CHRISTMAS, the Day of Gladness

By REV. THOMAS B. GREGORY

CHRISTMAS, both in its ritual and in its sentiment, is almost as old as Humanity itself. As far back as you can go we find something very like the Yuletide festival a season of rejoicing, attended by a somewhat boisterously joyful celebration.

About Christmas there is nothing that even approximates sectarianism or any kind of mental or social narrowness or littleness. Its spirit is as broad as humanity, and all men of whatever race, creed or geographical status, are invited to and are entitled to, take part in its glad festivities.

Very pitiful is the human being who, in the midst of the Christmas season, feels like flocking off by himself, like Dundreary's bird. It is a season, not for isolation and loneliness, but for fellowship and universal brotherhood, as though we were saying to one another, "ALL HANDS AROUND" with nobody left out.

When we pause to think of the way in which the Christmas originated it becomes easy for us to understand why the season is everywhere made to be the occasion of deep rejoicing and mid-form gladness.

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Beyond a doubt the festival had its birthaway up in the frozen North, in the region of the aurora borealis, where the battle between cold and the heat, the darkness and the light, is the longest and the most terrible, and it was quite natural that at the turn of the season, when the tired sun began to return, men and earth themselves should feel a thrill of partaking of joy.

And by degrees the festivities of the men of the far north worked their way southward, for even there the return of the subsequent life to mean the sunshine and heat without which the human race must perish.

The hyperboreans had their Christ, Baldur by name. Baldur the good, the perfect, the compassionate, who, taking pity on them, destroyed the Frost Giant and saved them from death. We cannot very well blame the hyperboreans if, at first their religion was largely of a material type, the worship of the sun, for Baldur was far more than the sun illumined.

And just as the pathetic thrust of the professional theologians is that the Christ of Humanity stands for OPTIMISM. All is well. Let not your hearts be troubled. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. In reality there is no evil, the thing we call "evil" being but good in the making. "I am come that ye might have life, not death; confidence not despair; gladness, not weeping and wailing."

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Away with all gloominess and greed, all doubt and despair. This is the season of love and goodwill, of hope and gratitude, day is always and everywhere "Orthodox" and in order.

If you are able to do so at any other time of the year, forget the Christmas time resolve to have the full measure of yourride, and to let your worthiest and highest sentiment assert itself to the full.

Let joy be unconfined. Again he is said, "ALL IS WELL." The Sun is not going to be conquered by the Frost King; the anarchists are not going to overthrow the Constitution of the United States and the government that was inaugurated by our venerated Washington; in spite of the little politicians who are ready to "give up to party what was meant for mankind," the ways and means of bettering the condition of mankind will survey be found; the life of men and nations shall not have been in vain; and as for God Himself, who watcheth at the gates of the little early by way, for all that we know to the contrary he may turn out to be our best friend and noblest helper.

Those who have crossed the North Atlantic in winter can not be reminded of the uplifting and joy-giving influence of the gulf stream. Those who have felt it can never forget it. Once fairly upon the warm "river of the sea," the chill and numbness of one's body and soul depart, the rigid muscles relax, the pent up feelings let themselves go, and laugh and chat, and all around seem jolly and enjoyment. And so we would wish to be refashioned for the latter.

And such as Christmas, with its good will and good cheer, its brave confidence and spontaneous gladness. It is the gulf stream of life warming us into the sentiment of a common humanity, with its unselfishness and comradeship, and imparting to us all the glad sense of security and victory.

However, the thoughts of men have been "wool wandering" from the beginning, and by and by, when Christ was born they said: "Here is the place! Bethlehem here in Jew who knows what it is, a hamlet for your life," as the reindeer Baldur came with joy, just for men's joy, and even as a month for men's material bodies? And they took the northern festival, modified and spiritualized and its holiness and gave it to the Son of Joseph.

If Every Day Were Christmas

WHAT if every day were Christmas? The suggestion at first blush is perhaps not altogether agreeable. One can imagine numerous objects against the idea because of the excesses to which many go on Christmas holidays. Let it be admitted freely that Christmas is misused, that it is often a season of excesses and extremes, even so who of us would do away with Christmas? For despite all the excesses of the holiday season and the hardship it works on many, is there not a rainbow of glory over every recurring Christmas celebration?

Christmas is a season of prophetic idealism and a rebuke to selfish living. At the approach of the anniversary of our Lord's birth, men and women whose thoughts have been mostly of self are moved to think of others. The idea of serving others and making others happy affects even the blase and the indifferent. Somehow, the idea that it is more blessed to give than to bargain finds lodgment in minds unused to tender and benevolent thoughts. For a brief period, cruel competitions that so sorely grind human society are deserted if not forgotten. For the time being all humanity seems to be one family. There is a delight in seeing everybody joyous. The foreigner is made to feel at home. Artificial barriers are broken, and there come even into hard faces some softened lines. The spirit of Christmas penetrates even behind stone walls, and the prisoner is made to know that he is still remembered and that society has not abandoned hope in him.

Christmas is the one season of the year when we are especially reminded to take Jesus seriously. The Sermon on the Mount seems practicable then—the Beatitudes possible in daily life. Even the great words, "Peace on earth, good will toward men," actually appear workable at Christmastide. The old text seems precious, so peculiarly appropriate. John 3:16 finds lodgment in our heart of hearts. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." Those comes into our minds the duty, not that we have not taken seriously the lessons that our Lord taught, but that now we take Him at His word, we shall see more, we sacrifice, we find a new joy growing out of these very practical and beautiful ministrations.

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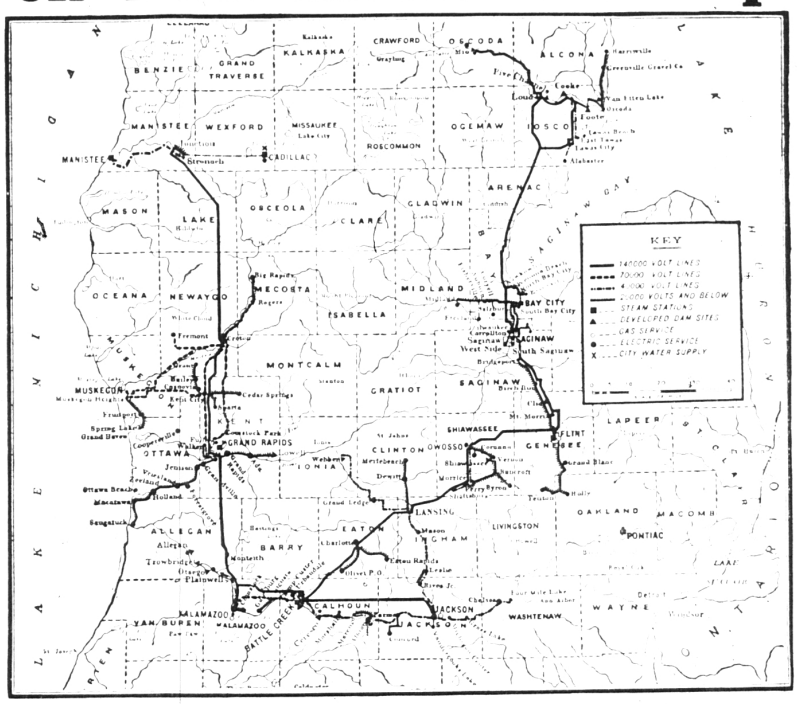

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