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Lo, now is come our joyfullst time,
Let every man be jolly;
Each room with Ivy leaves is drest,
And every post with Holly.
Without the door let Sorrow lie,
And if for cold he hap to die,
We'll bury him in a Christmas Pye,
And evermore be merry.



ALL of the evergreen plants have long been considered symbolic of immortality, of rebirth. Hence they, and they alone, are appropriate decorations for the Christmas season, which was originally a celebration, under the disguise of various national religious forms, of the turning of the sun at the winter solstice, and the consequent renewal of life on the earth.

When Constantine was converted, he seized upon every underlying likeness, however remote, between the old faith and the new. Every familiar symbol that might be stretched to fit the strange faith; every old custom that would help to reconcile his lately, and sometimes forcibly, converted people to their unaccustomed belief, was adopted and re-explained. And the return of the sun, bringing life and light to the winter-bound earth, became the prototype of the coming of the Son of Man, bringing life and light to the soul of the sin-bound world. So that at first all the heathen observances were retained as far as possible, and merely given a new meaning.

At the Christmas festival, the ivy and holly still made a summer screen of the stone walls, as in ancient Germany they had turned the huge halls at mid-winter, to bowers of greenery, wherein the sylvan sprites, who dwell in summer among the forest trees, might pass the frozen months without too much discomfort. An echo from Scandinavia is still heard in the saying current among the peasants of the old world that if any bit of holiday decoration is left in the house after Candlemas day (February 2), a troop of little devils will enter and sit, one on each withered leaf, every one bringing its own small curse upon the house. These little devils are merely the old forest sprites, detained against their will by their undestroyed winter refuge and fretting to return to the awakening woods of spring.

The churches were still green with Christmas garlands in those early days, and ablaze with candles, as the temples of Saturn had always been during the corresponding Roman festival of the Saturnalia. But, as Polydore Vergil remarks, "Trymmyng the temples with hangyngs, floures, boughes and garlandes, was taken of the heathen people, which decked their idols and houses in suche array." And as time went on, and it became no more necessary to make concessions that would help reconcile the people to their changed faith, these "heathen" customs became distasteful to the church. One of the early councils forbids men longer "to deck up their houses with lawrell, yvie, and greene boughes, as we used to doe at the Christmase season."

This command was observed in the temples, but in the baronial halls the

old customs lived on; lived down their questionable past; won again the toleration of the priests who had sternly banished them, and to-day all the evergreens again are admitted to the strictest church, so that we again can say at Christmas,

"Now with bright Holly all the temples strow
With Ivy green, and sacred Mistletoe."

The "Early Calendar of English Flowers," an old poem wherein each month is recognized by its appropriate plant symbol, ends with these lines:

Soon the evergreene Laurel alone is greene,
When Catherine crowns all learned menne.
The Ivie and Hollie berries are seene,
And Yule log and Wassail come round agen.

The laurel is used not at all, and the ivy but little, in American decorations at Christmas, since both plants are exceedingly rare here. But in England the use of the ivy at least is universal, and the references to it in Christmas song and story alone would fill a small volume.

Besides its claim to appropriateness for the Christmas season which it holds in common with other evergreens, it has two especially strong recommendations of its own. On account of its habit of clinging strongly to its supporting tree or wall, it is a popular symbol of friendship and fidelity, and as such, an excellent decoration for the season of good will and universal brotherhood. And it was, in Roman days, sacred to Bacchus, who, when a baby, was hidden by his aunt, Ino, among its leaves, to save him from Juno's destructive wrath. Pryne says:

At Christmas men do always Ivy get,
And in each corner of the house it set;
But why do they then use that Bacchus weed?
Because they mean then Bacchus-like to feed.

This satirical explanation was but too true in the earlier days, when Christmas lasted for weeks, and was given over to a revelry almost wholly heathen in character.

To-day, in America, the Christmas decorations almost exclusively are of holly, which, for all its popularity, is less consecrated by legend than any other holiday greenery. To be sure we make a sparing use of the mistletoe, which, from the ancient Druidical meaning of purity given to its wax-white berries, and from its use by them in the marriage rite, has come to give a charter for kissing as "broad as the wind." And we have added the bitter-sweet, which has no traditional signification whatever, is not an evergreen, and is to be tolerated merely for its beauty's sake, and for the slight suggestion it gives of the holly berry.

Our American holly is said to be less beautiful than the European plant, having leaves of a duller green. But, making all allowances for possible disadvantages, it still is a remarkably beautiful tree. And as a symbol of the immortality which it is the season's special mission to teach, it surely has no rival. The leaves remain on the branches for three years.

losing their hold only when they are pushed off at last by the growing buds of spring.

Throughout England, so little is its supremacy disputed, that it is popularly known as "Christmas," just as the hawthorn is called "The May."

Its name has been a matter of considerable interest. Theophrastus and other Greek authors named the plant Agria; that is, wild, or of the fields. The Romans formed from this the word Aquifolium and called it also Aquifolium, from actum, sharp, and follum, a leaf. Bauhin and Loureiro first named it Ilex, from the resemblance of its leaves to those of the Quercus Ilex, a species of oak which was the true Ilex of Virgil. Linnaeus adopted the name Ilex for the genus, and preserved the name Aquifolium for the most anciently known species.

Our popular name, holly, proceeds from a corruption of the word holy, as Turner in his herbal calls it holy, and holy tree. The thorny foliage, and the berries like drops of bright blood, could scarcely fail to remind a Christian of the crown of thorns, and this, together with the universal use of the plant in the churches at Christmas easily would account for the name.

In Germany it is known as Christdorn. The Danish name is Christorn and the Swedish Christorn. The same name, Christ's thorn, is found in some parts of England. But as no legend connects the holly with the crown of thorns, this name, universal among the Germanic peoples, must be merely the result of its appearance and of its Christmas popularity, as before suggested.

John Ruskin's Nursery Story

Dame Wiggins of Lee and her Seven Wonderful Cats.

It is not generally known that the famous Art Critic and Litterateur, John Ruskin, published a nursery story in rhyme. He attributes the original of the story to a Miss Greenaway and remarks that "in the old book no account is given of what the cats learned when they went to school! He added, therefore, the third, fourth, eighth and ninth stanzas and remarks:—"But my rhymes do not ring like the real."

We give the story here for the benefit of the young folk for the same reason which Ruskin gave when he wrote "I have the greatest pleasure in commending it to the indulgence of the Christmas fireside, because it relates nothing that is sad and portrays nothing that is ugly."

Dame Wiggins of Lee
Was a worthy old soul,
As e'er threaded a needle,
Or washed in a bowl:
She held mice and rats
In such anti-pa-thy;
That seven fine cats
Kept Dame Wiggins of Lee

The rats and mice scared
By this fierce whisker'd crew,
The poor seven cats
Soon had nothing to do;
So, as any one idle
She ne'er loved to see
She sent them to school,
Did Dame Wiggins of Lee

The Teacher soon wrote
That they all of them knew
How to read the word "milk"
And to spell the word "mew"
And they all wash'd their faces
Before they took tea;
'Were there ever such dears!'
Said Dame Wiggins of Lee

He had also thought well
To comply with their wish
To spend all their play-time
In learning to fish
For slitlings; they sent her
A present of three
Which, fried, were a feast
For Dame Wiggins of Lee

But soon she grew tired
Of living alone;
So she sent for her cats
From school to come home,
Each rowing a wherry.
Returning you see:
The frolic made merry
Dame Wiggins of Lee

The Dame was quite pleas'd
And ran out to market;
When she came back
They were mending the carpet.
The needle each handled
As brisk as a bee;
'Well done, my good cats,'
Said Dame Wiggins of Lee

To give them a treat
She ran out for some rice;
When she came back
They were skating on ice,
'I shall soon see one down,
Aye, perhaps, two or three
'I'll bet half-a-crown'
Said Dame Wiggins of Lee

When spring-time came back
They had breakfast of curds;
And were greatly afraid
Of disturbing the birds,
'If you sit, like good cats,
All the seven in a tree
They will teach you to sing!'
Said Dame Wiggins of Lee

So they sat in a tree
And said "Beautiful Hark!"
And they listen'd and look'd
In the clouds for the lark.
Then sang by the fireside
Symphonious-ly
A song without words
To Dame Wiggins of Lee

They called the next day
On the tomtit and sparrow,
And wheel'd a poor sick lamb
Home in a barrow,
'You shall have some sprats
For your human-ty
My seven good cats'
Said Dame Wiggins of Lee

While she ran to the field
To look for its dam,
They were warming the bed
For the poor sick lamb:
They turn'd up the clothes
All as neat as could be;
'I shall ne'er want a nurse,'
Said Dame Wiggins of Lee

She wished them good night,
And went up to bed
When, lo! in the morning
The cats were all fled,
But soon—what a fuss!
'Where can they all be?
Here, pussy, puss, puss,
Cried Dame Wiggins of Lee

The Dames heart was nigh broke
So she sat down to weep,
When she saw them come back
Each riding a sheep:
She fondled and patted
Each purring Tom-my
'Ah welcome, my dears,'
Said Dame Wiggins of Lee

The Dame was unable
Her pleasure to smother;
To see the sick Lamb
Jump up to its mother,
In spite of the gout,
And a pain in her knee
She went dancing about
Did Dame Wiggins of Lee

The farmer soon heard
Where his sheep went astray,
And arrived at Dame's door
With his faithful dog Tray
He knocked with his crook,
And the stranger to see
Out of the window did look
Did Dame Wiggins of Lee

For their kindness he had them
All drawn in his team;
And gave them some field-mice,
And raspberry cream.
Said he, "All my stock
You shall presently see:
For I honor the cats
Of Dame Wiggins of Lee"

He sent his maid out
For some muffins and crumpets;
And when he turn'd round
They were blowing of trumpets—
Said he, "I suppose,
She's as deaf as can be,
Or this ne'er could be borne
By Dame Wiggins of Lee

To show them his poultry
He turned them all loose,
When each nimbly leap'd
On the back of a Goose
Which frightened them so
That they ran down to the sea,
And half-drown'd the poor cats
Of Dame Wiggins of Lee

For the care of his lamb
And their comical pranks,
He gave them a ham
And abundance of thanks,
'I wish you good-day,
My fine fellows' said he
'My compliments pray
To Dame Wiggins of Lee

You see them arrived
At their Dame's welcome door;
They show her their presents,
And all their good store—
'Now come in to supper
And sit down with me
All welcome once more'
Said Dame Wiggins of Lee