

THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION.

The day after to-morrow the Church celebrates the grand and loving feast of the Immaculate Conception of the ever Blessed Virgin Mary. A year ago, on the occasion of the commemoration of that glorious event, we penned a short article that seemed to have attracted, for one reason or another, a certain amount of comment. About two months ago we received a letter from a subscriber in which the writer asks us to "kindly reproduce an article that appeared several months ago in the TRUE WITNESS on the subject of the Immaculate Conception." He then gives several reasons for making the request. We then concluded that the following was the article referred to; so we resolved, when the proper time should come around, to both satisfy our correspondent and celebrate the feast, by the reproduction of that editorial. It was thus we wrote:

In the grandest temple of the universe, in presence of the assembled Cardinals, Archbishops and Bishops of the world, over the spot where the Prince of the Apostles suffered martyrdom, in the heart of eternal Rome, surrounded by all the pomp and splendor of the immortal Church of Christ, seated upon the throne of the Popes, gorgeous with the accumulated dignity of ages, with every knee bending and every eye blessing the prince of one world and the prophet of another, on the eighth day of December, 1854, the majestic figure of the great Pontiff, Pius IX, appeared to the eyes of the world and before the gaze of the generations, past and to come, he proclaimed *ex-cathedra* the consoling, loving, lovely dogma of the Immaculate Conception. Heretofore our reason, as well as our Faith, taught that the Mother of the Son of God must have been conceived without sin; but henceforth not only "all generations shall call her blessed," but all the Catholic world must accept the truth of that most beautiful and most rational of all the dogma of our immortal Faith. The news reverberated among the seven hills and across the Tiber; the news resounded from the Adriatic eastward to Jordan, from the Pillar of Hercules westward over the Atlantic, around the world; the words flashed back through the ages, forward through the cycles of time; the diapason struck by the Pontiff with the keys of Peter, upon the Rock of Ages, sounded away beyond the starry dome into the regions of eternal glory, and the choirs of heaven joined the chorus of the universe as they chanted:

Immaculate! Immaculate! Loud swells the angels' song;
Immaculate! Immaculate! The heavenly aisles prolong;
Immaculate! Immaculate! Like lark above the sod,
The chorus wings its flight to the very throne of God.
Immaculate! Immaculate! The virgins raptured sing;
Immaculate! Immaculate! How the universe doth ring!

With Catholics we will not pause to argue the reasonableness of that splendid belief; with real Christians it is unnecessary to go into the evidence that the Divine One must have come to us through the most perfect of created beings; for the one who believes that the Saviour of men is the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, co-Eternal with the Father, it would be superfluous to bring evidence to show that His Mother must have been free from all taint of sin. From cold reasoning, on such an occasion, we turn to the unalloyed contemplation of the Mother of God, the Queen of Heaven, the Tower of Ivory, the House of Gold, the Comforter of the Afflicted and the Help of Christians, seated upon a throne, only a degree below that of the Eternal. Her Divine Son placing upon her brow the crown of undying glory, and her purity, like a jewel of untold value, glistening, radiating, flashing the scintillations of its perfection and matchless brilliancy upon the chancel of Heaven, and "like the light that left the distant stars ten thousand years ago," stealing through infinite space and lending to frail humanity the less intense, but yet wonderful aid of its sheen, to guide the race of man through all the darkness of sin and all the blackness of temptation, safely to God.

Such is the picture that all Catholics should contemplate upon this great fes-

tival! Painted with the pencil of the imagination upon the canvass of the mind, and lit with the perfect light of Truth, that grand fresco of Faith should hang in the gallery of the soul, and the heart should kneel before it, to admire, love, and adore; admire the beauty of Mary's perfection; love her as our Mother for all the graces she ever obtains for us; and adore the Creator in gratitude for the boon of such a resplendent creation as that of the Blessed Virgin.

Let Masses be sung and hymns resound; bring out all the beauty and splendor of the Holy Sacrifice; let flowers adorn the altar, and let censers fling their wreaths of vapor around the deep-pealing organ; it is a feast when all humanity should rejoice, and join with all pure created beings in their hymns of jubilation.

"Triumphant the Church, all thy glory revealing;
Militant the Church is wrapped in thy fame;
Suffering the Church, all thy bounty is feeling.
Mary, we hail thy Immaculate name!
Plus, our Pontiff King,
Unveils the Jewelling,
Gloriously set in thy bright diadem;
Mary, thy Holy Face
Mirrors the Saviour's grace,
Mary, our pure, our Immaculate gem!"

May this grand dogma of our Faith be the means of bringing thousands into the fold of Christ, as it has already attracted many to the Faith of Ages! And on this eighth of December, may all our readers rejoice; may they participate in the heavenly joys of that great day, and may Mary, conceived without sin, shed the rays of her maternal love upon their earthly path and guide them to the home of the blessed that surround her throne in Heaven.

SANTA CLAUS.

(By Sarah T. Hanley, in Catholic School and Home Magazine.)

Who is Santa Claus? Ask a "dear little dimpled darling" of four or five years later and she will quickly tell you about the wonderful old man who comes down the chimney on Christmas eve and fills the stockings of every good child in the world with all sorts of good things. Ask her a few years later and she will tell you that Santa Claus "don't come any more," and you know that for her, Christmas will never be the same again.

The name Santa Claus is a Dutch corruption of Saint Nicholas. History tells us very little about him. He was born in Lyria, Asia Minor, during the latter part of the third century. He entered a monastery near Myra, and was in due time made Abbot. He was also Bishop of Myra, and was noted for charity, benevolence and piety. He was imprisoned for his faith, under Diocletian, but was released and died about the year 326. His relics were preserved at Myra until the eleventh century, when they were removed to Bari. On the day of their translation, thirty persons were cured of diseases through his intercession, and his tomb at Bari became famous for pilgrimages. St. Nicholas has always enjoyed a wide popularity. He is the patron of Russia, and there are three hundred and seventy-two churches in England dedicated to him. He is the special patron of virgins, children, scholars, and mariners, reasons for which are given in the many legends and traditions which throw a kindly light on the character of this good man.

So much for the Santa Claus of modern times. But the white-haired, white-bearded, merry-hearted, old Christmas visitor can trace his pedigree to unnumbered centuries before St. Nicholas, and before the Christian era. The festival of Christmas, though commemorating the mightiest fact in the history of the world, when,

"At last, earth's hope was granted,
And God was a child of earth,
And a thousand angels chanted
The lowly midnight birth."

It is nevertheless a refined and modified blending together of three pagan festivals. The very date is pagan. From a very ancient period, every tribe and nation of Europe held their greatest festival during December, at the winter solstice. The Greeks celebrated their "Bacchanalian" for days. The Teutonic tribes kept the old feast of Twelve Nights from December 25 to January 6. The Roman Saturnalia lasted for seven days. Our Christmas gifts are a relic of an old Roman custom, while the shouts of "Bona Saturnalia" were the precursors of "Merry Christmas." The decoration and illumination of our churches recall

the temples of Saturn, radiant with burning tapers, and resplendent with garlands. Nearly all the legends, superstitions, and ceremonials, which are associated with Christmas in Europe and America, are the more or less original ones of the ancient Germanic "Twelve Nights."

But what has this to do with our question about Santa Claus? In every one of these pagan festivals, the leading figure was an old man of patriarchal aspect. With the Greeks, it was the aged, cheery, and decidedly disreputable Silenus, the chief of Satyrs and god of drunkards. In the Saturnalia, it was Saturn, the dignified and venerable god of time. In the Germanic feasts, it was Thor, a long-bearded and white-haired god. Although the central figure in the Christian festival was the Child God, the Christ-Kindlein, the influence of long-established pagan customs could not readily be suppressed. The tradition of hoary age as the true representative of that festive period, was set aside for a time but soon reappeared and has remained to the present time. At first St. Nicholas did not supersede but simply accompanied Christ in his Christmas travels, and he does so still in some rural districts in Europe. But before very long, the religious character of the festival was forgotten in the excesses to which worldly amusements were carried. St. Nicholas became more and more important and less and less venerable, while the Christ Child was so far overlooked that his name changed to Kris Kringle was given to the other. Santa Claus is then no other than the pagan god Silenus, of unknown antiquity, but a Silenus with every offensive feature removed, as through the change of manners and of morals everywhere, has been purified the whole grand festival of Christmas.

Santa Claus does not, however, rule the whole Christian world. The St. Nicholas of Southern France and Germany is a very different person. He is more like Saturn than Silenus. He distributes gifts to good little boys and girls, but he also carries a birth rod for the naughty ones. In Bohemia, parts of Lorraine, and the Tyrol, he is attended by an evil spirit who punishes the bad boys and girls. He is almost unknown in the Latin countries and in Russia. In Italy and in Spain, the Epiphany, instead of Christmas, is the day for giving presents, on accounts of the legend of the Wise Men. When on their way to Bethlehem, they saw an old woman cleaning her house. She asked them where they were going, and when told about the new-born King, she begged them to wait until she could go with them. But they said they could not tarry and bade her follow. She did so when she had finished, but the Wise Men had gone, and to this day she is seeking over the earth for the child Jesus. On the eve of Epiphany, she come down the chimney with gifts to the children, hoping she may still find Him. In Italy she is called the Befana, and in Russia, the Baboushka.

In Spain, it is Balthasar himself who brings the gifts, and the children leave their shoes near the chimney for him to fill them. In Belgium, several other countries of Europe, and all over America, the 25th of December is the blessed day which sees

"Little heads so curly,
Knowing Christmas laws,
Peep out very early
For old Santa Claus."

Worcester, Nov. 30, 1898.

The Archbishop of Sens and the Bishops of Chaons, Coutances, Seez, and Grenoble, and forthwith expected at Rome for the customary periodical visit to the tombs of the Apostles.

God has preserved you so far; only keep yourself faithful to the law of His providence, and He will assist you at all times, and where you cannot walk he will carry you.

According to an agreement very recently come to by the Holy See and France Tunisia will in future be withdrawn from the made subject to the immediate jurisdiction of the Pope. This decision is regarded as most important from a French point of view, and is due to the personal initiative of the Pope, who wished to give France a new proof of his good will.

Why is the letter "I" like a bad law? It makes an awful act a lawful act.

THE RECORD OF YOUR SINS.

Earnest Words by Philip O'Neill.

You do not call up your sins as David did, because you do not look within. I will name your common sins, that you may know what is written on your heart and also on the book of judgment. St. Paul names a few of your common sins in Ephesians v, in Galatians v, and Corinthians vi. He said: "Be not deceived, neither fornicators, nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor slanderers, nor thieves; nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, nor blasphemers shall inherit the Kingdom of God." "Uncleanness lasciviousness, witchcraft, hatred, envying, murders, revellings, seditions, heresies, wrath, strife, they which do such things shall not inherit the Kingdom of God."

If you knew that your guardian spirit had been withdrawn on account of your filthiness and impurities; if you knew that hordes of demons rejoice at your wickedness, and that you are moving in a spiritual darkness like that of Egypt, you might be alarmed. If you knew that the just anger of God, like a heavy cloud, hangs over you ready to burst at any time, you might become anxious. God's hatred of the impure is awful.

Think you that God, whose eye is eternally on you, will forgive you when you are too lazy, too careless and reckless to even ask forgiveness?

WHAT ASAPH SAID.

Asaph said, "I sought God with my hands lifted up at night." Commence to-night like Asaph. Will ye not repent?

The only hope of safety is in devoting the balance of life to an extraordinary and continuous effort of repentance, with the one single purpose of salvation ever in view—never to weary. Think of those calm, searching words of our Saviour on the Mount: "What doth it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" Drop everything and do penance for those crying sins. Drop everything and save your soul, my friend. Weep and pray when others sleep. The danger is great!

THE TIME IS SHORT.

My friends, within the space of a few years not one of you will be left. You will be removed to another life, where the things of the world shall have faded forever from your memory.

When your body loses its power of sense, of appetite, of feeling, and gradually falls into the stupor of death your soul grows more keenly alive to its spiritual woe. Cruel, heartless one; can you send your poor soul without hope on its mysterious way? As your body becomes cold, and your eyes become set, and the last gasp has been noted by the mourners around, the poor soul, trembling, fearing, fluttering, goes forth on its dread journey. There are mourners around, but in ninety cases out of a hundred the soul that is going forth is the greatest mourner of all. Its sorrow is for all eternity. Have pity on your poor soul, my friend!

St. Paul said: "O senseless Galatians, who hath bewitched you that you should not obey the truth?" This might be said to us also. Will some one move to introduce a little more fervor with our religious life, a little more earnestness of purpose into our daily efforts? Will some few strive to be humble and pious and holy, that others may take heart, seeing that it is possible? Let there be a movement all along the line in favor of holiness. Commence with earnest prayer for strength and light. Pray every day for humility, simplicity, and holy piety. Through this unnatural, unreasonable, unaccountable coldness the church is under a cloud.

Not one in five hundred ever bewailed his sins like the Publican or St. Peter. Not one in five hundred really thinks that it is necessary to love God above all things. Not one in seven hundred ever went into his room to weep over his sins. One-third do not go to their duty and are only nominal Christians. I blush for this unaccountable coldness. Good friends, dear companions in Christ Jesus, I ask you cannot something be done to revive a Christian spirit?—*Catholic Mirror*.

Sociological.—Every man owes something to himself; but what he owes other people is what bothers.

Husband anxiously: You should not carry your purse in your hand. Wife reassuringly: Oh, it isn't at all heavy.

Customer: Have you a copy of "Fifteen Decisive Battles?" Bookseller: No, sir; we are sold out. But we can give you "Reflections of a Married Man."