

"Art at Christmastide"

Above all our holidays Christmas is known to us by its wealth of memories and visions. From the days of our childhood we have cherished the beauty of the gentle holy scenes which still become visual to us at the sound of the word "Christmas". These pictures have become precious personal possessions to each of us.

The art which is the most enduring has been and forever will be the art which beautifully portrays those facts of life which man has known most universally.

The universal facts are birth, life and its course, death and the hope for immortality.

Christian art has chosen through the centuries as its most favorite subject the simple beauty of the Nativity of our Saviour. The lowly manger scene has been represented in painting and in stone by artists of each succeeding age with vibrant wholesome and joyous enthusiasm.

Art at its greatest height speaks in beauty and in truth a universal language.

In its portrayal of the Nativity it has declared its power to reach and to help as well as to raise and ennoble each individual life.

Two hundred years ago an English poet wrote

"See the knidly shepherds round Him
Telling wonders from the sky
Where they sought Him, there they found Him
With the Virgin Mother by"

Again and again this gentle story has been told and retold by artists in a manner that has made it part and parcel of life itself for all of us.

But Art at Christmas tide is not art at rest.

It is not something plucked out of the storeroom of the Museum and brought to the galleries for a season, only to be stored away for another twelve months to stay.

*It is rather to rekindle with human
qualities of love and devotion without which life would be dull
and empty.*

The glory of the Nativity is the simple happy promise of the useful life. That promise carries as well the reality of earnest effort constantly sustained amid hardships, and even at its end leading to the Cross.

If art can claim cultural value, then art must be able to speak well its universal understanding of life's course. That course is one with all the ages and in many respects changeth little. Today, as in centuries past, mothers of America are as one with the mothers of other ages in their understanding of the course of life once so nobly lived from the cradle of Bethlehem to the Cross of Calvary.

* → Many a Christmas season throughout the centuries has been amid a world at war or fearful of war.

B → After Constantine's time the churches of early Christian Rome soon suffered despoilation at the hands of Attila and his invading Huns. The later centuries met a like experience with the invasion by the Saracens. Again and again European despots or fanatical revolutionists burned and destroyed the church and its Christian Art, even as now----day after day, and night after night the monuments of rich meaning to English speaking races fall in ruin by bomb and by fire.

Though we seem apart from a world so hideously torn and bruised by the horrors of modern war we should realize that mankind has suffered so for nineteen centuries.

Through those centuries the meaning and the beauty of the Nativity of the Christ Child has survived and the art which recorded it with crystalline clearness has persisted in renewing itself from age to age.

pictured
~~portrayed~~ Its survival has been due in no small measure to the fact that art portrayed with equal clarity the beauty of life lived worthily and death reached nobly.

Art has portrayed the faith so universally understood which carried on

to Calvary and the richer hope beyond.

Throughout every catastrophe and into every succeeding age the voice of art has carried on. It has seen it through. Its universal voice still speaks silently in the nations blacked-out by censorship as it has spoken many times before. It still strives at this season to speak in a stunned though strong America.



Art's purpose is to help and not to hinder;

"to make gentle the life of the world."

If it serves its purpose well it is to tell of joy, effort, sadness and of death.

In each of these its purpose is to tell man of the fineness of man.

It is to tell of the firm fervor with which he chooses right from wrong and knows that eventually right will win.

It is still further to record how through centuries he has faced the future without fear.

It is finally to record his full conviction of honorable and holy fulfillment of life's purpose.

So it is that the story of Christmastide will continue to survive in all its beauty, as it has survived for nineteen centuries.

When throughout the middle ages the church grew in structure and in beauty to majestic architecture, each step was but the blending into stone, and metal, and glass of the finer aspirations of men. Little did they realize in each single effort the crowning beauty which the whole structure would attain.

"Wrought in sad sincerity
Himself from God he could not free
He builded better than he knew
The conscious stones to beauty grew"

In like manner the rich beauty of the art of Christmastide has flowed

into the life of Man from generation to generation until it speaks with a universal voice. As an everlasting measure of Man it will continue to fill mankind with a gentle, noble faith in the hope for peace and goodwill which shall abide with us.