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Pianos Pianos

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Lo, now is come our joyfull'st time,
Let every man be jolly;
Each room with Ivy leaves is drest,
And every post with Holly.
Without the door let Sorrow lie,
And if for cold he hap to die,
We'll bury him in a Christmas Pye.
And evermore be merry.

LL of the evergreen plants
have long been consid-
ered symbolic of immor-
tality, of rebirth. Hence
they, and they alone, are
appropriate decorations
for the Christmas season,
which was originally a celebration, under
the disguise of various national reli-
gious forms, of the turning of the
sun at the winter solstice, and the con-
sequent renewal of life on the earth.

When Constantine was converted,
he seized upon every underlying like-
ness, however remote, between the old
faith and the new. Every familiar
symbol that might be stretched to fit
the strange faith; every old custom
that would help to reconcile his lately,
and sometimes forcibly, converted
people to their unaccustomed belief,
was adopted and re-explained. And
the return of the sun, bringing life
and light to the winter-bound earth,
became the prototype of the coming
of the Son of Man, bringing life and
light to the soul of the sin-bound
world. So that at first all the heathen
observances were retained as far as
possible, and merely given a new
meaning.

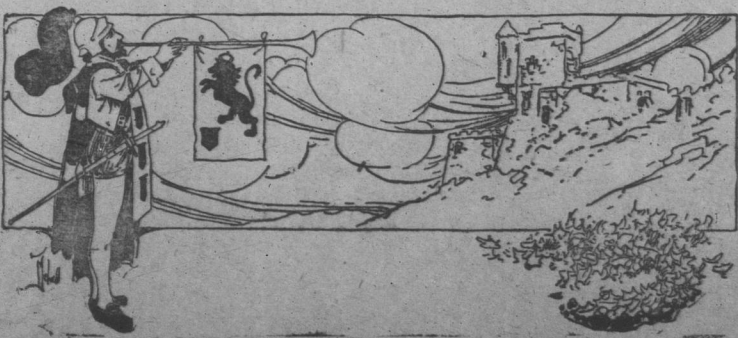
At the Christmas festival, the ivy
and holly still made a summer screen
of the stone walls, as in ancient Ger-
many they had turned the huge halls
at mid-winter, to bowers of greenery,
wherein the sylvan sprites, who dwell
in summer among the forest trees,
might pass the frozen months without
too much discomfort. An echo from
Scandinavia is still heard in the say-
ing current among the peasants of the
old world that if any bit of holiday
decoration is left in the house after
Candlemas day (February 2), a troop
of little devils will enter and sit, one
on each withered leaf, every one
bringing its own small curse upon the
house. These little devils are merely
the old forest sprites, detained against
their will by their undestroyed winter
refuge and fretting to return to the
awakening woods of spring.

The churches were still green with
Christmas garlands in those early
days, and ablaze with candles, as the
temples of Saturn had always been
during the corresponding Roman festi-
val of the Saturnalia. But, as Poly-
dore Vergil remarks, "Trimming the
temples with hangings, flowers,
boughs and garlands, was taken of
the heathen people, which decked
their idols and houses in such array."
And as time went on, and it became
no more necessary to make conces-
sions that would help reconcile the
people to their changed faith, these
"heathen" customs became distaste-
ful to the church. One of the early
councils forbids men longer "to deck
up their houses with lawrell, yvie, and
greene boughes, as we used to doe
at the Christmas season."

This command was observed in the
temples, but in the baronial halls the
old customs lived on; lived down their
questionable past; won again the tol-
eration of the priests who had sternly
banished them, and to-day all the ever-
greens again are admitted to the
strictest church, so that we again can
say at Christmas,

"Now with bright Holly all the temples
strow
With Ivy green, and sacred Mistletoe."

The "Early Calendar of English
Flowers," an old poem wherein each
month is recognized by its appropriate
plant symbol, ends with these lines:
Soon the evergreen Laurel alone is
greene,
When Catherine crowns all learned
menne.
The Ivy and Hollie berries are seene,
And Yule log and Wassale come round
agen.
The laurel is used not at all, and the



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