

mas night when all the world rejoices, when Angelic hosts are chanting the praises of the Redeemer, when Cherubim, and Seraphim, re-echo the glad hymns of praise, our own souls seem purified and elevated as it were, above the things of earth, and we go in spirit to the humble cradle of Bethlehem, and kneel down in adoration before that glorious King, and there we forgive and forget the transgressions of the past, and we offer that priceless jewel, more costly than pearl or diamond, or any treasure earth doth possess—'tis the fear of penitence.

Fallen human nature can there find hope and consolation, and redeem the past. The bleeding and broken heart there finds balm to heal the wounds of human woe. The man of crime, the calumniator, the wicked and jealous-hearted, those who through secret and cunning wiles would injure the pure and innocent, there find a fount to purify them from the iniquities of the past, and to fortify them against the battles of the future. And when storms arise, when the billows of passion seem to encircle us, and the ocean of life is like a dark and angry sea, there is still one star of magnificent beauty peering through the dark clouds, that will guide us to the haven of rest.

"When marshalled on the nightly plain,  
The glittering host bestud the sky;  
One star alone, of all the train,  
Can fix the sinner's wandering eye.  
Hark! hark! to God the chorus breaks,  
From every host, from every gem:  
But one alone, the Saviour speaks,  
It is the star of Bethlehem."

#### CHRISTMAS DAY.

Our old friend Father Christmas draws nigh to our doors once again. His steps have not faltered for all that has happened to stop us by the way, and while we, almost unconscious of the flight of time, have spared no thought from the work of the passing day, the seasons have run their measured course, and brought us, unmindful of their pace, to the dawn of the Great Anniversary. Before THE HARP again reaches its friends another Christmas Day will have lapsed into recorded time—another Festival, the greatest which the Christian celebrates, will be

numbered with the past. May the lessons of the season sink deep into the Irish heart; may the blessings of peace, of charity, and of love—the happiness which virtue and innocence confer—glow brightly round the Christmas hearth in the homes of the Irish race!

As time draws near the birth of Christ, sounds of joyful preparation ring on the ear. There is a special happiness in the faces of the children trooping through the streets, the churches crowd with penitents and worshippers, the shops are radiant with colour and light. The hardest heart softens, the sternest face relaxes in presence of Christmas, its observances, its associations, and its memories. The custom which unites with Christmas the blessing of plenty, the pleasures of a well-spread board, the exhilaration of "all good cheer" runs no danger of perishing amongst us. "Usage and wont" will have their due, and the long established connection between home comforts and Christmas tide has little to fear from innovation. So may it be. We have no wish to see the genii of plenty and merriment banished from the Christmas board. But we do think, nevertheless, that in this their material aspect, the observances of the season are in some danger of being perverted by excess. No one amongst us, we trust, desires to see the Birthday of Our Saviour reduced, as we fear it is elsewhere, to the level of a Pagan anniversary. We have not yet come to that, and we do not fear that we ever shall. But it is impossible to deny that the approach of Christmas is accepted by many amongst ourselves as a sort of justification for irregularities which at other times they would shrink from as improper and disgraceful. What is the connection between the nativity of Our Lord and the orgies of Bacchus? or how does the message of peace and good will invite the responses of inebriation? the "blot on Christmas" is darker and wider than is shown by a cursory glance. We touch a social sore, the evils of which are well known to those who visit the homes of the poor, when we say that the Christmas revel is purchased in many cases at a price of wretchedness and misery, of nakedness and hunger, of fireless hearths and