

of our Saviour, Jesus Christ. When it was instituted we cannot tell precisely. We do know, however, that traces of it are found about the time of the Emperor Commodus (180—192 A. D.). But when was the 25th of December fixed upon as the proper time for observing this festival? It is now very generally admitted that Christ's birth could not have taken place at that time of the year, which was the worst part of the rainy season in Judea, when shepherds could hardly be looking after their flocks at night in the plains of Bethlehem. We know, moreover, that the early churches were not uniform in the period of the year for observing the Nativity. Some held the festival in the month of May or April, others in January. This want of uniformity continued until the 5th century, when the 25th of December was set down as the most suitable time for the celebration.

But if we can speak with comparative certainty as to the time, we are more in the dark as to the reason for fixing upon this date. Various opinions have been expressed as to the causes that may have co-operated to fix the day. Some say that a certain existing tradition had influenced men's minds. Others think that it was in large measure the expression of a desire among Christians to supplant the great heathen festivals which took place at that season. Even though we are obliged to remain in ignorance as to the real cause which settled the question, there is no reason to believe that it was done arbitrarily. Efforts have been made, and with good success, to show that Christians have simply borrowed a pagan custom. It is well known, indeed, that from time immemorial, amongst not only barbarous but even refined nations, custom has surrounded the winter-solstice with many peculiar religious rites and ceremonies. Almost all the nations of the heathen world looked upon the winter-solstice as the most important point of the whole year, when renewed life and vigor was beginning to possess the great powers of nature. Of all the religious rites and ceremonies mentioned as taking place at this particular season of the year, the Saturnalia, a great festival held by the Romans in honor of Saturn, the god of Time, was undoubtedly the most important. And it is to this grand Roman festival that many are inclined to look for the origin of our present Christmas celebration. About the middle of December it began, and continued many days, during which time a general license was given to all sorts of jollity and mirth. But let us come nearer home. Our own heathen forefathers in Britain, Scandinavia and the forests of Germany from the earliest times celebrated this very season with the greatest festivities. It was at the winter-solstice that the Germans held their great Yule-feast (Eng. *wheel*) as a part of their system of sun-worship, to commemorate the return of the fiery sun-wheel. These Northern tribes firmly believed that during the twelve nights reaching from the 25th of December to the 6th of January they could trace the personal movements and interferences on earth of their great deities, Odin, Berchta, etc. So, too, long before the white cliffs