

celebration of Christmas
ing."

IN MARY (8th).—The
te Conception of the
rich no decided opinion
holies; but, a few years
eat convention of more
ls, bishops and other
rch of St. Peter, dur-
inth, the question was
after a long and heated
nber, 1854. The doc-
nception of the Virgin
essential article of the
belief, that is, "that the
moment of her concep-
ulate from all stain of
ecree of 1854, "The
of the family of the
solutely free from all
of Adam and its conse-
o find it anywhere, as
adar.

ative of Syracuse, and
a young nobleman of
vote herself to a religi-
him, and gave all her
revenge he denounced
e professing Christian
ad to suffer martyrdom
e Emperor Dioclesian.
er lover having told her
and disturbed his rest,
them to him; and that
ous self-denial, restored
en depicted as carrying
ls are placed. But it
belief that she did lose
of the early painters to
ght, by the emblem of

December is called
g words of an anthem
the first of the Great
erly to be sung in the
l Christmas Eve.

(21st), known also as
he Gospels he is asso-
latt. x. 3, Mark iii. 18,
i. 13) with St. Philip.
dition he was born in
spel to the Parthians,
a, a city in Northern
ges in St. John's Gospel
esent him as one whom
inclined to melancholy,
made a doubter. He is
the Apostles, of the
honest doubt and ques-
aperturable and joyous
Thomas' Day falls on
ortest day of the year,
g couplet:

Thomas grey,
the shortest day.
led the Proto-Martyr, is
from his having been
blood his testimony of
, however, more than
Christian preacher who
tion between Judaism
ner of Paul, yea, per-
the one who prepared
on." Augustine said,
ed, the Church would
lden times it was usual

on that day to bleed the horses as a precaution
against disease in the course of the following year.
In Barnaby Googe's translation of *Naogeorgus*, are
the following lines respecting this popular notion:

"This followeth St. Stephen's Day, whereon doth
every man

His horsès jaunt and course abrode, as swiftly as he
can,

Until they doe extreemely sweate, and then they let
them blood.

For this being done upon this day, they say doth do
them good,

And keeps them from all maladies and sicknesse
through the yeare,

As if that Steven any time took charge of horses
here."

In England, the 26th is familiarly known as
Boxing Day, from its being the occasion on which
the annual Christmas boxes are collected by gro-
cers' boys, butchers' boys, who leave parcels daily
at the houses of their masters' customers, as also
by the postmen, dustmen, lamplighters, etc.

CHRISTMAS DAY (25th) is the most important of
all the days throughout the ecclesiastical year, as
on this day is celebrated the anniversary of the
birth of Jesus Christ. It is unnecessary now to
raise any doubts as to whether this, the 25th
December, was the actual day of His birth in Beth-
lehem, because it has been so settled for ages past,
in fact ever since the time of Julius the First, Pope
of Rome, from 337 A.D. to 352 A.D., who, at the
solicitation of St. Cyril, Archbishop of Jerusalem,
and after careful enquiries, fixed this as the anni-
versary of Christ's nativity, and as such it has
since been held by all the nations of Christendom.
The Romans about this season held for several
days their annual feast of merriment under the
title of Saturnalia, or the Festival of Saturn. It
was marked by a prevalence of universal license
and merrymaking. "Everyone feasted and re-
joiced, work and business were for a season entire-
ly suspended, the houses were decked with laurels
and evergreens, presents were made by parents and
friends, and all sorts of games and amusements
were indulged in by the citizens. In the bleak
North, the same rejoicings had place, but in a
ruder and more barbarous form. Fires were ex-
tensively kindled, both in and out of doors, blocks
of wood blazed in honour of Thor and Odin, the
sacred mistletoe was gathered by the Druids,
and sacrifices, both of men and cattle, were made
to the savage divinities. Fires are said, also, to
have been kindled at this period of the year by the
ancient Persians, between whom and the Druids
of Western Europe a relationship is supposed to
have existed." The Church, however, was op-
posed to such universal and indiscriminate amuse-
ments, and accordingly, after a time, a compro-
mise was effected by transferring the heathen cere-
monies to the solemnities of the Christian festivals.
"Ingrafted thus on the Roman Saturnalia, the
Christmas festivities received in Britain further
changes and modifications, by having superadded
to them, first, the Druidical rites and superstitions,
and then, after the arrival of the Saxons, the vari-
ous ceremonies practised by the ancient Germans
and Scandinavians. The result has been the
strange medley of Christian and pagan rites which
contribute to make up the festivities of the modern
Christmas." The name given by the ancient
Saxons to the festival of the winter-solstice was
Jul or *Yule*, the latter term being still used in
Scotland for Christmas. Its etymology is doubt-
ful. Some claim that it is derived from a Greek
word, being the name of a hymn sung in honour
of Ceres; others say that it comes from the Latin
jubilum, a time of rejoicing, or from its being a

festival in honour of Julius Caesar; while others
again say that it is synonymous with *ol* or *oel*,
which in the ancient Gothic language signifies a
feast, and also a favourite drink used on such
occasions, hence our word *ale*. Skeat, an eminent
authority on etymology, connects the word with
the Middle English *goullen*, *gollen*, to cry out, be-
cause it was a time of revelry.

ST. JOHN THE EVANGELIST, (27th) "the disciple
whom Jesus loved," was the only one of all the
Apostles who died a natural death. He died at
Ephesus at the advanced age of ninety-four, in the
reign of the Emperor Trajan, in the year 100 A.D.
But although he escaped martyrdom he was called
upon to endure persecution in the cause of Chris-
tianity. It is related by several authorities that,
in the reign of Domitian, the Evangelist, being
accused of trying to subvert the religion of the
Roman Empire, was taken to Rome, and that
there before the gate called Porta Latina, or the
Latin gate, he was thrown into a cauldron of boil-
ing oil, from which, however, he emerged, not
only unhurt, but with renewed health and vigour.
In order to commemorate this incident, the Roman
Catholic Church retains in its calendar, on the
6th of May, a festival entitled "St. John before
the Latin gate."

INNOCENTS' DAY (28th).—This festival, some-
times styled, as in our "Tables and Rules," the
Holy Innocents' Day, has been observed from an
early period in commemoration of the barbarous
massacre of children in Bethlehem, ordered by King
Herod, with the intention and hope of destroying
among them the infant Saviour. "In reference
to the three consecutive commemorations, on 26th,
27th and 28th December, theologians inform us
that in these are comprehended three descriptions
of martyrdom, all of which have their peculiar
efficiency, though differing in degree. In the death
of St. Stephen, an example is furnished of the
highest class of martyrdom; that is to say, both in
will and deed. St. John the Evangelist, who gave
practical evidence of his readiness to suffer death
for the cause of Christ, though he was miraculously
saved from actually doing so, is an instance of the
second description of martyrdom—in *will* though
not in *deed*. And the slaughter of the Innocents
affords an instance of martyrdom in *deed* and not
in *will*, these unfortunate children having lost
their lives, though it was involuntarily, on account
of the Saviour, and it has therefore been consid-
ered that God supplied the defects of their will by
His own acceptance of the sacrifice." It was form-
erly called Childrens' Day. Processions of children
on this day were forbidden by a proclamation of
Henry VIII. in 1540. "The mournful character
of this day was anciently kept up in England by
the use of black vestments and muffled peals."

NEW YEAR'S EVE (31st), or Hogmanay, is not
known in England, being celebrated only in Scot-
land, where New Year's Day is to a very great ex-
tent, especially in the country parts, still regarded
as the great national holiday. The word Hog-
manay is supposed, by some, to be derived from
two Greek words meaning the holy moon or month;
by others it is combined with another word sung
along with it in a chorus, "Hogmanay, trol-
loly," which is stated to be a corruption of *Homme*
est ne—Trois Rois la (a man is born—three kings
are there), an allusion to the birth of Christ, and
the visit to Bethlehem of the wise men, who were
known in medieval times as the "three kings,"
while others again derive it from *au gui menez* (to
the mistletoe go), or *au gui l'an neuf* (to the mistle-
toe this New Year), an allusion to the ancient
Druidical ceremony of gathering that plant,

THE CHURCH CONGRESS ON LABOUR QUESTIONS.

The Congress at Folkestone followed the pre-
vailing fashion closely enough by making the
questions connected with labour and with the
position of the labouring classes a very prominent
feature in the programme. On the first day of
the Congress labour combinations were discussed,
and the "attitude of the Church" towards them—
a phrase with which Canon Scott Holland not un-
fairly made merry—was considered. This was
followed by a debate on the Duty of the Church
to the Agricultural Population, which was some-
what unhappily qualified by the addition of the
words "in view of their increased responsibilities
as citizens," thereby suggesting, as Mr. Byron
Reed pointed out, that the Church is being stirred
up to action by a sense of the increased power of
the agricultural labourer. Finally, the omnipresent
topic of thrift and old age pensions was discussed,
which is of course only another aspect of the same
general labour question. No one can therefore
fairly accuse the authorities of the Congress of
being indifferent to the material or the moral and
spiritual interests of the working classes.

When we turn, however, to ask what solid gain
resulted from all this discussion, we find it no
easy question to answer. We confess to a feeling
of confused weariness as we peruse the papers and
speeches which have been showered upon us in
such profusion. There is plenty of goodwill,
plenty of thoughtful study, but very little of definite
and practical counsel. One reason for this defect
is that different speakers, each speaking with the
authority of experience and observation, almost
invariably contradicted one another, so that it is
very difficult to extract any definite conclusions
from the total sum of discussion. It may be that
the subject is too vast for any generalizations, at
least at the present stage of investigation and
knowledge. Take the case of the agricultural
labourers, who form but one of many classes of
working men. As Dr. Jessopp remarked, the
labourer in one part of the country differs widely
from the labourer in another, and the few, the
very few, generalizations that are true of East
Anglia or of Devon are woefully inadequate when
applied to the rural population of the whole king-
dom. But the subject is often discussed as if the
labourer was a single, well-known person, whose
ideas and aspirations, merits and shortcomings,
can be catalogued and described with unfailing
accuracy. It is one good point in the discussion
at Folkestone that, so far as we have observed,
the word "Hodge" did not occur in it; but there
was some rash, and as a consequence contradictory,
generalizing, nevertheless.

We are glad, however, to notice a tendency—
by no means uniform, but still clearly marked—
to warn the clergy against interfering in questions
on which they cannot possess competent know-
ledge. The vague talk about "the Church" doing
this and reforming that is producing a natural and
wholesome reaction. Bishop Barry significantly
asked, in the course of the discussion on labour
combinations, what the word "Church," as used
in the papers and speeches, was intended to mean.
"The laity," he said, "seemed to think that the
clergy were the Church when the question was
one of responsibility." But the clergy themselves
are equally to blame in the matter. Many of
them need Lord Brassey's reminder that trade
disputes are nowadays settled only by experts, in-
quiring into the most intensely technical questions.
There is hardly a clergyman alive competent to
act as arbitrator in the trade dispute; and arbi-
tration, as Lord Brassey pointed out, is giving
place to "courts of conciliation," which consist of
representatives of employers and employed, and
on which the clergy would be even more out of
place than they would be as arbitrators. A simi-
lar warning was given by Mr. Dawes, but he
showed a tendency to go too far in the direction
of caution on this point. There is a line to be
drawn between the unwarrantable claim to techni-
cal knowledge on the one hand, and mere ignorant
indifference on the other. It is not enough to
preach in general terms the Christian duties of
charity, humility, and forgiveness; the preacher,
if he is to have any influence, must know enough
of the special circumstances of the case to bring
his exhortations home to his hearers, and to