

Friends at Court

CLEANINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S CALENDAR

December 20, Sunday.—Fourth Sunday in Advent.
 „ 21, Monday.—St. Thomas, Apostle.
 „ 22, Tuesday.—St. Deusdedit, Pope and Confessor.
 „ 23, Wednesday.—St. Columbanus, Abbot.
 „ 24, Thursday.—Vigil of Christmas. Fast Day.
 „ 25, Friday.—Christmas Day.
 „ 26, Saturday.—St. Stephen, First Martyr.

Vigil of the Nativity.

It was formerly the custom of the faithful to spend the night before a great solemnity in the church. Hence the term vigil, or watch, which we now give to the whole day preceding a solemn festival.

Christmas Day.

To-day the Church rejoices over the birthday of her Divine Founder—the Redeemer of mankind. The time appointed for the entrance of the Son of God into the world having arrived, Mary and Joseph were led by Divine Providence into Bethlehem. Failing to obtain admittance into the inns, they were compelled to take refuge in a grotto which served as a shelter for cattle. There our Blessed Savior was born to a life of poverty, humiliation, and suffering. He came to redeem the world, and to draw to Himself the affections of men, and therefore He presented Himself in the most amiable form that can be imagined—that of an innocent, helpless babe.

GRAINS OF GOLD

GOD DOES NOT FORGET.

The world will strip your failings,
 And hide the good you do,
 And with its sharpest thorns
 The ways you walk bestrew;
 You'll toil for men—they'll curse you;
 'Twas thus, and thus 'tis yet,
 And thus 'twill be for ever—
 But God does not forget.

The hours of silent grieving
 For some one loved and lost,
 The hours of self-denial,
 'Twere hard to count their cost;
 The falling soul uplifted,
 The sorrows bravely met—
 All are on earth forgotten,
 But God does not forget.

His eye is ever seeking
 The wee things done for Him;
 And they shall light the shadows
 Where Death waits, stern and grim.
 So lift your burden gladly,
 Nor falter, fear nor fret;
 For heaven is in the distance,
 And God does not forget.

—Ave Maria.

The more unhappy I am (said St. Francis) the more I will trust in the mercy of the Lord, my God.

Do not burden yourself with too many devotions; rather undertake few, and persevere with these.—St. Philip Neri.

As a means of accomplishing things, one should class next to initiative willingness to do the right thing at once.

Seek not proud riches, but such as thou mayest get justly, use soberly, distribute cheerfully, and leave contentedly.

I have come to see that cleverness, success, attainment, count for little; that goodness, or character, is the important factor in life.

Oh, that we could take that simple view of things—to feel that the one thing which lies before us is to please God.—Cardinal Newman.

Practically all of us can become leaders if we put forth the best there is in us. There is great satisfaction in knowing that one is a leader.

Our customs and habits are like the ruts in the roads: the wheels of life settle into them, and we jog along through the mire because it is too much trouble to get out of them.

The Storyteller

THE CURE OF NESTARDS

I.

We were touring Auvergne; and one day, in a particularly charming region, we halted at a quaint, old-fashioned inn, where they seemed very glad to see us; and made much of us, as though we had been specially invited or expected guests.

The village on the outskirts of which stood our delightful inn was called Nestards. It was situated at a very high altitude and close to a celebrated mountain pass. A small place indeed was this Nestards; with nothing to distinguish it but a lovely twelfth century church, a few small outlying farms, and perhaps a dozen cottages. Not far distant, in what had probably once been a crater—all this region is volcanic—a placid lake reflected the eternal sky.

There was a magnificent view from the church. Standing on the broad stone steps, one could see Mont Dore in the background, looming high above the nearer Dome mountains, their sharp, serrated peaks outlined against the azure heavens. So far away as to be hardly perceptible, three or four small farms, distant also from each other, told a tale of solitude and loneliness that almost made one shudder.

While we were eating the excellent dinner our hostess had prepared, she told us of the privations and toils that winter brings to the residents of this beautiful but wild mountain region. Snowstorms are sudden and terrible; for weeks and even months they are cut off from communication with the outside world. And if it be so at Nestards, the suffering is much greater among the dwellers in the isolated mountain farms. It is no unusual thing, at the end of the winter, to find shepherds and travellers buried under the deep snowdrifts. It was in this way that we heard the pathetic story of the Cure of Nestards.

It is quite unnecessary to say, we presume, that the post of Cure of Nestards is not much sought after, or considered an enviable one. The parish, besides being very small, is widely scattered, the stipend a mere pittance, and the hardships and dangers almost incredible.

Some years ago the village had been without a cure for nearly a year. The people, who are very devout, were greatly distressed at being left deprived of the sacraments so long. Happily for them, a young and very fervent priest, recently ordained, at last offered to take charge of the parish.

The Abbe Leray was prepared for what he would have to encounter—the scanty means of subsistence, the lonely life, the difficult and tiresome journeys. One thing only had deterred him: the thought of his mother. She was a widow, and he her only child. She had endured bitter privations to educate him for the priesthood; hoping, as her only reward in this world, that she might be permitted to take charge of his little household, and thus cheer and comfort him in his sacred calling.

Her son hesitated to ask her to share the hard life which he knew lay before him; but when she heard of his intention, she assured him it was the very thing she would have desired. She was used to poverty, and was never lonely. How could she be, with God and her own Jean! Her willingness to accompany him decided the young priest. A few weeks later they were installed in the small, poorly constructed and tumble-down presbytery, where they were eagerly welcomed by all the parishioners.

They arrived at Nestards in the summer time, and were entranced with the wild beauty of the place, and the charming old church. They soon made friends with all under their charge; and then began the toilsome but uneventful life that continued for several years, fruitful in the saving of souls.

At the end of the Abbe Leray's third year at Nestards, one of the most distant farms in the parish changed tenants. When the Cure heard of it, he at once set forth to call upon the new incumbent. To his great surprise, he was not only treated with coldness, but insolently requested never again to darken the doors of the house where he had expected to be received as a welcome guest.

The new owner of the farm was a young man about thirty years of age—a gentleman by birth, who had led such a dissolute life in Paris that he had wasted nearly all his patrimony, which had been considerable. He carried with him into his solitude a hatred of mankind, especially of priests. After the first visit, the Abbe Leray did not venture to call at Duret's again; but he always treated the young man with the greatest kindness whenever they met. Instead of reciprocating politely, Duret would reply