

CHRISTMAS CAROL.

Christ the Lord was born this day,
Christ the King in manger lay,
Then on earth let all men say,
In excelsis gloria.

Through the world was perfect peace,
Wars and tumults vain did cease,
When he came our hearts to ease;
In excelsis gloria.

Angels' voices praised his name,
Heaven above was bright as flame,
From the fields the shepherds came;
In excelsis gloria.

Mighty kings and chiefs were led
By a wandering star o'er head
To his lowly manger-bed.
In excelsis gloria.

Bringing to that stable bare
Royal gifts full, strange and rare,
Gold and frankincense and myrrh;
In excelsis gloria.

Angel, shepherd, earthly king,
Joyful hearts to him did bring,
And with joy let all men sing,
In excelsis gloria.

Glory to the heavenly child,
Glory unto Mary mild,
Maiden—mother undefiled.
In excelsis gloria.

—M. PEACOCK. In the Month,

CHAT'S WITH GOOD LISTENERS.

Some Practical Suggestions for Christmas.

Christmas is gradually presenting more and more a materialistic aspect. The load of gifts, and the anxiety of the givers to surpass one another in the luxury of giving, are hiding out of sight the real meaning of this glorious and lovely feast. Advent is made a season of meditation—not on the lessons of the time, but on worldly things—the cost of this and that. It is too often not a season of spiritual joy, but of worldly anticipation. 'What shall I get?' succeeds 'What shall I give?' The spiritual is hidden in the material; and even for little children, the Christ-Child and His Crib are obscured by the piles of costly toys and fragile ornaments. People who are not poor are very luxurious at Christmas; even people who can not afford to burden themselves for the whole year that they may rejoice in splendid gift-making at Christmas.

When the Third Order of St. Francis was founded, it was as a protest and an antidote to just such luxury. Simplicity of life, the putting of the spiritual first, and the showing of the Crib, the humble Manger, to the people was a reminder of this humility,—we need these now. Why should not all children that have a Christmas tree see the Manger beneath its branches, and the kneeling animals, and the grave of St. Joseph, and the Mother of God, and the Star in the East? Why should the beautiful symbols of St. Francis be replaced by the glittering gewgaws of 'the toy-shops? Christmas must be kept symbolically or we destroy, as far as we can, its true value.

And as to gifts, Emerson, who in his blind way (not knowing Christianity) said many true things, recommends simplicity and heartiness. I quote him, not for the authority of his name, but because of the truth of his words. The artist, he said, should give a drawing! the author, his book; the weaver, of the web he has woven; the gardener, the flowers he has raised;—each one should give part of himself. The most costly gift at Christmas, with the price legibly marked upon upon it, means, as a rule, that the receiver shall be even more generous.

This is not vulgar—for vulgar is too good a word for it; it is both mean and ostentatious. It requires a good deal of stamina to be both Christian and simple in the manner of living in these times; but once these qualities are attained, the anxious mother and the perplexed father have life made more easy for them; and Christmas becomes, not a day of care and worry, and of anticipation of large bills, but of serenity and joy.

Books are always good gifts,—books that mean something. They live and give refreshment when other temporary things decay. 'The Following of Christ,' or 'The Jewels of the Mass,' or 'All for Jesus,' or Newman's 'Occasional Verses'; or, for a non-Catholic, 'The Faith of Our Fathers' or Father Hill's 'Short Cut,' or any of a hundred other books, are joys forever. We can do more good at Christmas by paying all our small bills, and helping the poor about us, and giving good books to our friends, than by exchanging grudging money for silver ware or plush albums, or other useless things. 'Only books!' one may

exclaim. But the time will come when the donor, if the book be good and part of his own thought, will be devoutly thanked.

I have no right to preach,—these are only suggestions; but the most hopeful of us can scarcely fail to see the danger of electroplating little hearts with a love of luxury, and of encouraging older minds in materialism. MAURICE FRANCIS EGAN.—In Ave Maria.

CHRISTMAS.

A Beautiful Description of one of the Greatest Events in History, Condensed to suit space.

On its human side, the joy of Christmas is the joy we all feel at the sight, or thought, of beautiful infancy. The festival has the charm which belongs to infantile smiles and infantile tears;—the pathos which naturally comes into Christmas being as tender as the joy itself. Of all festivals of the year, therefore, Christmas is most universally in touch with human sympathies; for, where has there not been a babe to love, to idolize, to become the sovereign of the home, as it is the unspeakable joy? It is by the spell of this human sympathy, that Christmas has disarmed the puritanism of the Puritan and trained its garlands of spicy evergreens from pillar to pillar of Presbyterian, Congregational, Methodist, Baptist, and, first of all, to make the innovation, Unitarian houses of worship. The joy of the Christmas season may be called contagious, and its enthusiasm increases with crowds. If we were to ask each individual of the thousands on thousands, that throng the streets two, three, days, before Christmas, until, the day before, our streets and sidewalks are almost impassable, by reason of the eagerness to secure what will make this a true festival in homes, a hundred to ten would say: "Oh! our little one must be happy on Christmas day! It is the children's festival! for is not a child born to us, a son given to us?"

So far from thwarting these beautiful humanities which intensify around us with every coming of the Christmas season, we are rather to thank God, who, in creating man, made his sympathies so ready to respond to any natural appeal, thereby providing for conditions of grace; leading him through these very affections and sympathies to perceive supernatural relations between God and man, and a supernatural destiny for the creature through the infinite goodness of the Creator.

As if the angelic hymn heard above the hills of Bethlehem, had touched the subtle chords of harmony in the souls of believers so as never to be again silent, vibrating eternally under this theme of the "Word made flesh and dwelling among us," we find the offices of the Church overflowing with melody at this season, Antiphon and Responsory, Chapter and Hymn, to which ancient choirs gave such intonations of tenderness and delight, still charm the imagination even in their English translations. The *Adeste Fideles* with its refrain, *Venite adoremus*, is not the only Christmas hymn; although this has become so popular as to appear in the hymn books of nearly every denomination until they have forgotten its source. There is one for the office of Christmas Day, *A solis ortus cardine*, beautifully translated by Rev. Dr. Little-dale, and ascribed by venerable Bede to Sedulius, a priest, or as some say bishop, of the time of Theodosius the Great, which sings its carol for every ear that has once heard it.

"On hay reclined, the Lord Most High,
Within a manger deigned to lie;
And He Who feedeth the birds of air
Vouchsafed a little milk to share."

To commit these hymns to memory, is to store it with images of such delicacy and sweetness as to out rival the strains of Milton's Hymn to the Nativity, so justly celebrated; breathing, as they do, the humility and simplicity of the manger-crib; while the whole theology of the Incarnation, of the Advent-time and the Nativity, are expressed in a way to fix them in the mind of any child as no catechism page could do.

But if music and poesy can claim this inspiration, no less can that art which addresses the soul through the eye, as song addresses it through the ear. Some one has said that the idolatries among heathen nations had one palliation,—the universal expectation of an Incarnation; of a God appearing in the form of man. Certain it is, from the moment the second person of the adorable Trinity became

manifest in the flesh, pictorial art took a flight never before known, never before attempted. Sculpture had been the medium of the Egyptians, the Assyrians, the Greeks, the Romans, all through the centuries prior to Christianity. Paintings they indeed produced but they are inferior, in every way, to the sculpture of those gifted nations. But when Christianity put forth such stealthy blooms amid the shadows of the Catacombs, she rejoiced in color, in the narrative which color so beautified. How much there was for this young Church to tell, what wonders to relate! and sculpture was too slow. Thus we see the walls of the Roman Catacombs blossoming, as it were, with Madonnas—the Virgin Mother and her Divine Babe—with groups giving the most charming incidents in the childhood of our Lord, before the year one hundred even, and continuing, influenced by the same delightful spirit of narrative, beyond the year 250 fully to 300 A.D. The earliest Madonna yet known, on a wall of the most ancient part of the cemetery of Saint Priscilla, has all the gracious charm of Raphael's groups; yet it is confidently affirmed to have been painted during the life-time of the apostles, Sts. Peter and Paul.

"Strange," many people say, "that one finds no representation of the actual Nativity of the manger-crib, of the adoring animals!" This is partly to be explained by the ruin incidental to many of the Catacomb chambers, through a course of fully eighteen centuries, although other causes may be taken into consideration at the very earliest years of Christian art. But over one *arcosolium* in a very retired, and until lately undiscovered, portion of the Catacomb of Saint Sebastian, has been found a veritable Nativity—the Infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger; by the side we see the traditional ox and ass. Even in the small cut, as it appeared in the "Bulletin d'Archeologie Chretienne" of 1877, there is a wonderful tenderness in the face of this Little One in His swaddling-bands, looking out on the world He had created, which He had now come to redeem; and the two animals seem to kneel beside Him inclining over Him as if to warm Him by their breath. This dates to the period of Constantine near the middle of the IV. century; possibly a little later than a sculptured representation of the Nativity with the two animals, dating distinctly to 343, A.D. But if the literal Nativity was eclipsed in the Catacomb delineations by the visit of the Magi, it found a popularity during the XII. and XIII. centuries which has left us nothing to desire in the way of beauty of conception or execution. Its type is justified by the sculptures of the IV. century in several instances, and, in painting, by the Nativity lately discovered in the cemetery of Saint Sebastian; so that its later popularity was not without venerable authority in art; while the Gospel of St. Luke supercedes the necessity of any other. The loveliness of the middle age conceptions onward to our own day, cannot be exceeded, we are ready to think, they will line in all future and make the glory of the masters who have executed them. "The Holy Night," by Correggio, shares with the Sixtine Madonna by Raphael, the attractions of the Dresden gallery, nor has there been, nor will there ever be, an end to the descriptions lavished upon it. The rapture of the Virgin Mother kneeling beside the crib, and still holding her newborn Babe in her arms, is almost beyond any other triumph in art; the jubiliations of angels, the awe and delight of the shepherds, being infinitely below the bliss of the embrace given by Mary herself to the Word made flesh of her flesh, in her virginal womb; Mother and Infant in the soft radiance which emanates from the sacred Humanity. Others may have wished to express this even before Correggio's time, but to him belongs the glory of producing it to the eyes of men, so as to fix forever in their minds, that this Little One is, indeed, the light of the world, from whom sun and moon and stars and outnumbered systems have caught their first ray! Unfortunately, no engraving has ever fitly reproduced this marvel, and in photographs from this famous Nativity, the softness of blending tints is often sacrificed to the desire to keep distinct forms; whereas distinctness yields, in the original, to a spirituality which makes outlines felt rather than seen.

Luca della Robbia's Nativities in terra cotta, responding almost as readily to his swift conceptions as the wall and

canvases to the limner, give, in their material forms, a depth of entranced adoration, altogether their own; while Ferrigno's, full of color, and also full of the solemnity which belongs to shadows, are ideals of meditation; subduing every wandering thought; subjecting the imagination, even, to the unflattering fact of the mystery. It is with a soul penetrated with light, and yet awed by its own conception of the mystery, that Overbeck approaches the midnight cave and the crib. Angels kneel with the Virgin Mother and Saint Joseph beside the manger, and we feel the hush of that hour of adoration before the shepherds appear in the stable. There is no surprise in Overbeck's picture, but you feel the habit of adoration in every kneeling figure.

It is within the shadow of some manger-crib within our own minds, evoked by our own imaginations aided by these marvelous representations from the chisels and the pencils of devout genius, that we must turn during the bright festive days of the Christmas-tide, if we would gather the fruits of meditation for our own souls, or present these fruits in behalf of those we desire to set free, and bring to the gladness of Christmas in Heaven. Master-pieces, such as we have described so briefly, were not painted as decorations even when on the walls of chapels. They are expressions of lifelong habits of meditation, of dwelling upon the mystery and its circumstances. It was not a mere glance at the mystery, but it was a sinking, day by day, into "the depth, of the riches of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God!" And we must sink with them into the ineffable abysses of the Incarnation, if they are to be to us what these devout geniuses intended they should be to all who beheld them—what the *Gloria in excelsis Deo*, and *Magnificat* and the *Te Deum* are accounted to be—supernatural forces to speed us, and the dear souls for whom we supplicate, more and more swiftly to Heaven and its vision of Him who was made flesh in order to dwell with us; dwell with us here, that we might dwell, everlasting, with Him, in peace and gladness passing all understanding.—Eliza Allen Starr, in *The Poor Souls' Advocate*.

CHRISTMAS FLOWERS.

The Earth is so bleak and deserted,
So cold the winds blow,
That no bud or no blossom will venture
To peep from below:
But, longing for spring time, they nestle
Deep under the snow.

O, in May how we honored Our Lady,
Her own month of flowers!
How happy we were with our garlands
Through all the spring hours!
All her shrines, in the church or the wayside,
Were made into bowers.

And in August—her glorious Assumption;
What feast was so bright!
What clusters of virginal lilies,
So pure and so white!
Why, the incense could scarce overpower
Their perfume that night.

And through her dear feasts of October
The roses bloomed still;
Our baskets were laden with flowers,
Her vases to fill:
Oleanders, geraniums, and myrtles
We chose to our will.

And we know when the Purification,
Her first feast, comes round,
The early spring flowers, to greet it,
Just opening are found;
And pure, white, and spotless, the snowdrop
Will pierce the dark ground.

And now, in this dreary December,
Our glad hearts are vain
To see if Earth comes not to help us;
We seek all in vain:
Not the faintest blossom is coming
Till spring breathes again.

And the bright feast of Christmas is dawning,
And Mary is blest;
For now she will give us her Jesus,
Our dearest, our best,
And see where she stands, the Maid Mother,
Her Babe on her breast!

And not one poor garland to give her,
And yet now, behold,
How the Kings bring their gifts—myrrh and
Incense
And bars of pure gold:
And the shepherds have brought for the Baby
Some lambs from their fold.

He stretches His tiny hands towards us,
He brings us all grace;
And look at His Mother who holds Him,—
The smile on her face
Says they welcome the humblest gifts
In the manger we place.

Where love takes, let love give; and so doubt
not:
Love counts but the will,
And the heart has its flowers of devotion
No winter can chill;
They who cared for "good will" the first
Christmas
Will care for it still.

In the Chaplet of Jesus and Mary,
From our hearts let us call,
At each *Ave Maria* we whisper,
A rosebud shall fall,
And at each *Gloria Patri* a lily,
The crown of them all!

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