

venerable appearance, and who, we must suppose, was troubled at the thought of lodging her so unbecomingly. He had sought all through the village, and begged hard for room for her in some household, but in vain: every where they were repulsed, for the houses were full and they were strangers. We can hardly conceive that any eye could have rested upon the form of MARY, and yet that she should have been refused admittance into whatever home it might be; but she was closely veiled, and for the honor of the memory of those ancient women of Bethlehem, we will hope that the method of her attire fully concealed her from their sight. But thus it was to be, and for this alone, perhaps, great things had taken place in the history of the world.

The sequence of events is wondrous, and the tree of existence was well devised, even though it was planned in the realm of mythology. It had required centuries to secure the attendant circumstances of the birth of CHRIST, so far as they were apparently natural. Many ages before this period, in a country far distant from Palestine, a city was built, whose foundation is wrapt in the obscurity of Pagan tradition, and involved in stories of the gods and marvellous occurrences; but which grew from a small beginning to be the mistress of the world, and which, under the name of Rome, is and ever must continue to be venerable. It followed from her universal dominion that in the stable of Bethlehem the Saviour was born, for it was by the decree of CÆSAR that the "whole world" was obliged to be enrolled, and that JOSEPH and MARY were, therefore, compelled to travel to the city of DAVID.

Thus was born into the world, amidst surroundings that were rude and squalid, He, of whom the glorious temple of SOLOMON was unworthy, and whom the wide universe itself, "the heaven of heavens," cannot contain. Do we not read omnipotence in this ineffable depth of humility?

"Dark with excessive bright thy skirts appear."
Appearances proclaim their contrary, and lowliness here becomes the herald of majesty. Earth was regardless of Him, but Heaven sang hymns of triumph.

Yet, by-and-bye, earth also took up the burden of the song, and "Glory to God" was returned by many nations, where men of good will lived rejoicing in His peace. The happy Christmas time of old was a season of peculiar joy, observed with beautiful and edifying ceremonies in many lands, and even now, though the ages of faith are passed, it is still hailed with gladness and gratitude by multitudes.

"Cantet nunc io chorus angelorum."

Thus sings the Church: let the choirs of angels sound His praises, for the voices of men are weak and impure.

Let the priests stand at the altar and offer up the Holy Sacrifice in thanksgiving ere day has dawned upon the morning of His nativity. In the great cathedrals of mighty cities will the midnight Mass be celebrated, and within their sacred walls it may be thought that Christendom once more is true to its name; for all the splendor of the Church will there be put forth in honor of the festival, and hard must be the heart that will not acknowledge the influences of the Babe of Bethlehem. In the quiet country also, in retired village churches, will the faithful children of Rome do their utmost to express the praises of God. Under the balmy summer skies of the Southern hemisphere, or through the snow and frost of the North, the people will come in troops to kneel at His holy feet. Crowds that are beautiful to see as they pass through the night on their hallowed errand, because they are suggestive of the shepherds who hastened at the bidding of the angels to worship the Divine Infant when, wrapped in swaddling clothes, he lay in His rough manger cradle.

Those who have read of her, will remember how EUGENIE DE GUERIN gathered, on her way to midnight Mass, a spray of hawthorn covered with hoar-frost and glittering in the moonbeams, and how she longed to carry it with her to decorate the altar, if only it would have borne the heat. She, however, brought there a still more pure and lovely ornament in her faithful heart, and her life guided by the teaching of the Church. Let us hope that on the Christmas Day about to dawn upon us, many such garlands will be laid at the foot of our New Zealand altars, and that we ourselves, each of us, may be amongst those to offer them there.

NEWS OF THE WEEK.

We have received from Mr. Macedo, Catholic Bookseller, Princes street, Dunedin, the 'Irish Australian Almanac' for the forthcoming year, which contains some capital engravings, chief amongst them being a portrait of Archbishop Vaughan, of Sydney, a splendid face, suggestive of the talent which distinguishes the

eminent prelate in question. The almanac is furnished with the most complete information on Catholic matters, and will be found inestimable to both clergy and laity.

Messrs. MILLS, DICK and Co.'s Otago Provincial Almanac and Directory for 1877 has now been issued. The almanac is peculiarly neat and handy, and contains in a small compass a vast amount of information. There are few subjects, in fact, a knowledge of which is in constant requisition that are not treated of, and in the most convenient form, Gardening, Health, Postal Regulations, Gold Buying, Customs, Land, Law, and, in short, everything that persons of business habits require to find ready to hand are here contained. In addition, Rose's Southland Almanac is included in the volume.

We observe that at the Kumara matters appear to be assuming a more cheerful aspect. The surplus hands are decreasing, and an abundant supply of water has been introduced. Preparations are being made for Christmas sports on an extensive scale.

A NUMBER of farmers residing in the Spring Creek district have recently imported a steam threshing machine from England, says the 'Marlborough Express' of the 18th ult., and intend giving a public exhibition of its mode of working at the farm of Mr. H. Redwood. The machine is worked by steam, and the only fuel required is straw, with which it feeds itself as it goes along.

TRAVELLERS along the Main Southern Road from Albury to the Bowning railway station (says the 'Yass Courier'), by Cobb's coaches, cannot fail to be disgusted at the extraordinary number of drunkards that are observed about the various wine-shops and inferior public-houses that, at intervals, flank either side of the highway along the route. At some of these places men are to be seen whose behaviour indicates that their minds are not under the government of reason. At the grey dawn, as the coach speeds along, the sight becomes lamentable. Dozens of men are to be seen sleeping off their debauch, in a worse condition than the beasts of the field. At other places, where the shearer has been "lambled down," he presents a most pitiful appearance—his eyes are bloodshot, his lips parched, and having no more money, he is looked upon as a nuisance by the inmates, and is regarded as only fit for Tarban Creek. The liquors vended in nine-tenths of these places licensed by the Government are deleterious and villainous compounds, and the so-called colonial wine is so adulterated that those who attempt to quench their thirst with it at some houses, are known to become lunatics either temporarily or permanently. Here we have a key to the solution of the mysterious disappearance of many men, and to the numbers of inquests held on bodies found floating in the Murrumbidgee. It is a sad commentary on the wisdom of our Legislature that such destruction should be tolerated under the broad daylight of heaven. Under proper supervision an end could be put to the sale of these poisons. If persons are licensed to sell spirits, then by all means let it be decreed that such only are sold, and not that fiery liquid which, we are told, is a sort of cross between schnapps and kerosene. Thousands of fine fellows are ruined in health and constitution yearly, in connection with the debauch attendant on the shearing and lambing down season.

THE Musical Festival at St. Joseph's Church, Dunedin, came off on Tuesday evening last, and was, as we hoped, a thorough success. There was a very good attendance, and the music rendered on the occasion was beyond all praise. A chief feature in the performance was the brilliant organ playing of Mr. Charles Sykes, the talented conductor of the choir, who, although he has long been known to those who frequent the church in which he acts as organist as a perfect master of his instrument, had, we believe, hardly up to the present had an opportunity of acquainting the general public with the fact, that his powers as a pianist are quite equalled, if not indeed surpassed, by those which he possesses over the organ. His playing is distinguished, not only by extreme brilliancy of execution, but, as well, by a depth of expression that seems almost peculiar to himself, and, for example, the extremes of his ability were well shown, on the present occasion, in the triumphant chords of "Fixed in His Everlasting Seat," as compared with the pathos of "Cujus Animam." Of the excellencies displayed in his performance of the other solos given by him, limited space forbids us to speak; each in its way was perfect. The music of the Masses and the Hallelujah chorus were executed by the choir in superb style, proving, besides the native talent of the vocalists, that the utmost diligence had been employed by each in the preparation of his part, and that no pains had been spared by the conductor on their training. Of the vocal solos, Rossini's plaintive aria, "Pro Peccatis," was rendered very finely by Mr. Leary, whose rich bass was heard to great advantage in its grave, deep notes. Mrs. Bartlett gave with great expression "He was despoised." Mr. W. Ibbotson sang with much effect Gounod's "Nazareth," which was eminently suitable to his full and pleasing voice, and Mr. Fraser sustained splendidly the tenor part in Zingarella's "Laudate." "O Rest in the Lord," a delicious aria of Mendelssohn's, was done justice to, which means a great deal, by Mr. Hawkins, a young gentleman who, we believe, on this occasion made his debut as an amateur singer in public, but who, if we mistake not, has a busy musical career before him. He possesses an alto voice of wonderful quality, and which for richness, compass and power we have never heard equalled in organs of its kind, at all times rare, and sought for with anxiety in choirs that do not admit of the presence of ladies. On the whole the festival was highly enjoyable and thoroughly successful. The members of the choir were afterwards entertained at a supper in St. Joseph's schoolroom.

THE Rev. Father Donovan left Port Chalmers on Wednesday last by the s.s. Arawata for Melbourne; change of air having been recommended to secure his complete recovery from the effects of his late accident. The rev. gentleman was accompanied by his sister, Miss Donovan.

A TORCHLIGHT procession of firemen will take place in Dunedin on Saturday evening next, 23rd inst.