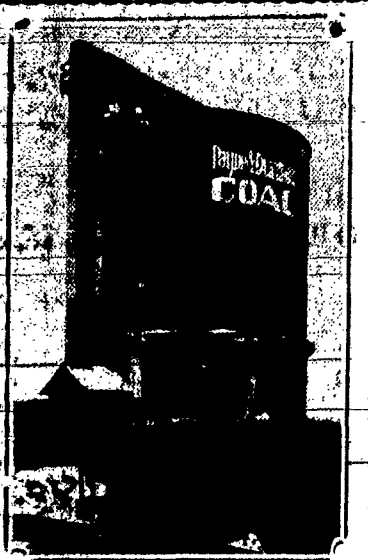


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Why Not Christmas Every Day?

A Striking War-Time Example of the Potency of the
 Great Feast's Spirit Is Invoked in Behalf of
 Year-Round Peace and Fraternity

By GEORGE BARNARD

Though I am not very old, I can not help getting a little preachy around Christmas time. I do not mean that I then feel more devotional (I hope I do, but I am not writing about my soul), but I have found in Christmas a spirit, not contentedly a religious spirit, which lights up the world for a flash, showing humanity in pleasing and harmonious colors. For a day the world is a quite different, much more pleasing, place. Then night falls and when the sun rises again the world has dropped back into the old rut of selfishness, jealousies, intrigues, backbiting, misunderstandings.

There is a trace on Christmas morning. You know the spirit. There is peace everywhere. Little misunderstandings are patched up. If you meet an old friend who has recently had a grouch, you put out your hand and he grabs it—and that wouldn't have happened a week before. If you step on a man's ripe bunton in a street-car, he positively beams when you say, "Pardon, Merry Christmas." Men are brothers on Christmas Day and there is joy in the very air.

Why Not Prolong the Peace?

Why can't we have Christmas every day? Need we let that ray of happiness, which comes with the dawn on Christmas morning, disappear with the setting sun?

To me it is tragic, and my Christmas joy is always alloyed with the paths of it. Humanity in the mass is a very mixed affair and one might well suppose that its aspirations are so various that it is not possible to find an ideal which could reduce all men to the level of common brotherhood. But Christmas day shows that men can forget their strivings and contentions and live in peace. It is a pity that when the world once a year registers joy it cannot (in photographic parlance) "hold it."

If I am preachy, I am not preaching. I do not propose to explain why the day on which the Christ Child was born should produce this almost universal happiness. A man's heart will tell him that, I think. Even if a man decided long ago that he "hasn't any time for religion," a sentiment will steal through to his consciousness out of the memory of his childhood and make him fall in step with the rest of Christendom on Christmas Day.

It is a spontaneous joy that comes to the world. It is not a manufactured expression of mass sentiment, such as is, for instance, Mother's Day. The invention of Thanksgiving Day (marking an excellent sentiment) was intended by the Puritans, I believe, to detract from the glory of the Catholic Christmas—for, after all, the heart of Christmas was the

Mass. In England the Established Church gives the beginning of the secular year holding "water-tight" services to see it in, whilst Catholics a week before offer Mass at midnight to herald the dawn of Christ's birthday. Nothing has been able to tear out of the hearts of the people their affection for the Feast of Bethlehem.

A War-Time Peace Incident

I want to remind you of what happened in the World War. Out in the mud of France and Flanders in the winter of 1914 the troops of the Allies and of the Central Powers faced each other in a filthy, water-logged trench along the Western Front. It may be true that the individual British or Dominion soldier did not have hate in his heart for the individual German or Austrian soldier who faced him. But he certainly had seared into his soul a bitter hatred of the collective force to which he was opposed. It had been part of his training to make his hate. He had been taught frightfulness in the home and the base camps. He had been fed on official lies (on one side as well as on the other) to strengthen his resolve for victory.

These men, then, were embittered, and whilst the world watched in wonder there came the miracle of the first Christmas of the war. Soon after dawn, in that wast of mud which showed no sign of life even in the most fertile soil, a head appeared and shouted "Merry Christmas, Fritz." Across the mud another head popped up and replied, "Merry Christmas, Tommy." Then many men looked over the parapet and, seeing smiling faces, clamored over the top. Standing in No Man's Land, the "dread" army of shell-pocked ground for the possession of which the night of the world had thrown itself into two camps, these war-weary men shook hands, and exchanged Christmas gifts which had reached them in parcels from home.

Spirit of Christmas

At many points along the line that spirit was manifested on Christmas Day, when the trenches were within paces distance apart. At other places hymns were sung in each line alternately and were cheered from the other.

I was not in France in that first year of war. Later I saw a recurrence of that Christmas fraternization between the advance guards of two armies locked in stalemate.

In one place, where the English opposed the Saxons, the truce lasted more than 24 hours. For several days after Christmas the troops in their trenches shouted morning greetings. They were not disloyal. They had just had a glimpse of peace and had seen the futility of the war. Of course it was all very unofficial and wrong, and as soon as the people who conducted the war for England from their arm-chairs heard about it they ordered an attack. But to those soldiers, to whom the attack meant the taking of life or the giving of their own lives, with very little to show on either side for that supreme sacrifice, that truce of the Christ Child had been a sacred thing. When the English officer was ordered to attack, he sent a note across No Man's Land to the German officer opposed to him: "I am ordered to attack and shall open fire at eleven." And so that little peace ended.

The Germans, I hasten to add were not less honorable. In German war letters I have come across striking instances of German officers refraining from breaking a Christmas peace without warning.

A Spirit That Passes Too Quickly

But at the dawn of a New Year—an entirely secular celebration—there was no such feeling of peace and fraternity. Or if there was, I failed to meet it, and I have not read about it in the mass of war experiences through which I have been wading lately. The feeling was quite different. Greetings were shouted, but with a spirit of defiance. Our guns opened 1917, I remember, with an aggressive salvo. I was in a broken-down shack on the Somme at that time and a little bunch of us had prolonged a card game around a guttering candle in the draughty hovel to "see the New Year in" before resting.

When the watch-hands had crept round to midnight there was a terrific crash as one of our heavy guns spoke. After a pause the shells were speeded in quick succession. Then another, and after another seven more. The guns had spoken "1917," and, maybe, brought sorrow to the heart of many a German mother. How different from Christmas.

And ever since that day when our men stood out in No Man's Land and talked to the Germans like brothers, I have had that feeling of deep regret that the spirit of brotherliness which is born of Christmas can not endure. That spirit is the mightiest thing in the world for the creation of human happiness. It was the only thing (except the burial of the dead for mutual comfort) that could hold up a war which (to those who were in the middle of it) seemed utterly remorseless and never-ending.

A Christmas Every Day

Shall we ever capture that spirit and harness it for the world's happiness? It is as fleeting and as transient as a sunset when a painter tries to fix it in pigments on a canvas; as fleeting as the glint of the sun on the wing of a sea-gull; as fleeting as a cloud shadow on a field of waving corn.

But if we could change the world and order it rightly, if we could teach men to carry in their hearts the message which the Christ Child came to bring, then there would be some hope of human happiness—a sort of Christmas every day.

The trouble is that everyone thinks it is the other fellow who needs reforming. Very often this task of changing the heart of the world should begin with changing our own heart.

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Killing Leopard Gains Fame For Priest in Africa

Monrovia (Liberia, West Africa) Dec. 13.—Underlying fame, high local honors, and a special title to hero worship came to Father Hughes of the Sasstown Mission, because he killed a leopard. The missionary's name has been changed by the natives to Father Drag, the Kru expression for leopard-killer.

The leopard, with ten human deaths to its credit, regarded as supernatural, and two innocent natives were killed accused of witchcraft, while four more were saved by Father Hughes' appeal. To the natives, who feared to kill the supposedly bewitched animal, the action of the priest makes him in their eyes a man to be respected above others, one superior to the dreaded powers of witchcraft.

Sasstown is in the Vicariate of Liberia, the Negro Republic founded by freed slaves from America. Catholics number 3,500.

Chicago Cardinal Given \$160,000 By Holy Name

Chicago, Dec. 13.—Cardinal Mundelein has just been presented this week with a check for \$160,000 by the Holy Name Society. The money is to be used for erection of a technical school for delinquent boys near Lockport, a suburb of Chicago. Ground will be broken early in the spring.

More than 1,600 Holy Name men attended the presentation of the gift. The Cardinal, in expressing his appreciation, said it pleased him more to do something definite for delinquent boys than to erect a cathedral.

New Lord Russell Revives Famous Title of Father

London, Dec. 13.—A famous Catholic title has been revived by the Right Hon. Frank Russell on his appointment as a Lord of Appeal. He has chosen the title Baron Russell of Killowen in the County of Down, which was the title taken by his father in 1894 on becoming a Law Lord and later Lord Chief Justice of England. This was a life peerage, and thus the title lapsed with his death of the first Lord Russell of Killowen in 1900.

The pagan practice of decorating with greenery (mistakenly was bequeathed by the Druids) is said to have developed the Christmas tree.

Church's Universality Shown in Mass for Deceased Cardinals

Rome, Dec. 13.—A negro of Venezuela, as celebrant, a Hollander as deacon, and a Japanese as subdeacon, gave the universal touch to the Solemn Mass of Requiem of deceased Cardinals of the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide.

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