



The Mistletoe Bough:
The Origin of the Christmas Custom.
(By Rev. John A. Hamilton.)

Have you ever asked how it is that we hang up mistletoe in our houses at Christmas? Because the Druids used to do so, you may tell me, but then we come to the question, why they did. Perhaps you may tell me again that their reason was that they believed the bright God, Baldur, had been killed by a dart of mistletoe. I do not think that was the real reason. I think that story—and a very pretty story it is—was made up to explain the custom when the true reason had been forgotten.

I believe that the custom of hanging up a bough of mistletoe is one of the very oldest customs in the world, and has come down to us from the time when men worshipped trees. It seems to you a very strange thing that men should do that, but if you will

think a little, you may see that it was not very strange after all. Imagine a savage man (and savage means a man who lives in a forest), who has little knowledge of anything outside the forest in which he lives. He does not even see much of the sun, scarcely anything of the stars. He knows nothing of the cause of the change of seasons. The winter is a bad time for him, for then there are no fruits to gather, no nests with eggs that a man can find to eat, few roots to be dug up, and the ground is hard, and the light is short, and the darkness long, and the cold is terrible. How is it that the bad time comes? The first sign almost that he sees of it is when the leaves begin to fade and fall, and he notes that when the trees begin to die, then the day shortens and the wind blows