

Friends at Court

GLEANINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S CALENDAR

December 8, Sunday.—Second Sunday in Advent. The Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary.
 „ 9, Monday.—St. Eutychian, Pope and Martyr.
 „ 10, Tuesday.—Octave of St. Francis Xavier.
 „ 11, Wednesday.—St. Damasus I., Pope and Confessor.
 „ 12, Thursday.—St. Melchiades, Pope and Martyr.
 „ 13, Friday.—St. Lucy, Virgin and Martyr.
 „ 14, Saturday.—Translation of the Holy House of Loreto.

Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Her Immaculate Conception was the first of the privileges, by which the Blessed Virgin was prepared for the dignity of Mother of God. This privilege signifies that Mary never contracted the stain of original sin; that her soul, in the first moment of its union with her body, was pure and spotless. She was thus excepted from the universal doom, in virtue of which every member of the human race enters the world stained by Adam's sin. This doctrine, so admirably in keeping with what the holiness of Mary's Son required, though expressed more or less explicitly in every age of the Church's history, was not formally defined until the year 1854.

St. Damasus, Pope and Confessor.

St. Damasus was sixty years of age when raised to the pontifical throne in 366. His profound learning, fervent piety, and zeal in maintaining the purity of the faith, and rejecting the false interpretations which various heretics endeavored to put upon the teaching of Christ, have caused him to be regarded as one of the most able and illustrious of the early Pontiffs. He died in 384.

St. Melchiades, Pope and Martyr.

St. Melchiades was Pope from 311 to 314. He had the happiness of witnessing the triumph of Christianity, which followed the accession of Constantine. His death was peaceful, but he is honored as a martyr on account of his previous sufferings in the persecutions.

GRAINS OF GOLD

THY COMING.

There was no harvest-time, O Queen!
 In all the Advent years:
 Men gathered not in gladness
 What their hearts had sown in tears.

But with thy coming, Mother dear,
 The earth ran oil and wine—
 Men knew—the Bread of Angels,
 And the grape of the Living Vine!
 —'Ave Maria.'

Life, to be worthy of a rational being, must be always in progression. We must always purpose to do more or better than in time past.

Love life, but love it not for vulgar pleasure, for miserable ambitions. Love it for what in it is important, grand, divine.—S. Pellico.

He who wishes to be wise while keeping aloof from the true wisdom, and saved without the Saviour, is not wise, but a fool.—St. Philip Neri.

Following Mary, thou strayest not; thinking of her, thou errest not; asking of her, thou needest never despair; clinging to her, thou wilt never fall.—St. Bernard.

The children will read something. A Catholic parent will see that they have Catholic books and papers; if he doesn't, he should confess the fact among his sins of omission.

Father Faber says that many lasting friendships have been built upon a kind word, opportunely spoken. It is a gift to be able to recognise a good trait or a good tendency in others and to strengthen it by a little meed of commendation. All reforming does not consist in repressing ill or reproving vice. Much effective well-doing comes from the habit of encouraging good causes and lending a hand to excellent things already going on.

The Storyteller

HEROISM IN A SOUTANE

For twenty years Abbe Francois had been at the head of a modest parish in the diocese of Mans. Ambitious only for the salvation of his flock, he dwelt among them in peace and piety, content to preach the Gospel, to remind them of their duties, and to show them the way to paradise. Then came the 'Terrible Year.' On a freezing morning in January, the Cure of St. L. had just finished Mass; playing God to put an end to the lamentable epoch of blood which had begun at Sedan. He had hardly taken off his chasuble when a woman, all dishevelled, burst into the sacristy and threw herself upon her knees, while she cried aloud:

'Ah, what a misfortune, M. le Cure! They are going to shoot him!'

'Whom, my good Justine?'

'My husband, my poor Clement! Save him, M. le Cure! He is innocent.'

'But why? Explain yourself.'

He lifted the poor creature to her feet and placed her on a chair.

'You know, M. le Cure,' she continued, 'that three Uhlans were killed by some one last night in the village. The Franks Tireurs did it, no doubt; and this morning the Prussians have been arresting people all over the country. Three of them are going to be shot at once, my Clement among them. Save him—save him—M. le Cure!'

'Ah, how I should like to! But can I?'

'Yes, yes, you can. Save the father of my poor little children!' she cried, falling on her knees once more with a fresh burst of tears.

The Abbe Francois, greatly moved by her profound sorrow, bent his head in reflection. Every grief which touched his people touched him also; but what could he do against enemies so powerful, so persistent, and so implacable as the Prussians? It seemed to him that some little words of comfort were all he had to offer.

This Clement Dufour he knew well. He was a carpenter, a mauvais sujet, who had finished his apprenticeship in the city, there imbibing Socialistic theories. In vain had the Abbe Francois repeatedly endeavored to bring back the wandering sheep to the fold. Dufour clung obstinately to the standard of anticlericalism, as much through egotism as ignorance. But all this was forgotten in the present emergency; the Cure saw that it was necessary to act immediately.

'Come, Justine,' he said, 'come to the Blessed Virgin.'

He led her into the church and bade her kneel before the altar. Then, without waiting to break his fast, he hastened to the mayor's office, where a captain of Uhlans was installed, giving orders at that moment to a couple of subalterns.

'I am the Cure of St. L., began the priest, with some timidity.

'What do you wish?' inquired the captain, disdainfully.

'I have come to ask your forbearance for some of my parishioners,' said the priest. 'They are innocent, poor children.'

'Labor lost, M. le Cure. Your people have given shelter to the Franks Tireurs; they must be punished. It will be a lesson to those who are too ready to offer hospitality to these tramp-soldiers, incapable of fighting in a regular campaign, and who day after day kill some of our men, not like warriors, but cowardly. Besides, I have my orders and I must execute them.'

The Abbe Francois implored, argued, insisted. The captain was inflexible.

'Give me Dufour's pardon at least,' he said at last.

'He is the father of five children.'

'I would like to do it, M. le Cure,' replied the captain, in a softened tone, 'but I cannot. I have orders, as I have already told you, from Prince Frederic Charles himself. They have killed three Uhlans; three Frenchmen must be shot. Man for man: it is the order.'

The priest looked at the soldier a moment in silence; then he answered slowly, as one who has taken a grave resolution:

'Man for man, you say, captain? Very well. Take me, then, in the place of Dufour. What does it matter to you who pays the penalty?'

The officer looked at him in evident astonishment.

'That is a very fine offer, M. le Cure. I admire your spirit of self-sacrifice, but I prefer to execute the man who has been already chosen. Return to your presbytery.'