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"Gloria in excelsis Deo, et in terra pax hominibus bonæ voluntatis."

The History of the Christmas Crib

(By Eliza Allen Starr.)

One of the most touching customs for Christmas is that of preparing the Crib in some part of the church; which dates to that serene lover of holy poverty, Saint Francis of Assisi. We are told that stirred as he was in his own soul by the tenderest sympathy for the little infant shivering in the Cave at Bethlehem in the December midnight, he caught the idea of making all this present and real to the eyes of his disciples. A cave was prepared; a manger was filled with straw; the ox and the ass took their places beside it. On the straw lay the radiant Child so lowly in His majesty, and beside Him His Virgin Mother and her virgin spouse and the simple shepherds. How poor it all was—must have been—from all we know of Saint Francis, and on what he was likely to do! "How inadequate!" no doubt some of these said whose genuity had been taxed to prepare it. But when midnight came, and the Midnight Mass, and when Saint Francis rose to preach to them, with the Crib in sight, who can ever tell the wonderful effect of that Christmas sermon! Transported out of himself, he took all his listeners with him, and the whole churchfull of religious prostrated themselves before the Infant in his Manger-Crib. From the Convent of Saint Francis the custom spread all over Christendom. Churches, monasteries, convents, homes, castles and cabins had each its representation of the Crib. It was the manger, the meekness of Saint Joseph, the rapture of the Virgin Mother, the absolute poverty of the Holy Family, which Saint Francis put before his followers. And we must do, as Saint Francis did, if we would win souls to the simplicity of the Cave and the Holy Infancy. It can never be

too humble to draw the hearts of the multitude, who press around it with a rapture of love and reparation which no grand painting or representation of any other sort could ever inspire. In the United States the Midnight Mass is said in churches at 4 or 5 o'clock in the morning, and is followed immediately by the "Mass of the Aurora," as it is called. In ancient times the Pope went directly from his Midnight Mass to the Church of Saint Anastasia, who was martyred on the 25th of December, 305, and the second Collect of this Mass still keeps her in distinguished remembrance. The third, or Solemn High Mass, has so many graces attached to it that we cannot allow even the weariness which comes after the early masses to prevail against us. Every priest has the privilege of saying three Masses on Christmas Day; and it should be considered the privilege of every Christian to assist at three masses, if possible. Nor can any one be indifferent to the significance, as well as the beauty and the grandeur, of this Mass, for is it not the triumphal song of the incarnation? That incarnation, which began in the obscurity and silence of a room in the Holy House of Nazareth, was fulfilled in the gloom and humiliation of a stable, but is now glorified to the eyes of all men by the magnificence of altars, of golden vestments, and, if in a cathedral, by all the solemnity of Pontifical ceremonial. If we have entered the stable to adore the Divine Infant in the Crib, it will relieve the wish of the heart to do something in honor of this little Babe, this Incarnate Word, who "came unto His own, and His own received Him not," to assist at the grand third Mass of Christmas. We shall, instinctively, offer it in expiation for that ignorance which shut against Him the doors of the pleasant homes of Bethlehem; that ignorance which leaves Him, even now, unrecognized by so many kindly hearts in the world which is called Christian, which cuts short His claims to worship and obedience, and even while Christmas greetings are sounding in our ears, makes Him forgotten in the love of worldly enjoyments. It will be just one little act of reparation to the Babe in the manger; and how precious is every such act, however small. Years ago a little girl, scarcely four years old, was in the habit of stealing to our side as we said our prayers. One day she was asked about a picture of the Nativity which hung near. In as simple words as we could we told her about the Babe born in a stable because no one had any room in their houses for His Mother; and how, when He grew up, He was put to death by cruel men, all because of His goodness. This child had never been baptised, and "must not be proselytized," but no sooner did this natural story come to her ears than her eyes filled with tears, and, throwing up her childish arms, she cried out: "Let me kiss the little Jesus baby again!" It was the true spirit of reparation; and that kiss, we believe, has never been; never will be, forgotten by Him who lay in His Crib in the Stable of Bethlehem. This spirit of reparation, which is so simple and so natural that a child practises it instinctively, inspires the sweetest and most sublime offerings made by man to God; and while the most hidden, they are the most powerful to win graces for ourselves or for others. This was the offering of His Virgin Mother, of His foster-father, who endeavored to supply the lack of love of others by the fervor of their own; and this is our offering when we attend the Solemn High Mass, or, better still, the Pontifical Mass, in honor of the "Word-made flesh and dwelling among us." As a reward for all this, instant and full, comes the Papal Benediction, bestowed on Christmas Day upon all who, having confessed and communicated, have paid the homage of adoration to the Infant Jesus. But what of that even-song, the magnificent "Second Vespers" of Christmas? Is it possible that our dinners on that day are so elaborate as to give us no time to assist at Vespers? Is it possible that we have so many and such dignified guests—friends so indifferent themselves to the Liturgy of the day that we cannot join in the Blessed Virgin's own Magnificat, and that the Antiphons of this great day are to be lost for us? Is it possible that anything which the world calls pleasure can keep us from that Manger-Crib where lies the Infant who is to redeem us and all we hold dear? Has He lost



MADONNA AND CHILD.

Courtesy of Catholic Almanac of Ontario.

his charm so soon? Is there nothing in that smile which draws us irresistibly from the luxurious home and makes us almost weep to think how comfortable it is; still more from the groaning tables of the banquet? Let us steal away from all these for a while, and see how the Church attires herself, with her Pontiffs, to sing the praises of her Infant King. Those who recited the dramatic Third Repository at Matins: O, ye shepherds, speak, and tell us what ye have seen; who is appeared in the earth? We saw the new-born Child, and Angels singing praise to the Lord. Speak; what have ye seen? And tell us of the birth of Christ. We saw the new-born Child, and Angels singing praise to the Lord. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost. "We saw the new-born Child, and Angels singing praise to the Lord," will enter into the spirit of the antiphons at Vespers. First Antiphon—Thine shall be the dominion in the day of Thy power, amid the brightness of the saints; from the womb, before the day-star, have I begotten Thee. Second Antiphon—The Lord sent redemption unto His people, He hath commanded His covenant forever. Third Antiphon—Unto the upright hath arisen light in darkness; the Lord is gracious, and full of compassion, and righteous. Fourth Antiphon—With the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is plenteous redemption. Fifth Antiphon—Of the fruit of Thy body will I set upon Thy throne. Antiphon at the Song of the Blessed Virgin—This day the Christ is born; this day the Saviour is appeared; this day the Angels sing praise in the earth, and the Archangels rejoice; this day the righteous are glad, and say: "Glory to God in the highest. Alleluia."

And each one set to its own ecclesiastical music; sung ages ago, as to-day, by choirs loving the chaste melodies they sang! No one can rightfully forego these sacred chants for any worldly reason; for the feast was given for this very end—the praise of the Babe of Bethlehem! To claim the feast, yet to neglect the intention, is one of the—shall we say sins, or blunders, of our time?

The Holy Father Denounces Divorce

Rome, Dec. 16.—At the consistory held this morning the Pope formally announced, among others nominated to Bishoprics, the names of Right Rev. John J. O'Connor, as Bishop of Newark, N. J., and Right Rev. William J. O'Connell, as Bishop of Portland, Me. The consistory was especially interesting, as the Pope, in an impassioned address, denounced the suggested divorce laws for Italy, and appealed to the Italians not to allow such an evil to be introduced in their country. The Pope declared that the example of other countries in the matter of divorce was criminal in so far as they recognized divorce, this social plague which once admitted, He prayed God to spare Italy from this social plague which once admitted, even on a limited scale, spread like a conflagration. The

Pontiff declared that divorce was the moral ruin of woman.

Cardinal Gibbons on Prayer:

Preaching at Corpus Christi Church, Baltimore, on Sunday last, Cardinal Gibbons said: "The reasons our prayers are not answered are that we frequently pray for things that are not good for us, or with bad dispositions. We are then like little children asking their father for something that will do them harm. If God does not grant what we ask for, He gives us something better. A lady said to me on the occasion of President Garfield's death: 'I have prayed for the President's life. My family have prayed for him, the city prayed for him, the State prayed for him, and yet he died. What, then, is the use of prayer?' I answered her that God answers our prayers either directly or indirectly. If He does not grant us what we ask, He gives us something equivalent or better. If He did not save President Garfield's life, He preserved the life of the nation, which is of more importance than the life of an individual. He infused into the hearts of the American people at a time of much political bitterness, a greater reverence for the head of the nation and He intensified and energized our love of country and our devotion to our political institutions. "Let us, therefore, never undertake any work without first submitting it to God. When the Constitution of the United States was being drafted at Philadelphia, Benjamin Franklin made a speech in which he showed how much he thought of prayer. 'We have spent days and weeks,' he said, 'but we have been wasting our time and have been groping in the dark, because we have not sought light from Him who is the source of all light.' Although Franklin cannot be regarded as a model for a Christian, yet that religious feeling placed by Divine Providence in the heart of every man had taken firm root in him. He believed in the efficacy of prayer."

A Jesuit's Challenge

It is worthy of note that, as the author of a paper in The Month informs us, the German Jesuit, Father Roch, in 1852 issued a public challenge offering to pay the sum of a thousand Rhenish guilders to any one who, in the judgment of the faculty of law in the University of Heidelberg, or of Bonn, should establish the fact that any Jesuit had ever taught the doctrine that the end justifies the means, or any doctrine equivalent to it. This challenge has been before the world for forty-nine years, but the thousand guilders have never been awarded.

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Rome and the Immaculate Conception

The Rome correspondent of The Dublin Freeman's Journal, writing on Dec. 9, says: Yesterday, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, was observed by the Romans with all that outward display of devotion which the present condition of the times permits. From the windows of several houses brightly-colored draperies hung, and in the evening many private residences, as well as colleges, convents, and other Catholic institutions, were illuminated with tiny lanterns and candles. In other days, ere the Power hostile to the Church had battered down the walls of Rome and placed its Government within the city, the outward expression of the people's joy on such a Feast as this was visible all over the city in the decorations and illuminations of their houses and of the numerous shrines at the corners of streets and on the facades of palaces.

A memorial of the Pontiff Pius IX.'s definition of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception exists in the Vatican. The walls of the large room preceding the Stanzes or Chambers of Raphael, as the visitor comes from the Sistine Chapel, are covered with great frescoes commemorating this religious event.

The circumstances accompanying and surrounding the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception have been carefully recorded at Rome. On the morning of the memorable Friday, 8th December, 1854, the weather, which had been previously dull and rainy, cleared up and a brilliant sunlight shone upon the city. After a lengthened series of ceremonies Pius IX., standing at the Throne in the apse of the great Church of St. Peter's, read, in the midst of a profound religious silence, the decree promulgating this doctrine. So great were his emotions on this occasion that he was frequently obliged to suspend the reading of the decree. The Cardinal Dean, with the Latin and Greek and Armenian Archbishops and Bishops present here, after thanking His Holiness for the decree, asked permission to render public this dogmatic definition. Meanwhile the cannon of Castel S. Angelo announced the tidings to the city. All the bells of the church towers of Rome pealed together in festive tones, and the inhabitants of the city began to adorn their houses with draperies, and antique tapestries hung out from the windows and balconies. In the evening, at the expense of the Roman Municipality, the great dome of St. Peter's, the Piazza, the two colonnades, and the buildings of the Capitol were all illuminated. A grand academy of the Literary Society Arcadia was held in the Hall of Conservators at the Capitol and here Cardinal Wiseman delivered a most eloquent discourse in presence of a great gathering of Cardinals, Archbishops, Bishops, Prelates and other distinguished personages. "Rome that day," says a writer, "gave unmistakable proofs of extraordinary exultation, demonstrating how general and how profound was its devotion to the Most Blessed Virgin."

Three remarkable memorials of this great event are to be met with in Rome—the Column of the Immaculate Conception in the Piazza di Spagna, the Stanza of the Immaculate Conception in the Vatican, and the marble slabs in St. Peter's, with commemorative inscription and lists of the Cardinals, Archbishops and Bishops present on the occasion of the promulgation of this doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. The first of the Column in the Piazza di Spagna was unveiled in the presence of Pius IX. of the 8th of September, 1857. It stands in front of the Propaganda, and is well known to every visitor to Rome. The shaft, discovered in the Campo Marzio, is 42 feet high, one of the largest known masses of Carystian or Cipollino marble. A flaw near the base is strengthened by a pretty bronze device. A statue of the Blessed Virgin in bronze surmounts the capital, and at the base are four marble statues, seated, of Moses, David, Isaiah, and Ezekiel, and four bas-reliefs referring to the event commemorated.

The chamber painted by Cav. Francesco Padesti in the Vatican is a most interesting record of this great event. The grand fresco represents the Definition of the Dogma. Pius IX., standing upon the steps of the Throne erected in the apse of St. Peter's, holds in his left hand a red-covered book, and with his right hand stretched forth he intones the "Te Deum." His features are illuminated with that historic sunbeam which wrapped him in light immediately after the reading of the decree. This fact of

the light then beaming on the face of Pius IX. is remembered by many still living who witnessed it on that day. In Padesti's picture the ray of sunlight is represented as proceeding from a cross in the heavens held by an angel, at which a crowned female figure, symbolizing the Church, points with her right hand. The Cardinal Dean, Macoli, stands at the foot of the dias, and is turned towards the Pope, who has a Cardinal Deacon on each side of him. The Prince Assistant at the Throne is Prince Orsini. Behind the Cardinal Bishops, to the right of the spectator, are the Prelates of the Papal Household. Then near at hand are the Consistorial Advocates, the Canons of St. Peter's, the Cardinal Deacons, with the dark, handsome features of Cardinal Antonelli conspicuous among these last. On the left, behind the Cardinal Bishops, are members of the Roman Senate, in their official togas, and beyond them in the picture many Prelates and Cardinal priests, among whom may be readily distinguished the well-known features of Cardinal Wiseman. In the group of ecclesiastics and other spectators on the right of the picture in the foreground are Father Perrone, the well-known Jesuit and theologian; Father Passaglia, of the same Order, whose vast learning had been of great service in preparing for this definition. A pathetic interest attaches to this figure, which is represented with an absorbed, almost sad, expression, as if contemplating the course of action which separated him from his Order. Here also is Father Marocco, of the Conventuals; Father Buttaoni, of the Dominicans; and Father Darrignau, of the Recollets. In the upper portion of this picture the Blessed Virgin is seen

(Continued on page 5.)

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