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Kindest Thoughts and all Good Wishes for a Merry Christmas and a Bright New Year.

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**Joyous Emblems of the Christmas Time**

Mistletoe, Holly and Modern Adaptions. A Norse Legend.

(By Vincent Ogden)

Christmas! The signs of its approach are about us on every hand; and if there were a crest of Christmas, I think it would consist of a large centre Christmas tree, with holly and ivy and mistletoe around. These are the outward and visible emblems of the festive season. Time changes many things, and the old-fashioned Christmas has gone—probably never to return—but the spirit of Christmas is eternal.

Most of our Christmas observances come from pagan customs, the Roman festival of Saturnalia, or even farther back to the celebrations of the winter solstice of the Saxon and Scandinavian mythology.

The first Christmas tree was associated with the winter solstice festivities of Scandinavia. In the ancient mythology of that part of the north, the tree is said to have been raised from soil drenched and fertilized by the blood of lovers who had died through violence.

On certain nights during the winter solstice, the legend runs, mysterious lights were seen amongst the branches of the tree, which the strongest winds could not extinguish. What we know as the Christmas tree was regarded with awe and veneration by the old Scandinavians.

**Modern Origins**

There are those, however, who speak of more modern origins. On the Continent, Martin Luther is credited with the origin of the Christmas tree in the Yuletide festival. One Christmas Eve, the story runs, Martin Luther was travelling alone over a large tract of snow-covered country.

The sky, with its myriads of stars, made a great impression on the mind of the great reformer, and on reaching home he endeavoured to convey this impression to his wife and children. To visualize his thoughts, he took from his garden a little fir tree, and carrying it into the nursery he placed small candles among the branches and lighted them. Thus, we are told, originated the lighted and decorated tree.

The Christmas tree, with its lights and glitter, is the symbol of life. The tree has been associated with the Tree of Life. When Adam was dying, the legend tells, he sent Seth to the Garden of Eden to beg for the oil of mercy. The guardian cherub would not grant this, but instead, gave him a sprig or seed from the Tree of Life, which he was enjoined to plant on his father's grave. The tree, which ultimately grew up, furnished the wonder-working rod of Moses; but it was in time cut down and rejected and for this reason it was fashioned into the cross on which the Christ was crucified.

**The Mistletoe**

The mistletoe today has been divested of all its ancient mystery. It is probably the one parasite of nature that is hailed with delight, and Yuletide and mistletoe are inseparably connected with each other. The mistletoe has been looked at from different points of view throughout the ages. It has never been known to grow from its own roots; trees—principally the oak—are the ground from which the plant springs.

The ancient Druids held it in great veneration, and at the winter solstice it was the centre of their sacrifices and celebrations. When found growing on the oak, white oxen were sacrificed as mistletoe was cut by the arch Druid with a golden knife. Sprigs of mistletoe were distributed by the priests among the people, and hung up over the entrances to their dwellings as a sign of friendship, for none was allowed to enter a house over the door of which was a sprig of mistletoe, unless they were friendly disposed towards the tenants. The sacrifices and festivities of the ancient Druids were made in honour of the divinity Tutanes, who, in other pagan mythologies, was Baal, or the Sun.

**A Norse Legend**

The story of the mistletoe is closely connected with the Norse god Balder. Balder was the son of the great god Odlin. He once dreamt of his approaching death, and the gods held council to protect Balder against all possible forms of danger. They took an oath from all forms of material creation—fire and water, iron and all metals, stones and earth, trees, sicknesses and poisons, beasts, birds and all creeping things that they would cause no hurt to Balder.

To test the oaths taken, the gods assembled, and endeavoured to cause hurt to Balder by using material things against him that had sworn to do him no harm. They cast stones at him, shot at him. But none could hurt the son of Odlin. Loki, however, was displeased, and he learnt the mistletoe had not taken the oath. It was regarded as too young, and Loki went and gathered some sprigs and gave them to Hother, the blind god, counselling him to shoot at Balder with them. "Do as the rest," he said, "and show Balder honour. I will indicate where he stands and do you shoot at him with this twig."

Hother took the mistletoe twig and threw it as Loki directed. It pierced him, and he fell down and died. Balder was subsequently restored to life by Freyja, the goddess of Love; and her tears are said to be the beautiful berries of the mistletoe, which must always be hung up, for it is only sacred to her when it is neither on the earth nor under it.

The custom of kissing under the mistletoe is peculiarly English; and if we only followed the rites of this, a berry would be plucked for each kiss. Here again we can see in the old mythology of Scandinavia the origin of a present-day custom. The mistletoe was a sacred plant, and a sign of friendship,

and from friendship to kissing is not a far step.

**The Holly**

The holly, with its bright red berries and prickly leaves, has from time immemorial been a part of the celebrations of the winter solstice, the Roman festival of the Saturnalia, and the Christian festival of the nativity.

In the Norse legend referred to, there is a story of the holly. Balder, at the time Hother shot his arrow of mistletoe, was standing beside a bush, and partly screened by it. Odin declared that as this bush had given part shelter to his son from the arrow which caused his death it should never die, but become an evergreen, and bear red berries in memory of Balder's blood spilled on its branches.

The holly is also said to have been a mystic foreshadowing of the Crucifixion. Its prickly leaves are symbolic of the crown of thorns, while drops of passion blood were held to have been contained within its red berries. The holly tree became the holy tree.

The ivy was the badge of the wine god Bacchus, and many old songs tell of the rivalry between the holly and the ivy.

The ivy has certain associations with thoughts of the grave, and it is therefore fitting that such a symbol of mortality be thrust outside the house.

**Visiting the London Zoo in the Christmas Holidays**

(Glasgow Scotsman)

The London Zoo always enjoys an exceptional popularity during the Christmas holidays. Even the most sophisticated modern child appreciates a Christmas visit to the animals, and the steep paths are thronged, every fine day, with a stream of eager children accompanied by grown-up relations.

Little "Jubilee" is still perhaps the most popular inmate of the whole zoo. She is growing up rapidly, and is already a definite personality that seems to enjoy the watching crowds, and sometimes likes to show off to them. Next to her in popularity with the child visitors is the baby Shetland pony, born at the zoo last week. The little pony is sturdy as well as pretty, and is not likely to share the fate of the young lion cubs and opossums that lived only a few days after their birth.

Lion cubs are notoriously difficult to rear in captivity. One recalls the attractive cub which, about two years ago, was deserted by his mother and was adopted by one of the zoo's stray cats, "Mr. Jones." In spite of the affectionate care of its cat friend, not to mention the trouble taken by its keepers, the cub died, as the more recent arrivals have done. On the other hand, the full-grown lions, leopards, tigers and other big cats seem to thrive in the cold weather, and look their best, staring disdainfully at the crowds, but occasionally deigning to purr when feeding time draws near.

No child should miss the amusing little marmosets that provide a miniature circus all day long, pulling each other's tails, playing complicated games of hide and seek, and chasing to and fro with squeals of excitement. The reptile house, with its grim-looking crocodile and serpent inhabitants, should always be visited, if only for the contrast its uncanny inmates provide with the comparatively friendly animals. Finally, the view from the Mappin terraces across the wintry acres of Regent's Park, veiled with the drifting smoke of leaf fires, is in itself worth a visit to the zoo in winter time.

**Who Wrote "Hark the Herald Angels Sing?"**

(Edward Bettes in "The Era")

How many of the people who will in a few weeks' time be joining in the singing of the most popular Christmas hymn, "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing," could say who composed the tune?

Even the hymnaries are not sure about the identity of the composer.

One describes the tune as "traditional," which strikes me as a shirking of the editorial responsibility, while others attribute it to W. H. Cummings and to Mendelssohn.

The latter are nearer the truth, for the tune as we know it was adapted by Dr. W. H. Cummings from a melody used by Mendelssohn in his "Festgesang," which he composed in 1840 for male voices and brass band for the opening of a festival at Leipzig in celebration of the fourth centenary of the invention of printing by Gutenberg. The more famous "Hymn of Praise" was written for the same occasion.

Our tune was the second of these part songs for male voices, and a few years later Dr. Cummings, who was principally known in his day as an authority on Handel, adapted the music to fit Charles Wesley's hymn, the first line of which was originally, "Hark, how all the Welkin rings."

Now, the Decca company have issued four records of a little known piano-forte concerto of Mozart's that proves that the tune was "invented" at least fifty years before Mendelssohn used it at Leipzig. The opening theme of the slow movement which was composed in February, 1784, is practically the same as the opening line of the Christmas hymn, and in the development of the movement the soloist introduces many ingenious variations on the theme.

Mozart wrote 25 piano concertos, and this particular one in E flat is number 449 in the Koehel catalogue.

The opening movement, Allegro Vivace, is trippingly Mozartian, though conventional in style. The Andantino at once secures interest by its unexpected anticipation of our Christmas carol, but the final Allegro movement is the more interesting as music.

If it were not for the Christmas spirit, there would not be so many New Year's resolutions.



At this season when the friendly gleam of Yuletide celebrations lights each window in Timmins and the North, we extend best wishes to all for a happy holiday time.

**FRANK BYCK**

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