

Christmas Thoughts

THE GREAT GIFT

Christmas is here—the season of giving. The little ones are all expectation; they have looked with wonder and delight upon the various stocks of toys from which Santa Claus is supposed to draw when he starts on his annual round. Their wants have been communicated to him in letters or through parents, and there will be disappointment throughout Christendom if the stockings are not filled to overflowing. Nor is the giving confined to the children; older ones take advantage of the season to exchange remembrances, and—what is still richer in reward—to give where no return is expected.

How far beyond calculation are the effects of the giving which the day inspires, and how all these gifts pale into insignificance in comparison with the great gift, the Christ, in whose honor the day is celebrated! Little did the disciples imagine, with all their adoration, what a revolution the Savior was to work with His gospel of love and forgiveness—of sacrifice and service.

The inward regeneration which has been effected in millions of hearts has shown itself in a multitude of ways. While the followers of other religions have, except where they have borrowed from the Christian nations, made little progress the ideals of the Nazarene have been winning their way, gradually but surely, carrying civilization in their wake. One doctrine, namely, that service is the measure of greatness—that life is to be estimated, not by what we take out of the world but by what we put into it—this doctrine alone is sufficient to reform both individual and nation life. Jesus, by precept and example, taught the divine truth that it is more blessed to give than to receive, and by so doing brought happiness within the reach of all. If our happiness depended on what others do for us, life would be full of disappointment, but when it depends on what we do for others we cannot be miserable, unless we shut our eyes to the opportunities about us.

The ideal controls the life; it will transform a man, a community, a country, a world, and Christ's ideals are conquering and will conquer—and in this bloodless warfare the vanquished share the advantage with the victors, for all are gainers.

LOVE'S FESTIVAL

Christmas is love's festival. Set apart for the commemoration of God's gift of His Son it has grown into a great holiday which is observed throughout Christendom by rich and poor alike. Even those who refuse to take upon themselves the vows of any church are constrained to join in the beautiful custom which makes both parents and children look forward to this day with pleasant anticipations. For weeks before December 25, busy hands are at work, tiny savings banks are gathering in their sacred store, and eager expectancy is written upon the faces of the young. To the boys and girls, Santa Claus is a sort of composite donor who monopolizes the distribution of presents and who, reading the minds of his little friends, rewards the good (and all are good just before Christmas) with the very toys that they themselves have selected, while the older ones learn by experience that it is more blessed to give than to receive. Back of Christmas and the Christmas present is love, and the broad, brotherly love taught and exemplified by the Nazarene is not content with the remembrances which are exchanged as tokens of affection between members of the family and between intimate friends; it is compelling a widening of the circle to include the poor and the needy though not of kith or kin.

What an instructor love is! How it develops the one of whom it takes possession! It is the mightiest influence known among men. When once it is awakened it dissolves all opposition. Dr. Parkhurst, the New York clergyman, in illustrating the difference between force and love said (quoted from memory) that force is the hammer which can break a block of ice into a thousand pieces but leaves each piece still ice, while love is the ray of sunlight which, though acting more slowly and silently, melts the ice.

At this season of the year our thoughts turn to the contemplation of the new degree of love revealed to the world by Jesus. To love between members of the family and love between friends He added an all-pervading love that includes every member of the human race. Even enemies are not beyond the bounds of this love, for

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man's puny arms are not strong enough to break the bonds that unite each son of God to all his brethren. "Love is not stupid," says Tolstoy. It makes known to us our duty to our fellows and it will some day rule the world. Force is the weapon of the animal in us; after it comes money which the intellect employs, sometimes for good, sometimes for harm. But greater than all is love, the weapon of the heart. It is a sword that never rusts, neither does it break, and the wounds that it leaves are life-saving, not life-destroying. No armor can withstand it and no antagonist can resist it. But why try to define this love or to measure its scope? Paul the apostle, in his first epistle to the Corinthians, describes it in language to which nothing can be added and from which nothing can be taken. Let his words suffice:

"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing. Love suffereth long and is kind; love envileth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Love never faileth; but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part; but when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I am become a man I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face; now I know in part; then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love."—(From an editorial by Mr. Bryan in *The Commoner*.)

REAL GREATNESS

Christ has given us a measure of greatness which eliminates conflicts. When His disciples disputed among themselves as to which should be greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven, He rebuked them and said, "Let him who would be chiefest among you be the servant of all." Service is the measure of greatness; it always has been true, it is true today, and it always will be true, that he is greatest who does the most of good. And yet, what a revolution it will work in this old world when this standard becomes the standard of every life. Nearly all of our controversies and combats arise from the fact that we are trying to get something from each other—there will be peace when our aim is to do something for each other. Our enmities and animosities arise from our efforts to get as much as possible out of the world—there will be peace when our endeavor is to put as much as possible into the world. Society will have taken an immeasurable step toward peace when it estimates a citizen by his output rather than by his income and gives the crown of its approval to the one who makes the largest contribution to the welfare of all.—(From "The Prince of Peace.")

HUMANITY'S SEARCH FOR PEACE

All the world is in search of peace; every heart that ever beat has sought peace and many have been the methods employed to find it. Some have thought to purchase it with riches and they have labored to secure wealth, hoping to find peace when they were able to go where they pleased and buy what they liked. Of those who have endeavored to purchase peace with money, the large majority have failed to secure the money. But what has been the experience of those who have been successful in accumulating money? They all tell the same story, viz., that they spent the first half of their lives trying to get money from others and the last half trying to keep others from getting their money, and that they found peace in neither half. Some have even reached the point where they find difficulty in getting people to accept their money; and I know of no better indication of the ethical awakening in this country than the increasing tendency to scrutinize the methods of money making. A long step in advance will have been taken when religious, educational and

charitable institutions refuse to condone immoral methods in business and leave the possessor of ill-gotten gains to learn the loneliness of life when one prefers money to morals.

Some have sought peace in social distinction, but whether they have been within the charmed circle and fearful lest they might fall out, or outside and hopeful that they might get in, they have not found peace.

Some have thought,—vain thought!—to find peace in political prominence; but whether office comes by birth as in monarchies or by election as in republics, it does not satisfy a selfish ambition. An office is conspicuous only when few can occupy it. But few in a generation can hope to be the chief executive of their city, state or nation. I am glad that our Heavenly Father did not make the peace of the human heart depend upon the accumulation of wealth, or upon the securing of social or political distinction, for in either case but few could have enjoyed it, but when He made peace the reward of a conscience void of offense toward God and man, He put it within the reach of all. The poor can secure it as easily as the rich, the social outcast as freely as the leader of society and the humblest citizen equally with those who wield political power.—(From "The Prince of Peace," an address delivered by Mr. Bryan on various occasions.)

THE DOCTRINES OF THE NAZARENE

The tokens of love and affection exchanged during the Christmas season are small when compared with the great gift brought to humanity by the meek and lowly Nazarene in whose honor Christmas day is observed.

To the Christian, Jesus came as an unspeakable gift, His face illuminated by a divine radiance, His life surrendered in fulfillment of a divine plan, His resurrection fixing in the firmament a star of hope that shall never be dimmed. But even those outside of the church, as well as its members, share in the benefit which humanity has received from the example and teachings of the Man of Galilee.

In a letter written to a friend, Thomas Jefferson analyzed the doctrines of Christ as they relate to man's conduct toward his fellows, saying:

"His moral doctrines, relating to kindred and friends, were more pure and perfect than those of the most correct of the philosophers, and greatly more so than those of the Jews; and they went far beyond both in inculcating universal philanthropy, not only to kindred and friends, to neighbors and countrymen, but to all mankind, gathering all into one family, under the bonds of love, charity, peace, common wants and common aids. A development of this head will evince the peculiar superiority of the system of Jesus over all others. The precepts of philosophy and of the Hebrew code laid hold of action only. He pushed his scrutinies into the heart of man; created his tribunal in the region of his thought, and purified the waters at the fountain head."

Those who accept Jesus as the Son of God and worship Him as such, can attribute the marvelous spread of His gospel to a supernatural force behind it; those, however, who dispute His divinity must find in the doctrines themselves an explanation of their increasing hold upon the human heart. No language that can be employed by pen, no words that can be spoken by the tongue, can exaggerate the influence which Christ's philosophy has already exerted upon the race, or estimate its future power.

Between the doctrine of might and the doctrine of right; between the principle that propagates itself by the sword and the principle that grows through the persuasive influence of its own intrinsic merit; between the grasping, over-reaching spirit that enthrones self and sacrifices all else to its own advantages and the generous, manly recognition of the rights of others; between a measure of greatness that estimates a man by what he has absorbed from society and that which estimates men worthy in proportion as they do service and diffuse blessings—these differences surpass comprehension.

If Jesus had left nothing but the Parables, His name would have been imperishable in literature; if He had bequeathed to posterity nothing but the simplicity of his speech and the irresistible logic of His argument, He would have had a permanent place among the orators of the world; if He had given to the world nothing but the commandment, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," enforced as it was by His own example, this one gift would have been sufficient to outweigh all the wealth of all the world; if He had left no record but the Sermon on the Mount, it alone would have made His natal day

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