

Addenda to Mr. Greaves' Paper on Darley Yew.

BY RICHARD USSHER.

IN connection with the above valuable paper, it may be interesting to place on record, by means of this journal, the present dimensions of some other exceptionally fine yew trees in Derbyshire, chief among which is the one in Doveridge churchyard, mentioned by Mr. J. C. Cox in his Notes on that church. Its measurements, taken by Lord Waterpark in the year 1872, and published in the *Field*, were :

Height, 36 feet.

Circumference of branches, 212 feet

Greatest spread of branches from N. to S., 63 feet 4 inches.

Do. do. E. to W., 72 feet.

Girth of stem at the ground, 23 feet 6 inches.

Do. at 7 feet from the ground, 24 feet.

Smallest girth of stem, 20 feet.

Length of stem, 7 feet.

This yew tree is quite hollow all the way up, and about one-third of the stem completely gone, which will account for its girth appearing small. It is perfectly healthy, and has grown in the circumference of its branches, in the last 30 years, from 167 to 212 feet. Mr. Cox writes of this tree thus: "Overshadowing the churchyard cross is a most exceptionally fine yew tree of grand dimensions. The girth of the trunk is about 22 feet, and the spread of the branches measured outside the tips no less than 212 feet. The celebrated yew tree of Darley Dale churchyard is eleven feet wider in actual girth, and is doubtless far older, but in

the present reach of its branches and general gracefulness of its foliage, it cannot be compared with that of Doveridge." It is situated to the south of the chancel. Its branches are supported by props of timber, to permit of pedestrians passing beneath it.

In Mugginton churchyard, south of the porch, there is a very fine yew tree ; at four feet from the ground its stem measures 24 feet 6 inches. It, too, is quite hollow from the ground to some distance up, and does not appear to be in a flourishing state of health ; it has evidently seen its best days. There is another smaller yew in this churchyard, planted in 1726 ; the circumference of its branches is now 150 feet, and is rapidly increasing. In South Wingfield churchyard, and some distance from the church, in its north-east corner, stands a somewhat low but remarkable fine yew ; at four feet from the ground its stem measures 23 feet, but as it is situated on an abrupt declivity, it is somewhat difficult to measure its various other dimensions ; it is rather stunted in its growth, and has not a wide spread of foliage. South-east of the church, in Ashborne churchyard, is a good sized yew, fifteen feet in circumference at four feet from the ground ; it seems in good health, and is growing well. A correspondent, writing to the *Derby Mercury*, says of it, " It is perfectly hollow, and running up on one side there is a narrow opening, the widest part of which, near the ground, measures only ten inches. The branches and foliage present an unbroken and regular outline of good proportions, and the general appearance of the tree is luxuriant and flourishing. The opening in the trunk is too narrow to admit a full grown person into the spacious cavity within, but the interior of this venerable churchyard yew was formerly the frequent haunt of children until it was protected by the iron railing which now encircles it." A much larger, and older tree in appearance, than the present one, formerly existed at the west end of the church, but has now disappeared.

There is a large yew in Etwall churchyard ; at five feet from the ground, its stem diameter is 10 feet, and its branch 60 feet.

The yew tree in Sudbury churchyard measures, at the butt, 16 feet.

Four feet from ground, 13 feet 4 inches.

Five do. do. 11 feet 10 inches.

Circumference of branches, 213 feet 4 inches.

Height, 44 feet 6 inches.

There is a yew tree in Lord Vernon's grounds, Sudbury, whose measurements are :—

Butt at ground, 14 feet 5 inches.

Four feet from ground, 13 feet 3 inches.

Five do. do. 12 feet 3 inches.

Circumference of branches, 221 feet.

Height, 58 feet.

There are two finely grown yew trees in Osmaston-by-Derby churchyard. The one in the middle measures at four feet from the ground 8 feet round, with a branch diameter of 42 feet; the other, further west, measures 7 feet at the same height from the ground, with a branch diameter of 45 feet. Both of these trees are flourishing most luxuriantly. Tradition says they were planted in 1650.

Various reasons have been given for the existence of yew trees in churchyards, but the question has not yet been answered satisfactorily. It seems to me that the most natural and likely one is, that from its being always green, it was considered a fitting tree to plant where bodies were buried, as a symbol of the immortality of the soul. Evergreen trees from the very earliest ages were utilized as emblems of this thought. The Egyptians had an idea that the palm tree was immortal, and they represented the soul by a palm branch. In the infernal judgment of Serapis, taken from the copy of an Egyptian manuscript on papyrus, there is Anubis holding the scales, in one of which is a palm branch, and in the other something which is equivalent to the soul balanced against it.* In the Poems of Ossian, translated by Macpherson, the Bard says—"Here rests their dust Cuthullin! these lonely yews sprung from their tombs, and shade them from the storm," thus showing that even among the Celts the yew was an accompaniment of burial grounds. The Greeks and Romans

* See Pritchard's Egypt. Mythology, page 204, plate I.

always used cypress and yew signals to denote a house in mourning. Euripides, Suetonius, Virgil, and Ovid all mention this. What more likely than that the Romans carried this idea with them into England, and taught it to the Britons. As time went on, churches were built, and bodies were buried in close proximity to them. Yew trees, as representing the soul's immortality, would consequently be planted near them. Palm branches would be wanted to carry in procession on Palm Sunday, but there being none, the yew tree was close to the church, would answer the purpose very well, and was used as such. The reason assigned for yew trees appearing in churchyards, "that they provided archers with bows," is, I think, quite erroneous. English yew was the worst of all yew for this purpose. A statute of Elizabeth says a foreign yew bow was to cost 6s. 8d.; second sort, 3s. 4d.; coarser sort, 2s.; English yews, 2s. There is no statute or proclamation known in which it is ordered to plant yew trees in churchyards; and if this was required to be done, there certainly would be. Why churchyards, instead of plantations, should have been used for yew cultivation is not easy to understand—probability all points the other way. Giraldus Cambrensis, who visited Ireland in 1184, found yew trees growing there in churchyards. To this day yew is used there instead of palms on Palm Sunday, and called palm. Yew trees in East Kent are also still called palms. The cypress represents in Asia what the yew does in Europe. All Mahommedan cemeteries are covered with the former. The ancient idea of the soul's immortality being represented by an evergreen tree is symbolized still in Asia by the cypress, and in Europe by the yew.