

Evolution OF THE Xmas Tree

A Yuletide Sketch by
JONATHAN JOYCE

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THE Christmas tree for the display of presents is an evolution. The true origin and significance of this arboreal feature of Yuletide are uncertain. Apparently it is derived from an ancient custom. The pagan races of northern Europe had a deep veneration for trees as the abodes of the gods. For instance, the Indians sheltered Berchta, the spirit kindly to babes. When celebrating festivals the chosen tree of the different gods were decorated with lights, wreaths and tinsel, and offerings to the spirits were suspended in the branches.

The Romans used greenery in the festivals of Saturn, celebrated in December, and carried the custom among the Germans. The Egyptians used trees for interior decoration, their favorite being the palm.

A work of fiction produced in France over 700 years ago contains a descrip-



A VERY EARLY USE OF THE CHRISTMAS TREE

tion of a tree having its branches from top to bottom decked with burning candles, with the figure of a child at the very top sending forth a brilliant light. This tree in some way symbolized Christianity, the candles representing souls and the child typifying Christ.

It is said that the Christmas tree was adopted in France and England in 1840. Prince Albert is credited with having introduced it in England the first Christmas following his marriage, which was in 1840. Within a few years after that one of the trees at Windsor castle bore gifts valued at \$45,000. But more than a century before Prince Albert's advent an improvised Christmas tree, called a "besant," was carried in processions in England at Yuletide. It consisted of a pole decked with holly or other evergreens and ribbons, together with oranges and apples and sometimes a pair of dolls.

The irrepressible desire for novelty has led to unique variations in Christmas trees. A society woman having a couple of valuable pet dogs got up a dogs' Christmas tree and invited forty or more of the neighboring thoroughbred pups to the ovation.

The device by which Santa Claus is cooped up in the trunk of a portable tree, with his head showing out at times, is very simple, yet very taking with young folks. It is accomplished by having two empty barrels without heads fastened one above the other and covered with moss, bark and lichen. Through a knot hole Santa's voice is heard. The structure being on casters, the imp inside can move it about the platform to the infinite delight of the children.

Another device for having a voice issue from the Christmas tree is accomplished by the use of the telephone, the receiver being hung in the tree. The absent ones can then send familiar tones to those present, and when the speakers are very dear and unavoidably absent the message is the best Christmas present that can be conceived of for the occasion. An electrical outfit for lighting Christmas trees has been invented at small cost. One clever boy used it with novel results by applying it to a magnificent evergreen standing in front of his home. It was lighted on Christmas eve after a snowstorm which decked the branches with fleecy garb. The heat of the lamps melted the snow, and then it froze in all manner of shapes. When lighted up again on Christmas night the pendent icicles and icy armor glittered like a myriad of gems suspended in the glare of shifting lights.

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