Special Supplement

Christmas Edition
CATHOLIC COURIER AND JOURNAL

Second Section

Volume IV. | Official Newspaper | ROCHESTER, N. Y., DECEMBER 16, 1932 | Rochester Diocese | Number 40.

The Tapestry of Nativity Grotto

By DR. ALEXANDER MOMBELLI
(Written for N. C. W. C. Christmas Supplement)

The precious amianthus linen has now been completely repaired and hung again on three walls of the Grotto of the Nativity of Our Lord in Jerusalem, thus bringing to a close the latest chapter in the history of this celebrated tapestry.

The amianthus linen covers all save the Eastern side of the Grotto, which side, because of its nature, was not in need of the decoration. The Eastern side is made up almost of a niche resembling an apse which is divided into two sections. The upper section is decorated by the remnants of an ancient mosaic depicting the Mystery of the Nativity, while the lower portion is adorned with pictures and lamps. The tapestry of the Holy Grotto has little more than a half-century of history, but its very origin is linked with a very sad incident.

"On April 25, 1873," says Father Barnabas Meistermann in his "New Guide to the Holy Land," "a band of 300 Greeks, monks and seculars, armed to the teeth, broke into the sacred grotto, maltreating and wounding the five Franciscan Religious who were praying there. After this they pillaged the Holy Place, carrying off everything that had an intrinsic value, even to the marble slabs that covered the Holy Crib. M. Patrimonio, French Consul at Jerusalem, procured from the Turkish Government the reinstatement of the Franciscans in their rights, with power to repair the damages which had been done. It was then that the French Government sent the beautiful amianthus linen, guaranteed against fire. But the Franciscans obtained no indemnity for the havoc wrought; no restitution has been made for the stolen objects, and the two art gems -the Adoration of the Magi and the Nativity-- painted respectively by Murillo and Maello which were snatched away during the disgraceful attack, seem to have been destroyed. Since this incident a soldier or policeman is on duty day and night in the holy grotto.

Murderer Escapes

"Twenty years later, in this same sanctuary, a Croatian, a Russian caouas and of the Greek religion, shot with a revolver and killed the Latin Brother Sacristan. He then fired on the Franciscan Religious who were passing in procession, and grievously wounded one of them, an old man. The murderer was arrested but before the trial he contrived to escape."

In spite of the custody entrusted to the police, the series of incidents at the Grotto has continued to grow each year, and several new chapters have been written in the history of the tapestry itself.

The latest incident, the one recently brought to a close, arose first in February of this year when the Franciscans called the attention of Bethlehem officials to the fact that damage had been done to the amianthus linen. Their protest went unheeded. Then, some weeks later, the Franciscans discovered that the button-holes by which the tapestry is suspended were virtually all broken.

The Custody of the Holy Places then took steps necessary for the defense of its rights, but the representatives of the Mandatory Power turned a deaf ear.

Some days later, a Bethlehem official, clearly usurping an authority which was in opposition to the rulings of the Status Quo of the Holy Places, had the tapestry taken from the Grotto to his office.

The precious amianthus linen is adorned with golden arabesques on a red background. In the lower section are lilies and symbolical fruits. In the center are eight coats-of-arms with double escutcheons and four parallelograms with gilt cornices each supported by angels, reproducing the most important events in the childhood of Our Lord in Bthlehem.

Nativity Depicted

On the Southern wall two parallelograms depict the Nativity of Our Lord and the Apparition of the Angels to the Shepherds. There are also on this section of the tapestry the following inscriptions: "Et Peperit Filium et Pannis Eum Involvit et Reclinavit in Praesepio" and "Et Dixit Angelus: Evangelizo Vobis Gaudium Magnum: Natus Est Hodie Salvator Qui Est Christus."

Two other geometrical figures are on the Northern side of the Grotto. Within these are reproduced the scene of the warning received by St. Joseph in a dream to set out for Egypt with the Holy Family and that of the Blessed Virgin offering the Divine Infant for the Adoration of the Wise Men from the East. There are also on this side these inscriptions: "Ecce Angelus Domini Apparuit in Somnis Joseph Dicens: Surge et Accipe Puerum et Matrem Ejus et Fuge in Aegyptum" and "Ecce Magi ab Oriente Venerunt Dicentes Ubi Est Natus Est Rex Judeorum" Venimus Adorare Eum.

The coat-of-arms are distributed as follows: four on the North side, one on the Western side and three on the South side of the Crypt. One is the symbol of the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Places, and another is the heraldic emblem of the Order of Friars Minor. The upper part of the amianthus linen is covered with passages from the Gospel which interwine with the motifs of the general ornamentation of the parallelograms and the coat-of-arms.

The "Hay-Barn" Church

By Vincent dePaul Fitzpatrick
(Written for N. C. W. C. Christmas Supplement)

In a little church within the city limits of Baltimore Our Saviour is greeted at dawn on Christmas Day in a way in Which He is greeted, perhaps in no other church in all the world.

This church which is dedicated under the patronage of St Lawrence is popularly known as "The Hay Barn Church." It was originally a hay-barn in its entirety, but now it is only half a hay-barn.

It is a one-story wooden structure with a cupola. It belongs to the J Lawrence Kernan Hospital for Crippled Children and it is on the hospital's property.

A number of years ago the hospital authorities gave permission for the use of half the barn as a Catholic Church. In the church proper there is a little wooden altar. There are pews for 150 worshipers, some of whom are doctors, nurses and domestic help from the hospitals. It is heated in winter by two old fashioned wood stoves.

Doves Heard at Mass

By the side of the church flows a little stream. Winters in Baltimore are for the most part mild. Snow on the ground is a rarity at Christmas. Thus as the priest sings Mass at 5 o'clock on Christmas morning, the murmuring of the stream is heard. In the loft can be heard the cooing of doves. Outside the church are ancient oaks. The spot is a picturesque one.

In the "hay-barn" section of the church the hay is packed in such quantities that it obtrudes through the windows and cracks. The scent of the hay pervades the church. At Christmas there is a "Stable of Bethlehem" in the church and the members of the congregation festoon the little "House of God" with evergreen and holly.

Before and after Mass the members of the congregation sing Christmas carols. The members of the congregation sing the Liturgical Music of the Mass. They have been trained for years in the singing of liturgical music.

Former Army Chaplain

St. Lawrence's or "The Hay-Barn Church" is a mission of St. Agnes' Church, Woodlawn, of which the Rev. Ignatius Fealy is pastor. Father Fealy was for years a chaplain in the

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Three Islands Bear Name of Christmas

There are at least three Christmas Islands. The largest and best known is in the Indian Ocean. The second is in the Pacific, and the third is in the Bras O'or, one of the many salt water lakes in the interior of Cape Breton Island.

There is a Christmas Sound down in Tierra Del Fuego (The Land of Fire), and at least two Christmas harbors—one at Kotzebue in the Pacific and another on Desolation Island, or Kerguelen Land.

Description of Christmas Eve In South China Told by Missioner

The story of a Christmas Eve at Pingnam, Wuchow mission, South China, is told in the December issue of The Field Afar, by a Maryknoll missioner laboring there. He writes:

"On Christmas Eve, young and old came plodding their way through the rice-fields to the mission. Some of them had journeyed barefoot for several days, lacking the means to purchase even the cheap sandal shoes they wear here. Now and then among the arrivals was a woman with a baby strapped to her back.

"The simple life of our Chinese is surprisingly like what we read of the Holy Land in Our Lord's time. The Mother and the Guardian of the Divine Infant were poor, like these peasants. Tissot's painting, 'Because there was no room in the Inn,' represents the streets and homes of Bethlehem as almost exactly like those in China. The narrow lane paved with rough stones, the sandaled feet of the Virgin and St. Joseph, and a barefoot woman passing with a child tied to her back, make the similarity almost startling. It is not hard here to vision the First Christmas, and to experience the happiness of that Holy Night so long ago on which the Son of God became Man for our redemption in Bethlehem of Juda."

Yule Observance In St. Patrick's Time in Ireland

Apostle's First Christmas Spent at Saul Preparing for Great Labors — Typical Scene in Country

By WILLIAM H. BRAYDEN
(Written for N. C. W. C. Christmas Supplement)

In this the fifteenth centenary year of St. Patrick's coming to preach the Gospel to Erin, there has come about a great revival of interest in the history of the Patrician Period. Much valuable literature in the form of books pamphlets historical sketches and articles, in which every aspect of the Apostle's life and times is discussed by experts has been published.

A common feature of practically all these productions is that they endeavor to present the story of St Patrick in more attractive and simpler form, than the unwieldly and often obscure narratives favored by the older schools. They have unwrapped the veils of romantic legend that too long had clouded definite facts of the Saint's career. They have discarded the mythical being, the product of so called "traditions" and have presented to us the real St Patrick, a great historic figure and a perfectly natural human being, whose heroic virtues made him a Saint.

This welcome treatment of the Patrician Period, coupled with the various commemorative celebrations of the start of his Mission, has brought a clear definite knowledge of the National Apostle within reach of the masses. Hitherto few works on the Saint had a wide appeal, being written rather for the expert student than for the general reader.

Foremost among the writers who have helped to bring about this general revival of interest in the life and times of St. Patrick is Dr Eoin MacNeill, our greatest, living expert on the period and subject. He has an able second in Dr. Helena Concannon, whose book "St. Patrick. His Life and Mission," was awarded the Aonach Tailteann Literary Prize in the Patrician Section. Another work which gives us facts in a clear, accurate and detailed style, without the superfluities of doubtful legend is the Memorial Book, "St Patrick" published by the Catholic Truth Society, (Dublin). Among its contributors is the first named writer.

What Research Reveals

In a close study of these works and of many others by former distinguished historians little if any information concerning the celebration of Christmas in Ireland at the time of St. Patrick, has been obtained. At first this may seem incredible. On second thought the reason for the omission is obvious. At the time of St. Patrick, Easter and not Christmas was the chief festival of the year. It was only in after centuries that Ireland followed the earlier example of the Teuton race, in making Christmas the great feast of the Christian year. Some old documents do refer to Christmas, which shows that it was at least recognized as a feast, but do refer to Christmas which shows that it was at least recognized as a feast, but no details

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St. Hubert's Bread Plays Central Part In Walloon Custom

A delightful Christmas legend and practice which one finds among the Walloons in Belgium centers around St. Hubert's bread.

Among the Walloons in keeping with this custom many housewives open a window of their house on Christmas eve. In this window they will place a loaf of bread they have baked, leaving it there until after Midnight. The legend has it that the holy moment which marks the dawn of a new Christmas day and the birth of the Infant Saviour, the bread placed in the window has been specially blessed.

Many Christmas Customs Survive

Despite the fact that the development of electrical and mechanical appliances has done a great deal to banish many ancient Christmas customs and practices, in some localities, particularly the rural sections of certain European countries, the people still cling to the traditions down from the Middle Ages when the mystery plays were at the height of their popularity, and research into ancient records is serving to revivify these traditions.

Star of Bethlehem Center of Holland Christmas Custom

There is practiced in Holland a picturesque Christmas custom which commemorates the Star of Bethlehem. In some sections of Holland, the young men, carrying a lighted star-symbolizing the heavenly guide of the Magi, go from house to house. From the throng of people which follows them, the young men collect alms. They also collect alms at each house. All of these funds are then turned over to the burgomaster for distribution among the poor of the locality.

St. Nicholas True Patron of Children

Santa Claus, the fat jovial figure pictured in song and story as the bearer of great bundles of gifts for children at Christmas time, is in fact of pious derivation coming from Saint Nicholas of Myra, who lived in the Fourth Century.

The idea of connecting St. Nicholas with the dreams of childhood and the bestowal of gifts derives from the fact that Saint Nicholas really is known as the patron of children, having from infancy exhibited great virtue and child-like humility, which he retained through life finding his greatest consolation in the bestowal of alms on the poor. His feast falls on December 6.

THE FIRST CRIBS

The practice of setting up Christmas cribs in churches, which St. Francis of Assisi originated, began about the year 1223, when St Francis set up the first crib in a grotto at Greccio, in the vale of Rieti, Italy, and there held devotions for the country folk of the vicinity.

Germany Recalls Desecration By Soviets of Xmas

Seeking to Prevent Repetition Of Broadcasting of Blasphemous Words over Air as Done Last Year

By Dr. Max Jordon
Written for N. C. W. C. Christmas Supplement

German authorities who are concerned with international broadcasting activities will concentrate their attention more than ever before this year on the radio programs which will be offered by the Russian stations during the Christmas season. The revolting interference from Moscow with the most cherished feast of Christianity which occurred just about a year ago is not forgotten, but it seems the right moment now to divulge the story which so far has never been fully told in public.

Shortly before Christmas last year it was announced in the Russian programs that the Trade Union Station was going to broadcast a word-picture of the "Antireligious Museum" and the date selected for this peculiar and rather suspicious program was Christmas Day, December 25.

The Berlin Foreign Office immediately instructed the Germany Embassy in Moscow to take suitable steps with the Russian Government in order to have this scandalous broadcast cancelled or at least postponed. A diplomatic protest was the more justified since the announcements as well as the description itself were to be given in Germany, which meant that the worst type of "Godless" propaganda would freely be spread all over the neighboring German territory and this on Christmas day when the mystery of Our Lord's Nativity is celebrated far and wide in the majority of all German, Austrian and Swiss homes.

The intention on the part of the Bolshevist broadcasters was obviously to give offense to the Christian faithful far beyond the Russian borders on a day which represented the most sacred of their ideals.

Russians Ignore Protest

The Russian Government, in answering the German representations tried to find an excuse by saying that the broadcast in question was not meant for German listeners, but for German-speaking Russians, many of whom make their home in the Southern parts of the country. No attempt was even made to explain the choice of December 25 as the date for the program.

Then came Christmas day, and as though nothing had happened, the Bolshevist agitators put on their "Godless" program, deliberately ignoring the protest of the German Government. The power of the station was more than sufficient to cover practically all of the European Continent. While Christmas carols filled the naves of the churches throughout the civilized world, the air was being poisoned from Moscow with the most vicious antireligious propaganda conceivable.

The announcer began by giving as the title of the program: "A stroll through the Antireligious Museum." Then he went on with a description of the place, which is located on the

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Christmas and Epiphany Observed Separately In Rome In Fourth Century

Writings of St. Ambrose Disclose Celebration of Nativity on December 25 as Separate Feast from Epiphany Was at Time Long Established Custom in Rome

By MSGR. ENRICO PUCCI
(Written for N. C. W. C. Christmas Supplement)

A ceremony which took place in the Vatican Basilica in the time of Pope Liberius, related by St. Ambrose in his book "De Virginibus" (Of the Virgins), bears important historical witness to the fact that the celebration of the Nativity of Our Lord on December 25 as a feast separate from Epiphany was at that time a long established custom in Rome.

A very noted book is "De Virginibus," which St. Ambrose, Archbishop of Milan and Doctor of the Universal Church, dedicated to his sister, St. Marcellina. All priests, in their use of the breviary, remember the touching story of the martyrdom of St. Agnes which is read in the Office of January 21, and which is taken from the first book of the above-mentioned work of St. Ambrose.

The family from which Ambrose was descended was truly a family of Saints. Both his brother, Satyr, and his sister, Marcellina, are venerated as Saints, and his book on the Virgins closes with the recollection of another holy martyr who belonged to his family, the holy virgin Soteres. The writer describes her as rivalling her martyrdom with the greatest heroism. Seeing herself so covered with wounds that only her face remained untouched, the holy virgin offered this to the executioner, that this, also, might be beaten and lacerated for love of Christ.

Tells of Touching Ceremony

In his book, St. Ambrose refers to a touching ceremony which he, in his youth, witnessed in Rome on Christmas Day, 353. Pope Liberius (352-357) occupied the throne of Peter at the time, and on that Christmas Day, in the Vatican Basilica, conferred the veil on St. Marcellina. It was impossible that St. Ambrose, writing to his elder sister in praise of her choice of the vocation to consecrated to God, should not remember that solemn Christmas ceremony. Indeed, the first three chapters of the third book of "De Virginibus" are dedicated to that solemn rite.

Marcellina belonged to a family of Roman patricians. Her father had filled the high office of Prefect of the Praetorium in Gaul. (Ambrose was born in Augusta Treverorum, the present Trier in the Rhine Provinces, while his father held office there.) It was natural, therefore, that the profession of religious life by Marcellina and the placing of the veil on her by the Soverign Pontiff should attract an extraordinary gathering of people to that Christmas ceremony. St. Ambrose, with the fullness of consolation apparent in every word, recalls in his writing all these circumstances as full of solemnity as of emotion.

St. Ambrose, writing to his sister concerning the ceremony "in the Basilica of St. Peter and on the Birthday of Our Saviour," when she made solemn profession of her virginity, asks what day could have been better chosen than that on which the Blessed Virgin gave birth to the Infant Saviour.

Words of Pope Quoted

"And Liberius," he continues, "in the presence of many other virgins consecrated to God, who vied with one another to be near thee, said to thee: 'Beautiful is the wedding that thou, O daughter, hast desired. See how many people are gathered here for the Nativity of thy Bridegroom, none of whom will depart unsatisfied? Thy Bridegroom is He Who, approached during the wedding banquet, changed water into wine. On thee will He confer the pure gift of virginity. . . . This is He Who with five loaves and two fishes satisfied in the desert four thousand people, and could have satisfied more if more had been there. And behold, He has called all this multitude to thy mystic nuptials and has satisfied it not with bread made of wheat but with His Body that comes from Heaven. Today He is born! Man of a Virgin, according to human generation, but before all He was generated by the Father, Only Son of earth and Only Son in Heaven, God from God and born of a virgin.

"We have quoted only a few sentences from the discourse of Pope

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The Christmas Play

By DR. WILLIAM M. LAMERS
Executive Secretary of The Catholic Dramatic Movement
(Written for N. C. W. C. Christmas Supplement)

An interesting practice in Catholic dramatic work is that of presenting plays during the Christmastide. The annual Lenten play is a well established feature of many of our school and parish stages. The Christmas play, on the other hand, is just becoming a general favorite.

Not that it is a new thing. It is as old in its elements as the Mystery Plays of the Middle Ages, as St. Francis of Assisi, as the carolers of Catholic and Merry England, as the revelers of the Twelfth-night, as the quaint customs which make beautiful the feast of St. Nicholas—and probably much older than the oldest of these.

It is not new in America. Many Catholic boys and girls between the ages of six and sixty who have read "Percy Wynn" must recall the delightful description of a production of Dickens' "A Christmas Carol" by the students of St. Maure's. It is interesting to note that Father Finn wrote a little Christmas play for the youths of old Marquette College over thirty years ago. An account of its production is to be found in a slender volume called "New Faces and Old."

Feast of Rejoicing

And indeed what time of the year could be more appropriately served by the drama? Even the penitential season of Advent has about it an air of suppressed anticipatory joyousness; and Christmas itself, and the sacred period embracing Epiphany and its octave—what Christian heart does not leap at the thought that to shepherds watching their flocks and keeping the night watches, angels came announcing glad tidings of great joy? Christmas is a feast of Christian rejoicing.

The Christmas play may serve a two-fold function. It may be used to give expression to this religious

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Honeysuckle Blossom In Christmas Legend

One of the loveliest Christmas legends heard in the South of France concerns the blossom of the French honeysuckle.

According to the legend, the French honeysuckle blossom got its exquisite rose color when the Blessed Mother laid the Infant Saviour in the manger in Bethlehem. This little plant was growing in Bethlehem at the time, the legend says, and as soon as the Infant Jesus rested upon it the tiny flowers flushed with happiness, recognizing the Infant as the Creator of the World.

Happiness and success are believed in the South of France to attend the finder of a French honeysuckle blossom.

Midnight Mass Chief Feature Of Belgians' Observance of Christmas

Neither gift-giving nor the decorated Christmas tree is a principal feature of Christmas in Belgium.

The bestowal of gifts relates more to New Year's Day than to Christmas in Belgium. As to the use of the Christmas tree, this fir was popular in Antwerp when that city had a large German population, but even there the practice has now virtually disappeared.

The great feature of the observance of Christmas in Belgium is the Midnight Mass, whether in a small chapel attended only by a limited number of persons or in a great cathedral thronged by a great congregation. The establishment of Christmas cribs in all churches is another dominating feature of the observance. These cribs remain intact from Christmas till Epiphany, when the shepherds gathered about the manger give way to the Three Wise Men from the East. In the localities where there are a number of churches the children visit the cribs in each during the Christmas season. There are also Christmas cribs in the individual homes, some of them being real works of art.