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The "Dominion Churchman" is the organ of the Church of England in Canada, and is an excellent medium for advertising—being a family paper, and by far the most extensively circulated Church journal in the Dominion.

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Address: P. O. Box 2640.  
Office, No. 11 Imperial Buildings, 30 Adelaide St. E  
west of Post Office, Toronto.

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## LESSONS for SUNDAYS and HOLY-DAYS.

- Dec. 23.—**FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT.**  
Morning—Isaiah xxx. to 27. Revelation xi.  
Evening—Isaiah xxxii., or xxxiii. Revelation xii.
- Dec. 25.—**CHRISTMAS DAY.**  
Morning—Isaiah ix. to 8. Luke ii. to 15.  
Evening—Isaiah vii. 10 to 17. Titus iii. 4 to 9.
- Dec. 26.—**ST. STEPHEN, THE FIRST MARTYR.**  
Morning—Genesis iv. to 11. Acts vi.  
Evening—2 Chronicles xxiv. 15 to 23. Acts viii. to 9.
- Dec. 27.—**ST. JOHN, APOSTLE AND EVANGELIST.**  
Morning—Exodus xxxiii 9. John xiii. 23 to 36.  
Evening—Isaiah vi. Revelation i.
- Dec. 28.—**INNOCENTS' DAY.**  
Morning—Jeremiah xxi. to 18. Revelation xvi.  
Evening—Baruch iv. 21 to 31. Revelation xviii.

THURSDAY, DEC. 20, 1888.

## CHRISTMAS DAY.

"Oh, blessed day which givest the eternal lie  
To self and sense and all the brute within;  
Oh, come to us, amid this war of life;  
To hall and hovel come; to all who toil  
In senate, shop or study; and to those  
Who, sundered by the waters of half a world,  
Ill warned and sorely tempted, ever face  
Nature, brute, powers and men unmanned to brutes.  
Come to them, blest and blessing Christmas day,  
Tell them once more the tale of Bethlehem;  
The kneeling Shepherds and the Babe Divine;  
And keep them men indeed, fair Christmas day."

—Rev. Charles Kingsley.

## CHRISTMAS SUPERSTITIONS.

BY THE EDITOR.

WE can hardly be surprised at the number and variety of superstitious ideas and customs associated with Christmas Day. The event this Festival commemorates stands alone in history, as the one most removed from the ordinary phenomena of life, of which we have any knowledge, or imagination could conceive. It has been the policy of the enemies of the Catholic Church to banish the remembrance of Christmas from among men, because the FACT this day of days celebrates refuses to blend with their artificial systems of theology, and witnesses against their narrow schemes with a terrible earnestness which they cannot endure. Hence the utter neglect of Christmas by certain so-called Churches; hence the glory with which this Festival is surrounded by the Catholic Church.

We are not apologizing for the following superstitious notions, we simply record them as illustrations of the supernatural atmosphere surrounding this day in early times. First then we note that it

was believed in olden days that if any portion of the Christmas decoration be left in a family pew on Candlemas day, a death will soon occur in that circle. The dread of this is not wholly extinct, as there are living persons, very aged ones, who take the utmost care to clear away all traces of Christmas in good time from their places in church. Herrick, whose quaint allusions to old customs are so interesting, writes:

"Down with the ivy, holly, all,  
Wherewith ye dress the Christmas hall;  
For look, how many leaves there be  
Neglected there (maids trust to me)  
So many goblins you shall see."

We are disposed to think that this arose out of an exaggerated form of reverence for Christmas and its belongings, so that the churches would be cleared of decayed leaves and berries whose corruption and unsightliness might not desecrate the church they had adorned. A little of this feeling is wanted here. We have seen Christmas decorations hung up all the year through, so losing all appropriateness and teaching. We say "teaching" with emphasis, for church decorations ought to teach Church doctrine, and through the eye touch the heart or inform the mind.

Another strange fancy is peculiar to the South of England. Young girls will pluck a rose on midsummer day and hide it out of sight until Christmas Day. It is thought that if unseen between these days it will bloom afresh at Christmas, and when worn at church will draw to them their future husband. There is a symbolism in this, we fancy, which we leave our young lady readers to guess at. Certain we are that no rose plucked in summer ever lived in winter, but as certain are we that there is a beauty as that of a rose, which blooms with ever brightening sweetness from Christmas to Christmas, drawing love by its irresistible charms all through life on earth and on from heavenly midsummers to eternal Christmas Days undimmed. This belief in the power of Christmas over flowers had a very curious form in connection with a tree in Buckinghamshire, said to have been a siip from the celebrated Glastonbury thorn. It was believed that this thorn blossomed on Christmas Day. When the "style" was changed in the last century, Christmas Day was put forward to 6th January. To test the correctness of the change some thousands of persons went to inspect the tree to see if it blossomed. Of course it did not. They therefore refused to go to church, or to receive friends or recognize the new order of dates. To avoid rioting the clergy of that district promised to observe "Old Christmas Day" as before the change of style. We can remember when in Yorkshire the old day was kept up with Christmas festivities in diminished glory. It yet serves to mark the end of the social period of Christmas, after which the churches are stripped of their holly and houses of the season's decorations. We need not sneer at the good old folks' clinging to the old date for Christmas which science changed. For in this age there are persons who keep up "old time" in spite of "standard time" being established. It seems inevitable that those who believed in roses and thorns blooming at Christmas, should connect the day with the heavenly bodies and the weather. A warning moon, an unseen moon, nearness to a new moon, at Christmas all were good omens for harvest. So also was a sunny Christmas good for

apples, or a windy one for grain, while a wet one foretold a wet year. The Meteorological Department, we fear, do not take much stock in these old superstitions. There can hardly be a doubt, however, that they were based upon observations of coincident facts. It is not uncommon even to-day for persons to draw general and very wide conclusions indeed from such casual coincidences as those which gave rise to weather notions. Indeed there are some notions very popular amongst those who ought to know better, which have arisen from, and are merely supported by, chance occurrences quite as disconnected as Christmas Day and the next harvest.

The foregoing relate to very foolish but quite innocent notions. There was, however, a very cruel custom in Kerry, of hunting wren and killing these birds with sticks on Christmas Day—surely a sad profanation of the day, when under the rafters where birds nested, the Lord of Glory received the homage of the brute creation amongst whom He was cradled. The tradition was that a wicked fairy drew men and boys after her, until they fell into the sea. At last a deliverer arose, and the fairy was compelled to assume the form of a wren, so this poor, innocent bird was hunted cruelly from bush to bush on each Christmas Day. The habit was so senseless and so brutal that some years ago it was stopped by authority. We should rejoice to see a stop put in Canada by the law to the utterly brutish practice of men and boys sallying forth gun in hand on all public holidays to kill or wound any and every bird they get within range. It is not sport, it is a mere gratification of a sanguinary, savage instinct which sees in life only something to destroy.

It is a relief to turn from so sad a picture, to the amusing one of men watching, as they yet do in Yorkshire, by the beehives on Christmas Eve, both old and new style, and listening for the bees to hum, as they are supposed to do, a hymn of praise to the Babe of Bethlehem. Some yet hold that the bees tell which is the true Christmas Eve. We prefer the almanac, but do not propose to even say a harsh word of those who believe in even the insects He has created rejoicing on His birthday—being in this more noble than some of His professed disciples. A somewhat similar belief obtains as to bells. Where the churches," says one author, "are said to have been swallowed up by earthquakes or the sea, the old Church bells are said to ring deep down every Christmas morn. and people put their ears to the ground to catch the mysterious chimes." At a Northamptonshire village the people used to visit a valley near by to listen to the Christmas chimes of sunken bells, swallowed by an earthquake. So also near Blackpool, Lancashire, dismal chimes are believed to come over the sea from a church which was swallowed up by the waves. We have heard such sounds coming out of the earth, not from any mysterious bells, but from colliers passing the dinner hour in ringing changes on hand-bells. There may be a symbolic meaning in this listening. If in the quiet hours of a Christmas night we put our ears in close contact with the earth we shall hear ringing down the line of eighteen centuries past the joy-bells of the Church of Jesus, ringing in Christian hearts all along the ages grateful jublations of welcome to each Christ-