

and calmly too, that he regarded it as the greatest success achieved by Mrs. Cratchit since their marriage. Mrs. Cratchit said that now the weight was off her mind, she would confess she had had her doubts about the quantity of flour. Everybody had something to say about it, but nobody said or thought it was at all a small pudding for a large family. It would have been flat heresy to do so. Any Cratchit would have blushed to hint at such a thing. . . .

After dinner Bob proposed:

'Merry Christmas to us all, my dears. God bless us!'

Which all the family re-echoed.

'God bless us every one!' said Tiny Tim, last of all.

He sat very close to his father's side, upon his little stool. Bob held his withered little hand in his, as if he loved the child, and he wished to keep him by his side, and dreaded that it might be taken from him.

They were not a handsome family; they were not well dressed; their shoes were far from being waterproof; their clothes were scanty; and Peter might have known, and very likely did, the inside of a pawnbroker's. But, they were happy, grateful, pleased with one another, and contented with their lot in life.

The Christmas Tree.

NOTES ABOUT ITS ORIGIN.

A pretty story by Henry Vandyke, published a few years ago, places the origin of the Christmas tree in the year 722. Winfried, or Boniface, otherwise known as the apostle of Germany, was great as scholar, preacher and traveller, but forsook the haunts of men to penetrate the remotest wilds, proclaiming the Gospel to the heathen. On one of these journeys he came on a vast multitude gathered round the thunder oak, before which fire had been kindled in honor of the god Thor. They were about to sacrifice a young child, an old priest, Hunrad, explaining that by doing so they hoped to propitiate the god of thunder.

Boniface struck aside the weapon descending on the innocent victim, sprung on the sacred altar, called on his few followers for aid, and led them in chopping down the oak, crying—'Tree god, art thou angry? Thus we smite thee!' When the oak was down he drew the attention of the awe-struck multitude to a young fir, bidding them carry it to the chieftain's hall, and proclaiming that no more should they seek the shadows of the forest, but at home with rites of love should make merry, and that the time was coming when all children in Germany should gather round the fir, rejoicing over the birth of Christ.

Notwithstanding the legend, many will be surprised to be told that the Christmas tree is so recent a thing that it was unknown outside of Germany, and by no means common there, at a time within the memory of men now living. Yet such is the fact.

WHEN IT CAME TO BRITAIN.

Princess Helen of Orleans introduced it into France in 1840, and it came to England with the Prince Consort at about the same time. In Hungary it appeared ten years earlier, but its use is still confined to the German-speaking bourgeoisie and the Magyar nobility.

To all these countries, and to Holland, Sweden, Russia and Italy, the Christmas tree came from Germany. In Russia it is not common even yet, being seen only in the houses of the aristocracy in Moscow and St. Petersburg. In Germany and among Germans the world over the Christmas tree is now almost universal.

There is no doubt of the Christmas tree's

German origin, but the precise place and time of its appearance were until recently involved in much obscurity, which is not yet entirely dispelled.

Christmas trees were apparently sold for the first time in 1807. But at this time they were quite common in North Germany. They were known in Holland in 1796.

At present in Sweden the Christmas tree is regarded as an importation from Germany. Christmas trees, properly so called, were not known in Sweden as late as the beginning of this century, although it was customary to erect pines and firs before the houses, and Christmas trees were common on some of the Swedish islands.

The net result of the records at hand seems to be that the Christmas tree was in use in Strasburg and its vicinity in 1600, or earlier, and that the custom did not spread much until about 1730.—'Christian World.'

'It Came Upon the Midnight Clear.'

(We shall never tire of reading nor yet of singing this magnificent hymn. It will go down through the ages until the coming of the millennium.)

It came upon the midnight clear,
That glorious song of old,
From angels bending near the earth,
To touch their harps of gold:
'Peace on the earth, good-will to men,
From heaven's all-gracious King.'
The world in solemn stillness lay
To hear the angels sing.

Still through the cloven skies they come,
With peaceful wings unfurled;
And still their heavenly music floats
O'er all the weary world;
Above its sad and lowly plains
They bend on hovering wing,
And ever o'er its Babel sounds
The blessed angels sing.

With all the woes of sin and strife
The world has suffered long;
Beneath the angel-strain have rolled
Two thousand years of wrong;
And man, at war with man, hears not
The love song which they bring:
Oh, hush the noise, ye men of strife,
And hear the angels sing!

And ye, beneath life's crushing load
Whose forms are bending low,
Who toil along the climbing way,
With painful steps and slow,—
Look now; for glad and golden hours
Come swiftly on the wing;
Oh, rest beside the weary road
And hear the angels sing!

—Edmund Hamilton Sears.

The Crimson Footstep.

A CHRISTMAS LEGEND.

(F. Burrill Graves, in 'Golden Rule'.)

Once upon a time, in the heart of a great forest, on the border of a beautiful lake, lived an old man with his orphaned grandson. It matters not when or where.

Little Jamie was an invalid; he was hunch-backed, and his limbs were withered. But his grandfather loved him very much. It grieved him greatly that the lad could not go with him into the forest to cut wood or on the lake to fish.

Their life for the most part was lonely; but every Christmas, at least, they enjoyed a special feast of such good things as the meagre means of the grandfather could purchase in

the town, which was miles away through the wilderness.

The winter of that year was very severe. But the old man, the day before Christmas, taking an empty sack and his walking-stick, set out for the town long before light, leaving Jamie to watch the cabin and keep the fire blazing in the big fireplace. It was intensely cold, and the wind roared huskily through the throat of the chimney that there would be a storm before sunset. The lad hitched about the floor as best he could, doing what he thought grandfather had neglected to do. He brought the wood, stick by stick, and piled it up near the fireplace. Then he dragged up an old settle, and spread on the floor in front of it a mat made of otter skins. The door was shut and the windows closed, but the cold air still sifted in through the crevices in the cabin.

When the old man reached the town, he rested a while at the inn, and then started out again. Notwithstanding the extreme cold, the streets were filled with people. Groups of children, too, could be seen looking into the store windows, each pointing out what he or she wished for Christmas. The old man would sometimes pause and look, wishing that he might get this or that for Jamie, for whose sake he felt it his duty to envy the merry, healthy children in warm furs and mittens.

It was afternoon before he started homeward, his sack well filled and thrown over his shoulders. He was cheery, and hummed some familiar melodies as he walked along. The desolation was very depressing after he had got well out of the town, for it had now grown dusky, and tiny flakes of snow began to fall. But he knew the way, and had no fear. Presently the storm increased, and the flakes fell so fast and thick that it seemed as if white sheets were let down out of the sky. The old man ceased his humming, and began to whistle as he trudged along. Then thoughts of Jamie alone in the cabin made him quicken his steps.

As he skirted the edge of the lake, he suddenly came upon a young man standing for shelter beside a fir-tree whose graceful limbs were already drooping under the burden of snow. He said to the old man as he came along and dropped his sack for a moment, 'Friend, I have lost my way in this blinding storm, but am anxious to reach the town before nightfall.' His face was fair and beautiful, and his voice fascinating and sweet; and, though he was somewhat scantily clad for such bitter weather, he did not seem to suffer from the cold.

The snow blew in their faces, and was fast covering the sack of the old man. Lifting it again on his shoulder, he said to the young man: 'It is far to the town, and surely in such a storm as this you could not find it. Will you not come with me to my cabin, which stands just at the end of this path? We must hasten, or the night will overtake us.'

Noiselessly in the deep wilderness they both hurried along, brushing the bushes as they passed. Soon a streak of yellow light streamed directly across the path.

'That is my home,' joyfully exclaimed the old man; 'and, though very humble, dear it is to me and the little lad in it.' As he pushed open the door, he added, 'You are cordially welcome, stranger, to such as I can give you.'

Jamie was sitting on the mat of otter skins, his withered limbs spread out and his back resting wearily against the settle.

'Oh, I'm so glad you've come, grandpa!' he cried, as the door swung open.

'I've brought you lots of good things, Jamie.'