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THURSDAY, DECEMBER 22nd, 1938.

THE CHRISTMAS SPIRIT

Christmas is the season of kindness. Christmas celebrates the coming of Christ into the world, and the heart of the Christ message is love—love expressing itself in natural channels of friendliness and good-will, love that "suffereth long and is kind." If we have kindly emotions, let them have their way and blossom into kindly thoughts and kindly deeds. Let the free child spirit of open-hearted friendliness prevail. For this is the child's festival, celebrating the birth of a Child, the wonderful Giver who gave Himself for mankind. Let us carry the Christmas spirit through all the following days that come and go with all their measure of care or pain or pleasure, and bear in our hearts the inspiration and love, hearing above all the sounds of earth and sense, the song of the angels heralding the birth of the Saviour of mankind.

IS THERE A SANTA CLAUS?

With one voice we answer, why of course there is. This is how the late Jacob A. Riis of New York explained it to a little friend: "No Santa Claus my little man? Why yes there is a Santa Claus, thank God. The world would indeed be poor without one. It is true that he does not always wear a white beard and drive a reindeer team—not always you know—but what does that matter. He is Santa Claus with the big, loving, Christmas heart, for all that; Santa Claus with the kind thoughts for everyone that make children and grown-up people beam with happiness all day long.

And shall I tell you a secret which I did not learn at the post office, but it is true all the same—of how you always be sure your letters go to him by the chimney route? It is this:

Send along with them a friendly thought for the boy you don't like; for Jack who punched you, or Jim who was mean to you. The meaner he was the harder do you resolve to make it up; not to bear him a grudge. That is the stamp for the letter to Santa. Nobody can stop it, not even a cross-draught in the chimney, when it has that on.

Because—don't you know, Santa Claus is the spirit of Christmas; and ever and ever so many years ago when the dear little Baby was born after whom we called Christmas, and was cradled in a manger out in the stable because there was not room in the inn, that Spirit came into the world to soften the hearts of men and make them love one another. Therefore, that is the mark of the Spirit to this day. Don't let anybody or anything rub it out. Then the rest doesn't matter. Let them tear Santa's white beard off at the Sunday School festival and growl in his bearskin coat. These are only his disguises. The steps of the real Santa Claus you can trace all through the world as you have done here with me, and when you stand in the last of his tracks you will find the blessed Babe of Bethlehem smiling to you. For then you will be home.

MEMORIES OF CHRISTMAS

If a ballot were to be taken as to which is the most popular holiday, which one would get the votes?

One guess only is necessary on this selection. It would of course be good old Christmas. That is the one that lingers the most in our memories, to which the most imagination clings, which brings back most clearly the faces of the past, which presents the most vivid picture of scenes that were brightest.

The tumults of other holidays are soon forgotten. But those tender scenes of Christmas how they linger in the mind! Those old pictures bring back the faces of dear old friends who have marched on before, parents, grandparents, many others who deprived themselves of things they needed, that they might load up old Santa with the things we had dreamed of but could not provide for ourselves.

What scenes of family jollity come back in those galleries of memory! Loved persons now silent were then bubbling over with gaiety and fun, waking the homes by their laughter, playing tricks and joining with the children in kid games, finding youth again after the lapse of long years of toil and anxiety.

What is it in Christmas that thus turns labour and anxiety into merriment and forgetfulness of unhappy thought? Clearly it is but one thing, that for a day we acquire the giving spirit. Instead of striving for ourselves, we begin to think of other folks and what would make them happy.

HEAVY READING

Any time now the 1939 edition of one of our best sellers, fresh from the press, will be streaming into offices, shops, and homes. Its statistical dryness will be illuminated by art work astonishing if not always impressive. The illustrations will be varied as to color and subject, but it is safe to predict the old favorites will be among those present.

The hunter will call the moose in four colours; the cows will be in the meadow of surprising pinkness; the old homestead will be seen standing firm under two tons of snow and the same amount of mortgages; the inevitable pointers will still point at unseen quail just north of January or June as the seasons progress.

That's right, it's the calendar. Indispensable as the morning milk, the calendar registers with inexorable impartiality the good days and those not so good. It will support unflinchingly the axiom that the surest way to a short Winter is a ninety-day note, also it will slow the flight of time if your main concern is that happy day which marks the start of next Summer's vacation.

NOMINATION MEETINGS

Although nominations meetings will be held on the day when many are celebrating the Christmas feast, we hope that citizens will bestir themselves sufficiently to attend these important meetings. Municipal business is your business. If you are interested in your own business, you should be interested in municipal affairs. We hope to see a good attendance of ratepayers at nomination meetings in the district. Your attendance will show your own interest in the affairs of the municipality and will be an encouragement to those who are in public office.

THE LOVELIEST BELL

(By John F. Gibbons)

Outside the snow fell silently. Inside the clock ticked quietly. Christmas Eve in the suburb where Evelyn lived was a quiet time. There was not much traffic to be heard in the streets. A few cheery sleigh bells as deliveries were made, and the voices of people who came in cars bearing gifts to the scattered houses in Aylglen, comprised the audible excitement of the night before Christmas in the little community.

Evelyn sat alone in her room. Poor Auntie, the only other occupant of the house this Christmas Eve, was old and very ill. Nothing to do but wait and wait in case she should waken and want anything.

The boys, like most brothers, rather selfish at times, had gone out to make merry long since. The woman who came in to help by the day had departed, as she herself had put it, "to spend Christmas in the buzzum of my family," and would not return until after the holiday.

Evelyn had been in town in the morning where the gaiety of the last-minute shopping crowds had made her own lack of Christmas spirit the more poignant. She had made a few visits during the afternoon delivering presents and had hurried home in the frosty, bell-laden twilight to prepare supper for herself and a special tray for the invalid. Those things which make or break a Christmas dinner had been ordered and the turkey was in the refrigerator. Her Christmas chores were over.

Silence, a heavy, wistful silence, broken only by the ticking of the clock and an occasional ringing of the muffled doorbell, pervaded the house. A few family friends appeared for a few moments with parcels and whispers and were gone.

To-morrow, Christmas Day, the boys would be at home and there would be the turkey and the dinner to prepare and one would be too busy then to feel any lonely ache.

Evelyn was a girl whose life, of necessity hard, had tended to make her mature beyond her years. Young men had come and gone. Some had bored her, not one had really interested her—except Peter. He had been different. But his firm had sent him out to India three years before and he had, no doubt, forgotten her.

Christmas cards that told her to "carol, sweetly carol" and mockingly wished her "the merriest Christmas yet," lay on the table.

To-night she would have had to stay at home in any case. Auntie could not be left and Evelyn would have been the last to leave her. Their aunt, according to the best she knew, had been a mother and a father to them all.

Evelyn mused. The past, the present and the future arrayed themselves before her. The past had clearly yielded up the present and the present, she could not help reflecting, bid fair to yield a dreary future. Auntie would die and the boys would get married and she would be left alone. One might as well face facts, she thought, dejectedly.

Auntie broke in on her reverie by calling. She was thirsty, poor darling.

Evelyn handed her the needed drink and was smoothing the pillows with deft fingers when the sick woman said gently, "Stand there where I can see you, dear. You know, you're very pretty and it's been so nice for me, because I've always loved pretty things."

The pathos of it weakened Evelyn's self-control. Her bravest smile lasted for a moment or two as she stood beside her bed, but the tears came and she tiptoed out of the room. Auntie mustn't know that she was crying. The thought of all the pretty things in life Auntie had missed, and that it was apparent she would never live to have, was heartbreaking. The tears rolled down her cheeks.

It was getting late. A stifled sob could be stifled no longer. But this was Christmas Eve, a time of miracles.

The telephone rang. Long distance calling Misse Evelyn Doman.

"Hello, is that Evelyn speaking?" came a deep familiar voice. Evelyn struggled to keep her own voice calm, while her heart turned over. "Yes," she said, wonderingly. It sounded so much like Peter and it couldn't be. Peter was so far away.

"Do you know who's speaking?" asked the voice. "N-not Peter," stammered Evelyn. "No other," came his prompt reply.

Her heart was pounding now. "I'm only a couple of hundred miles away," said Peter (she had heard the place aright, then, the operator had said Bremdon), "and I'll be in town to-morrow. May I drive out to see you?"

"Oh, Peter!" she exclaimed, ecstatically. "I'm so glad to hear from you. When did you leave India? Why didn't you write? What time will you arrive?" and question following fast on question slid over the line.

Peter's replies were adequate to the occasion, until along the wires there came his "Merry Christmas, Evelyn!" and she hung up the receiver with a trembling hand and stood transfixed with joy a moment beside the telephone. A peek in Auntie's room revealed that she was still in a heavy sleep.

Evelyn went into the parlour and looked out. It was almost midnight. The streets were suddenly alive with people on their way to the churches.

"Peter is coming—Peter is coming," she told the curtains on the windows. Peter, quiet and strong, who looked at you out of clear eyes and understood you. Yes, Peter had been different.

Evelyn felt strangely happy. Christmas was bringing joy in spite of everything. The thought of darling Auntie lying there so quiet and ill was certainly bitter, but seeing Peter would be very sweet.

Outside a sleigh bell jingled. "The loveliest bell I've heard today was that telephone," she thought, exultantly.

And in the warmth of a renewed Christmas spirit of hope and good cheer, Evelyn went to bed that night, but not to sleep for a long while, which perhaps does not need to be added.

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The Road to Bethlehem

By The Right Rev. John W. Woodside, D.D.
Moderator, The United Church of Canada.

When the shepherds in the Judaeen fields first heard the glad tidings and listened to the angels' song, they took God at His word. In swift and glorious decision they said to one another, "Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass." The generations have been following that shining trail. The artists, the poets and the story-tellers, the philosophers and the theologians, the common folk and the children have been journeying to Bethlehem in expectant faith.

And yet there have been times in which Christians must have found it well-nigh impossible to make that pilgrimage, moods in which they must have felt that if they went at all it would be with clouded vision and heavy hearts. For many of us the present may appear to be one of these. We seem just now to be "in the bleak midwinter"—the midwinter of disillusion and discontent. Fears of the unknown make life miserable for millions of people in all lands today. The stark tragedy of war leaves its horrible trail of death and suffering even across the road to Bethlehem. Hymns of hate too often take the place of the angels' song. Class is being incited against class, race against race, in a discouraging and degrading spectacle.

But we who believe in God know that there is another side to the picture even at this moment. We know that the spirit and ideal revealed to the shepherds at Bethlehem is alive and active, and steadily gaining ground in our day. We know that over against the man-made tide that threatens to overwhelm all the finer things of life there is a tide of God, deep and strong, which will surely carry this distracted world out of the darkness into the realms of amity and peace.

We see in the Divine Child who came to Bethlehem an incarnation of the Good Will which lies back of all the frightening, changing scenes in which we play our part. And if men ask a reason for the faith that is in us, we have convincing proof for our belief. The trends of the world are towards unity. Beyond any doubt it is dawning on the mind of humanity that there is no hope or prospect of stability or prosperity which is not based on a common loyalty embracing all mankind. War is not inevitable; nor is violent overthrow of the social order. The "homesickness of the human soul for justice, liberty and brotherhood" is not merely the sign of a universal demand for far-reaching changes; it is also the sign of a hope and a belief that the changes may be brought about in an atmosphere of peace and not of strife.

The friendly way in which the various Churches are drawing closer to each other is expressive of the

deepening faith and widening purpose that will unite more firmly all the forces making for righteousness. As never before, the Churches are coming to have one conscience; and that conscience is uneasy over everything in our social or political systems that injures human personality.

Beyond all questioning, deep and strong tides of goodwill are surging in the heart of humanity. People want to be friendly, to live and let live. No one will ever persuade us that the majority of the citizens, even in any of the militaristic states really want war. We know that the do not. Nor will any one persuade us to believe that all rich men want to grind the faces of the poor, or that the poor are but waiting the opportunity to despoil their more fortunate neighbours. The winning forces in the world to-day are not greed and selfishness, working by brute force. Goodwill and friendliness, "the trade-winds of the universe," are stronger than any of us have yet begun to realize.

And so, in the Advent season of 1938 we take the road to Bethlehem again, the white road marked by the footsteps of the faithful through the ages. And we go, not with clouded vision or heavy hearts, but with confidence and joyous elation, affirming our ideal of a world kingdom of peace and goodwill and acclaiming our share in its realization. We believe in humanity because we believe in God. And we believe in God because of what the shepherds heard on the Judaeen plains and saw in the manger at Bethlehem. The lack of goodwill is the ultimate heresy; its cultivation and flowering is the only kind of religion that will count at the Judgment Day.

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