



From the

SOCIETY FOR THE PROPAGATION OF THE FAITH

THE REV. LEO C. MOONEY
DIOCESAN DIRECTOR



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Enduring Christmas Present Is Memory's Gift to Writer

By GEORGE BARNARD

One day you will be old. Not necessarily, of course. There is still a certain amount of road mortality, despite "safety weeks" and all the devices to make us cautious. There are still those little weaknesses, inherent in human nature, which defeat the expectation-of-life tables of the insurance actuaries. Nevertheless, in the ordinary way you will one day be old.

When you are really old you will have little active life. You might potter about the golf course or the garden in the summer, or sit by the radiator in the winter. And think of the cozy firesides of your youth. And in that day (which is not an evil day, because you will be so much nearer to your eternal reward) you will live on the memories of the past.

Two immortal thoughts follow: First: While you are young and active, or at any rate mobile, you should pack into life all the pleasurable experiences you can gather. Experiences that will be pleasurable also in retrospect. Second: You should fix them firmly in your mind. Store of Memories.

In this way you will have a store of memories that will be better than wine to you when your limbs are weak and the record of your daily experience become smaller.

I am not old well not what I would call old. But I know what it will be like when I cannot travel, and meet people, and do things. Because once I was in a war, and in a war, when routine cuts off all the ordinary things of normal life, there are long hours, and often long days in which one can keep one's sanity only by living again the memories of the past.

War is boring. Of course battles are not boring (except sometimes in the sense of perforation), but a long war is not all battles. The opportunities for following one's own bent are so restricted that one might as well be within the four walls of a prison cell.

Often in the then desolate valley of the Somme, when there was nothing to do, nothing to eat, not much to see, I would find paradise without any of the things Omar F. Hayyam thought requisite to a pleasurable moment.

I had no book, no jug of wine, not a certain amount of food, only the blasted trunk of a tree to support my back in the cheerless scene. But I had my paradise. And it was memory. I had the memories of old school chums, of lazy days on the river, memories of beautiful gardens, of stately churches, of busy streets, of exquisite pageantry. And sometimes the sweetest memories were the vaguest. As soon as I tried to develop a feeling memory it had gone, like a snowflake falling on fire. When I tried to fill in the lines of a half-remembered face it vanished like a shadow. It was like trying to remember a perfume.

Christmas Stock-Taking. As the years go by the mind becomes less impressionable. A simple impression that would carve itself deeply on the mind of a child will make but little mark upon the mind of a man. The clearer the slate of your mind, the more clear-cut is the memory of an experience. Aunt Jane might remember to her dying day the thrill of a visit to a flower show (and talk about it); because in Aunt Jane's serene life that was by way of being an event. But Aunt Jane lived in different days. Nowadays life is one excitement after another, even to people who live in villages.

My fear is that unless I fix the pleasurable moments that crowd into weekly round of excitement, they will have vanished when, later on, I sit back and seek solace in my memories.

There was a time when my Christmas stock-taking was of a different order. I used to look up the bank balance (which sometimes turned out to be on the right side), and I would count up how much I had worked off the mortgage. I would reckon how much I had added to the material comfort of my home. Then I would count the year a good one, or not, as the case might be.

But that sort of stock-taking brings no real comfort. Am I happier if I earn more and spend more? I doubt it. There were good days in our boyhood, weren't there? And it wasn't the money we spent that gave us the happiness.

So now my Christmas stock-taking takes no account of money. I try to steal an hour or two to meditate upon the joys of the year, to recapture them and fix them firmly in the Bank of the Mind; for there my store will lie when I am old.

The Gift of Memory. My children are around me now. It is commonplace now to come home and stir them all up together in the bath, so to speak, to answer all their funny questions, and take them endless drinks of water. And that leads to another thought. These daily experiences that end in laughter and sometimes in tears are so much part of the routine that one is apt to regard them as burdensome. They keep me away from my books, for instance. The books will last. There will be long years (I hope) in which I read books when the wheels of life turn more slowly. But these days in which my children are young will never come again. I know that in

the days to come I would willing give a year or two of life to see again those baby smiles, to feel again those little arms. No money could bring them back. But memory will.

There are other things I shall remember this year (if you will pardon this public self-examination). I have met people who have given me joy. All sorts of people. People who are famous and people of whom no one has ever heard. I am thinking of many of them now that I am taking my annual inventory. And by thinking of them I am impressing them more surely on my mind. It is like taking in a pencil tracing.

Memories of the places I have seen this year come back to me. For me it has been a good year in travel. I saw for the first time the great Rock of Gibraltar. I took a drive around the sun-baked island of Malta. I saw the British Fleet leave Valletta one sunny morning for the east. I saw Italian troops leaving Naples for Eritrea. As I thought then, and shall always think, of the little white cottages that are already saddened by the loss of some who went out slaying to war.

Visit to Pinal Viki. I sailed into the old Papal port of Citta Vecchia for the first time, and that will be something to gladden me when I am old. I saw Pope Pius XI in his summer palace at Castelgandolfo, and I remember the view from the palace across the blue water of Lake Albano.

I remember the wine we drank under the orange trees in Albania. I remember the green phosphorescence in the Bay of Vigo as we went to our gear-lifting ship from the shore at night.

I remember the drive up the dizzy mountain road out of Barcelona that took me to the famous old shrine of Our Lady of Montserrat, a road that medieval knights had trodden. I remember the journey to the even older and more famous shrine of Santiago de Compostela, and the almost dread with which I saw the great thrible there swarming over the heads of the hypnotized crowd.

This year I have read books that gave me joy. These I can count back to again if God spares me my sight. But I must remember them. Hundreds of happy thoughts come back to me tonight when I am gathering the harvest of the year.

When I am old I shall not be lonely if I have my memories.

Social Action 'Quotes'

Practical Steps to Peace. "The substitution of moral right for material force, general disarmament, compulsory arbitration of disputes among states, the codification of international law, an international tribunal of justice and an association of nations, such is a complete summary of the practical methods available and necessary for preserving peace and assuring peace." International Ethics (NCWC, Washington, D. C.)

Mars and Ceres. "During and after a war, industry makes new gains in population and wealth at the expense of agriculture. The chain of causes operates in a vicious circle. Industrial rivalry among the nations leads to war; war further stimulates industrial rivalry. These forces are interacting continuously with accumulating losses to agriculture." American Agriculture and International Affairs (NCWC, Washington, D. C.)

Up To Parents. "The demand of industry, of business and social intercourse subject the family tie to a strain that becomes more severe as civilization advances. Parents who are sensible of their obligations will exert themselves to meet external pressure by making the home more attractive. They will set their children the example of giving home their first consideration." Pastoral Letter (NCWC, Washington, D. C.)

Slum Clearance. "The great cities in which congestion and other forms of bad housing are disgracefully apparent ought to take up and continue the work, at least to such an extent as will remove the worst features of a social condition that is a menace to health, good morals and religion." Bishops' Program of Social Reconstruction (NCWC, Washington, D. C.)

A Better NRA? "The true object of society, namely, social justice, can only be accomplished by the economic organization of society. Government is organized. Business enterprises are organized. Why then not organize our social and economic affairs, instead of permitting them to drift uncontrolled into chaos and anarchy." The Economic Organization of Society and the Ecyclical (NCWC, Washington, D. C.)

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