A MERRY CHRISTMAS

Dot Finds Her Lost Spirit

"OH, yeah?"

"Oh, decidedly yes," replied Mr. Burton, gently. "You think you are very hard-boiled and ultra-modern, now that you are a pretty young miss of twenty-one years. But don't for heaven's sake get so cynical that you don't believe in any Christmas spirit."

"Christmas spirit be hanged," snapped Dot, the pretty young daughter. "All everybody does at Christmas is buy a whole lot of things for their friends just because they know their friends are going to buy something for them. And everybody lives in agony for fear they have forgotten to send somebody a Christmas card. I say Christmas is the bunk—it's just another holiday."

"I suppose you'd be perfectly happy if none of your friends or any of the family ever gave you anything this Christmas?" asked brother Bill from the other side of the table.

"Why, certainly. If I could be sure that they weren't giving me anything this year I wouldn't bother. And it would be a great relief, too."

"Hmmm," came from Mr. Burton as he pushed back his chair and prepared to rise. "Oh, Bill," he called from the door, "I want to see you for a moment in the library."

"I'll be right up, Dad," said Bill.

As Bill made his way upstairs to the library he wondered what his father he to say.

"You remember what Dot had to say at dinner about Christmas?" asked Mr. Burton.

"Sure, but don't rope me in on it. I don't think that way."

"Don't get excited, son. What I called you here for was to devise some scheme whereby we could knock a bit of that cynicism from her head. It's becoming a little too strong in one so young."

"Oh, that's different," said Bill greatly relieved.

Father and son talked in the library for some minutes, in subdued tones. Then Bill rose.

"I don't think she'll get wise. I'll dip everybody off, you can look after the er—financial arrangements and other things," he said as he crossed the room to the door.

"Remember now," said Mr. Burton, "you must be very careful how you handle it. Otherwise somebody will be hurt."

All this happened a few weeks before Christmas.

Something Wrong

As the great day drew near, Dot noticed that there was something radically wrong in the Burton home. Nobody ever mentioned Christmas. Nobody seemed to go out on shopping tours. No presents or parcels were sent up to the house.

Everything was pursuing the usual course of events—just as if Christmas had never been heard of.

A few days before Christmas Dot remarked about it at the dinner table.

"What's the big idea?" she asked. "Aren't we having any Christmas? Or is everybody sneaking their parcels in the back way?"

Mr. Burton cleared his throat and looked across at Bill, who winked slyly.

"No, my dear, I think we all have

The Christmas Carol

begun to feel as you feel. That is, that Christmas is useless. One can save so much money by not giving away a lot of things you really don't want to give, just as you say. So this year we are going to disregard Christmas entirely."

DOT looked at him in amazement.

"But what about all your friends? What about the relations? What am I supposed to do? Give to my friends or forget them?"

"Forget them, my dear," said Mr. Burton quietly, with an odd twinkle in his eye. "We have taken the trouble to notify all our friends that owing to the depression, we are not exchanging any Christmas gifts this year. Your friends and Bill's were included in the list."

Dot rose to her feet. Her face was blazing with wrath.

"That's a smart trick to play. Why didn't you consult me? Now what are all my friends going to think? They'll think we're pikers!"

"Now, now, Dot," said Mrs. Burton from the head of the table. "Don't get all up in the air about it. You know you said a few weeks ago that you thought Christmas was a sham, and that you would be perfectly agreeable to not give your friends anything. You can't deny that."

Dot bit her lip. She knew she was in the wrong.

"Well," she hedged, "you might at least have consulted me. I think it's a rotten trick. What am I supposed to say when I meet my friends?" Then, as if struck by an inspiration, "What about Harry? Where does he stand? Is he in on this crazy idea?—Am I supposed to take back what I got for him, as well as the other things?"

"I haven't seen Dot's latest flame yet, Dad," said Bill. "But I'll see him to-night."

Dot stamped her feet in rage.

"You'll do nothing of the kind," she burst out. "I'll tell him myself. Tell him how hard up we are, that we can't give any Christmas presents this year." She was sarcastic now. "And let me tell you this much, I've gone and bought everybody I know a Christmas present and I'm going to give every one of them away, too. I'll give them to some charitable organization. And you," she finished, turning to her father, "will have to pay for them, too. Serves you right for not letting me in on your BIG secret." She turned and ran out of the room. Mr. Burton smiled.

Quiet Evening at Home

Christmas day arrived at last, but it was a quiet day in the Burton home. But of the whole day the evening was the worst for Dot.

The four of them were sitting in the den. Not a sound came from any of them.

Suddenly Dot jumped up from her chair and threw her book on the table.

"I can't stand this any longer," she said in desperation. "I'm going to deliver those Christmas presents to the relief headquarters. I don't care what anybody says. I'll go coo-coo if I stay here."

"That's a very good idea," said Mr. Burton. "Bill will drive you down." And the two of them left the room.

They were gone for about an hour, Bill taking his own time about getting there and back.

No light came from the front room when they came around to the front of the house and entered. As they walked along the dimly lighted hall Dot had the peculiar feeling that things were just a bit quieter than they should be. Suddenly, as she was passing the wide doorway leading into the front room, the lights flashed on. She jumped back in surprise and simultaneously there came loud cries and laughter from the room.

Dot looked in amazement. There in the front room she saw a huge Christmas tree, all decorated with brilliant ornaments and lights, with artificial snow spread all around and laden down with parcels wrapped in green, red and white tissue. The floor around the tree was littered with presents. Around the room sat or stood a score or more of her friends and relations.

"Merry Christmas," they cried in unison.

Dot was too stunned to speak. She looked at her father.

"We decided at the last minute," he said, "to have a Christmas celebration after all. Would you care to join? Of course, realizing what you said a few weeks ago, there won't be much for you. But you are invited to sit in and watch."

Dot recovered her voice. "Merry Christmas all," she cried. "Hello, Harry, haven't seen you since you got back. Hello, Mary. Gee, this is a surprise, all right." She stopped suddenly and looked at her father again, her eyes blazing. "But far be it from me to sit around and spoil your presentations. I'll just retire and let you enjoy yourselves." Her eyes were misty with tears.

Mrs. Burton spoke up. "Now, Dad, I think we've carried this thing too far, Dot," she said, turning to her daughter, "all the Christmas boxes that you were so anxious to give away were not given away at all. They will be delivered back here in a few minutes. You can join in the same as the rest. It was all a big joke. Your father never said at all that we were not giving presents this year. The cards he sent were invitations to this party."

But Mr. Burton still persisted. "Well, if she comes in here, she's got to seriously admit that there is something to Christmas after all."

"Oh, I do!" cried Dot, between laughter and tears. "I really do. I never realized until I thought I was going to miss it. I'm terribly sorry. I think the Christmas spirit is wonderful!"

The Wise Men

A Scottish New Year

TIES that bind Scots to their native land are never so closely drawn together as at the annual festical of New Year. For generations the celebration of Christmas in Scotland was practically ignored, but this is no practically ignored, but this is no longer true and the recognition of Christmas Day and the holding of sacred services and festivities at this season is extending rapidly throughout Scotland. Yet it is still true to say that in most homes the New Year celebrations hold the favorite place. These begin on New Year's Eve or Hogmanay, as it is called. Every household lays in the fullest stores of meat, and all manner of cakes and confections it can afford, as well as supplies of whiskey and port wine, specially for those who "don't taste except at New Year"! Every exile from the family circle is present if at all possible, as family reunions are the special feature of the occasion.

"First-Footing"

As New Year's Eve wears on, parties from all parts of the town or village make for the square, town hall, or market cross, whichever is the popular rallying ground. There they gather in happy laughing groups until midnight sounds and the New Year is hailed with acclamation and good wishes are exchanged between everybody. The singing of "Auld Lang Syne" concludes the gathering, when all go off to "first-foot" their friends. The first-footers are well supplied with friendly offerings such as shortbread, cake, fruit, wine, and often a piece of coal which is considered to bring good luck. Some gift must be taken, however modest, for to arrive without it would be sure to bring ill-luck on the house visited. And it must be a dark person who acts as "first-foot," for only such are regarded as bringing good luck. The first-footers are out for a night of it and proceed from house to house, and keep up their friendly calls until the early hours of the morning. For those of more serious outlook, there are watch-night services in the churches, but after the service the worshippers generally start their mission of first-footing.

New Year's Day is a holiday. Services are held in the churches for the children, and a constant round of visiting goes on among relations and friends. Football matches and other entertainments are also on the day's program. By custom all works are closed for a week, but for some years there has been an increasing desire to reduce the holiday period.

CHRISTMAS IN JANUARY

Christmas is not recognized as falling on the 25th of December everywhere. Several races, such as the Armenians, celebrate January 6 instead.

The Man of the Hour

"DADDY, who is Santa Claus?" What a simple question! But how difficult to answer! It is a question that has been asked by children—and not a few grown-ups—for more than fifteen hundred years.

Think of it! Fifteen hundred years old, and still a new question!

And why?

Because Santa Claus is the most famous, the most widely known and the most beloved of all legendary characters the world over. We in Canada call him Santa Claus; others call him St. Nicholas or Pere Noel, or Kriss Kringle. They all mean the same.

Do you know who he is? Can you answer this childish question?

Suppose we try.

In the first place, it must be made clear that Santa Claus, or St. Nicholas, cannot be associated with Christianity just because he happens to pay us a visit on the day we celebrate the birth of Christ. Strange as it seems, Christmas and the Santa Clausian festival, now so inseparable, are nevertheless quite unrelated.

Christmas, as the very name implies, is distinctly a Christian rite, although a similar day, under a different name was celebrated long before the birth of Christ. The ancient Druids in England, long before the conquering hordes of Romans and Norse, held feasts and festivals at about the same time of the year that we look for the appearance of Santa Claus.

In other countries too—in Greece, in Rome, in Egypt, as early as history records, the winter solstice was the occasion for revelry and festivity.

All of which doesn't tell us much about Santa Claus.

Suppose, for a while, we change his name to St. Nicholas.

Patron Saint of Russia

Some time in the fourth century (the actual date is not known), there lived in Lycia the Archbishop of Myra. So great-hearted a man was he that he became the patron Saint of both Russia and Italy.

This man was of huge proportions. He was beloved because he protected the weak against the strong; the poor against the rich, the good against the evil.

All through the land he went leaving happiness in his wake, where

distress and misery had been before. such occasions. But gradually th

But on December 6, 342, so history records, he died—in the flesh, but not in the spirit.

For many years after, great feasts were held in his honor on this date, and the spirit of Saint Nicholas was supposed to return and leave gifts on

such occasions. But gradually th celebration faded in favor of t festival at Christmas. He is no known in this country, under h German "nom de plume", Sant Claus, and his spirit returns o Christmas day laden with gifts to

Many hundreds of years ago, be fore children wore stockings, they would place their "sabots" or wooden shoes by the fireplace for St. Nicholas to fill. If they had been good boys and girls throughout the year, their shoes were stuffed with playthings and nuts and candy; if they were naughty children, a small rod was placed beside the shoe as a lesson to the child.

Strange how we, a supposedly highly civilized people, still celebrate occasions as old as time itself. St. Valentine's Day, Hallowe'en, Thanksgiving Day and Christmas, all were "holidays" when men clad in skins roamed the woods in search of food.

Santa's Wife

But wait. We've forgotten something.

Who was Santa's wife?

Now there is a poser?

In Italy, the children, while they believed Saint Nicholas was their patron saint, worshipped his wife instead. Rather a slap in the face for good old Saint Nick.

Unfortunately, her story is considerably more legendary than the story of Santa Claus. In her youth, when told that the three wise men were passing by her window, she refused to look. Just why she regretted this so much is not quite clear, but at any rate, she tried to atone for her mistake by making the Italian children happy. And contrary to most goddesses she was reputed to be very ugly.

Rather than steal any of her husband's thunder, she holds her own little celebration on the 6th of January which was her birthday.

There is a Santa Claus

And here is a question for the grown-ups.

Is the Clausian festival dying out? Why should this race, with all its culture and education and lack of superstition, believe in Santa Claus?

Because industry won't let it.

Because children will always believe in the supernatural as long as parents see fit to let them believe.

So every industry, whether it be the manufacture of railway engines or the preparation of dill pickles, depends to a varying degree on the Christmas festival.

Therefore we can't let it die.

All hail Santa Claus! There really is one!

The Christmas Miracle

By BETTY LAMONT

Over the air came a Christmas Carol trilling softly into the room . . . .

THEY had forgotten!

All day the thought was fighting its way to the surface of John's mind but for Anna's sake he held it hidden. Now, out under the stars, it burst forth in all the torment of a disappointed heart.

Christmas Eve—and they had forgotten!

The words stood out nakedly before his haunted eyes. It must be faced. John could fight no longer.

He had come out to the barn to get away from the look in Anna's eyes. Anna still believed in miracles. She thought they would come.

Miracles!

John's thin face quivered and his mouth set in lines of bitterness. He passed a weary hand over his eyes.

Miracles did not happen in the hills.

High on the topmost bench of a British Columbia valley John Morrison had located his farm. Crazy they had called him when he had climbed so far up the hillside, crazy to plant his trees so near the clouds. He listened to no one. He wanted freedom for his children to grow, space to develop a farm to hand his son when the proper time came.

The time had come and passed.

Farm and trees were still there, but the children were gone. Gone, because they did not like the loneliness of clouds and hillside, because they could not play with stars.

John's heart ached with memories of them.

A soft thud and the sobbing sigh of a cow in the stable brushed across his thoughts.

Christmas Eve!

Anna believed in miracles but Anna was wrong. They had forgotten.

Train Comes and Goes

Far down the valley a faint clear whistle sounded. The night train! John stiffened. The snorting and puffing of the iron monster came loudly to his ears but the whistle did not sound again . . . it thundered on. His figure sagged and the light faded from his eyes.

It was perfect Christmas weather. Some snow had fallen but now the stars shone bright and close. Over Larch Hill a moon etched the trunks of the silver birch in bold bright lines. John's heavy footsteps crunched wearily on the frozen ground as he started down to the house.

Anna was decorating a tree . . . a fir tree standing in a pot in the centre of a great round table.

She was a big raw-boned woman with strong brown hands and quick heavy movements. Her grey hair was drawn tightly back from a plain brown face, wrinkled in a fine network—a heritage of years lived in the crisp outdoors.

When John came in she smiled.

Anna's smile had brought him by many and varied milestones. Still, when he saw it something stirred deep down in John's being and he silently worshipped.

Now he shut the door carefully and sat down with a low sigh.

"Lovely night, mother. Real Christmas weather."

She turned back to her tree and he could not know that the smile had vanished and that her lips quivered.

Mother Saves Trinkets

"I'm glad, John, for if the children are comin' it will be easier for them than if it was deep snow."

John looked at her, wonder in his tired eyes.

"Anna, you aren't still expectin' them?"

She turned sharply, both hands hard down on the table behind her.

"Expectin' them? Of course I am, John. It's Christmas. They won't forget. The night train is just in; they might have been on that."

John stirred uneasily. Anna laughed.

"If they were, likely they got off at Salmon Arm to get Laura. You know Jim would have to bring Laura. They might all come bustlin' in that door . . ."

HER eyes were bright. John could not know she was praying the door would open. He leaned forward in his chair and his worn hands hung hopelessly between his knees.

"They've forgotten Anna. I didn't think they could, but I'm afraid they have. What do you and I matter now? They're on their feet."

He stood up and looked at the little tree.

"You fixin' all this for 'em, mother. Even savin all these pretties. It isn't fair."

His eyes misted as he fingered a little tinseled star hanging at the top of the tree. It was battered and worn.

"Gosh, I remember when we got this dinkus. For Eileen's first tree weren't it?"

Anna smiled shakily.

"Yes, John, and do you remember how she wanted the pretty star that had fallen off the top of the hill. Eileen was the clever one."

She laughed proudly. John's smile was bitter.

"Clever, yes, and we scrimped and saved to send her to school. When she's finished she goes off to the city, because its lonely here."

Anna came around the table and put her hand through his arm

"But it is lonely here, John, and Eileen is so young."

She fingered the star.

He flung away from the table and out to the kitchen.

"Look, it's eleven o'clock; soon be Christmas Day. Do you think we wouldn't know by now if they were comin'?"

His voice was gruff and angry.

"I'm goin' to bed. Come, Anna, it ain't no use."

Anna stood rigid by the little tree.

"John!"

She sounded small and frightened.

"Wait until midnight. Oh, John, I can't bear it, I can't."

Great dry sobs shook her frame, her hands moved in little questing circles before her.

"Don't, Anna, don't." He was leading her to a chair. "It won't help any . . ."

She rocked back and forth as she held his hands.

"It's Jim. Oh, if I only knew where he was."

Jim!

John's thoughts rushed back to that early spring day when he and the boy stood in the orchard.

"You are twenty-one to-day, Jim," he had said, and it's all yours."

Jim said "No!"

John still writhed at the bitter words clashing and meeting between them, still flinched as he remembered Jim's final,

"I'm going!"

Pride kept him from calling the boy back. Pride still kept the smile on his lips even as deep within fear coursed through his veins, for he, too, wondered about Jim.

He put a gentle hand on Anna's shoulder.

"Jim's all right, Anna, wherever he is."

A Knock on the Door

Anna straightened and wiped her eyes.

"Laura knows where he is. They always stuck close, those two

She'll come with them to-night, you'll see."

"To-night!"

John was losing patience.

"Anna, the night is nearly over. See—a quarter to twelve. They aren't coming."

Heavy crunching footsteps sounded on the snowy ground. A knock sounded. Anna flung up her head.

"John!" Her eyes shone. "John . . . open the door."

John stumbled forward.

"Oh!"

John hung weakly to the door. A long sigh escaped Anna's lips, but her smile choked it back as she came toward the man.

"Why, Mr. Brakes, what you doin' way up here on a night like this? Merry Christmas!"

"Telegram came over from Salmon Arm fer you, John, and a special delivery letter. My missus allowed it might be from the kids, so she hurried me right off to bring it to ye."

He fumbled in the folds of his heavy mackinaw.

"Here she be."

Anna and John looked at each other.

"Telegram? John, open it. It's from Jim."

John's fingers trembled as he tore it open.

"I can't see. Where are my glasses, Anna?"

"Here, John, here."

Together, they trembled over the slip of yellow paper.

"Merry Christmas, Mother and Dad. Listen in over CKWX at midnight sharp if you want a surprise. Love. Eileen and Jim."

The Christmas Miracle

Anna was weeping and laughing.

"John, they didn't forget. See they didn't forget . . . and Jim's at Vancouver with Eileen. Come in, Mr. Brakes, we forgot you for a minute. You forgive us, don't you? Oh, John, John."

She crumbled into a chair, flung her apron over her head and sobbed.

John's eyes were shining as he read the telegram again.

"You were right, Anna, they didn't forget."

He flung up his head.

"Anna . . . the radio . . . they say to listen in . . ."

The chimes of the old clock in the kitchen broke in.

"Midnight! Listen, Anna girl . . . a surprise . . . what would it be, now?"

HE flung the telegram on the table and rushed to the radio. His gray hair fell over his forehead and his gray eyes shone in his thin, brown face.

Over the air came a Christmas carol, trilling softly into the room, filling the corners with a sweet rush of melody. . . . "Silent night, holy night."

Anna lay back in her chair. She had won . . . her babies had remembered. A sob welled up in her throat. John put out his hand and touched hers in a firm grip of understanding.

"This is CKWX . . ."

Anna sat forward. Words poured into the room, announcing an unusual event . . . someone sending greetings . . . then flung out over the sudden silence . . . Eileen's voice . . . Eileen's fresh young laugh.

"Dad . . . Mother . . . it's Eileen. She laughed a low, loving chuckle. "How I wish I were there with you two old dears. Mother, if I could only hear you speak." Her voice broke. "I've got a Christmas present for you both and I'm giving it to you over the radio. I'm loving you . . . hard. Here's your present. Good-by. . . ."

"Eileen . . . wait . . . wait!"

Anna was on her knees against the radio as though by the force of her will she could drag Eileen into the room. Nothing answered but the sputter and crackle of static.

"Oh, my dear, I want you so."

She sank with a moan against the table.

"Hullo, folks, here's Eileen's Christmas present. Dad . . . it's Jim . . . and I want to shake hands. Honestly, I do."

John gripped the top of the radio . . . hard.

"Mother, what are you doing? Decorating the tree, and smiling. . . ."

John looked down. Anna clutched him around the knees as she knelt, and she smiled.

"Believe me, mother, that smile has helped me through the last few months. I'm with Eileen now, and I'm coming home as soon as I can get there. Time is about up, dad . . . I've got to go. . . . Mother, we would love to be with you to-morrow . . . just remember that."

"CKWX signing off . . . Merry Christmas, everybody."

Anna pulled herself up and laid a gentle hand on the speaker.

"Isn't it wonderful, John? Out of the air they came to us."

Mr. Brakes was blowing his nose lustily as he stomped up and down the porch.

"Mr. Brakes, come in, come in!"

He wiped his frosty old eyes repeatedly

"I was in but it was too hot, mam," he sniffed—and blew again.

"I heard 'em, mam. Never heard the like before. Fine kids, I see, fine. . . . Mother and father, too."

He wound his muffler securely around his neck.

"Must go down and tell the missus . . . never heard the like before."

John stood by the radio, dreaming. Jim would be home in the spring . . . to help seed . . . to fix the barn.

"John, look—the letter. See, it's from Laura."

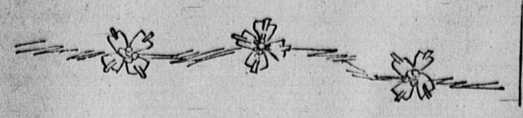
Anna pulled it from its envelope.

"Dear Mother and Dad Morrison, I've heard from Jim. You have heard, too. He told me about the radio surprise. I'm so happy. May I come to-morrow for Christmas dinner. I do want to be with you. Laura."

It was an hour past midnight when John again climbed the path to the stables. Such a short time before he had stood there sick at heart. Now he was happy.

The moon was low in the sky and the stars bent close in their own brilliant light. The breathless hush of a sleeping wild hung like a blessing over everything. A restless thud in the sheds and the low murmur of cows stopped him short. A rustle of hay . . . a soft animal sigh.

John started forward, then stopped with a smile. Why should he look? Miracles did happen . . . he knew that now.



Yuletide Recipes

By A FAMOUS CHEF

AT Christmas time, more than any other in the year, traditional English dishes come into their own. Consequently, our 1931 Christmas fare will not be so very different from that our forefathers enjoyed.

No matter how good its ingredients, a Christmas dinner can be ruined through insufficient attention being paid to details. I have prepared many hundreds of them, so perhaps some hints I have found useful may be worth passing on.

You cannot do better than start your dinner with a good soup. Here is the recipe for hare soup, a favorite of the great Charles Dickens:

Roast a hare and then pound it in a mortar. Fry some carrots, onion, celery, raw ham, thyme and parsley with butter. Add more butter to the pounded mixture. Cook over a slow fire.

An alternative Christmas soup is cockie leekie, made with the neck, feet and giblets of our friend the turkey, boiled with leeks, carrots, turnips and celery.

As to the turkey itself, bear these points in mind when choosing the bird:

A cock turkey is better than a hen.

Heads should be red, and eyes bright.

Feet should be supple, and legs black and smooth to the touch.

Breasts should be firm and skin unbroken.

Bread crumbs and sausage meat are the best stuffing for turkey, and I think the ideal accompaniments are roast potatoes, green salad and bread sauce.

Roast beef is the alternative to turkey, and it is certainly more traditionally English. To go with it provide horse-radish sauce, roast potatoes, brussels-sprouts and, of course, Yorkshire pudding.

Yorkshire Pudding

The Yorkshire pudding should be half an inch thick and made of an equal number of eggs and tablespoonfuls of sifted flour, new milk being added to make a batter the consistency of cream. It should stay in the oven 20 to 25 minutes.

The most successful Christmas pudding is not a result of using the most expensive fruits; balance—the exact proportions of this and that—is quite as important.

Here is a full recipe:

Mix three-quarters of a pound of grated bread crumbs with half a pound of best suet chopped very fine. In another bowl mix three-quarters of a pound of seeded and chopped raisins, three-quarters of a pound of currants, six ounces of chopped candied orange and lemon peel, two ounces of chopped almonds; add allspice, mace, cinnamon, Jamaica ginger, powdered cloves, and a little cayenne pepper. Mix these ingredients thoroughly and add the bread crumbs and chopped suet. When thoroughly mixed add six eggs well beaten with half a pint of brandy and milk in equal quantities with six ounces of sugar.

Mix very, very thoroughly, then pack the pudding mixture into greased moulds and boil for six hours at the time of making and six hours before they are wanted for the table. When you put the puddings away after the first boiling see that cloths are tied over them tightly so as to make the puddings air-tight, and put them in a dry place.

Serve the pudding very, very hot, and if you care to sprinkle it with rum or brandy, be sure not to light it till the very last moment. I think custard or brandy sauce are the best accompaniments.

Lastly, one or two words about mince pies. If you make your own mince-meat, the mixed ingredients should be kept in a hermetically sealed jar for at least a month, being stirred each week. The right proportions for filling the tartlet moulds are three-quarters puff pastry to one-quarter mince-meat. Mince pies should be served very hot, and brandy sauce makes an excellent accompaniment.

I hope that these few hints of mine will help you to enjoy your Christmas dinner—to my mind the most important meal of the year.

MISTLETOE

Mistletoe is a small parasitic growth which appears on certain types of trees. In ancient times it was thought to have great magical properties and it was always in evidence during the holiday season.

The Star of the East

The First Christmas Tree

THAT night a stray moonbeam found its way through the trees and cast its light upon the little cottage in the clearing, making it bright and cheerful in the surrounding gloom of the forest.

Inside the cottage, all was bright and cosy. The flames and sparks danced and crackled merrily in the fireplace, shedding a soft, shadowy glow about the room.

Seated in front of the fireplace, an old man sat reading. On either knee sat two small children, their eyes bright with happiness as they listened to the age-old story of St. Nicholas.

The old man stopped reading and raised his head to listen.

"What's that?" he asked.

From outside the cottage there came a faint cry. In a few moments it became louder—now unmistakably the cry of a child.

The children dashed across the room and opened the door.

"Why it's a little boy," cried one of them.

The man brought with him a glowing torch from the fire.

"Yes, it's a little boy, all right," he said. "But how on earth could he have wandered so far?"

He picked the little lad up in his arms and placed him in the chair by the fireside.

The boy was poorly clad, but his face, lighted by the soft glow from the fireplace, was almost angelic as he slept the tired sleep of exhaustion and hunger.

"He must be starved," said one of the children. "Let's get him some broth." And with that they dashed out into the tiny kitchen.

No sooner had they returned when the little boy awoke, rubbed his eyes and looked about him.

"Where am I?" he asked, wearily.

"Don't worry, lad, you'll be all right in a minute. Where do you live?"

"I don't live anywhere," said the boy. "I was lost in the woods and I saw the light from your window, and I was awfully tired."

"Here have some of this." And the two children offered him the bread and broth which they had prepared.

When he had finished, the old man spoke again.

"Now, children, you must get away to bed, if you expect Saint Nicholas to visit to-night."

"But where's he going to sleep?" asked one of them pointing to the boy in the chair.

"I guess you'll have to make room in your bed for him," replied the man. "There's no place else for him."

"Oh, that'll be great," said the children together, and with their arms around the little stranger they made for their beds.

SOON all was quietness in the house. The old man was sitting by the fire again, smoking his huge pipe and dreaming of days gone by and days to come.

Suddenly to his ears came the sound of music.

It grew louder and louder and he could hear the soft, gentle strains of a harp and the melodious singing of a choir.

The music awakened the children, too, but to their great surprise when

they awoke they found that the little stranger had gone.

"Where could he be," they asked as they ran to the window.

Outside the little clearing was bright and gay with silver-clad children. Each was playing a golden harp and their voices blended in wondrous harmony as they sang a Christmas carol.

The man watched with a look of amazement on his face. Surely he was dreaming? And where had the lost boy disappeared to?

There came a knock on the door and when the children opened it again, who should be standing before them but the stranger-child, now richly clad in a silver costume.

There was a strange radiance about him as he spoke.

"I am the Christ-child. I spend my life wandering throughout the world bringing peace and happiness to all good children. To-night when I was lost, you took Me in. When I was hungry, you fed Me, and when I was tired you gave Me a place to rest. I was a poor child, and now you shall have your blessing."

From a nearby fir tree He broke a twig and planted it in the ground.

"This twig," He said, "shall soon become a tree, and shall bring forth fruits and good things year by year to all who are good and deserving, for it has My blessing."

With that, He and His merry troupe disappeared into the forest, and their music gradually died away until it could no longer be heard.

That is the story of the first Christmas tree, which has since become a part of the Yuletide festival in every country.