

## CHRISTMAS HYMN.

SAY what offering can we  
Bring to Jesus lovingly  
On His birthday morn ;  
As by faith we softly tread  
Where on lowly manger-bed  
Lies the Babe new-born.

We would bring our life this day  
Humbly at His feet to lay,  
For His will to use ;  
Though so poor a gift it be,  
What is offered willingly  
He will not refuse.

Gold of love we'll offer there  
Incense, too, of praise and prayer,  
Brought with reverence due.  
And, for all the sins which He  
Bore for us upon the tree,  
Myrrh of sorrow true.

All our selfishness and pride  
We would strive to lay aside,  
And our pattern take  
From His life, who long ago  
Came into this world of woe  
For His brethren's sake.

J. E.

## USEFUL HINTS.

**TO MAKE BREAD QUICKLY AND EASILY.**—Weigh 2 lbs. of the best flour, and rub in one teaspoonful of salt, then mix gradually a pennyworth of German yeast with a pint and a half of lukewarm water; work this into the flour, and let it stand for a couple of hours to rise, after which you can slightly knead and make up into loaves, place in your tins, and bake in a quick oven. The above quantity will make four good loaves.

**BEEF TEA.**—To 1 lb. of leg or shin of beef, minced up small, add three half-pints of water and let it stand all night; in the morning put it in a nice clean saucepan and let it come slowly to the boil, watching that it only simmers gently; then put in a little salt to flavour, and a top crust which has been toasted a dark brown. Keep the lid close, and simmer gently for three hours, then pour it off, and when cold remove the fat; it is then ready for use.

**TO FRY FISH OR CUTLETS ECONOMICALLY.**—Dry your fish thoroughly with a cloth, then roll it in flour; next make a batter of flour and water, dip your fish in on both sides, dredge over some fine raspings—which you can procure from your baker; fry quickly in boiling lard or oil.

**STEAK-PIE OR PUDDING.**—In making, sprinkle about half a teaspoonful of moist sugar over the steak along with the pepper and salt; it not only improves the flavour, but makes the meat very tender.

**COFFEE MADE IN A JUG WITHOUT BOILING.**—Warm your jug, then measure out the coffee, say a good teaspoonful for each cup, pour the boiling water on to it, stir it round well, cover it over, and let it stand for five minutes; then stir it round again, put a table-spoonful of cold water and a good pinch of salt in to fine it, cover up, and let it stand for ten minutes, when it will be ready for use. Serve with hot milk.

**TO MAKE TEA AND PRESERVE THE FLAVOUR.**—First warm your teapot, then fill it with water boiling from the fire, and having the quantity of tea required measured out in a cup, put it into teapot on the top of the water, cover it up quickly and put the cosy over, letting it stand for ten minutes.

**LEMONADE.**—Peel three lemons, squeeze the juice into a jug, and add part of the peel, pour a quart of boiling water over the lemons, and sweeten to taste, either with barley-sugar or sugar.

**WHEN ROASTING MEAT,** sprinkle a little salt and flour over it; it adds to the flavour of the meat and helps to brown the gravy, which should be made from the dripping-pan, after the dripping is removed.

**TONIC.**—1 oz. of Peruvian bark, 1 oz. of gentian root, 1 oz. of coriander seeds, 1 oz. of Seville orange peel; pound these ingredients, and put them into a bottle of good French brandy; infuse for one week before using. Dose, one teaspoonful in a wineglass of water half an hour before dinner.

## OUR YULE-TIDE EVER-GREENS.



HOUSANDS of busy hands are, year by year, engaged in gathering and arranging the evergreen boughs and blossoms of the winter season; and much good taste is exhibited in their graceful distribution in our homes and places of worship. But a large proportion of those young people who gather and form these treasures of the woods and gardens into beautiful decorations, know nothing of their properties and uses, and the historical interest attached to them. Now, it is both pleasant and profitable to learn something more of the things we so commonly handle than their mere names, form, or colour; and thus, what little additional information I possess in reference to these Christmas greeneries shall be placed at their service.

I have adopted the old name "Yule-tide" because the custom of decorating with evergreen boughs was of ancient date in Britain; and, by a curious coincidence, the season which was made one of rejoicing and festivity on account of the sun's revolution at the "winter's solstice" by our heathen ancestors, was that period when in after years the advent of our blessed Lord was commemorated, and made the time for family reunions, giving of love-tokens, alms, and hospitality.

The name "Christmas," which succeeded "Yule-tide," was derived from the Saxon word *Messe*, a "feast," and so may be rendered "Christ-feast." *Yule* likewise means "a feast," of which term there are several very similar ones, derived from the same primitive root in the Danish and Swedish as well as Saxon and Anglo-Saxon languages. I will not enter further into the question of the meaning and origin of the quaint old name "yule," because in a former article I made some observations thereupon, but pass on to the main subject under consideration.

The shrubs and evergreen trees chiefly in use for the decorations of the above-named festival are the bay, box, cypress, holly, ivy, laurel, laurastina, mistletoe, and yew; and to supplement these, there are winter flowers, such as Christmas roses, monthly roses, crocuses, snowdrops, daisies, bachelor's buttons, dried lavender, together with ferns, furze, parsley leaves, pine cones, &c. I will confine my observations, however, to the few evergreens which are above-named, and within the reach of all.

The Bay-tree (*Laurus nobilis*) is a native of Europe, Asia, and Africa. It is a highly aromatic shrub, and is much esteemed, as most of you know, for culinary purposes, and the decorative trimming of dishes; but, already familiar with the tree and its uses, some of you may like to know something of its classical history. The curious traditions connected with it date back to very early times, long prior to the Christian era, when it was designated the "tree of Apollo." The story was that the heathen deity, Jupiter, was credited with having transformed Daphne into a bay-tree to save her from the pursuit of the former. On this account we learn that peculiar virtues were attributed to it; and, amongst others, it was believed to be a preservative against injury from lightning.

Probably on this account it was that some of the Roman emperors, including Tiberius, selected the bay to form the wreath which they wore round the head, just as they would have worn an amulet. It was also employed to make those with which poets were crowned, and the successful competitors in some of the ancient games—then as a symbol of victory. The bay was also credited with gifting those who tasted its leaves with prophetic inspirations, and thus the Pythian Priestess used to chew them, because, after a season of abstinence, they produced some degree of excitement. Besides being regarded as a symbol of victory, the withering of the tree was considered of evil omen, and a presage of death. An allusion to this superstition is to be found in one of the plays of Shakespeare, viz.—

"'Tis thought the king is dead. We'll not stay;

The bay-trees in our country are withered."

—Richard II.

The Box-tree (*Buxus*) follows next on my list. There was some traditional virtue or significance attached to it, evidenced in the discovery of the twigs found in some old British barrows in Essex. There are dwarf species as well as forest trees; and in the neighbourhood of Dorking there is some high ground called "Box-hill," which was at one time covered with this valuable tree, most of which was cut down at the beginning of the present century (1815), and sold for £10,000. The grain of the wood is exquisitely fine and close, and is found superior to all others for engraving and wood-carving, the manufacture of musical and mathematical instruments, and chessmen, &c., its delicate, pale yellow colour rendering any use of a dye not only superfluous, but destructive of its beauty. There are splendid forests of this tree both in north-western Russia and Persia; but in this country they now grow singly as a rule; but the dwarf kind (*Buxus sempervirens*), which is a Dutch variety, is much employed as a border for flower-beds, and in carpet-gardening. In country villages you may often observe the quaint shapes into which box-trees are cut, an idea borrowed by our ancestors from the Romans. The latter clipped them into the shapes of gigantic birds and beasts. No blossoms appear on this tree until the month of April; but its small and pointed leaves, somewhat resembling those of the myrtle, contrast well with the broad and brighter leaves of

the laurel. It was a great favourite amongst our forefathers for the decoration of their houses on festal occasions, and it is one of those named by the prophet Isaiah to flourish in the land of Israel, when the waste places shall resume their ancient fruitfulness, and become "the garden of the Lord"; and, again, we are told, "He shall plant in the desert the fir-tree, the pine-tree, and the box-tree together" (Isaiah lxi. 19), and also in chap. lx. 13, "The glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee; the fir-tree, the pine-tree, and the box together; to beautify the place of my sanctuary."

The Cypress stands third in alphabetical order, and may be utilised amongst our Christmas decorations. It is true that this peculiar and beautiful tree is much connected with cemetery plantations, owing to its dark and sombre hue; but it is likewise associated with births and weddings from ancient times in the East. When a daughter was born amongst the inhabitants of the Greek archipelago, a grove of cypress trees was planted by the father as her future portion, her fortune augmenting as her years were multiplied. And thus we may trace the origin of the name by which these groves were designated—viz., "daughters' dowers." The tree is one characterised by extreme longevity. Its duration of life is computed at from five to six hundred years, some proportion reaching from eight to nine hundred. But Strabo names one example in Persia which had attained the wonderful age of 2,500 years. They rise to a height of about 120 feet, and measure from twenty-five to forty feet in circumference. One cypress, seen by De Candolle in Mexico, measured as much as 120 feet round at the base, and was considered by him to be older than Adamson's and Humboldt's famous baobab, or baobab tree, of Africa, which tree is the patriarch of living organisations. By calculating its circles the specimen which they especially name was estimated at an age of 5,700 years. The cypress of Montezuma is forty-one feet in circumference, and, grand as it is, it is quite diminutive in comparison with that in Mexico, before-named. It is said that, when the roots of this tree are for six months under water, it is observed to grow to a gigantic size.

The Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) is a special favourite amongst our Christmas greeneries, for it is not only employed on walls, windows, and pillars, but is awarded a place of distinction on the dinner-table, to beautify with its scarlet berries the historical and characteristic "plum pudding," the "standing dish" of the season. There is considerable variety exhibited in the colour of the leaves, some trees producing them of an ivory-white, and some a beautiful and delicate shade of pink, while on others we find them variegated. The most remarkable specimens of this description which I have myself observed were some in the County Carlow. Perhaps the deep shade of the splendid avenue of ancient yew-trees with which these hollies were surrounded may have had some influence in the colouring, at least, of the ivory-white variety.

Perhaps it may be regarded as having a special claim to recognition, not alone for its bright appearance but as one of the limited number of trees indigenous to Great Britain. The name has been erroneously supposed to be a corruption of the word "holy," but it has, however, been dignified in Germany and throughout Scandinavia by the distinctive name of "Christ's Thorn," possibly because of its putting forth its berries at the nominal season of our Saviour's birth, the time-honoured custom of its use in the decoration of churches in commemoration of that event, and as a natural result of many of the ancient traditions connected with it. For instance, according to legendary history, it was the bush in which

God appeared to Moses in a flame of fire; and when the latter turned aside to see why the bush was not burnt, "God called unto him out of the midst of the bush," and told him that the place whereon he stood was "holy ground." There is also another legendary history attached to the holly tree, and that is that the cross on which our Saviour was crucified was made of its wood, on which account it was known as the *Lignum Sanctæ crucis*. But not alone since the Christian era has it been held in such esteem; for in Eastern nations, as well as in the West, and dating back to early heathen times, it was valued, not merely for its beauty, but for some fancied medicinal virtues, and as possessing some characteristics connected with the supernatural. It was dedicated to Saturn by the ancient Romans, whose feast, held in his honour, was observed at the same period of the year as the Christian festival, and commemorated, among other ways, by the sending of sprigs between friends and relatives, accompanied by good wishes, just as we send pictorial cards and kindly greetings. The flowers of the holly were regarded, according to Pliny, as an antidote to poison, and a decoction produced from the leaves was supposed to convey the gift of wisdom by the Persians, for which reason they sprinkled their children with it. Our own Druids, pitying the sylvan sprites when, during the season of frost and snow, there was no shelter provided for them by the leafless branches of the oak, used to garnish the walls of private dwellings with branches of holly, in which they could find a place of refuge suited to their taste.

I now pass on to the Ivy (*Hedera helix*), which is seen in perfection at this season, the blossoms being amongst the very few that gladden the eye in winter. There are various kinds of ivy, some being of a reddish purple, resembling the colour of the Virginia creeper; others of an ivory-white, and others variegated, having irregular markings and streaks of green and white; and perhaps no other plant can show so great a variety in the formation of the leaves and in their respective dimensions. What is known as "Irish ivy" was imported from the Canary Islands as a covering for an old wall or a border for a flower-bed; and even as an evergreen substitute for flowers in the same, as well as to serve as a climber over a wire trellis on a house, or an archway over a garden walk, it is of much beauty and value. It is also suitable as hanging greenery for a garden vase or a basket suspended in a room.

But it clings with only too "cruel kindness" to a tree, and absorbs much of the nourishment which should go to it from the soil, depriving it of air, light, and sunshine, and strangling it in its deadly grasp. Never allow it to grow as a parasite on any tree, and wherever found so doing, saw the stem through at the base, that it may wither, and release its hold, and then pull up the root, for it will kill whatever it entwines. Ivy will live to a stupendous age, ranging from five to six hundred years. As a decoration for the pillars of a church it could not be surpassed in suitability and elegance; and as regards any symbolic significance it is one of the emblems of eternal life. In reference to its classical history and ancient associations, it was dedicated by the Egyptians to Osiris, and by the Greeks and Romans to Bacchus, or the god of wine, who was represented as crowned with ivy, as it was supposed by the ancients to neutralise the intoxicating influence of any excess in wine-drinking.

But this graceful evergreen had a second symbolic significance in the old-world times, derived from the tenacity with which it clings to whatever it once entwines. On this account it was presented by the heathen priests to persons newly married, to represent the "Gordian knot," by which they were bound one to the other. Hence the motto, "We flourish

or fall together." Ivy was presented in the form of wreaths and garlands to the victors at the Isthmian games, afterwards superseded by pine-branch garlands. It bears round clusters of dark purple berries, which succeed the blossoms, in the depth of the winter season.

The Laurel, one of the most beautiful of our winter evergreens, was famous in classic times, and in the Christian art of the middle ages. It was introduced into Europe from the East in 1679. The name is derived from the Celtic *blaur*, pronounced "lor," and signifying "green." The plant is of the genus *Laurus nobilis*, or bay tree, of which there are many species, and all valuable, including the camphor, cinnamon, bay (before-named), and sassafras. A considerable difference in character is shown in the tree called the American laurel, a shrub of the genus *Kalmia*. Other kinds are known as the cherry laurel, or *Prunus laurocerasus*; and also the great laurel, or *Rhododendron maximum*. No plant has a finer glaze on its beautiful pointed broad leaves. Early in the year they turn to a fine yellow hue, and fall off; but they are completely replaced by the middle of April. The blossoms are small and white, growing in clusters. As to its classical associations, it was famous amongst plants. In the Pythian games the victors were rewarded by wreaths of laurels, while those in the Olympic were formed of green parsley. It was supposed to possess extraordinary virtues, endowing those who slept under its branches with poetical inspirations, and likewise to be a safeguard against the power of lightning, as it could never be struck by it. I have myself seen the group of laurels around the tomb of Virgil at Baia, near Naples, who died there on his way to Greece, and these laurels are the successors of the parent trees which were planted there by Petarch.

The *Laurestinus*, or *Viburnum tinus*, was known to the ancients as the *Tinus*, the leaves of which, as you know, are smaller, darker, and less glazed than those of the laurel. It is not a native of this country, but was introduced here at about the time of Bacon, having been introduced into Europe from the East in 1596. It is now common everywhere; but in the south of Europe it even forms extensive hedges. Its berries are of a dark purple colour, and the tiny blossoms grow in large clusters, presenting a flat, even surface of a pinkish-white tint. I am not aware that the *Laurestinus* has any classical associations, and only name it as an admirable addition to the greeneries which the winter season affords.

Next in order on our list of evergreens is the Mistletoe.

This curious plant, which owes its existence and borrows its nutriment from another, and not direct from the soil, is a parasite of the oak, crab-apple, pear, locust, and lime-trees, that on the oak being the rarest kind. In Anglo-Saxon it was called *Misteltôt*. A popular song, well known by many of our readers, bears the name of "The Mistletoe Bough," and the unfortunate young bride, who constitutes the heroine of a very tragic history, has been multiplied, like William Tell, and claimed by more than one distinguished family, but, I have reason to believe, was one of the Copes of Bramshill, although the catastrophe took place during a residence of her family in Italy. With reference to the mistletoe, I must remind you that the Druids selected it to do honour to their great festival in the winter solstice. They called it "All-Heal," and, according to some accounts, they used to cut it from the trees with their brazen celts, or upright hatchets, fastened to the ends of their staves; but, according to others, it was cut by the chief of the Druids with a golden sickle, kept for that purpose only. These branches were carried by them in procession, and laid upon their altars. (See Stukeley's

account—"Medallic History of Carausius.") It is said that the medicinal properties of this curious and beautiful plant were universally believed in, and that wonderful cures were effected by its use in cases of epilepsy and various other disorders of a like character. In the year 1729 a treatise was published on its virtues as a medicine by Sir John Colbach; and, more especially in reference to its use in epilepsy, another appeared in 1806 by a Dr. Fraser. The genuine plant is the *Viscum album* of botany; but there is one very nearly allied to it—the *Loranthus Europæus*—which may often be found on the oak, as on the

other trees named. This species is to be found near Vienna, in the garden of Schönbrunn, but does not appear in a more westerly direction. It has been thought that this, and not the *Viscum album*, was the sacred mistletoe of the Druids. A description of bird-lime is made from its fruit.

The use and veneration of the mistletoe was peculiar to the Celts and Goths, who alike introduced it into their religious rites as the sun approached the winter solstice. It forms the solitary exception amongst our evergreens in reference to the decoration of churches, and is, by common consent, altogether con-

fined to our private homes. The poet Gay, in his "Trivia," names it amongst the other greeneries set up in our churches; but he did so through some oversight, for the plant so peculiarly connected with ancient heathen worship in this country, having been, by a mistake of a country sexton, brought into a Christian place of worship, it was expelled on account of its heathen associations, which rendered its use inappropriate.

The last evergreen respecting which my space will permit me to speak, is the Yew, or *Taxus baccata*. Emblematic as it is of death, it is also recognised as one of immortality. In olden times the wood was especially valuable as the best for the manufacture of bows and cross-bows, and those of you who are well-informed in English history may remember that with the bows of yew the battles of Cressy and Poitiers were won; the best in use for modern archery, and a variety of articles, such as arm-chairs, are likewise manufactured from it. The trunks of these venerable-looking trees resemble a number of rods bound together, looking like "fluted" pillars. I have seen an avenue of such at Fenagh, co. Carlow, which presented the appearance of a dim cathedral aisle. The yew is famous for its great longevity. One found in a bog had 545 rings, each marking an annual growth, although the diameter measured only 18 inches—100 rings to an inch. Those at Fountain's Abbey are about 1,200 years old; one at Crowhurst of 1,500; at Fortingal, another upwards of 2,000; and at Brabourne, in Kent, and at Hedson, Buckinghamshire, there are patriarchs of from 2,500 to 3,000 years of age, being the oldest specimens of still living vegetation existing. Yew trees seem to have been favourites with our forefathers. We see them not only in churchyards, but in the little gardens in front of country cottages and farm-houses, very usually clipped into grotesque forms like box-trees. They were also much employed for garden hedges, of which a very remarkable specimen is to be seen at Battle Abbey, in Sussex. They are also much employed in the same way in Holland.

I will not now speak of the gorse, ferns, and other evergreens that also help to deck our homes at this great season of family reunions; my notes, composed of facts and fables, are concluded; but I must raise your thoughts to higher considerations: the unfading blooms and eternal reunions, where He is Lord of the feast, whose birth, as the "Son of Man," we feebly commemorate here.

The evergreen plants, which ancient custom has connected with that wondrous event, may typify in your mind the never-fading "Tree of Life," in the paradise of God. The incomprehensible "ages of ages" are spoken of, in connection with it, as if divided by months and years; but only to convey to your minds the idea that through the long course of that blissful existence will be granted successively new delights. Nor is this all. For the sick and suffering what is the feast? to the blind, the loveliest garden? But with the ever-varying joys will be granted the power of enjoyment, for "Then shall the blind see out of obscurity; the lame man shall leap as a hart; and the tongue of the dumb shall sing," for "the leaves" of that tree are "for the healing of the nations."

S. F. A. CAULFIELD.



THE STORY OF THE EVERGREENS.