

CHRISTMAS AGAIN.

Once more it is our blessed privilege to celebrate the nativity of our Saviour. Once more we take our places among the millions of redeemed and rejoicing worshippers whom the Christmas sun, as it journeys round the earth, awakens to the glad tidings of a Saviour born. The message comes afresh to us, "Unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord."

Once more we gather within the walls of our churches, as the wondering shepherds went to Bethlehem, to see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. We hear the wondrous story, so simple yet so complete, of the Saviour's coming to earth. In the few brief verses of St. Luke's Gospel which the Church has well chosen for the lesson of Christmas morning, we see the Roman laws and the Roman authorities unconsciously ordering the fulfilment of the old Jewish prophecies by compelling Mary and Joseph to journey to Bethlehem to be taxed. We see them enter the town with the multitude bent on the same errand with themselves, and toiling, pushing on, through the thronged and crowded streets to that inn where there was no room for Mary the mother of Jesus. But ere the morning comes, a multitude of the heavenly host are singing "Glory to God in the highest," and the mother is laying in the manger her first-born Son, wrapped in swaddling clothes.

Oh, it is a precious thing, year by year, thus to study anew these external earthly features of the Son of God taking to Himself our human nature, and from these externals to pass to the greater fact which is clothed in them!

Who would be without such a day as this! Who is there that, celebrating assiduously his own birthday, will yet refuse to mark with thanksgiving, and holy services, and joyful festivities, the coming of the Son of God!

There is, there could be, no greater reason for thankfulness than this coming of the Son of God, whether we consider, on the one hand, the greatness of the benefit conferred on us, or on the other hand, the greatness of the gift and of the love which prompted it. "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son," Was there ever love like this! Was there ever gift like this, that God should give His only-begotten Son! Was there ever love like this, that the Father should give His well-beloved Son! that the Son should willingly empty himself of His glory to take upon Him our weak human nature! It is a love which passeth man's understanding. It is an infinite love. It is the majesty of God seeking for a gift which shall be worthy of His dignity and honor, and finding nothing thus worthy but Himself. It is the love of the Father towards us, endeavoring to kindle in us a love toward Him. It is the Son willingly offering Himself, that He might come to us to draw and lead us, His younger brethren, unto His Father! Was ever gift of love like this? Angels to whom no such love had ever been shown, no such gift been given, shouted hosannas at the descending of the Son of God to earth, and shall we not welcome Him with loving hearts?

"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He hath visited His people."—*The Churchman*.

CHRISTMAS OBSERVANCE.

It is the peril of every day of commemoration that it may outlive the thought according to which it was instituted. This was true even of an event so full of intense national memories as the exodus from Egypt. There would come a time, the Holy Spirit foresaw, when the young would ask of the old, "What mean ye by this service?" and when it would be needful to turn to the solemn and sacred scrolls of the Law to explain the reason and to revive the motive of the paschal feast.

There is a vast difference in the manner of the Christmas observance in this land between the past and the present. Instead of being the care of a few who represented one or two religious bodies among many, and who held their festival amid the wondering of carping comments of the majority, Christmas has now become a national holiday. Hardly a pulpit but has something to say in its honor. More than one of those denominations which are bound by no rubrical provisions to do so are opening their doors and instituting services. It would seem as if the danger above spoken of were very far from the present day. Yet there is danger that the central thought, the coming of Christ to be born of a virgin, the taking of man's nature by the eternal Son of God, may be obscured by the accessories and lighter thoughts of the day.

It is only in a religious truth, and that a central truth, that an observance can permanently find root. Not as an English festival, nor as a merry household season, not because of literature and poetry and graceful custom, but as the day of the Incarnation, will Christmas have a continuing life. The outward observance is needed to keep fresh the doctrine, but the doctrine must continue to warrant the observance. If faith in Christ be lost, the day will not restore it. If the day be blotted out of the calendar, such is human nature, the doctrine will be in danger of falling into obscurity. This bids the Church both to keep this great day of commemoration and thanksgiving, and to so keep it as to remember why it is kept. The religious thought must overtop the social.

It is sometimes said that the Christmas communion is not fully attended because of family and social hindrances. This ought not so to be. It is one of those days when every communicant not hindered by sickness ought to try to be present, and all other cares and duties of the day should bend and give place to this.

Doubtless this is so in many places, but not everywhere.—*The Churchman*.

THE UPLIFTING IN THE NATIVITY.

In the coming of Christ humanity was lifted heavenward. There was in it a new life, a new joy and inspiration, a new hope combined with the power to realize. What some underlying force is to the upheaval of a continent, such was the coming of the Messiah to the uplifting of the race. A Divine life came behind it and entered into it. A Divine Person was conjoined with it and caused it to be reempowered; a divinely human Saviour put it upon a new and helpful and triumphant career. There was a lifting out of darkness and sin, out of sensuality and earthliness, out of bondage and fear, out of poverty and joylessness, out of mortality and misery. A new life combines with the life corrupted, a new power qualifies and invigorates it, a new hope animates it, a heaven before unknown becomes the object of man's desire and longing.

And what Christ in His coming did, the

Church, through Christ, is in its sphere to carry on. It cannot, indeed, as Christ did, combine humanity with Divinity; it cannot transform and lift it unto the life of God; but it is to be the great power in the world by which, through Christ and the Spirit, the fall is to be arrested, humanity recovered and set upon the high plane of the Divine life and freedom. Let "the powers that be" do what they can to promote justice in the earth, and to help man and society in their earthly relations. But the Church at every moment must look beyond this world. Its uplifting power must be supernatural. It must ever aim to lift man and society above this life and beyond it. The range it contemplates must be spiritual and heavenly. It must have faith, not in forces, but in God; not in civilization, but the Gospel. It must believe that through Christ it can do all things. It can recall men from their sin; it can help them in their misery; it can share with them in poverty and sorrow; it can proclaim a hope which maketh not ashamed; it can help them realize their immortal destiny. The Church, like its Founder, is to be a perpetually uplifting power, pointing men beyond this world, and helping them in all heavenly aspiration and attainment.—*The Churchman*.

CHRISTMAS CAROLS.

"Then came the merry masquers in,
And carols roared with blithesome din.
If unmelodious was the song,
It was a hearty note and strong;
Who lists, may in their mumming see,
Traces of ancient mystery."

The word *Carol* is taken from the Latin *cantare*, to sing, and *rola*, an interjection of joy—or from the Italian *carolare*, "to sing songs of joy." Carols were originally accompanied by a dance, and we find that, in the earliest ages of mankind, both song and dance were employed as acts of Divine worship, whether of the true God or of heathen deities. Choral dancing was a great part of Hebrew worship, and instances of its use abound in the Bible. "Let us praise His Name in the dance," &c.

This choral dancing was kept up in Christian times, and we still see it in the rhythmic movements of the chorus at Ober Ammergau. An old proverb of the 14th century says:—"The French sing or pipe, the English carol, the Spaniards wail, the Germans howl, the Italians caper." Carols have survived in England, but the dancing with them has almost disappeared, except in the case of some mummers.

The *Gloria in Excelsis* was the first Christmas Carol, and many others have since been founded upon the angels' words: yet, strange to say, no carols from the early Christian Church have come down to us. The reason probably is that, in earlier times, Christmas was kept as a quiet religious season, partly, no doubt, on account of the persecutions which made the Christians refrain from any outward expressions of joy, at any particular festival. Then, gradually, the heathen rites and customs connected with the New Year were joined to the religious rites, and when the Christians could meet without fear, Christmas became the great time for joyful festivity.

Some of the earliest carols were sung in Italy, in the time of St. Francis of Assisi. There had been a great deal of heresy on the subject of the Incarnation, and St. Francis, who wished to make the ignorant people understand and realize it better, asked leave of the Pope to celebrate Christmas in a new way.

After obtaining permission, he and his monks set forth to the little village *Graccia*, near Assisi, and with great pains they prepared in the Church a representation of the Nativity. On Christmas Eve the villagers came to the Church,

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