

START PLANTING EVERGREENS.

Whether to plant now a cone-bearing tree that shall serve this year and all years to come (and with greater glory every year as it increases in size and beauty) as the central feature of the Christmas celebration, or to delay thought about it until the season is at hand and planting of any kind is out of the question in the northern latitudes, and to buy from the most convenient dealer a tree cut and brought down from the forest—this is the question I want to put before you this month. Because when this issue of the Companion reaches you, it will be as favorable a time of year for setting out evergreen of the cone-bearing genus as it is possible to choose—speaking for the greater part of the country. Of course no horticultural rule holds in all parts of the world, and special regions develop very special rules. It is to be understood therefore that I am speaking always, unless otherwise specified, of the general average conditions and places.

There are many things entering into your choice in this matter; and I think each of them ought to be realized and weighed, one against the other, in making a decision. So let us first examine them all, one by one. The most important is the personality of the home—the household—of course. Is the family group of such a character that a tree set up indoors will bring the spirit and meaning of the festival closer to each one, or is it a group that will better be reached with these if the Christmas tree is a growing one, out in the garden under the sky and sun and stars?

THE INDOOR TREES.

Where there are children there is of course just one answer, and that is the indoor tree. Whatever your prejudices may be with regard to the (supposed) wholesale destruction of whole forests to supply the season's demand, no one can deny that a tree indoors, gay with lights and tinsel and happy, foolish ornaments, creates an atmosphere of festivity for which there is no satisfactory substitute. So here we score a point—and a pretty substantial one—in favor of the original Christmas-tree custom.

A further point to be considered is that the chances of inclement weather during the holiday period are fairly large; and there is no denying that to stand shivering in a winter sleet and wind around a tree which is losing its decorations by the minute, is an experience you always hope you will never have to repeat, if you ever have had it.

So here are two arguments in favor of the indoor tree—children in the household, and the likelihood that bad weather may interfere with ceremonies and festivities held out of doors. Then of course there are many households that have no garden space in which to plant a tree, and so, whatever may be said on either side, are obliged to make use of the temporary or annual cut-from-the-forest specimen, or go without. And there are many other households where age or infirmity of some member makes participation in outdoor celebration impossible. The case is strong, I think, in favor of continuing the custom as it has stood in the past, notwithstanding the objections raised to it.

What are these? And how well grounded are they? And how may they be met and overcome? Not overcome in the sense of defied or disregarded, but overcome in the true sense, which means of course overcome by resolving them; by finding the way to correct whatever it may be that justifies them, without foregoing the ancient and beautiful custom altogether; finding the way to proper use of these young forest trees without abuse, without actual wanton destruction.

The point most often raised, I think, is that cutting the young evergreens which find their way wholesale into the markets of the great cities and towns is actually destroying the forests of the future; and if this were true, it would be an argument so strong against the practice that it could not be met.

But the facts are somewhat different from this superficial view; and while I am willing to concede that the present system is the proper one, neither am I willing to contend for the complete abandonment of it overnight. The modification of it which the establishment of Christmas-tree plantations on land otherwise waste is bringing about is not so rapid perhaps as one could wish, though there are now several such commercial enterprises—and it is a movement in the right direction. Supplementing this is the application of proper forest methods to the selecting and cutting of such trees as may be needed, so that the whole enterprise gradually moves toward the desirable equilibrium of annual production sufficient to meet demand, with no waste and no want.

There is no denying that the same wasteful methods that are common generally in our handling of nature's provision have been employed in the Christmas-tree harvest; but forestry authorities are pretty generally agreed now that the important thing is to correct these methods, not to halt altogether the harvesting. Or, to quote one of the leading forestry experts of the country, "True conservation of the forest is not found in abstaining from the use of trees, but in a rational system of forests management."

FAVORITES FOR CHRISTMAS TREES.

And as the trees most in demand for the Christmas celebration are small, the harvesting of them falls within the legitimate practice of thinning, which is "an integral part of forest management." It takes out regularly if not annually a certain number of small conifers where these occur, is not only under certain circumstances an advantage to the trees remaining, but a necessity if these are to become what is intended. It is the intelligent use of nature's supply, in other words, that enable this

total supply to attain its maximum. Of course every part of the world where Christmas trees are used has its particular favorite for this purpose, and perhaps does not realize that in other regions a wholly different tree may be typical of the season. But, as a matter of fact, there are many kinds of trees to be recognized as Christmas trees, ranging from the broad-leaved and red-berried Holly so generally used in certain parts of the South, to the Balsam Fir of the Northeast—the latter the accepted ideal form and furnishing the markets of the great cities generally.

Fines, Spruces, Cedars and Hemlocks are favorites in regions where they abound; and indeed there is no reason why any particular genus or species should be demanded—or excluded. So in choosing a tree which is to be planted in the garden, it is best to select something from a genus native to the locality, if possible, as this will be more likely to thrive than an exotic kind. Yet there are a few widespread species such as our own White Pine and Arbor Vitae and the alien though now common Austrian Pine and Norway Spruce which may be pretty generally used with success, since these adapt themselves to various conditions.

WHAT TO SELECT FOR PLANTING.

Since it is only during their youth or comparative youth that many conifers retain the pyramidal form which makes them desirable as Christmas trees, this also should be considered in selecting a tree for planting. I do not mean by this that loss of symmetry at twenty to twenty-five years of age is ground for rejecting a species, but rather that it may influence the choice of planting site. It is a factor that ought to be known and remembered at any rate, especially where each year adds a new living Christmas tree to a garden or collection. For the effect of such a planting will begin to change within ten or twelve years sometimes, and the trees will begin to lose lower branches and to take on the forms of their maturity—often forms of great beauty and most picturesque, but not in the least like the decorous young pyramids of their early youth.

Beyond question the ideal solution of the entire Christmas-tree problem is two trees instead of one—an outdoor, permanent specimen, lighted at night during the holiday period, but otherwise not decorated; and the usual indoor tree. And the latter also a living tree, preferably.

So far as I know, no one has yet suggested here the best practice of all which, though not perhaps general in England, was not so long ago the custom and still is the custom of one place at least. There the Christmas tree is dug up and planted in a large tub; and after the festival is over it is replanted in its original place—marked with a permanent metal label which gives the date of its distinguished service.

In this instance a different tree is chosen in the forest, annually, and is borne from the hill where it has secured the family holiday to the school for a children's merrymaking and thence to a hospital where it refreshes and heartens the sick—traveling always with its big golden star at the very top remaining in place, as well as the tinsel "angels' tresses" tangled through its branches. Finally it goes back to the forest and is reset in its own place, and is not in the least injured by these experiences, as indeed why should it be? We ship trees many times as far as that, and keep them out of the ground with their roots balled with earth and burlap wrapped to hold this in place, for much longer than the week of Christmas celebrating. And then we set them out in earth and surroundings strange to them; and still they do not suffer.

Why do we not—those who have garden space for a few evergreens, at any rate—substitute for the chopped-off and already dead tree indoors, or for the added new tree each year (which cannot be added indefinitely without overcoming even a large place), the rotating use of a group of three or four; or even of a pair of managed nurseries to transplant regularly all of the stock or else to root-prune it, since only such frequent disturbance of roots and consequent formation of compact masses of small roots and feeding thread-roots insures the successful handling of the young trees when they are sold and shipped to distant buyers. The proper digging up and planting in a huge box or tub of a young tree every other year, or every third year, would correspond to this transplanting or root-pruning; and would need no more than retard growth (mind, of course, that I said the proper digging and planting). And retarded growth is the best possible thing, since it is only in the growing stage that the ideal pyramidal form is maintained.

FOR CHRISTMAS RITES.

This system would insure the indoor tree and the outdoor tree both; and would provide for the complete round of the rites and observances of the season, regardless of weather and of age or conditions of the household. It is a little trouble, perhaps; and of course it demands the careful handling of the trees, and the attention of someone who knows precisely what careful handling involves. But we may say that everything about the holiday preparations is actually a little trouble, and it seems to me that this is a kind of trouble which brings results more significant than almost anything else connected with the Feast of the Nativity possibly can. For this insures the contribution of only life and livingness; whereas the chopped-down tree, already dead, introduces the minor note of regret and reproach from which the season should be wholly free.

Of course I have adopted this system myself; but I have not been carrying it on long enough yet to say with finality how many years it may be possible to handle a single tree of a group without injury to it. If the limit is two or three times, this means that three trees will serve nine years, each being given two years rest between using. Add to this the original planting when the trees are first acquired (which of course ought to be at the season when they may serve first as the Christmas tree) and twelve

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Students of Agriculture in Minority.

Of the 142,111 resident students enrolled in land-grant institutions of the United States during the school year 1925-26 more than a third, 34 per cent., were registered for courses in engineering courses, 9 per cent. in commerce and business, 8 per cent. in agriculture, and 7.2 per cent. in professional education as shown by a report on land-grant colleges by Walter J. Greenleaf, associate specialist in land-grant statistics of the United States Bureau of Education, published by the bureau as Bulletin No. 37, 1927.

years are covered. Six to eight or ten trees therefore will serve a generation, as those things are reckoned—and will still be a young and vigorous windbreak or screen, if this is what you have planted to form.

Building Board Made of Straw Helps Farmers.

Building board is being made from straw in cereal regions where there are no forests, Sidney D. Wells, a chemical engineer of Quincy, Ill., declared in a report to the Engineering Foundation, New York.

The rise of this process, enabling the construction industry to employ a new material and to make a substantial contribution to farm relief, he attributes to scientific research. "In the great wheat areas," says Mr. Wells, "enormous quantities of straw are burned annually because it is too resistant to decay to be assimilated by the soil between harvest and sowing time. Only an infinitesimal quantity is otherwise utilized.

"Most cereal areas are devoid of forests and must transport lumber from distant places. From the beginning of civilization straw has been used in rural habitations for both men and beast, where the fire hazard was small. Its capacity for reducing the passage of heat has long been recognized.

"The laboratory learned that few raw materials, if any, were adapted as straw to the manufacture of insulating board. Its fibers are cemented together in long filaments, which can be pounded apart after softening by digestion at elevated temperatures for a few hours.

"The proportion of fiber is large; it is devoid of pith. Only mild cooking is required, and not more than twenty per cent. is rendered soluble. Much of the latter is adhesive; it acts as a strong binder and waterproofing agent.

"Board made from straw is exceptionally strong because the filamentous characteristics are retained; felted properties together with the cementing characteristics of the binding material form a strongly interwoven mass.

"In fabrication in the wet condition the fibrous mass is extremely flexible and plastic, but after drying, it becomes rigid and strongly cemented together."

—The Watchman gives all the news while it is news.



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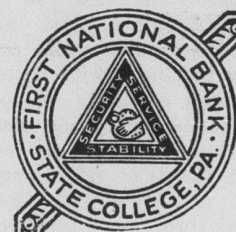
The Election

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