

Mistletoe, Prescribed Now for Kissing, Once was Thought to Cure Illness

An ancient custom, which 'prescribed' mistletoe for the prevention of cure of a wide variety of illnesses—epilepsy for instance—has given way to the happier idea that mis-

tletoe is the right prescription to assure opportunities for exchanging kisses during the holiday season.

Naturally, this makes mistletoe an object of interest—

as it has been for centuries.

Druid priests in early Britain cut mistletoe at the winter solstice and gave sprigs of it to the people. The sprigs were hung above doorways of homes and stables. The Druids taught, and the people believed, that this vine had great power to ward off evil and protect against illness.

Despite the early interest in mistletoe for its supposed medicinal qualities, its use as a 'prescription for kissing' had a place in the ancient world, too.

Romans and other early peoples considered mistletoe as an emblem of peace. Meeting under it, enemies kissed each other and made a truce until the next day.

Scandinavian myths tell the story of the death of Balder, the sun god, who was, so mythology says, killed by an arrow of mistletoe wood. His mother the goddess Freya, had asked all living things to pledge not to harm her son, but she neglected to ask the lowly mistletoe.

Balder's enemy, the blame god Loki, took advantage of this to make the arrow, which he persuaded Hoder, the blind god of winter, to shoot. Balder died, but through the efforts of all the other gods, he came back to life after three days, and the sun's light shone at the winter solstice.

Freya cried for joy, and her tears became mistletoe berries. She kissed everyone who passed under the mistletoe, and ordained that this same sign of affection should always be exchanged when people met beneath the mistletoe.

Poinsettia Puzzle Is Christmas Fun

A fun-maker at Christmas is to ask family or friends this question: 'What color is the blossom of the Poinsettia plant?' Chances are, the answer will be, 'Red, of course.'

Actually, the red 'blossoms' of the poinsettia are not the flower of the plant—they are leaves. The real blossoms are the tiny yellow flowers in the centre of the red clusters.

A comparative newcomer to the traditional Yule greenery the tropical poinsettia was

discovered in Mexico in 1828, by Dr. Joel Roberts Poinsett, first U.S. minister to Mexico. He aroused interest in its beauty and the plant is named for him.

Albert Ecke, a California farmer, developed and improved the plant, and first marketed it in 1960.

Yule Burns Bright

The French traditionally exchange gifts on New Year's Day, but the burning of the Yule log at Christmas is an honored custom in many parts of the country. After carols are sung, wine is poured on the log by the youngest child.

Of the \$12.1 billion spent by all governments in Canada last year, federal spending accounted for 55 per cent and spending by provincial and municipal governments combined for 45 per cent.

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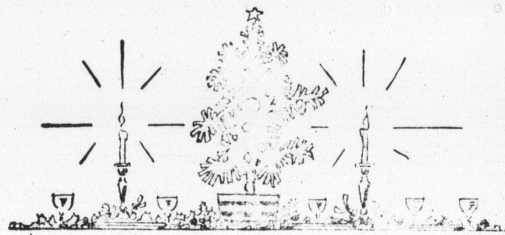
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