

CHURCH CHIMES

A MONTHLY RECORD OF CATHOLIC PROGRESS IN CANADA.

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VOL. I.

CALENDAR FOR DECEMBER.

- 6. *S. Nicolas*. Bishop of Myra, A. D. 342, was born at Patera in Lycia, and early distinguished himself by his exercises of devotion, charity, and perfect obedience. After living in seclusion as Abbot of a Monastery for several years, he was chosen Bishop of Myra, in which high calling he became noted for his humility and zeal, and active benevolence. He became one of the most popular saints of Christendom; is invoked as the protector of sailors, and as the patron saint of school-boys, of poor maidens, of travellers and merchants. He is also a Patron of Russia, and of numerous seaports and commercial towns. The Greek historians of his life say that he was present in A. D. 325, at the Ecumenical Council of Nice. His usual emblem is three golden balls in his hands, at his feet, in his lap, or carried on a book. Sometimes they appear like purses, and it is said they are three purses of gold, which S. Nicolas threw into the window of a poor nobleman, and thereby saved his three daughters from a shameful life, to which their father had been tempted by poverty to devote them. Occasionally S. Nicolas is represented standing before a font with his hand raised in benediction over it, in which are three little naked boys rising up with clasped hands, while a demon appears in the background. This was doubtless in its primitive form, a pictorial allegory of the grace in Holy Baptism; but in later times it was interpreted by, or probably became the foundation for, a ridiculous legend of the holy Bishop's having restored to life some Christian children who had been chopped up in order to be sold as salted meat. And thus in some of the later figures the font is vulgarized into a brine-tub, and the demon into a butcher or an executioner. He died in the year 342, at Myra, and was buried in his cathedral.
- 8. *Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary*. A Bishop of Nicomedia, writing in the seventh century, mentions this feast as of ancient date in the Eastern Church; but its observance was not enforced in it till the middle of the twelfth century. It seems not to have become universal in the Western Church till the fifteenth century. It is supposed by some to have been introduced into Britain by S. Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury, about A. D. 1150. The Council of Oxford, held in A. D. 1222, left its observance optional. Nevertheless, it was kept in England in olden days with great devotion.
- 13. *S. Lucy*, Virgin and Martyr, c. A. D. 304. This holy Virgin was the daughter of a noble and wealthy family in Syracuse, in the Island of Sicily. Her father died during her infancy, and she was brought up in the Faith of Christ by her mother, Eutychia. She refused to marry a young nobleman who paid his addresses to her, because she determined to devote herself to religion; and when he complained that her beautiful eyes haunted him day and night, she cut them out and sent them to him,

and begged that he would then allow her to be at peace; and God, to reward this sacrifice, restored to her afterwards, eyes more beautiful than before. She gave her whole fortune to the poor, which so enraged her lover that he accused her, before Paschasius, the heathen judge, of professing Christianity, and after much cruel treatment, she was martyred. The chief suffering by which she is distinguished is her having been pierced through the neck with a sword; to this the legend adds, that she did not expire until the Blessed Sacrament had been administered to her, her life being miraculously prolonged. She is generally represented carrying a dish, or shell, on which are two eyes; she has also a wound in the throat, or a sword piercing through her neck; sometimes she carries a lamp in allusion to her name. Her festival being so near the shortest day in the year, was the subject of the old rhyme:

Lucy light, Lucy light,
The shortest day, and the longest night.

- 16. *O Sapientia*. This day derives its name from the first of the *Greater Antiphons* to the *Magnificat*, commonly called the O's, anciently sung at Vespers in the English Church from this day until Christmas Eve. Their number varies from seven to twelve. In the Roman Breviary there are seven, viz.: December 17, *O Sapientia*; 18, *O Adonai*; 19, *O Radix Jesse*; 20, *O Clavis David*; 21, *O Oriens*; 22, *O Rex Gentium*; 23, *O Emmanuel*. The old English Breviaries added, *O Virgo Virginum*, and (on December 20 and 21) *O Thoma Didyme*, beginning the O's on December 16 instead of 17. Lately it has become a common practice to sing these O's at Evensong, in the place appointed for the Anthem. *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, with *Troits and Anthems*, gives the words of seven of them. In some Churches the O's are sung, as in the olden time, as *Antiphons* to the *Magnificat*.
- 21. *S. Thomas*, Apostle and Martyr, surnamed Didymus, or the Twin, appears to have been a Jew, and probably a Galilean; he is said to have travelled and promulgated Christianity among the Parthians, Medes, and Persians, to have been the Apostle of the Indies, and martyred at Meliapour, on the coast of Coromandel, at the instigation of the Brahmins, by the people, who threw stones and darts at him, and ended his life by running him through the body with a lance. Wheatly says that the Church recommends S. Thomas to our meditation at this season as a fit preparation to our Lord's Nativity; for, although he first doubted the Resurrection, he afterwards had the greatest evidence of its truth; and, "unless, with S. Thomas, we believe that the same Jesus, whose birth we immediately afterwards commemorate, is the very same Christ, our Lord and our God, neither His Birth, Death, nor Resurrection, will avail us anything." He is represented with a spear, or with an arrow, or a long staff.
- 25. *Christmas Day*. On this day the Holy Church throughout the world celebrates the greatest of all Feasts, the Nativity of our

Lord and Saviour JESUS CHRIST. The observance of this day in the Western Church is most ancient. In the East it was for some time confounded with the Epiphany. It has ever been kept with great solemnity, festivity, and rejoicing. S. Chrysostom styles it "the most venerable and tremendous of all festivals," and "the metropolis or mother of all festivals."

- 26. *S. Stephen*, Deacon and Proto-Martyr, A. D. 33, was one of the seven Deacons appointed by the Apostles to manage the public fund established for the relief of the poor, and to attend to minor ecclesiastical occupations. He is called the Proto-Martyr, or the first witness of the New Testament, and was stoned to death in the year 33. His relics are said to have been discovered through the agency of a dream, four hundred years after his death, and were then translated from Jerusalem to Rome, and deposited in the same tomb with those of S. Laurence. He belongs to the highest class of Martyrs, having suffered death both in will and deed; and is represented with a stone in his hand, and a book, or with stones in his lap.
- 27. *S. John*, Apostle and Evangelist, c. A. D. 99. The beloved disciple was a Galilean, son of Zebedee and Salome, and brother to S. James the Greater. In the division of the provinces which, it is said, the Apostles made among themselves, Asia fell to his share. It is recorded that he dwelt in a house which he possessed at Jerusalem, at least till the death of the Blessed Virgin, which happened about A. D. 48. Some time after this event S. John took his journey into Asia. Many Churches of note and eminence were of his foundation—Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea, and others; but his chief place of residence was at Ephesus, where S. Paul had many years before settled a Church, and constituted S. Timothy Bishop of it. Having spent many years in the work of evangelization, he was at length, by order of Domitian, cast into a cauldron of boiling oil, and signally preserved amid that fiery trial. The cruel Emperor, not convinced by this miracle, had the Apostle deported to Patmos. Here it was about the end of Domitian's reign that he wrote his Apocalypse. After the death of the Emperor S. John returned to Ephesus and took charge of the See of S. Timothy who had been martyred, and by the assistance of seven Bishops governed that large diocese. Here, at the request of the Bishops of Asia, he wrote his Gospel; he first, however, caused them to proclaim a general fast, to seek the blessing of Heaven on so great and solemn an undertaking, which being done, he set about it. The two great objects which the Apostle had in view in composing it were, first, to obviate the heresies of those times (especially of Ebion, Cerinthus, and others who began openly to deny Christ's Divinity, and that he had any existence before His Incarnation); the other was that he might supply those passages of the Evangelical History which the other Evangelists had omitted.