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SUNDAY READING.

A NEW
CHRISTMAS TRACT;
OR, THE

Right Way of Rejoicing at Christmas.

Shewing the Reasons we have for Joy at the Event of Our Saviour's Birth.

In which also a Description is given of the dreadful State the World was in before His coming; with some Remarks suited to the Times in which we live.



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CHRISTMAS TRACT

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Saviour's Birth
which also a Definition & given of a beautiful State the
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A NEW
CHRISTMAS TRACT, &c.

THESE are two ways of keeping Christmas: some seem to keep it much in the same way in which the unbelieving Jews kept their feast in honour of the calf which they had made. “ And they made a calf in Horeb in those days, and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.” But what a sad sort of Christianity is this! I am no enemy to mirth of a proper kind, and at proper seasons; but the mirth I now speak of is the mirth of Inconsideration and of Folly, and it is often mixt with much looseness of conduct and drunkenness. Is this, then, the sort of mirth proper for Christians?

Let us suppose now that a man was to chuse a church as the place in which he was to sit and sing

his jolly song, and to drink till he was intoxicated, surely this would imply that he was a person of extraordinary wickedness. But this you will say is what nobody is so bad as to be guilty of; well then, let us suppose, that instead of chusing a church as the place, he should chuse Christmas as the time for the like acts of riot and drunkenness; methinks this must imply no small degree of the same kind of wickedness; for, as he that should get drunk in a church would insult the church, so he that gets drunk at Christmas, which is the season for commemorating the birth of Christ, insults Christ and his religion.

I know it may be said, that those who take these liberties at Christmas do not mean to insult Christ, and that they act from inconsideration; to which I answer, that they are then very guilty in being so inconsiderate; for I would just remark by the way, that these people, who are so very inconsiderate in some things, are apt to be very considerate in others; for instance, they are very considerate about their pleasures, but very inconsiderate about their duty; they are often, perhaps, very considerate about this world, always very inconsiderate about eternity; very considerate for themselves, and very little so about other people; extremely considerate on their own side of a bargain, but as inconsiderate about the side of the other party; and when they

have committed a sin they are apt to be very considerate in finding out excuses for it, but very inconsiderate in tracing out the guilt and mischief of their wickedness. In short, then, let it be remembered, that the inconsiderate way of spending Christmas, which has been spoken of, is only, in other words, the wicked way of spending it.

But let us now come to the true way of keeping it. First, then, in order to know how the time of Christ's birth ought to be remembered by us, I would observe, that it is necessary to understand well who Christ was, and for what purpose he came on the earth. How absurd would it be to celebrate the Fifth of November, without knowing that, on that day, the Houses of Parliament were saved from fire, and our happy Constitution, as well as our Religion, was preserved to us. Again: how absurd would it be for any man to celebrate the King's Birth Day, or Coronation Day, who did not feel within his heart loyalty and affection towards his Sovereign, and who did not think that any blessings were derived from our Kingly Government.

Let every one, therefore, who wishes to spend Christmas aright, get acquainted with the benefits which have followed from Christ's coming into the world. We will endeavour, now, to shew, very shortly, what these benefits have been. The world, or the time of Christ's appearing, was divided into

Jews and Gentiles. The word Gentiles signifies nations, that is, all the nations except the Jews. Let us speak of the Gentiles first, and of the Jews afterwards. The Gentiles were worshippers of false gods, some of one kind, some of another. They all, however, agreed in this, that they thought one God as good as another, and no one among them had any anxiety to bring his neighbour over to his religion, which is a plain proof that they had no true religion among them; for, whoever is possessed of true religion, is possessed of a great comfort and blessing, which he will therefore be glad to convey to other people also. It was the custom of some of these Gentiles to worship stocks and stones; others bowed down to living animals, such as bulls or goats, or lizards; and others paid their stupid adoration to the sun, instead of the Author of it. Many of them worshipped their deceased fellow-creatures, and the dead men, who were thus turned into gods, had been, in general, some of the most wicked and abominable of the human race.

Now this ignorance of the true God was followed (as all ignorance of him is apt to be) by great wickedness in their practice. They were “given over
“ on this account (as St. Paul, the inspired Apostle,
“ declares) to a reprobate mind; to work all un-
“ cleanness with greediness.” They learnt to con-
found good and evil—vices were then commonly

practised, such as are not named among Christians. False principles, and false maxims of every kind, abounded. Slavery prevailed even in the most civilized lands, for almost all servants were slaves in those days. The earth was filled with violence. He that had killed the greatest number of his fellow-creatures got usually the greatest praise. Wars were carried on with dreadful ferocity, and multitudes were massacred at the public games, in battles fought for the amusement of the people. Humanity, kindness, and benevolence, were made no account of; and such a thing as an hospital was not known. Revenge was both practised and recommended; and those excellent christian graces, humility, universal charity, and forgiveness of injuries, were considered as weaknesses and faults. I shudder to think of the dreadful state of mankind in those days. God grant that the same evils may never return. They are the natural consequences of being without Christianity in the world; for when Christianity is gone there is no rule to go by. Every man may then set up a false goodness of his own. Morals, of course, grow worse and worse; a fierce and proud spirit comes in the place of christian meekness and benevolence, and claims the name of Virtue; and the Saviour of the World, with all his works of mercy, being forgot, man becomes cruel, and unjust, and selfish.

and implacable, and unmerciful, for all the violent passions of our nature are let loose.

If we enquire also into the character of the Jews, who lived before the coming of our Saviour, we shall find them to have been deplorably corrupt, though they expected his coming, and were, in some measure, acquainted with true religion. The little knowledge which they had, seems to have been perverted, through the wickedness of their hearts; and, in short, the Scriptures assure us, that "both Jews and Gentiles were all under sin." Such was the state into which the world was sunk before the time of our Saviour's appearance in it.

Let us describe, next, who Christ was, and what were the consequences of his coming. He is called in Scripture "the Son of God;" and in some places, "God's only Son;" which shews that there is no other Being like unto him. We know that a son, by his very birth, derives privileges from his father which belong to no other person; that he partakes in the same rank and inheritance with his father; and that he possesses also, in an especial manner, his father's favour, and altogether differs from a stranger or a servant. Christ, then, is to be considered, in all such senses as these, as the Son of God. It is true, he is called also the Son of Man, for he was born of a woman (namely, of the Virgin Mary,) and he took upon him our nature, dwelling on

earth for thirty years. We should take great care, however, that his appearance among us, as a man, does not lead us to form any low and unworthy notions of him. Suppose now that the son of a king was to travel in the dress of a private subject, on some merciful and condescending errand, to a distant and obscure part of his territory, surely it would be very ungenerous and ungrateful, if the poor villagers, whom he came to serve, were to deny to him the honours of a king's son, merely because they could not believe that so great a person could stoop so low as to come among them, especially if he brought proofs of his power and greatness along with him. Just so, methinks, are all those persons ungenerous and ungrateful, who refuse to Christ that divine honour which belongs to him, merely because he condescended to be made flesh and blood, and to dwell among us. Let us, then, receive, with simplicity and humility, the scripture testimony concerning him. It speaks of him in terms that are quite astonishing. "His name," says the Prophet foretelling of his birth, "shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace, and the Government shall be on his Shoulders." The Evangelist John tells us, that "the Word (meaning Christ) was with God, and the Word was God."—"By Him," it is said, in the Hebrews, "God made the

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“ world;” and again, “ let all the angels of God
“ worship him. All power hath been given him,
“ both in heaven and earth, and God hath com-
“ mitted all judgment to the Son.”—“ The hour
“ also cometh when they that are in their graves
“ shall hear the voice of the Son of Man, and shall
“ come forth, they that have done good to the re-
“ surrection of life, and they that have done evil
“ to the resurrection of damnation.”

Such are a few of the expressions used in scripture concerning Christ. Let us learn from these to adore his Divine Majesty, and trust his power, as well as to fear his wrath, and to account him able to fulfil all the purposes of his coming.

But let us next describe what these purposes were it may be said in general, that “ it was for us men,
“ and for our salvation, that he came down from
“ heaven;” or, as the Scripture expresses it, “ th
“ Son of Man came to seek and to save that which
“ was lost, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

The world, as hath been already shewn, was sunk in sin, and not in sin only, but in condemnation also. Ever since the fall of our first parent Adam, man had become a sinful creature. “ But as in Adam all
“ had died, so now in Christ were all (that is, all
“ who would receive him,) to be made alive.”
Christ, then, was the second Adam: as Adam was the Destroyer, so Christ was the Restorer of our race.

The Devil, who is called the Prince of Darknes, had, as we are told in Scripture, become the god and the prince of this world. Christ, therefore, came into the world as a conqueror comes, to recover an empire that was lost, and to bring back the rebels to their obedience, and to happiness. He came to overthrow that kingdom of darknes which through the power of the Devil, and the corruption of man, had been set up. "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the Devil." He came "to redeem us from all iniquity, and to purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."

But how does Christ fulfil his purpose of delivering us? First, I would observe, that he lived a most holy life, hereby setting before us an example that we should tread in his steps. He went about doing good. Never was any one so kind and gracious to all who came to him as Jesus Christ. I would here observe also, that he preached the Gospel to mankind; he told us what we must believe and do, in order to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. Through him also the Holy Spirit of God is granted to us. And, to crown all, he died for us. He was nailed to the Cross, and suffered a cruel death for our sakes, bearing the wrath of God in our stead. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Christ is that Lamb of God "which has

“ been offered up as a sacrifice,” and “ which
 “ taketh away the sins of the world.” Now, then,
 let us rejoice and say triumphantly with the Prophet
 of old, “ Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is
 “ given.”—“ Behold, (said the Angels,) I bring
 “ you glad tidings of great joy; for unto you is
 “ born, this day, a Saviour, which is Christ the
 “ Lord.”—“ Glory be to God in the highest, on
 “ earth peace, good-will towards men.”

Oh! how many thousands have had reason to bless
 the season which we are now commemorating—the
 season of the Birth of Jesus Christ! The world, it is
 true, is still wicked, for there are many who do not
 believe in this Saviour; and there are not a few who
 think they believe in him, and who do not. Never-
 theless, even the world in general has been the
 better for his coming, for the thick darkness is past,
 and the true light now shineth. Through Christ's
 coming iniquity has been lessened even among un-
 believers; for the real Christians, though few, have
 held up to view the nature of true goodness, and
 even bad men have, in some measure, been con-
 strained to imitate them; they have also grown more
 ashamed, than they otherwise would have been, of
 their vices.

But who can calculate the blessing which Chris-
 tianity hath been to thousands of true believers?
 How many lives have been made holy here on earth

how many hearts have been cheered and comforted by it; how many deaths, which would otherwise have been most gloomy, have been rendered joyful and triumphant; and, above all, how many immortal souls have been saved, and made happy to all eternity, through faith in this blessed Redeemer! “ My sheep (says Christ,) hear my voice, and they follow me, and I give unto my sheep eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hands.”—“ I go to prepare a place for them, that where I am they may be also.”

And now, Reader, what are your thoughts on the subject of your Saviour's appearance on this earth of our's? If you are a true Christian, your language will be such as the following: “ It is through the coming of Christ into the world that I have learnt to know myself, and to know the God who made me. I am by nature blind and ignorant; I am also sinful and undone; I am utterly without hope, except through the mercy of my Saviour; and even though I have been born in a christian land, I can trace back, in my recollection, many proofs of this my natural ignorance, and corruption, and hardness of heart. I was once like a sheep going astray, but I am now returned to the shepherd of my soul. I followed the bent of my own foolish will, but the grace of God in Jesus Christ, hath changed my sinful heart; the

knowledge of my corruption has humbled me; the thought of my Saviour's dying for me has stirred up divine gratitude within me, and that acquaintance with his Gospel which I have gained hath changed my whole views of life. Christ's character delights me; I read the history of his humble birth, his painful death, and his glorious resurrection, as it is recorded in Scripture, with hope and joy, and with holy confidence and trust. How shall I sufficiently bless God for Jesus Christ! Whatever change has been wrought in me I trace to Christ's coming into the world. If Christ had never come, how corrupt should I at this moment have been, how blind, how dark, how ignorant, how different from what, through the grace of God, I now am! How miserable in comparison of my present happiness! I am engaged, indeed, in a sharp conflict with my sins; but, through my Saviour's help, I hope to gain ground against them. I have occasionally doubts and fears, but, in general, I feel confident that the promises of God are sure and certain in Christ Jesus, for I know in whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that soul which I have committed to him till the great day."

A CHRISTMAS HYMN.

JOY to the world, the Lord is come,
 Let earth receive the King;
 Let every heart prepare him room,
 And Heav'n and Nature sing.

Joy to the earth the Saviour reigns,
 Let men their songs employ,
 While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains,
 Repeat the sounding joy.

No more let sins and sorrows grow,
 Nor thorns infest the ground;
 He comes to make his blessing flow
 Far as the curse is found.

Our father ate forbidden fruit,
 And from his glory fell,
 And we, his children, thus were brought
 To death, and near to hell.

Blest be the Lord who sent his Son
 To take our flesh and blood,
 He for our lives gave up his own,
 To make our peace with God.

He honour'd all his Father's laws,
 Which we have disobey'd;
 He bore our sins upon the Cross,
 And our full ransom paid.

Behold him rising from the grave;
 Behold him rais'd on high:
 He pleads his merit there, to save
 Transgressors, doom'd to die.

Soon shall the Lord to judgment come,
 And with a sovereign voice
 Shall call, and break up every tomb,
 And bid his saints rejoice.

O may I then with joy appear
 Before the Judge's face,
 And with the bless'd assembly there
 Sing his redeeming grace.

F I N I S.