

(WRITTEN FOR THE SUNBEAM.)

## THE LAND OF THE GOLDEN STRAND.

THEY tell of a ship that sailed the sea  
Till she sighted a distant shore,  
Where the mountain's hue was of wondrous blue.

And the winds sweet perfumes bore;  
And a city stood in a mighty wood,  
With towers and domes sublime;  
'Twas the long sought Land of the Golden Strand,  
A land of the olden time.

Soon a pilot rowed from the shining shore  
That ship in port to place,  
But the captain laughed, and a bumper quaffed,  
As he sneered in the pilot's face:  
"Think'st thou I," said he, "who sailed the sea  
"In hours of peril and fear,  
"Cannot steer my way, thro' yon playful spray,  
"To an anchorage safe and near?"

Reluctant the pilot left the ship,  
And the captain laughed, ho! ho!  
And turned her prow towards the sun that now  
O'er the city fair sank low.  
Full little thought he, he ne'er might see  
That bright sun set again,  
Yet he soon, alack! wished the pilot back,  
And repented his vauntings vain!

Too late! too late! nor helm nor sail  
Would the shuddering ship obey;  
Hearts chilled with fear, for grim and near  
A yawning whirlpool lay.  
In vain! in vain! to struggle or strain  
Mid the waters' deadly fold,  
Engulphed ere long, in the vortex strong,  
The mad wave o'er her rolled.

And such was the fearful doom they tell  
Of these men in the days of old;  
Swift death they died, at that hour of pride,  
In their arrogance overbold.  
On Life's great sea, not so should we  
Disdain meet help and care,  
For our goal, so grand, is the Heavenly Land,  
And the pilot's name is "Prayer."

SLIEVE-NA-MON.

## CHRISTMAS IN ROME.

(WRITTEN FOR THE SUNBEAM.)

CHRISTMAS is coming! The flowers are dead, the leaves have fallen; cold breezes are blowing, and the ground is white with snow. I know that you love the snow, dear Sunbeams, and the sleigh-bells and the Canadian Christmas; but come away with me to the land of sunbeams, where there is no snow, no winter: to beautiful Italy and dear Rome. Everything that is grand and precious is there to rejoice the Christian, and especially the Catholic heart. And Christmas there, as everywhere that the Catholic Church has set her blessed, motherly steps, is the feast of the children.

In your own churches, what do you see? A grotto and the Manger and the Infant Jesus within it. A sweet and touching picture!—but come with me and we will kneel together, not before a picture, but before the real Manger itself, in which our Lord was laid by Mary, His Virgin Mother, that first Christmas night, long ago.

Now, it is Christmas Eve in Rome. Would you think so? The sky is bright and clear, and oh, so blue—without one trace of cloud. The sunshine is streaming and flooding over all the city, from St. Peter's Dome and St. Onofrio to the Pincio and Palatine hills—the warm, cheering sunshine. Everyone is happy. A multitude of people, Romans and strangers, pass along the streets. Let us follow. We are in the Via St. Sisto, and in the distance, straight before us, rises an immense edifice with domes and towers: it is the church of Santa Maria Maggiore—St. Mary Major—for it is the greatest church in Rome, dedicated to the Mother of God. An immense throng is winding its way towards it. There are young and old, Romans and foreigners; every foreigner must be there. The Roman lives in Rome, but the stranger may never tread its streets again. Especially remarkable are the young seminarists in their various costumes. This group in blue is the Greek College; that one in scarlet is German. These in violet are from the Roman Seminary; those in violet and black are Scotch. Some have red cinctures and they are Propagandists; some have cinctures of black and purple, and

they are Belgians; each college is recognized. So on we go, past the fountain where Bernini's Triton blows the sparkling waters high in the air from a massive horn; past the church of San Carlo, which is exactly the size of one of the pillars of St. Peter's, and down into the piazza, across which is Santa Maria Maggiore, called also St. Mary of the Snows and St. Mary of the Manger.

This church is very old. It dates from the early part of the fourth century. A holy man, the patrician John, and his spouse, had a vision one night in which they were told to build a church on the spot of Rome found covered with snow in the morning. When the sun rose on the 5th of August—the season of the most intense and continued heat—his part of the Esquiline was as deep-hidden in snow as are the slopes of Mount Royal in January. Pope Liberius had received a similar message from heaven. Surrounded by his clergy and the people of Rome, who had assembled on the spot of the miracle, the Holy Pontiff himself traced in the snow the site of a church called St. Mary of the Snows, and in the year 352 he consecrated it. Each year, on the 5th of August, this miracle is commemorated, and during the ceremonies shower after shower of white rose leaves and other beautiful white blossoms is thrown from the domes until the pavement is covered.

We cross the piazza and are at the foot of the flight of stone steps that encircle the entrance. Little children flock around, with brown faces and black curly hair; little boys in coats of blue and vests of red; little girls in frocks of red and blue, and shawls about their shoulders, each one wearing the sandals of the *crocciar* peasant, each one clamouring for a few pennies for the "gentle stranger," Signora, Signora, *Qualche cosa per amore del Bambino*—"Something for the sake of the Infant." We satisfy them, and dropping a penny in the hand of the old woman at the door, we enter one of the grandest churches in Christendom. We cannot stay to examine it; we must repair to the sacristy, whither all are hurrying. At last our turn comes; we are in and moving towards an altar blazing with candles. Here, in its rich reliquary, is the Manger of Bethlehem! Ah! truly, truly, this is Christmas Eve. What matters it that we are far from home!—we forget that we are alone on this Christmas Eve: we hasten to kneel in reverence before the Crib in which lay the infant form of Our Saviour, Our God. We kneel as the shepherds knelt, as the angels knelt, as St. Joseph, as Mary knelt: we pray from the depths of our heart, and our eyes fill with tears.

It is the true Manger. You may easily understand how sacred to the early Christians of Judea were all the places and things sanctified by the touch or the presence of Our Lord. As soon as the Gospel spread to other countries, the new Christians would visit Palestine and pay reverence to the Holy Places. The Empress St. Helena, mother of Constantine the Great, visited Bethlehem and had the manger enclosed in silver and the grotto covered with the richest marble. When the Mohammedans invaded Palestine, the manger was carried into the West, in the year 642. Pope Theodore placed it in the church of St. Mary of the Snows,—hence its other title of St. Mary of the Manger,—and near it the body of St. Jerome, that he who in life had guarded it, might still repose by its side in death. The reliquary, or case, is the gift of a princess. In finely chiselled silver are represented Our Lord in the manger of Bethlehem, the shepherds kneeling around Him, and the wise men who have come to adore the King of the Jews. Above these bas-reliefs is the crystal case enclosing the wood of the manger. The five pieces that formed the manger have been separated and are hung one above the other: they can be seen distinctly through the clear crystal. The larger pieces are about two-and-a-half feet in length and four or five inches in breadth. The wood is dark and blackened by time—but all the jewels of the world would not equal its worth! After the arms of Mary, it was the first resting place of our dear Lord upon earth. It was the first throne of the King of kings, and it saw the first homage paid to Him. The angels of heaven stood around it—and since then how many Christians, how many saints have knelt by it during 19 centuries? About it to-day kneels a vast assemblage; people from all quarters of the globe; old and young; men, women, children; nuns and their pupils; priests and seminarists of every nation, of every religious order, are here; all the world owes honor and veneration to it, for the Saviour of the world lay in it, a babe, little, humble, poor as the poorest babe on earth.

The manger is exposed but once in the year. It is kept in a chapel of the church, and on Christmas Eve is brought into the sacristy, where we see it. Then the great church is illuminated. Vespers are begun. A Cardinal presides. The organs peal out triumphal tones; the glorious voices of the choir's famous singers begin the Psalms. A great hush falls upon the crowded Basilica as a heavenly voice begins the hymn *Jesu, Redemptor omnium*, "Jesus, Redeemer of mankind;" and nothing is so sweet as the stanza *Memento rerum Conditor*. A procession then forms and the sacred relic is carried back to its own chapel. On Christmas morning it is again brought forth and placed on the high altar. Pontifical Mass follows with the most splendid music and imposing ceremonies. It remains in that place until after Vespers of Christmas Day, when the four youngest Canons of the church, preceded by all the clergy, and followed by the Cardinal, carry it back to the chapel. Thousands upon thousands are crowded into the church—a dense mass fills the aisle down which the procession will advance. The sacristans and choir boys carrying torches come first; a passage is made; still each one strives to catch a last glimpse of the manger as it passes, and the children are told to look closely and see the manger of the Bambino, the Sweet Infant. Slowly passes the procession into the chapel. There writings are drawn up, stating that the relic was taken out and put back in the presence of the clergy and giving the details of the ceremony. It is then enclosed and remains unseen and untouched for a year, until next Christmas Eve.

We turn to go, our hearts rejoiced and consoled. But before we leave, look up towards the ceiling. It is gilded. Well, that gold is the first gold brought from America to Europe. You are celebrating the fourth centenary of America's discovery. Do not forget the ceiling of Santa Maria Maggiore. The first offerings of America's riches were dedicated to God. None but the Catholic Church can point to such facts. She does not seek riches, possessions, power—no; she sought and seeks the glory of God. America is Catholic in its origin, and soon must be so in every respect. The Church will continue to devote to God her every step onward in the Land of the West, as she gave to Him the first gold that came from its generous bosom.

One moment more. Enter with me into this magnificent chapel, the Borghese chapel—do you see that rather dim painting above the altar? It is the portrait of the Blessed Virgin, painted by St. Luke. It was placed here when the church was built. At its feet the Popes, Saints Symmacus, Gregory, Adrien, Leo, Pascal, passed nights in prayer. Innumerable miracles have been wrought here through it. Let us kneel and pray. And now we leave Santa Maria Maggiore; the night is coming on, and so, dear Sunbeams, good bye.—LEO.

## A DEAR LITTLE SCHEMER.

THERE was a little daughter once, whose feet were,—oh, so small! That when the Christmas Eve came round, they wouldn't do at all. At least she said they wouldn't do, and so she tried another's, And folding her wee stocking up, she slyly took her mother's, "I'll pin this big one here," she said,—then sat before the fire, She never knew the tumult rare that came upon the roof! She never heard the patter of a single reindeer hoof; She never knew how someone came and looked his shrewd surprise At the wee foot and stocking—so different in size! She only knew when morning dawned, that she was safe in bed, "It's Christmas! Ho!" and merrily she raised her pretty head; Then wild with glee, she saw what dear old Santa Claus had done, And ran to tell the joyful news, to each and every one: "Mamma! Papa! Please come and look! a lovely doll, and all!" And "See how full the stocking is! Mine would have been too small!" I borrowed this for Santa Claus. It isn't fair you know, To make him wait forever for a little girl to grow."