SPECIAL FEATURES

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Story of Easter in Plants at Botanic Garden

Species of Trees, Shrubs and Plants Mentioned in Bible Are Found in the Garden—Palms, Olive Branch, Christ Thorn and Judas Tree Typify the Story of Holy Week and Easter — Other "Scriptural Plants"—Wood of Aspen Tree Furnished Material for Cross of Christ—Cedar of Lebanon—Bulrushes and a Manna Tree.

FEW people know that the United States botanic garden at Washington contains a unique collection of what may be termed "Scriptural plants." There are at least a dozen trees, shrubs and plants, which are mentioned in the Bible as having had close connection with Christ, and others of its leading characters and with Easter.

Although the lily is our Easter flower there is no scriptural warrant for its especial use as the emblem of the resurrection. That it was regarded as a beautiful flower all references prove. Lilies and lily-work are mentioned three times in Kings, for forming patterns of carved ornaments for the pillars and other parts of Solomon's temple. Six times lilies are mentioned in the Song of Solomon as graceful flowers, emblematic of song and sweet perfume.

The lily-of-the-valley of the Bible is not the flower now known by that name, for our lily-of-the-valley does not grow in Palestine. But the jonquil, the Narcissus Jonquilla, our lovely white and yellow spring lilies, of several varieties, known familiarly as "Easter flowers," grow plentifully in the valleys of Palestine. Some authorities think that the lily to which Solomon was compared is the Amaryllis, that glorious flowering bulb with bright red and yellow flowers, which also grows abundantly in the vales of Palestine. The large anemone, iris, and the water lily are all natives of Palestine and believed to come under the generic term of "lily," as used in the Bible.

Holy week commences with Palm Sunday, and the date palm, the species used in church celebrations of that day, was the palm used in Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday, before His crucifixion, when the people "took branches of palm trees and went forth to meet Him."

The date palm has attained a luxurious growth in the botanic garden. It is the tall, feathery specimen familiar to many through illustrated Bibles. The palm collection at the botanic garden is notable as one of the finest in the United States and contains over a hundred fine specimens of these aristocrats of the plant kingdom. The date palm is one of the handsomest.

The olive, the most sacred of the trees of Palestine, especially those ancient specimens on the Mount of Olives, is not sufficiently hardy to grow well outdoors in this section of the country, although it flourishes in some warmer parts of the United States. It is, therefore, not adequately represented in the botanic garden. The one "olive branch" it possesses is a puny specimen, giving no idea of the tree of great growth and almost incredible age.

Good Friday is commemorated in the botanic garden by the Christ thorn, as well as by the reed, for on the day of Christ's crucifixion "they platted a crown of thorns and put it upon His head, and a reed in His right hand." The specimens of Christ thorn here are somewhat ungainly growths, with long flingerlike boughs, and they rarely grow in graceful proportions. The little twig conforms in every detail to the spiked crown of thorns which Guido painted so realistically on the head of the famous "Nazareno."

This tree, somewhat rare in our country, grows plentifully, both as tree and shrub, all over Palestine. It is a tall, gaunt tree of sinister aspect, which weirdly fringes the brink of the Jordan river and the lake of Tiberias. Two shoots of the thorn tree from the botanic garden were set out some years ago in the grounds of the Capitol, southwest of the building. These have grown to be about thirty feet in height. As marked in the botanic garden and in the Capitol grounds the tree is known as Zizphus Vulgaris, or Christ thorn.

The botanic garden also shows the reed, which was used in mockery as a scepter before Christ's crucifixion. It does not attain its full height in this climate until late summer. Botanically it is known as Papyrus Antiquorum, and it grows in the extensive marshes contiguous to the Lake of Galilee and in other parts of the Holy Land. The specimens in the botanic garden are very fine, and their waving plumes attain a height of about twenty-five feet. Last summer they formed the apex of the magnificent hundred-foot bed of grasses and reeds, which was one of the finest features of the garden.

It is not definitely known what wood composed the Savior's cross, but there is a tradition to the effect that the aspen was the cruciagent. The aspen, or trembling poplar, is common in Palestine, and it is possible this was used. In a lovely poem, "The Aspen's Sorrow," J. Maclean Watt gives voice to the popular legend regarding the aspen's connection with the divine tragedy. He says:

While kindly slumber swathes the misty world,
And all things sad are sleeping,
What voice awakes,
And sorrowing breaks
The stillness with her weeping?

Hush! 'tis the aspen trembling in the shade
For Calvary's sorrow,
Her anguished breast
Can know no rest,
Her night no morrow;
Ever the tide of her remorse comes sweeping,
For Jesus weeping.

But, on a day, when Hate of the world was king,
One that had walked beside Him, basely sold
His Lord for gold,
To base men's cruel will;
And they who bought,
Out of the woodlands green the graceful aspen sought,
And from her body Christ's cross fashioning,
They nailed Him there upon the wind-swept hill.

And there His agonizings entered her,
And, for her doom, His pain
Her heart must stir,
In daylight, starlight, sun or shade or rain.
Nor can she find relief
Through all earth's years;
For ever sounds, across the gloom, her grief,
With shuddering sighs, and sound of falling tears.

Another tree in the Botanic Garden suggestive of Christ's crucifixion is known as the Judas tree, tradition having it that the one who betrayed Christ hanged himself upon a tree of this variety. It is botanically known as cercis canadensis, and popularly known as redbud, or Judas tree. It bears a small pink flower shaped like a sweet pea. It is a native of Palestine, as well as of many other countries, and is common in Greece and other parts of the south of Europe. When full grown it has a stout trunk and thick, stiff, somewhat horizontal branches.

The Botanic Garden has two fine specimens of the cedar of Lebanon, both near the southern entrance to the grounds. Their interest is enhanced by the fact that their seeds were brought to Washington from the Holy Land by Senator Evarts of New York and Senator Hoar of Massachusetts.

The cedar was one of the most important trees in Palestine, for it is mentioned no less than fifty-one times in the Old Testament alone. It appears to have been highly prized as building material in his day by Solomon, as also by the King of Syria, who obtained cedar wood for building his palace in Nineveh. Fragments of cedar wood about three thousand years old were found in the ruins of Nineveh by explorers.

The ancient and famed locality of the cedar of Lebanon is now reduced to a quarter of a mile in extent, situated upon an elevation over 6,000 feet above the sea level. There survive some 400 trees, the largest a hundred feet in height, and believed to be about 2,300 years old.

A plant which grows in beauty in the Botanic Garden, and may be seen a little later in the season when outdoor life becomes more luxuriant, is a clump of waving bulrushes, which forms the centerpiece of the water-lily pond south of the main conservatory. It was from this species of rush that the ark of Moses was made, and of which we read in the verse, "And when she could no longer hide him, she took for him an ark of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and pitch, and put the child therein."

Besides being used for making vessels for floating upon the water, and for domestic purposes, the bulrush is famed as the material of which the paper of the ancients was made, called papyri.

Another plant in the Botanic Garden connected with the career of Moses is the manna tree. By Bible students it has been considered quite possible that this tree provided the manna which God sent to the children of Israel during their long march through the wilderness. The tamarix mannifera, as it is botanically named, is a small tree, or much-branched shrub, of heathlike appearance, a very attractive bush. At certain seasons of the year its stems are pierced by a small insect, and from the bark thus punctured exudes a honeylike liquid. When the tree is cut at any season this sweet fluid adheres to the knife and is very pleasing to the taste. The plant is common in the desert of Sinai, and its substance is even yet collected by the Bedouin Arabs, who preserve it like honey and harden it into cakes.

It is interesting to know that this substance, which was in all probability the manna of the Bible, is today used in making a certain variety of chewing gum, once more exemplifying the old proverb from Ecclesiastes, "There is no new thing under the sun."

Needless to say, the Botanic Garden has many fine specimens of rose of Sharon. The prolific leafy shrub, with its wealth of pink and white blossoms, grows in Palestine, but its hallowed name has not been identified with certainty. The seed of the oriental plane gracing the grounds of the Botanic Garden was brought from the Vale of Cashmere by Representative Thaddeus Stevens of Pennsylvania. Its numerous offspring have been planted generously throughout Washington, but the best showing of its use is to be seen in the fringe of planes which borders the south extremity of the Capitol grounds and lines the main walk up to the west entrance.

Another tree of especial interest as being connected with an old tradition relating to Joseph of Arimathea, the "certain rich man" who provided the tomb of Christ, is the fine hawthorn standing sentinel over the northern entrance to the Botanic Garden. In May this luxuriant shrub glows with unnumbered pink clusters, which throw their pungent fragrance far and wide. This is the flowering thorn, which tradition says formed the staff of Joseph of Arimathea, when he led the pilgrim band to Britain to spread the doctrine of Christianity.

This beautiful story, be it fact or fancy, states that when the Christians reached the hill at Glastonbury, in the south of England, known as "Weary-all-hill," and near which the great abbey was later reared, Joseph thrust his staff into the ground with the exclamation, "We are weary, all; here shall we rest." As a sign of divine cheer and encouragement the staff of thorn burst into leaf and bloom, and the travelers knew that their journey was over.

BULRUSHES IN THE CENTER OF A FOUNTAIN.

THE CHRIST THORN.

A COLLECTION OF PALMS AT THE BOTANIC GARDEN.

Celebration of Eastertide in Russia Is Joyous One

THE great Russian festival is near at hand. The last stretch of the long Lenten fast is about run, and when church bells peal out loudly on Russian Easter eve, which is two weeks later than our Easter—as they will despite the war—rich and poor alike will know that the time of denial is over, and that joyous Easter is come.

What Christmas is to other countries, Easter is to Russia, at least in times of peace. The "Merry Christmas" and ringing chimes of Christmas morning convey no more happiness of spirit, fellowship and kindliness toward all men than does the "Christos Voskresse," with its accompanying kiss of the Russian Easter morning, and the jangle of myriad bells, rung everywhere and by everybody on Easter day, for Russia is the land of bells, and Easter is the greatest festival of the year.

In marked contrast to the jubilation of the day is the quiet of the Saturday preceding. Churches are closed and priests are nowhere to be seen. Housewives are shut in with their varied preparations for the coming feast, and all alike are too much weakened by long abstinence to relish much activity.

A little before midnight things begin to stir. The priest arrives at the church. Old and young flock in after him until there is not an inch of space left unoccupied. Suddenly the great bell tolls the hour of midnight, the doors of the holy sanctum of bronze or gold open wide, disclosing the holy of holies, and the priest standing in the midst of incense-laden vapor.

Simultaneously the tapers in the church, and those which each individual has brought with him, are kindled, and the church, before dark, now blazes into light. At the same time the congregation raise their voices in the rich harmony of the Russian Easter chant, while the priest passes among them, blessing each one, and swinging the golden censer over their heads.

* * *

Then they pass from the church, still carrying the lighted tapers, and march from one village to another singing, rejoicing, exchanging Easter salutations, and producing streams of illumination wherever they go.

At 4 a.m. the church refills, this time the peasants bringing huge hampers laden with the food which they are to eat on their first breakfast after the penance, and which must be blessed by the priest before they will be permitted to gratify appetites long held in leash. On every side impatient voices urge the priest to "bless my bread," "my meat," or "my butter." The ceremony is at last completed, the hampers carried back home somewhat lightened by the toll given the priest for his pains in bestowing his blessing, and all of the good things are immediately sampled.

But this early morning meal is not the only feasting done at Easter, for it continues throughout the day, when, as is the custom, calls are made from house to house, and at each place choice cakes and wines are served to every newcomer.

Eggs are as much a feature with the Russian Easter as with ours. Not only are real eggs much in evidence, but gifts of every conceivable class and character are also concealed in egg-shaped packages. It is said that a huge egg, once presented to a lady of the nobility, proved to contain a wonderful Russian conveyance. Another remarkable egg formed an ornate covering to a nine-gallon flask of vodka. It was speedily tapped, a tube inserted and vodka poured in continuous streams into the outstretched glasses of the revelers.

The final ceremony at Easter is the blessing of the bread. The priest distributes bread to the people, breaking it from loaves which have been inscribed with the words, "Kristos Roskboss, Jesu Hominum Salvator." Those who obtain a piece with one or more letters of the first five words rejoice exceedingly and deem it a piece of marvelous good luck, bestowing good fortune throughout the year. Those receiving a piece with the letters of the last word grieve terribly, for it is a sign of ill omen.

Many stories cluster around Easter superstitions. In a little village of South Russia, runs one of them, lived a poor widower and his daughter. On the day before Easter the neighbors gave them all sorts of cooked food so that they might celebrate the festival joyously. Gayle the daughter placed the dishes on the table, with a candle at each corner. But perhaps her exuberance and the thrill of the coming feast bewildered both her and her father, for they forgot to leave a log burning on the fire, from which they might light the Easter taper on their return from the midnight mass. Failure to do this not only brought ill luck on the household, but showed an unforgivable indifference to the mandates of the church.

Vainly the girl sought from house to house for a light, but no one would take pity on a person who had been so wicked as to neglect keeping the Easter log burning. Weeping, she returned to her father. As he opened the door to admit his daughter he spied a fire burning far away in the fields, and at once concluded that some band of wanderers were camping out there for the night. They at least would not refuse, so he went to them and found, as he expected, a number of men lying around a camp fire. They gave him leave to light his taper, but as soon as it was lighted it went out again.

"You had better take some of the glowing embers," said the eldest of the strangers.

"But how can I carry them?"

"In the skirts of your coat."

The man, not questioning the strange instruction, forthwith held out his coat and the strangers heaped coals of fire into it.

When the candles were lighted he threw the embers on the earthen floor, and found, to his surprise, that his coat had not even been singed. The floor on the other hand, was glittering wherever the fire that he had cast away had fallen, and on examining the embers he found them to be pure gold.

Czar of Russia, a Soldier and the Easter Salutation

AT various times since the war began, last August, there have come dispatches reporting the czar's promise of greater liberty and peace for inhabitants of Russia who were not communicants of the orthodox Greek Church, the church of state. Which recalls an anecdote of the present emperor's father when he was czar and told by a member of the Imperial Russian Geographic Society to help bear him out in his belief that the rulers of the Russian empire possessed more leniency than ordinarily ascribed to them.

It appears that it was Easter morning and the czar was coming out of his cabinet for a drive. He greeted the soldier mounting guard at the door with "Christ is risen" and received, instead of the ordinary response, a flat contradiction—"Not at all, your imperial majesty." After the first crack of astonishment an explanation was, of course, demanded, for, according to the Geographic member, no one ventured to dissent from Alexander, even in the most guarded and respectful of terms.

The soldier, though expecting his head to be the price of explanation, said his racial opinions did not allow him conscientiously to admit the resurrection of Christ. To his complete astonishment, his sovereign commended him for having the kind of conscience that would endanger his life for the sake of a form of greeting, and sent him a gift both practical and substantial.

* * *

Down in Moscow, where the wonderful cathedral called the Kremlin is and where all this guard's closest friends and relatives had graciously been permitted to live, the Easter eve ceremonies had no doubt been even more purely Russian than in St. Petersburg, now Petrograd. But guards have no time for melancholy wonder as to why whole races of people have hated each other because of religious differences, and then coming down the avenue there was the emperor, returning to the palace. Which closed the incident for the courageous soldier.

But down in historical Moscow the night before there really had been celebrated, in a fashion as old as the sixteenth Kremlin, a strange ceremony, belonging only to Russia, and commemorating the resurrection of the Savior.

Easter eve had been ushered in with a torrent of spring rain. The first group gathered before the Kremlin to wait for the midnight bells was drenched by the time twice their number had been added, and in another hour a great throng stood in the heavy falling rain. Patiently and silently enduring the discomfort, nobles in glistening sables rubbed elbows with peasants attired in sheep skins which may have belonged to their fathers' fathers, and could hardly have been recognized by their original owner.

Prosperous merchants were wedged in alongside some wretched old woman who probably had not been warm the whole winter and didn't notice much the chill of a mere rainstorm. There were pilgrims, too, from everywhere in the Russian empire, for the Kremlin is a holy place, old men with white beards and long staffs that an occasional ragamuffin, suddenly turned demure and holding a candle rather unsteadily in his hand, kept shy of. Every one of them had a candle in his hand, every candle was lighted, and the strange glow illumined not only the vast cathedral, but also all the buildings around it.

Then suddenly, after the long hours of waiting, the clock struck twelve, and the deep-voiced bell in the tower of Ivan the Great began to toll. Every bell in Moscow took up the glad tidings that Easter morning had arrived, and a battery of artillery started firing guns in rapid succession. The quiet crowd fell into rapt enthusiasm, every one made the sign of the cross, and, while the raw March rain continued to pour, the excited believers of the Greek Church pushed forward to the walls of the Kremlin.

Here were ranged long rows of Easter cakes, each bearing a lighted taper and each to be blessed soon by an officiating priest, whose every movement had a deep significance for the orthodox who had braved the dismal, drenching rain. This ceremony lasted for more than two hours and was followed, as the people were dispersing, by a general giving and receiving of kisses that signified the fraternal affection all "brethren in Christ" are commanded to have.

Once this custom was much more general in Russia than it is now. At present the salutations are kept within one's circle of friends, if not simply relatives, and consist of three kisses on the cheek. "Christ hath arisen," says the one person, and the other replies, "In truth he has arisen." All classes of people observe the custom to a greater or less degree, even the emperor conforms to it, for at this hour, in the palace, two soldiers are seen to approach the czar that he may touch their cheeks with his lips and say "Christ is risen."

Better Method.

HENRY FORD said at a dinner in New York:

"Don't run down stocks. Stocks possess the true spirit of finance.

"'Did Stocks borrow money,' a man asked at a ball, to buy wife that magnificent diamond stomacher?

"'No, indeed,' another man replied. 'Stocks knows his finance better than that. He bought his wife that diamond stomacher to borrow money.'"

Woman and Prophet.

E. BERRY WALL, arbiter of taste, looked round the tiers of boxes at the Metropolitan Opera House one evening and said:

"I suppose, if a woman's shoulders are very beautiful, she has a right, a moral right, to wear a very decollete gown. At the same time——"

Mr. Wall chuckled and shook his head.

"At the same time," he resumed, "the fashionable American woman of today reminds me of the prophet."

"How so?" said his interlocutor. "How so?"

"She hasn't much on 'er in her own country," Mr. Wall replied.

Clock Collector.

GEN. HORATIO L. WOODWARD said at a dinner at West Point:

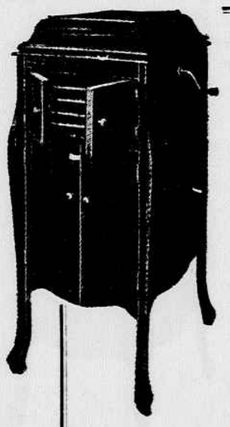
"The German armies of invasion have the name of being great clock collectors. The French in 1870 accused the German soldiers of marching back home with two or three fine clocks apiece. This charge is being repeated again today.

"It is no doubt a false charge, but it it is a funny one. It has given rise to a story:

"A German uhlan, back from the front on furlough, got out at the Berlin station with a fine grandfather's clock on his shoulder, which he had requisitioned from a French chateau.

"As the uhlan trudged his homeward way beneath his heavy and enormous clock, an innocent country fellow stopped him and said in amazement:

"'But, mein herr, but—surely—a watch would be handier, wouldn't it?'"



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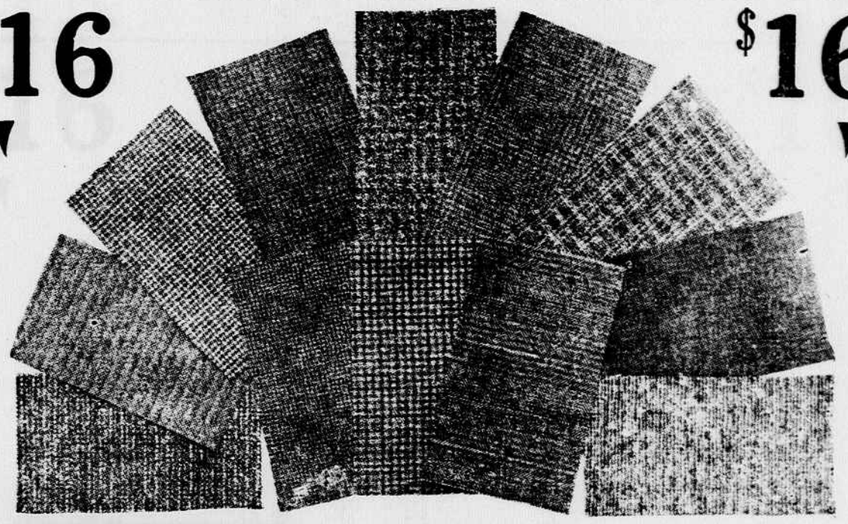

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