

PRAYER FOR UNITY.

O God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, our only Saviour, the Prince of Peace, give us grace seriously to lay to heart the great dangers we are in by our unhappy divisions. Take away all hatred and prejudice and whatever else may hinder us from godly union and concord; that, as there is but one Body and one Spirit, and one Hope of our calling! one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of us all, so we may henceforth be all of one heart, and of one soul, united in one holy bond of truth and peace, of faith and charity, and may with one mind and one mouth glorify Thee, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE DATE OF CHRISTMAS.

THE objection raised by some sects who do not observe the most joyous Festival of the Catholic Church, that we have no certain grounds for regarding the 25th day of December as the day on which Jesus was born, is a shallow irrelevance. The Church of Christ for some fourteen centuries has, with one consent, kept this happy Festival on the day known throughout Christendom as "Christmas Day." The family of a man has surely the right to fix the day upon which they will celebrate his birthday. The Queen of England appoints other days than the true date of her birth for the Court to honour as that anniversary. It is not the "day" we celebrate, but the "event," hence the Church had the right to appoint any one day in the whole year for celebrating the birth of Jesus. An illustration of this freedom is given us by the only Christians who are conspicuous for their refusal to observe Christmas Day. The Presbyterians keep up the Puritan folly of ignoring the day because the Romanists observe it, yet they celebrate the Festival of the Resurrection each Sabbath, although this Feast is also a Romish observance! But a more singular inconsistency is seen in the universal celebration of St. Andrew's day on the 30th of November by Presbyterians the world over. Yet the 30th of November has no connection with St. Andrew even by tradition. His bones, it is said, landed in Britain on that day; but it is hardly a Puritanic thing to honour a day because the bones of a Saint came ashore on that day, but this is what is annually done by those who reproach us for keeping Christmas Day. It may well have been that the early disciples were so overwhelmed with thoughts of the Life, the Death, the Resurrection of their Lord; were so overpowered by the magnitude of their task as founders of His Church, that they gave no heed to mere considerations as to the dates of certain events in the human Life of Jesus. It would have been to them utterly inconceivable that those who profess to love the very name of Jesus of Nazareth would disdain to meet with the vast multitude of His people once a year to commemorate the Incarnation. When the first thought of observing this day of days came into some pious mind in Apostolic days, it might have been said:—

"The moment of His birth
None can remember,—none
Recall His earliest glance from earth
Up to yon glorious sun,
Nor trace that point of memory
When infant thought began to be."

It is generally thought the formal appointment of Christmas took place early in the second century. It was for some time a moveable feast, and by eastern churches was held late in spring or early summer. In the fourth century an investigation was made as to the most likely date, and it was decided universally to consecrate the 25th of December to the purpose of commemorating the birth of Jesus. The chief grounds for this decision were the tables of the censors in the Archives of Rome. Although the proofs were not absolute as to the accuracy of this date, yet the Festival was from that time universally held on the day selected. Christmas Day has been ever since annually kept in honour as the day sacred to the memory of the most stupendous event in the annals of humanity, as the day (or night, for the tradition is that the Nativity occurred at midnight, which

"All hail with uncontrolled delight
And general voice, the happy night
That to the cottage, as the crown,
Brought tidings of salvation down."

Of all the circles of festivals Christmas is the most supremely human. Nay, more, of all the feasts of our race, Pagan or Christian, the birthday of Jesus is the only one which is based upon such an universal, tender, and pure instinct, that all races, conditions and ages of mankind can enter into its significance and share its joys. The music of Christmas touches the heart strings of humanity so that they vibrate in joyous unison, evidencing that He Whom we honor at Christmas tide made the harp of sympathy which sings with joy when the song of Jesus' birth fills Christendom with melody.

CHRISTMAS PEACE.

REJOICE in the Lord always, again I say rejoice. This is a glorious text, and one fit to be the key-note of Christmas day. If we will take it to heart it will tell us how to keep Christmas day. St. Paul has been speaking of two good women, who seem to have had some difference; and he beseeches them to make up their difference, and be of the same mind in the Lord. And then he goes on to tell them, and all Christian people, why they should make up their differences. And for that reason, I suppose, the Church has chosen it for the epistle before Christmas day, on which all men are to make friends with each other, and rejoice in the Lord. Let your moderation, he says, be known to all men. The Greek word signifies forbearance, reasonable dealing, consideration for one another, readiness to give way, not standing too severely on one's own rights. Now this is just the temper in which we ought to meet our friends at Christmas—f forbearance. They may not have always behaved well to us. Be it so, no more have we to them. Let us, once in the year at least, forget old grudges. Let us do as we would be done by; give and

forgive; live and let live; bury our past quarrels, and shake hands over their graves, for the Lord is at hand. He cannot mistake. He sees both sides of a matter, and on all sides—a thousand sides which we cannot see. He can judge better than we. Let Him judge. Why do I say, Let Him judge. He has judged already, weeks, months ago, as soon as each quarrel has happened; and, perhaps, He found us in the wrong as well as our neighbors; and, if so, the least said the soonest mended. Let us forgive and forget, lest we be neither forgotten nor forgiven. And, because the Lord is at hand, be anxious about nothing. The word here is the same as in the sermon on the Mount. It means do not fret; do not terrify yourselves; for the Lord is at hand; He knows what you want and will He not give it? Is not Christmas day a sign that He will give it—a pledge of His love? What did He do on the first Christmas day? What did He show Himself to be on the first Christmas day? Now, here is the root of the whole matter, and a deep root it is: as deep as the beginning of all things which are, or ever were, or ever will be. And yet if we believe our Bibles, it is a root which we all may find. What did the angels say the first Christmas night? Peace on earth and good will to men. That is what God proclaimed. That is what He said that He had, and would give. Now, says the Apostle, if you will believe the latter half of this same Christmas message, then the first half of it will come true to you. If you will believe that God's will is a good will to you, then you will have peace on earth. For believe in Christmas-day; believe that the Lord is at hand; that He has been made man forever and ever; and that to the Man Christ Jesus all power is given in heaven and earth; and then, if you want ought, instead of grudging or grinding your neighbors, ask Him. In everything let your requests be made known unto God; and then the peace of God will keep your hearts through Christ Jesus. You will feel at peace with God through Christ Jesus, because you have found out that God is at peace with you; that God is not against you but for you; that God does not hate you but love you; and if God is at peace with you, what cause have you to be at war with him? And so the message of Christmas-day will bring you peace. You will be at peace with your neighbors, through Christ Jesus. When you see God stooping to make peace with sinful men, you will be ashamed to be quarrelling with them. When you see God full of love, you will be ashamed to keep up grudging and spite. When you see God's heaven full of light, you will be ashamed to be dark yourselves; your hearts will go out freely to your fellow-creatures; you will long to be friends with every one you meet; and you will find in that the highest pleasure which you ever felt in life. But mind one thing—what sort of peace this peace of God is. It passes all understanding; the very loftiest understanding. The cleverest and most learned men that ever lived could not have found it—we know they did not find it—by their own cleverness and learning.