

Christmas Greetings To You All

The Spirit of Christmas

HAVE just finished reading over again,—and again means so many, many times,—that wonderful sermon of Dickens, "A Christmas Carol," and as I put down the book, a hundred ghosts and phantoms crowd about me, whispering in my ears tales of long ago, reminding me of many beautiful scenes, peopled with those loved ones who watched over my trembling steps in early childhood; who guarded my path in boyhood; and prayed for me in the years of manhood, when curiosity or duty took me into strange or dangerous places, where oftentimes old Scrooge and Marley and Bob, or even Tiny Tim, had never been heard of.

This, in my opinion, is one of the wonders, one of the charms of Dickens' Christmas stories: they fill the soul with the fine, generous spirit of childhood: they make a reality of the phantoms of the past: they lift the veil which separates us from the noblest, sweetest, memories and fill our hearts with a longing to live a fuller, finer and more generous life.

Yet there must have been something innately fine about old Scrooge from the beginning, because those phantoms and ghosts were thoughts springing from the innermost depths of his soul; and the moment being favorable, they sprang to life, they flowered in exquisite forms, so lovely that the dark spirits of greed and cupidity—fearful ogres of his mind—fled forever in dismay, and freed from the slavery of his own egoism, his own greed, he cried in ecstasy: "I am as light as a feather, I am as happy as an angel, I am as merry as a school boy, I am as giddy as a drunken man. A Merry Christmas to everybody. A happy New Year to all the world. Hallo! Whoop! Hallo here!"

How in those few minutes was his nature changed, where he once only listened to the jingle of coin, now his soul is opened to a thousand exquisite sounds. What lusty peals of church bells—clash, clang, hammer, ding, dong bell. Bell, dong, ding, hammer, clang, clash. Oh, glorious! glorious!

How beautiful the world was to his softened heart. How different it all seemed to be. No fog, no mist; clear, bright, jovial, stirring, cold, piping for the blood to dance to; golden sunlight; heavenly sky; sweet fresh air; merry bells. Oh, glorious! glorious!

What a picture of the rehabilitation of a human soul. A soul so hardened by contact with the material things of life that Scrooge had become blind to the endless beauties of nature. A soul so withered in the dry soil of usury that we find it almost hard to believe it possible this heartless wretch could ever again respond to the spiritual influence which eventually reclaimed him.

The finest thing about old Scrooge though, was that once he felt the warming glow of the loveliness of life penetrating his soul, he then and there determined that not for Christmas only would he enjoy the full benefits of his noble heritage, but that every day while life lasted he would, with ever gathering power, effect a closer, fuller contact with the splendor, gentleness and sweetness of nature and humanity.

Let us all listen to the ghosts and phantoms of the past; let us all react to the generous, self-sacrificing ideals of Christmas; let us all perceive that in the world there is no fog, no mist; that the world is bright, jovial, stirring.

Let us take some of the joy that will be ours to the poor and lowly; let us pour some of the golden sunlight of life on those in dark places; give some of the merry bells to the sad and disheartened; then we can well say with a smile in our hearts and on our lips, "This is Christmas. Oh, glorious! glorious!"

Christmas Customs

Does the Christmas tree owe its existence to the Egyptians? Several authorities favor this view, and the fact remains that in Germany, where the Christmas tree, as it is known now, really originated, families which are too poor to buy a tree sometimes use a decorated pyramid as the centre of their gift-giving. In this connection, it is interesting to note that if Queen Victoria had married an Englishman the gaily decorated tree would still be more or less of an unknown quantity in England, Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg being commonly credited with having introduced the tree in his adopted country, where it became very popular.

Gift Giving

The gift-giving habit is still more obscure in its origin. The giving of presents was one of the features of the Roman saturnalia, celebrated at the winter solstice, but there are not a few authorities who ascribe the custom, which pops up a perennial problem, to a patriarch of the Christian Church, St. Nicholas.

St. Nicholas was known to have been Bishop of Myra, in Lycia, but his authentic history does not go much further than that. It is claimed, however, that when a certain father of three daughters found himself in the predicament of not being able to supply suitable dowries for the three sisters, and, therefore, not in a position to marry them, the venerable saint came to his aid with secret gifts. This is supposed to have originated the habit of secret gift-giving on the eve of St. Nicholas' Day, December 6. In the course of time the custom came to be associated with Christmas Day.

The First Stocking

In passing, it might be noted that in a sixth century convent it was customary for the young lady boarders to hang a silk stocking on the door of the apartment of the abbess on Christmas Eve. The next morning they were summoned to witness the results of the liberality of the saint who, we are told, had bountifully filled the stocking with sweets.

Santa Claus appears to have come over to America with the Dutch colonists in the seventeenth century. His name, derived from the Dutch San Nicholas, indicated his connection with the kindly bishop. Where he got his reindeer is a matter for conjecture, but he seems to have been a first cousin of Knecht-Rupert, who brings good little German children presents on Christmas morning, and bad little German children a very serviceable switch. Santa Claus' German relative was a real community Santa Claus, for, on Christmas Eve, he used to collect the presents of all the parents in a village, and next morning distribute them with the explanation that he had been sent by Jesus Christ, his Master.

Mince pie is peculiarly English in its connection with Christmas. If this were for a story book: Once upon a time all the people got so fond of eating Christmas pie at Christmas that some of the people got mad and said, "It is a heathen pie, and not good to eat on Jesus' birthday."

Mince pie has long been sung in Christmas rhymes, but the aversion to its alleged sinful qualities were once so strong that for years it was considered advisable that a clergyman should not partake of its fragrant contents—not only at Christmas but all the year around.

It was very precious to its admirers of some centuries back, however, who surrounded its preparation with much ceremony, and set a guard over it on Christmas Eve, lest some wandering thief should decide not to play clergyman.

"Come guard this night the Christmas pie,
That the thief, though ne'er so sly,
With his flesh-hooks don't come nie
To catch it,
From him who all alone sits there,
Having his eyes still in his care,
And a deal of mighty fear,
To watch it."

Mistletoe From Druids

Use of the mistletoe is one of the survivals of the customs of the Druids, whose mystic religion held sway over the early Britons before the conquest of Britain by Julius Caesar. It was held in veneration of the ancient faith because of its association with the oak, the favorite tree of Tutanes, the Druid god. During the celebration of the winter solstice the mystic plant parasite was gathered with much pomp and rejoicing. Following a sacrifice, the mistletoe was distributed among the people, who hung it over their doorways as a propitiation to the sylvan duties during the season of cold. Its association with kissing and giggling appears to have developed at a later date. Holly, ivy and evergreen, commonly used as decorations at times of joyous festivals by many of the ancient races, have all come to be associated with the mistletoe as decorations peculiarly in keeping with the spirit of Yuletide.

A Christmas Message

Christmas has a special significance. It is the one international holiday. East and west, north and south, observe the day with special ceremonies, and for the same reason.

It is the birthday of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords—the Prince of Peace, the Babe of Bethlehem.

At His coming the angels sang and the wondering shepherds listened, and left their flocks while they searched for the Babe and worshipped; the wise men from the East, followed the Star till it stood above the manger—and they presented their gifts and worshipped.

The wicked king feared for his throne and slaughtered the innocents in impotent rage and hate, for the Babe escaped his malice and secure in the protection of his parents, who followed The Voice, laughed and played as did other babes in Egypt till the king's wrath passed. Then the Holy family journeyed to Nazareth where the Boy "grew and waxed in favor with God and man."

No wonder that Christmas is the Children's Day.

Coming as a little child, He has made motherhood the holiest position of women—and has forever sanctified childhood. "Of such," said He, "is the Kingdom."

Shall we not see to it that so far as we may, no child shall be lonely or hungry or sad on this His Birthday?

And shall we who toil in the fields not stop to listen to the angels' song and follow the shepherds of old to the manger?

Shall not the Wise Men from the East and the West join the three following the star "till it stood where the young child lay"? Can we not close our ears to the din around us? The fears—the jealousies—the hatred—all that creates discord, for

"Still through the cloven skies they come
With peaceful wings unfurled,
And still their heavenly music floats
O'er all the weary world.
Above its sad and lowly plaints
They bend on hovering wing,
And ever o'er its Babel sounds
The blessed angels sing.

And ye, beneath life's crushing load
Whose forms are bending low,
Who toil along the climbing way
With painful steps and slow,
Look now! For glad and golden hours
Come swiftly on the wing!
O rest beside the weary road
And hear the angels sing."

When It Waan't Merry

Even a king cannot stop the average Briton from enjoying his Christmas feast. Only once was it attempted, when William I. was crowned in Westminster Abbey in 1066. So unpopular was this choice of date, which interfered with the enjoyment that was the people's legal right, that considerable rioting was caused.

Peace above all things should reign at Christmas time. Yet, by a curious coincidence, many terrible wars have started on Christmas Day. After eating Christmas pudding, troops led by George Washington crossed the Delaware in 1762 in preparation for a momentous conflict. Great Britain was at war with Holland on the same day two years later.

British troops were in the field at Christmas time during the Ashanti Wars of 1873 and 1879. The battle of Sherpur was won by Lord Roberts in 1879, and a year later, on Christmas Day, distressing news came to hand of the Boer attack at Bronkerspruit.

Why should people expect to be admitted to a theatre at half price? That is what the management of Drury Lane Theatre, London, were asking on Christmas Day in 1762. For some unrecorded reason the audience expected a reduction in price, and when the management declined, lusty ones among the crowd stormed the theatre.

Marked in a singular manner by many accidents, Christmas Day is now considered by superstitious people to be a bad day on which to travel. The Tay Bridge disaster, in which many people lost their lives, occurred on this day in 1879.

Off the Kentish coast in 1880, the Indian passenger ship *Juliana* foundered. Ten years later the *Shanghai* sank in mid-ocean. Many railway calamities have taken place on Christmas Day; but probably the worst recorded disaster was the explosion in Pontypridd colliery in 1885. A number of miners were entombed. A rescue party fought against the falling debris caused by the explosion and succeeded in reaching their comrades.

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and a
Good New Year

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AND A
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A MERRY CHRISTMAS
AND A
PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR IS
THE WISH EXTENDED
AT THIS PERIOD TO ALL IN
THE NORTH LAND

Merry Christmas

Be Careful!

Our grandpa says old Santa Claus
Comes straling round the house,
And peeps in at the window
As still as any mouse.

But if he catches us awake,
Our grandpa says 'tis true,
He'll never leave a single toy,—
Then whatever shall we do!

So off to bed we'll hurry,
And close our eyes up tight;
For grandpa says old Santa Claus
Is peeping round
tonight.

