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Current Topics

AT HOME AND ABROAD.

This is Christmas day; the anniversary of Christ's

CHRISTMAS. birth is kept, the Church rejoices and the world is engaged in merry making. It is a very long time now since the Babe was born at Bethlehem; a multitude of changes have occurred since then, and, although the years are so many, the condition of things that now obtains seems even more, to divide us from that past than the great interval of time that lies between. Who can go back two thousand years and imagine himself an inhabitant of the world which then existed? The great Roman empire is for us a name. The deeds of its heroes, the wisdom of its law givers and philosophers, the grandeur and beauty of its orators and poets, are for the most part, as it has been remarked, the particular property of the school-boy or the student, and to all intents and purposes mankind in general has forgotten all about them. The destroyers who poured in upon the Roman Empire and broke it down and obliterated the remnants of its magnificence, have also passed away. The scanty records of their barbarity alone exist, and they also have become the almost exclusive possession of the school-room or the college hall. Nations have arisen and become extinct; languages have been formed and flourished and died out—peoples have grown and reached their full stature and declined, and the oldest races we have with us can hardly trace their roots to those forgotten ages.—There is one race only that has come down to our times in an unbroken succession—whose fortunes varied with the ages, indeed, but who remained ever the same, repeating, obeying, and cherishing the same traditions, speaking the same language, bound together by the same ties—the race whose nationality is expressed by the word Catholic—the people of the Church of Christ. God, said our Blessed Lord, could raise up of these stones children to Abraham. He raised up children to the Catholic Church of elements which, as it might seem, were harder to awaken to the spiritual life than were the stones to be raised to the temporal. The history of the Church is unique, no where else on earth is anything to be met with which even resembles it, and if the supernatural be separated from it, it becomes altogether incomprehensible. Who could conceive that the outcast born in a cattle-shed, and never attaining to any worldly distinction, condemned instead to a poverty-stricken, contemptible life, and a felon's end, should be the founder of an institution surviving everything, and conquering everything, The Jews put Christ to death and persecute his followers. Jerusalem perishes, but the Church survives. The Romans take up the task of the persecutor, but Rome falls and the Church remains. And how does she fare among those who destroyed Rome? By her organisation she saves religion that otherwise must have been blotted out by them from the face of the earth. She awes the wild barbarians, and conquers and restrains them. While the history of Europe is barbarous, everywhere her influence is seen throughout the barbarism, controlling, moderating, civilising. She unites the races and gives them a common interest; she brings justice back into regular and rational forms; she alleviates the lot of the slave, and mitigates warfare. Under her protection the arts and sciences spring once more into existence, and progress, and reach perfection, and learning is encouraged and fostered. Through all those rude ages her influence is manifest as more than human warring with the violent passions of the almost savage man—and though strongly withstood by him, always pursuing the route of the victor. Marks are again constantly evident that her treasure is held in earthen vessels. There are in her own bosom worldly ambitions and unworthy motives. False prelates are seen, unfaithful clergy the priesthood of a whole nation, it may be, is corrupt, and religious orders are at variance. Over and over again such a state of things prevails as must burst asunder any other institution and bring total destruction upon it. One thing only saves the Church, and gives her the triumph over every enemy, over the passions of men, over offended and hostile kings and emperors—over all that is without and all that is within—the hand that has founded protects, and Christ still lives and moves within her. The star that led the wise men up to the stable at Bethlehem was not to them a more certain sign of the divinity of the

child who was sheltered there, than the history of the Church must be to those that rightly study and consider it of the presence of God sustaining and directing her. It is close upon two thousand years since the Babe of Bethlehem was born—but through all those years he has been present with his Church. His presence is her life and joy. Heroes have been born, and done their great deeds and died, leaving a beloved and venerated memory behind them—to grow fainter as the years passed by, and generations arose to whom they were not known. But Christ was born and died, and ascended into Heaven, leaving not only his memory with us but his presence in his Church. He alone—who lived in the body among us two thousand years ago—is loved by men to-day as if their own eyes had looked upon him, and their own ears had heard him speak, and that has been pronounced by some as a conclusive proof of his divinity. The Church rejoices, then, to-day as celebrating the birthday of her ever present Lord and Master. He whose presence has never failed her for a minute. Who led her out from the catacombs and placed her above the Imperial throne; Who lifted her up from before the feet of the enraged barbarians, and gave them to her as her pupils and children; Who made her the instructress and guide of civilised nations; Who delivered her from pretended friends and treacherous adherents, and Who will deliver her from the enemies that surround and threaten her to-day? The Church rejoices, and the people rejoice to whom she has made known her living God as one who lives indeed, and is near at hand, and not far off and strange. But as to the merry-making of the world, that has also its right place and uses if it be carried out within due limits—and to all our readers we wish a Christmas thus merrily spent.

A GREAT CHAMPION.

THE opponents of the Irish cause knew very well what they were about when they so daringly attempted to prevent the appointment to the See of Dublin of Dr. Walsh. They were very well aware that in such an Archbishop the national ranks would obtain a reinforcement making them invincible and advancing the hour of their triumph. Dr. Walsh has at least done due honour to their sagacity or information, and from the first hour when he set foot on Irish soil as Archbishop of Dublin he has not hesitated to declare himself, and in every way possible to him, and those ways are various to support the patriotic cause. He had hardly landed when he authoritatively proclaimed to the long-suffering Catholic people, between whom and the Vicar of Christ it had been sought to raise a veil of misunderstanding and discontent, that the Pope was in full sympathy with their aspirations, and that in itself was no light encouragement, and increase of moral strength to them. He has commissioned his priests to sustain and guide their people in the patriotic struggle, and we are convinced that it is owing to him that the complete victory was won at any rate in Dublin, during the late elections. Any division there among the Catholic population must have resulted in defeating the national candidates, and had it not been for the Archbishop such a division there would certainly have been. He has taken every opportunity of coming forward in defence or support of the cause, and the latest occasion on which he has done so is the most remarkable. His association of himself and his clergy with Mr. Parnell and his colleagues is very striking, and shows most convincingly the complete confidence reposed by the Archbishop in the leader of the national movement. The occasion was that of the blessing of new schools erected at Swords, when the Archbishop took an opportunity of replying to some extreme accusations brought against Mr. Parnell, speaking at the Wicklow convention, by the Earl of Meath, the accusations being that he had declared himself determined to secure the nationalisation of the land—to prevent the accumulation of property in the hands of any persons,—and on the establishment of an Irish Parliament to proclaim Ireland an independent nation. The Archbishop pronounced every one of these charges false, Mr. Parnell had not said a word, he maintained, that could be interpreted as in favour of the nationalisation of the land, and as to the prevention of property's accumulating in the hands of any persons—that, said his Grace, was no less than an accusation of wholesale robbery, for which an action at law might be taken.—There was a sense, indeed, in which Mr. Parnell claimed the independence of Ireland, but it was that sense, said the Archbishop, in which the same had been claimed by O'Connell, who was neither Communist nor Revolutionist.—It was the legislative independence only that was claimed.—His Grace went on