

places The slaves had every freedom of action and of speech, and their masters served them meekly.

The Christmas tree itself is a bit of the old Saturnalia, and the gift giving but a relic of Roman customs, although beautified by the early Christians in attributing the gifts to the Christ child, whom the children were taught to believe, passed over the houses at midnight, leaving gifts for all good children. So in Germany later on the children were taught to believe in fairies, Kris Kringle or Santa Claus.

The custom of decking with evergreens, holly and mistletoe, dates back to the dark ages,—when the booths and huts were so decked either to drive away bad fairies or furnish resting places for the good ones.

The mistletoe owes its charm to the fable of Baldur: - Loki, the Fire god, was jealous of Baldur's popularity, and angered that his mother, Freyja, had secured an oath from nature that none of her four elements should ever harm her son. But Freyja had looked upon the rootless mistletoe as of two little consequence to be considered, and therefore had failed to secure its promise. Loki, being a Fire god, and one of nature's elements, could not himself hurt Baldur, but he could make a tool that some unsworn god could use. So he took the mistletoe and carved an arrow strong and sharp and called upon the blind god of Darkness to hurl it at his enemy. The god responded, and Baldur fell dead shot through and through. But Loki was not loved; and the other gods restored Baldur to life, and gave his mother, Freyja, command over the mistletoe. She hung it high on the tree, out of touch with the earth, so that Loki could no more use it. There it hung ever after; and all treaties of peace were made under it. To stand under the mistletoe, and to give a kiss beneath, was a solemn promise to be true, and to do no harm to the other party. The Druids thought that whatever grew upon the oak was sacred, hence their regard for the mistletoe

The varieties which grew upon the apple and other trees were held by the Druids as of far less value.

When the holly became the ornament for Christmas festivals, for many centuries it was spelled with one l, and was the holy-tree. There are many varieties of the holly, and many peasants in Europe to-day believe that it is decided whether master or mistress will rule during the year by noticing whether the prickly variety or the smooth one chances to be brought into the house first—the prickly holly, of course giving the rule to the master, the smooth to the mistress. Then, too, sorrow, shame, sickness, or trouble will surely visit a house if the holly is brought under the roof before Christmas Eve.

The Old Testament bears record of these ancient customs of decking their homes for the various festal seasons "with olive branches, and pine branches, and myrtle branches, and palm branches, and branches of thick trees to make booths, as it is written." In these bedecked booths the festal days were to be lived.

Christianity would fain make of this time a period of relaxation; the traditions left us by our forefathers make it a time of festivities. The happy yuletide of our Saxon fore-elders swung through its twenty days. The child was the "abbott of misrule," and in his hand was placed the fantastic wand of empire.

But this commercial age makes it a tiresome time of sharp bargains, incessive shopping and intrusive advertising. The season that was meant to bring buoyancy and mirth into the most dismal home, and a little playfulness into the life of the most poverty-pinched child, witnesses in our great cities thousands of little boys and girls overworked and underpaid, starting out early and coming home late, in order that the Christmas holiday trade in toys and gifts may be pushed to its maximum. It is hard to fix responsibility. There is such a show of