

REPRINT EXCERPTS FROM EGAN PAPERS

First of Series of Extracts from
Writings of Late
H. P. Resident

given permission to reprint selections from the writings of the late William C. Egan as a memorial to this fine and genial citizen who has but lately passed from us. Mr. J. L. Smith, one of Mr. Egan's many friends and admirers, has chosen the selections from papers originally appearing in "Billerica," a monthly bulletin of distinction that was published during 1915 and 1916. These selections reveal the friendly scientist of wide ranging interests, happy to share his best with the newest comer. The first selection is from an essay entitled, "Common Names of Plants."

—Editor.

Common Names of Plants

From the writings of W. C. Egan: The common names of plants spring from the hearts of the common people. Scientific ones have the mustiness of the herbarium. Both are essential. Common names change with localities and often skip from one plant to another, creating confusion. Take the Sycamore for instance. The biblical scholar claims it is a Fig-tree, *Ficus Sycomorus*, the Englishman insists that it is a Maple, *Acer Pseudo-Platanus*, while the lumberman of the Ohio river bottom swears it is the *Platanus occidentalis*, the American, or Western, Plane-tree. The Californian, Australian and New Zealander, each claims the name for separate and distinct species.

By right of priority the biblical student is correct, as the Common Wild Fig, *Ficus Sycomorus*, in biblical times was known as the Sycamore, or Sycamine among the common people. It was a large-leaved, low branching tree and on this account easily accommodated Zaccus when he climbed up into it in order to see our Lord pass by.

"Zaccus he

Did climb a tree
For the Lord to see."

How came the name Sycamore, modernized into Sycamore, to be applied to the Maple? There is a curious history connected with it. During the middle ages the acts of our Saviour were dramatized, and desiring to represent Zaccus in his aerial position they wanted a Sycamore tree, the Wild Fig, but none were at hand so they did the next best thing they could. They chose a Maple, which in leaf somewhat resembled the ancient Fig-tree and called it a Sycamore. The tree chosen is known, botanically, as *Acer Pseudo-Platanus*, the False Plane-tree, and soon became known as the Sycamore by the masses. Later on this Maple was introduced into England, its common name following it. This accounts for the Englishman's authority, although he often modified it and called it the Sycamore Maple. When Johnny Bull came to America "some of him" settled in Ohio and adjoining states and saw there a tree unknown to them, that in foliage somewhat resembled their Sycamore at home and it soon became a Sycamore to them. This is the Sycamore of commerce, used extensively for interior house decora-

tion and known as *Platanus occidentalis*, the American, or the Western, Plane-tree. The English settlers in California and elsewhere saw resemblances in other trees to their home Sycamore and the same name was given to them.

Common names, while they lie closer to the heart than the scientific ones, are very misleading.

The many curious common names given to the three-colored Violet, *Viola tricolor*, are interesting in that they nearly all indicate some form of affection, such as "Kiss Me,"

"Jump-Me-Ere-I-Rise," "Jump-up-and-Kiss-Me," etc. In "Old Time Gardens" Alice Morse Earle says in speaking of this flower "To our little flower has also been given this folk name, "Me-her-in-the-entry-kiss-her-in-the-buttery," the longest plant name in the English language, rivalled only by Miss Jekyll's triumph in nomenclature for the Stone-crop, namely: "Welcome-h-o-m-e-husband-be-he-ever-so-drunk."

A lady from the south visited Egan-dale one day and when passing a specimen of the *Aralia spinosa* remarked,

"I see you have the Tar-tree." I replied, "I've known it called Hercules' Club, Devil's Walking Stick and Angelical Tree, but never head of "Tar-tree." She then said that the darkies called it that because the spines "tars" (tear) their clothes.

The Illinois farmers are said to be equipping their scarecrows with radio loud speakers to frighten the birds away — which indicates that crows must have musical ears if not musical voices.



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