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## A CHRISTMAS LEGEND.

It Survives and Is Yet Told in Central France.

In the patois of Central France are preserved many touching Christmas legends. In passing through villages, in conversing with the peasants, in visiting the laborer's hut, one sees how the imagination of these simple people is struck with the least details of the Divine infancy.

"In one of my excursions through the country," says a traveler, "I found myself one Saturday in the house of a good peasant. Of course, I assisted at mass and at the sermon of the day. After ordinary prayers the cure spoke of the childhood of Jesus. I was glad of this opportunity of observing how the good pastor would fix the attention of the flock which he had tended for more than forty years with the charity of an apostle and unbounded devoutness.

"He commenced: 'Jesus was five years old; he lived with his parents in the village of Nazareth, assisting his father in his humble labors. His mother kept in heart the words, full of wisdom, which fell from the lips of the Divine Child. Not far from them lived a woman who had a son of the same age as Jesus. This child was suddenly seized with so profound a grief that convulsive sobs escaped from his breast; day and night the cries were the same, and the poor mother could find nothing to console him. Despair took possession of her heart. 'My child,' she said, 'is very sick. What can I do my God, to relieve him?'

"Suddenly a thought came to her. She would go to the house of her neighbor, that Virgin Mary, tell her all her trouble and ask her by what means she could calm her dear child. 'Jesus listened attentively to the plaint of the desolate mother, while the child continued to cry. Then, approaching the poor little one, he embraced him tenderly. Immediately his tears ceased. He looked sweetly at Jesus, and an ineffable smile lighted up his pretty face.

"The happy mother was astonished at this prodigy, and turning toward Mary: 'Holy woman,' said she, 'your son will be the greatest among the greatest.'

"Jesus pressed the hand of the child, saying: 'This one shall be my brother, he will suffer and die for my sake. Weep not, O privileged mother, but rejoice.'

"The woman went home, pondering on what she had seen and heard, and blessing God in her heart. After this event the children grew up together. Jesus instructed His friends in things so marvellous that He alone understood them. 'After the death of our Lord, a man, a saint animated with divine love, was stoned to death for the faith, and owned the era of martyrs. The first stone cast at him struck his face at the very spot which Jesus had blessed. This martyr, which the Christ child had consoled, accomplished by his death, the prediction of the Saviour.'

## THE CHILDREN'S MASS.

When Three Thousand Little Ones Assemble Weekly—Antics of the Urchins.

A stranger who happened to be in the neighborhood of Twelfth and May streets any Sunday morning about the hour of nine would think that he had discovered a portentous leak in that famous shoe that Mother Goose tells about. The children are so numerous that the conductors on the street cars certainly don't know what to do, and they make no bones, to use an anatomical expression, about acknowledging the fact.

Think of three thousand children, mostly between the ages of five and twelve, flocking like a swarm of birds to one spot, chattering, laughing, skipping, whistling, darting in and out, ahead of all staid, respectable-looking citizens, making the sunshine seem brighter, the air more exhilarating by their presence, by this wonderful avalanche of youth! They are going to Mass, these three thousand children, at that well known and venerable sanctuary, the Jesuit church, and they try, but mostly in vain, to appear sober and solemn, as befits this serious religious act.

The children's Mass is a new institution in the Church of the Holy Family, started only a few weeks ago. Formerly the children of the parish heard Mass in the chapels of their respective schools, and there are six parochial schools in that district, which, by the way, have been relieving the state of the education of twenty-one hundred children. But

though the chapels have been increasing from year to year they have not kept pace with the increasing number of children. Wages may be growing less and work getting scarce, but there is never any scarcity of babies in that portion of the West Side. The average number of children to a household would make the despairing statisticians of France grow green with envy.

So the chapels being no longer able to hold the children, it was deemed advisable to assemble them in a body in the church. The first Sunday the experiment was tried a hitch occurred, which for a short time threatened disastrous results. The early service, for masses are held every half hour beginning at five, was late, the congregation forgetting the new arrangement was slow in leaving the church. The consequence was West Twelfth and the neighboring side streets for blocks were a swarming mass of children that baffled the control of those in charge, and drove policemen and street car conductors frantic.

"Shure, they will be killed by the hundred," ejaculated one weary driver, as he tried to pull a boy down from his roost on a telegraph pole, while two more danced a jig in front of the clanging trolley car. "Old Nick himself must be in these boys, and if he isn't taking care of them sure somebody else is, for it's the marvel of heaven that none of them get hurt!"

But whether it was Old Nick that took care of them or somebody else, and judging from the fact that they were on their way to church Old Nick would never have been guilty of so misguided an act, there were none of them hurt, and no one seeing them a short while later, when safely ensconced in the church with their hymn cards meekly raised, singing like innocent cherubs, would ever believe they were the same gleefully uproarious lot.

The Sunday following things went more smoothly, and there was less confusion at the door. The policemen now breathe a sigh of relief, having grown accustomed to this child army that weekly swoops down upon them. It is true that a particularly crusty one has been known to again remark as some little chap has slid out unharmed from under the wheels of a wagon or a car and triumphantly stuck out his tongue at the angry "pop" something or other about Old Nick. Practically it was: "Old Nick takes care of his own," but bystanders frown at the sentiment, while even the motor men on the cars let the boys jig all they want on the track, convinced that nothing can hurt these little eels of children.

The girls have always been pretty well behaved, though there are a few tomboys and madcaps among them, too. As a rule, however, they content themselves like their elders in the sex, with gossip, inspection of each other's clothes and supercilious glances at their less fashionable neighbors. For human nature, especially the nature feminine, is the same at five as at twenty-five, and it displays its foibles even at the door of the church.

But inside it is different. At first there is a bit of a scramble, of course, and some of those with the most unquellable spirits go up the dim aisle with a suspicious skip and lift in their walk, but the greater number sober down at once and assume all the dignity that befits them as members of the congregation in good and unquestioned standing. The different schools are marshaled separately, each with several sisters of charity in charge, and each school has its own place in the church. There is St. Agnes' school, with 400 children, Holy Family with 550, St. Joseph with 400, Guardian Angels with 200, St. Aloysius with 80, and the Sacred Heart with 500, besides the children of Catholic faith from the six public schools that are in that parish.

Father Curran, who has charge of this children's Mass, frankly admits that he never could manage it at all only that he has lived all his life in the Jesuit parish and understands its people.

"A stranger would have got into hot water here at once," said he, "for such is the rivalry between the schools that one has to be continually on the lookout not to offend them. A child from the Sacred Heart will be indignant if put, by mistake, with the children from St. Joseph's, and vice versa, and, of course, the public school children are a class by themselves."

The children's Mass is doing another good thing for the Jesuit parish. It is not only making religion practical and comprehensible to little folks, by giving them short instructions suitable to their years, making church going a thing of pleasure, radiant joy and happy as the unspiced nature itself, but is making possible the congregational music of the future; for if the present generation does not sing well, the next generation will.

There is only one fault to be found with some of the hymns, and that is

they are too lacrymose. "On bended knee a guilty race" has even a touch of the ludicrous as one looks at the innocent, childish faces and hears the ringing of the joy in their throats. Religion, to attract children, must be kept child-like, and these agonizing sobs of repentance belong properly to maturer years. There is no use piling on the sorrow with children who have but skimmed the surface of sin. The principle of the kindergarten, that every word and act of a child's life should be sincere and heartfelt, is doubly true of religious acts. Therefore, children should neither play nor sing anything they do not understand and mean. Religion may be grave and solemn for the grown-ups, but by all means let this be radiant and joyous for the children. Doubtless these hymns will be improved upon in the permanent hymn card.

The children's Mass is a great institution. Anyone who will step into the dimly-lighted Church of Holy Family at 9 o'clock on Sunday and listen to buoyant voices of the little ones, see the bowed heads at the blessing, hear perchance the small fists thumping their breasts in infantile contrition, can not but be touched and benefited by the sight.

They are the child soldiers of the army and they await well for the campaigns of the future.—Mary Joseph Onahan, in the New York World.

## WHEN DOES THE NEXT CENTURY BEGIN.

This question seems to be as persistent as tho' it were one arising in the domain of politics. The question as it is being debated, does not refer to the time of Christ's birth, but to the meaning of the figures used to express a date. Does October 24, 1896, mean, for instance, 1,896 years, 10 months and 24 days after? The London Times considers the subject of enough interest to devote a column to its consideration by a correspondent. We extract some portions of the articles:

"The question is two-fold, what lawyers called, 'a mixed question of law and fact,' and may be divided as follows: (1) What do we mean by a given date, say February 10, 1896—i.e. what theory do we hold as to the correct method of dating; and (2) how does our theory, whatever it may be, agree with actual usage? There can be no doubt that one person may hold that the next century begins on the 1st of January, 1900, and another that it begins on the 1st of January, 1901, and yet that both of them may be in full possession of their faculties. It is not a case of strong language, and cannot be settled offhand, by the mere statement that 99 is not 100. Most people, however, unskilled in arithmetic, will agree so far. The truth is, each view depends on a theory of dating which is in actual use. The color of the shield depends upon which side of it you are looking at.

"Let us suppose a person to be writing a letter some eighteen months after the birth of Christ. How will he date his letter? Will he write say, July 10, year 2, or July 10, year 2? If he writes the former he will consistently hold that the next century begins January 1, 1900; if he writes the latter, he will hold that it begins January 1, 1891. The first view is based on the theory that the time specified is one year six months and nine days, (and some hours, to be exact), after the birth of our Lord; the second view is based on the theory that the time specified is the second year, sixth month and tenth day after the same event. According to the first view February 10, 1896, means, 1,896 years, one month, nine days, (and some hours. According to the second view February 10, 1896, means the 1,896th year, second month and tenth day, and we are consequently in the 1,896th year. According to the first view the number of the year is a cardinal number; according to the second view, it is an ordinal number. Both of these methods can conceivably be maintained, and, as stated, above, both are in use. If we write a letter in the afternoon, and wish to specify the exact time, we date—e.g. 4:30 p.m., which means four hours and thirty minutes after 12 o'clock. There we use a cardinal number. We might equally well write in the fifth hour, but as a fact we do not so write. Again in walking as soon as you reach the tenth mile stone from a given starting place you have completed ten miles. So when a boy is more than ten years old, we say he is in his thirteenth year, and he does not have to wait another year before getting into his teens. Again, in the Book of Common Prayer, the next century is referred to as a period, 'from the year 1800 till the year 1899, inclusive.' All these calculations are based on the reasonable ground that in concrete reckoning of

time and space we do not begin with 1, but with 0, and that there is the same space between 0 and 1 as there is between 1 and 2. The question then is, when we write 1896 are we using cardinal or ordinal number? It is clear that if we are using a cardinal number the last day of the century is December 31, 1899, while if we are using an ordinal number the last day of the century is December 31, 1900.

"Arguing then in vacuo, if we may so express it, one system is as good as the other, but the following considerations seem to lead to the conclusion that we used the number of the year as an ordinal number, and that consequently the century does not end until December 31, 1900: (1) In English we use the original number in the day of the month, we say, 1st, 2nd, 3rd, etc., and not 1, 2, 3, etc. The name of the month also is equivalent to an ordinal number, because by February—e.g., we mean the second month. It would thus be illogical to suppose that the year is a cardinal number when the month and day are ordinals. (2) If we turn the year into Latin, it is an ordinal number—viz., anno millesimo nonagesimo sexto. If it is objected that the Latin number may be ordinal and yet the English be cardinal, the obvious reply is that by this number the Latin means the same year as we mean by 1896 and not what we mean by 1895. (3) The parallel table of years made by chronologists in comparing the system of dating with another made 1 B.C. followed immediately by A.D. Thus in Zumpt's Annales, (to take a well-known book) the year of Rome (A.U.C.) 753 corresponds with B. C. 1, and the next year with B. C. 1. And this is, of course not an arbitrary calculation of Zumpt, but he is merely carrying on the accepted mode of reckoning. Strictly speaking A.D. (Anno Domini) is applicable only to this mode of dating, for if a cardinal number is used it should be P.C. (Post Christum.) On the whole, we may consider we are tolerably safe in holding that the next century begins on January 1, 1901, though great names may be quoted on the other side."—Literary Digest.

## THE ANGELS.

Their Existence, Their Nature and Their Powers.

That there are angels is an article of Catholic faith, defined by the Lateran Council. Their existence is proved by the Sacred Scriptures. Some heretics (the Hussites) denied their existence, asserting that the angels mentioned in the bible are merely ideal or poetical beings. Others have taught that angels are disembodied souls of men. Such vagaries, cessively in the order of being, from that of having an infallible and authoritative teaching Church, such as Christ has established. Indeed, the order which God adopted in creation requires angels for its completion. A certain gradation of perfection is observable in creatures, which implies that there must be beings wholly spiritual in their nature, between God and man. We see degrees of perfection added to creatures, exalting them successively in the order of being, from the clay we stand on up to man. Man being both spiritual and material, the distance between him and God leaves room for another order of beings still more perfect than man. The gap in the gradation of perfection is filled by the wholly spiritual beings—the angels. Beginning with inanimate and inorganic matter, there comes next in the scale of perfection, the Vegetable Kingdom. In flowers and shrubs and trees, there is life, without sensibility or instinct. All know the difference between a live and a dead plant. In the animal kingdom, another degree of perfection is added. In animals there is not only vegetable life, by which they grow and increase like plants, but there is sensibility—the power of sensation—and there is intelligence. Passing all the different grades of perfection in the merely animal creature, we come, at last, to the monarch of the earth,—to man. In him is the sum of all the perfections of all inferior creatures, to which is added the wondrous perfection of the human soul. Intellect, reason and free will, raise him high above the earth, and above all the creatures that God has made upon it, made of the dust of the earth. He has all the perfection of inorganic matter. Since he grows and increases from birth to maturity, he has the perfection of vegetable life. Sensible to heat and cold, to pleasure and pain, he is endowed with all the advantages of animal life. Gifted with reason, in the light of which, nature is an open book to him; with an everlasting longing for immortality and eternal happiness; with consciousness of responsibility, and with free will to overcome his animal propensities—he is manifestly the most perfect of God's earthly creatures.

But does this gradation of perfection end in man? No, there is a link wanting to complete the chain of God's creatures. One link more will connect all his creatures, from the dust of the earth to the throne of the creator. That link is supplied by the angels. They are higher in order of perfection than man, for he is "a little lower than angels." (Ps. viii. 5). Unlike man, who is a composite being of soul and body, the angels are wholly spiritual—"He hath made His angles spirits." (Heb. i. 7.) Hence all those sensations which we have through the senses, and those means of acquiring knowledge, which we have through them, are known to the angels. But this is a perfection in them, not a defect. The use of the senses is to convey knowledge of eternal things to the soul within the body. To have that knowledge without instrumentality of the bodily senses, belongs to a more perfect state of being. The organs of sense limit the powers of the soul, at best, and when any of them is injured or destroyed, that means of acquiring knowledge is imbedded or lost. That the angels have full knowledge of the material creation, is implied in the fact that they are employed in this world as "guardian angels" and "ministering spirits." (Heb. i. 14). Again, in the operations of mind, the angels are superior to man. Reason which is a perfection in us, when compared to mere animals, is an imperfection when we are compared with the angels. Reason is a slow means of discovering truth, and is useful only because our intellect is imperfect. Intellect perceives truth immediately on presentation; as in the proposition—"The whole is greater than any of its parts." But it needs the slower operation of reason to convince us that "any two sides of a triangle are together greater than a third." If we had the intellect of an angel, the truth of the latter assertion would, at once, be as clear to us as that of the former. We know that the angels need no process of reasoning to understand any truth, for as "they always see the face of the Father" (Matt. xxiii, 10) in that Beatific vision, their unclouded intellect beholds and understands all truths immediately. Yet, as they are creatures, and therefore first, their knowledge from contemplation of the Divine essence is limited. God alone, has perfect knowledge of Himself. But of all created things the angels have complete knowledge. All the laws of Nature, discovered and uncovered by man, are known to them. Of the mysteries of God, of future events, and the secrets of human hearts, their knowledge, naturally, is limited. Whatever they know of these, they know only by special revelation. Thus of the final coming of Christ on the "Last Day," our Lord said: "Of that day and hour no one knoweth, not the angels of Heaven, (Matt. xxiv, 36), and to God alone are the secrets of human hearts visible: 'Thou only knowest the hearts of the children of men' (2 Par. vi. 30). The angels have will and power over their own movements. The exercise of their will was manifested in their probation by both those who fell and by those who remained faithful to God. By a mere act of their will, they pass from place to place, and exercise power over other spirits and over material things. They can clothe themselves with a real body, or take the appearance of a body, as the Sacred Scriptures show. Witness the doings of the angel Raphael in favor of young Tobias and his family (Tobias v. etc.) and of the angel who in one night slew one hundred and eighty-five thousands of the Assyrians. The Bible supplies many examples of the power which the angels have in this world.

Bible commentators say that the angels were created when the earth was. In the text—"In the beginning God created Heaven and earth (Gen. i. 1) they take the word 'Heaven' to signify the angels. As to their number, the Angelic Doctor, Saint Thomas, says it exceeds every material multitude. The prophet Daniel, speaking of the angels before the throne of God, says: 'Thousands of thousands ministered to him, and ten thousand times a hundred thousand stood before him.' (Daniel vi. 10). No two angels are alike. They are of neither genus or species. Each of them is a separate creation. From the bible we learn that they are divided into three hierarchies, each of which contains three orders or choirs—nine choirs in all. First in rank are the Seraphim; next, the Cherubim; and after these, the Thrones. These three choirs compose the first hierarchy. The second hierarchy consists of the Dominions, the Virtues, and the Powers. And the third hierarchy includes the Principalities, the Archangels and the Angels. The word Angel, however, which signifies messenger, is applicable to them all; but each has its own proper name. The Archangel Michael, who is of the first order—the Seraphim—is the chief of all, as appears from the way in which St. John speaks to him in the Apocalypse.—Catholic Review.

Senate Reading Room