

are peculiarly applicable to the minds of many in this latter half of the nineteenth century, only that most days of the year are, for them, full of rain, or rather drizzle, together with an unwarrantable amount of smoke. The sky, now-a-days, for such folk, is always grey: they have left off even chasing happiness or regretting the past; the desert lies behind, the dark before. In the old-fashioned days, death and the great beyond were spoken of with reverence, while life was a sacred gift; but now you will daily hear young people flippantly or wearily express their fixed conviction that "life is not worth living—they only wish they were well out of it." Great pleasure, much excitement, used not to be *expected* in the routine of daily duty; therefore little trifles gave happiness, and the little joys that rose out of the quiet round of every-day life satisfied the quieter lives of our ancestors, and made them full, perchance, of a deeper gladness than ours, whose fleeting pleasures are hardly tasted to be flung impatiently aside. The earth has indeed made a most noticeable revolution since those old days—the golden age of the poets, the youth of the world, the days that ever recede further back as we strive to fix their date, and make one sadly afraid that they exist only as times that *might* have been, had sin never entered the world.

"For of all sad words of tongue or pen,
The saddest are these: 'It *might* have been!'"

One point, however, is fairly well fixed, that we have certainly lost, whatever else we have gained, much of that power of enjoyment that was natural in rougher, sturdier, more robust times. Rejoice! Who in this self-concentrated, subjective age *docs* rejoice; who throws himself heart and soul into the joys and sorrows of others; who ever rejoices with the joyous childish abandon of old days? We have grown so refined, so listless, that a good hearty laugh is relegated as vulgar. We are so busy dissecting our own inner lives, that the outer healthy life passes unheeded, and the cry to rejoice falls on deaf ears. Our friendships have not the ring, the devotion, the love, nor our enjoyments the zest, of old days. We are painfully conscious of the fact that intensity is out of fashion. Never does it strike one more forcibly than as we near the day that was of old, in all countries, among all stages of society wherever the Christian religion held sway, *the* great feast of rejoicing—a feast in honour of a Child, sacred to mirth, joy, and to childish delights and festivities. And now mild groans, real or affected, greet the very utterance of the word *Christmas*. "Oh, Christmas is a dreadful time. I am always glad when it is over." "Who wants Christmas? Can't think what on earth it is kept up for." &c. Reason holds sway. Rejoice—why

should we rejoice? Modern science, psychology, and advanced therapeutics would not only fashion our lives, but our very thoughts and feelings, for us. They have taught us much, but they have not taught us to rejoice. That has gone with spontaneity. Like the good old German song,

"And though in storm or sun again
Our hearts feel joy or sadness;
They know no more the old *true* pain—
No more the old *true* gladness."

Whatever called forth from old writers such hearty, genuine, though often uncouth expressions of joy and goodwill, of tenderest, most devoted reverence, as this same feast of Christmas? Whole books might be written of the carols and hymns of praise that incite to mirth and thanksgiving—all ringing with the refrain, "Rejoice, for the light, the joy of Christmas-tide, risen in this dark and desolate winter season!" Grave and gay, tender and didactic, all sorts of ancient carols and songs crowd into one's memory, full of the praise of Christmas—the marvel of it, the beauty, the joy, the mirth. An old Flemish "Noël" lies before me now, grand and stately, but full of the deepest thankfulness, joy, and wonder. "See how a God can love," sings the old poet; "see, here lies the goal of all longing; see, here lies the Word—dumb; see the crown of wisdom with no sign of understanding; see in swathing bands the Lord who rides on the wings of the wind, poor and feeble on earth—He who holds all creation in the hollow of His hand, &c." I wish I had the power to translate it rhythmically, to give the slightest idea of its grandeur or beauty. Marvellously naïve are others of these old Flemish Christmas songs, as, for instance, the well-known one—

"Maria die youde naer Bethleem gaen,
Kersavond voor den noenen," &c.,

that describes the journey of Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem, and how it rained, it hailed, it snowed, and Joseph said to Mary, "Good Heavens, what shall we do?" "I am so tired; let us rest a bit," says Mary. "No, no! Let us find a 'huysken' (little house), then we will rest." So they push on till they come to a "hoere schuere" (peasant's barn), without windows, or doors, or locks, and there the dear Lord was born. Noël, Noël!

For the children there was then Saint Klaus (who really existed for them, and was their own private patron saint), who was celebrated in much Christmas doggerel.

"Saint Klaus he was a holy man,
Wore his boots with spurs thereupon,
Rode therewith to Amsterdam,
From Amsterdam to Spain anon":—

returning with a store of apples, oranges, nuts, and pears, &c., for all the children; for—

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