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A CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

The coming Christmas, this year, does not, we are grieved to say, coincide with as much peace and goodwill on earth as reasonable men and women would expect to find in these enlightened times. We would have liked to see this wonderful Christian festival, the traditional anniversary of the birth of Christ, really to be an occasion for rejoicing and thanksgiving, a time to be merry and cheerful with a good conscience, knowing that all is well with us. But all is not well. We live in dangerous times, and the festival to which we have been looking forward with so much hope is overshadowed by events that cause concern and distress in the minds of all peace-loving men. There is tragedy, injustice and unrest in the world, and it requires an effort if one is not to give way to despair. Yet we must make this effort, we must hold fast to the promise of better things to come, and cling to the hope that reason and understanding will prevail, that the human progress achieved through the past will not be suddenly halted and overwhelmed by catastrophe.

There is little we can do individually in this direction, but the more deep-rooted and widespread is faith in the possibility of a peaceful solution of the world's troubles, in freedom, social improvement and a kindlier society, the greater are the chances of averting disaster.

Whatever to-morrow may bring, Christmas remains with us as a reminder of the fact that our civilisation is rooted in the Christian tradition and that simple goodness, basis of all Christian ethics, will in the end triumph over evil.

So let us become steeped in the Christmas spirit, shed for a day or two our responsibilities and cares, and rejoice, once more, in the knowledge that "unto us a Child is born".

Amid the jollities of the festivities it is sometimes forgotten that it is the birth of Christ we are celebrating. Christmas has been commercialised to such an extent that it has become a travesty, and no longer conveys or emphasises its real significance. What we actually celebrate is the great historical event on which it rests, namely, the commemoration of something that has changed the world and is the mainspring of the evolution of human affairs during over twenty centuries.

The Christmas story, furthermore, has always appealed to the imagination, quite apart from its theological meaning. The birth of a child arouses in everyone a feeling of wonder and gratitude and causes one of the deepest joys of which the human heart is capable. It is a natural joy which has little to do with material circumstances, it is a joyful event for rich and poor alike. Picturesque details by which the story has been embellished are of secondary importance. The central and important fact is that, according to Christian teaching, the birth of this Child was more than an ordinary family matter. It was an event that shook the world and determined the future course of human history. May its benign influence also bear on the counsels of those who direct the destinies of the nations in our times.

With these thoughts the Editor wishes to convey to all his readers a message of hope and his sincere wishes for a happy Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

SWISS SANTA ON ITV



A Swiss Father Christmas, who looked very much like the English version but who betrayed his origins by a fruity Maurice Chevalier accent, has made a surprise appearance on television to tell English viewers how Christmas is celebrated in Switzerland.

Behind the flowing robes, and the mass of silvery curls that served as a beard, hid a man who is an all-the-year-round Father Christmas as far as visitors to Geneva are concerned — Mr. Marcel Nicole, head of the tourist office there and a leading light in all the moves that go to make Geneva more attractive to the holidaymaker.

He was appearing in Granada's popular *People and Places* which, it is estimated, is regularly watched by 4,250,000 viewers in the North of England.

To interviewer Chris Howland he explained that he had travelled to Manchester for two purposes — to present twenty watches to children who earlier this year had spent a holiday as guests of the town of Rapperswil, and to distribute sacks of chocolate to under-privileged children in Manchester and Salford.

This chocolate — 5,000 bars of it — had been specially flown from Geneva, and was handed out at a party attended by some of the children and civic leaders.

Mr. Nicole, asked about the difference between Christmas customs in England and in Switzerland, pointed out one major break with tradition for this particular Father Christmas — no reindeer.

Of course, Father Christmas still had to come by air, but that, when travelling from Switzerland, meant flying by Swissair.

In his interview Mr. Nicole described in detail the family atmosphere of a Swiss Christmas. He talked about the way Swiss children put their shoes by the chimney, and about the family getting together for Christmas dinner with songs and poems, rewarded by gifts from the tree, following it.

During his brief stay in the North, Mr. Nicole, who was accompanied by his daughter, Denise, and by Mr. A. E. Weber, the North of England manager of Swissair, paid a courtesy call at Manchester Town Hall and presented the Lord Mayor with a handsome pewter plaque bearing the arms of Geneva.

Helvetic News Service.