The Service-Yew; on Merrow Downs
From LYRICS of the Heart and Mind
by Martin F. Tupper 1855

I.
When the Druid, long of old,
Solemn stalk'd in white and gold
Down among those ancient yews
Ranged in serpent avenues,
Then wert thou a sapling tree,
Then that Druid planted thee,
Thousand-winter'd son of earth
Thirty feet around in girth!

II.
Thence, amid thine old compeers
Thou hast stood these thousand years
Changeless, save for sturdier growth,
Strong in adamantine sloth,
Watching in the lapse of time
Many an outlaw's course of crime,
Gipsy's theft, and poacher's snare,
The felon's haunt, the brigand's lair,
With thicket-hidden deeds of strife,
The mangled throat, the bloody knife;
Or where underneath thy shade
Gay cavaliers their bivouac made;
Or the pilgrims rested well
Trudging to St. Catherine's cell;
Or the trampers to some fair
Joked and swore and haggled there;
Or beneath thy sheltering form
Travellers crouch'd to fence the storm.

III.
So, in vegetable strength
Down to modern days at length
Hast thou stood in sluggish power,
Ancient yew-tree, to this hour;
But how comes it that green sheaves,
A mighty stack of brilliant leaves,
High over all thy branches crown
Their gloomier mass of olive-brown?
How is it that, outspreading them,
A service-tree of sturdy stem
Born of thy solid trunk, on high
Flings forth its trophy to the sky?

IV.
0 marvel!—Poet, come once more
And muse our other mystery o'er:
Is this a heathen type, forsooth,
As overgrown by gospel truth,—
The healthy service, springing new
Ungrafted, from the deadly yew?
Is it a sign of happier years
O'ertopping oldtime wrongs and fears,—
Of liberty, and light, and love,
All antique thraldoms throned above?
Is it a proof that Mercy's might
Shall whelm the reign of sin and night,
And out of darkness, death, and woe,
Breed happiness to all below?

V.
Ah, Poet!—well it is to view
Such lessons in this service-yew;
Yet, art thou stopt on fancy's wing
By any peasant's questioning,—
"As how this yew could breed and rear
A greenleaf'd service like this here?"
Come then again, botanic friend,
And bring the matter to an end:
For never human grafting did
What only hap'd as Nature bid,
Some fieldfare, thirty years ago
Or thereabouts—it must be so—
Feeding on sorbus-berries nigh,
And perch'd upon this yew hard by,
Into some crack a berry dropt,
And, snugly posted, there it stopt;
Until the seed by some good hap
Struck rootlets to its mother's lap,
And drank her sap, and upward grew
A foster nursling of the yew;
And so, it overtops the rest,
Till, like a cuckoo in the nest,
This parasite, ungrateful wight,
Its patron soon will kill outright.
This Yew woodland has now become known as Newlands Corner

A ‘Service-Yew’ on Merrow Downs in 2001
Tim Hills

An ‘Ilex-Yew’ on Merrow Downs in 2006
Christian Wolf