

# Goodwin's Weekly.

Vol. XIV

SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH, DECEMBER 19, 1908.

No. 7

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PUBLISHED EVERY SATURDAY.

SUBSCRIPTION PRICE OF GOODWIN'S WEEKLY. Including postage in the United States, Canada and Mexico, \$2.00 per year; \$1.00 for six months. Subscriptions to all foreign countries within the Postal Union, \$3.50 per year.

Single copies, 5 cents.  
Payments should be made by Check, Money Order or Registered Letter, payable to Goodwin's Weekly.

Address all communications to Goodwin's Weekly.

Entered at the Postoffice at Salt Lake City, Utah, U. S. A., as second-class matter.

P. O. Boxes, 1274 and 1772.  
Telephones: Bell, 301; Ind., 302.

231-232-233 Commercial Club Bldg., Salt Lake City

## Christmas

CHRISTMAS is once more drawing near. It is an old festal day. It was a festal day long before the Christians adopted it, so long that even legends can not trace the time back to the beginning of the custom. At first it was, perhaps, intended as a recognition of the gratitude of mankind for the harvest, a day on which they could dress their altars, offer oblations to their gods and rejoice over the bounties that had come to them. But when the Christians fixed upon it as the natal day of the Messiah, a new sacredness was attached to it and a new joy. The appropriateness of it is increased as the date is studied. The longest night of the year in northern latitudes is passed; the sun that had been wandering farther and farther away, has halted in his course and has turned back, which is a promise of another spring and another harvest. At the same time it symbolizes to man an awakening after the chill and the darkness have run their course and the dawn of a perennial spring will be his. So on the coming of the day, in every land there is a festival. In England on Christmas eve the yule log is fired and great candles lighted, fill all the rooms, an outward sign of festivities, while within the fire-place is holly-crowned and the feast is spread, the roasts, the chicken and mince pies, the apples, the nuts and the cider. The churches hail the coming of the day with joy-bells and celebrate it with all the pomp of incense and organ and choir, as is becoming to those who accept its traditions and date a promise of eternal life from it. The story in the Testament is that at its first coming new lights shone upon the earth, an angel voice proclaimed the momentous news of the Savior's birth, while the singing of the heavenly host filled the ether with joyous acclaim and the deep refrain, sounding down, thrilled the world. The devout believe that song is repeated on every anniversary of that night, and certain it is that the instinct of man on that day is likewise to sing, hence everywhere carols are sung. It is especially the children's day. It comes crowned with gifts to them, and as they count their immense treasures, the babble of their joy is perhaps the sweetest music that ascends from earth to heaven. The promise that came with the first Christmas day exalted man more than anything else since the creation. When it was said he was but a little lower than the angels, it was but a figure of speech. But the promise made it a tremendous reality; it meant for him immortal life—a life growing more exalted through the ebb and flow of endless ages, a change like that which converts a grub into a butterfly in a

physical sense, in an intellectual sense a splendor unspeakable. Why, then, should it not be a day of rejoicing, a day of family reunions; a day on which to make the hearts of children glad;—a day of kind greetings to neighbors and friends; a day on which to thank God for his mercies and blessings, and on which to sing joy-songs and be glad?

## World History

DURING the past year peace in the world has generally been the rule. There was a temporary clash in southeastern Europe, through which Bulgaria became an independent state, and Bosnia and Herzegovina were ceded to Austria-Hungary, but that was simply carrying out the terms of the Treaty of Berlin, made at the close of the Russian-Turkish war.

There has been some heart-burning between Germany and France, some between Germany and Great Britain, but they were both on foundations too small on which to build a war.

England is greatly perturbed over the disposition of the natives of India. They are showing a vast amount of dissatisfaction such as precedes a revolt and a revolution. England's safety in that diversion is that through her influence with the Sultan of Turkey there will be no Mohammedan uprising, and through the jealousies and enmities of the native princes of India, it will be impossible for them to combine against the sovereign power. The wonder of the earth is how the few Englishmen in India have been able to maintain their hold on that country so long. There can be no explanation except that however much the natives may complain of Great Britain, their condition is better than before England took possession of their country.

Russia is struggling back to her normal state and in her slow but irresistible way she is making a stronghold on the borders of Manchuria and is doubling the track of the great continental road, which all points to a time in her near future when she will, if she can, try conclusions again with Japan.

The Shah of Persia died and a new Shah has assumed control. A constitution has been given to Persia, but it has been like launching a ship on a troubled sea, and no one can safely predict yet whether it is going to be able to pursue a steady voyage, or whether it will be dashed on the rocks before it ever gets out of the harbor.

In China both the emperor and the empress dowager have died. The new emperor is but a child, and the result is that China for many years will be in charge of her statesmen, uninterfered with by supreme authority. China has given many indications of a great awakening, and perhaps more interest gathers around her than any other country in Asia. When people try to estimate what 400 millions of people, all trained to industry, may accomplish when given modern facilities, the mind is staggered and the best estimation is but a guess. But surely she is extending her railroads; she is building more and more manufacturing plants; she is drawing her own people together; she has a constitution, and her future for twenty years will be watched more closely than that of any other power.

Japan is slowly but surely absorbing Korea, and to all intents and purposes, southern Man-

churia. Whether she will be interfered with in this last effort or not remains to be seen, because she is breaking her treaty obligations. She promised to remove her soldiers from Manchuria at a certain time, when the treaty was made with Russia. Russia has fulfilled her part of the agreement, but Japan has not. Japan is building a great navy, and if the empire were not so poor, she would be an ever present danger to the peace of the world. As it is she is building with a great navy a great merchant marine; she is taking the trade of England and Germany away from southeastern Asia, and the truth is that no nation can compete with her on the sea so long as she can draw her coal supplies from home.

Our own country has passed through another presidential election. It is swiftly regaining the prosperity which prevailed for a dozen years before 1907. She has been blest wonderfully in all the departments of industry. Her soil has yielded the greatest crop ever known; her mines are holding their own; and the iron mines are increasing their output; foreign trade is increasing and, as usual, the old world is leaning upon our country for bread and for textiles, and our country is such a necessity to the world, and promises to be for several years to come, that that very necessity is a guaranty of peace.

Next to the presidential election, perhaps the greatest single feature in our history this year has been the sailing of the fleet of battleships. It rounded South America, receiving especial honors in Rio Janeiro. At Valparaiso, while it did not stop, it passed in review before millions of people, sailing around the harbor and again out to sea, firing imposing salutes and receiving the acclaim of thousands shouting their welcome.

It came up the Pacific coast, spent some weeks in target practice in Magdalena harbor. It was received with great ovations at San Diego and at San Francisco. It sailed away to Australia and there our cousins of the southern continent exhausted all hospitality in giving it welcome. Then it sailed north, went to Japan and Japan gave it the warmest welcome of all, and bestowed more honors upon the fleet than any other country. From there it proceeded to the Philippines and after two or three or four weeks of uncomfortable stay it again proceeded to sea, and by the time this writing is in print it ought to be at Colombo in Ceylon.

It has been wonderfully favored. It has made a great impression on the way. We presume the honors will be renewed when the fleet reaches the Mediterranean. All the guns of Malta and Gibraltar will roar in welcome and the hope is it will reach home safely early in February.

There is nothing much to report from the countries south of us. Mexico is prospering greatly. Some incipient rebellions have transpired in Central America, but that is a habit with those people down there.

The Panama canal has progressed immensely this year, so much so that those best posted are fixing the date when it will be opened and the voyage from New York to San Francisco will be reduced by sixty days' sail.

That human tempest, Castro, had broken out a few times during the last year, but he has sailed away to Europe. He probably has treasure enough on board the ship to support him in elegance the rest of his life, and he will cease to be