

TREE MYTHS AND FOREST LORE.*

[BY WILLIAM DURIE.]

I.

THE great interest excited by the International Forestry Exhibition, recently held in Edinburgh, which proved so great a social and educational success, gave rise to a spirit of inquiry as to the part which trees have played in the history of the human race. This paper was originally headed "Plant Myths and Flower Lore," but the accumulation of interesting material became so great that it has been found necessary to limit the subject now in hand to "Tree Myths and Forest Lore," leaving aside, in the meantime, the no less attractive division of the smaller plants. It is intended to indicate the more notable myths, fables, and superstitions that have gathered round trees—those commanding natural objects which have in every age and nation called forth man's admiration, awe, and gratitude, in view of their beauty, grandeur, and usefulness.

Very early in the history of literature we find references to plant-life woven into the verses of poets and the discussions of philosophers. Homer sings the virtues of *Molu*, supposed to mean the *Allium Magicum*, a kind of garlic, as a safeguard against witchcraft, and of *Nepenthes*, the plant which, according to Milton, is of such power to stir up joy and to drive out of men's minds all sense of ill and sorrow. To Aristotle, who "took all knowledge for his province," the qualities of plants formed a subject of investigation. Theophrastus, his pupil, wrote a "History of Plants," which remains a curious record of what the Greeks knew and thought about "sleeping animals," as plants have been poetically called. Pliny's "Natural History" gives us similar insight into the state of the Roman knowledge. The facts and fancies about plants in the minds of the schoolmen of the Middle Ages are shown in the work on the "Virtues of Herbs," by the reputed Albertus Magnus. In the year of the Spanish Armada (1588), Dr. Porta, of Naples, published his Repertory of Herbs; and,

* Read at the last monthly meeting of the Inverness Field Club.

coming to our own times, apart from the great work of scientific observation and classification, we have, among others, the valuable works of the German Mannhardt, whose "Tree worship of Germany," and Professor Gubernatis, of Florence, whose "Mythology of Plants," have raised the folk-lore of plants to a distinguished place in the far-reaching modern science of Comparative Mythology. Fergusson's "Tree and Serpent Worship," and Sir George Cox's "Mythology of the Aryan Nations," are two of the most important contributions of British writers to the new science. This paper is to a great extent made up of selections from the works of the ancient and modern authors just enumerated, with an attempt at the consolidation and arrangement of very miscellaneous matter not easy to bring under a scheme of divisions. A recent writer holds Mythology to be in large measure based upon "metaphors of speech. The phenomena of Nature were explained by likening them to those human actions with which primitive man was acquainted; and when, in course of time, a higher level of knowledge had been reached, and the original meaning of the traditional epithets had been forgotten, they came to be taken literally and interpreted as referring to beings of a superhuman world." Andrew Lang has mischievously said that this mode of regarding myths is simply resolving all their romance into a series of remarks about the weather. The same writer, in his "Custom and Myth," has lately shown that this is a very partial explanation of the origin of myths, which are demonstrated, in some cases at least, to be only folk-tales glorified. Myths, which have been called "faded metaphors," are sufficiently marked off from folk-lore, inasmuch as the latter, seen, for example, in our most common nursery tales, is destitute of the theological element which either appears, or is supposed to be latent, in thorough-going myths. And, again, the later development into fable has a distinct character from folk-lore, from the prominence in fable of a moral or lesson of some sort as the reason for its existence. Everything in the world that appeared marvellous or excited wonder was naturally apt to give rise to myths. The marvellous (in the vulgar sense) diminishes in proportion as science explains it; and thus myths are the product of early ages, and are only possible at a time of popular ignorance.

Man's first instincts being the sustenance of his body and the propagation of the species, he found the elements of nourishment and reproduction so beautifully exemplified in the trees with which he was familiar, that they have been conjectured to have become his first ideal. Arguing from the known cases of savage tribes, it may be inferred that he would begin with the worship of an individual tree conspicuous among its fellows, and regarded as a conscious personal being, worthy of adoration and sacrifice; this would lead to the worship of many trees, then to the grove of trees, and finally to the worship of some personal being as animating the grove. Mr. Macbain, in his recent careful and interesting work on *Celtic Mythology*,* thus speaks of groves as centres of worship:—"The classical writers continually mention 'groves' as especial places where Celtic worship was conducted. A grove was a secret recess embowered by tall trees, and marked by votive offerings, insignia of the gods, and an altar of stone or some equivalent. Groves are prior in time to temples, and Grimm has analysed the Teutonic word for 'temple' to signify wood or even grove." (P. 88.) Stories long current among the people tell of trees which shed drops of blood, or which become dried up all at once, thus announcing the death of heroes with whose lives the trees have been associated. To this day there are families in Germany and Switzerland who plant a tree of good omen on the birth of a child—an apple tree for a boy, and a pear tree for a girl—so that the child and the tree may grow up together. The tree becomes the object of much loving care, and blight overtaking it, or any other mishap, causes apprehensions for the life of the child. In Saxony it is thought that when an infant dies in the house, Death passes out to the garden and plucks a flower. "Botanic superstitions," says Gubernatis, "are as old as the human mind. They set at defiance all sciences and philosophies, and, still more, all mere passing religions." Heaven itself is often represented to the early imagination as a tree of immense size; the sun and moon are trees which rise under its shadow. The thunder-cloud takes sometimes the form of a shower-tree, which distils the water of life, while its leaves dance and its branches make sweet music.

* A. & W. Mackenzie, Inverness.

A Russian story tells of an old man who once mounted to Heaven on a high tree, where he saw a bird which did not burn in fire, or drown in water. This obviously refers to the sun unconsumed in its own fires, and seeming to plunge into the ocean.

Probably none of the many versions of the origin of the world and of the introduction of man upon the earth, which have been given by different religious systems, can be found in which trees do not play a part. Under the various names of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the tree of Adam, the tree of the Serpent, Yggdrasil (the Scandinavian ash), the man-producing tree, the tree of Buddha, &c., the tree has become the symbol of universal life, and, by extending the idea, of immortality. In the Mosaic account in Genesis, three trees have a prominent place—the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the tree of life, and the fig-tree. Adam and Eve were forbidden to eat the fruit of the first; and when they had done so, they made aprons to themselves of fig-leaves, and they were driven out of Eden to prevent them from eating of the tree of life, and so living for ever. Several curious embellishments of this narrative are due to the imagination of the East and North. For instance, the tree of life is said to have sent its roots down to hades, covering the whole sky with its branches, and on its summit in heaven affording a shining throne for the Infant Jesus. According to a Russian tradition, Adam, when very old, boasted before God that he was a strong man and immortal. He was told that his pride would be punished, that he would be afflicted with headaches, that his hands and feet would refuse to serve him, and that, finally, he would die. Adam paid no heed to these warnings; but, as soon as he felt their truth, he hastily sent Seth to the Garden of Eden to pluck a golden apple for him. But, instead of an apple, his son brought the rod by which Adam had been driven from the Garden. Adam cut it in three parts and bound them round his head; his headache was cured, but he was little the better of that, for he died immediately. The bits of the rod were then planted and grew up to be three trees—a cypress, a cedar, and the “thrice-blessed tree”—the olive, out of which last came the Cross of Christ the regenerator, so connecting Adam with immortality.

The Mahometan account of the forbidden fruit is not materially different from the Bible narrative. Many Mussulman doctors

say that it was the banana-tree which gave occasion to the Fall, and they think it a point of religion to avoid eating bananas and figs as stimulating the passions, since it is thought that it was through eating the fruit that Adam and Eve became aware of the meaning and purpose of sex.

Buddhism has its famous Bo-tree, the source of life, the dispenser of wisdom, and the way to Heaven. In the Rig-veda, the sacred book of the Brahmans, the god Brahma himself is identified with the sacred tree, of which all the other gods are branches.

The prevalence of tree-worship would naturally develop a belief in the descent of men from trees. So that there was even a real, and not merely a metaphoric, sense in which men spoke of the roots and branches of a family. A traveller on the Malabar Coast, 500 years ago, found the people talking of trees which, instead of fruit, bore men and women of a diminutive size; and Colonel Yule, in our day, mentions a similar tradition among the Arabs. A Scandinavian myth relates that Odin and his two brothers, in their wanderings, found the ash and elm, and gave them power to beget men. The Pelopidae, among the Greeks, professed to trace their pedigree to a plane-tree. The converse of this belief has prevailed in some quarters. Dr. Tylor says that, in the Eastern Archipelago, childless women and uncharitable men are believed to migrate to scrubby plants, while good and fruitful people go to fruit-bearing trees, after death.

In the Middle Ages it was universally believed (our own Bishop Leslie even later believed it) that the Bernacle-goose grew as a fruit on a tree in the Orkneys; and, on dropping into the water, the covering of the fruit burst, and the goose came out. In the Hindoo legend of the "Rose of Bakavali," mention is made of a pomegranate-tree, the fruits of which resembled earthenware pots. When these were opened, birds of the finest plumage flew out.

The attitude of the early Christian Church towards tree-superstitions was at first hostile; they were denounced as inventions of the devil; but the superstitions persisting in spite of this, the Church tried to utilise them in its own service by giving a Christian, instead of a Pagan, direction to them. It blessed the

most ancient and venerated trees, and raised Christian altars and images of the Virgin near the same trees where Pagan priests had sacrificed to their divinities. St. John has inherited the trees and plants formerly consecrated to sun-worship. The Virgin Mary has succeeded to the floral honours of the chaste goddess Diana. The part that trees have played in Christian doctrine, from Eden to Calvary, from the tree of the Fall onwards to the tree of the Cross as the tree bringing salvation, was recognised by early Christian Fathers. The remainder of this paper will be devoted to the folk-lore and superstitions that have gathered round various trees, taking the latter term in a wide sense. The subject will be arranged under the following heads :—

- I. Folk-tales.
- II. Supernatural and Mythical Beings.
- III. Religious Observances, Scriptural Characters, Saints, &c.
- IV. Symbolic Uses.
- V. Courtship and Marriage.
- VI. Death.
- VII. Weather-lore.
- VIII. Animal-lore.
- IX. Medicinal and Magical Superstitions.

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II.

I.—FOLK TALES.

LET us begin with the Maple, because there is a Hungarian legend told of it containing many obvious relations with folk-lore in other fields, such as the stories of "King Lear" and "Beauty and the Beast"; the Biblical narratives of "Cain and Abel," and "Joseph and his Brethren"; the legend of "Romulus and Remus"; the story of the "Reed and the Dove"; the "Hindoo Legend of Sakuntala"; the story of Polydorus changed into a dog-berry tree; the myth of Orpheus; and the stories of the "Magic Flute," the "Strawberries," the "Red Boots," and the two brothers quarrelling about a peacock's feather. The points of agreement between these stories and the following narrative would seem to point to their common origin. I shall indicate these stories at the points of agreement in the course of the narrative.

A King had three daughters. The youngest was fair-haired, and of great beauty and sweetness of disposition (Cordelia). A young shepherd, who fed his flock near the palace, played the flute every evening (Orpheus), and the young princess (Eurydice) listened to him. One night the king, the shepherd, and the princess had each a bad dream. The king dreamed he had lost his crown-diamonds; the young princess, that she had gone to see her mother's tomb, and had not returned; and the shepherd, that wild beasts had devoured the pet-lamb of his flock (Joseph). After this dream the king called his three daughters and told them that the first of the three who should bring him a basket of strawberries should become his best-loved daughter, who should possess his crown and his seven kingdoms (King Lear). The princesses went away to search for strawberries, and came to a green hillock. The eldest cried, "Basket, be filled, that I may receive my father's crown." But the basket remained empty. The second daughter

said, "Basket, be filled, that I may receive the seven kingdoms of my father." Yet the basket remained empty. After these two dark-haired sisters (the two halves of the Night) had thus spoken, the youngest, with the fair hair (the Aurora or Dawn), said tenderly, "Basket, be filled, in order that I may become the well-beloved daughter of my father." Immediately, her basket filled with strawberries. Seeing this, the two envious sisters, fearing to lose the royal crown and kingdoms (Cain), put their sister to death; and, having buried her under an old maple-tree, broke her basket, and divided the fruit between them. They went home and told their father that their sister had ventured too far into the forest and been devoured by a wild beast (Joseph). Their father then put ashes on his head (Jacob), and cried, "Alas! I have lost the most precious diamond in my crown." At the new moon, the shepherd tried to play his flute, but it would not play. Indeed, why should the flute play, when there was no fair princess to hear it? Near the green hillock, on the third night, he saw a fresh young shoot springing up near the old maple-tree at the spot where the princess had been buried. As time wore on, the shoot grew, and he wished to make a new flute of it. As soon as he had put this flute to his lips (stories of Sakuntala, Polydorus, Dog-berry tree, and Magic Flute), the enchanted flute sang thus:—"Play, my dear; formerly I was a king's daughter; now I am a shoot of maple, a flute of a maple shoot." The shepherd took the flute to the king, who tried to play it, and it sang the same refrain. The two wicked sisters then tried it, and the instrument sang:—"Play, my murderer; formerly I was a king's daughter; now I am a flute of maple." Then the king cursed his two daughters, and drove them out of his kingdom. Such is the story, but it is evidently incomplete. From the details furnished by other similar stories, there should follow the resurrection of the princess slain by her envious sisters.

The maple is still an object of veneration in many parts of Germany.

The Palm-tree, one of the chief beauties of an Eastern landscape, has been the subject of many myths, especially in countries bordering on the Mediterranean. According to an Adriatic legend:—"A shipmaster in Venice saw seven witches come on

board his ship at night-fall; he concealed himself to see what they would do; in a single night they drove the ship to Alexandria, in Egypt; he went ashore and broke a branch of a tall tree, and took it on board. The witches then brought the ship back to Venice the same night, and disappeared at cock-crow. The captain found at daybreak that the branch was covered with dates, which convinced him that he had really been at Alexandria, since dates do not grow at Venice. We have here a new version of the nocturnal voyage of the sun, of which the palm-tree is the personification; it is during the night that he recovers his golden dates, shown to the world in the morning sunshine." The association of the palm-tree with the sun, as victor over darkness, is seen in some Hindoo myths, one of which relates that Arguna stole a small branch of the Betel-palm when in Paradise, and planted it on earth. This explains why the Hindoos always steal a shoot of Betel when wishing to plant it. Hercules is said to have carried a palm-tree with him in his miraculous journeys. In Arabia, it is believed to have been formed from the residue of the clay of which Adam was made.

The Cedar has long been accounted a sacred tree, of which the wood-work of Jewish and Greek temples was usually made. A Chinese legend runs thus:—"Hanpang, Secretary to King Hang, had a young and fair wife, named Ho, whom he tenderly loved. The king, having taken a fancy for this woman, put her husband to death. She threw herself from a steep place, and was taken up dead. In her scarf was found a letter addressed to the king, asking, as a last favour, that he would bury her in the same grave as her husband. But the king, in his wrath, ordered her to be buried in a far separate place. During the night, two cedars shot up, one from each tomb, and in ten days they had become so tall and strong that they managed to interlace their branches and roots, although widely apart. The people then named these cedars "the trees of faithful love."

The Elm, which Virgil calls the "Tree of Dreams," a name it still retains in France, may have got this name from the fact of village-justice having been often administered under its shadow, the prophetic or inspired character of early judges being supposed to be re-inforced in states of trance or dream. In the story of

Orpheus making plaint on his lyre for the death of his wife, Eurydice, the elm is said, for the first time, to have sprung into life in sympathy with his dirge.

A Spanish legend regards the White Poplar as the first tree God made, and as the immediate progenitor of Adam. The Black Poplar, according to a Greek myth, was the form into which the gods changed the sisters of the solar hero, Phaeton, when they mourned his disappearance in the ocean.

The Oak, king of British forests, has had its full share of myth. The ancient Greeks thought it the oldest tree. Scandinavian story ascribed man's origin to the oak or the ash—a myth also prevalent among the Romans. The Arcadians believed their ancestors were oaks before they became men. As showing the persistence of such myths after all faith has gone out of them, it is said that in Piedmont, to this day, in order to evade the awkward questions of children as to the arrival of babies, people say that they are born out of the trunk of an old oak—akin to the practice of Scotch mothers who assign that function to the cabbage.

The Pomegranate is, in the East, emphatically the tree consecrated to love. The worship of Rimmon, denounced in the Old Testament, was the worship of the Syrian Adonis, Rimmon being the Syriac for the pomegranate. "In a Hindoo story, the parents of a princess confine her in a garden which nobody can enter; at the same time, they announce that whosoever will enter the garden and carry off three pomegranates on which the princess and her attendants sleep, will marry her."

The Walnut figures in a Slavonic legend of the Deluge, in which the good people who escape and re-people the world are saved in a walnut-shell.

The Apple, having been regarded as *the* fruit, has appropriated to itself the word *pomum* in Latin, which is a generic name for fruit (specially of fruit having stones or seeds, as the apple, pear, quince, pomegranate, fig, etc.), while *Pomona* is the goddess in charge of *all* fruit trees. Adam's apple is equivalent to Adam's fruit; and it is a waste of time to discuss whether it was an apple or an orange, or a fig, or any other fruit full of seeds. According to a Hanoverian legend :—"A young girl descended to hades by a

ladder which appeared under an apple-tree in her garden. In the lower regions she saw a garden in which the sun seemed even more beautiful than on earth; and the trees were laden with fruit. She filled her apron with apples, which became golden as soon as she came back to the earth." This is supposed to represent the sun's journey at night ending in the golden dawn. A German popular song begins:—

“ Bitterly wept the dear Sun
In the apple-garden;
From the apple-tree has fallen
The golden apple.
Weep not, little Sun,
God is making another
Of gold, of iron, and of silver.”

The sun at first loses his golden apple and weeps; people try to put him to sleep in the orchard, and to make him hope to find his golden apple in the morning; he still weeps, and they tell him he will have another, of the three metals, representing the grey morning, the dawn, and the full sun-glow. A Swedish mythological enigma thus runs:—“Our mother has a bed-cover which nobody can fold; our father has more gold than anyone can count; and our brother has an apple which nobody can bite.” The explanation is:—“Our mother is the earth: the earth's counterpane is the sky; our father is in Heaven; his golden stars are countless; our brother is the Divine Saviour, whose apple is the sun.” The identity of the sun and the apple in such myths is scarcely open to question.

The Pear-tree has never been so popular as the apple, perhaps on account of the rapidity with which it succumbs to corruption. According to a Thuringian legend, a mad cow was at first changed into a pear-tree, and afterwards into an old woman. This legend is supposed to figure three seasons of the year—the hot sun becomes a pear-tree in autumn, and a sterile old woman in winter.

The Alder appears in a Tyrolese legend, thus:—“A boy mounted a tree and saw what the witches were doing below; they cut to pieces a woman's body and threw the bits up in the air; the boy caught a rib, and kept it beside him. When the witches counted the bits, they found one amissing, and they replaced it by a bit of alder; then the body revived.” They say in Germany

that alders begin to weep, to speak, and to shed drops of blood, when people speak of cutting them down.

The Lime-tree, or linden, bulks largely in Scandinavian mythology, where Sigurd, after slaying the dragon Fafnir, bathes in its blood ; a leaf of lime-tree falls on his shoulder and renders him vulnerable in that place only, while he is proof against injury in every other part of his body.

The Hazel has been the centre of many popular beliefs, especially about fairies, with whom it was a favourite tree. In the "Manners of the Ancient Irish," the hazel is the subject of the following myth:—"The Irish bards taught that there were fountains in which the primitive rivers had their sources ; over each fountain grew nine hazel-trees, which produced beautiful red nuts that fell into the fountains, and floated on their surface until the salmon of the river came up and swallowed the nuts. It was thought that the eating of the nuts caused the red spots on the salmon's belly, and whoever caught and ate one of these salmon was inspired with the sublimest poetical ideas." Hence the expressions, "the nuts of science," and "the salmon of knowledge."

The Cypress, honoured in nearly all mythologies, is the subject of these two Greek myths:—"Cypresses, before becoming trees, had been the daughters of Eteocles. Carried off by goddesses in an endless round, they at last fell into a lake ; the earth-goddess took pity on them, and changed them into cypresses." "Cyparissus was very fond of a tame stag. One day he killed it by accident, and he was so sorry that he wished to die. Apollo immediately transformed him into a cypress."

The Beech, a prophetic tree to the ancient Greeks, is still a privileged tree among the peasantry of some districts of France. They relate that—"A man, while hammering red-hot iron on an anvil, struck sparks into the eyes of the good God himself, who cursed him, and condemned him to be changed into a bear, with the condition that he should be allowed to mount at his will every tree except the beech."

From the point of view of the Solar mythologists, a good example of the growth and transformation of myth is found in the Laurel and the story of Daphne. "The Arcadians say that Daphne was daughter of the earth-goddess, and was loved by

Apollo. The gods interfered when he was persecuting her in his passion, and they turned her into a laurel-tree." Max Müller's explanation is that the Dawn was called in Greek *Daphne*, meaning *burning*; so was the *laurel*; hence the myth, from the double meaning of the Greek word. But Andrew Lang's destructive criticism, too elaborate for insertion here, should be taken into account, in dealing with the Daphne myth.

The sweet-smelling Myrtle was the subject of several Greek and Roman myths, such as—"The nymph Myrsine, having, at a race, out-run her friend, the goddess Pallas, the angry goddess killed her on the spot; from her body sprang the myrtle, a tree which Pallas herself afterwards loved, perhaps from remorse for slaying her friend." "Venus, being once afraid of being seen naked, hid behind a myrtle, and ever after adopted it as her favourite tree."

The Fir, with its curious cones, has always been held in high esteem in northern countries. "In the Battle of the Birds, the young prince goes to the top of a fir, by order of the giant, to look for the magpie's eggs; his bride, who felt her father's breath burning her back (the dawn followed by the sun), has marked with her fingers the steps of the ladder on the trunk of the fir, and, thanks to this ladder, the prince reaches both his bride and the bird's eggs."

The Birch, called the "Queen of Scotia's glens," is especially dear to German peasants. "An Esthonian peasant had seen a stranger asleep under a tree when a great storm was about to burst over them. He awoke the stranger, who thanked him, and said—'When you are far from your native land, and feel home-sick, you will see a twisted birch; strike it, and ask—"Twisted fellow, are you at home?'" One day, the peasant, engaged as a soldier in Finland felt sad, as he thought of his home and his children far away; he then saw a twisted birch, and he did as the stranger advised him. The stranger appeared again and ordered his quickest spirits to transport the soldier to his native land, with a bag of money."

About the Vine, dear to Bacchus, we have this Persian legend:—"In order to console the poor and the wretched, God sent to the earth the angels, Aroth and Maroth, with orders to put no one

to death, to commit no unjust act, and to drink no wine. Having looked on a beautiful woman, they forgot their commission and drank wine, which led them to oppression and iniquity."

The Orange is, perhaps, the finest of fruits accessible to everybody. "In popular Piedmontese stories, the rich and marvellous kingdom is often Portugal; and oranges are always called *Portogallotti* in Piedmont. Portugal is the most westerly country of Europe; in heaven, it is at the extreme west, at sun-set, that the kingdom of the blessed was placed. It was also at the extreme west that Hercules found the garden of Hesperides with its tree of golden apples." Portugal, the western region, and this garden, are, in myth, the same country; the orange, the Portogallotto, and the Hesperides apple, are the same fruit. The Greeks also called oranges Portagalea. How is this name explained? Is it because oranges are better or more abundant in Portugal than elsewhere? No. It is because the cultivation of the orange in Europe began in Portugal.

The Fig, the first tree mentioned by name in the Bible, is the subject of a legend told by Hesiod:—"As soon as the divine Mopsus succeeded in counting the figs on the fig-tree before Calchas, Calchas died; whoever eats a fig off that tree, acquires a new lease of life; he becomes like the immortals; but the fig-tree itself is condemned to perish, and Calchas ceases to live as soon as the number of figs on the tree has been counted, representing the days of his own life."

The Rose-tree has many mythological relations. A Hindoo story follows:—"A king had become blind. All the doctors declared that he could not be cured except by the Rose of Bakavali, the virtue of which was so great that it could even give sight to a man born blind. The king's sons went in search of it. The siren Lakka (the moon) told one of them—"The rose you seek is only found in the region of the sun, and no bird even can reach it.' Bakavali is daughter of the fairy-king; this rose is found in her garden, in the middle of a basin of rose-water, sparkling with diamonds. The prince plunges into the water and brings away the rose, extremely beautiful, and of an excellent perfume. By rubbing the king's eyes with this flower they become luminous as stars."

There is a pretty fable told of the moss-rose. "An angel had

slept under the shade of a rose-tree, and, feeling grateful, offered to do it a service. At its request, he threw over the roses a veil of moss." Hence the moss-like growth on the calyx of the moss-rose.

The Cotton-tree is contemptuously spoken of in Hindoo songs, because it has no smell and gives no fruit fit for food to man or monkey. Agassiz tells a strange story as current in Brazil :—" *Caro Sacaibu*, the first of men, was a demi-god. His son, *Prairu*, an inferior being, obeyed the orders of his father, who hated him. In order to get rid of him, *Sacaibu* made an armadillo and stuck it in the earth, leaving its tail on the surface, after rubbing it with mistletoe ; then he ordered his son to bring the armadillo to him ; but the animal pulled him down through the earth. But *Prairu* managed to get back again, and told his father he had seen men and women under-ground, who might be brought up to till the earth. *Sacaibu* went down to see for himself, having woven a cotton cord, to produce which he had sown cotton seed for the first time. The first men whom he drew up with the cotton cord were short and ugly ; but, the more he drew up, the better and taller they grew, until the cord broke, and the finest specimens of humanity were thus left for ever underground. This is why, in this world, beauty is so rare an endowment."

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III.

II.—SUPERNATURAL AND MYTHICAL BEINGS.

IN the introduction, some general statements were made regarding the worship of trees. Feelings of fear or curiosity, and primitive speculations on the uses to which trees might be put by supernatural beings, have given rise to various other beliefs, of which a brief summary follows.

Showing the popular notions of the food of the gods, some tribes in India propitiate their divinities by offerings of cocoa-nuts previous to undertaking any enterprise. The old Greeks not only imagined that each tree concealed a divinity or a nymph, but attributed to it a divine or mythical origin—thus:—The plane-tree had been planted by Menelaus, the oak by Zeus, the olive by Minerva, and the laurel and cherry by Apollo. Forests, according to the Romans, were guarded by the nymph Egeria. Even Cato, the Censor, in his book on Country Affairs, warns the farmer not to cut down any tree without first asking pardon from the unknown gods concealed in it. We are told that Socrates swore by the oak, a tree said to have been the chosen abode of Jupiter, whose priests pretended to know his will through the rustling of the leaves of an oak grove. Jupiter had nearly as many favourite trees as he had wives. His sceptre was made of cypress; so were the arrows shot by the god of love. While Minerva presented the olive-tree to the Athenians as the best gift in her power, Bacchus had the credit of originating the luscious fig-tree, and of making the heart-cheering vine his constant companion. Venus is often represented with an apple or a quince in her hand; but the rose was most closely identified with that goddess; our common phrase, “under the rose,” being traceable to the rites of Venus, which were under the guardianship

of the god of silence, signifying that the rites of love should not be revealed. Roses are painted or hung over tables in Germany, and formerly in England, to forbid "telling tales out of school." The old Scandinavian worship consecrated the oak to Thor, the thunder-god. The mistletoe, tendril of the oak, plays a part in the legend of the Norse god, Balder. He was so much loved that everything living on earth had sworn to save him from harm. But the mistletoe that grows on trees, and not on the earth, had been forgotten; Loki, the devil, killed him by means of a twig of it. It was then ordained that it should never again be used to man's hurt until it touched the earth, hence it is now hung from the ceiling to invite the friendly kiss. The Druids, to whom the oak-forest was the only fit temple, venerated both oak and mistletoe especially, cutting the latter with a golden knife, amid imposing ceremonies. Naturally, every race venerated the tree most conspicuous in its own climate. The Hindoos thus incorporated the wide-spreading pippul-tree in the Buddhist worship. Buddha, before he became a deity, is said to have retired under its shade for meditation and fasting. His queen, becoming troubled at his long absence, gave orders to cut down the tree. But, at the sight of the levelled tree, Buddha was so grieved that he fainted. On regaining consciousness, he poured 100 pitchers of milk on its roots, and then, prostrating himself on the ground, he vowed that, if the tree did not revive, he would never rise to his feet again. The tree immediately threw out its branches, and, by degrees, rose to its present height of 120 feet. It is now called the famous Buddha or Bo-tree.

The fear of demons, especially of the arch-fiend, had many connections with the popular notions about trees. The cherry and the chestnut were particularly assigned as abodes to evil spirits. The walnut was the favourite haunt of witches; while fairies were partial to the hazel. It was of a hazel-nut that Queen Mab's coach was made.

III.—RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES, SCRIPTURAL CHARACTERS, SAINTS, &C.

Much of the beautiful symbolism of Christianity—the Vine, the Lily, the seed in the parables—is borrowed from the plant-world.

Intimately associated with it also are the fateful trees in Eden, and the tree of the Cross, not to mention the tree on which Judas hung himself, and the barren fig-tree. This bond of union between religion and vegetation has been fully admitted by men of catholic breadth of view.

As we might expect, the legend of the first man, Adam, has many tree-connections. Nearly every large fruit has competed for the doubtful honour of having been the instrument of his ruin. The fruit most common in their own climate has usually decided the people's belief on the point. Traditions concur in fixing on the fig-tree, as both furnishing a fit covering for his nakedness, and as giving him an asylum of retreat from the presence of his Maker. The following lines give the plant-lore of his expulsion from Eden :—

“ When Adam fled from Eden,
He seized the bunch of dates,
And snatched the single wheat-ear ;
And, as he passed the gates,
He plucked the leaves of myrtle,
And clasped them to his breast,
And, driven by the Angel,
Fell fainting towards the West.”

A Jewish tradition declares Abraham to have raised an altar to God near a clump of turpentine-trees (much venerated by the Jews) in the valley of Hebron. Josephus maintained that these very trees were as old as the creation ; Eusebius says they were pointed out as Abram's trees in his time.

From Abraham to the Virgin Mary is a long stretch of time. The following is a tree-myth respecting her :—In journeying with Joseph and the infant Jesus to Egypt, to escape Herod's persecution, she felt tired and thirsty, and, seeing a palm-tree with fruit, she sat down under its shade, and said to Joseph—“ I much desire to eat of the fruit of this tree.” He answered—“ Mary, I marvel much you should wish to eat of this fruit.” Then the child Jesus, who was sitting on her knee, ordered the palm-tree to bow down and let his mother eat of the fruit at her pleasure. The tree obeyed, and Mary satisfied her longing for the fruit. As the tree still continued to bow, Jesus permitted it to resume its upright position, and, for its devotion, chose it as the symbol of eternal

life for the dying, and declared he should make his triumphal entry into Jerusalem with a palm branch in his hand. At another time, in the same journey, when they came up to an orange-tree in charge of a blind man, Mary asked him to spare an orange for her thirsty child ; the man gave her three—one for Jesus, another for Joseph, and the third for herself. Then the blind man received his sight.

The Weeping Willow was believed, in early Christian days, to have wept since the time when its twigs were used to inflict stripes on the Saviour, whose Crown of Thorns gave rise to these lines on the Hawthorn :—

“ The Hawthorn’s knotted branches frown,
As when they formed that cruel crown,
With which the Roman and the Jew
Did mock the Saviour neither knew.”

Of the Holm Oak, this legend is related :—“ When it was decided at Jerusalem to crucify Christ, all the trees met, and unanimously vowed not to allow their wood to be made the instrument of shame. But there was also a Judas among the trees. When the Jews came with axes to cut the Cross destined for Jesus, all the trunks broke into a thousand little pieces, so that it was impossible to utilise them for the Cross. The holm oak alone remained standing quite whole, and gave up its trunk for the bad purpose. This is why Ionian woodmen are afraid to tarnish their axes by touching this cursed tree. Such is the fate of many benefactors in this world ; but Jesus Himself did not share this bad opinion of the tree. He seems, on the contrary, to have shown a preference for the generous tree, which, in dying with Him, shared the fate of the Redeemer. We are told that the Christ showed Himself most frequently to the saints near a holm oak.

Cameron states that, in the Highlands, the Aspen-tree (Gaelic *critheann*—trembling) is believed to be the wood of which the Cross was made ; hence, its leaves have trembled ever since. The Elder has been popularly taken for the tree on which Judas hung himself—a tradition Shakespeare mentions in *Love’s Labour’s Lost*.

The Rose, the flower of Venus, has become, under Christianity, the flower of the Virgin Mary ; thus, it has long been the custom

for the Popes to send every year a golden rose to the most pious of Christian princes ; and the Rosary itself, on which pious women count their prayers, is said to have got its name from the red hips of the dog-rose, which formed the original beads.

The traditions regarding Mahomet give some prominence to certain trees. The rose is said to have sprung up out of the sweat he dropped on the ground in an agony of prayer. And, at the hour of his death, he is represented as inhaling the sweet odour of apples, brought him by his angel-guides to Paradise.

IV. THE SYMBOLIC USES OF TREES

Will now be considered :—

Whatever may be the explanation given by Gaelic scholars as to how it came about, it is a singular fact that the names of the letters of the Gaelic Alphabet, from A to U, are the names of trees, beginning with the Elm, and ending with the White Thorn. It would be interesting to learn (but the living authorities do not seem to know) on what principle the names first belonging to trees were afterwards distributed among the letters of the alphabet.

Apart from the obvious symbolic language of plants in the Lovers' Calendar, their symbolic use in other fields is common in our day. The Primrose, as a modest souvenir of Lord Beaconsfield, is a recent example ; still more recent is the proposal made at a Liberal gathering to wear a button-hole decoration in honour of Mr. Gladstone on his birthday, to consist of a lily for purity, supported by leaves of oak and ivy, to represent strength and tenacity.

With the Jews, the Almond-tree was the emblem of vigilance, because it is the first to show by its flourish that spring has come. The Spaniards adopt the Pomegranate as the national tree, on account of its many-seeded fruit, the emblem of fecundity ; the Prussians thus adopt the Linden or Lime-tree, the emblem of married love, while the English have the national Rose for beauty, and the Oak for strength. Grandeur and dignity are well attributed to the Ash and the Elm. The Sycamore, perhaps because it was the hiding-place of Zaccheus, is emblematic of curiosity, and the Holly, of forethought ; while the Quince symbolises temptation, following the story of the fatal apple ; the Pear-blossom stands for

affection, and the Myrtle, for love. The Orange-blossom implies chastity ; the tree itself, generosity. Intemperance is the ungrateful meaning given to the heart-cheering Vine. The Olive fares better as the immemorial emblem of peace ; and the Myrrh, as dropping gladness. The Hazel tells of reconciliation ; the Hawthorn, of hope ; the Palm, said to grow faster for being weighed down, of victory ; and the Cedar, of immortality. Death and regeneration are signified by the Walnut and the Cypress, while sorrow and mourning find representatives in the Yew and the Willow. The Poplar typifies bravery ; the trembling Aspen, fear ; and crime is fitly symbolised by the Tamarisk, the leaves of which were used by the Romans to cover the eyes of criminals on the way to death.

V.—COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE.

Most villages and towns, not hopelessly prostrate before the aggressive inroads of an unromantic civilisation, possess one or more "Lovers' Walks," for which an avenue of trees to line the path seems to be a great recommendation. Trees and their fruit have had much to do with the mysteries of love. Our own Hallowe'en rites are proof of this, in the burning of hazel nuts to discover the matrimonial future, as graphically described by Burns. Akin to this game is the custom among young girls in Belgium on St. Michael's Day. They mix together full walnuts with nuts that have been emptied, but sealed up again ; then, blindfolded, they take one at random. She who gets a full one will soon get a husband ; if an empty one, she will continue a "wanter."

When two Greek lovers part, they exchange, as a test of fidelity, the halves of a leaf of plane tree. When they next meet, each produces his or her half ; both together must form a complete leaf, or the courtship would be imperilled. Roman lovers used to plant a rose-tree on the grave of a sweetheart dying before marriage. In some Danubian districts, a young woman is engaged to her lover when he offers and she accepts an apple, which is an essential symbol of nuptial gifts. In Southern Italy, when apples are served at a wedding dinner, each guest takes one, and, having made an incision, he puts a piece of silver in it. All the apples are then handed to the bride, who bites into the apples, and

retains the money as a luck-penny. Sicilian girls, on St. John's Day, throw apples from their windows to the street, and then watch who will pick them up. If a man does so, the girl will be married within a year ; if a woman, no marriage that year ; if the person looks at it, without touching it, that foreshadows early widowhood for her ; if a priest passes first, the girl will die unmarried. At marriage ceremonies in Corsica, the church-door is decked with garlands of laurel, supposed to prevent domestic brawls. Formerly, near Bologna, when a daughter was born, it was the custom, if the family could afford it, to plant 100 poplars, of which great care was taken till the girl's marriage, when they were cut down and sold, to provide a dowry for her—the most sensible thing recorded of all these curious practices. It had probably been derived from a Roman usage of planting cypresses on the birth of a girl, the trees being called, from that time, her dowry.

TREE MYTHS AND FOREST LORE.

[BY WILLIAM DURIE.]

IV.

VI.—DEATH.

LIKE the newspaper announcements, death is here treated after marriage. Trees have been called the *most living* symbols of life. Immortality has been held typified in the revival of the trees in spring, notwithstanding the paraphrased language of Job :—

“The woods shall hear the voice of spring,
And flourish green again,
But man forsakes this earthly scene,
Ah ! never to return.”

The mournful appearance of some trees, such as the cypress and the weeping willow, has rendered appropriate their dedication to the dead. The old Romans had a complete rubric for the employment of certain trees for funerary purposes. When a man fell sick, a branch of laurel was hung over the door of the house in compliment to Apollo, the god of medicine. If the sickness ended in death, the laurel was taken down, and black boughs of cypress (emblem of Pluto, god of the lower regions) were substituted, or boughs of larch, which Pliny calls the funeral tree. Upon the coffin were placed wreaths of cypress leaves, decked with lilies and leaves of olive, laurel, and white poplar. And, during the procession to the grave, torches made of pine were burned, while the mourners, carrying sprigs of cypress, walked to the music of flutes, made only of boxwood. It has been supposed that the sprigs of cypress indicated the belief that the dead had died for ever.

The old Celtic inhabitants of our country, and some even yet, were so attached to trees, and thought man's life so intimately bound up with them, that they believed that for every tree cut down, somebody in the district would die in the same

year. The withering of the bay-laurel was once, in England, taken for an omen of death. In Richard II., Shakespeare has it:—

“’Tis thought the King is dead. We will not stay,
The bay-trees in our country are all withered.”

The ancient Germans used to put hazel-nuts in tombs, as good auguries of regeneration and immortality, a practice still in force in some places. In Russia, when a coffin is being borne to the cemetery, it is covered with branches of pine or fir trees, because of their evergreen foliage, held symbolic of the immortality of the soul. Coles, in his *Introduction to the Knowledge of Plants*, says:—“Cypress garlands are of great account at funerals amongst the gentler sort in England, but rosemary and bays are used by the commons, both at funerals and weddings.”

The Yew, a favourite church-yard tree, emblematic of the resurrection, is called, by Shakespeare, “The double fatal yew,” because its leaves are poisonous, and its wood was used for bows. The German and Celtic tribes highly venerated it. “Here,” says Ossian, “rests their dust, Cuchullin; these lonely yews sprang from their tomb, and shade them from the storm.”

The Willow is the distinctively funerary tree of the Chinese. M. Schlegel tells us that it has been used by them for the last 3000 years to cover their coffins, and to be borne in the hands of mourners as the symbol of another life. Although with us its employment is not so extensive, its frequent use in church-yards testifies to the bond of union joining East and West in the matter of funeral observances.

VII.—WEATHER-LORE.

Before the days of meteorology, many superstitions, crediting trees with powerful influence in changes of weather, were current. These can be mainly reduced to the domain of fable—the cloud-dropping tree, the rain-producing tree, and the storm-compeller, being all obviously of a purely imaginary description. The Celts had a great regard for the Mountain Ash, which was thought a lucky tree. Fishermen used to fasten a small piece of it to their boat, as a charm to bring good weather and a good catch. It is by means of palm-tree leaves that the natives of Southern India pretend to invoke or drive away rain. In North Italy, laurel-leaves

are used to ascertain whether the crops will be good and the weather favourable. The leaves are burned ; if they crackle, there will be a good crop ; if not, bad. As a charm against thunderstorms, the country people round Venice hang an olive branch over the chimney, with this invocation :—

“ Holy Barbara and St. Simon,
Keep away the lightning-stroke ;
Keep away the rolling thunder,
Barbara, we thee invoke.”

The Romans believed the laurel a safeguard against lightning ; and the Germans ascribed the same virtue to the hawthorn.

VIII.—ANIMAL-LORE.

“ A Hindoo popular tale about the Bul-bul, a species of nightingale, tells us that this bird remained sitting for twelve years on a cotton-tree, refusing to share it with other birds, for fear they would pluck the expected fruit. When it saw the beautiful flourish come, it rejoiced, but it in vain expected the fruit, which never came. Then it was exposed to the ridicule of all the other birds whom it had chased from the tree.” In Alsace, the people used to blame the bat for spoiling the stork’s eggs. The touch of the bat killed the young bird. To avoid this, the story goes that the stork put in its nest some twigs of maple, which alone had the power of keeping bats at a distance. The doors of houses used also to be hung with maple to prevent visits from bats.

Shepherds were once in the habit of cutting branches of Elder in order to make flutes, but only in places where they could not hear the cock crow, perhaps from a notion that the vicinity of that bird might have imparted a disagreeable tone to the wood. Juniper, many German ostlers think an excellent means of strengthening horses. It is usual to give them, three Sundays in succession, before dawn, three handfuls of salt and 72 juniper berries.

In Sanscrit, the Oleander is called the “ Horse-killer,” a name and superstition found also in Italy. The Ass of Apulenis had a mortal dread at the presence of the Oleander. On the contrary, the hazel is thought in Germany to have a good effect on horses, their oats being touched with a branch of hazel during certain

Sunday processions. In North Germany, when cows are taken for the first time to pasture, the last one is often decked with small branches of fir, supposed to assist her in calving. When a cow takes ill in some parts of France, and worms are supposed to be the cause, the peasants take a handful of dwarf-elder leaves, rubbing them in their hands, then saluting the tree, and addressing it in these terms:— “Good morning, Monsieur Dwarf-Elder; if you do not drive the worms from their present place I shall cut you down.” This threat, they believe, generally effects a cure; or, if they cut down the tree, they think the cure certain.

This paper will conclude with a few instances under the last head—

IX.—MEDICINAL AND MAGICAL PROPERTIES ATTRIBUTED TO TREES.

“O, mickle is the powerful grace that lies,
In herbs, plants, stones, and their true qualities,”

says Shakespeare in “Romeo and Juliet.” In days before doctors were a necessary part of the equipment of a community, their place was taken, however imperfectly, by priests and magicians. Diseases were imagined to be removeable chiefly in one of two ways—either by the prayers of the priest, if a good spirit had sent the disease, or by the incantations of the magician, working mainly with plants, which were also used for other purposes within the magic circle. Trees were called into frequent use in this connection.

Homeopathy would seem to be only a revival of the views current prior to the scientific study of medicine. “Like should cure like.” “Similia Similibus.” The red juice of the mulberry, like blood, was thought to be a cure for all kinds of bleeding. The leaves of the Weeping Willow, old medical works assure us, are a sovereign remedy for the same disorder. The Almond was thought by the Romans to arrest the influence of intoxicating liquor. Plutarch tells a story of a physician who, after dinner, defied anybody to make him drunk; but once he was caught before dinner chewing bitter almonds, when he confessed that, if he had not taken that precaution, a small quantity of wine would have intoxicated him. Pennant says—“In many parts of the

Highlands, at the birth of a child, the nurse puts the end of a green stick of ash into the fire, and, while it is burning, receives into a spoon the juice which oozes out at the other end, and administers this to the new-born babe." A similar practice exists in Brittany. When a child there is weak, they put birch-leaves in an oven to dry, and then place them in a cradle to strengthen the child. Birch-leaves were held in the Highlands as good for keeping away serpents, the bites of which were thought, in Italy, to be curable by the application of juniper berries. Pliny seriously attributed to the ash-tree a magical power against serpents. In some Mediterranean countries, warts are believed curable by rotten peach-leaves.

The leaves of the ash and the juniper, when burnt, were held to be a sure cure for the common scourge of leprosy, four centuries ago. It appears to be a practice still in force, near Venice, to bind a tree with ropes for the cure of fever, and then to say thrice without taking breath—"I place thee here, I leave thee here, and I am going to take a walk." The fever should then leave the patient, but the tree ceases to bear fruit. This is another instance of the tree being supposed to act as a substitute for man, and, by its death, to save his life.

The Elder-tree furnishes a popular German remedy for tooth-ache, which Russian peasants try to guard against by dipping Oak-bark in a neighbouring river and keeping it carefully in their houses.

German peasants say that evil spirits avoid places where juniper is hung. Holly used to be held as a charm against evil spirits in England, and it is still so considered in some continental countries. The magician's wand had to be made of hazel-wood, which also furnished the divining-rod for the discovery of hidden treasure, water-springs, and metallic mines—a belief in the virtue of which is not yet extinct. It was a hazel-rod that Donstieswivel in the Antiquary used in searching for the buried gold. Mistletoe-leaf was once believed to open all locks on pronouncing certain formulæ; and the oak leaf is still regarded by Italian peasants as an infallible protection against bullet-wounds, and is carried by young army recruits in that belief. The German peasants believe that the man who stands under an apple-tree on Christmas Eve

will see Heaven open. In Scotland, the apple is associated with a sight of "the other place," which Burns has immortalised in "Hallowe'en."

Many other curious notions under this head might be given, but the writer has ridden his hobby long enough on this occasion, and he concludes with expressing a hope that what he has written and culled from many sources may induce others to continue the investigation of the subject, which is fascinating in itself, and throws light, in many unexpected ways, on the mental and social history of man.