

**Hark! Angels Sing.**

O'er the hills night shadows steal;  
Scarce a light breeze stirs;  
See the Virgin mild  
Clasps her new-born child!  
Round the manger shepherds kneel—  
Humble worshippers.  
Hark! angels sing  
Round their heavenly King!  
'Tis for man, and not for them,  
Sleeps the Babe in Bethlehem.

Thou whose head to earth is lowly  
Bowed in woe and shame,  
When no help seems nigh  
To thy piteous cry,  
Think! it was not for the holy  
The Redeemer came.  
Hark! angels sing  
Round their heavenly King!  
For earth's sinful and defiled  
Comes to-night the Saviour Child.

He who to the cradle brings  
One pure, generous thought,  
To the infant there  
Brings a gift more rare  
Than the gold and myrrh the kings  
Of the Orient brought.  
Hark! angels sing  
Round their heavenly King!  
'Tis for man, and not for them,  
Sleeps the Babe in Bethlehem.  
—Harper's Magazine.

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TORONTO, DECEMBER 22, 1883.

**Christmas in History.**

BY REV. J. L. HURLBUT, A.M.

THE observance of Christmas, appropriate as it is, and now so world-wide does not rest either upon a divine command or an apostolic precedent. There is no allusion in the New Testament to any annual Church festivals, and the early history of the Church does not mention the celebration of any day in commemoration of Christ's birth until about 180 A.D. There was for a long time no uniformity in the date of the festival, which was held variously from January to May. It is remarkable that one of the earliest references to this day, at which all the world now rejoices, should be a sad story of the age of persecution. When Diocletian was emperor of the Roman world, between 284 and 305 A.D., on one occasion, while holding his court at Nicomedia, he learned that the Christians of the neighbourhood, with their children, had assembled in their church to celebrate the birth of Christ. He ordered the doors to be closed, and the church to be set on fire. His soldiers stood around to keep the sufferers

within the burning building, until church and Christians fell in the flames together.

Perhaps some reasons why Christmas Day was not observed earlier in the history of the Church were, among others, that the Gospels do not assign any day in the year for the birth of Christ; that the death and resurrection of Jesus as fixed by the calendar, were more important in the plan of redemption than His birth, and hence more generally observed by the early Church; and that there was no Jewish feast at the time of Christmas to be transferred into a Christian festival.

But the observance of a day in honour of Christ's birth grew more and more general in the Church, and about 380 A.D., in the times of Theodosius the Great the twenty-fifth of December was finally fixed on by the European Churches, and was accepted by those in the East. Why that particular date was taken cannot be known with certainty. There is the best of evidence that the birth of Jesus took place, not in the winter, but at a time in the year when shepherds and their flocks may be found together in the fields at night in Judea.

The festival of Christmas grew up at Rome, where it took the place and time of the old Saturnalia, or winter holidays of the heathen city. Indeed, many of the Christmas customs, and some of those the most beautiful, are said to have a heathen origin, and were simply transferred from the false worship to the true. Thus, hanging the houses with green was a heathen rite in Northern Europe from the earliest ages, and the lighting of tapers and giving of presents, which seem to us to recall the midnight manger and the gifts of the magi, are yet as old as Rome itself. The holly-berries and the mistletoe take us back to the Druid worship of the ancient Britons, and the yule-log rolled in state into many a baronial hall, is a reminiscence of the German yule-feast in commemoration of the sun's return at the winter solstice. Thus, as the water-jars at them arriage-feast were laden with wine at the Saviour's look, so the harmless elements of the primeval faiths took on a new meaning and beauty when touched by the Gospel of Christ.—*Sunday School Journal.*

WE beg to call the special attention of all Sunday-school teachers to the Announcement of our S. S. Periodicals for 1884 in this number of the *Banner*; and the Announcement of the *Methodist Magazine* in the *Pleasant Hours* for December 1—the best we have ever made. Several schools have for several years taken *Magazines* for circulation instead of libraries, being much cheaper, fresher, and more attractive. Special rates to schools given on application. HOME AND SCHOOL will contain many S. S. items, hints on teaching, etc., of special interest to S. S. workers—every one of whom should have it. Only 30 cents a year.

INTERNATIONAL SUNDAY-SCHOOL LESSONS FOR 1884.—It will be of interest to Sabbath-school workers to learn that the subjects for the International Sunday-school Lessons for the first six months of 1884 will be in the Acts and the Epistles. Three months will then be spent with "David and the Psalms." The last three months will be spent with "Solomon and the Books of Wisdom," the selections being from Kings, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes.



THE CHILD-DIKE.

WE have been much pleased to read the admirable sermon on Luther, preached in the Methodist church, Orillia, by the Rev. S. P. Rose. More than fifty years ago the Rev. Dr. Rose was the pioneer preacher of the gospel in this place, where his son is now labouring with such success.

So may the bright succession run  
With the last courses of the sun.

*A Child's Life of Luther.* 48 pages, 24mo. in size, illustrated. This is a fitting and appropriate memento to give to the girls and the boys of the Sunday-schools. Price 10 cents a copy; 75 cents a dozen; and in lots of 25 or more copies, at the rate of 5 cents each. Henry S. Boner, 42 North Ninth Street, Philadelphia.

The *Youths' Companion* is one of the most remarkable papers of the times. For 1884 it announces contributions from Tennyson, Hugo, Lord Lytton, Whittier, Dr. McKay, and many of the foremost writers of the world. It can only command this array of talent by virtue of its immense circulation of 820,000 a week. Its articles on current topics are written by the most qualified pens, and present, in a clear, vivid, direct way, the fundamental facts of home and foreign politics and all public questions. Its original anecdotes of public men are invaluable in their influence in stimulating right ambition and a high purpose in life. Every household needs the healthful amusement and high moral training of such a journal. It is published by Perry Mason & Co., of Boston, who will send specimen copies upon application. The price is \$1.75 a year, but it will be clubbed to new subscribers, with the *Canadian Methodist Magazine*, at \$1.50—the two for \$3.50 a year.

AND lo! there was heard at once the ringing of many bells,—rising at first far off in single notes of praise, then taken up hither and thither in harmonious concord—chime answering to chime and tower to tower—all in pleasant unison of joy, ringing down their sweet salutation to mankind below. To all of every name and nature, and to whom want, or inquietude, or sorrow were not unknown; that they, also, might lift up their voices in sweet acclaim, and rejoice alike for the blessings of peace and comfort now brought to them by the gladdening spirit of the bright Christmas festival.—*Leonard Rip.*

**The Child-Dike.**

HOLLAND is a beautiful country, full of green fields, with cattle and sheep grazing in the pastures; but there are few trees, and no hills to be seen. The ground is so flat and low, that two or three times the sea has rushed in over parts of it, and destroyed whole towns.

In one of these floods, about two hundred years ago, more than twenty thousand people were drowned. In some of the towns that were flooded not a creature of any kind was left alive.

A large part of the water that came in at the time of that flood still remains. It is known as "The Maas," and in one part of it there is a little green island,—a part of an old dike or dam,—which is called the "kinder-dike," or child-dike, and it got its name in this way.

The water rushed in over one of the little Friesland villages, and no one had any warning. In one of the houses there lay a child asleep in its cradle.—an old-fashioned cradle, made tight and strong of good stout wood.

By the side of the cradle lay the old cat, baby's friend, probably purring away as comfortably as possible. In came the waters with a fearful roar. The old cat, in her fright, jumped into the cradle with the baby, who slept through all the turmoil as quietly as ever. The people were drowned in their beds. The house was torn from its foundations and broken in pieces. But the little cradle floated out on the angry sea on that dark night, bearing safely its precious burden.

When morning came there was nothing to be seen of the villages and green meadows. All was water. Hundreds of people were out in boats trying to save as many people as possible, and on this little bit of an island that I have spoken of, what do you think they found? Why, that same old cradle, with the baby asleep in it, and the old cat curled up at her feet, all safe and sound.

Where the little voyagers came from, and to whom they belonged, no one could tell. But, in memory of them, this little island was called "kinder-dike,"—the child-dike,—and it goes by that name to this day; and this story is told to thousands of little people all over Holland as a remarkable instance of God's providence.

SUNDAY religion is good as far as it goes, but suppose a man dies on a week-day?