



## Christmas.

THERE is always a good reason for that which has obtained a strong hold upon the hearts of the people, and probably there is no festival—no experience in the whole range of human enjoyment, which is participated in by so many, which is anticipated with such eager delight, which creates such vivid transformation in the look of the outer world, and develops so many new and pretty industries, as this old yet ever-new celebration of the birth and love of Jesus. One of the hardest things to endure in a life that has few pleasures, that is circumscribed and limited by want of opportunities, and narrow means, is the routine. Whatever occurs to break this up, to change the current of thought, to stimulate activity, to give a motive that is sweet and pleasurable to life and work, is of benefit to body and mind, and when it comes to us as part of the general order of things, and can be enjoyed without breaking in upon our lives, or interfering with the performance of our regular duties, we should cultivate it religiously as an invaluable aid to health and happiness.

The theological aspect of it sinks into utter insignificance beside the human, the physiological, and the hygienic aspects, of which so few estimate the importance. We can remember the day, and the event which gives its significance upon our knees; but the gift we present may have occupied our thoughts, and warmed our hearts, and given brightness to life for weeks, though it were only a trifle of our own making. The emblematic green also smiles down upon us as a reminder, and a sacred promise; while the hospitable preparations which we make, even at a little sacrifice, enlarge the boundary of our daily vision, and compel us to put a new and broader interest into our lives.

Christmas loses its character and its significance when it is made a mere excuse for display, for grand entertainments which mean nothing, or a grudging hospitality which counts its cost as more than its gain. It is, above all other festivals, the one that typifies love and care for others, and its greatest charm is in sincerity and spontaneity.

It is especially too the family festival, beloved of the children, and a "Christmas" would not be Christmas from which they were excluded. Its proper and joyous observance is one of the privileges, not to say possibilities of the family, one that cannot be enjoyed by the bachelor, and compensates for somewhat of that "freedom" of which he boasts, and which he would gladly barter as the years roll on for a chubby, hearty boy, or sweet rosy girl. If a bachelor enjoys Christmas at all, it must be in the house of some married man, and if he never envied him before, he does then; with his children about him, his board spread with home-made Christmas dainties, and the light of a conscious integrity and harmony between himself and the plan of God's creation expressing itself in the serene satisfaction of his soul.

Life is difficult at best, and those who cut themselves off from the blessing of a home of their own, from children, from the constant surprises and delight which the growth, the varied circumstances, and development of new lives afford, are subjects for profound pity and commiseration—none the less so because an ignorant selfishness, and fear of manly responsibility often lies at the bottom of it. The way to really get all the good and happiness out of life is to take hold of it "strongly," as Goethe says, and not be afraid of its

duties or its responsibilities; be sure we shall find unexpected times of comfort in them in the days that are to come, when pleasure, as pleasure, has palled upon us, and even Christmas is cared for more for the delight it is to others, than the actual enjoyment it affords to ourselves.

## True Charity.

ONE of the problems of to-day is how to meet the question of poverty and the demand for help which grow stronger and more imperative every day, as populations increase, and the reckless and lazy learn the art of depending upon the sympathies of mankind, as upon an unfailling source of supply.

That there are circumstances exceptionally hard, and which need help, that there are misfortunes which defy the most prudent foresight and calculation, no one will deny; but the victims to these are quite overshadowed by the clamorous crowd who make a profession of beggary, and whose fraudulent practices in time become so transparent as to disgust and close up the very fountains of sympathy and compassion in the hearts of the most kindly disposed, and induce them to believe that all charity is thrown away, or worse, encourages idleness, and begets pauperism.

This is a sad aspect of the case, for the "poor" we are to have "always" with us, according to the Bible, and they will always present an unsolvable problem unless we can hit on some methods of treatment different from those which have yet been reached.

It is beginning to be pretty well understood, however, that ignorance first, and vice afterwards, lie at the root of poverty, and that the first necessity, in endeavoring to get rid of it, is to teach people how to help themselves.

Giving five dollars is worse than useless as a form of charity, unless it goes through the hands of some conscientious person, who can and will do what you are not willing to do yourself, give personal service, and work in their houses, and among the poor.

Not in the way of dropping a tract, or interfering in their daily affairs, but making one's self acquainted—gaining their confidence, helping with a sick child, starting a little sewing or cooking school in their midst, open to children or adults, and a loan office, where small sums could be lent without interest, which would tide over a hard time without the loss of self-respect, and leave them qualified to be beneficiaries a second time upon its repayment.

These loan societies are becoming a feature of all organizations which have for their object the aid and comfort of the poor, upon a basis which permits them to maintain their independent manhood and womanhood.

Charity doles are pauperizing and degrading, and they are not always true charity even on the part of the givers. There are plenty of so-called benevolent people who will give a small sum to excuse themselves to their consciences for not paying a larger one where it is rightfully due. Half-paid clergymen and their families throughout the country districts know what it is to receive cake and maple sugar, which make them sick, instead of a remuneration, which would enable them to buy proper food and clothing.

Periodically there are fits of virtuous and charitable indignation in great cities about the condition of working girls, and the necessity of providing "homes" for them—the principal feature of which is always that they are as unlike real homes as possible. Such charitable intervention is an insult to working girls; they ought to be as free to choose their own homes as their employers, and their wages should enable them to live in them comfortably. Let us learn to be just before we make a parade of being generous; and when

we exercise charity, do it in such a way as not to destroy what is best and most essential to character in any human soul.

## City and Country Needs.

It is a great pity that the city and country lives of American women should not be brought into such association as would be useful to both. Young women in the country need the money they could earn, and the purpose, the activity, the change, which work for money would give them. Women in the city need just the sort of help they might receive from girls who have been brought up in country homes, who know how to make beds, wash dishes, sweep rooms, and cook if necessary, and could, upon a pinch, lend a hand at any and all of these household duties.

But the two cannot be brought together because there are difficulties on both sides—of pride, and ignorance, and unwillingness to do the right thing, because the way of doing it does not exactly suit us. "Is it not a shame!" remarks a kind and well-to-do lady living in a suburb of New York; "here is a beautiful home for a woman who can do what I want, and no more hardship about it than if she was working in a home of her own, the certainty, besides, of good wages and appreciation on the part of her employers, which she would not be sure of in a home of her own, yet I cannot get girls to stay here, and half the time I have to do my own work for want of competent assistance. There are plenty of girls and women who would be willing to come from all parts of the country, accept the wages, the home, and the comfort these afforded them, but they have not the dimmest idea of the exigencies of city life. They want to be treated as "one of the family"—that is a *sine qua non*. They have dim ideas about being invited to the theater or the opera, and, above all things, they want the afternoons to take lessons in oil or decorative painting, or art needle-work.

"This they could readily understand, if they knew anything about the work and habits of city homes, is quite out of the question. The dinner is universally prepared for six or half-past six o'clock in New York, and by the time it is properly cleared away it is eight, possibly nine, o'clock. Breakfast is not so early as in the country, and the morning duties, lunch and the preparations for dinner, occupy all the fore part of the day. A cook gets her afternoon or evening out once a fortnight, and her "Sunday" (that is part of the day) at the same regular intervals. This would seem like hardship to nine out of ten young women who come to the city with great ideas of what they wish to accomplish, but are too often content to sit down as dependents while they acquire a scattering of some modern "art" which can hardly be used as a veneer for real absence of all special and even general culture.

What the girls should do who are really in earnest is to come to the city, and go to work in earnest at whatever they can find to do. If they are exceptionally good or capable they will soon be discovered; in the mean time there is no necessity for making a hardship out of work of any kind, and at the worst it is better than vegetating with no object in life at all.

The girls who do the best for themselves are those who ask no odds of fate or fortune, but simply "do" something, and do it in the best way they can. There are plenty who would find in doing "general" housework, where they would not be brought in contact with other and foreign domestics, a stepping-stone to better things, and in any case a home where it would be their own fault if they were not well treated, and did not make it cleanly and pleasant, for this much would be almost entirely in their own hands.