

AD TIRONUS CHRISTI.

'Twas the octave of St. Thomas,
'Twas the day St. Edward died,
That we kissed our last brothers,
In this happy Christmas tide,
And we bade you follow swiftly
To the stall where Jesus lay,
And the year's brief journey ended
Fought your truth to Him for aye!

Yes! methinks our royal Confessor
Sleeping in his Abbey's shade,
And our great Archbishop martyred
And the monks with whom he prayed,
Won for you this grace of grace,
(Which they sought themselves in vain)
To be numbered in the regions
Of St. Peter's warlike train!

Did they not possess forever
Joy that a full longing aye,
It might surely move their envy
Your fair lot to contemplate!
Ah! how often earth has Edward
Sighed to wear your sacred robe,
And St. Thomas held it dearer
Than all treasures of this globe.

Bravely follow then the footprints
Of the royal eastern king,
Till with Thomas and with Edward
At the Manger Thine ye stand;
There to make your great oblation
Dearer than the angels' gold,
To the Child who claims, my brother,
All the love our hearts can hold.

And your newborn Saviour will help you,
Oswald in his kindly grace,
Ephraim, who in the day of Thomas
Cried out, "Valiant Athanasius!"
Let your hands on their my brothers,
Let them guide you on the road,
They will cheer you with their converse
And will help to bear your load!

Then the Star to point your footsteps
Surely is not far to seek?
Till the cause of all our gladness,
Mary, Mother and Mother-Queen,
With her sweet and gentle radiance
She will light you through the gloom
Till she bless your mystic supplication
With the Offspring of her Womb!

FR. BEEDE, O.S.B.

SOME CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS.

Significance of Various Parts of the Church's Office.

In the mediæval times the faithful were wont to attend the churches at the long Office of Matins that precedes the midnight Mass, and the old writers tell us some interesting facts. The First Nocturn is typical of the dark period preceding the delivery of the Law on Sinai; the lessons, as now, were chanted without a title, similarly to the custom at "Tenebræ" and "Duges," and the altar was hung in black. The Second Nocturn signifies the gradual enlightenment of the world by the Law and the preaching of the prophets, and the black gave way to white; while at the last and joyful Nocturn, which ends with the "Gospel Homily" and the "Te Deum," the white gave way to red, symbolical of Divine Love. An interesting rite also occurred at Rome when after the reading of the Fourth Lesson the Pope blessed a helmet and sword, in allusion to the new-born King, of Whom the Office sings: "He hath girt Himself with power, and clothed himself with glory and strength." These were afterward presented to that prince and knight who had deserved well of Mother Church. If present, he was duly invested with them by His Holiness. The knight thrice brandished this sword, and wiping the blade on his left arm and sheathing it proceeded to chant the Fifth Lesson, which treats of the combat of Christ with the powers of Satan.

In the early ages of Christianity another ceremony no less interesting took place before the Seventh Lesson, which treats of the Gospel for the First Mass: "A decree went forth from Cæsar Augustus," etc. If the Roman Emperor was present he was now vested in a cope and conducted by two Bishops to the Lectern, where His Majesty chanted this Lesson. At the conclusion he was conducted to the feet of the Sovereign Pontiff, which he reverently kissed in token of the submission of the temporal power to the spiritual.

Rome had special customs of its own at Christmas. The Pifferari were seen in the various streets serenading the Madonna in the wayside shrines. They go out together, father and son; the old man plays a bagpipe, and the youth a flageolet. The primitive pastoral appearance of these Calabrian shepherds and their wild mountain melodies harmonized especially with the simple sentiment of homage naturally generated in the mind on the recurrence of our Lord's Nativity; for their clothes, together with their instruments, were actually such as may be readily imagined to be, both the same, unchanged and unimproved, that had been handed down from generation to generation. From the moment the Pifferari arrived, some days before Christmas, till the day of the festival, not only for the whole day, but from

three to four hours before sunset till three or four hours after it, in the depth of winter, did they wander about from place to place. They were seen and heard in the open streets, before a picture of the Madonna suspended against a wall of a house, with a lamp before it, where the moment they arrived they crossed themselves, and then began to play, observing the while a devotional attitude, bareheaded, their high crowned hats suspended by a string, the body bent forward, and the eye raised reverently towards the picture. To-day in Rome the Pifferari are no longer heard. At the Missa Pastorale, or Mass of Day Dawn at St. Mary Major's, where the relic of the Holy Crib is exposed, the shepherds were wont to make weird music on their pipes.—*Catholic Standard*.

CHRISTMAS.

Account of the Origin of the Great Festival.

There is not a poor mother who does not understand, nor a child who does not long for the arrival of the happy feast. How many ever stop to consider its origin?

Augustus Cæsar, the Roman Emperor, anxious to learn how many millions of men bowed beneath his sceptre, commanded a general census to be taken of each nation that made up his vast empire. To do this he named twenty-four commissioners whom he sent to every part of the world. Publius Sulpicius Quirinus, or according to Grecian history, Cyrenus, was intrusted with the government of Syria, of which Judea then formed a part. St. Luke tells us that this was the first census made in that country for the Romans. By the conditions of the decree every man, whether rich or poor, prince or peasant, was obliged to repair to his native town, so as to be registered in the Roman rolls.

Now St. Joseph and the Blessed Virgin were both of the royal lines of David, and they went to the city of David, which was called Bethlehem. Here, the Blessed Virgin who had been hailed "full of grace" by the Archangel Gabriel, being unable to obtain lodgings at the inn, because of the crowd in the town, sought refuge in part of a stone house, formed out of rock. It was in this wretched, forlorn place that the King of Heaven selected to mark His entrance into the world.

While this wonderful event was taking place; while the Blessed Virgin was bringing forth a Saviour, a band of shepherds who tended their flocks in the vicinity of Bethlehem, in a place called the Tower of Aden, noticed a brilliant splendor in the midst of the darkness, and out of the brightness an angel appeared unto them, and said: "Fear not, for behold, I bring you tidings of great joy, that shall be to all the people, for this day is born to you, in the city of David, a Saviour, who is Christ, the Lord; and this shall be a sign unto you; you shall find the child wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger."

Not was this all, for, suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly army, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace to men of good will."

We shall not dwell upon the joy and wonder of these simple shepherds. When the miraculous apparition had ceased and the night again resumed its darkness, the shepherds said among themselves, "Let us go to Bethlehem and see the Word which has been shown to us." Without a moment's delay, they hastened to the stable. There they found the new-born Infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger, and St. Joseph and the Blessed Virgin were at His side. The shepherds seeing that all was fulfilled which had been spoken to them by the angel, recognized in the Child, the Saviour promised to Israel, and they began to praise and glorify God. Mary, the Virgin Mother, heard all that the shepherds told her, and laid up all their words in her heart.

Such is, in a few words, the whole history of the feast of Christmas. St. Luke has been the historian of the Nativity, whence the Christian era is dated.

In this feast, which may well be called the feast of mothers, of children, of the poor, what encouragement is there not for all? But, more especially, what consolation for those whom the world excludes from the number of its favorites. They can enter the Church and kneeling beside the richest in the land, they may hear the shepherd of souls, standing by

the altar of the new-born Infant, and intoning the hymn of the angels, "Gloria in Excelsis Deo!" Nay, more, if poverty presses so hard that there is no Christmas present at home, they can carry with them the loving Babe of Bethlehem in their bosoms, for He Who was born in a stable will not disdain to enter the humblest heart that opens its door to receive Him.

From the birth of the Divine Son of Mary flow all the consolations of the Christian religion. From that rock-hewn stable of Bethlehem flow all the living waters which heal our wounds and relieve our sufferings.

It is with great reason, then, that all nations rejoice on Christmas morn, with its stars, its brilliantly illuminated Mass, its holy Canticles and its heavenly consolations. The Infant Saviour gave Himself for our ransom on the glorious festival. Let it be a reminder to all who can do so, to give something to cheer the less fortunate of this world. The hand of the little orphan is stretched out in our churches on Christmas morning in mute but eloquent appeal for charity; shivering poverty implora a passing alms as we leave God's temple; the very poor have children as dear to them as are the children of the rich to their parents. Charity begets happiness; the little angels in heaven will offer grateful prayers for those who comfort the comfortless in the world below. Let Christian souls then, for the love of the Infant Saviour, do all they can to make everyone's a Merry Christmas.—*Catholic News*.

CHRISTMAS CHEER.

City and District Savings Bank and Montreal Charities.

The City and District Savings Bank in conformance with its usual custom distributed the following donations to Montreal charities out of its year's profits. The money was distributed on Saturday.

Grey Nuns	\$ 850
do for St. Joseph Asylum	250
do for the Hall of St. Joseph Asylum	100
do for the Blind Asylum	250
do for the Hall of Nazareth Asylum	100
do to the Rev. Cure of the parish of St. Joseph for the poor of that parish	100
St. Patrick's Orphan Asylum	900
St. Bridget's House of Refuge for aged and infirm destitute persons	450
St. Bridget's House of Refuge for night refuge for destitute poor	500
For the poor of St. Patrick's Church	200
For the poor of St. Ann's Church	200
For the poor of St. Mary's Church	100
Sisters of Providence, for the Hall of Visitation street asylum	100
Sisters of Providence, for the Sacred Heart Asylum, Fulham street	100
Sisters of Providence, for the Deaf and Dumb Asylum	800
Sisters of Providence, Visitation street, to the Rev. Cure of St. Bridget's parish, for the poor of that parish	100
Sisters of Providence, St. Catherine street, to the Rev. Cure of the parish of the Sacred Heart, for the poor of that parish	100
Sisters of Providence, Sacred Heart Asylum, Fulham street, to the Rev. Cure of St. Vincent de Paul, for the poor of that parish	100
Sisters of Mercy	400
Sisters of the Good Shepherd	500
Catholic Orphanage, St. Catherine St.	200
Deaf and Dumb Asylum, Gate St. Louis St. Vincent de Paul Hospital	100
Notre Dame Hospital	500
Montreal General Hospital	500
Protestant House of Industry and Refuge	500
Montreal Dispensary	200
Ladies' benevolent Society	400
Protestant Orphan Asylum	100
Protestant Infants' Home	285
Protestant Industrial Rooms	150
University Lying-in Hospital	150
Il-rvey Institute	150
Protestant Church Home	100
Mackay Institute for Protestant Deaf Mutes	100
Women's Hospital	100
Hebrew Young Men's Benevolent Society	50
Hebrew Ladies' Benevolent Society	50
	\$10,800

A POWERFUL PLEA.

We draw the attention of our readers to the following despatch, that came from Brooklyn, N.Y., on the 18th of this month:

BROOKLYN, Dec. 18.—The Rev. Father Mahoney, pastor of the Church of Our Lady of Good Counsel, Putnam avenue, near Ralph avenue, Brooklyn, aided by his assistants, has, during the past week, made a house to house canvass of his parish to satisfy himself as to the extent of the prevailing distress. The results of his enquiries were made known in a rather startling manner to his congregation yesterday. At every Mass he ascended the altar steps and graphically pictured cases of hunger and destitution

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of which he had been an eye-witness. "Never in all my experience," he said, "has Brooklyn been in such a condition as at present. Hundreds of families are starving right here in our midst. Unless relief comes, and that speedily, the results will be appalling to contemplate. I have seen strong men, sober and industrious, actually begging for bread to feed their starving children. For months they have been out of employment. There is no work for them, nor are there any indications that the situation will improve for two or three months at least. This is the first time in my career that I have been obliged to use such language. I have invariably held that actual want and poverty are caused by the people themselves; that they are shiftless, spendthrifts, or drunkards. This time it is different. Good, honest families are feeling it. The little they had been able to save has disappeared. In many homes in the district this morning there is not as much as a loaf of bread. Woe to the men who have brought this about. A blight seems to have fallen upon the country, and for no apparent reason. There is no panic; at least there should be none. No disease is spreading among us. The prospects of good crops were never fairer. Everything points to a better spring than we have had in twenty years. Now, however, we are, and for a few months to come will be, face to face with actual starvation. Money is not in circulation. The building trades are at a standstill. Men who have the money bags tied up will not loosen the strings. What has caused this condition? The tricks of bloodhounds, who call themselves men. In order to crush the unfortunate toiler they have closed up factories and mills. Industries have been crushed, production curtailed that prices may be forced up. No one feels it but the unfortunate workman. He is made to feel it, so that next year he will be glad to take whatever wages the bloodhound is willing to offer. Ever dollar we had, every cent we collected, day after day, during the past week, has been sent to relieve the actual wants of the moment. The ladies attached to the church, the sewing society, and the St. Vincent de Paul members have done all they could, but the tide of poverty is so great that they cannot fight it back. Neither do the Charity commissioners seem able to deal with the distress. I want you to give every cent you have to prevent hundreds of deaths by starvation. I do not appeal to the rich, I am afraid it would be useless. I want it from those who need all they have, who know what it is to want themselves. Give a little and show the world how the poor can help the poor in their hour of need." The Rev. Father Mahoney has the reputation of being one of the most conservative Catholic clergymen in Brooklyn. For that reason his language caused a decided sensation. The congregation gathered in groups outside to discuss his plea for the poor.

Why are Parliamentary reports called "blue-books?" Because they are never red.

A MODEL SERVANT.—Lady Visitor: That new girl of yours seems very nice and quiet. Mistress of the house: Yes—she's very quiet. She doesn't even disturb the dust when she's sweeping up a room.