

Editor's Easy Chair.

THE comfortable words of the hymn

"Religion never was designed
To make our pleasures less"

are peculiarly appropriate for Christmas. They express a truth which the happy day emphasizes, and it is a truth which needs emphasis. One of the French players who came to this country with Rachel says in his journal that he was invited to take a pleasure drive to the cemetery upon Long Island. Evidently he had not heard of Froissart's epigram, because he was both surprised and amused at the invitation; probably, also, he was little familiar with the Puritan fathers, or he would have known that they were always going to the graveyard. In Judge Sewall's *Journal* every page seems to be hung with funeral scarfs and gloves. An oppressive gloom, as of death and the tomb, overhangs it all.

Indeed, the early Christians dwelt so often and so long in the catacombs that when they emerged, accustomed to associate life with the tomb, they doubtless regarded the whole world as a catacomb. Our American Puritan ancestry and spiritual training left this sombre touch and tone upon the earliest enduring work of our literature, and the fresh and smiling nature of the New World was first depicted by our art as a tomb.

"The hills,

Rock-ribbed and ancient as the sun; the vales
Stretching in pensive quietness between;
The venerable woods; rivers that move
In majesty; and the complaining brooks
That make the meadows green; and, poured round
all,

Old ocean's gray and melancholy waste—
Are but the solemn decorations all
Of the great tomb of man."

"Thanatopsis" is the swan song of Puritanism. Indeed, when Puritanism could sing, the great change was accomplished. Christmas was at the door.

Let us leave the severe question whether Christmas has ever done what Puritanism did, or ever could do it. It is enough to-day, under the mistletoe, to remember that even Puritanism promised Christmas as the final reward of joyless living; that is to say, it held out heaven as the prize of well-doing, or rather of correct believing, and although it was a very sober heaven of prolonged psalmody, yet it was

intended to represent happiness to the imagination, and even enjoyment. It was perhaps a severely tempered enjoyment, such pleasure as may be tolerated in the young by a strict duenna—a sternly regulated joy, the prunes and prisms discipline of a celestial sphere, but still the regulated play-ground would not be a graveyard, and the funeral scarfs and gloves would be no more seen.

Dr. Johnson, in his life of Milton, speaks of "religion, of which the rewards are distant." That was peculiarly the religion which looked askance at Christmas in this world, whether it was the religion of Saint Simeon standing on his pillar, or of the Saint of the Bay making the Quaker stand in the pillory on Boston Common. But Christmas was still the distant reward. Purged of the flesh, Christmas might be tolerated.

But in this world who of us desires Christmas purged of the flesh, Christmas without plum-pudding, or snap-dragon, or Maid Marian, or the sweet rites of the mistletoe? It came to this country, indeed, in the train of a prelatical Church. It must be owned that it was not one of the company of the *Mayflower*. Pastor Wilson or Norton may have suspected it to be carousing over at Merrymount with the losel Morton. But when the Bay excluded Christmas it exiled the sweetest part of its own faith. Nay, it wounded the whole, for if a man love not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? What is old Christmas, of whom Santa Claus is chief priest, but the incarnation of the Christian spirit in this world, of the Christian spirit in human relations? Who was it that said, feed the hungry, open the eyes of the blind, visit the prisoner, do as ye would be done by? And who does it but Christmas—Christmas of the warm heart and the full hand, Christmas that cheers and consoles, Christmas that lights the land with a smile, Christmas that practises as well as preaches?

It is the most truly symbolic of Christian days. The church is open and hung with green. There is public worship. There are prayers and praise. But what good pastor ever preached a long sermon on Christmas? Or what parishioner sitting in the pew had ever gloomy thoughts

on Christmas? Or what urchin who in the secrecy of his soul has been sometimes supposed to wish the awful wish that Sunday was over, has ever longed for Christmas to go? Christmas for that urchin may indeed imply rhubarb the next morning. But elsewhere in the calendar is it not the holy day itself, not the next day, that seems to him to imply rhubarb?

Christmas is the preacher who emphasizes the fact that the religion which it celebrates is adapted to human nature. Horace is called the laureate of the worldly, of the epicurean, of the pagan who would eat and drink in view of to-morrow. The gay adage *dum vivimus* is cited with a shudder as the gospel of pleasure. Christmas was hunted in the Puritan parliament as a kind of god of pleasure who was only a masked devil. It was confounded by Governor Bradford with the Belly god. But why, said Charles Wesley, as he sweetly sang—why give all the good tunes to Satan? The sweet singer might have enlarged his view and his question. Why give Satan any of the good things? Why, above all, let him have Christmas, as Andromeda was abandoned to the dragon of the sea? Let Christmas stand for pleasure, and for the reason that it is especially the Christian day. Then Christianity drops her weeds and smiles. Then the whole world takes up the refrain,

"Religion never was designed
To make our pleasures less."

And even Dr. Doddridge comes singing in,

"I live in pleasure when I live to Thee."

The doctor must not fly his own logic. Not to live in pleasure is not to live to Thee. Pure pleasure it must be, no doubt, but that is the pleasure embodied in Christmas.

If we were to fancy a wholly Christianized world, it would be a world inspired by the spirit of Christmas—a bright, friendly, beneficent, generous, sympathetic, mutually helpful world. A man who is habitually mean, selfish, narrow, is a man without Christmas in his soul. The child of good fortune, like Miss Messenger in Besant's *All Sorts and Conditions of Men*, whose chief purpose is to share her good fortune with others, and to teach them that love and sympathy are the keys of life, keeps Christmas all the year. Besant calls his tale what he says his friends call

it, an impossible story. Then Christianity is a dream, for Miss Messenger is simply a Christian.

If Besant's friends were right and the story is impossible, let us cling to Christmas all the more as a day of the spirit which in every age some souls have believed to be the possible spirit of human society. The earnest faith and untiring endeavor which see in Christmas a forecast are more truly Christian, surely, than the pleasant cynicism which smiles upon it as the festival of a futile hope. Meanwhile we may reflect that from good-natured hopelessness to a Christmas world may not be farther than from star dust to a solar system.

THE extreme richness and profusion and variety displayed in the Christmas shops of a great city, the sack of the treasures of the whole earth, which furnish such splendid spoil, recall curiously a remark of Buckle. He says that the history of the world shows enormous progress in all kinds of knowledge, in institutions, in commerce and manufactures, and in every pursuit of human activity, but not in knowledge of moral principle. The most ancient wisdom in morals is also the most modern. Time and the progress of civilization have added nothing to the demands of the conscience or to moral perception. The golden rule is an axiom of the most ancient wisdom.

These are bewildering speculations as we stroll along Fourteenth Street and loiter in Twenty-third Street, which, at the holiday season, have especially the aspect of a fair or a fascinating bazar. The whole world is tributary to Santa Claus.

"Nothing we see but means our good,
As our delight or as our treasure;
The whole is either our cupboard of food
Or cabinet of pleasure."

Invention and science have put a girdle about the globe fitly to decorate Christmas. Diedrich Knickerbocker, in his cocked hat and flowered coat, had heard of Japan, perhaps, as a romance of Prester John. But it would have been a wilder romance to imagine his grandchildren dealing at the feast of St. Nicholas with Japanese merchants in Japanese shops upon the soil of his own Manhattan and on the very road to Tappan Zee. Hendrik Hudson might have been reasonably expected to run down from the Catskills

with a picked crew to vend Hollands for the great feast. But Cipango—!

Yes; we have subdued distance, we are plucking out even the heart of Africa. As the streets of Bokhara when the fairs were held were piled with the stuffs of many a province and thronged by merchants of every hue, so the streets of New York at Christmas show that we have taken the whole earth to drop into our Christmas stocking. The festival might be well and fitly celebrated by a visit to the city merely to walk the streets and

"view the manners of the town,
Peruse the traders, gaze upon the buildings."

The eye can appropriate all the treasures that it would be theft for the hand to touch.

Corydon, sauntering with Amaryllis, and staring with her at the wonderful windows, may be a prince by proxy. "Those pearls," he whispers, "the diver plunged into Oman's dark waters to find for you. They are so far on their way, adored Amaryllis. They have reached your eyes if not yet your ears. Let me but be rich—and I expect at least five dollars for my first fee—let the world but discover that in me the Law, whose seat is the bosom of God, has a new Mansfield, another Marshall, and yonder pearls shall circle the virgin neck for which they were predestined. Or do you prefer the diamonds behind the next pane? Or shall Santa Claus sweetly capture both for you, one for state dress and splendor, one for days less rigorous, not of purple velvets and flowered brocades, but summer draperies of soft lace?"

So the Marchioness and the gay Swiveller, with their happy gift of transforming a shred of lemon-peel and copious libations of pure water into nectar, would have walked the Christmas streets of New York as those of Ormus and of Ind. Lafayette, with the gold snuff-box in which the freedom of the city was presented to him, could not have been freer of it. The happy loiterers could see all the beautiful things, and what could they do more if they should buy them all? Like the kind people at Newport in the summer, who spare no vast expense to build noble houses, and lay out exquisite grounds, and drive in sumptuous carriages, and wear clothes so fine, and take pains so costly and elaborate to please the idle loiterer of a day, who gazes from the street

car or the omnibus or the sidewalk, so the good holiday merchants present the enchanting spectacle of their treasures freely to every penniless saunterer, but for the same enjoyment they demand of the rich an enormous price. And the poor rich must bear also all the responsibility of possession and care, and cannot be secured against theft or loss.

The splendid streets beguile us from our question. In the brilliant bazars we are recalling the New York of silence and solitary woods and roving Indians—the New York that the Dutch settlers bought from the Indians for twenty-four dollars, and which is now the city that we behold, the metropolis of the State of which Mr. Draper, its Superintendent of Public Instruction, asks, "Who shall say that these six millions of people are not better housed, better fed, better clothed, more generally educated, more active in affairs, better equipped for self-government, than any other entire people numbering six millions, unless it be other citizens of our own country, surrounded by the same circumstances and conditions?" Not the Easy Chair certainly. On the contrary, it says Amen.

But has the moral advancement kept pace? Are the six millions as much better morally than the first six millions of their white ancestors upon the continent, as they are better clothed, better educated, and better housed? Are they only materially better? Have they better poets and other artists than the Greeks, than Dante, than Shakespeare, than Raphael and Michael Angelo? Have they wiser men than Plato, Aristotle, Bacon? Have they higher standards of conduct than those of Confucius and the Hindoos? A hundred years ago the pilgrim was sometimes a week travelling to Albany with great discomfort. We travel thither in three hours with incredible ease and luxury. Do we find more public virtue when we get there? Comfort, knowledge, opportunity, resources, are multiplied a thousandfold. Schools, libraries, museums, societies, appliances, have grown in a night like Jack's bean stalk to a towering height. Have they brought us nearer heaven? Are we more truthful, more upright, manlier men? In a world where mechanical invention and victories over time and space were of no importance, but where moral qualities alone availed, should we men of

the end of the nineteenth century stand any better chance than those of the beginning of the ninth?

That is the queer question which Santa Claus insists upon dropping into the stockings that hang by this Christmas hearth. He calls it a Christmas nut to crack. The old fellow chuckles as he thinks of it while he rides through the frosty starlight. "My children," he laughs, "what is the difference between six dozen dozen and half a dozen dozen?" While he asks and chuckles, the old fellow is himself an answer. He did not invent gifts. But he symbolizes universal giving. The moral law may be as old as man, but the demand and disposition for the general application of that law to actual life increase with every century. The moral law was the same when How-

ard revealed the horrors of prisons that it is now when modern philanthropy has purged and purified them. "The sense of duty," said Webster, in his greatest criminal argument, "pursues us ever." But it pursues us more effectively with the return of every Christmas.

The question of Santa Claus is startling, because it is the question whether civilization has been of any essential benefit to the human race. But to get a question fairly stated is often to answer it. Whatever strengthens and extends the power of the Christmas spirit is an unquestionable benefit to mankind. And it is not doubtful, is it, that the sway of that spirit is extending, and that every year its humane greeting is heard farther and farther,

"Merry Christmas to all, and to all a good-night"?

Editor's Study.

I.

THE Study could scarcely believe its windows.

It knew that this was the witching Christmas-time, when, if ever, the literary spirit begins to see visions, with morals hanging to them like the tails of kites; and to dream dreams of a sovereign efficacy in reforming vicious lives.

But the Study was so strongly principled against things of this sort that it was not willing to suppose itself the scene of even the most edifying hallucination. It rubbed its large French plate panes to a crystal clearness, sacrificing the beautiful frost-work on them without scruple, and peered eagerly into the street, emptied of all business by the holiday.

II.

The change which had passed upon the world was tacit, but no less millennial. It was plainly obvious that the old order was succeeded by the new; that the former imperfect republic of the United States of America had given place to the ideal commonwealth, the Synthetized Sympathies of Altruria. The spectacle was all the more interesting because this was clearly the first Christmas since the establishment of the new status.

The Study at once perceived that what it beheld from its windows was politically only a partial expression of the general

condition; that the Synthetized Sympathies formed a province of the Federation of the World, represented by a delegation eager to sacrifice their selfish interests in the Parliament of Man, but was not by any means the centre of things. The fact was not flattering to the Study's patriotic pride, but upon reflection the Study was aware of a supreme joy in not having its patriotic pride flattered.

Every aspect of "this new world which was the old" attracted the Study, but being a literary Study, and not a political or economical Study, its interest was soon centred in the literary phases of the millennial epoch. These were of every possible character, and their variety was so great that it was instantly evident how hopeless it would be to note them all.

But one thing that struck the Study with peculiar force was the apparent reconciliation of all the principles once supposed antagonistic, the substitution of emulation for rivalry, the harmonization of personal ambitions in a sweet accord of achievement for the common good. It was not exactly the weather for floral displays, but among the festive processions which poured into the public square under the Study's windows was one of Dramatic Critics wreathed with rose-buds, and led in flowery chains by a laughing band of Playwrights, who had captured these rugged natures, and had then per-