

HISTORY OF OUR SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST.

By the Abbé J. E. DARRAS.

(Translated from the French for the NEW ZEALAND TABLET.)

12. THE GOSPEL NARRATIVE, A MIRACLE OF AUTHENTICITY. ATTENDANTS OF THE INFANT GOD IN THE TEMPLE OF JERUSALEM.

Thus, forty days after the birth of a son in Israel, the purification of the mother was accomplished by a holocaust and a sin offering. The inheritor of the royal house of David, the Immaculate Virgin, blessed among all women, bearing in her arms the Lamb of God, who was to efface the sins of the world, found herself too poor to provide a lamb for the offering in the Temple. Her offering was that of the indigent; two turtle doves or two young pigeons, presented to the priest, whose day it was to perform the function of sacrificer, were substituted for the rich offering made by the women of Israel. Divine poverty, and touching emblem of the purity of Mary, characterized by the innocence of the dove! The priest, descendant of Aaron, prayed for the mother of the Son of God; and the legal purification was accomplished in the person of the Virgin without spot. This, however, was but one of the obligations imposed on Mary. The Divine child was a first-born; as such, he belonged to the Lord, and was therefore to be redeemed at a price. It is for this reason that the Evangelist adds that the child was to be presented in the temple. We have already dwelt at length on this condition of primogeniture in Israel. Here again, this conformity of St. Luke's narrative with the observances prescribed by the law is striking. Let them say, if they will, and as often as they will, that an apocryphal writer has invented all these narratives in after-times—that a falsifier has been able to measure his words to the perfect artlessness of truth, so that not one of them should be either out of place, or beside the question! Rationalism would thus suppose a miracle, more surprising than those of the Gospel which it rejects. Well, then! Yes; the miraculous pervades this entire history, and, if it were otherwise, the world would be still pagan. What forms are these we see—in the age of Augustus, at a time when the world was rushing headlong into voluptuousness, sinking itself into Epicureanism, gorging itself with luxury and blood? What forms meet our gaze in the persons of the just Simeon, “awaiting the consolation promised to Israel,” and of Anna the prophetess, wearing out an entire lifetime in prayer and fasting” in the Temple! Where, then, had true greatness, nobility of soul, piety and virtue, taken refuge? Ask the poets, the historians, the orators, the philosophers of Rome, if they were acquainted with these great things, even in name? Fasting—to those refined wits who went to enrol themselves with so much ease among the disciples of Epicurus! Prayer—to those slaves of the inflexible *fatum* (fate)! Truly, a great deal they minded these things at the banquets of Apicius, and beneath the perfumed *velum* of the circus, where the Gladiators assassinated each other with studied grace. Who does not see that to prodigies of corruption it is necessary to oppose prodigies of sanctity, that the incredible perversity of Paganism could only be vanquished by the divinity of the Gospel miracle; in fine, that the only *cortège* worthy of the Word made flesh, the only court befitting the presence of the God of all purity, was found in the Temple of Jerusalem, where the traditions of the patriarchs, of the just, of the prophets, were personified in such representatives?

§ III. THE MAGI. FLIGHT INTO EGYPT.

13. ADORATION OF THE MAGI.—DEPARTURE OF THE HOLY FAMILY FOR EGYPT.

“When Jesus therefore was born in Bethlehem, of Juda, in the days of King Herod, behold there came wise men from the East to Jerusalem, saying: Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, and are come to adore him. King Herod hearing this was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And assembling together all the chief priests and the Scribes of the people, he inquired of them where Christ should be born. But they said to him: In Bethlehem, of Juda. For so it is written by the Prophet: “And thou Bethlehem, the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda; for out of thee shall come the captain that shall rule my people Israel” (1). Then Herod, privately calling the wise men, learned diligently of them the time of the star which appeared to them; and sending them into Bethlehem, said: Go and diligently inquire after the child, and when you have found him, bring me word again, that I also may come and adore him. Who having heard the King went their way; and behold the star which they had seen in the East went before them, until it came and stood over where the child was. And seeing the star they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And entering into the house, they found the child with Mary, his Mother, and, falling down, they adored him; and opening their treasures, they offered him gifts—gold, frankincense and myrrh. And having received an answer in sleep that they should not return to Herod, they went back another way into their own country. And after they were departed, behold an angel of the Lord appeared in sleep to Joseph, saying: Arise, and take the child and his mother and fly into Egypt; and be there until I shall tell thee. For it will come to pass that Herod will seek the child to destroy him. And rising up, Joseph took the child and his mother by night and retired into Egypt.” (2)

(1) Mich., v. 2.

(2) Matth., ii, 1-14. The Adoration of the Magi did not precede the purification. Immediately after the departure of the illustrious strangers, the Holy Family, on the same night, set out for Egypt. Such readers as would desire to study this question of Evangelical Chronology fully, will find all the elements collected by R. P. Papebroek (*Acta Sanctorum*), and R. P. Patrizzi (*De Evangelio*, lib. iiii.). It is generally believed that the adoration of the Magi did not take place till a year after the birth of Jesus Christ; this is the opinion of the Bollandists. As to the sojourn of the Holy Family at Bethlehem, during so long a space of time, there is nothing surprising in this, if we take into account all the statements furnished by the sacred text. 1st. The Gospel tells us that the Holy Virgin dwelt in Bethlehem before her espousal (Luc. i. 27); but it does not in the least imply that St. Joseph fixed his abode there. 2nd. Far from attributing this residence, even premeditated, to St. Joseph, before the time when he received the sublime mission of guardian to the Immaculate Mary and foster father of Jesus, the Gospel supposes precisely the contrary. In effect, when, warned by the Angel, the Holy Family quits Egypt to return into Palestine, it is not to Galilee, where Nazareth was situated, that Joseph thinks of returning, but to the tribe of Juda, where was situated Bethlehem. The fear of Archelaus, son of Herod, who was reigning in Judea, and a divine

warning alone determined him to return to Nazareth. And the sacred historian notes this incident, as a circumstance providentially arranged, and contrary to all human probabilities: *Ut adimpleretur quod dictum est per prophetas: Quoniam Nazareth vocabitur.* (Matth. ii. 23)

THE AUCKLAND 'DAILY SOUTHERN CROSS' ON THE OTAGO PRESBYTERIANS; OR 'UNCO GUID.'"

THIS journal takes your Presbyterian friends somewhat severely to task for presuming to prosecute a "Kirk minister" for alleged "Spiritualism," or what Catholics would call "dealings with the devil." He also denounces as unjustifiable their attempts to interfere with Sunday travelling by rail. In the course of his remarks he says some rather queer things, looked at from a Protestant orthodox point of view. He would lead one to infer that his Christianity recognised no "mysteries," but was a system of pure Rationalism, or a sort of Freemason's religion. He seems indignant at the very notion of any ecclesiastical authority interfering to secure purity of doctrine, or the due observance of the Sunday. Of the admission by the Otago Presbytery that "vital religion" among the Otago members of the Kirk is at a very low figure, the 'Cross' makes the most. But really it was very candid in the Presbytery to tell the Colony that, however little it redounded to the credit of their people. I think Bishop Croke said something not unlike this lately about his flock. Their faith generally was strong; but their practice in many cases very weak. Many of them had but little of what the Otago Presbytery call "vital" religion. This is a common failing with the classes of Christians in these days. Protestants and Catholics mutually encourage each other in religious indifference and loose morals. Thanks to the "freedom" of the "Reformation," and to Martin Luther, of blessed memory. The matter of Sunday travelling and Sunday trading is a difficult subject. Under certain circumstances, and to a limited extent, they may be permissible, but surely there ought to be some restrictions or limit imposed by law. The Christian Sunday the Presbyterians, with some other classes, would wish to see observed with all the Mosaic rigor of the Jewish Sabbath. This, of course, is out of the question. Yet surely there is some just medium between that and the unlimited desecration of the day by working, travelling, and trading. For if it be innocent to travel it must be innocent to work, buy, and sell—in a quiet way—on Sunday. Works of necessity and mercy are allowable on Sunday, and if to run the railway trains on that day be a work of necessity or mercy no one would object. But is it a work either of necessity or mercy in reality? Is it? The Presbytery tell us in effect that their people pay but little regard to the sanctity of the Sunday even now, and that they will, it is feared pay still less—in other words, none at all—if they have every Sunday an opportunity of taking a railway excursion—riding, perhaps, too often on a "spree"—or other objectionable enjoyment. We cannot blame the Presbytery altogether for their fears. The 'Cross' says—"Then why don't the ministers make their 'sermons' more attractive and edifying, so as to make the people prefer them to a railway trip?" Very good from a Rationalist point of view this reasoning.

RAPID CATHOLIC GROWTH IN AMERICA.

WE are always being told by such writers as the Dunedin 'Star' that the Catholic religion is not fitted for a free and educated people, but only for the ignorant and enslaved, the unreflecting and the priest-ridden. To such writers let me submit the annexed extract from an American Protestant paper:—"Only think, thirteen per cent. of the Confirmations in Baltimore converts from other sects, and New England becoming Catholic faster than any other part of America." How the ghosts of the "Pilgrim Fathers" must be troubled if they ever revisit New England and see such things. The German persecution must have given a considerable impetus to the Catholic cause in America as it has done in England. Bismarck is proving a real benefactor to the Catholic Church in more ways than one. The Dunedin 'Star' may prove the same in a small way if he only persevere in his attempt to "run down" the Church, and to prove how to be opposed or indifferent to the education of the people. With reference to the remark about the one-third of the Irish in New England having more children than the other two thirds who are not Irish, Hepworth Dixon, in his work 'New America,' makes a similar remark, and he hints at an explanation—"That the New Englander American wives don't wish to become mothers; too much bother." For the credit of the sex it is to be hoped this is not the real cause, and that Hepworth Dixon has been misled. I wonder if the Dunedin 'Star' and his party fear that the "Anglo Saxon" will become less energetic, less devoted to the pursuits of literature, science, and commerce, by becoming Catholics; or, in other words, by returning to the faith of Alfred the Great. What other sovereign who ever ruled in England has come up to him in wisdom or in virtue? He alone, of all the sovereigns in England since the days of Hengist and Horsa down to the reign of Queen Victoria, has earned the title of "Great," and he was a Catholic, and the founder of Oxford University. The Saxon and Plantagenet sovereigns of England, all Catholics, were the real founders and architects of that noble temple of freedom, the British Constitution, and secured to the people those rights which the first Protestant sovereign did so much to destroy.

Irish and Catholic interests have had for some time past a faithful representative and spirited defender in 'Catholic Opinion,' a small but efficiently worked weekly journal published in London. We now learn that it has changed proprietors, and will henceforth be issued every Wednesday from the office of the 'Tablet.' We can only hope that the change will not involve the destruction of those strong Irish and national sympathies which hitherto characterised 'Catholic Opinion.' But the point we take to be extremely doubtful.

At the recent Literary Fund dinner in London, Mr Tom Taylor, the dramatist, said that during his twenty-two years of official life, his literary work was chiefly done in "the invaluable three hours before breakfast." To this we may add that George Eliott's favorite time for composition is from six in the morning till nine; and Mr Anthony Trollope "breaks the back of the day," as Sir Walter Scott has it, by improving the same shining hours.