THE TRUE WITNESS AND CATHOLIC CHRONICLE, DECEMBER 24, 1895,



NOST INSTRUCTIVELY IN THE "AVE MARIA" ON THE GREAT FEAST.

NEW, if any, of the feasts of the Christian year are celebrated on the precise day on which the event they commemorate took Those that are not celebrated on certain days of the month, but rather on certain days of the week, are divided into two groups. All those from Septuagesima Sunday to Trinity Sunday have Easter as their common centre; and Easter varies with each succeeding year, within a given cycle. The other group, which extends from the first Sunday of Advent to the Octave of Epiphany, has Christmas for its centre. It shall be the purpose of the present article to treat of the feast of Christmas, and to answer, if possible, a few of the questions that suggest themselves in connection with it.

I. The name of this beautiful feast is composed of the words ! hrist and Mass, and means the Mass of Christ-the Mass on Christmas day. We have a number of examples of the union of two words in this manner. In the time of the guilds and trades-unions it was customary for each separate organization, or group of organizations, to have its own patron saint. The members were re-quired to hear Mass on the feast of the patron; and in time the custom was adopted of calling the Mass by the name of the saint. We read, for example, of Michaelmas, Martinmas. St. Johnsmas, etc. The names Christmas and Candlemas, being universal in the Church, have not gone out of use in the lapse of time.

II. A more important inquiry is, In what year was Christ born? Authorities are not at one on this point; on the contrary, the greatest diversity of opinion exists. Two systems of chronology are here to be taken into account : that of the Bible, and that of the foundation of the city of Rome-or year of the city, as was the common expression through out the vast Roman Empire. The Biblical system of computation is twofoldnamely, the Hebrew orignal and the Septuagint, or Greek translation begun at Alexandria in Egypt some two hundred and eighty years before Christ. Great diversity of opinion exists with regard to the true Hebrew chronology. Our common English translation of the Bible fixes the birth of Christ in the year 4000, which is four years earlier than the usual reckoning of the Chris tian era, or A.D. This computation is adopted by Pope Benedict XIV. in his learned treatise on the feasts. Kitto, in his valuable work, says there are about one hundred and forty different compu-Hales, 5411; and Jackson, 5426. These take into account both the Hebrew and the Septuagint chronology. It may safely be said that the Hebrew text of the Bible and the Septuagint made from it furnish no perfect system of chronology.

It was not the intention of the Holy

the date of the coming of the Redeemer of mankind. Authorities are not agreed as to whether or not our Saviour was actually born on December 25, as tradition is not uniform. Clement of Alexandria mentions the opinion of some who place it on April 20, and others who thought it took place on the 20th of May while St. Epiphanius and Cassian state that in Egypt Christ was believed to have been born on January 6. Others again would have it in October. An objection was raised against December 25; because, it was maintained, that was the wet season in Judea, and shepherds could not have kept their flock in the open air. In the face of a constant tradition to the contrary, however, this objection is not worthy of notice.

The establishing of the feast of the birth of Christ on the day on which it is now celebrated is attributed by the decretal letters to Pope Telesphorus, who died in the year 138. But the first certain traces of it are found in the time of the Emperor Commodus, who ruled from 180 to 192. In the fourth century, on the application of St. Cyril of Jerusalem, Pope Julius I., who ruled the Church from 337 to 352, issued an order for an investigation to be made concern-ing the day of Christ's Nativity. The result of the inquiry of the theologians of the East and West was an agreement on the 25th of December. The chief grounds for the decision were the tables of the censors in the archives of Rome. While it is not certain that this is the exact date, it has been observed since that time. This is in harmony with the remark of St. Chrysostom in one of his sermons in 386 where he says: It is not ten years since this day was clearly known to us, but it has been familiar from the beginning to those who dwell in the West......The Romans, who have celebrated it for a long time, and from ancient tradition, have transmitted the knowledge of it to

IV. The following remarks on the present condition of the spot where Christ was born, taken from Father Vetromile's "Travels in Europe and the Holy Land." will doubtless be interesting to the reader at this time. Speaking of the church erected in Bethlehem over the spot where our Divine Saviour was born-a description of which would occupy too much space,-he says :

' The main altar is dedicated to the Wise Men of the East. On the pavement at the foot of the altar there is a marble star which corresponds with the point of the heavens where the miraculous star that led the Wise Men became stationary. The spot where our Saviour was born is exactly underneath this marble star, in the subter anean Church of the Manger The subterranean church.....iz entered by two spiral staircases of fifteen steps each; one belonging to the Latins, the other to the Armenians and Greeks. This most sacred sanctuary is irregular, because it occupies the irregular site of the stable. It is hewn out of the reck. and is a little over thirty-seven feet in length, eleven broad, and nine high. The floor, the place where our Saviour was born, and the site of the Manger, are cased with beautiful marble, the work of St. Helena; but the walls and ceiling are covered with fine tapestry, now falling into rags ; and nobody dares to repair or replace them, for fear of he jeal-ousy of the schismatics. No light penetrates from the outside; but the crypt is illuminated by the thirty-two give a perfect system of chronology, but trance is walled up; at the farther ex-only to record such portions of the his- tremity, on the east side, is the spot marked by a circle of marble, covered with jasper; and a circular plate of silver, surrounded by rays of the same material, around which are written the following words :



was doubtless a place of special devotion for the faithful; hence it was selected for the second Mass, and her commemoration was introduced to honor her memory. Besides, the second Mass is the least solemn of the three. Among the greater feasts of the Church Christmas occupies the third place; Easter being first, and Pentecost second.

I shall not pause to speak of the many social and other customs that have from time immemorial circled around this feast. The spirit of the season, however, is admirably embodied in the following lines, which may appropriately conclude our study of the Christmas feast :

On Christmas Eve the bells were rung, On Christmas Eve the Mass was sung That single night, in all the year. Saw the stoled priest the chalice rear. Then opened wide the baron's half To vassal, tenant, seri and all. Power laid his rod of rule aside, And Ceremony doffed his pride. The heir with roses in his shoes That night might village partner choose. All harled, with uncontrolled delight And general voice, the happy night That to the cottage as the crown Brought tidings of Salvation down. England was Merry England when

Old Christmas brought his sports again 'Twas Christmas broached the mighti-

est ale. 'Twas Christmas told the merriest

tale : A Christmas gambol oft would cheer

A poor man's heart through half the year."

TOO WEAK TO WALK,

FRIENDS HAD GIVENUP HOPE OF RECOVERY.

THE TROUBLE BEGAN WITH A COUGH WHICH SETTLED ON THE LUNGS-SUBJECT TO FAINTING SPELLS, AND AT LAST FORCED TO TAKE TO BED-RESPORED BY DR. WIL-LIAMS PINK PILLS WHEN ALL OTHER MEDICINES HAD FAILED,

From L'Impartial, Tignish, P.E.I.

Mr. Dominick P. Chiasson, who lives on the Harper–Road, about two mile from the town of Tignish, P.E.I., personally took the trouble to bring before the notice of the editor of L'Impartial, the particulars of the cure of his daughterin-law, Mrs. A. D. Chiasson, through the use of Dr. Williams' Pink Pills. The Spirit in inspiring the writers of the lamps, sent by different princes, which case is certainly remarkable, and we several books of the Old Testament to burn day and night. The original en- cannot do better than give it in Mr. cannot do better than give it in Mr. Chiasson's own words : "My son's wife," said he, "has been sick for some seven where the Blessed Virgin brought forth the Redeemer of the world. The spot is was a strong healthy person. Just about was a strong healthy person. Just about seven years ago she took a severe cold which attacked her lungs, and from that time up to the beginning of the past summer her health has been feeble, and at times we despaired of saving her life. It was not her disposition to give up easily, and on some occasions while en gaged in household work she would be seized with a fainting spell, which would leave her so weak that she would be confined to her bed for several days in a semi-unconscious state. More than once we thought she was dying. There was a continual feeling of numbress in her limbs, and almost constant severe pains





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tory of the dealings of God with man as would be necessary for the purposes which He had in view,-a subject which it does not enter into our purpose to treat of. The Bible itself furnishes the clearest evidence of this : for in examining the lists of patriarchs and kings, the durations of whose lives or reigns are stated, we find the omission of names at various places. It is equally evident from the fact that learned men who have made a careful study of the subject in almost every age have differed to the extent of more than fourteen hundred years. The Roman Martyrology gives the date of the birth of Christ as 5199. The Jewish historian Josephus has also A system of chronology differing from all those referred to above. We are forced to the conclusion that it is impossible to know with certainty what year of creation, or, if you prefer it, what year of the existence of man upon earth, his Heaven-sent Redeemer appeared in the little town of Bethle-

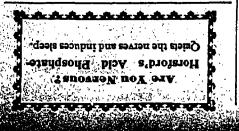
We have next to consider the year of the birth of Christ according to the Roman computation. At the time of the birth of our Divine Redeemer the Romans held sway over the greater part of the known world, including the Jewish country, and estimated time from the building of their city. Father Didon has made a careful study of the author-ities on this subject, and he sums them up in Appendix A. of his learned work, "Jesus Christ: Our Saviour's Person, Mis-sion and Spirit." I shall be content with quoting from him, and referring the r ader for a fuller treatment of the subject to his pages. He says: "A Scythian monk, Dyonisius the Little, abbot of a monastery at Rome, who died in the year 556, placed the birth of Jesus in the year 754 from the foundation of Rome, and the year 4714 of the Julian period. This date was universally accepted by Christians up to the seventeenth century, and has determined that which has been called the 'Vulgar era.' In relation to the exact year of the birth of Jesus, scholars hesitate between the year 747 and 751 from the foundation of Rome. For His entrance into public life they hesitate between the year 30 and 31." Four texts of Scripture enter into the Mathew, ii, 1; St. Luke, ii, 1; St. Mathew ii, 2, 16; and St. Luke, iii, 23. Father Didon concludes : "An attentive study of these various data obliges us to fix the birth of Jesus after the year 746 and before the year 751; for the census in Judea could not at the earliest have taken place before the year 747, and Herod died in the course of the year. 750-751." Investigation, it appears, can arrive at nothing more exact than this and with it we must rest content. Let us now consider an inquiry with regard to the precise day upon which this imp :portant event took y lace III. It is medless to say that for centuries the Church,"and from, it the world at large, has celebrated December 25 as

HIC DE VIRGINE MARIA JESUS CHRISTUS NATUS EST.

Here Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary.' A fine rich marble altar is erected over the spot, which belongs to the Greeks. About seven paces to the south is the Manger. It is a low recess excavated out of the rock, two steps lower than the crypt. The spot where the Infant Jesus was laid upon straw is marked by a block of marble hollowed in the form of a manger, and raised one foot above the floor. It belongs to the Latins, but the altar is located two paces opposite to the Manger, on the site where the Blessed Virgin sat when presenting the Child to be adored by the Wise Men.'

V. It was formerly the custom in certain places to celebrate more than one Mass on some of the greater feasts of the Church. The custom of celebrating three Masses on Christmas Day survived, and came gradually into general use ; it has a mystic signification, and denotes the threefold birth of Christ-His being begotten of the Father before all ages, His birth in time of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and His birth by grace in the in her chest which were only eased by a hearts of the faithful. In Rome it was stooping position. Added to this she the custom of the Popes to celebrate the first Mass in the Church of St. Mary Major, or the Liberian Basilica; the second in the Church of St. Anastasia, whose feast falls on the same day; and the third in the church of the Vatican.

This beautiful custom could not have come into existence until about the end of the fourth century, because Pope St. Liberius, after whom the Basilica is sometimes named, died in the year 366. Again, the first. Mass was celebrated at midnight, because it is certain from the words of St. Luke (ii, 8) that Christ was born in the night; and it has always been the pious belief of Christians that He was born at midnight. The fact that the second Mass was celebrated in the Church of St. Anastasia removes an objection that might occur to some persons-that the feast was instituted before the early part of the fourth century; for it is well known that no commemoration of a saint is introduced into the Mass of any of the great feasts. Anastasia is said to have belonged to one of the most illustrious families of Rome, and was martyred in the year 304. Her church





Can Now Walk to Church.

was troubled with a hacking cough, sometimes so severe at night that she did not obtain more than a few hours sleep. About the end of 1894 we had given up all hopes of her recovery, and neighbors were of the same opinion. She was reduced to almost a skeleton and could scarcely take any nourishment She had grown so weak that she could not walk across the bedroom floor without help. We had often heard and read of the great cures effected by Dr. Williams' Pink Pille, and at this stage, when all else had failed, I urged that they be given a trial, and procured a half dozen boxes. After using them for about three weeks she could walk across her bedroom floor without aid, and from that time on she continued improving in health from day to day. She continued taking the Pink Pills for about four months, with the result that she is now a healthy woman, and it is now no trouble for her to walk to church, a distance of two miles, and the grateful praises of herself and friends will always be given Dr. Williams' Pink Pills.

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