

THE TRUE WITNESS

AND CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

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CHRISTMAS GREETING.

To all our readers and friends we wish a "Merry Christmas." May this Christmas be, for each and all, one of real happiness and perfect enjoyment. There is no festival of all the year like Christmas; none other is so universal in its attractions; none other carries the young and the aged alike back to the cradle of redemption; none other is celebrated in every land with such accord of sentiment; none other tells so strikingly of home and all its blessings, of past joys, present pleasures and future hopes. "Old times are changed, old manners gone," sang Sir Walter; and truly the olden celebrations live only in song and story. But there remain sufficient of those ancient customs to fling an atmosphere of quaint enjoyment around this festive season. While we are in the full flush of Christmas, let us recall those touching lines of Marin MacDermott; they referred to exiles banished from the old land and from the dear firesides of their fathers—to-day these exiles and their children have built up happy homes for themselves in this new world, and at their boards of plenty they can think of their less fortunate fellow-countrymen, who enjoy not the luxuries that surround their own Christmas tree—

"When round the festive Christmas board,
Or by the Christmas hearth,
That glorious mingled draught is poured—
Wine, melody and mirth!
When friends long absent tell, low-toned,
Their joys and sorrows o'er,
And hand grasps hand, and eyelids fill,
And lips meet lips once more—
O! in that hour 'twere kindly done,
Some woman's voice would say—
'Forget not those who're sad to-night—
Poor exiles far away!'"

Gathered around the Christmas hearth,
with young hearts beating joyous in expectation of Santa Claus, and old hearts growing young, for an hour, in the happiness of the little ones beside them—

"When the oldest cask is open,
And the largest lamp is lit;
When the chestnuts glow on embers,
And the kid turns on the spit;
When the young and old, in circle,
Around the fire-brand close;
When the girls are weaving baskets,
And the lads are shaping bows;
When the old man mends his armour,
And trims his helmet-plume,
When the good wife's shuttle merrily
Goes flashing through the loom."

—let us hearken to the olden story, ever old and ever new—the story that has been repeated for nearly two thousand years, and that is as fresh to-day as when the first Christian mother rocked her baby to sleep with the hymn that the angels sang o'er Bethlehem and the account of the Infant that was found in a manger outside the city of David. It is the Christmas story *par excellence*; let us tell it again in our own simple way!

It was a chilly night in early winter; December was drawing to a close, but the spectre of the north had passed over the land and left a mantle of white to enwrap the shoulders and heads of the mountains. The pale moon hung low

upon the western horizon, and millions of stars twinkled in the cold, blue depths of the orient sky; the wind from beyond the Jordan was bitter and biting; it came from the deserts and it gathered strength as it paused amidst the recesses of Judean mountains. The sheep were huddled together on the hillsides; down in the valley the shepherds crowded around the feeble blaze of their fagot fires; the watch-dogs slumbered fitfully, and half-awakened by the cold, they barked in their disturbed dreams. Over in the City of David—called Bethlehem—strange scenes were being enacted. Hundreds had come up from all ends of the land to respond to the call of the Roman governor; the houses of the town were all occupied; men from the confines of Egypt, men from far-off Galilee, men from the "Eye of the East,"—Damascus—men and women from all quarters, in all their variety of costume and accent, filled the streets of the crowded city. Outside the walls was a khan, or stopping place; therein a few of the later arrivals found refuge. And in a grotto, within that khan, where an ox and an ass were eking out a supper of straw, a couple from Nazareth had found shelter. Not one of the thousands sleeping in that city knew of their presence; no one cared whether these poor travelers were housed or not; no one was aware of the wonderful things that were then and there taking place. Oblivious of the fact that the prophecies of four thousand years were being accomplished, the crowd slept on, and not a breath of warning came to the sleepers to tell of the greatest event that had occurred since the day of Creative miracle.

The moon sank below the hills of the west; the milky way still cast its arch across the dome of the sky; the stars twinkled joyously in their silent realm. The hour was midnight; the moment predicted throughout the ages had arrived. The crystal portals of heaven were drawn back, and the advance guard of the celestial army, all glittering in the splendor of God's eternal livery, with harps of gold in their hands and crowns of glory on their heads, stepped out into unmeasured space. Down through the stillness of the night came the first soft notes of an undying canticle, and the sound fell like the peaceful voice of God's sweetest singer upon the slumbering ears of the shepherds. As if aroused by some mysterious presence from their sleep, the half-startled, half-astonished flock-tenders arose and gazed about them. High up in the zenith they beheld a curtain of quivering light, like the fringes of the Aurora Borealis, sweeping downward to the hilltops; and faintly came the unison of harp and voice, both magical and mysterious in their effects. Nearer and nearer came the scintillating splendors, louder and louder came the songs of the advancing vision. The sheep shivered, with awe, and rushed together into a ravine, where they sought shelter from a danger they could not understand; the watch-dogs were mute with fear and they crouched behind the awakening shepherds.

All this time the throng slept on in the City of David; the wind blew its chill blast across the turbulent Jordan; and the world was wrapped in darkness, for it knew not the approaching redemption. At last the whole vault of heaven was filled with myriads of celestial beings; their wings of light flashed glories upon the scene, and the splendor of their sheen fell brightly upon the white turrets and grey battlements of ancient Bethlehem. Brighter grew the light; nearer came the angels; louder swelled the chorus. Down, down, descended the vast, the countless throng of

God's pure spirits, until, over the khan, they collected in one impenetrable mass of indescribable glory. Loud rang the harps on the winter air, and louder and sweeter swelled the voices of the choir; the shepherds listened; the wind ceased to blow from beyond the Jordan; all nature seemed hushed in mute adoration; but from the walls of the city to the distant declivities over by Jerusalem, and even beyond the sacred city, the refrain was wafted. "Gloria, in excelsis Deo," sang the angels; "Gloria, Deo!" replied the echoes that slumber around the lake of Tiberias; "Et in terra, pax hominibus boni voluntatis," responded the angelic singers; "Pax hominibus," answered voices from beyond the Valley of Giants.

The miracle of ages had been performed; the humble shepherds knelt at the Crib, and amidst the display of celestial rejoicing, they adored the Christ-child, the Savior of man! Slowly the heavenly army retired; back up through the blue abyss the angels disappeared; the light faded from the firmament; the voices died away in the distance of the Infinite; the gates of God's glory closed upon His envoys; the message of peace had been proclaimed to men; the Infant remained with the Holy Mother, and the long and heavy path of thirty-three years of suffering was commenced. The shepherds went back to their fagot fires, the sheep returned to their pasture patches, the watch-dogs fell asleep by their masters, the stars shone brilliantly in the sky above, the milky way spanned the blue empyrean, and the December blast swept down from beyond the Jordan. The thousands slept on in the city of David, and the great world rolled upon its axis, just as if no miracle had ever taken place, just as if God had not visited the earth and the hour of man's redemption had not been fixed. Only the Holy Virgin Mother, St. Joseph—the Foster Father—and the shepherds, who were watchers by night, were present at the event and adored the Infant Jesus on His appearance as man. Not one of all the vast throng knew that his own salvation was in the balance and that his Saviour was outside the city walls.

Nineteen centuries have rolled into the great gulf of eternity; each year has the birth of that Divine Child been commemorated by the faithful shepherds of the Christian flock; and each year the great world has slept, and the mass of the human race has been oblivious of the mighty things that were transpiring. Once more has Christmas come to us; will 1893 go past and the miracle of Bethlehem be repeated only for the shepherds from the hill-side? No; not so; let us go to the Crib; it is in yonder Church; there let us hearken to the celestial hymns that are chanted; there let us adore the new born Saviour of the world. While His representative offers up the perpetual sacrifice of the altar, while the incense curls around the deep-pealing organ, while the lights flash brightly upon the sanctuary of devotion, the Christmas chant will again ring in our ears: "Gloria in excelsis Deo!" "Glory to God on High and peace, on earth, to men of good will."

Once more may this Christmas be a happy, a holy, and a truly merry one for all; and may the blessings it will bring be as manna, in the desert of this life's pilgrimage, to all who are seeking that land of promise where the eternal and undying glories are chanted around a Christmas board that is styled the "Bouquet of God."

WE NOTICE that the Rainbow, St. Mary's Bazaar journal, is flourishing this season. We trust that our short-

lived, but very lively, contemporary will meet with as great a success this year as it did last. Decidedly the Rainbow is a splendid specimen of a Bazaar magazine. We were very amused with its peculiar editorials; but we hope that Edmund Yates can be held responsible for the communications over his signature that appear in that organ, for we would like to see that gentleman brought to time on several subjects—and in his letters to the Rainbow he leaves himself open to severe criticism. We understand that the young lady who is responsible for the first page of the spirited publication has been asked by the Detroit Free Press to correspond for its columns. This may be only a rumor; but even so it speaks well for the editress of the Rainbow. Long may that sign of peace flourish, and especially at this season of peace and good-will we trust it may be most successful.

THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION.

On the 8th December, a writer in the Star attempts to give the history of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. Commencing with the letter written by Bernard of Clairvaux, in 1140, to the canons at Lyons, and ending with the definition of the dogma, by Pius IX. in 1854, the writer of that article gives dates and names for all the different marked advances made by the Church regarding the promulgation of this doctrine. But all that is not the history of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. The fact that at any remote period, in the centuries gone past, the Church, or any branch of the hierarchy, saw fit to bring this great truth before the faithful in a more positive manner, is in itself an evidence that some person or other thought well to deny the doctrine and to dispute the dogma. The fact of some person denying the dogma is an evidence that it must have existed, it must have been believed; for if it were not credited by the Church there would be no necessity, or, in fact, possibility of denying it. So that no matter how far back in the ages we can trace the denial of the Immaculate Conception, that denial is evidence that the doctrine existed prior to that period. The fact is that, like all other dogmas of the Church, that of the Immaculate Conception has existed from the very beginning. Even to-day there are dogmas that are of faith, but they have never been defined by the Church; some because they have never been denied, others because the circumstances of the age do not require any positive promulgation of these truths. But if it became necessary, at any moment, the Church would formally define these doctrines; but that would not be a creation of them.

The Immaculate Conception is not due to the definition set forth in the bull *Ineffabilis Deus*; it is the bull that is due to the Immaculate Conception. Had this truth not existed throughout all ages, since the Conception of the Blessed Virgin, there never would have been a promulgation thereof. Here is where our non-Catholic friends are entirely at sea when dealing with fundamental doctrines of the Catholic Church. We do not blame them; they are honest in their opinions, but these opinions are based upon a wrong idea of a Christ-established Church. They seem to look upon the Church as upon any human institution—a government or some vast university—that has been set up by a founder and then left to work its own way, to develop according to the talent, genius and views of the individuals called upon to conduct its future. They