

Practical Papers.

CHRISTMAS.

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WITH the close of this month comes one of the most noted of Christian solemnities—the festival of Christmas. The twenty-fifth day of December, is celebrated throughout nearly all Christendom as the anniversary of the birth of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Around the earth, like a jubilant wave, rolls the glad refrain—"Christ is born!" The white-robed choirs of stately Cathedrals, the worshippers in village Churches, and little children of happy Christian households, take up the message of the angel, "Behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to *all people*. For unto you is born this day in the City of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord."

We need scarcely say that the observance of this festival is not of New Testament origin.

It is impossible for us to ascertain from the Gospels, or from any other source, the precise day of Christ's birth; and it was not until the fourth century that the theologians of the East and the West, after long investigation, agreed upon the 25th of December as the day of our Saviour's nativity. The Eastern Church adopted the Christmas festival from the Western, about the year of our Lord, 380: but the first observance of the Nativity is attributed by the decretal letters to Pope Telesphorus, early in the second century. Some trace the origin of this festival to the Feast of Dedication celebrated by the Jews; other writers believe it to have been called into existence by the heathen Saturnalia, a Bacchanalian winter festival. Doubtless the institution arose at a time when the tendency of the Church was to multiply festivals in honor of Christ, and as many other events in the Saviour's history were being marked by a distinct celebration, it seemed proper that his birth should have the same honorable distinction.

In Roman Catholic Churches, Christmas-day is ushered in by the performance of three masses. One at midnight, the traditionary hour of Christ's birth; one at day-break, and one in the morning. There are also scenic repre-