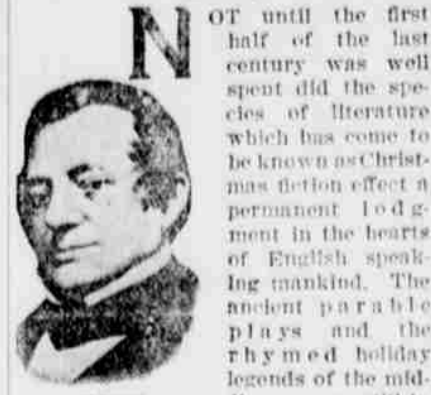


CHRISTMAS IN FICTION.

By GEORGE H. PICARD  
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NOT until the first half of the last century was well spent did the species of literature which has come to be known as Christmas fiction effect a permanent lodgment in the hearts of English speaking mankind. The ancient parable plays and the rhymed holiday legends of the middle ages are still in use on the continent, but the more secular minded English had only the rude Yuletide jingles and the quaint carols of beef eating antiquity.

Contrary to the prevailing notion, the inventor of the tale with a distinctively Christmas flavor was an American. It is likely that it would occur to few Americans and to no Englishman to dissent if it were asserted in their presence that Charles Dickens originated the Christmas story. His name is so inseparably connected with so much of the holiday literature enshrined in the popular heart that it is small wonder the mention of Christmas suggests him. The credit of the "literary find," however, must be given to another, a man who was at the end of his thirties when Dickens was born, who had been at Malta when Nelson's fleet sailed away to Trafalgar, who had visited Sir Walter at Abbotsford and had captivated him and who was afterward secretary to the United States legation in England. That, of course, means Washington Irving.

Irving's first book, "The Sketch-Book of Geoffrey Hamlyn, Gent.," had pleased everybody, so much so, indeed, that it was republished by John Murray in London and translated into several continental languages. Both the publishers and the public were urging him to do something equally meritorious. Nobody realized more keenly than did the author of the exquisite work the difficulty of producing its mate, and he was not a man to be driven into mediocrity. Three years later he published "Bracebridge Hall," and the chapter of that masterpiece of literary workmanship entitled "Christmas at Bracebridge Hall" was the pioneer holiday tale of English literature and has furnished a model for subsequent fictionists which has seldom been equaled and never excelled. Its easy grace and felicity of expression were a revelation to everybody in those days, and the wonder and the charm are potent still.

William Makepeace Thackeray, master of a realism that is the wonder and the despair of those who have followed him, needed no model and chose none. His "Mrs. Perkins' Ball" resembles nothing ever conceived in the mind of any other man. The public was pleased with it, but never so much as was Thackeray himself. Most amazing of all, the author of the tale professed to believe that it was "Mrs. Perkins' Ball" that had made his reputation—that, too, in the face of the fact that "Vanity Fair" had just been published. This perversion of Thackeray in regard to the literary value of his wares and his lack of faith in his masterpiece—he had so little confidence in the success of "Vanity Fair" that after it appeared he applied for a small government position—are proof sufficient that the man who creates a masterpiece may have a dim conception of artistic values.

All the makers of great fiction are more or less under the spell of their immediate surroundings, but few have made it more apparent than Charles Dickens. Those who knew the circumstances saw plainly that he had put himself and his sad childhood into many of his pathetic short stories. This is especially true of "The Ghost in Master B.'s Room," which is an account of things which happened to him in his troubled boyhood. As a child he was a firm believer in ghosts, and it is probable that he never entirely abandoned his faith in spectral appearances. Many of his tales are peopled with disembodied spirits, and they are like the ghosts of no other writer. They are the spooks that appeal to one and make one believe in their genuineness. They are frequently more real than the living characters who consort with them. Although they are dead, they conduct themselves like living entities.

Dickens' Christmas ghosts are unique in the realm of literature. Of all the silent shapes that have been summoned from the upper and nether worlds to lend enchantment to the Christmas tale his alone have become acclimated. There is never anything repulsive about them. They are the most companionable spooks ever invented. They are seldom sepulchral, but are frequently cheerful. They are not the haunting, sleep killing and never to be exorcised phantoms of the fairy tales, but actual personalities, freed from all

moral restrictions in regard to locomotion that come to us when we bid them and vanish politely when we are weary of their presence.

Bret Harte never made a secret of his admiration for the creator of Little Nell and Tom Pinch. Like Paul at the feet of Gamaliel, he was content to receive his lesson from the man he acknowledged to be his master. Not until after Dickens had finished his work did the young literary light who stood revealed in the far western firmament learn that his model had seen that exquisite elegy "Dickens in Camp" and had been heard to express his admiration of it in the most generous terms. The dying novelist declared that the work of the new American writer contained such subtle strokes of workmanship as no other writer in the language had yet exhibited. And then he asked, with a humorous gleam in his weary eyes, "Don't you think that his manner is very like my own?"

Like Dickens, Harte had a genuine fondness for the doings of Yuletide. One who knew him best says that up to the last day of his life "he thought much of the Christmas season and to the last kept up the fond and foolish custom of sending generous presents to his friends." Better appreciated in England than in his native country, Harte spent the later years of his life abroad, but his stories were to the last distinctively American. In that admirable performance entitled "How Santa Claus Came to Simpson's Bar" there is no flavor of the old world Christmas, and Johnny, clothed in the stars and stripes, is a young American of the most unmistakable sort.

Two of the most strikingly dissimilar Christmas stories ever written are Hawthorne's "Christmas Banquet" and Miss Mitford's "Christmas Party." There is little of Christmas in Hawthorne's grotesque tale. The joyous festival is only a literary makeshift around which is woven a weird psychological study that drives all remembrance of the blessed season from the mind. Its ghosts are not the sociable and easily banished spooks of Dickens. They are formless and creepy and all pervading. They are the fearsome specters that rise in the frigid vapors of German mysticism, and they are made fiercer still with a strong admixture of New England transcendentalism. It is a masterpiece in conception and in treatment—no question at all about that—but it does not make the Yule log glow more brightly or lend a better flavor to the steaming bowl.

Mary Russell Mitford does not deal in ghosts. All of her Christmas characters are flesh and blood people, and they are not of the sort that "will not stay dead when they die." Her "Christmas Party" is as dainty in its workmanship as anything which ever came from her careful pen, and that is saying much. It is as restful and non-suggestive as a pastoral, and its influence is as soothing as the delicate savor which escapes when the cover of a potpourri jar is lifted or the drawer of an old time cabinet is opened—the faint, pervasive odor of crushed rose leaves and dried lavender.



DICKENS.

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THE RATIONAL CHRISTMAS.

By ELLIS FRAME  
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"Let us give in reason this year," she suggested.

"Not merely for the sake of giving things."

"It's the spirit, not the money invested. Let us, therefore, turn from foolish squanderings. Let the gifts we give be things that may be needed."

"Instead of trash soon to be cast aside?"

"My darling, your suggestion shall be heeded. For there is wisdom in it," he replied.

She did her shopping early, being guided by lessons learned from much experience.

She would show her lord and master, she decided.

How excellent a thing was common sense.

For their baby boy she purchased a French corset

"And an oriental rug that caught her eye."

"Though the darling longed to have a rocking horse, it wasn't sensible," she murmured, with a sigh.

They had promised not to buy things for each other.

They would merely get a few things for the child.

She would sacrifice her sister and her mother.

And it gladdened her to see the way he smiled.

As he said his people, too, should be omitted.

So the wise and winsome woman, day by day,

From shop to shop, with sweet emotion, fitted.

Having dry goods bound up and sent away.

He bought a pipe and splendid smoking jacket

To give their darling glee on Christmas morn.

With these the child could make no such a racket

As might have been produced with drum and horn.

He also got the works, unexpurgated.

Of old Hierocles and Rabolab,

So that their little one might be alerted

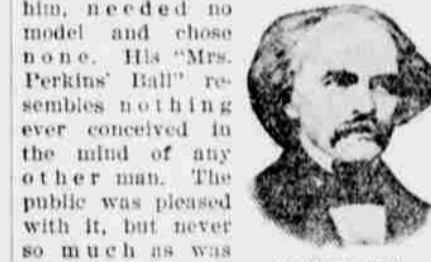
And long have glad remembrance of the day.

On Christmas when their presents were displayed

They sat upon the sofa side by side.

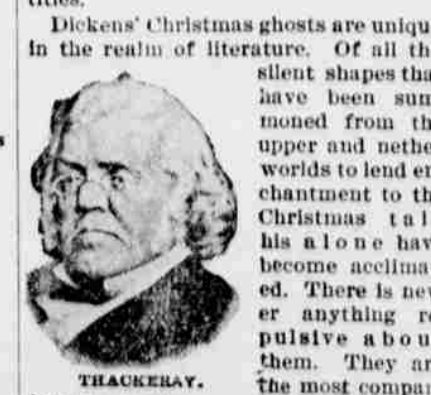
And while their child looked up at them, dismayed,

He had a culprit's manner, and she cried.



HAWTHORNE.

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lander. "Mrs. Taylor told me it was the pride of her husband's heart."

"How did it happen, Jack?" asked Philander, with interest.

"Mr. Taylor said his wife heard some one chopping about half past 11 last night, but she didn't think anything of it, and this morning they found the tree was gone—only the stump left."

"That's very strange," observed Mr. Philander. "Hard luck for Taylor."

"And, father," continued Jack earnestly, "I was in the woods on Turkey hill road today and that little tree we saw last Sunday is there yet. You didn't cut it down. I knew that one wasn't it."

Mr. Philander paled slightly.

"Why, father," pursued the terrible Jack with a directness born of sudden revelation, "this is Mr. Taylor's tree! I knew I'd seen it before!"

Mr. Philander shrank from their horrified gaze.

"The Taylors will be here in a few minutes, James," said Mrs. Philander coldly.

"My dear, I must have got turned around in the storm, but the Lord only knows how I got in Taylor's yard."

"It's on the other side of the woods, father," said Jack sympathetically, "and I guess you walked right through and into Mr. Taylor's yard."

"I must have done that," groaned Mr. Philander. Then with sudden inspiration he stripped the tree of its ornaments and candles and carried it through the house into the back yard. He scratched a match, and in five minutes the Philander Christmas tree was a charred ruin.

"Too bad, old chap," said Taylor commiseratively as Philander agitatedly explained the absence of the tree. "That's one reason why I don't believe in Christmas trees. They are apt to take fire, and there you are. I am glad it happened before we arrived."

"So am I," ejaculated Mr. Philander. But all the little Philanders agreed that it was the most beautiful Christmas tree they ever had.

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A TRUE STORY OF CHRISTMAS AT SEA.

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The gathering of "old salts," officially known as the Harbor Club, was in session at Captain Truman's store, down by the dock. Outside the wind howled and shrieked through the rigging of the fleet of coasting vessels warped alongside the Main street wharf, and unconsciously the men hitched their chairs closer to the fire as a fierce blast rattled the windows. During a temporary lull in the storm Capt'n Si Tuttle broke the silence with the following narrative:

"'Twas just such a Christmas eve as this, along back in the eighties, when I was roundin' old Hatteras in the good ship Tirzah Ann. You recollect her, don't you? Hailed from Greenport and could smash through any gale that ever blowed."

"In course 'twas some wet on deck, and the further we pounded along the rougher it got, and finally we had to turn and run afore the wind. Never saw such a gale to hang on! We plowed through seas you could only guess the height of. And dark! You couldn't see your hand afore your face."

"There was five of us aboard, and we was pretty well tuckered out next mornin', but daylight showed no let-up, and, to make things wuss, a heavy snow sot in. Seemed as if it turned to ice to wunst soon as it hit the deck, and afore you could say 'Jack Robinson' the rigin' was froze solid, and a dozen men with axes couldn't have cast loose the dory."

"Along about six bells the fust mate took the wheel, and I went below to get a brace, when there come a heavy crash, and both masts went by the board. I went up the companionway in two jumps, but afore I reached the deck the water was pourin' into the fo'castle in tons, and the ship begun to heave and wallow like a stuck pig."

"There warn't any use tryin' to launch the dory, even if we had had time, and in two shakes of a dog's tail the Tirzah Ann rose high on the top of a huge comber, quivered like a dyin' lion and then plunged head first beneath the waves with all on board."

Captain Si stopped and leisurely bit off a chunk of cut plug, when some one asked, "How did you escape?"

"We didn't," drawled the captain. "Every blamed one of us wuz drowned."

W. F. H.

**Christmas Superstitions.**  
If Christmas day on Sunday be,  
A troublous winter ye shall see,  
Mingled with waters strong;  
Good there shall be without fail,  
For the summer shall be reasonable,  
With storms at times among.

Wines that year shall all be good;  
The harvest shall be wet with flood,  
Peasence fall on many a country.  
Ere that sickness shall have passed,  
And while great tempests last  
Many young people dead shall be.

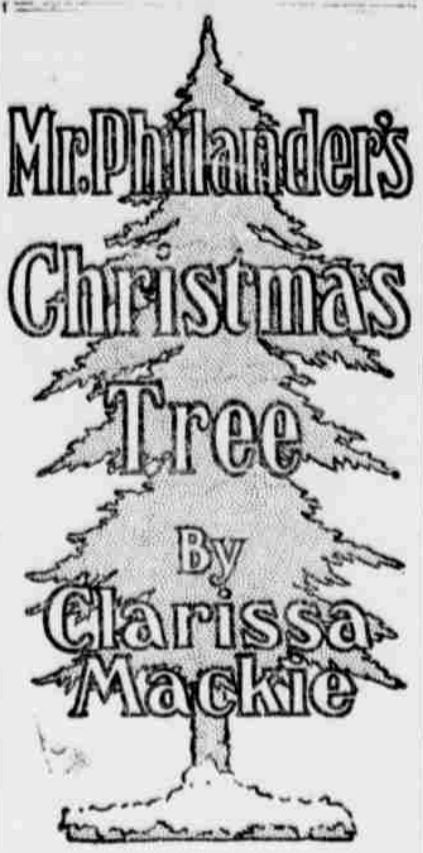
Princes that year with iron shall die;  
There shall be changing of many lords  
high.

Among knights great debate,  
Many tidings shall come to men;  
Many wives shall be weeping then,  
Both of poor and great estate.

The faith shall then be hurt truly,  
For divers points of heresy  
That shall then appear  
Through the tempting of the fiend,  
And divers matters unkind  
Shall bring great danger near.

Cattle shall thrive, one and the other,  
Save oxen; they shall kill each other,  
And some beasts—they shall die,  
Both divers and corn will not be good,  
Apples will be scarce for food.

And ships shall suffer on the sea,  
—From Harleian MS. in British Museum,  
Fifteenth Century.



that night, he found himself standing before his own gate.

He carted the tree around to the back door, and with Mrs. Philander's help it was taken into the house and set up in the parlor.

Mr. Philander thawed himself out in front of the kitchen stove and quaffed fragrant coffee that his grateful wife had prepared.

"It is a beauty, James," she said gleefully; "the finest we ever had. How delighted the children will be. I am sorry, though, you are so tired, dear."

"Oh, I'm all right now, Bella," said Philander cheerfully. "I was worried after I found that I had forgotten the tree, but I closed out that deal with Wells today, and I was busy every moment."

"How lovely that you got the contract, James!" cried his wife excitedly. "That is a fine Christmas present for you!"

"You bet your life it is," returned Philander jocosely. "Now let us get



JACK.

walled Bessie, dragging her new doll remorselessly by its flaxen hair.

"An' I finked it came that way, too!" protested Robin indignantly.

"It's a Santa Claus tree, babies, so don't feel bad about it. Run away and play," said Mr. Philander reassuringly. Then he turned to Jack, "Yes, it's the very same tree, my boy," he said proudly.

"It doesn't look like it, father," said Jack bluntly.

"Doesn't, eh? What's the matter with it?"

"Oh, nothing. It's fine, but it isn't the tree we saw," insisted the boy obstinately.

"Never mind, never mind," returned Mr. Philander good naturedly.

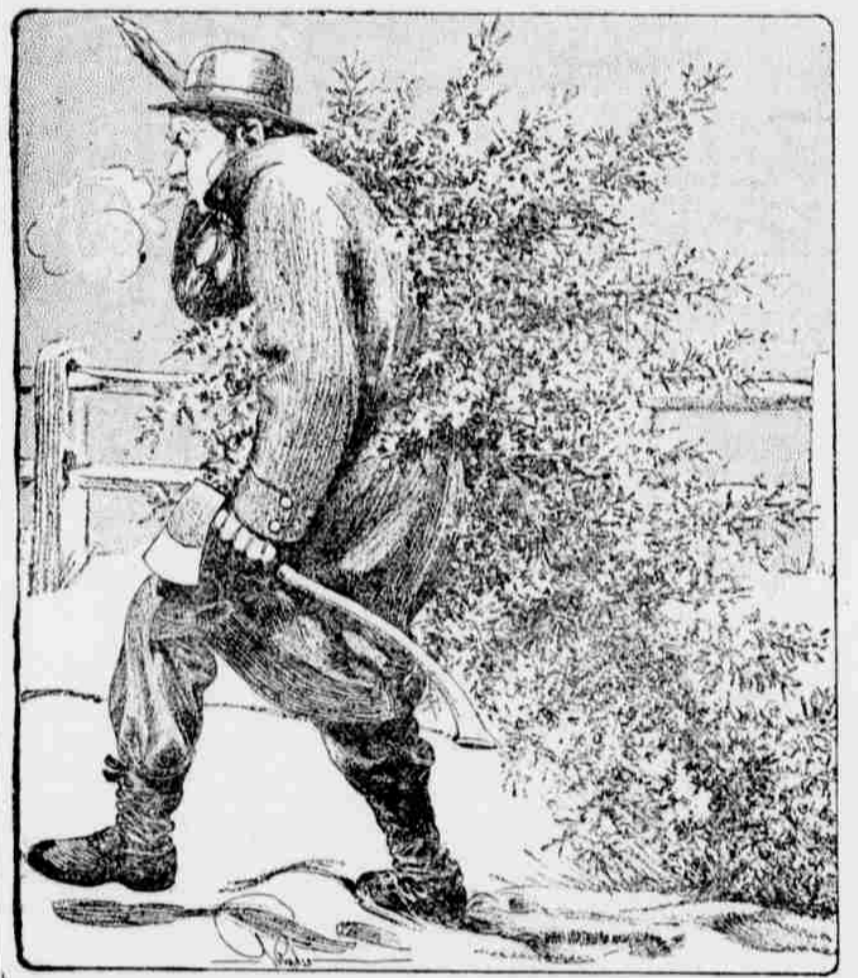
He sought his wife, who was helping Norah with the breakfast. "Our tree was a great success, my dear," he said gently.

"It is beautiful," replied Mrs. Philander happily. "The children are so delighted."

"Well, I'm glad of that. I was telling Taylor yesterday morning going down on the train that Christmas was not Christmas without a tree, and he said that it wouldn't be Christmas at their house, then, for they were not going to have one."

"How strange!" uttered Mrs. Philander. "Why not, pray?"

"Oh, I don't know. He said something about hard times. He said the good, old fashioned Christmas suited them well enough; that they would hang their stockings before the fire and all that, you know."



DRAGGED IT TRAILING THROUGH THE SNOW.

the tree ready for the kiddies. Everything handy?"

"There isn't a thing for you to do, dear, save to hang them on the tree," said his wife, leading the way to the lighted parlor, where the tree stood, its symmetrical branches glistening in the light and exuding a fresh balsamic odor.

"By Jove, it is the handsomest tree we ever had!" exclaimed Mr. Philander, surveying the shapely conifer admiringly.

They were soon at work, and presently the beautiful tree blossomed forth in glistening festoons of gold and silver tinsel. A radiant star tipped the highest point, while daintily decorated gifts burdened the branches and were heaped at the base.

It was with unusual satisfaction that the Philanders retired that night. They were loth to leave the resplendent tree, but utter weariness drove them to bed.

It was daylight when the first delighted shriek from a small Philander awoke his tired parents. Mr. Philander groaned dismally. He ached from head to foot, and he was sick from lack of sleep. Mrs. Philander was equally tired; but, with the self-abnegation of mothers in general and mothers in particular on Christmas morning, she got up and went downstairs to enter into the joys of the happy children.

When Mr. Philander came downstairs to breakfast the children gathered about him eagerly.

"Father," asked Jack, the eldest, "is this the very tree we saw last Sunday when we walked along Turkey hill road? Is this the very tree?"

"Who told you that, Jack?" asked Mr. Philander sharply.

"Oh, mother did. I told her I had seen it somewhere before, and she said it was that very tree."

"I fought Santy Claws brought it!"

"Dear, dear! I think the children prefer a tree just the same," said Mrs. Philander regretfully. "Poor little Tommy Taylor! We must invite him over to see the children's tree this afternoon."

"Yes, indeed, that will be an excellent plan. Suppose we invite a few people to spend the evening and enjoy the tree with us. We can put on some small remembrances and have a jolly time," said Philander, warming up to the subject as he proceeded.

"That will be delightful," agreed Mrs. Philander. "Let us ask the Taylors."

"Sure, we'll ask them!" chuckled Philander. "I'll show Taylor the way to keep Christmas."

That afternoon Mrs. Philander busied herself in preparing for the evening's entertainment. The Taylors had accepted gladly, and so had the other invited guests, and Mr. Philander, who was the soul of hospitality, walked about and rubbed his hands with pleased anticipation.

He made sundry trips to the cellar for apples and cider and cracked great bowls of nuts. He carried in huge arm loads of wood for the fireplace and surveyed the roaring blaze with complacent satisfaction.

It was at that moment that Jack Philander burst noisily in. "Oh, father, what do you think?"—he began breathlessly.

"Well, my boy, what is it now?" asked Mr. Philander indulgently as he warmed his coatalls comfortably.

"I heard Mr. Taylor telling some men that somebody chopped down the tree from his front lawn last night!"

"What tree?" asked Mr. Philander absently.

"Why, that tree—you know, the Norway pine that stood on their front lawn!"

"What a pity!" exclaimed Mrs. Philander.



BESSIE.

"W HERE is the tree?" whispered Mrs. Philander anxiously as her husband shook the snow from his coat and carefully wiped his feet on the brand new doormat.

"Couldn't get one," returned Philander moodily.

"Couldn't get one! Why not, James Philander?"

"I forgot it, Bella, until just as I got off the train, and as that was the last train from town I couldn't very well walk back and look up a tree. By that time the shops would all be closed and—"

"Walk back! Such nonsense! Of course if you haven't thought enough of the children to buy them a tree!"

"My dear," interpolated Philander desperately, "don't say another word, I'll find a tree somewhere tonight if I have to rob the church of the Sunday school tree!"

He thrust his arms into his overcoat and grasped his hat, but Mrs. Philander put out a detaining hand.

"James," she said seriously, "you cannot find a tree in Rose Heights tonight. You know there is not a shop in the Heights, and where else would you look for a tree?"

"I shall walk into the woods and dig one," returned Philander, with dignity.

"Well, you could do that, James, but it is 11 o'clock now and there is no moon. You will lose your way."

"Nonsense!" returned Mr. Philander. "I hope I know my way around Rose Heights. I saw a very handsome pine tree in that strip of woods back on the Turkey hill road. I could walk there blindfolded and lay my hand upon that tree," he asserted rashly.

"Very well," returned Mrs. Philander reluctantly. "I hate to have you go, James, but the children will be so disappointed. The presents are all ready, and I have been up in the attic and got the base for the tree and all the ornaments—in fact, everything is ready except the tree."

"The tree will soon be here," said Mr. Philander grimly as he jerked on his arctics and turned up his coat collar. "Just bring me the spade from the woodshed, please," he added.

"A spade, James! I thought they chopped trees down. The ground is frozen."

"Of course, the ax by all means," replied Philander irritably. He was vexed with himself for having forgotten to order the tree, which was one of the necessary adjuncts to the Philander Christmas. He had never forgotten it before. He meant to order it that morning and have it sent to his suburban home later in the day, but an important business matter had driven the remembrance of the festival from his mind until his wife's greeting when he opened the door recalled it to his attention.

He sallied forth, bearing the ax, and waded through the newly fallen snow to the corner of the street, where he turned toward Turkey hill road. The snow was only six inches deep, and the walking was not so bad. Gray clouds lung low, and there was a thick flurry of flakes as Philander turned the corner. When he reached the strip of woods it was snowing heavily, and he could only guess at the location of the particular pine he had in mind.

He whistled cheerily as he walked along, for his spirits were rising. He felt a warm glow stealing over his tired frame as he anticipated the delight of the three small Philanders when they beheld the selfsame tree that they had so warmly admired a short while before set up in their own parlor, ablaze with candles and rich with gifts.

Mr. Philander stopped and thrashed himself vigorously with his arms. There was a faint grayness in the air that was reflected from the fallen snow, and there was the tickling rush of flakes in his eyes. When he reached the very opening in the woods where they had admired the tree he turned around and looked carefully up and down the road. Of course he could see nothing, nor was there the faintest tinkle of bells. It was a very lonely spot.

Mr. Philander knew that the strip of woods was private property, and he also knew that he could make it all right with Lake, the owner of the woods, on the following day, as Lake lived four miles away and it was impossible to ask his permission now.

Although Mr. Philander had stated that he could put his hand on the tree in the dark, he found it rather a difficult thing to do after all. He lost himself several times in the dense thickets, and all the tree trunks seemed unfamiliar to his touch. Then, all at once, he emerged from the underbrush, and spyed boughs of pine brushed his face.

"Hit it, by Jove!" he exclaimed. He dug the snow away from the trunk and with a few lusty blows laid the tree low and dragged it trailing through the snow. He lost his bearings once or twice, and finally, at a moment when he almost despaired of reaching home

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He sallied forth, bearing the ax, and waded through the newly fallen snow to the corner of the street, where he turned toward Turkey hill road. The snow was only six inches deep, and the walking was not so bad. Gray clouds lung low, and there was a thick flurry of flakes as Philander turned the corner. When he reached the strip of woods it was snowing heavily, and he could only guess at the location of the particular pine he had in mind.

He whistled cheerily as he walked along, for his spirits were rising. He felt a warm glow stealing over his tired frame as he anticipated the delight of the three small Philanders when they beheld the selfsame tree that they had so warmly admired a short while before set up in their own parlor, ablaze with candles and rich with gifts.

Mr. Philander stopped and thrashed himself vigorously with his arms. There was a faint grayness in the air that was reflected from the fallen snow, and there was the tickling rush of flakes in his eyes. When he reached the very opening in the woods where they had admired the tree he turned around and looked carefully up and down the road. Of course he could see nothing, nor was there the faintest tinkle of bells. It was a very lonely spot.

Mr. Philander knew that the strip of woods was private property, and he also knew that he could make it all right with Lake, the owner of the woods, on the following day, as Lake lived four miles away and it was impossible to ask his permission now.

Although Mr. Philander had stated that he could put his hand on the tree in the dark, he found it rather a difficult thing to do after all. He lost himself several times in the dense thickets, and all the tree trunks seemed unfamiliar to his touch. Then, all at once, he emerged from the underbrush, and spyed boughs of pine brushed his face.

"Hit it, by Jove!" he exclaimed. He dug the snow away from the trunk and with a few lusty blows laid the tree low and dragged it trailing through the snow. He lost his bearings once or twice, and finally, at a moment when he almost despaired of reaching home