

ters upon the history of mankind, is embedded in our faith, our worship, and our mode of life. This event is not a figment of the imagination as the "wise" would have us believe, nor is it a mediæval fiction or a poetic fancy; for Christmas is a historic fact. The soul of it has been the inspiration of the most beautiful and appealing art; the story of it has become the very heart of faith and ritual; the uses of it have been marvellously wrought into the fibres of social and commercial life; its activities and products are everywhere visible. The story of Christmas is entirely detached from locality; it has escaped the limitations of time and the almost indestructible barriers of race; to all it is "the sweetest story ever told," for it holds a first place in the art, literature and religion of the modern world.

The historical accuracy of the Story of Bethlehem has been doubted by the so-called "higher critics"; but this should not surprise us as they have also cast doubts upon the Divinity of the Incarnate God, and even suggest, inferentially at least, amendments to the great moral code known as the Decalogue. Notwithstanding the critics, the accuracy of the Story of Bethlehem is unquestionable historically; and the Nativity, which gives it solemnity, is authenticated by Jew and Gentile. We must, of course, differentiate the fact, from the time of its occurrence, as this is still a matter of speculation for many believers who are not of the household of the faith.

Though not the cardinal feast of Christianity (this is reserved for Easter Day according to patristic teaching, based upon the earliest traditions), we find that the day of Christ's Nativity has the sanction of the centuries as one of the greatest celebrations of the Christian year. Among the earliest records regarding the celebration of Christmas we have two categories of documents — "Calendars," and "Martyrologies"; but it is not easy to differentiate between the two, as they naturally shade into each other. The most remarkable record of the early observance of Christmas is the so-called "Philocalian Calendar" which, however, hardly deserves the name of Christian record, as it is really a common-place book compiled by Dionysius Philocalus (cir. 354). Its value rests chiefly in two lists headed: "Depositio Martyrum," and "Depositio Episcoporum"; but in the list of feasts celebrated at that period, we find the "Nativitas Christi" (Nativity of Christ) set for the month of December. Another ancient document is the "Calendar" of Ptolmeius Sylvius (cir. 448). This is a medley of facts and feasts somewhat similar to our modern almanacs. It indicated the sittings of the