

course, because in every boy there is something mystical, he was thinking vaguely about the one bright star over which they had argued and the Christmas carols that he had read about, sung by old country folk. There was a music and mystery in the air; in the light that crept and then ran back over the strawstack and the field next, then the cow-chopping, and afterwards the black, silent bush where a mile or so back the Chippewas in their wigwams would be just starting their smokes, not knowing anything about the meaning of Christmas and with no sort of dinner but black squirrels and fox.

By this stage of thinking David had the axe hunted up, and he poked away furtively to the hickory tree in the lane where the old gobbler had roosted for years. He could see him plump and black against the dawn as he went shinning up to the limb; heard him squawk and half gobble in grumbling protest at being disturbed so before sunrise.

"Can't help it, old boy. Now's y'r las' chance to gobble on earth—if y're goin' to."

Immediately the old bird gobbled so blithering loud that he set all the other fowl into a clack and a flutter, and in the general *melee* David got him hard and fast by the legs. How he got him off the limb and down to the ground and away to the log on the chip-hill, should perhaps be set down in some classic about ancient sacrifices. But in a very little while there was a headless gobbler lying just outside the kitchen door for the dog to smell at suspiciously—when mother and the girls came down to wash.

"Igorry! I got 'im all hunkadory," said David as he hunched away to help dad with the chores.

Then the sun peered out of the neck of woods and the clearing was glorious with cold, clear light.

Breakfast was no sooner over than mother put her pudding into the steamer. The girls went plucking the gobbler in the yard; and long before it was time for Uncle Martin to arrive, that historic bird was sizzling fragrantly in the big top oven.

Along about half-past eleven the folks drove in—sleeked-up team, light driving harness and double-seated cutter with two buffalo robes; for Uncle Martin was a well-to-do man; a bulky, bearded, bush-whacking sort in his younger days, but now very mellow and benign, with Aunt Matilda as red-faced as a peony and jolly as a bed of sunflowers; also three young folk whose names are too long and numerous to mention.

So the stalls were full of horses, and the table with two extra leaves in it was quite surrounded by the two happiest, most uncantankerous families in all the Hunkers land. There was just a fleece of cloud over the bush for a while.

Uncle Martin asked the blessing; and he had one of the simplest ever known, the sort that always seemed sincere, for he took his time to pronounce every word, and that day he seemed to slip in an extra about Christmas—sort of a little prayer about things and people.

Then—without napkins—we sat and waited for dad to administer the old gobbler; girls and women so busy talking that nobody noticed with what fine old mastery the head of the family was doing the job. Uncle Martin talked to David, who was just at the age when words of wisdom from a big clean-limbed man like that were stored up never to be forgotten.

"Now, Aunt Tildy—what's your part?"

"Oh, a bit o' the breast"—she was going to say, when David broke in with a fine allusion to the good job he had made of the neck; because Julia was telling the other girls in a giggling way about the jew's-harp performance at the church, and he hated to be blunt and shut her up before company.

"Now then, David, I guess you'll have the part that went through the fence last," sniggered dad when he had got round the board—once.

"Huh! That's where you get left, dad. That gobbler aint been able to go through a fence for three years. He allus went over it."

Which in those times was counted a merry jest.

The talk at that dinner would have filled a book; ranging over a vast variety of topics: personal, municipal, political, and commercial; markets all reviewed—prices of every living and dead thing for five years back, even to clover seed and buckwheat; horse talk and family affairs; marriages and funerals in two sections; births and other festivals; revival meetings and fights in the township council—Uncle Mart. being a councillor; but there wasn't a word to hurt a living soul, though maybe it was because of the Christmas day and the fine plum

pudding that everything seemed to have such a golden edge.

When dinner was over, Uncle lighted his pipe, and Dad took a chaw of tobacco. They fed and watered the horses; when a mackerel sky put a soft benign tone over the crude landscape nibbled from the bush.

When they got in the old boys took down the shotguns.

"Say, maw, we're goin' out to shoot black squirrels. Yup."

But the boy Dave and his sister rummaged out

THE CHRISTMAS SPIRIT

By MARGARET BELL



A THOUSAND little fairy creatures danced on the frost peaks and sang as they danced. Away up in the heavens, seated amongst a billowy mass of amber clouds, the jovial face in the sun looked on and smiled. And as he smiled, the frost fairies danced the faster and sang more blithely. For it was Christmas morning. Christmas out in God's big open, and all Nature joined in a great festival of joy.

This joy festival was the one best festival of all the year, and the fairies had robed themselves in gorgeous raiment for it. Some there were in royal purples, and some in tints as amber as the cloudlets by the sun, and some shone dazzling gold, and red like rubies. And many more were gowned in amethyst, as if a bed of violets had been petrified and made radiant for wandering mortals to look upon. And some there were who changed their robes, each time the sun looked upon them. You could see them dancing a minuet in glowing reds, and immediately a magic finger would come out and change them to a brilliant green or purple. And then the clouds would come up and place a veil over the Sun Man's eyes, leaving the fairies all robed in a shimmering, glowing garment, glistening pure white. Truly it was a beauteous festival, one which thoughtful mortals would remember on down through the ages.



A GROUP of children came running along through the path in the woods, just as the Sun Man's face became veiled by the passing clouds. They were ruddy and their eyes glowed and sparkled like so many uncut sapphires. They were joyous kiddies, all of them, exuberant in the pure vigour of life, unspoiled by any superficial hand. They paused a moment, as they came to the edge of the wood, and listened to the little stream, as it went gurgling over the stones. Along the edge at either side were rough fringes of ice, which glowed almost like the frost fairies on the faded grass blades. One youngster approached the creek and set a wary toe on the fringe of ice, whereupon it cracked and fell into the hurrying stream. There it glistened and gleamed, a bit of polished silver, until it was carried away out of sight. Another little fellow remonstrated, and said that it was wrong to break the ice fringe. There the break appeared, an ugly gash in the beautiful frieze work, like a sword wound in the arm of Venus. And all the children gathered around and talked and gesticulated. Some took sides with one, some with the other. It seemed as if they had forgotten their mission through the wood, which was simply to see the fairies dancing on the frost peaks. And bye and bye, the great eye of the Sun Man came peeping from behind a cloud veil, and the glistening silver of the frost nymphs became all gorgeous once more, and they danced in riotous delight, in greens and reds and purples and blues.

The second little boy, he who had remonstrated with the first, raised his finger in warning, and bade the others listen. From out the woods came the distant whispering of the winter gnomes, who pirouetted on the branches of the silver-tipped trees. Just a quiet whisper it was, as gentle as the cooing of a summer dove, yet as potent as the tuning of a thousand lyres. The group of kiddies ceased their quarrelling, and turned toward the wood. The little fellow who had caused the hush turned his ear toward the whispering trees and a light of under-

the old rocker wooden skates, and while the old ramrod guns of Uncle and Dad made the bush crack for a mile and a half round the farm house, the young folk gathered on the old pond down on the flats, and they shinnied till the shadows came down.

Such was the Christmas at Hunkers—not so very long ago, when the simple things of strong-hearted folk made all the community life there was, and when we were able to see little things very large in the imagination, because they spelled so much of honest, home-made effort. Good old Christmas of Hunkers Corners!

standing crept into his eyes. Away up in the heavens, the Sun Man looked down kindly and twinkled his eyes.

"Listen," the pensive little boy said softly, "and you will hear what the woods are saying to us. We came out to seek the spirit of the day and now it is coming to find us. Each little silver-tipped branch whispers of gladness and joy, and bids us make merry and feast on the great store of beauty that Nature has placed all around us. There is a gift for everyone in the glistening frost fairies and the silver-tipped treetops. The old Sun Man blinks down a thousand blessings, and tells of a great new Hope which is to come and dwell among the nations on the Earth. And it will be the best of all gifts, and everyone can share in it, if they will only keep their visions clear enough to watch for it."

The kiddies moved silently toward the wood, where they were deluged with a thousand little dazzling frost fairies, who fell from the shivering trees, and enveloped them in silver. And all the kiddies laughed and clapped their hands, for they had found the Christmas Spirit in the woods.



AND the group of children began to chase the frost fairies among the faded grass blades. And they wandered through the woods, and out into bleak open spaces. And all the time there appeared the same dazzling spirits, coaxing them on. And the Sun Man away up amongst the clouds looked down perpetually and winked a roguish eye. And on and on they wandered, along bypaths, past comfortable farmhouses, past rows of pines and cedars, till they came to a large city all red and green in Christmas colourings. For a short time the frost fairies seemed to desert the children, then they would pop up in the most unexpected places. One youngster peeped into a large window where a white-crested nurse sat holding a baby, and dancing a vari-coloured ball before his eyes. On the window sill outside, a tiny icicle hung and dancing therefrom, a fairy with a golden robe caught in the grip of the morning sun, pointed toward the nurse and child. And the group of kiddies came and stood before the window, and watched the golden gowned fairy, till it had jumped off the icicle, and hopped further along the street.

It went dancing away toward another part of town, and paused this time, before a gaily coloured window where were displayed all kinds of toys and fruits to delight the heart of any child. A few kind faced women stood nearby, and a score of ragged children. The children laughed and gurgled, and many were munching candy. Each one held a precious parcel, and each one an orange and a small stocking filled with brilliant hued sweets. For a long time the fairy danced before the window, then went slowly along on its way. The group of wide-eyed kiddies followed it, past tawdry buildings, past churches and chapels, past wondrous houses of stone and dwellings of the discontented. And soon they came again to the edge of the great city, where they were confronted by a whole colony of frost fairies who danced and quivered before them. And they followed them far away, to the edge of the woods again, where the creek gurgled, and the ice fringe bordered. A great shout seemed to go up from all around, a great, silent cry, away up past the Sun Man who blinked amongst the clouds, past the silver-tipped treetops and the sighing pines.

And the children laughed loudly, and clapped their little hands in glee. For they had found the Spirit they had sought, out amongst the dear, familiar associates of Nature.