whether we have secured anything to offer the Master of the festival Himself? The kings of the East brought Him gold and frankincense and myrrh, but others in this latter day, what have they brought for Him? "What gifts for Christ, then, bring ye with the reft? Your hands have worked well. Is your courage spent. In handwork only? Have you nothing best Which generous souls may perfect and present. And He shall thank the givers for? No light Of teaching, liberal nations, for the poor Who sit in darkness when it is not night? No cure for wicked children? Oh, no cure, No help for women sobbing out of sight Because men made the laws?" And what gifts have we as individuals, as children, as servants? And in what far or near Christmas is it that each one of us all shall have burned away the dross of self, and shall give to the source and cause of all our Christmas the perfect gifts of love and sacrifice?

The Little Stranger.

There is a popular household story that is repeated year after year to German children at the beginning of the Christmas holidays, to kindle the spirit of charity, which illustrates to the child mind the words of our Lord: "I was a stranger, and ye took me in." In Germany every child passes through fairyland, and receives the great truths of moral and spiritual life in parables. The story is substantially as follows:

In a little cottage on the borders of a large forest there once lived a poor wood-chopper, with his wife and two children. He was a good and pious man, but was scarcely able to earn enough to provide food for his family. For all that he began his daily duties with prayer, and ended them with praise, and the family were very happy. His children's names were Valentine and Marie.

One snowy evening when the wood-chopper came home, he brought with him some green boughs, and after the evening meal began to hang them over the mantel-piece.

"Christmas is here," said he, "and I have no presents for you; but we will offer to the Lord the beautiful alters of grateful hearts. God will bless us."

He then said grace at the simple table, as they gathered around it to partake of the evening meal. There came a knock at the door.

"Who is there?" asked the wood-chopper. "A homeless child."

"Come in."

A child entered, very beautiful, but in ragged clothing, and stood before the fire.

"Who are you?" asked the wood-chopper, kindly. "Whence do you come?"

"I am a stranger, and have no home," answered the child.

"Come to the table, little stranger," said Marie. "There is not bread enough for us both; you shall have my supper."

"And I will let you sleep in my bed," said Valentine. "There is not room enough for two. I will sleep on the floor."

The family sung their evening hymn,— "The woods are all silent, and the little stranger quickly fell asleep in Valentine's bed."

At midnight the family was awakened by the sound of music without the door. The storm had abated, and the stars shone clear in the cold sky. Very sweet music it was. "Hark!" said Marie. "It is the song of children. What do they sing?"

"Listen!" said Valentine. The family was still, and the voices sang:

"O happy home, to heaven highest, Wherein Thou, Little Stranger, liest."

Like the softly attuned musical glasses seemed the music out of which rose the carol. The family heard it with delight.

The song was repeated:

"O happy home, to heaven highest, Wherein Thou, Little Stranger, liest."

The music drifted away as in a cloud of light, higher and higher, and was lost in the air. In the morning the Little Stranger woke, and said that He must go.

"You will be blessed," He said, simply, "because you took me in. Take this sprig of evergreen," He added, breaking a twig from the tree that the cotta had brought home, "and plant it, and you shall one day know who I am."

It was a sprig of the fir. The cotta did as he was bidden, and the sprig grew, and the fir-tree bore silver nuts and golden apples, and Marie and Valentine never again knew the want of food or a bed, or of an abundant Christmas table.

It was the first Christmas-tree. Who was the Little Stranger?

A man born in a state of poverty never feels its keenest pangs; but he who has fallen from a life of luxury feels them with all their bitterness.—(James Ellis.)



PROFESSOR DRIER herewith sends A Christmas greeting to his friends King Baba, the queen, and the royal heir Whose godfather he was last year, And these few gifts also presents, With all the season's compliments.



So Jack declares and sails away, For his time is short he cannot stay.



The king and queen with joy receive The box of gifts, you may believe; And as it quickly is undone, Eagerly curious, each one Comes crowding, every dusky dame.



The donor's face in gilded frame Is first unpacked—This gift—his own King Baba appropriates for a crown. He gives a most delighted laugh, And tearing out the photograph, He sticks the frame on his woolly hair: "Such a beautiful crown for Sunday wear!"



The queen's quick search rewards her haste, And she finds a gift to her royal taste; She was never so pleased before nor since. 'Tis a drum, that was sent to the youngest prince, But she puts it upon her queenly head, And a charming coiffure it makes instead. In the height of fashion she now appears, With the drum-sticks thrust through her pretty ears.

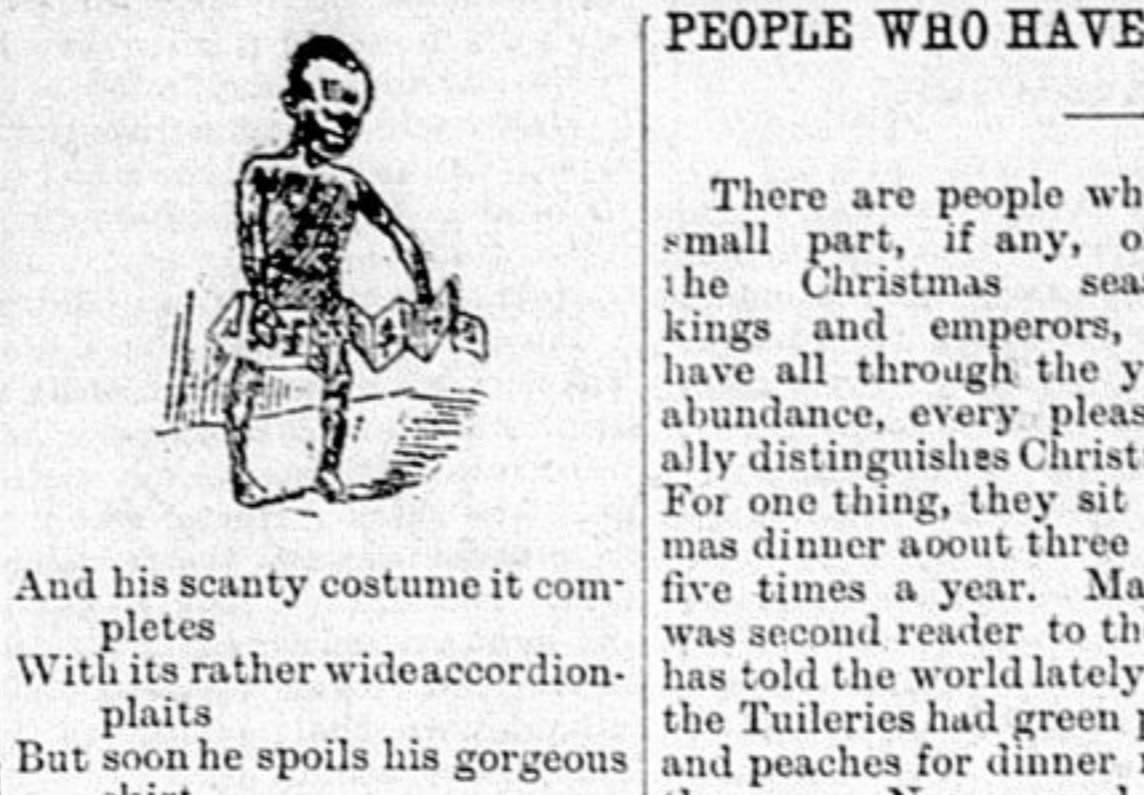


The kite was passed from hand to hand, But the Princess Bubbu fastened its band Around her delicate dusky waist, And as a tournure herform it graced. She wears it, indeed, with infinite "chic," And gives its tail the "court-train kick."

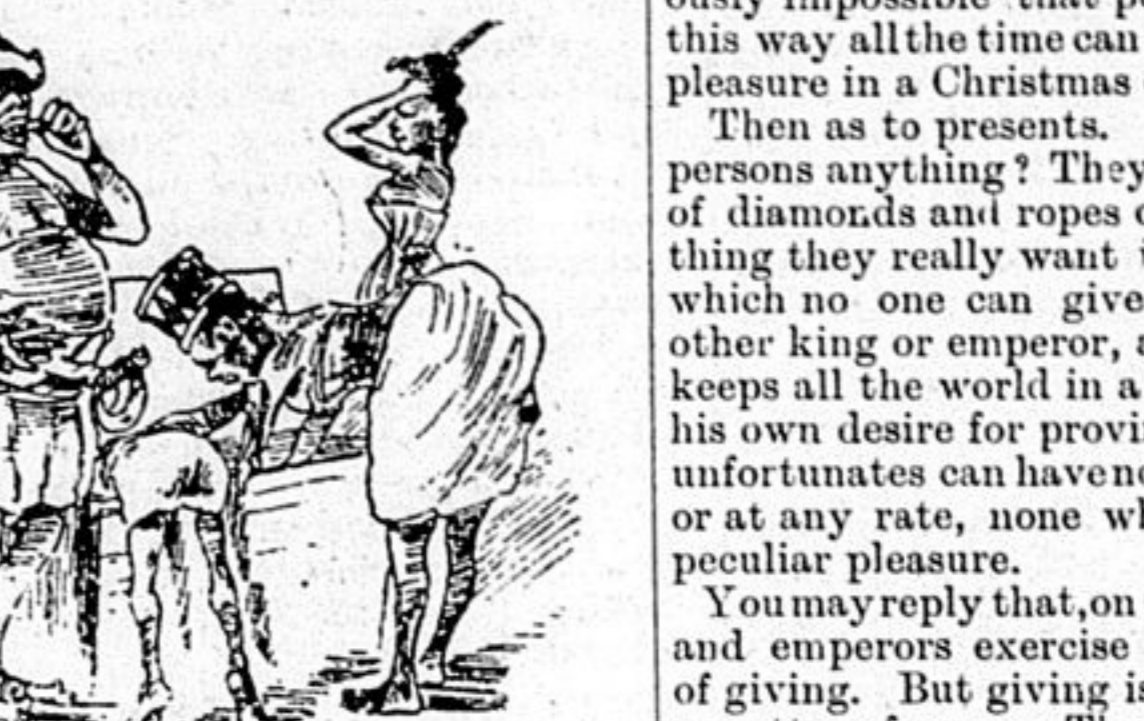


A net to catch specimen butterflies, King Baba considered a royal prize; And appointed a slave the net to bear Over his head as he takes the air. The lace-like cap on its slender pole He takes for his ensign, and every soul Must bow him low to the royal crest Thus borne aloft at the king's behest.

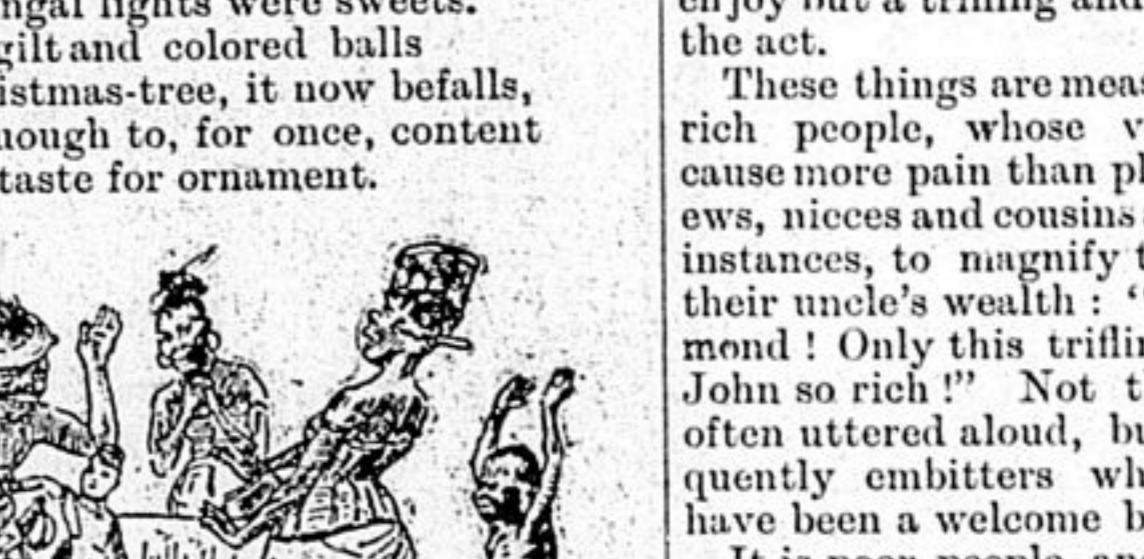
Prince Bobo is happy: only look! He has seized on a wonderful picture-book,



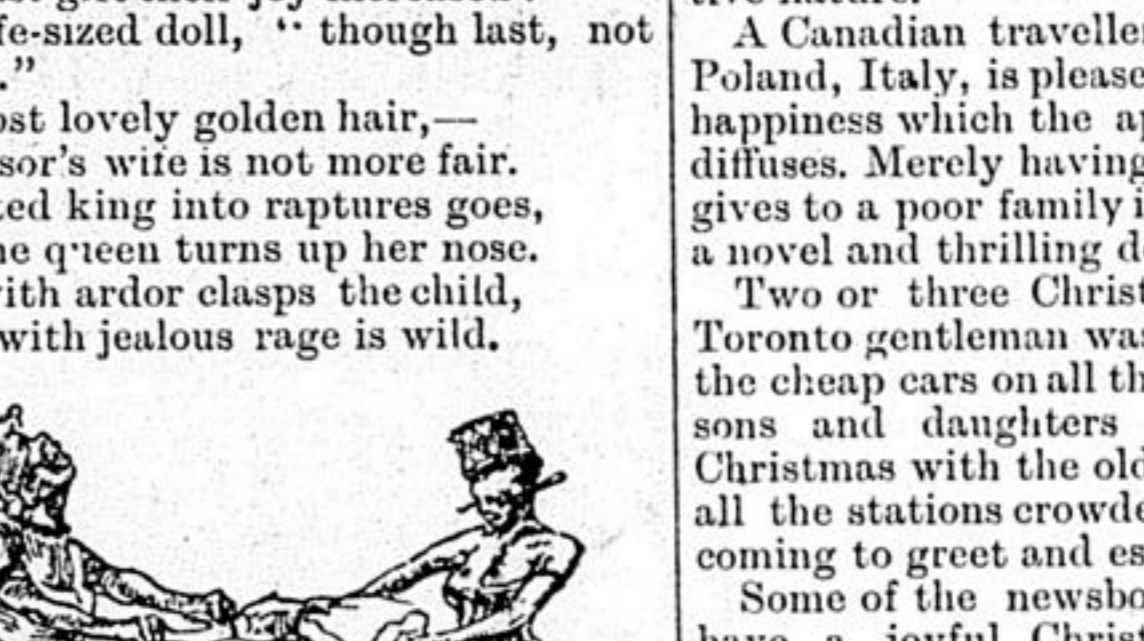
And his scanty costume it completes With its rather wide accordion-plaits But soon he spoils his gorgeous skirt



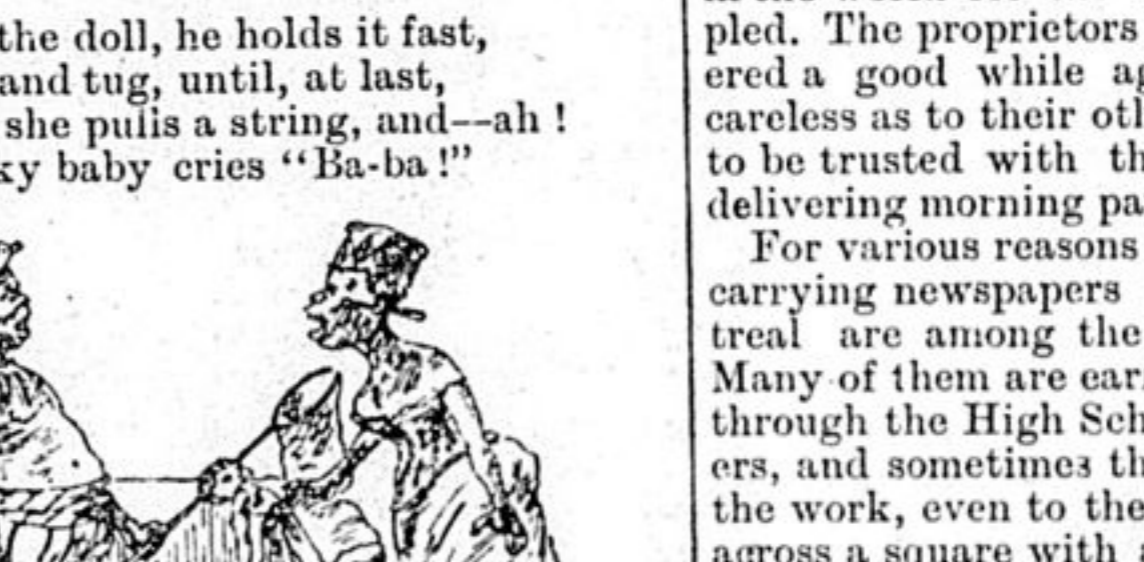
With a plastering that looks like dirt: For he finds a packet of chocolate creams,— Which is very much to his taste it seems. The absorbing interest it creates, His pictured petticoat illustrates



As if the Bengal lights were sweets, Four dozen gilt and colored balls For the Christmas-tree, it now befalls, Are quite enough to, for once, content The family taste for ornament.



With the last gift their joy increased: 'Twas a life-sized doll, "though last, not least." It has a most lovely golden hair,— The Professor's wife is not more fair. The delighted king into raptures goes, Whereat the queen turns up her nose. The king with ardor clasps the child, The queen with jealous rage is wild.



She grabs the doll, he holds it fast, They pull and tug, until, at last, By chance she pulls a string, and—ah! The unlucky baby cries "Ba-ba!"



Now, horror-struck, King Baba stands, Stares at the queen, who, with twitching hands And gleaming teeth, shrieks out: "Aha! 'Ba-ba!' I thought so!—Ha ha!—'Ba-ba!'"



Furious with wrath, for blood athirst, She grasps poor baby to do her worst: Its little arm by her teeth is crushed, And she fills her mouth with—fine saw-dust!

At this terrible sight King Baba turns, But the gunpowder now in his stomach burns. He roars with pain, the queen roars, too, The little princes weep, "Boo-hoo!" The court is in a hullabaloo, And Christmas winds up with a general row.

PEOPLE WHO HAVE NO CHRISTMAS

There are people who can enjoy only a small part, if any, of the happiness of the Christmas season. Such are kings and emperors, for example, who have all through the year, in the greatest abundance, every pleasant thing that usually distinguishes Christmas from other days. For one thing, they sit down to a Christmas dinner about three hundred and sixty-five times a year. Madame Carotte, who was second reader to the Empress Eugene, has told the world lately that the court party the Tuilleries had green peas, strawberries and peaches for dinner nearly every day of the year. Not canned, as we have them, nor preserved, but fresh from the green-houses of Versailles.

They had besides what she called "double courses," and all served with such ease and rapidity that they despatched the entire repast in three quarters of an hour. It is obviously impossible that people who are fed in this way all the time can have any particular pleasure in a Christmas dinner.

Then as to presents. Who can give such persons anything? They can show you pints of diamonds and ropes of pearls. The only thing they really want is another province, which no one can give them except some other king or emperor, and he will not, but keeps all the world in a suppressed broil by his own desire for provinces. So these royal unfortunates can have no Christmas presents or at any rate, none which give them any peculiar pleasure.

You may reply that, on Christmas Day, kings and emperors exercise the royal privilege of giving. But giving is part of their trade, a matter of course. They buy diamond snuff boxes by the dozen, gold watches by the gross, India shawls by the bale, lace by the hundred pieces; likewise rings and brooches in great numbers.

Now, really, people who have to give pretty objects away in such numbers can enjoy but a trifling and languid pleasure in the act.

These things are measurably true of many rich people, whose very gifts frequently cause more pain than pleasure. Their nephews, nieces and cousins are disposed, in many instances, to magnify their own claims and their uncle's wealth: "Only this little diamond! Only this trifling check, and Uncle John's rich!" Not that such words are often uttered aloud, but the sentiment frequently embitters what might otherwise have been a welcome benefaction.

It is poor people and poor nations, and people in the ordinary walks of life, that get the most enjoyment from festive days. As they are closely engaged, day by day, in doing their part of the world's mighty task, a feast is a rarity, and the whole year often passes unbroken by a single event of a festive nature.

A Canadian traveller in Ireland, Spain, Poland, Italy, is pleased to see the universal happiness which the approach of Christmas diffuses. Merely having a chicken for dinner gives to a poor family in the south of Europe a novel and thrilling delight.

Two or three Christmases ago a certain Toronto gentleman was in Spain. He found the cheap cars on all the railroads filled with sons and daughters travelling to spend Christmas with the old folks at home, and all the stations crowded with their relations coming to greet and escort them.

Some of the newsboys in our large cities have a joyful Christmas. Observers are aware that a change has come over the newsboys of late years. They are no longer, as a class, the disorderly ragamuffins they used to be before the day of the Newsboy's Home and the Children's Aid Society.

There is getting to be less and less room in the world for the careless and unprincipled. The proprietors of newspapers discovered a good while ago that boys who are careless as to their other duties are the last to be trusted with the responsible task of delivering morning papers.

For various reasons the boys who are now carrying newspapers in Toronto and Montreal are among the best boys we have. Many of them are earning their chance to go through the High School by delivering papers, and sometimes the whole family join in the work, even to the little sister, who runs across a square with a paper, or trots up a long path and thrusts the morning sheet into the box provided for it.

Such newsboys have an interesting time on Christmas morning when they go their rounds. True, there is Old Growler, who scolds if his paper does not arrive by half-past six, but never remembers on Christmas morning the faithful boy who brings it to him. There is also the happy family, hilarious over their presents, who sends out ten cents "to get rid of him"—him, who got up at four and worked till seven three hundred and thirteen times to bring them their paper. On the other hand, there is the benevolent old gentleman who always has a brilliant silver dollar for his newsboy, and comes to the door himself to give it to him, with a Merry Christmas.

So we see that Christmas follows the general rule; whatever pleasant days and exceptionally nice things come along, although the rich and the powerful may have their share of them, it is the man who is doing the ordinary work of the world, and who shares only its common emoluments and rewards, who derives from them the greatest amount of pleasure and benefit. Those who have a Christmas every day have no Christmas at all.

Where They Marry Young.

It is especially in the Argentine Republic, the child marriages of India being kept out of the count. Official statistics are just published showing that 5 per cent. of the girls who get married in the Argentine are under 15. The Argentinians encourage early marriages. Having the population question in view, their statesmen praise the practice, and they have songs in recommendation of it. So have we:

Gather ye rosebuds while ye may, Old time is still a flying; And this same flower that smiles to-day, To-morrow may be dying.

That age is best which is the first, When youth and blood are warmer; But being spent, and worst and worst Times still succeed the former. Then be not coy, but use your time, And while you may, go marry; For having lost but once your prime, You may forever tarry.

The Silver Question.

A.—"Why do you refer to Josias as a silver tongue?"

B.—"Because he never uses words unless he wants to strike you for a doll."