

Christmas Day is a Festival for all who profess and call themselves Christians.

The negations, the antagonisms and protests of olden days, are no longer sacred Shibboleths. The Catholic Church has triumphed, her enemies admit that her witness is true. They see in her decorated Temples, her festive song-services, her home rejoicings, her Christmas symbols and ceremonies, a reasonable service, a spiritual service, a service eminently acceptable to God as a Spirit, for the whole motive and inspiration of all these Festival manifestations is spiritual gratitude and spiritual joy. Every branch, every twig, every flower by which we adorn our Churches, shines with Gospel light, breathes out the fragrance of the Gospel message of a Saviour's love to mankind. We set forth in these outward and visible signs of Christmastide, the inward and spiritual grace of a thankful, reverential, devout spirit. We are told, with a sneer worthy an infidel's lips of scorn, that we desecrate God's house by placing within the sanctuary those beautiful flowers, those rich fruits which so eloquently declare the goodness of their Creator. As well tell a fond mother that her home is desecrated by her children placing her portrait, the symbol of affection, so that every wall will beam with the beloved face!

That God is a spirit; that He seeketh worshippers who come in spirit and in truth, is the very ground and impulsion of our Christmas decorations. We are not spirits like God; were we spirits as He is, material things might in His worship be unknown. We are in the flesh, we cannot manifest any mental or spiritual life save by material signs. Our common worship would be a mockery, a delusion and a snare, were we, because God is a spirit, to attempt to worship only by our spiritual faculties. Nay, it would be impossible, our frame is a material one, thought stirs the material brain, feeling moves the material organs of sensation. We cannot praise God, Who is a spirit; we cannot pray to God, Who is a spirit, without using material agencies. To deny man the use of material, symbolic signs in praise or prayer, is to annihilate devotion. Because God is a spirit it follows not that to Him symbols and ceremonies are vain, for He created the capacity, the desire, yea, the necessity of manifesting our praise and setting forth our wants, by material symbols and ceremonial signs. Because God is a spirit are we therefore to be dumb, to utter no sound or speech, nor gesture nor physical action of any kind in devotion? Because God is a spirit is it nothing to Him whether we bend in humb'e adoration, or loll in sensuous ease in worship? Because God is a spirit are we to abandon the material sign of common worship, the assembling of our bodies in a Church? Is not a Church assembly a symbol, are not all services ceremonial?

Away, away, then, with the trashy, senseless, godless objections raised by the unthinking, against our Christmas decorations! Insult us not by telling us that God is a spirit—we are not heathens. We know that love delights in giving signs of affection, that the beloved rejoice to receive material symbols of love. Does

not our God accept every sign of our love, can we overdo such manifestations as set forth our delight in His service and sanctuary? Our duty is to love Him with all our might, all our powers of affection. Thanks be to God—it is to all who indeed love His service and love His Temples, a delight to consecrate their time, their labour, their taste, their means in setting forth the story of Redeeming love, in witnessing to their belief in the Incarnation, in letting the light of their gratitude shine before men, by those material signs and symbols which adorn our churches in happy Christmastide.

Christmas Day is a day the Lord of our hearts has made, made sacred to rejoicing; therefore we will rejoice and be glad in it. Christmas Day, the Church of Christ has consecrated to be a perpetual witness of the Incarnation; therefore we will keep the Feast. Christmas Day is the birthday of our brother, it is the family festival, its whole teaching is of love, its memorial is of Him, in Whom the whole family in Heaven and on earth are named, through Whom comes the tenderest bonds of human life. Therefore shall the family home—the Church, be adorned with every symbol of rejoicing; shall be brightened by every token of festivity. Flower and leafage shall call from wall to wall, song shall resound re-echoing through every nook the praise of Bethlehem's Babe, while through every aperture of the soul shall distil the sweet influences of the Christmas Feast. Let the churl, and the snarler, and the sneerer, and the self-righteous betake themselves to wail their lamentations over our superstitions to the moles and to the bats, audience alone fit for tones discordant to Christmas music.

Stint not, then, this your reasonable service of Christmas decoration and song because of the malicious censurers whose blood, like snow-broth, moves not to the general impulses of Christian gratitude, or whose natures soured to gall like bitterness by party passion, hanker after the beggarly elements of Puritannic austerity. Willing hands, and willing hearts, and willing brains, and willing purses, pour out with loving devotions the services needful to make our churches, like the King's daughter, all glorious within.

God, Who is a spirit, will delight in the spirit which animates your zeal. He will smile a blessing upon your work and labour of love. In your signs and your symbols He will see consecrated offerings to His glory. By our Christmas decorations, we set forth our belief in the true humanity of the Redeemer of man.

To Thee, Who as at this time lay a helpless babe in Bethlehem's manger; to Thee, our God, our Saviour, our Brother; to Thee, Head of the Church, of the family of God, we humbly dedicate our Christmas signs and symbols and ceremonies; they witness to Thee and to the world, our love towards the Giver of all Christmas joys.

SEEK to love nothing out of God. God remakes a broken heart, and fills it with love He cannot fill a divided heart.—E. B. Pusey.

THE VISIT OF THE WISE MEN.

AT the birth of Jesus there came wise men from the East to worship Him. 'Wise men,' Magi. The word denotes both station and character. It was the name of an order of men in the east, who devoted themselves to scientific pursuits. Their principles and conduct are recommended to our notice as those of the subjects of a high degree of intellectual improvement. Any narrow and illiberal prejudices, or weak superstitions, which human science can dispel, cannot, in fairness, be laid to their charge. These men, having no connection with the Jews, leave their far distant country, and come to Jerusalem in search of Him "That is born King of the Jews." They state that they "have seen His Star in the East, and are come to worship Him." What should have led them to take such an interest in the birth of a "King of the Jews?" And why should they think the luminary which they saw indicative of His birth?

That they were under a special divine influence, is by no means an unreasonable supposition. There are other probable grounds of their conduct, however, well deserving their serious consideration who will most strenuously oppose ascribing it to celestial guidance.

The expectation of the birth of a signally eminent "King of the Jews," in Whom all the world was to have a deep interest, which the full clear predictions of the Old Testament produced and cherished among those who possessed it, was not confined to them. Tradition had preserved throughout the earth, in greater or less purity, many of the earlier revelations respecting Him. The several dispersions of the Jews, their intercourse with many and distant nations, and the translations of the Old Testament into Greek some two hundred years before our Saviour, had widely disseminated a knowledge of the contents of that Volume. The King of the Jews, therein promised, was represented as One Who should establish a spiritual empire among men; ruling in that righteousness which consists in a pure and perfect system of religion and morality; and in order to this, effecting that reconciliation between God and men, which is essential to their acceptableness with Him.

The wisest heathen philosophers have left their testimony that every system of religion which mere philosophy could supply was insufficient. Hence sound and enlightened minds acknowledged the necessity of divine interposition, in order to secure the benefits of true religion and pure morality: in order to satisfactorily meet man's natural sense of the need of atonement, that he may enjoy the favor of Heaven; and in order to derive its due practical benefit from his natural apprehension of a future state. The expectations, therefore, of satisfaction on these important points, which were excited by any, though often but a very faint, knowledge of prophecy, were gladly and warmly cherished.

History further proves that there was, at this particular period, a general opinion that the time was near when the universally ex-