

Editor's Easy Chair.

"AT this a hundred bells began to peal,
That with the sound I woke, and heard indeed
The clear church bells ring in the Christmas morn."

These are the last lines of the charming setting in which Tennyson placed his "Morte d'Arthur" upon its first publication forty-six years ago. In the *Idyls of the King* the poem now appears as the "Passing of Arthur," but the setting is gone. It was called "The Epic," and served to introduce the poem as read by the poet at a country house on Christmas Eve. "The Epic" is a fine illustration of the melodious Tennysonian blank-verse, and of the poet's skill in idealizing the most familiar and homely scenes and incidents.

It begins thus:

"At Francis Allen's on the Christmas Eve—
The game of forfeits done—the girls all kiss'd
Beneath the sacred bush and past away—
The parson Holmes, the poet Everard Hall,
The host, and I sat round the wassail-bowl,
Then half-way ebb'd: and there we held a talk,
How all the old honor had from Christmas gone,
Or gone or dwindled down to some odd games
In some odd nooks like this."

But presently it appears that Everard Hall, the poet, had written an epic of King Arthur, which he had burnt, as a work rather remodelling models than depicting life.

"And these twelve books of mine (to speak the truth)

Were faint Homeric echoes, nothing worth,
Mere chaff and draff, much better burnt."

But Francis Allen had picked the eleventh book from the hearth, and now

"He brought it; and the poet, little urged,
But with some prelude of disparagement,
Read, mouthing out his hollow oes and aes,
Deep-chested music, and to this result."

Then follows the beautiful poem as we know it, and then a brief epilogue in the tone of the prelude, and very delightful, describing the going to bed in the early winter morning, and in dreams Arthur returning as the modern gentleman, until the day breaks and the Christmas bells begin to ring.

This melodious setting of the familiar poem is one of the most delicate and beautiful tributes in modern English literature to the sentiment of the old English Christmas. When this poem was written, Dickens's *Christmas Carol* and *Chimes* were yet to come, and the Christmas re-

vival which they produced and Thackeray's holiday stories were to follow. But Tennyson's strain in treating the day is as characteristically English as that of the story-tellers, although the good cheer in the poem is more spiritual than in the stories. Emerson says of Macaulay that his good is good to eat, and that is true of the Dickens Christmas. But for hungry folk good to eat is a very good good.

Washington Irving was the earlier Christmas revivalist. His Christmas papers depict not only the kindly feeling of the day, but they suggest good cheer as well as good feeling, and with an imaginative touch which conjures up the ideal and traditional England, of which the foaming tankard and the sirloin are inseparable parts. It is this human aspect, indeed, which endears the traditional English Christmas. The song of the nativity was not only glory to God in the highest, but also on earth peace, good-will to men. Now peace and good-will in a generous and comprehensive sense include beef and pudding. Christmas cheer is not only a spiritual joy, but a satisfaction of the senses. It is spiritual meditation and invigoration, but it is also sitting "around the wassail-bowl."

"The game of forfeits done—the girls all kiss'd
Beneath the sacred bush."

It is the mingling of the two, the satisfaction of the complete man, which is the English tradition of Christmas.

As it appears in literature it is especially the festival of good-will toward men, and that requires a banquet which is not a Barmecide feast. The Christmas-box which contained good wishes and nothing more would be as sore a disappointment as to find in the stocking hung for Santa Claus only a pious tract. When the *Dairyman's Daughter* comes on Christmas morning she must be clad in a custard at least, and offer her greeting in whipped syllabub. The lesson of the day is not to say only, but to do. If we hear in our hearts, as well as with our ears,

"The clear church bells ring in the Christmas morn,"

we hear them saying something, as Whittington heard the bells of London. They are whispering to us to prove our faith by

our works, and to show that Christianity means not only right thinking, but right living, and in living the greatest of all virtues is charity.

The open house and hall which the Christmas ballads celebrate are symbolical. It is the day on which nobody shall go starving or cold, because it is the nativity of the Teacher who tells us to feed the hungry and to clothe the naked. It is the day of fraternity, and perhaps before it is over, before the wassail-bowl is wholly dry, and while a few forfeits yet remain to be redeemed, it may occur to some of us to ask, if the open house and hall are symbolical, why should not Christmas itself be symbolical, and since it is a day of fraternity, why should not every day be a day of fraternity?

The effervescence of good feeling which sparkles and rustles through Dickens's *Christmas Carol*; the spirit which melts old Scrooge not only into human sympathy, but into a hilarity which makes him whisper something to the old gentleman, his terrified debtor, that causes the old gentleman to say, "Lord bless me!" as if his breath were taken away, and then to add, "I don't know what to say to such munifi—"; the spirit which stirs Scrooge to give Bob Cratchit a dig in the waistcoat and to announce that his salary is about to be raised—"I'll raise your salary, and endeavor to assist your struggling family, and we will discuss your affairs over a Christmas bowl of smoking bishop, Bob"—this is the spirit of Christmas in its largest sense, the spirit not of a day only, but of a life, for it is good-will to man.

It is not probable that the millennium will be brought about by employers raising the salaries of their clerks, but it is certain that there will be no millennium without that spirit. Scrooge's Christmas did not end with sunset; it lasted all the year round. That Christmas, indeed, is an impostor which ceases to be Christmas because the twenty-fifth day of December is gone. Its reality can be tested only by watching closely the twenty-fifth of May and the twenty-fifth of September, and if they are full of the same kindliness, the same good cheer, for everybody and everything, with which the twenty-fifth of December overflows, then that day is not a donkey masquerading as a lion, but a genuine Christmas.

Once there was a Maid Marian who played at forfeits and snap-dragon, and

watched the morris-dancers and hobby-horse, and heard the waits singing under the cold moon, and at last, caught beneath the mistletoe, she paid the sweetest forfeit of all. And in the bottom of her heart, despite her rosy cheeks, she felt that she paid it willingly, and secretly sighed to think that Christmas comes but once a year. But long afterward, when for many a year she had been married to the youth who caught her beneath the sacred bush, as she made the plum-pudding every Christmas, and helped to hang the little stockings by the fireside, and hunted the slipper, and gayly buffed the blind-man, she remembered that it was not the snap-dragon nor the waits, nor even that happy forfeit, which made the old Christmas, but something that did not set with the sun nor die with the carol of the waits. She was caught now under the mistletoe, not by that youth only, but by little fellows with pudgy arms, who covered her all over with kisses; and when she was tired of romping, and the little fellows with pudgy arms were fast asleep, holding their dolls and horses and elephants and dogs, she said to that youth of other years, "It was not the games and the pudding and the mistletoe that made the old Christmas—it was love; and love makes Christmas all the year."

WHEN a gentleman who had taken up his residence in a secluded and beautiful rural town was asked about a notably picturesque drive in his neighborhood, he replied that he had never been there, and to the astonished inquiry of his friend answered that he wanted to leave something unseen. Perhaps he held *omne ignotum pro magnifico*, and felt that to "see with eyes" would be to lose an illusion. Perhaps it was a humorous whim to amuse himself with the certain surprise of the inquirer, as if a man should live in Rome and never see St. Peter's, for the pleasure of the shock of saying so. But whatever the reason, he had not seen the picturesque drive.

No such sentiment characterizes our modern society. The determination to know everything about everybody is universal, and a great part of what is published as news is merely gossip. Looking at a newspaper of sixty or seventy years ago, nothing is more striking than the absence of allusions to essentially private matters. That a gentleman had a dinner party or

that a lady gave a ball was no more supposed to be a subject for public notice than that she had bought a new dress or that he had laid in half a pipe of Madeira. If a stranger had asked at the door who had been bidden to the daughter's wedding, or who led the Virginia reel on Christmas Eve, he would have run great risk of a horsewhipping as an invader of domestic privacy.

The views upon public questions of Mr. Clay, of Mr. Madison, of Mr. John Quincy Adams, were made known in speeches carefully prepared, or spoken responsibly in debate. The printed statements of such views were unquestionably accurate. They were not to be taken upon probation by allowing time for correction, nor were momentary impressions of current incidents recorded as final judgments. They were public men, but they had also private lives, into which it was as impertinent for the public gaze to pry as into the domestic life of their wives and daughters. This is all changed; and to what is the change attributable? The life of persons who are in no sense public is depicted in the utmost detail that can be obtained, although the details are of the most vapid kind, and might be fairly supposed to be as uninteresting to the public as a description of the President's breakfast, except for the fact that the publication shows a public demand and interest in them.

The private lives which are so depicted are generally those of rich people, although in rural newspapers it is duly recorded that Miss Mamie Roe, of Crab-Apple Hollow, is visiting Miss Minnie Doe, of Squash Corner, and that Jehiel Jenkins and wife are visiting friends in Wisconsin. These last chronicles are obviously a good-natured lure of subscriptions by playing upon the harmless vanity of seeing one's name in print. But the general explanation is more complex, and not unflattering. The rage for publicity of things which are essentially private springs originally from a love of personal gossip, which is but the poorer aspect of the instinct which finds nothing so interesting to man as man.

This is the charm of Herodotus and Plutarch. They are treasuries of the sayings and doings of men and women, many of them well worth reading, many of them unimportant. Even a book like Hervey's memoirs is read with avidity as the an-

nals of a base and degraded society. It describes what was nominally the best, but actually the worst, society in England. It is a sordid, sensual, corrupt, and contemptible company, but its story is reprinted constantly, and is still read with interest. The gazettes which were the contemporary chronicles of the exterior aspect of this court circle cultivated the love of pure gossip, the taste for tales about men and women who were merely rich or conspicuous, and of no essential worth. They never said a wise thing nor did a good one, but, like Charles, they were born within a certain society; and from this perverted taste sprang our modern Jenkins, who is its minister.

But his gossiping impertinence was suppressed in the earlier days of the republic, when great fortunes were few and newspaper reporters untrained. As fortunes became enormous, and an uncultivated rich class without traditions was stranded, without resources of taste or education, upon a wearisome leisure, the natural consequence was profuse expenditure, the show of money, and luxury and extravagance which naturally sought notoriety. For this the greatly developed newspaper offered the opportunity, and gratified the taste for personal gossip which, however degraded and perverted, is inherent in human nature.

Jenkins in his absurdest form, the interviewer who describes a man's room and his table, the trained detective of news whose object is to seize any person whose name for any reason is known to the public, and to turn his life inside out to the public gaze, are all developments—some of them mere "freaks" and "sports"—of the natural interest of man in man.

Thus in this generous season, as

"At Francis Allen's on the Christmas Eve,"

we sit conversing into the night, with him resenting the clear note of chancicleer that announces coming dawn, and loath to allow the consecrated eve to end, even the things that we regret and deplore take on a kindlier aspect, and we try to find some reason in the old notion that evil is but inverted good. Uncle Toby would not slay the fly, and on Christmas Eve, when privacy is most sacred, we may regard gently, as a legitimate human interest in humanity turned topsy-turvy, even the impudence of the interviewer.

Editor's Study.

I.

IN the good old times, which are not so very remote chronologically, the heart oppressed by sympathy for want easily unburdened itself at the Christmas season in the elementary benevolence of gifts and alms; or if it was a literary heart it found the same comfort in prompting others to gifts and alms by kindly poems, by fervent essays, and by tales, little or long, celebrating the bestowal of turkeys upon the turkeyless and geese upon the gooseless. Such remembrances of the destitute were preferably conveyed in hampers, with orders for coal, and in extreme cases with the accompaniment of nourishing wines. Pale, wistful little girls had much to do with them in giving and receiving, and apple-cheeked, chubby old gentlemen prevailed in the transaction; the reformation of deplorable habits and the amelioration of sordid and avaricious characters often followed; and inferably the wrong old world was set right, and went on its way afterward without wabbling. To be exact, matters happened in real life very much as they still do in comfortable comedies on the stage; or at least this is what was implied in the Christmas literature of that period of *Fifty Years Ago* which Mr. Walter Bessant studies so delightfully in his book of the same name. A gentle superstition seems to have arisen to console the race for the formidable phase which the dismal science of political economy was then beginning to assume. It seemed destined at that moment to quit the cells of philosophy, and to descend upon the wings of Miss Martineau's allegories among the hovels of poverty, with the law of demand and supply under its arm, and a hamper full of stones admirably fashioned to resemble loaves, in response to the cry for bread which arose from those hapless homes. Something had to be done; the Muse bestirred herself, and produced the kind of Christmas literature which has appeased well-to-do people-of-heart for half a century. She need not really have been in so great anxiety; political economy exists, like other sciences, to learn from time to time that it is mistaken. It has come to recognize that circumstances alter cases; that conditions affect and annul inflexible laws; that the supply often creates the demand; that the fact that two

and two make four cannot be the last effect of mathematics. An unknown quantity lies beyond it still, and what if this lay behind it rather than before it?

II.

There seems arising in these times a new Christmas literature which boldly affirms that it lies behind, that science has ignored something, has left something out of the account, and that the forgotten factor is Christ himself. The new Christmas literature is not specifically adapted to the Christmas season; it is not expressed any more in kindly poems, fervent essays, or tales, little or long, alone, but in books that have meaning for the whole year and for every moment of life, but that may be most profitably read and pondered now, when all the associations of the time ought to remind us of the Man who came to bring peace and good-will to men. The new Christmas literature does not necessarily deck itself with sprigs of holly, and bathe itself in pools of burning brandy on platters borne by the tinsel-crowned, bottle-nosed genius of the feast to the board smoking with bowls of wassail, while the upper servants carouse in their hall, and the scullions carry out the fragments of the second table to the dogs and the poor. But it remembers that the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and it does not frown upon honest revelry and innocent mirth, though it entreats each and every of us first to love his neighbor as himself, and to be mindful of him not only now, but throughout the year. Oddly enough, after a period of scientific exaltation, in which it seemed as if man might really live by the nebular hypothesis alone if he could but have a little help from the missing link, the new Christmas literature denies that there is anything of life everlasting in these things, and it reverts openly to the New Testament as the sole source of hope and comfort.

III.

The New Testament, in fact, is the direct inspiration of the new Christmas literature, as it was of the old, but in a far wider, higher, and more luminous sense, with implications infinitely more significant. This literature does not mock at gifts and alms for the holiday season or any other, but it warns us that they are