



CHRISTMAS OBSERVED



*PRAIRIE UNITARIAN
UNIVERSALIST SOCIETY
DECEMBER 18, 1994*

ORDER OF SERVICE

Finger Foods

Music for the moving of tables

Introduction: Norma and Mike Briggs

Chalice lighting

A moment of silence

Christmas 1924

Music by George and Ruth Calden

The shepherds and the angel

Angels we have heard on high, No. 231

Christmas 1644

In the bleak midwinter, Trio song

Scrooge lives today

The spirit of Christmas

Creche tableau

Once in royal David's city, No. 228

Christmas bells, led by Al Nettleton

The Symbol Tree

Anthem by the choir

It came upon a midnight clear, No. 244

Closing thoughts: Julia Bonser

O we believe in Christmas, No. 248

Procession and dance

Thomas Babington Macaulay, extract from *A History of England* (ca. 1845)

Christmas had been, from time immemorial, the season of joy and domestic affection, the season when families assembled, when children came home from school, when quarrels were made up, when carols were heard in every street, when every house was decorated with evergreens, and every table was loaded with good cheer. At that season all hearts no utterly destitute of kindness were enlarged and softened. At that season the poor were admitted to partake largely of the overflowing of the wealth of the rich, whose bounty was peculiarly acceptable on account of the shortness of the days and of the severity of the weather. At that season the interval between landlord and tenant, master and servant, was less marked than through the rest of the year.

Where there is much enjoyment there will be some excess; yet, on the whole, the spirit in which the holiday was kept was not unworthy of a Christian festival. The Long Parliament gave orders, in 1644, that the twenty-fifth of December should be strictly observed as a fast, and that all men should pass it in humbly bemoaning the great national sin which they and their fathers had so often committed on that day by romping under the mistletoe, eating boar's head and drinking ale flavoured with roasted apples. No public act of that time seems to have irritated the common people more. On the next anniversary of the festival formidable riots broke out in many places. the constables were resisted, the magistrates insulted, the houses of noted zealots attacked, and the proscribed service of the day openly read in the churches.

Thomas Hardy, *Christmas 1924*

"Peace upon earth!" was said. We sing it,
And pay a million priests to bring it.
After two thousand years of mass
We've got as far as poison-gas.

Luke, ch. 2

And in that region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. And the angel said to them, "Be not afraid, for I bring good new of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill among men."



Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol* (1843).

Scrooge, working in his counting-house on Christmas Eve, is approached by two portly gentlemen, pleasant to behold:

"At this festive season of the year, Mr. Scrooge," said the gentleman, taking up a pen, "it is more than usually desirable that we should make some slight provision for the poor and destitute, who suffer greatly at the present time. Many thousands are in want of common necessities; hundreds of thousands are in want of common comforts, sir."

"Are there no prisons?" asked Scrooge.

"Plenty of prisons," said the gentleman, laying down the pen again.

"And the Union workhouses?" demanded Scrooge. "Are they still in operation?"

"They are. Still," returned the gentleman, "I wish I could say they were not."

"The Treadmill and the Poor Law are in full vigour, then?" said Scrooge.

"Both very busy, sir."

"Oh! I was afraid, from what you said at first, that something had occurred to stop them in their useful course," said Scrooge. "I'm glad to hear it."

"Under the impression that they scarcely furnish Christian cheer of mind or body to the multitude," returned the gentleman, "a few of us are endeavouring to raise a fund to buy the Poor some meat and drink, and means of warmth. We choose this time because it is a time, of all others, when Want is keenly felt, and Abundance rejoices. What shall I put you down for?"

"Nothing!" Scrooge replied.

"You wish to be anonymous?"

"I wish to be left alone," said Scrooge. "Since you ask me what

I wish, gentlemen, that is my answer. I don't make merry myself at Christmas, and I can't afford to make idle people merry. I help to support the establishments I have mentioned: they cost enough: and those who are badly off must go there."

"Many can't go there; and many would rather die."

"If they would rather die," said Scrooge, "they had better do it, and decrease the population. Besides--excuse me--I don't know that."

"But you might know it," observed the gentleman.

"It's not my business," Scrooge returned. "It's enough for a man to understand his own business, and not to interfere with other people's. Mine occupies me constantly. Good afternoon, gentlemen!"

Francis P. Church, Editorial in *The New York Sun*, September 21, 1897.

The newspaper received a letter from a little girl:

Dear Santa:

I am eight years old. Some of my little friends say there is no Santa Claus. Papa says if you say it in the Sun, it is so. Please tell me the truth--is there a Santa Claus?

Virginia O'Hanlon.

Church wrote the following:

Virginia, your little friends are wrong. They have been affected by the skepticism of a skeptical age. They do not believe except they see. They think that nothing can be which is not comprehensible by their little minds. All minds, Virginia, whether they be adult's or children's, are little. In this great universe of ours we are little insects, insects in our intellect as compared with the boundless world about us, as measured by the intelligence capable of grasping the whole of truth and knowledge.

Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus. He exists as certainly as love and generosity and devotion exist and you know that they abound and give to your life the highest beauty and joy. Also how dreary would be the world if there were no Santa Claus. It would as dreary as if there were no Virginia. There would be no childlike faith then, no poetry, no romance to make tolerable this existence. We should have no enjoyment except in sound and sight. The eternal light with which childhood fills this world would be extinguished.

Not believe in Santa Claus! You might as well not believe in fairies! You might get your papa to hire men to watch all the chimneys on Christmas Eve to catch Santa Claus but even if they did not see Santa Claus coming, what would that prove? Nobody sees Santa Claus, but that is no sign that there is no Santa Claus. The most real things in the world are those that none can see. Did you ever see fairies dancing on a lawn? Of course not, but that is no proof that they are not there. Nobody can conceive or imagine all the wonders there are unseen and unseeable in this world.

You tear apart the baby's rattle and see what makes the noise inside, but there is a veil covering the unseen world which not the strongest person, nor event he united strength of all the strongest people that ever live could tear apart. Only faith, fancy, poetry, love romance can push aside that curtain and view and picture the supernal beauty and glories beyond. Is it all real? Ah, Virginia, in all this world there is nothing else real and abiding.

No Santa Claus! Thank God! He will live, and he will live forever. A thousand years from now, Virginia, nay 10 times 10,000 years from now, he will continue to make glad the heart of childhood.