

Roman Senate and such pagan festivals as the *Lupercalia* and the *Terminalia* which had become national holidays throughout the Roman Empire. But side by side with these we find mention of Christmas Day. The subsequent history of Christmas is found mainly in the History of the Church.

We also find its observance emphasized in the carols and hymnology of the Middle Ages. A recent writer in the "Sunday Magazine" says: "From the dawn of Christianity, through the Middle Ages, the carol has proved a splendid vehicle for bringing home to the minds of the people the great truth of the Nativity. The message was one which filled all who heard it with ecstatic enthusiasm. Then there were few books and few readers; but the people could understand and appreciate the large pictures which were introduced by the clergy to bring home the great story with force. These pictures were vari-colored and often very beautiful, for the reverent hands of the artist-monks had painted them, and their theme could not be overestimated." To the gentle St. Francis of Assisi is due the introduction of the "Crib" which now forms a large part of Christmas attractions in Catholic churches. The first crib was erected in the Church of the Portiuncula, at Assisi, by St. Francis himself who popularized devotion to the Babe of Bethlehem. When St. Francis visited Rome, in 1223, he made known to Pope Honorius III. the plans he had conceived of making a scenic representation of the Nativity. The pope listened gladly to the details of the project and gave it his sanction. On the following Christmas Eve St. Francis constructed a crib and grouped around it figures of the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph, the ass, the ox, and the shepherds who came to adore the new-born Saviour. He acted as deacon at the Midnight Mass; and the legend relates that when he knelt down to meditate on the mystery of the Incarnation, at the *Credo*, there appeared in his arms a child surrounded by a brilliant light. A painting by Giotto, representing this scene, is preserved in the Portiuncula at Assisi. The Franciscan churches throughout the world make great ceremony of the Christmas crib; and we can never forget a visit to the Church of the *Ara Coeli* on St. Stephen's Day many years ago. This celebrated Church possesses one of the most beautiful cribs in the world. Here from Christmas Day to the Feast of the Epiphany is exposed the *Santo Bambino di Ara Coeli*, which is said to have come from the Holy Land. On the Feast of the Epiphany it is carried in solemn procession by the Minister-General of the Friars Minor who solemnly blesses the city with it from the top of the high flight of stairs that lead