



THE HOLY FAMILY, BY CARL MULLER.

LEAVES FROM A SYLVAN RETREAT.

By Rev. Upton H. Gibbs, in The Living Church.

Christmas-Eve, and the weather gives promise of an ideal day to-morrow. The ground in its mantle of snow glistens in the moonlight. The night is clear, while the whole floor of heaven "is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold." The hour is late, my helmet has retired and I am left alone "reminiscent." The Ghost of Christmas Past enters to keep me company. "Bless you, old friend! Your benignant countenance and expansive smile is as welcome now as in bygone years." I am accused of being a "laudator temporis acti." The experience of life shows that "the old order changeth, yielding place to new," and we who belong to the former must change and yield with it with good or bad grace. So we cry: "The King is dead, long live the King! Hail, Christmas present! Come and fill the hearts of the young with joy and gladness, and we their elders will rejoice with them. You bear the same blessed message as that of your forerunners, of a 'peace on earth, good-will toward men.'" May you imbue our hearts with the true spirit of the season. May they be filled with charity towards all—the charity which suffereth long and is kind; which envieth not, which vaunteth not itself and is not puffed up, which doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh not evil; which rejoiceth not in iniquity but rejoiceth in the truth; which beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things."

Do we realize what a blessing to humanity is the Christmas season? It is like a warm, vigorous, healthy breeze of loving kindness sweeping over the land, dispersing the chilling poisonous miasmas of envy, hatred, and all uncharitableness. Borne upon its wings, the mercy-freighted clouds of Providence arrive to descend in refreshing showers of brotherly love. For one day at least in the year, swords are turned into ploughshares, and we perceive the earnest of the time foretold by the prophet. A little child shall lead us, and on this day our feet are guided by the Babe of Bethlehem into the way of peace.

Whether December 25th was the actual date of this event is an open question. Some authorities place it in the springtime and others in the autumn. But the weight of authority remains on the side of the traditional date. Edersheim states: "There is no adequate reason for questioning the historical accuracy of this date." The matter is not important in itself, but if December 25th be the real day, it is singularly appropriate and beautifully significant. One would fain not have it otherwise, as it then coincides with the ancient celebration by the Northmen of the winter solstice. As they rejoiced for the return of the sun to cheer the wintry earth, so Christians rejoice for the return of the Sun of Righteousness rising with healing in His wings.

I was brought up to go to church on Christmas day. This is only meet and right, for Christmas is essentially a religious festival. Though it may have displaced it, yet it is not the saturnalia of the ancient Romans in another form. I deem the maintenance of its religious observance to be most important, otherwise it may degenerate into a saturnalia. Indications of this possibility unfortunately

are not wanting. I love the Christmas service, and some of my most pleasant recollections are associated with it. How willing we were to gather the holly and greens for decorations; to weave festoons and fashion various appropriate emblems and oversee their hangings and arrangement! Though this required much time and thought, we felt well repaid, when everything was finished and the church stood arrayed in festal dress. The choir also, diligently practicing, would enliven the time for those working at the rear of the church with carol, anthem, and hymn. Then, when the morning came, a goodly congregation assembled for the "Christ mass," to worship and adore the original Christmas Giver and His Unspeakable Gift, after which they departed to their homes, carrying with them to augment the joys of the day, the blessing and the peace of God, which passeth understanding. Surely something must be missed, unless Christmas is thus hallowed, because it is meaningless if it be not a holy day and kept as such.

It is a great pity that the first two lines of Charles Wesley's well known Christmas hymn were altered. As he wrote them, they read: "Hark! how all the welkin rings, Glory to the King of Kings." This is vastly better than the usual version, "Hark! the Herald Angels Sing, Glory to the New-born King." The original rendering is much more suggestive of the magnitude of the angelic choir and in more accord with the words of Scripture: "Suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God."

Many years have passed since I made one of a band of waits, in a village where I formerly lived. How pleasant it was to tramp through the snow in the crisp, frosty air, to serenade our friends and to receive at each stopping place a warm Christmas greeting and welcome. But when I recall these times a feeling of sadness comes over me as I think how many of those whose joyful voices broke on the stillness of the night are now silent forever on earth. While a shadow is thus cast over the former merry party, how much darker it would be were it not for the light of the Star of Bethlehem. Yes, Christmas night brings peace to all those who are any ways afflicted or distressed, in mind, body, or estate. To them, as to the shepherds of old, for comfort and for hope, is given the sign of the Babe, who is the earnest of a new and more abundant life, the bringer of sweetness and light. In the babe all things are become new. He is the fulfillment of the past and the golden promise of the future. His very helplessness endows him with the peculiar property of capturing the affections and enlisting the services of men. He persuasively appeals to the whole of humanity. All sorts and conditions of men respond to the cry of the babe. He lays hold of their hearts, exercising a purifying and elevating influence over them. It is the babe who causes the mother and father love to spring up and blossom as the rose. And none, no matter how rough or ignorant, but such love refines, making them less brutish and sottish and raises them to a higher level. The force which thus the babe exerts is manifestly, not physical, neither is it intellectual. It can be only spiritual, coming down from the God who is love, light, and life. Let us accept the sign with thankfulness and in faith. A happy and a merry Christmas to all! God bless us every one!

UNIVERSAL CHRISTMAS.

"Some say that ever 'gainst that season comes, Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated, The bird of dawn singeth all night long; And then, they say, no spirit dares stay abroad.

The nights are wholesome, then no planets strike, No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm, So hallowed and so gracious is the time."

The sentiment of Shakespeare's time is that of to-day. The most human and kindly of seasons is penetrated and irradiated by the feeling of brotherhood, the essential spirit of Christianity, as is June with sunshine and the breath of roses. Santa Claus coming loaded with gifts is but a symbol of the gracious influence which at this time descends from heaven upon every heart. The day dawns with a benediction; it passes in holiday happiness, and ends in the soft and pensive regret. It could not be the most beautiful of festivities if it were doctrinal, or dogmatic, or theological, or local. It is a universal holiday because the jubilee of a universal sentiment.

Christmas looks now out at us from the dim shadow of the graves of the Druids who knew not Christ. The Christmas log which Herrick exhorted his merry boys to bring with a shout to the firing is the Saxon Yule-log burning on the English hearth. The blazing holiday temples of Saturn shone as do the illuminated churches of to-day. It is the pagan mistletoe under which the Christian youth kisses the dutiful church-going maid. The holly of the old Roman Saturnalia decorates the modern hall on Christmas eve. The smoking spread, are survivals of the tremendous eating and drinking of the Scandinavian Walhalla. Thus do customs blend in the rejoicing. The carols and the Wassail, the prayers and the games, the generous hospitality and the Lord of Misrule, Maid Marian and Santa Claus, are a queer mingling of the old and the new. As the religious thought of all ages and countries, at a certain elevation, flows into an expression which makes the most divergent nations harmonious, so this happy festival gives evidence of the common humanity of the older and later races, and we seem to hear at its dawn a celestial strain, and catch a deeper meaning in the words: "Before Abraham was, I am."

The English tradition makes good cheer the glory of Christmas, with the proclamation that no man shall go hungry. There is no joy in an empty stomach except the thin ecstasy of starving saints in pictures, and they were already dehumanized—a Christian truth which asceticism has forgotten. Hospitality is

linked with giving of gifts. When the Neophyte asked his confessor what was the central truth of Christianity, an old man answered, Charity—which meant love, and love begot the spirit of universal fraternity. Almsgiving is but a symbol of that giving of the heart and soul and life to help others, of which the supreme sacrifice of Christ is the accepted type. Christmas declares the universal consciousness that peace on earth comes only from good will to man.

ALL ARE HAPPY THEN.

Odd Christmas Celebrations in Tropical Lands.

Christmas comes in midsummer south of the equator, during the summer solstice, and the "patios" of Brazil and other Spanish countries are luxuriant with tropical growths. The patio is an inside garden with the house closing it in on the four sides. The door of every room opens upon this floral loveliness. The space is often a large one, and all kinds of tropical vines and climbing plants are here trailing their lengths over the corridors and lattice-work to form a natural screen. There are always one or two fountains splashing coolness on the stone walks and surrounding foliage. Think of spending Christmas in such a charming environment—outdoors in the sunny, flower-scented air of a courtyard!

The Brazilian child has all the beauty to reveal in, but as the American child would say, "Where is the Christmas tree?" They have none, but instead keep the Saviour's birthday in their own style, which is a very different one from ours. They have instead "presepe," or "crèche," as it is called in France. The presepe is to be seen in many private residences, as well as in the hallways of the public hospitals. At private residences it is arranged in a shady corridor, like a grotto, the infant in the manger occupying the centre, surrounded with images of the holy family, kneeling shepherds, the Wise-men with costly gifts, and domestic animals. Figures of angels and much tinsel generally adorn the presepe, which is left standing until after the Epiphany. This custom is also observed in other Catholic countries.

In Spain they have a little museum, a "nacimientito," that came from Peru, and is said to be two hundred years old. It is in a box. When the lid is lifted, it discloses a representation of heaven, with angels playing upon musical instruments. The interior is the usual scene of the manger, but the front of the box when it is open, represents the Garden of Eden. In Cuba Christmas is celebrated in the same way—among brilliant colors of flowers, the evergreen cactus and the glowing sunlight of outdoors. The houses have colors ranging from sky-blue to pink, with white iron balcon-

ies, and these, with the blue of sky and sea, make a brilliant setting. They further celebrate with baseball games, and at night set off fireworks. Presents are exchanged sometimes, but it is a universal custom to indulge in all kinds of Christmas sweets.

They have quaint superstitions relative to Yuletide in those tropical lands. All who can, conveniently, attend mass—"Missa de Gallo," or cock's mass, it is called, as it takes place at the midnight hour. On the coffee plantations the children also have their presepe, and the old people say that on Christmas night the animals have the gift of speech, and that if only a child has sufficient courage to go out alone in darkness and silence, it will hear on the first stroke of twelve the cock crow in a loud, clear voice from its highest perch, "Christo nasceu—Christ is born. The bull, in a deep sonorous bass, inquires from a distant field, "Onde?—where? The sheep then answer in chorus, "Em Belem de juda"—in Bethlehem of Judaea. And in turn all the domestic animals give to the world the glad tidings of the Nativity. And many a child wishes it had the courage necessary to enable it to hear this wonderful conversation of the brute creation. Older folks have implicit faith in superstitions, and there are many curious customs connected with Christmas. In other parts of South America it is believed that oxen kneel in honor of the Occupant of the manger, that tees sing a hymn, and that bells are heard chiming from under the ground.

Christmas in Mexico enjoys a land of summer. The "nacimientito" is given in the village or town hall, and the representation takes in the bible story from the Garden of Eden to the birth of Christ. The figures used are not images, but beautiful little life-like imitations of the people represented. There is a background of green moss lighted by many wax candles. This exhibition is open twelve days before Christmas, to give ample time for all the people to see it. There are other similar exhibitions, especially of the shepherds at the birth of Christ. The Christmas and New Year's "cantaro" is the occasion of many pretty parties, held for the children in patios or gardens. The cantaro is a large earthen jar with a wide mouth, covered with different colors of tissue paper, so that it is completely hidden. It is suspended by a red cord from a tree in the courtyard. The children, blindfolded, must find it, and break it with whacks from their sticks. When the jar is broken and the goodies spill out, there is a happy scramble for them. Another custom is to put toys of beautiful native pottery in a bag, and then pass it around, each child in turn taking the first toy his hand touches. The nearest they come to our Christmas tree is to have a straw basket filled with gifts, decorated with green things arranged in the form of a tree.

SONG OF CHRISTMAS BELLS.

'Tis Christmas day! the sunshine sweet,
Streams golden down the city street,
And worshippers wend their way
Unto God's house this holy day.
From out the church a soft refrain
Sounds from the organ's sweetest strain;
But grander still in belfry high,
The Christmas bells sound from the sky.

Over the mountains and over the sea,
Over the hillside and over the lea,
Singing a glorious anthem of love,
Taught by bright angels from heaven above,
Sound out, ye bells, in melodious chime,
Singing the joys of the Christmas time,
Telling the world in a joyous refrain,
Jesus our Saviour is born again.

The weary walk with quicker feet,
While listening to their music sweet;
The poor feel rich in heavenly love,
The while they hear those bells above.
New hopes and joys are born again,
E'en in the saddest hearts of men;
And while the bells make melody
They're blessing all humanity.

CHRISTMAS!

Bishop Doane.
Bishop through the centuries, all along,
Echo the words of the angel song,
"Glory to God in the highest,"
Floating above the sounds of earth,
On the dear day of Jesu's birth,
When Heaven to earth came nighest.

Over the clamor of sinful strife,
Over the shadows and sorrows of life,
Their voices still are ringing,
Message of love and joy and mirth,
Blessed promise of "peace on earth,
To men of good-will," bringing.

When we have learned the song to rise
Of patient, ceaseless thanks and praise,
Then, unto God, the glory
Will rendered be; and we shall see
Fulfilled, in rare and high degree,
This blessed Christmas story.

And when our wills to God's conformed,
With love for all men filled and warmed,
Make "good-will" rule behavior,
Then wars and woes on earth shall cease,
Then shall begin the reign of peace,
Under our Prince and Saviour.

DECEMBER.

Harriet Blodgett.
"Oh holly-branch and mistletoe,
And Christmas chimes where'er we go
And stockings pinned up in a row,
These are thy gifts, December!
And if the year has made thee old
And silvered all thy locks of gold,
Thy heart has never been a-cold
Or known a fading ember.

The whole world is a Christmas tree,
The stars its many candles be,
Oh, sing a carol joyously,
The year's great feast in keeping:
For once upon a Christmas night
An angel held a candle bright
And led three wise men by its light
To where a Child was sleeping."

Preparations in Greenland for the joyous festival begin months before. All the gifts, which consist chiefly of clothing, are made by the women. Not only are clothes, such as tunics, breeches and boots, used for gifts, but all must be new, so that every one, young and old, shall appear at his best.



MADONNA AND CHILD, SCHOOL OF LIANARDO.