

A CHRISTMAS TREE IN THE FOREST :

By William Wallace.

A long, long time ago, before this great country was inhabited from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and when extensive forests stretched over great tracts of land, through which the foot of white man had not left its print, the frontiersman living in "the outer settlements" had small chance to celebrate the Yuletide season. He, with his family, composed a small world, which was too seldom entered by an outsider. Neighbors were at great distances apart, and their time was occupied in clearing the land and which was to become the fine, rich fields from which their children and grandchildren should reap such rich harvests.

In the early forties a sturdy farmer—or frontiersman; as those "pathfinders" were called—moved from the outer borders of what was termed civilization to a new country, where as yet the woodman's ax had not been heard or the curl of smoke from the log cabin seen by the red man, lurking about on the watch for the intruding paleface. Into the depths of a shadowy forest the frontiersman, accompanied by his family of wife and two sturdy sons, went, hunting a suitable location for a cabin. They traveled in a great lumbering wagon, covered with white canvass stretched over bows. All their worldly possessions were stowed inside the wagon, the wife and mother occupying the seat in front and driving the yoke of strong oxen which drew her "carriage." In front of the oxen walked the husband and father, picking the road through the woods and over the hills, now and again having to retrace his steps on account of some impassable obstacle which loomed suddenly before him. He went heavily armed, rifle over shoulder and knives in belt. The sons walked behind the wagon, keeping a keen lookout for hostile Indians, who might try to attack from the rear. Like their sire, they were heavily armed with guns and knives.

And so they went, farther and farther from days of weary travel they halted near a beautiful spring that came from a rocky cliff overhanging a stream that promised to be full of fish. Here the father and sons cut down trees and built a cabin, small, but large enough to afford shelter from the winter which was fast coming on. In the spring another room could be added. A replace built of flat rocks, picked from the bank near the spring, furnished a rosy place for fire, both for cooking and warming.

One evening, as the family sat around the cheerful fire of logs, hating of the past, present and future, the mother quickly said: "Well, declare, Christmas is almost here and I'd forgotten to think about it!" "Why, can it be possible?" asked the father, reaching for the ever-ready almanac, which hung by a string looped over a peg near the fireplace. "Yes, so it is," he agreed, scanning the small print of the calendar. "Just three days off."

The two sons, aged, respectively, 14 and 16, were not yet too old to enjoy the excitement and pleasure attending the holiday season, although they had had small opportunity to do so since they were in their teens, for their father was a man who was ever looking toward the setting sun, following it further and further as the settlements grew and prospered and dangers became less about him.

"Well, I'd like to be back at Bertonsville," declared Samuel, the older son. "There'll be great times here, I'll warrant. Neighbor Higgins' girls will have a Christmas tree and a taffy-pull."

"Ah, yes," sighed Thomas Peter, the younger son. "And over at Neighbor Van Smith's there'll be a big, wild turkey dinner and a lot of his friends will have an invite there. So you mind last Christmas, mother?"

"Yes, the mother 'minded,' and sent a pang through her good, tender heart to recall the pleasant and sociable times they had enjoyed while living on the outskirts of the little village.

The next day Sam and Tom (but not so nicknamed by their parents) went with their guns to hunt the deer, the only kind of meat they had for their table in this wild world. As they trudged through the woods, Sam said: "I wish we could have some little surprise on Christmas. But I reckon it's out of the question."

"Interrupted Sam, pointing a curl of blue smoke to be blowing to the sky through the trees. "That's not an Indian fire. White people are at home from round 't at Bertonsville. Let's go catch a rabbit you can never tell what an Indian surprise is waiting for you."

Two Indians the boys stole from the hill, which was almost empty. They crept on their hands and knees, making no noise. When

they rounded the obstructing point there came into view several covered wagons and a newly built cabin, with two more in course of construction. A number of stalwart men and boys were busy at the building and a number of women and half-grown girls were preparing food over the campfire, the completed cabin evidently not yet having been supplied with a fire place.

Tom looked at Sam, and Sam looked at Tom, smiles of happiness coming on their faces in spite of their trying to withhold any show of pleasure. Then they rose and timidly approached the new settlers. When within a few rods of the buildings their approach was noted, and it turned out that they were as much of a surprise to the strangers as the strangers had been to them.

It was not long before Tom and Sam found themselves seated before the forest board, enjoying a share of the plentiful meal of their cordial hosts and hostesses. Conversation did not drag, and Tom and Sam regretted to have to bid their new friends adieu and continued on their hunt. They promised to come the next day and bring their parents, also extending a cordial and homely invitation to the new-comers to visit their cabin some two miles distant toward the river.

When the boys arrived home that evening, carrying a number of fine rabbits, squirrels and a fat opossum, they approached their mother with



THEY CREPT ON THEIR STOMACHS, MAKING NO NOISE.

beaming faces. "We've got neighbors!" Sam cried. And then he and his brother told the good news repeating everything which had been said by the new-found friends over the hill.

And the next day, faithful to promise, Sam and Tom took their parents to call on the new neighbors, who proved to be quite numerous, for six families had come together to fell the forest and build up a town, to which others would soon come. The day passed in work and sociable intercourse, and, as Sam and Tom walked home beside their mother their father going ahead to keep a close lookout for their safety, the good woman, with a happy face, said: "What do you think, sons, we're going to have a Christmas tree after all. The new neighbor women have agreed to come over and help me all day Christmas. We'll exchange little trinkets and small articles of clothing and hang them on the tree for our sons and daughters. Then we'll have a taffy-pull in the yard in the evening by the light of a campfire. They have a keg of fine molasses and they'll bring a good supply over for the taffy."

Neither Sam nor Tom could speak for a minute, their hearts were too full for utterance. Then Sam said: "What kind of a tree will you use mother?"

"I thought that pretty sapling by the door would answer," she explained. "I'll cover it over with a sheet after all the presents have been hung on and keep it from view till we are ready to hand off the gifts."

"And shall we have a dinner?" asked Tom eagerly, his eyes shining with happy anticipation.

"Yes, we'll have it at our cabin, but the neighbors will bring a lot of nice things along. They have such fine flour and sugar and some potatoes. I'll cook those fine rabbits and squirrels you brought in yesterday. Oh, we'll have a feast—out here in the forest."

"And best of all, we'll have a Christmas tree," said Sam. And three happy hearts beat as they went through the forest homeward.

Old Fashioned Plum Pudding.

An old recipe for plum-pudding, said to be very good, is the following: One pound of best-sorted chopped fine, one pound of seeded raisins, the same amount of currants, well washed and dried; half a pound of citron in fine shavings; five tablespoonfuls of brown sugar, rolled fine three cups flour; one grated nutmeg, a tablespoonful each of mace and cinnamon, four large tablespoonfuls of cream, and six eggs. If brandy or wine is objectionable, two gills of orange juice can be substituted, and the rind of a lemon. Roll the fruit in the flour, moisten the bread crumbs with the cream, beat up the yolks of the eggs, and stir into them all the ingredients, and, lastly, the whipped whites of the eggs. Pour into a pudding-bag, large enough to leave room for swelling. About six hours of steady boiling is required. If the water ceases to boil, your pudding is apt to be sticky. Serve your pudding whole, encircling the platter with a wreath of holly and a row of lump-sugar. Insert an egg shell in the top of the pudding and pour brandy over all, lighting that in the egg and on the sugar.

Awful Doubt.

Willie—Say, Lena, do you suppose Santa Claus will know I've moved since last year?

GROWING BALSAM TREES

THEIR POPULARITY BRINGS JOY TO FARMERS OF MAINE.

An Army of Men Find a Means Never Before Enjoyed of Earning Christmas—Increased Land Values—Stripped Coast of Maine.

The Christmas tree is a comparatively new addition to the ancient Yuletide festivities. It will surprise most people to learn that the fashion of trimming a tree with toys and tinsel for the children or for the cat or dog if there are no olive branches has attained its popularity in this country only within thirty years or so. Holly and mistletoe may be relics of antiquity, but the Christmas tree is an innovation of the present day and generation.

The happy idea of utilizing the balsam fir as a tree for trimming at Christmas time came to someone who visited the shores of Maine and noticed the millions of picturesque young balsam firs that grew there, languishing for attention and of so little importance in the estimation of the farmers that the land upon which they grew was not considered of sufficient value to be subject to taxation. When the tax assessor passes land as valueless it must be admitted that it stands a very poor chance of interesting the community.

But the pretty little trees attracted attention from those who had not seen them growing before, and some genius decided to try the balsam fir as a tree for the children's corner of the Christmas room. The farmers who owned the land up there were slow to see their opportunity. At first they thought the offer of money for their firs was made as a joke, and they actually refused at first to sell, thinking they were being made the victims of some silly hoax. When it at last dawned upon them that the bidders were really in earnest the farmers speedily placed a valuation on the little fir trees and a market for them was established forthwith. At this time the wood of the balsam fir had not become famous as the lurking place of the Canada balsam, now so much in demand, so that the discovery of a use for the fir trees proved a double blessing to the Maine farmers.

Ten years after the balsam fir became the popular tree for Christmas the entire coast of Maine had been stripped of its firs and so profitable had the industry become that the farmers were planting new ones and the growth of the trees had become a regular part of the industries of Maine.

It takes about five years for the seed of the balsam fir to attain to the size of a salable tree, so that the farmers of Maine have a plant next year for the crop of five years later. So marvelously has the trade grown that to-day over a million trees are shipped to New York and New England. The farmers make from 5 to 40 cents from the sale of a tree, the retail price being from 20 cents to \$5, according to size and general appearance. A practical farmer, who desires to make the most of his opportunity will thin out the trees from the plantation, to make the remaining trees grow straighter, taller, and with more spread to the branches.

Before the discovery of the usefulness of the balsam fir as a means of bringing joy to the home at Christmas it was possible to buy a whole township in the fir region for \$100; that is to say, for this outlay a purchaser could get 23,000 acres of the land on which the little trees grow. Now this formerly despised land is worth from \$10 to \$15 an acre.

An acre will yield about 5,000 trees, and allowing \$10 an acre for stumpage, \$30 for labor and cartage and \$50 for freight the trees do not cost 2 cents delivered in New York or Boston.

The cutting of the trees begins in November, and thousands who would otherwise be idle are given employment at this time. The trees are shipped to commission men and by them sold to the hawkers, who take advantage of the freedom of the Christmas season to set up shop in any public highway or corner where they are free from interference. In many cities it is recognized that the Christmas-tree vendor is a privileged person for the time being, and he is usually permitted to turn the sidewalk outside the public buildings into a temporary store for the sale of Christmas trees.—Pittsburg Dispatch.

Honoring Santa Claus.

Santa Claus was born in Patavia, in Asia Minor. That was not his real name. He was an abbot, and named St. Nicholas. He afterward became archbishop of Myra. At the latter place he died and was duly buried. In May, 1887, his remains were carried by some pious Italians to Bari, on the Adriatic coast. They are now at rest in a splendid church which bears his name. The people round about make a pilgrimage to his shrine every year. No one seeking food on that occasion is refused it by the priests, while accommodation is given to as many pilgrims as the edifice will hold. On St. Nicholas day, December 6, a great celebration takes place in his honor. Early in the morning the populace take his image from the priests and carry it through the town. At night the city is grandly illuminated.

BEFORE THE CHRISTMAS DINNER

Before the Christmas dinner
How impatiently they wait,
And watch the clock so eagerly,
With fears that 'twill be late,
How every boy and every girl,
All dressed so nice and sweet,
Await their mothers' summons
Telling them to come and eat.



Before the Christmas dinner
Every girl and every boy
Has peeped into the dining room
With feelings of great joy.
They've seen the turkey
(One that never could be beat!)
A-baking in the kitchen,
A stuffed and gravied treat.

They've seen the bright-hued cranberry
In thickest jelly glow;
They've seen the sweet, spiced peaches
On the pantry shelf in row.
They've looked, and kept on looking,
At the wonders cook has fixed—
The salads, cakes and custards
Her most wondrous spoon has mixed.



They know they'll do them justice,
For their hunger's growing wild,
And groans of suffering is heard
From every waiting child.
Ah, how their mouths do water
As they hold their stomachs tight
And hope that very soon the food
Will all be OUT OF SIGHT!

MAUD WALKER.

A Christmas Message.

O Bethlehem, aslumber amidst thy starlit hills,
Those fair Judean pastures, whose ancient lore fulfills
The prayer of Priest and Prophet, the hope of Heaven and Earth,—
Dost hear, in dreams ecstatic, the anthem of Love's birth?
Dost see in wondrous vision, the aureole-crowned King,
The star-led Magi, speeding, their precious gifts to bring?
Dost see the Mother bending with yearning heart and eyes
O'er that incarnate Saviour—the Lord of earth and skies.
O heart, dost hear the story; or art thou too, asleep.
So weary with the vigil that human hearts must keep?
Dost know that thou dost shelter, like Bethlehem of old,
The Son of God Incarnate, and gifts of grace untold?
And as the star illumined The Way, that holy night,
Thy life may guide all wanderers, with Love's eternal light.
O Bethlehem, awaken! O Heart, arise and sing!
This is the advent Glorious, the Birthday of thy King!
Elizabeth Ruggles.

A Christmas Greeting.

We have it from some ancient seer,
That Christmas comes but once a year—
(A truth I might myself have sprung
Had I lived when the world was young!)
But now I change it into this,
And send it with a Christmas kiss—
"Since Christmas brings in peace and cheer,
"May Christmas come for you all year!"

Christmas Decorations.

Christmas without holly would not be Christmas at all. Let your dining-room be bright and cheerful. If there is a chandelier have it hung with evergreens and holly, and from that loosely carry long ropes of evergreen to each corner of the room, thus forming a canopy for the table. Place a bunch of holly over the corners of all large pictures. Either one or two sprays in a vase is very bright and attractive.

JACK TAR'S CHRISTMAS.

A HAPPY WELCOME AWAITS HIM IN NEW YORK PORT.

For Half a Century the Church of the Holy Comforter Has Made Him Forget His Homelessness—How They Are Remembered.

The port of New York lays claim to fifty thousand seamen. To be sure it is a shifting population, here for a day and away, with any one of a dozen ports as much like home as another.

For most of the days of the year no one cares less about his real business than Jack Tar himself, but on Christmas Day more of them than would care to own it have a longing down in a corner of their hearts that they were having a part in the Christmas cheer of the humble home that most of them have tucked away in some corner of the world, says the New York Herald.

When Jack Tar finds himself in New York on Christmas he is likely to be left to take care of himself, and the chances are he will seek the mug that cheers without being particular to have a guaranty that it will not inebriate.

If he is a man in the employ of the big steamship companies that dock on the North River perhaps he has discovered a place that is open to seamen the year round and where at the season of peace on earth and good will toward men a special thought is given to making these wanderers happy. This is the Episcopal Church of the Holy Comforter for Seamen, the one church in New York that is located on the North River.

For more than a half century the Church of the Holy Comforter has kept open house for the seamen who come into this port by the North River gate. It began in a modest way long before it came to the notice of the elder Vanderbilts, who in their wills made bequests that made possible the present building that faces on West and Houston streets and hugs in its angle a saloon that may some time have had its share of the seamen who now pass the swinging balize door and go in at the panelled Gothic one that leads to the reading room provided by the church. Not that all the seamen of the North River have given over the cup—by no means—but when they want a drink they go to a saloon that is not under the eaves of the Church of the Holy Comforter.

From two in the afternoon until ten at night this reading room is open, and in that time anywhere from one to two hundred men drop in to read the newspapers, the magazines and periodicals of all kinds that lie free and open to them upon the long tables; or to write letters home. In the course of a year fully ten thousand letters come here for these men and perhaps half as many are sent away.

As the afternoon wears on the air thickens with the smoke of pipes, and the hard skinned, weather wrinkled faces take on a calm and rested look. The flesh that was stiff with the cold, the muscles strained with the toil of a hard midwinter voyage relax in the warmth and comfort of the quiet room, for there is none of the boisterous, roistering element among the frequenters of the place.

This is as it is day after day through all the year, but with the coming of Christmas the rector of the church and his assistants make ready for the Christmas festival. The Tuesday night before Christmas, and the Tuesday night before New Years are given over to this, and for the occasion a fine programme of Christmas music is arranged. At its close each man is given as he passes out a comfort bag—and such a wonderful thing this comfort bag is!

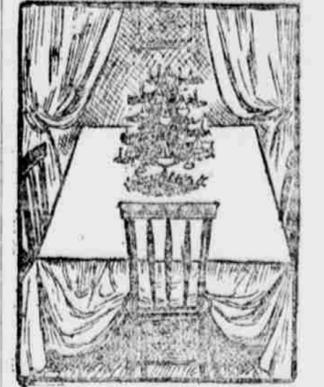
To begin with, it is made of a bright red cloth, with a drawstring at the top, but the wonders of it are within. There are needles and pins and thread, for things that rip and buttons that will come off and must be sewed on by the sailor himself; there is a package of absorbent cotton, linen bandages and court plaster; there is a knife or a pair of scissors, a package of writing paper and envelopes and a little box of the best mixed candy—a thing which all sailormen love. So much for physical comfort. As for the spiritual, there is always a testament or a prayer book, and on a slip of paper, printed in artistic type, a simple bit of verse that gives a man something good to think about. Many a Christmas stocking is not so well filled.

It is hard to tell just how many bags to make each year, for there are apt to be seamen who bob up at Christmas time at the Church of the Holy Comforter just as small boys become very regular in attendance at Sunday school when it comes near Christmas.

The good will spirit found in this chapel of the Holy Comforter is not a spasmodic thing, born with the Christmastide and gone when the last comfort bag is distributed. It lives on through the years, and it is big enough and broad enough to ask no man his creed. Only on Sunday are there religious services, save an occasional litany service read on a Friday night; and the men may come to these or stay away. And never in all its years has a seaman been asked to contribute a penny to the support of the church or any part of its work.

For the Christmas Tree.

A unique decoration for the center of the dining table during the Yuletide season is a small Christmas tree—say two feet high—placed for safe balance in a small but broad-based fern bowl. From the green boughs, orange cups, the halves of oranges, with the fruit all scooped out, leaving the rind smooth and round, may be hung by gay ribbons and kept full of baby bonbons, mixed nuts and raisins. If one has not a fern bowl heavy enough to hold the tree, which must be packed about the base inside the bowl to make it secure, the regulation wooden block, with the stem of the tree set into it,



may be made to appear very artistic, indeed, by covering it with ferns and rose leaves, or draping it with soft, green tissue paper which has been slashed to represent grass. A great many prefer the wooden block thus adorned to the bowl, which detracts from the real tree appearance. It is a pretty sight to see the miniature tree on the snowy cloth, and at night, when the tiny candles are lighted, it is about the most unique form of decoration for the Christmas table one can imagine. Fruit, such as grapes and plums, may be hung from its branches and picked by the guests at table.

Mourning at Yuletide.

Though in most civilized countries and towns Christmas is a time of gladness, there are some places where the festival time is mourned over. This is so with Santiago, the capital of Chile, for during Christmastide, forty years ago, that city was plunged into the depths of despair by a catastrophe such as has never in modern times befallen the metropolis of a civilized state.

The scene of the terrible occurrence was the cathedral-church of La Campana. A grand religious festival was taking place and the magnificent building was thronged with more than 3,000 worshippers, the elite of the gay Spanish-American city. Twelve thousand silver lamps shed a brilliant radiance over the mass of music and drapery below, and the acolytes were busy lighting the 1,500 tapers on the grand altar, when there arose a sudden cry of "Fire!" A candle had been overturned, and in an instant almost the interior of the cathedral was in flames. Many of those imprisoned within were rescued through the windows, for the one door was quickly blocked; but, when all was over, it was found that more than 2,000 of Santiago's bravest and best had perished.

Origin of Waits.

Christmas waits are a very old institution. The word "wait" was originally the name for a musician, or one who played on wind instruments. Waits were at first annexed to the King's court and sounded the watch every night, and in the winter paraded the streets to prevent lawlessness and theft. A regular company of waits was established at Exeter, England, in 1400. The word is also thought to be connected with the old German "wacht," a vigil or watching. "Waits" has also been considered a corresponding word with the Scottish word "waith," which meant wandering or roving. In allusion to the ancient "menstrales" of that country. A remnant of the custom still exists, in Scotland, for magistrates annually grant a certificate to a few musicians, generally blind men, who perambulate the streets at night during December playing on violins the old Scottish melodies. At the beginning of the year they call upon the people whom they have serenaded and receive a small subscription.

Why We Have Carols.

The Christmas carols originated it is thought, in England, in the eleventh century. They were sung between the scenes of the mystery and miracle plays. These plays were the popular form of religious entertainment, and between the scenes it was the custom to introduce songs dealing with the redemption of mankind. The songs naturally became fixed in the popular memory. At the Christmas gatherings later it was customary to call upon each person present to sing a song, and the merry-makers generally sang those which had been handed down by their fathers. The songs which were sung at the plays emerged as Christmas songs, and thus the carol was evolved. During the Commonwealth the wave of Puritanism overawed Christmas festivities and merry-making was abolished. Later, when the restoration celebrations were resumed, the carols became popular once more.