

Christmas reflections

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CHRISTMAS REFLECTIONS.

Living, as we are, in a world beset with fears and misgivings, harassed by economic problems and distracted by conflicting ideologies, it is with a sense of relief that we welcome the coming Christmas interlude. It will give us an opportunity to lay aside for a while the cares and preoccupations of our daily lives and to take part, once more, in the traditional festivities which are being observed throughout the Christian world at this time of the year.

The Christmas festival has an interesting history. The merry-making, the giving of presents and the very date on which we celebrate the birthday of Christ, all these can be traced back to the pre-Christian era. The ancient Romans observed December 25th as the Solar festival—the winter solstice—which probably explains why that date was fixed for Christmas by the early Church fathers who often adapted a pagan feast to Christian usage. From the 4th century onward the date of Christmas has remained unchanged though the Armenian Church to this day celebrate it on January 6th, the feast of Epiphany.

Under the Puritan Commonwealth, in 1644, it was forbidden to observe Christmas day by any festivities and December 25th was ordered, by law, to be a market day.

The meaning of the Christmas message was not always put into practice. Obscurantism and religious intolerance have often, in the past, made a mockery of it. Dark and evil things have been done in the name of Him whose teaching postulated neighbourly love, forgiveness and humility. But gradually, through the centuries, enlightenment has dawned on the nations whose people profess the Christian faith. To-day, no one, not even the agnostic, will deny that Christian thought has exerted — and does so still — a beneficial influence on mankind and that, without it, the world would be a far worse place to live in.

Christmas is essentially a festival for the family. To enjoy it to the full it ought to be celebrated in one's home, in the congenial companionship of those who are near and dear to us, with such good cheer as we may afford or is available to us. And if the household

includes children, our enjoyment will be all the greater for their enthusiasm and merriment.

There are few among us who, on seeing a brightly lit Christmas tree or hearing the moving strains of "Silent Night, Holy Night" are not transported back to the days of their childhood. They then remember, not without nostalgia, the time when Christmas was something we eagerly looked forward to, and our young minds accepted the beautiful story of Bethlehem and the message of the angels with a rapture and an unquestioning faith which in our maturer and more sophisticated years we find it difficult to recapture. These are precious memories, and blessed are they whose hearts respond and vibrate to their appeal.

Let us therefore steep ourselves in the Christmas atmosphere and rejoice in the knowledge that we are privileged to be associated with countries permeated by Christian traditions. For both in our beloved homeland and in the great community whose hospitality we enjoy, and in which so many of us have found a second home, the Christian spirit is still alive and the Christmas message of "Goodwill on Earth" has not lost its meaning.

To all our readers the Editor extends warmest greetings and very best wishes for a Happy Christmas.
The Editor.

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