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THE CHRISTMAS TREE.

Interesting Facts About A Perennial Sapling That Blooms Annually in the Home.

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Of all the plants and flowers the earth has ever produced there is only one that has never been noticed, and that blooms on our hearthstones today as bright and hardy as when the beautiful living green first shed its softening, civilizing, tender influence over the hearts of men more than 1800 years ago. In that long period of time have dynasties, nations have passed away, the mighty Roman Empire whose soldiers bound the King of Christmas to the cross, has perished from off the face of the earth; once proud races have been humbled in the dust; even the very face of nature herself has changed, but the Christmas tree, with its bright green unfirmness, still spreads its branches of peace on earth, good will to men, over the whole civilized world, for in all that vast space there is not a spot, no matter what the race, the nation, the people or their creed, where there is not some one who has heard and has believed the glad tidings that may ever in Bethlehem of Judea more than eighteen centuries ago a beautiful maiden mother gave birth to a lovely baby boy and cradled him in a manger, while kings and wise men, who had seen its star in the East had come to worship him, knelt at his feet and presented him with rich gifts. Wherever that story—most wonderful and beautiful of all the stories that have been told—is known and believed, there the decorations and ornaments of the Christmas tree gleam in the firelight and its gifts make glad the hearts of the little ones who gather around it.

But though the Christmas tree is an emblem of the fundamental event of the Christian religion, and though it is very pleasant to trace—as is often ceremonially done—the origin of the custom of giving Christmas presents to the bringing of gifts to the infant Jesus by the kings and wise men who came to worship him, yet a regard for strict antiquarian truth compels us to admit that both the tree and the gifts we hang upon it are of heathen origin. Years before the birth of Christ, many heathen nations were accustomed to hold great feasts at about the time of year at which we now celebrate Christmas. Among the ancient Romans these were the feasts of Saturn and Ops, which began on December 19 and continued for seven days. During that period it was customary for all the members of every household to give gifts to each other. As there is no positive information obtainable as to the exact date of Christ's birth, and as the preponderance of such evidence as we have, makes it extremely improbable that He was born in December, there can be little question that the early fathers of the Church, being anxious to induce the recently converted people to abandon their heathen usages, chose for the Christmas season the time of year that had formerly been devoted to the great heathen festivals above named, and as they desired to make their heathen converts feel that they had lost nothing in innocent pleasure by the substitution of a Christian festival for a heathen one, they modified and reformed, as far as possible, the customs of the latter—notably that of giving gifts.

The ancient Germans were also accustomed to hold great festivals at the time of our Christmas season, and they then not only exchanged gifts after the manner of the Romans, but they also attached to some gifts to their gods, which they decorated with lights. When Christianity first caused a foothold to form on the hitherto pagans with the Germans the same course that Greece had adopted with the Romans, Christianized and permitted them to retain, so far as practicable, the customs of the heathen festival that had been replaced by the Christmas season. Thus the tree from which gifts became Christmas trees, and as much were intimate by the Saxons into England, where they have come to be and hold the rest of the Christian world.

And how many Christmas trees do you think are used annually in the United States? You form some idea of the number from the fact that New York alone used more than 250,000 last year. And where do the Christmas trees come from? Most of those that are used in New York are obtained principally from Maine, that grand and quaint old pine tree state, where the lovely Indian name Ta-ko-ma-ne-ne-ne