

Christmas and its Customs.

Dark and dull night, flee hence away
 And give the honor to this day
 That sees December turn'd to May.

Why does the chilling winter's morn
 Smile like a field beset with corn?
 Or smell like to a meade new-shorne,
 Thus on the sudden:—Come and see
 The cause why things thus fragrant be.

HERRICK.

ALMOST twenty centuries have passed since the Christ-Child, the Redeemer of the Human Race, came upon earth. The Virgin Mother, St. Joseph and the humble shepherds, who happened to be tending flocks in the neighborhood of the stable at Bethlehem, were the only human beings to know that the prophecies concerning the coming of the Messiah had been fulfilled that night. But angel spirits adored and rejoiced, and a heavenly brightness surrounded the manger in which the Infant lay. Little did nations dream, that the King of Kings had been born, and that He was to establish a reign upon earth which would last "until the consummation of the world."

The day of the birth of Christ, or Christmas, as it is called, is not specifically known. However Pope Julius I., after having caused a strict inquiry to be made, set the date as December the twenty-fifth of each year, and since then all Christendom has celebrated the gladsome festival on that day. Primarily, the celebration was of a strictly religious character, but as time has passed, and as man is both spiritual and corporal in nature many quaint and curious features have been associated with Christmas, all tending to express homage to God, and good-will to all men.

In Catholic countries, a double supper is partaken of on Christmas eve. At twelve o'clock midnight masses commence, and throughout the entire morning, masses are being celebrated continually. The faithful sing Christmas carols and the day is spent in innocent amusements and pastimes appropriate to the